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## Badgering the Witness

Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer Speaks with Free Press about witnessing events

by **kerry chance**

"Terror poured from the sky" this past year in New York, and erupted from the streets twenty years ago in Johannesburg.

That terror remains over these places; a writer can see it. In the media, however, "the event casts no shadow," as Nadine Gordimer put it to a small seminar of Bard students and faculty yesterday. In media's sensationalizing and so-called 'objective' imaging of the event, the shadow is imperceptible. Only the imaginative word, the writer's word, can make it visible again.

To a packed Olin auditorium, and with her long-time friend Chinua Achebe by her side, Gordimer argued for taking back the position of the witness from lights and cameras and reinstate it in

its 'proper place:' the inwardness of the human observer. While critics have questioned her separation between word and image in this formulation, she argues that inwardness also falls into a duality with the exterior world - the political, the historical world, the world of social commitment. "I don't think other media can do it," she said, citing the media's attraction to the drama, rather than the meaning, of an event.

Gordimer has explored this duality, or what she has similarly called 'marginality,' through more than fifty years of writing, which

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**Pictured:** Professor Chinua Achebe introduces author Nadine Gordimer to a packed Olin auditorium. *photo by Rafi Rom.*

## Afghan women on "War"

RAWA spokesperson discusses the Northern Alliance and other crucial issues

by **danielle brown**

The Revolutionary Association of the Woman of Afghanistan (RAWA) is an independent political organization of Afghan women fighting for human rights and social justice since 1977. The founders were a number of Afghan women intellectuals, including Meena, a poet assassinated by agents of the Afghanistan based KGB in 1987.

Today, RAWA provides services for women and children in Afghanistan and Pakistan (refugee camps). Even under the Taliban, RAWA ran home-based schools for girls and boys as well as literacy courses for illiterate women and young girls. They also provide healthcare and financial assistance for families.

The Free Press spoke to Mehmooda, RAWA's spokeswoman, about the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan as well as the role of Muslim women in the war torn country.

**What are your thoughts on the U.S. bombing in Afghanistan?**

We have said time and time again that the Afghan fundamentalists, including the Taliban and even Al-Qaeda, have been odious products of the U.S., who were created and used against the Russians. Also, we have always urged the U.S. NOT to support these terrorist fundamentalists in any way, because those who will betray their very country and countrymen so cruelly, will never be very honest to others. Therefore, the recent conflict between the U.S. and the Taliban/Osama was just a family quarrel. But [we] hope that at the end, America has drawn some good lessons not to help any fundamentalist group in any country.

The U.S. bombing cannot be regarded as an invasion of a free country, or similar to the Soviet invasion. However, we have already condemned the killing of innocent civilians by the bombing. Moreover, we also suggested that if the US and its allies decide that the fundamentalists in Afghanistan are not at all helped financially and militarily, they (the fundamentalists) cannot survive for more than six months.

**Is the re-gaining of control**

*continued on page 4...*

## Catholics are people too.

Some feel Christianity has become "stigmatized"

by **emily schmall**

From classrooms to casual conversations, Christianity at Bard College is often stigmatized by right wing, radical politics, such as a fervent opposition to abortion, and a strict sentiment about celibacy until marriage.

Lydia Anderson, a Bard junior and co-founder of the Christian Students' Fellowship (CSF), says, "People [at Bard] tend to not look at the spiritual side but only the political side." She has found it troubling that people do not seem interested in separating the two. "Not everyone believes everything Jerry Falwell says."

Since the media's consistent exposure of recent scandals within the Catholic Church over the past few weeks, pedophilic priests might also be added to the negative baggage attached to Christianity. According to the March 21st edition of the Christian Science Monitor, more than 70 priests and ministers have been sent to prison for child molestation since 1985. About half of these were

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## Bard's network speed doubled

Bandwidth increased in move to ISP; "This is all goodness," says Maswick

by **rafi rom**

Access to the internet from campus is about to get a whole lot faster. Following an increase in bandwidth, a reprioritization of network use, and switch by Henderson to a new internet service provider, network slow-downs will hopefully be a thing of the past.

If all goes as planned, students' connection to the Internet will increase from 96kps to 192kps.

The changes in network infrastructure are possible because Bard College is switching its internet service provider from Applied Theory in Poughkeepsie to Hudson Valley Data-Net in Rhinebeck.

Previously, Bard's access to the internet was handled by two telephone companies, Citizen's Communications and Verizon. The switch to Hudson Valley Data-Net brings not only miles of new fiber optic cable, but also an increase in bandwidth from Bard's current volume of four and half megabits to ten.

The increase in bandwidth, or how much information can travel at any given time from the POP (where Bard's line meets the rest of the internet) to one's personal computer, allows for

experimental projects like video conferencing with Bard College's sister school, Smolny College in St. Petersburg, Russia.

"This is all goodness," said David Maswick, Dean of Information Services.

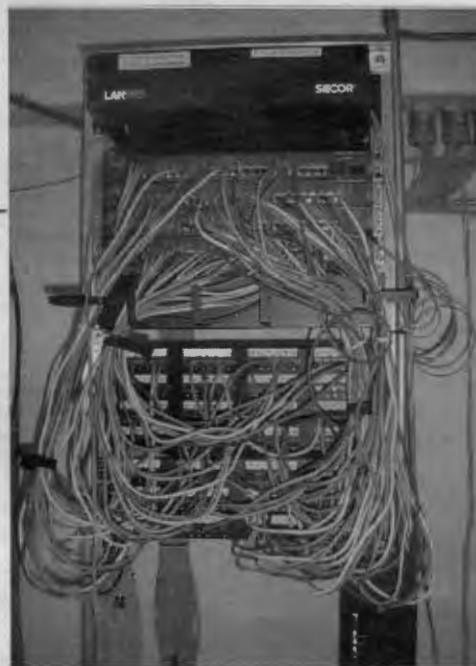
Right now,

Bard's network has in place measures that try to maximize general internet use for all of Bard. Before this priority system was enacted, Bard students were using 40 to 50 percent of the bandwidth to download MP3s, effectively freezing the system. Bard servers, such as e-mail and the website, get top access to bandwidth, and then the priority goes to Levy Institute, public labs, faculty and staff, and then students.

At night, when Bard's campus is empty of staff, students "get it all," said Maswick.

Another portion of the bandwidth is allotted for MP3 downloading, which Maswick also plans on increasing.

Although some students claim the right to download MP3s



falls under free speech, Maswick sees the crises as merely technical. "The only thing I care about is whether the network slows down," Maswick said. "I am not in the content policing business."

However, there are many things students can do to conserve bandwidth, Maswick says. He believes 90% of the problems could be solved if students turned their computers off when not in use and did not use their own computers as servers for MP3 programs.

Besides increasing the general capacity for internet use, switching companies also provides Bard with an ISDN phone service, which are necessary for video conferencing.

*continued on page 2...*

# The West's Neo-Colonialist Stakes in Zimbabwe

Media's portrayal of recent elections drastically one-sided

by **miles tendi**

Robert Mugabe prevailed in the just ended Zimbabwean presidential election winning 56% of the votes cast. Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai has refused to accept the result citing violence and intimidation perpetrated by Mugabe's followers as the reason why he only managed to win over 42% of the electorate.

The Western world has been quick to brand the election a sham with Zimbabwe's ex-colonial master Britain taking the lead. Comprehensive sanctions against the Mugabe administration are looming ominously from the US government and European Union.

However, the majority of African nations that sent observers to the election have deemed it free and fair. The African Union together with the Southern African development Community (SADC) have endorsed the result and already there is a flurry of messages from

*Miles Tendi is a student at the University of Zimbabwe who participated in Bard's International Human Rights Exchange this past summer in South Africa.*

African leaders congratulating Mugabe on his victory ahead of this weekend's swearing-in ceremony.

These two contrasting standpoints on the legitimacy of the election outcome are precipitating a global split along racial lines, black African nations versus their white former colonial masters but I will come to this later.

Tsvangirai has every right to reject the result. The manner in which the voting process was conducted certainly favored Mugabe. I will offer as an example one factor that I had first hand experience

with as a registered voter here in the capital city Harare:

Tsvangirai's support base is mainly in the urban areas while Mugabe boasts the rural vote. In order to ensure victory for Mugabe the Registrar General Tobaiwa Mudede, a government loyalist, went out of his way to diminish the urban vote. Harare had 800,000 registered voters but at the end only 400,000 managed to vote.

The number of polling stations in Harare was far too low in relation to the number of registered voters and coupled with that the capital city had tripartite elections. They were electing a national president, a new mayor for the city and ward council members all at the same

time. Naturally, it took a longer duration of time for a single individual voter to complete the voting exercise as he/she was effectively voting in 3 different elections and so the numbers waiting all day to cast their votes at polling stations swelled. Voters in Harare resembled human chains stretching for kilometers. The Harare electorate was frustrated. A good number gave up or chose to stay away.

It was therefore no surprise when Tsvangirai appealed to the High Court of

Zimbabwe to extend the voting period by 2 days. He won a one-day extension bitterly opposed by Mugabe's faction and so the elec-  
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Reformist cartoon from Zimbabwe media.

## Network, con'd

*...continued from page 1*

ISDN phone service is crucial for Bard because the college has just received a \$450,000 grant to establish a video conferencing infrastructure between Bard and Smolny College.

Hudson Valley Data Net also recently received a (much larger) grant from the U.S Department of Agriculture for 27 million dollars to help provide internet service to the many offices whom must relocate in the area after the World Trade Center attack.

Bard's off campus internet service will not change however. The local phone company, Citizen's Telecom, capped internet capability to 28.8bps.

The switch took place today between 11AM and 2PM. Over the next few days, Maswick will monitor the system and then begin increasing bandwidth allotments.

# Nepal's Violence Ridden History

by **emily mcnair**

### Present Conflict

In Nepal right now there is an escalation of the Maoist's People's War, which has been going on in the middle hills, particularly Gorkha, for the last eight years. Until Thanksgiving of last year, the attacks had generally been small scale and limited to village development committee (VDC) chairmen and police outposts. The death toll over eight years was estimated to be less than 2,000 people, and the attacks centered primarily on arms and ammunitions looting. Oftentimes, no one was killed, although people were routinely beaten up and intimidated.

The Maoists' name should not be confused with their ideology: they are in no way linked to China or really to Maoism, although (and this has become increasingly clear in the last months) they are linked with India's Maoists. The leader of the movement goes by the name Comrade Prachanda and is thought to be somewhere in North Western India. The espoused goals of the movement are to abolish the monarchy and establish a communist republic; they are not, however, anti-democracy or anti-religion.

*Emily McNair is a junior Anthropology major at Bard currently studying in Nepal.*

### Political Context

To understand the movement, you must understand it in the context of Nepali political change over the last decade or so: Nepal was ruled by an absolute monarchy (which was reestablished following the Panchayat democracy of the '70's) under the late King Birendra until the People's Movement for Democracy in 1990, which lasted about six weeks, resulted in about 108 deaths in the Kathmandu (KTM) valley, and was ended by the King willingly ceding power to a popularly elected, representational Parliament, with a Prime Minister and a President.

The King maintained some power, as head of State and commander of the armed forces (Royal Nepal Army -- RNA), and so was more than just a figurehead, but generally devoted himself to social causes. King Birendra was very popular, considered a caring and benevolent ruler by most, and the country was shaken to its core by the massacre of the King, his wife, daughter, and youngest son, along with several other members of the royal family, at the hands of the Crown Prince, Dipendra, at the beginning of June 2001.

The king's popularity had grown as Parliament's had fallen. From the very first, the new government of Nepal has been riddled with corruption at all levels,

criticized as not particularly representative of the people, and for not getting anything done for the people, particularly outside the KTM valley.

### Economics

Nepal receives the highest level of foreign assistance per capita of any country in the world, yet remains ranked as one of the poorest. They have the fewest miles of motorable road in the world, one of the lowest literacy and life expectancy rates. The government actively courted a situation of economic dependence on foreign currency (up to 70% of its GDP comes from external sources) and is saddled with massive international debt, yet none of the goals of development are anywhere close to being met -- outside the KTM valley, most people still live as they did in the Middle Ages, with no access to education, health care, electricity, safe drinking water, sanitation, etc. The difference now is that they are exposed to what they could and should have, as village people move to the valley in search of employment or some kind of a better life, and also through the constant stream of tourists trekking through the Himalayas.

### The Maoist Movement

So it should be fairly clear why the Maoists, in the beginning, enjoyed fairly widespread popular support outside the valley. The government responded primarily with

policies of containment, attempting to isolate the cells and the regions where they were active, without engaging in any sort of widespread military campaign -- which worked pretty well for a while. They stopped letting tourists go into these districts, and no Maoist-related violence against foreigners has occurred to date. The tourism industry is hugely important to Nepal, and we are now witnessing the devastating economic effects of the absence of tourists, now that the Maoists have scared them off. To return to the Maoists: the conflict escalated in November when they broke a four-month cease fire that had been negotiated with the government primarily through spokesmen of the main opposition party, the CPN-UML (Communist Party Nepal - United Marxist-Leninist), who rhetorically conceded their demands to the point where they weren't fighting for anything anymore.

So over Thanksgiving weekend, they launched a series of attacks that were unprecedented on all levels: they struck in areas they had never been known to be active in before, they displayed a far greater level of firepower and coordination than they were thought to have, and, most seriously, attacked the RNA for the first time (they had only attacked the police previously, who are brutal and corrupt, and generally disliked and mistrusted by the people).

This came at a time of waning

support for the government and the new King (Gyanendra, the late King's brother), who is generally disliked and whose role in the June massacre is somewhat suspect, but also waning popular support for the Maoists, who in later years had started acting towards the populace with a mob-like thugishness, demanding payments in return for security, kidnapping local leaders and demanding ransoms, as well as inciting ethnic conflicts in certain areas (especially the Kirantis in Solukhumbu, the Everest region), disrupting scant electrical supplies in isolated areas, and attacking development project sites, like bridges and hydroelectric dams, in areas where the people did not support them.

### Post- September 11 Terrorism Rhetoric

The November attacks could not have come at a better time for the despised government, who wasted no time in declaring the Maoists "dastardly terrorists, anti-nationalists and anti-democratic" and appealed to the US for aid. This is an important rhetorical shift -- they had previously been labeled insurgents, insurrectionists, rebels, guerrillas, etc, but never terrorists. I think we know where this came from. The government declared a state of emergency and suspended 17 constitutional articles, including the rights to free speech and freedom of the press, and the right

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# Novelist Nadine Gordimer Writing on Witnessing

*Says fiction and poetry have the most power to effectively deliver testimony on catastrophic events*

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have produced 13 novels and numerous volumes of short stories. From *The Conservationist* (her favorite among her work) to *The Burger's Daughter*, and *July's People*, Gordimer has a history of South Africa written into her own marginal position as writer-witness, one which points to event with the nuances of terror and resistance.

After a radio interview, student seminar, and little sleep, Gordimer kindly sat down with the Free Press to discuss the position of the writer-witness, journalism and media, as well as her new book *The Pick-Up* (2001).

**The title of your talk, "Witness: The Inward Testimony," offers a definition of witnessing events of crisis and violence. Can you briefly describe your conception of witnessing, and how it relates to your experience as witness in South Africa?**

Well, I think that because of the incredible technological advances, the whole idea of witnessing has changed. Generations ago, not so long ago, there were newspaper reports, and even during the atomic bombing there was television then, but way after the event, we saw what happened to Hiroshima. When [the attacks] happened in New York, it was all instantly seen all over the world. Six thousand miles away in Johannesburg, anyone who had the TV on, there it was. Some people saw the actual second plane hit; certainly the Americans did.

It was an event whose immediacy -- this incredibly powerful image -- was witnessed all over the world, for the first time ever in history. In other words, it was the television coverage -- the cameramen -- who were the first witnesses. These people who were standing [on the street] were not near enough to say they were wit-



nessing.

Then you get the descriptions in the newspapers of what was first seen on television and what people rushed to try and see. Then comes "political analyses," like *Dateline*, which speculates about the "why." That, of course, goes on for a long time.

So we all had the impact of the terror hit immediately, and the consequences have slowly come out since then, yet we still haven't found any new consequences. And the consequences are indeed worldwide because it moves into the whole question of, "what is terrorism? Can we whack terrorism out? Who are the terrorists? Is this state terrorism?"

My thesis is that there's another damage to the whole thing, which must come slowly from the writer. And that's what I called "inward." Take the Japanese writer Kenzaburo Oe. He wrote about a very complex relationship between an airman and remote Japanese villagers. The plane crashes, but then a black American bails out of the sky. In this village, they had never seen a black man before -- never mind an American -- and he's like an animal to them. They chain him up, they're repulsed by him and they're afraid of him, and they don't know what to do with him:

they don't know whether to kill him or not. So they decide that they're going to rear him like an animal and they leave the children, the young boys, to go and take him food and to empty his bucket and so on. The story is about what happens between these children and this man. To me, in that little story, the question of alienation, the question of "the other," and the question of race and culture are discussed.

You can read as many books as you like about Hiroshima, and there are other examples from the past that also shows how, eventually, when the event has become history -- a matter of dates and the amount of people who were killed, and who was at war with who -- when that is all made in history books, so to speak, and on the internet, and one can look it up, there is another dimension which comes from these wonderful writers.

**I also had a question relating to what we began discussing during the seminar. What do you think is the relationship between writing as a journalist and writing as a poet or fiction writer? Does it align with the word and image distinction that you were talking about earlier?**

I think it's something in between, because a journalist is also the guardian of the word. Two things, first of all, journalist must stick to facts...Everyone suggests that a journalist must tell it like it is. And you also always have a deadline. So I think it's in between the word of the imaginative writer and the image.

**In your work, you have explored complicated themes of marginality and oppression, largely within the country of South Africa. In your most recent book, *The Pick-Up*, you explore new forms of marginality that seem to reflect South Africa and an increasingly globalized society. Do we need new terms to write about marginality and oppression?**

Well, whatever happens in our society and happening around us is happening to us as well. It calls forth an unfamiliar form of reaction and I think that's some of the things I'm exploring in that book, the strange unresolved conflict between these two people who are lovers. Whether they're in love or not, I don't know.

[The male protagonist] feels love is a luxury that he can't afford, and [female protagonist] is a girl who is afraid of a bourgeois senti-

mentality. It's almost as if there's a question about love reluctantly intervening there.

There difference in their conception of a worthwhile life -- she is so shocked at the idea, she is even ashamed to take him to her bourgeois family, that she is against, even though she is living on a monthly amount of money handed up up up. But for him, this is what he wants, and he feels that she is naïve, she doesn't understand the

My thesis is that there's another damage to the whole thing, which must come slowly from the writer. And that's what I called "inward" ... [this is the other] dimension that comes from these wonderful writers.

world, and from his point of view he is absolutely right. But, from her point of view, which she thinks is a kind of moral one -- it brings into question what morality is but it doesn't attend to the circumstances.

Things that I am exploring in that book, on that intimate level, as well as the whole idea, unimaginable, for those of us who have a passport and a citizenship, to think what it must be like. We are, in this room, are we not all immigrants? We all are. Your family came here, you may have come from the Mayflower for all I know. Everybody, you are not a real Indian, so it doesn't matter how far back your immigrant status goes. It's same with me.

But how interestingly our attitudes change. Now, at home, from

the real indigenous people of Africa, there is great resentment for the people that come from Nigeria, from Zimbabwe, they even come from Korea, from North Korea. It's all done with bribes and who knows what, some of them are legal and some are not. And they're often street traders. Well, you've got hired recruits, and many of our own people are street traders. And they resent this very much, and they grumble to the government about it, and they parade in the streets.

**I know you have been active in forming a community of writers in South Africa. How do you describe the state of that community now, and where do you see your own literature going?**

I don't know. It's only as I write it. And, in any case, I'm getting extremely old -- I don't know how many more books I'll write. Writers are...we don't have a school of writers, and I'm so pleased we don't. We get on well, we know each other, and there's a lot of mixture between people of different ages and different generations, out of out great interest. I'm hoping for

more journals where people can see their publications. And more money forthcoming, either from private sources or from the government, to publish more books and to properly distribute them because we've got big distribution problems.



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# What the New Afghan Government Means for Women

...continued from page 1

by the Northern Alliance a welcome or unwelcome change, in regards to women's rights?

Please note that it is a positive development that, finally, Taliban are no longer in power. But, they were replaced by Northern Alliance. Some of their leaders may talk about "elections" and "women's rights," but in fact there is no ideological difference between them and the Taliban. They are as much misogynists as the Taliban. The Northern Alliance is comprised of some so-called Jehadi fundamentalist groups that committed hair-raising crimes when they entered Kabul after the fall of the puppet regime of Najib in 1992.

More importantly they were the first who imposed numerous restrictions on women, including wearing the veil. One of the forgotten aspects of the Afghan catastrophe is the role of Rabbani-Masoud & Co. (Northern Alliance, also called Jihadis) in destroying and looting the country, and the death and destitution they brought with them after the fall of the pro-Soviet puppet regime. More importantly, hundreds of girls, women, and even young boys were raped, and a great number of girls committed suicide lest be assaulted by the barbaric Jehadi (Northern Alliance) henchmen. Most of the anti-women rules and measures to deprive, suppress, and insult



Afghan women sewing in a RAWA run workshop

**In regards to the delegations at Bonn to create a coalition to re-build Afghanistan, some argue that, while women should eventually be included in decision-making, now is not necessarily the right time to push women's rights. Is this the right time?**

The women included in the interim government unfortunately cannot represent the suppressed Afghan women. Dr. Seema Samar is a leadership member of "Wahdat Party," a pro-Iranian regime, criminal fundamentalist party, whose dreadful past and career has been documented by many, including Amnesty International. She is a narrow-minded tribalist interested in Hazara and Shea people only, and averse to non-Hazaras. Of course, we don't care for her painstaking efforts at mudslinging on RAWA. If she was not in connection with such a murderous pro-Iran party, we would have not tried to expose her.

Dr. Sohaila Seddiq is a known Parchamite. —a pro-Soviet puppet party headed by Najib. She was also opportunistic enough to work with the Jihadis (NA) and even Taliban criminals. Seema Wali, in addition to living for decades in the

much more than any other religion in the world. Therefore, religious fascist forces could easily take advantage of thousands of ignorant people to promote their ridiculous/criminal ideas and impose themselves on the country. Needless to say, there are fundamentalist parties and certain governments in the world always ready to import these fascist fundamentalist forces for their own sinister ends. Since these anti-democratic, misogynist, and demagogue forces have sufficient money, [they] might find their way into government and jurisdiction.

**Do you feel that human rights are an exclusively a "Western" ideal, or are they universal?**

From the very beginning they have been named HUMAN rights and not "Western human rights." Therefore, it is only the fundamentalists who try to call it a "Western" value. Because they don't want to treat non-Muslim communities of the world as well as women even in their own societies equally and in a human manner. They also call "democracy and "elections" "Western" terms which should be avoided by every good Muslim, because they fear of both these Universal ideals of our time!

**How would the empowerment of women improve their status around the globe? Would it have a beneficial effect on politics and international affairs?**

In our opinion, in order to improve their status fundamentally, women around the world have to

fighting for democracy and women's rights. They must not suffice in tiny achievements in struggle and have a political agenda to be in power. If women's movements throughout the world don't limit themselves in some social/economical gain —though very important— and make the men and anti-fundamentalist women to share power with women, then the empowerment of women would make sense. Our world has never seen that dozens of countries have women as their leaders something that *have to be experienced*. And RAWA has no doubt that a world with as many female politicians as males, would be wonderful, and a much more just and equal world.

ious tyrants. And we sadly see that past criminals are again at helm and none of those in power likes RAWA due to their desire for a fundamental change in the Afghan society, a society without the fundamentalist germs. However, despite our reservations and hopelessness, we don't forget that today is not yesterday, the people of Afghanistan and world community now CAN watch much more closely the country and what is going on in it. RAWA will continue to fight for democracy and women's rights and we are sure that justice-loving women and men will not forget us and regard our just fight as their own.

From the very beginning they have been named **HUMAN rights** and not "Western human rights." Therefore, it is only the **fundamentalists** who try to call it a "Western" value.

**In regards to women's rights, as well as human rights, what are your hopes for a new Afghanistan?**

Afghanistan is a completely devastated land without economy, education, health system, infrastructure, etc. Women have been

for more information:  
[www.rawa.org](http://www.rawa.org)



RAWA runs schools for Afghans in Pakistani refugee camps as well as secret schools in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime.



Meena, founder of RAWA who was killed in 1987 by the Afghanistan wing of the KGB.

them were taken when these Jehadi murderers came to power till 1996 when their brethren-in-creed-Taliban replaced them. Andrew Murray of *The Guardian* wrote of the Northern Alliance, "the first achievement of the war on terrorism has been to install in Kabul the Northern Alliance, for whom terrorism has been the entire line of business and way of life for more than 20 years." Another journalist, for *The Independent*, said, "But it remains a fact that from 1992 to 1996, the Northern Alliance was a symbol of massacre, systematic rape and pillage. Which is why we - and I include the U.S. State Department - welcomed the Taliban when they arrived in Kabul. The Northern Alliance left the city in 1996 with 50,000 dead behind it. Now its members are our foot soldiers. Better than Mr bin Laden, to be sure. But what - in God's name- are they going to do in our name?"  
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U.S. and being alien to Afghanistan and its people, has never fought against the NA and Taliban.

All that said, it seems that RAWA's anti-fundamentalist, fighting for democracy, and women's rights agenda is still very much relevant, and will be so far a long time to come.

**Why do you think it is that Islam, a religion whose origins are associated with freedoms and rights for women, is being re-interpreted by extremists and "fundamentalists" to oppress women? Also, why is this new wave of extremism finding its way into governments and law-making?**

Religion can be misused in any society, especially in those much more backward like Afghanistan. And I think Islam is, perhaps, a religion that contains numerous controversial points particularly regarding women's rights,



create their own organizations, the first and easiest victims of var-

# Zimbabwean Election Response

...continued from page 2

tion went into overtime. But it was too late because even then the voter turnout in urban areas was only 45% and yet in the countryside 80% of the registered voters turned up (there was a plethora of polling stations in the country and some of them were mobile too).

Furthermore the official closing date for voter registration was the 29th of January 2002 but registration had gone on, until the 3rd of March, secretly in Mugabe rural strongholds while those in urban areas remained in the dark about this "extension".

As to be expected Mugabe swept the rural vote convincingly and with it the presidency while Tsvangirai haplessly, or perhaps naively is the correct word, over relied on a diminished urban vote.

## Land Distribution

Mugabe embarked on a land redistribution programme to redress the legacy of the colonial land distribution imbalance between white and black Zimbabweans in the run up to this election. The white population in Zimbabwe is minute and yet it owns the vast majority of land in this country while the blacks are over settled on unfertile land. Mugabe chose to take back this land by means of controversial guerilla type land invasions that at times resulted in the total breakdown of the rule of law in the areas concerned.

Landless black rural inhabitants were resettled on prime land acquired from the white population-no wonder they turned out in droves to vote for Mugabe! The Western world particularly Britain, where most of the whites in the country hail from, opposed the land grab sponsored by Mugabe and ploughed a considerable amount of funds and backing into Tsvangi-

rai's campaign. The white community in Zimbabwe too was overt in its backing of Tsvangirai.

The largely state controlled media had field days throughout the campaign period lambasting Tsvangirai and his party as a white controlled movement. Tsvangirai did not help his campaign by his bungling and changing stances on the land question. At one point he promised the whites their land back if he won. How Tsvangirai overlooked the fact that independence was only won 2 decades ago in this country is dumbfounding.

Integral to the colonial liberation war, waged out in the country, was the land imbalance and the memory remains strong. Being the wily old political fox that he is, and having been a prominent nationalist in the liberation struggle, Mugabe whipped up the liberation war memory plus rallied it around the land redistribution programme.

On any day, in his sharp suits and mannerisms, Mugabe will pass for an English gentleman but he shed all that off in this campaign. If you happened to be from Mars and had just dropped in to listen to the Mugabe campaign you would leave with the strong but pseudo belief that Mugabe's opposition candidate was British Prime Minister Tony Blair and not Tsvangirai.

He challenged Blair again and again for attempting to thwart the Zimbabweans' right to take back what was rightfully theirs. Hardly did he address the runaway inflation or stagnant economy that has become characteristic of a once prosperous country. Instead he eloquently urged Zimbabweans to reaffirm their independence come the election. It proved to be a master stroke that not only won him this election on the whole but saw him win the majority of votes in several constituencies that had

been won by Tsvangirai's party in the 2000 parliamentary election. The simple reason being that significant land redistribution had been conducted in these areas.

## The Western Response

So too the West's total opposition to Mugabe and preference for Tsvangirai began to pass off as neo-colonial in its machinations-they had played into Mugabe's hands. They are repeating the same mistake owing to their refusal to accept an election outcome that African nations have endorsed. Zimbabweans themselves accepted the outcome without the slightest hint of violence. Life has long since gone back to normal.

If the international community genuinely wants to see the advancement of Democracy and Human Rights in Zimbabwe it should equip civil society in this country with the expertise and finance required for it to successfully relaunch its bid. This would pressurize the Mugabe administration into the renewing of a truly democratic home grown constitution, similar to the one that flopped in 2000.

The current Lancaster House constitution was crafted by the British for Zimbabwe at independence and has been consistently, as well as effectively, used by Mugabe to keep the political campaign platform unbalanced. This helped to ensure his near 28-year grip on power and his "lawful" suppression of dissenters. This is where the struggle now lies.

Mugabe should not be isolated but engaged in dialogue, however cagely, in a bid to restrain him lest he fast becomes a forlorn figure regarded as Africa's version of a defiant Saddam Hussein or a Fidel Castro in the making as this would only increase the suffering of Zim-



babweans.

I put it to you that the most threatening stumbling block in the Democracy and Human Rights movement today is the specter of double standards. There have been sham polls in Uganda, Zanzibar, Madagascar and Zambia on the African continent recently-not to mention the farcical presidential election in the United States- but there was no hullabaloo anywhere near that which was raised over Zimbabwe.

## Change...Change...Change!

The Zimbabwean economy is the second largest in the Southern African region behind that of South Africa. South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma was in Zimbabwe recently to see Mugabe on behalf of his leader, Thabo Mbeki. With hope, the trip was an encouragement by Mbeki to Mugabe to come onboard in the fight to breathe new life into the regional economies.

Investment to this region has dwindled and this has been attributed to the destabilizing events in Zimbabwe and the concurrent negative international media coverage. The onus is on Mbeki to bring Mugabe closer and make him practice responsible governance, otherwise a crisis shall likely ensue in this region. The region may have

been perturbed by the recent nose-dive of the South African currency, the Rand, but I believe the worst is yet to come for this region if it does not restrain Mugabe through dialogue.

As for Tsvangirai, he would do well to take his defeat as a lesson. He was naive on many issues such as doing little to woo the rural population, which happens to be the largest in this country. I will not dissect him any further, after all he is only a trade unionist by profession and not the seasoned politician with an unrivalled grasp of Zimbabwean politics that Mugabe is.

African opposition political parties are known to have very short political lives and Zimbabwe has been no exception down the years. It is imperative for the sake of a viable and competitive democratic polity that Tsvangirai keeps his Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party together otherwise an unofficial one party state will emerge in this country because Tsvangirai's MDC is the only credible opposition to Mugabe's ZANU PF party. Even that hangs in the balance for Tsvangirai who still has to answer for an alleged assassination plot on Mugabe.

# The Long History of the Maoist People's War

...continued from page 2

against preventative detention - all of which should sound hauntingly familiar to those of us living under John Ashcroft's regime. Just last week, amidst great debate from opposition parties, the government voted to extend the state of emergency another three months - until May, which happens to be when the general elections will be held.

## Recent Escalations of Violence

Since November, the attacks have escalated steadily, with the worst to date occurring last week, when about 200 people (mostly RNA) were entirely overwhelmed by Maoist forces in the western state of Achham. The most heinous and entirely unprecedented attack occurred in far south-western Nepal: a night bus full of civilians and, of course, unprotected in any way, was stopped by Maoists on its way to Birganj, a border crossing with India. The doors were locked from the out-

side, no one was allowed off, and petrol bombs were thrown inside. More than a dozen people were killed, including an 8 yr old girl, and dozen more were injured - help could not arrive on the scene for more than 3 hours owing to the isolation of the place, and the unavailability of resources in general in this area (and everywhere outside the valley); people were shot as they broke windows and tried to escape the bus, which was doused in more petrol and lit on fire.

This marks the first time the Maoists have attacked civilians, and it is possibly a serious turning point in the conflict. As for US intervention: the US has given some money to the government, but most likely will not get involved. However, we rhetorically support them, and Colin Powell made an approximately 15 minute long tour of KTM, and pledged to support the war against terrorism in all its forms, including in Nepal. The US ambassador to Nepal made a tour of the attack sites in Achham, was visibly moved, and

reiterated this pledge.

## Analysis for the Future

In my opinion, however, this amounts to a lot of false hope; the government is fanning the flames of in order to bolster waning popular support for its policies. The newspapers here are full of speculation about what this aid will entail, (remember that the newspapers are controlled by government censors, particularly sensitive to any reports concerning the war) and are full of reports that the US will send, at the least, helicopters (which are direly needed in areas that are inaccessible except by days or weeks of trekking with heavy equipment), and some even expect US Special Forces, fresh with experience fighting in this kind of terrain in Afghanistan, to be sent in to train and then fight with the RNA.

This will not happen, I am sure, as the US has little or no interest in Nepal, first of all, and secondly, Nepalis are highly suspicious of any entrance of foreign troops onto Nepali soil (and rightly

so: they narrowly avoided colonization (the Anglo-Nepali war of the 1840's was won mostly because of natural defenses, the malarial plains of the Terai in the south, and then the Himalayas). Nepalis are now poised between the two superpowers of Asia, India and China, and are surrounded by the evidence of their power: Tibet, in the north, and Assam, Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kashmir -- all independent kingdoms or principalities until the last century -- Nepalis are very sensitive about their independence.

The only thing our intrepid leader W's war in Afghanistan has done is to drive the heroin trade into Nepal, over the nearly indefensible (being K2 and the Hindu Kush and whatnot) western border. This will have absolutely devastating consequences for Nepal, both in terms of a drug problem it has never seen before (bringing with it the potential for expanding the HIV/AIDS problem, which is practically negligible here, with just over 1,000 cases recorded, all related to the prosti-

tution trade in young Nepali girls in India, and Nepalis who have gone to India to work), and in terms of providing a huge money source for the Maoists, who are in control of many of the western territories already, and if they are not involved yet, soon will be. Heroin will most likely become a huge issue here, and could have devastating consequences. Also, as the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir continues to escalate, and the US continues to support India, India's Maoists have been crossing the border (east and west) into Nepal, and supplying the Nepali Maoists with arms, ammunitions, explosives, and land mines.

# European Union Summit Attracts 400,000

*Protestors Marched Against Capitalism While the EU Met Behind Closed Doors*

by **raimondo chiari**

Massive protests greeted ministers at an important European Union (EU) summit two weeks ago.

The demonstrators, numbering 400,000, were protesting a wide range of proposed energy and financial reforms at the EU meeting in Barcelona.

"The Festival Against Europe of Capital," which received little press coverage, demanded education reform, focus on social and labor rights, and proposed alternative models to neo-liberal European integration.

In the wake of the spring elections for five of its members (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland and Sweden) the EU met to discuss its reformist agenda. A wide range of themes and discussions took place, including the liberalization (privatizing what was once government owned) of the electricity and natural gas markets; the integration of financial markets; change in the labor market to make it more flexible and able to create employment; and the Galileo project, a satellite navigational system based on European instead of U.S. technology.

On March 15, while the roundtable discussion juxtaposing flexibility and minimum labor rights was taking place, 110,000 peaceful demonstrators converged outside on these very issues of economy and employment, participating in a variety of actions.

In light of the threat posed by scarce demographic growth to their sustainability of social systems, EU states are pushing toward market reform, starting with an increase of the retirement age from 58 to 65 years and a differentiation of sala-

ries "according to productivity and qualifications."

Outside, the Intergalactic "Critical Mass" Bike-ride peddled through Barcelona, while Lobby busters and Zapatistas walked from different convergence centers. In the evening, a candlelight memorial was held for Carlo Giuliani, the 28 year old protestor shot in the head at the G8 summit in Genoa, Italy last July.

Protestors encompassed a wide spectrum of members, including ATTAC, Basques, students, Argentinean workers, and the Catalan Socialist Party. The demonstration was divided into four blocks: the campaign against Europe of Capital and War, the Catalan Platform for a people's social Europe and self-determination, trade Unions, and a miscellaneous group. All demonstration took place at least 5 kilometers away from the EU meeting sight.

At the summit, the EU members fixed the date for the opening of the energy market (an action opposed by France), for 2004, and agreed to start the Galileo project, despite British resistance.

In the Declaration on the Middle East, the EU stated that "Israel must immediately pull out its troops from the areas under Palestinian Control" and allow liberty of movement to Yasser Arafat. The EU stated it advocates for "the creation of a independent and democratic Palestinian State," while providing Israel a right to live in security.

The EU also pledged to give 0.33% of its GDP by 2006 to help developing countries, and to present the plan at the UN development conference in Mexico.



This was the first time the UN, the World Bank, the IMF and WTO promised to ensure financial resources for economic development goals. However, the contribution is less than half as much of what Europe pledged to contribute the 1970s.

In the streets, the daylong peaceful demonstrations continued, until the pattern of violence already witnessed in Genoa repeated itself. Camouflaged into the peaceful segment of the anarco-syndicates, at 8:10 PM members of the Black Bloc came out and initiated a rampage of property destruction. Violent fringes burned trash containers, bashed windows, and flipped over cars. The peaceful majority tried to avoid panic and confusion and began to retreat.

The police responded indiscriminately. They charged the peaceful protestors on both sides, pushing them into the Ramblas, the symbolic and historical avenue that

connects Plaza de Catalunya and Plaza de Colon.

Police used tear-gas and rubber bullets in addition to their nightsticks. The crowd eventually reached the Stadium of Mont Juic, where Manu Chao, Cheb Bolowski, Xavier Rivolta and many others were playing for a closing concert.

In Seattle, 50,000 demonstrators participated in the symbolic starting line for the anti neo-liberalist globalization movement. Since

November 1999, the movement has grown in Washington, Prague, Nice, Quebec, and Gotheborg. Genoa seemed a climax as 300,000 people attended. However, after the wide spread violence at the G8 summit, and the events of September 11, many questioned if the momentum of the movement was broken. In February the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil demonstrated that the movement does not simply criticize but rather propose viable and constructive alternatives. In Barcelona, despite the violence permeating the conclusion of three days of peaceful and democratic dissent, the 400,000 participants confirmed the movement's vitality, energy, and desire for a socially aware and democratic process of global homologation.

## Anti-Berlusconi Protestors March on Rome

by **raimondo chiari**

Millions of protestors descended on Rome last weekend in support of social rights and to bring the cause of democracy against terrorist violence after the assassination of Marco Biagi.

Organized by leftist trade union CGIL (Italian General Work Confederation), three million demonstrators converged at the coliseum to defend article 18 from, a law tightly regulating Italy's labor market, from reform. However, after last Tuesday's assassination of Biagi in Bologna, the tone of the protest inflated.

Biagi was an associate for work legislation of the past three governments (under leftist prime Ministers Prodi, D'Alema and Amato) and was collaborating with the right-wing coalition led by Prime Minister Berlusconi. Last Tuesday, Biagi was shot as he was entering his apartment. The New Red Brigades, the so-called "Combating Communist Party," claimed responsibility for the killing.

Leftist CGIL Secretary General Sergio Lofferati responded to attempts by Berlusconi to use the shooting to undermine the protest by saying, "[He] who accuses us to be part of this climate of hatred offends us, offends our history, the intelligence of Italian citizens, and the history of men and women who have always fought against terrorism with a straight face."

# Lots of Action in the Student Action Center

by **matt dineen**

The Student Action Collective is preparing for a very active spring. Along with the makeover of the Student Action Center (Old Gym basement) and an open house party, there are a couple large, possibly historic, national mobilizations planned, which many students are getting excited about.

Apart from the ongoing, bi-weekly film series, SAC has been pretty quiet since the protests against the World Economic Forum in early February. However, the walls of the organizing space (Student Action Center), have been painted and a new couch has been added. The plan is to make the space cozier and more inviting, thus helping to revitalize activism on campus. Also, new videos and books have been added to SAC's library.

The week after Spring Break there will be an open house party in the Student Action Center. On

Thursday April 11th the Boston-based political folk-singer David Rovics will perform in the Red Room, also in the basement of the Old Gym, and the door to the Student Action Center will be open to all. The festivities will begin at 8:00 pm.

SAC is starting to organize for the April 20th peace and justice mobilization in Washington, DC. With the amount of student interest already expressed there will likely be busloads heading down there to speak out against the Bush administration's "War on Terrorism." For more information visit: [www.a20stopthewar.org](http://www.a20stopthewar.org)

The other off-campus action that SAC will be involved in is the Festival del Pueblo in Boston, the week of May Day (May 1-5th). According to the organizers, "the purpose of this festival is multifaceted. First, it is a conscious attempt to build links between the 'protest



movement' and more community oriented initiatives, without compromising the militant flavor of the large mobilizations. It is a recognition of the need to reconcile the emerging anti-capitalist and anti-

war movement with the day-to-day struggles of our communities and workplace. Furthermore, because we are not flocking to a gathering of the elite, but instead acting on our own initiative, it is a festival

of a proactive nature, rather than a reactive one. As such, it is an opportunity for us to set the tone, thus dictating the when, where, and why of the festival." For further information on May Day and the week of activities in Boston visit: [www.festivaldelpueblo.org](http://www.festivaldelpueblo.org) or email [Festivaldelpueblo@hotmail.com](mailto:Festivaldelpueblo@hotmail.com)

There has also been some student interest in celebrating May Day on campus. This could involve following the lead of our sister school Simon's Rock by declaring May 1st a holiday, giving campus workers the day off, holding a student strike and teach-ins on labor history, and of course a spirited out-door festival.

Anyone interested in getting involved in any of these activities should attend SAC's weekly meeting on Wednesdays at 7:00 pm in the Student Action Center or subscribe to the listserv: [b-sac-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:b-sac-subscribe@yahoo.com)

# Powerless by Design

*As Bard students plan a walk to New York City, many are still blindly critical of the counter globalization movement. However, the criticisms all fall under a framework of complicity.*

by **rafi rom**



The Hudson River. RiverWalk meets Tuesday nights at 10PM. For info: riverwalk@bard.edu

Activists today face a looming crisis. The political momentum of the Seattle movement has lost its steam in America since September 11.

In order to reinvigorate activism in the U.S., a group of Bard students are planning a walk to New York City for the beginning of summer. RiverWalk is a gathering of people who share at least one common vision; that we can actively improve the world we live in. By walking along the Hudson to New York City, we will appreciate the river; yet simultaneously remind ourselves of the multitude of disasters that plague both the Hudson River and the rest of the world.

RiverWalk will begin in the Vassar area on May 28, with an overnight festival including speakers, music, and other activities. The walk will end in Central Park on June 2. Besides enjoying the first week of summer, walkers will also get a chance to learn the issues, participate in planned and ad-hoc actions, and get to know people who share a united vision of progress.

RiverWalk, simply by the act of walking, will highlight some of the various "problems" the counter-globalization movement has often pointed out, only to be criticized for spreading itself to thin. Yet as

constructive nature, but in their actual reaffirmation of the power structure we are protesting.

In his book *Powerless by Design*, Michel Feher contended that both the governmental actors and the reactive liberal press formulated a system in which they were both "powerless"—the former by claiming all modern genocide to be age old ethnic conflicts, and the latter by taking a solid "anti" stance against all moves by the western governments. Such a powerless by design system led to the western powers claiming intervention impossible, and the leftist press claiming all attempts at intervention were inappropriate. The conflict lasted years longer than it had to, ending in the loss of thousands of lives.

Most critics of modern activism also operate under a "powerless by design" framework. I have selected six typical responses students use to justify inaction, all of which reinforce Feher's thesis.

The first justification has often been used in both the realm of activism and "conventional" political action, like voting. "Even if I go," I have heard many say, "our generation is so apathetic no one else would come."

First of all, our generation is not as apathetic as one might think. There have been several political

choices of the political elite but the choices of the masses to remain inactive.

chising our generation from politics, we essentially endorse the status quo crafted by a political elite which does not reflect our views.

The second "powerless" framework is an acknowledgement of the terrible state of things, coupled with a feeling that one cannot do anything. In Walden, Henry David Thoreau said we should "not spend our time in atoning for the neglect of past opportunities, which we call doing our duty. We loiter in winter while it is already spring."

There are plenty of things to "do" besides loiter. There is no one solution to our multitude of problems. By participating in actions like RiverWalk or getting involved politically in other ways (within the system, like volunteering for a senator you like, or outside of it, via means of protest) you can actually "achieve" something.

The third excuse also moves the power away from the individual by saying, "This is simply how the world works." This is how the world works because this was the choice people have made over the years. Exploitation is not the result of a system disconnected from people—to explain it in these terms diminishes the gravity of the problem. And by choice I mean not the

conceivable single event that can solve all the world's problems. Critics who repeat this refrain mistakenly look for an immediately tangible result stemming from one episode of political action. A single anti-war rally in the 1960s did not end the Vietnam War, but such actions collectively led to policy change. RiverWalk is but one small action that is part of a larger critique that has been voiced in protests around the world.

After justifying all political inaction, most critics often turn to trashing the "anti-globalization" movement.

The most common complaint from conservatives, the mainstream press and conventional liberals alike is that the "anti-globalization" movement has no focus and is just a mish-mash of unrelated causes.

First, it is important to understand that the globalization movement is not necessarily "anti", but counter. It is not for "no" globalization, but for another globalization. Even the most extreme activist has hopes for an alternative form of globalization. The majority of activists have specific requests, whether of a political, environmental or economic nature. Just look at any of the number of websites dedicated to the counter-globalization cause and you will see how specific these groups can get.

Secondly, the counter-globalization movement's power derives from this very "lack of focus". By not adhering to any ideology, activists traditionally opposed to each other (unions and environmentalists for example) have successfully joined together. And the lack of focus stems from the myriad of political problems that confront us today. Activists did not ask for the world to be structured in such a way that there are so many problems. We have been forced into a defensive mode, stuck fixing mistakes of the past and present instead of crafting a true progressive political agenda.

True, the counter-globalization movement has its problems. Yet is not our political system, haunted by a legacy of inequality, also flawed? So you must ask yourself whether it is better to remain inactive and therefore hand over your individual power to implicitly support a system you have ethical problems with, or join a movement that is simply flawed and make it better.

Often critics conclude by citing the "violence" at the protests. Militant protest is complex and there certainly is no consensus on how to handle it. But dismissing an entire movement because of fringe violence is absurd. Not all protesters smash windows, just like not all proud Americans attack Mus-

lims.

The issue of violence is also relative. As the Anti-Capitalist Convergence points out, "Bombing, encouragement of dictatorships, sweatshops for benefit of US corporations, third world debt, world hunger or lack of shelter and healthcare are all forms of violence." Fringe protesters breaking windows may or may not be violent, but the actions of state power must also be examined.

(Personally, I find the violence at protests indicative of a "powerless by design" framework within the counter-globalization movement itself. Although violence once may have been effective in attracting media, I doubt change will now result from breaking a McDonalds window. "Breaking stuff" is for Limp Bizkit, not for political activists.)

The final framework justifies inaction by saying globalization is "too complicated" for us to understand.

Automatically deeming something too complex for the majority of people to understand is fundamentally incompatible with democratic principles. Democracy rests on the fundamental belief that all humans, by virtue of being human, have the capacity through reason to understand problems to be resolved through healthy political debate.

Moreover, there is no consensus amongst even the "experts" on globalization. Nobel Prize-winner Amartya Sen questions the priorities of economic development, while New York Times columnist Paul Krugman criticizes the process by which globalization has occurred.

Though the technical aspects of globalization are complex, there are many philosophical ones that, especially within a liberal arts environment like Bard, are wholly accessible.

Here lies the key. We need to change the framework of contemporary political questions. Allowing such a "powerless by design" framework to persist automatically places an obstacle (of our own volition) in the way of serious change.

Instead of asking the questions outlined above, you should ask whether or not we really should live under a system that politically disenfranchises more than half the world. Next time instead of saying there is nothing that you can do, ask yourself what you can do, and look at what others have done for some ideas. Or ask the question we chose to ask in the creation of RiverWalk: Is a better world possible? Once you dismiss the powerless by design framework, you will see how possible a better world really is.

## A position of hopeless complicity

allows flaws in our current political system to perpetuate themselves.

By willfully disenfranchising our generation from politics, we essentially endorse the status quo

crafted by a political elite which does not reflect our views.

the Hudson River will show, there is no one "problem" for activists to focus on. Communities along the river have already organized in response to the decades of PCB dumping by GE, cement factories, nuclear power plants and the overgrowth of prisons. By uniting with community-based activists along the river, we hope to localize the counter-globalization movement.

Immediately, a project like Riverwalk faces a series of legitimate critiques. I will attempt to answer many of them here. These criticisms always serve as a rational excuse on why not to become active in either RiverWalk or any other student-led initiatives for change.

The power in these criticisms (often from the left) lies not in their

campaigns waged by college activists, from Harvard students demanding "living wages" for on campus employees, to the national campaign against supporting food corporations that operate in privatized prisons, which have been incredibly effective. There definitely is no shortage of highly influential political campaigns in recent years.

Perhaps more importantly, all you are doing with a stance like this one is justifying your own inaction by blaming it on the inaction of others. Every involved individual is part of a collective force that drives change.

A position of hopeless complicity allows flaws in our current political system to perpetuate themselves. By willfully disenfran-

choices of the political elite but the choices of the masses to remain inactive.

By blaming the current situation on anonymous corporations and international institutions without even trying to act, you are in fact handing over your power to the very institutions you detest. Even if you are negatively acknowledging the mechanism that makes the world "move," the acknowledgement alone reaffirms the power of those making decisions.

Oftentimes students will criticize activism by simply dismissing it, asking such questions like, "how are you going to save the world by doing this?"

No one is saying we plan on "saving" anything simply by walking to New York City. There is no



# We Are All Just a Bunch of Freaks

Taking on bigotry and religion at Bard

by **adrienne mathiowetz**

I am not Christian. I'm a Unitarian Universalist, my religion widely accepted on such a "liberal" campus. I preface my argument in this matter in the hopes that it will make my case seem more valid: that a lot of Bard student aren't in fact as tolerant as we may claim, and a prime example of this is the general attitude towards Christianity on campus.

Maybe it's struck you as it has me. I was walking into Kline the other day when I suddenly hit upon a minor epiphany: "Bard students are creepy," I exclaimed in a rather random outburst to my comrade, Sara. "Look at us! That kid is definitely creepy. I'm really creepyl! You're creepyl! We're all #\$\$^ing creepy." Unsurprisingly, she found my observation to be lacking in logic. What's off about Bard students? We're all nice people; a few potheads scattered here and there, but... you know. College. Everyone here looks like they go to a liberal arts college. They are nice, liberal people. Peace-loving. Accepting. Diverse. Open-minded. Knowledge-seekers, world-changers. These adjectives are obviously low on the creepage scale, probably ranking a solid -5% in the creepy pie chart.

Note the lack of Bard-student adjectives. "What nice people go to Bard!" you may exclaim over your fine repast of tofu, gleaming on its china plate. "We rule. We rock. I love us." And I love Bard, and I think that the students here

accomplish wonderful and amazing things. The problem is, though, that I don't think the entire list of typical liberal undergraduate attributes can be applied to the majority of Bardian students, "open-minded" being my focus for this argument. Now, before you go ape-shit on me and wave your various flyers for all the community service you've done in the local prisons and point to the slash-marks above your bed counting the war protests you've attended, listen to me for a moment. These things are all very well and good, truly. You deserve a cookie. But Bard, I'll tell you what I find creepy: the majority of you are prejudiced.

Religion is a touchy subject, and the insult of bigotry can't just be flung around higgledy-piggledy without detailed explanation. But think about this. How often have you heard the phrase "Oh, yeah, so-and-so's really nice. But...Christian." Personally, I've never heard anyone described as a Christian without either intending insult or feeling the need to excuse the fact with various other good qualities the person in question also has, as if they could perhaps overrule this negative side to them. Now, naturally, there are certain stereotypes that go along with the label. If you're a Christian you've been brainwashed. You want to, in turn, brainwash others. You're a bigot yourself, who refuses to acknowledge any other religions as

anything other than sin, and I mean come on, you call evolution "evolution" and other crazy crap like that. Right? Scary stuff.

The problem we've all recognized before with stereotypes is that they are general, and when applied to individuals are rarely accurate. What is more unique to people than their spiritual beliefs? The fact of the matter is that Christians simply see something differently than many of the people here. They have a little faith in something. Or they have a lot of faith in something. Whatever. It works for them. You wouldn't think that a nice, liberal campus could have so many people automatically set against others, simply for holding a set of values. Do that for one religion and it's called anti-Semitism, that appalling term with which none of us would associate ourselves. We read articles of the horrors of fascism happening in other countries, and cluck something politically correct about how horrible it is that some people can't even express their beliefs without being hated. Wake up, students. I think a lot of us, myself included, could stand a little self-evaluation of our views toward others.

The general student's view of Christianity doesn't seem very open-minded. It maybe verges on extremely conservative and bigoted...kind of...how shall I put it...creepy. Eh?

## The Bard Free Press

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## Bard's Open Minded Campus Closed on Religious Questions

...continued from page 1

Catholic priests. The number could be much higher, but national attention has been limited due to victims' reluctance to turn cases over to the police, and a church's authority for internal decision-making about the fate of an accused priest.

How Catholicism is received at Bard because of the Church's scandals may be augmented with humor. "Priests molesting children in the Catholic Church is becoming a joke. It's becoming a stereotype," said one Junior who asked to remain anonymous. Stereotypes such as this might endanger students' willingness to comprehend the true nature of the Catholic Church, because of their inability to separate the body from its leaders.

"If people are unaware of something, they tend to stereotype," Priest and professor Paul Murray explains. Murray is one of many priests who publicly critique the ancient patriarchy of the Church. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops will address the issue of child abuse and the violation of celibacy at its annual meeting in June.

Murray believes Catholics and non-Catholics alike who pin religion to its leaders should under-

stand the potential of the people to make changes. "I get tired of this business of looking to the bishops and waiting for them to act. What I see is a need for Catholics to find the power within themselves to realize that they are the Church. I think people need to take more of a claim in their own hands."

Murray also believes the Church cannot and should not be characterized by its most outspoken members. "There are very strong progressive voices in the Catholic Church, and some students at Bard are aware of them, but more needs to be done so that people learn of the other side of things, the side they don't usually see. Even the hierarchy of the Church takes the left leaning position on some issues, but people are much more acquainted with the position of the right." A large constituency of the Church advocates a formal opposition to capital punishment and an acceptance of gay rights to marriage.

Maureen Cooper, a junior at Bard, names the Catholic Worker Movement as one of the more progressive voices in the Church. Led by Dorothy Day, a devout Catholic and autocrat, the movement was based on living in voluntary poverty, feeding the poor, and upholding farming communes run

by social outcasts, such as alcoholics and the homeless. The movement still thrives across the country by its soup kitchens and newspaper.

Though she strongly supported the traditions of the Church, Day was known to deviate from some of the leaders' politics. She once said, "I loved the Church for Christ made visible. Not for itself, because it was so often a scandal for me."

Cooper attributes Bard's ignorance of this aspect of Catholicism to laziness. "People don't want to become familiar with what the spirit of the Church is about. It's just easier to complain than to find the good in things."

Father Murray, from the time of his undergraduate years at Bard to the present day, has witnessed a hesitancy to accept the institution of the Catholic Church. "What I find here at Bard is that students are not enthusiastic about attending religious services, but that does not mean that they are not listening to or are interested in voices from religious traditions." He added, "I find a lot of interest and respect for those traditions."

Cooper agrees that students are generally seeking a facet of spirituality, but she believes students have more than disinterest

for religion. "Religion is kind of a dirty word here. People don't want to talk about it."

Brad Dana, a self-proclaimed religious person and a First-Year at Bard, does not see a Christian presence at Bard. "The majority is so anti-organized religion that Christians fear they will be ridiculed by people who don't know what they're talking about generally."

Lydia Anderson and Ben King, also a Junior at Bard, began the CSF their first year at Bard because Lydia was teased for her religious beliefs. It became clear to them that, although admission numbers would not necessarily translate into practice. "It was unexpected," Anderson said. "It was going from the mainstream to being such a minority." Members want their weekly Tuesday night meetings to be a place for Christians to "voice their grievances," says King.

Father Murray leads a Catholic mass each Tuesday evening in the Chapel. It is unusual for more than a few people to attend, but Father Murray does not see this as an indication of a permanent departure from Catholicism. "I think that the young adult years are a time for the formation of one's

social identity, and many things are questioned. We live in a world where the religious institution of one's youth is going to be part of that question. I think that's fine and the process is a good one. If one is going to mature as a religious, spiritual person, one must be able to claim that territory as an adult."

Jennifer Josephberg, a first year at Bard, has had little trouble continuing to practice and follow her religious practices, partly because of her parents' prompting. She also believes it is necessary to question one's faith before one can fully reaffirm it. "You have to go away from it for awhile before you're able to accept it again."

Students can learn about the history and pedagogy of the Catholic Church by taking classes with Father Murray, or by taking part in the activities of the CSF.

Like the Muslim and Jewish students showed at the recent commemoration ceremony of a newly dedicated place to pray in the Village dorms, the members of CSF are less intent in upholding the structure of the Church, but rather are interested in preserving the underlying faith that unites them.

# Some Musings On Priests and Pedophilia

*One Christian Scientist Analyzes the Ongoing Parish Child Abuse Scandal*

by **veta allan**

## Writer's Note:

In the wake of the recent Boston abusive priest scandal, there has been further nationwide revelation, discussion, and coverage of sexual molestation between religious leaders and their followers, mainly children. The details of the cross-country statistics, victims, and legislative actions are to follow. The topic, however, relates to a "bad dinner table topic," religion, and I would like to first make a statement as to why this news story is particularly relevant to Bard despite its often anti-religious disposition.

Simply, the term "child abuse" brings distaste to many mouths, but

to place it alongside religion stirs even more complex emotions and issues. Bard College's practicing religious population, not spiritual or associative, is minimal. While there is a chapel on campus, the Sunday morning student numbers do not fill the pews. It is often difficult, speaking as a Christian Scientist, to sense much "faith" throughout the campus, at least any faith in the so-called institution of purity, morality, and spirituality, namely religion. This agnostic, and often atheistic, sentiment at Bard, combined with the common humanitarian sentiment, may brew particular responses to these affairs--ones of cynicism, aggression, pity,

resentment, and/or self-righteousness. However valid these reactions may be, it is important to respect the faiths of the victims and therefore understand the current importance of increasing popular demand for new legislation to prevent these child abuses, whether one is of a religious sect or not.

## The Story

Several weeks ago in Boston, Massachusetts (ironically one of the earliest safe-havens for those pursuing religious freedom from England), life-changing accusations were made. While it has been the trend within the Catholic Church to deal with molestation issues internally, parishioners decided it was time to place the punishing power in someone else's hands. The State has been brought in to act.

On March 20th, the Archdiocese of Boston handed over four boxes containing evidence of 90 priests' sexually abusive acts with children in the past 50 years to the state prosecutors who have been waiting to receive them since March first. While in many dioceses around the country there are stricter laws on child abuse reporting, the Church has gotten away with many years of internalizing the information on the grounds that it is confessional and therefore confidential.

Just last month a Boston-area priest, John Geoghan was con-

victed of molesting a child and is in jail. There were claims dating back 35 years that he was abusive to a now grown man named Jim Sacco and his four siblings. While the priest was possibly reprimanded, he was never defrocked, or taken out of the diocese completely.

Currently there are four types of legislative reporting levels that states choose to adopt in regards to child abuse. While 19 states require clergy to report child abuse with exemption for "clergy penitent" conversations, 6 states require that "all persons" must report all cases of child abuse, leaving clergy status ambiguous. 18 states plus Washington DC do not require clergy to report at all, and only 7 states demand clergy reports in all cases, including confidential confession.

States like North Carolina, one of the 7 states with "all case" demands, have non-reporting punishment laws, sometimes called "feel-good legislation" that only mandate a misdemeanor and a maximum of a one year sentence for convicted abuse. This gives judges little incentive to take on the complexities and confidentiality of the church.

Ideological positions have pro-



hibited much structural change within the Church. Many believe that people have the ability to confess, atone, and redeem their sins.

Interestingly, these Boston accusations have begun a trend nationwide. More news articles, more court cases, more analysts, psychiatrists, and victims find themselves finally in a time in which people are willing to hear them and to redeem the priests for their sins through legal measures.

The broadening nature of the scandal may end up costing the Church as much as 1 billion dollars over the next few years. Many feel it is time for the Church to pay up, while others wish that the punishment will not leave the image of the Church tainted.



"With Arms Wide Open..."

## LASO COLUMN

# Chiapas Media Project Screens Documentaries at Bard

by **zachary martin**

The Chiapas Media Project (CMP) presented a series of three films documenting the struggle of indigenous peoples in the Mexican states of Chiapas and Guerrero on campus last week.

The Silence of the Zapatistas (El Silencio de los Zapatistas), Defending the Forest: The Struggle of the Campesino Environmentalists of Guerrero (Defender los Bosques: La Lucha de los Campesinos Ecologistas de Guerrero), and The Sacred Land (La Tierra Sagrada), all films were made by indigenous members from their respective communities who, thanks to the CMP, have been able to acquire media tools and the knowledge to use them. The presentation was brought to Bard in coalition with SAC, The Human Rights Project, and the LAIS and Social Studies Departments.

The Sacred Land stressed the reason for the Zapatista uprising on January 1st 1994 (the day NAFTA went into effect). For more than 500 years indigenous people of Mexico have been struggling against debt, slavery, and brutal assimilation tactics as their lands were taken from them and their cultural traditions destroyed.

The Zapatista, who have often said their word is their

weapon, have also employed the weapon of silence. The film Silence of the Zapatista concentrated on the period of silent protest that began in 1995 when it became clear that the Mexican government would not honor the San Andres Accords and ended in 2000 with the election of Vicente Fox as president of Mexico. Students also had the chance to become more familiar with the lesser-known struggle in the state of Guerrero over the deforestation in this area that has been worsening since 1970.

The Film Defending the Forest told the story of the Organization of the Campesino Environmentalists (OCE), a group who in 1998 halted one company's illegal exploitation of this region, as well as documented the arrest and torture of OCE leaders Rodolfo Motiel and Teodoro Cabrera.

None of the films were more than 20 minutes long. All of them contained mixes of indigenous languages and Spanish with English subtitles (the word "chinga", or "fuck", was not translated into English however). All of these films showed the importance of autonomy in indigenous communities of Mexico. By allowing these people to make their own films the CMP are one of the few groups

that has sought to respect this aspect of their struggle.

The films were presented by Alexandra Halkin, director of the CMP who spoke before and after the viewing answering questions ranging from the nature of the CMP and its work in Guerrero and Chiapas and how the project has helped a forgotten people struggle to gain national and international attention. Surprisingly, the most asked questions centered on the problems arising in Guerrero, the second poorest state in the Mexico, which due to the fact that it has not received the same amount of media attention as its sister state Chiapas, has suffered more violent repression.

CMP plans to move its headquarters from Chiapas next year to Guerrero, at which point the CMP project in Chiapas will become entirely run by community members of the area who have been with the project since the beginning. Halkin also spoke of the current state of Chiapas which last year saw the removal of many formal military bases as part of the agreement reached between the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army) and the Mexican Government. Despite this, violence in the area has continued much the same due to the ever-lingering presence of paramilitary groups. This and the inability of the Mexi-

can Government to honor any of the promises made to the EZLN in 1995 has caused another break down in peace talks. While it remains to be seen what the next step for Mexico will be in addressing the issues raised by the EZLN and the many other indigenous human rights groups struggling throughout the country, the CMP has helped to play a major role in keeping this struggle in the public eye. What students who attended the event saw on Monday night was a first hand view of what has been happening to indigenous people in the Americas for the last 500 years.

Students interested in learning more about the CMP can visit their web site [cmp@chiapasmediaproject.org](mailto:cmp@chiapasmediaproject.org). Students interested in learning more about the Zapatista conflict in Chiapas can visit [www.ezln.org](http://www.ezln.org) -- the primary site is in Spanish but has links to great sites in English. The North American on-line publication [www.znet.org](http://www.znet.org) also has good coverage of events, with many communiqués and speeches translated into English (not to mention a great data base of leftist essays by modern activist on many different topics).

There are also numerous books on the subject that give good historical and social views on the Zapatista rebellion. Look

for books such as Rebellion in Chiapas by John Womack Jr., or John Ross's Roots of Rebellion and The War Against Oblivion, as well as the collective writings of Sub Commandante Marcos entitled Our Word is Our Weapon. For a wider view on the struggle of indigenous peoples of Mexico try Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's México Profundo, a book that predates the Zapatista uprising but is in many ways a prophetic work on the storm to come. Most of these (along with many others that escape me right now) can be found in Bard's library.

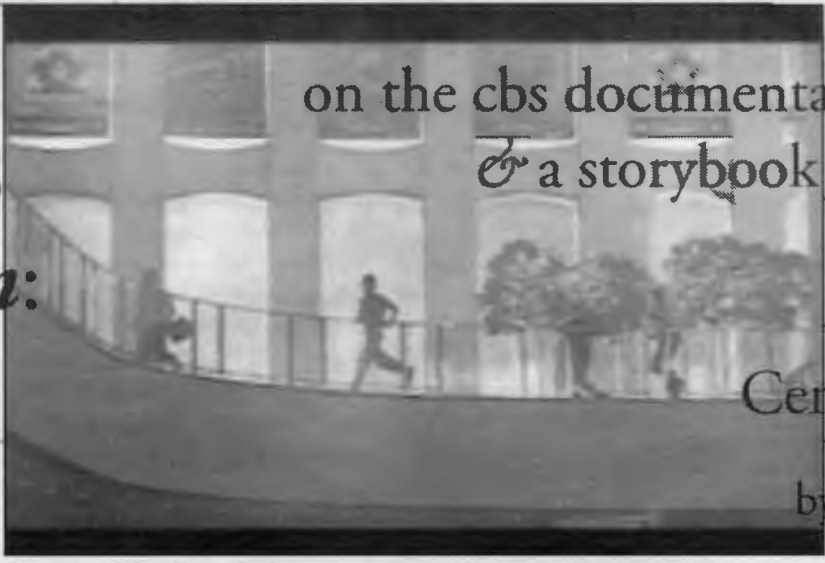
¡Ya Basta!

## LASO Notes:

1. Early in April LASO will be hosting its yearly Carnival event. This year will feature activities all day, Bomba y Plana dancers (Afro/Puerto Rican dance) and mask making during the day and a party (or "Fiesta") later that night in the Old Gym-- refreshments will be provided.

2. Any and all students who have an interest in Latin America Culture and seeing more brought to Bard's campus are encouraged to come to LASO meetings. LASO meets every Wednesday at 7:00 on the Second floor of the Campus Center in the Red Room. We are always looking for students to help with events and planning.

# September 11th, Blair Witch Project, Saving Private Ryan: Which was Better?



on the cbs documentary *9/11*  
& a storybook end to the  
World  
Trade  
Center attacks

by jonah weiner

*Now, in the days immediately following the bombings, it is as if we dwell in the unique time between a traumatic event and its symbolic impact, like in those brief moments after we are deeply cut, and before the full extent of the pain strikes us—it is open how the events will be symbolized, what their symbolic efficiency will be, what acts they will be evoked to justify. Even here, in these moments of utmost tension, this link is not automatic but contingent.*

—Slavoj Zizek, "Welcome to the Desert of the Real!" (Written September 17th, 2001)

Writing six days after what had been instantly named a new generation's 'day that will live in infamy', Zizek describes here a period of potential inscription, of a certain openness to articulation and organization enjoyed by the (as-yet-unhardened) symbolic status of the World Trade Center attacks. How, he asks, will the attacks be put to use? What interests will they be made to service? At root, what readings will they lend themselves to/ what readings will subsume them? We

are familiar with a flurry of such readings, which had proliferated greatly even before lower Manhattan had stopped smoking: some liked to read into the collapse of the towers an assault on globalization mounted by its very victims—'we had it coming'—while others read the attacks as an assault on freedom and democ-



cracy launched by those either too evil or too jealous to respect it—'only cowards could do this'. Zizek formulates his own stakes in the discussion in less polarized but nonetheless oppositional terms: for him, the agentless Real of the non-digitalized third world

By seeing less, and seeing less only once, we are able to feel that we are actually seeing a lot more: shots here are 'incidental', more real because they are imperfect, they let in what the-guy-on-the-street would have seen, etc.

burst into the sphere of an irreal, digitalized first world, and now America will act in turn, either to fortify itself further (and retaliate) against an ominous and threatening "outside," or more nobly, to recognize practical flaws and, moreover, the gross inequities implied by such fortification and take a step outwards, making sure not only that these events will never happen here again but, more importantly, that they will "never happen anywhere."

If the idea of a moment of total openness to symbolization is in any way plausible, far less plausible is that subsequent moment when the first one is to slam shut, when the 'event' and its reading snap together inextricably and the contingency of their link is eradicated once and for all. Still, we have in the past six months seen certain, more hegemonic readings ossify around ground zero, and we have certainly seen (though we have in no way been allowed to see all) major consequences of these readings (say, on the people and cities of Afghanistan).

All of this said to establish a certain context in which we can discuss the CBS documentary-memorial *9/11*, which aired Monday, March 11th. For if, with or without Zizek, we remember September 11th and the days that followed as an unmoored period (albeit ever-decreasingly so) of instable readings, as a period haunted by a nebulous, irreducibly surreal excess, *9/11* provides us with a striking example, six months after the fact, of historical revisionism—or more precisely,

of symbolization, re-articulation, and tropification that seeks to put that day, once and for all, to bed. And in many respects it succeeds.

Any discussion of representation is always beset by questions of exploitation, in a broad sense of the word: in short, the thinking goes, who are you to speak for them (for us)? From debates about the funds that will be paid to victims' families to debates about the various proposals for rebuilding 'ground zero', to debates about street vendors selling FDNY apparel and American flags in lower Manhattan, the question of if and how the World Trade Center attacks are being exploited—under the auspices of commercial and more

aesthetic projects alike—almost immediately inundated discussions of September 11th, and will certainly continue to pervade them for some time. How thankful CBS must have been, then, to win a doubtlessly fervent bid for the footage of two French brothers, Jules and Gedeon Naudet, documentary filmmakers who happened to be following the life of Tony, a rookie firefighter stationed only blocks from the World Trade Center, and who caught the whole day—plane crashes, col-

lapses, and all—on tape, much of it from within the main lobby of Tower 1. For here is an experience that must be as 'real' as they get, a document so pure that its spirit of utter surprise is tangible. And it is a tape captured not by news crews but by wholly unprepared civilians, their lives about as protected as those of the soot-covered office workers everywhere around them, civilians who by great chance managed to come out of the thing unscratched: in short, those doing the representing speak to us not only for but as survivors of the attacks. In assembling the brothers' tapes into a documentary, then, CBS was able, if not to leap out of the dubious roles of 'big media' and 'third party', and into that of 'a participant' in the event it memorialized, at least to dramatically blur the line between both.

No surprise then, that a document so 'pure' should distinguish itself from the September 11th with which most of us are familiar—namely, the one we experienced on our television screens. *9/11* occurs much differently than *9/11* occurred for the majority of the world. That day was, for most, constituted by replays (now the second plane hitting from this angle, now from this one, now from this one, and over and over again), by cuts to Washington (anyone remember the Pentagon?), to Pennsylvania (anyone remember the fourth plane?), and to Kabul (anyone remember the Taliban?); it was constituted by computer graphics illustrating the timetables and trajectories of hijacked planes, and, of course, all of this filled in by the ceaseless commentary of news anchors. This is a supposed look, after all, inside (and what is supposed to be the 'outside' here, if not what-we-already-saw-on-TV?) *9/11* engages in no freeze-frames, instant replays, or graphics, and only the faintest manipulation of footage occurs (on the order of digital zooms and fades). It is made an explicit point, in fact, that TV media are other from the film. They are distanced and framed by the camera, literally, when we watch news reports over the shoulders of real people (as if we might forget that we, in turn, watch these people on our own television screens), and othered when Jules says that a power outage that evening was greeted warmly by the firefighters, as they "wouldn't have to watch the news anymore."

In this way and others, *9/11* opposes itself to and distinguishes itself from the flatness of the TV broadcast, while at the same time counting on some of the 'rawness' and 'immediacy' that video (which can be 'live') connotes and film (which certainly cannot) doesn't. Hand in hand with this, the effects of editing are greatly reduced, conducted back and forth over a single forward-moving axis, with Jules' story on side and Gedeon's parallel on the other (the drama of two brothers' separation and reunion also structures the film). The footage each brother cap-

tured is allowed to run uninterrupted for long stretches, suggesting a one-to-one relationship between the viewer and the event (with a thin, almost negligible piece of video enabling the exchange). Limitations of the camera are often used to similar effect. For instance; we see the second plane crash from Gedeon's camera, which gets nothing better than an obscured shot, facing the wrong end of the south tower. And even though the choice was obviously open to the Naudets and the CBS producers, scenes never repeat: noticeably, each plane crash only happens once. By seeing less, and seeing less only once, we are able to feel that we are actually seeing a lot more: shots here are 'incidental', more real because they are imperfect, they let in what the-guy-on-the-street would have seen, etc. (Part of this reasoning is, strictly speaking, fallacious, as the majority of images that we saw of early September 11th were probably amateur as well).

*9/11* does not, however, do away with narration. Quite to the contrary, it trades in the ultra-fragmented narrative of TV news coverage for a different kind of narrative—one much closer, as it were, to the linear development and dramatization characteristic of Hollywood films. As none other than guest narrator Robert DeNiro puts it in one of his interspersed introductions, these guys were there "from beginning to end." Of course, there was nothing approximating an "end" as far as news media and the people reading, watching, and listening to it were concerned. The very possibility, in fact, of an "end" to September 11th is only one of the effects of *9/11*'s choice of a filmic-narrative—adopting a clear exposition-climax-resolution structure that couldn't exist without Hollywood—as opposed to a more televisual documentary style (and the recent fake documentary *Blair Witch Project* ended with far less sense of resolution than *9/11*



Robert DeNiro, guest narrator of the documentary. Above left, a still from the film in which a firefighter takes a breath in front of a row of TV screens, after the collapse and, top, another still, taken from inside the north tower after the first plane hit.

does—maybe because it only had 30,000 dollars riding on it).

*9/11* heavily references manipulations characteristic of narrative film—in terms of its character archetypes, obvious scripting for dramatic effect (Tony's fate is not only deliberately kept a secret until the last third of the movie, but it is strongly hinted that he'd died when in fact he had not), an artificially linear development, and a musical score (I'm not kidding)—and evokes, specifically, the war movie genre. We start sev-

eral months before that fateful Tuesday, and are introduced to Tony, a likeably nervous "Proby" firefighter (the nickname designates a new recruit still in his 'probation' period). We watch other firefighters in his company play pranks on him, we watch a carefree, domesticated life of cooking and cleaning around the house (that is, the firehouse), and we see Tony's more or less minor 'first fire', a car with a flaming hood. This establishment of 'normal' life in the First Battalion is deliberately and systematically punctuated by forebodings of the disaster to come—among them, a funeral for a rookie FDNY firefighter, killed in a blaze, and, just as poignant, the heavily doubled meaning when Tony and others in his company speak in anticipation of his "first big fire." When that fire comes at 8:46 Tuesday morning the firefighters we have already met are first on the scene, and we see them 'put to the test' by 'the trials' of a day marked by explosions, rubble, and mass (invisible) casualties. On September 12th, after the dust has settled, the scarred battlefield is revealed, and the process of cleaning-up solemnly begins.



Geddon Naudet, left, with his brother Jules, far right. Center is the main narrator of the film, an FDNY firefighter. The Naudets caught many of the events of September 11th on videotape.

to assuage that trauma. In the face of this, one might be tempted to argue that fragmentation brings one closer to the real, as it allows for blots and excesses that a heavily scripted and organized narrative never could, but this argument would be difficult, to say the least. Put most simply, in either respect certain things are allowed to show through while others are excluded.

Which leads to one last question about 9/11. What does it leave out? I ask this question, obviously, with an eye towards an answer I've already got in mind, and one that I couldn't get out of mind while watching the film, for it seems a truly strange example of valorizing revisionism that no war movie (not even a war movie directed by Steven Spielberg) could ever perpetrate: 9/11 leaves out violence, it leaves out death, it leaves out hysteria, it leaves out fear, it leaves out bodies. There is, on-screen, a bloody nose, and the limp leg of a corpse. The latter belongs to Father Mychal Judge, the FDNY Chaplain who, as we are told, was the first official death in the attacks. As far as 9/11 shows, he was the first and the last: mutilated and severed limbs are mentioned once or twice, and soberly so, by rescue workers, as is a pair of people we are told (but not shown) were on fire in the lobby. The only concrete sign of death to make it on to

the tape besides Judge's is that registered in one sequence by two or three crashing sounds that, as the narrator says, signal people falling to the ground from the floors above. One might assume that in keeping death off of the screen, and alluding to it so sparingly, the film acts out of deference to the "unrepresentability of the tragedy," but this is not the case: the day is not merely not represented as a massacre, but is presented, positively, almost as if it were a natural disaster: the corpus to which damage is done is the cityscape, the skyline, the buildings themselves, while human damage (physical and psychological) is wholly absent.

The shot of the first plane crashing is perhaps the only one in the film that manages to re-call the powerful sense of extra-ordinary violence one experienced that day. Other images have, I suppose, become in many ways normalized and even aestheticized after enough re-contextualization and repetition: the image of the soot-covered streets, of the immense wreckage after the collapse, the collapse itself, even: all of these things have become familiar to us in a way that it seems the image of a plane striking a building never could be. It is for some reason easier to remove the people who were inside the towers from one's

as two firefighters wave a gauge over a street grating, checking for a possible gas leak. All attention is directed downwards, at the mun-

dane, following up on an effectively mediocre call the kind with which the firemen are familiar. The groan of engine noise rises up, impossible to place as recorded by the tiny camera microphone, growing louder and louder until it can't be ignored and everyone in the shot, bewildered, looks up. We are powerless as the camera swings us around, aiming upwards and south, and just as we get our bearings against the vertical standard of the north tower, a plane enters the frame and slams into it. The juxtaposition of 'normal life' and the surreal is nowhere staged as powerfully as it is here, in the simple transition from down to up. We go from staring downwards confidently, at the grating, to staring upwards, in fear, at the open sky. Furthermore, the move from down to up prefigures the same gesture as it was to occur for the masses of people whose attentions would become focused on the skies

in a way they never had been before—a striking transformation in and of itself in a city where pedestrians rarely look up.

The image of the plane bursting into the company of rooftops and slamming into the

tower is as jarring six months later as it was the first time we saw it—but this points out something comparably bizarre, namely, that for the most part the first time we saw it was also the last time we saw it: the image was replayed constantly September 11th and had been effectively yanked, it seemed, from all major American media outlets after newspapers had come out the morning of the 12th. And as neither is seen more than once and the second is not even seen unobstructed—it is little more than the glint of a wing and an explosion on the unseen side of the south tower—the two planes exist here in much the same way as they've existed in news media since September 12th: as the apparitional, almost

arbitrary causes of the whole thing, which can only ever appear insofar as they immediately disappear into the buildings.

The aftermath of the destruction is here a visual catalogue of shattered cars, debris, soot, charred papers, twisted steel, and chunks of concrete. Moreover, the only ones out of our cast of characters to show any significant degree of emotion are the two French brothers, who break into tears and hold each other in a sustained embrace upon finding each other again. Their American counterparts, the firefighters who have survived and returned to the firehouse (all of them do, by the way), are much less emotional, talking for the most part with wide (but dry) eyes, about the spectacle of the day ("Look at that! They were there, now they're not there!" says one as he chomps on an apple, almost in the air of a bewildered stand-up comic)—not the slightest sign of panic registers among a group of professionals so used to catastrophe. Not

even the sensitive proby breaks down in the face of what we know must have been pure horror, but simply remarks that "someone's got balls."

...it seems a truly strange example of valorizing revisionism that no war movie (not even a war movie directed by Steven Spielberg) could ever perpetrate: 9/11 leaves out violence, it leaves out death, it leaves out hysteria, it leaves out fear, it leaves out bodies.

All the fear and uncertainty—that pervasive sense of the world-twisting surreal (which Žižek identifies as 'the real') that I and everyone I saw that day experienced—none of it has any place in this film. We have found a way to symbolize and make sense of the radically destabilizing: in this case, by assimilation to a familiar Hollywood model. But is this not, at root, what a memorial always does? The trauma of death has been lowered into the grave, buried, and comes to us now re-presented under a different, more manageable figure. September 11th has given way to 9/11, so that we might

go about the process of remembering (and, of course, forgetting) more comfortably.



At best, 9/11 has an ambiguous relationship with the real of September 11th, removing something from its presentation with one hand (namely, the intense fragmentation and repetition that characterized TV that day) and adding linearity and narrativity with the other. The move is, in a way, perfectly circular. As Žižek writes elsewhere in his essay, space was prepared for the spectacular demise of the World Trade Center, like it was for that of the Titanic before it, by "ideological fantasizing" about what it represented (in the case of the former, global trade or 'the American



An image from CBS.com, of a woman reacting to a screening of 9/11

way', and in the case of the latter, burgeoning industrialism). Space was also cleared by more specific Hollywood fantasizing about the destruction of New York City, mapped for Žižek in movies from *Escape from New York* to *Independence Day*, with numerous points before, after, and in between: "The unthinkable which happened was thus the object of fantasy: in a way, America got what it fantasized about, and this was the greatest surprise." With 9/11, the 'unthinkable' that somehow escaped the Hollywood fold has been re-appropriated: if cinematic tropes somehow enabled our most traumatic reactions to the attacks, now different ones return



A shot from the 'outside': The second plane hits in an image common in news reports on September 11th. With the exception of the collapses, no such footage is seen in 9/11.

# \*MUSIC BRIEFS



**Le Tigre**  
*Remix 12*  
Mr. Lady Records

In some subterranean bar amongst insomniac martinis and mood lighting, between the art-couches and the maroon suits, Le Tigre's *Remix 12* is probably being ignored; it has that generic blend-in sound that never gets you dancing, that allows you to sit and say "is this Le Tigre?" For indeed, what the trio does best isn't found on the album; there's no energy and no flair, just a bunch of slowed-down tunes with some trip-hop beats in the background. Each song has a few electric conventions tacked onto it; the occasional sample, the odd boingy house sound, the addition of some extra snare-drum snaps—they all suffocate the band's feisty feminist fury and make you wish for the upbeat, raucously-riffed bits like on "Deception" and "FYR." But speaking of "Deception," its remixed counterpart is at least peppy and fun—a funky redo of the original, like changing an already great steak with A1 sauce. But for those who care to see the real thing, not the remix, catch the March 29th and 30th shows at the Bowery Ballroom in NYC. They're sold out shows

but then again, I'm sure that you can work something out.

Tosh Chiang



**Town and Country**  
*C'mon*  
Thrill Jockey Records

For starters, this band is playing the Black Swan in Tivoli April 8th. Get in touch with the Black Swan in regards to ticket info, and now the review of their newest cd. An unfortunate press release for this record compares Town and Country to Godspeed You Black Emperor!—unfortunate because the former are hardly as cheesy, if not as immediately gripping. The comparison makes sense, really, only via the tendency of both bands to repeat one phrase over the course of an entire composition, subjecting it to minor variations along the way. With GYBEI, though, this variation invariably leads to an increase in tempo and volume, a frenzied, rousing climax. Town and Country are far more subtle—but, then again, they're a vastly different kind of band. There are no punk roots here but rather a direct quotation of late 60s minimalist composers. In "I'm Appealing" an essentially two-note guitar

riff, strummed as if it were being played quickly on a harp, builds in intensity with nothing more than pitch changes. Percussion is downplayed as well, with occasional strikes of a drum, a muted bell, and an ethereal hand chime that sounds like an electronic sample. All the instruments used on *C'mon* are acoustic, but not in the wack 'hey guys let's get some beer and coffee and just play great music sitting cross-legged' way—Town and Country songs are intricately structured and, in their reference to classical music, are by turns lush, pared-down, expansive, but never merely 'organic'. These are people who seem to have gone to school for music (they're from Chicago, and on Thrill Jockey, after all), but that shouldn't stop the most anti-intellectual fans from liking them. On a personal note, me and the two guys up late laying out this paper (current time 4:56 am Monday night) are enjoying a very tender moment in silence, listening to the Town and Country cd as I review it. Hardly challenging, and choosing a definitionally accessible sound as their model, Town and Country are a breath of fresh air in the context of my daily regimen of mainstream hip-hop and Blink-182. And, moreover, a breath of fresh air not achieved at a cerebral, overly experimental cost (which is not to say that the cerebral is bad in its own right, but rather that it is hard to deal with after downloading "What's my age again?" and listening to it three times in a row).

Jonah Weiner



**Vision of Disorder**  
*From Bliss to Devastation*  
T.V.T. Records

Vision Of Disorder has amassed a large, enthusiastic, and loyal fan base mainly through their extremely violent and unrelenting live shows. Speaking from first hand experience, the carnage that occurs in a V.O.D. mosh pit is a rare occurrence given the widespread commercial stranglehold currently pervading over the heavy music scene. It seems as though heavy music and teenybopper pop are currently sharing a disturbingly similar aesthetic connection. While its easy to blame Korn and their innumerable, idiotic offshoots for the lack of variety and musicianship in metal, the real blame should fall upon the public who seem incapable of recognizing bands who are sincere about their craft, musicians who have been creating mind-blowing recordings for years (ex. Converge, Candiria, Dillinger Escape Plan, Messhuggah). While extreme metal and hardcore have been strong throughout this time of manufactured heaviness, both genres seem to carry with them the weight of a scene. Luckily for interested

listeners, there are a few heavy bands doing their own thing, separating themselves from their scenes, and making heavy music without sacrificing integrity for the sake of commerciality. As their newest musical concoction gets released into the world, Vision of Disorder will appropriately reside in the top tier of heavy bands. With "From Bliss to Devastation," Vision of Disorder has created an album that should have all self-respecting metalheads salivating. Unlike the bands previous output, (Vision of Disorder, Imprint, For the Bleeders) "From Bliss to Devastation" is a streamlined metal record, a dark, grimy listening experience that has hints of everything from Black Sabbath, early Soundgarden and Alice in Chains, to Clutch, Pantera, and Helmet.

Taking their hardcore / metalcore roots and largely discarding them, V.O.D.'s new sound is corrosive, dark, and extremely original. Leading the way is vocalist Tim Williams. His vocal performance on "Bliss" is both a realization of his hardcore roots and a reinvention of sorts, adding gritty yet soulful singing much akin to a less polished Lynn Staley. The combination of diverse vocal styles create a cohesive blend that help keep the record from getting monotonous. With the bands front man now taking the lions share of attention, the two-headed guitar monster of Matt Baumbach and Mike Kennedy work more carefully on providing riffs and structures that compliment the songs rather than overwhelm them. While some old school fans might miss the cha-

*continued on page 13...*

**K104.7**  
Today's hottest singles,  
reviewed today  
by Jonah Weiner

Creed. "Bullets," Weathered

In "Bullets" Creed transforms into an almost unidentifiable amalgam of archetypal grunge and hard rock bands, and it is incredible. Their previous big singles, "Take me Higher" and "Arms Wide Open," epitomized a completely unselfconscious epic-alternative style that couldn't have happened before Soundgarden broke up, Pearl Jam released "Given to Fly," and Matchbox 20 mixed shaggy hair and adult contemporary. With "Bullets," though, Creed trade in their 'early 90s alternative rip-off' status for the straight-up, real-deal thing, to the point where it's hard to tell this is even Creed. A metal song with only the faintest trace of the divine light of God, its vocals sound like Alice in Chains, its chorus sounds like Stone Temple

Pilots (think Scott Weiland and that megaphone he yelled through), and its riffs sound like Helmet overproduced. And its video has a PS2-style animated Scott Stapp and his Creed-mates floating around with angel wings and blasting demons.

Aaliyah. "More than a Woman," Aaliyah

A posthumous release from Aaliyah, and a much better memorial than "Rock the Boat" was. The difference is, of course, that this one has Timbaland production. Aaliyah's best songs seem to rely, if not directly on Timbaland, at least indirectly on his R&B-Fast Tempo Dance Beat style of songwriting. R&B slow jams can be, at their worst, fatal, and at their best, unlistenable. By amping the beats up, dispensing with over-the-top vocal theatrics, and cutting up vocal tracks in a way that approached Aaliyah's singing as if it were one sample source among others, songs like "We need a

Resolution," "Are you that somebody," and "Try Again" made Aaliyah into a sort of anti-R&B star. (And, on these exact terms, it's remarkable how the new Brandy single borrows so heavily from Aaliyah, taking her tendencies to their extreme). I've heard that the synth loop on "More than a Woman" is a Georgio Moroder sample from the Midnight Express soundtrack—whether or not that's true the reference point here is not Turkish hash smuggling and homoerotic baths but, instead, dated, overly serious synth dance compositions.

Jay Z. "People are Talkin," Jay Z Unplugged

What a strange idea that music as fragmented as jiggy hip hop beats—where horns from 60s funk records can play comfortably over quick hi-hat rhythms and synthesized disco bass lines—could be translated into a live performance of traditional instrumentation. The result is mixed: on the

one hand it contains some of the fun of recognizing a Public Enemy riff as your friend tries to play it on his acoustic guitar in his dorm room. On the other hand, it's contains all the wackness of hearing a Public Enemy riff played on the same instrument your friend uses when he tries to play Elliot Smith covers. Jay Z meets jam band, and the result is not cool—"People are Talkin," however, is a studio track, a hidden song at the end of the Unplugged session. Ironically, the production is totally minimalist, anchored by a prominent four-note bass line that is only occasionally punctuated by high pitched squeals and sped-up soul vocals. Jay Z's rhymes are delivered with no characteristic bravado. And although one could probably say this about any hip hop track, the best way to listen to this song is with the bass turned way up; this way the samples are even more obscured, focusing attention on how good a pared-down rap track can turn out.

## hrvatski and his magical laptop "rock" old gym by huffa frobes-cross

Hrvatski is an educated musician. He graduated from the Berklee College of Music, and in interviews has showed that he has a firm knowledge of the academic tradition of experimental music.

And in several ways that made his recent performance at Bard College a pleasant surprise. On the one hand it is nice to see someone coming from the laptop scene (especially related to tigerbeat6) who is not particularly anti-intellectual and is willing to at times make music that is a little more introspective. However, it is also a relief to have an intelligent electronic musician who is willing to let loose and even at times play straight up danceable music while maintaining a connection with his more esoteric references.

Performing with a laptop, a couple of effects boxes, and at one point a guitar, Hrvatski displayed an enormous stylistic diversity throughout his Old Gym performance, referencing the rhythmic choppiness of Venetian Snares at one moment and then moving into something more like the all out noise of Merzbow the next. However, there was a constant sense of logical progression and further a sense that at any given time what was going on made sense in terms of what came before it. A more danceable section would be rearranged and decimated to produce noises for the following section which, in turn, would be rhythmically arranged for the next section.



The effect was not only to produce a virtuoso display of his ability to mimic a number of different styles and play them in the same piece, but more interestingly to continually point up the bits of aural similarity between styles from across the spectrum, and to elaborate in a short space of time the process of music creation on a computer. A process in which sound input into the computer often becomes like a digital goo which maybe retains some particular characteristic of its original source but is more just a plaything of the processors and sequencers which will rework it.

This same interest in the expandability of sound fed through a computer was explored in the short encore Hrvatski played with his opening song. Based entirely

on the sounds of a toy glockenspiel it was a quiet piece of drony audio processing reminiscent of electronic minimalism. Although there were times where they used the flexibility of current software to transcend these influences it was on the whole overshadowed by Hrvatski's solo performance. Throughout the night, however, Hrvatski played on his strength of keeping in contact with a much broader scope of music production than most experimental electronic musicians and as a result gave a performance that was both generous to the audience and extremely interesting.

## V.O.D., continued

...continued from page 12

otic, frenetically thrashing riffs from 96's mind blowing "Imprint" record, the sludgy, thick wall of guitar created by the duo is extremely punishing and diverse, utilizing multiple effects to create an eerie metallic foundation. Bass wise, "From Bliss to Devastation" is a groove lovers dream. With the bass tuned several steps down, the bass lines on the album add a menacing mechanical low end furthering the music's visceral edge. Completing the rhythm section is drummer Brendon Cohen, a fast and dynamically precise drummer who makes an obvious effort on "Bliss" to curtail his once overwhelming arsenal of fills. Much like the other instruments on the album, the drums serve the purpose of the songs and rarely stray into showy tangents. The songs themselves are can be enjoyed as individual pieces or as a full body of work. While "Itching to Bleed" and "Without You" are reminiscent of old V.O.D. songs such as "Southbound" and "Sunshine" are refreshingly catchy for such a heavy band, showing the band isn't afraid of some much deserved public recognition. Ultimately it's songs like "On The Table" "Regurgitate" and the brutal title track that best exemplify the bands new diverse sound. With slide guitar and staccato riffs wailing and moaning

in the background, Tim Williams voice and lyrics seethe in the forefront.

The underlying factor that ultimately makes this album so terrific is its combined maturity and freshness. Ignoring popular trends may not please industry insiders or fans of pop music, but it sure as hell earns respectability in my book. The bottom line is this; V.O.D. have spent the last 2 years figuring out just what kind of band they are. Without the backing of a record label or any true promise of financial stability, and without knowing if their new material would ever be released to the public, V.O.D. dug in and exorcised their demons for the sake of their art. Through all the uncertainty, which would dismantle a lesser band, V.O.D. persevered. From Bliss to Devastation is a furious bastard of a record, a concrete testament that although it may be a rare phenomenon, genuine integrity still lives in heavy music.

Gabriel Marks-Mulcahy

## half seas over & ginger ninjas play bard hall and are REVIEWED by skye mcneill

When I walked into Bard Hall last Thursday night I happened to pass by two people covering each other in colored electrical tape. This in-preparation duo was The Ginger Ninjas, one half of that night's musical mélange, and a band I have come to consider a little gem among the usual indie-hardcore bands of the last few years.

Despite the competition of a heavily flyer'd Red Room show at the same time, a crowd of loyal Bard band show regulars showed up curious to hear Louisville, Kentucky trio Half Seas Over, and ready to give their support to The Ginger Ninjas. Though it is a good space, I generally think there is something lacking as far as atmosphere in Bard Hall, but that was quickly changed by the introduction of a light show machine (courtesy of Half Seas Over), and The Ginger Ninjas were bathed in a dizzy spectrum of rock arena furor.

Tosh Chiang (also of the Broken Bottles) sent me on a nostalgic trip to the early 90's (which I will unabashedly admit is still my favorite time in recent music history) when he donned a pair of round white-rimmed sunglasses, though he threw them off during the first song. But one thing that sets The Ginger Ninjas apart from other bands that look like they rock, is quite simply, that they actually do. Tosh and fellow Ninja Leah Mos-

kowitz (also of Popsicle Riot) carried on a musical Chinese Firedrill throughout their set, quickly switching to different combinations of drums, bass, guitar, and vocals, and vivaciously playing songs with refreshingly off kilter riffs and beat changes, but comfortably familiar harmonies. The simplicity of a two piece band can sometimes feel lacking, but Tosh and Leah's adeptness at each instrument and ability to balance their sounds was fulfilling without being either overwhelming or empty.

Leah went from full-out screams while playing drums to almost bashfully soft yet steady vocals while plucking the guitar during the newer "Elephant," which seemed to be a crowd favorite. This was especially appealing since, in her role as Popsicle Riot's drummer, we only get to see one side of Leah's musical abilities. Her animated personality while playing showed how much she really



enjoyed what she was doing.

Tosh played guitar less flashily perhaps than he does with Broken Bottles, but one could still pick up how frickin' ill he is at it, and I was also a little taken aback at the sweetness of his singing voice. Also this time around the Ninjas were prepared, for when, during an instrument switch, the bass suddenly stopped working (the second show in a row this has happened to them), Tosh leapt to the back of the room faster than the winning sharp shooter at a Western showdown and presented a second bass. Although Leah and Tosh made the claim "We're not cute" at the beginning of the show, when

The Ginger Ninjas ended their set I had a rather charmed smile on my face.

Half Seas Over, a stylin' all girl band, was a little more electronic-based with a thick keyboard sound in lieu of bass and programmed beats instead of drums. The three had spunk, as well as matching stone-washed denim jackets, bold colored ties, and lightning bolt tattoos, and save for one slightly under-the-breath negative comment about the crowd's lack of dancing during the 'audience participation' piece (I blame it on Bard Hall's irregular ambience rather than my compadres), they were high spirited and engaging.

Though they played David Bowie while setting up, I couldn't help but feel like they were a little too heavily influenced by bands like Sleater-Kinney or Le Tigre and was pleased by the occasional break into more heavy and gritty guitar sequences. Half Seas Over had

some technical difficulties which caused the vocals to be practically inaudible, and that was rather disappointing, but I think they made up for it by telling rather bizarre jokes.

At any rate I was impressed by how solid their songs were and ended up buying one of their self made CDs after the show. (They also had a whole slew of rather eclectic hand made t-shirts in 80's puff-paints). The CD seems to be a little older and the songs less developed and slower, if not a little darker with a tinge of Patti Smith. But maybe the lyrics were dark the whole time and I just couldn't hear them.

Despite my extreme adoration and cherish for the pulpy underbelly of a haven known as the Red Room, it was for once nice to enjoy a show without having to stand in the back of the room so as not to be battered by thrashing moshers and to leave that show not reeking of smoke. And now, Molly of Half Seas Over's joke: 'What's the difference between beer nuts and deer nuts? Beer nuts are a buck fifty and deer nuts are just under a buck.' Ba dum.

# Gerhard Richter is Alive!

*Retrospective at MOMA reviewed*

by **huffa frobes-cross**

Gerhard Richter is alive, and yet he has a retrospective at the MOMA of 40 years of his painting. He is almost unique as a painter in that he has lived and continued to work beyond the point that his life's work has been coalesced into a coherent narrative of artistic production. The issues which people bring up about his paintings now, such as the question of placing his abstract work in relation to his representational work, are issues which involve a body of work produced over an entire lifetime not simply a single show or even a few years. Other artists whose work is similarly viewed like Mark Rothko or Frank Stella have produced very straightforward explanations of their work in which one series logically progresses to the next along some kind of teleological path. The strange thing about Richter is that despite the desire to talk about his entire huge body of work at once, despite the fact that he seems to encourage us to do so, there is no easily discernible progression, there is no quick story of Richter's work.

Richter is often called a photo-realist, at least two-thirds of his



work seem to support this kind of claim. This large portion of his work is painted from photographs in such a way that they resemble the photograph more than the object that the photograph is representing. They are always blurred in some way, although this blur most often appears to be a mimesis of a photographic blur, however, it is not necessarily a representation of the blurriness of the photograph he is representing. Even in this description there are problems in trying to define what photo-realism means if Richter is a photo-realist. Richard Estes is most often seen as a prime example of American photo-realism. His pictures from a certain distance have a tendency to almost fool one's eyes

into believing that they are real, or that they are real photographs. Here photo-realism stands for a kind of transparency, a style of painting in which the actual fact of the paint of the physical structure of the painting are to a large extent effaced and one has a feeling of almost seeing the real thing. Now whether this definition holds water at all or whether it is a manifestation of the mythology of photography as pure representation is a question we will set aside, more importantly at the moment this definition is totally ineffective in relation to Richter's work. Not one of Richter's "photo-realist" paintings fool one into believing that they are actual photographs. The blur that brings to mind photographs and the particular nature of the photographic image at the same time brings to mind paint and the particular nature of the painted image. As a result at no level does Richter give one a feeling of transparency he is representing the lack of transparency in a photograph while at the same time representing the lack of transparency and the materiality of the painted image. If photo-realism means ultimate

transparency in which the real is seen clearly with no distortion Richter is the antithesis of that tradition never letting one comfortably settle on any particular reality even the reality of the paint itself competes with the image it represents for supremacy. If photo-realism means a less extreme though almost synonymous kind of transparency in which absolute faithfulness in the reproduction of the photograph as an object is achieved Richter again fails. His blurriness or at times his painterly brush strokes are never entirely at the service of a reproduction of the photograph.

Of course, the other problem with this definition is that even under the most crude usage of the term photo-realist it excludes a significant portion of his work which falls under the general heading of abstract painting. These works owe a debt to abstract expressionism in their freeness and make reference to the cold gaudiness of Frank Stella's maximalism in their colors and their obscuring of gesture. They are about the same scale as his large-ish representational paintings, and are often painted in large part by

scraping paint with a palette knife across the canvas. Often there are elements in them which seem to be a representation of an indiscernible bit of a photograph, an out of focus blue swath or a motion blurred skin tone. These works also make reference to a small series of Richter's work in which he used a similar technique with the palette knife to partially obscure an already painted image. A common way in which some people attempt to connect this work with his representational work is to consider them as a whole as the destruction of the photographic image. This interpretation makes sense when taking into consideration the series of works which are in fact partially destroyed images somewhere in between the representational and the abstract work. However, viewing Richter's work as a contrast between paint as image and paint as abstraction is interesting but it does not so easily explain the abstract paintings. If they are viewed as a destruction of his painted images (whether they are in terms of their actual creation or not is irrelevant for the moment) and then can stand against them in this way this strikes the representational work in a strange light. All of the photo-paintings already contain within them an attempt to destroy the image. They are a destruction of the image of the photograph and a destruction of the object of the photographic image. The abstract work would then be a kind of decadence in which this destruction is taken so far that the image is lost entirely. But this doesn't feel right looking at these paintings which contain incredibly bright colors never seen in the representational work, and which seem not like a destruction but an overabundance of everything to the point that it cannot be easily made sense of.

Richter is also often called a "Pop" artist. This comes from a number of elements in his work including his infrequent use of media events as subject matter. Another major reason why his work has been related to Pop art is his inclusion in the vocabulary of painting the lowly snapshot photograph. The snapshot photograph being seen as a manifestation of the image production of the artistically uninformed masses done with the sole purpose of simply capturing "what's there." This elevation of a vernacular medium into the realm of high art brings him into contact with Pop art. Richter's relationship with the media events he chooses to capture is an extremely confusing one, and most likely discontinuous with the way one is likely to perceive the same relationship within Pop art. Fur-

## the paintings of gerhard richter



ther, neither the English or American schools of Pop were apt to make use of the kinds of subject matter that Richter uses. For many American Pop artist the interjection of "low" art, or commercial art into a high art setting of the gallery was a way of commenting on the way in which we determine high and low art and their relative values. Richter's relationship to the snapshots he uses is extremely ambiguous, but it's unlikely that he had a desire to "elevate" the snapshot itself. Artists like Warhol, following in the footsteps of Duchamp, would often simply recontextualize an object in order to effect its inclusion in the world of high art. This strategy often draws attention to the differences between what is likely to be in a gallery and what

ideologies ethical viability. However, his exclusive use of newspaper photographs as subjects for this series both complicate his relationship to history painting and draw another possibility misleading comparison to Pop art. From a Pop art standpoint Richter might be capturing a certain prevalent everyman type media sensibility about the events he is depicting and by that avoiding giving a sense of the high authority of the historical painting as it comes down from a lofty academic perspective. However, Richter is, in one way, actually relying on the authority of the photograph as a perceived analogical image to revalidate historical painting while at the same time questioning the ability of historical painting to cut to a truth

Richter has said specifically that he has found it

impossible to simply use a photograph and be satisfied with the result, saying that it is difficult to make a photograph a "picture."

is not. Richter has said specifically that he has found it impossible to simply use a photograph and be satisfied with the result, saying that it is difficult to make a photograph a "picture." In a sense, Richter expresses a desire to have his works make a connection to what is considered within the tradition of fine art, and his consistent use of one of the most conservative mediums available suggests that. Rather than wanting to elevate the snapshot he does not answer the question of the relevancy of the snapshot as art by confusing the connection between his paintings and their source through his constant partial destruction. Although this would also be an unfair comparison, in a way, he is much more like the pictorialist photographer who has so little faith in the straight photographs potential to be art that he has to distort its more directly "representational" aspects. Finally, as I mentioned above, Richter is interested in quite different subjects than most artists put under the heading Pop, Richter's subjects much more quickly draw comparisons to the history of history painting. His two most famous historical series are about murder or possible murder, in cases where a number of seemingly impenetrable issues of ethics and human rights arise. Cases which like Richter himself attack the possibility of any

beyond the moment by focusing his paintings only on the representation of the moment most of the moment, the newspaper photograph. So Pop is probably a misused term for Richter as well, but maybe not an entirely wrong one.

So what's left? There are other prevalent viewpoints about Richter that I have not addressed, there are many many attempts to make his work proceed from some thesis statement. Many of these attempts provide extremely interesting ways to further analyze Richter's work. Yet, as Richter himself would most certainly recognize it is the nature of such attempts, insofar as they have a nature to them, to fail. My own narrative of Richter would not distinguish him from any other artist, or any other object of interpretation for that matter, by saying that he has produced a body of work which provokes incessant failed attempts to conceive of its totality in a coherent way. What may be particular about Richter is the way in which he does not let us forget this fact, always making us uncomfortable in front of a Richter.

# Who is Sam Brown?

Underground cartoonist Sam Brown talks with the Free Press

by **kent johnson**

Cult cartoonist Sam Brown is a growing figure in the underbelly of the comic world. He does not do interviews, and he refuses to be photographed. Brown's artwork is only available through his strangely hilarious website, "explodingdog.com," and he has made a reputation for himself almost entirely by word of mouth as

His first book, wish for something better, is a mesmerizing collection of his cartoon narratives. He composes, with a photographer's sense of symmetry, a stick-figured

depiction of mankind in which he manages to represent a huge spectrum of gesture and emotion.

Arguably, the best pieces in the book are "You Don't Love Me", "Failure as a Superhero", and "Finding Out What is Under the Snow". His stories are childlike, hopeful, and disturbingly grim. The imagery of "Failure as a Superhero", in particular, attains, in its minimalism, the kind of pathos a more lifelike representation would fail to achieve.

After months of e-mails, I

finally convinced Sam Brown to do a brief telephone interview for *Free Press*, provided that it was under five minutes. On the night of March 21st, I received a call from Sam, and he agreed to talk.

**Are you ready?**

Yeah. Sure.

**Who are your influences?**

I can't name any particular artists that have influenced me. I don't know...the pictures and words of the last 100 years.

**Do you believe in true love?**

What? I guess not. It doesn't influence my work.

**How long has the site been around?**

Two years.

**Is it true that you are unemployed?**

Yes. Yes it is. For a year now.

People should buy my book.

**What are your working habits?**

I make breakfast and draw.

**Your work is, at times, extremely morose, and, at times, extremely hopeful. Why?**

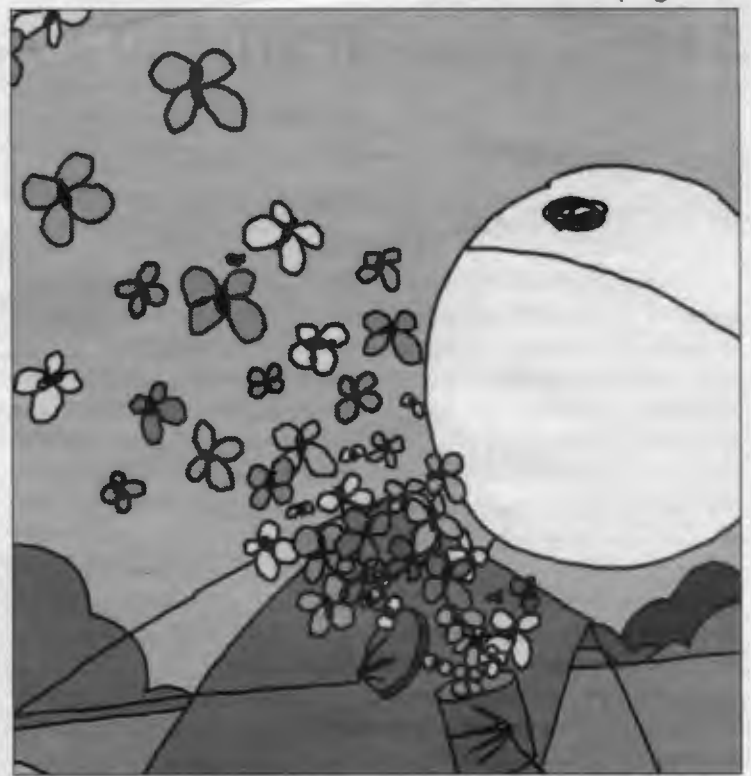
I think polar extremes relate to how people feel about what's happening today.

**Why the name, 'exploding dog'?**

Well, the history of it is...I made ten videos of animated dogs doing different things, a dog watching TV, a dog in a rocket ship...and a dog exploding. No blood or anything. The website was originally an extension of that.

**Have you had any formal training in art?**

I studied Video Art for four



years.

**Will we (the human race) be ok?**

I guess we have the option to be ok. Right now, the furthest we've progressed is through the military, through destruction, but that has no purpose. I don't think our purpose is to blow shit up.

**How do you feel about your growing popularity?**

It's cool. Oh, I like it. I'm glad I'm doing something people can relate to.

**What is your definition of success?**

Looking back and being proud of my life. Like if I'm on my deathbed...and I'm proud. I do want to make an Exploding Dog video game. That would be successful.

**Let's talk about love.**

(laughs) Ok.

**Are you currently romantically involved?**

I have a girlfriend, yes.

**How is it possible to love successfully in our modern world?**

Nothing is different. You need to be able to say to your partner that you can overlook any problems, overcome any obstacles.

**What do you gain, and what do you lose by loving?**

I don't know.

**What are you striving for?**

I don't think I want people to come away with anything concrete. I want someone to like it. I don't want to change how people act. My characters are sexless, that's consistent, but I'm not trying to say anything with that. For each specific drawing, it's not on my mind.

**Are there any new developments or changes in your work?**

Well, there's the video game. It's a fun concept...interaction and storytelling. I sketch everyday. The site...gave me a format. The drawings have changed.



## collective consciousness



by chelsea beck



bard free press

write.draw.  
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# 74th Annual Academy Awards a Huge Bore

Free Press regular finds no redeemable qualities of this year's Oscars

by frank torino

Tom Cruise kicked off the 74th Academy Awards with the wit and sincerity of a sleazy car salesman. As he gushed through his personal philosophy on the nature of cinema, viewers knew that they had a long night ahead of them. The ceremony ran through its usual course of tear-jerking film tributes, awkward musical performances, and the odd, wild-card spectacle (in this case, a fairly decent show by the famous circus troupe, "Cirque Du Soleil). Whoopie Goldberg did an adequate job as the host, although her strand of comic relief was a bit less provocative than her 1999 Oscar debut, in which she consistently shocked spectators with the nastiest set of one-liners to ever hit the show.

Particularly disconcerting were this year's musical performances, which featured an aged, perturbed Sting, who looked like he was on the verge of cardiac arrest, and a very intimidated Enya, who sang with the grace of a ventriloquist's doll. Faith Hill's performance isn't worth mentioning, mostly due to the fact that her song, for the film, Pearl Harbor, is better suited for a credit card commercial than it is for a blockbuster film.

The awards' presenters are always a burden to watch and one wishes that the Academy would get wise and drop the sappy introductions altogether. Needless to say, this year was no exception, and

many of the actors seemed bitter, medicated, or fresh out of rehab. Husband and wife Ryan Phillippe and Reese Witherspoon had a snappy lovers' spat while presenting the award for "Best Makeup", and John Travolta (while presenting "Best Foreign Language Film") looked so spaced out it seemed the



Enya and her new husband, backstage at the Oscars Sunday night.

Scientologists had finally gotten to him. Jennifer Lopez showed up looking like a stood-up prom date, her hair styled like "Animal" on The Muppets, and Gwyneth Paltrow presented an award in what I can best describe as a grungy,

baroque, tank-top--just about the nappiest outfit I've ever seen.

The worst thing about the Oscars is the acceptance speeches, and this year's orations were about as exciting as a dose of Lithium. Every year, someone goes into hysterics, and this year it was "Best Actress" winner, Halle Berry, who amazingly outdid last year's recipient, Julia Roberts, for Most

he might burst out laughing. Thankfully, Denzel Washington, probably the most concise speaker of the night, upon receiving the award for "Best Actor", treated the audience to a warm, succinct, eloquent gesture of gratitude.

The Oscars have never served as a judge of quality, so, to some degree, it's not even worth arguing for the films that were snubbed at Sunday night's event. But special recognition should be given to "Best Supporting Actor" nominee, Ben Kingsley, whose frightening performance in the film, Sexy Beast, represents acting at its best (Kingsley lost to an anemic looking Jim Broadbent, who won for the film, Iris). Also worthy of mention is Jean-Pierre Jeunet's masterpiece, Amelie--a fantastic blend of surrealism, romance, and comedy that, to many, is a symbol of the bright future of cinema. Sexy Beast and Amelie hold their place among the other great films of 2001 that were denied major awards, which include the Coen Brothers', The Man Who Wasn't There, David Lynch's Mulholland Drive, and even Oscar frontrunners, Todd Field's In the Bedroom and Baz Luhrman's Moulin Rouge. In short, 2001 was a good year for film, even if its greatest achievements were missed by the shortsightedness of the Academy.

Ridiculous Speech. Berry was so 'shocked' to win the award that she tortured viewers with a never-ending blitzkrieg of melodramatic whining, so much so that even the distinguished Honorary award winner, Sidney Poitier, looked like

## Milla Jovovich ResidentEVIL

by tyler stevens

I did not see *A Beautiful Mind*, but *Resident Evil* I did see. Paul W.S. Anderson's film version of the wildly popular Playstation game comes about as close to being a satisfactory video game adaptation as is possible. And it has Milla Jovovich to boot.

Anderson, as the force behind the unstoppable *Mortal Kombat* movies, has already proven himself adept at remolding arcade classics into Hollywood action films. With *Resident Evil*, Anderson has gone beyond mere "awesomeness" and entered the realm of "wicked awesomeness", graduating from "low budget video game movie with Christopher Lambert" to "relatively low budget video game movie with Milla Jovovich".

*Resident Evil* presents an entirely spatial horror, by borrowing elements from other movies in the sci fi/horror genre and turbocharging them with frustrating-mid nineties video game tropes. The zombies are, on one level, a reference to *Night of the Living Dead* style "return of the repressed"(as in a scene borrowed from *Night* in which zombie family members attempt to devour each other), but much more importantly, they are obstacles, making an already diffi-

cult gaming situation more confusing. Milla plays a security agent at the sinister Umbrella Corporation suffering from amnesia.

Her gradual reconstruction of the last few hours recalls *Memento* on fast forward (or rewind), and also allows her to suddenly remember her self-defense skills in the nick of time. In a brilliant twist on *Resident Evil* the game's "auto aiming" function,

Milla takes out dozens of killer dogs without thinking or even looking. Throughout the film we are given schematics, detailing the shape of the space that we are seeing, the positions of the characters, and of their zombie attackers, heightening the films already claustrophobic "360 side-scroller" aesthetic.

So, yes, *Resident Evil* is far better than the Mario Bros movie, if less political. Milla's transmutation from naked girl in shower to confused girl is evening gown to ass kicking kung fu girl in evening gown and back to naked girl(now with tubes in her head and arms) is definitely at least as impressive as her turn in *Return to the Blue Lagoon*.



## And the Oscar goes to...

- Actor-Leading**  
Denzel Washington, *Training Day*
- Actor-Supporting**  
Jim Broadbent, *Iris*
- Actress-Leading**  
Halle Berry, *Monsters Ball*
- Actress-Supporting**  
Jennifer Connelly, *A Beautiful Mind*
- Animated Feature Film**  
*Shrek*; Aron Warner
- Art Direction**  
*Moulin Rouge*, Catherine Martin and Brigitte Broch
- Cinematography**  
*Lord of the Rings*, Andrew Lesnie
- Costume Design**  
*Moulin Rouge*, Catherine Martin and Angus Strathie
- Director**  
*A Beautiful Mind*, Ron Howard
- Documentary Feature**  
*Murder on a Sunday Morning*, Jean-Xavier de Lestrade and Denis Poncet
- Documentary Short**  
*Thoth*, Sarah Kernochan and Lynn Appelle
- Film Editing**  
*Black Hawk Down*, Pietro Scalia
- Foreign Language Film**  
*No Man's Land*, Danis Tanovic
- Makeup**  
*Lord of the Rings*, Peter Owen and Richard Taylor
- Misc (Score)**  
*Lord of the Rings*, Howard Shore
- Music (Song)**  
*Monsters Inc.*, "If I Didn't Have You" by Randy Newman
- Best Picture**  
*A Beautiful Mind*, Brian Grazer and Ron Howard
- Short Film-Animated**  
*For the Birds*, Ralph Eggleston
- Short Film-Live Action**  
*The Accountant*, Ray McKinnon and Lisa Blount
- Sound**  
*Black Hawk Down*, Michael Minkler, Myron Nettinga, and Chris Munro
- Sound Editing**  
*Pearl Harbor*, George Watters II and Christopher Boyes
- Visual Effects**  
*The Lord of the Rings*, Jim Rygiel, Randall William Cook, and Mark Stetson
- Writing (Adapted)**  
*A Beautiful Mind*, by Akiva Goldsman
- Writing (Original)**  
*Gosford Park*, by Julien Fellowes