

June 2001 **NOTED** Issue #2

Newsletter of The English Department

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NOTED is the newsletter of the English Department at the University of Geneva. It is published regularly now, though still not often. **Noted** is the fruit of a collaboration between an enthusiastic bright-eyed and bushy-tailed student and a weary old Assistant who should probably move move on soon. Unfortunately, as it is, our student-editor is graduating this year and will leave first. This newsletter cannot exist without student participation and initiative, so I need a volunteer or two for next year if **Noted** is to continue. I would also need your contributions for the next issue by Nov. 30th, 2001. The survival of **Noted** is in your hands now.

Contact me by e-mail at:

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Editorial

Congratulations, everyone! We made it. This year will go down in English department history as the one when there were no P.O's around at all! Things have gone surprisingly smoothly--not the wild ride of the headless horseman, in any case. Considering that we have been implementing the new modular system for the first time as well, this is pretty good. Some thanks are in order. First of all, Sylvie Ferioli and Claire Tierque have done a great job of keeping things organized and sane at the Secretariat, and are always willing to answer questions and solve problems for confused and anxious students (and teachers). Then there are the three Maître-assistantes who have run this department since March: Saba Bahar, Guillemette Bolens, and Valeria Wagner, who have organized exams and managed everything so effectively that you probably didn't even notice the difference. We should also be grateful to Professors Margaret Bridges, Elizabeth Kaspar, and Margaret Clayton-Tudeau for taking over the upper division courses and *mémoires*. Finally, you students have been quite gracious about the whole thing, so hats off to you too!

However, while we can all be proud and happy that we survived this year, let's not forget that the University owes us some professors and intermediate teaching staff. Please feel free to complain loudly about the ravaged state of this department--within hearing distance of the Dean, the Rector, the D.I.P., Mme Brunschwig-Graf, anyone! Maybe that will put some pressure on the University to expedite the searches and confirmations. The bottom line, in this editor's opinion, is that the University is in no hurry to pay the salaries of normally-appointed professors (the replacement professors are paid a fraction of the original P.O. salary!) and has stalled the process at every level (or at least that's what it feels like!). We assistants may appreciate having some older colleagues around again someday, but it is you students who are being short-changed now and should cry foul!

In the meantime, the job searches for Modern English, American, and Linguistics are weaving their long, meandering course through their various stages. If all goes well, next year we should have some job talks to attend again, so be sure to come and listen, ask questions, and speak your mind when the time comes!

Otherwise, good luck on exams, and enjoy your summer! See you all again in October!

English Department News

Lise Magnolay, our librarian, is recovering from a broken leg after a bad fall. You may have noticed she has not been around in recent months, but she'll be back in October to help with your book searches and problems. We wish her a speedy (but perhaps not *precipitous*) recovery.

Wlad Godzich is definitely not coming back! It's official. He has given in his resignation here and will stay on at the University of California, Santa Cruz, as the Dean of Humanities. Although he will be in Geneva for the July exams, and will return when needed for thesis defences, he will probably not be coming back for the October exams (though this is not 100% certain yet).

The candidates for professor in **Modern English and American** have been narrowed down to 27 each. We may have some job talks to attend in the fall semester! Your *Noted* editors will keep you posted on the late-breaking developments (*easy to do since they occur about as often as this newsletter*).

Dominic Pettman, *Maître-assistant suppléant* and frequent contributor to *Noted*, will also probably be leaving us for a tenure-track job in Hong Kong next year (the offer was not formalized by the time this issue of *Noted* went to print, but seemed pretty certain--so congratulations, Dominic, and good luck!).

Changes in the 1st-Year Program: This may not affect you personally, but we thought you should know about the changes we're introducing into the 1st year. Maybe you can give us some feedback for the next issue, and we might even get a dialogue going about how to improve the first year!

The department has been changing the first year program every couple of years ever since this editor has been in this department. The present system is itself the result of years of tinkering with a program initially introduced by Wlad Godzich. One of the main problems with the first year is disagreement among the staff about the place that the teaching of writing should have in the 1st year.

The new system will involve a dramatic reduction in Writing Lab hours (to about one afternoon or one full day per week). As is the case now, the Writing Lab will be open to any student in the department, regardless of year. We will no longer require 1st year students to go on a regular basis (though I still think

they would be smart to do so). Instead, we will add another hour (45 minutes really) to Analysis of Texts, which will be devoted to the teaching of writing. The details of this hour are yet to be worked out, but the idea is to (re)introduce a formal space (and the necessary *time*) for the practice, discussion, and theory of *writing* literary analysis in addition to the practice and theory of *reading* currently emphasized by AT.

Some of you may recall there used to be a course called "Expressions" which was devoted to the teaching of writing in the first year, but it was eventually replaced by the Writing Lab, on the premise that writing would best be taught individually on a tutorial basis. However, since the Writing Lab is not obligatory, many students simply don't bother to go. Others feel that only their AT instructor's opinion of their writing counts, since that's the person who grades their papers. The upshot of it all is that teaching writing is the red-headed stepchild of the 1st-year program--no one knows who should really be responsible for it. The introduction of a third hour devoted specifically and formally to the teaching of writing (whether through exercises, group editing, discussions, or other activities) is meant to ensure both students and teachers have the time to give writing the attention it deserves.

Members of the department have expressed fears that the idea of an extra hour devoted only to writing will create the misleading impression that reading and writing are distinct activities, whereas they are really very closely linked and, for many intents and purposes, inseparable. Most of you will understand and agree with this concern. It is undeniable that learning how to think analytically involves a dual process of learning to read critically and learning how to write that argument in a clear and focused way. However, you probably also know that while writing well generally presupposes reading well, this does not mean that learning how to read better will immediately and *automatically* translate into better writing (especially since the English essay is a particular form that you usually do not know when you arrive in AT). In any case, the idea now is to ensure we have enough time for *both*.

So, in the fall we will try our latest experiment. Do you veterans of the 1st year have any advice or comments on this subject?

The Second Year: Vertiginous Freedom?

Students have expressed concern this year about the transition from the 1st to the 2nd year. It seems that the tightly-focused textual analyses of Analysis of Texts do not adequately prepare students for the unpleasant shock of having to produce their own paper topics in the 2nd year. While 1st-year essay questions are carefully crafted to guide your attention to precise issues of meaning and form, many 2nd-year instructors (including myself) leave you on your own to produce a suitable "problematic" for the 10-page paper due at the end of the semester. The result: panic, numerous frustrating rewrites, and a disconcerting sense of discontinuity between the first and second year.

As the instructor of both an AT and a 2nd-year seminar, I can see the justice in this complaint. Part of the problem is that the Faculty requires several in-class essays during the 1st year, which dramatically reduces the number of take-home essays we can assign. It is my opinion that take-home essays require students to think more carefully about finding a thesis than in-class essays do, and the work of finding an original thesis and understanding why it is appropriate helps to prepare students for the type of thinking required in finding a problematic for a 2nd-year paper more than anything else. After all, finding a thesis is much like finding a problematic: it requires understanding the textuality of literature and the stakes and purpose of analysis. The same problems that plague 1st-year papers (paraphrasing the text, not glossing quotes, underdeveloped or unfocused paragraphs, not having any argument or point) are all related to the misunderstandings about the nature of texts and the purpose of writing about them that occur in the 2nd year (and beyond, alas!).

On the other hand, the fact that there is no required writing in the first months of the 2nd year is really unfortunate. Too much time passes between the last AT paper and the first attestation paper (which might be only at the end of May--some students have actually told me they had not written a thing all year!). In this situation, 2nd-year students could make things easier on themselves by trying to work with instructors and Writing Lab staff early on in the writing process, proposing ideas, asking questions, and getting feedback on proposals and outlines. As a 2nd-year teacher, I have found that part of the problem lies in students' slow transition from a passive to an active participation in their learning. In high school you had little choice and you looked to your teacher to tell you what to do

and how to do it. In the 1st-year program, we also give you little choice, but we try to encourage you to start thinking more independently by refusing to give you rules and formulas for the reading and writing that you do. Sure, there are certain rules and conventions we ask you to learn (like the Style Sheet!), but we will not tell you what is the "correct" interpretation or the "right" answer about a text. We can only help you read more carefully and critically, taking nothing for granted, appreciating the full complexity, power, and sometimes, utter strangeness of texts. This is the task of the 1st-year Analysis of Texts course.

Sometimes a sense of the complexity and strangeness of texts gets lost over the summer between 1st and 2nd year, and in the absence of regular writing assignments and teacher feedback, students fall back on reading habits and strategies learned in high school. So the first batch of 2nd-year papers tend to be very theme oriented, analyzing characters' morals and motives, and retelling the plot with various degrees of detail and commentary. That's okay--that's what rewrites are all about--learning how to differentiate analysis from paraphrase, thought from intellectual reflex, and ideas from gropings towards ideas.

But rewrites take time. What students need to do in the 2nd year is to give themselves time to plan, discuss, think about, and rewrite a paper. They can go talk to their teachers even before the week of registration for exams. They can speak up in class when they don't understand something, and speak up when they do. They can question the teacher, question the texts, question the methods and purpose of the class. This will keep us from getting complacent and will help you make sense of it all beyond simply getting the attestation and passing your exams.

Last, but not least, you must not wait until the last minute to give us your attestation papers. (This is actually the real reason I wrote this whole column!) The last couple weeks have been particularly horrible for those of us who had to read dozens of drafts and rewrites in the space of days. I'm not sure students got all the attention they deserved, but I'm sure that we didn't deserve all that stress from your 11th-hour awakening to the clicking of the *Service des Examens* clock. I know it's hard to manage all the freedom and time between the end of the semester and the due date for attestations, but please try to pace yourselves. I don't want to get twenty papers the week before Sept. 5.

A.S., Editor

I Read, Therefore I Am . . . Myself

I speak, therefore I am. This is what Descartes could have said instead of his all too famous "Cogito ergo sum." Especially inside of the University sphere, words are the most efficient of business cards: on their account are we often judged, admired, accepted or cruelly rejected.

During my first days as a college student, I thought that placing a few erudite words into each of my sentences would necessarily grant me the respect of both my peers and superiors. I almost forgot that only content would give substance to my carefully elaborated vocabulary, and that no "forme" could save a weak "fond." Soon I began to understand that the real strength of words lay more in the cleverness of their associations and in their precision instead of their apparently learned character. Language, therefore, when correctly used, can serve as a most efficient manipulation instrument.

The Fall of and Into Language

It is no surprise, then, to find a whole range of myths revolving around the notion of language. In the Biblical version of facts, the Fall of man was also that of language: since the apple was picked, humanity has been doomed to hopelessly fail in mastering words and in expressing the essence of feelings. Here lies the incongruity: words do not correspond to their objects. How could such arbitrary and conventional tools do so? Since one word is always attached to far more than one single concept, ambiguity inevitably arises in all attempts at communication. In Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, the narrator observes that whereas Adam's words "had not been merely appended to the things

he saw, [but] had revealed their essences, had literally brought them to life," after the Fall, "words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs" which no longer correspond to the concepts they point out to.

As if this were not enough, a second punishment fell upon language after the episode of Babel. Since then, not only can one word designate at least several concepts, but also, one concept can be designated by more than one word, with nuances nevertheless, which, to complicate things more, modify this one concept into a few cultural declinations of it. For example, if the word "glory" already refers to an ambiguous concept in English, then its equivalent in Somali adds to the ambiguity: a different phonological unit appoints to a similar but yet not equivalent concept (the idea of "glory" is not conceived in the same way in England as in Somalia). Hence, there is no single link between a word and its object: the connection is perverted, all covered by interference.

Again, Paul Auster's narrator notes that "most people...think of words as stones, as great unmoveable objects with no life, as monads that never change," but they forget that "stones can be worn away by wind or water, they can erode, they can be crushed, you can turn them into shards, or gravel, or dust."

In the two-way movement of both words and meanings, as the distance between today and the legendary "Golden Age" increases, these come to the point when they no longer correspond to each other. There is no such thing as a "master of words," and Lewis

Carroll's Humpty Dumpty is just an imaginary character. Only on the other side of the looking-glass is it possible to make words mean "just what [one] choose[s] [them] to mean." And all of a sudden, in Humpty Dumpty's world and only through his will, "glory" comes to mean "a nice knock-down argument for you!"

Dialogism

Just as Humpty Dumpty doesn't really exist, there is no absolute and unique language. Our general notion of it is constituted schematically by the multitude of personal, private, individual languages with which we are confronted. This brings us to Mikhail Bakhtin and his theory of dialogism. Let us start from the beginning:

An object is not brought to life by a single word, like in Adam's Eden, but rather by the interaction of all preceding words, thoughts, judgements, images, points of view, connotations and analogies that have previously been associated to it and still gravitate around it: "Between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, about the same theme." The elasticity of this environment allows for constant modifications of the word and, as a consequence, of the object. A concept is always surrounded, either obscured or enlightened by a coalition of alien words. Hence, when a word "direct[s] itself] towards its object, [it] enters a dialogically agitated

and tension-filled environment of words, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, [and] intersects with yet a third group."

As a result, language is constituted of underlying movements and internal motions of which words are only the outcome, the visible part of the iceberg, so to speak. The most complex process takes place in the underlying layer, just right beyond, or under, words. The reader of Ivy Compton-Burnett's novels gets a real sense of this "sous-conversation" (as Nathalie Sarraute calls it), this tangential character of dialogue, which always stays on the correct level but nevertheless constantly threatens to topple over towards the direct revelation of all refrained, refracted and repulsed thoughts. In most of her novels, dialogues invade the literary space, leaving no room for any intrusion of the author. The whole plot is centred on the tensions and distortions applied to the characters' words.

If dialogues impose themselves always more in contemporary novels, it is probably a reflection of the omnipresence of language as a topic in daily conversations. I personally noted this by listening to a few random conversations in the street; it reveals a lot to record how many times the word "say" or one of its synonymies are used in each bit of dialogue. We speak of what other people said, constantly, invariably, reinterpreting and analysing their words. Consequently, an individual discourse is almost always constituted of bits and pieces of alien discourses: "The majority of information and opinions are generally transmitted in an indirect manner, not as if they

emanated from the speaker, but referring themselves to a source."

And these alien discourses, recognised as such, are only the visible side of plurilinguism. Indeed, most reported speech is not transmitted as coming from a different source from the speaker. He/she commonly appropriates to him/herself, as if they were his/her own, ideas, bits of discourses, words and expressions, which all originate outside of him/herself. However, these discourses are not merely transmitted. They are represented by the speaker, literally pictured by him/her, which implies that he/she must position him/herself in regards to them. Beyond an individual voice, there lies an amalgam of different echoes, which we may, or may not, be able to recognise as alien and distinct from the voice.

Do You Speak University?

If we admit that an individual uses all kinds of speech manifestations when expressing him/herself, we will then come to recognise the existence of socio-languages. People who belong to the same social stratum tend to reuse each other's discourses and therefore create a closed sphere of language exchanges and transmissions. Socially typical languages, then, appear every time that the members of a group share a conscious feeling of belonging to it. This is what tends to happen at the University, where certain key words are more in usage than anywhere else, those words becoming some kind of "rally points" by which students and professors acknowledge each other's membership to the social group.

According to Bakhtin, "at any given moment of its historical existence, language is completely diversified: it is a coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions

between present and past, [...] between social groups of the present era, between currents, schools, circles, etc. These discourses of plurilinguism intertwine in multiple ways, forming new, socially typical discourses." In this context, the ideological evolution of an individual happens through a double-process of, on the one hand, differentiation from, and, on the other hand, identification with selected discourses. A voice personifies itself through the process of selecting which echoes it will assimilate. As a result, it is only by being confronted with a multitude of different languages that we can constitute our own personal language as a unique combination of voices

Of course, this is not entirely possible in real life, the access to various social languages not being always easy. If we might not get to a comprehensive list of social discourses in reality, then literature offers us a convenient substitute of real-life experience. In a novel, we find a microcosm, in which samples of social discourses interact. If the novel is good, according to Bakhtin, it must represent the greatest possible number of languages. In other words, it must be a truthful image of this plurilinguism, which originates in reality but only becomes clearly perceptible in fiction.

Here is a beautiful and novel definition of literature and its uses. Thanks to books only can we individualise completely and successfully our own dialogical voice. Thanks to literature can we learn how to use language, how to communicate and how to manipulate words in an effective manner.

Annick Lauper is a 1st-year student.

The Meming of Life

Perhaps you haven't heard of a "meme" but you've certainly been exposed to one, or more accurately, thousands. First introduced by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (which, contrary to initial rumour, is not about his ex-wife) this concept has trickled down into popular-culture from the super-conducting synapses of the scientific mind, and is now the business of admen, cultural critics, cult leaders and playground pranksters. Essentially, the meme is a self-replicating self-replicator, which, like DNA, transmits itself from person to person and from culture to culture. Much like a virus, the meme spreads contagiously through society, prompting author Daniel Dennett to describe the human brain as a "meme nest" (making it sound unpleasantly like lice). The meme is thus a metaphoric microbe, nurtured like germs in our lab-like culture.

Dawkins' own examples of the meme include "ideas, catchphrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or building arches." Other instances over the years include Choose Life T-shirts, Magic Eye posters, Gary Larsen mugs, Baby On Board bumper-stickers, Baby I'm Bored bumper-stickers, and, of course, the Macarena. The most popular example, however, is the jingle or catchy tune, which passes from the child, to the mother, to the postman, to the cleaner, to the intern, to the president and back again. A couple of years ago, for instance, many of us were helpless in the face of the Barbie Girl meme.

Such a hazy definition, however, begs the difference between a meme and a fad? As far as I can tell, very little, although the former seems to apply to a wider array of possibilities. This means that while yo-yos are both a meme and a fad, romantic poetry is just a meme. The abstract and flexible properties of this concept has meant that

"meme" has outflanked both "vector" and "rhizome" as the postmodern theorist's jargon du jour, meaning - in a neat twist - that the meme itself is a meme.

The two primary modes of meme-transmission are through language and the media. William Burroughs would argue that language itself is a virus, jumping from host to host, and coast to coast, in order to perpetuate itself. Within this "meta-meme" hide the humble memes which make up everyday slang. The valley girl meme was big in the early 90s, and has enjoyed a revival thanks to movies like *Clueless*, prompting down-to-earth mechanics from Meyrin to cry, "that's sooo five minutes ago," "gag me with a spoon" and "whateveerrrr." The Ricki Lake meme has also added the gem, "talk to the hand." MTV must surely be one of our most active meme-portals, piping in a plague of them for the monkey-do brigade. Backwards caps, baggy pants, breakdancing, elaborate handshakes - these are all American memes which, like the Ebola virus, seem to come and go, often hiding underground only to re-emerge with sudden force. Even Jerry Seinfeld (not one to neglect the comic potential of the yadda-yadda-yadda meme) calls for a blackban on "high-fiving," the phrase "don't go there," and "air quotes."

One of the most amusing memes must be what I call "the strutting rooster" meme, which has been traced back to high-level athletics events. Cocky male sprinters have recently found it necessary to pull off their lycra tops as soon as they cross the finish-line in order to give the cameras an eye-full of their finely sculpted torsos. While this is excusable with the world's most primed and buffed sportsmen, it becomes absurd when our 13-year-old kids do it at little athletics.

These pasty lads look more like malnourished Spanish racing turkeys than the Afro-American powerhouses they are imitating.

I have felt compelled to write this article, however, in response to three memes which have survived far longer than the rules of cultural biology should allow. The first is the "dancing baby" meme, which began as an admittedly cute screen-saver, spread across the world as an animated file through the Internet. This was then picked up by everything from TV commercials to Ally McBeal, and should have died on the spot as the antibiotic of overexposure kicked in. A full three years after the first baby boogy, however, and MTV has started showing a new hit-song called - you guessed it - Dancing Baby. The little nappy-shaker hasn't even learned any new steps in all that time!

The second is the phrase "at the end of the day." It seems that all public figures - especially in the English cricket team - seem to be infected with this crepuscular affliction. Which day? Why is it end-

ing? They seem to view this statement as a rhetorical super-glue which can be used to attach any other cliché which comes to hand. "Why was our batting so bad? Well, at the end of the day there's always tomorrow, eh?"

The third is the Full Monty meme. Now this has got to stop. Now! Yes I know that tuberculosis is coming back with a vengeance, and that all the medieval germs are morphing into superbugs, but surely our sanity depends on focusing our efforts on eradicating this good-natured pathogen. Traced back to a low-budget British comedy, this meme has spread like wildfire through the cultural landscape. We can only pray that its recent appearance on Broadway signals the death-knell for this most stubborn of memes, so it can go and rest in peace with Kenny, Monica, peddle-pushers and all the others.

Dominic Pettman is Maître-assistant suppléant in Contemporary Literature.



Home Philosophy 201: Calvin and Hobbes

Rough is the life of a *Noted* foreign correspondent!

Fed up with the weather in this city, I have decided to show my disapproval by not writing about Hamburg before we've had five consecutive days without rain, which should give me at least until June [*the editor notes with regret that she received this article back in April*]. Being a foreign correspondent, however, this does put me in something of a tight spot, because what else can I write about that you might want to read? After some pondering, I thought to myself, write about something close to their hearts. Geneva!! A love we all share. However, having been there exactly twice, for the total duration of three and a half days, chances are slim that my thoughts on your city will be brimming with enlightenment for you, my readers. Unless of course they are combined with some noteworthy trivia... This is how the topic of this article came about: "Calvin & Hobbes," that great classic of American literature which, unfortunately and inexcusably, has not yet been added to the standard reading canon of the world's English departments and hence needs to be given some extra attention. The fact that the comic strip is deeply rooted in Genevan intellectual history only adds to its prominent position on my shortlist of topics to write about for *Noted*.

"Calvin and Hobbes" was first created in 1985 by American cartoonist Bill Watterson, who says he named the characters after 16th-century theologian John Calvin (who you should all be familiar with, considering that you practically walk by him every day when you go to class) and 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes (whom you, being the bright and well-educated bunch that you are, should be familiar with even though he's not on that wall). Six-year-old Calvin is a delight to everyone but his parents, teachers and classmates, fears no one except the monsters underneath his bed and his babysitter Rosalyn, hates oatmeal and girls like his classmate Susie (whom he is suspected of having a crush on nevertheless). His stuffed tiger Hobbes comes to life when no one else is

around, luckily for Calvin, who can always use a good friend. Hobbes gives advice on girls ("What do you find attractive in women, Hobbes?" - "Whiskers! Long whiskers!"), religion ("I wonder where we go when we die." - "Pittsburgh?") and math ("Seven plus three, Hobbes?" - "Seventy-three.") and gracefully takes the blame for many of Calvin's antics and small disasters.

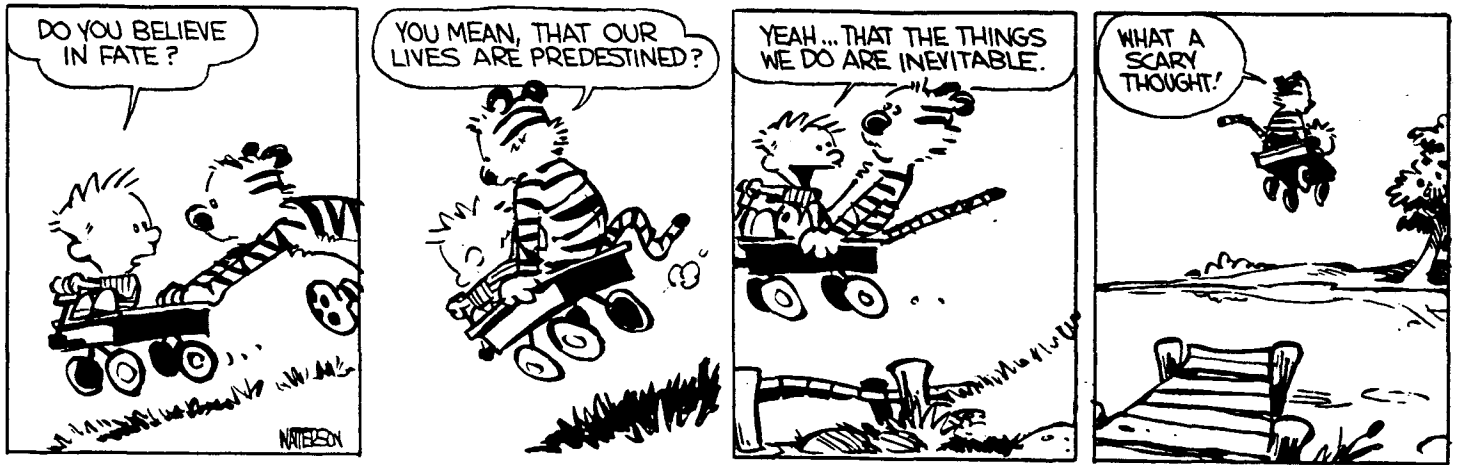
Close Reading Calvin

But reading "Calvin and Hobbes" is more than simply an amusing way to kill your time when really you should be plowing through *Moby Dick*. On the contrary, I would argue that it contains at least as much wisdom and food for thought as the latter, a claim I will proceed to prove in this here column. On close reading, the text I base my argument on (the 1988 collection *The Essential Calvin and Hobbes*) reveals that Watterson has hidden allusions to the ideas of both John Calvin and Thomas Hobbes in his comic strip.

First of all, there is discipline, a central feature of Old Calvin's theology. When he first passed through Geneva on his way to Strasbourg in 1536, he was asked to stay because apparently your lovely city was such a decadent place at the time that his help in reforming the populace (and the church) was much-needed. Soon after he arrived, Calvin wrote the first Genevan Catechism, aimed at instructing the youth of the city in basic good Protestant behavior, as well as the Articles Concerning the Government of the Church, which were derived from a literal reading of Christian Scripture and imposed a strict moral code on the citizens of Geneva. Who weren't too enthusiastic and asked the great Reformer to beat it, only two years after he had moved there (though he did come back later and stay until his death).

The issue of discipline is central also to "Calvin & Hobbes." Calvin's obliviousness to the





fundamental rules that govern the lives of most people his age goes far beyond what we would expect from someone this tiny. The stories told largely revolve around the small catastrophes and near-deaths that occur due to Little Calvin's failure to behave the way Old Calvin would have wanted him to. His mother (the modern equivalent of Old Calvin's church body consistory which dealt with questions of public discipline) is near the edge of despair in almost every panel she appears in, and undoubtedly only the prospect of being stuck with another monster like him has kept this otherwise friendly and loving woman from having a second child. (In one of my personal favorites, after Calvin has wrecked the kitchen chasing the "vile glop" that escaped from his oatmeal bowl at breakfast, she screams at her husband: "It's YOUR fault we didn't have a sweet little girl! YOUR stupid chromosome! Not mine!")

A second hint at Old Calvin that has made its way into "Calvin & Hobbes" is the supper motif. John Calvin, in a fight with the ministers of Zurich, wrote The Heads of Agreement on the Lord's Supper, which detailed his view on who should be accepted to the Lord's Supper, or rather how Christians should act so that they would be accepted to this "spiritual banquet." The prominent role the Supper played in Old Calvin's writings lives on in the frequency with which eating and family dinners play a role in "Calvin & Hobbes." Here, however, nothing could be more different from a spiritual banquet than the kitchen where Calvin and his parents sit down to eat. It is the site of both inter-generational conflict (Calvin: "What's THIS disgusting slimy blob?" Dad: "Try it. You'll love it." - "Oh yeah? Well, what if I DON'T love it?" - "Then it will build character.") and intergalactic battles, when a bowl of oatmeal turns into an evil spacecraft and Calvin into Spaceman Spiff who saves the world and on the way there lays the kitchen in ruins.

The third (and by no means the last) connection between six-year-old American brat Calvin and his pre-Enlightenment namesake is the notion of predestination. In The Institutes of Christian Religion (1536), John Calvin argued that sin was a hereditary depravity and that some people were predestined by God to be saved while others were doomed right from the start. Could this be an explanation for why Little Calvin is so often troubled by the thought of destiny? (Calvin: "Do you believe our destinies are controlled by the stars?" Hobbes: "No, I think we can do whatever we want with our lives." Calvin: "Not to hear Mom and Dad tell it.")

And yes, what about Hobbes? To the eyes of most people, Hobbes is only a stuffed tiger, so Calvin gets to embody some of Thomas Hobbes' philosophy. Sometimes Calvin's world seems like an exact replica of Hobbes' state of nature, a point in human history where laws and rules of conduct do not yet exist and everyone wages war on everyone else. In Calvin's daydream episodes, teachers, parents, principals and even classmate Susie continually turn into slimy monsters, smelly dinosaurs and drooling dragons that attack Calvin (or Captain Napalm, Spaceman Spiff or Stupendous Man, depending on who he is in these visions). In most cases, some type of authority figure - usually Mom or Mrs. Wormwood, the teacher - set an end to Calvin's dreams of fierce battles and glorious victories. Studious followers of Thomas Hobbes will easily recognize the parallel with the sovereign from Leviathan who, by his authority to which all others submit, can end the anarchical state of nature and introduce something like law and order.

But of course "Calvin & Hobbes" is not so much a crash course on Renaissance philosophy as it is meant to be a lot of fun. That people agree with this we see in publication figures - more than 2,400 newspapers worldwide had carried the comic strip when it ceased publication in 1996, and more than

23 million "Calvin & Hobbes" books are in print today - and also in the worldwide fan community the two characters have come to enjoy over the years. There are some hilarious websites dedicated entirely to "Calvin & Hobbes." Not all of them indulge in epic discussions of Calvinism and the state of nature, but many are worth reading nevertheless. Some of them, however, seem to support the old rumor that the excessive reading of comic books plays a role in some people's failure to even make it through junior high school. The following lines are an exact copy of a fan's submission to an odd facts list on one of the many many Calvin & Hobbes fan pages: "I just wanted to mention the super hero that came before STUPENDOUSE MAN. The character Caitin Napalm only appeared twice throughout all the Calvin and Hobbes books once in the 1st book and once in another I think it was Yukon Ho!"

But there are other, less disturbing finds as well. The Calvin & Hobbes Jumpstation, for

example, lists the names the characters are called in various languages. The Brazilians, for example, prove that they have no sense of philosophical tradition by renaming the strip "Calvin e Haroldo." The Danes and Norwegians went even further by completely ignoring intertextuality: there, the two are called "Steen & Stoffer" and "Tommy og Tigern," respectively. Finland, however, wins the prize for the most nonsensical translations: what on earth do "Lassi ja Leevi" or (an alternative name) "Paavo ja Elvis" have to do with anything? I don't even want to start thinking about the article I would have to write if *Noted* was published in Helsinki - trying to establish connections between Calvin, Hobbes, Lassie and Elvis Presley might just be going a little too far.

Katharina Thote is studying English at the University of Hamburg. She contributes regularly to this newsletter, which is more than I can say for the students of this department (but that will change next year, right?).



In the Neighborhood:

A Review of Peter Hutchinson's Exhibit

These next few days, expect bright spots of color to catch your eye as you walk by the Blancpain Stepczynski gallery located at rue Saint Léger (next door to the Sunset café). You may even catch yourself stopping and taking a look inside, even though contemporary art might not be your thing because it all looks like "obnoxious spots on the wall." Actually, if you do stop (which I sincerely hope you do), you will realize that the spots are not spots at all but the photo-collages of land-artist-turned-photographer Peter Hutchinson.

On your right as you enter the gallery hangs "Summertime" (2001), a picture composed

of a dozen or so digital photographs of Venetian architecture. Below the pictures, a caption reads "Sometimes Venice reminds me of Katherine Hepburn ..." and the caption goes on to explain why. Thus the photographs that at first glance resembled clichéd tourist shots are transformed into a personal meditation of the effects of Venice on an Anglo-Saxon mind. (Born in London in 1930, Peter Hutchinson emigrated to the US when he was 23 and has been living there ever since).

Bridging the gap between art and actually lived experience, Hutchinson's captions also serve to elucidate and link seemingly incongruous visual elements.

In "Hannibal", for instance, a mountain, an elephant, and three motorcycles, are brought together by a few sentences that relate Hutchinson's six-month motorcycle trip across the Alps to Hannibal's historical impasse. The only difference between the two is that Hutchinson actually "got to Rome," as he jokingly states in the caption.

"Hannibal" is the sixth of the eight pieces that make up the grandiose "Roman Empire Series" (1980). Of great interest to all you history fans, the series begins with a depiction of the wolf watching over her human whelps, Romulus and Remus. It continues with personal evocations of various aspects of Roman civilization such as "The Etruscans and Pyrrhus," "Flora, Ceres and Pompeii," "Agrippina the Younger" (played by the artist's mother), "Caligula," "The Roman Soldier," and finally, "Caesar in Gallia."

While Hutchinson's work has a distinctively historical flavor to it, it will also most certainly appeal to students of literature. His concern with language is evoked in his use of elaborate captions. But it also comes across thematically, in works such as "Verbal Landscape," where letters from the alphabet hang from the branches of a tree. Another work whose title betrays a fascination for words is "An Alliterative Alphabet," an illustrated collection of poems, one for each letter of the alphabet. For the letter "M" we have the entry: "Mechanics make model machines, mainly manipulated masochistically. My mother made many mind-boggling mandarin macaroons. Meanwhile marmalade monkeys melted marshmallows." (There is a copy of this book available in the gallery).

Of direct literary interest is a work entitled "The Scarlet Letter 2, Adultery." A close-up of a flower box where red flowers grow in the shape of an "A," the picture alludes to the letter Hester Prynne wore on the front of her dress in Hawthorne's novel. The other composition with a literary innuendo is entitled "Paradise Regained. Alliterative Landscape Series," an idyllic landscape of snowy peaks, lush slopes and flowers, all of which are meshed together with dabs of paint added by hand. At the center of the composition: a house looking as if it were shortly

going to be engulfed by the surrounding wilderness. A lover and connoisseur of plants, Hutchinson studied plant genetics at the University of Illinois before becoming a Fine Arts major. By integrating his interest in botany into his work, he reminds us of the precarious relationship between the natural world and our civilization, as one is constantly pitted against the other.

But there is a hint that we are on the point of entering a new era that will redefine the relationship between nature and civilization. In "Science Fiction. Botanical series" (2001), Hutchinson transforms familiar organic structures into imaginary elements suggestive of a reality dominated by trans-genetic mutants. Real and alien combine to produce objects such as a "space weapon with cactus genes," a "milkweed communication pod," a "red planet fishing fleet," an "ion powered space vessel," and so on. A sight that would have impressed Carl Sagan and Charles Darwin, no doubt.

In his concern with the history of our planet and our culture, Hutchinson transcribes his experience of our tangible reality into visual and verbal terms. This is extremely refreshing in the sea of pretence that one repeatedly finds in the field of contemporary art today. The effect of Hutchinson's work is such that we stop minding this sea of "obnoxious spots on the wall." Through the dialogue he establishes between his evocation of the physical world in which we all live and the subjective reality each of us carries within, Hutchinson takes us beyond and leaves us soaring.

This exhibit ends on June 30, 2001. The Blancpain Stepczynski gallery is open from Tuesday to Friday from 2:30 to 6:30 PM and on Saturday from 2 to 5 PM. If you wish to purchase you can also fix a rendez-vous by calling (022) 328 38 02. If you have purchased and are looking for a place to put it because you have no space of your own you can always call me!

Julianna Bark is a fourth-year student currently finishing her mémoire. She is also the co-editor of Noted and the president of the ADEA.

**the feminist journal, Femmes en Suisse, invites you to a
*soirée electro***

Thursday, June 14th at 9 o'clock

at the Comédie de Genève (Bd des Philosophes 6)

to inaugurate their new issue, new editors, and new direction

More Neighborhood News: What Is that Red-Horned Building Across the Street?

I imagine most of you know that the *Bâtiment des Philosophes* is classified as a historical monument. But I bet that you didn't know that the strange building across the street is also a historical monument, though of a different kind of history: the living history of the Geneva of our times. That large building (actually three) with the huge red horn on the front is **RHINO**, one of the oldest and most famous squatts in Geneva.

You may or may not recall, depending on your age and whereabouts ten years ago, that Geneva faced a unique housing crisis in the 1980's. Speculators were buying up buildings in town and letting them sit empty while they waited for the market to pick up. The result was a shortage of housing in the midst of a surplus of empty apartment and office buildings. The shortage was particularly severe for low-rent housing. Students attending the University of Geneva had virtually no chances of finding an apartment they could afford anywhere near the center of town.

In 1988, a group of students formed the ESAV-*logement*, an organisation dedicated to finding housing for students near the *Ecole Supérieure des Arts Visuels* (ESAV, now renamed ESBAG), and entered into dialogue with the mayor, Mr. Haegi, about the fate of several unoccupied buildings in the neighborhood. By November of that year, this group had evolved into **RHINO** (*Retour des Habitants dans les Immeubles Non-Occupés*), and had occupied three buildings at the corner of Boulevard des Philosophes and Boulevard de la Tour which had been empty for about ten years. And with what one newspaper at the time called a "saut dans l'illégalité," a new era in Geneva history was born.

Although **RHINO** was not the first squatt in the Geneva, it has been one of the most visible and the most tenacious. It created a precedent that led to a semi-formal entente between squatters and municipal authorities tolerating the occupation of unused buildings for which owners have no immediate plans in exchange for a peaceful departure if the owner acquires a permit to renovate or rent. This has worked out well over the years, and up until recently, Geneva had a thriving squatt culture. Over two hundred buildings, and at least two thousand people, created a network of alternative living, working, partying, and performance spaces. Many squatters have families and

some have even managed to purchase the buildings they live in, or negotiate some other legal solution to their residency. Many are students, musicians, artists, and trade workers who could not otherwise afford to live in the center of town. Naturally, there are also squatters by conviction, people who could afford to rent, but prefer the communal and alternative lifestyle of squatts, either for political or cultural reasons. Squatts have over the years produced an entire alternative nightlife in this city, including concerts, plays, festivals, discos, restaurants, cafés, bars, puppet-shows for children, film screenings, conferences, political discussions, and every possible type of cultural and recreational activity. For years, the only cutting-edge techno in Geneva could be found at the now-defunkt *Terreaux du Temple* squatt, while the squatt at *Lissignol* near *Placette* was one of the very few lesbian bars in the canton.

Amidst all this cultural activity, **RHINO** has held a distinguished place, being the site of no less than two separate spaces dedicated to public life. The **Cave 12**, in the basement of the one of the buildings, has been a concert and performance venue since the early nineties. In fact, up until two years ago, it was one of the most important centers for the performance of experimental music in Europe, hosting annually the internationally-respected *Solo Festival*. On the ground level of another building (the one with the red horn), the **BistroK** serves hot meals for 7 or 8 frs every day at lunchtime. It is the only café in the neighborhood which subscribes to English language newspapers as well as the *Courrier* and the *Canard Enchaîné*. (Even the downstairs neighbor of the English Department, the venerable *Café de la Comédie*, is too cheap and too insular to buy a newspaper in English for the members of our department to read on their coffee breaks). In addition to feeding the poor students and artistic underclass of the neighborhood, the **BistroK** serves as an important meeting space for various groups and organizations, often hosting concerts, dance music, charity fundraisers, political meetings, and parties.

Over the years, **RHINO** has been threat-

ened with eviction many times, and has fought back with a variety of legal and public-relations strategies. This flexibility and creativity put it on the forefront of the kind of radical movements described by Naomi Klein in *No Logo* (see the book review in this issue). In addition to writing letters to the mayor, petitioning the Conseil Municipal, and working with the lawyers at ASLOCA (Association des Locataires), RHINO residents have playfully and wittily drawn attention to their cause with eye-catching interventions such as wearing a red-horn on their foreheads when they sit in on municipal discussions or using the surface of their buildings to communicate with neighbors and passers-by.

Every November, RHINO celebrates its birthday (the date of its occupation) with a new visual stunt. Once there was huge inflatable purple ribbon wrapped around the building like a birthday present. Another time a rocket with flashing lights was attached to the front where the red horn now juts out. Signs with questions, statements, and provocations have been a popular feature over the years. In fact, one of the first things I remember seeing when I arrived in Geneva in 1994 were some large signs on the windows of RHINO calling for a "*poetique du logement*." For someone who had just arrived from the United States, where you can easily get shot and killed for trespassing on private property, and you definitely get a fine and maybe even arrested for posting unauthorized signs, nothing could have been more exotic than this sight was for me. I had a *frisson* of admiration and fear: admiration at the the unexpected beauty of the idea (though a "poetics of housing" doesn't sound quite as charming in English), yet suspicion of the aggressive appeal to passers-by like myself. After all, what did they care about what people in the street thought about their poetics and their politics? Why not just live and let live? (I think this is how many Americans, raised on the sacred twin values of individualism and privacy, react to the solicitous street politics common in Europe).

However, over the years, I have come to appreciate the courage of the RHINO squatt, especially in contrast to most of the others which are content to blend in with their surroundings and avoid making waves. Of course, not every group of squatters has the artistic and political determination of RHINO, not to mention the energy to challenge an entire neighborhood to ideological warfare by flaunting their illegal status (though most Genevans are surprisingly tolerant of their squatter neighbors). Nevertheless, most of the very militant and visible squatts have been closed, and mainly the ones practicing the ultra-Genevan politics

of discretion have survived.

The red banners which have been posted on this building since last year are only the latest variation on this strategy of public exposure and political provocation. Proposed, discussed, and chosen by all the inhabitants of RHINO, the thirty questions posed by the red and white banners are a whimsical mixture of politics, cultural intertextuality, and surrealism: "*Do you speak Rhino?*", "*Qui a peur de l'autogestion?*", "*Etes-vous pour ou contre?*", "*De quel couleur est la corne rouge de RHINO?*", etc. The questions try to gently disarm the viewer's preconceptions ("*Pensez-vous que nous n'avons pas de douche?*") and engage him or her in the housing problematic ("*Cherchez-vous un appartement?*"; "*Comment habitez-vous?*") while evoking the political so personally that it feels like the whispering of one's very own conscience ("*Faut-il se resigner?*" or "*Squatter est-ce un acte politique?*"). I consider this current installation the most successful of RHINO's many very visible and eloquent attempts to invite the public to acknowledge its existence and enter into a kind of virtual dialogue with its occupants.

Unfortunately, the red siren call for attention and dialogue may be the squatt's swan song. Though threatened many times over the years with evacuation, and always saved miraculously by some delay or development in the negotiations, RHINO is facing the possibility of the end. The current owner has proposed to make at least half of the apartments into H.L.M. housing (though they would revert to market prices after several years) in order to circumvent the squatters' successful appeals to not evacuate them from their homessimply to create yet more expensive apartments inaccessible to students and low-income renters. RHINO may be evacuated before the year is out, which would leave some 40 or so young people and families to scramble for a place to live, kill the underground heart of the neighborhood, and close an important chapter of local history. But now at least this won't happen before your eyes without you knowing what you're seeing.

Agnieszka Soltysik has been teaching American and Culture Studies in this department as an Assistant since 1994. She may have lived in a squatt at some point, but would rather not give the University any excuses to save money by firing her by admitting it in print.

You'll never have an exam on this book (but it's worth reading anyway)

I normally don't have much time to read anything except books I'm teaching or researching for my dissertation (or that I can justify as having some remote relationship to one of these two things). But when several friends from different parts of the world e-mail me to recommend the same book within days of each other, I bow to forces greater than my academic super-ego and take a look.

This is how I happened upon Naomi Klein's *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (London: Flamingo, 2000). Klein's book hit some kind of nerve in me, and I ended up reading it all up within a couple days. It wasn't just that she's my age and writing about current political and cultural issues from a generational perspective I can relate to (more so than older media analysts like Pierre Bourdieu or Christopher Lasch who reflect many of the moralistic dichotomies and pre-feminist oversights of an earlier cultural moment). Klein, a Canadian free-lance journalist born in 1970, takes on the issue of globalization, a topic which tends to be written about too much and yet remains totally elusive and numbingly abstract. One of the strengths of this book is that her analysis of the world today is carefully documented with concrete issues and facts while remaining totally accessible and fun to read. And it's not easy to write readable prose on the issues she tackles: the dramatic growth of corporate power and its detrimental influence on public space, life, and jobs both in the Third World countries where today's consumer goods are made and in the Western countries where they are sold (it's hard to even read one sentence of these worn-out phrases without one's eyes glazing over).

The topic may not be so new, but what is refreshing and exciting about her analysis is that she also discusses the various movements and strategies that have emerged in the past few years to resist and oppose the global mega-corporations and their increasingly arrogant practices. Unlike the older media analysts, Klein treats these various organizations and radical movements as a serious and growing force of opposition to the commercial ideology that has become so powerful and ubiquitous that many of us (and many influential academics--just think of Jean Baudrillard and the whole "Fatal Seduction" thesis, where the only resistance to media power is mass silence!) have felt totally overwhelmed and helpless before it.

And even if you're not particularly "political," I'm sure you have felt occasional pangs of concern followed by a sense of helplessness and resignation. You must have read about sweat-shops at some point and wondered if your 100 franc Calvin Klein sweater or H & M pants weren't made by children or teenage girls working for a few centimes an hour? Just walking around town, haven't you ever resented the barrage of images of commercially-correct beauty, life-styles, behaviors, and "cool" people pasted on every billboards, bus-stop and magazine cover? If you have, you have probably also felt like you could never do anything about any of these things. How do you fight a corporation? Who do you address yourself to? How do you talk back to a thousand billboards? The great thing about Klein is that she harnesses this concern and resentment into a devastating exposé of the ways in which the corporate world and its media *want* people to feel resigned and helpless in the face of its seemingly inevitable death grip on the planet (which it tries to sell as the *only* possible way of life) and how they can and have failed!

Marketing the Brand

The first part of the book, subtitled "No Space," represents a kind of design history *cum* sociological analysis of corporate investment in the idea of a "brand" name or logo. It details the development of the marketing philosophy now dominant in the corporate world: that the image of the brand is more important than the products it sells (which explains why companies devote more of their budget to marketing than production, salaries, or anything else).

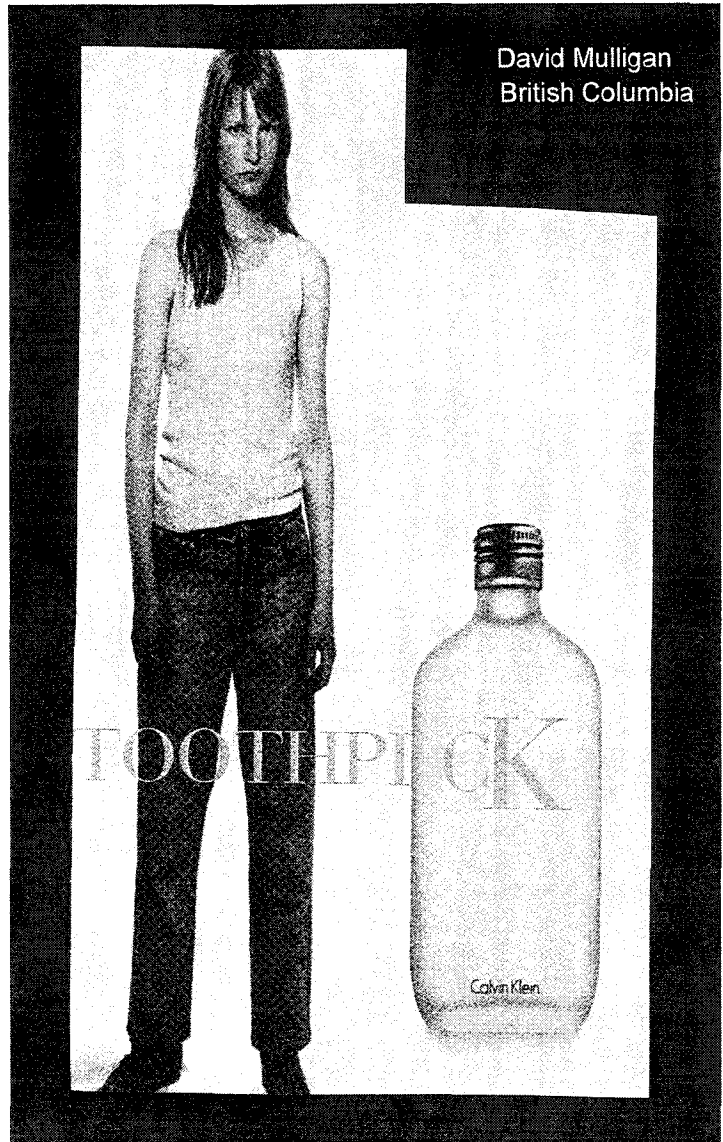
In a chapter of this section which should be of particular interest to students of this department, Klein describes how corporations cleverly co-opted the political demands of your immediate predecessors (students of the late 80's and early 90's), who agitated for more equal media representation of minority identities and lifestyles, by eagerly transforming "identity politics" into "identity marketing." As a result, we have Diesel Jeans ads showing sailors kissing, and tequila ads featuring a beautiful transsexual woman water-surfing (the caption reads something like: "She's a he. Life is tough. Have a drink."). Certainly it's good that non-traditional identities are being recognized in the mainstream media,

but it's worth noting that few of these "progressive" ads get beyond the most common stereotypes and clichés--notice how the tequila ad I just quoted assumes a heterosexual male audience, and the Diesel ad conforms to the oldest gay caricatures in the world (that gay sailor cliché hasn't shocked anyone since the 1920's). More importantly, there's a growing sense among activists that their political demands have been co-opted and trivialized by advertising campaigns which function parasitically in relation to real political and legal advances. Identity marketing of this kind never breaks new ground, but follows opportunistically on the heels of shifts in cultural attitudes won by people who actually work and risk things for these changes.

This first section also documents how our generation (I include those of us who grew up in the eighties with those you who come of age in the nineties) has grown up in an environment of total market engineering. We really are the "MTV generation" in the sense that all of our music, our popular icons, and shared culture--the stuff from which we create our identities--have been commercialized, sponsored, marketed, merchandized, and sold out from the very start. To understand what this means, you have to try to imagine music that was not created solely to make a profit, but to communicate something, to inspire joy, celebrate a community, or intervene in the world. You have to think back to the rock and folk music of the sixties, the punk movement of the seventies, or the ephemeral "rave" origins of techno. But just as all of these forms of music have been appropriated by the music industry and stripped of their original energy and meanings, the current youth culture scene is almost entirely corporate -- there is no "cool" outside of consumption, and there is no youth culture outside the youth market. All of our forms of rebellion and disappointment with the world are sold back to us as fashion statements (flower power, reggae, punk, trash, Goth, etc).

Freedom of Choice . . .NOT!

Klein's second section, "No Choice," focuses on the way corporate trends such as mergers, "synergy" alliances (special contracts between brands), and huge franchise chains such as MacDonald's or Starbuck's Coffee (coming to Switzerland soon) tend to limit consumer's choices rather than diversifying them (as free market proponents claim), penalizing both consumers and suppliers. (Think of the way the UBS and SBS merger a couple years ago resulted mainly in a



larger, more arrogant, super-bank which immediately introduced fees for all sorts of services that had been free before).

Chains and franchises also tend to eliminate "healthy" market competition rather than promote it because they have the capital and power to drive smaller businesses out of business, capturing the market rather than making it more dynamic. Look at the way Migros and the Coop do not even pretend to compete with each other. They carry the same food, but different brands, and there is virtually no overlap on which any kind of real price competition could occur. Between the two of them, they simply cover the entire brand market territory. The monopolistic power of these two food giants translates frequently into pressure on farmers and suppliers to sell them meat, fruit, and other products at the lowest possible prices, which are not passed on to the customer. Migros and the Coop buy apples and pears from farmers in the Valais for around 50 centimes a kilogram, and sell them in their stores for 3 or 4 frs per kilo. That's some pretty expensive apples for you and some pretty hard times for farmers--and a nice deal for the

supermarkets that rule Switzerland. The result is that many farmers have stopped cultivating and harvesting their land, preferring no profit at all to backbreaking labor at a loss, and many fields in the Valais now lay wasted and scattered with rotting fruit. (My father-in-law likes to joke that the Valais needs Max Havelar).

Another insidious practice of large monopolistic chains is a form of censorship whereby products that are deemed "inappropriate" or not "family-oriented" are removed from shelves (including magazines, books, videos, and CD's). Naomi Klein documents various forms of this practice, especially common in the United States, where religious sensibilities make people more easily offended than in Europe, but forgets to mention an even more fundamental form of censorship: how large chains simply ignore all cultural products produced independently or by smaller companies. This is not even censorship -- it's just total control over consumer choice by limiting it to mass-produced commercial pop culture. Imagine trying to find independently-produced or local music at CityDisc, a small-edition book by a Swiss publisher at Placette, or an independent cult classic (like a film by Andy Warhol) at OpenVideo. There are so few alternative stores in Geneva already that most of you probably cannot even imagine listening to local bands or reading off-beat specialized books, and can't see what's wrong with this picture.

Sales and Sweat: McJobs are the Future

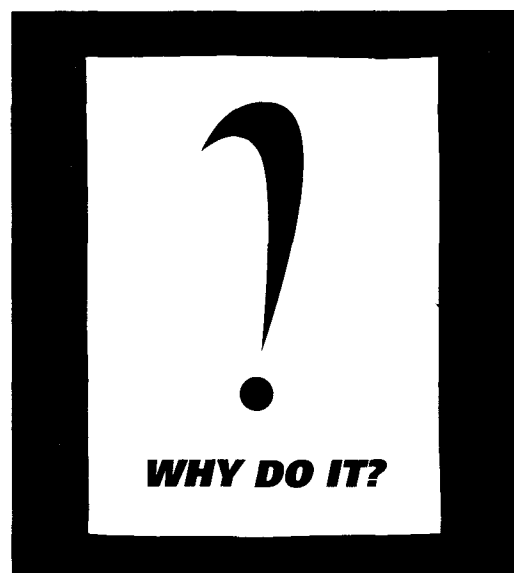
The third part of the book, "No Jobs," documents not only the outrageous working conditions in sweatshops and "Export Processing Zones" (grim, highly-policed mini-cities with special tax laws and labor law exemptions where workers in Third World countries make products for Western companies for sub-minimum wages), but the elimination of real jobs in the Western countries where these goods are sold as well. For example, there is the proliferation of service jobs defined as temporary or part-time (even if the number of hours is just short of full-time status) in order to avoid providing medical benefits, social security, or even regular schedules and minimal job security. Some of you might even have a job like this -- you probably have colleagues that are not at the university and not likely to get a better job any time soon. Temporary work (such as the jobs available through the Manpower company) are the fastest growing job sector in North America and Europe. The general trend of global companies such as Disney and H&M is to avoid all employer-related responsibilities altogether, by contracting out production orders to Third World sub-contractors, on the one hand, while keeping

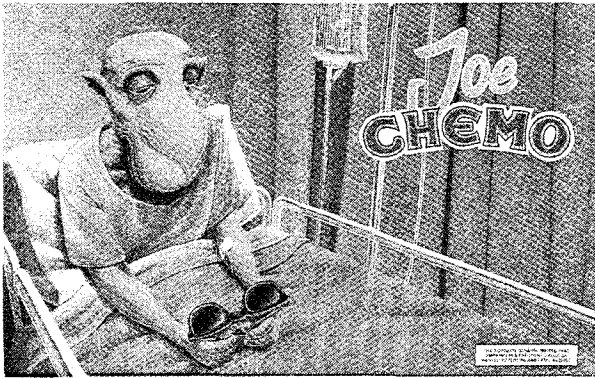
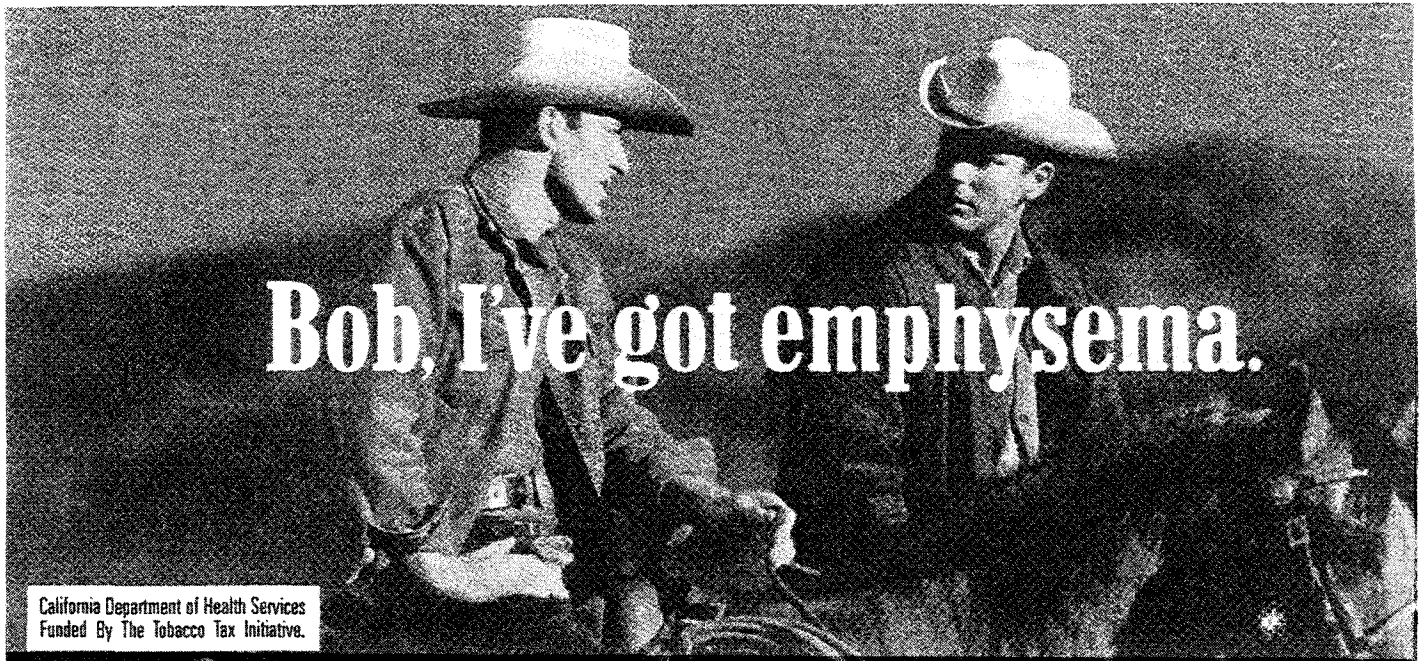
Western sales workers and cashiers legally sub-employed by calling them temporary workers (even though service workers are increasingly older and end up working for years at a time in the same job).

The World Strikes Back!

The final sections of her book document the various forms of resentment and resistance that these strategies have produced in recent years. It's only natural that corporations which have practiced such cynical self-promotion and pursuit of profits over people's interests would finally lose their loyalty and trust, especially that of young people, who are beginning to see that they have nothing to look forward to in this world of mega-mergers and McJobs. This is perhaps the most interesting part of the book, where Klein documents and analyzes the various forces and groups that have emerged to oppose the practices and trends described in the earlier sections.

One of these practices is called "**culture jamming**," which is the defacing of brand logos or billboards in order to subvert the original message. The effectiveness of this strategy is directly related to the heavy marketing investment in brand recognition and brand image in recent years. Brands have become so charged with meaning and cultural weight that a little parody or street graffiti can produce a genuinely shocking or liberating effect. For example, a Joe Camel ad can be transformed into an anti-smoking ad by changing a few letters to spell "Joe Chemo" and adding an IV tube to the camel's arm. Nike has drawn lots of culture jamming attention to its Swoosh logo and "Just Do It" slogan after reports of sweatshops in China and Vietnam became public in the mid-nineties: "The Swoostika," "Just Don't Do It," "Justice: Do It, Nike," "Just Boycott It," etc.





Culture jamming:
parody ads from
Adbusters Magazine
(Summer 1997)
www.adbusters.org

Culture jammers can be anyone from professional artists (Barbara Kruger's art relies heavily in its techniques, and actually pioneered many of them) and marketing professionals who want to use their skills to create alternative messages, to Marxist-anarchists, punks, women's organizations, and any random person with a large felt-tip pen (you see quite a few billboards in Geneva marked up with anti-capitalist, anti-consumerist, and anti-WTO messages). A couple years ago, a local activist and writer made a stir in Geneva by dressing up as the mascot clown of McDonald and behaving like a belligerent drunk. He posted signs around town saying



"Ronald McDonald est un SDF." Though maybe unkind to homeless people, this gesture succeeded in drawing attention to the rising anti-corporate anger that exploded in Geneva in May of 1998 and in Seattle in 1999.

Reclaim the Streets

Another original form of protest that has emerged in recent years is the "Reclaim the Streets" movement, a movement that began in England in the mid-nineties. Growing out of a collaboration between radical ecologists, anti-corporate activists, artists, and deejays, RTS is the fastest-growing political movement since Paris '68. The idea behind it is the desire to reclaim public space for spontaneous gatherings that look like a mix between a demonstration, an artistic installation and a party. A busy intersection of commuters, shoppers, and traffic suddenly becomes a surreal landscape of impromptu art, play, and music as RTS occupies the street, deejays quickly set up a sound system and start playing music, and thousands of people arrive and start to mingle and dance. There might be jugglers, wading pools, swing sets, rugs, couches, and free food. The result is a delicious utopian moment of play, free expression, and politics. RTS would like to remind people, if only for a few minutes, that life could be different than a hectic race to earn and consume. The success of this movement has led to RTS branches in many different cities and countries (including Geneva, where they helped organize the anti-WTO demonstrations in May 1998).

The **Critical Mass** movement is related to RTS and involves another kind of "large-scale coincidence." At 6 p.m. of the last Friday of every month (including here in Geneva, where Critical Mass meets at the Pont de Bergues), dozens or hundreds of bicyclists meet to ride through town together, creating a "critical mass." The point is not block traffic so much as to *become* the traffic, gently forcing cars to yield the right of way.



To Conclude

I have written such a long and detailed (sorry about that!) review of *No Logo* because I wanted to share with you my enthusiasm for this perceptive and readable book. Many of us get so absorbed in our academic work that we forget that we live also in a larger world (I'm obviously thinking of myself here). Klein manages so well to make the economic and political world seem fresh and exciting again by making perceptive connections between things that we tend to consider separate and abstract: ecological concerns, worker's rights, gender issues, marketing and media, etc. What's even more inspiring is the fact that a whole new generation of young activists has moved beyond the media blitz that paralyzed earlier critics and is taking on the global corporate machine in creative, flexible, and surprisingly effective ways.

Agnieszka Soltysik edits this newsletter, arranges the layout and graphics, and tries to pad it with her out contributions (though this will not be necessary next year as you will all write something for the next issue).

New! Special Column:

You may have wondered what you can do with a degree in English or Comparative Literature besides teach. Noted has asked some former students to share their experiences with us, so from now on, every issue will carry an article by or about a graduate of this department. Some day you may even write one.

Life, Art, and the Hypermonumental: Marketing the Prison Experience in Tehran

A warden took me by the arm as I put on my blindfold and stepped out of my cell. He led me down several corridors and had me sit me down somewhere, then a door swung shut behind me. I peered out from under my blindfold, and saw I was facing the wall, in a concrete cell with no windows. Filming the streets of Tehran for a documentary two days earlier, I'd been arrested on charges of spying, and taken to Evin prison. Sitting there blindfolded in a tiny concrete cube in perfect silence, waiting for my interrogator, I must say it was a very special moment. What a feeling (bein's believin'). I'd never been as utterly terrified in my entire life. The term "Evin," you see, bears heavy connotations. In its mythico-historical allure, it comes closest to the Santiago de Chile football stadium. Though nobody knows the figures, everyone knows the anecdotes, the many graphic details of how before and after the Islamic Revolution, Evin was the favored locus of systematic torture and countless executions.

The door was opened and shut, someone pulled up a chair behind me, and just sat there, while those many graphic details went prancing through my head in a wild and spirited little dance. He leaned towards me.

"Listen closely now", he slowly, emphatically crooned into my left ear, "if you tell the truth, we'll find a solution for you. If you don't, it will cost you dearly. Is that understood?"

"Yes", I answered. A feeble, high-pitched croak. I sounded like an emasculated water toad.

"So. Tell me something. And don't try to act smart. Tell the simple truth. Which is better?" He paused, I waited. "Switzerland or Iran?"

Ever since moving back to Tehran, everyone from the janitor to the plumber to the cab driver has been eager to know how I would personally

compare Europe to the Islamic Republic. My interrogator was obviously just as interested.

"Actually," I managed, "until yesterday, I would have said I preferred Iran." He chuckled to himself, and leaned back in his seat.

As any businessman or backpacker who has been here will tell you, the Western Gaze is a big issue in Iran, and you needn't be Edward Said to see why. Once the Paris of the Orient, an Aryan haven under the sexy splendor of the Shah and his groovy Queen draped in Yves Saint-Laurent, now the land of Gog and Magog, rarely has a country been confronted with as many rich and imposing stereotypes and fabrications. And with life perhaps not imitating, but indeed reacting and overreacting to art, things have become a little muddled, touchy, and strained.

It is, of course, unlikely that an article such as this will be very helpful. Many readers may choose to see Evin as an allegory for Iran itself: gloomy, oppressive, outwardly unchanging, and embroiled in a desperate attempt to look intimidating and civilized at the same time (incidentally, dissident cleric Kadivar recently coined a popular phrase by calling Iran "one big prison for reformists"). But the truth is, an eyewitness account of Evin means international media attention, even career opportunities ñ all you need is a brief jail term, then you capitalize on the aura of a "tortured" political prisoner by publishing embarrassing, sensationalist muck in the first person singular ("I begged the warden not to kill me").

These days, I find it all the easier to shamelessly cater to Western expectations, for with my case still open, and the Intelligence (or "Information") Ministry scrutinizing and inspecting me before reaching a verdict, it is the Iranian Gaze which troubles me more than any other. On the night of our arrest, we were interrogated for 16 hours. Being Iranian, but coming from abroad, my colleague and I were a little too eccentric for anyone's liking. Why would expatriate Iranians make a documentary on Tehran

for a foreign production company, if not for reasons of espionage or sheer slander? Why would anyone be filming highways and office blocks, gas stations and billboards, if not for some ulterior motive? And yet I wonder whether, on that occasion, the Information Ministry really employed their celebrated, time-honored methods of inquisition. I should think not.

"What is your opinion of Imam Khomeini?"

"I'd say every human being has weak points and strong points".

"How interesting. Do tell us his weak points".

"He had none".

"I see. So tell me, you disapprove of the theocratic State, don't you".

"Why should I disapprove? It was voted on in 1979".

"You grew up abroad, and you're saying you really don't disapprove?"

And so on.

That night, I looked on as they searched my apartment (family letters, old snapshots of teenage beach parties, a tape collection of 1970's Easy Listening) and was pummeled with even more questions, none of which I could answer convincingly. Particularly when it came to my photographs of Tehran's concrete wastelands, and my monarchist memorabilia. How to explain ironic retro-kitsch to an enormous, heavily armed thug in a black suit who just assured you you've "dug your own grave"? How to convince a member of the secret service who just ushered you through Tehran handcuffed in a BMW with tinted windows in the middle of the night that the city holds a very photogenic, quasi-neo-modernist flair?

When arrested, we had been filming Shariati Street, near the Revolutionary Courthouse. It so happens that the courthouse had been recently bombed by an armed opposition group, the Mojahedin. To make things worse, it so happens the Mojahedin had previously filmed the complex. So our case was a little difficult to explain (as ironically kitsch-retro, and as thoroughly quasi-neo-modernist as Shariati Street may have appeared to us).

De facto, Tehran is practically off-limits for cameras, since there is hardly a street without a police station, a military compound, a headquarter for an Islamic "committee," or an annex to some Ministry. Even hospitals are considered State

secrets, and are not to be filmed. Last year, the municipality finally started urging the army to move out of the center, having assessed that military institutions use up a tenth of the city space.

The tired irony here is that a tremendous effort to survey and discipline the city has amounted to so little. On the one hand, prostitution, drugs, teenage delinquency, violent crime, illicit sociosexual mingling, and hypercritical public debate are all very much out of control. And on the other, much as the gigantic propaganda murals offer easy targets for graffiti and paint bombs, the concentrated mass of government paraphernalia repeatedly falls prey to armed attack on behalf of resistance groups, and has proven an endless source of anxiety and paranoia for the government more than anything else. Moreover, the city's disordered, unbridled growth - Tehran has quadrupled since 1980 - encourages a certain sense of chaotic repose. At the very least, the sprawling, anonymous urban fabric alleviates what would otherwise be a more pervasive sense of control and supervision. Many of those who have lived in other cities actually speak of a bizarre sense of freedom that is particular to Tehran.

As for Evin prison itself, as an urban-architectural space, it's indisputably a masterpiece. When Evin is pointed out to the curious visitor, all he or she can see are dark brown, arid hills along the Alborz mountains, with one slope separated from its surroundings by a white fence. Only from certain rooftops, like that of the "Freedom Hotel" (Hotel Azadi) towering over Evin neighborhood, can one see a handful of buildings that make up the prison complex. A large part of the prison, however, blends neatly into nature, being built underground, beneath the hills.

I cannot think of another landmark that is as elegantly less-is-more and as imposing at the same time. If white fencing on an empty hillside is the architectural understatement par excellence, by merging with Tehran's stately mountainous surroundings, Evin gains an aura of inevitability. It comes with the city.

Listening to my cellmates palaver over tea and tasteless "Montana Lights," I heard countless cross-comparisons of the many different wards the prison had to offer. Evin is one big carceral Disneyland. With the impressive selection of buildings, rooms and cellars that can be rearranged

at will, anywhere along or beneath the hillside, conditions are made to vary drastically, according to whether you're a man, woman, cleric, relative of a cleric, a "political," celebrity "political," a dealer, etc. Although all sections are overcrowded, some cellblocks are filthy, while others are immaculate. Some offer grass, opium and alcohol, while in others even pen and paper are impossible to come by.

As architect Rem Koolhaas has pointed out, nowadays, with pedagogical ideals and agendas replacing each other at high speed, by the time a prison is built, it is usually already out-of-date. The advantage of certain "hypermonumental" prisons, however, lies in their lavish use of space. Thanks to their wasteful proportions, they can easily adapt to new philanthropic regimes without any changes in structure, and keep an air of permanence while adapting from within, often covertly betraying the very principles they were founded on. No programmatic break, but an "architecture of revision" from within the penal colony. How not to see Evin as an allegory for larger issues?

More and more figures of the reformist movement are openly admitting that mass incarceration is part and parcel of the reformist bargain. On the eve of the election of President Khatami, mayor of Tehran Gholamhossein Karbastchi (another key reformist figure), laughingly blurted out that, "obviously, this means prison for the likes of us." Karbastchi was eventually sentenced to two years, and by now, Evin is so packed with celebrities, it must be the single most glamorous spot in Tehran. Prison memoirs are now *le dernier cri*. Some attempt to analyze recent developments in broad brush-strokes, others just explain, in detail, the practical, day-to-day workings and prison routines. The titles of the memoirs are telling: *One Shouldn't be Afraid of Evin* (Kadivar), *Evin isn't a Bad Place to Be* (Ebadi), *I Don't Feel out of Place in Evin* (Safari), *Evin Hotel is a Little Further Down the Road* (Lahiji). It seems like intellectuals are joined in a curious effort to demystify what is Iran's most legendary dungeon, perhaps even preparing and encouraging people to drop by sometime. "The long road to reforms leads right through Evin," quips Mr. Kadivar. Playing on the Shah's one-time promise that every Iranian would own a car, Kadivar suggests every Iranian should be the proud owner of a file in Evin prison.

A name that is often used and quoted these days -- not least by superstar convict Akbar Ganji, in his latest article on political imprisonment -- is

that of Michel Foucault, with his endless ruminations on surveillance and the ubiquity of power. By contrast, when I first came to Iran three years ago, all the bookstores around campus were displaying translations of Friedrich Nietzsche, a rather more chest-thumping, gung-ho sort of fellow.

As Evin's place in the Tehran imaginary is shifting, within Evin itself, there have been obvious revisions, such as a de-specialization of the prison staff, with recruits being used to run administrative tasks. God bless the recruits. They do their job, but in their reluctant, fuck-am-I-doing-here manner, often openly sympathizing with the prisoners, and, to quote the jailed reporter Baqi, "ostensibly treating the prison staff as inmates." The intelligence agents are, for their part, also undergoing changes, and are sporting a new sort of elan. If the New York Gambino Mafia once admitted it was Scorsese's *Godfather* that taught them how to walk and talk and look convincing, and if it would be perfectly normal, as it were, for the British MI5 to seek inspiration in the likes of John le Carré or Ian Fleming, it so happens that the Iranian Information Ministry is itself the most promising masculine paradigm of our time, with the strongest cult potential since Don Johnson. A sphere of innocence untouched by the adulterations of media-honed sex-appeal, the Information Ministry offers untapped authenticities, a promise of fresh prototypes and tantalizing new styles. Consider an interrogator in a turquoise suit and beige rubber slippers, sporting a four-day stubble and an impeccable blow-dried coiffe, even after 16 hours of interrogation, and using the most polite and elegant renditions of Persian etiquette as he brings you tea and sugar and apologizes for smoking -- but perfectly happy to scream, threaten, and bang his fists on the table in a show of exquisite, deft virility. And he is but one among many. In the wake of the ongoing power struggle, the Ministry has reportedly been pervaded with bleeding-heart reformists. The hard core, those who found the liberal, wishywashy approach revolting and disgraceful, have regrouped under the auspices of the Judiciary, which is responsible for the current wide-scale arrests. Be that as it may, for the first time in a long time, political prisoners are no longer subjected to physical torture, which is principally reserved for people in the business of drug dealing and organized crime, and which is performed by the dreaded Agahi, a subdivision of the army. The "politicals" are now tortured psycholog-

ically, which is at least as efficient and destructive, but which holds certain advantages: psychological torture doesn't leave physical traces (apart from weight and hair loss), and it isn't gritty and juicy enough to stir the public's sense of imagination.

The very fact that Evin now contains non-political prisoners attests to changes in society at large. Iran is as poor as it hasn't been in a long time, and its criminological panorama has shifted accordingly, especially with the boom in drug-related crime. My own cellblock was a tutti frutti of all sorts of prisoners who were awaiting sentencing. There was a one-legged army general who had been caught with 250 kg of opium. There was also an Iranian who had grown up in Hawaii and Tennessee, whom everyone called Billy, and who was caught with his buddy's stash of heroin. Another was a handsome, soft-spoken historian who had written too critically of Iranian wartime policies, and who was psychologically tortured for over a month ("they try to systematically destroy your every sense of self"). Yet another was a conspirator in a two-million dollar bank scam, who had been hung upside down naked and beaten for days on end by the Agahi until he was a mess of blood and broken bones. Khosro, another cellmate, was a cigarette smuggler from Kurdistan who quietly sang Shirley Bassey songs ("But if you stay / I'll make you a day / like no day has been / or will be again").

The most conspicuous cellmates were three young men from Ahvaz who had made a confused attempt to hijack a small charter plane. "We couldn't agree on where to go. Some were screaming 'Damascus!', others were suggesting Dubai, someone was saying Germany," they explained in raucous Khuzestani accents. Their families had taken part in the attempt, so their mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles were all in Evin awaiting sentencing.

Eventually, I met a member of the Mahdavia, an armed opposition group which strives to hasten the arrival of the Hidden Imam (the Shi'i equivalent to the Messiah). Since the Imam is scheduled to appear during a time of unparalleled depravity, the Mahdavia have decided they must topple the very devout and righteous Islamic regime, in the hope of sowing some decent corruption and decadence on this earth. Another prisoner was a member of the aforementioned, Marxist-Islamic Mojahedin, who are just as pointlessly trigger-happy as the Mahdavia, and who entertain the bizarre idea that they can bomb Iranians into spon-

aneous upheaval against the government. They lost all the popular support they had when they extensively bombarded their own countrymen during the Iran-Iraq war.

When it comes to high-profile opposition groups, one mustn't forget the monarchists, with their nouveau riche frumpiness and their politics of nostalgia. The monarchists are based in Tehrangeles (the Iranian neighborhoods of LA), from where the exiled "Prince Reza" occasionally fluffs his feathers and beams passionate radio transmissions to his reportedly "countless" followers within Iran.

Who wouldn't rather put up with the long, reformist road through Evin? I feel sorry for any serious revolutionary these days.

Before being transferred to a common cellblock shared by forty prisoners, I spent a short span of time in isolation. At one point, my interrogator burst into my cell, holding all my signed statements in one hand. He was upset. I'd forgotten to sign certain pages, and it had made him look silly in front of the public prosecutor. As he was excitedly waving the documents in my face, the door slammed shut behind him, and he was trapped in the cell, alone with me.

"Where's the bell?"

"We don't have a bell."

Awkward silence.

"So what do you do to call the warden?"

"Take that blue slip of cardboard and hang it outside the door."

He followed my advice. Another silence.

"What do you do then?"

"You wait".

He waited. He then started calling the warden, gradually getting louder and louder until, finally, he was screaming and violently banging his pudgy fists against the steel door. A wonderful moment.

"Golmohammad Rahati" (not his real name) graduated with a Licence in Comparative Literature in 1999. He currently lives in Tehran and works as an independent journalist and artist. He has founded an online newsletter about feminism in Iran, which you can access at: www.badjens.com, and is the co-creator of a website about the urban spaces of Tehran: www.gashtgari.net. He claims that he still doesn't know what he wants to do with his life.

A Hot Dog, Please!

The flight attendant indicated the way. I didn't even ask her but my face spoke volumes. Through the window the tarmac was beckoning: You're in L.A. Really! I was incredulous. I fell asleep after take off in Kloten and when I woke up I was in the land of the Hernandez' dreams.

California ! My heart started drumming a staccato as the asthmatic orange-white bus disappeared in the distance of Wilshire boulevard, jolting towards downtown. I gazed after it.

But my frustration grew rapidly the following days. People here spoke an extraterrestrial language! Shopping became an adventure. You couldn't even trust animals on the labels! Once I ended up with a can of condensed milk for lunch instead of a can of beef. Oh, these foreign languages.

At the age of 17, I became speechless again. I tried to rummage desperately in my English memory. My knowledge wasn't really exciting: My mom taught me to count (till 10) and at an eatery in Manila I snatched a good sounding idiomatic expression: "Asgardians behold." A tourist from Seattle and a massive fan of The Mighty Thor used it pretty often that night until he was carried away with a bottle of beer still in his hand.

But my vocabulary grew with a breathtaking speed . . . I found new words everywhere where I set foot, alien words which sounded more and more familiar. My ears transformed into two nimble satellite dishes, gobbling every single English sentence sailing through the air. In the quiet hours of the night I pored over every magazine lying around. Learn, learn, learn! But it was worth it. In a month I was capable of putting more than three words in a row.

Back in Olten, I tried to make use of my new social capital to have a good grade at the high school diploma. No more major howlers. But the following five years in factories and construction sites I didn't learn anything new. Moreover, I kept mixing up this damned fricative th-sound with the standard "t"! It really drives a Filipino crazy. The better I heard my own speech productions - yes, really, with time your own ears mock at your poor tongue - the more I tried frantically to avoid words with the terrifying "th" in them but goddamnit, how do you manage to do so, when your aunt in L.A. lives near Hancock Park at

NorTH PlymouTH Boulevard ? The custom officer gets the north part pretty easy but William Bradfords Plymouth created evil difficulties. In the end, all of them write Plymatt on the immigration record, although I tend to scream desperately: "The History of Plymatt Plantation, "t" with an "h"! Never heard of it?"

The second time round in L.A. I was grabbing some sun with my friend Fred at the Marina Del Rey beach. Before going for a dip I told him about an article I just read in the L.A. Times. According to that article more and more Angelinos are leaving their hometown for San Francisco or Seattle. Throughout my pronunciation I meticulously paid attention to avoid any word with a decisive "th." Tackling the story I was so tense that he hung completely concentrated on every single word I uttered, barely holding back laughter. There was no going back. When I started to talk about the differences of Northern and Southern California I gave it all and pressed my tongue with all my might, shit scared, against my teeth, puckering my lips, on top of everything and let all points of the compass through my lips: Soautarn and Noartarn California... Fred roared like a tornado.

Well, and then there was Melissa, my cousin. She finished me off. The real Filipino-Californian authority. Not a single word of Tagalog in her head but tons of "sorta/kinda/gramma." As I was stopping over at her place in the Valley she told me: "It's really funny. Not only do you have a German accent but also you still have this typical Filipino problem with the "th." Maybe you are incapable of improving your pronunciation because you don't have an ear for music. I've seen Lea Salonga in Miss Saigon and even with her it sounds different." This silly slanty, I am the musician incarnate ! Every Filipino/a is one. Even Lea Salonga!

I went back to North Plymouth Boulevard and swore to get rid of my accent. I didn't want to be shamed by Lea, the divine.

And so I crammed again: parrot exercises in front of the T.V. (every twilight show was good enough), trying to twist my tongue as good as KRS-ONE and reading words aloud from books. I sacrificed all my solitary time and finger-lids for the language.

The next week the reward for all the toiling finally came: while asking a police officer which road to

take, he didn't believe that I wasn't a native. Jesus Christ! No more donkey work. That's it for Public Enemy. I have achieved my goal! How I hooted at the petty dwarfs, who would have me believe that one can't learn a perfect pronunciation after a certain age, saying at the same token that your accent will stick on you forever like a derisive nickname. I mock at you, you sceptics and doubters! I did it!

In a good mood I hopped on the bus in Koreatown heading to my aunt's place. All of a sudden I had a hell of a hunger. Thank God a Slav recently opened a snack bar near the bus stop.

In front of me where three people. Waiting, I imagined biting in that juicy thing called Frankfurter in the old world and all of a sudden hot dog in this part of the globe. The Slav, corpulent, with a bald head and an enormous pitch-black moustache, served the other clients. He picked up the mini-terrier with

pliers and stuffed the meat with some onions and ketchup in the white bread.

Finally, it was my turn. "What you want?" the owner asks me - he probably just landed in L.A.

"A hot dog without ketchup, please," I said and smiled at him.

"Aaah!" the Slav enthusiastically exclaimed, "you Filipino?"

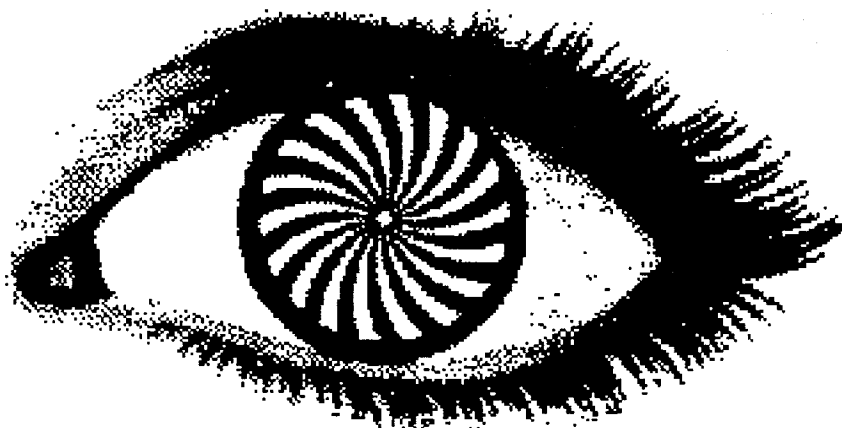
I polished off my hot dog, went home and threw away every rap CD and grammar book I had in the trash can.

Sitting in the plane on my way back to Geneva I put on the headphones to watch the movie.... in French.

Charlemagne Hernandez is a fourth-year student and member of the ADEA.

Wanted: Co-Editor for NOTED for 2001-2002

Year and experience not important. What I need is a motivated person who will contribute occasional articles, solicit and proofread contributions, and collaborate on various matters of lay-out and content. There is very little real work, but considerable elbow-twisting, teeth-pulling, and other violent forms of persuasion to be used on friends and colleagues. Could this be you?



you will submit

*articles book reviews poems ideas
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