

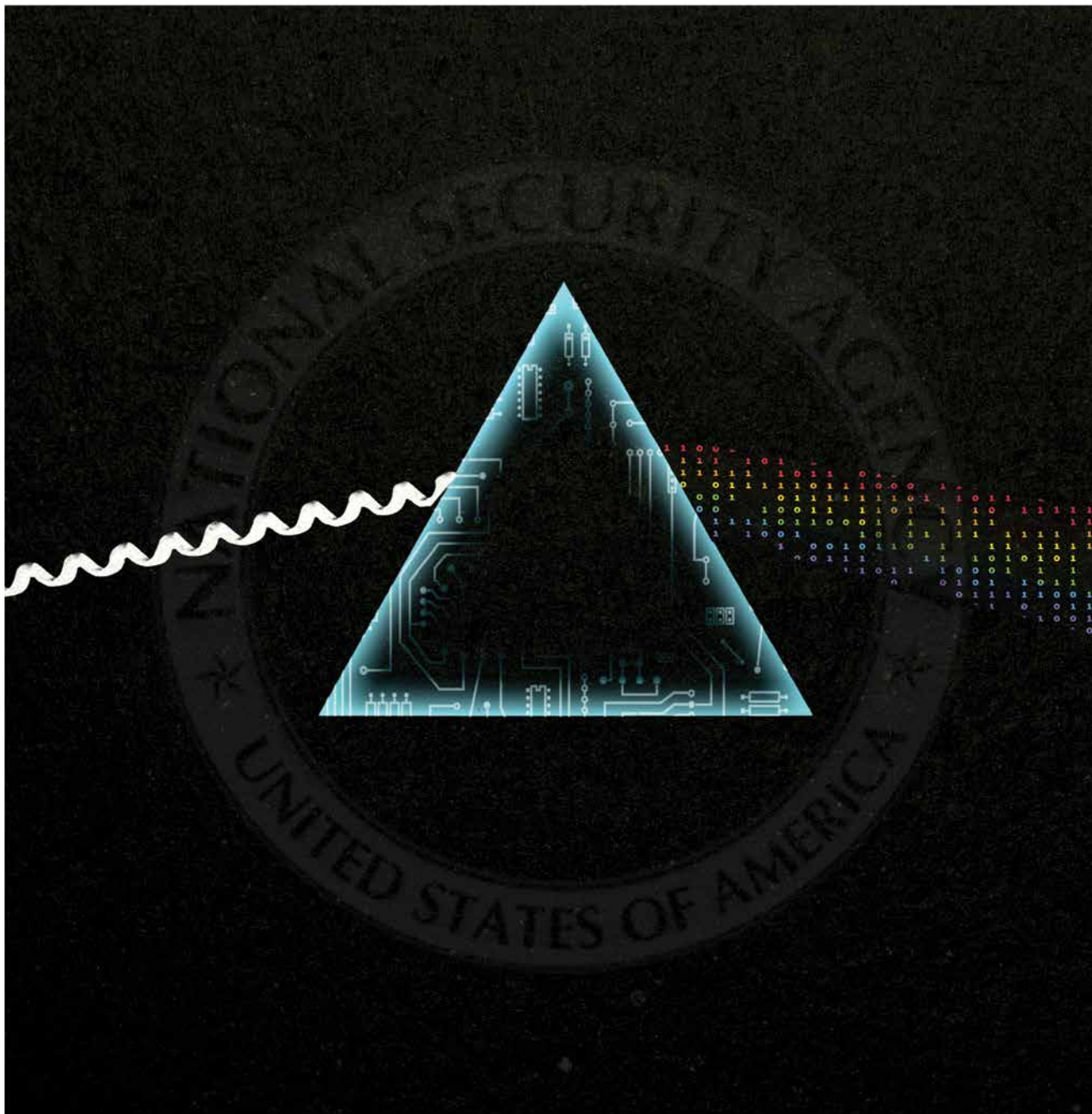
CounterPunch

THE NSA AND ITS ENABLERS BY PETER LEE

BLOOD AND HOPE IN EGYPT BY ANDRE VLTCEK

AN INTERVIEW WITH BILL AYERS BY RON JACOBS

LANDSCAPES OF DESIRE BY KIM NICOLINI



CounterPunch

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**The Dark Side of the PRISM By
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Amchitka's Legacy

Mr St. Clair, I found your article on the Amchitka A-bomb tests extremely interesting for personal reasons. But, first of all, let me say that I have benefited immensely over here for several years from your superb articles and fine command of writing and English; I only regret that I haven't contributed enough to *CounterPunch* but am saving from my meagre salary to do so, meanwhile sending copies of articles to academic friends around the globe in hope that they will be moved to do so. When I was drafted by the military machine in 1969, after dropping out of college for a break, I joined the US Navy to save my skin but ended up in the frying pan because of my college language background, seconded to a then shadowy organization no one knew anything about—the NSA. This was before Steven Seagall and Hollywood and the fantasy world of NSA special black ops; we were nothing but 'enlisted pukers' but dangerous, because of the insanely named 'top-secret crypto-access' clearance we carried. In my case, for Russian, my college major, but first I was sent to study Arabic as well; they were nuts that way, back then; and I was sent to the Middle East; first, and here's the point, we had operations up on Adak or the sur-

rounding area, shared with the USAF, I think, and I was that close to being sent up there because of my Russian. It was not a good place but now, thanks to you, I find out that it was harrowing and horrifying. Thank you again so much for the amazing article and all the other tremendously informative ones that have come before.

*Roger Bradshaw, Editor
China Daily, Beijing*

America's Imperialism

Susanna Hecht's essay on the efforts by American imperialist to turn Brazil in a slave colony was troubling and enlightening. I read it three times and learned something new with each perusal. I'd love to see more lost history on the pages of *CounterPunch*.

*Thomas J. Patterson
St. Paul, Minnesota*

Bravo Wypiljewski!

Ms. Wypiljewski's essay on Gramsci in the last issue was first-rate. You should nominate it for some kind of award for column-writing. The problem is that she sets the intellectual bar very high for your other columnists. I hope they can rise to the challenge.

*Gilbert S. McMahon
Burlington, Vermont*

St. Clair Told You So

St. Clair's Empire of the Senseless was an excellent column. I admit I'm circu-

lating it under the subject line, 'We told you so...'

*C.G. Estabrook
Urbana, Illinois*

Is Whitney Married?

Is Mike Whitney married? I hope not. No, I don't have designs on him. It's just that his columns are so damn depressing. I couldn't imagine waking up next to him and listening to his forecast about another gloomy day of rain, gale-force winds and a possible asteroid impact. Don't get me wrong, I love his columns and adjust my fantasy stock portfolio accordingly. But it must be hard on his family. I hope St. Clair sends him on vacations to someplace sunny like White Sands, New Mexico. But knowing Whitney he'd probably start carping about the horrors of the missile base and the Trinity site. Carry on, but pack an umbrella.

*Susan Cortland
Las Cruces, New Mexico*

Welcome Back Martens!

This Friday morning I woke up around noon. Made my coffee. Smoked a cigarette. Ate a slice of last night's pizza. Did a little yoga. Smoked another cigarette. Then I fired up my Mac and checked out *CounterPunch's* Weekend Edition. I almost jumped out of my chair, when I saw Pam Martens' name on the sidebar! My favorite writer, who'd gone AWOL for some damned

reason. I poured myself the first gin-and-tonic of the day and settled down to read her fascinating piece on legal corruption in Manhattan. She never disappoints. Sign her up, put her on retainer, don't let anyone else take her away. Skol!

*Daniel Montrose
Wheeling, West Virginia*

CounterPunch Brings It

Jeffrey, I must say your Empire of the Senseless essay in *CounterPunch* was simply beyond compare and the first couple of paragraphs had me humming an old tune I had forgotten. Thank you bro for existing as a lighthouse of truth.

*Fernando Waltmeller
Richmond, Virginia*

Arts Q & A

Loved the interview with Elin O'Hara Slavick. Few artists are as articulate as they are creative. And she's politically astute, too. Her cover image was incredibly moving. I've framed it and placed it in my office.

*Adrienne Walters
Tiburon, California*

Thank you Lee

I like Lee Ballinger's writing. He's smart and well informed. But I wish he'd write more about *music*. I'm desperate to find new bands worth listening to!

*Sara Conrad
Terre Haute, Indiana*

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ROAMING CHARGES

The Torture Never Stops

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

It was a little after five o'clock on a Saturday morning last April. The prisoners in the communal cellblock at Camp 6 in Guantanamo Bay Prison had just gathered for morning prayers. Suddenly the overhead lights went out, the cell doors slammed shut and tear gas canisters exploded in the room.

Military guards charged in, firing shotguns loaded with plastic bullets toward the huddled detainees. Three men fell to ground, writhing in pain from being struck by the "non lethal" ammunition. The other prisoners were forced onto the floor with guns pointed at their heads and kept prone on their bellies for the next three hours.

According to Guantanamo officials, the action was launched to quash a protest by the detainees, who had placed blankets over the surveillance cameras in their cells. But it seems more likely that the storming of the cellblock was a punitive measure against hunger striking prisoners.

The raid came only hours after members of the International Red Cross had left the prison, following an investigation into the abusive treatment of prisoners then entering the twelfth week of their hunger protest.

One of the detainees roughed up by the guards that morning was a Moroccan political dissident named Younous Chekkouri. Chekkouri has been imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay since 2002. Chekkouri's descent into Kafkaesque began in the summer of 2001. He had been living in the suburbs of Kabul, working for a charity devoted to helping children of Moroccan descent. After the attacks of September 11, Chekkouri decided to move with his young wife back to Pakistan, where he had gone to university. He sent his wife out first and Chekkouri followed a few

days later, but was snared at the border in the driftnet set out to detain men of Arabic descent. He was roughly interrogated by Pakistani ISI agents, who errantly identified him as a member of a Moroccan terrorist network. He was thrown into a mass prison outside Kandahar and five months later auctioned off to the CIA.

The CIA interrogated Chekkouri for several weeks in a secret prison in Afghanistan. He revealed nothing of value and the spooks wrote him off as human by-catch in the war on terror. Even so, the agents believed they might be able to coerce information about other Arabs in the region from him and packed Chekkouri off to Guantanamo, hoping that the terminal austerity of that prison would loosen him up.

More interrogations followed, some more bracing than others. But it was the same story each time. Chekkouri knew about no plots and had never associated with terrorists. After a few months, the inquisitors gave up, resigned to the fact that Chekkouri was a dead end as any kind of informant. The interrogators stopped coming. But Chekkouri's confined life remained much the same. He was subjected to arbitrary rules, fed dreadful food, awakened before dawn each morning, placed under 24-hour surveillance, his Koran desecrated.

Year after year passes. Eventually, a military tribunal secretly cleared Chekkouri for release. Yet he remained locked up with no prospect of gaining his freedom. Indeed, he, like dozens of other detainees, was denied the right to challenge his imprisonment.

In the spring of this year, Chekkouri joined about 100 other detainees in a hunger strike, protesting the grim, hopeless conditions in the prison. At first, the US military tried to cover up

the hunger strikes. Then word began to leak out to the press, followed by angry denials from Gitmo officials. The Red Cross team was dispatched to Cuba to conduct interviews with prisoners, a visit that prompted the storming of Chekkouri's cellblock.

Then the government's tactics changed. They began a brutally force-feeding regime on more than 44 of the hunger-strikers, including Chekkouri. He was placed into an execution-style chair. His legs and arms strapped down. An IV was inserted into his arm. He was kept in the chair for more than 20 hours. Later he returned to his cell. But the force-feeding continues. The guards come at night and chain him to his bed, then insert feeding tubes up his nose and down his throat, draining liquid protein into his stomach. It goes on like this day after day, week after week. A torture without end.

Yet, these men have nothing to confess. They hold no secret knowledge that can be extracted by prolonged suffering. They have committed no crimes deserving of such savage punishment. Their hidden torments serve no deterrent effect. This is torture for the sake of torture, in a quadrant of the world unbound by legal or moral restraints.

A few weeks after the raid on Chekkouri's cellblock, Obama gave a speech at the National Defense University calling for the closure of the Guantanamo prison. "Gitmo has become a symbol around the world for an America that flouts the rule of law," Obama pronounced.

But Obama's fatuous rhetoric is betrayed by his administration's ruthless legal tactics. In court filings made only days after Obama's speech, the Justice Department argues that indefinite detention of prisoners who have long been cleared for release is actually the goal of the administration. "The public interest," Obama's lawyers write, "lies with maintaining the status quo."

In other words, one criminal act is used to perpetuate another. Thus, does sin pluck on sin. **CP**



DIAMONDS AND RUST

A Way Out of No Way

BY JOANN WYPIJEWSKI

The train between Vermont and New York City always stops in Palmer, Massachusetts. “The town of seven railroads” in the nineteenth century, Palmer has no passenger service now—its handsome Union Station revamped as the Steaming Tender Restaurant, its former Olmstead landscaping a memory under pavement.

The train shifts direction here, pulling forward and then inching back, with the restaurant, the CVS, the mini-mall, the railyard detritus and bare suggestion of a mill town appearing once in advance and then again in reverse as the train chugs into forest.

This is October so it’s pretty, even if leaves drop before they have a chance to dazzle. The blazing New England fall of picture postcards disappeared years ago. Old Vermonters blame acid rain, the temperature, some bug. I’ve heard it said that the trees are dying, but such talk is muffled.

It is a landscape of lowered expectations. Towns dependent on cash registers stuffed with tourist dollars only a few weeks out of the year hope visitors don’t notice.

Amtrak operated while the government that is always trying to kill it shut down, and I spent my six-hour ride reading about another, differently precarious autumn.

Two Octobers ago, Nathan Schneider watched humanity swirl from the streets emptying into New York’s Foley Square and had a memory of himself as a boy on a DC subway. “What will my generation do?” he remembered his child-self wondering. Now grown, he thought he sensed an answer in the throng that had come out in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street; “the trouble was knowing what it really was, or what it meant.”

Thank You, Anarchy: Notes From the

Occupy Apocalypse is Schneider’s engagement with those latter questions. As a work of observation and analysis, an evocation of a spirit and excavation of politics and political impulse in a time of crack-up, it is exceptional.

Schneider was a reporter/participant in what came to be called Occupy from the summer of 2011 (when a handful of people practiced a mode for direct democracy in the city parks), through the encampment in Liberty Square (“an eddy of grace amid the Fall,” destined for police attack and entropy), to the aftermath of frantic action, grand illusions, doubt, finally perseverance, practical and existential.

The book documents a year and a generational lifetime. Schneider, a radical Catholic, mystic explorer and editor of *Waging Nonviolence*, speaks of Occupy as an apocalypse because for him and so many it was a break from powerlessness, from Daily Show irony and mouse-click isolation, from accommodation to horror as normalcy.

“We have come to Wall Street as refugees from this native dreamland, seeking asylum in the actual,” an early Occupy document stated. “We seek to rediscover and reclaim the world.” After the scales fall, life never looks the same.

This is what some older leftists, those who advised “throwing a little cold water” on the kids or writing them off as insufficiently disciplined for revolution, never understood. They had their own dreamland.

Consider actually existing resistance in the US before Occupy. The young did nothing about the drug war, nothing as neoliberalism buried their futures once the no-logo marching stopped, nothing after September 11. They stuck to their college classes, racking up debt in the dream of having

a place in the “knowledge economy,” or scuttled in NGO hamster wheels, or slogged through their deadening jobs, their underground jobs, their joblessness, almost all of them focused on putting one foot in front of the other, heads down.

The senior citizens of the left did little to uplift them. The antiwar movement limped away in 2006. Before it did, it alienated anyone who didn’t have time for its ideological factionalism and political sleights-of-hand.

Unions didn’t manage even to get inequality into the talking points of the party they keep alive let alone the larger culture, but chewed up one another along with idealistic kids in their organizing mills.

The civil rights remnant mostly took the road of electoral politics and, like the women’s establishment, stuck in defense, found itself in a cul de sac.

Immigrant forces exploded with energy, and for them there was ICE but no massed defense from the rest of the progressive side.

The gay movement, grown used to going it alone, kept at it. For different reasons, so did party formations, their sadsacks hawking newspapers in the rain.

Occupy’s form reflected this fractured predicament; it also pointed a way out. We sometimes forget how politically depressed we have been, our state of social recession, as someone put it.

Occupy never was going to be a revolution, except maybe of the mind, and for that the kids had to go back—to listening and thinking and being vivid together—before they could go forward.

They created a school to study power. The reality calling them to radicalism was not just the interlocking crises of the system but their own captivity.

Breaking free, trying to, was their beginning. It could be ours. From the evidence in this beautiful, insightful book, nothing is finished. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

Ashes to Ashes

BY CHRIS FLOYD

I flew into Washington the day the government shut down. I had come back to America to scatter my mother's ashes in the sea. It was her last request: to put her to rest in the Atlantic Ocean, off Myrtle Beach, where she had spent some happy times more than half a century ago.

I made my way to Tennessee, where her ashes were waiting in a black plastic box on the mantelpiece in our family home. All along the line, facilities were shutting down from a dispute over a corporate boondoggle—"Obamacare"—based on a conservative Republican template drawn up to enrich the rapacious insurance-health-care complex, whose heavy, grinding gears had harrowed both my sick and aged parents to their graves, one inch from bankruptcy.

But now, in the bizarre and ugly weirdness of our failing United States, this plan—once the farthest feather on the rightest right-wing—had become a commie monstrosity to be resisted at all costs.

While bullshit ruled the public world, private life—and private death—went on. My brother and I, the family's last remnants, set out on the 600-mile journey through the old Confederacy to carry out our filial duties.

Beer, whisky, Coca-Cola, BC Powder and beef jerky carried us through Marietta, Atlanta, Lithonia, Augusta, Red Bank, Columbia and finally down the dark, moonless ribbon of Highway 501 to the coast.

Near midnight, we reached the sprawling, garish tourist trap that had grown up where that stunning young woman and her handsome soldier husband had once stolen away from his Army base for quiet seaside weekends.

We found the town had been be-

sieged, occupied, overwhelmed by swarms of growling, roaring hogs: it was Biker Week in Myrtle Beach! Up and down and around the streets they rolled, gunning their engines in bravura displays, hour after hour after hour. A motley mix of part-time hobbyists—pudgy accountants and middle managers, hauling their soft bulk on wide, well-appointed suburban machinery—and hard-core, black-leathered, tattooed lifers, leaning back on bad-ass Harleys.

Not quite the dignified setting she might have imagined for this last act, but what the hell. "It is what it is," my brother said, as he always says, and we set off for the beach. It was nearly empty in the post-midnight hour. The deep white sand was indirectly lit from the hotels behind, but the sea itself was black, fused with the black sky. The whitecaps seemed to emerge from utter darkness and disappear into it again.

The rhythmic roar of the invisible waves filled the air. Only days before, I'd finished a reading novel about the Zen master, Hakuin, and now it suddenly struck me: this is what he was talking about—this is the sound of one hand clapping.

Such exalted thoughts vanished in the bleary morning after. The day of the scattering was at hand. The public world, where normally I spent hours greedily scarfing the news, had shriveled to nothing more than a few headlines glimpsed in a box on the street.

The shutdown was still going on, and apocalyptic default was imminent; the entrails of polls were being examined to assess the all-important political ramifications. The Peace Prizer had kidnapped somebody in Libya; one of his hit squads had been chased out of Somalia. The never-ending, all-devouring, pointless, heartless psycho circus

rolled on.

We drove down to nearby Murrell's Inlet, where our rented boat awaited. The two-lane road was lined with bars, roadhouses, restaurants, all of them crammed to overflowing with bikers. Cops were out to direct traffic through the metal morass.

We finally found the rental place. They brought the boat around. We went three miles out to sea, as the law requires. We did what we came to do. Then we headed back to Tennessee, to clear out and close up the house for good.

In the inevitable self-centeredness of grief, I couldn't help but see it all as the emblem of something larger, the end of an era. My mother was born in the depths of Depression, to a sharecropper who'd been born in the 19th century. She worked the tobacco fields, helped in the hog-killing, wore flour-sack dresses until she was 10.

Public schooling, electrification and government work lifted her family up. She got out of the holler—though not far enough to suit her—and lived the long, post-war, middle-class life that is now ending, in blood, absurdity and degradation, all around us.

The American Dream, I guess. But we know now its seeming solidity was built on sand—or ashes. Built on the death and suffering of countless, faceless "others" around the world, and in our own streets. Built on the poisonous myth of "exceptionalism," the cargo cult of "the market," and the tragic denial of our commonality.

It didn't have to be that way—but it is what it is. Her life rose and fell with this historic arc, like a wave going back into the dark. She is free now, drifting on the open sea; where are we? **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

The Banker Blockade

BY MIKE WHITNEY

Five years after Wall Street plunged the global economy into crisis, analysts warn that another meltdown might not be far off. The source of the problem is the repo market where banks exchange collateralized securities for short-term loans from investors. Repurchase agreements, or repo for short, are a critical part today's financial plumbing. They provide banks with vital low-cost funding for their investments. But repo is also risky, a fact that was driven home in 2008 when Lehman Brothers defaulted triggering a run on the Reserve Primary Fund which had been exposed to Lehman's short-term debt. The frenzied selloff pushed the fund to the brink of collapse forcing the US Treasury to step in and guarantee money market funds across the country. Had stricter regulations been in place—addressing key issues of loan quality, additional capital, and risk retention—the run on Reserve Primary would not have happened and the fallout from Lehman would not have been as severe. Instead, the wholesale funding mechanism froze, the financial system suffered a major heart attack, and the economy dipped into recession.

Keep in mind, the financial crisis was not caused by subprime mortgages or the Lehman Brothers default. It was caused by massively overleveraged financial institutions borrowing money in an unregulated market where securities were comprised of dodgy collateral. Had regulators prosecuted the fraudulent activities of the banks in their nationwide predatory lending scam; the shoddy underwriting would have ceased, the toxic mortgages would not have been bundled into bonds, the bonds would not have entered the secondary market, and the ensuing panic would not have crashed the market. The fact that the underlying subprime

collateral was toxic created, what Yale Professor Gary Gorton dubbed, the e coli problem, that is, if even a small amount of meat is contaminated, millions of pounds of hamburger must be recalled. That same rule applies to mortgage-backed securities. No one knew which MBS contained the bad loans, so investors abandoned the market entirely, wiping out trillions of dollars in equity.

As it happens, the banks were not just borrowing on their sketchy MBS either, they were also amplifying the debt many times over through a process called rehypothecation. This increased their leverage by many orders of magnitude. In a recent speech by Fed Governor Jeremy C. Stein on the “systemic risks in triparty repo”, Stein shed light on the scale of the problem. He said: “This market is one where a large number of borrowers finance the same securities on a short-term collateralized basis, with very high leverage—often in the range of twenty-to-one, fifty-to-one, or even higher.” When an asset is levered at 50 to 1, a mere 2 percent drop in value will leave the investor broke. Even so, as Stein points out, the banks are still balancing humongous amounts of debt on miniscule crumbs of capital in order to maximize profits. If the system blows up, as it inevitably will, taxpayers will be on the hook again.

Troubles in repo first surfaced in August 2007, when France's largest bank, BNP Paribas Bank, halted redemptions on mortgage-backed assets in three of its investment funds because it couldn't settle on a price. BNP's announcement sparked fire sales in MBS pushing down prices while exposing a perilously overleveraged banking system. In 2011, Fed chairman Ben Bernanke admitted the system was teetering towards insolvency in testimony

before the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission. He said “Out of maybe ... 13 of the most important financial institutions in the US, 12 were at risk of failure within a period of a week or two.” The implosion in repo eventually forced the Fed to backstop the entire financial system with trillions in loans and other guarantees. The emergency measures were all taken in response to a meltdown that could have been avoided with proper regulation.

Although the costs to the public in terms of bailouts, high unemployment and slow growth are excruciatingly well known, efforts to reign in repo or implement tighter rules have largely failed. The Wall Street banks have their tentacles wrapped around Capital Hill and every regulatory agency in DC. They have resisted any change to repo fearing it may impact their bottom line, so nothing has been done.

Stein and other reformers have proposed reasonable fixes to reduce risk and avert another devastating bank run on the shadow system, but with little success. The fact is, the banks like the way things are now, where they can conduct their activities largely in the dark, where capital requirements are virtually nil, and where they can sell their toxic securities without oversight. Why would they want to change a system that gives them a free hand to do whatever they want in the pursuit of bigger profits?

That's not to say that regulators have thrown in the towel entirely. They haven't. They're just no match for the army of lobbyists and attorneys deployed by the banks.

Everyone who follows the issue knows that repo is a ticking time-bomb that poses grave risks for the economy, the financial system, and the American people. As Yale Professor Gary B. Gorton said, “Without some repo reform, we are at risk of another panic.” Indeed, another crisis is certain. Regulations could make the system safe, but the banks don't want regulations, and the banks are calling the shots. **CP**



DAYDREAM NATION

Just a Snatch

BY KRISTIN KOLB

I'm graced with a beautiful child, in the "double digits," as she says with whoops and twirls in her black cape and leopard-print beret—now ten years old. Sometimes I feel like I feed off her exuberance as I slouch cynically, ever closer to the Big Four-Oh. She weeps when a garden spider's web is dinged on the clothes line, demands ice cream with the steel of Stalin, concocts secret languages, and sleeps with her mouth half open, hands over her head in surrender—a pose she assumed on her first night outside my body.

"Ten years old today" repeated in my head when a friend sent me some internet drivel: "You're a mom. What do you think?"

It was a *Gawker* post about pop sensation Miley Cyrus' latest controversy—modeling for fashion photographer Terry Richardson. She tokes on a joint in some shots. In others, she tugs at her cherry-red leotard to display the contours of her labia. She holds a tall-boy can in front of her genitals, protruding like an erection, her tongue sticking out in her trademark way.

The lighting is glaring. The photos are flat and soulless. Richardson appears in some looking like a character from *Gummo*, despite the obvious attire of a Midtown Manhattan apartment, and Time Warner headquarters shining through the window.

I hadn't followed her twerking—too busy reading actual news. Besides, isn't that dance just harkening to the days of Josephine Baker?

But these photos hit me, as my daughter is closing in on adolescence. The point is packaging sexuality, not celebrating it. Violation is the theme—the dirty old man with his bad little Disney princess and her corporate sponsors.

The photos reminded me of Richard Avedon's portrait of singer Chan Marshall, published in *The New Yorker* in 2004. At the time, Marshall, also known as Cat Power, was in late-stage alcoholism and just discharged from the hospital.

The elderly Avedon visited her in the ward with a bouquet and flattery. The next day, after champagne, he photographed her in his apartment. Her hair is done up in a messy bun. Her eyes glow through dark circles. A cigarette with an inch-long ash is in one hand. In the other, she holds a swatch of a Bob Dylan T-shirt like a dish towel over her breasts. Her jeans are unbuttoned, and we see her pubic hair trail the zipper line.

"I was so drunk I could barely stand up," Marshall said in a 2006 interview. "I couldn't zip up my pants because my stomach was killing me. I didn't even realize I wasn't wearing underwear until the magazine came out."

It's a cringing and tragic photo, but she's still beautiful. Violation is sexually potent. That's inescapable.

Ceding power to the man behind the lens, or the wallet, and celebrating hot messes is what my generation tried to act against. Riot grrrl Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill performed in her underwear and scrawled "slut" on her belly. P.J. Harvey wrapped her body in cellophane for an album cover.

But when a wasted Chan Marshall showed her snatch to the twentieth century's great portraitist in *The New Yorker*, nearly every smart guy—and woman—I knew swooned.

There's snobbery in the Miley Cyrus derision. Here she is, all twerking and teddy bears, making more money the more she points out her privates, when riot grrrl Hanna stripped her

way through Evergreen State College. In the 90s, sex work became cool, and alumna of elite liberal arts colleges got naked at clubs in most hipster enclaves. Some scored book deals. Others landed mortgages. Is Miley just another empowered grrrl, albeit in a greedy, unhip, corporate fashion?

Sinead O'Connor gave her take in a blunt letter—"don't prostitute yourself"—and caught hell for slut-shaming. But if you read it, it's obvious that she's just a concerned mama bear. However, she's lost culture cred because she never slid down a pole or shed her clothes for a lens. Old-fashioned and ancient history.

Hanna told *The Daily Beast* in March that her stripping was "a shitty job," not a feminist statement. And riot grrrl was as much about writing on rape and emotional abuse, anorexia and addiction, self-empowerment and strong examples, as it was about a music scene.

The "power" question is more relevant now than ever, with events like the Steubenville High School case, where teens filmed a gang rape and used social media to brag. Recently, numerous young women have been bullied online, taunted after sexual assaults go viral, and killed themselves as a result.

After I saw the *Gawker* post, I walked my daughter to school. The girls in her class huddled and giggled. I heard "Miley Cyrus," and hyper chatter.

As I left, tears welled. A line from a poem by Roberto Bolaño came to mind: "Best of luck to those bestowed with dark talents and no good fortune. I've seen them wake up on sea shores and light cigarettes as only those who long for teasing and caresses can." **CP**

The NSA and Its Enablers

The Rot at the Heart of the Internet

BY PETER LEE

The United States government has been engaged in a war on public access to telecommunications cryptography since the dawn of the Internet age. And it's been getting too much help from the corporate IT sector. Now, with an assist from Edward Snowden, the bill is coming due, with the prospect of tens of billions of dollars of lost business and the erosion of the security and integrity of the Internet.

It all started with the US law enforcement and intelligence agencies' fear of "going dark" as communications migrated from easily tappable analog waveforms to easily encryptable digital pulses, and users turned to encrypted e-mail, encrypted e-commerce transactions, and Virtual Public Networks for privacy and security. That anxiety morphed into the government's fatal desire and ambition to be able to read anything and everything that passes across the Internet.

For the surveillance regime, public enemy number 1 is public key end-to-end cryptography for e-mail, which was made universally available through the effort of Philip Zimmerman, a political activist.

In 1991, Zimmerman raced against imminent Congressional legislation outlawing strong encryption to create PGP "Pretty Good Privacy" encryption software for secure e-mail communication and release it on the Internet. In 1996, he responded to the restriction on circulation of PGP software on the Internet as a violation of Munitions List prohibitions, and the Clinton administration's plans to install the "Clipper Chip"—which would enable weak, commercial level encryption of telecommunications with the decryption keys held by the government—by publishing the PGP source code as a book of zeros and ones that could be disassembled, scanned, and programmed into a computer. Thanks to Zimmerman and PGP, the cryptography cat is out of the bag and terrorists, pedophiles, drug dealers, dissidents, activists, businesspeople and ordinary guys and gals can exchange coded, uncrackable messages over the public Internet.

The mathematics of public key cryptography—based upon currently intractable problems of factoring gigantic numbers or solving discrete logarithms—is apparently still solid. As Edward Snowden, who should know, put it: "Encryption works. Properly implemented strong crypto systems are one of the few things that you can rely on."

Encryption also happens to be a red flag. If you use encryption, you can also rely on the NSA storing your encrypted communications indefinitely and, eventually, trying to decrypt them.

Theoretical brute force decryption of a single message (using networked computers to try out all the possible permutations until the puzzle cracks) protected by 2048 bit en-

ryption would take decades if not centuries. Even with the NSA's has some special mathematical tricks (which have apparently been able to call into question the security of 1024 bit private/public key encryption), the complexity of encryption can easily be kicked up another notch to 3072 bits to confound enhanced decryption capabilities.

The technological magic bullet for cryptography is quantum computing. Peter Shor, a mathematician at Bell Labs, concluded in the 1990s that a theoretical computer based upon manipulation of the multifarious and entangled states of quantum bits or qubits (instead of the binary on/off operation of existing computers) could solve the mathematical conundrums at the heart of modern encryption. The US government is supporting a broad range of research in this difficult and arcane field. However, given the immense challenges of quantum computing—in the academic realm, successfully isolating and massaging enough qubits to factor 15 into 5 x 3 is considered to be a noteworthy achievement—the NSA, whatever is going on in its secret and well-funded bowels, is probably still a good ways away from creating a decryption-worthy quantum computer.

Although the mathematics of encryption is powerful, implementation is a nightmare. The devil, is in the details, and that's where you'll find the NSA.

Public key encryption works by installing encryption software on your computer, using the program plus input from your computer to generate random numbers, which are then chunked into the program to generate a super-secret private key. That private key is used to generate a public key, which is freely circulated on the Internet. Correspondents take the public key to encrypt messages that they send to the originator, who decrypts the messages using the private key.

The precious private key is far too long to remember or key in manually; it is itself encrypted and stored, according to the user's level of caution and/or paranoia on a computer hard drive or removable USB memory stick, and is accessible through a user-created, memorized passphrase.

The simplest and least elegant way for a government agency to decrypt a target's communication is what is known as "rubber hose cryptography", some form of legal or physical coercion that compels surrender of the passphrase.

Somewhat more elegant methods are presumably practiced by the NSA's "Tailored Access Operation" (though it apparently does not usually deign to attack individual computers, preferring to go after routers and networks instead). The most likely attack is surreptitiously installing a keylogger on a target computer, so that the passphrase can be recorded and transmitted as it is typed in. In one of life's little ironies—actually in one of those illustrations of the equivocal commitment of computer companies to individual privacy and the convergence between government surveillance and corporate data-collection practices—the federal government has found itself unable to legislate an outright ban on secretly installed

“The NSA in its current form is not an organization that can be trusted with your credit card number, let alone critical telecom backdoors.”

spyware such as keyloggers, since that might gore the ox of cookie-happy corporations eager to continue collecting data from their oblivious users as well as the pass-phrase happy NSA.

Various “side channel attacks” use other methods to derive the private key. For instance, the Windows operating system may place certain data—for instance the vital pass phrase—in its cache for a brief period of time to await execution as the CPU cycles through another task, leaving it vulnerable to collection. Clandestine measurement of the voltages, electromagnetic gyrations, the time it takes to complete the encryption task, and even the sound of a device as it grunts through the encryption and decryption process in normal operation or under hacker-induced stress can yield clues to the keys.

To add another level of complexity, the public/private key system relies on trusted third parties to issue certificates linked to the public keys, so that potential correspondents can be assured that the keys actually do belong to the individual or organization that ostensibly issued them, and they are not inadvertently exchanging keys and sending their vital secrets to a malicious adversary. Yes, the NSA, as well as a variety of criminals, manage to obtain forged credentials and misrepresent themselves to target users as trusted sites in so-called “Man in the Middle attacks.”

And there is more. Much, much more.

The Achilles’ heel of public key encryption is random number generation. Generation of true random numbers is an esoteric art. The website Random.org (provider of 1.11 trillion random bits to the Internet community as of October 1, 2013) offers its users—gambling sites, lotteries, scientists, and the like—genuine randomness powered by atmospheric noise. Cryptography programs, however, rely on a shortcut, an internal “pseudo random number generator” or PRNG to “seed” the algorithm i.e. generate the initial values that the program works on to generate a private key. The most popular open source program for data encryption, PGP, instructs the user to diddle on the keyboard during the key creation process. The random millisecond intervals between key strokes are recorded and used to seed the algorithm. Since there are limits to the amount of time the user is willing to sit at the keyboard and randomly strike keys, there are genuine and perhaps significant limits to the randomness of the seed numbers generated.

If the universe of random numbers is restricted, private keys become more vulnerable to mathematical attack.

Presumably, the NSA’s constellation of world-class mathematicians include numerous adepts at the Boneh attack on the “hidden number problem”, which takes as its point of departure that, if any bit of a key is known and a sufficient number of encrypted messages can be sifted through, the key can be derived. This attack provides some context for the NSA’s policy of permanently storing any encrypted traffic, foreign or domestic. It can be assumed that the NSA is not only hoping that the relevant key will be recovered through the assistance, witting or otherwise, of the target. The NSA is perhaps also assembling populations of messages large enough to eventually make mathematical attack feasible.

The weaker the pseudo random number generator, the better the chances. For many years, the US government has been accused of an unhealthy interest in degrading the PRNG programs available to public cryptography.

In September 2013, Edward Snowden delivered the smoking gun via the *New York Times*, *Guardian*, and *Pro Publica* concerning Sigint Enabling Services, a NSA decryption program with an annual budget of around \$250 million, and its top secret element, Project Bullrun. Bullrun encompassed a host of decryption initiatives whose success in opening up previously inaccessible decrypted traffic in 2010 reportedly “gobsmacked” the NSA’s British partners, GCHQ.

It subsequently emerged that the NSA promoted the incorporation a random number generator called “Dual EC EBRG” as one of the four methods endorsed in the National Institute of Standards and Technology’s NIST SP800-90A standard for random number generators, and finagled the ISO to adopt the same standard, as the *New York Times* reported:

Internal NSA memos describe how the agency subsequently worked behind the scenes to push the same standard on the International Organization for Standardization. “The road to developing this standard was smooth once the journey began,” one memo noted. “However, beginning the journey was a challenge in finesse.”

At the time, Canada’s Communications Security Establishment ran the standards process for the international organization, but classified documents describe how ultimately the NSA seized control. “After some behind-the-scenes finessing with the head of the Canadian national delegation and with CSE, the stage was set for NSA to submit a rewrite of the draft,” the memo notes. “Eventually, NSA became the sole editor.”

The problem was, Dual EC EBRG was an inferior random

number generator, as was quickly discovered by the IT community after the standard was rolled out in 2007. More disturbingly, its output was driven by a secret set of constants that, if known (and presumably known only to the NSA) would make cracking encryption trivially easy.

Nevertheless, since DUAL EC EBRG was enshrined in the standard, it became sine qua non for procurement under FIPS-140-2 government cryptographic security standard. This, in turn, meant that vendors had to include the dodgy PRNG in their software if they wanted to sell to the government which, in turn, meant that a large number of suppliers included it in their offerings. Dual EC EBRG was shunned by many developers and was not shipped as the default PRNG for many applications; however anxieties have been voiced that perhaps the NSA could access the myriad backdoors available to it to flip the PRNG default over to DUAL EC EBRG in a targeted system.

For one vendor that wouldn't even be necessary. RSA—an important provider of security and cryptographic tools originally founded by Ron Rivest, Adi Shamir, and Leonard Adleman, the begetters of the industry standard prime factor approach to encryption—offered DUAL EC EBRG as the default for a key suite of developer tools. In a humiliating acknowledgment, after the Snowden revelation RSA had to issue a public notice to its customer to jettison Dual EC EBRG.

The manipulation of standards and clandestine procurement of keys to attack e-mail encryption are also central to the NSA's attack on the other two legs of the Internet encryption tripod, TSL and VPN.

The TSL (Transport Socket Layer; still frequently referred to by its old name, Secure Socket Layer or SSL) system is a layer of the Internet Protocol used for secure two-way communications between a "client" i.e. you and a "server" i.e. your bank, amazon.com, Visa, Google, Facebook, cloud-based e-mail providers like Gmail or Yahoo! etc. With the rise of mobile computing—and the explosion in the use of unsecured public WiFi networks—TSL encryption has become even more pervasive in ordinary Internet traffic, as has the NSA's interest in cracking it.

The most commonly used TSL method for encrypting data has been the RC-4 cypher. In early 2013, it was revealed that the RC-4 cypher was vulnerable to a certain, data intensive attack. For a look at the oblivious optimism of Internet security firms in the pre-Snowden days, before it was known that the NSA was archiving all encrypted data, here is how one company evaluated the RC-4 flaw in March of this year:

At the moment, the attack is not yet practical because it requires access to millions and possibly billions of copies of the same data encrypted using different keys. A browser would have to make that many connections to a server to give the attacker enough data. A possible exploitation path is to somehow instrument the

browser to make a large number of connections, while a man in the middle is observing and recording the traffic. We are still safe at the moment.

However, the NSA does not need to plow through billions of communications in order to decrypt TSL traffic—if it has access to the private key used to encrypt the traffic.

TSL communications rely on a private session key residing on the corporate server to generate one-time "session keys." Under the most commonly implemented TSL scheme, employing RSA encryption, the session key expires when the transaction is completed and the connection is closed; however the server's private key is permanent and can be used to decrypt any traffic with that server. This flaw that has been known for several years—and is correctable by switching to another encryption scheme, Diffie-Hellman, which creates a new private key for each session, blocking the use of keys from future sessions to decrypt past sessions to achieve "Forward Secrecy"—but didn't seem important until people realized that the NSA was apparently archiving all encrypted communications and could decrypt them if and when it eventually obtained the permanent private keys.

The NSA seems to have done quite well in obtaining keys—although legal gag orders on Internet providers prevent the public at large and users in particular of targeted services from a full understanding of the extent of the agency's success.

Whether through hacking, FISA letters and subpoenas, or coerced, grudging, or enthusiastic cooperation from the big Internet companies, the NSA has apparently acquired an enviable portfolio of valid keys "for commercial products" from corporate holders. They are held in the NSA's Key Provisioning Service, presumably to decrypt as needed current sessions, as well as the historical archives of intercepted communications the NSA stores on its own servers. If a key is desired, by fair means or foul, a request goes out to the euphemistically named "Key Recovery Service".

The most recent publicly reported addition to the NSA's private key portfolio belongs to Lavabit. Lavabit was a cloud-based encrypted e-mail service that Edward Snowden used, presumably in instances where he did not have the end-to-end encryption link with his correspondent, to communicate through Lavabit's servers via encrypted SSL links. After l'affaire Snowden blew up, the US government demanded Lavabit's SSL encryption keys on the justification that it needed them to set up a "pen register" device to monitor ongoing traffic relating to the account of, to paraphrase the unsealed court documents, [redacted].

In August 2013, after six weeks of what looks something like stalling, Lavabit complied with the order by delivering the key (actually five 2048 bit keys, one for each e-mail protocol it supported) in the form of an illegible 11 page printout of numbers in 4-point type which the US government found less than satisfactory. Facing a \$5,000/day contempt cita-

tion until the keys were delivered in electronic form, Lavabit shut down its service, rendering surveillance issues moot but leaving open the questions of whether the NSA had archived historical Lavabit SSL traffic and whether US government could use the information it had obtained from Lavabit to access and decrypt it.

A similar e-mail service, Silent Circle, founded by Philip Zimmerman of PGP fame, shut down its service, presumably pre-emptively, in order to forestall similar demands from the US government.

Similar security issues underlie the creation of “Virtual Private Networks”, which operate at a higher level than the discrete TSL sessions, and are meant to give users the means to encrypt sensitive information for packetized transmission between multiple computers or networks via the public Internet.

VPN provisioning is a big commercial business. The service is marketed as a silver bullet for the information security of corporations (which wish to use the public Internet for transmission of sensitive internal information between locations), the evasion of censorship and surveillance in authoritarian jurisdictions such as the People’s Republic of China, and the legal impunity of the gamers and movie and music enthusiasts who illegally download copyrighted material and seek to mask their identities and locations.

Microsoft’s implementation of a commonly used VPN encryption protocol, PPTP, is considered so flawed that critics regard traffic on VPNs using Microsoft PPTP to be virtually unencrypted. A popular substitute, IPSec, has been dogged by allegations from a software subcontractor that the FBI tried to install a backdoor dating in 2000-2001 on the most widely used implementation, OpenBSD Unix.

John Gilmore, the Internet freedom worthy who coined Gilmore’s Law, “The Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it,” participated in the IPSec standardization process. After the Snowden Project Bullrun revelations, he took to an e-mail list to complain about the convoluted birth of the IPSec standards and voice his suspicions that the excessive complexity and clumsy implementations surrounding it might be related to a government effort to compromise its effectiveness:

Every once in a while, someone not an NSA employee, but who had longstanding ties to NSA, would make a suggestion that reduced privacy or security, but which seemed to make sense when viewed by people who didn’t know much about crypto. For example, using the same IV (initialization vector) throughout a session, rather than making a new one for each packet. Or, retaining a way to for this encryption protocol to specify that no encryption is to be applied.

Regardless of whether coders were being evil or just being bad coders, the security of many VPN systems has apparently been compromised.



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Internal documents made available by Edward Snowden in August already gave a strong hint that VPNs had been cracked. A slide tutorial on the NSA integrated data sifting program XKeyscore included the sample search: “Show me all the VPN startups in country X, and give me the data so I can decrypt and discover the users.”

The early September Snowden revelation concerning Project Bullrun put the fat squarely in the fire, reporting that Britain’s GCHQ, presumably building on the capabilities of its US partner, was targeting the decryption of the traffic of 30 VPN networks, with a goal of cracking 300 VPN networks by 2030.

Revelation of the NSA’s single-minded, no-holds-barred pursuit of decryption capabilities across the full spectrum of encrypted communications from e-mail to TSL sessions to VPNs (and to mobile phones to Skype and chat) created an awkward problem for the US IT community.

The NSA’s disinterest in stopping at collection of metadata—the “outside of the envelope”—and its intense and well-funded interest in getting “inside the envelope” on a system-wide level pointed to a high level of US government commitment to degrading the overall functionality of the Internet itself as a secure communications tool in order to maximize the surveillance effectiveness of the NSA and other security, intelligence, and investigatory agencies.

As Matthew Green of Johns Hopkins pointed out, massively scalable surveillance requires a broad-brush approach—and a little help:

“If your goal is mass surveillance, you need to build insecurity in from the start. That means working with vendors to add backdoors.”

Indeed, the NSA has worked with vendors through an outreach program, the Commercial Solutions Center, that gives equipment and software providers a chance to showcase their products to the agency, while creating opportunities for the NSA to negotiate the inclusion of useful flaws, vulnerabilities, and backdoors in addition to the CALEA—Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act—real time surveillance access mandated for all telecommunications equipment installed in the US.

When the debit side of the IT ledger is toted up—a willing to compromise encryption keys, the seemingly casual implementation of dubious standards, the cooperation in setting up government backdoors—the end result is a picture of extensive and intensive corporate collusion with the NSA that results in the creation of cryptographically dodgy products.

That is not a great thing for the IT industry’s image—or sales.

If the Internet industry cares about one thing as much as freedom of information, it is money. And huge amounts of money—in transactions, software, equipment, services, sales, and market valuations—flow along SSL and VPN connections.

Global e-commerce sales exceed \$1 trillion per year. The global VPN market is on the order of \$28 billion. Cloud computing—with the need for encryption of critical business and consumer information for storage as well as transport—is a \$50 billion dollar market that vendors hope will quadruple by 2020. Google’s market capitalization today: close to \$300 billion.

Big numbers, and a big reliance on the promise of effective encryption.

Instead, thanks to the Snowden revelations, the public was given the distinct impression the secure communications, transaction, hosting, and storage environments peddled to global business and consumers by the likes of Microsoft, Cisco, and Google are a Potemkin village of purported Internet safety obscuring the ruins of a communications infrastructure thoroughly undermined by the NSA.

It might be said that the most significant compromise of “methods and sources” has not been of NSA surveillance capabilities, which are perhaps already known or suspected by its various governmental, criminal, and terrorist adversaries. The sources and methods revealed were of those IT companies that seem to have played along with the NSA and then turned around to sell the gullible public the sizzle of security without the steak.

Unsurprisingly, the IT bigs appear defensive and selectively informative in trying to clear the air concerning their cooperation with the NSA. And, to this date, there has been a shortage of unambiguous corporate “naming and shaming” in the Edward Snowden releases as filtered through his media partners, leaving it up to skeptical observers to decide whose protestations of heroic devotion to user privacy and secrecy should be taken most seriously.

It seems that Google, befitting its Don’t Be Evil motto—and its intimate interrelationship with the US government information regime—has tiptoed most nimbly through the reputational minefield of decryption vulnerabilities.

In 2011, Google had already modified its TLS protocol to enable Forward Secrecy as the default for its Gmail and search customers, implying that it was aware of the issue of decryption of archived communications. In September 2013, after the Snowden revelations, it professed itself shocked, shocked, that the NSA was intercepting backbone data and declared itself in an “arms race with the NSA.” Google announced it would encrypt the traffic between its data centers, and proactively encrypt static data stored on its cloud. Google offered to hold the cloud encryption key itself (though less trusting users have the option of encrypting their data themselves and holding their own keys). And search requests are now all encrypted—except for ad clicks!

Responses like this may do little to help the Ciscos, Microsofts, Apples, and Googles in less forgiving jurisdictions like Brazil or, for that matter, China, whose own backbone telecommunications suppliers, Huawei and ZTE,

are basically banned from the US market as alleged security risks—and whose e-commerce market may surpass the USA's and become the largest in the world this year with \$250 billion in transactions. The rest of the world doesn't look too good, either. After the first round of Snowden revelations in June 2013, American cloud computing vendors already estimated they faced losses of \$30 billion dollars in sales over the next three years, largely to European competitors flaunting their perceived advantages in assuring user security.

But there's more to the damage than political embarrassment, damaged reputations, lost profits, and the loss of privacy. The real damage is what the NSA inflicted on the Internet, by detecting, exploiting, creating, and propagating the security flaws which its corporate partners implemented—and then proving incapable of keeping the whole shoddy system secret.

As Johns Hopkins professor Matthew Green tweeted:

The NSA in its current form is not an organization that can be trusted with your credit card numbers, let alone critical telecom backdoors.

Exhibit A is Edward Snowden.

Even if we discount the combined ingenuity of white hat corporate and open source security hackers, hostile governments, and highly motivated and capable criminal gangs to exploit the horrors that the NSA has wrought on Internet security, the fact still remains that an NSA employee walked out the door with 50,000 vital top-secret documents describing the corrupted standards, dodgy implementations, compromised vendors, and NSA workarounds which attack the heart of Internet security.

Hopefully, the NSA is right and Edward Snowden is the worst of the worst—i.e. the people who steal secrets from the NSA are intelligent, highly principled hackers who are fanatical about opsec and data security, plan their moves carefully, and only reveal information cautiously and judiciously for the public good through responsible media outlets. If the NSA is wrong—and the NSA has been wrong a lot—the NSA may have a few disloyal and greedy employees and contractors with the requisite knowledge and clearances who would, in Edward Snowden's words, be happy “living in a palace petting a phoenix” or whatever equivalent China's security bureau, the Russian mafia, European crime syndicates, or South American drug cartels can provide.

Thanks to the NSA and its corporate IT partners, there is rot at the heart of the Internet that will take a lot of digging to root out. **CP**

Readers interested in setting up PGP encryption on their computers to enable encrypted e-mail (and, apparently, obtain automatic archiving of those e-mails on the NSA's servers) can go to PressFreedomFoundation.org

PETER LEE edits China Matters.

Fear in the Air Blood and Hope in Egypt

BY ANDRE VLTCHER

At seven o'clock, tanks left several side streets and moved directly to the El-Gaish Road, to that magnificent sea front avenue and promenade, the pride of the ancient city of Alexandria.

That day 2 people died. The victims were two protesters, members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

And so the number of casualties is increasing; two more citizens, two more lost lives in that apparently unstoppable carnage that began on the day of the coup d'état, 3rd July 2013, when, as described in 'objective' and cold language by mass media outlets, 'General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi removed President Mohamed Morsi and suspended the Egyptian Constitution.'

After the 'event', almost immediately, countless reports were filed, and clichés established, calling the coup 'bloodless'. But according to several of my sources in the capital, by early September 2013 at least 1,600 Egyptian men, women and children had already spilt their blood, mostly victims of brutal actions conducted by the security forces, the military and the police. And the real numbers are most likely higher, much higher.

Just to put all this into some perspective, during and after that beastly military coup in Chile (on 11 September 1973), performed by General Augusto Pinochet and his cohorts, planned and backed by the US government, several private foreign and local companies, between 2,000 and 4,000 people lost their lives. If the situation in Egypt does not change rapidly, before the end of the year, the country can easily beat those Chilean numbers of victims, in just a short period of 6 months.

* * *

Before the killings in Alexandria, on that very same day, I drove through the El-Gaish Road, and a few hours later I went to one of the epicenters of the protests. I went on foot. My local guides, two university students, were too scared to accompany me. They went away, stayed behind. Their last advice was, as they saw me chatting with several Muslim Brotherhood members: “Either way you will get messed up... If you make Brotherhood people angry, you are finished... If you befriend them, security people or snipers will see it and they will get you!”

This time, nothing happened. The Brotherhood members appeared to be grateful to have me here. They were posing for the lenses of my cameras, shouting pro-Morsi slogans, waving flags, and insulting the military. They were not hostile at all, on the contrary. I was the only foreign looking filmmaker and photographer there, at that moment, and that gained me some 'mileage', and certain spontaneous respect.

I had not come here to promote the Muslim Brotherhood, certainly not. I came to try to make sense of what was happening in the post- coup d'état Egypt, just working in the middle of this riot or protest, or whatever it could be called, I was moving in the middle of that mess, and Brotherhood people simply let me do what I came here to do. We were not friends and we were not enemies. I came to give images to the world, and they were longing for exposure.

I had to move fast, to make the job of snipers extremely difficult, almost impossible. And I had been changing my locations of filming and photographing, on several occasions, very rapidly.

Fear was omnipresent. When in the car and surrounded by the crowd, drivers were petrified, begging me or screaming at me, to put my cameras down. This time nothing happened, but in my mind I still had fresh memories of overturned, burnt cars in the middle of the streets of Port Said earlier this year. One can of fuel and a match, just a few seconds shorter than it would take to unlock a door, and our lives would go literally up in flames.

There was fear of the security forces, which recently unleashed their brutal tactics dating from Hosni Mubarak's days. There was fear of snipers, of informers.

Foreigners were being labeled as 'spies'. Foreign citizenship was not a protection, anymore. A press card could bring more trouble than safety. Suddenly nobody was safe in this country, in these days. The army, the second greatest recipient of Western aid after that of Israel was in full force and confident, repositioning itself as the ruling force in Egypt.

In the meantime, desperate slums were growing in all major cities, and rural poverty was becoming unbearable. Apartment buildings were collapsing, one after another, as houses of cards, a result of corruption and the terrible quality of construction. Garbage was piling up everywhere, and the infrastructure was crumbling.

In the meantime there were Maseratis and Ferraris being driven through Heliopolis and other upmarket neighborhoods. There were countless advertisements for plush country clubs, gated communities growing around golf

courses, with elaborate gardening and greenery in the middle of the desert.

It all suddenly resembled the post-1965 Indonesian savage capitalist model, the favorite model that the West recommends or even forcefully implements in most of the destabilized countries all over the world.

Just a few months ago I was told by one of the high-ranking diplomats based in Cairo: "There are so many studies now, coming from the West... and many advisors, who are promoting Indonesian-style 'democracy' and its economic model, for this country. It is amazing and truly surprising..." To me it was totally logical, and I was not surprised at all. In both countries, the progressive governments of the past were overthrown by the military, subservient to Western interests. Decades later, in both countries, the revolutions ousted

the heads of old regimes, Suharto in Indonesia and Mubarak in Egypt, but patently failed to change the core of the system.

Indonesia offers the best example of how a country can commit successful moral and social suicide, sacrifice the majority of its people, while fully satisfying the business and geo-political demands of the West.



Muslim Brotherhood in Alexandria by Andre Vltchek

* * *

Now there are tanks in front of the Presidential Palace in Cairo, and a few hundred meters up the road, there is one more tank, parked in full view, guarding Hosni Mubarak's lavish mansion. These days, tanks are everywhere—in Heliopolis, Cairo, Giza, and along the highways leading to Suez and to Alexandria.

Mr. Reda, a driver attached to me by my local friends, is swearing left and right as we drive past those countless roadblocks, endless military compounds, armed-force bases and structures.

My driver is neither a real Marxist, nor a true revolutionary. He is actually a mainstream and pious Muslim, a staunch supporter of the deposed President Mohamed Morsi, and hater of everything that stands in the way of a religious, Islamic state. He keeps repeating that would he be given a chance, he would fight for Morsi, even spill his blood for Morsi.

Once in a while he has his loud outbursts, in both Arabic and English, sometimes combining both languages in one uninterrupted flow: “I am with the Muslim Brotherhood! Morsi, inshallah; he will return... Sisi no good... Baradei no good... Hosni Mubarak no good...”

As we drive on some dusty overpass, there is a small park clearly visible down below, and a fairly imposing building hidden behind its greenery. Mr. Reda suddenly feels an obligation to double as my tour guide: “Here people are crazy, crazy! In Cairo we call it the Yellow Palace.” This is his description of the mental hospital... But soon he begins his litany again, invigorated and modified by his visual encounter with a psychiatric institution:

“ElBaradei crazy... Mubarak crazy... Abdul Fatah al-Sisi crazy!” Then a short pause and: “Morsi, please come back... soon... He will; hamdulillah he will!”

* * *

Just a few months earlier this year, in February 2013, in front of the same Presidential Palace, at night, my young revolutionary friends defied teargas, brutal police cadres, even snipers, who were parked on the roofs, shooting periodically at anything that moved, killing and injuring protesters. In those days, the rebellion was against President Morsi who had been, as many believed, betraying the essence of the 2011 Revolution.

By then, President Morsi, who won his mandate in 2012 with just a tiny majority of 51.7% and only after the second round, had many enemies on both the left and the right.

Many in the military cadres despised him, and many from the left associated him with countless Western interests in Egypt and in this entire part of the world. It was hard not to be suspicious about him: in one single week, during my stay, he inundated with water, the tunnel connecting Gaza and Egyptian Sinai. He invited the IMF back to Egypt, and he declared all anti-government demonstrations illegal.

Many, probably most, of my Egyptian friends wanted Morsi out of office. But hardly anybody would think of, let alone support, the Egyptian military overthrowing the government, with the tanks rolling down the avenues, and people “disappearing”, being arrested and brutally killed.

* * *

I find myself inside the real mental clinic, drinking tea with my dear friend, psychiatrist Dr. Mohammad Shafik. He is part of the group that I call, unofficially, “Egyptian revolutionary doctors”, consisting mainly of dedicated socialists and revolutionaries, humanists. Just as many in this group, Mohammad Shafik isn’t only a doctor, but is also an activist, organizer, and a thinker.

From his point of view, the situation after 3rd July 2013 coup d’état became very complex, but not incomprehensible. I ask him how many people are left in Egypt—those car-

rying the revolutionary ideals of the early Arab Spring, of 2011? According to many, Morsi stalled the revolution, and the military later took full advantage of people’s disappointment, and brought itself, and in a way, the legacy of the old Mubarak’s regime, back to power.

Dr. Mohammad Shafik nods:

At this point, very few revolutionaries are left in Egypt. That is if we talk about political forces. There are of course still millions of those who were at the beginning of the uprising, fighting for social justice, freedom, and other important issues... But in terms of political powers—there are very few of those who still stand and openly say ‘we are against the military rule and we are still against the Muslim Brotherhood, and decisively against the return of the old regime of Mubarak. There are only two most prominent organizations from the Left: our “Revolutionary Socialist Organization”, which is the Marxist and trickiest body founded in the 1990’s, and the “Movement of 6th Of April”, which is one of the movements that started the 2011 Revolution. Both of these organizations are taking a strong position against the coup and against the Muslim Brotherhood.

* * *

Wassim Wagdy is one of the main leaders of the Revolutionary Socialist Organization. He is slightly camera-shy, and he generally dislikes talking on the record, but he makes an exception when he is told that I am a friend of the two ‘revolutionary doctors’; Admed Attia from Port Said, and Mohammad Shafik from Cairo. I ask him what the program of the organization really is, and he does not hesitate for one second to confirm its revolutionary, and left wing orientation:

“We are fighting for a socialist society; not only for a so-called democratic Egypt. We are struggling for what can be described as ‘real popular democracy’. And from that position we are antagonistic to both forces—the deposed Muslim regime, and the old regime of Hosni Mubarak.” Which, he believes, is almost synonymous with the present military regime.

We talk about savage capitalism in Egypt, about its devastating effect on the social system of the country and even on its education system. Here, like in other nations that survived several decades of pro-Western dictatorship, brainwashing succeeded in preventing people from being able to define their position in society, and even defining the state of society itself.

I was invited to the new offices of the Revolutionary Socialist Organization in Giza. The walk-up space is complete with a small library and meeting room. It is a bit chaotic, but chaos here is creative. Even the chairs and tables are decorated with revolutionary banners, and the wall is adorned with the profile of the famous Egyptian singer Om Kalthoum, a

red star painted near her head.

The Organization is recruiting new members. Men and women sit on metal chairs, in a circle; Wassim Wagdy is speaking to them and listening attentively.

It is clearly a revolution in the making.

“Education” is on everybody’s lips. Education is what Egypt needs; true education—not private schools and capitalist indoctrination. In short, knowledge, not schools.

I drag one of the young members to the crammed library. It is hot, but I turn off the fan, in order to film the interview.

“What is it that you feel about the system?” I ask Abdulaziz Sami, the manager of the social center. “How bad is Egyptian capitalism?”

“It is like...” he is hesitating. He does not want to sound silly. But then he realizes that what he is going to say is not silly at all. And he says it: “It is like a vampire. It sucks everything from the people. It even sucks dreams out of men, women and children. And for the West, Egypt is like some golden egg... Not a country, but food.”

Wassim Wagdy later continues: “Here, capitalism is destroying people, it is ruining human lives. Capitalism is all about money... If you bring in money, you can survive, but if you don’t have enough, you have no rights. It is very brutal here... It is also very brutal in all poor countries, everywhere.”

He tells me about workers taking over enterprises here, like in Argentina, and he talks about the mighty, powerful unions.

I tell him that in my discussion-turn book, Noam Chomsky told me about the importance of conscious and organized labor here in Egypt, before and during the revolution. According to Chomsky, Egypt is on the same wave as Latin America, but only with some delay.

It still can happen... It may... Not everything is lost. Millions of Egyptians are feverishly working to improve the country, to improve the world. Some are fighting; and dying.

After I leave the office, I get detained.

* * *

They tried to assassinate the Minister of Interior on the 5th September, the car bomb attack.

The fingers of the military immediately point at ‘terrorists’ and ‘Islamic insurgents’ and, still indirectly but unmistakably, at the Muslim Brotherhood.

What is next, nobody knows.

But at horrific slum called Imbaba, things are as usual, that is, awful. And nobody cares much about the power game played by the military. Or more precisely, not many are supporting it.

Ms. Tahany Lasheen, a prominent political activist, was born here, and has lived here all her entire life. She said that Imbaba is a true revolutionary district, and is getting more revolutionary all the time.

Now more than half of the city lives in slums, explains Ms Tahany. She talks about collapsed security, sexual harassment, and other crime plaguing the poor neighborhoods. She talks about privatized electricity, non-functioning garbage collection, and the scarcity of drinking water.

Listening to her, the country is just a skeleton, a wreck. And that, perhaps, led to the heroic 2011 Revolution, the one that got derailed and kidnapped, that went unfinished.

But the awareness is still there, even in the slums. People are observing and they are thinking.

“On June 13, the entire Imbaba went against Morsi”, explained Ms Tahany. “I never saw anything like that since the Revolution! So many people! People were with the military, with Sisi, all the way. But then the massacres came, the slaughters. Thousands of people died. And suddenly, public opinion in the slum totally changed. People understood. People began regretting their earlier support for the military. They were horrified by the killing spree in Rabaa and Nahda. They had friends and neighbors who died there!”

* * *

How quiet and serene is Cairo early in the morning. The eternal River Nile flows through this ancient city that has seen so many great and miserable deeds performed by human kind. The city that gave the world a great and ancient culture. Then it built some of the first universities and hospitals. It lived through the brutal Christian crusades... nationalism, socialism, and then Western-sponsored dictatorships. It gave so much, and it survived so much. Now Cairo is again in pain.

At night, often, the stars feel so close, almost reachable. Then early in the morning, everything is peaceful: the desert, the river, even the city itself.

But the country is not peaceful. It is far from it. And the worst may still yet come.

The small group of die-hard revolutionaries is fighting, defending the ideals of 2011. But the inertia is enormous, and so is the military power that has for decades enjoyed huge support from abroad.

Dr Mohammed Shafik is resting in his clinic on a sofa. At some point he gets pensive: “I am obsessed with photography. Now I have my own professional camera. I take it with me everywhere. But you know... Now it is becoming difficult to even take normal pictures, of nature, of the River Nile. There is so much fear all around. There is so much fanaticism... And it does not only come from the Islamists...”

The fear, the anger, and the frustration: one feels it in the air. In Cairo, Surabaya, Dhaka, and Kampala: wherever a brutal system won, wherever it has stayed in place for too long.

But Egypt is huge, and ancient and different. It has a big

heart and it has dreams; it still knows how to dream. And it is moving forward, slowly, arduously, leaving drops of blood on the ground after each step. But it is definitely moving! **CP**

ANDRE VLTCHek is a novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. His discussion with Noam Chomsky, *On Western Terrorism* is now going to print. His critically acclaimed political novel *Point of No Return* is now re-edited and available. *Oceania* is his book on Western imperialism in South Pacific. His provocative book about post-Suharto Indonesia and market-fundamentalist model is called "*Indonesia—The Archipelago of Fear*". He just completed feature documentary "Rwanda Gambit" about Rwandan history and the plunder of DR Congo. After living for many years in Latin America and Oceania, Vltchek presently resides and works in East Asia and Africa. He can be reached through his website.

Checking in With Bill Ayers Arc of a Dissident

BY RON JACOBS

Bill Ayers needs no introduction to the readers of *Counterpunch*. An SDS organizer, cofounder of the Weatherman/Weather Underground Organization, teacher, lecturer and writer, Ayers has published several books promoting a radical and democratic approach to education. He recently retired from the faculty of the University of Illinois-Chicago's School of Education. Despite an overwhelming vote by the faculty and others at the University to grant Ayers *emeriti* status upon retirement, political and financial pressures from a few alumni and outsiders convinced the University to rescind the honor.

His newest book, titled *Public Enemy: Confessions of an American Dissident*, was released in early October 2013 by Beacon Press. It is an engaging and conversational reflection on family, politics, teaching and the current situation by the man behind the FOXNews-generated cartoon the world thinks is Bill Ayers. In September 2013 I exchanged emails with Bill about Barack Obama, the current period of insurrection and his new book.

Ron Jacobs: *If I recall, you expressed a mild hope for change after Obama won the election in 2008. What's your take now? Was that hope misplaced?*

Bill Ayers: He won in 2008, and I never shared any of the optimism gushing forth from several sides. Barack Obama has always described himself as a moderate, main-line, pragmatic, middle-of-the-road politician, and (if you add ambitious to the mix) his record bears that out. But every time he asserted this true self-assessment, the right said, "No, he's a secret socialist and closeted Muslim who pals around with Black Nationalists and radicals and terrorists," and the left said in effect, "I think he's winking at us!" He wasn't winking.

Some people mistake thoughtfulness and curiosity and kindness with radical politics, but that's absurd. Barack Obama may be the smartest person in any room he enters, a personally kind and decent man, a good papa, and more. But he also sits on the throne of empire, leader of the militaristic carceral United States.

Of course the 2008 election afforded a time of relief: goodbye George Bush and Dick Cheney, goodbye to eight years of fear and loathing, war and repression, torture and secret sites—or at least goodbye to holding our collective breath. And, yes, hello to a blow against white supremacy—not a final or a fatal blow, but a poke nonetheless.

I actually voted for Obama—the second time in my life I voted for a Democrat for president. Who was the other? George McGovern, of course. But in neither case did I think an election would usher in a society of peace and balance, truth and reconciliation, joy and justice. That work needs to be done by we, the people.

It was great to feel the energy of rising expectations in Grant Park on Election Day, 2008, to see the shining faces of hope everywhere. It was a moment to embrace and savor, a moment to hold onto in tough times. But as I said to students on election night, there's no sense relying on the new leader to bring the change we long for and fight for—it's up to us now to get busy transforming ourselves, linking up to change the world.

In the heat of the primary battle, Senator Obama was asked which candidate he thought Martin Luther King Jr. would support, and he responded that Reverend King would not likely endorse any of them, because he'd be in the streets building a movement for justice. That's a terrific place to begin.

So here we enter the necessary if unglamorous world of organizing, of re-framing debates and dialogues at every level, of political education, of self-change and movement-building from the bottom-up. Lyndon Johnson, the most effective politician of his generation, was never involved in the Black Freedom Movement, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt wasn't a labor leader. Abraham Lincoln never joined an abolitionist political party but reality forced upon him the freeing of an enslaved people. Each of these three in fact responded to grassroots movements and reality on the ground to do some of the right things when it mattered.

And it's to movements on the ground that we turn as we think beyond this or that election or administration and consider the problems and possibilities of building a future dramatically and decisively different from today. We agitate for democracy and egalitarianism, press harder for human rights and a sustainable world, link the demands that animate us—for peace and education and universal health care and lifetime guarantees of income, against war and incarceration and surveillance—learn to build a new society through our collective self-transformations and our limited everyday

struggles. We seek ways to become real actors and authentic subjects in our own history.

Ron: *I don't want to dwell on electoral politics too much, but given that the likely candidates in the 2016 US elections will be as bad if not worse than the 2012 choices, do you think there's any likelihood that a progressive populist sort could garner real attention from the voting population?*

Bill: Short answer, yes; see Bill DiBlasio and his run for mayor of New York. Also, populist appeals are often a necessary cloak for any politician to be taken seriously; for example see Reagan and Clinton.

Elaboration: Elections don't bring about fundamental change. Progressives and radicals spend way too much time staring at the sites of power we have no real access to (the White House, the Congress, the Pentagon) and far too little time organizing in the places of power right in front of us: the community and the classroom, the workplace and the street.

Ron: *There's been a lot of insurrectionary activity over the past few years—the Arab Spring, Occupy in the US, the teacher's strikes in Mexico and the Oaxacan uprising, to name a few. What is your take on this motion? How do you perceive it in terms of previous revolutionary epochs?*

Bill: These are exciting times, treacherous times, dangerous times, and revolutionary times. Each of the struggles you mention—and let's add the Chicago teacher's strike and the mobilization of undocumented youth right here—was "impossible" before it began, and each was "inevitable" in retrospect. Each reminds us that the contradictions of imperialism and capitalism aren't resolved and will manifest somehow, somewhere in resistance and rebellion. Each also shows that the resistance opens a space where every grievance can come into the public square and find a home.

Ron: *In a tangential question, how much role do you think agencies like the National Endowment for Democracy and other CIA-front groups play in situations like the uprising in Egypt? In your opinion, can their role ever be positive?*

Bill: I have no idea "how much," but participatory democracy, self-determination, justice, and freedom can never be delivered by US guns or bombs, cloaks or daggers.

The Masters of War say otherwise, and they are an easy crowd to understand because they play a single note: Invade, Strike, Bomb, Break Things Up! There's no problem too large or too small for a laser-guided missile.

The Liberal Hawks and the Chicken Hawks are for more interesting, and even fun to watch if the consequences of their dishonest self-delusions weren't so deadly—they trumpet their good intentions and their high moral standards everywhere as they tie themselves into knots pushing for war. Against all evidence they tell us they are certain that this proposed strike will stop the use of chemical weapons, send a message to Iran and Korea, and make Americans safer.

See if you can follow the twisty logic of this one—promoted by Jonathan Alter, Charles Blow, and several of the MSNBC crowd: The president was right to go to Congress for authorization to strike Syria; the Constitution requires it since only Congress can declare war; Congress must now vote yes on authorization or no future president will ever again ask permission; voting "no" on this war guarantees that the executive will brush Congress and the Constitution aside. So why exactly do we have Congress and the Constitution, Jonathan?

Ron: *Do you think US strikes have been averted in Syria? If they have, to what do you ascribe that?*

Bill: Averted for now, yes. This moment of popular resistance to the military option as the only option shows that what we do does make a difference. Not immediately. Not obviously. Not in a straight line.

Who knew there was a wide and deep anti-war consensus in the United States?

Apparently not the president, who appeared blindsided by the growing opposition to U.S. military attacks on Syria, nor the always hawkish Sens. McCain and Graham who speak for the aging national security elite, nor the New York Times which flacked for a violent strike on the first day of Obama's war announcement but made an about-face the next day, running a devastating front-page photo of "rebel" forces executing their trussed, face-down young prisoners point-blank.

Indeed there is a freshly expansive, growing, tidal wave of sentiment that permanent war is neither in the interest of



Bill Ayers, 2013

the American people nor the global community. It's become evident to large sectors of the population that the long war of occupation in Afghanistan, now sputtering toward withdrawal of foreign troops, is a total disaster; the invasion and occupation of Iraq—based on fraudulent evidence—is a complete failure; the military rush to interfere in Libya will have blowback across Africa for decades; and illegal U.S. military interventions and drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, Mali, Bahrain and Afghanistan continue to result in bitterness, widespread deaths, displacement, corruption and tyranny. People do not believe official promises that US military action will be either “surgical” or limited. They do believe that U.S. military attacks in Syria will surely lead to civilian deaths.

These are terrific victories for peace and social justice activists, and they are the fruit of years of work. Iraqi and Afghan veterans have agonizingly educated the American people about the harsh realities of war and return. The 50th anniversary of the March on Washington threw into sharp relief the linkages between war, poverty and injustice first identified by the Black Freedom Movement. As Dr. King put it, “The greatest purveyor of violence in the world today [is] my own government.” He continued, “I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin to shift from a ‘thing-oriented’ society to a ‘person-oriented’ society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.”

Nor could the sea change in public sentiment have come about without the tens of thousands of small demonstrations by peace and justice activists, the anti-war contributions of musicians, playwrights, filmmakers and comedians, and the imagination and persistence of CodePink. It is clear, too, that the large and determined opposition to the 2012 NATO summit in Chicago—although forced to demonstrate inside a massive police occupation of an emptied and barricaded city at an enormous cost to taxpayers—educated the public and served notice that global military meetings would not be welcome in urban North America. Official talk about NATO has been muted in the current run-up to war. And the recent revelations about domestic and global spying have aroused resistance and diminished U.S. and corporate credibility.

Resistance to military recruitment in high schools across the country has made a difference as well. And a number of progressive struggles—for immigrant rights, for quality public education, for living wage jobs, for ending reliance on fossil fuels, for racial justice, for ending the carceral state, for dignity and queer rights, and for healthy food and safe water—have raised consciousness about how the furnaces of permanent war abroad and the national security state at home are usurping resources for basic human needs. People are increasingly saying, “Enough!”

Greater moral imagination is required to create alternatives to missiles, drones, aerial assaults and devastation. During the hundred days of the Rwandan genocide, U.N. General Dallaire noted that the world community could have saved lives and manifested its outrage by jamming Radio Rwanda's airwaves to disrupt the continuous directions of who to kill. That would have been a non-violent, partial disruption of war crimes. But US military intervention and humanism almost never go hand-in-hand, no matter how passionate the “moral” rhetoric. It seems that great sectors of the US population have learned this, at a terrible cost to the people whose countries and lives have been ravaged.

But the people's resistance to endless war, right here in the heart of empire, shows that our efforts toward peace and justice can take root.

By the way, since Syria has signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (CWC) bringing the number of states who are party to the CWC to 189, what state in the region has failed to ratify the Convention? Israel.

Ron: *Upon reading your latest book, it seems that your hope in writing it is to make who you are more of a multi-dimensional person instead of the cartoon the media presents you as. Do you think the effort is worth it? In other words, do you think the way the mainstream media portrays you and other “Sixties radicals” will change?*

Bill: Of course, images of the so-called Sixties change as contexts change—popular one moment, demonized the next, just like the CP, the IWW, the Abolitionists, and MLK. Don't pay images any mind; there's too much important work to do.

I have zero interest in cleaning up my “image” in the bought media, and as I say in the book, I don't want to be a character from Kafka correcting the record for a hundred years. The book is a memoir, neither a manifesto nor a program nor a history, and as such I attempt to create a narrator who is in dialogue with an “I” character. Without the irritating condescension and the scolding tone of omniscience, I attempt to set this person down in a moment and watch him make choices without benefit of hindsight. I try to portray what he faced as he tries to live a moral and even a revolutionary life in shifting times. So there's a lot about teaching and parenting, but also about demonizing and blacklisting, and how this character faces what comes his way in the endless dance of the dialectic, the complex mix of chance and choice. **CP**

RON JACOBS is a contributing editor of *CounterPunch* and author of *The Way the Wind Blew: a History of the Weather Underground* (Verso).

CULTURE & REVIEWS

The Odd Couple

James Brown
and Jay-Z

BY LEE BALLINGER

James Brown and Jay-Z have much in common. Jay-Z grew up in the Marcy Projects in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant ghetto. Brown was often dismissed from school for "insufficient clothes" and was sent to prison at fifteen for stealing a coat.

James Brown's music was massively sampled on hip-hop records as the new musical genre made its way out of the South Bronx on its way to a dominant position in world culture. One beneficiary of that process was Jay-Z, the best-selling hip-hop artist of the 21st century.

Both had problems with the music industry. When no label would sign him to a record deal, Jay-Z created his own record company, Roc-A-Fella Records. Although James Brown did have a record deal, in 1959 he had to go to Dade Records when his label, King Records, wouldn't allow him to record instrumentals. The result was "Do The Mashed Potatoes, Parts 1 and 2," a Top 10 R&B hit issued under the name of Nat Kendrick and the Swans. Brown had to pay for the recording of his 1962 album *Live at the Apollo* because his record company said it wouldn't sell. It went to number one on the charts. Ultimately Brown, like Jay-Z, started his own label. People Records put out a torrent of albums by sidemen and singers alike.

Both could be far from generous in the role of employer. In 1970 James Brown's entire band quit in a pay dispute (Brown also fined band members for musical or sartorial mistakes). Jay-Z's 40/40 Club in New York City was sued by wait staff who said

they were paid below minimum wage. After reviewing the earning reports of several employees, a federal judge ruled that the club owners were violating New York labor laws.

James Brown rehearsed and punished his band members to the point of mutiny. "If I had to fight James Brown, right away I would have a gun," Brown's former bandleader Fred Wesley said. "Because his determination to win is...just more powerful than anyone else's I've ever seen." In *Empire State of Mind: How Jay-Z Went From Street Corner to Corner Office*, Zack O'Malley Greenburg writes of Jay-Z's similar focus and drive: "He has a habit of casting aside his teachers once he's mastered their lessons...he isn't on the long list of entertainers who've been taken advantage of by opportunistic friends and family members."

Although it took him longer than the Motown or Stax artists, James Brown crossed over on his own terms and brought his hard Southern-derived music to all, symbolized by the fact that on "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" the children's chorus was made up entirely of whites and Asians. Country stars such as Barbara Mandrell and Porter Wagoner waged a lengthy and ultimately successful campaign to bring James Brown to the Grand Ol Opry. James got up on that hallowed stage and sang a couple of country songs and spoke about the impact of the Grand Ol Opry on his work. He received a warm greeting, a precursor to the current wave of country/rap duets.

Similarly, Jay-Z has helped to greatly expand the hip-hop audience, which he explains as due to "This generation right now, they...are a bit removed from those racist feelings because again, it's hard to teach racism when your child is out [at] clubs. It's integrated and the music we listen to is the same."

James Brown did time in prison as a juvenile and as an adult. Jay-Z reluctantly gave up his life as a drug dealer to pursue a rap career, ultimately because he knew he could easily wind up incarcerated. After all, since Ronald Reagan began the "drug war" in 1982 at the same time that industrial jobs began to disappear in the United States, 31 million Americans have been arrested on drug charges.

Both men have backed politicians. James Brown endorsed Hubert Humphrey in the 1968 Presidential election and Richard Nixon in 1972. In 2012 Jay-Z raised \$4 million for Obama in one night by co-hosting a fundraiser with his wife Beyonce, charging \$40,000 for entry to his 40/40 club. Obama once quoted Jay-Z's song "Dirt Off My Shoulder" at a press conference and last year said that Jay-Z exemplifies "what Made in America means."

Despite the many similarities, there are also fundamental differences between the Southern soul man and the Northern urban rapper. While James Brown was a fairly wealthy man, Jay-Z's worth is estimated at half a billion dollars. Jay-Z isn't just living well, he's certified member of the bourgeoisie. He sold his Rocawear clothing company a few years ago for \$204 million and, in 2010, he made more money than all but seven CEOs in America.

Apart from his support for Obama, Jay-Z is studiously apolitical and, in fact, his support for Obama is itself apolitical. "Whether [Obama] does anything," Jay-Z says, "the hope that he provides for a nation, and outside of America, is enough. Just being who he is. You're the first black president. If he speaks on any issue or anything he should be left alone." This get out of jail free card is the ideological cover for Jay-Z's rap: "I feel like a Black Republican, money I got comin' in."

James Brown was highly political. On songs such as "Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved" or "Soul Power," Brown advocates for the environment and

for increased spending on education. James Brown was anti-nuke. When he was doing six years in prison for traffic violations, more time than William Calley did for the My Lai massacre, Brown told the New York Times: "I think there's a lot of money spent on housing people away from home that should be spent on building them a home so they won't ever have to leave."

Brown's massive hit "Say It Loud" featured the key line: "We'd rather die on our feet than be livin' on our knees." "Say It Loud" is actually an even more powerful statement today, now that the more or less automatic racial unity of 1968 has been replaced with the hatred of poor blacks expressed by Bill Cosby, Chris Rock, and many others. On 1972's "Funky President," Brown was an early proponent of reparations ("Let's get together, get some land") and even called for workers to own their own factories.

Jay-Z looks at factories differently. He used sweatshops to produce hip-hop gear for his Rocawear clothing lines. The New York Times reported that "According to Charles Kernaghan, Director of the National Labor Committee, most urban consumers would be appalled if they knew of the horrendous conditions garment workers were forced to endure inside sweatshops to make hip-hop apparel... twenty workers who attempted to form a union said they were immediately fired, and subsequently smuggled Rocawear and Sean John labels out of the sweatshop as evidence."

Jay-Z does occasionally give a shout out to the poor and the imprisoned but even on a song like "Hard Knock Life" he focuses mainly on himself and how much money he makes. He is all about "I" in contrast to James Brown who, in public and in private, was all about "we." How are we going to be free?

A 1960s meeting that Brown described as "cordial but direct" took place with SNCC's H. Rap Brown to discuss strategies for black liberation. They disagreed over the use of violence and, when Rap Brown accused him of

being a big star who was out of touch with the masses, James took exception, pointing out: "I probably come from a much poorer background than you do." James Brown went on to do benefits for both SNCC and the NAACP and, after James Meredith was shot in Mississippi in 1966, Brown flew to his side.

Jay-Z's response to the Occupy movement was quite different. He sold "Occupy All Streets" T-shirts for \$22 and kept all the money.

Another difference between the two is that Jay-Z glamorizes the drug trade, tirelessly rapping about his history as a drug dealer. James Brown was a drug addict, a victim of the drug trade. On "Blue Magic," Jay-Z raps:

Blame Reagan for making me
into a monster
Blame Oliver North and Iran-
Contra
I ran contraband that they spon-
sored
Before this rhyming stuff we was
in concert

The end result of that scenario was reflected in James Brown's hit song "King Heroin," which provided a terrifying look at the destruction caused by drugs.

Although a major star, James Brown never lost his connection to his predominantly poor audience, holding court and espousing his liberation agenda in rib joints, barber shops, and private homes. Today, Jay-Z glories in his own personal escape, detailing the ways his life has nothing to do with poverty and castigating his audience for not having the personal drive to join him in the one per cent.

One million, two million, three
million, four
In 18 months, \$80 million more
Put me anywhere on God's green
earth
I triple my worth

"U Don't Know," Jay-Z

Compare that to the 1973 Maceo Parker track "The Soul of a Black Man,"

which was produced by James Brown, who added lyrics such as "It's so hard! It's so baaaaaaaad...When you got three meals a day: oatmeal, no meal, and missed meal!"

All that said, how can we account for the fact that Jay-Z has established the Shawn Carter Scholarship Foundation to help underprivileged kids attend college, donated \$1 million to Katrina relief, and joined forces with the UN and MTV to launch a documentary series called *Diary of Jay-Z: Water for Life*, which chronicled his journey to Africa to raise awareness of the world water crisis?

It's not really possible to see into a celebrity's mind and determine with certainty if their motives are sincere or if their actions come from the desire for publicity or tax deductions. *Water for Life* suggests that charity and the right business moves can solve the problem of a lack of access to water. But charity isn't change—Jay-Z praised his long-time sponsor Coca-Cola for providing money for water pumps in Southern Africa even though, as Robin D.G. Kelley noted in the September *CounterPunch*: "At the time, Coke was targeted by protestors in India and Colombia for depleting scarce local water sources for its bottling plants, and releasing toxic waste water into the ground." Although Jay-Z made an entire movie about clean water, the drinking water in the Honduran factories which made his Rocawear clothing was found to be contaminated with fecal matter.

Any famous artist who becomes part of the charity machine will inevitably encounter Bono. Jay-Z did just that, meeting with the self-styled liberator of Africa at Bono's fancy digs in the south of France. They may have talked about who they'd had power lunches with or maybe they just discussed tax avoidance strategies. Jay-Z joined Bono for a duet at the infamous U2 concert at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin where a metal wall was erected to prevent the thousands of people gathered outside

the concert site from seeing the show. Protesters noted the irony of erecting a wall to celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall. In his songs, Jay-Z has praised three different articles in *Forbes*, the right-wing business magazine owned by Bono, most notably “I Get Money: The *Forbes* 1-2-3 Remix.” The fawning Jay-Z biography *Empire State of Mind* was written by a *Forbes* reporter.

Yet the divergence between James Brown and Jay-Z is more the story of two different eras than the story of two different individuals. The essence of it can be seen in two very different Southern California uprisings. The Watts Rebellion in Los Angeles in 1965, which took place just three weeks after James Brown released his epochal single “Papa’s Got a Brand New Bag,” saw a city explode because blacks were denied jobs or any meaningful place in society even though the economy was expanding and had room for them.

The Los Angeles Rebellion of 1992 took place in a collapsing post-industrial economy that had no room for a large section of the city’s residents. Nor was this rebellion limited only to blacks as Watts had been. Of the thousands of people who were arrested—many for simply taking items like food and diapers from stores—51% were Latino, 36% were black, and 11% were white.

At the time of the Watts rebellion, segregation was near total in the United States and the black elite lived in the same areas as the black poor. Under pressure from a sweeping, all-class civil rights movement, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Then, as Numan Bartley wrote in *The New South 1945-1980*: “The open-housing provisions of the 1968 Fair Housing Act maintained established federal policy by easing the escape of affluent African-Americans from ghettos.”

Since that time the polarization of wealth in America has increased dramatically among all races. Today there are scores of black generals, admirals and CEOs of Fortune 500 corporations.

There are hundreds of black millionaires and below them a growing layer of black professionals who have little if any connection to the mass of African-Americans.

James Brown came on the scene at a time when none of this had happened and could not be foreseen, so he was a part of an intense national debate about the way forward. Jay-Z came on the scene when the issue had been decided (his wife Beyonce grew up in Houston with a maid). What little debate remained was marginalized and focused on the way forward for who?

Jay-Z’s answer to that question can be found on his song “The Ruler’s Back”:

I’m representin’ for the seat
where Rosa Parks sat
Where Malcolm X was shot
Where Martin Luther was
popped

What does that mean? Jay-Z’s entire career ignores the challenge Martin Luther King laid down at the SCLC convention in 1967, a year before he was assassinated. In one of his most moving speeches, King said: “One day we must ask the question ‘Why are there 40 million poor people in America?’ When you ask that question, you’re raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy.”

There is little discussion of “the capitalistic economy” in popular culture today despite the fact that polls indicate that millions of Americans want answers to exactly the questions King posed. That’s because the limits of current discussion are set by celebrities like Oprah and Jay-Z who, not surprisingly, are numbers one and seven on *Forbes*’ list of the richest African-Americans. One result of the narrow national dialogue was reflected recently in a Pew Research Center study which found that “a majority of black Americans blame individual fail-

ings—not racial prejudice—for the lack of economic progress by lower-income African Americans.”

Alongside the growing inequality of wealth in America goes a growing equality of poverty which continues to spread out in new directions. More and more, lower class whites have more in common with lower-class blacks than they do with upper-class whites. This has become so obvious that even Jay-Z sees it. He recently told Rap Radar’s Elliott Wilson that “All our feelings and anxieties and all that thing are more similar now.” The accepted wisdom that suburban whites now constitute the biggest market for hip-hop is, even if true, merely confirmation of the generally ignored fact that the suburbs, not the ghettos, are now the place where poverty in the U.S. is growing most rapidly.

Jay-Z also says that “Hip-hop has done more than any leader, politician, or anyone to improve race relations.” That is at best an effect and not a cause of the change. Working underneath are more fundamental processes, especially the polarization of wealth in a post-industrial world, which set the conditions for the emergence of hip-hop in the first place. According to a recent report, half of the combined net worth of the world’s 250 richest individuals could be used to double the annual income of the world’s poorest three billion people. The painfully obvious need for a massive redistribution of wealth puts Jay-Z’s mantra of “Get that money!” into its true selfish context.

Jay-Z has shown no interest in movements such as Occupy (which emerged just across the Brooklyn Bridge from Jay-Z’s first home in the Marcy Projects), Moral Mondays (which this past summer swept across North Carolina, just a few hours drive from James Brown’s Georgia birthplace), or 100,000 Poets and Musicians for Change, now present in almost as many countries as hip-hop.

With the help of the many musical genres impacted by the earthshaking

career of James Brown, these movements have the potential to challenge the ongoing suffocation of open discourse. Our national dialogue is so severely diminished because it's difficult for anyone other than the likes of Oprah, Bono, and Jay-Z to be heard. **CP**

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The Outsider Cinema of Andrea Arnold

Landscapes of Desire

BY KIM NICOLINI

Andrea Arnold's most recent film *Wuthering Heights* (2011) is a beautiful emotional adaptation of Emily Brontë's 1847 novel. Arnold takes Brontë's tale of unrequited love, revenge, class and otherness and creates an organic Romantic cinema that mirrors Brontë's writing, perched on the divide between romance and realism. Arnold's dark, seething, viscerally sensual film liberates Brontë's tale from traditional Hollywood trappings. Arnold gives her and Brontë's vision free reign by delivering emotionally immersive yet aesthetically abstract cinema.

When looking at *Wuthering Heights*—the tale of two doomed and class-crossed lovers—Catherine and Heathcliff—one might wonder how it relates to Arnold's "social realist" films set in working class council estates in the contemporary United Kingdom. But *Wuthering Heights* actually fits perfectly with Arnold's other films. Together, they comprise a single body of work that emotionally and aesthetically interconnects, depicting the primal emotional landscape of marginalized outsiders who long for both freedom and human connection.

Arnold's films are stories of yearning bound by class barriers. Whether women living in council estates or a

young black man living on the moors, her characters are at odds with the world they occupy. Marginalized by class, race, gender and emotional isolation, they fluctuate between looking onto a social landscape from which they feel alienated and being consumed by a longing to belong to that same world. This applies to Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* as much as it does other Arnold characters: angry fifteen year old Mia in *Fish Tank* (2011), grief stricken Jackie in *Red Road* (2006), and young single mother Zoë in the short film *Wasp* (2003). All of these women, like Heathcliff, want something just beyond their reach, and we feel their yearnings as they grasp for it.

Arnold's adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* makes perfect sense. Brontë was an outsider in a male-dominated literary world in which women were not given a place at the table. *Wuthering Heights* was published under the male pseudonym of Ellis Bell, and Brontë projected all her own personal emotions—outrage, otherness, longing and alienation—onto a male character, Heathcliff. Brontë's novel was written at a time when the second wave of Romanticism was giving way to the Realism that would dominate literature and culture during the second half of the nineteenth century. Brontë's story informs Arnold's *Wuthering Heights* and as well as her other films. As a female director in an industry dominated by men and a woman who grew up on council estates in the UK, Arnold also is an "outsider" in both gender and class. Her films are personal tales that function much the way *Wuthering Heights* did for Brontë.

Many critics have described Arnold's films as "dark" or "difficult," but this designation is limiting. It prevents us from seeing beyond Arnold's immediate bleak scenarios and finding the tenderness with which she treats her characters. Cinematic realism tends to romanticize the working and underclass, turning them into objects of sympathy. Characters are put on display as

testaments to the working class, but often any beauty is scrubbed from the picture. Arnold's films may be "dark" and "difficult," but they are also incredibly beautiful. Her filmmaking style and organic emotional sincerity allow her characters to breathe as "real" humans, not just social symbols.

Arnold's films are both abstract and unflinchingly real. Her characters are placed within tough social confines, a young black man beaten down like a dog; a teen girl trapped in the claustrophobic confines of council estates; a single mom weighed down by poverty and four kids; a bereaving and guilt-ridden widow, yet Arnold never patronizes or condescends. Her Romantic aesthetics create emotional landscapes that resist romanticizing (or fetishizing) her underclass characters. They occupy a harsh world, but Arnold is never harsh with them. She gives them dignity and tenderness. She shows us complex emotional humans who, while inextricably bound to their class, are never merely symbols of it.

Arnold's technique allows her films to straddle the line between cinematic Romanticism and social realism. The camera roams through her films, often at extremely close proximity to the main character. Whether following Zoë to a bar to meet a young man in *Wasp*; looking through Mia's eyes as she stares out of the council estate window in *Fish Tank*; or trekking through the moors with *Heathcliff*, the proximity of the camera emphasizes the social claustrophobia while also immersing us in a singular emotional perspective. At times, the camera is so close it is like we are literally inside the characters' heads.

Except for *Red Road*, all of Arnold's films were shot in traditional Academy 4:3 ratio, an aspect ratio largely left by the wayside in the era of the widescreen. Filming within this tight frame closes the distance between the audience and the characters and does not allow us room to objectify them. Mise-en-scene and set locations are present,

household knick knacks, bottles of beer, overflowing ashtrays, bags of sugar, slaughtered rabbits, dirty windows, but the environment works as an extension of the characters' psycho-geography. Settings and characters overlap. Details aren't simply documentary evidence of the working class but bits and pieces of the human material that comprises the overall emotional landscape.

The films are all shot with grainy non-linearity. Characters slide off the edges and move in and out of focus. Colors bleed, are overexposed or super saturated. Shots look like Polaroid snapshots in a family album, a style that lends itself to intimacy even while depicting alienation.

Characters look through doors and windows and down hallways at a world with which they can't connect. They fluctuate in their relationship to other people. At times, they are removed from the world they occupy and watch from the sidelines (as adults party in a kitchen in a council estate; rich white people have tea in the "big house" on the moors; strangers fuck in alleys on the screen of a surveillance monitor). Then, they will be immersed in intense and awkward proximity to other characters (clumsy sex scenes, a showdown with girls on the streets, a tussle in the muddy moors). Arnold pulls us back and forth between removed isolation and intense human interactions. This tension between alienation and proximity destabilizes our perspective and further allows the films to resist romanticizing the characters.

Arnold often relies on non-actors as her central characters. She discovered Katie Jarvis in *Fish Tank* and Simone Jackson in *Wuthering Heights* while they were fighting with their boyfriends on the street. Young and old Heathcliff (Solomon Glave and

James Howson) and young Catherine (Shannon Beer) in *Wuthering Heights* are non-actors. Arnold also employs the social realist technique of serial filming, in which actors are not given the screenplay and don't know what's coming next in the narrative. Even in a film based on a preexisting text like *Wuthering Heights*, Arnold's filmmaking is so unconventional that the actors have to react on from a raw emotional level rather than pre-scripted highly practiced craft.

Arnold uses Romantic techniques to liberate her films from dreary social



Andrea Arnold

realism. Nature and the animal world become externalizations of her characters' emotional states. Pounding rain; birds flying across an empty sky; bare branches scraping at windows; wind whipping through the moors; rabbits caught in traps; a country lake and a fish caught with bare hands; a tethered old horse; an old dying dog—these glimpses of nature and the animal world provide glimpses of beauty and yearning within a suffocating social environment. Arnold weaves between beautifully quiet shots of nature (a leaf blowing to the ground) and the real economic and emotional struggles of her characters (towering council estates) creating cinematic Romantic cinematic poems for the 21st century. The fragile bits of nature blowing across the screen reflect the fragility and

beauty of her characters.

There are glimpses of community and connection within these harsh landscapes which often come through music and dancing. When everything seems as bleak as can be, a girl will dance her heart out or a mother will dance with her lover while partiers fuck on a chair (*Fish Tank*). A woman consumed by grief and vengeance melts into the arms of the man she hates while they slow dance (*Red Road*). A mother who dumps her kids outside of a bar so she can dance with a man will also step outside to sing and dance with her children on the street (*Wasp*). Though doused in alcohol, mayhem, adultery or revenge, these moments open up the claustrophobic confines of the films and give the characters emotional complexity that transcends class stereotypes.

Arnold's characters are not easily defined by their class and position. Her characters are much too complex and unpredictable. Men can be both hurtful traitors and sympathetic, mournful lost souls (*Fish Tank*, *Red Road*). Mothers who seem abusive and neglectful reveal themselves to truly love their children (*Fish Tank*, *Wasp*). Arnold's characters are full of compassion and cruelty, longing and vengeance. They are complex fragile beings who can transcend class, even if they can't escape it, through their ability to dream. **CP**

KIM NICOLINI is an artist, poet and cultural critic living in Tucson, Arizona. Her writing has appeared in *Bad Subjects*, *Punk Planet*, *Souciant*, *La Furia Umana*, and *The Berkeley Poetry Review*. She recently published her first book, *Mapping the Inside Out*, in conjunction with a solo gallery show by the same name. She can be reached at knicolini@gmail.com.

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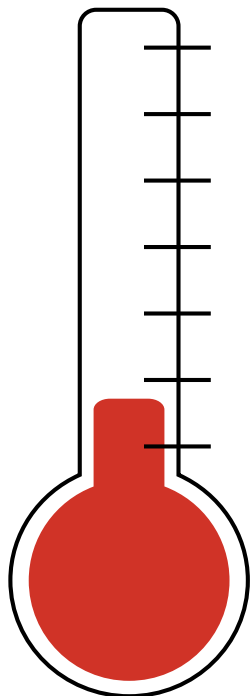
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