



dialog

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PHILOCTETES CENTER
FOR THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF IMAGINATION
AT THE NEW YORK PSYCHOANALYTIC INSTITUTE

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WINTER 09

I'll Go On: An Afternoon of Samuel Beckett

In the first American production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, which opened in Coral Gables, Florida, in 1956, much of the audience walked out before intermission. Since then, the play has become a classic, performed throughout the world: in a mixed race production at the University of Cape Town, in a bilingual Hebrew and Arabic production in Israel, and with an all-female cast in Holland (which Beckett protested). A touring production to be staged by prisoners in Sweden was cancelled when the actors, unlike the chronically trapped characters in the play, escaped out the back door. On November 22, an excerpt from a 1961 television production of *Waiting for Godot* was shown to a full house at The Philoctetes Center, as part of *I'll Go On: An Afternoon of Samuel Beckett*, which featured six short screenings, followed by a roundtable discussion with actors, directors and scholars of Beckett.

In addition to the excerpt from *Godot*, which featured roundtable panelist **Alvin Epstein** as Lucky, the screenings included the short play *Not I*, in which Billie Whitelaw's mouth is the only thing visible to the audience, and *Film* with Buster Keaton, the only film Beckett wrote, about a man terrified of being seen. In the roundtable discussion, Epstein, who appeared as Clov in the American premiere of *Endgame* and as Nag in last year's production of the play at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, commented on the difficulty of watching his performance of Lucky from 47

years ago. As directed by Alan Schneider, Epstein howled and capered in his role as the slave tied with a rope to his master. "It's all wrong," Epstein complained of the television production. "On stage he was stock-still and the thing had cumulative value because of it."

A major focus of the roundtable, moderated by **Lois Oppenheim**, Chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Montclair State University and author of *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue With Art* and *Directing Beckett*, concerned the question of how to stage Beckett. Pulitzer Prize winning playwright **Edward Albee**, who has directed a number of Beckett plays, spoke of Beckett's ability to craft every aspect of his plays as a musician would compose a score. "Beckett knew the difference between a two-second silence and a three-second silence," Albee said. He criticized BAM's recent production of *Happy Days*, which employed a more dramatic set than the simple grassy mound indicated in the play's stage directions. Agreeing with Albee's criticism, **Tom Bishop**, Florence Gould Professor of French Literature at New York University and author of *From the Left Bank: Reflections on the Modern French Theater and Novel*, commented, "The BAM production implied apocalypse rather than an everyday event." Albee insisted on the importance of seeing the characters in the play as representative of a common experience: "Everybody by the time they reach

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Note from Edward Nersessian: Another Layer of Instinct

At the end of July 1932, following a proposal by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation of the League of Nations, Einstein wrote a letter to Freud asking the question: why war? In his reply in September of the same year, Freud made a number of points, of which I have selected one for this article.

This is what Freud wrote: "According to our hypothesis human instincts are of only two kinds: those which seek to preserve and unite—which we call 'erotic,' exactly in the sense in which Plato uses the word 'Eros' in his Symposium, or 'sexual,' with a deliberate extension of the popular conception of 'sexuality'—and those which seek to destroy and kill and which we group together as the aggressive or destructive instinct." Freud then adds a warning: "But we must not be too hasty in introducing ethical judgments of good and evil. Neither of these instincts is any less essential than the other; the phenomena of life arise from the concurrent or mutually opposing action of both. Now it seems as though an instinct of the one sort can scarcely ever operate in isolation; it is always accompanied—or, as we say, alloyed—with a certain quota from the other side, which modifies its aim or is, in some cases, what enables it to achieve that aim."

In these quotes, Freud talks about two instincts, and thinking about behavior as motivated by instinct has allowed for a great ▶▶



Edward Albee



John Turturro



Alvin Epstein

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Note from Co-Director Edward Nersessian

► deal of important hypothesis and theory development. As our series on sexuality illustrated—in particular the roundtables moderated by Drs. Donald Pfaff and Sue Carter—we are now capable of thinking about instinct in terms more closely tied to brain structure and function, including hormonal and chemical processes.

Just as with sexuality, when one thinks about the so-called aggressive instinct, one is immediately struck by the complexity of the issues involved. Aggression is essential for survival—a component of erotic behavior, and a necessity for competing and achieving success. But it is also the instinct behind murder, destruction, war, and genocide. These were to be the subjects of a series of six roundtables on aggression at the Philoctetes Center in the winter and spring of 2009. Unfortunately, given recent events that have seriously affected our funding, we will need to curtail some of our programs, although we hope to preserve as many of them as possible. In that regard, the enthusiastic response of our friends who have made donations to the center has been extremely encouraging.

Illustrating the ways in which our programs continue to offer an important public resource, several recent roundtables have explored some of the precise issues that have been so dramatically brought to the forefront of our awareness. Articles about these roundtables in this issue of *Dialog* explore the themes of criminality, greed, concealment, and legal certainty.

Naturally, the moral reprehensibility of murder, genocide, and destruction is unquestionable. What about the morality of the kind of behavior we have recently witnessed, be it unconscionable lending practices or fraudulent accounting? Such cases raise pointed questions of right and wrong, particularly since some of the victims in this instance were charitable organizations. Notions of right or wrong are of course in the immediate purview of law and religion. The fundamental human need for laws and enforcement, in the absence of inherent self-regulation with regards to right and wrong, is an issue for those who study the mind and the brain, and a scientific question par excellence.

Why do humans commit crimes, cheat, and lie, often repeatedly, while fully understanding that certain behaviors are wrong or criminal? During the past few weeks, I have been asked on a number of occasions what causes a man—one regarded in an exalted way by many of his peers, colleagues, and clients, as well as the charitable causes he supported—to engage in allegedly criminal activity, causing immense damage. In a situation like this, one is tempted to throw out all sorts of hypotheses—poor self-esteem compensated by grandiosity and narcissism, insufficiently un-conflicted superego, sadism, addictive-type behavior, shame, pride, greed. I don't accept any of these theories, because the answer to this question can only be revealed through a thorough, psychoanalytically based investigation of the individual over a significant period of time, most importantly with that person's full cooperation and participation.

Psychoanalytic work demonstrates how what we call conscience—or what Freud put under the rubric of superego, which is the mental agency whose role it is to show us right from wrong and help us avoid doing wrong—rarely manages to control the constant pressure of the sexual and aggressive instincts. Humans have a highly developed capacity to explain and justify all manner of behavior, and to trick themselves into accepting their rationalizations even in the face of strong evidence to the contrary. Only psychoanalytic investigation can hope to arrive at a truth at the individual level. On a larger scale, however, increasingly sophisticated findings from neurobiology are beginning to reveal the neuro-anatomical, neuro-physiological, and neuro-chemical bases for these paradoxes, and it is hoped that in the future mind and brain studies will enrich our understanding of human behavior.

This way of approaching a problem from different perspectives has characterized the programming at the Philoctetes Center. In the letter cited earlier, Freud wrote the following to Einstein: “When I heard that you intended to invite me to an exchange of views on some subject that interested you and that seemed to deserve the interest of others beside yourself, I readily agreed. I expected you to choose a problem on the frontiers of what is knowable today, a problem to which each of us, a physicist and a psychologist, might have our own particular angle of approach and where we might come together from different directions upon the same ground.” Just as this philosophy has defined our roundtables in the past, it will define them in the future. For investigators from different fields to be able to share their perspectives with each other is vital. It is what we have been able to offer our participants and our audiences, and we will continue to do so as we move forward. *E.N.*

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Autobiography/Biography: Narrating the Self



Nicholson Baker

“I’ve never written a full-length biography because I fear that I would get two thirds of the way through the book and feel that this man was not my friend,” **Nicholson Baker** confided at the December 13 roundtable, *Autobiography/Biography: Narrating the Self*. Baker is the author, most recently, of *Human Smoke: The Beginnings of World War II, the End of Civilization*, along with a number of novels he called “93 percent autobiographical,” and *U and I*, a literary autobiography that explores Baker’s fascination with John Updike. Joining Baker were two celebrated biographers, **Simon Winchester**, author of *The Professor and the Madman* and *The Man Who Loved China*, and **Judith Thurman**, author of *Isak Dinesen: The Life of a Storyteller* and *Secrets of the Flesh: A Life of Colette*. Thurman seemed to relate to Baker’s apprehensions about biography, describing the tumultuous process of becoming immersed in her subjects’ lives. But when she asked Winchester, “Do you lose your bearings?” he answered, “Well I have to confess, no I don’t ... I loved my [most recent subjects] when I started and I loved them when I finished.”

Winchester observed that it would be interesting to analyze all of the information he withholds when deciding how to tell the story of a particular individual.

Panelist **David Shields**, author of the essay collection, *The Thing About Life is That One Day You’ll be Dead*, and the upcoming *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, explained that he begins a writing project from a state of uncertainty toward his subject. “I stage my ambivalence as the theater in which the piece takes place,” said Shields, whose writing attempts to blur the lines between fiction and non-fiction. Drawing on an idea of the memoirist Patricia Hampl (a past panelist at the Philoctetes Center), Shields suggested we might think of the voice of the literary essay writer as similar to the voice of the lyrical poet. Rather than offering the reader an authentic “I,” the essay proffers a speaker as artful construction. Shields asserted his belief that, since the writer is always present in a work, he should be up front about this presence, rather than pretending to deliver a purely factual kind of truth.

While Baker conceded Shields’ point, he wasn’t keen on the idea of always putting quotation marks around the word truth. He referred, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, to founding *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross’s idea that “there are these drawers and we open them up and there are facts. That’s a very useful absolutist notion.” Ross initiated a rigorous fact-checking protocol at *The New Yorker*, and, as observed by

a journalist in the audience, it’s the only major magazine that still maintains an entire department dedicated to the practice.

Moderator **Louise Yelin**, author of *From the Margins of Empire: Christina Stead, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer*, posed the question, “What truths and untruths do biographers engage in?” Winchester pointed out the difference between a historian’s approach to writing biography and his own. “Had David McCullough written the book, it would be presented in a much more neutral tone,” he said of *The Man Who Loved China*, in which he focused a great deal on how his subject’s long-term adulterous affair influenced his experiences in China. Winchester added that it would be interesting to analyze all of the information he withholds when deciding how to tell the story of a particular individual.

We might consider the outrage that followed the publication of A Journal of the Plague Year, when evidence came to light that Defoe had indulged in copious fabrication.

Thurman distinguished between the nature of Shields’s literary approach and that of biographers like herself and Winchester. Shields’s aim, she observed, was to establish for the reader “an intimate relationship with the writer,” to reveal aspects of the self, no matter the topic being explored, whereas “we’re talking about a more formal relationship with the reader.” As for the biographer’s search to know her subject, she said, “The truths have a kind of iridescence. They will shimmer forth and then disappear again.” Baker suggested that it can be enormously revealing to hear someone’s actual voice, rather than just the voice on the page. “It really helps if you have audio,” he said. But Thurman countered that when she was writing her biography of Isak Dinesen, she chose not to watch the documentary that she knew was available. “I thought it would be louder than the voice of [Dinesen’s] books.... I didn’t want the intimacy of seeing her in film.”

When Yelin asked, “How do you choose your subject, or does your subject choose you,” Winchester told the story of how he chanced upon the topic of *The Professor and the Madman*, about William Chester Minor, who contributed thousands of entries to the first Oxford English Dictionary from his cell at the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum. While reading in the bathtub one morning, Winchester came across a fascinating footnote that mentioned Minor, whom he hadn’t heard of before. He immediately picked up the phone to call the one lexicographer he knew. She turned out to be an expert on Minor, and faxed him an essay she had written about the man. When he was finished with his bath, Winchester read it and was hooked.

The roundtable discussion portrayed both biography and autobiography as colored by a complex process of reconstruction, fragile memory, and deliberate selectivity on the part of the writer. Thomas de Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, Vladimir Nabokov’s *Speak, Memory*, and Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie* all came up for scrutiny in terms of the authenticity of their narratives, even as panelists expressed their admiration for the works. Lest we, in the era of James Frey, think the revelation of a memoir that embellishes the truth is unique to our time, we might consider the outrage that followed the publication of *A Journal of the Plague Year* in the early eighteenth century, when evidence came to light that its author, Daniel Defoe, had indulged in copious fabrication. But the important thing, the panelists suggested, is that writers maintain their own sense of integrity in pursuing their work, and remain open to whatever mysterious turns their subjects take. *P.R.*

Deep Listening: Why Audio Quality Matters



Kevin Killen



The Rega P25 with Rega Exact 2 cartridge



Greg Calbi

As sound technology advances, the quality of the sound we listen to does not necessarily follow. This idea was central to the December 6 roundtable, *Deep Listening: Why Audio Quality Matters*. **Greg Calbi**, managing partner and mastering engineer at Sterling Sound in New York City, began the roundtable by explaining that “those who have not heard cannot imagine the joy of really hearing,” adapting a quote by Gabriel García Márquez to his own métier. As consumers demand more portable devices and faster download speeds, they are missing meaningful listening experiences. What Calbi termed “Musical junk food,” with its “distorted live concerts, mp3 files on ipods with earbuds, [and] oversimplified sound from mini-systems,” is preventing people from enjoying high-definition audio.

With a panel made up of talented sound technicians and audiophiles, the conversation ranged from the intricate technicalities of sound engineering to the rarefied pleasures of high fidelity equipment. **Michael Fremer**, the Contributing Editor at *Stereophile* magazine, explained that the reason people have begun multitasking while listening to CDs has a lot to do with the quality of the sound. “There’s something about [a record] that makes it more emotionally nourishing,” he commented, as opposed to a CD, which is “more of a parasitic thing ... you put on some music, it gets you in a cer-

tain mood so then you can do the thing you need to do.” With records, Fremer noted, the quality of the sound makes people want to sit and listen.

Craig Street, a Grammy award-winning producer, observed that differences in the listening experience among music formats has to do with the way that sound frequency interacts with our bodies. “It’s been shown over time through different forms of research and experiments that we take sound in through our bodies. We get high frequencies in through our skin. Our body cavities take in lower frequencies,” Street explained, adding that vinyl or analog tape allow for frequencies that don’t come through on standard CDs.

For **Evan Cornog**, author of three books of political history, publisher of *Columbia Journalism Review*, and a confirmed audiophile, listening is about being as immersed in the sound as possible, from being able to hear the space the sound was recorded in to finding the perfect volume level for a given piece of music. The most important part, he noted, is “getting close to that creative intention” that was in the room when the recording happened.

Kevin Killen, a five-time Grammy award-winning engineer, is a master of finding perfect timing with an artist during a recording session. When asked how he knows when an artist is ready for the perfect take,

he observed, “You start to hear the voice warm up and you know there’s a certain resonance that occurs and ... a warmth to the bottom and a clarity to the midrange ... and then you look for that little bit of air that sits on top of the voice.” Killen demonstrated this concept by playing an Elvis Costello and Burt Bacharach duet, “God Give Me Strength,” and drawing attention to a moment when Costello’s voice surges with emotional intensity.

As the listening continued, audience members had a chance to experience samples of sound quality on both vinyl and CD. **Steve Berkowitz**, Senior Vice President of Sony Music’s Legacy Records and a multi Grammy award winning-producer (whose high fidelity turntable was used in the sound demonstrations), was passionate about how sound is integral to our very survival. “If you’re in the woods alone and twigs break behind you, you turn around. You don’t think about it ... you just do it because you are an animal. Consciously or subconsciously, subliminally or quite specifically, when the sound is different, you hear it and feel it differently.” The discussion not only provided the audience with an opportunity to appreciate some lush, nuanced recordings, but also to contemplate the future of recorded music. The future of sound engineering may depend upon corporate forces, but the best quality sound may still be found in the technology of the past. *K.E.*



Steve Berkowitz



Craig Street



Michael Fremer

True Crime: Inside the Mind of Mayhem

Karl Menninger once wrote, “Crime is everybody’s temptation,” and forensic psychiatrist Robert I. Simon coined the phrase, “Bad men do what good men dream.” While some would agree that the seeds of criminal impulse reside in everyone—a view reflected in Dostoyevski’s *Crime and Punishment* and in Leopold and Loeb’s desire to commit the perfect crime—the opposing view holds that the violent criminal is truly a breed apart, an evil monster, a sociopath who can only pretend to be normal. In the latter category, we might identify men like Harold Shipman, who perpetrated an unprecedented spree of murders under the fiendish guise of a trusted physician. With this set of references, moderator **Spencer Eth**, Professor and Vice-Chairman in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at New York Medical College, evoked contrasting interpretations of human criminality to introduce the November 1 roundtable, *True Crime: Inside the Mind of Mayhem*. Turning to his fellow panelists, he asked, “Are they a different breed, or are they just like us but have lost their ability to control their impulses?”

“I don’t believe there are monsters. I believe there are people who do monstrous things because they are dislocated from their conscience.”

Shoba Sreenivasan, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine, noted that while Cicero described the “bright line between good and evil,” Machiavelli saw a far hazier border, holding that one can be good if there are compelling reasons, and evil when it’s expedient. Sreenivasan, who conducts sexually violent predator evaluations for the states of California and Washington, went on to present the views of psychiatrist Harvey Kleckley, who believed that evil had to do with certain personality characteristics, in particular the inability to connect emotionally. She then screened excerpts from televised specials about three noted serial killers: Richard Kuklinski, a contract killer described as having “a mind made for murder;” Kenneth Bianchi, one of the Hillside Stranglers, whose all-American good looks masked his disturbing sadism; and Gary Ridgeway, who had sex with his victims after murdering them. In response to this gruesome litany, Eth concluded, “These three exemplify a class of people who are not like the rest of us, even if they could pass themselves off as normal.”

Joe Loya, author of *The Man Who Outgrew His Prison Cell: Confessions of a Bank Robber*, offered the contrasting perspective of a former criminal, noting, “I don’t believe there are monsters. I believe there are people who do monstrous things because they are dislocated from their conscience.” Loya, who recounted that his best friend in prison killed his cellmate, expressed his belief that criminals are not born, rather they become what they are through the violence and sadism inflicted on them as children. Loya reported that inmates form communities and strong bonds not only as a technique for survival, but out of a paradoxical sentimentality, a possible compensation for deep-seated emotional numbness. But ultimately, the inmates that Loya knew were chiefly committed to subduing their enemies. “They want to dominate another person ... and reduce them, and cut them down ... it’s all about dominion.”

John Coston, author of *To Kill and Kill Again* and *Sleep, My Child, Forever*, described the two types of criminals he encountered in researching his books. The first was a “very sympathetic” woman who was abused as a child and abandoned by her father and her husband.



Joe Loya

After filing for bankruptcy and seeing no alternative for her financial woes, she decided to take out insurance policies on her children, kill them, and then collect the money. (These final details elicited an audible gasp from the audience.) The second criminal was a young man, also abused as a child, who began killing at 18, when he murdered his friend’s mother. He was intelligent, highly organized, and able to escape detection, killing simply for the thrill. But in order to experience a greater thrill, his crimes became more and more risky, and he was eventually caught. While each of these killers ended up becoming a monster, especially in the case of the infanticide, Coston felt that they straddled the line between inherent, inhuman evil and a relatable human weakness molded by terrible circumstances.

Loya spoke about how long stretches in solitary confinement broke him down and pushed him to the level of self-awareness necessary for his reformation.

Qiu Xiaolong, author of the award-winning Inspector Chen series of crime novels, said that he is more inclined toward the model wherein the criminal represents a kind of everyman. Addressing the ways in which a society and a culture can shape notions of evil, he explained that when he was growing up in China, there was no study of criminal psychology. Rather, criminality was described in strictly political terms as counterrevolutionary. In one of his novels, Xiaolong observed, the criminal is shaped by what happened to him during the Cultural Revolution.

Regardless of how criminal behavior is formed, Professor Sreenivasan professed the belief that criminals, even murderers, can be rehabilitated. Loya, who spent seven years in prison for bank robbery, spoke about how long stretches in solitary confinement, during which he would hallucinate and hear voices, broke him down and pushed him to the level of self-awareness necessary for his reformation. But, he acknowledged, his epiphany was due in part to his education and his command of language, tools that were out of reach to many other inmates. In response to an audience question about the criminal’s tendency to dissociate, Loya added a note of humor to the discussion, recounting that he used to have a soundtrack that played in his head when he committed crimes. “At first it was ‘Smooth Criminal’ by Michael Jackson, and then I realized, ‘Oh, that’s not me,’ so I went deeper and got ‘Comfortably Numb’ by Pink Floyd. I was trying to organize my life in a cinematic way.” *A.L.*

Greed



Jay Phelan

When members of Congress asked Ford CEO Alan Mulally if, as a symbolic gesture, he would be willing to take a \$1 salary in return for federal aid, his notorious response was, “I think I’m OK where I am.” (Mulally’s compensation in 2007 was \$21.7 million.) As the economy slides deeper into recession, the rapacity of corporate executives—and their apparent immunity to shame—has brought greed to the fore as the most topical of mortal sins. While moderator **David Kirkpatrick** noted that the namesake of the October 26 roundtable, *Greed*, is “a subject we all have personal experience with,” current events betray levels of acquisitiveness far beyond the imaginings of the average consumer. Citing greed as a “primordial topic” and seeking to contextualize it in the present “frightening” financial moment, Kirkpatrick, Senior Editor for Internet and Technology at *Fortune* magazine, asked his fellow panelists, “When does wanting become excessive?”

Laurence Tancredi, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at New York University School of Medicine, offered a broad definition of greed as “a kind of selfish, compelling desire for goods, mostly money, power, food,” adding the important qualification that such desire be “at the detriment of another person ... as opposed to, for example, someone who would just want to collect clams.” **Robert Frank**, Visiting Professor of Business Ethics at New York University Stern School of Business, countered with a more benign interpretation of greed, referencing Adam Smith’s premise that “greed often leads to good outcomes.” Drawing on Smith’s seminal work, *The Wealth of Nations*, Frank explained that when producers who are competing for a market share create innovations to advance their business, they often benefit society and create a downward movement in prices. He went on to note, however, that when the economy goes sour, it is a challenge to figure out whom to blame, suggesting that the fault may in fact lie not with wolfish CEOs, but with those who fail to implement sensible regulation.

But what are the biological roots of greed, and how do we discern the drive to acquire in surfeit from the impulse for simple human comforts? **Jay Phelan**, Professor of Biology at UCLA and co-author of the best-selling *Mean Genes*, pointed out that greed and seeking out happiness are two behaviors that are closely intertwined. **Rabbi Philip Hiat**, scholar in residence at Central Synagogue, responded by proposing that there are good forms of greed and bad forms of greed. “I’m a greedy person,” he announced. “I don’t want a lot of money. I don’t care about the stock market. But I’m greedy for knowledge. When I see someone who has a lot of knowledge, I am jealous of that person.” He went on to define the truly rich person as one who is satisfied with his or her own lot, but quickly added that people always want to advance

themselves in some way. Professor Phelan interjected that our acquisitive nature is rooted in the fact that we are descended from people who were acquisitive and who reproduced a lot at a time when those impulses were necessary for survival.

The panelists then addressed the question of whether impulses towards greed can be curbed. Professor Phelan noted that while animals have strong taste preferences, if a certain food is closer and easier to retrieve, they modify their tastes. One of the evolutionary strengths of humans, he explained, is that part of the brain allows us to override certain genetic impulses, adding, “I’m constantly overriding a craving for Krispy Kreme donuts and In-and-Out Burger.” Kirkpatrick observed that we continue to struggle with our survival drive and our drive for social harmony, and when to allow one or the other to prevail. Professor Frank commented on the relevance of this struggle in the realm of sexuality, pointing out that in early societies, high-ranking males took more than one mate, an arrangement later subverted by the convention of monogamous marriage.

While the panelists agreed that the desire for individual gain is one of the more deeply ingrained impulses in human behavior, they described numerous scenarios in which altruistic acts rendered advantage not only for groups, but for individuals as well. Rabbi Hiat reminded the audience that the New York cab driver who last April returned a lost Stradivarius gained a great deal from his apparently selfless act. Professors Frank and Phelan agreed that there are benefits, both material and social, for those who surround themselves with a loyal, trustworthy cadre of associates. Professor Tancredi discussed experiments with monkeys using a token economy that point to a biological basis for the notion of fairness. While the panelists questioned whether the turmoil on Wall St. stemmed from natural, competitive human drive or pathological, addictive impulses, there was some consensus that what goes around comes around and, more optimistically, that one good turn begets another. *A.L.*

Caché

Moderator **Brigitte Peucker**, Elias Leavenworth Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures and Professor of Film Studies at Yale University, remarked on the “sharp intake of breath” that accompanied one of the more shocking moments in *Caché*, the centerpiece of the November 8 film screening and roundtable at the Philoctetes Center. She noted that this is the kind of startling effect that filmmaker Michael Haneke is known for creating. *Caché* follows the story of Georges, a French television personality who is tormented by a series of mysterious videotapes left anonymously on his doorstep. The film hinges in part on the technique of blurring the distinction between events that occur in actuality, and events that are replayed on video.

Roy Grundman, Associate Professor of Film Studies at Boston University and curator of the 2007 MoMA retrospective, “Michael Haneke: A Cinema of Provocation,” noted that *Caché* is one of Haneke’s most complex films, in particular because it incites viewers to question what they are seeing. He said he noticed many things the second time he saw the film that he hadn’t noticed the first time, a sign for him of the film’s allure and complexity. While the fallibility of perception is a theme found in other Haneke films, Grundman pointed out that *Caché* is unique in that it incorporates questions of the “ethnic other,” i.e. non-white residents of France. He noted that this element had added poignancy because the film was released at the time of the race riots in the Paris suburbs. In response, ▶▶

► Professor Peucker remarked that no matter how much Haneke’s purview is broadened to include socio-political strife, the political is allegorized through the nuclear family at the film’s center. She noted that although Haneke’s films frequently address class tensions, *Caché* brings the question of interracial adoption into the mix, adding a compelling political layer.

Brian Price, Assistant Professor of Film Studies at Oklahoma State University, emphasized that Haneke’s most intriguing talent lies in addressing the political in terms of what we see and how we see it. “Haneke ... is really interested in problematizing this idea that we can just look at something and understand it simply by looking at it,” Price observed, “because what we already think and what we already believe will impact what we see and how we see it.” In *Caché*, this question of perception is at the heart of the central character’s conundrum.

“It’s very akin to what we see and do in psychoanalysis. We don’t take the surface as what’s real. We are always looking for what is hidden.”

The panelists spent several minutes parsing the final sequence of the film, which is a long fixed shot of the front of a school where, unbeknownst to most viewers, two pivotal characters meet and hold an inaudible conversation as the credits roll. After polling the audience to see how many missed this sequence, **Garrett Stewart**, James O. Freeman Professor of Letters at the University of Iowa and author of *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema*, wondered what the conversation was intended to signify to those attentive enough to notice it. He speculated that it might be a continuation of an earlier dream sequence, while Grundman theorized that it could in fact be the scene that launches the entire story, further highlighting Haneke’s unconventional take on chronology.

Psychoanalyst and Center Co-Director **Edward Nersessian** reiterated how helpful it was to see the film twice. Laying aside his original expectations of a “Hitchcockian puzzle,” he realized that the film is not only about visual perception, but also about psychological perception. For Nersessian, the film underscores the fact that the cohesiveness of a narrative does not mean that the narrative is truthful, and he pointed out the danger of making assumptions based on appearances. “It’s very akin to what we see and do in psychoanalysis. We don’t take the surface as what’s real. We are always looking for what is hidden.” *A.L.*



Roy Grundman

The Presumption of Rationality: Psychological Challenges to Legal Certainty

The failure of justice epitomized by prisoner treatment at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay has prompted many people to ask what has happened, in the last several years, to the rule of law. This question begs another, deeper question, one that was at the center of the October 25 roundtable, *The Presumption of Rationality: Psychological Challenges to Legal Certainty*. Moderator **Anne Dailey**, Evangeline Starr Professor of Law at the University of Connecticut, pinpointed this line of inquiry at the event’s outset, asking, “Where do laws come from?” Dailey then laid out a set of related, interwoven questions for her fellow panelists, challenging them to unravel the many strands of analysis that constitute our notion of justice. Does the rule of law derive from reason? What happens when we think of law as a product not of reason but of imagination, of how we imagine the world should be? Does the full embrace of the imagination lead us in the direction of more authoritarian, less democratic forms of law?

Kenji Yoshino, Professor of Constitutional Law at New York University, was quick to remark on the historical provenance of such deliberations. “The distinction between imagination and reason with respect to statecraft is as old as Plato’s *Republic*, which argues that reason should be the basis for law because reason can be found.” However, according to Plato, the rational person is in fact imaginary and non-existent, as opposed to the poet, who is by definition irrational and must therefore be banished. Paradoxically, we must use imagination in order to conceive of a rational construct. Yoshino proposed that historically the law is not against the use of imagination, but against the use of reason that is not backed up with the threat of punishment.

What happens when we think of law as a product not of reason but of imagination, of how we imagine the world should be?

In response to Yoshino’s implication that, from a historical perspective, might makes right, or at least that reason backed up by deterrent force is preferable to reason alone, **Peter Brook**, Mellon Visiting Professor at Princeton’s University Center for Human Values, mused about the long-standing difficulties inherent in deciding how to treat suspects. With or without the threat of punishment, proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt is a slippery undertaking, one that often cedes to the more palatable but less conclusive exercise of determining *mens rea*, or a guilty conscience. In the absence of reasonable proof, we look for other means of determining guilt, the most conspicuous being confession. But this leads to the obvious problem of false or coerced confessions, one of the most glaring flaws in the “imaginative” application of the law at Guantanamo.

Nomi Stolzenberg, Nathan and Lilly Shapell Professor of Law at the University of Southern California Law School, challenged Brook’s assertion that the rule of law fails to adequately account for the treatment of criminal suspects, arguing that the presumption of innocence accounts for the fallibility inherent in determining guilt. The problem of the justice system, she contended, is that it “can never know that the guilty are in fact guilty.” She maintained that mindfulness of the risk of error, even in the medieval period and in biblical criminal law, resulted in procedural law that was surprisingly liberal. “It was all about due process in the name of the inherent fallibility of ►►



Peter Brook

► human reason,” she noted. However, Stolzenberg observed, this same caution about absolute guilt also raises doubts about absolute innocence, leading to the kind of equivocal thinking used to justify incarceration without evidentiary process. Mocking the reasoning of an authoritarian government, she shrugged, “Look, people are doing terrible things, so we have to relax the rule of law and due process standards.”

Introducing the perspective of individual psychology to the discourse, **Carol Gilligan**, University Professor at NYU School of Law, asserted that legal rationality fails to take into account the insights of psychoanalysis. Freud’s studies on hysteria, she explained, led to the concept of dissociation, which yields a conclusion that upends the primacy of rationality: What if we don’t really know what we think we know? “What happens to the law,” Gilligan declared, “when we bring into doubt the rationality of men?” Her pointed reference to *men’s* rationality, as opposed to women’s, provoked a lengthy discussion about how gender issues influence the execution of justice. Before the panelists took questions from the audience, Professor Yoshino offered a final thought on how to transcend the debate about whether or not the rule of law is a man-made (or woman-made) construct. “We can engage in collective decision-making once we let go of the idea that God is going to show us the truth.” **A.L.**

Voters and Friends

As president-elect Obama prepares to assume office, the excitement of a dramatic election season is beginning to fade. But for those who study voting behavior, the data that comes out of the election results offers its own kind of excitement. On October 15, the night of the second presidential debate, the Center’s Re: Mind group hosted the roundtable, *Voters and Friends: Group Influence in Political Belief*. Moderator **Eric Dickson**, Assistant Professor in the Department of Politics and the Center for Experimental Social Science at New York University, began the discussion by asking panelists to respond to the question of how “reality deviates from the classical story we tell about how democracy works and how individuals make decisions about what candidate to vote for.”

According to **Bryan Caplan**, Associate Professor of Economics at George Mason University and author of *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies*, psychologists and political scientists have long mistrusted the idea that opinions about matters of public interest are formed from solid, evidence-based reasoning. **Howard Lavine**, Associate Professor of Political Science and Psychol-

ogy at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, commented that people want to maintain their prior beliefs, and at the same time make “efficient and accurate” voting decisions. “Political party identification allows us to maximize these goals. We can often make good decisions without knowing too much,” he noted. But he went on to point out that people also evaluate and critique their party, especially during times of unrest. “Elections that arouse a lot of anxiety, like this one ... elections that are really about something, I think generally produce more folks that are willing to pay attention to the facts, and generally produce more good decisions.”

Referencing the classic Aristotelian division of rhetoric into logos (logic), pathos (emotion), and ethos (character), Caplan estimated the general breakdown of voting decisions to about 10% logos, 50% ethos, and 40% pathos. **Jeff Merritt**, the founder of Grassroots Initiative, a non-profit election-consulting firm, observed that the effectiveness of different types of appeals used by candidates varies from election to election. “This is the kind of election where people are thinking about logos,” Merritt said. He explained how his organization and others analyze voter behavior. Census records indicate who has voted in a particular election, which suggests whether they’re likely to vote in the next one. From this information, the demographics of a particular voting district can be approximated.

Kristina Hoke, President of the Manhattan Young Democrats, offered insight into direct appeals to voters. Exploiting the power of a personal connection, one of her colleagues will pretend to have the same last name as the person he’s soliciting on the phone. “It’s amazing the results he gets,” Hoke said. “When I’m hung up on over and over again, people will talk to him.” Hoke was surprised to find that in the recent election “generally the older people were, the more likely they were to engage in some kind of conversation.” Though most canvassers are young, she added, other young people don’t necessarily want to talk with them.

Responding to a question about class in relation to voting decisions, Caplan pointed out that class affiliation isn’t necessarily defined by economic status. “Generally education crushes income,” he observed. “If you go and talk to a PhD driving a taxi cab ... they generally think like other PhDs. On the other hand, if you have the self-made man who dropped out of high school, he generally thinks like other people who have dropped out of high school in terms of policy.” Caplan also offered a challenging perspective on efforts to increase voter turnout: “In academia you can ask questions that would get you booed off the stage, such as *is it really a good idea to encourage turnout?*” More educated people tend to vote at higher rates, and they also tend to have more political, economic, and scientific knowledge. “It follows that if we could actually get a hundred percent turnout, the typical voter would be much less informed than he is today,” Caplan said.

When an audience member questioned the increasing duration of presidential campaigns, and whether this serves our electoral process, Levine commented, “The election is for all intents and purposes eight weeks, because most people who have made up their minds and are paying attention for two years at a stretch are not persuadable voters.” Dickson agreed, but added, “A candidate like Barack Obama, if the election were genuinely eight weeks, would never stand a chance.... Maybe the vast majority of people aren’t paying attention throughout the two year process, but most people in the sort of opinion elite are, and if a candidate is able to go through a campaign for two years and is able to seem sane and informed and not say too many crazy things ... that probably tells us a lot.” **P.R.**

The Design of Influence: How Words and Images Sway Minds

In the beginning of the presidential campaign, **Steve Brodner's** caricatures of John McCain portrayed him as “a person with very clipped features.” By the end of it, according to Brodner, a regular contributor to *The New Yorker*, his drawings of the republican candidate “became more and more like a blob.” For Brodner, this representation reflected McCain’s evolution from a person of substance, admired for his strong beliefs, to a man sending very mixed messages. The power of caricature in a political campaign was a topic of discussion at the October 22 roundtable, *The Design of Influence: How Words and Images Sway Minds*, organized by the Philoctetes Center’s Re:Mind group.

Moderator **Steven Heller**, co-chair of the Designer as Author program at the School of Visual Arts and former Art Director at the *New York Times*, began with a screening of what he called “political pornography.” Showing stills of George Bush speaking with slogans like “America Supports You” and “Compassion in Action” in the background, Heller commented, “Because of his articulation and oratorical skills, it’s been important to have bullet points behind his head so people can see what he’s saying. He really has raised the bar on chintzy computer-generated typography.” Heller pointed out that the McCain campaign’s signature typeface evokes the style of engraved type used on the Vietnam Memorial wall, while he described one version of Obama’s “O” image as presenting “a kind of Man Ray-like approach to the future. You see this thing coming over the mountain and you’re very inspired.” Heller also showed an image of his favorite campaign button, in support of Hillary Clinton: a cute white elephant on a pink background with the text, “It’s a Girl.”

Heller explained that the lineage of political iconography extends “back to the days of [Andrew] Jackson, if not before.” **Jason Young**, Professor of Social Psychology at Hunter College, added that campaigns are just as savage as they’ve always been, commenting, “It’s just that technology makes it a lot more reachable and accessible now.” He elaborated that appeals to the primal emotion of fear are extremely effective, and all we can do to protect ourselves from their influence is to “continually be on guard and question everything.” But fear as it was deployed by the McCain campaign did not achieve the desired effect, Young said, because it failed to show how the candidate would alleviate the fear. “They focus so much energy on establishing the threat, very little on how they’re going to save the day.” Enlarging on the variable results of using fear tactics, Brodner proposed, “Why does Willie Horton work, and why does Bill Ayres not work? ... People look at Obama and, based on the work he’s done and the exposure they’ve had to him, they say, ‘No, it doesn’t read. There’s no narrative there.’ Dukakis had a narrative that that just connected with.”

Questioning the impact of a well-designed campaign, **Paul Starr**, Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs at Princeton University, pointed out that “the vast majority [of voters] aren’t susceptible to these influences, because they’re influenced by a long-term identification with the party.” People vote with their parties 85-90 percent of the time, and “even people who declare themselves independent turn out to be closet partisans on further questioning.” But Starr conceded that differences in voter turnout in response to campaign tactics could certainly influence an election.

In discussing his caricature work, Brodner distinguished be-

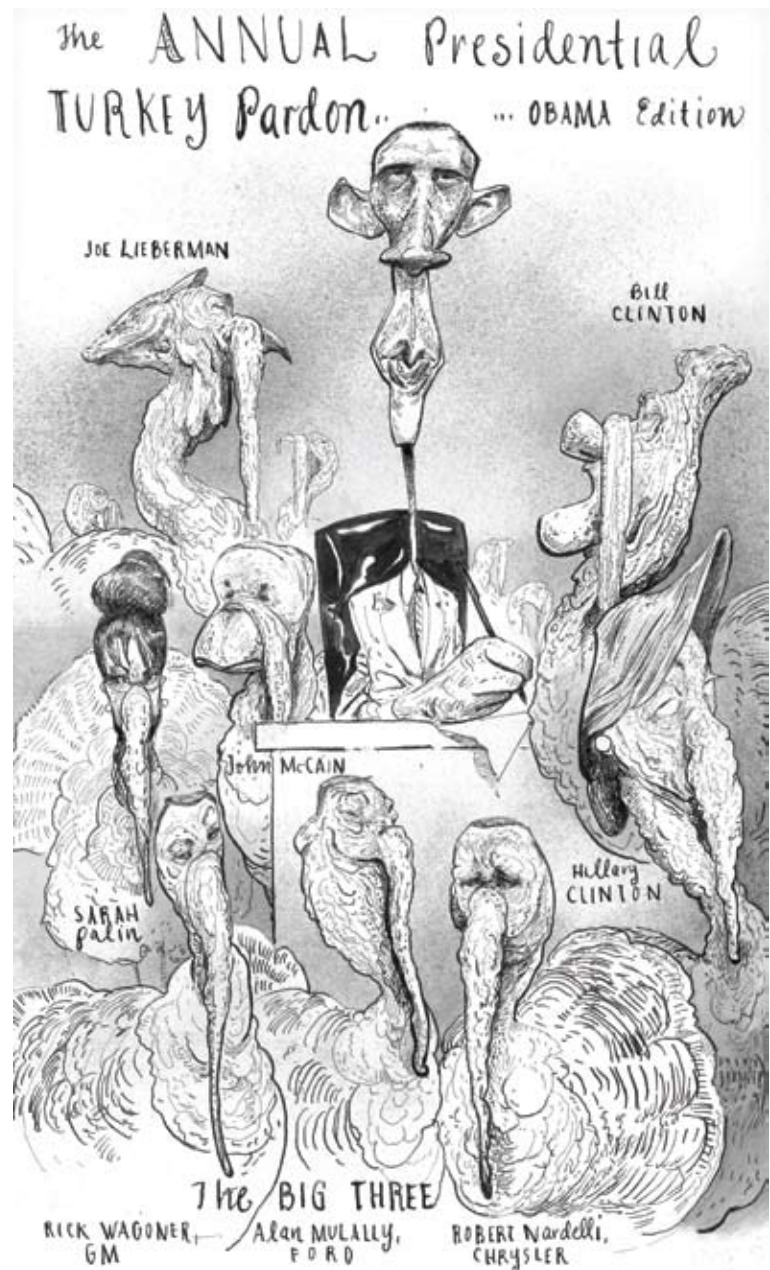


Illustration courtesy of Steve Brodner

tween political figures who were difficult to draw, like Ronald Reagan, whose image changed in complex ways over the course of his presidency, and politicians like Richard Nixon or Newt Gingrich. In the latter cases, Brodner said, “You don’t have to work, you can just do it in your sleep.” When Heller asked Brodner what it was like to draw George Bush, Brodner drawled, “A walk in the park.”

The panelists discussed the notorious *New Yorker* cover by Barry Blitt that featured Michelle Obama in the garb of a militant revolutionary, Barack in a turban, and a portrait of Osama bin Laden over the fireplace. Starr thought the discussion around the image was good for Obama because it brought people’s fears out into the open. Brodner agreed, noting, “There are places in the United States where people live pretty much irony-free lives.... I think the cover was a gateway for some people for a kind of awakening or an opening up into ways of expressing yourself with irony.” From a psychological perspective, Young reflected, “Letting people implicitly draw their own conclusions is far more persuasive and far more impactful than spelling it out, and caricatures are a brilliant way of doing that.” *P.R.*

Is Freud Dead?

“We need him now more than ever,” asserted **Jim Hopkins**, explaining the relevance of Freud’s ideas about group psychology in today’s swiftly changing political climate. Hopkins, co-editor of *Philosophical Essays on Freud*, was one of the panelists at the November 14 roundtable, *Is Freud Dead?: The Relevance of Freud’s Theory of Group Psychology in Today’s World*. Moderator **Mark Edmundson**, Professor of Romantic Poetry and Literary Theory at the University of Virginia, began the discussion by asking the panelists about the election of Barack Obama, which took place only ten days before the roundtable. Edmundson noted that the election has quite possibly impacted the way many people conceive of themselves as Americans, as well as their hopes for the potential of the country.

Given the sea change in a nation that Freud notoriously loved to hate, the panelists’ first order of business was to discuss what Freud’s reaction to Obama would have been. Freud’s great granddaughter **Jane McAdam Freud**, a multidisciplinary artist, speculated that the election of Obama was exactly what Freud would have predicted, since “he believed everything happens in extremes,” which aptly describes the swing from Bush to Obama.

Professor Edmundson shifted the conversation to aspects of Freud’s theories that can be adapted to make them more relevant today. **Bennett Markel**, a psychoanalyst who practices in Berkeley, suggested that Freud was “a product of his time” and did not have the historical experience to understand group psychology the way we do now. Professor Hopkins added that Freud’s views fail to fully account for Darwin’s theory of competition. “We evolved in a process of cooperation in groups, the better to compete in groups,” Hopkins explained. “Every time a group became better at competing, its mode of competition became universal.”

As the conversation moved back to the realm of politics, **Ken Eisold**, former President of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations, discussed Freud’s theory that the ego ideal is replaced by political leaders. Eisold reconfigured this notion, postulating instead that the ego ideal is replaced by formulations of group identity. “We see it a lot in all the ethnic conflicts in Africa and Europe and Asia,” he observed. “[People] go to war with each other ... without strong leadership to do that, but something gets mobilized around the identity of a Hutu or a Tutsi.”

McAdam Freud acknowledged that psychoanalytic concepts are not immediately accessible to the general public, but that “there are ways of entering into it.... One might be sensory experience through music or art.” According to Professor Hopkins, self-awareness—whether through art or psychoanalysis—allows us to “present ourselves as fully human,” giving us the potential to impact perception on a group level. “When we repress, we repeat,” McAdam Freud warned vis-à-vis the collective American psyche.

Identifying new gateways to collective perception, Professor Hopkins observed that the development of communication technologies such as YouTube greatly contributed to Obama’s victory, and will continue to shape public perceptions. “It would be much harder for [today’s] politicians to promote the idea that the next thing we must do is bomb [Iran],” he speculated. McAdam Freud suggested psychological analysis should be mandated for Presidential candidates, and also used more frequently in early education. Throughout the discussion, each panelist, whether analyst, political thinker, or artist, had suggestions for how psychoanalysis can still affect our world today. *K.E.*

Music at Philoctetes



Top: Jane Ira Bloom and Drew Gress, *The Art of the Ballad*
Bottom: Béla Fleck and Lewis Porter, *Banjo Innovations*

Freud, Psychoanalysis, and the Philippon Bible

The day after panelists at the Center pondered the question, “Is Freud Dead?” **Diane O’Donoghue**, Chair of the Department of Visual and Critical Studies at Tufts University, introduced a kindred discussion: “We are here this afternoon to also talk about Freud and psychoanalysis, but through a rather different lens: that of a mid-nineteenth century German-Hebrew bible.” The bible in question was compiled by Ludwig Philippon and his brother Pheobus, and was the focal point of the November 15 roundtable, *Freud, Psychoanalysis, and the Philippon Bible*. O’Donoghue, who moderated the event, observed that the bible was the source of Freud’s earliest experiences of reading, and that its images, along with its exhaustive annotations, would later have a profound influence on Freud’s writing.

Mary Bergstein, Professor of Renaissance Art and Historiography at the Rhode Island School of Design, described the Philippon bible as a “symphony of words and images” that were introduced to Freud in his earliest childhood and would “present scenes of déjà vu throughout [his] life.” The bible presents illustrations from a wealth of cultures—from ancient Egyptian to Greco-Roman—which, Bergstein noted, probably influenced Freud to search for “his own genealogy, his own Jewish genealogy, in the classical Mediterranean world and in the Egyptian world.”

Abigail Gillman, Associate Professor of Modern Languages and Comparative Literature at Boston University, explained that one of the functions of early German-Hebrew publications of the bible was to wean the Jewish community off of Yiddish translations. While on the one hand the bible was a means to “inculcate knowledge of good German,” Gillman elaborated, translators also sought to make Hebrew more available and to bring out the poetic, expressive nature of the language. Remarking that Philippon was the founder of the first Jewish book-of-the-month club, Gillman emphasized that part of the bible’s aim was to inspire Jews to take up and fulfill their civic obligations as Germans, including serving in the German army. As an educational tool, she observed, the Philippon was “more encyclopedia than bible”—not a synagogue bible, but a bible for the home.

Offering further historical context, **Bennett Simon**, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Cambridge Health Alliance, noted that the bible was published at a time when German classical scholarship was taking an anti-Semitic, anti-Phoenician turn. “Anything to the East of the holy land was getting subtly—or not-so-subtly—denigrated,” he added. Speculating about Freud’s later fascination with classicism (his consulting room and library were notably adorned with antiquities), Simon remarked, “Freud’s struggle was not just to find a heroic past for himself, but I think quite seriously to sort out what combination of virtues and characteristics become one’s ego ideal.”

The intense focus on imagery in the Philippon bible was underscored by an accompanying exhibition at the Center, which presented reproductions of the book’s wood engravings. **Andrew Stein Raftery**, Associate Professor of Printmaking at Rhode Island School of Design, illuminated the historical prominence of such engraving, which satisfied that era’s passion for illustration. Illustrations made from durable wood blocks were widely used in popular works—from Dickens to Thackeray—and signaled that Philippon had aspirations for his bible to reach a wide audience. Raftery emphasized that Philippon drew on a store of already existing engravings to create a “remarkable series of visual footnotes.” These so-called footnotes would find their way into Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which, Professor Simon noted, focuses on the transformation of dream imagery into language. *A.L.*

Our Life in Poetry: T.S. Eliot’s “Four Quartets”



Anne Stevenson

In T.S. Eliot’s poem, “East Coker,” the second of his “Four Quartets,” the speaker sees his years of writing as a series of failures: “Because one has only learnt to get the better of words / For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which / One is no longer disposed to say it.” Commenting on such ruminations, which interrupt the lyrical passages of the poem, **Anne Stevenson**, the guest poet at the December 10 session of the *Our Life in Poetry* series, praised Eliot for his “great suspicion of words.” She remarked, “Every poet who’s worth his salt is suspicious of words.” **Michael Braziller**, publisher of Persea Books, introduced Stevenson as “an American poet publishing in England for forty years, not nearly as well-known as she deserves to be here.” In 2007 Stevenson received the Neglected Masters Award from the Poetry Foundation of America, and her most recent book is *Selected Poems*, published by The Library of America.

East Coker was the town of Eliot’s ancestors, and in the church there, which Stevenson has visited, there’s a corner memorializing the poet. Stevenson pointed out that the “Four Quartets” are modeled on Beethoven’s late quartets. After reading selections from “East Coker,” Braziller elaborated on the poem’s various recurring themes: Christian mysticism, paganism, explorations of the human psyche. “It’s a poem of doubt, and of clinging to a vision of Christianity and of a civilized way of worship and of living which he really is not sure he believes in,” Braziller said. “I consider it a very psychological poem about change, about trying to submit to change, about humility toward change.”

Stevenson described “East Coker” as a kind of answer to “The Wasteland,” which Eliot had written almost twenty years earlier. “If you take it in the context of “The Wasteland,” where everything was disintegrated, he’s putting the pieces together again ... to make some kind of new pattern,” she said. Today, Eliot’s work can be seen as outdated and preachy, Stevenson commented. But his assertion in “Burnt Norton,” the first Quartet, that “human kind / Cannot bear very much reality” carries an enduring critical weight.

After fielding questions from the audience, Stevenson read from her “Correspondences,” a long poem that provides an extended family history in letters. Stevenson did research for the letters, but they are ultimately her own imaginative construction, presenting “compound ghosts” of figures from the past, a notion she also mentioned in describing the echoing effect of various literary influences on Eliot’s work. The final lines of the last letter in “Correspondences” display Stevenson’s own suspicion of words—an acknowledgement of their force, and an apology for their moments of failure: “Dear Father, I love but can’t know you. / I’ve given you all that I can. / Can these pages make amends for what was not said? / Do justice to the living, to the dead?” *P.R.*

Our Life in Poetry: In Pursuit of Bewilderment

“I love the idea of celebrating bewilderment,” the poet **Matthea Harvey** said during *Our Life in Poetry: In Pursuit of Bewilderment*, held on November 18, adding that she sees it as a “*Take that!* to the know-it-alls of the world.” The event, moderated by **Michael Braziller**, publisher of Persea Books, featured three poets: Harvey, who teaches at Sarah Lawrence College and is the author, most recently, of *Modern Life*; **Timothy Donnelly**, author of *Twenty-seven Props for a Production of Eine Lebenszeit* and Assistant Professor in Columbia University’s Writing Program; and **Dennis Nurkse**, who also teaches at Sarah Lawrence, and whose latest book of poetry is *The Border Kingdom*.

Diverse textual and imaginative sources have inspired and formed these poets’ work. Donnelly’s “Dream of a Poetry of Defense” was “an experiment in estranging language from its original context,” in which he combined words from Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *A Defence of Poetry* and *The 9/11 Commission Report*. The title and idea for his poem, “The Driver of the Car is Unconscious,” came from a phrase he found in a German for Beginners book. Harvey’s “The Invention of Love” and “How We Learned to Hold Hands” emerged from the poet’s creative thinking about the origins of things, while Nurkse offers poems that address the bewildering experience of love.

Bewilderment is something of a natural state for a poet, Nurkse implied, because “in poetry you can work with the untrustworthy self.” The form allows for fragmentation and radical doubt. According to Harvey, Nurkse’s poems can be read as “misunderstandings of everyday life.” Attracted to the idea of estrangement from quotidian reality, Harvey often asks students in her classes to write poems in the voice of an alien. From that standpoint, she said, things that we take for granted are “called into question and made unfamiliar.”

After the poets each read a number of their works, Braziller called attention to their varied styles: Donnelly writes in fixed stanzas, long lines, and more conventional forms, while Harvey writes a lot of prose poems, and Nurkse courts a certain spareness. Donnelly explained his attachment to traditional form: “I’ve always felt the need for some kind of rigor, some regulation, something to give a sense of organization to my own meandering.... The structural foothold gives me a sense of purpose when I’m uncertain.” Harvey, on the other hand, said that because she feels an impulse toward narrative control, she

tries to shake things up by creating her own forms. In her prose poems, after taking one surreal step, she’ll then figure out how that guides the rest of the poem. “If the world is ruled by the theory of the Baked Alaska, which is that everything’s hot on the outside and cold on the inside, then what are the repercussions for the world?”

Because language is such a habitual daily tool, it often loses its freshness. “We forget that it’s an invention. We forget that it has this strange life of its own because it’s always doing things for us,” Donnelly said. In the language of a poem, it’s possible to recapture that strangeness, to explore the wilderness in bewilderment. But it can also be the poet’s constant job to keep the terrain wild. Describing her reliance on a state of uncertainty, Harvey said, “Once I understand how to write a [particular] poem, I’m no longer interested in it and I feel slightly sick.” *P.R.*

Musical Creatures

Violinist **Stephanie Chase** introduced the central theme of the course, *Musical Creatures: How Vertebrate Locomotion Shapes Human Music*, by observing that music is “composed, organized sound, and very often composers have been inspired by nature.” She noted Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony and Vivaldi’s Four Seasons Concerto as examples of music that seeks to embody the sounds of nature, adding that the use of vibrato in an instrument evokes the sound of a human voice filled with emotion. Chase, who organized and moderated the October 28 event, held up her own instrument to illustrate the principle, employed by Stradivari and Guarneri, that the length of a violin should correspond to the distance between shoulder and wrist. Chase then gave the floor to her guest **Andrew Warshaw**, Associate Professor of Music and Dance at Marymount Manhattan College, whose work on locomotion-encoded musical patterns seeks out further links between music, nature, and the human body.

Warshaw began by noting that his theories about music evolved indirectly from a knee injury he sustained as a dancer. Opting out of surgery, he sought treatment with a mind-body practitioner named Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, whose work focuses on the study of basic neurological patterns. She taught him the principle that human intelligence is built on the platform of movement experience, that the movement capabilities we’ve inherited over the millennia are the building blocks of our thinking. Observing that impairments to movement are connected to high-brain lesions, Warshaw wondered if he could find movement patterns connected to low-brain centers, an area he also referred to as the “old brain” because of its connection to primitive evolutionary behaviors. This led him to study movement patterns in vertebrates, which Bainbridge Cohen had been applying to her work with performers and people with brain injuries.

Warshaw explained that the oldest movement patterns were spinal patterns, which are initiated in the mouth, head, neck, spine, or tail, and which can be observed in divers, snakes, fish, and crawling infants. He elaborated on the three movement patterns that he employed to connect vertebrate movement to music. The homologous pattern is a forward pushing or reaching movement of the upper or lower limbs in unison. The homolateral pattern, which is primarily used by humans to prepare for other movements, is the motion in tandem of limbs on either side of the body. The most complex is the contralateral pattern, wherein the upper and lower limbs move in opposition across the body.

Warshaw introduced two instrumentalists who would help him illustrate his theories: Damien Bassman, a percussionist who ▶▶

Late Summer

When the rain woke me
I no longer knew
and had to remind myself:
this is darkness,
that is the wineglass,
this is the blowing curtain,
that’s the immense city,
it’s late in my life
but early in August,
this is my wife
naked in my arms.

—Dennis Nurkse



Audience members listen in

► writes and performs for Broadway productions, and William Molton, Master Teacher of Music in the Dance Department at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Bassman and Molton demonstrated the ways in which these basic patterns of vertebrate movement are applied to musical themes and improvisations. Chase, who has performed as a soloist with several of the world's leading orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, got into the act by executing complex arpeggios and excerpts from classical compositions. Making the leap from basic movement structures to sophisticated music theory, Warsaw enthused, "In so many of Beethoven's structures, he'll lay out a theme homologously, and then his development of it is immediately into the contralateral." The next step in his analysis of musical structures, Warsaw said, was to evaluate these patterns using MRI machines.

While to the untrained ear, the connection between theory and sound may have been hard to detect, the interplay between abstract ideas and deft musicianship was fascinating to watch. At one point Warsaw, observing Chase's dextrous fretwork, commented, "It's like watching the mind go back and forth between the fingers and the bow." *A.L.*

Our Life in Poetry: Auden in New York

In his essay, "Squares and Oblongs," W. H. Auden considers two possible responses to the question, "Why do you want to write poetry?" If the poet answers with "I have important things I want to say," Auden asserts, "then he is not a poet." But if he answers by saying, "I like hanging around words listening to what they say," then maybe he is going to be a poet." At the October 23 course, *Auden in New York*, poet **David Lehman** offered this quote, along with details about Auden's life and some fine readings of his poems. Lehman is series editor of *The Best American Poetry*, head of the poetry division of the graduate writing program at The New School, and author of the poetry collection, *When a Woman Loves a Man*. The event, part of the ongoing *Our Life in Poetry* series, was moderated by **Michael Braziller**, publisher of Persea Books.

Already a celebrated poet in England, the 31 year-old Auden moved to New York in January of 1939. Just after he arrived, William Butler Yeats died, and Auden wrote "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," as much a reflection on the public role of poetry as an elegy for the influential poet. Later that year, at the outbreak of World War II, Auden wrote perhaps his most famous poem, "September 1, 1939," which powerfully details the psychological and imperialistic underpinnings of war. The poem holds accountable both "the sensual man-in-the-

street" and "the lie of Authority / Whose buildings grope the sky." Auden later rejected the poem "for what he called its 'incurable dishonesty,'" Lehman explained. He felt that the line, "We must love one another or die," sounded false, with its implied antidote to war, because after all we must die anyway. Auden didn't allow the poem to be reprinted during his lifetime.

"He was exceptionally good at moving a crowd with words, and this scared him," Lehman said. "He had a lifelong fear of demagoguery." But despite Auden's concerns about the rhetoric of "September 1, 1939," its popularity has persisted, and the poem was widely circulated after 9/11. "He's someone we can read today and feel that he's of our moment," Lehman observed. "While it's wonderful to read Yeats or Eliot or Pound—they're great poets—Auden still feels fresh. It's as though the poems were just written. It's like Frank Sinatra. He sounds like he's in the next room, whereas Bing Crosby's four rooms down."

Braziller and Lehman also read Auden's villanelle, "If I Could Tell You"; "The More Loving One," which Lehman called "about as good a poem about unrequited love as you can find"; and "Under Which Lyre," a poem Auden wrote for Harvard's class of 1946. Lehman noted that the understated effect of the clipped last lines of each stanza in "Under Which Lyre" is a difficult trick, adding, "It's almost as if he's testing his own virtuosity." The poem ends with a "Hermetic Decalogue," a credo both funny and serious, and fresh in several senses of the word: "Thou shalt not do as the dean pleases, / Thou shalt not write thy doctor's thesis / ... Thou shalt not live within thy means / Nor on plain water and raw greens. / If thou must choose / Between the chances, choose the odd; / Read The New Yorker, trust in God; / And take short views." *P.R.*

The More Loving One

Looking up at the stars, I know quite well
That, for all they care, I can go to hell,
But on earth indifference is the least
We have to dread from man or beast.

How should we like it were stars to burn
With a passion for us we could not return?
If equal affection cannot be,
Let the more loving one be me.

Admirer as I think I am
Of stars that do not give a damn,
I cannot, now I see them, say
I missed one terribly all day.

Were all stars to disappear or die,
I should learn to look at an empty sky
And feel its total dark sublime,
Though this might take me a little time.

—*W.H. Auden*

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Upcoming Events

Helvetica: Typography and Literacy

Film Screening & Roundtable

Saturday, January 10, 1:00pm

Participants: Christopher Calderhead, Arem Duplessis, Steven Heller (moderator), Elinor Aishah Holland, Gary Hustwit, Elaine Lustig Cohen

Literacy and Imagination

Roundtable

Sunday, January 11, 2:30pm

Participants: Robert Logan (moderator), Jonathan Rosen, Lance Strate

The World of the Translator

Roundtable

Saturday, January 17, 2:30pm

Participants: Peter Cole, Peter Constantine, Jonathan Galassi, Edith Grossman, Suzanne Jill Levine (moderator), Qiu Xiaolong

David Levy

Performance & Discussion

Wednesday, January 21, 7:00pm

Participants: David Levy

Spinoza

Roundtable

Saturday, January 31, 2:30pm

Participants: Akeel Bilgrami (moderator), Rebecca Goldstein, Jonathan Israel

Creative Ambiguity in Scientific and Humanistic Thought

Roundtable

Saturday, February 14, 2:30pm

Participants: Eva Brann, Donald Pfaff (moderator), Robert Shapley, Sandra Sherman

On Aggression: The Politics and Psychobiology of Genocide

Roundtable

Saturday, February 28, 2:30pm

Participants: Ismael Beah, Helen Fein (moderator), Benedict Kiernan, Taylor Krauss, Henri Parens

Evolution of God(s)

Roundtable

Sunday, March 7, 2:30pm

Participants: Beate Pongratz-Leisten, Tyler Volk (moderator), Robert Wright

Music and the Brain

Roundtable

Saturday, March 14, 2:30pm

Participants: Jane Ira Bloom (other panelists TBA)



An Afternoon of Beckett

Continued from front page

middle age is buried up to their waist.... By the time you reach late middle age, you're buried up to your neck."

John Turturro, best known for his roles in such films as *Barton Fink* and *Do the Right Thing*, performed in the role of Hamm in BAM's *Endgame*. Turturro pointed out that as a director Beckett wasn't always consistent with his own stage directions. He often scaled his performances to the particular theater he was working in, as the contradictory directions in his notebooks attest. When Turturro was offered a part in *Waiting for Godot*, he read it with his seven-year-old son. "It was effortless, it was perfect," Turturro said of his son's reading of Gogo. "He got [the play]. He thought it was very funny."

Turturro later commented on Beckett's acute perception of extreme mental states. "If you have any experience with the world of mental illness, which I have a lot of, I was shocked when I first read Beckett with how precise it was." Oppenheim explained that Beckett spent several years in psychotherapy, as well as reading everything he could about psychology and psychoanalysis as a young man.

Bishop went on to note that when Beckett encountered difficulty in writing novels, he turned to plays to distract himself. These distractions turned out to be his most famous work. Another interesting aspect of Beckett's career, Bishop pointed out, was his switch in the early 1940s from writing in English to writing in French. The playwright notably translated most of his later French-language works into English. In response to a question about the "Irishness" of Beckett's work, Bishop quoted Beckett's comment, "I preferred France in war to Ireland at peace." But Yeats was of great importance to Beckett, Bishop pointed out, and the geographical locations in his plays have the names and feel of Ireland.

Oppenheim concluded the discussion by asking if the panelists had any personal experiences with Beckett. "When people meet artists of whatever genre that they greatly admire, I'd say more often than not they're disappointed by the human being that they meet," she said, "yet I've never heard anyone say anything that comes even close to that about Beckett." Albee first encountered Beckett in Germany at the world premiere of his own play, *The Zoo Story*, which was on a double bill with Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, and they became better acquainted when they met subsequently in Paris. Though Bishop was a long-time friend of Beckett, in their conversations he avoided talking about the playwright's work, a topic that Beckett notoriously evaded. Epstein never met Beckett, but talked to him by phone when he was directing *Endgame*, and found him very sweet and gentle. "He just sounded like my mother on the other end of the phone." *P.R.*