

CounterPunch

A SHORT HISTORY OF ECONOMIC SANCTIONS BY DAVID MACARAY

GALEANO AND THE AMERICAN LEFT BY DANIEL EDWARDS

FREE-RANGE CAPITALISM BY STAN COX

THE DUST-UP WITH CHINA BY MIKE WHITNEY

THE FILMS OF SOPHIA COPPOLA BY KIM NICOLINI



CounterPunch

www.counterpunch.org
CounterPunch Magazine, Volume 22, (ISSN 1086-2323) is a journal of progressive politics, investigative reporting, civil liberties, art, and culture published by The Institute for the Advancement of Journalistic Clarity, Petrolia, California, 95558. Visit counterpunch.org to read dozens of new articles daily, purchase subscriptions, order books, plus access 18 years of archives.

Periodicals postage pending at Eureka, California.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
CounterPunch
P.O. Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)
ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)
www.counterpunch.org
All rights reserved.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Jeffrey St. Clair

MANAGING EDITOR
Joshua Frank

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Lee Ballinger, Melissa Beattie, Darwin Bond-Graham, Chloe Cockburn, Windy Cooler, Chris Floyd, Kevin Alexander Gray, Steve Horn, Lee Hall, Conn Hallinan, Barbara Rose Johnson, Binoy Kampmark, JoAnn Wypijewski, David Macaray, Chase Madar, Kim Nicolini, Brenda Norrell, Vijay Prashad, Louis Proyect, Martha Rosenberg, Christine Sheeler, Jan Tucker, Mike Whitney

POETRY EDITOR
Marc Beaudin

SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR
Nathaniel St. Clair

BUSINESS MANAGER &
DESIGN PRODUCTION
Becky Grant

SUBSCRIPTIONS & ORDER FULFILLMENT
Deva Wheeler

DESIGN CONSULTATION
Tiffany Wardle

Contact Information

CounterPunch Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558
Toll Free 1 (800) 840-3683
1 (707) 629-3683

EDITORIAL:
counterpunch@counterpunch.org
BUSINESS: becky@counterpunch.org
SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MERCHANDISE:
counterpunchdeva@gmail.com

Submissions

CounterPunch accepts a small number of submissions from accomplished authors and newer writers. Please send your pitch to counterpunch@counterpunch.org. Due to the large volume of submissions we receive we are able to respond to only those that interest us.

Advertising

Advertising space is available in CounterPunch Magazine. Media kit available upon request. All advertisements are subject to the publisher's approval of copy, text, display, and illustration. CounterPunch reserves the right to reject or cancel any advertisement at any time.
email becky@counterpunch.org

Address Change

Please notify us immediately of email and/or mailing address changes for uninterrupted delivery of issues.

BY MAIL:
CounterPunch Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558

BY PHONE:
1 (800) 840-3683
1 (707) 629-3683

BY EMAIL (preferred):
counterpunchdeva@gmail.com

Donations

CounterPunch's survival is dependent upon income from subscriptions, donations and book and merchandise sales. We are a non-profit, tax exempt organization under The Institute for the Advancement of Journalistic Clarity, DBA CounterPunch. Donations are welcome year round. Donate by mail, telephone or online: www.counterpunch.org.

Subscriptions

1- year print edition \$55
1- year digital edition (PDF) \$35
1- year print & digital edition \$65
1- year institutions/supporters \$100
1- year print for student/low income \$45
1-year digital for student/low income \$30

All subscription orders must be pre-paid—we do not invoice for orders. Renew by telephone, mail, or on our website. For mailed orders please include name, address and email address with payment, or call

1 (800) 840-3683 or 1 (707) 629-3683.

Add \$20.00 per year for subscriptions mailed to Canada and \$40 per year for all other countries outside the US.

Please do not send checks or money orders in currency other than U.S. dollars. We DO accept debit cards and credit cards from banks outside the US that have the Visa, Mastercard or other major card insignias.

MAKE CHECKS OR
MONEY ORDERS PAYABLE TO:
CounterPunch
Business Office
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

Send Letters to the Editor to:

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
or email :
counterpunch@counterpunch.org

Cover Image: Artist's Statement:
Art is storytelling. This portrait of
Eduardo Galeano is my attempt
to tell his story. The colors and
shapes are intended to be content
as much as the straightforwardly
narrative images. Rob Urie

In Memory of
Alexander Cockburn
1941-2012



TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR 4

ARTICLES

A Short History of Economic Sanctions
BY DAVID MACARAY 10

Galeano and the American Left
BY DANIEL EDWARDS 15

Free-Range Capitalism
BY STAN COX 19

Purple Heart Nation
BY JERRY LEMBCKE 21

I Want to Live
BY LEE BALLINGER 23

CULTURE & REVIEWS

The Films of Sofia Coppola
BY KIM NICOLINI 26

Mad Men Goes Dark
BY NATHANIEL ST. CLAIR 27

COLUMNS

Roaming Charges 5

Buddha of the Blues

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR
The compassion of BB King.

Diamonds and Rust 6
Redemption Song

BY JOANN WYPIJEWSKI
The killing of Charlie Keunang.

Empire Burlesque 7

The One Who Lost the Music

BY CHRIS FLOYD
The days of bad craziness.

Daydream Nation 8

Fight or Flight

BY KRISTIN KOLB
On cancer and Kahlo.

Grasping at Straws 9

The Dust-Up with China

BY MIKE WHITNEY
Obama's dangerous Asian-Pivot.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rock the Vote?

Very much enjoyed that Noel Ignatiev's piece in CP on voting. It's far better stated than my own reason for not voting, which is "the only thing worse than having voted for the asshole who lost is having voted for the asshole who won".

Ben Tripp

A Volcano of Truth

Alexander Cockburn's piece The Bin Laden Assassination: a Volcano of Lies is an incredible testimony to the value of *CounterPunch* as an alternative source of information and insight. Back in 2011, no less.

Bill Blunden

Bright Lights

Thank you and Carol Miller for publishing "Why Are So-Called Progressives Defending Special Ops Training" on May 11. Especially since the corporate media (CNN to Fox) are dismissing Jade Helm, if not actually distorting the facts of it, please continue to oversee this operation and, perhaps with a follow up article from Carol Miller, provide balanced information about this drill. Another dimension of your coverage is that, beyond politics or conservative vs progressive, a perspective from all sides is needed...by all sides...commutatively. Friends and family from different parts of the Country and from all political persuasions have seen elevated military and police activity in the skies and expressed feelings ranging from ill ease

to alarm. We all need to talk about this...shine some very bright lights on it.

Jim Brown

Down With Woodward

Brilliant piece on Bob Woodward, another one of those wonder-when-they're-gonna-take-him-down-a-notch articles I always imagine (in that dept, I owe the dearly departed A. Cockburn a great deal, may he rest in peace), although I think I have a little nastier approach to Mr. Woodward, not as relates to your article, but other articles, one of them in *CounterPunch* where the writer is always careful to say how brilliant his (Woodward's) first work was (the American "fair balance" in the news, say NPR or Bill-What'sizname, the avuncular "leftish" show host; the Vietnam vets do it whenever they criticize the war but are careful not to criticize the men/ heroes) but it seems pretty clear that others paved the way for Woodward and that the focusing too much on "Deep Throat" (oh ha-ha cutsie-pie American wordplay) was a red herring across the path of internecine strife with Nixon, so, perhaps not such brilliant sleuthing. But, enough on that, the Val n' Joseph stuff was funny, although I hated that pair from the first mention of them in the dust-up, because I saw them as self-promoters (but then who in the public eye in the U.S. isn't - "Use every man after his own desert and

who should 'scape whipping" - Hamlet) but mainly because, after my time in the NSA, I've always hated CIA officers and U.S. diplomats, who, to borrow from the marines in Vietnam (referring to war reporters) are all "tits on a boar hog", although unveiling a CIA agent is a felony act, isn't it? But my real problem was when I saw that widely circulated photo of them sitting in a cute crawly convertible sports car, he at the wheel sporting a rakish E Pound fedora and looking oh so Ian Flemingy, she at his side with an Isidora D scarf tossed stylishly & carelessly about her protected neck, I wanted to call in a fucking F-4 strike on them (this was before drones).

*Roger Bradshaw
Beijing*

The Israel Farce

Excellent article by Ajamu Baraka on the farce that masquerades as the "peace-process." Baraka has succinctly and accurately framed Israel's agenda. Israel is not an honest broker, has no intention of ever allowing a sovereign and contiguous Palestinian State, and uses the peace-process as a mask for an ugly colonial-settler project.

*Dan Corson
Tampa, FL*

Manufactured Criminals

To quote Arlo Guthrie, "The more things you make against the law, the more criminals you have!" The private for-profit prison industry is truly evil

-- they have the incentive, the good ol' capitalist motive, to deprive people of their liberty for a profit. This includes undocumented immigrants who thanks to laws like Arizona's SB 1070 are now criminals by definition, and must be incarcerated -- in prisons conveniently built by CCA, which is in turn paid by the state of AZ to lock people up. Who drafted SB 1070 for local-yokel AZ state senator Russell Pierce? ALEC. Who writes legislation for ALEC? CCA. Pure evil.

Robert Vint

Institutionalized

Best guess is that they'll have adult diaper vendors at the next Left Forum. The young people didn't appear to know history or political theory. The Podemos rep, an alleged philosophy prof, was fucking clueless. They are sitting ducks for international capital. The energy was with #blacklives-matter---- a lot of focus on local organizing with international understanding from some of the speakers. Syriza sent old commies, the only politically astute people in the international contingent. They know what to do but the troika has them in a corner. Everyone knows *CounterPunch* and I got feedback on my own writing. People knew who I was despite having no pictures that I know of on the web? CP is considered an institution, almost a public right. Kshama Sawant, socialist from Seattle, gave a good speech. She seems smart with a good bullshit detector.

Rob Urie



ROAMING CHARGES

Buddha of the Blues

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

In the summer of 1998, Alexander Cockburn and I spent a few days in North Richmond, California, a battered industrial city just outside of Berkeley. We had just published our book *Whiteout* on the CIA and drug trafficking and had been invited to speak at a black church about the horrific toll of the drug war on urban America. North Richmond was the Antietam of this senseless slaughter, its neighborhoods ravaged by gang shootings and police killings, most of them fueled by the crack trade abetted by U.S. intelligence agencies to help fund their covert wars in Central America. At the time, North Richmond was staggering under the highest murder rate in California, more than 50 killings per hundred thousand residents. We spent the afternoon helping still grieving families place 200 black crosses at sites where drug killings had occurred during the past few years.

After a somber day, Alex and I drove down to Oakland to see B.B. King perform. King was touring with his big band and they were smoking hot that night, opening with a driving rendition of "Sweet Little Angel" and closing it down 90 minutes later with a fiery version of "Let the Good Times Roll." King had swelled to a Pantagruelian girth by then and he spent most of the evening performing from a chair. Even so, his voice remained robust and he picked and bent his notes as soulfully as ever. About halfway through the show, King told the crowd that he had spent the afternoon visiting with inmates at San Quentin. I jotted down what he said in my notebook. "Friends, there are too many of us locked away. Locked away and forgotten. They're in prison, but let's not think of them as prisoners. They are people, like you and me, down on their luck." Then he launched

into "Ten Long Years." Afterwards, Alex told me it was the best concert he'd ever heard. (Of course, Cockburn had also made the same snap declaration about a Little Richard gig, during which Alex had nodded off 30 minutes into the performance.)

Thirty years earlier, King released *Live at Cook County Jail*, a scorching performance recorded in one of nation's most wretched facilities. The platform King and his band played on had served as a gallows for executions not too many years earlier. While he was at the jail, King spent the day talking to inmates, about 80 percent of whom were black. "They would stay for seven or eight months before the trial took place because they couldn't afford the bail," King said. "And then when they did go to trial, if they were guilty, the time was not deducted from the time they were given. And if they were innocent, they got no compensation."

Like Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard, King made a point to perform in prisons and jails for decades until the American incarceration industry became sadistic enough to prevent inmates from enjoying live music. In 1981, invited Congressman John Conyers to attend his concert before 3,000 inmates at the infamous Jackson State Penitentiary in Michigan, then the largest walled prison in the world. When King was asked why he played in prisons so often, he said he had often envisioned himself behind bars.

King was so serious about the state of American prisons that in 1971 he teamed up with defense attorney F. Lee Bailey to start the Foundation for the Advancement of Inmate Rehabilitation and Recreation, which advocated for humane conditions in jailhouses, the education and training of inmates, an

end to solitary confinement, and the introduction of more art and music into prison life. The timing for such a campaign couldn't have been more urgent. That very year, Nixon had inaugurated his war on drugs, a cruel and relentless blitzkrieg against black Americans that would eventually ensnare King's own daughter Patty, landing her in a grim Texas prison. In Nixon's own words, scribbled down by HR Haldeman, "it's all about the blacks."

When King recorded *Live From Cook County Jail*, the U.S. prison population stood at 450,000, less than 100 inmates per 100,000 people. By the year King died, the U.S. sported the highest incarceration rate in the world, totaling about 2.3 million prisoners, more than 712 inmates per 100,000 people. The vast majority are jailed for drug crimes.

Riley B. King, great-grandson of liberated slaves, was born in 1925 on the Berclair cotton plantation outside of Ita Bena. Late in his life, King dispelled any notion that he left rural Mississippi for the neon lure of the big city. Instead, King said he fled the Delta for Memphis out of fear: "I saw lynchings, seen people hanging, seen people drug through the streets. I had to get away."

For the next 70 years, the hellhound of race-hatred haunted his trail, as the terrorists in white sheets of his youth mutated into state-sanctioned violence by men in blue. Yet BB King never surrendered to despondency. The great Buddha of the Blues remained a voice of compassion, a voice charged with the faith that no human life, however desiccated by the cruelties of the world, is ever beyond reclaiming.

When I'm down, I drop the needle on BB King. Almost any record will do, but there's nothing quite like his raucous version of "Help the Poor," from *Live at the Regal*, for psychic uplift. In his singing and playing, I hear the sounds of fierce struggle, of shackles breaking, of unyielding aspiration toward a freer future. King's music is, and will always remain, an antidote to despair and nihilism. **CP**



DIAMONDS AND RUST

Redemption Song

BY JOANN WYPIJEWSKI

“He was the kind of man who did not like shame,” Charly Keunang’s sister, Line Foming, said of him after his death. An odd statement, on the face of it—what kind of man likes shame?—it was nevertheless necessitated by circumstance.

In the story first told of Charly Keunang’s death, it seemed he had nothing but shame. No name. No address. No past. No prospects. No loved ones to claim his body.

A figure on a cell phone video, his own mother did not recognize him as the man dying before her eyes 3,000 miles away. “Come, watch the TV”, Heleine Tchayou called out in French to her daughter at her home outside Boston. “See how they’re killing another black man.”

“They” were officers of the Los Angeles Police Department, who in the bright light of March 1 went to the tent of Heleine’s son, Line’s brother, on LA’s skid row, following a 911 call. The video doesn’t tell much, only the essential detail. A man is whirling on the sidewalk among six cops. Then he is down. Then he is shot dead. In between, four cops are on him. Fists punch downward. *Tzzetzeza...tzzetzeza*, goes a Taser.

There is shouting, but the words are obscure until the man is still, the cops standing upright, and someone on the street cries, “Motherfucker” over and over again. I have seen a freeze frame of one hand outstretched during the action, the hand police say was trying to grab an officer’s gun. The man was being tased and punched at the time, and the gun never left its holster.

‘Africa’ is how the victim was known among those with whom he lived on skid row, so the early headlines were all some variation of Homeless, Nameless,

Africa Killed by Police on Skid Row.

The headlines changed once the LA coroner matched fingerprints of the dead man to those of Charley Saturmin Robinet, a French national convicted of robbing a bank in Sherman Oaks in 2000 and imprisoned until 2013. Yet, as federal officials had known for years, the real Robinet was alive and free in France, his papers stolen in the late 1990s by someone who used them to obtain a passport to come to America. And so the new story was one of serial theft: a convicted robber with a stolen identity had been suspected of theft on skid row and was shot while fighting police.

‘Cameroon’ is how some on skid row also knew the dead man, and Cameroon—in the form of the community in LA, working with Pastor Que Jn-Marie of the Church Without Walls and activating immigrant networks across the country under the leadership of David Gedeon Singui, president of a Cameroonian mutual aid association in LA—is what ultimately restored to Charly Keunang his history, his family and his name.

Funerals are rarely about the truth of a life except in essential detail, and Charly Keunang’s on May 16 was no different. After the three-hour ceremony at the “Church of Bells”, Holman United Methodist, and the all-night wake at the African Book Club, after the wailing and the prayers, the speeches and the songs, the remembrances and dancing and socializing over food, who Charly was, how he had come to his dream of Hollywood, why he’d agreed to rob a bank (besides owing money to an acting school), whether he was mentally ill, what besides shame drove him to conceal from his family his assumed name, incarceration and

poverty, were no clearer. He remained as enigmatic as the tweets he posted a year ago—a mix of self-help philosophy, market trends and aphorisms. “The truth is always unexpected”, he tweeted last May. “You asked for a lie. That’s the law, isn’t it?”

But funerals are for the living, as they say. And what the living needed, apart from a body over which a mother could grieve, was the simplest and at once most difficult affirmation. “Today”, declared Holman’s pastor, Rev. Kelvin Sauls, “we are saying that Charly Africa Keunang was a human being, and we have gathered here to celebrate his humanity and his dignity.” The Cameroonians needed to recognize an expatriot who’d got lost in silence, and to contemplate why.

The skid row people, in their angry admonition, “Wake up!”, needed to challenge the better-situated mourners and to declare, in their own words and time, “I Am a Man”. Everyone needed to believe, with Ibrahim Keita, that “there is no longer room for compromise when it comes to the question of humanity”, that killing is not just, and there is no strength in division.

It didn’t really matter if Charly was homeless or an ex-con, if he “studied physics” or “was popular with women”, as the newspapers announced, changing the script yet again upon learning his true name and gathering scraps of biography; it didn’t even matter if, as programs for the funeral proceedings put it, he was “a hard worker”, from “a normal family” who loved soccer and was determined to reclaim his life in Cameroon.

Charly Africa Keunang was a human man, who suffered, died brutally and, with the help of friends and strangers, might be buried. David Gedeon Singui called it “a community duty”, because “Call him any name you want; he was our brother.”

Donations may be made at <http://www.gofundme.com/Homeless-killed-LA>. **CP**



EMPIRE BURLESQUE

The One Who Lost the Music

BY CHRIS FLOYD

It was a run-down house in a bad neighborhood. In the front yard, a gray Chevette with a smashed grill. The porch sagged and creaked as I walked across it. The front door was unlocked. I went in.

It was not dark yet, but late in the day. The wide front room was shadowy; no furniture except a folding card table, a couple of folding chairs and a clapped-out recliner. The table was heaped with a jumble of loose papers, unopened mail, empty beer cans, a dead computer. A slight whiff of spoiled food coming from the back of the house.

I found my brother on the floor, crawling slowly across the bare wood. Although I hadn't seen him for a year, maybe two, he showed no surprise at my sudden appearance. "Do you see them?" he said, looking up briefly then returning to his intense scrutiny of the card-thin space between two floorboards. "The little red things. A line of them."

I didn't see anything. "Ants?"

"No, the little creatures, the things. They come out, then go down into the other place. I've got ... I've got to ... I can't tell what they're saying."

"They must be gone," I said.

He got up. "No, but forget it. How ya doin', boy?" He padded over in his bare feet and gave me a hug. He was a shambling mess, in baggy, stained tracksuit bottoms, baggy t-shirt over his bloated belly, his thinning hair long and greasy, his beard unkempt. But in his eyes, I could see, for a moment, a gleam of his old self.

We sat down and talked. He was as lucid as you please, catching me up on the latest disasters of his life. Fired from his third job in a year. Banned from Wal-Mart after some kind of unspecified altercation. The car wreck. The

tense encounters with Daddy, who was paying his rent and buying his groceries while hiding his true state from Mama. The guitars he had to sell. The meds.

The meds. Thirty years of them by now. It began in the service. His luck had already started turning sour in the aimless years after his ultra-hip, high-school hero days, but it took a sudden, deep plunge when his draft lottery number came up.

He rushed to join the Air Force before he was drafted and fed into meat grinder in Nam. He never saw combat; somehow he ended up working in the psych ward of a military hospital, dealing with those driven out of their minds by the war.

Day after day of bad craziness, doling out pills—and scarfing them down himself, trying to stay just this side of sane amidst the howling pain of the maimed and mad.

Never got off the pills. Never made it all the way back. He lived a dazed and stunted half-life, burying himself in conventional tropes, strangling his bohemian spirit, letting the music in his mind wither away. His sporadic attempts to break out always ended in disaster and defeat.

Then his son got killed by a drunk driver, and the brittle conventional facade fell to pieces. The unhappy marriage collapsed from dry rot. The sinecure at the post office was lost. Always the meds, legal and otherwise. He sought help at a VA hospital; they put jumper cables to his head and volted his brain. He came out more confused, flailing in a downward spiral.

Now here he was. Here we were. When he went to the kitchen for more beer, I looked at the open page of a spiral notebook on the table. Among cryptic scribbles—"She's the daughter,

not the wife She *will* be the wife Or both Closing song Allmans? New set?"—I saw this:

"Today is Thursday. It's May 24. I live in Lebanon, Tennessee. Bill Clinton is the president."

The whole set-up was depressing, but it was this that broke my heart—his struggle to hold on to reality, clinging by his fingernails to the rock, trying to keep from being swept away by the waves and lost in the thrashing depths of "the other place," where little red creatures spoke in unknown tongues and a ghost tour filled with music and romantic intrigue rolled through an alternate universe. (Which I soon learned could be entered—when certain conditions coalesced—through a damp spot on the bedroom wall.)

This was not rock bottom; that came later, living stranded in a seedy motel room, with a broken TV and an air-conditioner that couldn't be turned off, broken glasses, teeth falling out, shivering, crying, menaced by the dealers and gang-bangers who'd set up camp in the surrounding rooms.

Through tears, he said: "I've become them. Back then." The ones he'd treated in the psych ward. The ones who lost the music.

Then came a rescue of sorts. My mortally ailing father and my aunt finally got him into decent housing back in our hometown.

A new doctor—a Muslim who had somehow fetched up deep in rural Tennessee—flushed the mind-bending meds from his brain.

They had long talks, about Islam, Christianity, war, old movies. His drug-swollen body slimmed down. He was still fragile, shell-shocked, but starting to wake up, bit by bit.

One day my father got a call from my aunt: she hadn't heard from my brother for two days. My father dragged his frail frame to the nearby apartment block. He had a key; he opened the door. My brother's body was on the couch; he had died, peacefully, in his sleep.

They buried him in a military grave.

CP



DAYDREAM NATION

Fight or Flight

BY KRISTIN KOLB

My favorite painting by the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo (for whom I almost named my only child), is titled *El Sueno (Le Cama)*, or *The Dream (The Bed)*. Frida lies in her canopied bed, asleep. Vines crawl over her blanket and cover her body. A skeleton wired with explosives sleeps above her and the bed floats in clouds.

I stared at that painting a lot this past year. Frida has been an inspiration to me during my breast cancer treatment, which began in April 2014.

My disease is locally advanced to the extent that I required an intensive six months of neoadjuvant chemotherapy; followed by a double mastectomy, lymph node removal and reconstruction; removal of a parathyroid tumor; then 6 weeks of daily radiation to my chest and arm.

And now, I receive targeted therapies, Tamoxifen and Herceptin, to block estrogen, progesterone, and HER2 protein receptors in my body, which fuel my disease.

My cancer is Stage 3 and will require ongoing care. (I've learned to speak in medical jargon, and my apologies to the lay people who endured that sentence.)

Frida was a young woman who lived with a random illness, an activist, a lover, a fighter. She painted in her bed. I am a young woman with a life-threatening illness, and I have an somewhat notorious reputation as an activist, a lover, a fighter, and an occasional writer.

During chemo, I absorbed Frida's life story. I was keen during the first half of my treatment, writing in my bed, on my laptop, as she painted on her small easel.

The other night, I watched a film about her with my family. My daughter,

who is 11, responded, "She's gross. She's ill."

She's tired of sickness too.

After the daily radiation, which structured my entire life and felt reassuring—(Something is being done every day to treat the cancer!)—I became very depressed. My body was experiencing more and more side effects from treatment—chronic cough, kidney infection, dehydration, heart problems, memory loss from chemo, anxiety, fatigue, swollen arm, premature menopause, etc.

I've been in and out of ER numerous times, nuked with radioactive heart tests, and needled with IVs to the point that I stopped recognizing myself.

Mostly, I've been staring at a wild rose bush outside my bedroom window, unable to think in the chemo fog, let alone write about my experiences. It's been 5 months since my last CounterPunch piece, and I've missed it.

I've been too ashamed of being really sick, and furiously wanting my old, carefree, pre-cancer life back to write about what might help others who are struggling with a possible death sentence.

I'm not alone. It's a well-known fact that cancer patients slip into depression and, often, experience episodes of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as treatment wanes, anniversaries come and go, friends die, and side effects debilitate.

The oncologists and surgeons treat the tumors, but they don't speak at all about the emotional toll of becoming a veteran of a very private, invisible, inner war.

And rarely is their strong support at clinics for the patient's mental health.

Cancer is a private disease, but I made mine public, and the pressure to "beat" the disease is intense. I don't

want to let down my family, friends and CounterPunch readers. I want to move on as much as others want to stop hearing about it.

At 41, my friends are experiencing a very different reality: marriages, new babies, affairs, job promotions, mid-life crises of various stripes. And I'm envious. There is the urgency to live life fully and create my legacy. There is the very real possibility that I won't see my daughter grow up and go to college.

Many nights, I fled to the beach fronts of Vancouver to sit and stare at the water and scheme. Maybe build a cabin off the grid, for one, or get a van, and just leave the stress of the medical world, the guilt of being sick, and the anxious memories behind.

But I'm realistic and I'm working on coming back. Gratitude, compassion, breathing, and mindfulness help, but a will to create, to help others through writing, is more energizing and powerful for my spirit.

Every time I visit the chemo ward, I meet another person who inspires me. Last week, it was a young woman, 19 years old, fighting lymphoma, and her mother, who survived colon cancer. She was frail and sweet and witty. Her mother was feisty. I always ask, wryly, "So what are you in for?"

When I mention to other patients that I try to write about the experience of cancer, they always enthusiastically say, "Yes! And tell the real story of what it's like—not the pink-ribbon version."

I've seen that in the work of Frida Kahlo, who once said, "I don't paint dreams or nightmares, I paint my own reality."

She also said, "I was born a painter. I was born a bitch."

I've been in flight, but I am better at fighting. My oncologist wrote in her notes last month there is a 97% 5-year survival rate for women who have responded to treatment as I have. That was a good day. **CP**



GRASPING AT STRAWS

The Dust-up with China

BY MIKE WHITNEY

The Obama administration has abandoned the idea that China can be contained or integrated into the existing U.S.-led system. U.S. powerbrokers and foreign policy experts now believe that the best way to deal with China's meteoric growth and expanding regional influence is through direct military confrontation. This may explain why the dovish Chuck Hagel was replaced as Secretary of Defense with the more hawkish Ashton Carter. The Obama administration wanted someone at the Pentagon who would provoke China into either engaging the U.S. militarily or backing down and humiliating itself. This is precisely what the dust-up in the Spratly Islands is really all about. The U.S. is using an insignificant land reclamation project in a remote part of the South China Sea as a pretext to bully Beijing into acting according to Washington's diktats. China, however, has no intention of caving in to U.S. pressure; in fact, China's state-owned newspaper issued a terse warning that "war is inevitable" if Washington continues with its harassment.

The Obama administration doesn't really care that China is dredging up sand to build islands a couple hundred acres off its own coast. After all, Vietnam and Taiwan have carried out similar projects and Washington hasn't shown the slightest bit of interest. What makes China so different?

The answer to this question can be found in a recent report by the Council on Foreign Relations titled "Revising U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China." The report's authors, Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis, say that there is no real opportunity for "peaceful coexistence" or "mutual understanding" with China, since China is the U.S.'s primary strategic rival competing for hegemony

in a region that Washington sees as critical to its vital interests. This is why, according to the report, that "crucial changes" must be made "to the current policy in order to limit the dangers that China's economic and military expansion pose to U.S. interests in Asia and globally."

Blackwill and Tellis also make the case that China is not a "responsible stakeholder," which is an opaque way of saying that China refuses to accept a subordinate role in a U.S.-led system, but insists on maintaining its own sovereign independence. This, of course, poses a direct threat to the current order, which only allows for one center of power and authority: Washington.

As a result, the U.S. is beefing up its military presence in Asia, strengthening existing alliances across the region, and directly intruding into China's airspace and territorial waters. This, in essence, is Washington's new "grand strategy", a plan that essentially punishes China for succeeding within a competitive, capitalist system that is largely controlled by the United States.

The Obama administration is admitting that the only way the U.S. can maintain its hegemonic grip on Asia is through direct military action, which suggests that relations between the two nuclear-armed rivals is bound to deteriorate in the days to come.

U.S. policymakers know that the costs of such a conflict are bound to be astronomical. Even so, they have decided to move forward with their new plan. Why?

Sec-Def Carter answered that question in a recent presentation he gave at the McCain Institute at Arizona State University. In the speech, Carter said the "Asia-Pacific...was the defining region for our nation's future"...

that "half of humanity will live there by 2050" and that "more than half of the global middle class and its accompanying consumption will come from that region..." "There are already more than 525 million middle class consumers in Asia, and we expect there to be 3.2 billion in the region by 2030...President Obama and I want to ensure that... businesses can successfully compete for all these potential customers...Over the next century, no region will matter more... for American prosperity."

So, it's all about money. In other words, the driving force behind the "pivot to Asia" is commercial interests. The Obama administration is prepared to risk a Third World War to create a hospitable environment for U.S. mega-corporations to peddle their soapsuds and tennis shoes.

That's what the Spratly Islands flap is really about. The Pentagon has been enlisted to pry open markets so that multinationals can maintain a competitive edge over their rivals.

Carter even admits this when he says, "We already see countries in the region trying to carve up these markets ... forging many separate trade agreements in recent years, some based on pressure and special arrangements... Agreements that...leave us on the sidelines. That risks America's access to these growing markets. We must all decide if we are going to let that happen. If we're going to help boost our exports and our economy...and cement our influence and leadership in the fastest-growing region in the world; or if, instead, we're going to take ourselves out of the game."

Who's Carter kidding? The people were never asked if they wanted to pursue this loony "pivot" strategy or not. Nor were they asked if they wanted a war with China, which they definitely do not.

What the American people want is peace, but they'll never get it with warmongers like Carter in office. **CP**

A Short History of Economic Sanctions

War By Other Means

By David Macaray

With nuclear non-proliferation negotiations winding down between the U.S. and Iran (not to overlook the participation of Germany, France, UK, China and Russia), and with normalization of relations with Castro's Cuba becoming a reality, the topic of sanctions has been in the news lately.

Basically, sanctions are defined as economic penalties implemented either by one country (unilaterally) against one or more other countries, or by a coalition of countries (multilaterally) against one or more other countries.

They take the form of "limited" or "comprehensive" trade barriers, including embargos, blockades and boycotts. Recently, we've seen customized and narrowly focused "smart" sanctions (largely as an alternative to the clumsy and calamitous penalties imposed on Iraq), where specific individuals (via travel bans or cyber mischief) or arms suppliers are targeted.

Another form of economic sanction, one that has become increasingly effective in the Digital Age, is the placing of severe restrictions on the target's financial transactions, including freezing bank accounts or engaging in across-the-board divestment proceedings.

Sanctions can be remarkably effective (as with the mid-1980s divestiture movement aimed at apartheid South Africa), or weirdly trivial (as when the U.S. attempted to limit the availability of Hennessy cognac, Rolex watches, Wisconsin cheese and blockbuster DVDs to North Korea's dictator, Kim Jung Il), as well as everything in-between.

Because it's the federal government who's doing the implementing, and because these penalties interfere with the "free flow of commerce," sanctions tend to be less popular with the rightwing than the leftwing. Also, the dissolution of the USSR has made them far more effective, with countries no longer able to play one side against the other.

In fact, given their increased sophistication and feasibility (especially over the last quarter-century), one might say that sanctions are now to international leverage what forensic science is to criminal investigations. They've become the near-automatic, go-to procedure.

But unlike forensic science, their success ratio hasn't been anything close to impressive. Even though, admittedly, it can be difficult to accurately "quantify" a sanction's success, it has been estimated that only about one-third of all economic penalties achieve their desired goals.

Understandably, success depends on a number of vari-

ables, including well-planned, coordinated implementation. Obviously, multilateral sanctions are going to be more effective than unilateral ones (the exception being when one country has a near-monopoly on a vital commodity), and just as obviously, economic sanctions are, in almost all cases, going to be preferred over military adventurism.

On the flip-side, it's been argued that, from a purely dollars and cents standpoint, sanctions can actually "punish" the country imposing them. They not only deprive its citizens of freely purchasing consumer goods (e.g., Cuban cigars), they hurt a country's manufacturers and jobbers by forbidding them to sell their goods.

To that point, the sharp-eyed U.S. Chamber of Commerce (which would like to abolish all unions, and favors open immigration as a means of driving down wages) has estimated that the Cuban blockade continues to cost American businesses an average of \$1.2 billion a year. No one is quite sure how the Chamber arrived at that figure, but that's the amount you regularly hear mentioned.

While a \$1.2 billion hit is considerable, the U.S. government couldn't care less—not when it involves the dreaded Cuba, and not when the State Department and White House remain dead-set on nursing past grievances and pretending to address human rights violations in the Caribbean. Indeed, a reduction in retail sales (or a decline in consumer delight) isn't going to move the foreign policy needle one millimeter.

Still, when dealing with recalcitrant or criminal or "rogue" nations (or merely engaging in payback or settling a grudge), the options are limited.

Donald Fisk, of the Center for Strategic International Studies (a rightwing think tank), takes a pessimistic view. He notes, "Economic sanctions are a policy instrument with little, if any, chance of achieving much beyond making policymakers feel good about having done something for a particular domestic community."

Yet the response of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran, would seem to indicate otherwise. The Ayatollah insisted that the multinational sanctions placed upon Iran be lifted "the moment the nuclear treaty is signed." Even if, as many have alleged, the Iranian nuclear "threat" is largely an hysterical invention of the Israeli lobby, if these sanctions hadn't damaged Iran, he wouldn't have so urgently addressed them.

Typically, by imposing sanctions, a country hopes either to change another country's foreign policies (militarism, expansionism) or domestic behavior (human rights violations), or to affect regime change itself. An example of the latter was the comprehensive economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations on Iraq, from 1990 to 2003.

In Iraq's case, it was the hope of three successive U.S. administrations that by imposing harsh sanctions, Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein, would be driven from office, a policy largely predicated upon the overly optimistic belief (delu-

sion?) that there was a powerful anti-Saddam opposition force capable of pouncing at the first opportunity.

But instead of driving Saddam from office, the stringent sanctions wound up hurting the Iraqi public in ways few anticipated. While Saddam and his family, along with his coterie of sycophants and followers and military officers, continued to live off the fat of the land, Iraqi citizens suffered gravely.

And this wasn't solely Uncle Sam's blunder. In response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, coupled with concern over the proliferation of WMD, the United Nations Security Council imposed a comprehensive financial and trade embargo, a woefully misconceived policy that wound up victimizing Iraqi children in particular.

Although estimates (from UNICEF to Amnesty International to WHO) vary widely, the most consistent figures indicate that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children died directly or indirectly from the effects of the sanctions—primarily from malnutrition, untreated illnesses due to lack of medicine, and contaminated water. Imposed in 1990, the sanctions weren't lifted until 2003, coinciding with the U.S. invasion.

During the period when the Cold War still dominated the international stage, the United Nations (established in 1945) remained pretty much on the sidelines when it came to invoking sanctions. In fact, the UN Security Council issued only two official sanctions during that time—one against Rhodesia, one against South Africa.

It was only after the Cold War that the UN became noticeably energized and emboldened. Largely in response to U.S. and EU calls for action, the UN has issued sanctions against Afghanistan, Angola, Eritrea, Haiti, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, North Korea, Serbia, Somalia, Sudan, among others.

With the USSR having dissolved, in 1991, and the U.S. now recognized as the world's only "superpower," and the U.S., EU and UN all basically working off the same page, the threat of economic pressure has become the West's default position.

Sanctions go all the way back to 432 B.C., when Athens initiated economic penalties against the province of Megara. Known as the "Megarian Decree," and believed to have been devised by Pericles himself, these sanctions banned Megara from all trade and access to seaports within the Athenian Empire.

As Athens and Sparta were wary enemies, and Megara was an ally of Sparta, it has been suggested that the economic hardships and audacity of the Megarian Decree were what led to the nearly 30-year Peloponnesian War.

Although sanctions can be traced back to ancient Greece, they more or less lay dormant for many centuries to follow—partly because wide-scale international trade wasn't a reality until relatively recently, and partly because the concept of coordinated economic leverage was still in its embryonic stage.

In the late 19th century, European idealists began discuss-

ing how a "non-military" means of arbitration could be enforced, and famously, in 1919, President Wilson, in pitching his League of Nations, advocated the virtual economic ostracizing of aggressor nations.

But history has shown that putting together a "united front" is easier said than done. There are too many variables and too many temptations. League of Nations sanctions (1935-36) against Italy failed to induce Mussolini to withdraw his army from Abyssinia (Ethiopia), largely a result of Great Britain and France refusing to join in.

Opponents of sanctions take the view that not only do they usually not work, they often do more harm than good by punishing the wrong people. Instead of hurting the targeted king or dictator or military strongman, they hurt everyday citizens, as they did in Iraq.

Also, critics argue that when you cut through all the self-serving rhetoric and propaganda, these measures are little more than examples of larger, more powerful countries preying upon smaller, more vulnerable ones. As the cliché suggests, when the only tool you have is a hammer, everything is going to look like a nail.

Moreover, when it comes to sanctions, the U.S. has an undeniable history of hypocrisy and bullying. On the one hand, we seek to seize the moral high-ground by forming broad-based coalitions and gaining the support of the international community, and on the other hand, we are quick to ignore world opinion when it conflicts with our self-interests.

The mining of Haiphong harbor during the Vietnam war, and the mining of Managua harbor during the Reagan administration (Contras vs. Sandinistas) are two excellent examples.

When the ICJ (International Court of Justice, the judicial organ of the UN) condemned U.S. aggression against a sovereign nation (Nicaragua), we simply ignored them. The U.S. applauds the UN when they do our bidding, but snubs them when they differ with us (the way Israel recently snubbed the Pope when he praised the Palestinians).

And then of course, there's Cuba. The UN, which has done so much of America's bidding, has not only officially denounced the U.S. blockade of the island, it has done so every year since 1991, and has gotten overwhelming international support for that denunciation.

In fact, as recently as 2013, out of a total of 193 member states in the General Assembly, 188 of them voted to condemn U.S. policy. Laughably, the sole General Assembly member to side with the U.S. was Israel.

Conversely, proponents argue that, while economic sanctions are far from perfect, they're the only tactic available—short of military intervention—capable of altering the course of history. Indeed, it very often boils down to a choice of sitting back and doing nothing or ultimately doing the "wrong" thing.

Proponents ask: What if the world had imposed the harsh-

est possible trade embargos against Germany (including the international banking community freezing German assets), in 1939, after it invaded Poland? Would “starving” the Nazi beast have stopped Hitler in his tracks? Many argue that it would have.

Also, it should be noted that behind-the-scenes arrangements regularly occur, where sanctions are either threatened or, in fact, subtly implemented without fanfare or controversy. In other words, not every instance of economic pressure or every application of leverage is going to be publicized.

To skeptics and proponents alike, the general consensus regarding sanctions is that, to have the best chance of succeeding, three elements need to be in place: (1) multilateral (rather than unilateral) participation and coordination, (2) the existence of a dependable internal opposition to the targeted regime, and (3) a willingness to use incentives as well as sanctions.

Before we briefly examine three instances of economic sanctions—Cuba, South Africa and Japan—let us consider a domestic boycott, one that resulted in a modicum of success. This was the Coors beer boycott that began informally in 1966, launched by a Denver-based Hispanic group, and lasted, unofficially, all the way to the present day.

There were three reasons for the boycott: Coors’s open hostility to labor unions, its allegedly discriminatory hiring practices (aimed at blacks, Hispanics, women and gays), and resentment of Joseph Coors himself, a lunatic-fringe rightwing activist and donor. The boycott became “official” in 1977, when the AFL-CIO called for a nation-wide boycott.

By most accounts, the tactic was fairly effective. Actor Paul Newman received national publicity for renouncing Coors in favor of union-affiliated Budweiser, and California beer drinkers showed admirable discipline in their shunning of Coors. California sales dropped from a high of 40-percent in 1977 to 14-percent in 1984.

Although Coors and the AFL-CIO reached an agreement in 1987 (the result of some extremely generalized but high-minded principles being agreed upon), there are still many places—union halls, college campuses, blue-collar bars, gay bars—where Coors continues to be boycotted.

The harsh trade and travel embargo aimed at overthrowing Castro and turning Cuba into a democracy marked its 50th anniversary on February 7, 2012. This sorry fact should, in and of itself, elicit both hilarity and embarrassment. To stubbornly adhere to a failed policy for more than half a century is either a monument to perseverance or a case study in stupidity.

The Cuban blockade is reminiscent of the Guantanamo mindset where “suspected” jihadists were water-boarded as many as 200 times. While the previous 199 sessions weren’t enough to get them to crack, confidence was high that the next one would do the trick. Absurd and cruel beyond words.

For fairness sake, let’s take a look at the reasons for initially

imposing the “Castro embargo.” Arguably, it was a combination of his decision to nationalize about \$1 billion of foreign-owned businesses, and his becoming a Communist (or “Marxist” or “state socialist”) during the peak of the Cold War, aligning himself with the USSR during that paranoid period, and thus theoretically having the capacity to launch a nuclear attack on the U.S.

Again, the whole idea behind the blockade was that it would weaken Fidel to the point where citizens would revolt, and the “loyal opposition” (the anti-Batista, anti-Castro crowd) would rise up and overthrow the government. Clearly, with the Bay of Pigs fiasco serving as Exhibit A, that idea turned out to be no more than a CIA wet dream.

Nevertheless, those who continued to support the embargo even after the USSR bowed out, used “human rights violations” as their rallying cry. While Cubans enjoyed excellent medical treatment, it wasn’t a particularly fun place to live if you happened to be an intellectual, journalist, labor leader or homosexual.

Anti-Fidelistas argue that there is no free press in Cuba, that the jails are filled with political prisoners (dissidents), that trade unions are illegal, and that homosexuality, at least through the 1980s, was vilified.

As for gay rights, that’s something of a phony argument. Because the 1980s weren’t exactly an enlightened period in the U.S. or Europe (or anywhere else for that matter), Cuban antipathy to gays can’t be pinned on Fidel Castro. Homophobia in Cuba, like most other places, is a cultural phenomenon.

Further, proponents of the embargo note that, even with the blockade still “officially” in place, the U.S. is today, and has been since 2001, Cuba’s biggest supplier of food. It’s true. You can look it up.

Despite the blockade, U.S. farmers continue to profit under the radar by selling hundreds of millions of dollars a year in agricultural products to feed Cuba’s 11.2 million people (a population a bit smaller than Ohio and a bit larger than Georgia). The hypocrisy is enough to make your eyes water.

With travel restrictions lessened, and the U.S. already acting as Cuba’s agricultural “benefactor,” proponents insist that, if for no other reason than pressuring Brother Raul to improve its human rights record, we should maintain the embargo. And of course, those Cuban-Americans living in Miami Beach ain’t going to forget the \$1 billion in “stolen” assets.

Still, the fact remains that not only has the embargo failed utterly, Cuba no longer poses any “threat.” The world has moved on. Moscow has gone Hollywood; “Communist” China has hundreds of Wal-Mart stores (Sorry, Mao); Vietnam now has its own stock market; the iconoclastic Bob Dylan has performed in Las Vegas lounges. It’s a different world.

But again, and most importantly: The blockade has failed. Whatever its intended purpose, it has failed. By clinging to

the embargo, we Yanks not only look hypocritical and silly, we appear mean-spirited and vindictive. You want to improve U.S. relations with Latin America in ways we never dreamed possible? Put a Major League baseball team in Mexico City.

If the Cuba trade embargo stands as the archetype of sanctions not working, the anti-apartheid South Africa boycott stands as the archetype of what sanctions can do when well-coordinated and multilaterally applied. More importantly, it

tion.

Harold Wilson, the Labour Party leader, said publicly (in 1964), that his Party was “not in favour of trade sanctions partly because, even if fully effective, they would harm the people we are most concerned about—the Africans and those White South Africans who are having to maintain some standard of decency there.”

Having made little headway and looking for a new ap-



ANTI-APARTHEID RALLY AT SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY, 1984. PHOTO: AFRICAN ACTIVIST ARCHIVE.

represents an example of what they can do when they gain momentum.

As previously noted, the majority of economic sanctions, for whatever reasons, aren't successful. The anti-apartheid divestiture movement was an exception. The term “apartheid” applies to a system of racial segregation in South Africa that was created and administered by the National Party, from 1948 to 1994. Basically, it was an arrangement where the white minority dominated the black majority.

The South African divestment movement was first proposed in the 1960s but wasn't implemented on a sufficiently large scale until the mid-1980s. It took that long for the movement to draw attention to itself, to gain confidence and, ultimately, to wield enormous influence.

As far back as 1962, the United Nations General Assembly passed a “non-binding” resolution (Resolution 1761) that established an anti-apartheid committee (The UN Special Committee Against Apartheid), whose goal was to impose economic sanctions on South Africa's apartheid government. Alas, the UN's call for a boycott was opposed by Western Europe and the U.S., with Great Britain leading the opposi-

proach, in 1977, the AAM (Anti-Apartheid Movement) began appealing to faith-based institutional investors' sense of “corporate social responsibility.” This eventually resulted in the formation of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, a high-minded lobbying group. An African-American clergyman and theologian, Dr. Leon Sullivan, led the charge.

In addition to being a pastor in Philadelphia, Dr. Sullivan happened to sit on the board of directors of General Motors, which, at the time, was the largest employer of blacks in South Africa. At his urging, GM adopted a policy that called for comprehensive racial integration and equality. The provisions of this policy eventually became known as the “Sullivan Principles.”

Using this “corporate” approach, the anti-apartheid movement quickly gained traction. The AAM not only lobbied for institutional divestment from any South African-based companies, but divestment from any company anywhere in the world that hadn't adopted the Sullivan Principles. By appealing to economics rather than “morality,” the AAM had hit upon a brilliant tactic.

The movement reached critical mass in the mid to late-1980s, largely the result of grassroots activism in the U.S. and Europe—specifically the activism of students on U.S. college campuses, with UC Berkeley leading the way. As the result of these student protests and demonstrations, billions of dollars in university investments were eventually removed from South Africa. The writing was on the wall.

In 1986, the U.S. Congress presented Ronald Reagan with the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, a bill introduced by progressive Berkeley congressman Ron Dellums. Although President Reagan vetoed the bill, the anti-apartheid movement was already too powerful to ignore. In a remarkable show of strength, the Republican-controlled Senate overrode Reagan's veto.

The Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 proved to be a landmark. It banned future investments in South Africa, limited bank loans, prohibited direct sales to the police force and military, and put an end to the import of South African agricultural products, along with steel, iron, uranium and textiles.

Then, in 1988, a wildly ambitious and far harsher sanctions bill was passed by the House of Representatives, calling not only for American companies to leave South Africa, but for U.S. citizens to be forced to sell any investments they had in the country. Along with these stringent provisos, it also called for the cessation of most U.S. trade with South Africa.

Although this incendiary bill never became a law (it failed to pass the Senate), a clear message had been sent—namely, that unless South Africa abolished apartheid, more of these stringent measures were in the pipeline, ready to be voted upon. By 1994, when South Africa officially abolished apartheid, billions of precious dollars had left the country, and the divestiture movement had succeeded.

One doesn't have to be a loony conspiracy buff (e.g., insisting the moon landing was a hoax, Elvis is still alive, etc.) to believe that the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, in 1941, precipitating America's entry into WWII, was not entirely unexpected by the U.S. government. In fact, you'd have to be something of a Pollyanna not to see how this "sneak attack" made utter sense.

The basic facts are these: In the 1930s, Japan was going through an expansionist period of its history, intent on extending its empire to include China and French colonial Indochina. Its brutal 1937 attack on Nanking, China (which became known as the "Nanking Massacre" or "Rape of Nanking"), announced to the world that the Japanese Imperial Army was prepared to take whatever steps necessary to achieve Asian hegemony.

Unlike the U.S., which was blessed with rich fossil fuel resources (coal, oil, natural gas) and any number of valuable and versatile ores, Japan was almost the exact opposite. Other than copper, it was a stunningly resource-poor country. In truth, Japan was virtually dependent on trade to sustain both

its industrial base and ambitious military operation.

The U.S. and its allies feared that in its quest for additional natural resources, Japan's plan was to conquer not only China and Indochina, but Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, as well, seeing these countries as sources of vital raw materials, not least of which was rubber.

In an attempt to curb Japan's aggression and force them to leave China, the West eventually initiated some austere economic sanctions, including (on July 26, 1941) the freezing of all Japanese assets in the U.S., and (a week later) cutting off Japanese access to British, Dutch and American commercial oil.

With limited reserves of petroleum—and oil being absolutely necessary to its survival—Japan instantly realized that the only way to save itself, much less to continue its domination of China, was to break the embargo.

And the only obvious way of doing that was to wage war on the U.S. Do it immediately, do it swiftly, do it when the U.S. least expected it, do it where the attack would have maximum effect, and do it while Japan still had the resources to mount a winning offensive.

While this is a gross oversimplification of events that led to the war in the Pacific, it does provide insight into Japan's sense of the inevitability of a military response.

The U.S. and its allies believed the oil embargo would convince Japan to end its ambitions in China and Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, that wasn't the outcome. With no thoughts whatever of withdrawing from China, Japan interpreted the embargo as a clear provocation, and acted accordingly.

Whether it was Western arrogance, a case of high stakes gamesmanship backfiring, or simply a woeful cross-cultural misunderstanding, the Japanese oil embargo will be remembered as one of the greatest miscalculations in history.

Consider the irony implicit in the oil embargo: Severe sanctions were imposed in the hope of stopping a limited war (Japan vs. China). Instead, these economic penalties resulted in launching war in the Pacific.

So what conclusions can one draw? The unsatisfying answer seems to be that sanctions may work some of the time but not all the time, and may not work in the ways expected. Moreover, when sanctions don't work, they can backfire, causing harmful results.

Thus, defending the policy becomes a matter of subjective selection. People who advocate sanctions will point to South Africa as an example of their success, and people who oppose them will point to Cuba and Japan (and Iraq) as testimony to failure. From either perspective, history favors extreme caution. **CP**

DAVID MACARAY is a playwright and author.

Galeano and the American Left

Utopia is on the Horizon

By Daniel Edwards

“Utopia is on the horizon. I move two steps closer; it moves two steps further away. I walk another ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps further away. As much as I may walk, I’ll never reach it. So what’s the point of utopia? The point is this: to keep walking.” - Eduardo Galeano.

The incomparable Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano came into this world, and departed it, in his beloved Montevideo. But in the 74 years that separated those two events, the writer, poet and reluctant historian became a citizen of the entire continent. “I am a writer who wants to help rescue the memories snatched from all America, but above all from Latin America, that scorned, dear land,” he once said. After a long battle with lung cancer, he died in April of this year and was mourned the world over. It was a fitting tribute to a man who never stopped fighting for Latin American unity and independence.

It is easy to overlook Uruguay on a map of South America. It is a compact, sparsely populated corner of the region, sandwiched on all sides by the vast expanses of Brazil, Argentina, and the Atlantic Ocean. But the sleepy streets of Montevideo, a short jump across the Río de la Plata from Buenos Aires, are the gateway to a passionate artistic and literary scene which has spawned some of the continent’s greatest minds. It was there, on September 3rd 1940, that Eduardo Germán María Hughes Galeano was born.

Galeano arrived on the cusp of change in the world order. The British Empire, on which the sun never set, was reeling from Adolf Hitler’s blitzkrieg and would soon reach out to the Soviet Union and to the nascent superpower of the United States for salvation. Winston Churchill’s “few” would survive that bloody test, but at a price: Britain’s hegemony, exhausted by war and debt, gave way to that of its powerful cousin across the Atlantic Ocean. So began the new battle for global supremacy that would rumble on between the hammer and sickle and the stars and stripes. Its repercussions would be felt in the politics and society of almost every country across the planet, and perhaps nowhere as markedly as in Latin America.

Galeano enjoyed the privileged upbringing and early rebelliousness shared by so many of those who would later become committed revolutionaries. Like Ernesto ‘Ché’ Guevara over the border in Argentina and the Castro brothers, Fidel and Raúl, in Cuba, he belonged to a generation which found its calling early and was not afraid to carry its beliefs through to

the end. However, rioplatense blood runs deep, and like most young boys in Montevideo, Galeano’s first dream was to be a soccer player. “I played in midfield and it always went badly because I was a terrible player. The ball and I never reached an understanding. It was a case of unrequited love,” he confessed. Fortunately for the history of Latin American letters, he abandoned sports and dedicated himself to pen and paper.

The Uruguayan worked in his formative years as a factory worker, bank teller, messenger boy, painter and cartoonist. His first journalistic breakthrough came at the tender age of 14 when he published a cartoon in the Socialist Party mouthpiece, *Sol*. Later, at just 20 years of age, the budding writer edited the prestigious *Marcha* magazine, where he worked alongside such luminaries as Nobel Prize-winner Mario Vargas Llosa and his compatriot Mario Benedetti, a poet of rare talent. But it was the angry, petulant history of exploitation and degradation called *The Open Veins of Latin America* which propelled Galeano to the world’s consciousness.

Compared to what would come later from his pen, this was a less refined, stream of consciousness work. Galeano himself would admit decades later that in the intervening years, he would look back on the book that made him an iconic figure and feel a certain embarrassment at the great success it had brought him. “I would not be able to read it again,” he confessed in 2014. Yet the fact that in terms of experience and knowledge, the Uruguayan was still to hit his literary peak takes away absolutely nothing from this point-by-point denunciation of the power systems stretching from the Río Grande to Tierra del Fuego.

The book chronicles the historical exploitation that has dogged the Latin American world from the moment Christopher Columbus first hit dry land in 1492. For the author, an entire continent’s wealth and vitality was siphoned out through its “open veins” while its people suffered and starved.

“The human murder by poverty in Latin America is secret; every year, without making a sound, three Hiroshima bombs explode over communities that have become accustomed to suffering with clenched teeth. This systematic violence is not apparent but is real and constantly increasing: its holocausts are not made known in the sensational press but in Food and Agricultural Organization statistics,” Galeano fires, laying bare the human tragedy of what was happening in his own backyard. Every example of looting and exploitation is documented and exposed: first by the great Spanish Empire, then by British traders, and finally by the United States juggernaut, backed by United Fruit and other subsidiary arms of the CIA. Galeano argues that there is a perfect continuity from one form of oppression to another:

Subordinated to foreign needs, and often financed from abroad, the colonial plantation evolved directly into the present-day latifundio, one of the bottlenecks that choke economic development and condemn the

masses to poverty and a marginal existence in Latin America today. The latifundio as we know it has been sufficiently mechanized to multiply the labor surplus, and thus enjoys an ample reserve of cheap hands. It no longer depends on the importation of African slaves or on the encomienda of Indians; it merely needs to pay ridiculously low or in-kind wages, or to obtain labor for nothing in return for the laborer's use of a minute piece of land.

A superficial reading of the book is all too easy. In some circles, the simplistic interpretation goes like this: America, bad; Latins suffering under the yoke of imperialism; a typical incitement to burn the stars and stripes, the political science thesis of any idealistic young person. But to fall into this trap is to misunderstand the essence of what Galeano was trying to say. The author makes it abundantly clear that, while foreign business concerns create a relationship of dependency and underdevelopment which hurts the people of the continent, there is another accomplice just as self-interested and just as willing to ignore mass suffering—the rural landowners, and an urban middle class which has sprung up over the last century.

Galeano quotes a piece of graffiti on the wall of an upscale neighbourhood in Bolivia's La Paz: "End Poverty: Kill a beggar". That scrawl lays bare the attitude of those for whom the peasants toiling in the fields or mines might as well belong to a different country. In previous times, it was the latifundistas of the Argentine pampa and the metropolitan elite who traded with Great Britain and filled their homes with Wedgewood china, Steinway pianos, and other luxury-import goods. Now, as in the years when *Open Veins* was published, it is the city-dwelling middle classes who look the other way on poverty and inequality in return for affordable consumer goods imported from the United States and Asia. This was something that the author felt keenly and lamented throughout his life, as this wrenching passage on the inequities caused by the Venezuelan oil industry demonstrates:

Seventy percent of the country lives a totally marginal existence. In the cities an unconcerned, well-paid middle class stuffs itself with useless objects and makes a strident cult of imbecility and bad taste. The govern-

ment recently announced with great fanfare that it had exterminated illiteracy. Sequel: in the recent electoral fiesta, registration lists showed a million illiterates between eighteen and fifty years of age.

Some forty years later there was a new, more just government in Caracas' opulent Miraflores palace: that of Hugo Chávez. While millions were raised out of poverty, taught to read and included in nation-building for perhaps the first time in the country's history, the affluent classes again became mobilised in politics after years of apathy because the man in charge represented a perceived 'threat' to their exclusive interests.



EDUARDO GALEANO AND HUGO CHAVEZ. PHOTO: AFP

"A strange dictator, that Hugo Chávez," the Uruguayan wrote in an essay after the president had been returned to power in 2004 with a recall vote of 60 percent in

favour, "Masochistic and suicidal: he created a constitution that allows the people to throw him out...Until just yesterday, in the petrol Paradise of Saudi Venezuela, the census officially recognised one and a half million illiterates and there were five million undocumented Venezuelans without civic rights. These and many more invisible people are not prepared to go back to Nobodyland, which is the country that the nobodies inhabit."

That middle class which Galeano accuses of "watching Tom & Jerry films" while Chávez got out of prison and into the presidency were aided and abetted by the private media. This is the same private media that constantly screams "Freedom of speech", that played an integral part in the attempted coup of 2002, that aimed to erase Chávez and his movement from the map. Unlike similar attempts that have stained South American history over the centuries, and Galeano had first-hand experience with them, this reactionary plot was not successful. El Comandante would famously gift his United States counterpart Barack Obama a copy of the Uruguayan's most famous tome during a state visit in 2009. It was a clear signal that this Latin American president would not tolerate a return to the power structures of old.

Galeano's unapologetic exaltation of Chávez, and earlier,

of the Castro administration in Cuba, reveals his solution to historical imbalance: nationalist, socialist government, commanded by a charismatic leader. This willingness to forgive authoritarian figures for their excesses has been called a weakness of the writer. Ex-Buenos Aires governor José Manuel De Rosas, Paraguay's infamous former president Francisco Solano López and the Castros themselves in Cuba, have all seen their less-than-impeccable democratic credentials whitewashed and their contributions to national self-sufficiency exalted. Galeano had remained a lifelong sceptic of the legitimacy of much of the so-called 'democracy' that was introduced in Latin America: "It doesn't bother anyone very much that politics be democratic, so long as the economy is not," he fired in the later *Book of Embraces*. The Uruguayan defended those whom he believed represented the ideals of Latin American self-determination and independence. He was an early supporter of that iconic revolutionary Ché Guevara, whom he met on more than one occasion. Years later, Galeano told how he had jokingly criticised the Argentine for playing that Cuban obsession, baseball, instead of the soccer that was favoured further south. "You are the first person to call me a traitor who has lived to tell the tale," Ché replied. Galeano was an unstinting defender of Guevara and published a grisly account of his death in Bolivia in *Memories of Fire*. Later, he would explain just why the revolutionary was such an important figure: "He committed a mortal sin. He did what he said, and he said what he thought. That is unforgivable. In Latin America, words and action never find each other."

Reading back through *Open Veins*, one is also struck by the tragedy of optimism. The author speaks of the democratic socialist regime of Salvador Allende in Chile, which had nationalised the country's enormous copper reserves and stood up to the world trade system which had kept the nation backward, with true respect.

"Nationalization will put an end to a state of affairs that had become intolerable for Chile, and prevent the repetition in copper of plunder and descent into the abyss of the nitrate cycle", he predicts, while recognizing U.S. pressures on a man whom he describes as "president by every precept of representative democracy preached by Washington."

In just a matter of months after the book hit the shelves, Allende had killed himself in Santiago's presidential palace and the murderous junta led by General Augusto Pinochet and backed by the U.S. and the neoliberal 'Chicago Boys' had taken power. Uruguay would also fall, leading Galeano into exile in Argentina. He was there a matter of months before the arrival of another military dictatorship which would one day leave behind it a country on the edge of economic oblivion and the shameful legacy of some 30,000 'disappeared' militants, unionists and activists. Galeano fled Argentina in 1976, this time for Spain.

"The three southern countries are today a festering sore

upon the globe, chronic bad news. Torture, kidnapping, murder, and exile have become the daily round. These dictatorships are tumours to be extirpated from healthy organs—or are they the pus that betrays the infection of the system?" he asked in a revision to the original text of *Open Veins*, written after hope had been crushed under the military jackboot. As well as ripping him away from his homeland, military leaders in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay also hit at Galeano's artistic soul. One of the countless acts of repression was to ban *Open Veins*, marking it as a subversive text. In a novelised account of the terror of the 'Dirty War', *Days and Nights of Love and War*, Galeano describes in gut-wrenching detail a fishing trip on the Paraná delta with fellow author Haroldo Conti, followed immediately by his disappearance at the hands of military authorities:

It is a week today that they took him from his home. They blindfolded him, beat him and took him away. They had guns with silencers. They left the house empty. They stole everything, even the blankets. The newspapers did not publish a single word about the kidnapping of one of the greatest Argentine novelists... Marta was at home when it happened. She was also blindfolded. She was allowed to say goodbye and she was left with the taste of blood on her lips.

In the poetic, beautiful *Book of Embraces*, Galeano laments the seeming insensitivity and lack of compassion in the region which allowed such barbaric events to take place: "The system feeds neither the body nor the heart. Many are condemned to starve for lack of bread and many more for lack of embraces," he writes. Elsewhere he notes, "In the River Plate basin we call the heart a 'bobo,' a fool. And not because it falls in love. We call it a fool because it works so hard."

During that painful exile he wrote what is arguably his finest work, *Memories of Fire*. Once more showing an almost petulant disregard for literary structure, Galeano composed a three-volume masterpiece that aimed to chart the history of Latin America, beginning with indigenous folk tales that tell how the world, the stars, the animals and everything else came into being. Slowly but surely we enter the age of the Conquistadors, the end of the ages for those ancient civilisations. A passage describing the final overthrow of the Inca Empire and its ruler by the bloodthirsty Francisco Pizarro serves as a prelude for the suffering we would see repeated 400 years later in the author's most famous work:

Atahualpa is tied by his hands, feet and throat, but he still thinks: 'What have I done to deserve death? At the foot of the stake, he refuses to believe that he has been defeated by men. Only the gods could do that. His father, the sun, has betrayed him. Before the iron tourniquet breaks his neck, he cries, kisses and cross and allows himself to be baptised with another name. Saying his name is Francisco, the name of the man who

defeated him, he knocks on the door of the Europeans' Paradise, where there is no place reserved for him.

The link between that first cruel intrusion into Latin American life and the crimes that were being committed across the continent by an array of dictatorships and military juntas is palpable. It is clear that for the author the disappearances and murders of the 1970s had a clear historical precedent.

Galeano finally returned to his native Uruguay in 1985. He later joined the Pro-National Referendum Committee, dedicated to overturning a post-dictatorship law which forbade legal action against former military leaders for past crimes. There was also a literary reunion with Benedetti and other former contributors to *Marcha*, which was shut down during military rule. The new weekly publication, *Brecha*, still goes out today and Galeano served on its editorial board right up until his death. In a twist of fate worthy of fiction, he lived long enough to see José 'Pepe' Mujica, a former guerrilla leader and leftist activist who was imprisoned during the dictatorship, ascend to the presidency in 2009. "He is the president who most closely resembles, of all those we have had over the years, who we really are at the deepest roots of our national identity," Galeano told the world at Mujica's inauguration, adding that a new age "blessed by the enthusiasm and feverish hope of the people has been born." Mujica himself accompanied the widow Laura to the writer's wake, giving a moving tribute in which he highlighted his friend as "a seeker of hidden truths who trotted across the most cursed of America, the part which you do not read about in books."

Even as he fought against the ravaging effects of cancer, Galeano refused to give up his worldwide mission for justice. In 2011 he camped out alongside thousands of angry youth in the Spanish capital Madrid to show his solidarity with the Indignados (Indignant) movement, stating that the protests "show that life is worth living".

"The world is divided between the indignant, and the undignified, and soon everybody will know on which side they can be or want to be on," he fired. Even in his twilight years, he was a tireless militant with an almost unequalled flair for words.

The line between author and militant is a dangerous tight-rope to walk for any writer. Veering too far towards the former can result in great prose, but shorn of its revolutionary message, it becomes empty and frivolous: writing that is destined to be consumed and then forgotten. Equally, raw anger spewed onto the page may catch the eye, but without intellectual and creative weight to support it, the words end up holding the same meaning as a message spray-painted on a decaying city wall: powerful but ephemeral, soon to be washed over, consigned to the past. It requires great balance and maturity to keep the indignation without losing the artistic soul. Galeano held this principle until the very end.

Perhaps the greatest gift an author can leave us is that of

strength of conviction, of belief. The belief that a revolutionary is useless unless he or she leaves the comfort of the desk and the typewriter and goes out to experience a world that for so many compatriots is made of endless toil and struggle. This Galeano did: as well as camping out with the Indignados, and meeting guerrilla fighters in the most difficult of conditions, he was a tireless documenter of the most forgotten corners of Latin America. Isabel Allende, the Chilean author and distant cousin of Salvador Allende, put it best in her foreword to the later edition of *Open Veins*, describing Galeano's willingness to live in the face of what he so passionately denounced:

He has walked up and down Latin America listening to the voices of the poor and the oppressed, as well as those of the leaders and the intellectuals. He has lived with Indians, peasants, guerrillas, soldiers, artists, and outlaws; he has talked to presidents, tyrants, martyrs, priests, heroes, bandits, desperate mothers, and patient prostitutes. He has been bitten by snakes, suffered tropical fevers, walked in the jungle, and survived a massive heart attack; he has been persecuted by repressive regimes as well as by fanatical terrorists. He has opposed military dictatorships and all forms of brutality and exploitation, taking unthinkable risks in defence of human rights. He has more first-hand knowledge of Latin America than anybody else I can think of and he uses it to tell the world of the dreams and disillusion, the hopes and the failures of its people.

The Uruguayan's message of justice, rebellion, love and, above all, never-ending *lucha* (struggle) struck a chord with an entire continent. Revolutionaries from Guevara to Chávez, from the indignados to Bolivian president Evo Morales swarmed to Galeano's side, drinking in his words and following his ideas like moths drawn to a flame. The angry young tyro whose fury spilled onto the pages of *The Open Veins of Latin America* with such energy and disorderly vigour eventually matured into one of the most poetic voices of the 20th century. But he never lost his idealism, his sense that Latin America deserved something greater than the hand dealt it by both foreign and homegrown elites. It is perhaps fitting that finally, in the twilight of his extraordinary life, in Venezuela, and in that Bolivia which in *Open Veins* sought to "Fight Poverty" by killing a beggar, social change had finally begun to manifest itself, giving those at the bottom a say in how they wish to lead their lives.

This legacy, and the explosion of left-leaning governments at the beginning of the 21st century, is a worthy tribute to a man who never stopped fighting for change. With the passing of Eduardo Galeano, the Latin American left has lost its most eloquent spokesman. His words live on as homage, but also as exhortation, to keep fighting in the struggle for equality in one of the most divided and unequal corners of the world. **CP**

DANIEL EDWARDS is a journalist living in Buenos Aires.

The Cruel, Dirty World of Corporate Outsourcing Free-Range Capitalism

By Stan Cox

With a battle raging in Washington over the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal, the publication of Erik Loomis's *Out of Sight: The Long and Disturbing Story of Corporations Outsourcing Catastrophe* could not be more timely. His book shows why the unfettered mobility of capital advances the frontiers of human exploitation and the destruction of nature without doing anything to curb either. The TPP, like other such gifts to Big Business, will only accelerate that exploitation and destruction.

The air and water in America's big cities is, on average, cleaner than it was in the 1970s, and overall, workplaces are less hazardous. But Loomis, a historian at the University of Rhode Island, argues that a significant part of that improvement was accomplished because companies are outsourcing their dirtiest, most dangerous inputs, production, wastes, and jobs to other countries.

In a parallel process, companies routinely outsource environmental and workplace hazard within U.S. borders. Despite more than three decades of resistance by the environmental justice movement, companies continue to locate dirty production facilities, polluting activities, and wastes in predominantly nonwhite, low-income communities, where they can safely be ignored by media and policymakers.

The free-trade regime of recent decades has provided big business with a powerful weapon to use against American workers and communities. One of the most common ploys to resist environmental regulation is what Loomis calls "job blackmail." As a result, starting in the 1980s, "Corporate mobility cleaved unions from environmentalists" and "Companies began playing states off one another in a national race to the bottom." NAFTA boosted that race, and the TPP promises more of the same.

Out of Sight's world tour of corporate outsourcing and its outrageous consequences is inhabited by both familiar and less visible villains. It's well known that Walmart, Gap, and other retailers have been found habitually importing and selling goods produced by foreign workers for starvation wages under terrible working conditions. But there are many other, sometimes surprising, bad guys involved. Loomis points out:

The U.S. Marine Corps contracts its shirt production with DK Knitwear in Bangladesh. A 2010 report showed that one-third of DK workers were children,

mostly young girls, and that the plant had no fire alarms despite previous fires in the facility. Women at Zongtex Garment manufacturing in Cambodia soiled themselves at machines making clothes for the U.S. Army and Air Force . . . Like the rest of the apparel industry, the government relies on subcontractors, pays no attention to the working conditions in plants, and pushes for the cheapest price regardless of the social cost.

Loomis retraces the history of the 1990s, when a coalition of students and organized textile workers in the United States made progress in pushing some companies, most prominently Nike and Reebok, to insist on better treatment of the sweatshop workers who made their products. However, "the concerns of American activists strayed from sweatshop labor in the aftermath of 9/11 and the Iraq war," and many companies "returned to their exploitative ways." He cites the case of Kimi, a company in Honduras making clothing for export that was forced by international pressure to recognize its workers' union. Kimi responded by simply moving its operations to Guatemala; in doing so, the company faced little or no resistance from Gap, for which it was a contractor.

A 1997 U.S. trade pact with Cambodia was an improvement over most such deals. In it, labor groups and members of Congress forced the Clinton administration to include a solid range of rights for Cambodian workers. With workplaces being inspected by the International Labor Organization, treatment and payment of apparel workers improved dramatically, and union membership increased. But when the U.S.-Cambodia pact terminated in 2005, all of those hard-won gains disappeared.

It took another impossible-to-ignore disaster to get the outsourcing of danger and pollution back on the political agenda. The present-day parallel to the notorious 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York City occurred in Savar, Bangladesh, where in 2013, the huge Rana Plaza textile factory collapsed. The 2,500 workers who were injured and the 1,134 who died could have been spared, had the factory owners or the Western companies to which they shipped their products responded to earlier repeated warnings about the building's dilapidated structure and the horrible working conditions within it.

In the aftermath of the Rana Plaza tragedy, Loomis notes, European companies joined in an agreement to invest in and enforce factory safety in Bangladesh. American companies, however, declined to participate. Gap's chief executive explained that his shareholders would be hurt by an agreement that exposed the company to "legal liability and risk."

Much controversy has surrounded international trade in meat, fresh produce, and cut flowers, but in *Out of Sight*, we learn that production of all kinds of processed foods--Kellogg's cereals, gummy bears, Jolly Ranchers--has been outsourced, with the usual grim consequences. Some compa-

nies have even figured out how to outsource production to foreign workers within U.S. borders. After sending much of its candy production overseas, Hershey kept a Pennsylvania plant open for public relations reasons; however, the plant employed cheap imported workers. Some of them thought they were being brought to America to be exchange students but found themselves toiling in a chocolate factory, threatened with deportation if they demanded their rights. In this case, the workers took that risk and resisted, exposing Hershey and getting some of their back pay.

Worldwide, some of the worst abuses occur in the seafood processing industry. Loomis cites a case in which Walmart's relentless pressure to keep prices low resulted in a Mexican seafood supplier enforcing work shifts as long as 24 hours, underpaying workers while locking them in the plant, committing psychological abuse, and threatening workers' families. A representative of the Workers' Rights Consortium called it "one of the most egregious workplaces we've examined." Under pressure of bad publicity, Walmart eventually suspended the contract.

Even pollution-producing power generation can be outsourced. Since California's 2001 energy crisis, companies have been locating power plants just across the border in Mexico, where, free of U.S. clean air laws, they can pollute freely. In Mexico, natural gas liquefaction facilities can legally be located near population centers, and they are.

Loomis also exposes the nasty underbelly of the recycling business, in which vast quantities of often toxic or hazardous "recycled" trash is dumped into the hands of poor nations in Asia and Latin America. And he expects this dirty trade to increase with passage of the TPP. Already, when foreign governments decide enough is enough and try to regulate or bar U.S. companies that are causing environmental damage, they expose themselves to being sued in U.S. courts. And the 1989 Basel Convention to regulate trade in hazardous wastes was severely weakened from the start by the U.S. refusal to ratify it.

But outsourcing can boomerang. Production for export to the United States and other affluent countries accounts for a significant share of the terrible air pollution that the people of China have to endure. Now, Loomis points out, we're seeing that some of the pollution we avoided through outsourcing is following prevailing winds across the Pacific, along routes taken by the container ships that bring those Chinese imports. He writes, "Although Los Angeles has done much to improve its smog in recent decades, Chinese air pollution is again making LA air unhealthy...12 to 24 percent of sulfates in the American West come from drifting air pollution from Chinese production for the export market."

While applauding local food movements, Loomis warns that if they stay too narrowly focused on production and consumption of food, their impact also will stay localized, because "food movements also need to be justice movements

and connect to bigger issues—food justice, worker justice, and animal justice are interconnected. If we are serious in thinking about a democratic food system, we have to support good working conditions throughout the food industry. It means we have to support farmworkers and meatpackers' unions. We have to end the tipped minimum wage and demand greater funding for OSHA and FDA to inspect our food factories."

Loomis advises students, "You might want organic peanut butter in your college dining hall, but you can also demand that the peanuts are grown on a farm that treats workers fairly. Also, are the dining hall workers, janitors, and dormitory workers treated well?" He repeatedly stresses the importance of the recently launched fast-food workers' \$15 minimum-wage campaign as a crucial political event.

Out of Sight shows that the global exploitation of working people and the ecosphere must be engaged directly. At the same time, Loomis is no fan of boycotts: "Opting out of the global production system does nothing for workers. It only makes us feel good about ourselves." What's required is a massive shift of power from owners and managers toward workers in every country, along with international standards that follow corporations "wherever they go."

Because "it is impossible to create a just society in a world of unrestrained capital mobility,"

he recommends, "Workers should have the right to sue their employers or the companies contracting with their employers regardless of where the site of production is located," and without being fired. "This is the only way to ensure that workers in the United States and the developing world can prevent catastrophes. Otherwise, with the incentives of the global race to the bottom, the companies will just keep moving."

Loomis urges activists and citizens to "force the government to act for the benefit of people rather than corporations." Governments' ability to regulate the international economy may have been severely weakened by trade agreements, but, he argues, "the vast majority of victorious struggles in U.S. history have been won only after they forced the government to codify their demands into law." Because the two major parties' stranglehold on the system has killed off past third-party movements, Loomis believes that there is only one effective political tool for achieving the necessary changes: "taking over the Democratic Party."

Now there is plenty of good reason to believe that prospects for effecting radical change within the Democratic Party are vanishingly dim; however, Loomis believes it can be done, pointing out that at the other end of the political spectrum, in the Republican Party, "conservatives have shown it is doable."

Whether sweeping political and legal changes are achieved through the Democratic Party or in spite of it, they are not going to be achieved by polite petitioning of the courts and Congress. Loomis writes, "Mass movements are a great thing.

We need people marching in the street against corporate exploitation. We need outrage leading to consumers demanding concrete change...But giving workers the power to demand the changes they need to live dignified lives is the only way to ensure the actions we as activists take are permanent.”

In this culture of hard-sell pharmaceutical commercials, digital miracles, and TED talks, expectations are always high that anyone discussing a serious problem will also reveal a single brilliant solution. As a result, any book on a social, economic, political, and/or environmental issue is expected to end with a simple “here’s-what-we-do” message. The most serious crises of late capitalist economies, of course, have no neat, simple solutions; they require nothing less than a complete change of system. And if any author claims to have a secret formula that readers could use to end the outsourcing of worker misery and pollution—well, you can bet that author is either a hoaxster or an economist or both. That’s why, when Loomis (who is honest and is not an economist) concludes his book with five steps to move the process of political change along, there are no scintillating surprises. He urges readers to learn about the issues, influence their communities, get out in the streets and demand action, put pressure on politicians, and come together with fellow citizens in groups working for justice. The publication of *Out of Sight* will give those struggles a big boost. **CP**

STAN COX is author most recently of *Any Way You Slice It: The Past, Present, and Future of Rationing*. Contact him at t.stan@cox.net and @CoxStan.

Purple Heart Nation

America’s Dangerous Preoccupation with War Wounds

By Jerry Lembcke

CORRECTION

A review on March 15...misstated the reason that 41 Army Rangers...received Purple Hearts after their company was ambushed in an Afghan minefield. As is the case with all presentations of the Purple Heart, it was because they were wounded or killed...not for demonstrated bravery.

—Book Review *New York Times* March 29, 2015

CORRECTING THE CORRECTION

A correction in this space last Sunday...failed to note the source of the error. An editorial emendation, not the reviewer, James Wright, was responsible for the misstatement of the reason that 41 Army Rangers...received Purple Hearts.

—Book Review *New York Times* April 5, 2015

The correction, and its correction, referred to James Wright’s review of *For Love of Country*, a new book by Howard Schultz and Rajiv Chandrasekaran. Corrections in the *Times Book Review* are not uncommon but their correction is rare enough to wonder what, in this case, accounts for all the fuss. Schultz is the CEO of Starbucks, so one might suppose that the attention drawn to the review by his celebrity status is a factor. However inaccurate the confusion of the iconic symbol of the Purple Heart with acts of bravery may be, the reviewer, James Wright, had acceptably captured the sense of the book’s narrative—which seems to be that very association of battlefield wounds with valor and of military defeat with virtue that the editors label an “error.” A look at the book put under scrutiny by these corrections reveals that it was the authors who bear responsibility for the blurred imagery, having written of the medals given the forty-one Army Rangers wounded on a 2013 raid near Kandahar as “award[s] for their actions,” implying that the Rangers had received Purple Hearts for bravery.

It is interesting then, that not only did the *Times*’ editors improperly “correct” Wright, but that their correction still did not point the finger at the ambiguous impressions created by the authors themselves. In correcting their correction, they still let the writers off the hook. Rather than calling-out the book’s flawed objective, the editors took a self-sacrificial hit, attributing the mess to their own “editorial emendation.” With those contortions on display, it is hard to resist thinking that the editors were, and remain, committed to the idea that wounds per se connote something gallant about the wounded.

It would appear that some form of denial was blocking the editors’ ability to deal honestly with the content of the book for which they had solicited a review. Library shelves are packed with books like this which conflate war injury with honor. And, like this book, many others use war casualties to credential the warrior identity, some straining to count the “unseen wound” of PTSD as Purple Heart-worthy. My own stack includes David Philipps’ *Lethal Warriors*, Ann Jones’s *They Were Soldiers*, and David Finkel’s two books, *Thank You for Your Service* and *The Good Soldiers*. Thick with sentimentality and “war story”-styling, most (Philipps is the exception) forego footnotes, indices, and references in disregard for customary accountability. *For Love of Country* is a just such a book.

The tortured review-correction-correction sequence that led to no greater clarity of Schultz and Chandrasekaran’s

intent may have exposed some repressed discomfort that editors have with the mash-up of Purple Heart symbolism to which the *Book Review* has contributed over the years.

Institutional psychology, however, is hardly the heart of the matter. Rather, the tangling of Purple Heart meaning with that of combat bravery is a thread in an American lost-war zeitgeist that set in after the defeat in Vietnam and matured during the stymied campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. With the dimming of its imaginary city-on-the-hill beacon that guided it through its first three centuries, the nation entered the twenty-first century wounded, feeling deflated, its best years behind it, its future a mission to find dignity in loss and honor in defeat.

Defensively, then, the *Book Review* editors could say that their tolerance for the downscale literary value of *The Love of Country* and books like it (the *Times* imprimatur is on several of those books, including *The Good Soldiers*, above) is an effort to remain resonant with an already extant public mood. They are only tapping into a cultural vein, so to speak. They have a point, but the history of the Purple Heart medal sheds some additional light on what it signifies to Americans today.

Today's Purple Heart was authorized in 1932 to replace previous medals of its type dating back to the American Revolution. The 1932 criteria for granting it included wounds received in action against the enemy and meritorious performance of duty. With the establishment of the Legion of Merit in 1942, awarding the Purple Heart for performance of duty was discontinued. There were 1,076,245 Purple Heart awards for World War II, just over 3.5 for every combat death—a ratio which puts the number itself into some context. Curiously, that ratio jumped to 7 to 1 after Vietnam and 10 to 1 for the war in Iraq.

What matters more for the nation's political culture than the awarding of the medal per se is the public awareness of those awards and their meaning when conveyed via news coverage. Most medals are bestowed beyond the presence of news media, sometimes at bedside in field hospitals or even at battle sites; most go unreported and unknown to the public. That being so, the comparison between post-war periods reveals some remarkable differences.

Purple Heart news was negligible in the first fifteen years after World War II. The number of *New York Times* stories was less than one percent of the total number of awards. In the same time span after Vietnam the number of stories was still small, yet it was a 200% increase over the World War II proportion of the total. Purple Heart news skyrocketed with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, jumping 1,000% over the numbers for the post-Vietnam years.

Considering that World War II was immensely popular and decisively won, in comparison with Vietnam and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that were neither, it is striking that interest in “the wounds of war” marked an upward trend across those time periods. As it turns out, the way those wounds

functioned as cultural signage may have been more important than the numbers themselves.

The real story is told in the content of the news reports. Recalling that the Purple Heart had been officially dissociated from “performance of duty” in 1942, it is no surprise that only 5% of the Purple Heart news stories appearing in the 15 years after World War II made reference to “bravery” and 12% to “heroism.” In the aftermath of Vietnam, however, those numbers rose to 16% of the stories mentioning bravery and 23% referring to heroism. Since the official criteria for the award had not changed, and performance of duty—brave, heroic, or otherwise—was still not a consideration, the inclusion of those salutary qualities in the news stories appears to be the subjective affectation of the journalists themselves. But why would the American wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan evoke from journalists the imagery of bravery and heroism more frequently than did World War II?

The inverse relationship between the popularity and success of the wars, on the one hand, and the significance attached to the wounds of those wars, on the other, seems to be counter-intuitive. Acclaim for action under fire, after all, would seem more likely conferred for successful missions with positive connotations, whereas persons known to have fought for ill-reputed and lost causes might go unrecognized in news reportage or cultural representation. By that logic, accolades for martial accomplishment, unofficial as they would have been, should have been more forthcoming for the World War II generation of American Purple Heart recipients than for Vietnam veterans. That this logic does not hold might be explained by the connotations attached to the words “bravery” and “hero.”

Purple Heart stories in the *New York Times* containing “hero” rose steadily from 12% of the total after World War II, to 23% after Vietnam, then to 31% during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Stories with “bravery” rose from 5% to 15% of the total between the post-World War II years and Vietnam, but then remained at that level into the present. While keeping in sight the big picture drawn by those trends—the association of the Purple Heart with both bravery and heroism grew dramatically from the popular and victorious World War II to the unpopular and lost war in Vietnam—it is just as striking that the frequency of “hero” in the stories continues to increase on the same trajectory. The reason for this must lie in what the two terms, bravery and heroism, signify.

The accolade of bravery isolates the recipient from a group context, imaging the combatant in a risky situation vis a vis the physical danger posed by the enemy—perhaps putting him or herself at risk to disarm or kill the opponent. Bravery can be demonstrated by living-up to one's own standards under the circumstances. Heroism, on the other hand, has a more relational dimension, a more social connotation: the fighter has risked life and limb, not just to complete the mission or for self-survival, but to insure the safety and sur-

vival of others in the unit. It is this willingness to give up one's own life for others that is the measure of the hero.

Again, keeping in mind that neither bravery or heroism are criteria for receiving a Purple Heart, it is interesting that both terms have increasingly worked their way into news coverage of the awards, and it is stunning that the appearance of "heroism" has grown even greater during the course of recent wars.

We could speculate that America is attempting to compensate for its lost wars, trying to find merit in those defeats by projecting meaning onto the wounds of its Purple Heart awardees. This meaning that can then be "read out" as something affirmative about the collective self. The longer the string of losses becomes—a string that now reaches back some forty years—the more desperate is the longing to find significance in the cost of those losses. The prominence of "heroism" attached to twenty-first century Purple Heart symbolism is a clue that the element of sacrifice, inherent in heroism, is satisfying a societal longing created by the lost wars of the last half-century.

In the absence of a Good Fight like World War II and the period of self-validating triumphalism that followed, the nation now strains to configure some affirmation from out of its losses. It finds the script for this in biblically-based notions in which sacrifice in-and-of-itself is virtuous and in the Protestant sense that discomfort defers the moral corruption that comes with gratification. Defeat confirms the villainy of the enemy and exposes weaknesses, even treachery, within the gates. Viewed as God-sent tribulations, the wounds of war become tests of faith visited upon the graced—Purple Hearts become badges of honor, "a good award," as one Iraq War veteran told Nina Berman for her book *Purple Hearts*.

The mishmash of sentiments rising from the ashes of the American empire has twisted into a paralyzing anxiousness that presents a dangerous cultural preoccupation with war wounds. Unable to think clearly about the casualties of war and the decline of American global prominence, national guardians of culture such as the *New York Times Book Review* editors seem stuck. On the one hand, there is the forthright condemnation of war and the damage done by it to our national reputation and to the individuals who served. On the other hand, there is an all-in commitment to the continuation of the imperial mission lest those losses already taken will have been in vain.

The confusing signals being sent by literary elites leave a space in political culture where powerful emotions generated in the current post-war (and lost-war) climate can be used for leverage against both anti-war voices at home and imagined dangers abroad. Like Germany after World War I, as described by Anton Kaes in his book *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War*, the damaged veteran—shell-shocked then; a Purple Heart awardee today—stands-in, metaphorically, for the nation shocked by defeat

and in need of restoration and redemption.

In the context of inter-war Germany, wounded warrior imagery fueled scapegoating for the loss of the previous war and the call for rearmament for the war to come. The mishandling of Purple Heart culture in the United States today is stirring those same sentiments.

The corporate CEOs who write books like these, and the book review editors who promote their books, surely mean well. However, the angst that muddles their thinking has political consequences far from the printed page. Wartime losses of life and limb, national wealth and pride, come with powerful emotions. Left unfocused, these emotions will be amplified and given direction toward ends that are a danger to all.

CP

JERRY LEMBCKE is Associate Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Holy Cross College in Worcester, MA. He is the author of *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory and the Legacy of Vietnam*, *CNN's Tailwind Tale: Inside Vietnam's Last Great Myth* and most recently of *PTSD: Diagnosis and Identity in Post-Empire America*. He can be reached at jlembcke@holycross.edu.

I Want to Live

The Before I Die Walls

By Lee Ballinger

"We are encouraged by media and advertising to fear each other and regard public life as a danger and a nuisance, to live in secured spaces, communicate by electronic means, and acquire our information from media rather than from each other....In contemporary terms, privatization is largely an economic term, for the consignment of jurisdictions, goods, services, and powers—railways, water rights, education—to the private sector and the vagaries of the marketplace. But this economic privatization is impossible without the privatization of desire and imagination..." —Rebecca Solnit

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, thousands of abandoned houses were left to rot and die. In a classic case of making lemons into lemonade, local artist Candy Chang painted an abandoned house in her New Orleans neighborhood with chalkboard paint and stenciled it repeatedly with a grid of the sentence, "Before I die I want to _____."

"Anyone walking by could pick up a piece of chalk, reflect on their lives, and share their personal aspirations in public."

Chang writes in her book *Before I Die* (St. Martin's Griffin, \$24.99). "It was an experiment and I didn't know what to expect. By the next day, the wall was bursting with handwritten responses and it kept growing." The responses were diverse:

Build a school
Love recklessly again
Name a star
See equality
Write a novel
Abandon all insecurities
See New Orleans thrive
Have a student come back and tell me it mattered.

All of these now-complete *Before I Die* phrases speak to deep needs and yearnings just waiting for an invitation to come out and play.

Behind every completed sentence is a story. Eric told Candy Chang: "I lost my house and much of my community in Hurricane Katrina, and a month prior I lost a brother to suicide. I became numb. I happened to discover the *Before I Die* wall by accident one day and it changed my life. Seeing so many emotions left by complete strangers on such an 'unbeautiful' house in New Orleans reassured me that beauty is everywhere. Now I continue to move on, looking for beauty in the world and helping others to see that there is a reason to live despite the obstacles that life throws at us."

Katrina pushed much of First World New Orleans to the brink of Third World status, a world in which countless people live on a dollar or two a day. As time passes and hope fades, each day is a replay of the previous day's struggle to consume enough calories to survive. Essential to surviving that reality in order to change it is hope and a mechanism to express it.

After the success of the first wall, Candy Chang and some of her friends created a toolkit and website to help spread such a mechanism to the four corners of the earth. There are now *Before I Die* walls in over 500 cities in 70 countries on six continents in a total of sixteen languages. In Milwaukee, a wall was installed by a Marquette University student organization after they found the original *Before I Die* wall online and drove all the way to New Orleans to see it. In Chung-Li, Taiwan, 25,000 people wrote on a wall in just five months. In Montreal, responses in eight languages appeared in a single day.

Broadly speaking, there are three categories of statements on the *Before I Die* walls. The first are the most individual and personal:

Lisbon: Repair my broken heart
Melbourne: Surf seven days a week
Asuncion, Paraguay: Not be forgotten

Minneapolis: Drive an ice cream truck
Johannesburg: Master the trumpet
Santiago, Chile: Be a stripper and a nun at the same time
DC: I want to see, hear, taste and feel every corner of the world

These responses range from the deeply personal to the downright whimsical ("Be a stripper and a nun at the same time" is pretty whimsical). There is a second category where the thought is still the distinct province of an individual, yet the dream might not come true without major shifts in the social arrangement:

Chicago: Receive my citizenship
Almaty, Kazakhstan: Organize 1000 exhibitions
Brooklyn: Pay my student loans
Pohang City, South Korea: Hang out with North Korean children
Black Rock City, Nevada: Support myself with my art

The strongest threads in the fabric of *Before I Die* are explicit calls for change. They come fast and furious from here, there, and everywhere:

End racism
See a year without war
Raise awareness of our shared humanity
Help the poor
Be the minister of education
See a just society
See a peaceful Mexico
Have a socialist government

Individual desires cannot be separated from more universal ones, if only because the universal is made up of countless individuals. Someone in Milwaukee who writes "see my mom cancer-free" finds their echo in the line on a New Zealand wall: "Discover the cure for cancer."

Before I Die walls might seem like mere random lists but their meaning is actually quite profound. They stand in loud and vibrant opposition to the privatization of public space that plagues New Orleans and all other cities. The shift from public life to private profit has led to the triumph of that vulgar obscenity known as the billboard. The billboard belongs to some faceless corporation and, when on occasion people take a little spray paint to express themselves on one, they are arrested.

Billboards are on an invasive mission to conquer so much public space that we cannot avoid them. They try to sell us stuff we don't need, probably don't want, and likely can't afford. Billboards are part of the advertising overload that

fills the spaces we try to share. From the sides of taxis to the videos we are forced to watch while filling up our cars to the logos which adorn our clothing, Corporate America defines public space not in terms of nurturing the public, but in terms of spurring ever more consumption. The spaces where we can still gather together are branded by corporations (sports), defined and distorted by corporations (colleges), or held in precarious limbo by the need to please corporate charities or corporate-driven grant-givers (grassroots organizations). The space-eaters insist that we don't need a relationship to each other; we only need a relationship to the retail industrial complex.

In contrast, Before I Die walls are interactive public message boards that publicize dreams that come from within. They call out to us to overcome our fear and division, assuring us that our lives have meaning. These walls and chalk give us a vehicle to express our needs.

Jennifer writes: "I'm a first year teacher at a low income high school in Vancouver, Washington where students face an enormous amount of poverty and hardship. I've seen struggles that I never anticipated encountering in my life... After my class watched Candy's TED talk about the Before I Die project, we began reflecting on the video and the class completely exploded. They started talking about things they would like to do before they die... [They got a sheet of paper] and the class attacked it... and started writing hopes and dreams I'd never heard them express."

The Before I Die walls stand as testament to our need to express ourselves and to have that expression touch others. We need to share. We need to feel a part of something. "Need is a profound and wonderful thing," Brooke Heagerty writes. "It is the foundation of human existence. We need each other to survive, to live, to be human. Study after study shows the debilitating effects of children who are brought up without others, without touch, without the social and human interaction they need. Their hearts beat, but they only exist. They don't live. Humans need humans to do that."

Much of what's on the walls could be described as a bucket list: idle talk, bar chatter. But all of it flies in the face of the way we are conditioned to live as mere cogs in the machine. Day after day, one foot in front of the other. Dreams? They go to the back of the line.

There is a history to this. In America it goes back to antebellum days, when slaves were told by the master's ministers not to concern themselves with life on this earth, but with a paradise on the other side. Those who weren't chattel slaves were conditioned to be content with their own market-driven or wage-based slavery. Don't ask for more, something better's coming. Just don't ask when, because it won't be before you die.

IWW organizer Joe Hill attacked this notion and one of its primary promoters, the Salvation Army, in his World War I-era song "The Preacher and the Slave":

*You will eat, bye and bye
In that glorious land above the sky
Work and pray, live on hay
You'll get pie in the sky when you die*

The call to sacrifice without tangible payoff is a message still burned into our brains today. The church remains a prime culprit in running this misdirection play. Yet the church itself is mainly concerned with its fate in this life, obsessed with retaining tax-exempt status and keeping the government's faith-based funding flowing into its coffers.

Meanwhile, Before I Die walls mock such hypocrisy as they spread onto the sides of libraries, into hair salons, and go mobile on trucks. Isabel de la Vega Hernandez installed a wall on the side of her family's house in Xalapa, Mexico. Prominent among the offerings, in a country where teachers have been locked in epic battles with the government for many years, was "Build a public school." Hernandez urged her neighbors "to make a quote that people remember, just like John Lennon did."

In some cities, people take Before I Die as an invitation to remix the concept into new flavors, albeit from the same recipe:

[Lebanon] Lebanon would be better if
I _____

[Brazil] Porto Alegre needs
more _____

[Nairobi] Happiness Is _____

[Faridabad India] I Want To Be _____

[Brazil] Salvador deserves _____

The Before I Die wall is another example of the international rose that is growing among the noxious weeds of nationalism. The walls are in the same spirit as 100,000 Poets and Musicians for Change, which held over 1,000 events in 110 countries last fall and is sponsoring an international conference of artists in Italy in June. Both efforts have leapt easily over another wall—the limited U.S./Western Europe template for previous international efforts to unify the planet. This worldwide synergy doesn't just look good and sound good, it is essential for fundamental transformation.

Walls are meant to keep us out or keep us in. Ironically, the Before I Die walls free us up to imagine a world without walls. So pick up some chalk and talk that talk. (<http://beforeidie.cc/site/>). **CP**

Lee Ballinger is an associate editor at Rock & Rap Confidential. Free email subscriptions are available by writing rockrap@aol.com.

CULTURE & REVIEWS

The Films of Sofia Coppola Lost in the Landscape of Privilege

By Kim Nicolini

At the end of Sofia Coppola's first film *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), neighborhood boys pour over evidence they have collected from the beautifully blonde and now dead Lisbon Girls. Putting together the mysterious pieces of a puzzle, the boys' ponder fragments of these girls' lives as if they are looking into the mesmerizing yet intangible lives of celebrities. Though the Lisbon girls lived in the cushy Detroit suburb Grosse Pointe, they are the daughters of a math teacher and not part of the privileged class. Yet through Coppola's lens, the girls carry an air of celebrity: from their beauty, their inaccessibility, and their suicides. Though not part of the surreal world of Hollywood as we see Coppola's later films, the Lisbon girls are captured in Coppola's dreamlike, sugar-coated vision of lone soles alienated by their position of privilege.

Based on the novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides* is the only Coppola film not written by her, but it does set the table for the themes and stylistic nuances that run through all five of her feature films. We see female bodies trapped by their environment; the claustrophobia of culturally constructed identity, and a longing for something intangible beyond that construction. We catch glimpses of Coppola's fascination with the nowhere road of celebrity, like we find in the aimless actor Johnny Marco (Stephen Dorff) in *Somewhere* (2010) or in Kirsten Dunst's frivolous yet despon-

dent teen queen in *Marie Antoinette* (2006).

Coppola's films wash across the screen in a wave of excessive nothingness, saturated with detail, color, reflections and objects that merge with people. The characters themselves often become objects merging with or becoming entirely lost in their landscape: *Marie Antoinette* collapses into wallpaper; Johnny Marco suffocates under the plaster cast of his own face; Lux Lisbon is swallowed by a football field of grass; Scarlett Johansson's Charlotte (*Lost in Translation*) appears like a piece of hotel furniture. The characters' eyes drift off screen, out windows, into the trees, the stars, neon lit skylines, and setting suns as they try to find a way out of themselves.

Certainly longing is a universally human emotion, but Coppola's films aren't about just any people. They are about the wealthy and the encumbrances that come with celebrity. While the Lisbon girls' are trapped in isolation imposed on them by their beauty and inaccessibility, other characters in Coppola's films are (uncomfortably) lost in their own position of privilege.

Coppola's films drift in a palette of pastels bleeding into neon, overexposed sun seeping through trees, blending into spinning disco balls, sparkling champagne towers and chandelier crystals. The movies are seductive objects, bulging with jewels and luxurious fabric. In the midst of these landscapes are girls trying to come to grips with being girls. Elle Fanning plays the daughter of Johnny Marco, a girl who is innocent as she pirouettes on the ice rink, but who also is fully aware of her isolation as a daughter of privilege.

All of these "girls" are ultimately alone. *Marie Antoinette* is a naïve teen girl who's married off for politics. She acknowledges her "ridiculous" position

while throwing outrageous parties and indulging in consumption of food and fashion piled so thick it's suffocating. Sure, *Marie Antoinette* was dealt a bad hand, but the teen queen had no shortage of resources to make the suffocating more exciting and tasty. Piles of deserts on top of piles of shoes on top of piles of cocaine take the sting off of being bound to her throne.

Marie Antoinette drags the trains of her dresses like a weight she must bear. She lacks privacy and the ability to become her own person. Yet she acts like a frivolous child set loose in the world's largest candy shop. The movie is baroquely beautiful, but watching it is like eating an over-iced cake filled with arsenic gum drops. In the end it just makes us nauseous, and we feel like the shattered chandelier that comprises the final shot – the symbolic image of *Marie Antoinette's* soon to be severed head.

Marie Antoinette opens with Gang of Four's "Natural's Not In It" which could be the theme song for all Coppola's films:

The problem of leisure
What to do for pleasure
Ideal love, a new purchase
A market of the senses

What does one do to solve the problem of too much leisure? If only we all had the leisure to ponder such questions. Leisure and pleasure haunt Coppola's characters whether they are raiding celebrity homes (*The Bling Ring*, 2013) or wandering the halls of a luxury hotel (*Lost in Translation*, 2003).

When I first saw *Lost in Translation* (2003), I was lulled by its beauty: from the opening shot of Charlotte's (Scarlett Johansson) butt crack to the glistening color-saturated surfaces of Tokyo seen through Bill Murray's limo. I felt like an opiated somnambulist as I watched Charlotte contemplate Buddhist temples and Japanese flower decorating. An estranged girl going nowhere and doing nothing, she meets up with Murray's Bob Harris, a Hollywood

actor getting paid millions of dollars to endorse a Japanese whiskey. I was socked in the heart by the tale of these two disparate loners as they move through restaurants, bars, and karaoke parties. When they part their ways to the closing threads of Jesus and Mary Chain's "Just Like Honey," I felt like I had doused myself in a jar of cinematic honey.

However, on second viewing, what at first seemed like a softly hypnotic dance felt like the whining screech of lost rich people lamenting their woes. I thought, "Why am I watching these people? And why do I even care?"

Coppola's films are beautifully schizophrenic. Tantalizingly in their opulent aesthetics and infused with perfectly orchestrated pop soundtracks, it is easy to fall under their spell. But the accumulation of their excess becomes a dizzying autopsy of the gilded class. While Coppola allows us to empathize with her characters, she also leaves us with a bitter aftertaste. The films document celebrity as an empty road to nowhere, but what does that nothing mean when you know your bank account is loaded? On one hand we want to empathize; on the other, it is hard to feel emotionally connected to the sad travails of the very privileged.

Coppola's *The Bling Ring* cuts to the chase. The movie follows a gang of rich LA kids as they pillage homes of celebrities such as Paris Hilton and Orlando Bloom. The teens steal underwear, shoes, purses, cash and guns. Images of their loot are as excessive as Marie Antoinette's parties. Boxes are stuffed with Rolex watches and heaped with jewels. Walls are adorned with paintings of Paris Hilton in bondage or neon signs scrawled with Lindsay Lohan's name. The scene is pretty and unpretty, a vivid portrait of the narcissism, greed, and sham of celebrity culture. Its excess is dizzying and feels like overdosing on Paris Hilton shaped Sour Patch Kids. In this film, there is little sympathy, only the emptiness of excessive style and

materialism.

Sofia Coppola's own life surely plays a role in her films. The daughter of Francis Ford Coppola who produced every one of her movies, Sofia is a privileged Hollywood insider. She is a benefactress of big movie money, and has access to the capital it takes to produce these cloyingly beautiful films. It is hard to judge them on their own right.

But this makes them interesting. Coppola shows the claustrophobia of celebrity, and yet when I critique her for whining about her own state of privilege, I push her further into the claustrophobic box by not allowing her the right to her own vision. The films are nuanced pieces of art that provoke thought and question the role celebrity plays in personal and mass identity, yet they also inspire me to throw eggs at the screen and shout "Fuck you, you privileged whining rich bitch."

Maybe that's her point – that her films can straddle both sides. They can be transcending and claustrophobic. They can be objects of beauty that are inherently ugly. Just as the kids in *The Bling Ring* get their thrill by playing voyeur and sneaking into celebrities' houses; we play that role when watching these movies. For the duration of one of these films, we wear the lifestyle of the rich and aimless. We understand that "more than this, there's nothing," and perhaps that is where we find transcendence and comfort – in knowing that "nothing" is the great pay off no matter how tall your wig is or how many pairs of Louboutin heels you have in your closet. **CP**

KIM NICOLINI is an artist, poet and cultural critic living in Tucson, Arizona. She recently published her first book, *Mapping the Inside Out*, in conjunction with a gallery show by the same name.

Mad Men Goes Dark

By Nathaniel St. Clair

"People just come and go and no one says goodbye" says Don Draper in the series finale, lost somewhere in the salty air of Big Sur. But that's not entirely true. *Mad Men* said goodbye. On May 17th that actually happened.

For a show that ran 7 seasons in 9 years, the brilliance of it was, to me, how the lived in the hollow, uncomfortable spaces between what we want and what we need, that perpetually dared us with visions of the most horrific things imaginable — corpses under beds, car crashes on the Thruway — only to reveal the status quo as the scariest outcome of them all. Which is why Don Draper's journey through a turbulent decade was marked not by the peaks and valleys of a history book but by a dull, steady thrum of repetition. Fresh starts were as cyclical as fashion. The names and faces changed, but the hangovers remained the same.

This made for art that could be as frustrating as it was enthralling. But there's no question that *Mad Men* was a work of art, in no small part because of the way it often stumbled. It was the most purely creative show I've seen on television. Not in terms of the wildness of its imagination, but rather in its dogged celebration of creativity as a worthwhile, if destabilizing, pursuit. Don and Peggy weren't tortured artists in the familiar, bright-burning supernova sort of way. They were never too good for this world. Rather, they were intensely of the world. They conformed their unpredictable urges and impulses to the structures of a rapidly changing society. They lived to work. Their work was their life.

Mad Men is over. But the work goes on. Great show. Bravo. **CP**

NATHANIEL ST. CLAIR is social media editor for CounterPunch.

CounterPunch

ISSN 1086-2323 (print)

ISSN 2328-4331 (digital)

www.counterpunch.org

1 (800) 840-3683

\$5.00 per issue

P.O. Box 228

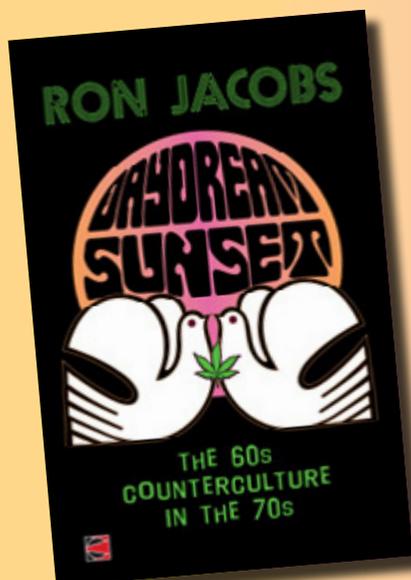
Petrolia, CA 95558

return service requested

Exclusively Available from CounterPunch Books

DAYDREAM SUNSET

THE 60S COUNTERCULTURE IN THE 70S



Flashback to the Seventies –They weren’t as Reactionary as You’ve Been Led to Believe! The Sixties remade Western culture. The Beats, rock and roll, and the bebop subcultures of the 1950s exploded into the psychedelic mishmash of politics, youth, sound, art and movement that became known as the counterculture. Combined with the popular political movements of the day – many of which considered the counterculture theirs, too – it was possible in early 1969 to believe that “the” Revolution was just around the corner. Then things fell apart. The decade of the 1970s was a time of retreat by the forces represented by the counterculture and new left. The forces of the old regained turf. Despite it all, some things would never return to how it was before the 1960s.

Visit the CounterPunch store or call to order:

store.counterpunch.org/product-category/books/

1(800) 840-3683 or 1(707) 629-3683

