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Looking Back

For our tenth anniversary, we combed through the archives for pieces that caught our eye. They ran the gamut: from manifestos to book reviews to op-eds to interviews to research projects to personal essays. What follows isn't a "greatest hits" list, nor is it supposed to be a representative history of the magazine over the years. Instead, it's something in between. We picked these excerpts because—one way or another—they were just plain interesting. You can find our past issues and read more at <http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu/archive>.

Rita Koganzon
"Teaching For Global Domination"
Winter 2006

The danger of orienting our political society towards the goal of continual economic dominance is significant. It means subordinating political principles to the fluctuating dictates of the market—liberty to productivity, rights to innovations—in such a way that principles become relative and only competition remains absolute. Whatever measures serve to keep us ahead of China are acceptable. This is no abstract experiment, but the very real policy of states like the former Soviet Union, which used the government's educational apparatus as a weapon during the Cold War, heavily emphasizing math and science at the expense of all else and then channeling students into technical fields where they might best serve national military and strategic ambitions. Nor was such an abuse of public education at odds with the Soviet political constitution. The

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government existed solely to direct the economy, so no subsequent need to train citizens to be anything other than workers ever arose. The Soviet political principles that allowed for and followed from such ambitions hardly need illumination.

Yesha Sutaria

“Real ID’ Capable of Anything But”

Fall 2006

REAL ID hinges on definitions and classifications that are so broad and sweeping that they widely clear the bar for dangerously ambiguous terminology that had been set by its progenitor, PATRIOT. This did not stop the House from passing the bill (261-161-11) on February 10, 2005; the House’s willingness to pass any legislation even remotely aimed at combating terrorism is rivaled only by that of the Senate. To be fair, the Senators did go through the motions of debating the bill on its merits, which allowed them to put off passing it for a couple of months. This seemingly unnecessary delay made Sensenbrenner nervous, however, so he pulled the legislative equivalent of a cheap parlor trick: he latched the Act onto a military spending bill as a rider, thereby ensuring its passage via unanimous Senate approval on May 10, 2005.

Alex Beinstein

“Questions for Michelle Obama”

Fall 2007

Michelle Obama: More often than not, [women] are the primary caretakers of our children—scheduling babysitters, planning play dates, keeping up with regular doctor’s appointments, supervising homework, handing out discipline. Usually, we are the ones responsible for ensuring that the household runs smoothly: cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, home repairs.

And for those of us who work outside of the home as well, we have the added challenge of coordinating these responsibilities with our jobs. If a child gets sick, we are the ones who are juggling our schedules to be home with them. If a toilet overflows, we are the ones frantically rescheduling that 9 a.m. meeting so that we

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can meet the plumber. And when all of that is said and done, we have the added social pressure and expectation to be attractive, charming and delightful mates—well groomed, in good spirits, ready to be supportive of our significant others.

I'm tired just thinking about it all. So I think what it comes down to is that women and families are not getting the support that they need to thrive. We have spent the last decade talking a good game about Family Values, but I haven't seen much evidence that we actually value women or families. We have been ignored and we must take better care of ourselves and our community, and our government needs to give us the support to do so.

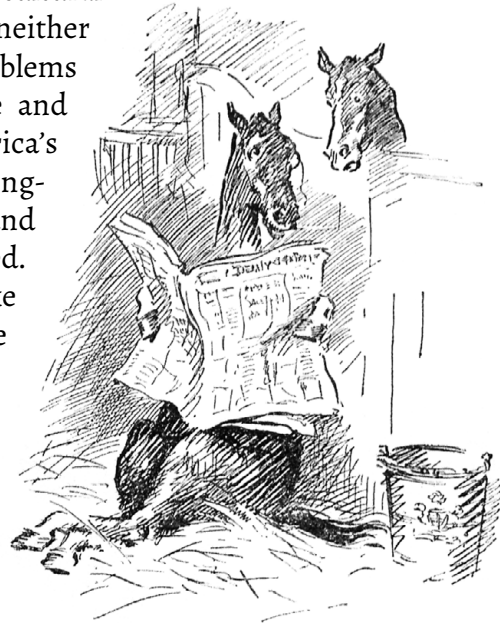
Gabriel Cahn

"Towards A Postmodern Conservatism"

Fall 2007

Conservatism, properly understood, should attempt to preserve variety, cultural and economic, in American life. The wholesale embrace of a corporate culture attempting to homogenize America in the name of efficiency and profit is a fundamentally progressive position. While large scale government regulation does not provide a conservative solution to the cultural problems created by big business neither does the acceptance of these problems as a fait accompli. Instead private and local attempts to preserve America's "proliferating intricacy of long-established social institutions and modes of life" should be applauded. Postmodern conservatives, like Dreher, have attempted to create truly conservative alternatives to the flattening uniformity brought about by the laissez-faire dogmas of the Reagan generation....

The arrogance and disregard of the so-called conservatives



As swift as an Arrow out of a Bow.

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in the current administration for humility, prudence, and other truly conservative values has created room for true debate about the benefits of the modernist ideal. In practice, politicians cannot couch their arguments in the same terms as conservative critics of modernity without appearing radical. However, the aberrant appeal of “anti-establishment” candidates such as Ron Paul or Barack Obama show how exhausted most Americans are with the modern consensus that has reigned supreme in Washington during the Bush and Clinton administrations. Conservatism, despite its tarnished reputation, can still be a salutary force in American democracy. Conservatism should remind us in an ever-changing world of the continuity of permanent things. However, to renew their political movement, conservatives must admit the crimes, and there have been real crimes, that they have been committed in the name of conservatism. Then conservatives must show that they are no longer willing to tolerate the politicians or the intellectuals who justified these crimes. They must begin a debate to define their fundamental values. They must be willing to find guidance not simply in hero-worship of Reagan or Bush but in more lasting conservative truths.

Margot Parmenter
“Talking about Torture”
Fall 2009

In early modern France, torture comprised the accepted legal institution. Unlike John Yoo’s memorandums, which retroactively approved the Bush administration’s narrow definition of torture and allowed the American government to circumvent the Torture Convention’s international prohibition of “cruel, inhumane, and degrading punishment,” the law of this period clearly allowed for—and, indeed, relied upon—two specific torture practices....

All of these methods were designed to inflict severe pain, but they were meant to do more than that. They were meant to elicit the truth. According to Lisa Silverman, a history professor at the University of Southern California, early modern Europeans conceived of truth as an entity connected to, even located within, the body. Rather than seeing truth as something arrived at through a conscious process of reasoning and discussion (as we do today),

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the early modern world saw it as an absolute entity attached to physicality. Thus, torture was understood as an effective way of discovering the truth about a matter. Though individuals (seen through a Christian worldview as inherently evil and corrupt) could dissimulate, their bodies could not, so that inflicting pain was a way of forcing the body to relinquish its secrets. As Silverman explicates, “Torture inflicted pain as a means of achieving the spontaneous truth of the body rather than the composed truth of the mind. Torture sought the evidence of an animate body.” The idea was this: because of original sin, the human consciousness could not be trusted to provide truth; pain, however, could dislocate the corrupt will, allowing the body to tell its story, a story the French justice system needed in order to punish criminals.

Jack Friedman
“The Real Culture War”
Winter 2011

But even beyond the numbers and the polls, a deeper culture of dissatisfaction with and distrust of government has been bubbling underneath the surface for quite some time. This often self-righteous anger is fairly irrational, considering that the major contributing factor is the government’s habit of capitulating to voters’ demands for record low taxes, record high spending, and their apparent aversion to any compromise whatsoever. Those who point out these increasingly embarrassing hallmarks of modern government are not necessarily decrying an expansion in its size or authority—in fact, it is a criticism commonly found across the policy spectrum. Their critique really highlights government’s inability to ask for any semblance of sacrifice or cooperation from an increasingly disengaged public.

Michael Lipkowitz
“Meditations on a Queer Canon”
Winter 2012

Following this seemingly paradoxical logic, a heteronormative canon and a queer canon can exist simultaneously. The canon we are left with is amorphous and changing, one that is determined by the needs of the individual, rather than by the needs of the society

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that surrounds him or her. This reminds us of Bloom's idea that the purpose of the canon is not to develop the individual as a social being, but rather as an individual with his or her own interiority. The purpose of books is not to direct us toward our Western society, but toward ourselves. It is as if Cunningham says, *what we need is a canon that shows us as we are....*

But at the end of our interior struggle, the choice of the works that govern our subjective, interior lives, can itself only be a subjective one. We choose whether our canon is Western or queer, or some mix. If the works of the Western canon do not answer to our "fresh sufferings," we can pitch them to the side and make our own canon.

Sara Stalla

"Shuffle, Ball[et], Change: African Influences on American Dance Forms"

Fall 2012

Black dance did not only have an influence on folk dances and comedy routines, but also on the "high art" of ballet. Coming to the U.S. from Russia, choreographer George Balanchine made radical innovations in balletic technique which were well-received. One could argue that his familiarity with his native country's own rhythmic and energetic folk dances eased the transition to the use of African styles—the cool aloofness of ballet and the cool aesthetic

of African dance meshed well.

America's pervading performative tone and style were described as "not the aristocratic, haughty coolness of [traditional European ballet] but the cool arrogance of people with an attitude—Americans, black, brown and white" (*Digging the Africanist Presence in American*



The Palace was, as the Imperial City, all of Gold.

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Performance, 63). This pervading American coolness came from African coolness.... “All texts are intertexts,” writes Gottschild. “To know one’s culture and to play its game, but also to remember and keep one’s own— that is and has always been the task” (*Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance*, 57).

Jordan Larson

“Notes on a Rookie: *Rookie Mag* and Feminism”

Winter 2013

Rookie greets contemporary feminism with plenty of conundrums as it resists a facile grasp of its implications. The magazine comes from a place of privilege, its existence an anomaly wrought by the flash popularity of its precocious, white, middle-class founder. It’s ostensibly feminist, but *Rookie* shies away from many difficult topics. For example, there’s no discussion of the intersection of race and class in women’s oppression (not a particularly new or radical concept), and it lacks any other more brazen take on women’s health or politics. On the other hand, the magazine has clearly connected with girls across the country, bypassing the more disparate mainstream media to give them a sense of hope and community. *Rookie* does not publish workout or dieting routines, “embarrassing” stories about boys knowing you’re on your period (oh no!), or tips

on how to blow his mind in bed. It does contain articles on first encounters with the male gaze, plenty of tips on writing, and a discussion on reconciling an enjoyment of pop music with its entrenched misogyny....

The articles in *Rookie* push a new variety of expertise. In addition to the many reimagined magazine tropes—interviews, tutorials, and reviews—the diary form is central to much of *Rookie*’s success. While many articles maintain a confessional



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tone and first-person perspective, the website also publishes a weekly “dear diary” feature in which staffers write about their personal lives. While clearly embodying a particular teen-girl stereotype and aesthetic, *Rookie*’s embrace of the diaristic form has overtly political and empowering implications. Author Kate Zambreno writes of the diary: “This is often the mode that allows her to come to writing—perhaps this is why it’s so widely derided as not literary or seen as raw material. Yet the diary is part of the girl’s process—a way to do the work. And of course now we write our diaries in public, for all to see.” Zambreno’s 2012 book *Heroines* mixed literary criticism and memoir, drawing largely from her blog *Frances Farmer is My Sister*. For Zambreno, the move to the Internet allows an intensely private form to become simultaneously public, the two extremes merging in online writing....

Similarly, there are other girls grasping for the heart of contemporary culture, albeit in much different (and less noted) ways than *Rookie*. Among those is *Rude Girl Mag*, a WordPress created by Bre Moore for women of color, partially in response to the homogeneity of *Rookie* and its exclusion of non-white perspectives. Geared toward women ages 18–25, the website is in many ways a *Rookie* corollary. Its tagline: “Cause we’re tired of being left out.”

Joshua Trubowitz

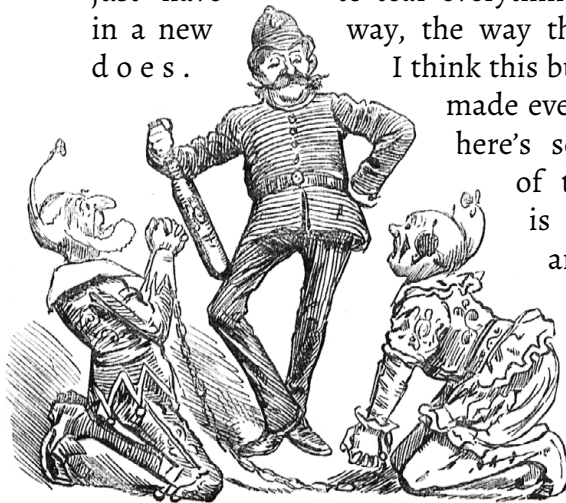
“The Heart of the Political: An Interview with Martha Nussbaum”
Fall 2013

Martha Nussbaum: The role that I see for the arts, or at least a big role for the arts in society, is to give pleasure and certainly beauty, but of a sort that brings us together and helps us overcome the anxiety of finite, bodily humanity. For example, in my little section on Millennium Park in Chicago, I say that it’s a wonderful example of a complex artwork that is funny, unifying, but, because of the way that it makes people recognize what’s comical and strange about the human body, is actually delightful, and we can celebrate it without thinking, “oh, now we want to be gods and we want to get rid of the body.” In short, I think it helps overcome racial anxieties, gender anxieties, and so on....

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Joshua Trubowitz: *The example of Millennium Park is particularly interesting because it is right next to Grant Park, which you mention in your book as well as an example of that problematic vision of beauty as purity, transcendence, and hierarchic greatness. But Grant Park will still be there, so how should the citizen in the aspiring society be oriented toward these two fundamentally incompatible ideals of beauty?*

MN: It's part of our history. It's part of who we are. And so I guess keeping them there reminds us of some difficulties we had in our past. I mean, what do I think of those buildings over there [points across the Midway to the Harper towers]? I talk about our campus in the same way. I think those buildings expressed an aspiration to be outside of time, outside of the community, and we surround them with different buildings which express different values—with the Robie House, which expresses a love of the earth, and then the Booth building—which I think is a wonderful building—which has both the horizontal and the vertical. And so we're saying, "yeah, we had that history, it's still there, but we now have a kind of wisdom about it and we can laugh at it." I think the Palevsky dorms laugh at it, and that's great, because it really did make people upset when they were first put in. We can also build it in to a structure like the new Booth building or the Logan Arts Center that alludes to it but transcends it in a good way toward greater inclusiveness and a greater embrace of the full city existence of this university. And so I don't think you just have to tear everything up, but you contextualize it in a new way, the way this building [the Law School] does.



I think this building, already in the late '50s, made everything different because now here's something on the south side of the Midway that, you know, is beautiful, but it's human, and its scale is human, and its whole design focuses on community and interaction. So I think that's what you do with the old; you just put it in a different context and you create a commentary upon it.

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Sabina Bremner

“What Does Literature Do for Us? *Ulysses*, shared realities, and subjectivity”

Spring 2013

This, then, is the real function of objectivity, to the extent that it is possible. We need confirmation that our version of reality makes sense. When we interact with others, we recount our realities according to an unspoken procedure in which we position ourselves as observers to our own experience and describe the discrete actions as if they were viewed externally, tacitly comparing realities. The real damage wrought by solitary confinement is that it deprives inmates of partaking in this “shared world” which, in a sense, characterizes being human. Subjective reality needs objective validation, which can only occur if the subjective experiences which constitute these inner realities are capable of being considered by others who arrive at them from different perspectives and thus contribute to a shared world. We experience life as so shared that our moment-to-moment streams of thought are secondary to their filtration into the language of objective experience—and so an episode like “Penelope,” in which an inner reality comprises an entire literary world, is alien to us. We can glean from *Ulysses* that no experience is entirely subjective: Even in the moment of perceiving something, to some extent we are always already divorcing ourselves from its immediacy.

Matthew Schweitzer

“Notes from the Abyss”

Fall 2014

Ahmed does not know if he had been targeted specifically, or if his home had fallen on some unmarked sectarian fault line that ruptured. He had received some vague threats a few months earlier regarding his political commentary, but nothing came of them. “I did not take these letters very seriously,” he says, “because there were no bullets in the envelopes or frightening phone calls at night”—the trademarks of serious assassination attempts professors have come to recognize. Since 2003, over 500 Iraqi academics have been killed by unknown factions. The universities are dangerous places to work

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or study, and the Interior Ministry admits that over 9,000 fake university degrees have been purchased by prominent civil servants. Younis is unsure how to comfort his friend. He faces an equally potent danger, as the Dean of International Relations at Mosul University. “It is very difficult to find any words to bring peace because I know there will be no peace, only words,” he confides in his friend. “We all face terrible hardship and threat from every side, and sometimes it is necessary to let the sadness and weariness take over.”

Jon Catlin
“After 9/11”
Winter 2014

Spiegelman suggests that such remembrance efforts actually helped America forget 9/11 as a real historical event. For stereotypically proud, cocky New Yorkers, this meant moving on quickly from 9/11: “On 9/11/01 time stopped. / By 9/12/01 clocks began to tick again... / You go back to thinking you might live forever after all!” For all Americans, the “Genuine Awe” of the attacks was “reduced to the mere ‘Shock and Awe’ of jingoistic strutting.”

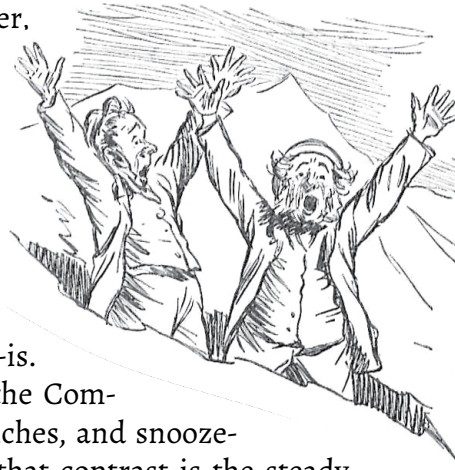
When I recently viewed newspaper front pages from September 12, 2001 on display at the Newseum in Washington D.C., I observed just how common this sentiment was. The *San Francisco Examiner* ran the headline “Bastards!” across an image of the burning towers. Others ran the headlines “Outrage,” “Evil Acts,” “Mass Murder,” “War on America,” “It’s War,” and “Bush Vows to Strike Back.” (More measured headlines avoided these loaded labels and leaps to retaliation: “Terror,” “Attacks Shatter Nation,” “Unthinkable,” and the poignant “We Mourn” allowed the tragedy to sink in—at least for one day.)

Hannah Nyhart
“Into the Clear Blue”
Fall 2014

At least a couple of times a term I come home from a long-but-good day and steal a glass of milk from my roommate and stand in the kitchen thinking, “Is this all there is?” Because it is a good life, but

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it feels like a small one. And I wonder, if I'd picked it out and strived toward it, instead of falling into it the way it feels I have, would it feel bigger? Or would it only look big from afar, and shrink once I'd gotten there.



A firm or solid
Stone, of a vast
bigness.

Unreached, a dream doesn't fit into the panorama view of life-as-is. The dream stands in contrast to the Com-Ed bills, and foil- wrapped sandwiches, and snooze-button parts of daily life. And in that contrast is the steady assurance that this isn't all there is.

That's why forty-five balloons and a lawn chair is as potent a dream as walking on the moon, or moving to the city, or the house you're going to build your folks when you make it. And it's also why they're all equally vulnerable. This is the dirty secret of dreaming: what happens after. I'm not sure there's a dream, however great, that isn't emptied as it's fulfilled. Once a dream is converted into an accomplishment, it becomes part of the daily panorama. And that question of whether there's more is back. You get used to the view from the new house, or of the city block. And even a moon rock, tucked onto the shelf next to the cereal boxes and the bills, must blend in eventually.

Angela Qian
"Interview with Monkey Business"
Spring 2015

Angela Qian: *Haruki Murakami's stories are famous for how he portrays adolescent and adult isolation, and alienation. From what I've read, I've noticed similar themes of transience and feeling alone in writers like Banana Yoshimoto, Yoko Ogawa, and Matsuda Aoko's story "Photographs are Images." Do you think there is a thematic trend of feelings of isolation among Japanese literature, or is it a global trend? And is there a tie to the Japanese societal phenomena of parasite singles and hikikomori?*

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Aoko Matsuda: I don't think it's particular to Japan. I feel that isolation is a huge theme in American literature too. Rather than being particular to Japan, I think the feeling of isolation is shared all over the world. But *hikikomori* and those types... but America also has *hikikomori* doesn't it?

AQ: *I guess it's not as famous of a phenomenon.*

Satoshi Kitamura: Don't you think that in a way—I kind of feel that the world is becoming Japonized in these things. An idea like *otaku*, which became English, the word, came because people behaved in a certain way. The Japanese started doing this ten years before the rest of the world. That's how I see it—in England, twenty years ago, there was a TV program showing stupid Japanese TV shows. At the beginning they thought, "How weird those are." Five years later, they start the same TV shows themselves, just like Japanese TV. So in a way, the Japanese, probably because of our society, somehow started—in a negative sense—and are sort of ahead of the rest of the world. In things like isolation, or some style of isolation, like *otaku* things.

