THE MIDWAY REVIEW
A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND CULTURE

Rachel Cromidas on Life after the Olympic Bid
Margot Parmenter on Andrew Sullivan and Torture
Rebecca Anne Maurer on Nabokov and Remembered Life
Chad Hughes on Krugman and the Intellectual Recession
Erin Dahlgren on Everyday Speech
Brandon Sward on Hobbes Before Leviathan
Gabriel Cahn on Directors, Disco, and Decadence
Nathan Schulz on the Aesthetics of Chess
THE MIDWAY REVIEW

Editor in Chief
Gabriel Cahn

Business Manager
Bryant Jackson-Green

Managing Editor
Erin Dahlgren

Design Editors
Rachel Cromidas

Editorial Board
Andrew Chen
Michael Deschamps
Noah Ennis
Justin Garbacz
Stephen Hyde
Sean Maher
Ji Xia
Ardevan Yaghoubi

Founding Editor
Rita Koganzon

Faculty Advisor
Herman Sinaiko

Front cover photo by Helena Yu
Back cover photo by Emmy Mickevicius
Interior photos by Monika Lagaard

The Midway Review is a forum for civil debate across the political spectrum and among the humanities and social science disciplines, and for reflection on current events, culture, politics, religion, and philosophy.

We are accepting submissions to be considered for our Winter 2010 issue. Please consult http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu for submission guidelines.

Letters to the editor may be addressed to midwayreview@uchicago.edu. We ask that letters for publication be limited to 350 words.

The Midway Review is printed by In-Print Graphics on thrice-recycled paper.

Publication of the Midway Review is made possible by the Student Government Finance Committee, the College of the University of Chicago, and the Collegiate Network.
No Little Plans: Chicago’s Next Olympic Marathon  
Rachel Cromidas  
*If citizens on both sides of the bid are serious about making Chicago an even safer and more prosperous place to live, and a hot-spot for international tourism, they won’t take down their 2016 banners or protest fliers.*

Talking About Torture: Why a Simple Confession Just Isn’t Enough  
Margot Parmenter  
*More than the truth of torture, shouldn’t we take an interest in the truth about torture?*

The Most Mundane Loss of Self  
Erin Dahlgren  
*Isolated chunks of vocabulary and syntax were thrown so often into the mix, that the idea of a gradual shift in language pattern begins to look more complicated.*

Chess Is Not a Game  
Nathan Schulz  
*I’d wager that much of chess appreciation is predicated on a human love of the general concepts that seem to govern chess play.*

Men as Mushrooms  
Brandon Sward  
*In order to fully understand Leviathan, and Hobbes himself, it is necessary to understand his presentation of the citizen in De Cive.*

Re-writing Memory: A Case Study of Vladimir Nabokov’s “Mademoiselle O”  
Rebecca Anne Maurer  
*Searching for patterns isn’t meant to discover the true “Mademoiselle O” story; rather, it is an attempt to extrapolate details about Nabokov’s autobiography and to investigate how narrative memory works.*

The Economist and the Hack: The Treachery of Paul Krugman  
Chad Hughes  
*The arguments presented by Krugman are based on gross simplifications of complex ideas and out-of-context quotes meant to portray neoclassicists as heartless fools.*

At Whit’s End  
Gabriel Cahn  
*Although Stillman’s films have almost completely escaped the notice of the broader public, their combination of the best elements of classic Hollywood and modern comedy makes them worthy of reappraisal.*
It was humid, the first Tuesday of July, and President Zimmer was sharing his lunch break with a bullhorn and a crowd of protestors.

A handful of South Side residents, University of Chicago students, and representatives from the Illinois Single-Payer were marching against the closing of a University of Chicago Medical Center Clinic on 47th Street. The protest, led by South Side Together Organizing for Power on the corner of 58th and Ellis Avenue, was typical: the marchers chanted, “Health care is a human right!” and circled the Administration Building, while University employees darted in and out of the front entrance.

But one set of small, black, and white posters carried a slightly different message: “Better clinics—No Olympics Games.” This slogan became incorporated into another chant as the group continued to pace along the street.

The protest was primarily about criticizing the Medical Center for disregarding the poor—this much was clear. Less obviously, it also implicated the city’s Olympic bid—and the bid’s potential cost for taxpayers—as a big part of the problem with Chicago’s health care disparities.

The protestors won’t be using this argument anymore. Chicago lost the Olympic bid last month with a surprisingly low number of votes from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and the city has not indicated that it will pursue another after garnering last place against Madrid, Rio de Janeiro (the winner), and Tokyo.

But for those who opposed the Olympic bid this summer, the Games became a proxy for all of Chicago’s public works ills: the failing schools, the broken transit system, gang violence, care disparities. The colorful Chicago 2016 banners adorning Washington Park loomed over these South Side community issues leading up to the Oct. 2 bid decision, and continued to hang somberly for sometime after the city’s loss, raising the questions: “When will the park district take them down?” and “What will the city do next in this beautiful park, and the dismally low-income neighborhoods at its borders?”

In Chicago’s failed quest for the Olympic bid (a loss Mayor Daley blames partly on “dart-throwing” nay-sayers), the opponents asked, “How can we fund an Olympics when our public schools are failing? How can we send thousands upon thousands of tourists into South Side communities that we’re afraid to enter ourselves?” All the while, supporters championed the injection of private money into the veins of the city’s transit map and business corridors. With the Games behind them, I want to see these two groups come together, because they have much in common. Both want Chicago to prosper and be worthy of global acclaim, and both understand that this won’t happen until we reverse the trends of heightened gun violence, failed schools, crowded clinics, all of which unfortunately undergirded the city’s aspirations.

For Tom Tresser, the No Games Chicago member who brought the “Better Clinics...” posters to the July 2 protest, the issue of poor medical services and the 2016 Olympics were inextricable. Tresser
has been a community activist and an “angry taxpayer” for the past decade, first as the founder of Protect Our Parks and now with No Games. When he learned of the city’s plans to place major Olympic venues in public parks, he said that his background in fighting for public land compelled him to get involved in the anti-Games efforts.

“We have the same goals,” he said of his organization, the amalgam of South Side and healthcare activists, and Hyde Park residents gathering outside of the University bookstore. “We’re trying to make the city better from a grassroots level, and one of the things [No Games] has been saying all along is that we want better trains, better schools, better clinics—and not the Games.”

But if you ask many disappointed supporters of the city’s bid, the Olympic Games would have been exactly the financial stimulus to make those improvements, and to revitalize the South Side communities that have historically been forsaken by public programs in particular, far more than Chicago could have on its own.

In fact, without the promise of international tourism, private donations, and the millions of dollars in federal spending to improve the city’s security and transit systems that past Olympics host-cities received, Chicago seems to be back at the starting line, with little more than a bruised ego to show for it, or so one would think. But it is wrong to assume that the Olympics would necessarily have brought to the city, along with inspiration and global notoriety, the impetus for sweeping social improvements. One obvious reason is that the money raised to fund and insure Chicago’s bid came from private businesses, zealous citizens, and friends of Mayor Daley, that is, from a different pool than the support that the University of Chicago Medical Center or the Chicago Transit Authority are likely to receive.

But the Olympics have already forced Chicagoans to see the South Side in a different light, even as the IOC plots the path of the Olympic torch through Rio de Janeiro. Indeed, as disappointed or celebratory as we may be over the outcome, we must not forget that Chicago’s near South Side exists; it is a cluster of low-income, high-crime neighborhoods, which, despite being caught up in a century-long economic decline, surround one of the city’s largest greenscapes: a gorgeous park designed by urban planning legend Fredrick Law Olmsted. If citizens on both sides of the bid are serious about making Chicago an even safer and more prosperous place to live, and a hot-spot for international tourism, they won’t take down their 2016 banners or protest fliers. Rather, they will remember what they stand for—and those communities that would have been affected most.

III.

Take Washington Park, the small neighborhood of roughly 13,000 residents and a median household income of $15,000 according to the U.S. census, located just west of the proposed sites of the Olympic Stadium and Aquatic Center.

If you talk to Brandon Johnson, his neighborhood has forgotten how beautiful it is. With its 372 acres
of park land and 20 minute train ride from the Loop, it's little surprise to community leaders like Johnson, executive director of the Washington Park Consortium, that the neighborhood attracted international attention as the proposed site of the 2016 Olympic stadium in Chicago’s bid.

“Now that we’re getting attention from some famous people,” Johnson said in an interview in June, “the neighborhood is remembering it’s attractive again.” Johnson was not just talking about members of the IOC. He expected Mayor Daley and other North Side-dwellers to recognize Washington Park’s potential as more than a blighted neighborhood; more than a wilderness dotted with vacant lots dividing Hyde Park and the El Trains.

True, the bid committee had serious improvement plans for Washington Park tied to the Olympic bid, including an 80,000-seat stadium that now must be discarded. And the city would probably have pumped thousands of public dollars into a redevelopment of 55th Street between State Street and Cottage Grove, the thoroughfare that thousands of spectators would have taken on their way to the stadium.

But Washington Park has plans of its own, drawn up over the summer by community activists and Alderman Willie Cochran’s office, and dubbed the Quality of Life Plan. This proposal details how community members want to see their neighborhood develop over the next decade, and was created in partnership with the non-profit community development organization Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC) and a steering committee of neighborhood volunteers that began brainstorming as far back as the late 1990s. It was quietly unveiled last May, while debates over how the Olympics would be funded began heating up in City Hall.

The plan has little to say about the spectacle of the Olympics, besides expressing hope that the Games would bring skilled jobs and visibility to the community. Instead, it stresses after-school programming for neighborhood youth, bringing businesses to Washington Park’s main streets, and planting community vegetable gardens in currently empty lots.

And that is not to mention Woodlawn, Bronzeville, South Chicago, Grand Crossing—other pockets of urban poverty that were counting on the Olympics to remind Chicago that it has more to offer than the glistening Lake and bustling Loop.

They asked for affordable housing in Woodlawn and Bronzeville, where gentrification slowly threatens to push low-income residents out of their homes. They asked for more-widely accessible transportation to connect the city’s north and south, and stronger clinics to support residents who can’t afford primary care. We couldn’t bring the Games to Chicago despite all our banners and the support of President Obama, but this city has an Olympic-sized task ahead of itself still today. Community revitalization is more of a marathon than the sprint and stumble Chicago took toward October 2. I don’t think there is anyone in this city that wouldn’t benefit if Chicago actively ran that quick race, starting with the west and south sides.

The bid committee often invoked a famous phrase, uttered by Chicago’s urban-planning legend Daniel Burnham, to demonstrate that Olympian aspirations were in the city’s history: “Make no little plans…make big plans, aim high in hope and work.” Why shouldn’t this advice still ring true? 🏋️‍♂️‍♀️‍
Talking About Torture: Why a Simple Confession Just isn’t Enough

by Margot Parmenter

In the October 2009 issue of *The Atlantic*, columnist Andrew Sullivan wrote an open letter to former President George W. Bush asking him to tell the truth about American governmental torture of terror suspects. In the same issue, just pages before the topical epistle, Mark Bowden opined upon the ascendancy of ideological media in the post-journalistic era. At first glance, the relationship between the two articles is not particularly striking; indeed, they deal with topics that seem to have little to do with one another—and yet, both writers seem intimately concerned with the truth.

Sullivan, making no attempt to ignore the reality of American torture, asks only for a confession; if President Bush could just acknowledge his mistake, maybe the country could move on. The world already knows the truth, and it is no longer possible to deny that torture occurred. Bowden, however, calls the very assumption upon which his colleague relies into question. Painting an unsettling picture of modern day American journalism, he claims that the unbiased truth seekers of yore have been largely replaced by ideologues flinging stories at each other in a brutal battle for supremacy. Thus, it seems that it is not as easy to talk about truth as Mr. Sullivan suggests. We may not all agree about what happened, but even if we did, wouldn’t an element of the truth still be tied up in the meaning of the events? Mr. Bowden’s ideologues are, after all, not fighting to get the story told—they are fighting to get their story told. He does not base his denunciation of modern journalism upon an argument that the new media gets its facts wrong, but upon the more troubling observation that it doesn’t seem to care about the facts at all. Bowden uses the example of recently confirmed Supreme Court justice Sonia Sotomayor to illustrate his point. The news story most widely disseminated in the weeks preceding the Senate confirmation concerned a speech at Berkeley Law School in which Sotomayor suggested that she, as a “wise Latina woman,” would be a better judge than any white male. The fact that she made such a comment was indeed true; the ideologically motivated blogger who found the snippet did his homework.

However, he also had little interest in presenting the nominee in a balanced light: he pulled the comment out of a much longer speech, watered down the context, stirred in some dirt, and proceeded to flinging mud across the aisle at his political opponents. Thus, Bowden’s article tells us that the truth of the story doesn’t reside in its facts. By themselves, the facts don’t tell us anything—they only give information. The truth is in the way we tell them. If information was truth, everyone who knew it would agree, and there would be no reason for ideologues to battle about the stories that get told. But the truth is not something that we discover, it is something we participate in. In light of Bowden’s article, Andrew Sullivan’s call for a confession appears much more problematic.

Though I respect what Mr. Sullivan tries to do, that is to give the American public some closure by calling for an acknowledgement of the truth, I do not think that he goes far enough. If the truth can be understood as something a society creates collectively, it is not enough to accept that torture occurred. More than the truth of torture, shouldn’t we take an interest in the truth about torture? With the late August release of the Office of the Inspector General’s Special Review of the

Margot Parmenter is a fourth-year in the College majoring in History.
CIA’s *Counterterrorism Detention and Interrogation Activities* and the publication of many other official documents, it seems that the textual evidence with which to begin the process of truth-telling is available.

So now it is especially important that we remember the warning of Mark Bowden’s journalistic ideologues: it is imperative that we do not allow this information to be mixed with mud and turned to dirt. If we are going to tell the truth about torture, we should tell the whole truth. More than acknowledging what happened, we should understand it so as to prevent it in the future. If all the news stories, the opaque documents, and the shocking photographs relate anything, it is that this is not an easy thing to do. Understanding torture is a much more complex undertaking than recognizing it (the Abu Ghraib pictures may be worth more than a thousand words). Still, perhaps we can start our path toward comprehension in the seventeenth century.

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. The first of these was referred to as the *question préparatoire*, and was used upon suspected criminals in order to gain a confession. Before legal reforms took place at the end of the seventeenth century, the standards of proof were such that a confession was necessary in order to bring criminal charges; thus, interrogatory torture was central to the work of the court. A possible offender was subjected to one or more of three distinct types of torture. Males underwent the *estrapade*, or *strappado*, in which an individual’s hands were tied behind his back with a rope that is then used to suspend him from the ceiling. Or, he underwent the *question d’eau*, in which the victim’s wrists and ankles are shackled so that his body is uncomfortably stretched at a slant. Females were subjected to the *brodequin*, an iron chair that confines their legs to vices.

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), 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.

Interestingly, only this first form of torture, the *question préparatoire*, was able to establish truth according to Early Modern standards. The second
form, referred to as the question préalable, employed the same techniques, but toward a different end: it was meant to provide information about accomplices, and produced knowledge, not truth. Ms. Silverman explains that, “torture was employed to produce truth concerning the self, and...information concerning others.” During the seventeenth century, the European public would then not have suffered from the same dilemma facing Americans today. Not only was the truth of torture’s occurrence acknowledged, torture was itself the practice that afforded truth. Rather than being something to confess about, torture provided the confessions. Although both this statement and the ideology underlying it may seem foreign to modern day Western thinkers, it is perhaps not so far from our experience. Many contemporary television crime dramas, such as the recent Lie to Me* on the Fox network, are built around the trope of the confessing criminal. On these shows, a brilliant behavioral analyst or a criminology genius that can read a suspect’s physical confessions plays the hero. Even the lie detector, a common apparatus employed in police work, encapsulates the notion that a person’s body can—and does—give them away. What does all of this mean for the modern torture debate? Well, perhaps the fact that torture was used to produce truth in the past calls attention to Mr. Sullivan’s misstep. Understanding the modern day torture of terror suspects demands contention with the fact that these practices, like their historical precursor, harbor an important motive: the search for truth. The truth about torture is that torture is about truth, whether that truth be a confession in the seventeenth-century or an intelligence-gathering project in the twenty-first.

An examination of twentieth century thinkers provides evidence for this. Many denounce torture specifically because they believe the opposite of the Early Modern French. Torture, according to their view, is particularly objectionable not only because it is cruel or barbarous but also because it cannot achieve the goal that is meant: justification (especially in the case of terror suspects). It cannot produce any kind of truth, and thus appears only as a useless, abhorrent infliction of pain upon a human being. Reed College professor Darius Rejali, who appears prominently in Sullivan’s Atlantic article and has done much work on the history and theory of torture, says quite simply that “torture does not work.” Elaine Scarry, author of The Body in Pain, one of the foremost texts cited in the modern torture debate, offers a reason why. More than simply recognizing that torture disorients, disables, and impairs the psychological mechanisms necessary for recollecting information or composing coherent thought, Scarry suggests that torture actually inhibits the truth, by destroying its creator, the human self. Operating under a modern ontological framework, Scarry regards the self as an entity in its own right, not as something that is subsumed into the body. The self is—for her, and for many modern thinkers—a dynamic thing composed of the will and consciousness. Thus, true human being and freedom exists in a non-material realm; the self resides in one’s ability to decide to extend into and to engage with the world. Torture doesn’t work because it kills the capacity for truth by attacking the truth-telling entity. In other words, torture cannot produce truth, a consciously composed entity created by or at least in participation with human beings. Georgetown law professor Louis Michael Seidman puts it this way:

Even the lie detector, a common apparatus employed in police work, encapsulates the notion that a person’s body can—and does—give them away. What does all of this mean for the modern torture debate?
existence of human will cannot be reconciled... moreover, torture forces us to resolve [this] conflict by admitting, against our “will”...that we have no will. When the pain is intense enough, we must concede that we are no more than our bodies.

Pain, through the sheer force of its physical sensation, collapses the self back into the body. As Andrew Sullivan says, “When a human being is tortured, his body and mind are used as weapons to destroy his agency and will.” The pain inherent to torture overwhelms the consciousness and makes it impossible to exercise those non-material processes that are necessary to being a self with the capacity for truth-telling. Thus, instead of producing truth, torture renders it impossible. These modern thinkers see torture employed for the same ends as did seventeenth-century Frenchmen, but they find it wanting.

So, if torture is still about truth, but is no longer considered capable of producing truth, how do we account for it? If the truth can, so to speak, no longer be told under torture because there is no one to tell it, how can we possibly understand its presence at the very heart of our political culture?

I think that the answer can, at least in part, be found with reference to the work of twentieth-century thinker Ludwig Wittgenstein. His second major work, the *Philosophical Investigations*, suggested that modern Western society had become completely attached to a Cartesian epistemological division between the self and the world. In Wittgenstein’s estimation, the predominance of Cartesian theory caused modern human beings to overestimate their ability to know themselves. Since Descartes posited that the existence of everything other than one’s own consciousness was uncertain, the Western cultural adoption of his theory has caused individuals to assume that they can only really know themselves, and further that they cannot gain any truly reliable information about the external world. Thus, it seems that our modern understanding of both knowledge and truth is at odds with that of the Early Modern French.

Whereas the question préalable, while unable to produce truth, could elicit knowledge about others, today our epistemological sense tells us that it is nearly impossible to really know anything other than ourselves. If the truth is something that we create as autonomous, conscious beings, knowledge is something that we can neither make nor definitively acquire. For modern day Americans asking themselves about the truth of torture, the concept of knowing is a quixotic entity. Thus, our philosophical problem with knowing the truth resides not in the truth but in the knowing. Seen in this light, Andrew Sullivan’s position is not hard to understand. Perhaps the most that modern thinkers can do is to acknowledge the truth of torture’s existence. Really knowing what happened seems an impossible goal.

Events like those of September 11, 2001 are exceptional; they allow all who live through them to literally observe history in the making. Every American who lives through such occurrences can remember what they were doing during their realization of the catastrophe. These momentous events imprint themselves upon our lives in a million subtle ways. I was sitting in Mr. Demchak’s eighth grade history class when I first heard the news. My teacher, who was called away from the class to be informed, didn’t interrupt the end of our class discussion; he simply told us that we would be leaving school early that day. When we
asked why, he said, “Because things just got interesting.” His words epitomize a conclusion, the meaning of which is magnified by the passing of time: something changed on that day, and for the modern Western world, already so philosophically doubtful (though perhaps too practically cocksure), this change shattered what was already a dubious reality.

Now, I do not mean to overlook the multifarious nature of modern governmental torture. I do not mean to suggest that the Bush administration did not make errors in judgment, to deny that the War on Terror seemed to involve an enemy both so opaque and so hostile to the Western worldview that federal officials felt it acceptable to strip him of his human rights, or to overlook our lingering beliefs in the testimony of the physical body (if there is one thing that I am sure of, it is that we are not so much more civilized than the early modern world as we would like to think). I want only to posit a different idea about the connection between torture and truth. I want only to suggest a motivation for the American government’s actions that is neither immediately apparent nor meant to compose any sort of justification. It is this: in the wake of September 11’s devastation, perhaps the American government ran aground upon the ideological conflict between Early Modern and Modern epistemology. Faced with a new world that was no longer familiar, that grew increasingly unreliable, and that remained fundamentally unknowable, perhaps America felt too acutely the separation between self and knowledge. That is, perhaps we would have given anything to possess just one real piece of information about the new world we were living in—even the cherished principles that form the basis of our entire way of life. After all, as even a quick perusal of the released documents will show, not one of the institutional actors—not in the Department of Justice, nor in the C.I.A., nor in the military—really believed that their enhanced interrogation techniques worked. Maybe when the government authorized torture of individuals like Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, what it really hoped for was not specific details about accomplices (its belief in water-boarding’s efficacy being superficial at best), but some sort of reliable knowledge about the post-September 11th world. Maybe America was willing to sacrifice the very thing it holds most dear—that valuation of the self, that respect for individual agency and will that renders all human beings worthy of a certain dignity—because it wanted to know something, anything, about the new world.

The practice of torture, then, appears at the center of our democracy not as a reincarnation of the barbarity of the Early Modern era, but as a new horrifying instantiation in its own right. Twenty-first century American torture doesn’t care about the truth. It wants knowledge, and it is willing to injure the self, that entity whose existence obscures the reality of all other things, in order to get it. This is why it is crucial that we do not rest at an acknowledgement of what occurred. We must insist upon examining and understanding the whole truth because a practice that ignores, disregards, and obfuscates can only be overcome by an application of that which it overlooks. The truth about America is that we are supposed to uphold and protect the conscious self whose natural and inalienable rights are, in Western political discourse, the foundation of society. We are supposed to respect the inviolability of the human being whose physical security is the most basic freedom. This truth is, in my opinion, is more important than any kind of knowledge. Abandoning it in order to gain some sort of limited military intelligence is unacceptable.

Andrew Sullivan is right to call for an acknowledgement that torture occurred. But once we have accepted this, maybe it is time to think about the whole truth. Maybe the most important thing to understand about torture is not that it occurred or even who was responsible, but that its commission represents a dangerous ideological movement. Confronted with an indecipherable world, the American government sacrificed truth for knowledge, and lost its most fundamental values in the process. 📍
An old woman, a little crumpled and a little frayed, perches on an iron bench. This particular morning, she is attentively awaiting her first victim. From around the corner, a distracted and mustached young man nears her spot. Only a minute later, they sit side by side, talking.

Slowly, a balance is struck within their conversation: the young man lets go of any previous engagement while the woman lets go of her fear of his departure, so that they more and more hear one another’s response. Her muddled grammar inspires a shift in his speech from ‘yes’ to ‘yeah.’ His dropped adjectives, some a little too colorful for this context, filter absurdly into her rants. His use of “should” completely disappears, making way for “got to.” His first response: “That’s a very good point.” His last response: “I know what you mean.”

After what seems like a century, their conclusion arrives: the woman sits up a little straighter while the young man relaxes his shoulders and saunters off around the corner. Something strange has just occurred for these two diametrically opposed strangers. Something not all too uncommon, something beautiful, and something all the same very dangerous to generalize. Let us begin from the deepest building block of their conversation: the language itself.

From a simplistic linguistic standpoint, their conversation can center around two basic areas: specific word usage and syntax. Each of these areas changed in different directions, either towards more elevation or more relaxation. However, another quite opposite phenomenon contributed to this common ground. Isolated chunks of vocabulary and syntax were thrown so often into the mix that the idea of a gradual shift in language pattern begins to look more complicated.

Consider this fascinating case: The old woman did not actually replace “alright” with something like “fine” as the conversation progressed; instead of choosing to contribute “fine” as a slightly more elevated version, she latched onto the adjective “satisfactory,” provided à la carte by the young man only a sentence before. The puzzle they created did not seem to fit together, but neither noticed. Why, we might justly wonder, does this process seem to occur so haphazardly? With two people quite diversely different in speech habits, thrown together so quickly, is the result simply bound to be a mess?

Another alternative exists. Consider the process of learning a second language, which grows more and more problematic for those of us in our mentally inflexible old age. We may learn the grammar; we may understand which auxiliary verb modifies which past participle. We may brand, with hot pokers, what seems like completely illogical syntax into our poor brains. Yet when do the mental acrobatics cease? The answer is quite simple: when we cease being acrobats.

Instead of thinking in our mother tongue and converting the text, we begin to gain fluidity in a new language when we hear and understand a complex clump in a specific context. We hold onto it tightly, in one fist. We could recall the verb for preference and fish for an object, and only then grapple for the necessary link, as in the French sentence: “j’aime–les–pommes”. We could sift through our barrel of specific verbs and nouns and links and tenses, searching for those individual pieces among millions. Or, we could sift through clumps, organized by context, and
find “je les aime” at greater speed when we need it. The clumps become singular ideas, removing the mother tongue bit by bit.

George A. Miller, one of the first to find evidence for this clumping phenomenon, tested individuals learning radio-telegraphic code. Naïve individuals, as he terms them, who tried to remember each dit and dah as a separate chunk, could remember only about nine binary items in sequence. Conversely, those who Miller instructed to mentally organize the binary digits into groups of five could remember up to forty binary digits. Miller offers: “The point is that re-coding is an extremely powerful weapon for increasing the amount of information we can deal with.”

An underlying aspect of this clumping phenomenon, at least in the context of speech, must not be forgotten: the clumps, above all, are not created and then stored; they are stolen. Illegally stolen. One slip by your language partner of “je n’ai pas compris,” and suddenly you’ve used the phrase a total of three times in an hour-long class. Your friend drops the clump “a bit bizarre,” and you begin to apply it quite liberally in conversations with other acquaintances. These clumps seem to give us the advantage of speed, which is essential in rapid-fire social situations.

Still, when we reflect more, the phenomenon seems a little unsettling. With so many language clumps to draw from, we may only give ourselves the impression of creating totally original renditions of the ideas inside our heads. This impression starts to break down when we are confronted with someone who possesses quite a different library of language clumps. The theft comes out into the open as new constructions pop up from underneath our normal dialogue. And what is more, we have had very good training, since an early age, to try out these stolen pieces with enthusiasm or at least with flexible willingness.

Not a few will probably come to this phenomenon and look for a solution. For how can we humans, we brilliant, completely independent, and ferociously self-assertive bunch of Homo sapiens, accept what appears to be a lack of expressive freedom? How dare our language partner, our friend with his superfluous vocabulary, and even our mother, how dare they all wrest this freedom from us! Yet this phenomenon only disturbs those who are unwilling to look at humans in a non-individualistic way.

Perhaps we speak in a hodge-podge, in a puzzle of all those beautifully workable clumps surrounding us. Perhaps we even have a hodge-podge library of ideas inspired by this lingual library. This may mean a lack of individual control, but not of freedom. In conversing with the old woman on the bench, the young man becomes more flexible, more able to seep into new modes of expression, and more able to access a previously hidden piece of society. The old woman, just as well, finds herself confronted with a verbally realized change of identity. Both lose their own structure in order to become another. At bottom, conversation is the ultimate, and at the same time, the most mundane freedom from self.
I.

“Chess is not a game. Chess is a well-defined form of computation. You may not be able to work out the answers, but in theory there must be a solution, a right procedure in any position. Now real games... are not like that at all. Real life is not like that. Real life consists of bluffing, of little tactics of deception, of asking yourself what is the other man going to think I mean to do. And that is what games are about in my theory.” —John von Neumann

“Chess, with all its philosophical depth, its aesthetic appeal, is first of all a game in the best sense of the word; a game in which are revealed your intellect, character, will.” —Boris Spassky, World Chess Champion (1969-1972)

By one estimate, there are approximately $10^{123}$ possible legal games of chess. Actually, that number is the lower bound predicated on a number of uneasy assumptions. In any case, $10^{123}$ is almost surely a gigantic number. Compared to the pathetically miniscule $5478$ possible games of tic-tac-toe, chess is vast.

However, although there is still a staggering $10^n$ possible games of checkers, that game has yet to gain anywhere near the measure of respect in society that chess has. Go is actually a far vaster game than chess, but only boasts $27$ million players worldwide. Conservative estimates put the number of chess players worldwide in the hundreds of millions. A critical question concerns why the vast finitude of chess can inspire an intelligent man like Boris Spassky to make statements such as the one above, and whether such statements are in need of stricter qualification or more humble language.

I can’t answer that question in full, but I can say that for a variety of reasons, many people and certainly most chess players think of chess in visual and conceptual terms, in a way that would be quite difficult for checkers and Go. A knight’s motion on the chess board is meant to imitate that of a real world knight. The king and queen sit powerfully behind a mass of pawns, the comparably weak foot soldiers. Chess pieces come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and different chess pieces have distinct moves, unlike the identical pieces of checkers and Go.

This visual presentation invites a visual conceptualization of the game’s mechanics. A chess player can look at his position and see if he’s doing well without engaging in specific calculation; he can play from general tactics by “controlling the center” or “attacking the enemy king.” Although any chess player will admit that being able to calculate specific variations for moves ahead is an indispensable skill, this skill is almost always paired with a conceptual understanding of chess. I’d wager that much of chess appreciation is predicated on a human love of the general concepts that seem to govern chess play.

Nahtan Schulz is a third-year in the College, majoring in Mathematics and History.
Given that chess, as von Neumann states, is ultimately a well-defined form of calculation, aren’t these conceptual prejudices really no more than CliffNotes or fairy tales? Is that even a problem, though, so long as it’s impossible for a human to compute googols of variations? For a long time, the chess world was able to revel in the seeming inexhaustibility of these conceptual fairy tales, but no more. The rise and success of chess computer programs has precipitated an existential crisis in the world of chess. Chess programs are still designed by humans and share some of their weaknesses, but explicit calculation assumes a much greater role for the computer program than for the human, and the results are telling. Sometime in the last five to ten years, the very strongest chess players were suddenly no match for the very strongest computers; now, the game is now solved for positions with only seven pieces remaining on the board. To compare, checkers programs have been stronger than the best humans for almost fifteen years (without disquiet), checkers was solved about two years ago (again, without disquiet), while the strongest Go computers are still no match for moderately experienced players on a 19x19 board.

No computer could out-conceptualize Kasparov! No human could out-calculate Topalov! Although arrogance may have played a factor, it does not wholly account for their accusations.

Duchamp’s take actually sounds a bit refreshing. The idea of characterizing the chess pieces, as a “block alphabet” that makes visual designs on the board, seems to encapsulate the simultaneous finitude and richness that in some form or another characterizes the game’s appeal to many players. This artist’s take is also more modest than the scientist’s. Where Steinitz compares chess to biology, Duchamp compares chess to Boggle! However, much more significant than Duchamp’s recognition of chess’ finitude is his belief in chess’ beauty. Would he feel the same way if powerful chess computers existed in his day? Another major component of Duchamp’s love for chess was its social purity; however, several years after the heyday of his chess career, the game took on enormous social importance for both the Soviet Union and the West during the Cold War.

Later, as an antithesis to Duchamp, world champion Mikhail Botvinnik epitomized both the scientific and social interpretations of chess. The devoted Communist Party member and electrical engineer would go on to become one of the greatest players of all time. To many modern chess players, Botvinnik is primarily remembered for being an “iron logician.” In fact, Botvinnik’s approach to chess was very human. In the mid to late 1970s, Botvinnik tried in vain to create a powerful chess
Botvinnik was indeed a very strong chess player, not in spite of his basic belief in certain conceptual prejudices, but because he was more effective at applying them than his opponents. His strong talent for explicit calculation did not hurt either. But to speak of his “iron logic” seems completely inappropriate. Botvinnik was probably wiser than many of his opponents, but hardly more logical.

Steinitz’ and Botvinnik’s games have been heavily studied, and it’s clear that those two players in particular were susceptible to letting their conceptual prejudices deeply influence their game in practice. One can feel it in their games; both players have clearly defined styles.

III.

“It is not difficult to devise a paper machine which will play a not very bad game of chess. Now get three men as subjects for the experiment. A, B and C. A and C are to be rather poor chess players, B is the operator who works the paper machine. ... Two rooms are used with some arrangement for communicating moves, and a game is played between C and either A or the paper machine. C may find it quite difficult to tell which he is playing.”

—Alan Turing

“There is a point I would like to make. With the development of chess and higher level of play, chess players lose their individual handwriting and there are fewer players with a clear style”

—Vladimir Kramnik, World Chess Champion (2000-2007)

In 1997, Garry Kasparov accused the developers and operators of IBM’s chess-playing supercomputer Deep Blue of illegally collaborating with the human grandmaster’s mid-game when the machine made some apparently “human” moves. In their 2006 world championship match, Veselin Topalov accused Vladimir Kramnik of illegally using computer analysis mid-game when Kramnik made some apparently “inhuman” moves. Garry Kasparov and Veselin Topalov ended up losing their respective matches, and to date neither one has furnished convincing evidence regarding their allegations of cheating.

Many kinds of cheating have taken place in the chess world, both before and since these incidents. The most curious example took place in the early nineteenth century and involved a supposed chess-playing automaton that was in fact operated from within by a very short and sweaty chess master (he probably also developed a goodly case of scoliosis). However, it’s pretty clear that no such suspicious business took place in the aforementioned matches.

In part, their claims of cheating can be attributed to the fact that Topalov and Kasparov were arrogant. They probably believed their own ridiculous accusations. No computer could out-conceptualize Kasparov! No human could out-calculate Topalov! Although arrogance may have played a factor, it does not wholly account for their claims of cheating. Their accusations stemmed from a faith in a theoretically nonexistent dichotomy: that there exists in chess a fundamental difference between what can be conceived or calculated explicitly, and what can be conceived conceptually. In making this mistake, they are not alone. Many players have been unwilling or unable to excise such a prejudice. The reducibility of chess is a hard thing to have to admit. In theory, chess must have a solution. Until recently though, chess players were not nearly as burdened by the consideration of that truth.

But, insofar as we are human and finite, perhaps chess will never die:

“I like the moment when I break a man’s ego”

—Bobby Fischer, Chess God
Before Thomas Hobbes, political theory consisted largely of various collections of hopes or observations, belonging more to the humanities than to the social sciences. While theory before Hobbes differed widely both in method and purpose, it had in common a lack of as well defined a system as Hobbes’. By beginning with a set of postulates and working through to their logical conclusions, Hobbes formulated a conception of politics that was for the first time “scientific”. In order to understand modern theory, and hence modern political science fully, it is necessary to examine the roots that were laid down by Hobbes.

While Hobbes’ fame rests largely on *Leviathan*, this work is not in and of itself a complete statement of his political thought. The subtitle of *Leviathan* is “The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil,” indicating that its primary focus will be on the commonwealth. However, if the *Leviathan* is to be understood in the larger context of Hobbes’ thought, then it seems necessary to examine how he conceives of the citizens of that commonwealth. Hobbes’ text on the citizen, *De Cive*, appeared prior to *Leviathan* as part of a larger trilogy concerning human knowledge, consisting also of *De Corpore* (*On the Body*) and *De Homine* (*On Man*). In order to fully understand the Leviathan, and Hobbes himself, it is necessary to understand his presentation of the citizen in *De Cive*.

Early on, Hobbes acknowledges that mere rhetoric will be insufficient for his work. In *De Cive*, he states: “As far as my Method is concerned, I decided that the conventional structure of a rhetorical discourse, though clear, would not suffice by itself.” While convinced of the insufficiency of unsupported and solely rhetorical devices, Hobbes does not hesitate in employing them: the title of the *Leviathan* is itself metaphorical. That figurative language is at once both insufficient and central means that there must be some integral part of Hobbes’ message that can be communicated only through rhetoric.

For Hobbes, rhetorical devices are the opposite of logic. He distinguishes between these two types of eloquence when he writes: “One is a lucid and elegant exponent of thought and conceptions, which arises partly from observation of things and partly from an understanding of words taken in their proper meanings as defined. The other eloquence is an agitator of the passions (e.g. hope, fear, anger, pity), and arises out of a metaphorical use of words, adapted to the passions. The former fashions speech from true principles, the latter from received opinions of whatever kind.” Consequently, it is presumable that the situations in which Hobbes uses simile and other such devices are illogical; were they logical they would have been described via the superior method of logic.

Among the subjects that Hobbes treats figuratively is the nature of the commonwealth itself. Hobbes’ chosen simile for the commonwealth even affects his method, such that he chooses to “… begin with the matter of which a commonwealth is made and go on to how it comes into being and the form it takes, and to the first origin of justice. For a thing is best known from its constituents. As in an automatic Clock or other fairly complex devices, one cannot get to know the function of each part and wheel unless one takes it apart.” While it remains unclear whether or not the constituents of the commonwealth are likewise illogical, the commonwealth qua commonwealth cannot be subjugated to logic.
In one of his more unusual comparisons, Hobbes says that men in the state of nature exist “… as if they had just emerged from the earth like mushrooms and grown up without any obligation to one another.” Following from Hobbes’ premise that the incomprehensible must be presented figuratively, it seems that not only the commonwealth in its entirety surpasses logic, but so too does its chief component, man in the natural state. If both the commonwealth and its potential citizen cannot be subordinated to reason, then it seems that the possibility of a stable commonwealth would be slim to none.

Although the publication of De Cive occurred after the outbreak of the English Civil War, it was in fact written prior. It can therefore be presumed that Hobbes’ concern with stability was a true concern, or in other words, one that did not come into existence as a result of the political turmoil in England at the time. It is surprising that someone who is supposedly so concerned with stability would espouse a theoretical framework that would ostensibly make the attainment of such stability so problematic.

However, the actual act of subjection is a logical process. Since “… the state of nature has the same relation to the civil state, i.e. liberty has the same relation to subjection, as desire has to reason or a beast to a Man,” subjection, or rather, living within the commonwealth, is a rational activity. Subjection, unlike both the commonwealth as a commonwealth and the nature of man in the natural state, is capable of rational description. Indeed, De Cive is an attempt, at least partially, for such a description. Due to the fact that subjection is rational, in contrast both to the commonwealth and to the natural state (which are both irrational and necessitate the use of simile), the need for subjection occupies a higher position in Hobbes’ thought than human nature or custom. This means that the need for subjection is more universal than any particular commonwealth or man in the state of nature. Therefore, in the event of conflict in the commonwealth, the necessity of subordination can be appealed to, but man as he is in the natural state (human nature) or the commonwealth inasmuch as it is a commonwealth (custom) cannot.

A notable difference between the similes for men and for the commonwealth is that the former is organic whereas the later is inorganic. As the commonwealth is an edifice that the citizens construct themselves, they are not justified in resisting their subjection to it given that they could have designed it differently if they had wanted to do so.

After considering the use of figurative language in De Cive, the stable commonwealth seems more feasible than it did at first. A prospective rebel against the commonwealth would presumably not want to act against his own nature, even if he could, and would be unable to change the commonwealth with reason. Thus, he would curtail his ability to attract followers, assuming that citizens are rational beings. The only recourse left to such an individual would be to seek change through the existent political structure without recourse to any higher authority (where he can only propose replacing one system of laws with another). In such a situation, it seems probable that the citizens would defer to a sovereign who protects and sustains them before a political dissident.

While sometimes accused of being overly reductionist in its view of humans, it is precisely this reduction which allows Hobbes to introduce a new kind of political theory. By relying only on the most fundamental principles, Hobbes seeks to make his conclusions inescapable. As a result of this technique, stability does not merely become a good thing for the commonwealth. It becomes its raison d’être, since only the stable regime is capable of keeping its citizens alive. Through metaphor, Hobbes links his postulates to the most visceral desires, and in doing so makes illogical claims palatable to his readers.
Rewriting Memory: a Case Study of Vladimir Nabokov’s “Mademoiselle O”

by Rebecca Anne Maurer

Our memories appear to us as enduring images of past events. Yes, we might forget details, but we don’t change the memory. We either remember or we forget. However, the consistency of memory has been challenged by academics ranging from literary critics to neuroscientists. The new consensus is that memories are not static pictures, but dynamic scenes in a constructed narrative. The events that make up our life stories are re-remembered as we age. Renowned neurologist V.S. Ramachandran has argued that humans have the unique faculty of “introspective consciousness”, which lets us construct a story out of our memories to produce a changing sense of “self”. Autobiography scholar John Paul Eakin has said that “Autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving concept in an intricate process of self-discovery and self-creation.” But despite the growing consensus that memories change over time, it has been difficult to see how they change and why; if our memories had changed, how would we know? The only window into memory is through a person’s present self-reporting, either in speech or through autobiography. With only one snapshot, deriving changes is impossible.

This problem is solved in the multiple autobiographies of Vladimir Nabokov. Nabokov published the story of his French governess, “Mademoiselle O,” multiple times over the course of several decades. The first edition was written in French and published in 1936 while subsequent editions were published in English in 1943 and again in 1967. The changes that occur across these editions provide a unique opportunity to investigate the changes in life narratives and to trace the lenses and filters that induce this change.

Each edition of the story describes the same events: Mademoiselle O arrives in the strange new country of Russia; she reads French beautifully but is otherwise unpleasant, oversensitive about her language and her weight and unfriendly to the other members of the household. But each edition embellishes the same events with different details, anecdotes and emphases, giving evidence for the filters Nabokov used looking back upon the past at different times in his life. Searching for these patterns isn’t meant to discover the true “Mademoiselle O” story; rather, it is an attempt to extrapolate details about Nabokov’s autobiography and to investigate how narrative memory works.

The story of “Mademoiselle O” demonstrates the dynamic nature of the narrative structure; through the years, the story becomes increasingly filtered through Nabokov’s political bitterness and his longing for the Russia of old.

Rebecca Anne Maurer is a third-year in the College, majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities.
ingly embittered over time. In the 1967 edition, published when Nabokov was 68 years old and in exile for almost 50 years, he mentions that the winter of Mademoiselle’s arrival was the only winter his family had spent in the countryside. In the 1967 edition he says this was because it was, “a year of strikes, riots and police-inspired massacres, and I suppose my father wished to keep his family away from the city, in our quiet country place”. However, the two earlier versions make no mention of the massacres, and in the earliest version of 1936, Nabokov blithely reports that she came that winter, “as if destiny had the desire to present to a stranger the most Russian Russia possible”. Instead of blaming their sojourn in the country on politics, in earlier versions it was a chance to complement the authenticity of the winter where it snowed so heavily.

In a scene about a simple carriage ride through St. Petersburg, the city goes from the setting of a festival to the setting of political tensions. In the two earlier versions, it is used as an opportunity to reflect on Nabokov’s memory of the tri-colored banners and the festivals in the city. Yet in the 1967 version published in Speak, Memory it also becomes a moment to demonstrate contempt for the tsarists. The narration includes a never-before written image of “Fabergé whose mineral monstrosities, jeweled troykas poised on marble ostrich eggs and the like, highly appreciated by the imperial family, were emblems of grotesque garishness to ours.” Nabokov reinterprets an old scene to include an admonishment of the tsarists decades after they lost power, as though he is only now venting his frustrations.

This moment brings into relief one of the problems of using autobiographical texts for this type of investigation. What if Nabokov never saw Fabergé eggs in that scene and made up the image for the story? As most autobiographical scholars now readily admit, “the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity.” Nabokov himself has wrestled with this question and provides an answer in the epilogue to a version of “Mademoiselle O” published in Nabokov’s Dozen (1958). There, he writes that the story is “true in every detail to the author’s remembered life.” The key here is the word “remembered,” and the notion that the life one remembers could change as time passes, or in fact, not even be ‘truthful’ to the list of discrete events and occurrences that have happened in one’s life. Or, as Shirley Neuman, an autobiographical literary critic said in her article in “The Observer Observed” (1981), truth at any given moment is what the author “wishes were the case (and therefore may have come to believe is the case).” This implies that there is an element of volition—conscious or otherwise—which develops the lenses through which we view the past. Although there can never be a perfect translation from memory to the written retelling, it’s impossible to access the true memories no matter what: the translation is part of the filtering process being explored.

The clearest example of increased political embitterment in “Mademoiselle O.” occurs when Nabokov describes the family home at Vyra. He writes in his 1936 version that, “The anxiety that I feel now when I remember the beautiful house where I grew up doesn’t have anything to do with those political events which, to use a cliché of journalism, moved my country deeply. I make fun of them, these political events”. In the 1943 Atlantic Monthly version, however, he replaces this line with a description of a staircase that his great-grandfather built of iron so that it wouldn’t burn in case of a fire. He then describes it after the Revolution, saying that when the house burned down, “those fretted steps remained standing, still leading up.”
Nabokov immediately follows this image with a caveat, saying, “But this is neither here nor there: such a number of things fade away, while and because their owners grow, change, and forget them, that it would be unfair to lay all the blame on civic convulsions.” This equivocation disappears entirely in the 1967 version: now all that remains of the house is, “those fine-wrought steps, with the sky shining through their openwork risers, remain[ing] standing, all alone but still leading up.” This last version leaves the reader with a sense of Nabokov’s resentment towards those who destroyed the Russia of his childhood. This anger starkly contrasts the whimsical attitude of the 1936 remembrance.

In addition to political changes, Nabokov’s memories about his past become increasingly filtered through a longing for the Russia of his youth. In all three editions there are clear appeals to nostalgia, but in the early versions it takes the form of a yearning for his lost childhood. For example, in the 1936 French version he says that, “No, that isn’t a sigh of banishment that I heave, unless the life of an old man is a sort of banishment when compared to his first passions”. He equates his exile not with exile from Russia, but rather with exile from childhood and from his own personal past. Similarly, there’s a telling moment in the opening scene of the French text when he discusses giving away various aspects of his life to characters in his novels. He says that it is a moment of “disproportionate sentimentality” when he gives them objects and people from his life. Additionally, he is always careful that it isn’t a “large part of my past—I am too miserly for that—but some image which I believe is able to leave me without detriment”. This guarded retention of his past highlights the nostalgia for his youth.

However, as his exile extends into its second, third and fourth decades, he begins to yearn for Russia rather than for his lost youth. In the later editions, Nabokov is more willing to give away large parts of his past to his characters. He no longer hesitates, calls himself miserly or calls these “gifts” detrimental. Rather, sentiments of longing emerge when he writes about Russia. In the scene on the veranda in Speak, Memory, he views the world through different panes of colored glass that create various imaginary landscapes of yellow, green and blue. The clear pane, which shows Vyra the way it truly was, is “the pane through which in later years parched nostalgia longed to peer.” Similarly, in earlier versions, he expresses little emotion about his exile while in later editions he is quite concerned with the pain of estrangement from his homeland. In a discussion of traveling back to Russia after some time abroad he says filled with nostalgic longing, that “In result, that particular return to Russia, my first conscious return, seems to me now, sixty years later, a rehearsal—not of the grand homecoming that will never take place, but of its constant dream in my long years of exile.”

Ultimately, these three texts set up a compelling illustration of the filters that make our life stories dynamic, evolving narratives. With the rare opportunity offered by “Mademoiselle O”, we are able to actually see processes that are almost always invisible. When an autobiographical text retells the same events with a different tone or emphasis, the author is no longer thinking of his past through the same lens. The author is no longer remembering the same story. In Nabokov’s case, the outline of a man emerges whose nostalgia for his youth is gradually replaced by political bitterness and nostalgia for Russia.
These lenses can be represented by the colored panes of glass on the veranda. Nabokov shows us the same Vyra and the same story in each edition, but each time he looks through a different pane of glass that colors the world in a different way. Some panes are more embittered, others sadder, and others are more blithe. But there is no clear pane—no absolute interpretation or rendition. Critics like Eakin have long understood this, but have rarely been able to peek at just what sort of pane the author is looking through. The different versions of “Mademoiselle O” show us that not only is this type of investigation valuable, but it produces information about the author that is available only by examining the subtle changes between versions—in this case that Nabokov was becoming more embittered as he grew older.

As for the rest of us, who don't write multiple editions of our own autobiographies, we can learn from Nabokov's example that our pasts are not static in our minds. Yes, we add new chapters and characters as life continues, but we're also continuously ruminating over the past, reviewing it through different panes of glass. There is no absolute past, no static memory. Our lives are constantly re-written as we go.
The Economist and the Hack: The Treachery of Paul Krugman

by Chad Hughes

This summer, while making small talk during a Labor Day party, one of my great aunts asked me what I study. I told her economics. Her response was charming:

“In this economy!?”

The faulty logic displayed by my crazy ninety-year-old aunt is, unfortunately, essentially the same recently exhibited by Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman. In his rambling and often paranoid New York Times polemic, “How Did Economists Get It So Wrong?” Krugman maintains that the current financial crisis was somehow precipitated by the “intellectual collapse” of the Chicago School. How he reaches this conclusion is frustratingly unclear. This is likely because the arguments presented by Krugman are nonsensical, as well as based on gross simplifications of complex ideas and out-of-context quotes meant to portray neoclassicists as heartless fools.

What is most frustrating about this piece is that Krugman is in fact a brilliant economist. Anyone familiar with his contributions to the field of economic geography would be left dumbfounded by the things he says (for he most certainly knows better) as well as why he says them. The treachery of Paul Krugman is not his attempt to discredit neoclassicism, but his lazy and utterly meaningless approach. His treachery places him in the debate over stimulus spending, not as the worthy economist that he is, but as a partisan hack imposter.

Before I begin, I should clarify what I mean by “treachery.” I am not entering the debate between neoclassical and Keynesian economics. It is not my aim to prove Krugman’s belief that Keynesian economic policy is what is best for the country. My aim is simply to show that Krugman’s critique of neoclassicism is meaningless in “How Did Economists Get It So Wrong?” This is not to say Paul Krugman’s ideas are meaningless, but rather that the arguments he employs to discredit other economists throughout the piece are so. Furthermore, I aim to discuss why Krugman employs such trickery. I ask this question specifically because I, respect Paul Krugman as an economist (based on his incredible work in economic geography) and believe that he should be capable of providing a meaningful argument. I set out to defend Chicago economists (and neoclassicism in general) against the arguments Krugman employs in this particular article. Again, I do not set out to defend neoclassicism against Keynesianism. I am not attacking Krugman’s beliefs; I am criticizing the arguments he uses to discredit other ideas.

There are many intelligent people who read Krugman and trust him as an economist. New York Times readers rely on Krugman to keep them up-to-date on developments in the field, to digest and synthesize complicated ideas, and to provide them with well-reasoned, expert insight. Instead, Krugman uses tricks in order to discredit others and to claim “victory” for his own ideas. This must not go unnoticed. Indeed, we must challenge Krugman to participate in the debate as the economist we know him to be rather than the partisan columnist he has become. Arguing as he does merely weakens his ultimate goal of proving Keynesian supremacy, as it suggests that he may not have a more legitimate approach.

Chad Hughes is a fourth-year in the College, majoring in Public Policy and Economics.
**The “Intellectual Collapse”**

Krugman’s basic critique of neoclassicism is that its proponents “mistake the beauty of its models for truth.” Such models, according to Krugman, while impressive, have no relevant application to the real world. Krugman reaches this conclusion by taking a number of other economists’ assumptions, which are meant to simplify models that underscore a single aspect of the real world, and chastises them for being “unrealistic.”

Krugman maintains that the assumption of rational expectations correlates with a “fascination in a frictionless market system.” While this sounds enticing in the context of the housing bubble, it is a flawed argument. Countless models, including Krugman’s own, necessarily assume rational actors. The purpose of such models is not to reflect the real world but to provide simplified representations with the hopes of gaining understanding of particularly unclear aspects of reality. Krugman certainly knows this, but he decides to play dumb in an attempt to make others look foolish.

Krugman’s unfair treatment of assumptions, as his most regular tactic throughout the piece, is telling. He allows for assumptions in his own models, yet he represents others’ assumptions as dogmatic beliefs; it is through such logic that the majority of Krugman’s contentions are meaningless.

By applying such “logic” to Krugman’s brilliant core-periphery model, one could accuse him of believing that the real world contains only two sectors of employment—industrial and agricultural—and that all workers are completely homogenous. To take this line of reasoning to the Krugman’s own ridiculous extent, one could say that Krugman’s core theory is worthless because it does not explain the distribution of economic activity throughout the city of Chicago. This, however, would be absurd and unreasonable.

By using similar tactics, Krugman argues that neoclassicists believe in neither bubbles nor recessions, and that recessions are desirable and in “wholesale” contradiction to the ideas of Milton Friedman. He also argues that neoclassicists believe mass unemployment is voluntary on the part of the unemployed, government spending can never increase employment, humans are rational at all times, and free markets are always perfect. His statements concerning neoclassicism’s relationship to recessions are particularly interesting. By the end of the piece, Krugman assures us that Chicago economists caused a recession that they at once do not maintain and value as good for society.

Krugman argues that the efficient market hypothesis has been invalidated by the current recession (which it also caused). Furthermore, it has been invalidated because a part of the efficient market hypothesis maintains the impossibility of recessions if the market always “gets it right.” In his response to Krugman, John Cochrane takes exception to this line of thinking, arguing that the very point of free-market economics is not that the market is always perfect, but that nobody is able to fully understand and explain price movements:

It’s fun to say that we didn’t see the crisis coming, but the central empirical prediction of the efficient markets hypothesis is precisely that nobody can tell where markets are going… Krugman writes as if the volatility of stock prices alone disproves market efficiency, and efficient marketers just ignored it all these years. This is a canard that Paul knows better than to pass on, no matter how rhetorically convenient.

Krugman uses the belief of market efficiency to show that any economist who believes in such efficiency has been proven wrong by this recession, since he believes that a faith in market efficiency necessitates the belief that the free market is perfect and recessions are impossible.
No Chicago economist—or any other economist—has ever believed that recessions do not exist. A recession is not inconsistent with a belief in the efficiency of the real market. The growth following the 2001 recession was driven in part by an abundance of debt. The recession, according to neoclassicists, is essentially a recalibration of the economy to a level of sustainable growth. Further, if future growth is unsustainable, a recession will follow to recalibrate the economy.

This is the point economists have been making about recessions and business cycles since Schumpeter. Krugman scoffs at this idea, mocking Schumpeter for having made the point during the particularly sensitive time of 1934. However, Krugman knows that to believe recessions are necessary is not equivalent to believing recessions are pleasant for society. Rather, they are an inevitable recalibration of an inflated economy. No economist wishes for a recession, but this is what Krugman would have us believe about neoclassicists, even though at other moments he would have us believe the opposite.

Krugman’s obstinacy that neoclassicists do not believe in recessions—yet believe recessions are valuable—is an aspect of Krugman’s attempt to play into the belief that Chicago economists are cruel calculators and out of touch with the real world. Krugman also derides the Chicago School based on its stance on employment. Again, Krugman’s rationality falls short: “If you start from the assumption that people are perfectly rational and markets are perfectly efficient, you have to conclude that unemployment is voluntary and recessions desirable.”

In a further attempt to underscore neoclassicists’ firm belief that unemployment is necessarily a rational choice, Krugman combines misrepresented quotes by John Cochrane and Casey Mulligan:

And Friedman certainly never bought into the idea that mass unemployment represents a voluntary reduction in work effort or the idea that recessions are actually good for the economy. Yet the current generation of freshwater economists has been making both arguments. Thus Chicago’s Casey Mulligan suggests that unemployment is so high because many workers are choosing not to take jobs: “Employees face financial incentives that encourage them not to work... decreased employment is explained more by reductions in the supply of labor (the willingness of people to work) and less by the demand for labor (the number of workers that employers need to hire).” Mulligan has suggested, in particular, that workers are choosing to remain unemployed because that improves their odds of receiving mortgage relief.

In the above quote, Mulligan is not talking about unemployment; he is talking about a reduction in employment. These are not equivalent, as Krugman knows. One is not unemployed if he actively chooses to leave the marketplace. Mulligan is discussing a reduction in the labor supply. Such a reduction would actually reduce unemployment. If one is not part of the labor supply, he is not unemployed. Think, for example, of retirees.

There is a kernel of truth, however, in Mr. Mulligan’s belief that certain government programs may have exacerbated the current level of unemployment. Some people choose to remain unemployed because by doing so, they may, for example, receive mortgage relief. The cost of becoming employed, in some instances, is greater than remaining unemployed. This, however, does not mean neoclassicists actually believe that all or any of the unemployed desire their situation. Making an unfortunate and difficult choice to qualify for an assistance program clearly does not mean one wants to be unemployed. Nonetheless, Krugman maintains that Chicago economists be-
lieve that the unemployed desire unemployment, as an attempt to make them seem insensitive.

**What’s the Point?**

As stated above, most frustrating is that Krugman doesn’t understand that his treatment of other economists’ ideas is unfair. So, what’s the point? Why does Krugman use unfair tricks to discredit a huge amount of important theory and to attempt to make other economists look like fools?

John Cochrane offers two theories. His first is that Krugman wants to “essentially be the Rush Limbaugh of the left.” Personally, I do not believe that Rush Limbaugh would want to be Rush Limbaugh if he only knew better. The difference is that Krugman does know better. Perhaps this is naïve, but I do not believe that Krugman would truly want to risk his credibility simply to become a popular partisan pundit. Cochrane’s second theory says: Krugman is out of ideas and therefore “swiftboats” other economists’ ideas rather than attempting to dispute them with real ones.

Krugman’s main goal in discrediting neoclassicism is to claim victory for Keynesian ideas. Krugman states that Keynesian policy is essentially “the only game left in town,” but provides no evidence to support this claim. He simply tells us that the Great Depression and the current recession prove neoclassicism irrelevant, leaving us with government spending to fix the unnecessarily low consumer demand. He expects his readers to simply take his word because he has won a Nobel Prize. Unfortunately, he undermines his position by meaninglessly attacking other economists’ ideas. Cochrane is right to challenge Krugman for being out of ideas. Perhaps such a challenge will inspire Krugman to prove them wrong.

**The Debate: Responsibility for Both Sides**

Perhaps, however, Cochrane is wrong. Perhaps Krugman simply took the easy way out. He realized it would be easier to smear neoclassicism, with nonsense, rather than to construct a well-reasoned argument. Additionally, perhaps Krugman believed that such a smear would be a more effective way to undercut those who disagree with his ideas. One could assert that the debate is too complicated for a general audience and that Krugman’s chosen style is therefore a more effective way to convince the general public of his ideas.

But this however, is an unfortunate line of reasoning. *New York Times* readers are more than capable of understanding a more thoughtful and meaningful critique—of which Mr. Krugman is certainly capable. The debate is not too complicated to be explained to the general public in a responsible way.

Finally, despite what economist on both sides would like to think, the debate over the relevance of Keynesian polices is worthwhile. Krugman is right in asserting that Chicago economists need to stop “giggling” to one another when somebody presents a paper supporting Keynesian ideas. Such papers need to be taken seriously, if only because so many economists, politicians, and members of the public take them so seriously. Cochrane states that American politicians unfortunately still function within a Keynesian framework. For this reason alone Chicago economists need to stop giggling and start understanding. Both sides must recognize the importance of this debate, no matter how irrelevant they consider the other to be.
Imagine Woody Allen as a WASP—a screenwriter and director fascinated by the conversations, conventions, and neuroses of New York’s Upper East Side Christian elite instead of second-generation Jews from Brooklyn. Or, if that possibility seems too farfetched, instead picture a Preston Sturges transported to the 1990s—a filmmaker playfully mocking the social conventions of the upper crust, depicting the changed sexual and social relationships marking post-1960s culture, only now unencumbered by the Motion Picture Production Code. If both of these imaginary filmmakers sound like impossibilities, even paradoxes, but their themes found cinematic expression in the films of Whit Stillman, an often-overlooked writer and director of the 1990s. Although Stillman’s films have almost completely escaped notice by the broader public, their combination of the best elements of classic Hollywood and modern comedy makes them worthy of reappraisal.

It has been over a decade since Stillman’s third and final film, The Last Days of Disco (1998), was released by Universal Studios to financial failure and public neglect. Despite starring Kate Beckinsale and Chloé Sevigny and being marketed as part of a disco revival which included Ryan Phillipe’s 54, the film grossed an abysmal $3 million on an $8 million dollar budget. Much like Stillman’s other two films in his “doomed-bourgeois-in-love” trilogy of comic dramas, Metropolitan (1990) and Barcelona (1994), it was generally unpopular with audiences and was soon forgotten (except by a small group of critics and a cult following of Stillman aficionados). Soon after, Stillman himself lost patience with the American film industry and left for Europe, attempting to break into the French and English film industries with little success. Yet this autumn The Last Days of Disco was re-released by the Criterion Collection, the second of Whit Stillman’s three films to be so honored.

This relatively minor burst of exposure may simply be a blip on our culture’s cinematic radar. However, for supporters of Stillman’s work there may be no better time to approach this film afresh, to explain what makes Stillman such a perceptive guide to the perennial problems of youth. Despite The Last Days of Disco’s seemingly dated subject matter, it is one of the rare comedies that can help an audience better understand its own character and its particular blend of virtues and vices. Always sharp and self-deprecating dialogue, along with its dark subject matter, combine with a nostalgic and romantic sentimentality into a dramatic whole greater...
than the sum of its parts. Stillman’s film presents a timeless picture of youth that doesn’t flinch from depicting its inevitable follies, all the while allowing for their charm and ultimately holding out for the possibility of youth’s redemption.

Before approaching the film, it is helpful to establish The Last Days of Disco’s relationship to the rest of Stillman’s oeuvre. While correctly understood as a comic director, Stillman defies simple categorization. His first film, Metropolitan, was accurately described as “either an elegy for the death of the upper classes disguised as a sweet, teen romance, or…a sweet teen romance disguised as class elegy.” In Metropolitan, as in all of his films, the class in question is the “urban haute bourgeoise,” or Upper East Side-bred New Yorkers sent to boarding schools and New England liberal arts colleges. His second film, Barcelona, is a romantic comedy depicting the culture clash experienced by two American cousins in 1980s Barcelona. Yet this seemingly light-hearted plot is set against the backdrop of Cold War tension, violent anti-Americanism, and European secularization. Characters from both films make cameo appearances in The Last Days of Disco. However, it is only in this final film that Stillman makes his boldest attempt to explore the moral dimensions of his characters’ actions.

The backdrop of The Last Days of Disco is downtown New York City in the very early 1980s. Its focal point is a disco palace, known only as “the Club,” a locale clearly modeled after Studio 54. The central characters of the film comprise a small circle of young Manhattan professionals: aspiring lawyers, publishers, and advertising executives. Stillman depicts the bacchanalian glamour of the disco scene in all of its glory; with its outrageous costumes, racial diversity, and possibility for sexual experimentation, both gay and straight. However, his protagonists mostly flit through in an insular, lily-white world, clad in Lacoste, J. Press, and Brooks Brothers, seemingly aloof from the currents of the times. Yet some are winningly sincere in their attempt to claim a status as “adherents to the disco movement,” as aspiring lawyer Josh Neff (Matt Keeslar) puts it shamelessly. Their status as latecomers to the disco phenomenon, as elite, white adherents to a scene begun by a less privileged community, is part of the contextual irony of the film.

Nevertheless, Stillman does more than gently mock the inability of white urbanites to genuinely participate in foreign subcultures. He probes the social mores of his Upper East Side subjects, revealing their universality and finally, their limitations. The gritty disco milieu is only a backdrop for the human comedy that is more surprising and thoughtful than its frivolous setting leads a casual viewer to believe. While Stillman’s film follows the travails of numerous members of a social circle, the moral center of this film is the naïve, quiet, and straight-laced Alice (Chloë Sevigny) and her principal foil, a domineering, cynical college friend and roommate Charlotte (Kate Beckinsale). Recent Hampshire graduates, they are both embarking on careers in publishing while attempting to find social success, narrowly defined as a relationship with a similarly well-bred, social climbing man.

For Charlotte, the most important goal on the disco scene is “to be in control of [her] own destiny, not to fall into that fifties cliché of waiting for guys to call.” She is confident that they have
entered into “a whole new era of music and social models. [Where] we’re in complete control.” Charlotte’s confidence in the possibilities of these new social models relies on a faith in individual agency and self-sufficiency, in social and sexual life. Her need to control also leads to a level of self-serving flexibility. She will espouse a relativistic non-judgmental viewpoint in one scene, only to harshly attack Alice’s choices in the next. She is an exemplar of Armond White’s claim that, “Stillman has expunged the Hollywood tradition... that makes us expect a caustic, dismissive, or trivializing view of the ruling class. Stillman disorients robotic viewers by presenting characters who are already, caustic, dismissive, and trivializing.”

For Alice, Charlotte’s confidence in individual agency is a dangerous example. While Alice is clearly the more intelligent of the duo, her social and sexual inexperience lead her to follow her friends’ example and attempt to seduce men around her with disastrous consequences. In the moral climax of the film, the illusion of control is shattered by the realization that an ill-conceived tryst has lead her to contract incurable herpes. It is part of Stillman’s strange genius that even venereal disease can find a place within the moral fabric of his comedy. Stillman may seem to present an almost Victorian image of a young woman destroyed by a social disease. However, he is not simply creating an updated version of the myth of the “ruined” or “fallen” woman, but rather a more nuanced view of the hidden costs of modern mores.

“I’m beginning to think,” Alice says after she discovers her condition, “that maybe the old system, of people getting married based on mutual respect and shared aspirations, and slowly, over time, earning each other’s love and admiration, worked the best.” “Well,” Charlotte replies, “we’ll never know.” That final statement, not simply the quasi-Victorian nostalgia for the social models of the past, is Stillman’s subtle jab at our post-romantic culture. Modern social life is still characterized by our inability to make an informed choice between the old and the new. We can’t simply rationally discover the difference between the old system and the new one, when the new system is thrust upon us by our social context. We too will “never know” its advantages and disadvantages. Whit Stillman has joked about his own nostalgia: “For me, the present is a golden era that’s ending too. That’s the greatest golden era. Right now. I just like pining for lost times. I can pine for this morning.” While his nostalgia for the disco era permeates this film, it is his nostalgia for even older values, while admitting the impossibility of their return, that is his most unusual aesthetic contribution.

Josh Neff, disco adherent, and Alice’s sometimes love interest, represents the best possibility for spiritual renewal for those, like Alice, unable to find solace from modern society. Like her, he is portrayed as shy and easily discouraged; he explains once that he “will take no for an answer.” However, in his case it is revealed that his strangeness comes from manic-depression, only helped by regular doses of lithium. We find out that he was expelled from Harvard for singing hymns in the streets. The words of one particular hymn, which he later sings for Alice, encapsulates part of Whitman’s concern about the anxieties of modernity:

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and thy balm.
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire,
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire
O still small voice of calm.
We can understand how any attempt look beyond our base desires for a moment of divine calm can appear to society as a kind of insanity. Josh’s desire for transcendence, although imperfectly expressed, is more admirable than the hedonistic pursuits of many of his friends. Even Charlotte, in a rare reflective moment after a traumatic incident, goes back on her earlier disparagement of Josh and reconsiders the normality of hymns. She even sings a moving version of “Amazing Grace.” While Josh has given up the community of believers for the community disco, his aspiration to find a place for stability and peace through his relationship with Alice is one we can view sympathetically.

The film ends with Alice reunited with Josh, taking a subway to begin their relationship anew. The O’Jay’s “Love Train” begins to play and they begin to dance; soon all of the passengers begin to boogie along with them as the train speeds away. Yet the film does not end with “Love Train,” and as the credits roll Charlotte’s rendition of “Amazing Grace” plays again. Stillman has said this was his “cowardly way of interjecting religion around the edges” of his film. Despite its marginal placement, it provides a powerful reminder of the connection between redemptive human love and divine grace.

Stillman has always spoken of his hostility to “problem” movies, complaining about their triteness and predictability. While The Last Days of Disco contains stories other than that of Alice and Josh, all of which add to the film’s charm and complexity, none of the dilemmas are simply solved and left behind. Stillman’s characters are all flawed and open to his deft mockery, yet his humor never lacks compassion and always reveals sharp truths about the audience as well as the characters.

Stillman himself has returned from eleven years of self-imposed exile in Europe to his cinematic home, New York City. He claims he has written consistently and hopes to transition back into film production. It seems unlikely that a filmmaker so wedded to analyzing the social foibles of the ever-shrinking East Coast elite will garner much attention in our blockbuster-obsessed culture, but perhaps that is our loss. In The Last Days of Disco Alice is described by one of her co-workers as “aesthetically” a “reactionary.” This description can be extended to Stillman himself, justifiably so considering his characters, his ethical concerns, and his admiration for an idealized past. However, any contempt he has for the present is perfectly balanced by his hope for the future. That, surely, makes him not only the best kind of reactionary, but also places him in an aesthetic category of his own.
SOURCES

The Most Mundane Loss of Self

Miller, G.A., The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on our Capacity for Processing Information. Psychological Review, 63, 81-97, 1956.

Talking About Torture: Why a Simple Confession Just Isn’t Enough


Re-writing Memory: a Case Study of Vladimir Nabokov’s “Mademoiselle O”

Ramachandran, V.S. Radio Lab Interview: <http://www.wnyc.org/shows/radiolab/episodes/2006/01/15>

At Whit’s End
