



# Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

## FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION—Cannes Edition

JIM KELLER

This year's Cannes Film Festival, presided over by Jury President Nanni Moretti, will open with Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* on May 16. What will undoubtedly follow is the first fuel injection of the 2012 Academy Awards race. The festival will be packed with industry insiders and celebrities galore (because getting a ticket to even one of the festival's screenings for a non-insider is virtually impossible). So for those of us who dream of one day crossing the Croisette in the French Riviera city, here's a look at some of the films to be presented this year. My list is comprised of highlights from those films, which, with considerable pedigree behind them, may find themselves in the throes of Oscar come February:

*Moonrise Kingdom* (director: Wes Anderson):

Recounts a tormented and surprising story in which a pair of lovers in 1965 flee their New England town in the midst of a summer storm, which prompts a local search party to fan out to find them. The film features an ensemble cast comprised of Edward Norton, Bruce Willis, Bill Murray, Frances McDormand, Tilda Swinton, and Jason Schwartzman, as well as newcomers Kara Hayward and Jared Gilman, playing the pre-adolescents.

**For Your Consideration (FYC):** While Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* scored a nomination (Best Animated Feature) and *The Royal Tenenbaums* was up for Best Original Screenplay; neither won, and chances this year seem limited to Screenplay, especially with an ensemble cast.

*Lawless* (director: John Hillcoat):

The story centers on a group of brothers who run a bootlegging business in Depression-era Virginia and their skirmishes with local law enforcement that want a cut of the profit.

**FYC:** Having seen an early cut of the film, it has everything: a strong perfor-

mance from a male lead (Tom Hardy), a gorgeous, lush landscape, and pitch perfect music to match the scenery. While neither Hillcoat nor Hardy have been nominated previously, look for Best Director, Picture, Actor, Cinematography, Art Direction, and Score nominations.

*Killing Them Softly* (director: Andrew Dominik):

Jackie Cogan is a professional enforcer who investigates a heist that went down during a mob-protected poker game.

**FYC:** Brad Pitt has been nominated three times; once in supporting, the other times in lead (*Twelve Monkeys*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, and *Moneyball*, respectively)—this could be his year to shine. Dominik hasn't been nominated yet, but 2007's *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* proved that he is a force to be reckoned with. Keep an eye on Pitt for lead actor and Dominik for Screenplay and Director.

*The Paperboy* (director: Lee Daniels):

A reporter returns to his Florida hometown to investigate a case involving a death row inmate.

**FYC:** Daniels gave us *Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire*, which earned Best Picture, Director and two acting nominations, so he could certainly figure in here. Also, Nicole Kidman has been nominated twice for Best Actress in a Leading Role (*Rabbit Hole*, *Moulin Rouge!*) and won once (*The Hours*); there is no reason to count her out for the supporting category here. Finally, with a more serious role, Zac Efron could surprise us all.

*On the Road* (director: Walter Salles):

Based on the novel by Jack Kerouac, the film follows beatniks Dean and Sal on their search for "It," which results in a fast paced, energetic roller coaster ride dotted with highs and lows throughout the US.

**FYC:** The director of *Central Station* and *The Motorcycle Diaries*—both nominated, critically acclaimed films—is certainly one to watch, but the cast featuring up and comers Sam Riley and Garrett Hedlund in the leading roles is perhaps the more intriguing element of the film. Rounded out by three-time Oscar nominee Amy Adams, and Oscar winner Viggo Mortensen, alongside Kirsten Dunst and Kristen Stewart, there seems plenty of opportunity for any of the actors to shine.

*Rust and Bone* (director: Jacques Audiard):

Based on Craig Davidson's shared title short story collection, the film centers around a 25-year-old man of modest means who is unwittingly strapped with a five-year-old boy and who develops a relationship with an orca trainer.

**FYC:** Audiard is the Frenchman behind 2009's *A Prophet*, which earned a Best Foreign Film nomination, but was also nominated for the Palme d'Or (Cannes' top prize) and won the Grand Prize of the Jury instead. However, the Academy generally doesn't honor foreign directors as their films are more often than not relegated to the Foreign Film category. The Academy does honor foreign actors, however, and if the trailer is anything to go by, Marion Cotillard has plenty of scenery to chew here. Matthias Schoenaerts is also one to watch after his critically acclaimed turn in last year's Best Foreign Film nominee, *Bullhead*.

Of course, Cannes isn't primarily known as an Oscar vehicle. The "Un Certain Regard" Category recognizes young talent and encourages innovative and daring works by presenting the category winner with a grant to aid its distribution in France. The highlight of this year's lineup is Benh Zeitlin's premiere feature film, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, which won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and which many

believe to be the festival's lone standout. The film follows six-year-old Hushpuppy, who leaves her Delta-community home in search of her mother while her father's health fades and environmental changes release an army of prehistoric creatures called aurochs. Time will tell if Zeitlin's film can keep its momentum and end up an Oscar contender.

Screening out of competition this year will be Bernardo Bertolucci's *Me and You*, DreamWorks' follow-up *Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted*, and the HBO Mini-series *Hemingway & Gellhorn*, as well as Dario Argento's *Dracula 3D* and 2010's Palme d'Or winner (for *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*) Apichatpong Weerasethakul's latest, *Mekong Hotel*.

The closing night's film is Claude Miller's *Therese Desqueyroux*, which is based on

the novel by François Mauriac. It features Audrey Tautou portraying an unhappily married woman who struggles to break free from social pressures and her boring suburban setting.

Both *The Artist* and *The Tree of Life* bowed at Cannes last year and the films were nominated for Best Picture and Palme d'Or, respectively. However, not all films at Cannes prove to be American success stories: see Tilda Swinton's fantastic turn in *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, or that of Kirsten Dunst in *Melancholia*, who took home Best Actress honors from Cannes. What will it be this year? Will Cannes alumni go on to vie for the Academy's top honors? Or will this year's fete prove to be more art-house fare for the Academy's wheelbarrow? We'll get a glimpse of this when the winners are announced on May 27! •

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## The Evolution of English

ZEENA NACKIERDEN

"I cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible." This line, uttered by Catherine Moreland in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, could apply as much to the way English is used today in certain social and professional situations as when it was first written in the eighteenth century. Henry Hitchings is a theater critic for *The London Evening Standard* and in his work entitled *The Secret Life of Words: How English Became English*, he takes an entertaining look at the evolution of English, making the case that the language is "a transcript of history, not an immutable edifice. Changes occur in language because there are changes in the conditions under which language is used." This quote may seem self-evident to the Twitter generation, but others would surely wish to be buried with Shakespeare at the thought of transcribing Hamlet's "To be, or not to be?" into text speak: "2b/-2b=?" Lesser transgressions, depending on one's point of view, have also crept into our popular vernacular. For instance, the opening credits of *Star Trek* ("To explore new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before") was spoofed by Douglas Adams in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: "To boldly split infinitives that no man had split before." Skilled practitioners of the English language gain the respect of their peers while grammatical errors have often been attributed to moral or mental inadequacies. Hitchings points out examples such as the penchant of George W. Bush, 43rd American president, for ambiguous syntax, or the fact that the late President Herbert Hoover had to take a remedial course prior to being admitted to Stanford University. Many dyslexics also attest to feeling mentally inadequate because of their reading abilities.

Who makes the rules that can, at best, serve as a lucid guide to an average listening or reading audience or, at worst, serve as a skit for *Saturday Night Live*? Hitchings calls these arbiters of proper English "prescriptionists" and describes their default state as "[saying] what we should not do, rather than [being] precise and con-

sistent about what we should do." The belief that the avoidance of mistakes is of paramount importance leads prescriptionists to proclaim that Elvis Presley should have said "I'm all shaken up" rather than "I'm all shook up." Robert Lowth, bishop of London from 1777 to 1787, was a famous prescriptionist who popularized the distinction between "would" and "should," noting that the former denoted "inclination," while the latter denoted "obligation." He also decreed that it was unacceptable in formal written English to end a sentence with a preposition, but accepted its practice in familiar use. Hitchings paints a portrait of prescriptionists as individuals who hand down judgments based on a wish to impose order on life's encroaching chaos, rather than making decisions based on science.

Winston Churchill's quote that "Britain and America are two nations divided by a common language" becomes obvious to the reader as Hitchings takes us on a historical tour of American attitudes towards English. Noah Webster is perhaps the best-known example of someone who campaigned tirelessly for an American language that would exemplify independence. Webster's *The American Spelling Book*, which contained his ideas for how the language should be codified, was published in 1787 and totaled 100 million in sales. The ideas for Webster's impressive and enduring legacy, *The American Dictionary of the English Language*, were planted earlier in his career, when he said: "As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as in government." A modern-day example of an adherent to this framework of thought is Chinese nationalist, Li Yang. He developed Crazy English, an unorthodox teaching method designed to "conquer English and make China strong."

The carefully constructed arguments of purists or nationalists can provide the illusion of order and cohesiveness among people. Purists also enable us to be part of the in-crowd or scoff at the linguistic gaffes and atrocities committed by others. Hitchings remarks how a misused semicolon or stray comma might elicit in

some readers the same violent distaste as seeing a puppy tortured. Purists may insist that order is the only rational response to assimilating people who may use a verb at the start of the sentence (Tahitian) or distinguish among several genders (Burushaski language spoken in Northern Pakistan) into a group that can communicate effectively in one language. Paradoxically, mavericks have contributed to a language that is also associated with protests. One example cited by Hitchings is the sixteenth century critic, Thomas Nash, who had a gift for making enemies, including all of his own country's bishops, and who appeared to have been responsible for words such as helter-skelter and swagger. Closer to home, the Brooklyn

bard, Walt Whitman, was "an eloquent advocate of a more fluid experimental approach" to the English language.

Today the barriers between formal and informal English are becoming more porous thanks to the Internet. Colloquialisms are filtering into dictionaries and the digital age may be accelerating the evolution of the language, permanently imprinting the emoticon and heralding the demise of punctuation marks such as the apostrophe. Bishop Lowth must be rolling in his grave. •

Reference:

1. Henry Hitchings, *The Secret Life of Words: How English Became English* (London, John Murray, 2008).

## Capitalism, Part 2: Malthusian Markets and Darwinian Democracy

BENJAMIN CAMPBELL

In 1989, Francis Fukuyama penned *The End of History?*, an influential article that he later expanded into a bestseller. Fukuyama argued that due to the "total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives," one could project "Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." Today, as the purported liberal democracies frantically struggle to prevent financial collapse while utterly failing to avert ecological disaster, Fukuyama is remembered mainly for the hubris of a bygone era. Such displays of smug establishment self-assuredness seem to have markedly declined sometime between the bombing of Baghdad and the bailout of Bear Stearns.

Although the *status quo* now appears entirely delimbed, some, like *Natural Selections* columnist Jacob Oppenheim, continue in the Fukuyaman tradition, insisting "t'is but a scratch!" However, Oppenheim betrays the collective decline in confidence, able to muster up only the boilerplate assurances of market efficiency, while flailing in both directions on the issue of technocracy. Increasingly unable to mount a positive case, capitalism's apologists are now left with little more than an impossibility theorem. In response to the hopeful cries of "a better world is possible," they offer only its cold negation. The claim that all alternatives have been tried and forever discredited is difficult to take seriously as an honest intellectual assessment. Rather, it appears to be meant to limit debate on a subject that capitalists are increasingly uncomfortable discussing. As Republican messaging guru Frank Luntz recently advised, "don't say capitalism."

The Fukuyamans have long understood Luntz's advice, preferring to mount their defense in the name of "liberal democracy."

This is impressive rhetorical framing, for not only does it imply that their opponents carry the dim torch of a discredited despotism, but does not everyone today believe in some conception of liberty, and at least admit a begrudging respect for democracy? Even the Eurocrats being installed to fend off the masses must feign fealty towards the Athenian anachronism, much as aspiring politicians in this country must pretend to be Christian. The question then is not whether liberal democracy, but democracy over what, and the safeguarding of what liberties?

In fact, the "liberal democracy" in question is one that couches in "liberty" vast private property rights that are protected from democratic control. The notion of property rights is extended from the right to own personal goods for use, to the right to own vast sectors of the economy for profit. That is, property rights are extended to capital, which we can belatedly define as money invested for profit. Thus, by "liberal democracy," what is really meant is capitalist democracy.

The first thing we should note about capitalist democracy is that it is inherently contradictory. Capitalism is not democratic, and conversely, democracy is not capitalist.<sup>1</sup> This internal contradiction was the implicit message of Zuccotti Park's democratic assemblies held in the shadow of capitalist power, and it is a message that many Eastern Europeans have had to learn the hard way. In response to growing resistance to Eastern Bloc authoritarianism, the West passed through the Iron Curtain a "liberal democracy" that was a Trojan Horse carrying within it a band of rapacious profiteers. Thus, while Oppenheim in his Western wisdom is incredulous that anyone might

"still profess a belief in communism with a straight face," in fact, a majority of Romans today believe that "communism was a good idea," even judging life better before the revolution.<sup>2</sup> It seems unlikely that the people who overthrew Ceaușescu did so for the liberty of Western capital to subjugate their nation, but democracy and capitalism are so often presented as a package deal.

Capitalist democracy is a strange chimera that can only be understood if one recognizes that it was not created by intelligent design, but in fact evolved out of a continually unfolding struggle in the material world. Liberty and democracy are vulnerable creatures, and the extent to which they currently survive had to be fought for and protected against the predation of power. Not only does power concede nothing without a demand, but it will claw back all prior concessions if not met with resistance. It may therefore seem surprising that a supposed defender of "liberal democracy" would polemicize against the type of activism necessary to win and protect the things he professes to value. However, not only do "liberal democrats" have a strange definition of liberty, but they often have a strange definition of democracy, one that strictly limits the power of the people to control much of anything. To Fukuyama, democracy merely requires "the consent of the governed." To Oppenheim, it seems to involve rule by an "educated elite," that is merely "legitimized" by the public. One wonders if these thinkers would consider feudalism democratic, so long as the "governed" "legitimize" and "consent" to their domination. Remember, the impossibility theorem assures the serfs that they have no alternative.

The second thing to note about capi-

talist democracy is that it bears little resemblance to a small-government libertarian fantasy. The very fact that private property is deemed a right implies that the state must protect it, and, since nearly everything is privatized, this requires an extraordinarily powerful state. A veritable Panopticon is ever vigilant in protecting private land from public use, private industry from worker control, foreign resources from foreign peoples, and “ownership” of ones and zeros from free speech. “Liberal democracy” thus serves as a subterfuge for a state that violently intervenes in affairs to protect the interests of capital, rendering indefensible Oppenheim’s assertion that liberal democracies “do not cause harm.” One cannot separate the economic system from the political system necessary to enforce it.

The third thing to consider is how the incongruent capitalism and democracy might co-exist. The interests of the two are not aligned, but we should consider the possibility that they might be complementary, with capitalism providing economic growth, and democracy regulating it for the public interest. After all, this is the dominant ideology of contemporary politics, with most debate reducing to disagreements over the degree of democratic oversight required.

In fact, the regulation of capitalism for the public interest is extraordinarily difficult. Capital exists in perpetual Malthusian struggle, selected solely on its ability to replicate itself. Individual capitalists might wish to be socially responsible, but such vestigial notions are quickly eliminated when they do not serve the sole fitness metric of profit. Thus, capital by its very nature will prey on everything that stands in the way of its growth. In such an environment, all other entities are subject to natural selection, endowed with high or low fitness depending on the degree to which they advance or hinder capital’s profit. If a lineage of democracy is to survive in this hostile ecosystem, it will therefore evolve to serve capital by grafting itself into symbiosis with power. The result is the embarrassing spectacle of politics in a capitalist democracy, where opposing factions of corporate yes men argue over which industries to serve, how best to ensure their profit, and cultural issues of little economic consequence. Viewed from a certain vantage point, this all retains an appearance of democracy, encouraging an illusion of control, and all the

while capitalism blindly drags the democratic rump of the chimera ever faster in the direction of its suicide.

The manner by which capitalism distorts democracy is manifold. A clear starting point is this country’s election financing laws, which after decades of relentless pressure have now yielded to a level of overt bribery that would make the robber barons of the last gilded age blush. In the age of unlimited donations to billion-dollar campaigns, this corruption is so brazen that I will not rehash what has been so thoroughly covered by liberals and late-night comedians. It is difficult to abstain from such a low-hanging fruit, but I do so to emphasize that the influence of “money in politics” runs much deeper than electoral financing. How else could one explain capital’s triumph over the welfare states of Europe?

The influence of capitalism begins on the individual. Absent all other effects, merely existing in hierarchies of logarithmic inequality is corrosive to attitudes towards political equality. Individuals tend to over-attribute outcome to individual merit, resulting in deference to the “educated elite” and contemptuous or paternalistic dismissal of the uneducated masses. In fact, ascension to dominance in a system of unfettered self-interest selects for the amoral sociopathy that personifies capital, while advancement to subordinate positions selects for submissive sycophancy to the alphas. The persistent attribution to capitalists of the god-like status of “job creators” is not merely Luntz’s doing, but reflective of a type of thinking deeply embedded in capitalism.

Beyond such passive influences, capital enlists legions of lobbyists to serve its interests, while organizations that work in the public interest are far fewer and poorly-funded. One obstacle to the public counterbalancing corporate force is that, in general, it is not clear what the public interest is. Such a determination would require the deliberation of a democratic institution, which would have to adapt to the same hostile environment as Congress. Thus, advocacy groups and unions that begin as corporate counterweights also tend to evolve into symbiotic alliances with capital. Even the “grassroots” Sierra Club recently admitted to accepting \$26 million in funding from Chesapeake Natural Gas.

Capital’s lopsided organizational dominance allows it to exert an enormous influence on legislation and regulation, as well as

on ideology via the interaction and revolving door between its lobbyists, the political duopoly, the media, and “think tanks.” The nation’s most prestigious think tanks, its universities, now function predominantly as non-profit hedge funds run for the purpose of accumulating capital. This results in a range of distorting influences, from the oversight of boards of trustees stocked with wealthy capitalists, to blatant conflicts of interest such as the energy deregulation advocated by Harvard’s Enron-funded policy group.

Finally, capital holds a trump card, as it owns industry. In many cases, these industries can be used directly for influence, from manipulating monetary policy through the Federal Reserve Banks, to propagandizing through the highly-consolidated corporate media. Most importantly, capitalists may always take their ball and go home, or overseas. Capital has now successfully eliminated most barriers to international capital flow, leading to the infamous “race to the bottom,” where jurisdictions must compete to serve capital by offering the slackest labor protections, lowest environmental standards, and most Dickensian social safety net. Even if such “capital flight” could be checked, capital would retain the ultimate veto of a “capital strike.” In practice, the threat of such an eventuality is extraordinarily rare, as the multitude of aforementioned influences keeps liberal democracy running smoothly for what Einstein referred to as “the oligarchy of private capital.”

The point of debate is not, and has never been, whether capitalism leads to great economic growth. The fact that capitalism leads to a great growth of capital is nearly a truism. Rather, the question is to what extent we can control this growth for the public interest, and to what extent it controls us. The fact that we are presently unable to avert several consensus ecological catastrophes strongly suggests that we have little control. As Marx put it, capitalism is the sorcerer who can no longer control the powers called up by his spells.

Here, I have introduced a paradigm for understanding our political economy. While Oppenheim has repeatedly asserted that his political opponents are not concerned with empirical evidence, the difference between us lies in the paradigms we use to interpret such evidence. One cannot study an enormously complex system without a theory as to how the system works.



*This Month Natural Selections interviews Susan Powell, Supervisor in the Comparative Bioscience Center.  
Country of origin: Panama*

## New York State of Mind

**1. How long have you been living in the New York area?** I've been living in New York or the New York area since 1988. I moved here from Seattle when my daughter was 1, now she's 25! During the last 24 years we have lived in Manhattan twice, Hoboken three times, and spent a couple of years on a small farm in Putnam County.

**2. Where do you live?** At present I'm living (once again) in Hoboken, which some people consider the west West Village. It's as close to Manhattan as it can get and I still own property! I'm two blocks from the Hudson River. What a view Hoboken has! And it has great, freshly made mozzarella, too...

**3. Which is your favorite neighborhood?** I have to admit, I'm a Manhattanite at heart. As long as I've been here I think I've only been to Brooklyn two or three times, Queens about as many times, Bronx...have I ever been there? Only driven through, I think. But in Manhattan my favorite neighborhood would be either the West Village or the Chelsea/Gramercy Park area. But then there's also Carnegie Hill and Tribeca, NoHo... I guess it really depends on my mood.

**4. What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated?** Without a doubt the most overrated thing in the city is the Broadway musical and Times Square. They are such tourists' traps; I really just can't understand their appeal... The most underrated thing is the people. They are just fantastic. Crusty, abrasive, iconoclastic, often rude, until something shakes them out of their self-absorbed world and they become the most caring and supportive people I've ever known. Remember the blackout in 2003, the nightmare that was 9/11? I was in awe of the way everyone behaved. So kind, so tolerant, so generous. Who would have thought?

**5. What do you miss most when you are out of town?** I miss having people who know how to navigate the sidewalks and who realize the importance of walking fast enough to allow the other pedestrians to keep moving!

**6. If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be?**

I would make NYC a place where interesting, creative people can afford to live again—artists, musicians, academics—I don't like that it's become a playground for the very, very rich.

**7. Describe a perfect weekend in NYC.**

The perfect weekend in NYC would occur in either April or October, when the weather is finest. Many, many people would have left the city for the weekend and the tourists would not yet have begun to arrive in droves. The people on the streets would have relaxed just a bit. Buy a good café latte, a croissant, and wander through the market at Union Square. Then head to the Village or Tribeca for some window shopping, always looking for unusual stores. An early dinner with friends and then an evening performance at Carnegie Hall or Lincoln Center. Sunday at the Met or the Morgan Library, lunch and dessert at Sant Ambroeus. Life doesn't get any better.

**8. What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC?**

There have been so many....I wouldn't know where to start...everything from the sublime (Philip Glass and the Venice Baroque Orchestra at Carnegie Hall) to the nightmarish (a taxi ride down Madison during which the cab suddenly swarmed with thousands of cockroaches, climbing out of every conceivable place from which they could climb!)

**9. If you could live anywhere else, where would that be?** Oh, that's easy. Paris or Berlin.

**10. Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker?** Absolutely, I do! As a child my family traveled the world, we moved every two or three years and I never felt like I had a real home, home was just wherever we happened to be at that moment. I have never lived anywhere as long as I've lived here and I have come to consider myself a native. I've put down roots. ☺



### *Capitalism, continued*

Those who claim to not have a theory, or ideology, have generally taken the dominant paradigm for granted. It is good practice to be conscious of one's theory and continually assess how well it corresponds to reality, lest one be left denouncing Copernican insights while scrambling for epicycles to salvage a Ptolemaic view.

Oppenheim offers a view in which good governance would involve an "educated elite" neutrally evaluating the evidence to determine the utilitarian good. Not only is this oddly similar to the bureaucratic socialism he condemns, but the emphasis on the primacy of ideas leaves him with no better explanation for failure than "the fecklessness of our leaders and the trea-

son by inaction of our intellectuals." In contrast, I present a materialist paradigm where both ideology and institutions tend to entropically parallel the balance of power in the existing world, suggesting there are structural roots to the our current predicament. How many trains need to derail before one stops blaming the conductors, or worse, the passengers?

Capitalism did not displace feudalism by philosophers rejecting the divine right of kings. Similarly, the current defeat of the welfare state at the hands of neoliberal austerity is not occurring because Friedrich Hayek outdebated John Maynard Keynes. Economic theory has paralleled, rather than caused, the rightward shift of recent

decades. In fact, as we will see next, the dominant economic paradigm is both intellectually feeble and not at all resemblant of reality. ☺

### Footnotes:

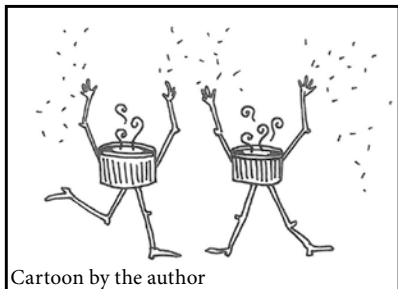
1. The latter may be observed by noting that there is not yet a "democracy market" where capitalist firms can trade votes and their highly-leveraged derivatives.

2. Polls by the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes in Romania, and the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy.

3. Fukuyama wrote *The End of History?* while employed by the RAND corporation, a US government and corporate-funded think tank.

# Natural Confections

CARLY GELFOND



Cartoon by the author

Hi there! It's been awhile since we've seen each other here. I know, I know. It's not you—it's me. You're right. But you should know that while I may dabble here and there on other pages of this publication, this column is my true home, my real love. I promise, I'll never leave you again! Well, maybe I can't promise that, but if I do pop up elsewhere, rest assured that you can expect me back here before too long, scribbling cartoon fruit and vegetable people all over your newsletter like usual.

Now let's get back to the important matter at hand: what's cooking. On a recent weekend, I awoke with a rush of adrenaline, the kind that only one thing can cause: an adult was coming to dinner. The guest—Bob—is a large imposing figure, always impeccably dressed, with a keen appreciation for good food and an even keener appreciation for good wine. Though he now lives on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, Bob grew up with John's dad outside of Chicago. We see him often when John's parents visit New York, but having Bob come out to Brooklyn without them would be a new thing for us, not to mention the fact that coming to Brooklyn at all was a new thing for Bob. We had been surprised and delighted, then, when he had been the one to suggest the evening together, as any willingness expressed by Manhattanites to venture out to our "distant" borough typically elicits our enthusiasm to have them.

But now, the day of Bob's visit had come, and I sat up in bed and looked accusingly at the clock, realizing I had only seven hours to prepare for our guest's impending arrival. I cursed myself for not having made everything three weeks in advance to freeze and defrost day-of—like my Grandma, who, incidentally, also sets the table right around that time, too.

Fortunately, I may be the luckiest girl ever (on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) because I need only walk three blocks from our apartment and I'm at the Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket, which just so happens to be one of the best farmer's markets in the city. I left John home to vacuum while I scurried off to find inspiration among the stalls of purple cauliflower and curly parsley.

When I got there, something exciting happened. As I stood at a vegetable stall filling my reusable shopping backpack (yes, that's right) I was distracted by the unmistakable scent of lavender wafting from a nearby tent. I paid for my kale and potatoes and followed my nose, Toucan Sam-style, to the source, where a woman was standing behind a table spread with a plethora of lavender products. I've always been intrigued by the idea of lavender as an ingredient for cooking and baking; in the sea of cooking blogs to be found on the Web, I've come across lavender shortbread, lavender bread pudding, spritzers, jelly, and sorbet, not to mention focaccia and a smattering of other recipes in which lavender is featured prominently.

I reached for a little brown paper bag of edible lavender, which, for the reasonable price of \$5, could be saved for New Year's confetti if things didn't work out.

Fortunately, they did. Well, mostly. Even though a torrential downpour soaked poor John as he stood on the deck grilling salmon (and Bob and I stood safely inside taking photos of him through the open door),

the fish was perfectly done—smoky and slightly charred. For a side dish, there was black Jamaican rice—given some color and complexity with roasted parsnips, purple potatoes, and fresh cut parsley, scallions, basil, and chives—and a salad of sunflower greens with shaved Parmesan.

Now, this is the part where I tell you about the fabulous dessert that followed, right? The problem is, I didn't get to make it. I ran out of time (see above re: not like Grandma). As the three of us sat at the table scraping the last bits from our plates and draining the last drops from our wineglasses, I hoped Bob wouldn't notice what to my mind was a conspicuously absent finale of sweetness. If he did—ever the gentleman—he didn't show it. He graciously praised the food (and company) as we showed him to the door.

The next night, John and I sat in our pajamas on the couch eating the most decadent and adult of desserts—a creamy, luxurious lavender crème brûlée.

## Lavender Crème Brûlée

### Ingredients:

4 cups heavy cream

1 tablespoon dried edible lavender flowers

8 egg yolks

½ cup granulated sugar, plus ¼ cup more, kept separate

*Note: You will need 5 or 6 ramekins/custard cups and an ovenproof glass baking dish large enough to accommodate them within it.*

Preheat oven to 300 degrees Fahrenheit. Butter ramekins and set them in a glass baking dish.

In a large, heavy saucepan over medium heat, bring the cream and the lavender flowers to a simmer. Remove from heat and allow the flowers to infuse the cream for 15 minutes. Strain cream mixture through a fine mesh strainer to remove lavender flowers. Discard flowers.

In a large bowl, whisk together the egg yolks and ½ cup sugar until light and creamy. Slowly add the strained cream to the egg mixture, blending well. Divide custard mixture among the ramekins.

In a clean saucepan, bring several cups of water (exact amount needn't be specified) to a simmer. This is for the hot water bath, a process often used to cook custards and bake eggs in the oven without curdling or cracking—the proteins in the eggs are very heat sensitive and need only be warmed to cook thoroughly. Carefully pour hot water into the baking dish to come halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Make sure that the water outside the ramekin comes up to the level of the custard inside. This is important! It will insure that the custard is protected from the heat.

Bake for about 40 minutes (but begin checking after 30) or until set around the edges but still loose and a little bit jiggly in the center. (The cooking time will depend largely on the size of your ramekins.) Remove ramekins from oven and let them sit in the water bath until they have cooled. Once cool, refrigerate the ramekins at least two hours.

When ready to serve, sprinkle remaining sugar over custard in each ramekin.

Since I'm guessing many of you, like myself, lack a small handheld kitchen torch, place ramekins below the broiler for about 4 minutes or until sugar bubbles and turns golden brown and firm. Refrigerate before serving—either to important company, or, even better, just to yourself. ☺

## Culture Desk:

### Natural Selections Chats with Radio Personality Ken Dashow

BERNIE LANGS



Ken Dashow

For many years, I've found that some radio disc jockeys have voices and personas that exude the comfort of a good and familiar friend. The golden era of radio during my childhood in the 1960s featured great personalities like Dan Ingram and Bruce "Cousin Brucie" Morrow who brought listeners the first exciting taste of The Beatles and the British Invasion. Today, I enjoy listening to the exuberance of Pat St. John's show on WCBS-FM, especially his feature "Collectible Cuts" where he plays rock and roll rarities and unheard outtakes of famous songs. The classic rock radio station WAXQ "Q104.3" has a Sunday night program, "Underground Garage," led by Bruce Springsteen guitarist and The Sopranos actor Little Steven Van Zandt. That program digs deep into rock history and finds amazing nuggets of songs that are catchy and not widely known, mixed with Little Steven's amusing banter.

My favorite radio show, also on WAXQ, is Ken Dashow's "Breakfast with The Beatles." This Sunday morning show highlights the music of The Beatles and their musical circle, often with guests who worked with the group, and sometimes featuring interviews with the two surviving members of the band (and, of course, Yoko Ono). Ken Dashow is a bit of a Renaissance Man, having written several plays and a couple of screenplays. Ken's enthusiasm for The Fab Four is appreciated by his listeners, who send in requests and email anecdotes about their experiences with The Beatles or life stories about times they've heard particular songs. The show has a homey, "good vibe" feel to it, with Ken often referring to his audience as his "family of listeners."

I've been in casual email contact with Ken Dashow for a while, and was once driving along with the radio on and heard him close "Breakfast" with my remarks and a George Harrison song I'd requested on the occasion of a Jets football playoff game (Ken is a

big Jets/Mets fan). I recently posed a few quick questions to Ken about the show and he was kind enough to respond. He noted that "BWTB started innocently—my then program director, Bob Buchmann, on the 30th anniversary of The Beatles coming to America said, 'Hey, you love The Beatles, right? Why don't you do a Beatles show this Sunday morning?' Response was incredible, so he said, 'Wanna do it again?' I'm still waiting for him to tell me to stop!"

I also asked Ken why he believes The Beatles endure and why their music is so universal, to which he answered, "Why?" is the hardest question to answer; the brilliant music choices, moving popular culture in a more worldly state of mind—incorporating Eastern mysticism, instruments, and music into their songs—in the end (pardon the pun [on The Beatles' song "The End"]), the songs were about bringing love into your life and the world—and that message is timeless."

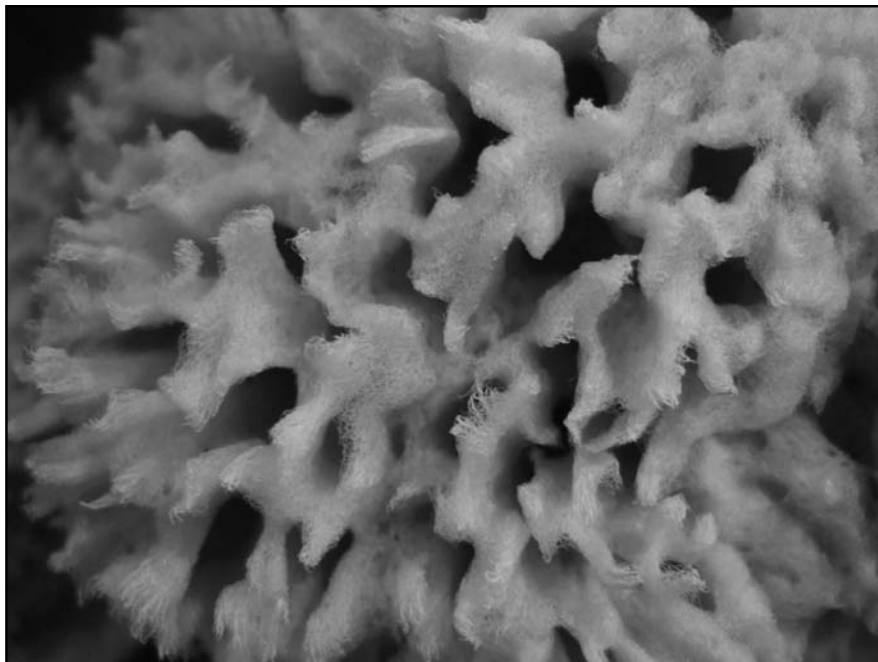
I find that one of the things that appeal to me about Ken's show is his sophisticated knowledge of the music of the group. He recently talked about how the songs may sound simple, but trying to recreate them is incredibly difficult (Ken plays drums with friends). The example he gave was trying to perform a good cover version of the early song "Please, Please Me." As a rock musician myself, I nodded—I won't even attempt to play a rendition of that song.

I also asked Ken if he had any inside scoops he'd care to share with *Natural Selections* and he noted that from all his discussions with members of The Beatles and all he's learned about them that they, too, "...all loved The Beatles"—even spoke about them in the third person. John, for all his post-Beatle carping, kept his Sgt. Pepper suit (as did George), and would ask people to buy memorabilia for him so he'd have everything they made."

In closing I asked Ken what he does to relax. He noted that he plays golf and enjoys home remodeling and repair. He closed our discussion with a remark that reflects the positive energy he gives out "...even writing is a freedom I cherish." ♦

## Life on a Roll

Sponge by Elodie Pauwels



## Vox Clamantis in Urbe

# Why is Queensboro Plaza so Desolate? or The Tyranny of Mandatory Parking Requirements

JACOB OPPENHEIM

The area across the river from The Rockefeller University campus, at the base of the Queensboro Bridge, seems ideally suited for dense residential and commercial construction. The views are some of the best in the city; there is easy access to Manhattan from eight subway lines; and a newly renovated grand plaza sits at the foot of the bridge. Former factories and warehouses provide attractive, though currently unused, space. Yet, as all who have walked across the bridge or exited the subway at Queensboro Plaza know, this potential is completely squandered. Much of the area in former Long Island City is given over to vacant lots, with small clusters of shops surrounding the few high-rises yet constructed. A closer glance at many of these buildings reveals much of the cause for this desolation: the lower floors are all parking garages. In an area replete with subway access, not to mention buses and cheap parking in nearby lots, every new building must nonetheless provide a certain number of parking spaces. Nearly all of those spaces are empty. Rather than a market failure, this is a prime example of statute run amok.

Unlike most regulations, there exist no theoretical justifications for mandatory parking minima. If a developer constructs a building that tenants (residential, commercial, or industrial) or their customers cannot access, the rent it can demand will fall precipitously. Parking lots and garages take up valuable space; thus, there exists a tension that ensures that developers have every incentive to either build the proper amount of parking, or make deals with their neighbors to provide a sufficient amount thereof. In most American cities, parking minima exist, slowing the development of cities such as Seattle, where only one-third of the parking spaces in new construction are even occupied, and the redevelopment of downtown areas in the outer boroughs here in New York. The cost of building the necessary parking discourages both developers and tenants from occupying prime urban real estate just across the East River.

"But wait," you might say, "if high rises spring up in downtown Brooklyn without sufficient parking, commuters will simply park in the surrounding residential neighborhoods, inconveniencing the locals and creating traffic snarls in normally quiet communities." This argument brings us to the second cost of free (and subsidized) parking: its existence along streets perpetuates a cycle of need-less regulation. In order to fully understand why, one must consider the market value of a parking space. At its core, it is a short-term (measured in hours or days) lease on a piece of land. Yet parking spaces frequently cost only a dollar or two (or less) per hour, while garages charge an order of magnitude more. Street parking is clearly heavily subsidized. Its very existence encourages commuters to drive and to seek it out, adding to the volume of traffic on the roads. If parking were not subsidized and subject to market forces, many of those spaces would likely not exist; the rest would be considerably more expensive. By encouraging driving, free and subsidized parking serves as a major disincentive to the use of mass transit.

Nowhere else is this clearer than Los Angeles, where a subway and light rail system exists, serving hundreds of thousands of people, and a bus system covers the rest of the city. Due to the cheapness and availability of parking, however, residents choose to drive, shortening their commute (no going out of their way to catch public transportation). When nearly everyone acts in this manner, no road or highway can possibly hold the number of drivers. Hence the infamous traffic jams. A classic example of this is the relatively new Walt Disney Concert Hall in LA. Although the venue is served by two metro stations, almost no one arrives by mass transit. Why? Because of the massive parking decks below it, the cost of which made the project enough of a money loser to the developer that the city had to step in to cover the cost overruns.

A market-based system could easily deal with the problem of street parking. The building owner would own the spaces in front of it, for use as he or she desired. Such spaces could be rented or sold outright to tenants, but in many cases they might be given to commuters, who value parking. A second system would keep the parking spaces in government hands, but would change the cost of parking to match the efficient price—the one at which one space is always free. San Francisco is currently experimenting with such a system. In residential neighborhoods, the solution is simple: give only local denizens the right to park for more than a set amount of time. Such a system creates a shadow ownership of parking by the local community, and could easily correct for cases like the development at Atlantic Yards, where residents of Park Slope and Clinton Hill rightly worry that arena attendees will take away their street parking.

Mandatory parking minima and subsidized parking are another way in which local governments make us all poorer. I have previously covered occupational licensing and the regulatory barriers to construction and development, all of which limit economic growth and disproportionately harm the poor and working class. Next month, I will explain why these are the economic injustices that need to be addressed and why income inequality pales in comparison. For those interested in how parking regulation harms us all, I suggest Donald Shoup's excellent book, *The High Cost of Free Parking*. •



### Ever Consider Branching Out?

Attend *Natural Selections'*  
Annual Open Meeting:  
**Thursday, May 10th**  
**at 5:30pm** in the Faculty Club

*Everybody is welcome*  
*Opportunities for*  
*involvement in various*  
*aspects of production*

