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Table of Contents

- 4** **Much Ado About Discourse**
Braden Flax
- 5** **“Grassroots Organizing 101” and the Coalition of the Progressive University Community**
M.E. Walker
- 6** **The Amazonian Synod: Exacerbating Fault Lines In The Catholic Church**
Mary Alice Jouve
- 17** **The Communist on Witherspoon Street**
Maryam Ibrahim
- 8** **Beyond Performing Eco-Friendliness**
K. Stiefel
- 10** **Why is Left-Wing Student Art Bad?**
Marc Schorin
- 11** **Israel’s 2019 Elections, Explained**
Kai Tsurumaki

Much Ado About Discourse

Braden Flax

When we discuss ideas, even on a college campus, it is the case that such discussions have consequences. Such implications apply not only to the outer world which we will increasingly influence, but also to the very people who are involved in, or subjected to, speech that minimizes us to a point of perceived worthlessness. The ideas that we're exposed to and that are legitimized in our environment lay the foundation for our future conduct, and they can have negative impacts for us personally. Unfortunately, there are those who would counter that, instead of actions, words are to be uniquely prized and upheld as the tools of the trade in an atmosphere of academic apathy. Further, sophistry represents the end as well as the means; or to be more precise, it would be as such if it were not so relentless and never-ending. Resolution, we are assured, can be achieved through debate; a robust exchange of ideas can't help but to eradicate ideas that don't make sense, refine those that are more defensible, and ultimately lead to a Platonic paradise of intellectual vindication and conceptual actualization. Unfortunately, to espouse this perspective is to ignore history, misunderstand the place of words in affecting change, and, if one is not careful, to support the very steps backward that discourse is supposedly so well-suited to guard us against.

A skeptical reader may prematurely object that, on the one hand, the author claims that words are linguistic fillers for conceptual phantasms that don't really manifest in the material world, and therefore that they should not monopolize our attention. On the other, he ascribes to them the potential to dehumanize those who are apparently such snowflakes that they can't even ward off such ineffectual, nebulous rhetoric. What hypocrisy! Perhaps this critic might have a point, if the first paragraph really were advancing the perspective that could be most uncharitably attributed. Such an uncharitable attribution, though, would fly in the face of an honest debate, so I trust an opponent would never stoop so low. Nevertheless, I prefer to cover my bases, so ahead with the clarification:

1. Discourse should not be the sole, or primary, object. Words are, in fact, significant, but even more so as deployed by those with unrestricted access to an audience and the authority of a university.
2. It is unnecessary for those at the top, as it were, to express urgency and defensiveness, other than as a tactic of propaganda. Since the table is already tilted, their words go further than those of their opponents, and there's no need to think of their jibes as anything other than the sparks of minds clashing to-

gether in disinterested contemplation, to be filtered back into the social sphere only as a self-righteous afterthought.

3. Those who are marginalized are in a very different position. They may enjoy discussion for its own sake, and they may realize the utility of language in developing their perspective, making their case, negotiating with adversaries, and communicating internally. But when it comes to their fundamental rights, which are under greater threat than their antagonists care to admit, language cannot be their only recourse.

Are words actions? Well, it depends. There is a sometimes useful distinction between speaking and other forms of expressive behavior, but what we say to one another drastically shapes future interaction, from individual relationships to political realignments. More to the point, speech can have debilitating effects on those who are exposed to it. While it may not make sense to criminalize verbal provocation as we do more explicit forms of physical violence, one might be inclined to forgive an increased sense of compassion for victims and harshness to perpetrators, even if the offense is delivered from behind a microphone. After all, there is a context for speech; some, delivered aggressively and in service of pervasive, unjustified power structures, is in actuality accompanied by the capacity for even more serious affronts. Campus trolls and the like, therefore, are merely the allies and spokespeople of more dangerous reactionary elements, whose behavior is fairly unambiguously beyond offensive language.

Do power differentials really exist, and are they really that awful? Well, yes, they exist; if you doubt it, try teaching a class spontaneously in your professor's place. More fundamentally, the most pronounced divide in our society is that between laborers and their bosses, rendering necessary a revolutionary displacement of a decaying social order. But back to the question of speech, one might wonder if differentiation of roles (between students and instructors, for instance) is really a hierarchical one. Maybe it's not, in some far-off future, but we live in the reality that we have to navigate day-by-day, even if we strive to transcend it in our politics. So yes, it's pointless to pretend that hierarchies, many of which are unjustified, don't exist, and it follows that speech by different people is received and processed differently according to their relative ability to be heard and taken seriously. Sometimes, this is all too necessary; constantly indulging people who say the Earth is flat, or that English is the only real language, or that rudimentary mathematics demonstrates incontrovertibly the existence

of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (it clearly does, but I recognize I'm unlikely to win this one) may not be the best way to spend our collective time and intellectual effort. Aside from the fact that people who are still obsessed, for example, with race and IQ fall into this category, this is not what we're talking about; rather, people are implicitly diminished and dismissed according to traits, many of which are uncontrollable, that are historically the basis for grotesque treatment and systematic dispossession.

Let's take the case of Ben Shapiro, who recently stood a chance of being invited to our own campus. According to the pretense of the initiative through which his candidacy was advanced, he would, after receiving more votes than some of his competitors, have been welcomed to give insightful and productive speech. Following this, people would be expected to engage with him according to the rhetorical pillars of right-wing victim culture: civility and deference. In other words, people should bring academic quibbles and soft-spoken nuance to what would then be a one-sided roast, a theatrical exhibition of one-liners executed just well enough to titillate the sensibilities of those with nothing better to do than to inflate, mock, and lament the presence of SJWs. Whether or not we are prepared for him is almost beside the point; if we lost in the court of childlike jeers, this would be a function of shallow performance, rather than the deep intellectual engagement that is supposedly the objective.

Fortunately, Shapiro's nonsense proved too much to be implicitly endorsed, even by the institution given the geographically imprecise, but historically apt, designation of "Southern Ivy." (Though in his place, the most votes were received by the most recent CEO of American imperialism, President Barack Obama, who, although a better speaker by leaps and bounds, is even more questionable on multiple fronts.) Objections to executive power notwithstanding, the mindset that allowed Shapiro to be brought up in the first place is the issue at hand. The idea that his words impact different people in the same way runs contrary to any adult understanding of history and may even be, dare I say it, illogical. He uses different words, in a different tone, with different motivations, and with access to a platform that most of us are not used to. It's worth considering the surrounding context of speech not so it can be repressed, but so that it can be understood and combated when necessary; there is a difference, after all, between non-invitation and censorship, and just as stark a distinction between institutional, top-down shutdown and bottom-up opposition.

“Grassroots Organizing 101” and the Coalition of the Progressive University Community

M.E. Walker

On Saturday, November 9, members of a range of progressive activist groups on Princeton’s campus met in Whig Hall for an interactive workshop called “Grassroots Organizing 101,” the first of a three-part inaugural community organizing training series. Two local activists, Antonne Henshaw and Alexis Miller, spoke about their experiences in organizing, including working within coalitions, horizontal leadership structures, and centering the voices of directly impacted individuals. Henshaw, a formerly incarcerated activist and master’s candidate at Rutgers–Camden, organizes through NJ-CAIC (Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement) and is the vice president of Wo/Men Who Never Give Up. Miller, a J.D. candidate at Rutgers Law School, is a lead organizer with the Patterson, NJ, chapter of Black Lives Matter. The two main organizers of the series are Amanda Eisenhour ‘21, co-president of Students for Prison Education and Reform and a junior in the Department of African American Studies, and Rafi Lehmann ‘20, a leader with the Alliance of Jewish Progressives and senior in the Department of History.

Groups involved in the event include the Alliance for Jewish Progressive (AJP), the Princeton Environmental Activism Coalition (PEAC), Princeton Students for Immigration Empowerment (PSIE), Students for Prison Education and Reform (SPEAR), and the Young Democratic Socialists (YDS).

At the workshop, the students and local activists discussed how to form partnerships between students and other communities, how to work with partners’ individual strengths, experiences, and privileges, and how to organize without co-opting. Miller recounted an instance when white allies formed a human chain around black activists at a protest, preventing law enforcement from reaching them and decreasing

the aggression experienced by the protestors. She stressed the importance of sharing responsibility within an organization, particularly in representing the group to the public. Sharing the role of group speaker helps diffuse the potential risk of targeted violence amongst the whole group and presents a larger-seeming front to the public as compared to one or two delegated representatives. In addition, it reduces the risk of the movement’s message being co-opted and distorted by one or a few individuals.

Both local activists continually reaffirmed the importance of communication, since community organizing is fundamentally about

solutions together.

“A lot of students are doing a lot of organizing work on campus, but they’ve never done formal training and feel uncomfortable calling themselves organizers,” Eisenhour said in an interview after the first event, describing the intent behind the workshop series as “creating a space for ideas and collaboration to thrive.” She added, “Students have a much bigger influence when they’re working together... because a lot of the stuff we’re trying to work through, trying to do, has been done by someone else before.”

The first workshop also represented an initial step in strengthening ties between progressive groups on Princeton’s campus, with the goal of establishing an interorganizational framework, called the Coalition of the Progressive University Community.

“Even if our movements all look different, there are universal skills and challenges... that we all share,” Lehmann said. “It’s a matter of [saying] let’s actually create an organized group... to create robust relationships.”

Referring to the challenge of organizing student-activists at universities when one quarter leaves each year, he added, “Because of the rapid turnover within progressive groups, we’re in a constant state of recruitment and training... we often don’t have a chance to step back... If we form this coalition, that already quintuples the number of people exposed to these ideas, ideally.”

“I don’t think it’s something that can be led by any single person,” Eisenhour said of the Coalition. “My vision for it... is a space where people can share knowledge about organizing work on campus... So many of the things that we work on are interrelated.”

“I’ve felt even since freshman year that this is something that needed to happen,” Lehmann said. “We’re building real power with this coalition.”



Photo from the first grassroots organizing training. Credit: Rafi Lehmann

working with other people, who each have their own connection to an issue. Henshaw advocated outside activists begin relationships with directly impacted communities by asking whether anything the outside activists are doing is hurting them or making things worse, since people who are directly impacted have firsthand knowledge of the situation. He also discussed his experience organizing towards achieving anti-carceral legislative gains in the New Jersey Legislature, which has involved navigating relationships with a variety of people.

Members of the progressive organizations present also discussed with each other and with Henshaw and Miller the challenges they currently face in their work, coming up with

The Amazonian Synod: Exacerbating Fault Lines In The Catholic Church

Mary Alice Jouve

For the past several decades, fault lines have been forming in the Catholic Church. Leaders and members find themselves divided on how the Church's teachings apply to myriad concerns like capitalism, colonialism, and global warming. These issues were at the heart of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region, or the Amazonian Synod, called by Pope Francis this October; how Pope Francis and the Catholic Church respond to these problems and the criticisms they face will determine the future of Catholicism and its relevance to the world.

As he detailed in his new book, *Without Him We Can Do Nothing*, Pope Francis hoped to start the process of decoupling the Catholic Church's presence in the Amazon from its long history of colonialism and cultural erasure. He argues that "[Christianity] is not identified with a particular culture," so Church leaders in the Amazon should work to shape the Church and its traditions to better serve the people who live there rather than trying to erase local culture and religion.

This guiding principle has led to notable recommendations made by the Synod, as Pope Francis has emphasized the idea of synodality throughout this meeting. Synodality is the idea that both clergy and laypeople should work and dialogue together so that dioceses can better serve Catholics in the area, recognizing that each community has different needs and that assimilation is harmful.

Catholics who live in the Amazon region have expressed hope that the Synod will start the process of creating a Catholic tradition that they can take ownership of. Missionaries to the Amazon have historically associated religion with the erasure of indigenous culture. As a Tuyuka priest and a participant in the Synod, Rev. Justino Rezende recounted that Catholic missionaries often forbade parents from passing down indigenous knowledge and religious tradition. In addition, he saw many men leave the seminary because white missionaries were forcing assimilation as part of becoming a priest. This has led to a dearth of indigenous priests in the region, making it harder for congregations to receive regular Communion.

These problems have led some Catholic religious leaders in the Amazon to start creating an indigenous Catholic tradition not unlike the other traditions that already exist in the Catholic Church such as the Eastern Rite. To solve the shortage of priests and the forcible erasure of religious traditions, members of the Synod advocated for the ordination of married priests and more indigenous priests. Creating a female diaconate has also been proposed so that more

people can distribute Communion and play a pastoral role in communities. However, major doctrinal changes such as these cannot be made in a smaller gathering such as this and will require further discussion and approval by the Pope.

The general movement to reclaim indigenous traditions as part of Catholicism has led to a wider call for the Catholic Church to make opposing climate change and capitalist exploitation a moral imperative. After listening to the perspectives of Amazonian people affected by climate change, the Synod set forth the idea of "ecological sin" or "an action or omission against God, against others, the community and the environment." This new concept recognizes the solidarity between animals, the environment, and humans and that ecological sin is a sin against future generations. Calling the Amazon the "biological heart" of the world, they recognize the responsibility they have for their congregations and the outsized harm that global warming and imperialism will cause to their communities.

A number of bishops also directly connect climate change to corporations, asking questions about the moral implications of supporting an economic system that is hurting the congregations the Church is supposed to be ministering to. They argue that the exploitative and "predatory" characteristics of capitalism are in opposition to Catholicism. Protecting human rights is not only a political imperative but a religious one as well, since Catholics believe humans are made in the image and likeness of God. The bishops set forth actions items such as calling on churches to divest from fossil fuels, sending ministers to be posted in individual parishes to bring the climate crisis to the forefront of parishioners' minds, and setting up a fund for reparations to the inhabitants of the Amazon region.

Efforts to make the Catholic Church better serve the Amazon region have drawn the ire of many conservative Catholics who are further aligned with capitalist interests and wary of indigenous traditions being incorporated into the Mass. Pope Francis's initiative to promote synodality has been criticized as creating a pathway for Catholicism to become blended with local religious traditions. Testimonies that speak to the horrific effects of logging and other extractivist policies implemented by corporate-friendly governments are reduced to claims like that of the conservative Catholic media outlet LifeSite News, that the bishops support "nature-friendly primitivism" instead of the progress that is sup-



posedly achieved under capitalism.

Comments made by Catholic leaders against the Synod have made the controversy surrounding it even more divisive. Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke, a leader of conservatives in the Church, indicated in a Nov. 9 interview that if Pope Francis approved of the earlier working papers of the Synod, Burke would consider Francis in schism with the rest of the Catholic Church. Outcry was also raised over a ceremony held in the Vatican at the beginning of the Synod where the Pope blessed a statue of Pachamama, an Andean fertility goddess initially revered by the Incans. In a statement published Nov. 12 entitled "Protest against Pope Francis's Sacrilegious Acts," conservative Church leaders decried the ceremony as idolatry and called on him to repent. More liberal Catholic Church leaders, like Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, say that this was simply an instance of the Church adopting pagan iconography as it has done for centuries with symbols like St. Brigid's Cross and that it was done in solidarity with the people the Church is trying to help through the Amazonian Synod. Pope Francis has continued to support the inclusion of the statue, apologizing and recovering the statue when it was thrown into the Tiber by an angry Catholic.

Catholic missionary work has long been associated with the spread of Western colonialist and imperialist empires. The Amazonian Synod represents an attempt by the Church to turn towards a new way of spreading Catholicism, using a framework closer to cultural diffusion rather than through an air of superiority. It also attempts to expose the complicity of many Catholics in the ravaging of the Amazon as they support the brutal, capitalistic domination of US and the governments it backs in Latin America. If the Church wants to continue to play the role of a universal moral authority, they must serve everyone and not just an elite and privileged minority.

The Communist on Witherspoon Street

The Legacy of Paul Robeson, A Princeton Native Who Fought to Advance Equality Worldwide

Maryam Ibrahim

With only about 30,000 residents, the town of Princeton often feels as though its only notable traits are events many decades or centuries past, and, of course, its University, which attracts students, professors, and tourists from all around the world. However, for students specifically, the incentives to explore off campus are close to zero, as we are fortunate to have a seemingly endless amount of events, guest speakers, and entertainment on campus. If we do leave campus, it is likely in order to commute to a neighboring area, fulfil a referral from University Health Services, or run some other errand. Even so, there are many aspects about Princeton as a neighborhood that aren't often spoken of. While they may not be as conspicuous as some of the city's more famous historical events, they are still worth remembering. An unexpected feature of Princeton's history is that it is the hometown of actor, singer, athlete, and leftist political activist Paul Robeson, who found success and respect both in the United States and abroad, even through the hardships of racism.

As a black man navigating majority white spaces, Robeson was no stranger to blatant racism and discrimination, as he faced obstacles based on his race in every stage of his life. Born in 1898 in Princeton, NJ, Paul Robeson and his family lived in a home at 110 Witherspoon Street until Robeson was eight years old. They were forced to move to the attic of a store about 30 miles away from Princeton after his father lost his job at the Princeton Presbyterian Church and his mother passed away. Despite tragic beginnings, Robeson's polymathy flourished in high school as he excelled in theater, athletics, and academics. This in turn allowed him to receive a full ride scholarship from Rutgers, making him only the third African American man to attend the university. At around the same time, Princeton was falling back towards racism. After a short period of admission for black students pre-World-War-I, black admission was halted until around the post World War II era. This exclusionary practice wouldn't have been a surprise to Robeson, as he struggled to find respect even when he proved his merit in several fields. Although he was a star athlete, many college football teams refused to play Rutgers because he was on the team. After receiving a law degree from Columbia Law School, Robeson practiced law for only a few years, until becoming unwilling to continuously face racism in firms after a stenographer refused to take his diction because of his race. Fortunately, Robeson had his acting and musical talents to fall back on, and he decided to pursue a full-time film career which ad-

vanced his reach across the globe. It was only in England, where Robeson enrolled in the School of Oriental and African Studies in London in 1934, that his radical political views began to flourish. Eventually, he was encouraged to visit the Soviet Union with an anti-imperialist organization.



In the midst of widespread anti-Communist sentiment during the Red Scare, Robeson saw a much different world when he visited Moscow. "Here I am not a Negro but a human being for the first time in my life... I walk in full human dignity" (The Independent, 1935). In the USSR, Robeson, along with many other African American intellectuals and leaders, experienced a society where race was not the determining factor of treatment or status in society. Robeson was often questioned about why he decided to come back to the United States, which is a common question asked of those who are vocal about the inequalities in their home country. Robeson responded to these inquiries with, "Because my father was a slave, and my people died to build this country, I am going to stay here and have a part of it just like you, and no fascist-minded people will drive me from it." (Paul Robeson, House of Un-American Activities Council Testimony 1956)

I first heard of Paul Robeson through his connections to a United Nations petition from 1951 entitled "We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief From a Crime of The United States Government Against the Negro People." Robeson presented the petition to the United Nations along with the Civil Rights Congress, a short lived radical legal defense organization. The document sought

to raise awareness of and prosecute the United States for systematic discrimination against African Americans. The petition opened with:

"The Civil Rights Congress has prepared and submits this petition to the General Assembly of the United Nations on behalf of the Negro people in the interest of peace and democracy, charging the Government of the United States of America with violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide."

(We Charge Genocide, Introduction, 1951)

The document highlighted the proliferation of educational inequality, mass incarceration, job and housing discrimination, and more. The document isn't referenced often due to its failure to widely circulate during an intensely anti-Communist period. However, it did have a clear reach in Europe, as it raised awareness about the conditions of African Americans in the US. Despite highlighting many Civil Rights struggles for African Americans, Robeson's Communist affiliations subsequently led to him to be blacklisted from Hollywood, denied a passport from the State Department for nearly a decade, and subjected to close FBI surveillance on himself and his family for the remainder of their lives.

While there have been several attempts to disregard Robeson's legacy, it seems as though the residents of Princeton have not entirely forgotten about Robeson's impact. The city has preserved his childhood home as commemoration and as an "open house" for the discussion, review and resolution of concerns in the Witherspoon-Jackson neighborhood, with special emphasis on resident concerns, immigration issues, cultural and social services." Other examples include a plaza and boulevard dedicated to him in New Brunswick. While these may not be able to completely encompass his international awards and recognition, they are subtle reminders of his humble beginnings in New Jersey.

Paul Robeson had a number of friends who went on to become prominent long-time faculty members at Princeton, even while he had almost no affiliation with the university, despite living in close proximity to it for the formative years of his life. If Robeson had been admitted to the university, we would undoubtedly have a building, center, or even an arch named after him. Better yet, his impact in standing up for justice and equality worldwide would likely have a further reach both on a local and national scale.

Beyond Performing Eco-Friendliness: Why We Must Hold Institutions Accountable First

K. Stiefel

Due to poor reporting, some people now think that inhalers are pumping the atmosphere full of deadly gases. Recently, researchers in the UK examined the carbon footprint of the metered dose inhaler (MDI) and suggested economic models for switching the National Health Service prescriptions to a different kind: the dry powder inhaler (DPI). The MDI is the best at ensuring a consistent dose of aerosolized medication in a single puff and is used not only by asthmatics and sufferers of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), but also by many people with short-term breathing problems (think bronchitis) who need quick and reliable relief. As a life-saving medical intervention device, the MDI allows individuals with certain kinds of compromised airways to increase their chances of survival. In comparison, the DPI is harder to use during a fit of coughing or gasping because it involves inhaling the medication as a fine powder instead of a mist. Someone who cannot take a fast, deep breath without blowing out (even a small exhale can cause the entire dose to be wasted) cannot use the DPI to take their medication—presupposing their medication is available in this form since few are manufactured due to higher costs. Why would these researchers explore increasing the number of DPIs in circulation if they are not as functional as MDIs? The answer is found in the aerosolizability of the MDI which is caused by hydrofluoroalkanes, gaseous compounds with fluorine, or “F-gases.” Hydrofluoroalkanes are not to be confused with chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which were implicated in the 1970s in destroying the ozone layer, but they are nonetheless one of the many compounds which contribute to the greenhouse effect. The lifetime production of greenhouse gases for DPIs is somewhat less than that for MDIs and, the paper argues, the greener choice is to encourage doctors to prescribe them when appropriate and subsidize the production of DPI-compatible medications.

Without missing a beat, the story of this small report on the feasibility of more DPIs in Britain was picked up by Time magazine, BBC News, and Climate News Network to be circulated under sensational headlines like “How One Commonly Used Asthma Inhaler is Damaging the Planet” and “Climate threat from inhalers

can prove costly.” Later, the Washington Post published an article titled “No, asthma inhalers are not ‘choking the planet’” as a play on the previous headlines. Christopher Ingraham at the Post used his business analyst column to put the results of the study back into proportion, calculating that the MDI inhalers accounted for at most 0.14 percent of the nation’s annual carbon footprint. The article emphasizes that many consumer choices can be critiqued and readily changed without health complications to reduce individual impact and makes a vague gesture to “activists” calling for “radical systemic change” before reminding readers that poor air quality contributes more to worsened symptoms for asthmatics. While this coverage by the Post is certainly better than that of other magazines that primarily fearmonger about MDIs, it critiques consumer-reduction models of environmental impact without offering an alternative framework beyond “change.” The Post, as a news outlet owned by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, who has a direct stake in ensuring that individuals instead of institutions are held accountable for their footprint, cannot truly critique the systems that contribute most to climate change: industry and institutions. The narrative that emphasizes individual changes rather than acknowledges corporations’ and institutions’ roles as the largest contributors to climate change hurts any chance of an effective solution.

Putting aside the individual consumer “choice” of inhalers, emissions data contextualize the problem as a minor source of emissions compared to both overall greenhouse gas emissions and haloalkane emissions. The U.K. Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy provides statistical data for the carbon emissions of different sectors each year; in 2018, the two largest sources of emission by far were transportation and energy (in that order). Public, non-residential emissions are admittedly rising, but there was only a 1.6 percent increase from 2017 to 2018, once adjusted for heating sources, on the already miniscule slice of 2.0 percent of the national emissions. In comparison, the business sector causes 18 percent of all emissions. Global data collected by the Environmental Protection Agency show a similar trend, with 65 percent of greenhouse gases being carbon dioxide released

from fossil fuels and industrial processes; only two percent are “F-gases.” Furthermore, inhalers represent a tiny amount of the emissions of haloalkanes. The primary source of hydrofluoroalkanes are refrigerants, but the EPA does not require manufacturers to report the emissions from their products. The United Nations Environmental Programme estimates that 79 percent of emissions are from refrigerants compared to 5 percent for all aerosol products (of which inhalers are a tiny percentage). Since the hydrofluoroalkanes do not degrade the ozone layer like their CFC cousins and are in fact the “green” alternative to them, there is no substantial difference between them and other heat-trapping gases. While an impact framework focused on the individual is susceptible to over-emphasizing small choices like an MDI inhaler, focusing on how institutions shape our impact requires identifying the truly significant sources.

Not every lifestyle allows one to take the same measures to reduce their individual impact; consumer-based responsibility narratives also serve as a barrier to acknowledging inequitable access. By making environmentally friendly products a commodity, and therefore more expensive than comparable alternatives, poor people are blamed for an environmental impact that they do not have the resources to curb. Companies have calculated that if they slap on the labels “sustainably sourced,” “biodegradable,” “compostable,” or “carbon offset,” they can raise their prices. An “Amazon Basics” plain coffee cup 10 ounce 500-count pack costs \$50.42 (10.08 cents per cup) while the equivalent “Amazon Basics” “compostable” cup in the same size and quantity costs \$65.00 (13 cents per cup). On top of the green surcharge, the “compostable cup” is actually not usually compostable. Amazon is able to get away with this because the limiting factor, a polylactic acid (PLA) coating, does break down—if only after months and incredibly specific conditions. There are approximately 5,000 composting facilities in the US based on a survey sent to states, and only a fraction of them will accept the cost-inefficient paper products. They are not evenly distributed, either; the top five states have over 33 percent of the reported composting facilities. Within those states, a careful examination will certainly show



socioeconomic divides between those who have access to the composting stream and those who do not. Thus, the majority of these more expensive “compostable” cups will end up in landfills regardless. These cups are still available with Amazon Prime, getting shipped on inefficiently packed trucks guzzling fossil fuels to meet consumer demand. All of these calculations presuppose that one has the education to know what kinds of products to demand. Ultimately, companies make more money while avoiding the necessary large-scale changes to their operations to become environmentally conscious.

More broadly, sustainability is inexorably linked to class in American society. Most “greening” efforts, such as taking public transit or carpooling, assume a specific relationship to wealth. For those who cannot afford to buy and maintain a car or live in the suburbs, these are not even options because there is no connection to the sources of pollution and the limited options make it harder to control one’s impact. When you ride a city bus, you do not have the luxury of choosing to ride exclusively electric ones. Similarly, greening one’s living space in any appreciable way (eco-friendly insulation, solar panels, gray water recycling systems, etc.) is not practical for renters who will definitely leave the space and require permission from their landlords first. It is doubtful there will ever be a price point in the free market for these products where short-time residents will see enough in savings to justify the out-of-pocket costs. On a limited budget, even eco-friendly food can become unattainable. The cheapest foods are all pre-processed which means a massive carbon footprint (and negligible health benefit) compared with fresh produce. “Shopping local,” assuming one does not live in a food desert and has access to produce, requires that one lives in an area with enough resources

to run a farmer’s market—a custom that is becoming more and more bourgeois by the season. Once a market has moved inside or operates year-round, you can rest assured that the majority of the products will be meals, snacks, small-batch foods like cheese or honey, and artisanal products for top dollar prices. If there is a produce selling stand, it often sells expensive “heirloom” or non-traditional color varieties for surcharges. We see the “green” movement for what it is, then: the petty bourgeoisie spending more money for what amounts to new status symbols.

The individualist framework also makes it easy to ignore the cause of some of the respiratory health issues that harm asthmatics, among others: pollution that disproportionately impacts marginalized communities. The Post article touches briefly upon the fact that poor air quality worsens asthma symptoms (and necessitates more inhaler usage). However, the author fails to mention that asthma is also well-known to have pollution and occupational hazard exposures as risk factors. One or two or ten consumers buying a greener product does not stop factories from toxifying the very air they breath. Thousands of consumers could drastically change their habits to attempt to improve the air quality in cities, but these choices would not stop electricity generation plants and fossil fuel-based transportation from causing the same detrimental effects. These institutional footprints should not be used to absolve all (wealthy) consumers of their impact, however. The broadening of focus that examining institutions requires helps us see that individual consumption is not a monolith. It becomes clear that not all consumers consume resources equally. The most industrially developed nations contribute the most to greenhouse gas emissions. The most industrially developed nations produce a disproportionate amount of waste. Thinking of

countries as an institution, we see some making more efforts than others. These observations necessitate the discussion of environmental justice, which emphasizes the inequities in marginalized groups both bearing the consequences of climate change and missing the benefits of conservation and other forms of climate activism.

By placing the responsibility for mitigating the environmental impact on the individual consumer, corporations and institutions create a narrative where blaming themselves is not an option. This leads the public to paint scapegoats and boogymen out of marginalized people, to blame people who use inhalers in life-saving interventions for the fraction of greenhouse gases they emit instead of demanding immediate intervention in the operations of factories and institutions which have hastened our sprint to the edge of climate crisis. Instead of focusing our efforts on telling people with inhalers to switch to potentially less effective options, we should consider telling billionaires to sell their private jets or companies to offset their pollution from their own profits first.

Why is Left-Wing Student Art Bad?

Marc Schorin

I went to the library for research. I pulled out a stack of books; Marina Abramovic’s dreamlike memoir, a collection of essays about art by Marxist luminaries from Marx to Barro, a contemporary French academic’s survey into “the politics of the spectator,” etc.—but I needn’t have. I wanted to know why student left-wing art is bad. Why is “protest poetry” unreadable, performance art unwatchable, and “guerilla art” of any kind not only needlessly confrontational but even counter-productive? I didn’t have to go to the library; a random visit to *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* told me everything I needed to know, because it is everything student art is not.

Shange was not a student when she wrote *for colored girls...*, but it was a milestone in the underground theater movement that student art continues to draw inspiration from (while it did show at the Booth Theatre on Broadway, it grew out of the tradition of alternative theater, directly challenging the canon it eventually joined). While it might be unfair to characterize Ntozake Shange as a “left-wing writer,” her work continues to speak to common alienated experiences as well as defy the hierarchy-reinforcing standards of capitalist production. Every student artist wants to do what she does, but most every student artist fails, because they have mistaken the form for the substance. In other words, they see the choreopoem and they are taken aback by its avant-garde, its boldness, its success. And these aspects, the ones that immediately strike even the laziest audience member, are easy to mimic. But they do not see the careful study that went into it, the deep soul-searching labor that produces imagery that would fuck you up. Student theater—and, more broadly, student art—does not fuck you up, because it wouldn’t dare to.

The “student” in “student art” is a necessary if arbitrary designation: the point is that I am talking about people our age who are more ideologues than artists, regardless of whether or not they are actually students at any institution. Left-wing art itself, broadly, contains a great many number of successes, from the surrealists to Le Guin—these artists infuse their politics with their art and vice-versa and, more to the point, they do it well. But that we are students drains our art of its necessity.

Urgency in art typically derives from its context; this art is needed because of its political milieu, its time, its place, etc. When student art is created, it is almost never without the illusion of necessity. It is not bad, per se, that student art thinks it will change the world; it is bad that it doesn’t. It conceives of itself as groundbreaking but refuses anything remotely controversial or soul-searching (sometimes it need not be but in that case it should just be admitted). This refusal

is embedded within the nature of what it means to be a student.

To be a student is to position oneself awkwardly. Given the nature of our education system—that it is a function of class—to be a student anywhere is to be a student at an elite institution. The elitism is only amplified at Princeton. The final layer of “awkwardness” arises from the elite nature of art at Princeton, and its domination by white and masculine stories. However, regardless of race or gender or even class, we are laborers but we are privileged. Student artists in particular are under a false consciousness: as a class, we think we are radical, but in fact, we only serve our own and, by proxy, the ruling classes’ interests. Real leftist art could and does often break through our navel-gazing, but is there any at Princeton?

To better understand where left-wing student art fails, we should investigate where it succeeds. One particularly powerful example of successful art is the Title IX graffiti that was set up all over campus last semester.

At considerable risk and consequence to herself, a student wrote “Title IX Protects Rapists” in spray-paint around campus. After the student was raped, Princeton’s Title IX Office underwent what might be characterized as a cover-up; the student was questioned, threatened, and, ultimately, no charges were brought against the person who assaulted them.

That this graffiti represented a protest is obvious. That it is art might not be quite as self-evident. That I call it leftist might even be offensive. That I say it was successful might just be confusing. After all, there were no lasting changes made to Princeton’s structural support of rape and rapists. However, not only was attention paid to the artist’s suffering, that attention catalyzed a protest that organized Princeton students to a level this campus rarely sees (the BJJ protests in 2017 are a good example). It awakened the student body by exposing a shared experience of oppression, and in this sense, it is a leftist endeavor and a successful one. Moreover, it is an artistic one: these graffiti externalized the artist’s pain in a way that belonged to them and them alone but was shared by the entirety of campus. The graffiti represented both a display and a performance; a display on the part of the producer, which conditioned the performance (the protests) of the consumers. In other



Photo from *for colored girls*, a choreopoem.
Credit: Martha Swope/©NYPL for the Performing Arts

words, although the graffiti might not have been intended as an art project, it was enacted and received as one; meanwhile, its obviously intended political message was heard.

Granted, the Title IX graffiti is not like other student art. Perhaps it is because it probably did not intend to be art that it was so successful: it was impossible for the artist to conceive of herself as an artist, and so there was no pretension to what they produced. But more importantly, the graffiti destabilized the power of the institution and, therefore, the power of the students within it. When confronted with the failure of our single shared source of power to account for its own structural flaws, what it means to be a “student” becomes arbitrary.

Ultimately, student art can only be successful if it actively and meaningfully destabilizes its own and the audience’s power. By “actively and meaningfully,” I mean that student art must transcend the perfunctory concessions to liberal sensibility, like program notes and that include the word “intersectionality” but do nothing to undermine themselves. It is this undermining of one’s own power that leads to the self-erasure that distinguishes “good art.”

One of student art’s hallmarks is its self-indulgence, a necessary feature of art that pats the artist on the back. This art seeks to “express” what the artist feels, a task that nearly invariably leads to failure. “Self-expression” has become a pillar of amateur art; in this context, to “express oneself” is not literally to testify to one’s experiences, but rather to worship one’s own self—to impose one’s own experiences over everybody else’s. In practice, “self-expression” is how reactionary politics makes itself palatable to a liberal audience. The practice that should take its place is self-erasure, an undoing of everything that makes up the self. This is the art that is truly cutting.

Israel's 2019 Elections, Explained

Kai Tsurumaki

The past few weeks have seen a whirlwind of updates in the seemingly endless turmoil of the Israeli elections this year. Both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the main opposition leader Benny Gantz failed to establish a governing coalition after the second election of the year, and the country is preparing for a third now. To further complicate the situation, Netanyahu was indicted on corruption charges on November 21st.

The chaos of recent Israeli politics has left many wondering why the country has fallen into this situation, how the legal processes behind this work, and what could be next.

Israel's first elections of the year were originally scheduled to take place this November, when Netanyahu's fourth term as Prime Minister would finish. However, early elections were called in April. This can be attributed to a few reasons. His administration cited differences within the governing coalition over military conscription for ultra-Orthodox Jews; however, it is notable that an investigation had been recently opened into Netanyahu for potential bribery and breach of trust charges, opening the possibility that he maneuvering to get ahead of any indictments that might come his way.

From the exit polls, the April election appeared very close, and both sides naturally claimed victory. *Likud* and Blue and White, the parties of Netanyahu and Gantz respectively, received 35 seats each. However, Netanyahu was eventually decided to be in a stronger position to form a coalition, and Gantz conceded. It was reported in many publications that he had won the election.

On May 29th, in an unprecedented twist, Netanyahu revealed that he had failed to assemble a government, the first time in Israeli history that such a situation had occurred. Negotiations faltered due to conflict with Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the secular right-wing nationalist *Yisrael Beiteinu* party. Despite only having five seats, the party became the deciding factor in the election.

After this, Benny Gantz could have been appointed the next prime minister-designate and given the same opportunity. Instead, parliament voted to dissolve itself, forcing a new round of elections on September 17th and denying Gantz that opportunity.

The September election showed similar results to its predecessor, with Blue and White very slightly ahead of *Likud* in exit polling. The former party ended up with 33 seats to the latter's 32, but the first shot at forming a coalition still went to Netanyahu.

Some analysts have suggested that Gantz may have wanted to allow Netanyahu to go before him, as with there already being a failed attempt to create a government, he could have increased bargaining power in the following negotiations.

Netanyahu's second attempt at a coalition also failed, and once again, Lieberman was key in denying him a right-wing coalition. He also attempted a unity government, but the conservative *Likud* could not come to an agreement with the liberal Gantz, and the initiative passed to the latter politician.

As Gantz attempted to get his majority, a new wrinkle was introduced with an ultimatum from Lieberman. He has previously pledged to only support a unity government, but on November 9th he announced that if either Netanyahu or Gantz did not commit to compromise in a unity government, he would ally *Yisrael Beiteinu* with the other candidate. Lieberman especially emphasized avoiding another election.

Unfortunately, when Gantz's time to form a coalition ended eleven days later, a legislative majority still eluded him. He and Netanyahu held talks for a unity government in a last ditch effort to avoid a third election, but ultimately failed. In this new round, polling shows that the Blue and White party appears to again have a slight edge over *Likud*, and both sides would still need the support of *Yisrael Beiteinu* for a coalition. The possibility for an outcome very similar to that of the past two is strong.

The very next day, Israel's Attorney General, Avichai Mandelblit, announced that Netanyahu was being indicted on charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. The cases against the Prime Minister involved allegations of him offering and giving favors in his governmental capacity to various prominent media magnates in exchange for favorable coverage or expensive gifts.

In addition to the challenges this creates for Israel's democracy, with the top prosecutor and premier of the country at legal odds, this event could damage Netanyahu. Despite his fervent protests, including proclaiming an attempted coup and calling to "investigate the investigators," an ongoing criminal case could damage him when Israel's citizens next go to the polls.

Israel's electoral future is uncertain, with



no clear path out of the current political deadlock. The eventual outcome of this election, though, has very important ramifications. Within Israel, this is a test of whether the country wants to continue down Netanyahu's right-wing path, or if they are ready for a transition to a more moderate to liberal government.

The impact of this election on Palestinian natives could be great. A Gantz led government, which would likely include the Arab party Joint List, would be much more amenable to compromise and cooperation on that front than Netanyahu's administration has been.

In an international context, the Israeli Prime Minister has an important influence in the Middle East. Whether that seat is filled by Netanyahu or Gantz will affect the policy of the United States and other global powers, as well as what they will be able to get done in the region. This reaches to critical issues, such as Russian influence in the Middle East and conflict with Iran.

Israel's current political situation is both complicated and unprecedented. This election may be more strongly contested than any in Israeli history. Will Netanyahu receive a record fifth term? Or will Israel choose a new leader for the first time in over a decade?

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