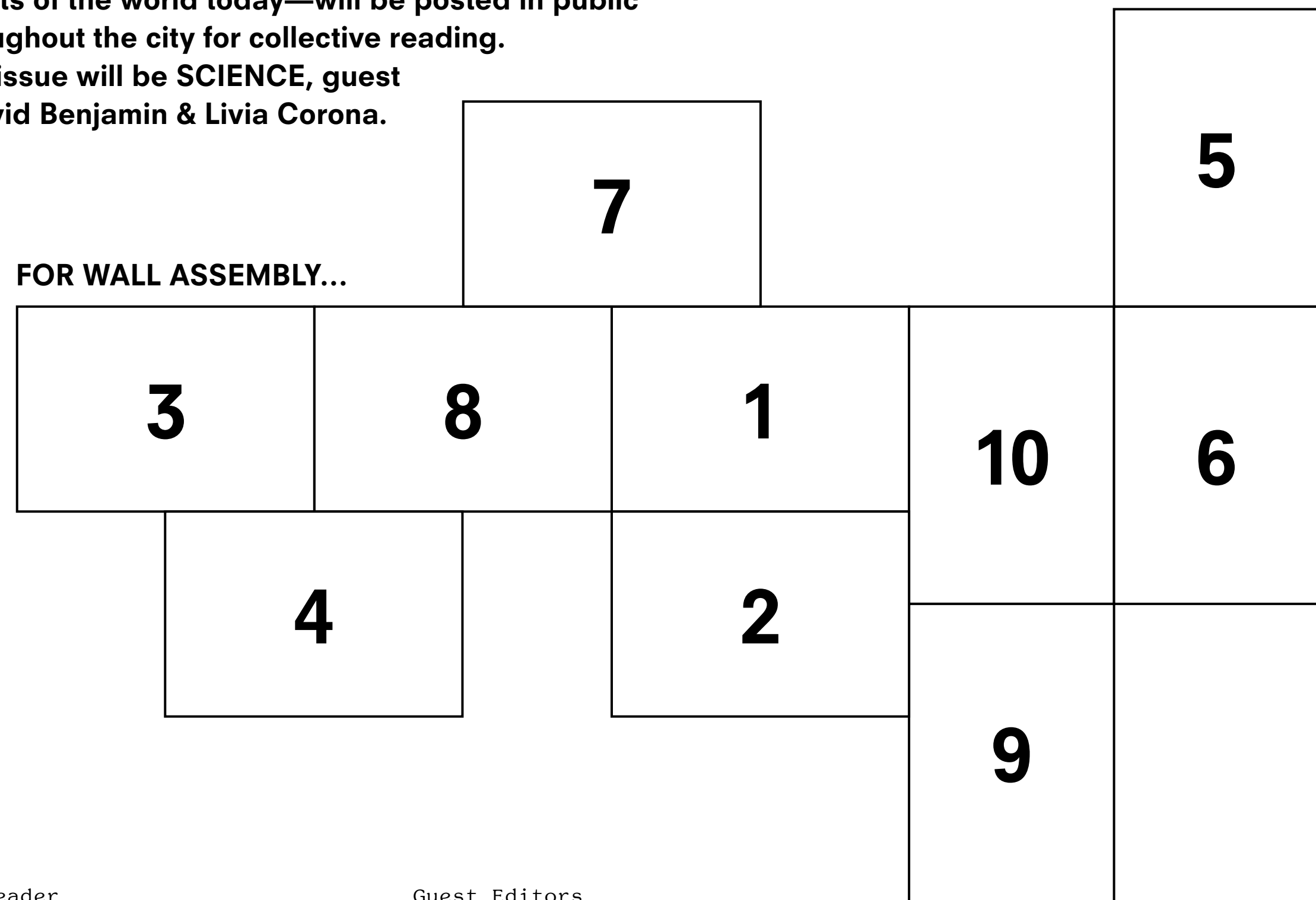


The **New City Reader** is a newspaper on architecture, public space and the city, published as part of "The Last Newspaper," an exhibition running at the New Museum of Contemporary Art from October 6, 2010–January 9, 2011. Conceived by executive editors Joseph Grima and Kazys Varnelis, the newspaper's content centers on the spatial implications of epochal shifts in technology, economy and society today. The **New City Reader** will consist of one edition published over the course of the project, with a new section produced weekly from within the museum's gallery space, each led by a different guest editorial team of architects, theorists and research groups. These sections will be available free at the New Museum and—in emulation of a practice common in the nineteenth-century American city and still popular in China and other parts of the world today—will be posted in public on walls throughout the city for collective reading.

The next issue will be **SCIENCE**, guest edited by David Benjamin & Livia Corona.



The New City Reader

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"The Last Newspaper" is curated by Richard Flood and Benjamin Godsill. For more information please visit newmuseum.org

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DECEMBER 17, 2010

STYLE

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A Newspaper Of Public Space

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(DJ/rupture)
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(DJ N-RON)
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Norm Chomsky
Sara Cwynar
Geeta Dayal
Carolina González
Eric Rodenbeck
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The New City Reader

A Newspaper Of
Public Space



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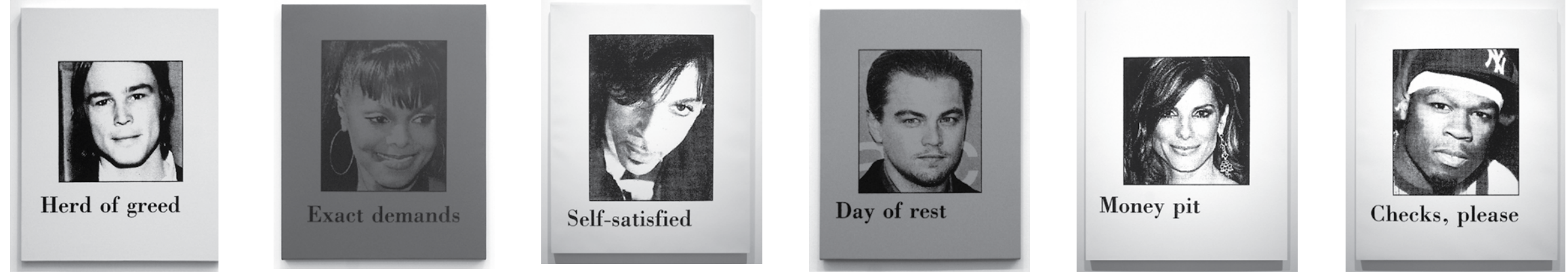
Burning e-mails (Jessica Simpson), 2005
Being watched (Russell Crowe), 2006
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Scott Hug, New York Post Page 6 Heads series, 2005-2008, unique (+ 1AP), acrylic Benjamin Moore paint and digital silkscreen on cotton canvas, 30 x 24 inches.

THE SUBSTANCE OF STYLE YOU'RE IN!

by Lucy F. Collins

Is the battle cry of the fashion industry, "one day you're in, one day you're out," becoming extinct? As the veil is slowly being torn by savvy bloggers and folks with enough cash to buy access, it appears that the lines separating the in-crowd from the fashion don'ts are blurring.

It used to be the case that Fashion Week—a fashion fête of seasonal shows across the globe—was an industry event, a trade show granting editors and buyers access to top designers and their collections. Now Fashion Week is a consumer-driven affair. Whether it's the rising level of spectacle in the shows or the hulla-baloo of the street photographers and gawkers outside the tents, increasingly the goal of Fashion Week is to attract the attention of a public that is not professionally tied to the industry. As such, it's beginning to feel like the consumers are now the insiders.

EVEN IN THE EARLY DAYS OF FASHION, CONSUMERS WERE ALWAYS GRANTED A PEEK INSIDE. THE IDEA OF BEAUTIFUL WOMEN GIVING A LITTLE TWIRL IN FANCY CLOTHES IS CERTAINLY NOTHING NEW.

"Project Runway" has granted anyone with a television access to some of the intricacies—and dramas—of the actual design process. Websites such as Polyvore have enabled even stay-at-home soccer moms to design inspiration boards similar to those used by high-level trend forecasters and designers. And blogs have given anyone a platform from which to address the growing fashion public—most notably Tavi, the 13-year-old blogger who is now often seated in the front row next to Anna Wintour.

With all of this consumer empowerment, what has happened to the hierarchy of professionals who maintain the pedigree of the industry? In light of pressures exerted by the recession and an ever-increasing interest in sustainability, the very notion of fashion is being refigured. Under a new rubric that may not demand such speed of change or editorial help in navigating multitudes of trends, is there still even a role for the elite fashion community?

While it's true that there is a distinction between high-end haute couture and more generically designed prêt-à-porter, it was always "ready-to-wear" that paid the bills, so appealing to those who will ultimately buy the mass-produced garment is really the top concern of most designers. In fact, even in the early days of fashion, consumers were always granted a peek inside. The idea of beautiful women giving a little twirl in fancy clothes is certainly nothing new. In the 1920s, fashion shows—then called fashion parades—enticed crowds by the thousands. While it may seem that fashion shows are growing more and more spectacular in nature—and less about clothes to be worn—fashion shows were always about press—or rather, free advertising.

So what may feel like a restyling is actually just the full blossoming of ideas in place years ago. Fashion, most essentially, is about attracting attention. The fine balance between making people want what you have, but making it impossible for them to get it, is difficult to achieve. Yes, this is the formula for being cool, but in a recession, the values of cool must acquiesce to the bottom line. And when the uncool have the money to spend, they too must be allowed "in."

by Robert Sumrell

The news was just the news until Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese and Truman Capote introduced "the New Journalism" in the 1960s. In a matter of months, they broke critical distance, married fiction with journalism and introduced their own subjectivity to current events.

Sadly, contemporary journalism seems to have moved away from this potential "newness," and instead reporters have turned New Journalism into a technique that guarantees personal acclaim while making calculated moves to pander to as much of a general readership as possible. This issue of the *New City Reader* does not.

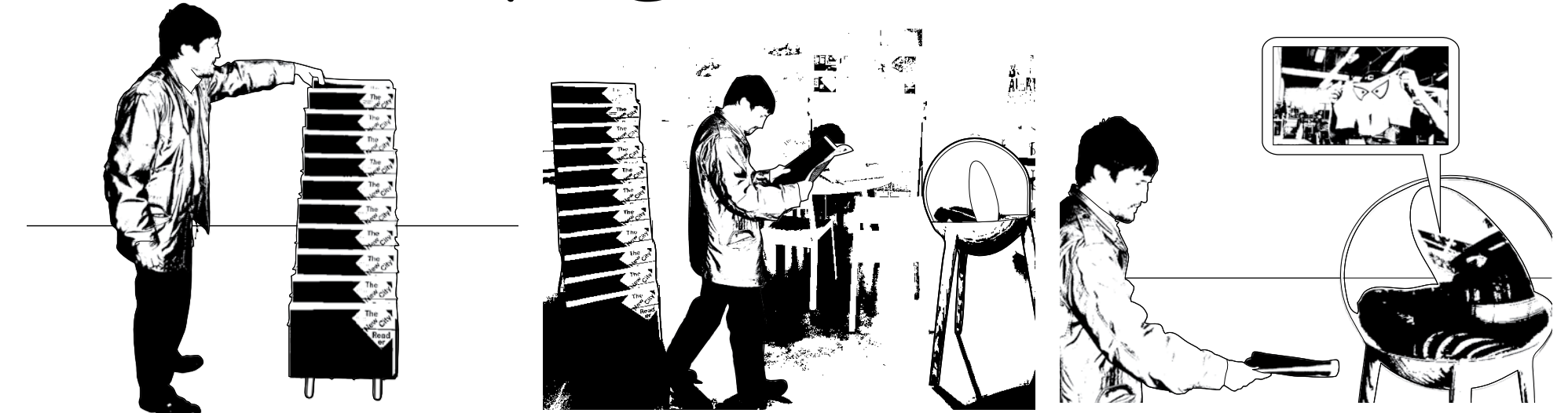
Style is neither fashion (the concern of people who care about profits and

marketing) or a simple plea for attention (whether by hipster or the fashion plate). Style occurs when someone does something according to their own perspective without regard for good taste and in so doing, makes a bit of the larger public feel inclined to take some risks for themselves.

Style can't be taught. It has nothing to do with wealth, taste, education or fame, but sometimes, just sometimes, and maybe only for a few moments, it can change the world.

Be wrong, be bad, be brilliant and be sincere; but be something. Be whoever it is you are when no one is watching you, and do it within an inch of your life.

OUT OF AFRICA, INTO RFID

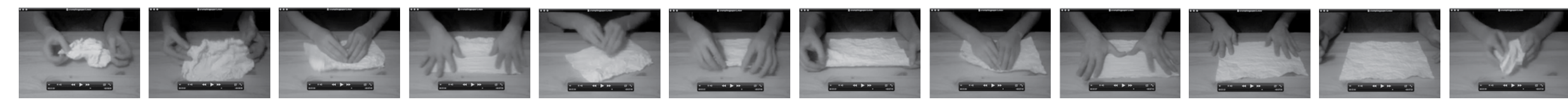
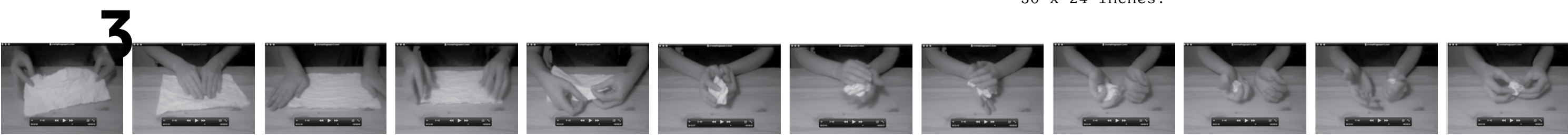


Text and project by Nicole Mackinlay Hahn
Illustrations by Daniel Payne

The title may sound cliché, but Africa has become a true brand, and it's in style now more than ever. Several recent newspaper headlines begin with the factually accurate yet allegory-eliciting phrase, "Out of Africa." In 2008, I wanted to elevate the fashion supply chain stories beyond the not-so-pretty electronic article surveillance tags emblazoned with branded sentiment. I envisioned waving an RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) wand over an ethical bubble to authenticate and make transparent our products and news, and Mirror/Africa was born. I started with a few reference points: first, I thought of the ever-growing trend to authenticate brands with elaborate and self-sanctioned back stories, mirroring the "objective" journalistic norm. I also thought of the corner kiosks that New Yorkers used to buy newspapers at. There was a ritual involved in receiving the news that has been lost since the advent of mobile devices. With this installation series, I am honoring Africa with a glorified kiosk that shares video anecdotes and provides an interactive experience that is tangible, emotive and informative without the use of smart phones—please scan the RFID tag on the newspaper at the kiosk to experience this project.

As the world scrambles for African resources, Africa is battling counterfeit drugs, fraud and corruption. Africa is turning to innovative artists, designers and technologists for inspiration and support. A Ghanaian tech company recently won a start-up award for a top-up scratch card that is even lower cost than the use of RFID in authenticating medication. In the U.S., hysteria over privacy concerns is driven by the use of RFID technology by companies like Wal-Mart—whose biggest concerns are inventory inaccuracy and employee theft—but back in Africa, enthusiasm for this technology has allowed for more progressive RFID applications that create efficiency, security and transparency, empowering the consumers so that they themselves can authenticate the product they are buying and selling.

Nicole Mackinlay Hahn's "Mirror/Africa," installed on the 3rd floor of the New Museum, New York from December 18, 2010 to January 9, 2011, can read the RFID tag on this issue of the *New City Reader*.



SEX AND THE CITY

by AUDC (Robert Sumrell and Kazys Varnelis)

Ten years ago, Bruce Mau published his landmark book “Lifestyle,” setting his own work against the context of contemporary culture and declaring that crafting visually compelling work was no longer sufficient. Instead, Mau argued that the contemporary designer’s task was to craft landscapes of consumption that give fuller, richer meaning to individuals.

In retrospect, Mau’s text proved remarkably prescient. Lifestyle has become a central part of everyday life in the city. Take New York. Once a metropolis, producing wealth through trade and manufacture of industrial goods, it fell into decline in the 1960s, reaching its nadir in the late 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s it turned to producing wealth through the fabrication of financial products. During the last decade, however, it became a sink for overaccumulated capital, luring in oceans of wealth under the pretext of real estate investment while serving as a venue of luxury consumption. New York, like Venice and other late empire cities, is now a dumping ground for wealth.

The change in the city would not have been possible without lifestyle as a mediating element. Through lifestyle, the bourgeoisie refigured itself as a “creative class,” seeing work and consumption as a continuum to be shaped together. Lifestyle makes it possible to understand that holding an unpaid position at an architect’s office, owning a money-losing clothing store, buying an apartment at 40 Bond or eating a meal at Momofuku are all crucial experiences that make one’s life complete. Even expense is now a virtue; after all, lifestyle never goes on sale.

But Mau made one mistake. Understanding the designer as an avant-garde figure, he believed that designers would shape lifestyles. This was not to be: in a network culture awash in information, individuals act as aggregators, turning not to one expert source but to many voices, preferably voices of individuals they feel they can relate to, freely combining an array of sources plus their own impulses into a lifestyle.

Lifestyle emerges out of leisure, but needs to be carefully distinguished from it. As surplus time, leisure was originally the province of aristocracy, the only group that had the luxury to partake of it. For the aristocracy, however, leisure time was rarely idle. Instead it was a matter of carefully producing an image fitting their position in society. The bourgeoisie followed that model, understanding the role of the housewife to be that of a consumer, ensuring that both the family and its home were properly appointed. Still, the pressures of metropolitan life threatened to overwhelm nineteenth century individuals so they sought—and were often instructed to seek—unstructured leisure as an escape valve. Even though the Protestant ethic demanded that all time be regimented and useful, psychologists understood that the modern worker needed “time off.” Uselessness became therapy, a compensation for the instrumentalism of mass society.

Still leisure time posed sexual danger: idle hands are the devil’s plaything. With too much excess time, men and women could lose energy through unproductive sexual activity such as onanism or sodomy. Freud wrote that unfettered sexual impulses would make leisure time stressful and could even dominate work life. Moreover, the dangers of uncontrolled sexuality threatened the competitiveness of nations by undermining the production of children, so sexuality would be limited to the production of children by a married man and woman. Reinforcing this idea of production in the home, domesticity became a project of home economics. Throughout the late nineteenth century, idle time was rationalized into organized leisure, consisting of activities that included gardening, playing music, attending church, volunteering, scouting, improving oneself by going to museums and parks and belonging to social organizations. Sports too were a form of discipline, training bodies capable of receiving instructions.

Lifestyle begins in the remote isolation of Southern California. There, a middle class society appeared to be all there was, a continuum free of class distinctions and established social structures. Southern Californians enjoyed the benefits of an easy climate that supported low-cost construction and a less Protestant, more Latin attitude toward work that romanticized the ranch tradition, suggesting that leisure take place every day. Soon, as Charles and Ray Eames would show, crafting one’s way of life by designing daily habits could be leveraged into a career. This transformation of leisure into lifestyle was argued as a healthier way to live, a natural means of capitalizing on the benefits of fertile land, clean air and sunshine.

After the excess sexuality celebrating the end of World War II produced the baby boom, population growth ceased to be an issue. Instead, over-rationalized consumption and a satiated populace threatened to slow economic growth. As a means of stimulating the economy, advertising agencies

began to market goods for their pleasure value, encouraging consumers to buy objects for novelty and aesthetic qualities. Cocktailing, a relaxed evening of drinking with friends which began in the late 1920s among wealthy Americans, spread into mass culture as the “cocktail hour,” to become integral to both American business and social culture. Among the champions of this lifestyle was Hugh Hefner who, through the 1953 launch of *Playboy* magazine, brought pornography mainstream, combining racy photographs with celebrity interviews, literature and an affirmation of the bachelor way of life. Throughout the 1950s, sexuality was increasingly tolerated. Female lounge acts like Rusty Warren and Terry “Cupcake” O’Mason produced stag records that brought the nightclub atmosphere home while laws governing pornography were relaxed allowing for greater displays of nudity and sexuality in both print and film.

Along with postwar prosperity came a surge in college attendance. The 1944 Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, or the G.I. Bill of Rights, opened the door for middle class Americans returning from service to attend college or vocational school while the National Defense Education Act provided federal assistance to the civilian population. Colleges slowly became more integrated and inclusive of the general population, and once attendance swelled, the dependence of these schools on increased revenue meant that a college education became increasingly common.

Loosened by the hippie movement, oral contraceptives and the Cold War idea of America as a land of individual freedom, a more openly sexual and loose vision of American society slowly emerged. Within this milieu, college developed as transitional utopia between childhood and adulthood in which students’ every need would be provided for and desire could float freely. Co-ed dormitories and the easy availability of birth control pills allowed sex among college students to become more frequent and more casual throughout the decade.

The city had its share of sex as well. Manhattan fell on hard times in the late 1960s, as both industry and middle-class families pulled out. Still, less restrictive laws and cutbacks in policing led to a thriving sex trade in the city. Peep shows, porn theaters and sex shops sprouted around Times Square, long an area in decline. Located by the Port Authority Bus Terminal and the Lincoln Tunnel and in close proximity to both Pennsylvania Station and Grand Central Terminal, Times Square served as a key entrance point to the city, the sort of area of great mobility that sociologist Robert E. Park described as crucial to cities, allowing individuals to throw off their old identities for new.

At the same time, New York became a center for youth fashion, rock music and art, and individuals involved in these professions enjoyed experimenting with all aspects of their lives, including their sexuality. Andy Warhol’s Factory, located on East 47th Street was a scene that encompassed celebrity culture, fashion and the glamour of color television. Art became an index or record of the events in the space, and sexual self-fashioning on the part of the participants was critical to its success.

While artists had some flexibility to flirt with gender roles and dabble in perversions, deviant sexuality was still largely forbidden. Prior to the 1969 Stonewall riot, gay bars were largely “private clubs” and were often raided by vice cops. In the gay culture of the time, the focus on the right and ability to legitimately have sex led to public sex acts that became an important means of self-expression. Exposing others to gayness, it was thought, would help normalize it. Identity became constructed and performed. Gay men would undertake an aggressive and stylized hyper-masculine emulation of workout wear, lumberjacks, construction workers and policemen. After Stonewall, gay bars proliferated, but public spaces were also colonized for sex, most notably the West Street piers, the meat market truck yards, the Rambles at Central Park and subway restrooms. All of these provided exciting venues for spontaneous and anonymous sexual encounters. The openness of gay sexuality was attractive to heterosexuals as well, and watching or partaking in gay sex was hardly unusual.

Most of all, the gay sex scene focused on bathhouses like the Continental Baths, facilities that included gyms, pools, restaurants, dance floors and live music. Bette Midler, the New York Dolls, the Pointer Sisters, Sarah Vaughn and Nell Carter performed at Continental Baths to an increasingly mixed crowd that often included celebrities. By 1974, the entertainers, together with the attraction of watching gay sex, had brought too much straight clientele into the baths. Gay attendance dwindled and the club ultimately closed only to be opened again in 1977 as Plato’s Retreat for heterosexual swingers.

The primary appeal of Plato’s Retreat was with a “bridge and tunnel” crowd of suburbanites and residents of the outer boroughs who came in to experience evenings of pleasure in the city. In this, it had a counterpart in Studio 54, the disco that also opened in the same year. Named after an old television studio on West 54th Street, this somewhat more staid version of Plato’s Retreat brought together celebrities, models, housewives and politicians in the delirious excess of disco culture. Unlike Plato’s Retreat, sex generally didn’t take place on the premises, although the sexually charged atmosphere was commonly understood to be a place to meet people for sex. Also unlike Plato’s Retreat, which welcomed all, Studio 54 maintained a strict velvet rope policy, judging people on the basis of the clothes they wore and whether or not they were regulars, amplifying the idea that Studio 54 was not just a place to go out to but a total way of life.

Studio 54 would be closed by the IRS in 1980 for tax evasion. Even though Plato’s Retreat’s founder was imprisoned for tax evasion after being investigated by the IRS, the club endured until 1985 when Mayor Ed Koch ordered all sex clubs shut amidst the AIDS crisis. Still, both clubs had a catalytic role in bringing the city back from its low point, making it attractive not only to the bridge and tunnel set but also suggesting that the city could appeal to both young people and empty nesters tired of aging

suburbs who sought lives of greater pleasure and distraction. The Lifestyle had brought lifestyle to the city.

The use of the term “the Lifestyle” as a synonym for swinging (itself named after a form of dance)—non-productive, polymorphic sexuality—underscores how lifestyle comes after production. The Lifestyle emerges after the mainstreaming of nonproductive sex—thus the accepting of homosexuality, alternative sexualities and gender choice in society and even more widely acceptable homosexuality through “lesbian” pornography. It’s no accident that the lifestyle is most common among empty nesters whose children have already grown.

But just as true regulars of Plato’s Retreat wound up finding jobs in the sex industry and true regulars of Studio 54 turned to fashion, music or dealing drugs, lifestyle suggests that it’s not enough to merely consume anymore; one has to participate fully. By the end of 1970s, the post-Fordist economy had driven more and more individuals to more fully identify with their work. Thus hippies pursuing craft production wound up running boutique industries, phone phreakers Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak wound up starting Apple Computer and actor Ronald Reagan would become president.

Lifestyle suggests that the traditional aspects of leisure—that is self-realization, following one’s idiosyncratic interests and consumption—can take place anywhere. Moreover, lifestyle is accompanied by a relentless marketing of the self, so that one can be understood by his or her aspirations and interests. Lifestyle becomes the ultimate form of consumerism and under it no aspect of life can be pulled out as free of consumption. But in its affirmation of individuality, cultivation of lifestyle becomes a Nietzschean pursuit. Thus, today individuals neglect their families not because they are forced to work to get ahead or because they are driven by a Protestant work ethic but rather because work gives them meaning. Where workaholics were seen as abnormal, the overworked lifestyle serves as a model for the family, affirming the importance of life itself, showing how much he or she cares.

Just like “the Lifestyle,” lifestyle turns deviance into an amusement. Absorbed into niche marketing and tolerated by capitalists eager to market every last aspect of human experience, subcultures and sexual practices alike lose their transgressive and political elements. In the process, control becomes ever more total, dissent increasingly impossible. When Kurt Cobain sang “everyone is gay” in the early 1990s, he discerned an emerging world in which virtually all forms of deviance would be accepted, a world in which effeminate, drug-addled rock stars would be merely banal, a world in which he would be merely another hipster. For the rest of the song—which he dedicated to his family—he apologized repeatedly and within a few years took the only route preserving his deviance and avoiding becoming a figure of amusement and nostalgia by committing suicide.

As Mau was formulating his notions of lifestyle, the phenomenon matured in cities. This was epitomized in the television show “Sex and the City.” Here, four female protagonists—recent arrivals who had grown up in suburbia and thus become used to lives of idle pleasure—navigated a landscape of sexual adventure in New York City. Instead of retreading the momentary encounters of Plato’s Retreat, however, intercourse in “Sex in the City” revolved around elaborate rituals of consumption. Soon, following in the footsteps of the show’s protagonists, a generation of pleasure-seekers arrived in the city to indulge in the same experiences that the characters in the show experienced. Organized “Sex in the City” tours are common today, enthralling participants with visits to authentic sites like a sex shop in which a character purchased a vibrator, a shoe store and a bakery that largely makes cupcakes—themselves nostalgic markers of childhood, that is pre-sexual, indulgence.

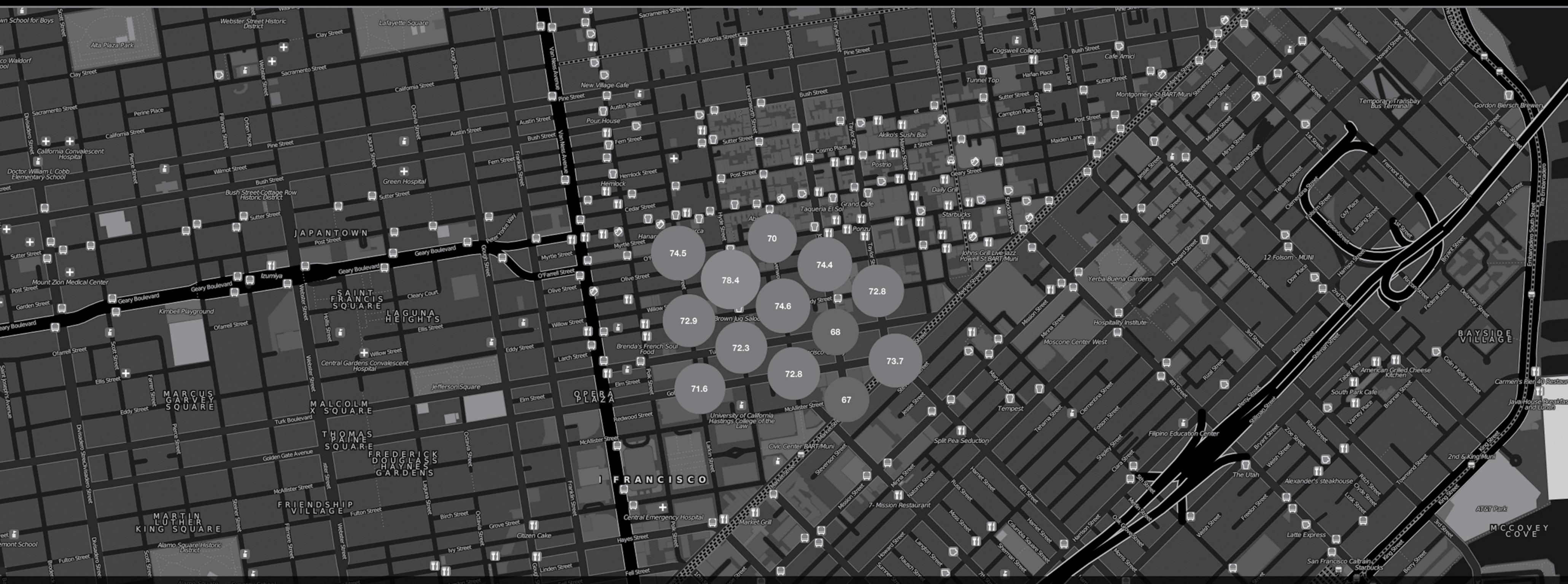
If “Sex in the City” established urban life as a matter of lifestyle, it has long ceased to give insight into actual life in New York. Candace Bushnell, the author of the *New York Observer*’s “Sex in the City” column, upon whom Carrie Bradshaw is based, “retired” by getting married in 2002, and the show ended in 2004. As a symbol of consumption without consequences, Bradshaw became increasingly untenable after the collapse of the real estate bubble. Her own tastes now appear dated, fashions that even the bridge-and-tunnel crowd would feel out-of-date and overexposed wearing.

Instead, the new urban figure is the hipster. Like Carrie Bradshaw, the hipster lives to consume but does so following Internet-based sites like the Selby and the Sartorialist, monitoring sidewalk fashion and trends rather than the catwalk. Simultaneously interested in authenticity—goods with established history and lasting value, the discovery of which produces trends that move too fast for traditional publications to digest—the hipster is marked by a detached and cynical voyeurism rather than the participatory enthusiasm of the fashionista. Hardly employable and highly judgmental while participating in the same system he or she condemns, the hipster is the twenty-first century flâneur.

Consumerism and everyday life, suburban and urban, authenticity and fashion and production and consumption are no longer distinct spheres. Instead we have a new form of life, a *gesamtkunstwerk* in which everything is designed, subsumed by lifestyle. As the hipster navigates this terrain, endlessly searching for the thrill of the next new old thing, he or she moves from one adapted lifestyle to the next in search of meaningful novelty. It’s no longer clear if there is any alternative or if this endless drift from lifestyle to lifestyle is really what we wanted all along.

dis





Legend At 11:24AM, the maximum was 78db
 All measurements in decibels. Average: 72db, Min: 57db, Max: 78db

120	Threshold of Pain
110	SFPD Sirens
100	Inside a Nightclub
90	Heavy Trucks
80	Limit for Construction Noise
70	Raised Human Voices
60	Serious Annoyance
50	Sleep Disturbance
40	Quiet

4PM 8PM 12AM 4AM 8AM 12PM 4PM 8PM 12AM 4AM 8AM 12PM 4PM 8PM 12AM 4AM 8AM

REPLAY BLUR ON

AN INTERVIEW WITH ERIC RODENBECK OF STAMEN DESIGN

by Daniel Perlin

Eric Rodenbeck We did cab-spotting, and we did crime-spotting—about where the taxis are and where the crimes are. The stuff that I'm working on with a group called Tinker in Italy is actually analyzing what is a siren and what is not a siren.

Daniel Perlin I was actually with you when you guys were doing the crime-spotting.

ER Yeah. That was a little while back. So we've since extended it...I just wanted to take that conversation further.

Cab-spotting was about getting stuff from a commercial entity; crime-spotting is about getting it from the city. And what I wanted to do with this [siren project] is basically extract the geospatial information from the sound environment.

But one issue is that, because most of the calls that the fire department is responding to are medical calls, that department is not allowed to release information about where they go at anything smaller than a ZIP code-level. Because it's potentially identifying information about somebody...you can't actually give out the street address for these medical issues.

DP So you're basically going to ZIP code-level and no deeper?

ER You can get ZIP code-level but no deeper from the city already, but you can't get it on a block level or a street address level. My idea is that we basically find people who are interested in this, and they put these [siren sensors] in their houses, or they hang them out their window.

There's a thing that happens where if I make a call right now to 911, three fire trucks are going to show up in front of my house. Which seems kind of crazy to me. I'm glad to be getting that level of service, but it's really fucking loud, and it's really a lot of money, and it's really a lot of wear and tear on the roads. There are fire

trucks constantly going up and down the street, and I don't think people who don't live [in San Francisco] have quite a sense for actually how many fire trucks are zipping around, and I want people to know about that.

DP So [the project] has both to do with noise, but also to do with sort of the urban condition of spatial noise in a certain sense.

ER Yeah, that's the idea.

DP In terms of the mapping of it—is that the next step, where you're going to integrate geo-location in real time of where these trucks are going?

ER I'd love to get to that point. Tinker is working on making the sensors now, and once they get us data, we'll be able to do stuff with it.

DP I assume there's decibel detection, but also frequency detection...those are pretty sophisticated sensors, right? They're not that easy to do, right?

ER That's the question.

DP So it's kind of both a concept of noise, but also there's some social utility to it as well.

ER Totally. The reason to do this is kind of make the conversation about urban environments a more open one. We want to know this information—we're paying for it.

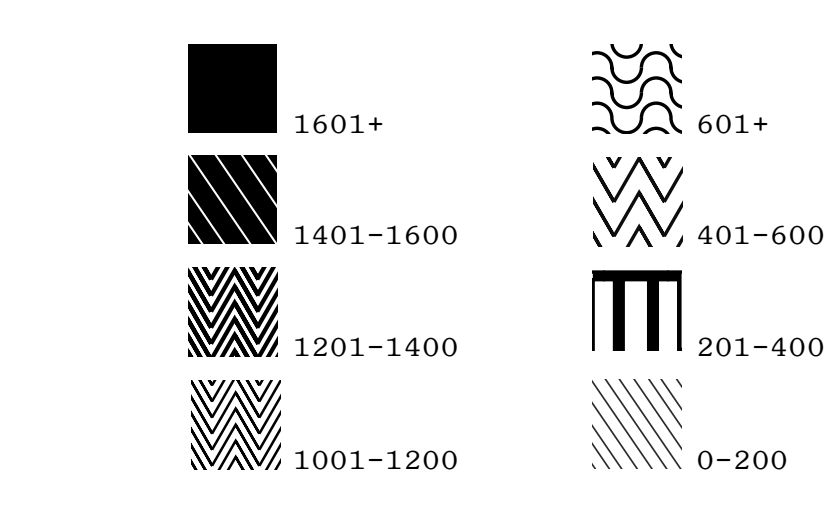
In order to be an informed citizenry, we've got to know what's going on. And I wanted to be more specific about it than saying, "It's noisy downtown." Because then people are like, "Well, if you don't like noise, then go back to the suburbs." But my point was, "No, it's really noisy downtown—it's an actual problem."

With cab-spotting, we actually have the data on where the cabs are and when they go to different places. There are contentious city meetings between the city and the taxi cab companies and restaurateurs, say in North Beach, where they say, "We need more cabs in this neighborhood on Saturday nights because people aren't coming to the neighborhood." And the taxi people are saying, "Well, we can't have more cabs because there's not enough business even for the taxis as it is." You can imagine the kind of fights that they're having. We thought that if we could actually show up to one of those meetings, and say, "There are six empty cabs in North Beach pretty much at all times," suddenly you could have a discussion about it that was more numbers-based and fact-based than just emotional. And crime is like that too. This trend is happening.

NUMBER OF NOISE COMPLAINTS, NEW YORK CITY, JULY 2009—JULY 2010

by Sara Cwynar

Data from <http://gis.nyc.gov/ops/mmr/pdf/tables/NOISE.pdf> and http://gis.nyc.gov/ops/mmr/pdf/files/NOISE_301.pdf



NOT FADE AWAY (PART 4)

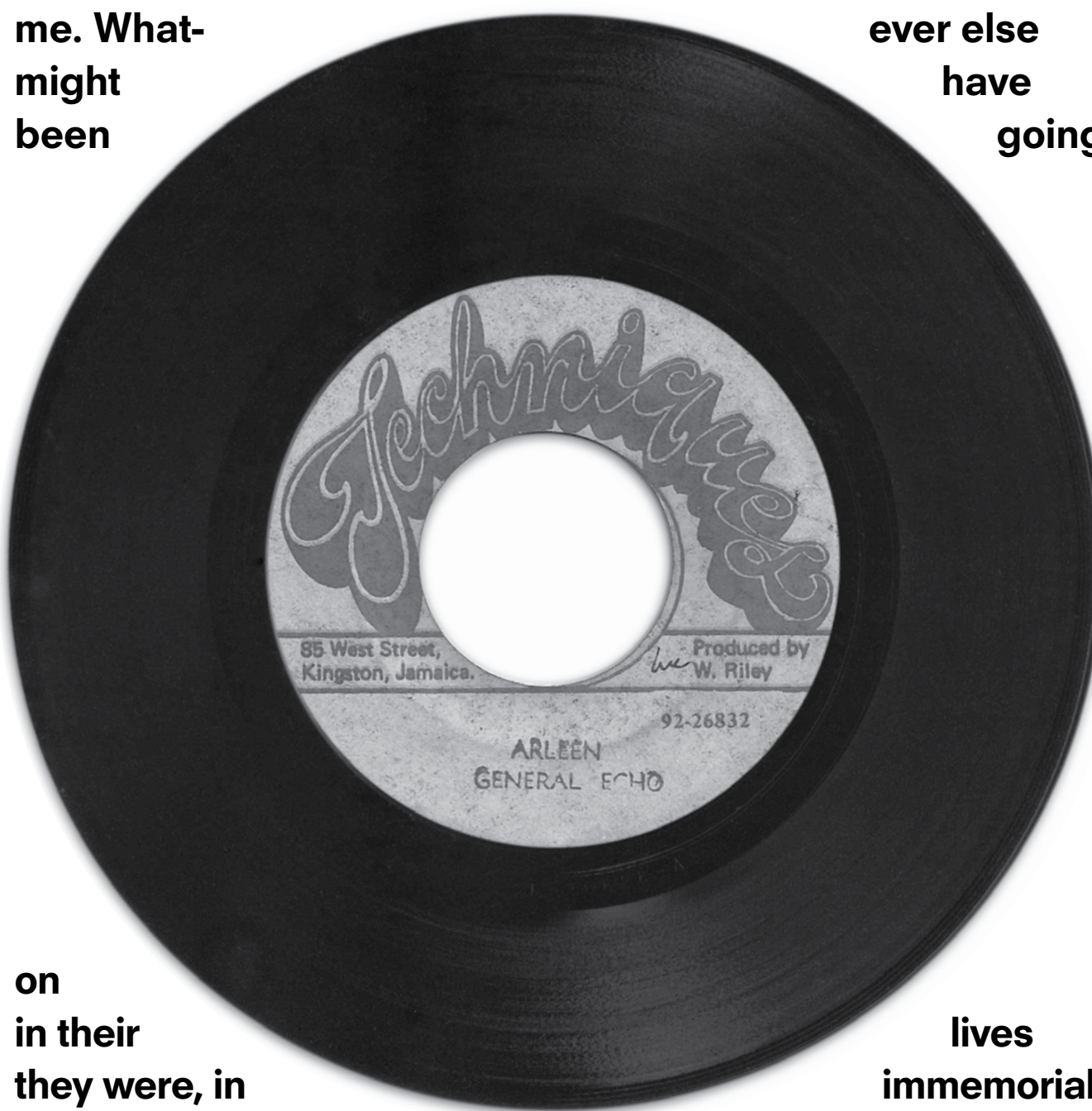
by Luc Sante

Let me play you "Arleen," by General Echo, a seven-inch 45 on the Techniques label, produced by Winston Riley, a number one hit in Jamaica in autumn 1979. "Arleen" is in the Stalag 17 riddim, a slow, heavy, insinuating track that is nearly all bass—the drums do little more than bracket and punctuate, and the original's brass-section color has been entirely omitted in this version. I'm not really sure what Echo is saying. It sounds like "Arleen wants to dream with a dream." Whether or not those are his actual words, it is the immediate sense. The riddim is at once liquid and halting, as if it were moving through a dark room filled with hanging draperies, incense and ganja smoke, sluggish and nearly impenetrable air—the bass walks and hurtles. Echo's delivery is mostly talkover, with just a bit of sing-song at the end of the verse. It is suggestive, seductive, hypnotic, light-footed, veiling questionable designs under a scrim of innocence, or else added, talking shit in a daze as a result of an injury: "My gal Arleen, she love whipped cream / Everytime I check her she cook sardine..."

General Echo, whose real name was Errol Robinson, was prominent in the rise of "slackness," the sexually explicit reggae style that began to eclipse the Rastafarian "cultural" style in the late 1970s; his songs include "Bathroom Sex" and "I Love to Set Young Crutches on Fire" ("crotches," that is), as well as "Drunken Master" and "International Year of the Child." He had his first hit in 1977, put out three albums and a substantial, if indeterminate, number of singles amid the chaos and profusion of Jamaican releases, then as now. Along with two other members of his sound system, he was shot dead on the street by Kingston police in 1980; no one seems to know why.

I bought the record from some punk store in downtown Manhattan at the time it was on the Jamaican charts. I first heard it at Isaiah's, a dance club that materialized every Thursday night in a fourth-floor loft on Broadway between Bleecker and Bond. This was a few years before the enormous wave of Jamaican immigration to the United States, which was mainly a phenomenon of the later 80s and a result of the kind of violence that killed General Echo. Nevertheless the club regulars were more than half

Jamaican transplants, nearly all of them men. The walls were lined with impassive types wearing three-piece suits in shades of cream and tan and broad-brimmed, high-crowned felt hats that looked at once Navaho and Hasidic, with their locks gathered up inside. They danced as if they didn't want to dance but couldn't entirely contain themselves—the merest suggestion of movement: a shoulder here, a hip there. It was hard not to feel judged by this lineup; I kept ratcheting down the enthusiasm level of my dancing. But they didn't even see me. What-might have been going



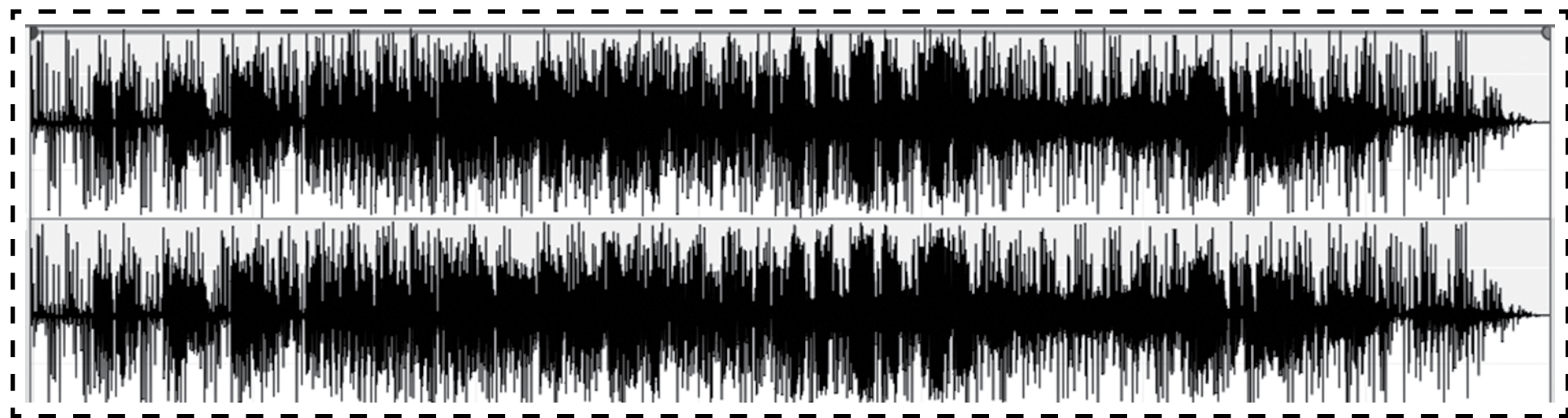
on in their they were, in fashion, bach- and this gave the club a taste of the grange hall. Sometimes I went there with a girlfriend, sometimes with a group. We smoked weed and drank Red Stripe and sometimes inhaled poppers, which would lend you huge brief bursts of euphoric energy and then foreclose, leaving you in a puddle. I hardly ever made it to the 4:00 a.m. closing because the next day I had to work, and four hours' sleep made me feel sick. As a result I missed all the incidents involving guns, which invariably occurred at the end of the night. The club would have to shut down for weeks or months at a

time—it was anyway unclear what went on there the other six nights and seven days. Eventually the owners installed a metal detector, the first one I ever encountered, little suspecting they would one day be ubiquitous.

We went there for the bass and the trance state resulting from hours of dancing to riddim that stretched forever, the groove a fabric of stacked beats fractally splitting into halves of halves of halves, a tree that spread its branches through the body, setting the governor beat in the torso and shaking its tributaries outward and down through shoulders, elbows, hips, knees, feet so that you couldn't stop except when you collapsed. Most often I went there with E., who danced like a whip and who could keep on well past my exhaustion limit, and because I needed her, I did so too. Dancing was our chief mode of communication, an intimacy like two people sleeping together in different dreams, our bodies carrying on a conversation while our minds were in eidetic twilight. Neither of us really trusted language with each other, so we found this medium of exchange that trumped it, precluding silence and misunderstanding. She had a small body whose axis was set on powerful hips with an engine's torque, while above the waist she was all moues and flutters so that the sum of her was exactly like the music: the massive horsepower of the bass below and the delicate broken crystal guitar and plaintive childlike melodica above.

We lived in that place called youth where everything is terribly, punishingly final day-by-day and at the same time tentative and approximate and subject to preemptive revision. We broke up and got back together, again and again, we lived together or at opposite ends of the island, then she moved west and didn't come back, and I went out there but elected not to stay. Then her body betrayed her. She became allergic first to television, then to television when it was turned off, then to inactive televisions next door, then to recently manufactured objects, then to so many apparently random stimuli she became her own book of Leviticus. Then her muscles gave way, and she couldn't dance, then couldn't walk, then couldn't speak and in the end became just a head attached to a useless doll's body before she stopped being able to swallow and soon after to breathe.

FREE SONG!



New York Is Killing Me
by Gil Scott-Heron with Nas

GIL SCOTT-HERON

Yeah the doctors don't know, but New York was killing me,
Bunch of doctors coming round, they don't know
That New York is killing me
Yeah I need to go home and take it slow in Jackson, Tennessee

NAS

New York is fast, how do I compare
It's 24 frames in every second of a movie
Can't see frame change but it's always moving
Characters, tourists, travellers and Arabs cook Halal food
It's foul moods on the average
Hood battlers, half-cyphers, tight spitting, spazzing
Noticing black asses on white women
Village Voices I heard around Strivers' Row
Next to where Calloway once sang, "Heide Ho"
Welcome to the side-show where many eyes are low
Posted up Daily News travel round by the low

GIL SCOTT-HERON

Let me tell ya fast city ain't living all
It's cracked up to be
Fast city ain't living all
It's cracked up to be
Yes seem I need to go home
And slow down in Jackson, Tennessee

NAS

And the gangs in New York are like wolves in sheep clothing
Navy men off the ships in sidewalks strolling
Ladies watching shopping stressing hard
With maxed out credit cards and her depressing job
Grey skies, winter's cold
US Open tennis, charity dinners for the rich and old
Giving nothing to the poor to strengthen their soul
I can see why some get up and go, and move where it's slow

GIL SCOTT-HERON

Lord have mercy, mercy on me
Yeah Lord have mercy, have mercy on me
Tell him to bury my body back home in Jackson, Tennessee
Yeah Lord have mercy, have mercy on me
Yeah I need to be back home, need to be back home,
Need to be back home, need to be back home yeah
Born in Chicago but I go home Tennessee
Yeah born in Chicago but I ...

MUSICAL HOLD-UPS—ASALTOS AND AGUINALDOS

by Carolina González

"White Christmas." "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer." "Winter Wonderland." This more-or-less secular year-end playlist leaves me cold, not in small part for how relentlessly it spins in stores, urging us to buy-buy-buy.

My triggers for Christmas cheer are the folk songs known as villancicos and aguinaldos, which originated with sixteenth-century Spanish peasants and recount variations on the Holy Family's search for shelter, on the Three Kings' journey bearing gifts. As they rooted in the American continent, the songs picked up Black and Indian accents, and here in New York, they have often become hymns of return to a tribe, to a home space.

The traditional staging for these songs is the parranda, or asalto, where crews go from house to house and sing for lechón, rum and other treats. Imagine a more impish, impious Caribbean version of itinerant caroling. So many of the songs keep the theme of visiting newborn Jesus but add persistent calls for entry, food and drink.

Enacting a trip from the hills of the imagined rural community ("alegre vengo de mi montaña de mi cabaña que alegre está"), demanding seasonal pasteles or booze ("si no me dan de beber lloro"), the asalto is less a nostalgic fantasy about the past than a pretext for love—from struggle, from privation, from alienation, from our loved ones near and far.

The 1970 Fania classic "Asalto Navideño" has become the Nueva York Navidad touchstone because, even as the cover plays with the less savory association that Nuyoricans of 1970s New York had with the word ("asalto" also means holdup), the song was straight-up jibaro, via Hector Lavoe's hick voice and Yomo Toro's soaring cuatro. Brass had no place in aguinaldos until Willie Colón used it to open "Aires de Navidad." Now it sounds as Christmasy as coquito.

The Dominican Christmas merengue has developed into a strong genre, and any merengue band worth its salt has at least one Christmas song in its repertoire. The ideal scene that many of these merengues act out is the homecoming party, the return of the prodigal sons and daughters.

One of my favorites in the genre is by Fernandito Villalona. In it, you hear his lilting tenor, before the drugs stuck burrs in his throat, before the comeback as a sober, chastened merengue elder, as he begs his love to allow them to spend Christmas together. "Déjame volver, déjame amanecer." And we too ask to return, home, to family and friends, to a warm respite in the cold city.

With its "tuqui tuqui tuqui tuqui" chorus traditionally sung by children, any version of "Burrito Sabanero" (1975) from Venezuela originally written for the popular TV puppet Topo Gigio—evokes the childhood wonder over Christmas. Even Aventura's bilingual bachata version maintains the spirit of the song, thanks to the high guitar lines and singer Romeo's high pitch.

The asalto or parranda is not as common in New York as it once was, the anarchic, carnivalesque release from routine. Security measures in large buildings and distances to travel between the homes of friends are limiting the gangs of roving merrymakers to more structured settings, turning the rituals into performances.

But as aguinaldos stray from Spanish meters, into bomba, merengue and joropo, the common songbook still allows us to sing together, even as parrandas grow fewer. Start up the chorus of "A Las Arandelas" and watch Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Colombians of various ages join in. If we can't play a guitar, we smack the tambourine, shake the maracas. But most important is the voice, to harmonize and tell ourselves the story of coming together, of traveling far from home or sharing space in this our home.

CALL TO PRAYER

By Daniel Perlin

If you listened closely in Brooklyn in May 2009, you may have heard something new: the sounds of women singing the Azan, the Muslim call to prayer. Though the practice is prohibited by traditional Muslim law, Indonesian artist Khairani Barokka created a website (<http://www.callandresponseproject.com>) requesting online submissions of women singing the Azan. After receiving the clips, the artist assembled them into a playlist and broadcast them through rooftop speakers in Brooklyn's Bushwick neighborhood.

Though deceptively simple, the project, "Call and Response: Women Reciting and Remixing Azan," challenges the premise that the prayer is to be sung only by the male voice. It also questions notions of authenticity, as the speakers broadcast digital reproductions of women's voices from around the world. Though clearly critical of established norms of religious practice, for the artist, the work also includes a deeply personal origin.

Barokka, who often goes by the name "Okka," proudly claims the Azan as her "Ur-sound," her primary auditory experience. At the first moments following her birth, her father leaned in and gently sang the song in her ear, leaving an indelible auditory mark upon her life. The song is part of everyday life for so many, yet, as she notes, "until I began this project, I had never heard it recited by a woman—never mind the fact that my mom was the one who'd just given birth to me, my father got dibs on the Muslim-branding!" By shifting the gender politics of song, the artist cites the female Imam Amina Wadud's act of leading the Friday prayer in 2005 as an influence—a recital that led to death threats.

However, unlike Wadud, whose institutional affiliations with the Progressive Muslim Union have forced her to do much of her work remotely via video conference, Barokka's work stands out as a performance in broad daylight in public spaces. These temporary spaces of broadcast offer a chance for a re-examination of all aspects of religious song in public space, questioning the definition of fixed sites and zones such as houses of worship, minarets and other private spaces.

Barokka states that "the goal of 'Call and Response' is to rupture, in some small way, this landscape with regards to taboo, performativity and gender." For the artist, by broadcasting this prayer on rooftops in Bushwick from her iPod, city space and air are in a sense transformed into agonistic spaces of religious and cultural critique.

Sonically, this work also provides an opportunity to challenge stable notions of early personal sound memories. Barokka states, "I became fascinated with the idea that many women have some kind of connection and emotional response to Azan—be it positive or negative or a mishmash of sentiments—yet have never heard anyone of our gender recite it."

Her Web site continues to receive submissions; further performances are planned. In a way, by re-addressing primary sound, it seems that the piece at once speaks forward and back, to desired memories and to memories that could come to pass. Far from proposing a simple resolution to questions of gender and religious politics, Barokka personalizes this work, sharing and transforming her earliest audible memory to a newly imagined community of listeners and potential broadcasters.

AN INTERVIEW WITH GENESIS BREYER P-ORRIDGE

by Matthew Whitley and Leigha Mason

Matthew Whitley

What do you think is the significance of using style as a sort of insertion or weapon? Or what do you think the function is?

Genesis Breyer P-Orridge

Well, for the first time, for me personally, what really appealed to me was the idea of fashion being about preciousness. And in contrast to that, with the army, clothing being equally as specially designed to fulfill a very particular function. We were curious about the idea of camouflage from the previous eras of warfare. [Psychic TV] was basically dazzle camouflage. It worked for a long time, the government and everyone assumes that people in bands are really stupid, so they don't take you seriously, and that's what gave us that leeway, that gap, to create as much as we did and to gain as much ground as we did before they realized we were serious. 1991 is when the government of Britain came crashing down [on TOPI and its predecessor TOPY, or The Temple Ov Psychick Youth], and on me in particular as the figurehead, which was the negative side of the using the rock band as the public trope, as the camouflage.

MW Do you think that using that sort of "celebrity" subverted the anti-hierarchical nature of TOPI? Since you became the "cult leader?"

GBP-O It didn't have to, but it did, because we underestimated the comfort level of other people with that idea, that icon, that archetype. And suddenly, you're in this awful trap of being seen, not just as the authority figure, but as the person giving back instructions as to what to do next, which was completely opposite of what we were trying to do. That became a weak spot. That was basically the Achilles' heel of the TOPI structure. It was that obsession of the media with finding a figurehead and the surprising weakness of most people to accept it. So, not through our own personal interest in that role, it still was the weak spot.

Leigha Mason So by bringing back the TOPI patches now, is there a new relevance to them, or is it just a way to signify commonality within some kind of subculture?

GBP-O There is a definite significant increase in people who feel some kind of hunger for more substantive information, more satisfying, more nourishing information. Whenever that's there, it means there's an opportunity for counter-establishment activity to happen again. Based on my experience of over 40 years, that's when the doors open, when people are frustrated. The context has changed, but people don't know necessarily, or can't see, what the new context is, so what's happened lately is there's been this huge explosion of access and data, but it's not got any connectivity to anything else. You can go, "I'm really interested in something really specific, you know, what so and so said in...1942, in such and such a town," and you can click and you get that piece of information. Well, that means all that you've found out is what you were looking for. There are no surprises, there's no travel. No journey from point A to the answer and all the hologram in between. You've lost the holographic information that goes with discovery. And people are feeling unsettled by that. The most intelligent, bright, interesting people are demanding a little bit more in their meal, on the meal table than just what they asked for. They want surprises and challenges, and they want collaborations and collectives and communities, and they want to fuck up the status quo again, and they want to meet people who feel similar in some way. Not to join up and sign some manifesto, but it's good to have some form of recognition. And, at the same time, by making the patches as big as we have, stylistically, we're hoping that it's going to generate paranoia. Our experience in the past has been, with [Throbbing Gristle] when we used just any kind of



camo, it took only twenty or thirty people in camo for the media to think there were two or three hundred, and wonder what it was that we were all about. So this is about always a dual function for the people who are interested in some form of creation and change that they see, even on the slightest level, connected with our activities. It gives them some sense of being able to locate like-minded people. It might not, but it can increase that, and the other thing is it generates paranoia and fear in the people we would like to see destroyed. So that's one of the reasons. The other is fun.

LM Which is also a type of subversion.

GBP-O It's also very powerful. Some people have forgotten how powerful fun is.

MW I think play is essential for anything subversive, certainly. You were talking about the necessity of having a journey, and I was just reading recently in the news that scientists have bred a mouse that has two fathers' genetics exclusively. There was no female involved. Recently you and I completed a sort of memorial for Lady Jaye [Genesis' other half, who died in 2007]. However, it's also important that you maintain that she's still here, still present. Do you think death is out of style? Or is birth out of style?

GBP-O Death is never out of style. The majority of us poor little human animals spend most of our lives in denial about the fact that we will be physically obliterated. There's been this increasing pressure, the obsession with celebrity and fame, which is of course most people's idea of the escape from mortality. And that has actually accelerated, as we all know, with Facebook and Myspace and so on. That's the "trickle down effect," to use a Ronald Reagan phrase, a sort of Warholian concept about celebrity. And now everybody and their mother and their unborn child is famous and has a page and has friends they've never met and friends of friends and sites of sites. The concept of even existing has been so diluted by all of that, that even though all these

people are joining in the game of being remembered through the datasphere, it's actually getting thinner and thinner and thinner, and the fear of it cracking is getting bigger and bigger. So if you come up with new systems, new combinations to create the social networks, then yeah, definitely, that makes the idea of death and life not only a very fragile concept of style but a constantly shattering style.

LM Working [recently] on the coffins we've been gilding, you had some concerns about making it look too manufactured. So, taking that away as a formal element and applying it to an artistic methodology, what would be at stake if something like pandrogeny became a manufacturable arts method, or "style," that anybody would do, for various reasons, "authentic" or not?

MW The mass pandrogyn.

GBP-O Well, that would be interesting. I mean, the odds are very slim. So far, the rate of people surrendering to being

pandrogenous is about one out of every six million, that we know of. Probably even smaller, if we only knew. It seems to be one of those boundaries that very few people are willing to confront.

LM What about your spiritual and artistic methods being used for cultural capital?

GBP-O We utilize the idea of having notoriety as a weapon all the time.

LM Yeah, but what about you being utilized within a value system? Would you want people to co-opt your methods spiritually or artistically?

GBP-O Well, you can't co-opt spiritual things, but you can co-opt the appearance of things, and you can mimic the meaning of things and the manifestos and be very good at it. It's worth that attrition rate in order to have some people wake up or to communicate directly with some people. And that's what this patch is about, it's trying to say, "Hey, let's find each other a bit quicker. The times are right to do that." So, that's not an issue for us, we don't mind if everyone on the planet mimics the same thing, because that would just mean that the plateau has shifted and there would be another change required.

MW Do you think that pandrogeny being one in six million, and something that you would move on from if massively archetypal and reproduced, has a risk of creating an ego or expounding on the self rather than destroying it?

GBP-O Yeah, there's a certain aspect of potential narcissism. But the bottom line is that we're really concerned with people's motives and intentions and the search for the few. And that search is kind of a constant refining, and if you happen to drag the popular culture along by accident with you, it's still more interesting to have it here, Post-Burroughs, post-cuts, then it was to have it in the 50s when all the housewives were taking pills and raped by their husbands and so on, so it's a trade off. But when creation is involved, it's usually a worthwhile trade off. That's another reason to have a forum, like the One True TOPI Tribe: "is this right?," "are we making mistakes?," "what could go wrong?," "what would you prefer?," "are there women out here who would disagree?" and so on, you know, keep a discussion going, a dialogue and self-criticism all the time. It should never be seen as finite. It's part of an ongoing discussion.

Top: Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, photographed by Luke Gilford

Right: The Empress of Topaz, photographed by Jessica Craig-Martin



MAKE A NEWSPAPER HAT

Designed by Stephen Jones
Diagram by Nick Robinson

Recycle upward! Make your copy of the New City Reader into a stylish and important fashion accessory.

The source material for this project was originally created for the Victoria & Albert Museum and has been reworked by Stephen Jones especially for the New City Reader. "Hats! an Anthology," co-curated by Stephen with the Victoria & Albert museum, will travel to NY fall 2011.

<http://www.stephenjonesmillinery.com/>

PAPERED OVER

by Bethany Ritz

Availability, infrastructure and economics now favor most kinds of recycling to the point that, today, in spite of the downturn in the paper recycling market in late 2008, paper recycling nets \$7.5 million per year for New York City. However, a certain amount of apathy prevails because of the superficial understanding that trees are a renewable resource. More important for the continued effort to promote recycling is to inculcate the idea that not all trees are found in systems that are themselves renewable. Some forests are quite resilient, but it has been calculated that it would take 4,000 years for some rainforest to fully recover back to its previous unique state.

New Page, a paper company that mainly sources its virgin material by certified forests of North America, continues to pursue recycled materials, be they recycled pulp, pre- or post-consumer materials. From 2007 to 2008, New Page was able to increase its use of these materials by 2,000 tons due to a greater demand for its Arbor line. A rise in purchases of products made from recycled materials means a rise in the paper recycling market. But it is not only demand that feeds the buoyancy of this market; supply must be consistent so that recycled material remains more affordable than virgin wood.

Obviously the next major frontiers of paper consumption and recycling are the emerging global superpowers; China's import demand for used paper product is the highest in the world, followed by India. The Environmental Protection Agency Web site discusses China's impact on the paper recycling market: "In recent years, dramatic economic growth in China has fueled very strong export demand for America's recovered paper product. This has caused prices to skyrocket, making it more expensive to produce recycled paper here at home. One way we can help is to collect more recovered paper. Increasing supply will lower costs, which in turn, will enable mills to manufacture and sell more recycled-content paper." According to a 2004 study by Dequan He and Christopher Barr for the International Forestry Review, China's consumption of paper products was at that point expanding 10% a year. In 1990, the country consumed 14.6 million tons of paper products; by 2003, that number was up to 48 million tons.

Today the publishing and design industries—whose main sources for paper stock are in Asia—now have to scrutinize their supply chains like never before. When looking for sustainability in a paper company the first thing to question is where it sources the raw material. Some will come from recycled pulp—but what about today's supply forests themselves? There are varying degrees of responsible tree harvesting. Seri McClendon, CEO of sustainability consulting firm Clean Agency, says, "Pulp/paper verification is one of the most important areas of responsibility in the paper market." Even companies that use some recycled material still probably consume a hearty amount of trees.

But increasingly, that stock can come from renewable and regulated forests, registered by organizations like the Forest Stewardship Council or Scientific Certification Systems, the two largest certification organizations. According to McClendon, "A certified forest is one that adheres to strict forest management standards that ensure logging for paper pulp and other raw materials minimize negative environmental impacts including habitat destruction, water pollution, displacement of indigenous peoples and violence against people who work in the forest and the wildlife that dwells there."

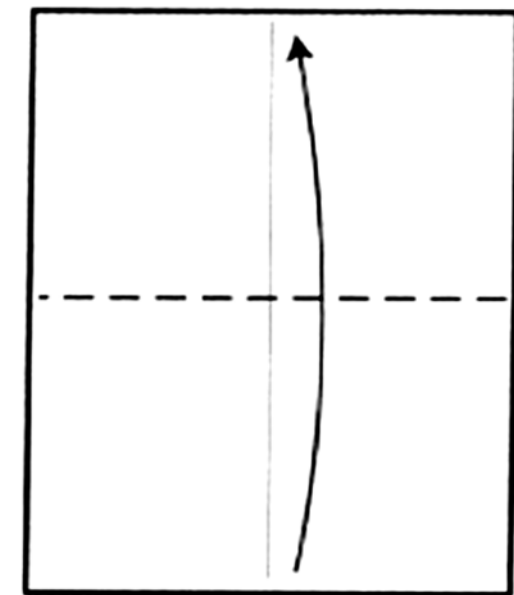
The United Nations' report "Vital Forest Graphics" states that certified forests are increasing in number. However, it continues, "The question is whether wood grown using truly sustainable and socially responsible practices will be able to meet this increased demand." Regulating these forests can be difficult in some areas. A rapid increase in demand could cause certifications to rise without appropriate regulatory processes in place to maintain the goals of certification.

Still, companies themselves are increasingly aware of their critical roles as bulk consumers. "The global paper market is becoming more transparent as companies increasingly report their environmental impacts and highlight their commitment to sustainability," says McClendon. "With this transparency comes increased environmental awareness for large paper customers such as retailers and catalog companies who will demand verified paper as a sign of high quality for their brands."

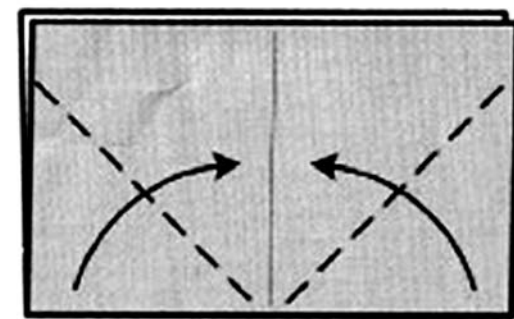
THE QUESTION IS WHETHER WOOD GROWN USING TRULY SUSTAINABLE AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PRACTICES WILL BE ABLE TO MEET THIS INCREASED DEMAND.

Beyond stock and supply considerations, which are adapting to the market economy through the increased viability of these operations as lucrative businesses, is the relatively uncharted zone of recycled paper as the raw matter of high design. The recent currency of the cradle-to-cradle concept, popularized by the book of the same title by William McDonough and Michael Braungart, instilled product designers with the mission to do much more than merely gloss-up recycled paper. By designing with the conscious anticipation of the end of a product's life-cycle, the design industry ostensibly follows a sustainable new path that can revolutionize extraction, production and consumption methods.

Whether the sloganeering will translate to more truly sustainable design is another question. Take for example Mathias Bengtsson's Paper Chair, a sculptural behemoth of 20,000 laser-cut, stacked and glued sheets, sold in an edition of 20 for \$32,500 at high-design retailer Moss. The high cost may make it sustainable—who can afford paper at that markup?—but the real sustainability will have to be spurred by both consumer demand and design at a larger scale. When that happens, paper may finally be a resource cut out to last.

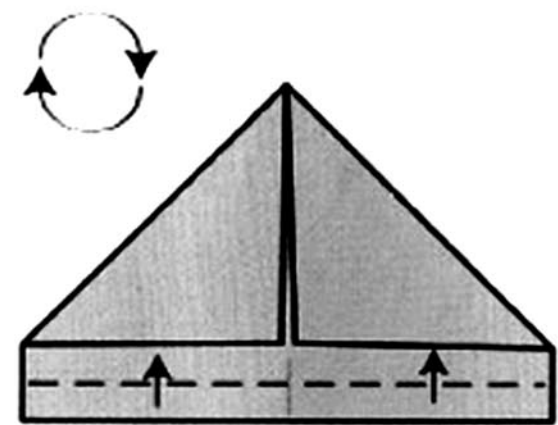


1. Fold a sheet of newspaper in half.

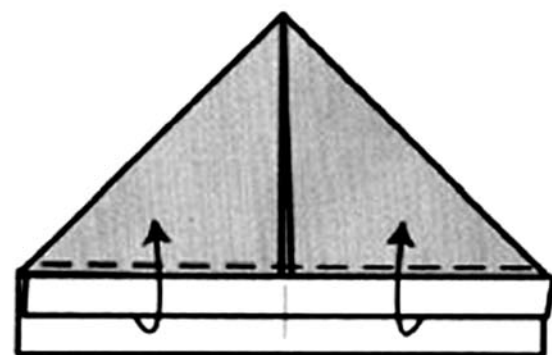


2. Fold each half of the lower edge to the vertical center.

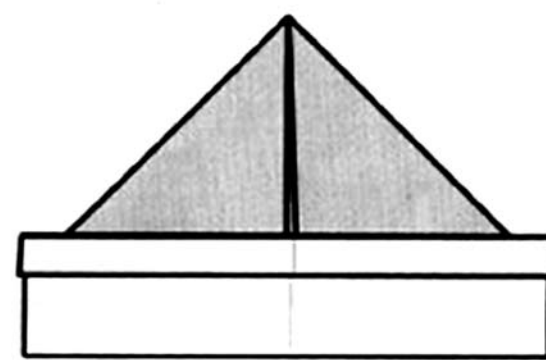
Turn it over.



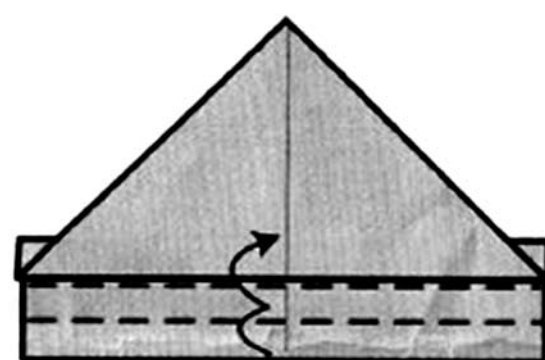
3. Fold the lower edge of the top layer in half.



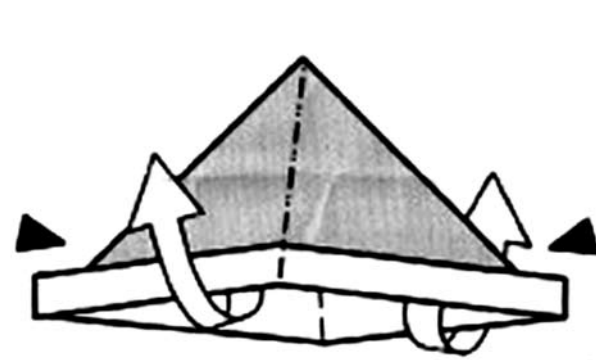
4. Swing the thin double layer flap upwards.



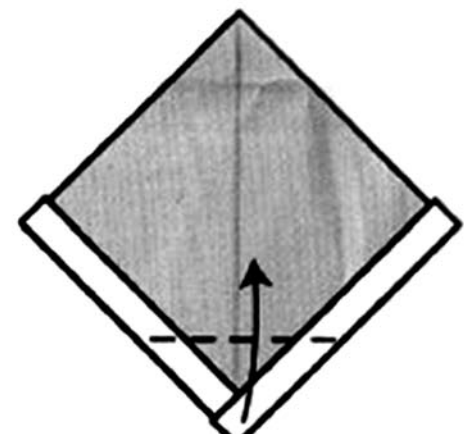
5. This is the result. Turn the paper over.



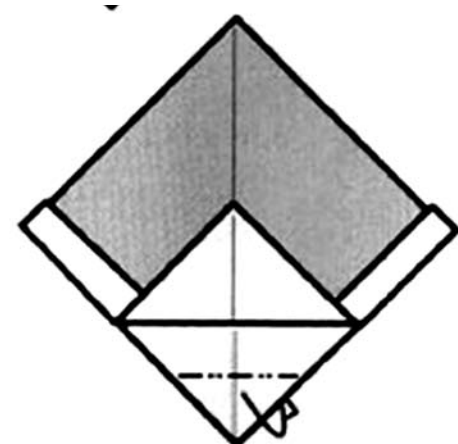
6. Repeat steps 3 and 4 on this side.



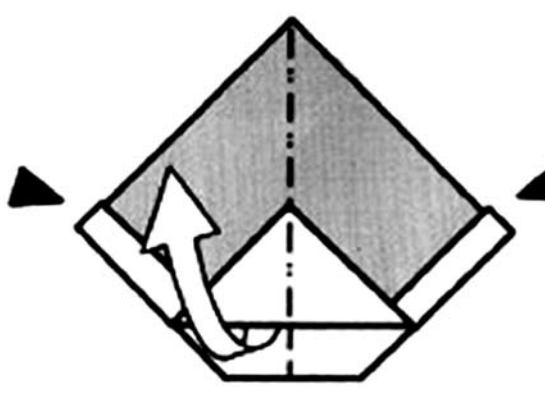
7. Put your hands inside and pull all the way open, flattening it the other way.



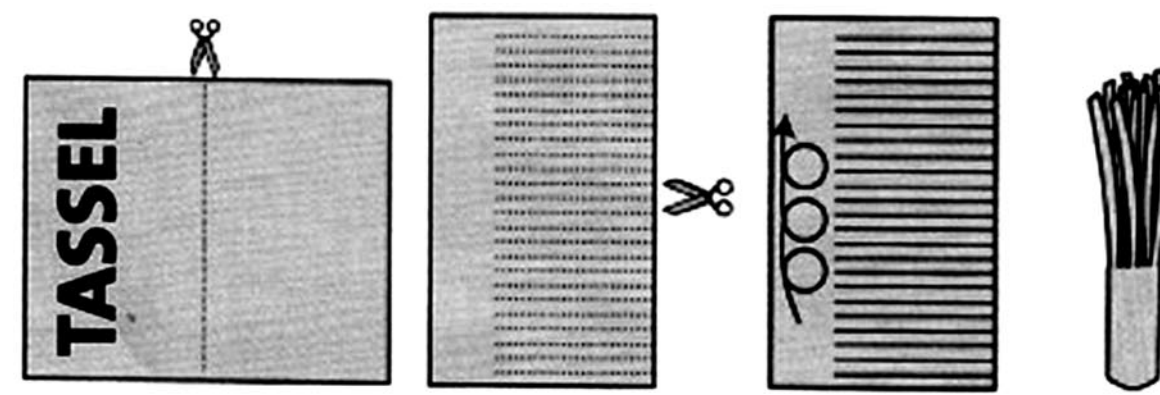
8. Fold up the lower corner.



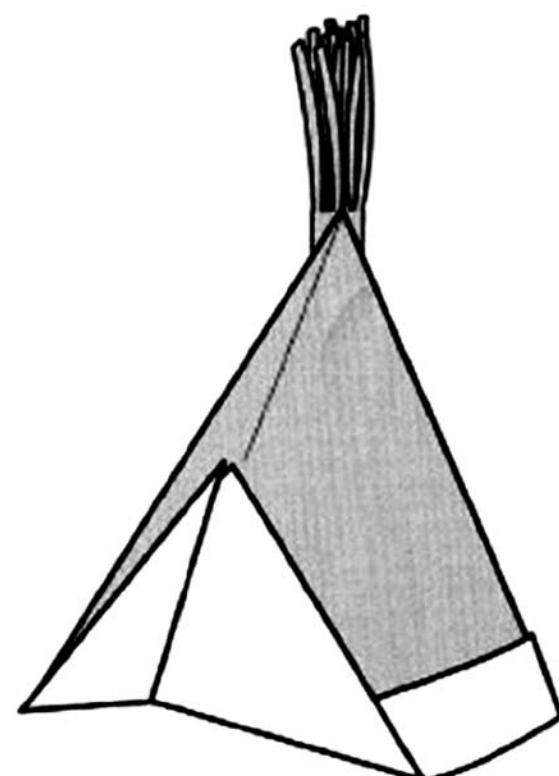
9. Fold a smaller corner behind underneath.



10. Open into a hat shape.



11. Attach the tassel with sticky tape.



<http://vimeo.com/17905481>

WHY WE SHOULD MAINTAIN A CULTURAL CAPITAL TAX

by Norm Chomsky

Some are surprised by the recent increase in taxation placed on cultural capital producers. I'd like to explain why this shouldn't come as a shock or be a problem for anyone.

The need for free labor for the production of cultural capital products has always been clear. But now, it seems, we have a glut. This is largely due to the ubiquity of cultural capital producers on the Internet who share a zeal for incessant and overwhelming commentary on all aspects of life. The move from physical products to immaterial digital ones has shifted weight from the art of costly mechanical reproduction to the art of nearly cost-free digital reproduction. Content devalues as the means of production become cheaper and cheaper. It is simple math. The old emphasis on individual authors making Grand Statements and Great Art has been replaced by the viral proliferation of ideas, of memes birthed by the hive mind, of endless remix iterations.

But, you might ask, "Why new taxes?" It should come as no surprise that as cultural capital becomes less rarefied, a tax is placed upon labor. Even though such labor is often produced by creative underclass laborers such as artists/DJs/bloggers/etc., I see no reason not to tax all creators. Before, it was enough to work for free. But now, with the arcades of cultural capital being open to all, a tax should be placed to allow for the creation of cultural capital benefits for all producers. The strikers against these taxes must understand that what needs to be built is stronger cultural capital economies for all.

Now, with a democratic leveling of the field, publicity engines—which remain in the hand of a select

few—are key. PR and publicity experts have always been subject to income and related taxes. These experts warrant special reverence in today's creative climate because they are the ones who can generate exchange value from cultural capital.

Cultural capital tax should come not in the form of free labor (as it is commonplace that cultural workers provide "content" for little or no pay), but in the form of cultural and affect money paid by the content creators. The protesters out in the streets this past Thursday have been clamoring about precisely this. They seek to monopolize coolness, tapping into the protectionism and elitism that marked the debates of hipster-dom, embracing a better-than-thou approach which, I believe we can all agree, is antithetical to America itself. Monthly fees of a discreet and proportionally just nature should continue to be paid to Bloomberg for subsequent redistribution to some of New York City's traditionally uncool classes such as the Wall Street financiers, whose cultural credibility is at an all-time low in the aftermath of their recent bailouts and general PR issues. This crowdsourced creative money should be paid to each publicity agent (the owners of large blogs such as Gawker, Huffington Post, corporate tweeters, search engines such as Google and video-sharing sites like YouTube, etc.) who in turn feeds cultural capital to hip-disadvantaged Wall Street financiers with the hope of raising their coolness to a competitive level. Don't let the naysayers tell you that this smacks of Socialism. This increase in pay to the agents and their backers is creating a viable business model where free and taxed income can help pay for the overwhelming costs of maintaining their content providers' necessary cultural mystique of "coolness," those who "are in-the-know," "hip," "smart," "taste-makers," etc.

While this sounds dangerously like trickle-down cultural economics it is in actuality a trickle-up economy, with the producers eventually earning increased value for their unpaid creative activities.

As the recent debates and legislation have shown, the affect or cultural capital tax is best served in many forms. Of course, cash money is the best option. Cash can be transferred into power and therefore an increase in cultural validity (one need only look to the Boards of Directors and other benefactors of cultural and charitable institutions to understand this). Other forms of payment work, as well: coolness donations, such as free tickets to select events; patches or other branding placed on laborer bodies (everyone wants an army, after all); songs or artworks created with uncool corporate brands in mind; literary texts sprinkled with warm dedications to less-than-hip firms. There are many ways to pay. I ask that we be as creative as the creatives being taxed when we think of ways to pay: this proposed tax hike is an opportunity for us to shine as artists, in every sense.

This tax increase should be welcomed by all. It is the price that must be paid in order to distinguish oneself as the playing field is constantly leveled. As any Marxist should know, one always reserves the right to refuse labor. If you don't want to be taxed, you can stop producing.

ART WORKERS LASH OUT DURING TAX PROTESTS

by Susan F. Burns

NEW YORK—After a week that brought New York City revenue from the new cultural capital tax of over \$114 million, tens of thousands of demonstrators took to Manhattan streets on Friday to protest city-wide increases in taxes on cultural capital and cuts in affective labor jobs.

On a cloudy and bitterly cold day, the demonstrators came from all five boroughs, waving iPads and hand-written signs explaining the root of their frustrations. In the controversial new program, harbingers of cool noted for things such as having one of five stylish haircuts, downloading MP3s from tastemaker blogs or performing in a band that plays to audiences of, between ten and ninety-nine people, now all come with increased taxes. Much of the revenue generated by taxing the creative underclass will subsidize cultural education courses for traditionally uncool workers such as accountants and Wall Street executives.

As the protesters sang verse after verse of LCD Soundsystem's "Losing My Edge"—adopted as the movement's anthem—sharp words of profane and political criticism were aimed at Mayor Bloomberg and his polemical new advisor, Alain Badiou. The volatile mood was enhanced by musical groups that performed along the way, including a kilted pipe band from Staten Island that has embraced the extremist measure of lowering one's cultural capital in an attempt to escape taxation.

"Everything's collapsing," one woman said. "My landlord won't accept any of my cultural capital for rent." An older man placed blame for the crisis on the bloggerati, whose failure to balance free content

with a viable business plan left the city's banks with a mountain of bad debt now borne by the taxpayers. "The tastemakers have robbed us," he said. "They've destroyed the cred that we've built up over a number of years. They've just destroyed it."

The atmosphere was rowdy at times, with signs and images casting Mayor Bloomberg in a demeaning light. One sign called him the "parasite in chief." Others likened him to the RIAA. The magnitude of the rally took the authorities by surprise, with throngs of people streaming from Brooklyn to Union Square for more than eight hours.

Mayor Bloomberg's office was unavailable for comment, but one advisor close to the Mayor who agreed to speak under conditions of anonymity, told the New York Times, "Bloomberg feels that these people need to pay up. This is about coolness reparation. The time has come for those wielding the strong arm of cultural capital to share it with those contributing only boring economic wealth."

The tax passed in New York City in November and is expected to serve as a model for state-level legislation, with New Jersey, California and Rhode Island currently engaging in debate on similar bills. Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma is hoping to propose an equivalent tax in the U.S. Congress next year in order to bring some cultural pork back to his home state.

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↑ MUSIC OF INDIA
124 Lexington Ave., 2nd floor (between E. 28th and E. 29th St.); 6 to 28th St.

It's easy to miss Music of India, located on the second floor of busy Lexington Avenue above a little Indian take-out place. But the expansive store, established in 1992, is easily one of the best Indian music stores in Manhattan. The owner is absurdly knowledgeable and speaks perfect English. Prices are slightly higher here—many CDs are priced closer to \$10 than \$5—but, these are not bootlegs. I picked up a four-CD compilation of classic 80s Bollywood songs for \$20, which is a deal no matter how you slice it. Average price of a CD: under \$10.

↓ PUNJABI GROCERY AND DELI
114 E. 1st St., East Village; F to 2nd Ave.

The tiny Punjabi Grocery and Deli, located off of busy Houston Street, is jammed 24 hours a day with taxi drivers and clued-in East Villagers searching for a good, cheap Indian meal. A steamtable serves up a variety of hot sabzis—all of the food here is pure vegetarian, and the place smells pleasingly of saag paneer. Behind the cash register, you'll find an array of DVDs—recent Bollywood movies, mostly, but also some intriguingly trippy yoga instructional videos—and CDs. The mostly Sikh folks who work at this place are friendly and religious, and the CD selection reflects that; you'll find prayers to Guru Nanak and Hindu bhajans along with the usual ghazals and Bollywood filmi fare. Average cost of a CD: \$5.



by Geeta Dayal

A lot of great music—from Indian classical to Bollywood filmi music to bhangra to devotional chants—is hidden behind counters in cell phone stores, bodegas and travel offices. The trick is finding them. Jackson Heights, Queens, home to one of the largest Indian communities in New York, is the most obvious place to explore, but there are many more. Here are a few places to check out in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

↑ PAK PUNJAB
50 2nd Ave. (at E. 3rd St.), East Village; F to 2nd Ave. or 6 to Astor Pl.

Pak Punjab, a busy East Village bodega, has a small stock of CDs and DVDs stacked next to the Cup-O'-Noodles on the left. Lots of bhangra compilations here—the "Punjab" would seem to suggest that—along with a bunch of qawwali music. A few surprises lurk among lots of obvious Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and the like, but it's hard to decipher the psychedelic covers unless you can read Urdu. (The guys working there were Pakistani, not Punjabi, when I was there—hence the "Pak" in the name, I guess.) Price of a CD: \$5.



↓ CHEAP DEAL
Church Ave. and McDonald Ave., Kensington, Brooklyn; Q to Church

The nexus around Church and McDonald Avenues, two of the biggest commercial streets in Kensington, is chock-a-block with cell phone stores, gadget stores, bodegas and cheap ethnic restaurants. If you look hard enough, you'll see music too. Cheap Deal is an incredible find—a combination cell phone store/travel agent/video store/music shop that also sells perfumes in giant bottles, including scents like "Obama," "50 Cent" and "Mariah Carey." The store has a huge range of Bollywood filmi music, old and new, along

with a smattering of bhangra and Indian classical music. Best of all, it has a huge collection of cassettes along with the CDs. The Bangladeshi owners are very shy and don't speak much English but are incredibly friendly and helpful as long as you speak slowly and motion to what you want. The woman chuckled when I told her I was looking for the Bappi Lahiri soundtrack to the 1982 cult flick "Disco Dancer," and after some searching, she found it. Cost of a CD: \$4, or three for \$10. Cassettes: \$2.

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↑ SAREGAMA MOVIE & MUSIC
E. 6th St. between 1st and 2nd Aves., East Village; F to 2nd Ave. or 6 to Astor Pl.

Saregama is not a convenience store, but a serious Indian music and video store—which also sells phone cards—and a gold standard for the area. Still, it's worth including on this list, because few know about this storefront, drenched in neon and wedged between the depressingly identikit Indian restaurants on 6th St. These guys really know their stuff, and the selection is impressive and wide-ranging—Indian classical, bhangra, disco, vintage Bollywood funk, brand-new Bollywood soundtracks, etc. Shiny, shrink-wrapped new CDs are neatly arranged on clean shelves—you won't find bootlegs here—and the prices are slightly higher than your average bodega. But it's worth it; this place, along with Music of India in Murray Hill, are like the Other Music of Indian music stores. Average price of a CD: under \$10.

↓ OMNI
Dahill Rd., near Church Ave., Kensington, Brooklyn; Q to Church

Kensington has been termed "Little Bangladesh" in recent years, though you'll find plenty of Indian and Pakistani immigrants here too—if you spend more than an hour or two in the area, you'll hear the Muslim call to prayer, which rings out over the entire neighborhood in mesmerizing tones. Omni, a Bangladeshi-owned store located on a mostly residential strip of Dahill Road, does FedEx, mailbox rentals, photocopies, DVD conversions and money transfers. They'll also fix your computer, sell you a calling card or an iPhone and fax things for you. Omni has a big collection of CDs—almost as many as a dedicated music store—so it's too bad that they're not the friendliest guys on the planet. Price of a CD: \$5.

