

March 2007

**TOP SECRET**

# INTELLIGENCE

**Mat Callahan's quarterly newsletter of music, art, and philosophy**  
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Dear Friends:

As we prepare to embark for the Divided States of America I recall a high point of our last visit in November 2006. Sharing the stage with us in San Francisco was the wonderful artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña. In his incisive monologue he exhorted the audience to loudly affirm certain lights brightly piercing the gathering gloom. Among these he named Gore Vidal and Kurt Vonnegut. As an avid reader of both these "lights" I must add further affirmation: Vidal and Vonnegut have distinguished themselves by remaining true. True to their principles, true to their craft and true to their guarded, tremulous hope that humankind will sooner or later "get the message" and overcome its paralysis in the face of Power, Lies and Fear.

I consider Vidal and Vonnegut my friends. Not that I know them personally. But they embody friendship as I use the term. I could refer to them as fellow citizens or comrades, too. Perhaps these terms, with their revolutionary histories, are even better suited to the needs of the moment. But then I recall how as a teenager in San Francisco in the Sixties the appellations Brother and Sister were generally applied to everyone except the "straights" who were "too far gone" to appreciate the new world being born. Thus are names given to bonds connecting people to each other and to the vision they share.

Presently, I prefer Friend because I subscribe to the Pythagorean definition of friendship, particularly its ancient, indeed timeless, dimension. Because it elevates the rational choice over the biological inheritance in the sense that friends are made not born. Thinking, not only being. As a matter of fact, all humans are my brothers and sisters. I did not make this so any more than I can unmake it. Yet the many crises of the moment demand we take the step beyond biology to conscious decision. Besides, there are few things worthier of honor than life-long friendship.

With that I'd like to introduce a new friend, David Rovics, whose acquaintance we made last November. We played a concert together in Hartford, CT and had a wonderful time afterward at the home of gracious hosts. David's website is: <http://www.davidrovics.com> and you can go there for more specific information and David's thoughtful writing, as well. Here, I just want to say that it gave me a moving perspective on history, struggle and friendship when within a few days, I met and performed with Pete Seeger and David Rovics. I am right between these two generation-wise and there is a mighty river carrying all three of us along. While our influences are diverse – in fact, I grew up opposing Pete and "Folk Music" as such; I was a rock n' roller?! – we share something universal: a love for humanity and a love for music. This will not fade away. It remains alight, enduring.

**The following are our tour dates:**

March 9–18 US tour with David Rovics

*Saturday, March 10<sup>th</sup>*

*Vox Pop, 1022 Cortelyou Road, Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY*

Lars Din opening all the way from Gainesville, Florida!

Contact Sander: [sander@voxpathnet.net](mailto:sander@voxpathnet.net)

*Sunday, March 11<sup>th</sup>*

*Wrench in the Works, 861 Main St., Willimantic, CT*

doors open at 7 pm

Contact Chris: [heneghanc@yahoo.com](mailto:heneghanc@yahoo.com)

*Monday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 5:30 pm*

*Berklee College of Music, Boston, MA*

Contact Victor: [zendive@aol.com](mailto:zendive@aol.com)

*Thursday, March 15<sup>th</sup>*

*New Haven, CT*

Contact Paula: [paulapanzarella@yahoo.com](mailto:paulapanzarella@yahoo.com)

*Friday, March 16<sup>th</sup>*

*House concert, Dunkirk, MD*

Contact Russell: [russell@margaritanewhomes.com](mailto:russell@margaritanewhomes.com)

*Saturday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 7 pm*

*Fleming Center, Washington, DC*

Contact Wade: [sweazl@aol.com](mailto:sweazl@aol.com)

*Sunday, March 18<sup>th</sup>*

*40th Street Stage: Norfolk, VA*

Contact Luna: [LunaNegra@aol.com](mailto:LunaNegra@aol.com)

*Tuesday, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 8:30 pm*

*Googie's Lounge, 154 Ludlow btween Stanton & Rivington*

above The Living Room

212 533 7235

*Friday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>*

*La Paloma Sabanera, Hartford, CT*

sponsored by Hartford Independent Media Center

contact Josh: [joshua.blanchfield@hartnet.org](mailto:joshua.blanchfield@hartnet.org)

*Saturday, March 24, 8–9 pm*

*Banjo Jim's with Eli Smith*

corner of 9th St. & Av. C

212 777 0869

*For further tour information contact:*

Thad Wharton of

Broken Arrow Records

<http://www.brokenarrowrecords.com>

[info@brokenarrowrecords.com](mailto:info@brokenarrowrecords.com)



*The following article continues a discussion begun in the last issue of this newsletter published New Year's 2007. Its author, Josef Brinckmann, is an expert on medicinal plants, their cultivation and distribution worldwide. He has presented papers at many UN fora and at industrial and public policy functions in many countries. –MC*

## More on the Fight Against Bio-piracy

*By Josef Brinckmann*

Quite coincidentally and shortly after publication of the New Year's 2007 Newsletter, which included my article "The Fight Against Bio-piracy," a few related articles hit the media wires that provided much fodder for discourse among colleagues involved in the discussion of traditional knowledge and intellectual property. One article published on January 5<sup>th</sup> by *The Associated Press* "Libido-enhancing root in global dispute" clearly illustrated the enormous divide in perception between the indigenous keepers of traditional knowledge in the "South" and the patent holders with corporations in the "North". In the aforementioned article by Rick Vecchio, a maca patent owner is quoted as saying "Peruvians should not be so narrow-minded, but should instead be grateful. After we studied it, put money into the research, (maca) has become a useful commodity" (Vecchio, 2007). But it is no surprise that the representatives from Perú who are challenging the maca patents find such statements to be the epitome of arrogance. To investigate further, I searched for other public statements made by the patent owner on the same topic. In an article published in "*Legal Affairs*", the same patent owner was quoted as saying "We really enhanced the equity of maca itself... We shouldn't be blamed, we should be thanked" (Koerner, 2005). But, I can assure the readers that thank-you cards are **not** in the mail from Perú to New Jersey. Perú is interested in benefit sharing and fair trade. If there should be substantive discussions of what constitutes fair trade and benefit sharing, I suspect that each side may have significantly different perceptions.

Moving from the traditional knowledge surrounding one native Peruvian root tuber (maca) to that of another native Peruvian root tuber (potato), an article was published on January 12<sup>th</sup> titled "Insulted Andean farmers pick GM potato fight with multinational Syngenta" (IIED, 2007). The bad guys from the North in this article is Syngenta AG, a multinational corporation with staff in 90 countries that markets seeds and crop protection products (so-called "crop protection" products are also known as fungicides, herbicides, insecticides, and pesticides). They have patented a genetically engineered terminator potato. "The terminator technology refers to genetic modifications that 'switch off' seed fertility, and can therefore prevent farmers from using, storing and sharing seeds and storage organs such as potato tubers." The good guys from the South in this article are "The Indigenous Coalition Against Biopiracy in the Andes." They say that the commercialization of terminator potatoes would threaten more than 3,000 local potato varieties that from the basis of livelihood and culture for millions of poor people (IIED, 2007). Since there are already documented cases of heirloom varieties of food plants (e.g. corn cultivated in Mexico) being contaminated by genetically engineered varieties, I think they have a valid concern. As hard as people have tried throughout history to control nature, nature somehow remains wild. There are pollinators and strong winds outside of human control. Stuff moves around. Cross-pollination happens.

Also around the start of the New Year, another tuberous subterranean organ made the news in the context of intellectual property rights. In an editorial by Joseph E. Stiglitz, former chief economist of the World Bank, published December 30<sup>th</sup> in the *British Medical Journal*, he cites an example involving a native medicinal (and culinary) plant of India, turmeric rhizome. Stiglitz writes that intellectual property rights create monopolies and that restricting the use of medical knowledge not only effects economic efficiency, but also life itself.

He goes on to say that such restrictions are tolerated apparently in the belief that they might spur innovation, balancing costs against benefits. But the costs of restrictions can outweigh the benefits. As an example he cites the case of a patent that was granted by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for the healing properties of turmeric rhizome, even though the medical uses of turmeric are ancient traditional knowledge in India. In this case it is difficult to see how the issuing of a patent (one that covered prior known traditional uses) could stimulate innovation. Enforcement of the patent would force small enterprises in India to pay royalties to a corporation in the United States (Stiglitz, 2007).

The turmeric case for India is just like the maca case for Perú and I know that there are many other quite similar cases cropping up worldwide. Trying to sort out who owns what traditional medical knowledge, what ownership means and what it is worth, these are complex issues to say the least. We all would like to have access to, and benefit from, ancient knowledge. But it is not likely that those at the source of the traditional knowledge nor those "innovators" who genetically modify food and medicine plants in order to patent them, or patent "new uses for old herbal drugs," or patent new methods of preparation, and so on, would agree on public domain, free access for all. It's about money. It's about social equity, or lack thereof. And it is still about the injustices and inequities from the colonial period that continue to influence the relationship between North and South, the developed and developing, the haves and the have-nots.

## REFERENCES

- (IIED) International Institute for Environment and Development. Media Release: 'Insulted' Andean farmers pick GM potato fight with multinational Syngenta. London, UK: IIED. 12 January 2007.
- Koerner BI. Viagra natural. *Legal Affairs*. November-December 2005. Available at: [http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/November-December-2005/feature\\_koerner\\_novdec05.msp](http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/November-December-2005/feature_koerner_novdec05.msp)
- Stiglitz JE. Scrooge and intellectual property rights. *British Medicinal Journal*. 30 December 2006;333:1279–1280.
- Vecchio R. Libido-enhancing root in global dispute. Peruvian officials to challenge 'biopiracy' of plant in court. *The Associated Press*. 5 January 2007.

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*"The world's a little bit under the weather,  
I'm not feeling too good myself"* – The Meters (1971)

## What Is Healthy?

As I write this they're recalling turkeys. Last week it was Global Warming and the week before that the Doomsday Clock. Of course, if you were born in 1945 you've lived the last 62 years under the shadow of the mushroom cloud. Total planetary destruction is nothing new to you, right?

Anyway, be sure to stop smoking, walk a little every day, cut down on the transfats and you'll be doing your part to save the planet! I hear New York is getting ready to ban iPod use while crossing the street. Now, that's the stuff! You wouldn't want to be hit by that driver dialing his cell phone would you? Stay Alert!

And speaking of staying alert: Has anybody noticed that the lights are on and no one's home? Reports are in that there isn't even a wizard behind the curtain anymore. There's no one there. It's a perpetual motion machine called Capitalism that everyone believes in because Communism failed. But who's steering it? The US? The UN? China? Bill Gates? *Bono?!!*

Following the sage advice of Economists we have achieved perpetual war in perpetual fear. And we have no choice. These are economic LAWS we're talking about here. Democracy and freedom are words akin to "blue" and "sky". They have a warm glow and a holy ring to them. But nowadays they just mean, "It's all your fault!" You, are stupid, greedy, fat and lazy. You have to be protected from your own selfish selves. Hate thy neighbor, he's out to get you...

### **We have entered the twilight zone.**

Once upon a time, sewers were invented and public health greatly improved. Once upon a time, clean water, clean air, clean food and clean shelter were universally accepted as essential to society's success. Once upon a time, it was common knowledge among health care providers that the main causes of mental and physical disease were social, not microbial. In other words, poverty and war. Now all of this is out the window. Russia is visited by the genius of the Free Market and life spans plummet. Obesity is the main threat to health in the richest country on Earth and 10 million Mexicans flee the wonders of NAFTA to clean toilets there. Meanwhile \$12 billion dollars, in shrink wrapped \$100 bills, disappears into the Iraqi sand. And we have the spectacle of Angela Merkel, chancellor of Germany, wagging her finger at the captains of industry gathered at the WEF saying we have to get ethical-while Mercedes puts the brakes on any implementation of EU standards that would limit emissions from their cars. This is brilliant. Next, they'll tell us to stop farting. That'll curb those greenhouse gasses! You betcha.

I suggest another course altogether. We will not get answers from *any* institution: media, governmental, academic or otherwise. What we are facing is a crisis of legitimacy. All authority resides in brute force and blatant fraud. There is quite literally no one to turn to, no one who can 'save' us except ourselves. We may get some clues from the internet. But, sorry to have to tell you this, we're going to have to read BOOKS!! Yeah, those rectangular paper things covered with letters and sentences and paragraphs. You don't have to plug them in, though, that's a bonus. Anyway, books happen to be the place where the secrets are hidden. Buried deep in thousands of years of accumulated experience, fantasy, data gathering and argumentation is the wisdom we need to change the world.

Now, I know everyone wants action. Let's do something! Reading? That's not going to stop these bastards. But who are these bastards? The rich? The powerful? The Pope? A great conspiracy? Doubtless there's millions of conspiracies going on all the time all over the planet. If you read the "Epic of Gilgamesh"-a story at least 4500 years old-you'll find that there were conspiracies back then. If you read "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" you'll find the Olympian Gods were constantly conspiring against one another or some hapless human. And if you read about Gracchus Babeuf you'll learn about the Conspiracy of Equals during the French Revolution. Then, if you read "On the Nature of Things" by Lucretius you may convince yourself that there's nothing to fear, anyway. And that's where we have to begin, friends. Nothing to fear.

If we read "Propaganda" by Edward Bernays or "Manufacturing Consent" by Walter Lippmann we know that since the first decades of the 20th Century a plan was devised and implemented that goes by the name of Public Relations. Public Relations is a euphemism for systematic deception. This takes more work than simple lying. What is required is the opposition to truth by means of the steady onslaught of *opinion*-which by definition means a point of view that can neither be proved or disproved. This can easily be fitted to whatever happens to be happening in order, as Bernays so clearly put it, "control the public mind". Sounds creepy, I know. It also sounds clever. But as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century ended we saw where this cleverness leads. We had the "leaders of the free world" talking about the "reality based community" that

was unable to "keep up" with the forward thrust of US imperial ambition. Now, as a proud member of the reality based community I took umbrage at this affront. However, I quickly regained my composure when I realized that this guaranteed the collapse of their system. The wild speculations of Enron and World Com, of Hedge Funds and other 'financial instruments', not to mention the Shock and Awe that promised immediate victory on the battlefield, are characteristic of the decline of empires, not their ascendancy.

Read Fernand Braudel's "Civilization and Capitalism". Read anything by Marc Bloch, Immanuel Wallerstein or Giovanni Arrighi. These scholars have been tirelessly gathering the material that demonstrates the long arc by which civilizations rise and fall. Read Gibbons' "The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire", for that matter. But whatever you do, don't say that we have no answers. We do. In fact, we've had answers for a very long time.

I want to call attention to one set that, to me, seems particularly apt, at this perilous moment. Whether it is to cure a person of disease or to free a society from injustice there must be a model that we construct embodying both a concept of health and justice and which directly confronts the crisis of legitimacy. I suggest an axiom can be formed beginning with the ancient Greek concept of Harmony. This was articulated in different ways by virtually all societies but harmony is a Greek word and it is their systematic working out of its implications I find most useful here.

### **The Pythagorean 3ms**

Music, medicine and mathematics. These are pathways through which Harmony enters the world. Harmony is the guiding principle that derives from studying the practices of each particular field and all three together. All three together form a circle-perfect and infinite. They present to our thought the Limit emerging out of the Unlimited, an original contribution Pythagoras made to philosophy. (a word he is purported to have coined) Now in a short article I can't go into the depth and breadth of Pythagoras' teachings. But suffice it to say that a clear definition of Harmony is presented there.\* Furthermore, its explication includes basic tools for bringing it about in three integrally related ways: balance in body and soul, beauty or concordance in creative expression and consistency in mathematical proof. The fact that in subsequent centuries these teachings were mystified and appropriated by charlatans must not obscure the wisdom they contain. At their core they are rational, empirical and have contributed timeless truths employed in music, medicine and mathematics to this day.

It needs to be added here that Pythagoras insisted that in politics there was only one concept as such: justice. Justice constitutes the political in the precise sense of the healthy resolution of dispute and the increase of harmony among the polis or body politic. Without it we have only pathology: Might makes right. That human beings have the capacity to learn and apply these lessons Pythagoras had no doubt. Yet it is testified to repeatedly by his disciples that the struggle for justice meant that the public interest, specifically identified as friendship, must take precedence over the private or individual interest. Friendship was defined as mutuality and equality which were also equivalent to justice.

Using these tools it is possible to identify the causes of our current ill-health and to attack them with the precision required. This entails the painstaking dismantling of habits of thought that allow our healthy and happy trust in others to be manipulated in the service of the most ill-conceived nonsense. In his fine book, "A Man Without A Country", Kurt Vonnegut mentions another, "The Mask Of Sanity" by Dr. Hervey M. Cleckley and he suggests we read it. This is because Dr. Cleckley's description of psychopathic behavior reads like a description of the people running the world! This, in turn, reminds me of Lu Hsun, whose

own decision to become a writer sheds light on this point. Lu Hsun was studying to be a doctor. Once, during the course of his studies, he was shown a lantern slide of the execution by Japanese soldiers of a Chinese man. The apathy with which this execution was witnessed by the onlooking Chinese stirred Lu Hsun deeply, convincing him that curing the bodies of these people was useless. It was their spirit that needed to be made healthy again. Thus he became a writer. Among his earliest works was "The Diary of a Madman" which inverts the position of madness and sanity by making the protagonist who sees reality as it actually is "mad" while the society which deems him so is actually crazy. The story concludes: "Save the children."

Now, Lu Hsun's writing contributed to the Chinese Revolution that succeeded in driving out Japanese and other imperialists, reinvigorating the spirit and physical health of China. This gives us some indication of whose definition of madness/sanity was correct. And, yes, there are plenty of books to read on the subject. "The Great Road" by Agnes Smedley, "Red Star Over China" by Edgar Snow or, if they're too sympathetic to the revolution to be considered reliable, read "Sand Against the Wind" by Barbara Tuchman. These are among dozens of books that testify to both the process and result of the Chinese liberating themselves from what had immiserated them a very long time.

Or, if you don't want to do such heavy lifting just read JG Ballard's autobiographical, "Empire Of the Sun". In it is a powerful scene where the main character, Ballard himself as a boy, encounters members of the People's Liberation Army-communist troops. He notices that they are the first people he has met in China who look him in the eye. All the rest, Japanese or Chinese, either looked up to or down on each other and at every other person, literally and figuratively. This is diagnosis and therapy combined. The mental and spiritual malaise gripping us today must be cured if we are to have any chance of ridding ourselves of the physical one.

The mask of sanity is maintained by the constant barrage of bad news which serves two complimentary functions: it feigns concern for the public welfare while tuning anxiety to a fever pitch. It also does something else, perhaps more insidious: it renders invisible or trivial the innumerable efforts being made all over the world to mobilize opposition to suffering and injustice. Because, it's true, millions of people *right now* are struggling heroically to right wrongs and improve the health and happiness of our planet. But, according to 'official sources', they are at best hopelessly naive, at worst, dangerously deluded. So, on the one hand, we're trained to believe what the media says, particularly its warnings (food scares, viruses, terror, Islam and so forth) while on the other we buy the products we are told will protect us and passively accept increased governmental surveillance. Simultaneously, we become deaf to the warnings that are substantiated by mountains of evidence (dating back almost 40 years!) that Global Warming, a product of two hundred years of industrial production, is an immediate threat necessitating a world-wide mobilization to counteract. So, as we run in panic from our own shadows and beg deliverance by way of iPods, prozac and the police, we remain blissfully unaware of the real peril engulfing us. This is why crying wolf will never do. Even in the face of disaster—especially in the face of disaster—it is crucial not to resort to fear-based methods which, themselves, contribute to the confusion. Outrage, indignation, anger—yes, but fear, panic, hysteria—no. The dividing line, in this regard, is between the herd and the parade. Between the cattle-prod and the call to arms. Between coercion and persuasion. Between surrendering responsibility and taking it in full. Yes, we are facing disaster. But that is all the more reason to get to the bottom of it. To identify by whom and by what we have been brought to the brink.

Remember Bob Marley's famous injunction, "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds". It's up to each of us to implement that as we struggle to purge the world of the sickness that afflicts it.

*\* For more on Pythagorean thought read the following:*

The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library  
compiled and translated by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie  
Phanes Press  
ISBN 0-933999-51-8

Greek Philosophy from Thales to Plato  
John Burnet orig. pub. 1914, reprinted 1961  
Macmillan & Co. LTD London  
St. Martin's Press New York

Lectures on the History of Philosophy Volume 1  
GWF Hegel  
Bison Books, University of Nebraska  
ISBN 0-8032-7271-5