



# dialog

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PHILOCTETES CENTER  
FOR THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF IMAGINATION  
AT THE NEW YORK PSYCHOANALYTIC INSTITUTE

JAN/FEB 08

## Divided Society/Divided Self



*Dan Rather*

On Tuesday, December 4, the Philoctetes Center welcomed former CBS Evening News anchor **Dan Rather**, who moderated the roundtable *Divided Society/Divided Self*. The discussion focused on civil war, a term Rather aptly dubbed “an oxymoron if there ever was one.” Rather, whose familiar voice and attentive manner set the tone for the evening, went on to point out that civil war is one of the least understood forms of human interaction, and asked the panelists to “shed some light on a dynamic that is as old as history itself.” **Seamus Dunn**, former Director of the Centre for the Study of Conflict at the University of Ulster, began the discussion by considering the case of Ireland. Though there’s an official peace agreement between the governments of England and Northern Ireland, tensions continue among the Irish people, whose differences, from the church services they attend to the pubs they frequent, fuel a deep-seated mistrust. There is a “nervous peace,” Professor Dunn suggested, but the top political leaders can’t reach sufficient agreement to put the appropriate bills through Parliament, nor can the generations-old conflict achieve resolution through political means alone.

The conversation turned next to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both **Richard Bulliet**, Professor of History at Columbia University’s Middle East Institute, and **Avishai Margalit**, George Kennan Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, weighed in on the complexities involved in working toward peace. Professor Bulliet was dubious about the most recent talks in Annapolis, claiming that since they don’t represent the interests of Hamas, it will be difficult to arrive at any significant resolutions. Professor Margalit pointed out

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## Note from Director Francis Levy: Civilization and its Discontented

Due to our interest in psychoanalysis and neuroscience, roundtables at the Philoctetes Center often reflect the way the conflicts and structures of the intra-psychic world play themselves out on the stage of human existence. For instance, during the audience question-and-answer session of the *Modernity and Waste* roundtable, the psychoanalyst Sherwood Waldron pointed out the significance of the anal stage of child development in determining how adults deal with waste. In this stage of life, children take great pride in their own production. At the same time, they inevitably feel a degree of shame when they are potty trained and taught that there are limits and boundaries. What might give a child a sense of power can be a source of revulsion to others. Could revolutionary concepts of waste management through the repurposing of trash (popularly known as *mongo*) or the reincarnation of discarded food (*freeganism*) represent a rechanneling of these early drives, a unique form of sublimation, or what one panelist more pointedly called, “potty training on a societal level”?

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*How could Bosnians—who had coexisted peacefully for hundreds of years—regenerate ancient conflicts in a civil war whose end result was the destruction of a polity?*

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Similarly, our roundtable on civil war, *Divided Society/Divided Self*, was created to explore how inner conflicts play themselves out on a collective level. How could Bosnians—who had coexisted peacefully for hundreds of years—regenerate ancient conflicts in a civil war whose end result was the destruction of a polity, in addition to the destruc-

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*Audience question, Divided Society/Divided Self*

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## Note from Director Francis Levy (continued)

tion of cherished ancient cities like Sarajevo? Reading accounts of the undermining of a society is very much like tracing the path of a self-destructive individual. Freud introduced the notion of *Febleistung*, or “faulty achievement,” a form of conscious self-undoing that results in an unconscious success. And what about deeper forms of conflict? Is xenophobia really a form of psychosis in which fear and hatred of an imagined other become the means of escaping the problems that are the true sources of social unrest? For all its innovations in precipitating the rise of the middle class and the creation of indigenous languages and cultures, did the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which truly gave birth to the notion of the nation-state, find its ultimate expression in the balkanization that characterized the demise of the Soviet Union? This fragmentation is reflective of the fragmentation of per-



*Panelists and audience members mingle before a roundtable*

sonality that Lois Oppenheim describes in her book, *A Curious Intimacy: Art and Neuropsychology*, when she writes, “Beckett’s narrative and dramatic fictions have in common a profound preoccupation with differentiation and de-differentiation, with identity and self-representations contrasted with ego-world fusion and boundary loss.” By contrast, other traumas produce individual conflicts that in turn play themselves out in a form of mass inebriation, in which the self is subsumed by the demands of the crowd.

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*We are often asked what we wish to accomplish at the Philoctetes Center—what the agglomeration of roundtables, lectures, and discussions hope to achieve.*

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Sometimes the study of human behavior may reach even further back to the advent of movement itself. In our roundtable *Dance, Movement, and Bodies*, the psychoanalyst Daniel Stern examined the roots of body awareness in an effort to understand its influences on the individual’s self-representation and sense of agency. We are often asked what we wish to accomplish at the Philoctetes Center—what the agglomeration of roundtables, lectures, and discussions hope to achieve. The writer of a recent *Times* piece about the NYPI and the Philoctetes Center described the Center as doing for psychoanalysis what the televised ministries do for the Christian Church. Inasmuch as we are not worshippers, I find it hard to believe that we would ever exalt any creed, but we are influenced by the complex examination of the human condition that psychoanalysis and neuroscience provide in trying to understand the relation of the self to history. *FL*

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## Divided Society/Divided Self (continued)

that internal strife within Israeli and Palestinian communities compounds the problems. One way to address the situation, he proposed, is to take a cue from the Irish conflict and work with prisoners and ex-prisoners as a source of information and negotiation.

**John Harbeson**, Professor of Political Science at City College and a specialist on sub-Saharan Africa, offered his views in response to Rather's question about religious strife as a source of civil war. Professor Harbeson argued that religion was not a major factor behind the conflicts in Rwanda, Ethiopia, or Somalia. The issue in those countries, he said, has more to do with the role of the state and who wields power within it. Ethiopians need a peacekeeping force to bring about reconciliation, while in Somalia it's unclear if the goal is to establish a unified nation-state. Harbeson noted that African countries that had power-sharing systems in place before they attempted democratization are in the strongest position today.

**Susan G. Lazar**, Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at Georgetown University, addressed the second portion of the roundtable's theme—the divided self. She explained that the way an individual negotiates his or her own identity within a larger group often causes a desire for “narcissistic revenge.” However, making the most controversial assertion of the evening, Professor Lazar claimed that over millennia human morality is evolving, and that there is a chance to eventually eradicate the kinds of conflicts we see today. “Would the E.U. have been imaginable 300 years ago, or the UN?” she asked pointedly. Margalit contributed the example of slavery as a once widely practiced phenomenon that is now largely seen as immoral.

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*Contemporary wars are marked by the disappearance of the professional warrior. Over 90% of the people who die in wars these days are civilians.*

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Over the course of the evening, the panelists articulated many sobering claims about civil war in our era. There are five times as many civil wars as there are interstate wars, and the median length of an interstate war is three months, whereas civil wars last about six years. Contemporary wars are marked by the disappearance of the professional warrior. Over 90% of the people who die in wars these days are civilians. It's more likely that nuclear weapons would be used in a civil war than in a war between states, since there are more established restraints in the international realm, as Bulliet pointed out. But the panelists also offered some hope by emphasizing the importance of viewing violent conflict through the prism of history. Highlighting the ever-shifting focal points of conflict, Bulliet noted that “between 1540 and 1840 there was virtually no war in the Middle East during a time when Europe had a war every thirty seconds.” He went on to say that he believes there is no real contradiction between the West and Islamists (which he distinguished from Jihadists), and that “one day we'll be friends, but we may have to go through some very rough centuries before that happens.”

Following a number of insightful comments from audience members, some of whom spoke from their personal experiences with civil conflict, Lazar was again called upon to defend her defiantly optimistic outlook. “There is hope for eradicating civil war, but not in our lifetime,” she said. Margalit offered another solution, speculating that there may be “a way to turn intense hatred into platonic hatred.” When an incredulous audience member asked how, Margalit replied, “Out of exhaustion. People do get tired.” *P.R.*



# The Critic as Thinker



Stanley Kauffmann

In 1946 **Eric Bentley** published his seminal work, *The Playwright as Thinker*, which forged a new standard for the way critics and scholars understood and wrote about the theatre. Bentley went on to distinguish himself as a playwright and as one of the foremost theatre critics of the latter half of the 20th century. In the environment of renewed intellectual rigor Bentley helped to establish, **Robert Brustein** and **Stanley Kauffmann** emerged in their own right as two of the most influential educators and commentators of the American theatre. In 1966 Mr. Brustein became Dean at the Yale School of Drama, where he established and directed the Yale Repertory Theatre. He later served as Professor of English at Harvard and founded the American Repertory Theatre. Mr. Kauffmann, former theatre critic for *The New York Times* and *The New Republic* (where he remains a long-time film critic), went on to publish several collections of criticism, and teach the subject at Yale.

From the moment Center Director Francis Levy introduced these three titans of the American theatre, acknowledging two of them as his former professors, a buzz of excitement prevailed for the roundtable *The Critic as Thinker*, held on Saturday, October 27. The panelists offered not only a wealth of historical perspective, anecdotal impressions, and humor, they infused the discussion with the unique rapport of colleagues, and sometime competitors, whose careers intertwined and overlapped. **Roger Copeland**, Professor of Theatre and Dance at Oberlin College, moderated the event, setting the fuse to strands of conversation, then stepping aside for the combustion of insight and commentary produced by the panelists.

Touching on *The Playwright as Thinker*, Professor Copeland remarked that no other book did so much to create a climate in which theatre could thrive. Brustein expressed his gratitude for the book, observing that before its publication, critics were trained to talk about the acting, the sets, and the directing, but never about the play itself and its intellectual content. Kauffmann acknowledged that Bentley's book was an inspiration to him because it demonstrated that complaints about the theatre were important to the medium's vitality. Kauffmann joked that he was humiliated to discover that many of what he took to be his own ideas had in fact originated years earlier in Bentley's work.

Bentley spoke at length about the prevailing environment in the theater at the time he wrote his controversial book. "I've always loathed Broadway," he commented, "not just on Marxist grounds,

but on the grounds that it's pretentious middlebrow culture." He went on to discuss his thoughts on Eugene O'Neill, who he conceded would later prove a more profound playwright than he had originally thought. However, taking the example of *Mourning Becomes Electra* as a play that attempts to portray the Civil War, he explained that from a historian's perspective "it's not serious, it's just a backdrop for a composer of melodrama." Though Bentley appreciated the depth of feeling in O'Neill's autobiographical dramas, he didn't believe that he was effective as a thinker. "Aren't you saying," interjected Brustein, "that he was better when he wasn't thinking?"

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*Brustein defended the primacy of the contemporary thinking playwright, citing David Mamet, Adam Rapp, and Paula Vogel. "We have about 35 really fine playwrights."*

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The critics went on to debate the merits of the current cultural climate, with Kauffmann bemoaning the lack of perceptible direction in the theater. "When we talk about reforming this or that in the theater," he complained, "I don't know what we're reforming it toward!" But Brustein defended the primacy of the contemporary thinking playwright, citing David Mamet, Adam Rapp, and Paula Vogel. "We have about 35 really fine playwrights," he affirmed. Brustein, who in his career managed to create the very theater he yearned for in his criticism, made the important distinction that the theaters created to nurture the "playwright as thinker" were no longer being supported. "It's not that there are no playwrights in this country. They just don't have a place to have their plays produced."

Concerns about the state of the American theatre kindled a dialogue with the audience, many of whom complained that it had become more and more difficult to attend plays, in part because of the expense, but also because the culture of critical writing that once guided their tastes had declined. Earlier in the evening, Kauffmann succinctly addressed the common lament that great theater (and great criticism) was a thing of the past. "If you look at an anthology of great plays from the Greeks to today, you think, 'My God, what a panorama of achievement!' Then you look at the dates, and you see that hundreds of years elapsed between one play and the next. Sometimes you have the bad luck to be caught between." *A.L.*

## Beyond the Haunting Melody

On Tuesday, November 20, the Philoctetes Center inaugurated its series of music courses, conceived and conducted by **Stephanie Chase**, Artistic Director of the Music of the Spheres Society. The event, entitled *Beyond the Haunting Melody*, featured guest artist **Edward Applebaum**, a composer of contemporary classical music. Mr. Applebaum began the evening by explaining his own creative process from a psychoanalytic point of view. His insights about creativity were based in part on ideas explored in Theodore Reik's book, *The Haunting Melody*, which addresses the life and music of Gustav Mahler, focusing in particular on Mahler's Symphony No. 2. Dr. Applebaum presented excerpts of Mahler's music, examining the connections among the composer's orchestral works. Ms. Chase, a violinist, played two of Applebaum's compositions, "Landscape of Dreams" and "Dirt Music," which he created specifically for Chase. The interplay between psychoanalytic theory and live music generated a dynamic that typified the Center's endeavor to bridge art and intellectual analysis. *A.L.*



# Hypergraphia and Hypographia: Two 'Diseases' of the Written Word

"The fundamental situation that I'm putting myself in when I write novels is a situation of not knowing," explained **Jonathan Lethem**, a panelist at the roundtable *Hypergraphia and Hypographia: Two 'Diseases' of the Written Word*, held on Thursday, October 25. The author of seven novels and recipient of the National Book Critic's Circle Award, Lethem addressed the concept of writer's block, or hypographia, discussing his own writing technique in relation to the psychological underpinnings of the condition. Lethem was responding to the question that Moderator **Lois Oppenheim**, Chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Montclair State University, used to introduce the roundtable: "Why does imagination sometimes operate at a very rapid pace and sometimes come to a complete halt?"



*Jonathan Lethem*

**Alice Flaherty**, Assistant Professor of Neurology at Harvard Medical School and author of the recently published book *The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer's Block, and the Creative Brain*, explained that hypergraphia, the overwhelming drive to write, has classically been associated with temporal lobe epilepsy, and often follows periods of grief or bereavement. Her own experience with the condition, which came in the aftermath of the death at birth of her twin sons, led her to study and write about the phenomenon. **Alan Jacobs**, Assistant Professor of Neurology and Neuroscience at Weill Cornell Medical College, noted that hypergraphic epileptics often feel that every one of their thoughts must be recorded, and tend toward excessive journaling.

**Francis Levy**, author of the forthcoming *Erotomania: A Romance*, speculated that the writer's fear of becoming blocked might itself lead to obsessive writing. Professor Flaherty proposed that some writers experience both syndromes, citing Coleridge as an author who vacillated between the two extremes. Levy then recounted his own efforts to nurture his writing practice by cultivating highly structured, ritualized behavior through martial arts, exercise, and psychoanalysis. He took pains to make the distinction that in psychoanalysis he is trying to know things, whereas in writing he is trying to "un-know" things and venture into a more dangerous inner world.

**Pedro Reyes**, an architect and sculptor whose work addresses the geometry of interpersonal relationships, expounded on several of his own extemporaneous drawings inspired by the conversation, includ-

ing a snail-shaped Pre-Columbian codex meant to represent speech. He went on to postulate that regardless of the form of expression—speech, writing, or drawing—the obsessive is often driven by an inner sound or a repetitive physical activity.

Given the wealth of divergent perspectives in the room, the conversation veered from mood disorders and psychopharmacology, to the compulsive word counting practiced by Graham Greene, to the hermetic art of Henry Darger. Appropriately, the artist Jon Sarkin was in attendance. His visually impulsive painting, which was featured in the Philoctetes exhibition *Hyper Graphica*, proliferated in the aftermath of a stroke.

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*Lethem expressed his belief that having an appetite—or at least a high tolerance—for uncertainty is a requisite of a durable writing career.*

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Earlier in the discussion, Mr. Lethem shared some of the advice he offers to apprentice writers who are apprehensive about becoming blocked, noting that he encourages them to abandon the idea of writer's block in strict terms and think of it instead as a necessary process of waiting. Lethem expressed his belief that having an appetite—or at least a high tolerance—for uncertainty is a requisite of a durable writing career. Interestingly, the protagonist in his novel *Motherless Brooklyn* is afflicted with Tourette's syndrome, another obsessive disorder. Lethem revealed that he identifies strongly with the cognitive patterns associated with the disorder, and likened his own obsessive grooming of his sentences to a kind of Tourettic compulsiveness. When asked if he had strict, self-imposed rules about when and how he could write, Lethem summed up the idiosyncratic nature of the writing practice, joking, "I just call Francis, and if he's done all his push-ups, then I can start working." *A.L./V.S.*

## The Last Winter

Following the screening of *The Last Winter*, held on Tuesday, November 6, director **Larry Fessenden** spoke with producer **Jeffrey Levy-Hinte** about the significance of using the horror genre to dramatize the inner lives of characters faced with a doomsday scenario. "Monsters exist in our lives," Fessenden remarked, "We create mythological tropes to deal with real problems." He went on to describe one of the leading characters in the movie "anthropomorphizing his sense of dread and guilt about environmental collapse." This foreboding accentuates one of the central themes of the film—the vulnerability of earth as habitat. "If we destroy the planet," the director explained, "then truly the whole species can't return home."

For Fessenden, the use of the conventions of horror produces a cathartic effect. "You certainly don't want to be in that situation, so when you walk out of the theater you should feel cleansed," he explained. Commenting on the film's flirtation with the supernatural, Levy-Hinte suggested, "There is this notion that there are some anxieties that are so deep that they lead to delusional expressions, and that these delusions overpower you." The discussion ended with Fessenden relating the film's tragic denouement to the aftermath of the catastrophic events of 9/11. "In a moment of crisis, two characters cannot agree on how to save themselves," he explained. "They're too wrapped up in their own worldviews to solve these problems." *F.L.*

# Perception & Imagination: Masters of the Senses



*Philip Pearlstein & Greg Calbi*

The roundtable *Perception and Imagination: Masters of the Senses*, held on Friday, November 16, investigated sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch from both vocational and neurological perspectives. The panelists examined the senses individually and for their composite effects in an attempt to identify the link between perception and human creativity.

**Mark Mitton**, a renowned sleight-of-hand artist who has performed for the likes of Salman Rushdie, John Mayer, and Greg Maddux, conceived the idea for the roundtable and moderated the event. He opened by commenting that magic, comedy, and the performing arts help to connect us to our senses.

Addressing the sense of smell, **Sophia Grojsman**, Corporate Vice President and Senior Perfumer at International Flavors and Fragrances, recounted her family's role in saving people from the ghettos of Belarus after World War II in order to explain why, after immigrating to America, she strove to make a career of creating comfort by stimulating the senses. In developing such hallmark scents of femininity as Calvin Klein's *Eternity*, Lancome's *Trésor*, and Estée Lauder's *White Linen*, Ms. Grojsman felt she succeeded in translating a temporary feeling of security and confidence.

Chef **Nils Noren**, Vice President of Culinary Arts at The French Culinary Institute and former Executive Chef at Aquavit, focused on an intellectual approach to food and the interplay of senses, commenting, "Food is not only about flavor and taste, but sight and sound. If the carrot doesn't have the crunch, it won't taste as good." He stressed the importance of creating food relevant to current trends and customs, finding new flavors, and using new technology to develop an exciting and consistent product. Interestingly, Noren cited the similarities between Japanese and Swedish cuisine, and professed his bias for creating cocktails that are packed with taste, but clear like water.

The neurologist **Frank Wilson**, author of *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language, and Human Culture*, spoke about his relationship with touch in three phases of his life: medical school, his introduction to musical practice, and his meeting with a palmist and subsequent certification in hand reading. Through this latter experience, he felt he began to truly understand the communicative power of human touch, discovering its capacity to disarm our defenses. When we take someone's hand in our own, he went on, we reveal closely held sentiments and vulnerabilities. Mitton expressed person-

al gratitude to Wilson for allowing him to understand the hand as an essential communicative device, one crucial to the practice of magic and, ironically, deception.

**Greg Calbi**, Mastering Engineer at Sterling Sound, delved into the multi-dimensional and sculptural aspects of sound. Treating the roundtable audience to an unusual experiential perspective, Mr. Calbi played a demo recording of Bob Dylan's "Ring Them Bells," followed by his re-mastered version, demonstrating how deeply our sound perception is affected by the methods used to re-create audio elements. Discussing his heightened awareness of the subtleties of sound, he recalled a trip to Italy, where, because he didn't speak the language, hand gestures rather than sound became critical to his ability to understand and communicate. Further highlighting the interplay between our auditory and visual senses, Calbi made a point of dimming the lights during the music, allowing the audience to retreat inwardly to experience the abstract emotional power of music.

The celebrated painter **Philip Pearlstein**, President Emeritus of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, addressed the connection between realism and surrealism in his own works. As he verged more and more toward realism in his later career, he recounted, his depictions began to carry surprising emotional tones. He fondly recalled that after discovering at age 35 that his vision was not 20/20, he began wearing glasses, giving him an experience of clarity he never imagined possible. This change confirmed his belief that through the window of his eyes he can continually discover new and refreshing perspectives. *J.G.*

## Protagonist

The *Philoctetes* film series was inaugurated three years ago with a screening of Jessica Yu's *In the Realms of the Unreal: The Mystery of Henry Darger*. On Sunday November 18, the film program continued with a preview of Yu's new film, *Protagonist*, which relates the story of four men who devote themselves to radical callings as a response to childhood feelings of helplessness. The film creatively inter-cuts their recollections with a Greek chorus of clay puppets enacting Euripides' *The Bacchae*. "I didn't want to be the victim again," comments the career criminal who was abused by his parents as a child. "I wanted to be a victimizer. It was the perfect marriage for me of greed and violence. I was a religious fanatic for evil." Eventually the subjects' compromise formations shatter and the only certainties become a shared feeling of uncertainty.

In the discussion that followed the screening, Matthew von Unwerth, who coordinates the film series, emphasized the importance of narrative to understanding the film. He pointed out that the young girls with penises who are at the heart of Henry Darger's 15,000 page novel, after which Yu's earlier film was named, function in much the same way as the four extremists in *Protagonist*, presenting an early version of the filmmaker's attempt to address how individuals learn to cope with and overcome the legacy of childhood trauma. "Everyone as a child was prevented from expressing what they were feeling," commented Dr. Albert Sax, a psychoanalyst at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, referring to the subjects in *Protagonist*. "I do think there is a common theme," he went on. "As children they weren't allowed to express their own identities." He added that what interested him was what caused these characters to modify their behavior, an observation that served as impetus for the discussion that followed among the other audience members. *F.L.*



# Doctor/Patient Relationships & Sophocles' Philoctetes

There were two unusual elements that distinguished *Doctor/Patient Relationships*, held on Saturday, December 8, from other roundtables at the Philoctetes Center. Firstly, it began with a play reading—Bryan Doerries' adaptation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the work which inspired the creation of the Center. Secondly, the discussion itself was preceded by a long, thoughtful silence.

**Michael Stuhlberg** read the role of Philoctetes, the wounded warrior who is nearly felled by his own pride in his encounter with the wily, pragmatic Odysseus (**Adam Ludwig**) and the empathetic Neoptolemus (**Jesse Eisenberg**). The interpretation of the conflict between the suffering of an individual soldier and the needs of a society at war was both subtle and emotive.

Moderator **Lyuba Konopasek**, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Weill Cornell Medical College, offered the audience a role similar to that of the play's chorus (read by **John Schmerling**), asking them to write down their thoughts about the themes addressed in the play. After several minutes of silence, the responses came: "How excruciating pain can become to your self," "how the helper is not trusted," "how someone can be rescued from their misery by magic done by a magician," "the interplay of the victim and victimizer in the same person," "every man must bear the weight of his own fortune." After one audience member added, "there are always predators ready to mislead us and steal what we have," Dr. Konopasek turned to the panelists for their reactions.

**Jonathan Jacobs**, Executive Director of the Center for Special Studies at New York Presbyterian Hospital, raised issues about the role of the caretaker, commenting, "While we would like to think that people choose medicine for altruistic reasons, the purpose of the relationship is not always to help the patient." Dr. Jacobs gave the example of doctors who are primarily interested in research and clinical data, and went on to point out that there are inevitably financial motives in some doctor/patient relationships. "It is not only a unidirectional relationship," he added.

"There are no doctors in this play—just patients," observed **Robert Michels**, Professor of Medicine and Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College, bringing the discussion back to the performance.



Jesse Eisenberg



My son, I am Philoctetes,  
the keeper of Heracles'  
bow, whom the generals  
and Odysseus abandoned.  
Suffering from a snakebite,  
they left me here to die  
in tattered rags, sleeping  
in a jagged cave, starving  
without much food to eat.

I only wish the same for them.

(except from Sophocles' *Philoctetes*)

"It's pre-Hippocratic." After describing the universe of the play, in which the characters' "hopeless dependency leads to extreme distrust," Dr. Michels reflected on the role of the modern doctor in the context of the kind of suffering seen in the character of Philoctetes. Citing contemporary expectations of the physician, he stated, "I trust he is extensively socialized to be my fiduciary, to worry about my needs ... a level of trust I wouldn't have had 2600 years ago." On the other hand, he admitted, "The socialization and professionalization of modern medicine leads to a certain loss of humanity."

**Louis Pangaro**, Professor of Educational Programs in the Department of Medicine at the Uniformed Services University, saw the play as a metaphor for the teaching of medicine. In his view, the Neoptolemus character could be seen as a young doctor caught between the needs of the system and the needs of the patient. He remarked that the role of the doctor has been compromised by a health care system that economically penalizes doctors who spend the time necessary to understand their patients' problems.

Addressing the subject of trust, Konopasek brought up the question of deception—a central theme in the play, particularly with regard to the attempt to dupe Philoctetes into giving up his bow. "I think in a well run system you shouldn't have to lie to the patient," Michels reflected. He cited the case of the patient who asks, "Doctor do I have cancer? If I have cancer I'm going to kill myself," juxtaposing it to the case of a patient who tells his doctor that he's killed somebody. In the latter case, the breaking of confidentiality, which might seem like a good idea, could also be deemed socially counterproductive in that it fractures the bond that allowed the truth to emerge in the first place.

**Bryan Doerries**, a writer who has directed many of his own adaptations of Greek and Roman plays, turned the discussion towards the subject of belief, recounting the time he spent comforting a friend in a hospice ward, where the dispensing of palliatives was dependent on the self-reporting of pain. With regard to psychosomatic patients who profess illness, Michels commented, "Someone who craves the sick role has a fascinating personality disorder and one that is relatively curable."

In response to an audience question about assisted suicide, Michels observed, "I don't think it's a good role for physicians. It's extremely easy to kill yourself. You do not need to go to medical school to do it. I'm not sure I want to grow old in a world where my children send me Christmas presents of books on assisted suicide." *F.L.*

## Distortions of Memory

Moderator **Lois Oppenheim** began the roundtable *Distortions of Memory*, held on Saturday, November 10, by citing a passage from Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* in which the narrator realizes that the imagination "individualizes" people and provides them with what he calls a "legend." The narrator goes on to say, "How paradoxical it is to seek in reality for the pictures that are stored in one's memory." A later remark in this passage, "Remembrance of a particular form is but regret for a particular moment," provided the jumping off point for Professor Oppenheim's first question: is memory a creative act?

**Deirdre Bair**, author of biographies of Simone de Beauvoir, Samuel Beckett, Anaïs Nin, and Carl Jung, responded by recounting that de Beauvoir always described her childhood home as being dismal, ugly and dark. De Beauvoir grew up in an apartment on the top floor of a building in Montparnasse, the ground floor of which was the famed restaurant La Coupole. When Ms. Bair visited the top floor of the building, she found that in fact it was full of windows and light. Similarly, Bair described how Sartre infuriated Giacometti by persistently misrepresenting the location of an auto accident the sculptor had suffered. The detail was so important to Giacometti that Sartre's distortion led to a falling out between the two men. Bair quoted Giacometti as saying, "He's not allowed to take my facts and use them for his own means."

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*"Most of what is autobiographical," Nersessian proposed, "has gone through a series of alterations and continues to go through alterations."*

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**Maryse Condé**, known as the Grande Dame of Caribbean literature, addressed the subject of memory in relation to autobiography. Having grown up in Guadeloupe in a colonialized society, Ms. Condé asserted the importance of distinguishing collective memory from individual memory, commenting, "If our collective memory has become something we trust, we can allow ourselves as individuals to be free." Center Director **Edward Nersessian** proposed that very little autobiography is accurate. "Most of what is autobiographical," he asserted, "has gone through a series of alterations and continues to go through alterations."

**William Hirst**, Professor of Psychology at the New School, remarked that the past is stuck in the present. "What kind of people would we be if we weren't imprisoned by the past?" he elaborated. "We want the past to give comfort to us." He referenced the work of Frederick Bartlett, observing, "There is no real memory. It is a reconstructive process built out of the potentiality to remember."

**Bruno Clément**, Professor of French literature at the University of Paris, further emphasized the relativity of memory by quoting a section from Beckett's *Molloy*, in which the narrator begins by saying, "It was midnight. It was raining," only to finish the passage, "It was not midnight. It was not raining." Professor Clément pointed to the mind's need to filter memory, however great the distortions that may result. Bair supported Clément's point with a quote by Saul Steinberg, who counseled his fellow émigré artists never to return to their home country—"It is your memory of the place that allows you to flourish creatively." Ironically, as Bair pointed out, Steinberg went to great pains to return to his native Romania during World War II. As history would show, the supplanting of his earlier memories had little effect on Steinberg's creativity, at least from the standpoint of his productivity as an artist. *F.L.*

## The Biology of Freedom

Early in his career, Freud engaged in an on-again, off-again attempt to explain how memory and ideas work on a neuronal level—a project that he was unable to complete to his satisfaction. Center Director **Edward Nersessian**, who moderated the roundtable *The Biology of Freedom*, held on Monday, November 12, cited Freud's efforts to understand the biology of mental phenomena as an introduction to the evening's discussion. He then turned to panelist **Donald Pfaff**, Professor and Head of the Laboratory of Neurobiology and Behavior at The Rockefeller University, to elaborate on the topic. Professor Pfaff chose instead to defer to fellow panelist **Pierre Magistretti**, Professor of Neuroscience at the Brain Mind Institute of the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale in Lausanne, asking him to discuss the seminal research of Antonio Damasio. This gesture marked the tenor of a discussion in which the panelists displayed a pronounced curiosity about their colleagues' research and opinions.

Professor Magistretti prefaced his remarks by sharing some of the ideas of the psychologist William James, who believed that emotions were the result of a changed somatic state. The opposing theory, he went on, held that emotions generated somatic response. Damasio adds to this debate by theorizing that we are capable of imagining somatic states before we experience them, which can influence decisions that might lead to emotional change. Meanwhile, Professor Pfaff clarified the central contradiction of James' premise—"If you are angry and you remove all bodily manifestations, you are not really angry."

**Francois Ansermet**, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the School of Medicine of the University of Geneva, related these theories back to Freud's ambition to create a global theory of the mind/brain. He proposed that the link to somatic states relates to the phenomenon of drive, a concept manifested in the infant who is unable to discharge the excitement produced by his or her own body. This prompted **Christina Alberini**, Associate Professor of Neuroscience, Psychiatry, and Structural and Chemical Biology at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, to point to recent data indicating that there is a physical modification in the brain due to memory traces, which are records of experience in the neural networks.

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*The caregiver is the container for discharges that arise in a child, and if the caregiver can't receive and contain them, there may be damage to developing structures in the brain.*

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Expanding on the theme of infant drives, **Daniel Schechter**, Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychiatry in Pediatrics at the Columbia University Medical Center, raised the importance of considering the "other" when addressing a child's relationship to emotions. He explained that the caregiver is the container for discharges that arise in a child, and if the caregiver can't receive and contain them, there may be damage to developing structures in the brain that prevents memory traces from becoming more complex. The panelists agreed that the healthy emergence of individuality is dependent on the plasticity of memory traces—the ability to make associations and form new traces—that allows for continuity and development.

Although, as Magistretti pointed out, the concepts under discussion were "a bit more subtle than nature vs. nurture," the participants made vivid some of the perils, and wonders, inherent in the formation of emotional and cognitive processes. As the discussion evolved, they managed to address both the pleasure principle and the paradox of constant change, which Ansermet encapsulated by remarking, "We never use the same brain twice." *A.L.*



# The Future of Technology

In a world increasingly suffused with technology, what transformations are in store for the individual and for society? This was the central question addressed by the panelists at the December 15 roundtable, *The Future of Technology*. Moderator **David Kirkpatrick**, Senior Editor for Internet and Technology at *Fortune* magazine, began by specifying that the discussion would focus on the future of information and communication technologies.

**Ken Perlin**, a Professor of Computer Science at NYU and recipient of an Academy Award for Technical Achievement, cited the Internet as an example of technology that has been molded into unexpected shapes according to social needs. Although it was invented as a document-sharing tool, Professor Perlin noted, its current incarnation largely demonstrates that what people really want to do is “sit around and talk.” He emphasized that it is nonsensical to act as though innovation will change the fundamental rules governing human behavior.

**Bernard Meyerson**, Chief Technologist for IBM’s Technology Group, raised the issue of privacy, commenting that computer technology renders anonymity nearly impossible. Citing the concept of being “plugged in” to a larger consciousness, popularized in the film *The Matrix*, he speculated that the younger generation is decidedly more amenable to the dissolution of traditional privacy boundaries. **Jaron Lanier**, columnist for *Discover* magazine, spoke in neo-Freudian terms about the neotenuous nature of virtual reality, describing it as an extension of childhood into adulthood via technology. Mr. Lanier, whose expertise spans advanced information systems and folkloric instruments, is widely credited with coining the term “virtual reality.”



*Jaron Lanier playing the khaen*

**Esther Dyson**, who invests in start-ups and guides many of them as a board member, commented on the implications of social networking sites like Facebook. She likened the proliferation of images and ideas that constitute a user’s identity on the site to the biological need to spread one’s genes by reproducing. Addressing the potential loss of human contact that results from immersion in technology, Perlin quoted a friend, who, when asked why people still go out of their way to travel to conferences and meetings, quipped, “because of the danger that we might touch each other.”

As the panel turned to the audience for questions, topics ranged from the online game *Second Life* to the future of our connection with nature. Lanier discussed new projects with virtual elements designed to mimic the wilderness, but expressed concern for the future of human interaction with the natural world. The panelists largely agreed that this relationship is being thrown out of balance by the seductions of technology. *V.S.*

# The Role of the Subject in Science

The first step of the scientific method is observation. On the basis of observations, a scientific researcher proposes a hypothesis for experimental testing. The results of the experiment are then published and subject to peer review. Fellow scientists will confirm, modify, or refute the findings, and the wheel of science revolves, orbiting closer and closer to the singularity that is “the truth.”

This relatively new process (only about 400 years old) has yielded some of the most impressive and rapid advancements in human history. While science can seem like a cold, exact process to the layman, almost inhuman in its dedication to precision, there is no way of denying that at its very core is the primal human interplay between subject and observer. The roundtable *The Role of the Subject in Science*, held on Saturday, November 3, focused on examining the dynamics of this fundamental relationship.

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**Piet Hut**, Professor of Astrophysics at the Institute for Advanced Study, moderated the roundtable. He opened the discussion by pointing out that many aspects of the universe once considered to be in opposition—electricity/magnetism, matter/energy, space/time—have been demonstrated to be one and the same. Such unifying theories have catapulted science into new domains and forever changed the way we look at the world around us. Professor Hut went on to propose a new paradigm shift: the unification of the subject and the object.

**Margaret Turnbull**, an astrobiologist who created the Catalog of Habitable Stellar Systems for the SETI Institute, proposed that we turn the telescopes back on ourselves, posing the question, “What do *we* look like from afar?” **Jan-Markus Schwindt**, a postdoctoral candidate in theoretical physics at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, recounted two observations that marked the beginning of his career in science, the first, that “science turns things into numbers,” and the second, “I am not a number!” The quip opened the way to a deeper discussion of subjectivity and the nature of human consciousness.

**Edwin L. Turner**, Professor of Astrophysical Sciences at Princeton University, postulated about the limitations of objectivity by noting that the passage of time is calculated in physics with second-type differential equations, but that there is nothing to account for the experience of the present moment. “Powerful tools impose powerful limits,” Professor Turner cautioned, implying that perhaps sophisticated techniques of observation have stunted our ability to examine the nature of our own subjective mind. **Sukanya Chakrabari**, a postdoctoral fellow at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, identified predictions as “the holy grail” of science, leading to a discussion about the intersubjective nature of science.

Professor Hut concluded the discussion with a compelling mental exercise. He asked panelists and audience members to focus on the wall in front of them. Highlighting both the divide and the connection between subject and object, he challenged the crowd to conceptualize the relationship between themselves and the wall in two ways—first to focus on the perceived distance between themselves and the object, and second to become aware of this distance as a concept emanating from subjective consciousnesses, located in the ethereal arena of the mind. *Z.L.*

# A Sense of One's Self:

## Poetry in the Therapeutic Context

**Michael Braziller**, founder and publisher of Persea Books, introduced this season's poetry series by moderating a roundtable that brought together three writers whose experiences illuminate the ways in which poetry can be used to cope with and, at least momentarily, transcend potentially devastating circumstances. "Serious illness both terrifies and isolates us," Braziller reflected. "To some extent each of my guests came to poetry, and poetry came to them, as a means of articulating a crisis."

In 1980, **Karen Chase** began working at New York Hospital in White Plains where, over the course of a decade, she read thousands of poems by psychiatric patients. During that time, she met a young man named Ben, who had given up speaking and withdrawn from social interaction. Chase, whose own poetry has been widely published, initiated an exercise with Ben, a verbal "exquisite corpse" in which she wrote a line of poetry and then passed it to Ben, who added a line of his own, going back and forth until they reached an organic stopping point. Chase's book, *Land of Stone*, presents the poems that grew out of her work with Ben over the course of two years, and chronicles his growing expressiveness. Chase read several of the poems from the book, which, given the fragmentary style in which they were written, were surprisingly cohesive and affecting.

**Madge McKeithen** fell in love with poetry in a hospital bookstore. In 1997 her son began experiencing stiffness in his muscles and joints, which became progressively worse. He soon exhibited signs of a cognitive disorder, a degenerative illness that ultimately was diagnosed as sub-cortical dementia. At the time she was coping with the crisis, McKeithen was beginning to write poetry. As she left the hospital one day, she noticed a collection of Emily Dickinson's poems and stopped to read from it. The companionship and sustenance she drew from these poems grew into her book, *Blue Peninsula*, which offers a narrative of her son's illness interspersed with the poems that helped her gain insight into her own feelings. McKeithen noted that she became fixated with the power of words to describe the subtlest variations of her emotional life.

For **Alicia Ostriker**, author of eleven volumes of poetry, writing as an attempt at self-therapy began in her thirties. It was an effort, she said, "to exorcise where it all went wrong." In the beginning, she didn't see the poems as therapeutic, but rather as diagnostic, showing her how she really felt. She discovered that she had an "author-ego," a self she had been submerging, but that didn't like being submerged. In her perception, this explained why her poems were often "violent and murderous." Her use of poetry as a tool for self-revelation reached its apotheosis when she composed *The Mastectomy Poems* six months after having surgery for breast cancer in 1990. Ostriker read several of these poems, including "Mastectomy," which was dedicated to her surgeon. Commenting on her writing process, she said that the metaphors for the poems didn't come to her during the experience, but later, when she gave herself permission to make poetry about it. "The task," she said, "is to go deep enough so that you get it right."

The three writers showed a curiosity and respect for each other's experiences that spoke volumes about how poetry can create a bridge between isolation and insight. Braziller, whose efforts as moderator reflected his own deep appreciation for the impact of poetry, noted at the evening's outset, "The music and states of awareness in poetry have been a catalyst to find courage, acceptance, and even renewal." *A.L.*

# Our Life in Poetry: John Donne

**Marie Ponsot**, the guest poet for the first session of this season's poetry course, *Our Life in Poetry*, initiated a unique approach to examining the work of *John Donne*, the poet under discussion. She asked each member of the audience to read a line from Donne's poem "The Canonization." The involvement of many readers, Ponsot felt, accentuated the incantatory nature of Donne's writing, with each voice serving as a contribution to the fluency of the poem. The exercise was visibly, and audibly, effective in drawing the audience into the life of the poem.

**Michael Braziller**, Publisher of Persea Books, conducted the course, held on Tuesday, November 27. As a preface to the evening, he pointed out that in Donne's day, poems were rarely distributed in print, but were instead read aloud to small groups of patrons and friends. Ponsot, whose collection *The Bird Catcher* won the Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry in 1998, noted that reading Donne was what first made her want to write poems.



*Marie Ponsot*

Braziller read "Good Morrow," and followed with the observation that the poem, despite having been written 500 years ago, still had the power to affect young people today. Ponsot revealed that the poem recalled her own youthful anxieties, when, as she put it, "I watched everybody, and I watched them out of fear." She noted that in an age marked by geographical discovery and exploration, Donne was engaged in discovering himself, his passions, and the possibility of love. In this quest, he developed an attitude towards women that, while it could hardly be described as feminist, was expressive of an extreme reverence. "There are very few writers about love," Ponsot added, "that imply the valuing of the partner the way Donne does." As if to underscore the ascendancy of compassion in Donne's poetry, Ponsot proudly wore a button declaring, "Still Against War."

After the audience read "The Canonization," a poem that Braziller indicated was more complex and angry in tone than "Good Morrow," Ponsot read "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." She characterized it as the poem that most reveals Donne as a metaphysical poet. Ponsot's ability to maintain a connection with the audience while reading, allowing Donne's thoughts to register clearly, helped bring the poetry alive.

Following Braziller's reading of Donne's "A Hymn to God the Father," Ponsot read her own poem, "Dancing Day," an imagining of her consciousness after death. The last line of this moving poem might well have characterized the dialogue between the poet and her audience throughout the evening. "We are all more than we thought/ And as ready as we'll ever be." *A.L.*



# Transformations:

## How Fairy Tales Cast Their Spell

In February of 2007, Lincoln Center Theater's staging of Tom Stoppard's epic *The Coast of Utopia* served as the point of departure for the Philoctetes roundtable, *Imagining Utopia*, moderated by Lincoln Center dramaturge **Anne Cattaneo**. Once again, a Lincoln Center production, this time of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, served as inspiration for a roundtable, entitled *Transformations: How Fairy Tales Cast Their Spell*, held on Friday, November 30. This time Ms. Cattaneo appeared as a panelist, along with *Cymbeline* director **Mark Lamos**, who has helmed numerous productions on Broadway and at Lincoln Center.

**Jack Zipes**, Professor of German at the University of Minnesota and author of *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*, moderated the event. He began by proposing that fairy tales are created in an attempt to search for truth in a world where truth seems to have vanished (a predicament that evinced a sigh of familiarity from the audience). **Roger Rahtz**, Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at New York University Medical Center, responded by stressing that while enchantment in fairy tales may begin to reign in the course of a quest for truth, the ominous backdrop of a darker reality looms. **Maria Tatar**, Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures at Harvard University, offered the interpretation that fairy tales depict the paths taken on a greater journey from darkness to beauty.

Cattaneo, who remarked that these were precisely the themes addressed in *Cymbeline*, went on to compare the arc of the fairy tale to the experience of watching a play, calling it a ritual in which the audience witnesses a profound transformation. This transformation, she said, can be very psychically resonant. Mr. Lamos noted that a fundamental ingredient in this process is the suspension of disbelief, recalling that when he read fairy tales as a child he found in them an instant identification of his own anxieties. He added that Shakespeare's plays are not far from being fairy tales, observing, "If Cordelia lived, *King Lear* would be a fairy tale." Professor Tatar, however, sought to establish a stronger distinction between Shakespeare and fairy tales, noting that Shakespeare offers depth and psychological analysis, while fairy tales depict one-dimensional characters that offer no "critical distance."

**Donna Jo Napoli**, Professor of Linguistics at Swarthmore College and an author of children's fiction, confessed that it was strange to hear people talk about the suspension of disbelief. "When I write," she said, "I believe every detail." While she conceded that the plot lines of fairy tales, if viewed from a distance, portray behavior that seems insane, a close look at drastic human behavior in the real world reveals detailed decision-making processes. For Professor Napoli, the fairy tale depicts what an individual is willing to give up in order to be a decent person.

The panelists went on to discuss the sources of fairy tales, the elasticity of the many versions of each story, and their roots in a rich oral tradition. Professor Rahtz noted the preponderance of female protagonists, and the ways in which fairy tales allow children to identify with several characters at once. Napoli bristled at this remark, stating that if a child doesn't identify with one particular character, the writer didn't do his or her job. Napoli's belief that fairy tales should present a character that confronts and endures evil, both internally and externally, underscored the resonance that the genre continues to have for readers young and old. "There are a lot of children," Napoli concluded, "who need to know that you can face horrible things, and you can still find a way to live decently, even if it's only inside your head." *A.L.*

# The Future of the Stock Market

When asked what inspired her to become the first woman to buy a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, panelist **Muriel Siebert**, author of *Changing the Rules: Adventures of a Wall Street Maverick*, explained that she simply wanted to work for herself and be paid equally. By breaking through the long-standing gender barrier on Wall Street in 1967, Ms. Siebert hastened social change in a stock market that had yet to experience the revolution of automated technology. In the late 1960s, nothing was automated. As panelist **Bernard Madoff**, Chairman of Madoff Investment Securities, pointed out, the arduous task of finding stocks to purchase for a buyer was done entirely by telephone. This look back at the evolution of the stock market was the starting point of a discussion about a future in which the influence of social and technological changes could transform the market on an almost daily basis.

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*The market is one of the few industries in which the cost of doing business, in terms of commissions, has gone down, translating into a clear advantage for occasional traders.*

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**Justin Fox**, business and economics columnist for *Time* magazine, moderated the roundtable, held on Saturday, October 20, and began by raising a central question: Has the restructuring brought about by technology and automation actually made the market perform better? **Robert Schwartz**, author of *Reshaping the Equity Markets: A Guide for the 1990s*, commented that prior to automation, collecting market data was a painstaking process, often performed by doctoral students who were known as "slaves." With the availability of automated, universal market data, he went on, there is a greater degree of transparency, but it will take more time to gauge whether or not this translates into greater market efficiency. But how is efficiency defined? **Ailsa Roell**, Professor of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, cited Pareto efficiency, wherein no person can be made better off without making another person worse off. This hard reality was reinforced by Mr. Madoff, who clarified that the for-profit nature of the market means that a buyer always knows, or thinks he knows, something that the seller doesn't, and vice-versa. At the same time, Madoff continued, the market is one of the few industries in which the cost of doing business, in terms of commissions, has gone down, translating into a clear advantage for occasional traders.

**Josh Stampfli**, the architect of automated marketing structures at Madoff Investment Securities, shed light on the mechanics of how technology can change the market. As brokerage firms send their workflow to Madoff Securities, Mr. Stampfli must create programs that manage their risks. His objective is to develop algorithms that minimize risk and, with proper oversight, perform the same function formerly carried out by several trained brokers. Putting the complexity and precision of technological advances into perspective, Madoff pointed out that trades that took 20 seconds to execute in the 1980s now take one-tenth of a second, which in fact engenders new considerations about risk and competition.

With a combined experience on Wall Street of over 80 years, Siebert and Madoff provided historical perspective and uniquely informed insights about what might lie ahead for the stock market. While capitalizing on their expertise, Mr. Fox also mined the technical and academic acumen of the other panelists as he guided the discussion to address aesthetic changes, like the eerie silence that now pervades once-bustling trading rooms; the role that panic and mob mentality play in the market; and ethical concerns raised by more widespread, democratized trading. *A.L.*

## Upcoming Events

### Our Life in Poetry: Emily Dickinson

Course

Tuesday, January 8, 7:00pm

Participants: Michael Braziller & Alice Quinn

### Weather and Imagination

Roundtable

Saturday January 12, 2:30pm

Participants: Deborah Coen (moderator), Sheila Jasanoff, Antony Leiserowitz, Stephanie LeMenager, Ben Orlove

### The Rhythmic Brain

Course

Monday, January 14, 7:00pm

Participants: Eric Barnhill & Stephanie Chase

### The Development of Temperament During the First Three Years of Life

Roundtable

Saturday, January 19, 2:30pm

Participants: Carol Sue Carter, Frances Champagne, Donald Pfaff, Daniel Schechter

### The Motive for Metaphor

Roundtable

Saturday, March 1, 3:30pm

Participants: Paul Fry (moderator), Susan Stewart (other panelists TBA)

### Five Centuries of Violin Making

Course

Tuesday, March 11, 7:00pm

Participants: Stephanie Chase & Stewart Pollens

### The Mirror and the Lamp: The Psychobiology of Imagination

Roundtable

Saturday, March 15, 3:30pm

Participants: Margaret Browning, Alan Leslie (other panelists TBA)

In addition to the archive of videos, podcasts, and transcripts available on the Past Programs page of our website, [www.philoctetes.org](http://www.philoctetes.org), the Center now has a channel on YouTube: [www.youtube.com/philoctetesctr](http://www.youtube.com/philoctetesctr).

All Philoctetes events are free and open to the public.

## Chuck Close



**Chuck Close** is famous for his self-portraits, but his work is also as much about the world he occupies as it is about himself. Marion Cajori's film about Close visits the studios of Robert Rauschenberg, Brice Marden, Dorothea Rockburne, Robert Storr, Nancy Graves, Elizabeth Murray, and Phillip Glass, among others, to complete its portrayal of an artist whose work is often misunderstood. In the discussion that preceded the screening, held on Saturday, December 1, Close spoke with **Vincent Katz**, director of *Kiki Smith: Squatting the Palace* (shown last year at the Center), and **Matthew von Unwerth**, coordinator of the Philoctetes film series. Asked to describe his process in creating a painting, Close commented, "People wonder how I can sit at arm's length and know what it's going to look like from a distance. A composer goes into his room with no musical instruments, scoring for the oboe and the French horn. Most people don't understand how art happens. It is really about a series of decisions, and putting yourself in a position to make those decisions."

Close went on to downplay the realist label that has been applied to his work. "Painting is this window-colored dirt on a flat surface—but it transcends its physical reality. It makes space where there is no space. The reason I never liked the word realist is that I have always been interested in artificiality." In the film, Phillip Glass further amplifies the point, saying of Close's work, "The image was something you looked at while you were looking at the picture." Brice Marden reiterates the notion from a more intimate perspective: "Chuck is really a cool guy, but he is very intense. It's way beyond the image. The image is a convenience."

Speaking with the audience, Close described how minimalism and pop were the two big movements when he came to New York after studying at the Yale School of Art. "I was trying to purge my work of de Kooning and abstract expressionism," he explained. By eliminating the presence of other artists, he felt he could reduce the elements involved in his work and call attention to process. Close revealed that he regards art as a fundamentally social activity. "I wanted to get stuff out in front of people," he mused. "It's a narcissistic kind of need. I'm narcissistic enough to think that people would want to see it. If there is no audience then I'm not making art. I'm not driven to make stuff just because I need to." He underlined the interactive nature of his endeavor with a quote from Duchamp—"The work is not complete until returned by the observer." *F.L.*