

brownstone

may 2008

rude mechanical orchestra • the path of least surveillance • books through bars • freeganism • the modern bill of rights • footprints of freedom • homeless gay youth

the
freedom
issue



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OUTSIDE

Mass-produced replicas of the Statue of Liberty at a midtown souvenir shop represent America's greatest export — freedom.



photo by karly domb sadof

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brownstone

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letter from the editors

When we were first tossing ideas around for this issue of Brownstone and freedom came up as a possibility, we were apprehensive, yet intrigued. We knew it was a challenging, rich theme, but how, for instance, would we do a photo essay about freedom without turning it into six pages of American flags? When you Google-Image freedom, everything from a picture of an eagle to an animal-rights poster to a poster of butterflies comes up within the first 10 results. As fundamental as everyone knows it is, freedom is a concept that gets thrown around a whole lot and can mean all sorts of different things to different people. Most of the time it's empty, this nebulous idea floating somewhere up above us along with "justice" and "power." Sure, we think we understand it and we're all taught that it's important, but what does it look like? What does it mean in our everyday, earthly lives? With this issue of Brownstone, we tried to explore freedom in a grounded way, to take a look at a few of the many ways New Yorkers and NYU students understand and express the concept. We examine freeganism, a lifestyle that aims to be free from the bounds of capitalism. We profile Books

Through Bars, an organization that provides books to prisoners who are denied freedom in the most literal and explicit way. We look at the way freedom intersects with art in Chris Alden's column about music sampling and in the piece about the Rude Mechanical Orchestra. And on our numbers page, we poll New Yorkers on the way they use their freedom. Of course, these 24 pages barely begin to scratch the surface, but as with every issue of Brownstone, our goal is to get a conversation started. We hope we succeeded.

On another note, this will be our last issue with Brownstone and we'd like to thank everyone who made this possible: First and foremost, our photo editor, Karly Domb Sadof, and production chief, Kyle Kolb, whose brilliance and dedication have truly made Brownstone what it is. We'd also like to thank everyone at WSN, especially Editor-in-Chief Adam Playford, Managing Editor Megan Stride and Associate Editor Alvin Chang, for their support, advice and endless patience; and our wonderful team of reporters. And of course, everyone who made all of this worthwhile by picking up a copy. ■

— Kristen V. Brown & Ellen Cushing

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ABOUT BROWNSTONE

Brownstone (ISSN 1549-9391) is the cultures magazine published by the *Washington Square News*, New York University's daily student newspaper. *Brownstone* is published two times each semester. Issues of *Brownstone* are free and can be found alongside the *Washington Square News* and around the NYU community.

books through bars

In a tiny room in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, Jess Ross is surrounded by books: stacks of books, shelves of books, boxes of books. In front of her sits a foot-high stack of letters from prisons nationwide.

This is the New York City chapter of Books Through Bars. Founded in Philadelphia in 1989 before making its way to New York in 1996, the organization solicits letters from prisoners requesting specific books and book donations. Three times a week, on Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays, Ross and the other members of the group read each letter, match prisoners' book requests to the vast collection of titles in the room and then pack and ship them off to prisons around the country. According to BTB, these books provide incarcerated people with the opportunity to learn about their cultural heritage, prepare for the GED test, stave off some of the isolation and restlessness of confinement and discover new perspectives and interests.

"Reading is a form of socialization in this place that tries to dehumanize you," explains Ross, a librarian and core group member. "It brings you back into the real world."

Despite the importance of books, in no state is it legally mandated that prisoners have access to reading materials, and the majority of prison libraries are underfunded and insufficient. In order to send a book to a loved one in prison, individuals must do it through an "authorized vendor," making groups like BTB one of the only ways prisoners can receive the books they want.

Vikki Law, one of the founding members of BTB-NYC, stresses that it's not just a charitable organization. It wasn't started as an effort to "send books to those poor people in prison." The motivations were more political than humanitarian: The group uses the book-distribution service as a platform to engage in debate about issues of imprisonment in general, as well as to provide books that prison libraries themselves are unwilling to buy.

Law's personal motivations for working with BTB reach as far back as high school. "When I was in high school, a lot of my friends ended up going

to prison," she says. "There, they figured out they liked to read." She recalls visiting these friends in prison, where she saw that people who would have never thought of going to college were working toward getting their GEDs in prison.

But the organization has run into its share of challenges. Sending books to prisoners involves navigating an obstacle course set up by literary review committees of prison systems, and books get rejected for reasons ranging from content to format. A prison in Texas recently rejected books based on "homosexual content," says Ross.

The requests from prisoners vary, from dictionaries to African-American history books to guides on how to draw. Melissa Morrone, a librarian and member of the group for

years, says they put some of the unusual requests on the wall. "You can get a whole list of serious things, then 'How to Make Love to a Woman' at the end," she laughs.

But they keep some of the most poignant letters in a binder, which they display at events for people to flip through. Now overflowing with drawings and letters from prisoners across the country, the binder contains everything from a letter from an aspiring pastry chef and candy maker to a note from a prisoner on death row expressing his thanks to the BTB members.

Below one of the drawings sent in by a prisoner are the words, "Escape into a world of fantasy. Reading can set the mind free."

BY MARIE-HELENE ROUSSEAU



RUDE NOISE

Clad in (mostly) matching green uniforms, a group of about 20 musicians parades up the street, horns blaring, flutes piping and drums pounding. It doesn't matter that most of the players haven't looked at the instrument in their hand since high school—that's not what they're all about. They even advertise on their website that if you want to join, they "do not discriminate on the basis of musical ability."

This cluster of New York-based musicians and dancers, which calls itself the Rude Mechanical Orchestra, spend their weekends

and evenings fighting for social justice and equality, picketing against unjust work conditions and working for immigration reform and several anti-war efforts by playing music at hundreds of events since their inception four years ago.

"RMO is a strong voice for women, for the queer community, for the trans[gender] community, for the radical community in New York City," explains Sarah Blust, bass drummer and one of the orchestra's founding members. "But sometimes the slow march of progress can be frus-

trating."

The band's repertoire is eclectic to say the least, tapping into cultures and styles from all around the world. Any given event can include songs like "Bella Ciao," "El Pueblo Unido" and "Eye of the Tiger."

The group was founded in the spring of 2004 to perform at the March for Women's Lives in

Washington, D.C. and ended up playing later that summer at protests outside the Republican National Convention. From there, the rest is history. This summer the orchestra plans to take a two-week tour to Minneapolis to join protests against the Republican National Convention in an environmentally friendly bus

that runs on waste vegetable oil and is being worked on by students of Brooklyn's Automotive High School.

"Join us!" Blust said. "Let's make the revolution a big dance party that jumps over all the ignorance and fear and barbed wire and security cameras of the world."

BY MARC BEJA



The Rude Mechanical Orchestra lets loose at their CD release party.

courtesy of rude mechanical orchestra

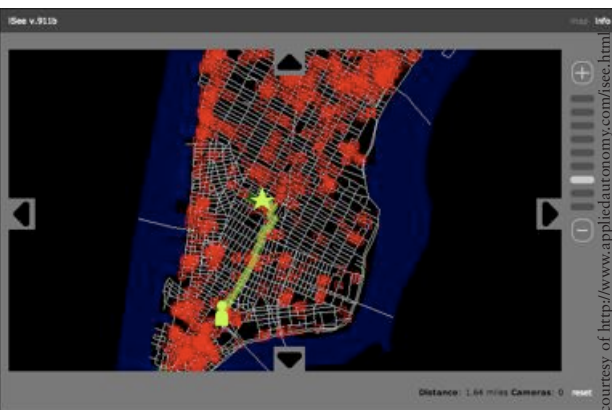
the path of least surveillance

Whether we know it or not, the average New Yorker is on camera hundreds of times a day. Closed-circuit TV cameras are stationed at ATMs and subway stations, in department stores and public plazas. Though it's unclear exactly how many of these cameras there are in New York

— they multiply nearly daily and there's no definitive registry — it's certain that as the technology becomes cheaper and the threat (real or imagined) becomes stronger, the number of cameras has proliferated. For example, the number of cameras on the Lower East Side more than quadrupled between 1998 and 2001, according to activist groups. In the wake of 9/11, closed-circuit TVs, especially, have multiplied: Nearly 400 MTA buses are now outfitted with cameras, as are subways and high-profile buildings that house organizations like the United Nations. Seeing this as an infringement on fundamental freedoms — as well as noting the

potential for misuse, such as racial profiling and voyeurism — a group of activists has created iSee. The site, released in 2001, is the brainchild of the Institute for Applied Autonomy, a largely anonymous activist group that employs technology to work for "individual and collective self-determination," according to its website. The web interface looks like a creepy red, black and blue version of Google maps, with little squares marking the thousands of cameras all over the city. The site also allows users to find the "path of least surveillance" by entering their origin and destination into the program, which then spits out a route that encounters as few cameras as possible.

BY ELLEN CUSHING



NUMBERS

SURVEY of the NEW

The Bill of Rights is the closest thing we have in this country to an explicit definition of freedom, but in the 200-plus years since James Madison introduced those ten amendments to the First United States Congress in 1791, it has largely fallen into the recesses of the American mind. Most people know a couple of amendments, but few actually practice them. Who among you owns a gun? Has stood on a soapbox in the park? This poll of 100, which was taken from a New York population comprised of at least 75 percent NYU students, takes a loose, modern glimpse at the way the Bill of Rights is interpreted and experienced today. The original questions did not explicitly state the amendment that inspired them.

1st

have you ever attended a community meeting?



have you ever started a petition?



2nd

do you own a gun?



anyone in your immediate family?



3rd

would you let a soldier stay in your home if the troops dropped into your town unannounced?



maybe?



4th

have you ever tried to sneak anything past bag checkers?



5th

would you lie in court to protect a friend?



maybe?



6th

do you feel witnesses have to be visible to the accused, even if it means endangering a life?



would you endanger your life to be a witness in a case for a stranger?



7th

would you ever go to court over \$20?



\$50?



8th

are interrogation techniques, like waterboarding, justified against suspected terrorists?



9th

would you give up your right to freedom of speech for a one-time offer of a monetary sum?



for \$1,000?



10th

do you feel that the constitution is comprehensive?

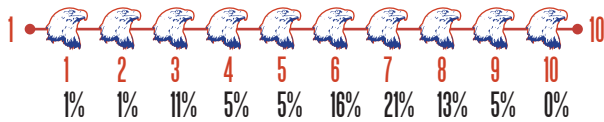


do you feel oppressed on a daily basis?



a more modern bill of rights

on a scale from 1-10 how free do you feel in your everyday life, with 1 being completely oppressed and 10 being completely free ?



Age:
 17-21: 75%
 22-28: 11%
 31-40: 4%
 75-80: 1%
 No Response: 9%

have you ever exercised free speech?



Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the People to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

if not, would you withhold incriminating evidence?



No person shall be held to answer for any ... crime, unless on ... indictment of a Grand Jury ... nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself; nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

for a friend?



In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State ... and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.

\$500?



In suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

for \$100,000?



The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.

Q & A

a politician and an activist on freedom

BY KARLY DOMB SADOFF

First elected to office in 1978, New York State Senator Martin Connor has been reelected every two years since. He helped to establish the New York Senate's Puerto Rican and Hispanic Task Force, and has served as a member on numerous New York State committees regarding federal/state regulations, women's rights issues and public management systems. In his many years serving as an elected official, Connor has argued for tougher gun control laws, helped to pass hate crime legislation and worked on the Elderly Pharmaceutical Drug Program.



STATE SENATOR MARTIN CONNOR

How do you define freedom?

I define freedom, firstly, by the first amendment — speech, freedom to petition, to assemble, et cetera. And secondly, as freedom from from hunger danger homelessness and, I think, unemployment as well.

Is it freedom to or freedom from?

It's both. It's freedom to do things like worship, speak, write and it's also freedom from things like poverty.

What's your favorite part of your job?

Legislation — putting forth legislation and debating legislation. I like to stop harmful things from being done to my constituents and advocate for the things they need.

How does your job impact your personal understanding of freedom?

Because of the very diverse district I serve, I have very poor constituents. People have real needs for things like housing. True freedom comes only when people are employed, have a roof over their head and have food to eat.

How should/can citizens assert our freedom?

The number one way: vote on public issues. Make your voice heard and really get involved.

What are things we take for granted in the US?

When we only have 40 percent of the population participating in elections, people are taking for granted the right to control their own government. We also take for granted the basic rights that are under assault by The Patriot Act — I do believe it is an assault on our rights.

What's your favorite pizza topping?

Anchovies!

ACTIVIST DANA FARRINGTON

A self-proclaimed activist, Dana Farrington is an NYU sophomore studying journalism and metropolitan studies. She has been involved with NYU's STAND chapter (an anti-genocide student organization), Just Is (a social justice coalition) and Action Courage (an emerging organization that provides necessary resources for activists).

How do you define freedom?

I think a person's freedom is measured primarily by his or her opportunity. Real freedom seems to come from the ability to choose the course of one's life.

Is it freedom "to" or freedom "from"?

It is important to be free "from" certain things like oppression, but it is essential to have the freedom "to" represent yourself and your opinions. I don't believe that I can ever be absolutely guaranteed freedom "from" something.

What's your favorite part of life as an activist?

Right now I feel that my job is to learn as much as I can. I love meeting new people and learning from their experiences.

How does your life as an activist impact your personal understanding of freedom?

I have been extremely fortunate to be able to experience everything I have so far. I personally appreciate my freedom most when I can create or participate in a space designated for community and discussion. I have been lucky enough to be able to express myself freely in a way many people, unfortunately, cannot.

How should/can citizens assert their freedom?

Even if certain freedoms are written in our constitution, it's clear that when the government acts unchecked, it can disregard them. This denial of freedoms should push citizens to always educate themselves on what their rights are and move them to democratically stand up for themselves if these rights are curtailed.



What are things we take for granted in the United States?

First, it depends on who "we" are. Secondly, those of us who are lucky enough to be able to take things for granted sometimes forget the violence and poverty that exists within our own country. I'm also learning that it can, though not always, be a luxury to be an activist.

Do you think freedom is something that can be enforced?

To sustain freedom, we can't rely on outside enforcement. Freedom can only really be sustainable if we monitor and fight for it ourselves.

What's your favorite pizza topping?

Pizza is not complete without pepperoni. And no, I'm not a vegan.

designing for change

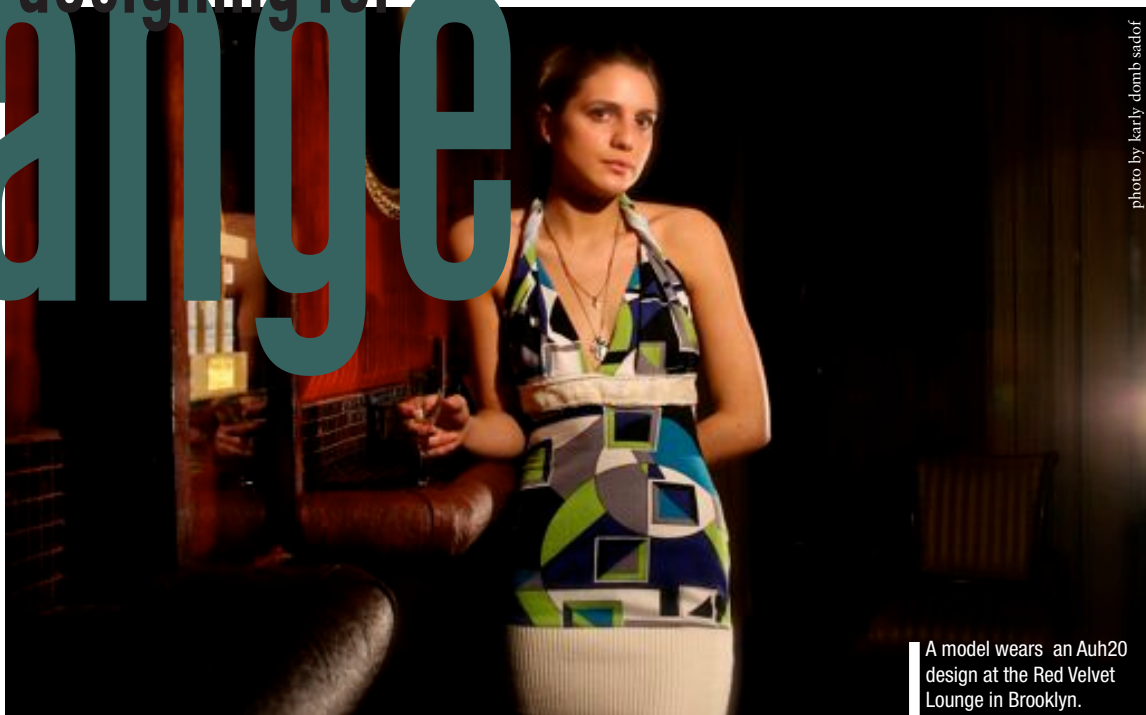


photo by karly domb sadof

A model wears an AuH2O design at the Red Velvet Lounge in Brooklyn.

BY KRISTEN V. BROWN

East Village clothing designer Kate Goldwater wears her politics on her sleeve, literally. With slogans like “Marriage for everybody,” “Don’t you wish your girlfriend was pro-choice like me” and “I am a feminist” adorning her socially conscious and environmentally friendly designs, Goldwater readily uses her fashions to make a statement.

“I’ve always loved fashion and expressing creativity through clothing,” she says, “but I couldn’t imagine working for the fashion industry and using sweatshop labor and working for people I don’t morally agree with.”

A year and a half ago, the recent Gallatin grad opened her store, AuH2O on Seventh Street between First and Second avenues. Studying art and clothing in social justice while an undergrad, she realized she could use fashion to make a political statement and affect social change.

“There’s two ways my clothes make a statement: There’s a subversive and a very blatant statement,” Goldwater says. “My clothes are made from recycled clothes, so that’s already a statement because I’m not contributing to the culture of mass production and waste. Then, on top of that, I like to screen things on, like once

we have a democratic nominee, I’ll be screening shirts that say either Barack or Hillary.” Made entirely of recycled materials — pieces of shirts culled from Salvation Army, old ties and even Metro cards — Kate practices the age-old motto of “Waste not, want not.” But she works to turn old into more that just new; she wants to turn it into stylish. However, choosing to exist outside of the mass-produced mainstream comes at a professional price: As the store’s sole employee, she works long hours to make her clothes as cheap as those that are factory-produced, and her outside-the-box ethos have gotten her rejected not once, but twice by *Project Runway*. As she explained in an open letter to the producers, published on the *Huffington Post*, “Within two minutes, the judges knew I wasn’t what they wanted. They frowned when I answered I didn’t go to design school, and they weren’t pleased that I was only 22 and had no industry experience. And most importantly, they were not hip to the eco-fashion, socially-conscious concept.”

Goldwaters’s first creations, however, weren’t quite so eco-chic: She took her first stab at designing as a 12-year-old when she found an old tent in her

basement. After getting permission to deconstruct it, she turned it into a heavily stapled and duct taped pair of pants. After that, she was hooked on sewing, a habit that has evolved into a successful boutique peddling one-of-a-kind wears.

But while Goldwater’s passion for fashion has spawned a thriving business, multiple fashion shows and a popular website, politics are still the driving force behind her operation. Even the name of the store is political; AuH2O, the periodic symbols for gold and water, was a gimmick used in Barry Goldwater’s political campaign against Lyndon B. Johnson. Avid Democrats, the family used to sport buttons that said, “Goldwaters for Johnson.”

So what’s next for this activist-turned-fashion designer? Eventually, an entire socially-conscious, environmentally friendly network of boutiques. “Right now I’m trying to establish myself in the East Village and online,” Goldwater says, “but eventually I want to have a store that’s connected to a thrift store and stores in all of America’s liberal cities. But I’ll always keep things affordable, and my employees will always be designers, not sweatshop workers.” ■

A PHOTOGRAPHIC TOUR OF MANHATTAN
LANDMARKS WHERE FREEDOM HAS BEEN ASSERTED,
QUESTIONED AND EXAMINED.
BY KARLY DOMB SADOFF

footprints of freedom





HAMILTON HALL

During the April 1968 Columbia protests, students barricaded themselves in Hamilton Hall to protest plans for a segregated gymnasium. Later, the 60 black students involved in the protest forced the white students to leave.



STONEWALL INN Though police raids on gay bars were common in 1960s New York, when police raided The Stonewall Inn on June 28, 1969, the fed-up patrons fought back. The Stonewall Riots are often regarded as the birth of the modern gay right's movement. The windows of the Stonewall Inn, which is still a favorite local watering hole, commemorate the 1968 riots.



TRINITY CHURCH Located at the intersection of Broadway and Wall streets, Trinity Church was burned and rebuilt during the Revolutionary War. In the church's surrounding graveyard, many revolutionaries, including Alexander Hamilton, are buried.



BROWN BUILDING NYU's current Brown Building, which houses the school's biology and chemistry departments, is the site of the March 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. The fire helped the growth of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, which fought for better working conditions in the 1920s and 1930s. Until Sept. 11, 2001 it was worst workplace disaster in New York City.





AUDOBON BALLROOM Though today the Audubon Ballroom bears little resemblance to the original site other than its elaborate façade — the main storefront is now a Dallas BBQ — it's the same locale where Malcolm X was shot to death in 1965.

FORT WASHINGTON The highest point in Manhattan, Fort Washington became the American Revolution's most tragic battle site when British forces attacked an American stronghold of only 2,800 — leaving 53 dead, 96 wounded and 2,722 captured.



FUTURE FREEDOM TOWER SITE

The Freedom Tower, set to be built by 2011, will stand on the site of the former World Trade Center Towers as a memorial. Standing at 1,362 feet, the Freedom Tower will become one of the tallest buildings in the world.



UNITED NATIONS Technically not in New York City, the United Nations rests on international territory. The international organization's mission is to stop conflicts between nations and provide a forum for discussion regarding international law, international security, economic development, social progress and human rights issues.





'f' is for *freegan*

BY NATALIE ZUTTER
PHOTOS BY KARLY DOMB SADOFF

Freegans dig through garbage on a trash tour in search of food.

THE BAGELS CERTAINLY SMELL fresh. As the scent of onion and garlic wafts through the early-April evening air, they even smell straight-from-the-toaster warm. It's hard to believe that they're coming out of a trash bag outside of a midtown Dunkin' Donuts, one of several stops on tonight's freegan trash tour.

Adam Weissman, a freegan helping to lead the tour, smiles and shakes his head slightly. "People don't believe us when we talk about good-smelling garbage. It's actually very common."

Over the course of two hours, the group visits at least six grocery stores, markets and coffee shops. The amount of time spent at each spot varies, as they sift through the bags that the owners have dropped outside for pick up. But they don't just dig through the "trash" like animals. There is a science to their movements. They open the bags at the top and re-tie them when they're done.

"It'll be better than when we found it," Janet Kalish, the leader of tonight's tour, says. "And easier to carry."

'FREE' + 'VEGAN' = FREEGAN

Freegans — members of a movement that developed in the mid-1990s — choose not to pay for food, housing or other amenities and materials. Instead, they develop creative ways to obtain these necessities, including "dumpster diving," squatting and the establishment of communal workshops. Many also advocate for animal rights and fair trade.

"We're basically trying to create a community outside of capitalism," Leia MonDragon, 23, says.

No student completes grade school science without learning the Darwinian adage of "survival of the fittest," but this, too, is challenged by the freegans. Instead, Leia says, the basis of the freegan ideal finds its inspiration in Peter Kropot-

kin's 1902 essay "Mutual Aid Amongst Animals."

Freegans believe that Darwin was not actually promoting human-versus-human struggle, with the strongest or smartest reigning victorious. "If you look at nature, 'the survival of the fittest' really means [that] animals that help each other out, pool resources and take care of each other end up having more offspring and healthier communities."

THE FREEGAN LIFE

Part of what makes this particular community "healthier" is the fact that it is self-supporting. One of the major projects of the New York freegans is their bike workshop, which benefits the community in two important ways: First, it disseminates repair skills among its members, and second, it teaches reuse through the collection of discarded bike parts.

"People without money lose out on the ability to learn some basic skills we need to survive in life," Leia says.

At the bike workshop, people have built entire bikes from found parts. And of course, the finished product is shared among the group, as freegans rely heavily

on free transportation.

Living spaces are also shared. Fervent defenders of rent-free living, freegans work together to find land. Some act as squatters, seeking out opportunities to retake land for the group, while others renovate run-down lots, transforming them into community centers.

"To me, rent is one of the most insidious evils in the world," Leia says. "An unquestioned, unthought-of form of oppression. No other animal pays rent. No other animal worries about where its home is going to be. The idea of an animal being homeless is an absurd idea."

Freegans' attitude toward empty lots is similar to what motivates their weekly trash tours: Why, they ask, should perfectly good food be tossed into landfills when it could be filling starving stomachs?

As some of the guides explain on the weekly tours, food production is not set according to need but is instead skewed by subsidies. According to studies conducted by the University of Arizona's Garbage Project, 40 to 50 percent of food is wasted.

At one of the tour's stops the group arranges all of the food on top of a box, and one member gives a speech emphasizing these, and other, points. It is at this point that the tour gets its biggest amount of observers, as people see the gathering and wonder what's going on — not to mention the impressive display of appetizing food.

"A lot of people, mostly native New Yorkers, find [the trash tours] amusing, or pathetic, or creepy," Janet says. "I think the people who immigrate are more interested and more open. If we offer some people food, they'll take it. And others, we don't even bother. There are certain people you can tell by their expressions they're above it or they don't relate to subsisting on things that were thrown out."





Finding on a recent Freegan trash tour.

“IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT FINDING FOOD”

“Freeganism is more of a tactic than a strategy,” Leia says. “We want to live in a communal society. We try to share resources.”

“It’s not just about finding food. It’s really about trying to consume in a sustainable way. A lot of times people treat themselves and say, ‘Well, I deserve it.’ Not that there’s anything wrong with once in a while treating yourself,” Janet adds. “But ... there has to be more of a sense of [planetary] community.”

Becoming a freegan wasn’t a drastic lifestyle shift for either Janet or Leia; both, before learning of the movement, led lives focused on conservation and anti-exploitation. Leia stresses how natural it was to adopt the freegan lifestyle. “On [people’s] fences you find bags of clothes. As long as you keep an eye out for things like that, it’s everywhere.”

Janet relates similar stories, such as when she discovered a gift card in a Victoria’s

Secret bag out of which she was offering a woman fruit or when she found \$40 sitting at the top of the stairs in the subway. Janet says, somewhat unenthused, that she had never considered “the potential to be making money off this thing.” Needless to say, Janet didn’t spend the \$40.

For Janet, the freegan lifestyle has been both an affirming and a teaching experience. “It helps me feel a little more that my actions make a little bit more of an impact,” she says. “I never imagined that I could live without buying food, but that’s just one more thing that I can do ... It sort of provokes creativity. Instead of this society of instant gratification, I think [that this is] a more realistic way of living.”

But freeganism is not about a passive lifestyle. The movement is defined by social action, motivated by firm opposition to a consumer-driven economy. “We’re all very angry at capitalism,” Leia says. She relates how “people talk about ‘smashing the state,’ ” but that freeganism has afforded her a new outlook on the matter.

Crediting fellow freegan Wendy Scher with this philosophy, Leia explains, “You can talk about smashing the state, but as long as you talk in the negative, people can’t envision the alternative. So long as you’re not giving people an alternative to act out, people are going to keep living in the capitalist system ... People need something to engage in.”

That something is the identity, outside of the realm of capitalism, that the freegans have forged for themselves.

The irony, of course, is that freeganism, which is so vehemently opposed to capitalism, is entirely predicated on it. After all, there would be no restaurant scraps to dig through if there were no restaurants.

Still, though, the freegans seem to see themselves as teaching others that there is something beyond capitalism, rather than dismantling the entire system. Janet, for one, hopes too that people will think more critically about materialism. “It seems that our society is being convinced that buying is patriotic,” she says, citing constant talk of the failing economy. “We’re being reminded [in even the local news] that if we’re not buying, something is going wrong. [Buying] has become normal and healthy.”

“If we try to return to a simpler mentality, more connected to the land, there would be more art, entertainment ... People could devote more time to enjoyment of the earth and not the search for bigger, better toys.”

Ultimately she sees her lifestyle as intimately tied with larger questions of autonomy and views freeganism as, essentially, freedom. “Your freedom ends where it encroaches on a mass amount of people and beings,” she says. “Almost anything you can buy is connected to some form of exploitation ... I think that being responsible in an ethical way and choosing to be a freegan actually afforded me that freedom.”

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HEADING HOME

BY EMILY LEONARD
PHOTOS BY DEBRA ANGKOSUBROTO

From 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. every day of the year, homeless queer youth in Manhattan can find refuge.

Located in a basement behind a metal security gate on the industrial west side of Manhattan, Sylvia's Place is easily distinguished from its neighbors; it's the building adorned with faded rainbows and chipping paint, an explosion of color in an otherwise monochromatic area.

Sylvia's is just one of the 25 gay-specific homeless shelters built within the last five years in the United States. They come in all shapes and sizes, from a ten-bed emergency shelter in east Detroit to a one-room intermediate home on St. Marks Place.

But even these new shelters are not enough to meet a rising demand. Homelessness among LGBT youth has become an epidemic, accounting for roughly 42 percent of the 1.6 million homeless youth nationwide.

Generally modest in size and funding, these "makeshift shelters" serve one purpose: to accommodate clients for the night, even if they have to sleep beside an industrial oven. Though their numbers are growing, the shelters themselves are usually overcrowded.

"[Other shelters] have a waitlist of three to six months. Where can these kids go when they have nowhere else to turn?" asks Lucky Michaels, shelter administrator at Sylvia's Place.

During the day, Sylvia's Place serves as a food pantry, a branch of the Metropolitan Community Church. But on Saturday night, the basement pantry becomes a haven for homeless gay teenagers.



"As the weather gets colder, we get like two or three new people a night," says Dedre Brown, a 29-year-old volunteer from Brooklyn. "At one point last winter, there were 42 people in here."

Despite the cramped quarters, Sylvia's truly provides a warm refuge. Beyond the entrance, a protective meshed metal cage, the shelter is crowded and active. Gurgling pipes hang from the ceiling, pans sizzle on the industrial stove and shouts can be heard from across the room. To the left, a sizable kitchen area boasts two ovens, a metal table and a pantry stocked with all the essentials: bread, tuna salad, peanut butter and oil.

Past the kitchen, a small bathroom is adorned with signs warning clientele to keep their clothes on hangers after they've been washed. In the back of the shelter, two staff members work behind a makeshift desk. Among them is Daniel "Scout" Rose, a 27-year-old gay man.

"I'm queer, but I don't identify by my sexuality," he explains.

As a volunteer, Scout works as an overnight counselor to Sylvia's young patrons and assigns household duties to the teens.

"We're a food pantry during the day, so the space has to be clean, or the department of health will shut us down," he says. But tonight, it seems Scout will be more of a spectator than a counselor.

ights out is kind of loose on Saturday nights," he says.

Dedre Brown, Scout's coworker, relates well to the shelter's young clients. Her camaraderie with the teenagers comes, in part, from her own experiences.

"She was a homeless homo!" one teenager yells, while another adds, "You was a double H?"

Like Scout, Brown is an overnight coun-

**“my job ranges
from breaking up
fights to stopping
people trying to
commit suicide.”**



Sylvia's Place on Manhattan's industrial west side, provides refuge for gay-homeless youth and is a food pantry during the day.



selor. She's worked at the shelter for a year and also worked for five years at Neutral Zone, a center for LGBT youth just three blocks away. It was there that she met the shelter's director, Kate Barnhart, and offered to volunteer her nights at Sylvia's Place.

"There is no typical night here," Brown says. "My job ranges from breaking up fights to stopping people trying to commit suicide in the bathroom."

As she talks, Brown rummages through the bags at her feet, full of donations from well-wishers.

"People find out about us and give us the most random stuff," she says, trying on a pair of dangling, bright orange plastic earrings, much to the consternation of the fashion savvy clientele.

"You're about to look like you're stepping out of a damn Prince video!" one teenager says.

While some gifts prove less useful than others, the counselors say that donations are always welcome, especially in the form of socks, towels and toiletries, which are the shelter's most valued items. Additional bedding is also appreciated: The 15 sleeping bags stowed away during the day become a scarce commodity at night.

Along with Michaels, Barnhart has spent years looking for new ways to accommodate the steadily rising numbers of homeless LGBT teens. In 2005, Sylvia's East was established, an intermediate shelter in the East Village that accepts clients for extended stays rather than a night-by-night basis. In January of 2008, Michaels opened the Marsha

P. Johnson Center, the nation's first 24-hour emergency drop-in center for LGBT youth. Located in Harlem, the center is over 5,000 square feet and boasts a fully stocked kitchen, as well as a pool table, computers and a living area. But while accommodating, the center is non-residential, forcing its clients back onto the streets when night falls.

On one particular Saturday night, there are perhaps twenty people at Sylvia's Place, some spooning tuna salad from an oversized tub at the kitchen area, others taking a cigarette break outside and one transsexual in a hot pink bra and green facial mask singing the latest Alicia Keys single.

Mavinga King, a 19-year-old black bisexual from Queens, is with the smokers outside. Pulling on a cigarette at the entrance of Sylvia's Place, King wears a heavy, stylish coat and brand new Nike sneakers to protect him from the cold.

"My father wanted me out of the house the day I turned 18," said King, who's been homeless for over two years. "I left a few months earlier because I didn't want to give him the satisfaction of kicking me out."

For King, Sylvia's Place has provided a level of support once missing from his life. For one thing, the location is convenient; the gas station where he works during the day is clearly visible from the outside of the shelter. Also, the gay-only mandate of Sylvia's Place creates an environment of acceptance — celebration, even — of his sexuality.

"I'm bisexual, but I'm more interested in transsexual men," said King. "I have a girlfriend, though. She's a real girl," he adds.

This is not King's first encounter with the Sylvia shelters. Last year, he was permanently kicked out of Sylvia's East for his belligerent attitude. But today, King is smiling: He has a cigarette in one hand, a pair of black-market Nike sneakers in the other and a roof over his head. For now, at least, all is well.

And for the future? Last month, King passed the high school equivalency exam, the first step in furthering his education.

"I did cheat though," he admitted. "I ran into the bathroom, I looked up the word ambition because I didn't know what it meant."

His unfamiliarity with the word seems ironic for the purpose-driven teenager.

"I want to do everything before I'm 50," said King. "I want to produce movies, make music, create software ... I have dreams."

Yet for many at the shelter, it is difficult to overcome the stereotypes of being a homeless teenager. Just ask Zahra Desouza, a 22-year-old lesbian with college aspirations.

"Yes, we all have cell phones, jobs, too, even though we live in a shelter," said Desouza, who works the night shift as a security officer for a church on Broome Street.

"I'm not willing to live in a room for the rest of my life," she said. ■

Chris Alden can often be found playing his accordion around Washington Square Park.

CREATIVITY, inc.®

BY CHRIS ALDEN

When I write music, I am a thief.

As I organize the sounds of the world around me — whether it is the vibration of a cello string, the murmur of a crowded room or a digital sample of an old Sidney Bechet recording — ever more I am forced to steal.

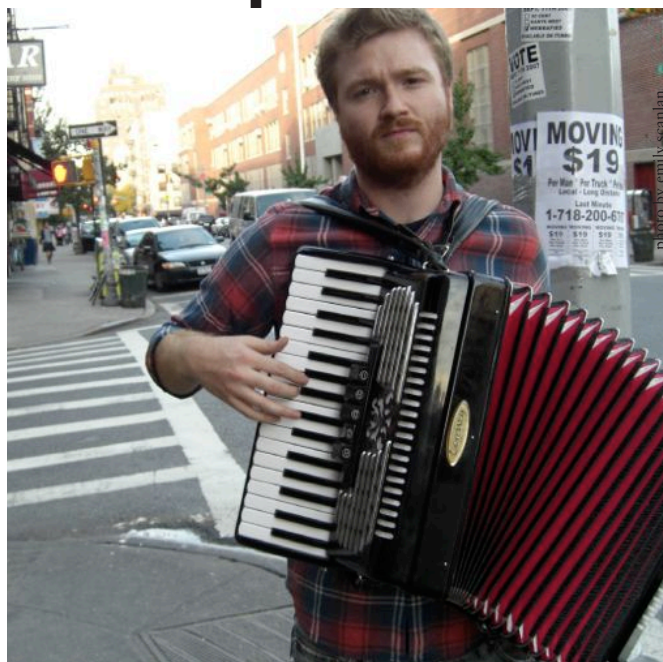
But I'm not alone in my thievery. Plunderphonics is a musical aesthetic that assumes all sound to be free game for musical expression, whether an artist has legal rights to it or not. And it's becoming increasingly popular, with examples ranging from hip-hop DJ Dangermouse's Grey Album to experimental composer John Cage's Rozart Mix or even my own electro-acoustic compositions. Plunderphonics is a logical extension of our most natural creative instincts. Music has always been the directed organization of our acoustic environment, taking the sound we hear around us and shaping it into an aesthetic object. The resources we use for music-making reflect the technological as well as cultural development of the time and place where that music is made. The bone flutes and animal skin percussion of prehistory were manifestations of our closeness to nature, while the mass-produced alloy-based instruments of wind bands that began to develop in the late 19th century reflected our almost myopic pride in industrial progress. Today's most prevalent musical instruments — our iPods, stereos, laptops and loudspeakers — are no different from those of previous generations in material function, making sound travel through changes in air pressure or in cultural significance.

A problem arises though, as our legal system creates an artificial distinction between recorded sound and sound that is purely acoustic, in which record companies have control not only over all of the songs in their catalogue but over all of the sounds as well. This failure to recognize the distinction between a crafted musical composition and the raw sonic material that makes it up is equivalent to the conflation of the sound of a violin with Bach's violin sonatas. Under these conditions, musicians in the digital age are being blocked from all of the culturally significant musical material of their time. Instead, the law leaves them to create music that is either stagnant or unrelatable.

As record company lawyers and federal judges continually carve away at artist and consumer access to that world of sound, musicians are fighting back. Groups like Radiohead and Nine Inch Nails have released their recording stems over the internet to allow fans and other musicians to remix and remake music with their sonic material. Unfortunately, this type of declaration for the freedom of sound is the exception rather than the rule, with record companies and their tech distributors creating better encryption and rights-tracing techniques. In addition, lawyers for the Recording Industry Association of America are pursuing more lawsuits with higher stakes.

Chained by a legal limit to creativity, I write music as a thief.

Chained by a legal limit to creativity, I write music as a thief.



The freedom of musicians and artists is not the only liberty being threatened. As software companies lay claim to the basic building blocks that allow our digital world to function and multinational biotech firms patent the genetic sequences that define our very biological autonomy, our fundamental rights to cultural and biological evolution are in serious danger. I do value the fundamental principle of intellectual and creative ownership as an incentive for innovation and as a legitimate means of income for artists and inventors. However, if we find ourselves at a point where corporate claims to intellectual and creative property continue to go unchecked, then the supposed rights of corporations to this property will put the very material of innovation off limits and our freedom to create and advance will disappear. As artists, consumers and above all citizens, we should all be wary of a world where the words "NO TRESPASSING" are written largely at the boundaries of creativity and innovation. ■

Chris Alden is a Steinhardt senior in the music composition program. Listen to his music at www.greenmyeyesmusic.com.

KILMAINHAM GAOL PRISON

A view from the outside looking into a cell at Kilmainham Gaol prison, Dublin, Ireland. Now a museum, Kilmainham Gaol was the site of imprisonment and execution for many leaders of the Irish rebellion, including the 1916 Easter Rising.

— photo by kristen v. brown



