

The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies

Labor Writes 2012

OCCUPY: härd wärk



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The Harry Van Arsdale Jr.
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Foreword

Johannes Vermeer's "The Girl with the Pearl Earring," also known as "the Northern Mona Lisa," is one of the Europe's most recognizable works of art. It is therefore wholly fitting that Bekim Leka's make-over of "The Girl" adorn the cover of this year's *Labor Writes*. Mr. Leka, a plumbing and pipefitting apprentice with UA Local 1, laid various small items of his trade – solder, wood screws, bolts, locking nuts, wire clips, etc.– on a computer generated image, thereby simultaneously updating the portrait and laying claim to it. There is no culture, however high, that does not depend upon labor, both dirty and hard, that is deemed by many, for those reasons, quite low. There is also no work, however low, that does not have an aesthetic dimension, often quite high.*

What, in fact, is the essential difference? All work makes some kind of contribution to the on-going task of constructing human life as we know it and as it might be. And I daresay that even Mr. Vermeer would have found the conditions of his existence quite incompatible with his creativity, if it had not been for the contribution of various anonymous practitioners of early forms of the trade to which Mr. Leka is apprenticed, and that of others like him.

Indeed, there were many for whom Mr. Vermeer himself was just another artisan, a painter, and not worthy of notice unless he failed to execute his commissions exactly as the buyer wished. The artwork in this issue was produced for classes on "Issues in Public Art: Representations of Work and Labor" or "Art and the Trades," both of which are currently taught by Barrie Cline, herself a graduate of Empire State College and a working artist. For these courses students read excerpts of Larry Shiner's stimulating book, *The Invention of Art*, which advances the notion that in a range of forms and media, "high" and "low" art, the "creative" and the "decorative," were not initially distinguished from one another. All art, as it required physical labor, was thought "low," with the possible exception of writing, which, as an instrument of power, was assimilated more or less by proximity to the "high." (Of course, there were low forms of writing, too, which were marked by vulgarity and other forms of challenge to the high and mighty, but all of them were subject to stringent censure.) It might be good or bad, better or worse, but there was nothing refined about most it.

Mr. Vermeer, too, then, was "low," however, "high" his art, and by laying claim to it Mr. Leka strikingly reminds us of this fact. So it is with the rest of the work in this issue. Those who do the hard work, the dirty work, of society are rarely accorded the respect to which, it seems to us, they are due. As our students find their way in their trade, we encourage them also to find their way in the wider culture, to assert their essential place in the social order and to insist upon the recognition and reward that they deserve. In this we have aspirations for our students similar to that which is fueling the current Occupy protests and movements. We want them to remind the world that they are here; that they matter; and that they are not going away. Only by doing so will they come into their fair share of the social and cultural inheritance which is rightly theirs. OCCUPY: härd wårk!

Michael Merrill, Dean

* See especially the contribution of Cornelius Skeahan in this volume on "The Artistry of High Voltage Splicing." "There is a misconception by some in the electrical industry," he writes, "that aesthetics are unimportant in the functionality of energy performance." The truth is that "poor workmanship will result in poor energy provision." And this relation holds whether or not those doing the work are fully aware of the distinction between art and craftsmanship. Cable splicers are "involved in a complex and creative task when in the vault." The work can be 80 years old or brand new. It still "reflects the signature styles of the previous electricians who have passed through the manhole," for better or for worse.

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Introduction

Rebecca Fraser, for the Editorial Committee

The work of many goes into the production of an anthology like this – instructors creating assignments, students writing those papers and creating art, editors editing the writing, and the committee putting the collection together. In addition, there is the good and often invisible work of the College’s Graphic Designers and the Printing office. Lots of decisions are made along the way; lots of conversations are conducted – in the classroom, in committee, between departments, with students, faculty and staff. This is truly a collaborative and creative effort, and for the committee, I say thank you to all of you who played a part in the making of this book. For those of you just picking up the volume, I invite you into our students’ lives and jobs as they consider the labor of their hands and the site of their work, and into an extended dialogue about work, society and solidarity.

Cover Art

“The Waste Land” and “The Girl with the Pearl Earring” Bekim Leka

“The Waste Land” is an uplifting feature documentary emphasizing the creative and transformative power of art and the beauty of the human spirit. A bestselling contemporary artist, Vik Muniz, takes the audience on a journey from Jardim Gramacho, the world’s largest landfill in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro to the heights of international art stardom. Muniz interacts and collaborates with the “catadores,” who are pickers of waste materials and unique characters that live and work in the garbage society. The collaboration with the “catadores,” displayed Muniz’s genuine nature, and made them famous for as long as it lasted. Muniz’s show at MAM Rio de Janeiro was second only to Picasso in attendance records. It was here that Muniz first showed his “Pictures of Garbage Series” in Brazil.

Following his example, I tried to mimic Muniz’s work by using an artwork from Jan Vermeer entitled, “The Girl with the Pearl Earring.” I chose this painting because of the fact that it is easy to follow the lines and fill the spaces with different plumbing materials, and this painting caught my attention for its beauty. Among the materials used on this project are plumbing and electrical materials. It’s amazing how art can be anywhere and can be created with anything, as long as the talent, desire and hard work are the foundation. Muniz’s idea of using garbage for his work was beyond creativity and imagination.

ON THE JOB

Tenacity

Stephanie Lawal

I have been a union carpenter for nearly eight years; my first four were apprenticeship years. As a result, I was placed on various types of carpentry jobs. Each entailed a vastly different set of skills and tools. When you install drywall, your knife and screw gun are essential. In woodworking, everyone rolls around a box filled with precision woodworking tools. Some of these tools include planes, chisels, and various handsaws. If I were to hang doors, I would want to have an excellent “plumb bob.” For installing furniture, one would be foolish not to have a rubber mallet. I fell into the rough end of carpentry work, where most of these tools are never used. For any carpentry job, one needs a tape measure and a pencil. As a carpenter who works in the high-rise concrete field, a good framing hammer can help you immensely. I have been enriched by my experiences in the high-rise concrete building industry.

I remember my first couple of weeks working on high-rise buildings. In actuality, I was on the second floor – it was a high second floor. People don’t realize that no matter how high or low, every floor is wide open. From working on the edges and sometimes off the sides of the buildings, I soon learned to work carefully. As for my hammer, I was laughed at daily for its small smooth head, which was no match for the hundreds of nails that I hammered every day. For that matter, neither was my arm; it ached for weeks. My foreman liked my hard work and tenacity; I completed that building and went on to the next job and to many more with the same company.

For our phase of the work, my main job is to ensure temporary safety. I cover holes, build handrails to bar large openings, stabilize ladders, build handrails for ladders, and secure re-shores. Re-shores literally tear up the concrete; concrete hardens continuously over time. While this is happening throughout the entire floor, 4x4 legs are placed from floor to ceiling, and it is a possibility for them to come loose. In order to ensure that they do not fall off the building, they need to be secured to the ceiling. There are various methods to do this. Mainly, metal “banding wire” has to be attached to the leg, and then securely attached to the ceilings. This is done with a powder-actuated gun or a banding wire, which is nailed to a small piece of plywood or cleat. This is attached to the ceiling by drilling through the cleat and concrete with a hammer drill, and by hammering in an anchor.

Overtime is a regular occurrence when doing safety, as there are things that cannot be left for the next day. I often follow directly behind the “strippers,” who remove all the components after the concrete has set. Oftentimes, I am perceived as having an easy job; the guys don’t see all the components of my job. In my

experience, what seems simple is deceiving. The ways in which the handrail stands has to be positioned a certain way for strength, which is often overlooked. When I would miss a day and someone had to fill in for me, that person would often gain an appreciation for my job and would hope not to have to replace me again.

When I began working for a new company, the first thing the foreman asked was, "Have you ever done concrete before?" I responded that I had, to which he replied, "We'll see." Over the next couple of weeks, I proved myself. That first day, another carpenter started at the same time. My foreman asked for my hammer to show that carpenter. He wanted to show him what a "real hammer was," as opposed to his ancient hammer. On my second day, I started working promptly at seven o'clock; the foreman noted that I was the only one working. Over the last few months, he and my coworkers have noticed my desire and ability to work. Furthermore, I have built a sound reputation. Those who have worked with me in the past, look out for me, and tell my newer counterparts that I am a "good girl." They mean well; unfortunately in this business, I am still compared to other women as opposed to other carpenters. With that said, I am usually the last female left on the job. In that way I do feel special.

I enjoy the work that I do; I get to hammer nails into wood while problem solving. I've developed a skill, doing the work that most people don't want to do. This is not a problem for me. Big brothers surround me; men who look out for me, respect me, and defend my integrity. ○

Nature's Construction

Shantar A. Gibson

Artist Bio

Shantar Gibson is an artist who lives and works in New York City. She attended Pratt Institute sharpening her skills in mediums ranging from painting, silk-screen Printing, graphic design, photography and video. In this work, there is a consistent theme of industrial portraits that represent various subjects found within the construction landscape. Most of her subject matter is inspired by everyday objects and comment on how this returns/reflects the nature of a construction environment. Her career background as a Local 3 electrician and tradeswoman, combined with her background in art, creates the unique opportunity to make art that represents the often over looked and underrepresented voice in the trades from an insider's point of view. In these industrial inspired photos – *Nature's Construction* – we see an Abstract/Impressionist style capturing moments and interactions between her and the objects that she comes into contact with on a construction site.

Artist Statement

As an artist I aim to accept and find the beauty in everyday occurrences by letting things evolve naturally. Through this process I believe the practice of one's craft includes a multitude of mediums which can result in significant platforms for art. I understand that art can be a mediator for much of society's ills as well as successes.

I know that communication is one of the most valuable resources we can possess to express our selves. As an artist I know that an audience is never guaranteed. A voice is not always heard, and value is rarely ever appreciated. However I still believe that art has the ability to house and crate a venue for expression. The world as we know it is being built and rebuilt; it is my privilege to facilitate this vision.

Art has given me the chance to rise above ideals and manifest that which does not discriminate or choose sides of right or wrong. Instead the mission I have taken up is an artistic pursuit that projects on the observer to reflect and question that which is put in front of them. Let me say this, when art is used in its highest forms it has the ability to bring a subject to the surface making itself vulnerable to scrutiny. My art is willing to take the necessary beatings that most ideals cloud with bureaucracy and regurgitated opinions.

I have come to understand that when an opportunity to make art knock at your door you can never be too busy, too tired, too old, too sick, too young. It can never be the wrong time; you are never the wrong race, the wrong gender, or in my case, the wrong voice or the wrong expression. ○



Shantar Gibson



Shantar Gibson

Extraordinary Measures

Katheryn Vazquez

In the Educational Planning/Labor Studies course, we read a book called *The Mind at Work* by Mike Rose. This book is about his experiences following young individuals studying to be in the trades. Mike Rose saw that people working in the trades were perceived by professionals as mindless and lower class. Rose disagreed with this and wanted to further explore the mind at work. He found that tradesmen and women take pride in their work as if it were an extension of their selves; trade workers calculate tasks and use multiple skills that without practice would overwhelm the layman. As I reflect on the concepts Mike Rose used in his exploration of trade students, I think about my work for International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union # 3. Under the union, I am employed by Hal and Lloyd or H&L, and I am a first year electrical apprentice. The location of my job changes frequently and right now I am working at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

I am working on the roof of the building installing heat tracing. Basically, it's an orange wire that emits heat up to 150 degrees. I wrap it around all the pipes on the roof ensuring that water does not freeze and crack the pipes during the winter months. The more complicated part comes when I have to splice the wires together. First, I have to slice the first layer of insulation from the wire. I do these two inches away from the end; I have to be careful not to cut too deeply because there is a grounding mesh under the first layer. Once I peel back the orange, there is a braid of stranded steel. It's sliced so thin that the slightest nick from my blade will cut it off; I then have to unbraid this wire. There is not too much that goes into this task, but you should be mindful not to tangle it because that's just another way to break it off.

After that's done, I gather all the strands and twist them to one side of my tracing. I now have a white insulation to detach. The white insulation is cut one inch from the end leaving another one inch to stay as part of my working material. Under the white insulation is black insulation; the black rubber contains two conductors, which have one on each side. These are also stranded wires; I have to be careful not to cut these as well. I remove all the black rubber. The whole tracing wire is flat and about half an inch thick; I make a slice across the top and the same in the back. I run my blade on both sides to free the conductors. I finish by pushing the black rubber off, and my conductors are finally neatly separated. This is done three times per splice.

Once I have them all ready to be put together, I tape the conductors at the base of each tracing. The braids that I separated are twisted into one ground. I put a small copper tube around them and crimp them together. They are squeezed

together with about a ton of force or about all the might I have. The conductors go through the same procedure for each side. However they are much smaller and don't require much strength. The two conductors are covered with longer yellow crimps and are covered by another black cover that looks like the nipple from a baby bottle. I take a large rubber tube, and cover the whole splice two inches from the start of orange. I take my heat gun and shrink the tube covering my work forever, or until another electrician cuts it open. I tie, wrap it to the pipe, and find another one to start.

Mike Rose found that people go through extraordinary measures while performing tasks at work. It was exciting to do this at first because I have never heard of heat tracing before. This procedure was new to me, and I get to go to the Met every day. Today, I worked out in the rain. I worked under grates on my hands and knees. At the museum if I need to leave my station, I need an escort. There were times when I did this on a 14-foot ladder that was shaking. I can never get to a bathroom, but that's the same on every job. Going to lunch is a joke, the guys on the job just decided not to eat. All of these things are a struggle to get through, but all I keep thinking is I cannot wait until it snows. The view of the park is going to make for priceless pictures. ○

The Artistry of High Voltage Splicing

Cornelius Skeahan

Too much of an Electrician's work is never accessible to the public eye. Our craftsmanship resides behind the scenes providing a daily necessity civilization has come to expect yet which the public rarely gets to view for its artistic value. Exceptions to the rule exist in lighted signs on roadways, neon-lit storefronts, and ornamented sky-rise buildings which can exemplify aesthetic value. Lighting designs illuminating walkways and landscapes, as well as decorative holidays uses also can exhibit artistic flair.

However, what I am talking about is the art of getting electricity to the product; the requisite power and light society has come to rely upon. From the public's standpoint, there still exists an esoteric mystery of how (power) voltage and (current) amperage make it to its final destination due, in part, to a misconception of the electrician's work being purely functional. But our craft is comprehensive, featuring equipment that connects and disconnects the flow of electricity through transmission lines (cable) that carry voltages over vast distances incorporating substations with step-up and step-down transformers.

For this essay I would like to describe one aspect of the energy grid contributing in a large part to the performance of the electrician's craft work. This is the world of high voltage splicing which requires an artist's skill seldom exposed to the public eye. Some might argue that the work of tradesmen is craft, but I would like to argue here that it is in fact public art, however hidden, and that there is little distinction between craft and art when the thought process is directed toward making a product that evokes creativity as does the work of high voltage splicing.

The high voltage splicing crew travels in teams of no less than two. Some partnerships are transient and others remain together for years like a marriage where each becomes reliant on the other many times knowing each other's intentions before words are spoken. Obviously the scope of work to be performed, the time frame and the size of the job will determine the final size of the crew. What the public sees are the box truck near an open manhole with manhole guards, orange cones, and workers who don reflector vests; the public remains unsuspecting of the happenings in their neighborhood.

Picture yourself with a team of splicers pulling up to a manhole on a street in New York City. Here the crew will perform a high voltage splice on a specific cable called tape shield cable. The composition of TSC is a series of product layers from the conductor to the outer jacket beginning with a copper compacted strand to semiconductor, insulation (which is rubber and cross link polymer) followed by

a layer of semiconductor insulation, and concentrically wound copper take (flat), and finally covered by an outer jacket made of heavy duty plastic (HDP). Tape shield cable is most commonly found on the City's commercial projects. Another type of cable employed for high voltage transmission is flat strap cable or FSC, which is used mostly for utility and industrial work and its composition of layers from inner core (conductor) out are a copper compounded strand, semiconductor, insulation (rubber), semiconductor, tin/copper flat straight straps laid length wise parallel to cable, and finished with an outer jacket of HDP. The composition of these cables signifies the skill required for this type of work.

As the team begins their work they must practice a series of steps which are required for the process. Preparation is the key ingredient to a successful job and for the splicer and it begins with visual inspection, and graduates to concise communication. Air monitoring for toxic gases must be performed and assisted by an exhaust blower motor connected to an eight inch hose that continually draws air from the manhole preventing possible buildup of deadly gases; determining water infiltration and possible liquid interference may require the use of a water pump; street traffic must be observed to reduce the risk of pedestrian or vehicular accidents; and general safety and work protocols need to be allowed for. Additionally, the use of exact nomenclature unique to the splicer must be maintained which, over time, becomes a habitual sort of lingo. Good communication habits can mean split second decision-making, which, when working with high voltage electricity, can mean the difference between life and death in such a dangerous environment.

The environment of the high voltage splicer is case by case, as each location has its own characteristics, dangers, and, rarely, advantages. Generally speaking, the conditions are far from optimum. Working in the vault of the manhole can demand some acrobatic skills not listed on job description of the normal electrician. Sometimes the confines of the site compel the splicer to contort his or her physique into vulnerable positions, further complicating the work and the potential for an accident. Working from a manhole requires one man on the street – the “topman” – and one in the hole. On the street there is added pressure on the “topman” to monitor the air meter, observe traffic, and watch out for his or her partner in the hole.

High voltage electrical splicing work is unique to itself. If the general public were to look down into a manhole, they would see an elaborate labyrinth of cable outlining the perimeter walls of the vault. Cables entering and exiting the vault may seem haphazard in their layout, but there is sequence and experience engineered by the electrician resulting in the provision of safe and reliable power for the daily routine of modern civilization. The variety of voltages and currents has a direct impact on the type of material and equipment utilized to attain the finished product. And with that extensive knowledge is the shared skill required for functional and competent performance.

There is a misconception by some in the electrical industry that aesthetics are unimportant in the functionality of energy performance. But the truth is that a neat, well-designed product provides economical and safe energy provision. Safety must remain a paramount concern, and poor workmanship will result in poor energy provision. The danger that most electrical work is not viewable to the public may encourage the danger of poor craftsmanship thus leading to the dangers of malfunction however the electrician, regardless of his knowledge of the distinction between art and craftsmanship is involved in a complex and creative task when in the vault.

Once safely in the vault, the electrician begins the first task, called “wrapping the hole,” which means physically laying out the cable in its final position to give an estimate of the length of cable necessary for the splice. The cable enters the vault by a raceway constructed of PVC (polyvinyl chloride), FRE (fiberglass reinforced epoxy), galvanized pipe, or concrete ductwork. The existing cable in a manhole can be over 80 years old or brand new and often reflects the signature styles of previous electricians who have passed through the manhole.

The second task is to “shape and train” the cable, where the splicer works the cable to sit on rack arms, or cable-supporting shelves in the vault. Prior to performing the splice, the electrician must ensure there is no stress to the cable; if not resting perfectly on the rack arm, stress can cause the joint insulation to break down, resulting in voltage “arcing,” which raises the potential for an explosion in the street endangering the public.

The act of cutting the cable requires precision gained through years of practice. The electrician in the hole operates the cutting jaws of the electrically powered hydraulic pump cable cutter. Communication between the two must be precise, clear and uninterrupted. For example, once the hydraulic cutter begins its motion the potential for accidents increase. An article of clothing can become snagged, or the heavy cutting jaws can slip from the hands of the splicer. A clean cut is prideful and is required if the joint is to take and carry the voltage.

The cut requires the use of a grease pencil and stick ruler to measure and mark where and how far the layers of cable will be stripped back. A hook knife is used to score the outer jacket of HDP. The next layer of tin/copper flat straps are peeled back and taped flat in reserve until later. The splicer then removes the next layer, a thin film of semiconductor which is discarded, exposing the rubber insulation beneath which is another layer of semiconductor before the splicer’s knife blade cuts with a surgeon’s precision the conductor, a compacted strand of copper.

All of this work is choreography of electrical mechanical maneuvers; splicing has the added burden that the worker is always under the pressure of time. Full concentration is required for the cutting process, therefore the splicer must

maintain confidence in his topman who continues unwaveringly to monitor for potential disaster. As mentioned earlier, some teams of splicers are transient so a standard protocol and precise nomenclature must be adhered to in order to reduce the potential for error or injury.

Once the stripping back of the layers and the cleaning is complete, the work of performing the joint begins. Two heat shrink tubes and re-jacketing tubes are slid over each of the cables and pushed back for later. The connector tubes, or barrel connectors, are slid over each of the cables to be joined. The barrels physically secure the conductors to one another. The cutting head on the hydraulic cutter is swapped out for a crimping head which, through a series of crimps on the tubes to the compacted strand of copper, completes the copper connectivity. Inside the tubes, it is imperative that there is little to no physical space separating the two ends of the compacted strand copper. Space leads to possible arcing, a buildup of heat and the breakdown of the insulation or the splice, increasing the potential for a future explosion which would result in a loss of power to customers, even the potential for injury or death. During the crimping process, each time the man in the hole yells up “shot” he signals that the crimping head is in place and instructs the topman to depress the trigger on the hydraulic pump, thus crimping the barrel onto the conductor.

After the crimping procedure is complete, the splicer gives a visual inspection to each crimp, lightly running his bare hand over the crimped tubes searching for any small burrs or imperfections that can potentially compromise the insulating properties of the joint. Burrs are removed by a 4-way hand flat file but poorly crimped tubes require a do-over at the expense of time and material. Whatever the number of crimps required, each one is as crucial as the one before and the one after. It takes only one missed error to allow for almost certain catastrophe.

The insulation is then cleaned, removing conductor film and imperfections. The equipment used includes abrasive cloth and cleaning pads with solvent. Once again the cleaning is no simple task as each stage of the splice is as important as the last. For example, the administration of the rubber tape through practice becomes a skill that to the observer looks easy but has taken the splicer years of experience to perform properly and expeditiously. The rubber tape is unwound off its roll and applied to the crimped tube layer upon layer. It is passed over and under the cable with two hands over and around and under and around with a gyrating speed. The layers are built up by each level covering half the width of the last layer to the level of the manufactured insulation thickness, which is approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ inch.

The next step is to bring the first heat shrink tube to the center of the crimped barrel that earlier was slid over the cable and put aside. The topman adds to his responsibilities the preparation of the propane torch hose and nozzle which are

lowered by rope into the hole. The topman adjusts the proper mix of oxygen and gas in order to heat but not melt the shrink tube. If the tube is burned and destroyed the splice will need to be broken down and started over. Once the second heat tube has cooled, the last heat shrink, or re-jacketing, tube can be applied. This tube covers the joint all the way to the manufactured outer jacket with the flat straps still outside waiting for attention. The copper mesh tape is employed next and, like the rubber tape, is applied in the same over and around hand to hand fashion.

Following the heat shrink tube installation, it is time to work on the flat straps. These straps from one side of the joint to the other overlap the previous wrap by ½ inch on each side. The two sides are tack soldered to the copper mesh tape still leaving the tail so that there is connectivity between the two properties. Soldering must be neat and clean.

Next the final heat shrink tube is applied and the heat shrink process is performed. The flat straps are then trained to 90 degrees to the joint and at 180 degrees so they look like a hand fan to the joint, producing one solid piece that will be crimped inside a trade size 4/0 connector tube. This is the final step to the physical splice/joint and is repeated for each leg of the cable in the job prospectus.

As it is with most electrical work, the installation approaches the work of an artist, and working in a manhole such talent is never accessible to the public eye. Citizens do not see the inner workings and the conditions electrical tradesmen encounter when facilitating power to or from a municipality, continuing the city's smooth operation for present and future generations. Electricians must sometimes move acrobatically. In the trade you hear discussion about "puddle jobs," where workers have no choice but to crawl through pools of water to reach work areas. In too many cases dangerous or less than desirable conditions are unavoidable and become acceptable as part of the job due to outside competition. Such non-union competition may not adhere to general safety protocols, nor care about lowered standards faced by union tradesmen in an era of cost-cutting.

The aesthetic quality of the high voltage splicing is presented here as an act of the artist performing complex tasks that result in quality craftsmanship, but more than that, the signature left behind by each electrician who descends the ladder into the hole makes the completed tasks personal. This is the individual's artistry and serves as an example of the complexity of the work and the skill displayed in a job that has been performed expertly through years of patient practice.

The skill acquired to perform such competent and safe electrical work is best learned through an accredited union apprenticeship program, and as in the case of being qualified to conduct high voltage splicing, advanced skill training. Thanks to IBEW Local Union 3 of New York City and its training programs, I am an A Journeyman electrician who has received hundreds of hours of classroom and

practical education resulting in certifications and licenses making me and my fellow electricians the best money can buy. For this essay, I would like to thank my friend, union brother, and “A” Journeyman Eric “Eidetic” Spicer; without his technical input on splicing, this paper would not have been possible. ○

Wires

Ed Monaco



Ed Monaco



Ed Monaco

Job Site Safety

Christopher Pascal

The organization, OSHA, caters to all people in the work force; the rules and regulations are instilled and dedicated to the preservation of a safe, healthy and productive work environment. Workers of all trades and professions are expected to abide by their guidelines for the work place; however, not every employee and or employer always adheres to these regulations. Many times rules are followed, but many times rules are broken because companies like to cut corners in order to save money. However, in my experiences on the job, safety does outweigh the risky and unsafe conditions.

I am currently a part of the extension of New York City's #7 subway line; it is truly fascinating to see just how far our technology has brought us in terms of the construction field and the level of task performance. A quick example of evolution in technology is the crane, which is a massive vehicle and instrument used to lift and move various items of varied weights. The crane is an instrument that has simplified a major aspect of the construction industry. On the down side, new technologies can cause accidents to occur. The extension of the #7 subway line is a job that takes place underground; 130 feet below ground level. To reach the bottom or to get back up and out of the monumental hole that resides between 10th and 11th avenue on 34th street, one must brave the towering staircase that links the bottom and the top level. This ever-inviting hole is not only used as an access for the workers, but it is a shaft way for lowering and lifting construction related items out by a large mobile crane.

At least once a day, we endure the scaffolded staircase with a netting around it, which is exposed on two sides of the shaft way. This is a problem because while we are in motion, the worksite crane is moving extremely large loads of construction material. The only reason we do not have an Alimak (elevator used for construction) installed is because the general contractor doesn't want to pay to hire the operating engineer who is required to run it. No matter the safety hazards that this poses, it's a classic case of cutting corners just to save a buck! The operation that takes place with this crane seems to be under control; there have been no accidents, but any accident would be nothing sort of catastrophic. The stability of the operation is in the hands of men and women who maintain the crane itself, as well as the slings used with the crane, securing the loads that are lifted and lowered every day. All it takes is one wrong signal, a mechanical malfunction, or a sling/cable defect to be overlooked for something to go wrong.

When dealing with construction jobs, there is always the condition of the air quality that causes concern. The underground tunnel way, which is my home for 40+ hours out of my week, is no different. I must speak honestly and say that I truly don't know the quality of air on this job site, and there is a massive breeze that moves the air through the tunnels constantly to renew the air. However, I do know for a fact that with construction come hazardous particles that are released into the air. For example, one of the conduits being installed is non-metallic tubing made of millions of fibers hardened together; rarely are conduit raceways completely straight from end to end. Therefore, these pipe fibers must be cut and assembled to fit wherever it is they must go. As soon as one begins to cut, a certain odor taints the air briefly and millions of little fiber particles become airborne. However, I must commend the company I work for because they do offer free testing for the workers' respiratory systems. However, they do not offer this "luxury" to the apprentice, which marks how a company cuts corners wherever they can to save finances even if it is endangering the health of its workers.

Even with these two examples, and perhaps numerous more, the general contractor of this job is extremely strict with their safety protocol. There are safety personnel constantly walking on the job site, ensuring all that they can in terms of safety, so no one can sue their company. With the constant reminder of how things must be done, we are forced into extending the duration of our daily jobs, which in turn will cause more money to be spent. For that, I commend the contractor; I would imagine it is cheaper to have some downtime than it is to be sued for a safety violation. All in all, construction is construction and accidents do happen. My job is relatively safe in all terms of safety and just as I acknowledge the unsafe conditions, I also acknowledge the safe ones. ○

IDENTITY

Untitled Drawing 2011

Anthony Faiello

I am an artist. I was an artist? No, I am an artist. I am a plumber and I am an artist. It is sometimes difficult to be both, but I try. When you can draw and it comes easy to you like a second language, or one could even say it's your first language then doesn't that make you an artist? At one point, I saw drawing as an essay that explained things far better than words ever could, but then I had to grow up. I needed money; I needed to work, which is when I became a plumber and I simultaneously couldn't be an artist. I was an artist less and less until I was more of a plumber than an artist; my prowess with a pencil became a memory. People say, I've become cold even soulless, only an afterimage of my former self, yet it was necessary to grow up, and in the end, you need to do things that you don't want to because that is the nature of the world.

So I am a plumber. I was an artist. However, every once in a while, I revamp myself as an artist – even if only for a little while. ○



Anthony Faiello

I Ran to It and Never Looked Back

John Farrell

When people asked me what I did for a living, I would cringe. Now, I am proud to say I am a Local 3 electrician with pride in my occupation. When I was twenty-three, I got married and gained an amazing stepson. Soon after getting married, I had another little boy. At the same time, I was working at Applebee's when two kids from my neighborhood came in to eat. They told me about their new jobs in computer programming. A few years later during one of my shifts, they came in again. They said laughingly, "You're still working here, man?" I felt belittled and embarrassed. I saw people who supported their families on a waiter's salary at Applebee's, but they were definitely struggling. They were barely making ends meet; I hoped and prayed that wouldn't be me for long. I was determined to not let my family go through that, but I needed to get an education and a job.

Between working with needy customers and for stressful managers, I was emotionally drained. I did not want to wake up and go to work in the morning; it was a horrible feeling. The only good thing that came out of that place was meeting my wife. I never thought about becoming an electrician; the opportunity sort of just fell into my lap. My wife's uncle was telling me about Local 3 for a while. When the time came to take the test, I finally went for it. I filled out the application, took the exam, went for an interview, and passed the health exam. However, this process took a long and grueling four years! However, I was just so happy to finally have an opportunity to get out of Applebee's. Beginning a job as an electrician made me a hundred times happier. I ran to it and never looked back!

The opportunity to learn a trade was something I always hoped for. I learn something different every day; I'm always doing something new. I am learning a trade that I can use to support my family; I am even learning how to be handy at my own house. I'm excited to be able to help out with small projects such as: installing ceiling fans, light fixtures, or outlet receptacles. In addition, I am learning other trades just by working near others and asking questions. No matter what my life entails, I will have something to fall back on. The skills I am learning, and will continue to learn, provide security for my family and me. My family is very important to me; my main concern is keeping them happy, which goes without saying. Yet, my third child was just born, and knowing my little girl has financial security is incredible! I actually love waking up in the morning to go to work as an electrician now. There are long days, which mean I don't see my family as much as I would like to, but the time I'm putting in now will be worth it. As the years go by, I will make more money, and I won't have to work as many hours.

Another reason I wanted to get to Local 3 is because of the education I am receiving. When I began my electrician apprenticeship, I only had a high school diploma. By staying in this program, I will receive a college degree. Knowing that I will have this degree under my belt provides a sense of security for me. As I become older and gain more experience, my education gives me so many more options and opportunities. Eventually, there might even be opportunities to move up in the company! Whether its foreman, shop steward, business agent, or one-day president of the local, I am exactly where I am supposed to be because of a little bit of luck, my determination to learn a trade and be successful, and a desire to advance my education. Each day when I wake up and see my family sleeping, they renew my motivation to go out there and do the best at what I do and work my hardest. ○

Find a Job You Love

Jeffrey Primus

I used to think that I would work in a field that involved computers. I've always been computer literate. When it was time to choose a high school, I went on several tours and almost chose a school with a focus on computer science until I visited my last school, Transit Tech High School. When I visited there, I was immediately intrigued. The classrooms were set up with machines, system boards, and an actual train car. My mom and I spoke to several instructors at the school. When the tour was completed I turned to my mom and said, "This is it, this is the career path I choose. I want to study Electrical Engineering and become a successful electrician."

I was eager to start working towards becoming an electrician. I studied as an Electrical Installation major for four years at Transit Tech. I learned the basics of the field and how it works. I learned how to use different computer drafting programs that are used in the field such as AutoCAD and Multisysms. We were also taught the science and theory side of engineering. The best part about this program was that we got hands on training in basic residential wiring. We were required on a weekly basis to complete projects and as we moved, the projects got more complicated. We also were required to take a regents exam in our major field and an exit project in order to graduate. As a result when I graduated, I was certified as an Electrical Computer Technician.

I first learned about the Local #3 apprenticeship at school. One of my shop teachers explained to me how the program would allow me to get on the job training while being paid. Once the apprenticeship was over, I would be an Electrician. While at Transit Tech, I was fortunate enough to take tests and go on interviews for many different companies such as MTA, Metro –North Rail Road, and LIRR. When the opportunity for the Local #3 apprenticeship came, I was excited about the opportunity.

I first applied for the Local #3 union when I graduated high school. I was required to take a test, write an essay and get letters of recommendation—all just to qualify for an interview. Once there, I was interviewed by at least five people who were currently members of the Local #3 union and working in the field. They asked many questions, but their main focus was why I wanted to become a member of the union.

One reason I joined the union is it is a leading and successful system operating in my field. The apprenticeship program offered through the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers is a great opportunity to get to where I want to be. While simultaneously achieving my academic goals of obtaining my

degree, this program provides me with the opportunity to attend school, receive my degree on a full ride scholarship, work in the field and gain experience as an electrician. Although I may not start out getting top dollar, this is a very promising field that will always be around and it will benefit me in the long run. After I complete the program, I will be qualified to work as an electrician with any company in the world and I will have a degree if I should decide to do anything else. I joined the union because of my family.

I was introduced to the electrical field by my grandfather. Although he isn't a part of the union, he worked as a splicer for Con Edison. I watched my grandfather do handy work around the house a lot growing up and was always interested in it. He used to tell me about his workday, what he did when he got home and let me play with his tools. Sometimes he even took me to some of his work sites when he had time. Ultimately, I decided that this is what I wanted to do. I believe that hearing those stories and actually seeing my grandfather work as an electrician inspired me the most. I have two family members who are in the union and other relatives who are electricians that explained to me what a union is and the benefits and opportunities being in a union could have.

A union is an organized group of workers who join forces to make decisions on different issues that affect their working conditions such as wages, benefits, safety, working hours, and any other issue or condition that may come up. The point of a union is that you have a strong based support system. This will help ensure that we are fully compensated for everything that we do.

Currently, I am employed with Target Corporation. I have been working there for the past three years. I have done almost everything that I can do in that store. I began working as a sales floor team member and I later became a cashier. I worked with the stores remodel team to help build our grocery section called PFresh. I now work overnight as a bakery specialist in the grocery. Although I have achieved and gained a lot from working at Target, it is not my career choice. I would not be able to make a comfortable living off of it, but more importantly I am not happy working there. It was never in my plan, so at times working there can be upsetting because I feel like I am not living up to my full potential and meeting the standards that I set for myself.

Although I am still young, I don't believe that should be used as an excuse not to strive for excellence and want more in life. Someone once said, "Find a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life." That is how I feel when it comes to my current career choice compared to the goals and aspirations I have for myself. This is why I joined the apprenticeship program for the Local #3 union to achieve my life goal of becoming a successful electrician, to see all my hard work pay off and to be able to say that I love what I do. ○

LABOR IN SOCIETY

The High Line: From Animal Products to Cultural Products

William Cawley

What we experience today as the High Line Park was once a thoughtfully planned, highly efficient economic thoroughfare called the West Side Line. The elevated railway's unique design routed it through the middle of the block instead of over the avenues, allowing it to make stops inside of warehouses and factories for convenient loading and unloading with no disruption to traffic flow on the street. For years it would serve as an economic boon to the Meatpacking District where direct access to uptown markets drove the creation of tens of thousands of jobs. The High Line, before its decommissioning in 1980, was the transportation that fueled production in west side Manhattan.

Today, the High Line continues to support a bustling local economy with a new form of production: the production of the cityscape as a cultural artifact. Apart from other popular vantage points of what we consider quintessential New York City (the Brooklyn waterfront view with the Brooklyn Bridge towering over the East River, absorbing all the glory of the entire right half of the image or the cliché helicopter view of midtown skyscrapers that starts off any movie involving New York office workers), the High Line abandons images of imposing façades in favor of a back door peek on New York City living in a historic neighborhood. The park does not attempt to hide its historic roots as a distribution engine of animal products, but rather embraces and envelopes its former self, allowing it to become observed and appreciated as a cultural and historical artifact. The residents of the living spaces that form the scenery of the parks are encouraged to participate by adding their daily rituals to a dynamic museum-like exhibit on display to tourists and New Yorkers alike. Observable living activity is as diverse as the behaviors of New Yorkers come and as residents throw their curtains open on warm spring days, they knowingly open their world to gazing eyes from the outside in increasing proportion to the kinkiness of their building's design.

As Facebook photo albums overflow with images of architecture de la mode on the High Line, the celebrity of the location and hence, the price also grows. Real estate speculation has driven up property values and caused a wave of development that is revitalizing the exhibitionist neighborhood whose small businesses benefit from a larger customer base drawn to the voyeuristic park. This is symbolic of New York City's contemporary economy which heavily depends on the FIRE sectors (finance, insurance, real estate). In this respect, by attracting renewed interest and investment into the neighborhood, the Highline has restructured its relation to the city and its economy and has reemerged as the

neighborhood's lifeline. Now, instead of opting for the typical, commercialized views of the Manhattan skyline from crowded, expensive observation decks or private helicopter tours, citizens and tourists can enjoy the many individual narratives that compose the cityscape of the park. Just as construction workers discuss among one another whether buildings were "union" or "non-union," tourists marvel at the trendy architecture of the new condominiums, teenage boys walk around looking for seminude "sights" and longtime residents contemplate the amount of change that they have witnessed. Every visitor to the High Line is invited to consider how to interact with the cityscape and how to identify themselves with respect to the city. ○

The High Line

Brandon Kai Chung

My first impression of the High Line was not very favorable. I entered the park at 20th street and 10th Avenue and walked uptown toward the end of the park near the Javits Center. The majority of the sights around the area included new luxury apartments and old industrial buildings, seemingly from the days when that part of the city was known for production. After a long day of work, seeing buildings reminded me of work. From 14th Street to 20th Street, I was impressed with the views that the first portion of the High Line offered. The time during which we visited afforded us some really awesome views of the sunset across the river and into New Jersey. The various colored lights along the park and the lights of the surrounding buildings added to these views.

The transformation of the High Line into a public park has provided a detour for New Yorkers to distance themselves from the hustle and bustle of city life. The fact that you walk above ground level makes it seem that you are rising above the rat race of the city and are allowed to hit the pause button on your life. Despite this elevation above the rest of Chelsea, you still manage to feel a part of the city. I feel that the first portion of the High Line is idealistic, but it's an inaccurate depiction of city life since many of the buildings are so high end. The area cuts through a working class production to an upper class art section of the city; many of the residential structures reflect the sophisticated nature of the tenants they hope to attract. I clearly remember one apartment building with a wavy exterior and several small windows that looked rather sophisticated. A majority of the apartments around the area were visible to people passing on the High Line since many of the exteriors are comprised of heavy duty glass. This gives the area a "look-but-don't-touch" feel: people can see what is available to them, similar to window shopping. I am willing to bet that most of the people who visit the High Line are not of the economic status as those who inhabit these dwellings. I am also willing to bet that even though most of the people from our course expressed indifference or even disdain for the excess of the area if given the opportunity, many would not think twice about living there. ○

Artist's Statement

Jeannie R. Lockwood

Tying into my public art project and recycling initiative is the creative project that will be a work in progress for me. I have chosen to show the beauty of the materials used in the electrician's trade, however, my illustration is not the usual representation of our work or materials. Rather I look at the actual physical materials in which I am so interested for the purposes of recycling and shape them into items of more traditional beauty. While there is certainly detailed, intricate labor involved in creating these items, it is a very different type of labor than what we do in the electrical industry from day to day. Functional and beautiful, useful and wearable, these pieces can be worn by anyone and admired by everyone.

Copper is a very special material. Highly conductive (hence its use as a conductor for electrical wires), it is obtained through a process of mining, smelting, and electrolytic refining. "Copper is one of the oldest metals ever used and has been one of the important materials in the development of civilization. Because of its properties, singularly or in combination, of high ductility, malleability, and thermal and electrical conductivity, and its resistance to corrosion, copper has become a major industrial metal, ranking third after iron and aluminum in terms of quantities consumed. Electrical uses of copper, including power transmission and generation, building wiring, telecommunication, and electrical and electronic products, account for about three quarters of total copper use Copper byproducts from manufacturing and obsolete copper products are readily recycled and contribute significantly to copper supply" (USGS Materials Information from <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/copper/>).

Copper, like aluminum, is 100 percent recyclable without any loss of quality whether in a raw state or contained in a manufactured product. In volume, copper is the third most recycled metal after iron and aluminum. It is estimated that 80 percent of the copper ever mined is still in use today (Wikipedia page on Copper). Copper is one of the ingredients in rose gold, a pinkish gold that was very popular in jewelry during the late 1800s and is coming back into popularity now. Brass and bronze are alloys of copper and are also very important in various industries. Apparently the reason that policemen in the USA are nicknamed "cops" or "coppers" is to do with their uniforms which used to have copper buttons. Atomic number 29 in the periodic table of the elements, copper oxidizes to a beautiful greenish-blue patina or verdigris when exposed to rainwater or air over long periods of time. It can be found in the body in tissues, liver, muscles, and bones. Two things I find fascinating about copper are that bacteria will not grow on a copper surface because it is biostatic, and folklore states that copper bracelets relieve arthritis symptoms. What an amazing material!

Dazzled by all the uses and properties of this incredible metal, I chose to make a creative art project with copper scraps harvested responsibly from my jobsite. I used scraps that would have otherwise been garbage. I made necklaces, bracelets, earrings, rings, and charms. I also made friends with some plumber's apprentices and got some items from them which I used to make some fun things. I'm also fortunate enough to be in class with a carpenter's apprentice who made me a wonderful frame to display my creations in. I would say this effort has been highly collaborative and depended on the cooperation of trades.

For these pieces, I have drawn inspiration from the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements of the late 1800s and early 1900s. I recently worked in the Chrysler building, an astounding example of Art Deco construction and art, and began to think about that structure and its internal artwork as if it could be wearable. In addition, I was influenced by Persian designs from inlaid metal and have always been inclined toward Celtic designs from the medieval period. ○



Jeannie R. Lockwood

Living Poets Society

Frank Bergen

“Poetry is the mother fucking movement.” Mahogany Brown, The Nuyorican Poets’ Café Host.

I have never been a poetry fanatic; I never truly took any interest in poetry at all. The classics or well-known poets that I was required to read throughout high school never seemed to stir the sort of emotions that my teachers expected. This lack of emotional awakening can be attributed to my age and maturity. Many of the first poets I read died several decades if not centuries before I was born; this made it difficult for me to relate to the subject matter of Robert Frost and Edgar Allan Poe. The mending of a fence line or a man being tormented by a raven held no interest to a 17-year-old jock whose top priorities were trying to get drunk, laid or hopefully both. My dated and preconceived notions of poetry consist of: coffee shops, black turtlenecks and berets, and snapping fingers. For these reasons my first foray with poetry left me dissatisfied, but perhaps seeing a live performance by modern day poets might be the catalyst for change.

There was a cold wind blowing through Manhattan’s Lower East Side, and the address I was looking for was further from the subway than I cared to walk. However, I wasn’t going to allow a little wind and laziness distract me from arriving at The Nuyorican Poets’ Café with an open mind and do my best to leave all of my expectations at the door. I wanted to get the most that I could from this experience; I am well aware of how important a role one’s attitude can play when trying something for the first time.

From the instant that I walked through the door, I knew that letting go of my beatnik stereotypes was the right thing to do. The venue was dark and confined, or perhaps not confined but certainly congested. I was only a few feet from the door and a few dozen feet from the stage, but there seemed to be a couple of hundred people crammed into this modest space. Although the volume of spectators took me aback, I was more surprised that I could only see one face, which was the face of the host, Mahogany Brown. All eyes were on this lovely black woman’s friendly face, and her kind eyes warmed the crowd. In such a large audience, no one got up to go to the bathroom or had a single side conversation with their friends – even the bartender was intently watching the stage. I have never seen such a strong focus of attention; she laughed, had a good time, and spoke from the heart. Everyone in attendance recognized and respected her.

Lemon Anderson was the first poet to take the stage that Friday night. Anderson is a skinny light skinned half Puerto Rican and half Norwegian soul; his attire consisted of a pair of skinny jeans, a yellow tee shirt, a tight red leather jacket

and of course a fedora. I suppose all hipster stereotypes couldn't be erased in one night. Even though Lemon's wardrobe may have been predictable; his natural presence on stage, candor, and humor all took me by surprise. The poet began his performance by listing his previous accomplishments; he is a Tony award winning artist who has worked with Spike Lee and Russell Simmons. In a rather arrogant manner, he suggested that Spike Lee should have been happy to work with him, which irritated me. Next, he informed the crowd that he would be reciting from his own book of poems "County of Kings," which would be available for purchase by the bar after the performance. When he started to recite, Anderson flipped the switch from hype man to talent.

It became clear that his arrogance was earned; he is a great performer. The greatest actor in the world is only as good as his material. Anderson opened with his poem, "Himalaya," a reflection of his childhood summers spent with his mother, Millie, at Coney Island riding the infamous roller coaster. Anderson describes his mother with such honesty and love that its validity is hard to doubt: "My mother Millie is only five feet full of tough tenderness. A rare proud Puerto Rican by way of campo called Cayey. Rigorous, rebellious, reckless one; born second out of seven children. Chosen to sip the chilled chalice of the 1970s tough love supreme, but behind her bold boiling points, she loves me so unconditional." The second aspect of "Himalaya," Coney Island, was coupled with his strong sense of family. As with many great poets, where the author grew up has a great influence on their work; Anderson is no exception.

His words describe Coney Island of the 1970s in a clear and vivid manner that allows the reader or audience member to create a complete mental picture. Anderson said, "That's the only thing I like about Coney Island in the summer anyway, is the Himalaya. Cause the beach is a mess hall of drunk lifeguards getting robbed under the boardwalk, the sand is like walking barefooted on hot coal. Plus, you have broken glass everywhere." His description of the "flashy crowds" and "Layaway jewelry on prison tattooed arms" gives the perfect visual description of the people from that era.

When Lemon Anderson thanked the audience and left the stage, it took me a few moments to realize what emotion he left me with. The courage to take center stage and read your own story in your own words is a completely inspiring act. I admired Anderson for his honesty. I admired him for his courage. The ability to convey such personal experiences through words that so fittingly describe his true feelings without fear of embarrassment or ridicule is a trait that I do truly hope to display someday. The show that was put on at the Poets' Café, the atmosphere, and patrons of the café itself have forever changed the way I look at poetic culture. I think I will return to "Mending Wall" and "The Raven," and while reading them with my new outlook, perhaps I will find the emotional awakening that was dormant in my youth. ○

Do We Need Health Care Reform?

Terence Sullivan

While Clinton's Health Security Act failed to ever come to any sort of legislation, Obama did try and keep his word and for almost two years fought against the Senate to finally pass a bill of public healthcare that helped protect over 30 million uninsured Americans. However, there are still holes in the system and losing my health insurance caused me to join Local 3. A single payer idea tends to take a set percentage of a worker's wage to help pay for health care across the nation; this is a format that Canada has become known for. It's upsetting that so many people decided to fight the idea of universal health care when they truly did not have a complete understanding of what was actually being set in legislation. As a result of the pressure that voters put on their Senate leaders, the final signing of the bill lost some of its original purpose; the total estimated cost dropped \$200 billion. The passing of the bill was great news to many Americans, but what should really be pointed out is that the Senate, and not the president, is the one reworking Obama's promise. Just like any president of the United States of America, they can't make laws; they only strongly persuade and urge those who are able. Even though it was not exactly what he originally fought for, Obama was likely forced to sign this legislation for political reasons. Until 2010, the United States of America was one of the only westernized countries that did not offer health insurance for its current residents. As a citizen, it's embarrassing to look at the rest of the world and realize that our general health is not a main priority of the taxes we're required to pay.

Looking back, I am thankful to have had health insurance growing up, which was due to my father working as a Local 3 electrician. These benefits are very similar to the ones I receive now while being an apprentice in the industry. During my childhood and teenage years, I did have my fair share of injuries and complications, but I never had an understanding of the actual cost of treatments. I grew up playing ice hockey; I had my collection of hospital visits. I received 3 MRI's, which I later found out the actual cost was \$2000 a pop, but that was ten to 15 years ago; the cost is triple that price today. I had multiple visits to the emergency room to receive stitches, the yearly physical from my regular doctor, and the trips to the pharmacy to pick up prescriptions for the entire family. After I lost my own health insurance, I heard the word "co-pay" for the first time. That same word would appear at the pharmacy, and again at the doctor's office. However, there weren't any other bills that I had to pay out of pocket, which was thanks to the healthcare I was able to receive. The benefits I obtained were given to me until the age of 18, or until I was no longer a college student.

My experiences with SUNY Stony Brook didn't last as long as they should have, and I eventually dropped out after two years at the university. For the first time in my entire life, I was without health insurance and without a job. I was living with no health care, no weekly paycheck, and was back at my parents' house. I didn't even think to start paying for my own insurance costs; my first priority was to start working as soon as possible. While job-hunting, I had a fair amount of free time available, but I was careful about the decisions I made. For example, I declined a sledding invitation from a few of my friends. I later found out my uninsured friend ended up injuring himself in a wipeout; he informed me that the little sledding accident had cost him over \$4000.

At this point in my life, I decided it was in my best interest to purchase my own personal health insurance, but I discovered that I was unable to afford the \$400+ premium that was required monthly. I started working a full time job that had a good pay rate, but I was still uninsured. Previously, my father had offered to get me a job in Local 3, and at the age of 24 with this newfound understanding, I accepted. As a young single male I realized how important it is to have an active healthcare system in my life. Medicaid declines family households from obtaining healthcare because they make "too much" money, yet their gross income cannot afford the bare necessities. Healthcare reform was and has been needed for everyone; one should not have to live in fear of getting ill or getting into an accident. ○

Americans and Freedom

Ernie Fusco

Throughout history, a skew between perception and reality has been used to paint the portrait of the rich white man using any means necessary in order to get ahead. From the moment Columbus set foot in the new world, Europeans were thinking of ways to dominate the landscape and the indigenous people while maintaining the perception that this new world was one of freedom and opportunity. Dark perceptions of reality can blind people to the actual atrocities that are taking place and continue for long periods of time. Three specific aspects truly exemplify this point: Columbus's abuse of the Indians, the rapid growth of African slavery, and the growth of early America.

Columbus was a man who spoke of many grand ideas regarding his desire to tame the savage natives and show them the glory of God, but in reality he only abused and denigrated them into slavery and death. He repeatedly wrote in his journals of assimilating the natives into the European way of life by teaching them the ways of God and civilized man, but these ideas quickly gave way to those of murder and servitude. Columbus quickly changed his tune and actually sent back a message to the Majesties of Spain stating, "he would bring back from his next voyage 'as much gold as they need ... and as many slaves as they ask'" (from "A People's History of the U.S.," U.S. History Course Packet). This was the beginning of a dark period that would lead to the slaughter of thousands of people. Even though slavery was not prevalent in Europe at the time, he needed to satisfy the debt that he owed to the investors that helped fund his expedition. Columbus believed they were, "so naïve and so free with their possessions that no one who has not witnessed them would believe it" (from "A People's History of the U.S.," U.S. History Course Packet). According to their dark perception, the natives were blessed for learning about civilized culture; those in the new world were still able to paint it as a place of freedom and opportunity. This made it very easy for him to continue on with his necessary actions, especially since the lure of gold was able to blind people. After the slaughter and enslavement of the Native Americans, came the beginning of another dark period that would continue in this country for hundreds of years: African slavery.

In reality, human beings were being bought and sold as commodities; the perception shifted to seeing Africans as property and not people. In society, validation is a common thread used everyday; if people are able to validate their actions with some sort of reasoning, people are able to overlook even the worst crimes against humanity. In 1640, a law was passed that excluded blacks from possessing arms; in 1705, an excessive law was conceded that made dismemberment of unruly slaves legal (from "Slavery and the Law in Virginia,"

U.S. History Course Packet). By legally making slaves property, no one needed to feel any kind of remorse for any wrongdoings that were done to them. This type of validation allowed many people to ignore the horrible events and continue to believe that North America was a place of unlimited opportunity and freedom.

Even with a society that was heavily affected by its class system, early American leaders were able to paint a picture of a place where even the common man could come and have a chance to prosper. The structure of the colonies made it fairly believable “with its wide distribution of property, weak aristocratic power, and an established church far less powerful than in Britain, colonial America was a society with deep democratic potential” (from *The Story of America* by Eric Foner; Norton, NY, 1998. p. 12). While the potential was there, the reality was that everyone could not find happiness in America. If you weren’t a white Protestant male, you couldn’t buy land no matter the distance between the monarch and yourself. If it weren’t for People like Thomas Jefferson, the old would have stayed dark. However, he believed this nation had the potential for a bright future and he and others created a new perception. He changed the original version of the Declaration of Independence from “property” to “the pursuit of happiness.” Subtle changes like this were the way that our early leaders were able to maintain a division between the perception and reality of the situation at this time. Foner also points out a very ironic point in his book when he says, “Apart from ‘liberty’, the word most frequently invoked in the legal and political literature of the 18th century was its opposite, ‘slavery’” (Foner 29), thus illustrating the fact that our forefathers were just as morally backwards as they were righteous in many regards. These men were able to maintain their grasp on the power in this nation by creating a belief in the liberties that this new country provided each and every one of its inhabitants.

Political leaders are very often able to create one perception in order to hide the reality from the eyes of the public. This was definitely the case throughout the growth of this continent and nation. The ideas that our country is supposedly based on are pleasing to the ears but unfortunately were not truly put into practice for all citizens for hundreds of years. The use of perception as opposed to reality is a tactic that has been used since the first political systems were created, and they most definitely will be used well into the foreseeable future for better or worse. ○

WORKING HARD

Weightless Tools

William Gill

If I was a busboy at a restaurant, it was a moist and dry cloth. If it was as a valet parking job, it was a pen in the ear and a pad full of tickets. As a deckhand on a pier, it was a ring full of keys and a two-way radio. As a construction worker, it was every tool under the sun. If it's to entertain a party, it's the right equipment and music. I have held many different jobs in my life and at any occupation there are tools to carry and to use to perform the tasks at hand. The things you carry are the things you need for a job. Without them you cannot do your job. This is a very basic fact. What I have realized as I got older and bounced from job to job is that the physical things are not the only tools a person at their position should and can carry. There are a handful of non-tangible things that a good thorough worker should carry every day to and from work.

I have been working in construction since junior year in high school. I remember like it was yesterday, my father taking me to home depot to buy my first set of tools. We went around and bought the basics – hammer, tape measurer, tool belt, etc. I remember him telling me, “You always need the right tool for the job.” At the time, I recall thinking about the weight and physicality of the job. Depending on the job, there can be heavy items or light, but nonetheless as a worker you carry them. If it was framing houses, it was hammer, nails, saws and levels. If it was lying concrete, it was wheel barrels, shovels, floats, and panels. To perform any task on a job site, you need the right tool. Because I was the youngest guy on the crew, thankfully figuring out and knowing what the right tool wasn't part of my occupation. In time, I learned a lot about construction and tools. It wasn't so much as just being physically inclined to perform, but it is more important to be mentally inclined to complete a task and to complete it to best as it can be done. It isn't simple math and ABC's. It requires constant thinking. Being one step ahead with a partner. Being able to trouble shoot a problem and using thought and then the right tools to solve that problem. One thing for sure – I believe a good worker carries is his or her “smarts.” In my opinion, that is the ability to think on the go.

I remember my father asking me if I learned anything the first couple of days and my response would be, “No just worked and worked hard.” His reply would be, “Good, you always work hard.” He explained that a good worker is one who has a good “Work Ethic.” In his own description it was someone who comes to work ready to work. Though it sounds kind of basic and simple, it made sense when he broke it down. He explained how in life you have bad days or days when you don't feel like doing much or putting in a lot of effort. Still when it comes to work you have to “leave all of it at the door.” When it comes time to picking up the tools, you put the bullshit down and do your job.

I recall as well, some of the toughest days of physical labor I have ever worked through in my entire life. For example, pouring concrete foundation in the dead of February, ten degrees below in the mud. Humping dozens of eight foot foundation panels and barely being able to feel my hands and toes. My good friend, Chris, who was my age and was also working with this contractor, complained and questioned why we were doing this hard physical labor. My foreman at the time simply replied, "It builds character; the cold is all mental." He then removed his jacket and shirt and started humping panels himself in the freezing cold. At the time I recall thinking to myself that it was just a boost of morale or motivation for us to keep working. Later in my life as I matured, I realized that at any task or job I am given, it cannot be as bad as that day or any of those hard days. Because I have lived it and done it. So my character is always positive and optimistic toward any task that seems hard or impossible. What needs to get done will be done and saying that you can't, means you won't.

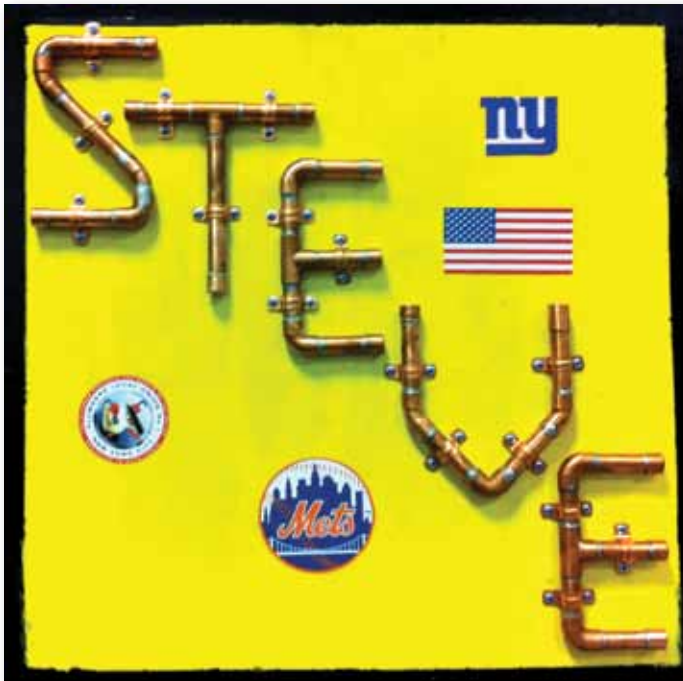
I think another important thing that is carried by anyone at a job is responsibility. I do not think it is carried by choice, rather set on a worker's shoulders and carried throughout the day. As I became smarter, more knowledgeable, showed smarts and work ethic, I was given more responsibilities from more foreman and senior mechanics. It was no longer just receive orders and move something or install something. It was asking my opinion or giving me a task as a whole and having the responsibility to complete it and complete it correctly. With carrying responsibility came carrying consequences. If the workplace was a place where someone could just do a half-ass job and be approved for it, then there would be no need for knowledge and smarts. But a good worker, I believe, carries pride. There is pride in doing a job as best as you can and meeting standards for the task. To put forth the extra effort to not only satisfy the boss or client, but also to satisfy yourself in the completion of a task. ○

STEVE

Steven Scott

While making my name out of copper pipe for my project, I was able to relate it to the graffiti I saw at Five Pointz in Long Island City, Queens, New York. The kids are a part of the collective of Five Pointz by decorating the wall with their feelings, and how they want to be represented. These works look marvelous, which include: amazingly descriptive pictures, perfectly constructed letters, and an assortment of vibrant colors. These works of graffiti are made with the intention of representing each individual, which displays the true meaning of art.

When making this project, I repeated the phrase, “You are only as good as the work you do;” I took this, ran with it, and tried to make the best possible artwork. I made the copper pipe all the same size because I felt it should be uniform; I placed it onto a piece of wood and strapped them down. Originally, I was going to paint it a metallic silver color, but a personal event took place, which made me change my mind. I decided to paint it the favorite color of someone very close to me; this change made me realize why people make art the way they do. Certain things are put into artwork to show off an individual’s insides; I am proud of this work that is representing me. ○



Steven Scott

Hard Work is Life

Jeanette Martinez

Working hard can mean a range of different things. To me being a responsible adult is hard work. It's waking up every morning ready to go sweat and earn a dollar. Hard work means sacrifice. It's dealing with things you would rather not deal with. It's trying to find your purpose in life and then pushing through all obstacles in order to achieve it. Hard work is facing your fears of rejection and failure. It's being vulnerable. Hard work requires just as much mental strength as it does physical.

Working at my last job was hard work. I went to work every day knowing that I hated that place and the work I did there. I didn't want to deal with the management there at all. Every night I unloaded an average of 45 racks of clothing and 100 totes and boxes of accessories. Then I loaded the empty racks and boxes from the morning's delivery. I unloaded and loaded this truck every night, rain, thunder or snow. By the time I got off at midnight, I was sweating, tired and beat. But the hardest part of working there wasn't the physical work. Hard work was mustering the strength I needed to get myself to go back there every day even though I knew there was no chance of professional growth for me there. Hard work was having the mental strength to remain passive as I watched lazy kiss asses get promoted, while I got skipped for one promotion after another. Hard work was being responsible enough to accept that I had bills and that, whether I liked it or not, this job was paying them. Hard work was accepting that my decision to drop out of college had me where I was at, and it was no one's fault but my own.

Deciding to try to get into Local 3 wasn't a hard decision for me. As soon as the idea of being an electrician first entered by head, I knew without a doubt that I had found my calling. Preparing for the test by going to classes four days a week and doing homework, while still maintaining a full time job and fulfilling my responsibilities on the home front, that was hard. Even harder still, was knowing that my hard work might not pay off. The union might have rejected me. When I took the test, I honestly thought I had failed. I went home and cried, but I had to believe that it would be alright in the end. I wanted this. And whether it was now or on the next test, I was going to get into this union. Hard work was waiting for that response letter in the mail. Hard work was keeping the faith alive.

As an adult we're forced to be responsible even when we don't want to be, when it would be more fun not to be. We have to make decisions we would rather not deal with. I have a friend. She's been with her husband for eight years. She knows he's not the love of her life, but she figured that out one visit to City Hall and two

kids too late. She knows he's not the man that's going to make her utterly happy. But she does know that he is the father of her two children. She knows she's an adult, responsible for the lives of two innocent little children. She wants her kids to have a father, a family. So she put her needs and wants on the back burner. Making the decision to sacrifice your happiness and needs for the good of your children, that's hard work.

We all come from different backgrounds. We all have our own problems and adversities we must face. Being responsible enough to hold our grounds, face our problems, overcome the obstacles life puts in our way, that's hard work. It would be easier to run sometimes. But making hard decisions and having the courage to deal with the consequences makes us adults. And no one ever said life was going to be easy. ○

hård wørk

Keisha Spradley

¹**hard work** \hård wørk\ adj: an action considered tedious, arduous or labor intensive.

²**hard work** \hård wørk\ n: goods and services produced of a sufficient quantity and quality.

³**hard work** \hård wørk\ v: the exertion of effort, which produces such goods and services.

Synonyms: action, advance, exertion, profit, production, progress.

Antonyms: idle, poverty, talk, wasted, working hard.

¹**Hard work vs. Working hard:** Going to a job you hate every day is hard work.

If you are going to a job you love and are leaving exhausted but satisfied by your progress then you are working hard. Staying in a relationship where you are not appreciated, loved or respected is hard work. Staying in a relationship where you mutually make sacrifices are nurtured and encouraged requires working hard.

²**In Literature:** Plato died over 2500 years ago; yet, he still writes, “I never did anything worth doing by accident, nor did any of my inventions come by accident; they came by work.” Thomas Edison is also accredited to implementing this motto into his work. The electrician’s union would not exist if he didn’t develop the precursor to the modern day light bulb. The world will always cherish and embrace their works. Whether Plato or Thomas Edison coined this phrase is irrelevant; it is important to recognize that what they produced was the result of intentional effort and not happenstance.

²**In Politics:** Cornel West states, “Black People have been working hard for decades.” I don’t agree much with what Mr. West has to say, but in this declaration we are in accord. My grandmother dropped out of school in the eighth grade to become a maid. I most assuredly know that my maternal grandmother did not dream of growing up to be a maid. It was, however, one of the few jobs available to a black woman in the 1930s, and it was hard work. There was a constant flow of meals to cook, dishes to wash, laundry to iron, children to tend, advances to fend off, napkins to fold and floors to mop. She did this all before she went home and repeated it for her own family. She

worked real hard to insure her nine children had options for the type of work they would do one day; all her children completed at least a Bachelor's degree. She taught them the value of hard work and working hard; she chose the first so they could choose the latter.

³**In Religion:** According to 14:23 of Proverbs from the Holy Bible, "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty." The Bible was written over 2000 years ago, and its words still share wisdom relevant to us today. Profit and progress are not just nouns, but action verbs. They come when we live in a manner that brings our own improvement. There are as many great ideas as there are people conceiving them; I never saw an idea talked into reality. I've never seen persistence go unrewarded; only in doing, not dreaming, can one fulfill his or her own evolution.

³**American colloquialisms:** "Work smarter not harder." The consensus is that there are two ways to move forward: work harder *or* work smarter. I believe it is the combination of working your smartest and hardest that will produce the best results. When I need to run pipe along the wall or ceilings at work, there are numerous approaches I can take. I can measure out the first section, secure the pipes, move on to each adjoining section and repeat as quickly as possible. This would probably be the fastest way, but not the most accurate. I can measure each section several times before cutting any pipes, take my time, break in between to reserve my strength and maybe complete a section a day. This would be the most accurate way, but not the most industrious method. The most efficient option would be to plan all the tasks I need to complete, measure carefully, and finish the work as quickly as possible while maintaining good quality. Working hard and working smart yields exponentially greater rewards than either option alone.

Hard work is a noun, a verb and an adjective. It is relative to what you believe is work and what is hard for you. I physically and mentally exert myself every day, but I don't consider it hard work because I enjoy my job as an electrician's apprentice. Things you enjoy just don't feel like work. Going to a job you love and having to soak your feet at night is just working hard. That's what I do. I work hard, but it's not hard work. ○

SOLIDARITY

Day 19: OccupyWallStreet

Karlson Wong

It was a beautiful Wednesday afternoon when I got to Zuccotti Park. It was 2:35 p.m. to be exact. I made sure that I left anything that could be considered a weapon at my jobsite, and convinced my foreman to let me leave early. Due to the negative image the *AM New York* spoon-fed my foreman earlier that morning, he didn't quite agree with the protest. I had spent the entire day trying to persuade him into opening his eyes and his mind to what the protest was really about. Even though he is part of the 99 percent, he didn't see what I see. He told me that corporations have the power and control to pick and choose who gets high salaries and who doesn't. To him and others, this is just a part of life. "Kid, it's all about whom you know in this business," he said to me. Regardless of my lack of success in convincing him that it was for a good cause, he saw how strongly I felt about attending the march that day and let me leave work early.

When I got to Zuccotti Park, I was glad to see an entirely different side of the argument. The weather was beautiful, spirits were high, and many fearless people were prepared to be arrested. In case they were detained, legal contact information was written in permanent ink on protestor's wrists. From across the crowd, I noticed a familiar sight. It was Bob the electrician from Boston with his white hard hat. Like me, he's part of the IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers). I greeted him with a firm handshake to show my readiness to join the cause. I stayed by him and took mental notes on how he explained to reporters that he was not representing the electrical union, but was there as an individual who belonged to the union. I learned quickly that our hard hats attracted a great deal of attention. It attracted other electricians, and especially those who weren't sure whether or not it was safe to expose their Local 3 tee shirts and jackets. After being interviewed by reporters from Iran, Taiwan, Spain, France, and New York City, I finally got a chance to introduce myself to the other young electricians from New York City. Most of them were new to the business, and still wet behind the ears like me, as my foreman would call it. When I asked them what made them show up after work, the answer was simple. It was about the rich getting richer, while things for the rest of us get tougher. We are the 99 percent that Thomas Jefferson was hopefully referring to when he wrote, "We the people ..." (I was told by a high school teacher that Thomas Jefferson actually meant "We the rich people of this room drafting this document ..." when he wrote "We the people"). Regardless of what I've been told, I would like to believe that Thomas Jefferson was referring to the 99 percent.

As the march began, I noticed a lot of signs that confirmed my ideas about OccupyWallStreet: “Stop corporate greed;” “Wall Street should buy stocks, not corporations;” “Help the needy, not the greedy;” “We must be the change we wish to see in the world;” “Stop the kleptocracy;” and “Millions of Americans lost jobs, homes, and their retirement. Are you enjoying your bonus?” The following were my favorites: “JP Morgan PD 1 percent,” “Stop the war on workers,” and “Let THEM eat big macs.” I may not have a political science degree or even a degree in economics, but a short conversation with a peer or neighbor reveals that many are losing their jobs. For example, some people are taking on more difficult workloads that were originally made for two or more.

As we packed into Foley Square like Chinese food in a takeout container, I met a plumber who belonged to Local 690 in Philadelphia. He reminded me of Hulk Hogan with his bandana and dirty blond beard. He recognized the IBEW sticker on my hard hat and celebrated with his buddies with cheers that another union was present in solidarity to support the cause. He was upset, needless to say, when he found out that the IBEW has not officially stated their opinion on the matter. I counted about a dozen people from the Local 3. They all showed up as individuals and none as representatives from the union.

The greatest upset at the march to Foley Square that day was the lack of support from my union. Although the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) publicly announced their support for the protest, the Local 3 refused to take any sides and refused to answer any of my calls regarding the matter. They may have decided to not get involved publicly because union members are protesting against corporations that give them job opportunities. Karl Marx argued in “The Communist Manifesto” that a capitalistic society would produce internal tensions between classes, which would eventually lead to its destruction. Although, I don’t believe communism is the answer, I don’t believe that we are at such a dramatic form of modern monetary slavery. To those in charge of the IBEW, Local 3 and all others who are part of the 99 percent who have yet to stand up, as Karl Marx confirmed, “The workers have nothing to lose but their chains.” ○

OCCUPYCongress Report

January 2012

Good afternoon to everyone:

Danny F. and I had the awesome opportunity to participate in OccupyCongress and was it interesting! We stayed in a hostel full of young people that had traveled from far and wide to take part in the event. I made friends with a woman from Zimbabwe, met Occupiers from North Carolina, Connecticut, and Australia.

At the Capitol Building in the morning we encountered a scattered group of people numbering around 2000. There were Capital police around the front steps of the building and down each side. Most of the people in this group were young, and the police were subdued compared to NYPD behavior typically seen around OWS actions. I should add that the weather was cold and was incessantly rainy, making things even colder. However, we were in very high spirits. I met with Malik Rhasaan from OccupyTheHood, and he introduced me to people from their Philly chapter. Very awesome to connect with people that share a common interest, listen to their reasons for Occupying, learn about their social background, etc.

Around 10 a.m. or so, we held a huge General Assembly, explaining hand signals and other matters; then we were given instructions on the upcoming action: How to locate our Congressman by zip code. Then there was live music, smaller General Assemblies, and food. When the time came for the actual OccupyCongress, we all marched to the office building and started lining up to go through a metal detector/scanner. Danny went inside while I waited outside, chanting with the rest of the Occupiers. The police blocked the outside perimeter of the two facing sidewalks in an effort to keep the street clear of oncoming traffic. Of course we were not happy about that, as there were Occupiers across the street that were being kept from crossing to our side, where the Congressmen's office building was. However, even the oncoming traffic honked their horns in solidarity, encouraging us.

As the line of Occupiers waiting to be scanned enter the building cleared, it was after 4 p.m. and fearing that they'd close the building for the day, I used the People's Mic to alert Occupiers that there was no waiting to enter and be scanned, prompting groups to stand in line again. I did this twice more and then stood on the line myself. As I entered the building I was very confused at the directory, which appeared to list hundreds of tiny names and corresponding room numbers. Luckily, a Brooklyn Occupier helped me out by entering my zip code into his cell phone and figuring out who my Congressman is. I walked up the stairs to the

2nd floor and was impressed by the beautiful, huge marble interior, but quickly became infuriated at a CATERED PARTY being set up, while people were chanting, marching and protesting outside.

I turned three corridors before I found my Congressman's office, getting more and more furious with each step I took. By the time I reached his office, I was having a meltdown. I'll consider myself lucky that he was not there because I was totally unprepared to articulate myself and was not privy to his voting record. I looked him up after the fact and he did vote for the National Defense Articulation Act, but he had also voted for the Jobs Bill, which was important to me. So, that was my lesson #1: Come thoroughly informed and prepared when doing something as important as speaking with your own representative.

I left the building and joined with the few still standing outside. I found Danny and we started walking down the street, trying to catch up with the large group that had started to march back up to the Capitol. By this time it was twilight and I was dead tired. It was 6 p.m. and an "OccuParty" started on the lawn of the Capitol building. I sat outside on a roundabout, while Danny went into the party. Shortly afterwards, someone on the People's Mic announced that they would start ANOTHER march and people started filing out into the street. As Danny and I observed, the crowd had multiplied to a much, much larger number. But I did not know where they were headed. Danny calculated that it was time to head to our bus stop to start making our way back to NYC. We were both so spent that we slept the majority of the way back.

I want to thank Danny, Jim McMahon, Dean Merrill, and all the wonderful staff and fellow students I've had the good fortune to meet at Empire State College for this great opportunity. The closest thing to describe what is happening to me would be a quote I read somewhere, stating "A revolutionary is the highest elevation of the human spirit" or something to that end. Thank you all again, so much!! And come join the actions!!!

In solidarity,

Sherry Cruz

Craft, Art and Unions

Jaime Lopez

Craft and Art can be a bond created by men and women of great skills and applied purpose. The men and women of the trades are a perfect representation of skilled quality work. Some skills require the same type of precision that an artists need for painting a portrait. Similarly an Artist and a Crafts worker will both achieve completion of a project after immense labor and determination. The value of the Crafts worker has slowly diminished as Artists have risen to superiority. Our skills are constantly attacked by new machinery and through the management of people. The production line has reduced the ability of a worker to practice their Craft from beginning to end. In order for a company to increase productivity and lower dependence, they must reduce the skills needed. The result is a reduction of pay or compensation and an easily replaceable employment position.

Now, more than ever, the workers of America have to reunite and join unions. There are too many workers without proper wages, sufficient health care, proper dental care, and safe working conditions. The men and women of this country are working harder and longer days. Production is always rising even though unemployment is high as well. The rights of working class people are being taken advantage of with no end in sight. There is always going to be a struggle between Workers and Companies. It is a dependent relationship in which the parties involved always request more from each other. The major issue is that without proper representation, the worker stands no chance against these companies who can easily replace workers who complain.

No matter how technologically advanced our job setting becomes, the human element is always the most important. New skills will be needed for the maintenance of new machinery and the programming of systems. Safety inspectors should be rigorous in their reviews of conditions. As the value of the Artists increase, and the importance of skilled Artisans and Craft workers decrease, we must remember to protect the skills that are passed on by previous generations. They have true value in our communities.

A union protects the workers right to request proper compensation for his or her work and Craftsmanship. A union is the best way to become represented without consequences from your employer. With the amount of money large corporations spend on anti-union campaigns and propaganda; it seems they are winning the fight. The unionized labor in our country is decreasing yearly. As a predator separates his prey, then conquers the weakest, these big money influences create legislation in the government that separate the most powerful weapon our unions have, "Strength in numbers." ○



Jaime Lopez



Jaime Lopez

Solidarity

Krystal Brown

Before I was assigned an essay on the term “solidarity,” it was a foreign word to me. Immediately, I searched for the word in the Merriam Webster Dictionary. Solidarity is defined as “a unity (of a group or class) that produces or is based on a community of interest, objectives and standards.” Basically, it’s a group of people bonded by a common goal; bonds between humans form a society. Every individual within that group operates within the boundaries of that bond. It is the act or feeling responsible for more than just oneself. At the time, it is the only connection that these specific individuals have with one other.

Solidarity is a theme of most revolutions: “United We Stand and Divided We Fall.” As a group, people are strong and they can make a difference; they can even change laws. An example of this is the boycott of public transportation in the south when Rosa Parks was arrested. Many people, black and white, stopped using public transportation, and the system lost money. This act of solidarity made such an impact that laws were changed.

I needed to interview someone for this paper, but before my interview I wanted to know more than enough. I didn’t want to be influenced by someone else’s word; I wanted to hold onto something I believed in. I reread the reading assignments, but this time I was reading for purpose. The author’s opinion on solidarity is a union issue; the topic was still confusing; the due date for my draft was near and I had nothing.

In a panic, I called my neighbor’s daughter who is in Local 3 to ask for the interview. It was quick and short, but she left me with a better understanding of this brotherhood (being male and female). The group operates as a family. You don’t choose your brothers and sisters. You may not like them, but as a family they are strong. It means looking out for your fellow man or woman, making sure they are taking precautions to complete their goals safely. She informed me that she didn’t think that solidarity existed in Local 3. However, she also felt that the economic situation was bringing solidarity to the union because of unemployment. This caused the union to stand strong as they were facing the same issues.

All the roles we play in society, how we interact with others, and whom we have in mind are the essence of solidarity. Friendships, acquaintances, acts of kindness all embody and define solidarity. To me, there is power in numbers; solidarity is not only important for a union, but also for communities or any group that one may join. In communities, it can be something as simple as giving up a bus seat to the elderly, pregnant women, or mothers with young children. In other settings,

it simply means that we are more considerate to others rather than acting out in selfish behavior. For example, not driving past the speed limit provides safety for the other drivers on the road. Solidarity works when a group is faced with a common issue, which is usually a problem that affects most of them. Since majority rules, the other members need to have the group's best interest at heart, or it could lead to problems. For example, if it's a racist group, each member should not have to stand up for an immoral agreement.

Solidarity is important because without it we would fall into chaos, violence would increase, and people would not care about anything or come together to complete a task. Solidarity is possible to a certain degree; human beings are all different, which makes us a society. We can achieve higher levels of solidarity by spreading awareness, finding people with similar beliefs and mindsets, and organizing them into a group with a stronger public voice. As for the workers, they have a responsibility to the union to support it in its endeavors.

I feel solidarity can work, but the group needs to operate like the military: one goal, one mission. In the western world where we insist on being individuals, we have a great deal of work ahead in order to reach solidarity. It has worked in the past; I witnessed the MTA's union leader being jailed for calling a strike. Commitment, brotherhood, and responsibility to self and to the group are crucial for solidarity to function. ○

The Strength of Unions

Dustin Haskell

The nine year old boy watched as his mother's tears fell from her chin to the kitchen table. She would put on a brave face throughout the day, but when she thought no one was watching she would let her tears fall. The boy knew where the tears came from and knew that he couldn't do anything to make them stop despite what he might wish. He knew those tears came from the difficult position they were in. Their home was nearly lost to them; the kitchen was bare – same for bread, water and a few cans of old vegetables and other items unidentifiable without their labels. He hadn't seen his father for many days; he was off fighting every day to give them a new start and freedom from this desperate situation. If he failed, it would fall upon the shoulders of a nine year old boy to take up the fight and struggle on until the goal of his family and so many others like it was achieved. Someday his own blood and sweat would mingle with that of his father and others before him in the hopes of throwing off the mantle of oppression and bringing peace to his family.

This could be an excerpt from any war novel in a library. Instead it is part of a typical tale here in the United States of an average family's struggle to survive in a troubled economy where few jobs are available and sacrifices must be made to make ends meet. The boy's father is not off to war but instead must stay where the work is, sending home his meager wages in the hopes of making a better life for his family. Someday the nine year old boy will be required to work to help provide for his family and eventually for his own children. This tale is certainly on the extreme end of the spectrum but is not difficult for many people to imagine. While there are many people in stable jobs who can take care of their families and themselves, others are pink slips away from desperation.

It is an unfortunate condition of a checkered past that one major way of avoiding this kind of trouble is severely looked down upon. As a former United States Marine who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom, I understand the importance of a brotherhood. Now I am a part of another brotherhood. I am a proud member of Plumber's Local Union 1. This new brotherhood I became a part of four years ago has helped me to avoid the desperate situation so many others have come to face. For so many people in this country, unions are nothing more than organized crime. The mistakes of the past have carried over the years. Oppression, shady leadership, back alley deals, and political corruption were the letter of the day for many years of the union workers' history. As with so many other things, only the bad news carries forward. No one remembers the good that you do, or if they do at all it is merely a side note to the things that went horribly wrong.

Plumbers Local Union 1 was established back in 1886. The goal of the union was to help its members to earn a living wage, in other words to be paid a fair price for the work that they do. Now many people will look at a union plumber today and ask him how it is that he can command such a high price for his work. To those people I would say, "Do you not expect to pay top dollar for the best doctors?" Most people would look at me as though I were crazy. However, with only a little thought, the comparison is not difficult to understand. The average family doctor pays for five to six years of the best education so that he or she can look at any given situation and make an informed decision. That decision can be the difference between life and death for his or her patients. The preventative measures a doctor puts in place, such as inoculations or dietary changes, are the keys to the longevity of the people he or she serves. Although patients may not be pleased with how much they must pay for this service, they continue to come to their doctor knowing he or she has the highest level of education and training to complete their job successfully.

A union plumber is not very different in this respect. While most people think of a plumber as the guy tucked under their sink clearing out a clog, few understand the true importance of the role we play. A doctor helps prevent and cure disease. Before trained plumbers came to be, cholera, dysentery, and other deadly plagues were responsible for more deaths than war. Having properly planned and executed plumbing systems were the only cure of these horrendous epidemics. It was the proximity of waste water containing liquid and solid waste from human inhabitation to the sources of drinking water that caused these diseases to be so widespread. We receive the highest level of training to prevent anything like this from happening in our society today. Not even the doctors of the time could save people from such horrible diseases. It was the plumber that protected the health of nations, and thus has this become our slogan. Our promise to protect the health of the nation is the core value of Plumbers Local Union 1.

We are the front line of defense against horrific disease and the downfall of mankind. We are the Marines of the construction trades. As a brotherhood, we are trained to protect the United States from destitution. Imagine if suddenly the plumbers in New York were no longer working; then the pipelines that provide fresh drinking water to thousands would stop working. Without properly trained workers to fix the situation what would we do for fresh water? Or worse, how would our waste be carried away to be safely treated? For five years we are taught the most successful techniques and the safest ways to execute those techniques in order to keep our nation healthy.

Without the solidarity of the union these things would not be possible. Each of us contributes a portion of our pay to help continue the proper education of our members so that each generation is properly prepared to uphold the high standards which have come to be expected of union workers. We train in a classroom and on the job so that when we finally do command our living wage,

we deserve it. The fragmentation of non-union workers is evident in the back-biting and under cutting that goes on when trying to find work. A worker not supported by a union may be forced to take a cut in pay, work longer hours, give up or never even receive benefits just to get a job. Then they are put in hazardous situations and expected to work unsafely so that their boss can save some money. By having the strength and solidarity of a union behind us, we can demand that we are provided with the proper safety equipment and situational training so that we can go home to our families safely with a decent paycheck.

In times of war, solidarity is an absolute must. Those of us who have served in the military understand that only through a strong brotherhood can we expect to survive. Each of us must be willing to watch the next person's back. Through perseverance, courage and solidarity, anything can be achieved. When we see one of our brothers or sisters in trouble, we do not hesitate to come to their aid. No sacrifice is too great, short of our own lives, to ensure the safety of those around us. Despite the enormous and numerous hazards in any war zone, the camaraderie never ceases for a moment; we are taught early on that we are only strong as a unit. Despite what movies may show us, one cannot fight a war by himself.

In that same way, unions are perhaps the only way to ensure the safety and prosperity of the common working man and woman. As in the Marines, we are taught that we must watch out for one another. Only through solidarity and the confidence that we are never alone can we collectively bargain for our best interests while still providing the highest quality service to the people we are sworn to protect, the people who depend upon our training and expertise to keep them healthy. ○

Copper Saved is a Penny Earned

Chris Martyn

The idea for this project was sparked one day on the job when a penny came in handy. I had to repair a leak in a soldered joint; I couldn't get a complete shutdown of the water, so I drilled a hole into the pipe. Then, I put a vacuum on the hole to suck out the water, so it could drain from the hole, which gave me enough time to fix the leaky joint. After the joint was fixed, I brazed a penny onto the pipe to cover the hole I drilled. In addition, this project represents the money workers get from scrapping copper at the junkyard, which is known as "mongo." On job sites, a collection of copper scraps build up, and when the box is full usually the apprentices cash it in, and split it amongst each other. However, with the economy as bad as it's been and more people being laid off than usual, copper has been split between all the men on the job. ○



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