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The Reed College Quest

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VOL. 211 ISSUE 3

THIS SHOULD REMAIN UNSAID

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2018

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Jan Mieszkowski
@janmpdx

Your rap name is Li'l + the Presocratic philosopher you meant to read but didn't.

8:58 PM - 1 Sep 2018

Alma Matters?

Changes to Alumni Constitution Spark Controversy

By Elai Kobayashi-Solomon

They say that sharks can smell a drop of blood in the ocean from a quarter of a mile away. And while sharks may pride themselves in this seemingly unique faculty, those who’ve spent more than a couple minutes browsing a Reed Facebook group knows that Reedies possess a similar skill: their ability to detect a whiff of campus drama while scrolling through their News Feed could make even the most capable hammerhead jealous.

So here’s a little tidbit for those who, for whatever reason, aren’t fully satiated by comeback memes and passive-aggressive Facebook likes: back in June, the Alumni Board voted to amend the constitution and bylaws of the Alumni Association. Some alumni are not happy with these changes. And they’re planning on doing something about it.

At this point, as you lean over an overpriced and tasteless mug of Commons coffee, a perfectly legitimate question may pass through

your mind: who cares? The Alumni Association? Constitutions and bylaws? In case you weren’t aware, dear *Quest* reporter, there’s a very good reason why I was up until the crack of dawn yesterday bashing my head against the cover of Homer’s *Odyssey* in a desperate attempt to formulate a thesis for my upcoming Hum 110 essay — I’m currently a *student* at Reed. Not an alumnus.

Fair enough. Unless you’re the Nate Silver of Alumni Association policymaking, you probably don’t have a dog in this fight. Even so, there are a couple of reasons why the recent changes to the Alumni Constitutions are salient to current students.

The Alumni Association serves as an important resource both for current students and recent alumni. Anyone who isn’t a current Reed student, has completed at least one year of class at Reed, and who wasn’t expelled from the college receives automatic membership to the Alumni Association. This membership comes

with a laundry list of benefits, including library and JSTOR access, access to the Center for Life Beyond Reed, and, perhaps most importantly, invitations to alumni events which, more often than not, involve copious amounts of free food. The Alumni Association also helps to provide networking and career opportunities to both alumnus and current students.

The goals, services, and programs of the Alumni Association are decided by the Alumni Board, a group of volunteers who, according to Reed’s website, “represent the alumni in the broader Reed College community.” The board, in turn, operates according to the rules and guidelines set forth in the Alumni Constitution. Thus, changes to the Alumni Constitution have large implications for the majority of students who, with the help of caring thesis advisors, inventive procrastination methods, and more than a couple cans of PBR, eventually set their theses aflame in triumph and graduate from Reed.

At this point, a precocious undergraduate trained in the ways of Socratic inquiry such as yourself may interject — *look, bud, I appreciate your somewhat long-winded explanation about the Alumni Association. But I slogged through your stale jokes to hear about some honest-to-God realpolitik. Where’s the drama?*

Every good drama, though, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The impetus of the recent changes to the Alumni Constitution, officially announced in the September 2018 issue of *Reed Magazine*, stretches back to 2015, when a group of former Alumni Association presidents began to examine ways to make the board more streamlined and effective. With the help of a third-party consultant, members of the Alumni Board discussed and debated potential changes to the Alumni Constitution over the next several years. And in June 2018, Reed’s Alumni Board voted 20-5 to amend the constitution and Bylaws of the Alumni Association.

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From Night Watchmen to CSOs

History of Community Safety, Current Concerns

By Ella Rook and Yoela Zimberoff

CW: Assault

A *Quest* article from 1960 reported that Reed’s Community Safety Officers (CSOs), who were then called nightwatchmen, were once again being “obnoxious,” and that “the only real purpose the nightwatchmen serve (since their protection value is virtually nil) is letting girls into dorms after hours, and for this we need only one of them.” Since the ‘60s, Reed may have become less sexist, but many students still believe that CSOs are solely good for unlocking the doors of forgetful students. Recently, there has been concern among students who expressed worry that the CSOs are becoming increasingly militarized. With this in mind, let’s take a step back to understand how we arrived to the current state of CSOs on campus.

The first nightwatchman was hired in the late 1930s following a violent attack on Winifred Ayres, an assistant in the History Department who lived in Anna Mann, the women’s-only dorm at the time. The attacker, according to a *Quest* article published at the time, disguised himself as a woman to sneak into the dorm and attacked Ayres with a milk bottle. Following the brutal attack, the Reed student body voted to impose an 11 p.m. curfew on women and tasked a custodian with the job of “nightwatchman”—unlocking doors to let women back into their dorms after hours.

The nightwatchmen continued up until the mid ‘70s, when the U.S. government started taking a closer look at student safety and substance use on college campuses. As a result, Reed’s nightwatchmen became the more formal institution of “Community Safety.” The task of Community Safety further expanded when later, under the direction of Bill Clinton, colleges were required to implement drug and alcohol policies in order to receive federal funding. With the college’s standing as an institution for higher learning in question, Reed developed the Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Policy in the ‘90s. Gary Granger, Director of Community Safety, emphasized the need to implement these new policies in a recent interview with the *Quest*, saying, “if you want money from the feds, you need to do this.”

Granger came to direct Reed’s CSO program in 2010, arriving after two Reed students overdosed on heroin. In a meeting with then-President Colin Diver at the time, the

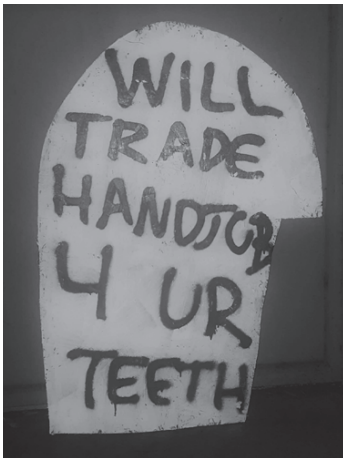
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Cryptic Campus Artwork Incites Debate Mystery Signs Leave Students Totally “BUGGIN”

By Jake Buck

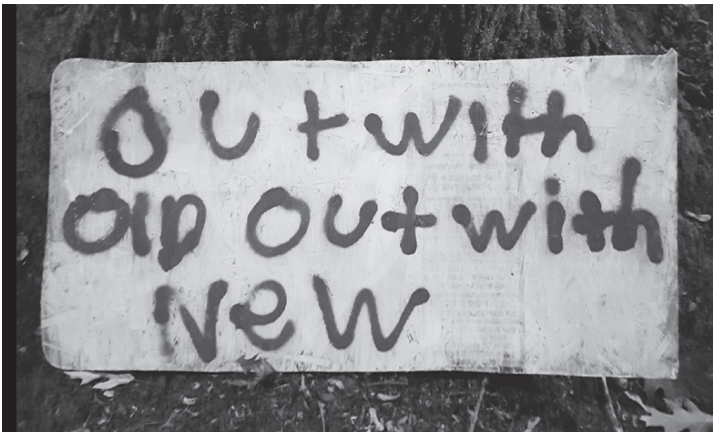
This past weekend was marked by the sudden appearance of at least thirteen mysterious plywood signs scattered throughout Reed’s campus, which stirred up an online debate. By Sunday night, the signs greeted students walking around campus with messages such as: “OUT WITH THE OLD OUT WITH THE NEW,” “IT’S A CRIME,” “GLUE-BABY,” “BUGGIN,” “TO ALL THE SPIDER’S I LOVED BEFORE A NETFLIX ORIGINAL,” “NO WEED ONLY PCP,” “DON’T GO THERE,” “WOLVES?,” “OBJECT, IN MINE CLOSE, VERRY CLOSE,” “WILL TRADE HANDJOB 4 UR TEETH,” “THIS SHOULD REMAIN UNSAID,” “IN DOG WE TRUST.”

The creators behind these cryptic signs spoke to the *Quest* about their artistic statement that sparked a campus-wide debate. One of the several artists behind the signs, who requested to remain anonymous, reported that they “just did it for fun” and that there is no real message behind the signs, except for the one that reads, “IN DOG WE TRUST.” Another student affiliated with the anonymous group of artists told the *Quest*, “Those residing on the campus of Reed College should embrace



the brevity of comfort and the gravity of danger in the world we live in. Not only do we all need to be uncomfortable (viscerally and toe-suckingly) in response to art, we need to fuck off with our falsely comforting statements to others.”

Artists’ intentions aside, many student responses to the signs were quite critical. Several students on the Reed Questions Facebook group argued that the signs are childish and feed paranoia. Juliana Cable, one of the directors of Reed Arts Week (RAW), assured everyone that these signs are not affiliated with RAW. They went on to say, “I worry about the association at Reed between



Photos courtesy of Jake Buck

weird, intimidating, inhospitable changes to public space and ‘art kids.’ The fact that some folks automatically assumed this was some kind of promotion for Reed Arts Week frankly speaks to a history of pretentious inconsiderate bullshit that I, and lots of other RAW staff and artists, are actively fighting against. I love weird, difficult art as much as the next guy, but I also have anxiety and PTSD and don’t think there’s anything cool or edgy about making people’s daily life on this campus harder for no real discernible reason.” Other students in the Facebook group expressed concern about the signs, citing them as “creepy,” while others seemed to

appreciate the work, particularly enjoying the signs “I graduated and all I got was this sign,” and, “BIG FROG.”

Students like Cable raise an important point concerning the responsibility of people who use these public spaces as a canvas for their own projects. It’s unclear if we should expect to see more of these works in the future, but these signs have already begun to spark a fruitful discussion about the relationship between private projects and public spaces, one that will, perhaps, continue throughout the semester, with the advent of Reed Arts Week soon approaching.

Fields and Forms

Visiting Writer Gregg Bordowitz Discusses Poetry, Projects

By Max Nobel

On Thursday, September 13, Gregg Bordowitz — the English Department’s first visiting writer of the year — conversed with students about his work at Poetry Salon, with students and community members and faculty all in attendance. Ahead of his reading in Eliot Chapel, and following a series of lecture performances called *Some Styles of Masculinity*, the event provided a more intimate forum for interacting with Bordowitz, a poet, teacher, and performer, much of whose life work is compiled in the exhibit *I Wanna Be Well* in the Cooley Gallery, which will run until October 21.

“There’s no correct way to read these” Gregg Bordowitz noted before beginning his recitation of “Debris Field #5,” referring to the series of poems made of ten syllable lines composed entirely of neo-nouns. This entry begins with “ROMANCE.” He read each word into the tableaux slowly, in the style with which activists, including himself, used to read the names of those who had died of AIDS at meetings, each word weighted and considered. His experience living with AIDS works its way into all the media he uses, and when asked about the similarities between the themes of his performances and his poems, he explained that no matter the transmission, he is trying to address the same conflicts and tensions he experiences.

Musical influence is one such influence that appeared in both his performance “Rock Star” and in his poetry. He started out writing his “Debris Field” poems as fast as



Photo courtesy of Russ Foust

possible, writing each subsequent entry faster and faster. Dee Dee Ramone, he relayed, once told Joe Strummer, a member of The Clash, that “The [Ramones] show is 5 minutes faster.” “He wasn’t,” as Bordowitz put it, “worried about them getting better, at all, he was just really proud that they got the same amount of songs ... faster. That always kind of stuck in my head.”

The poems Bordowitz read came out of a project about voice and his relationship to Other Countries, a poetry collective of African-American gay men writing about their experiences of the AIDS crisis in the late eighties and early nineties. All of the members he knew have since died from the disease. He approached them with resources from Gay Men’s Health Crisis and

helped document their readings and performances and plays. Some of their poems are included in the project he created in collaboration with Other Countries, titled *Taking Voice Lessons*, which pushes against the contemporary historicization of AIDS as a “gay white man’s disease.”

As he worked to make a space with the project for their voices to be “unproblematically accessible” and recognized within a canon that had excluded them, Bordowitz’s mother lost a three-year battle with cancer. The event left him unable to write in prose and, wanting to continue working on the project, he created *Debris Fields*, an account of the forms of wreckage of voice with which the project contended, both his own voice and the largely

unrecognized voices of the poets from Other Countries.

Bordowitz also discussed his writing habits more generally. He had never written daily until his forties, deciding eventually that he needed something “to wake up into,” and for the period of the project *Debris Fields* became a daily practice for him. Coinciding also with his second attempt at sobriety and the regularity of pills, they served as something that both helped his writing and fit into everything else. He feels that he’s in a rut with them right now, that he’s trying to get out of. His partner noticed that, in his sleep, he counts syllables on his fingers.

For the last question of the salon a student in the audience brought up a quote of Bordowitz’s that had

resonated with her: “When I do a solo, I’m never dancing alone.” He responded with a rumination on the role of solitude in his creative process and what separates it from loneliness. For him, loneliness is being lost, not knowing your direction, feeling pain at the absence of others. And solitude is feeling full, the state of being both physically alone and in conversation with others, losing track of time, remembering conversations, with people who are no longer here, not extricating yourself from but connecting yourself with the relationships that have shaped you.

When Bordowitz was writing his first art history book, *General Idea: Imagevirus*, about a Canadian gay arts group of whom only one member was still alive, he spent two years visiting archives and trying to use primary documents to write it with methods that he didn’t know. In the end, writing it took ten days. On each one he’d imagine he was in a bar telling their story to a different person. Some days it was people he knew well, some days it was people who’d died, one day it was a total stranger. On a similar note, he explained that, in his work, he “narrowcasts” instead of “broadcasts,” because he believes that people are able to and do take an interest in the lives of others, even those who are unlike themselves. Whether with an audience in the chapel or a group of curious students, here at Reed or at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he teaches, he is always in conversation. In his poetry, his films, his art, and his performances, he’s talking to you.

Reed Alumni Face Constitutional Crisis

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The purpose of the changes, former At-Large Director of the Alumni Board Darlene Pascienczsy ’01 explained, was to streamline and “modernize” the constitution. Because of this, many of the changes are directed at improving bureaucratic inefficiencies and flaws. For example, among other tweaks, the updated constitution corrects the names of college offices which don’t exist any more and expressly allows the Alumni Board to vote on matters via email.

While such changes may be relatively uncontroversial even to a committed Luddite, several members of the board have pushed back against the changes. Much of the disagreement revolves around a change to the status of chapter representatives. Chapters are geographic regions where, traditionally, many Reedies tend to live and work. There are currently eleven active chapters; these include Chicago and Portland, among others. Each chapter elects its own representative, and under the old structure, all chapter representatives received an automatic seat on the Alumni Board. Under the new

constitution, however, chapters will no longer automatically have a reserved seat on the board. Instead, there will be three reserved chapter seats on the board, and chapters will nominate their own representatives to fill those seats.

Current Alumni Board President Lisa Saldana ’94 thinks that the changes to the chapters reflect the changing nature of the alumni community. “The alumni community has grown, and its changed pretty dramatically. Folks are now a lot more mobile,” Saldana explained. “If you were living in Chicago, three years from now, you may not be living there any longer. We don’t want the fact you moved away means that there isn’t a way for you to connect with Reed because you no longer live in a chapter city.”

Saldana also argues that ultimately, the changes are beneficial to the chapters, and points out that the majority of chapter representatives supported the changes. In her view, chapters are allowed to operate more independently under the new changes. “The chapters aren’t losing a voice,” Saldana said. “The new system allows chapters to come up with their own strategic plan so they

aren’t constrained by the parameters of the Alumni Board.”

Paul Levy ’72, Vice Chair of the Washington D.C. chapter, disagrees and was one of the board members to vote against the decision. “Much of the activity takes place in the chapters, so it just makes sense that they are each represented on the [Alumni Board],” Levy told the *Quest*. “It’s incredibly valuable to have representation from all of the chapters.”

Levy explained that several chapter chairs felt as though they were being shunted aside in the new board structure, which allows for only three, instead of eleven, chapter representatives.

“A whole generation of chapter leaders has quit in disgust,” Levy said. “Some [chapter representatives] volunteered their time for many years. People felt devalued and swept aside.”

Despite the opposition of Levy and others, as stated earlier, the Alumni Board already voted in favor of the changes in June. That doesn’t mean, however, that Levy, and others opposed to the changes, have to take the decision lying down.

Under the existing constitution, if the college receives 50 or

more written objections to the amendments within 30 days of the changes being published in *Reed Magazine* — which occurred on September 7 — the Alumni Board must conduct a referendum of the entire alumni body. This would be unprecedented in Reed’s history, and the resources of the college would presumably have to be directed towards conducting a vote, whether that be through email, snail mail, or perhaps carrier pigeon, that includes all 17,000+ living alumni.

And Levy, who was aware of this caveat, circulated a petition in opposition to the changes during Reunions 2018 which, according to him, received more than 90 signatures. Levy plans to send the petition to Reed’s administration to trigger a referendum.

“No one knows what will happen if we go to [a referendum],” Levy said. “I don’t think anyone knows how long that would take, or [what] it would look like.”

When asked about the petition and the potential for referendum, however, Saldana pointed out that Levy may have overlooked the constitution’s fine print.

“The constitution specifically says that 50 individuals have to

write in, independently, to the college, not to just sign a petition,” Saldana said. “A petition isn’t attached to anything.”

In Saldana’s view, then, it doesn’t matter how many people sign Levy’s petition — it is simply an illegitimate way to trigger a referendum according to the guidelines of the current Alumni Constitution. Levy, however, disagrees with Saldana’s interpretation of the constitution’s rules, and mentioned that he may be willing to pursue “litigation, if it comes to that.”

If Levy is serious about triggering a referendum, he will have to send in his petition within the next couple of weeks. Even if the petition arrives at Reed’s doorstep in time, however, Saldana, along with the Reed administration, may consider such a petition illegitimate according to the Alumni Constitution. Levy would, no doubt, protest such an interpretation.

Hum 110 professors should be happy. Like many conference discussions at Reed, the potential referendum may come down to close readings, and potential disagreements, over the fine print.