

JAMES SHERMAN

HU'S ON FIRST

We take you now to the Oval Office.

GEORGE Condi! Nice to see you.
What's happening?

CONDI Sir, I have the report here
about the new leader of China.

GEORGE Great. Lay it on me.

CONDI Hu is the new leader of
China.

GEORGE That's what I want to know.

CONDI That's what I'm telling you.

GEORGE That's what I'm asking you.
Who is the new leader of China?

CONDI Yes.

GEORGE I mean the fellow's name.

CONDI Hu.

GEORGE The guy in China.

CONDI Hu.

GEORGE The new leader of China.

CONDI Hu.

GEORGE The Chinaman!

CONDI Hu is leading China.

GEORGE Now whaddya asking me
for?

CONDI I'm telling you Hu is leading
China.

GEORGE Well, I'm asking you. Who is
leading China?

CONDI That's the man's name.

GEORGE That's who's name?

CONDI Yes.

GEORGE Will you or will you not tell
me the name of the new leader of
China?

CONDI Yes, sir.

GEORGE Yassir? Yassir Arafat is in
China? I thought he was in the
Middle East.

CONDI That's correct.

GEORGE Then who is in China?

CONDI Yes, sir.

GEORGE Yassir is in China?

CONDI No, sir.

GEORGE Then who is?

CONDI Yes, sir.

GEORGE Yassir?

CONDI No, sir.

GEORGE Look, Condi. I need to know
the name of the new leader of China.
Get me the Secretary General of the
UN on the phone.

CONDI Kofi?

GEORGE No, thanks.

CONDI You want Kofi?

GEORGE No.

CONDI You don't want Kofi.

GEORGE No. But now that you
mention it, I could use a glass of milk.
And then get me the UN.

CONDI Yes, sir.

GEORGE Not Yassir! The guy at the
UN.

CONDI Kofi?

GEORGE Milk! Will you please make
the call?

CONDI And call who?

GEORGE Who is the guy at the UN?

CONDI Hu is the guy in China.

GEORGE Will you stay out of China?!

CONDI Yes, sir.

GEORGE And stay out of the Middle
East! Just get me the guy at the UN.

CONDI Kofi.

GEORGE All right! With cream and
two sugars. Now get on the phone.

CONDI *picks up the phone.*

CONDI Rice, here.

GEORGE Rice? Good idea. And a
couple of egg rolls, too. Maybe we
should send some to the guy in China.
And the Middle East. Can you get
Chinese food in the Middle East?

End of play.

This play was written shortly after Hu Jintao was named chief of the Communist Party in China.

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Up Front

TIME AND A NEW COLLABORATION

Academic publishing schedules and the Bush administration's yearning for war being what they are, the satire on the facing page might not seem so funny by the time you read it. Consider its publication a gesture of optimism.

And speaking of our schedule, we're happy to announce a new partnership: Jonathan Kalb, critic and contributing editor, has started an "on-line forum for critical writing about the theater" called HotReview.org. (He accepts no argument about the title.) "Conceived as an antidote to apathy and as a response to the scarcity of print forums today," as "resistance to the blurring of the difference between objective commentary and public relations," it will publish reviews, essays, articles, interviews, and polemics about any aspect of contemporary theater. Indignation encouraged, also theater artists' responses. Pieces will be posted to the site as soon as they are accepted; *Theater* will publish a selection of them in future issues. This prospect of a double life seems optimistic, too.

—*Erika Munk*

“TIME DOES NOT STAY”

The above caption for Art Spiegelman’s haunting cover image—a lone, bereft figure surrounded by decaying monuments of the comic imagination, leaden and still, abandoned by their narratives—serves as an epilogue to *Drawn to Death*, the new comic book opera he created with composer Phillip Johnston and director Jean Randich. In the song that accompanies this image, Spiegelman meditates on the relentless progression of time and the difference between the so-called time-based arts and comics, which, he argues, “turn time into space.” Comics freeze the flow of narrative into frames, and space those frames across the page, allowing the reader to “rewind,” and “fast-forward” at will, to pause, even to stop altogether: “chosen moments can be frozen for replay.” This type of mastery over the image works as a corrective to the ephemerality of the stage; by combining comics and theater, Spiegelman hopes to find out just how far both genres can be stretched.

Similarly, Framji Minwalla’s analysis of the first-act monologue in Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul* focuses on the Homebody’s tangled language, her impassioned attempts to master the syntax and vocabulary of paradox. Her monologue creates a series of evolving images through a torrent of difficult words and stories that fold back upon themselves like a body in pain. The lapidary rhetoric of her speech, her reliance on

digression, qualification, confession, dissection, and all manner of linguistic re-play mirrors Spiegelman's own desire for mastery—self-mastery—a desire that Minwalla skillfully unravels for its political underpinnings, its attempt to connect two histories: one “confessional, private, intimate,” the other “violent, sociopolitical, public.”

“How does one express that real life is actually a deeply political issue?” Spiegelman wonders. That's the question we must ask ourselves—over and over again—in a world where “real life” has become a deeply contested territory.

—*Erika Rundle*

ONE SAD SIGN OF BAD TIMES

Last December Art Spiegelman announced his resignation from the staff of the *New Yorker* after ten years as their most famous and controversial cover artist. In an interview with the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, he said: “From the time the towers fell, it seems as if I've been living in internal exile, or like a political dissident confined to an island. I no longer feel in tune with American culture, especially now that the media have become conservative and tremendously timid. [The *New Yorker* editorially supports an American war against Iraq—ed.] All criticism of the administration is automatically branded unpatriotic and un-American. . . . Those like me are condemned to the margins.”