Nasty: Notes from a Protest and an Encounter with the Executive Director of the Cultural Center of Cape Cod

by G. Tod Slone (June 2022)



Eric Hobsbawm, Peter de Francia, 1955

> *Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine.* —Thoreau
>
> *I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions. Every decent and well-spoken individual affects and sways me more than is right. I ought to go*

> *upright and vital, and speak the rude truth in all ways*. —Emerson

Well, the National Poetry Month hoopla is over. Here's what I did to celebrate it. Over the years, especially thanks to the decade I spent living and battling the "machine" in Concord, I quoted Thoreau and Emerson numerous times. Why? Quite simply, over the years, I'd personally witnessed "machine": fraud, hypocrisy, and lies. And that personal experience made me into an individual, a dissident, against the "machine." Reason and truth, the very enemies of "machine" ideology, are an integral part of human thinking. Cowardice, desire to team play, and ambition to rise in the ranks serve to diminish reason and truth. Political hacks, arts directors, poet chancellors, journalist careerists, and tenured academics tend to be egregious examples of the very erasure of reason and truth.

And so, what is the "machine?" Well, it is society, which is composed of many machines—the woke machine, the academic machine, the legal machine, the political machine, and the arts and poetry machine, for example. Society inevitably goes against the individual thinker—the dissident—who seeks to be a truth teller, a rare parrhesiastes in this *Age of Fragile Ideologues*. The dissident does not seek to become a cog of the societal machine. Cogs—bureaucrats, apparatchiks, political hacks, tenured academics, poetasters *et al*—will likely never be able to understand a counter-friction against the "machine."

Cogs inevitably embrace a closed-door policy, while simultaneously vaunting their doors to be open, as in "*All the Arts for All of Us*," the aberrant motto of the Cultural Center of Cape Cod. Their bottomline, however, underscores their egregious hypocrisy, for they will inevitably ignore an actively critical individual or simply dismiss him or her with denigrating epithets, and will not be able to comprehend

his/her criticism, no matter how clear and reasoned. They will also be aware that an individual has no power. But for an individual, power and renown are not the goal or modus operandi. Open rude truth-telling is his/her purpose. A cog of the "machine" will not be able to comprehend any of this. Such incomprehension is requisite for climbing the machine ladder and/or gaining social-network followers.

Over the course of several weeks, I perfected a broadside, which I finally titled: "*Some of the Arts for Some of Us*," which would have been a rare truth statement from a cultural organization. Then I contemplated a sign, which I'd wear around my neck.

I, Poet
Banned!
Censored!
Ostracized!

In retrospect, I realized that message could have been viewed as a wo-is-me statement, rather than a simple statement of fact. By no means, am I sad, depressed, or full of hatred, as a result of the banning et al. Perhaps a different sign would have been better?

I, Poet
Not Co-opted!
Not Castrated!
Not Corralled!
Not Cornfed!

Per usual, after a number of solo protests over the years, I hesitated. Why? Because I knew it would be highly unlikely that I might truly interest one, just one, person (in this case, poet) in matters of freedom of expression. And I knew damn well that reason would never succeed in convincing people who did not/could not reason, due to deep ideological indoctrination. But per usual, I managed to kick myself in the

arse and go for it. Hell, if I didn't, how could I state that poets tended to be pathetically apathetic to a poet like me, who had been permanently banned by his neighborhood library, Sturgis Library, and ostracized (by the Cultural Center) for speaking his mind openly and thus exercising his purported right to freedom of expression?

First, I drove for 30 minutes to West Harwich, where I went for a three-mile run at the Bell Neck Conservation trail. Then I drove back into Yarmouth, parked, got out of the car, and at 9:05 a.m., there I stood, slightly sweating, in front of the Cultural Center of Cape Cod with my sign and copies of my broadside. What better place, I thought, for a cultural center to be than in a "sprawling 19th-century brick bank building." Money and art; art and money! Soon, a couple of elderly people walked out of the Center, one slightly grimacing at me, though just slightly. Then a woman came trotting out of her car and looked at me. "I am peaceful," I said. "You are," she replied nicely. I'd thought maybe there'd be a small crowd for the Great "Poetry Marathon," where "at the Cultural Center Celebrate [sic] the beauty & power of poetry." But "crowd," small or large, would have been a misrepresentation of reality.

At 10, when the readings were scheduled to begin, a few more people arrived, each looking quite ancient … like me, of course. They chose not to look at my sign. But then a woman walked by, looked at it, and said, "Oh I'm sorry." "I haven't been given permission to read here," I replied. "Do you know these people?" she asked. "No," I said. "BUT I have been critical of some of them." "Well, I'm glad you're telling it," she said and continued on.

Another woman arrived, stepped out of her car with a bunch of papers, so evidently she was going to read. She walked briskly past me, incurious as a poet could be. Then an old buzzard arrived and said, "I'm here just to listen." "Well, there's only about five people in there now," I said. "Well, that's

the way these things go," he said. And ain't that so, I thought. On the Main Street side of the building, a woman had stepped out of the Center, took down the LGBTQ or whatever flag and replaced it with a red, white, and blue WELCOME flag. "They won't let me read here!" I said to her. But she remained fully silent and went back inside. Turned out she was the arts receptionist behind the arts cashier.

An old guy stepped out of his car in the parking lot, blasted a loud cough, then eventually slowly limped over to me.

"Who did you piss off?" he asked.

"Good one!" I said. "Well, I pissed them off cause I dared criticize them."

Lenny was his name. "Where can I find your work?" he asked.

"Well, you mean my writing?" I said. "I don't like calling it work."

I handed him a flyer, the only flyer I'd manage to distribute at the Great "Poetry Marathon." Lenny entered the building. I wanted to maintain a peaceful appearance (how to avoid the cops!), so did not push myself on passers-by. I walked around the building a few more times and even two blocks down to the river. Then back in front of the Center, I sat on the fence across the street, then walked over to the library on the other side of Main Street. I kept my sign on and asked if I had to wear a mask. One of the librarians said, "No." Librarians tended not to be curious in the same darkness as establishment poets and academics. My sign did not move her to pose a question or two. I ended up taking out a few DVDs.

Back at the Center, I sat on the fence again for a moment. Then finally I entered the Center, as the final leg of my protest, knowing quite well that could be problematic. But it turned out not to be. "Can I see the chief?" I asked the flag-changer receptionist. She stood up, walked around the corner.

There were about 15 poets seated and one reading all in the middle of the big room. The reader looked like he was dead, though standing. They all looked rather dead. Would I want to read there? No. Might as well read in front of a flock of geese at the Veteran's Beach in Hyannis. Only a few of the poets hazarded to look my way. None of them, unsurprisingly, proved to be the least bit curious, as in why was that poet banned? Well, Lenny had been curious, and I'd congratulated him on that. I probably should have approached the group and stood for a moment in back of the reader and brandish my sign. That would have probably provoked a response. But, all too aware how easy it is for cops to be called, I wanted to avoid being aggressive.

The gal came back, and said, "This way, sir." And so, I stepped into the office of the Executive Director, Molly Demeulenaere, a *washashore* like me. We began talking. Soon another woman entered without introducing herself and stood like a guard. Evidently, she'd entered to act as a witness. That woman told me three times during the "discussion" to please move a bit because behind me on the floor was a "painting of value." Art & Money! Apparently, Demeulenaere knew who I was. I was a bit surprised since she'd never responded to the few emails I'd sent her. I, of course, knew who she was. Hell, I'd sketched a cartoon on her, so had to hunt for her image on Google. I should have recorded the encounter, though she might not have allowed that.

Demeulenaere voiced her anger. I voiced my protest. No shouting. As expected, the meeting proved to be nothing but a *dialogue de sourds*. Yet I was glad I'd actually gotten to hear why my critical "work" was not welcome at the Executive Director's Center. "Critical art is not permitted in your Center," I said. "Well, that's your opinion," she responded. "You don't come here much. You should come here more. We do have critical art." "That's not critical art hanging on your walls," I said. "Real critical art is something you would not

accept—something critical of you, your ideology, and your Center, for example."

Lie #1: "We're not political"

"You criticize people you don't even know," said Demeulenaere.

"Well, I criticize what they say in the *Cape Cod Times*, for example," I responded. "I don't need to know them. I criticize statements they and you make like the one you made in the *Times,* the one I quoted in my cartoon."

I handed her a copy of the broadside (#2 out of the 25 I'd printed up), which contained the cartoon. "I emailed a copy to Giardi a few days ago," I continued. "She didn't respond. Did she receive it?"

"Diane, you mean!" said Demeulenaere, then took the flyer, looked at it briefly, didn't like the cartoon on her at all, in which I compared her statement to that of a hack politician's. "We're not political here!" both she and the other woman exclaimed.

Yet what about the LGBTQ flag and the Center's "Trans(formation): A Collaborative Portrait Series Exploring Gender Identity in our Cape Cod"? Identity politics was definitely political!

"You can keep it," I said.

"No, I don't want it!" she snapped and seemed to indicate the cartoon was insufficiently artistic in *forme* and certainly in *fond*. She held the flyer out to me, so I took it back.

Lie #2: "All the Arts for All of Us"

"You'll notice I criticized the Center's motto, '*All the Arts for All of Us*,' because it's egregiously hypocritical," I said. "The Center will not include my art. Are you a fan of Orwellian inclusion is exclusion?"

She didn't respond … just a word-salad deflection. Critical art, of course, was not ideologically-conformed art like LGBTQ art. Real critical art went against the art-establishment grain and thus disturbed art-curator apparatchiks at the helm. That's what my art did and that's why it was prohibited at the Cultural Center of Cape Cod … as well as the Cape Cod Museum of Art (see wwwtheamericandissidentorg.blogspot.com/2012/09/hrant-r-russian.html and wwwtheamericandissidentorg.blogspot.com/2020/10/michael-giaquinto.html) and the Fine Arts Work Center of Provincetown (see wwwtheamericandissidentorg.blogspot.com/2021/03/margaret-murphy-fine-arts-work-center.html). For evident reasons, paid art-apparatchik ideologues like Demeulenaere would not be able to understand that reality, let alone agree that it was a reality.

"I haven't been given permission to read my poetry here," I continued. "You can read if you like," said Demeulenaere. "But your Giardi stipulated poets have to get permission, which is why I sent the emails," I said. "She did not respond to my two emails requesting permission."

"Your emails are nasty!" she snapped.

"Characterizing my criticism as 'nasty' indicates a certain intellectual laziness," I stated. And later in my car, I thought, her *modus operandi* of characterizing art and criticism she didn't like as "nasty" was in itself "nasty." Hell, I challenged authority figures like her. How could that not be considered "nasty" by those who cannot bear to be challenged? Moreover, dismissing all criticism with a single epithet is of course an indication of severe intellectual lassitude. Below are the two "nasty" emails I'd sent to Giardi:

From: George Slone
Sent: Monday, March 28, 2022 12:26 PM
To: dgiardi@cultural-center.org dgiardi@cultural-center.org
Subject: Your call for poetry readers

To Learning Director Diane Giardi, Poetry Marathon At the Cultural Center of Cape Cod:
Well, I'd love to read some of my highly critical (inflammatory to cultural apparatchiks!) poems at your Center. Please do let me know when I can do that. Thank you!

Au plaisir,
G. Tod Slone (PhD—Université de Nantes, FR), aka P. Maudit, Founding Editor (1998)
The American Dissident, a 501c3 Nonprofit Journal of Literature, Democracy, and Dissidence
www.theamericandissident.org
wwwtheamericandissidentorg.blogspot.com
todslone@hotmail.com
217 Commerce Rd.

From: George Slone
Sent: Monday, March 28, 2022 12:26 PM
To: dgiardi@cultural-center.org dgiardi@cultural-center.org
Subject: Your call for poetry readers

To Mme Giardi,
Well, since you have not given me permission to read at YOUR poetry event, will I be permitted to protest against the event? Again, I stress that *culturalistas* like you need to buck up and accept criticism as an integral part of culture, poetry, art, etc.

Au plaisir,
G. Tod Slone
Barnstable, MA

But I'd also sent to Demeulenaere a cartoon I'd sketched on her with an essay she'd incited, both of which were kindly published by *New England Review* in February (see www.newenglishreview.org/articles/inclusion-is-exclusion/. The following email was sent with that regard:

> From: George Slone
> Sent: Sunday, December 19, 2021 2:23 PM
> To: Cultural Center of Cape Cod <mollyd@cultural-center.org>Cc: Trish Somers [email redacted]; info@yarmouthcapecod.com <info@yarmouthcapecod.com>; bnash@cultural-center.org <bnash@cultural-center.org>; Cultural Center of CC <lwolk@cultural-center.org>; Cultural Center of Cape Cod <aneill@cultural-center.org>; jblatchford@cultural-center.org <jblatchford@cultural-center.org>; Cultural Center of Cape Cod <mollyd@cultural-center.org>; ccartisansgallery@gmail.com ccartisansgallery@gmail.com
> Subject: A direct challenge for the new executive director
>
> To Molly Demeulenaere, Executive Director, Cultural Center of Cape Cod:
>
> Below is a direct challenge for you. The attached cartoon forms part of that challenge. Think about the tremendous conflict that inevitably exists between being a staunch individual and being part of a group and the consequent pressure to groupthink and groupbehave. My bona fides are also attached [theamericandissident.org/g_tod_slone_biography.html]. You might also wish to consult *The American Dissident* website for a list of other organizations I've challenged over the years. I am wide open to discussion. Are you?
>
> Au plaisir,

G. Tod Slone (PhD–Université de Nantes, FR), aka P. Maudit, Founding Editor (1998)
The American Dissident, a 501c3 Nonprofit Journal of Literature, Democracy, and Dissidence
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And over the past decade I'd sent criticism to her predecessor Robert Nash, who like her, chose never to respond (see wwwtheamericandissidentorg.blogspot.com/search?q=Robert+Nash). Well, as poet Gary Goude wrote, "Looks like the word 'nasty' must mean Truth in their interpretation of your writing." And so then it was time to leave. "Have a good day," said Demeulenaere. "Why say that?" I responded. "You don't want me to have a good day!" "Yes, I do," she said. And off I went, "nasty" man.

Not much was accomplished with that encounter, of course, though it was good to see that the Executive Director actually knew I existed. The only response I'd ever received from her and the Center was absolute silence. I'd been critical of the Director of Education Amy Neill, Associate Director Lauren Wolk, and PR Coordinator Judy Blatchford. I'd even sketched a cartoon on them as a barbershop quartet (see wwwtheamericandissidentorg.blogspot.com/2021/10/amy-neill-lauren-wolk-robert-m-nash.html, as well as wwwtheamericandissidentorg.blogspot.com/2014/09/robert-m-nash.html and wwwtheamericandissidentorg.blogspot.com/2021/07/cultural-center-of-cape-cod.html). How sad that those like Demeulenaere did not realize they incarnated the "machine." How sad they did not understand what it meant when cultural centers worked hand-in-hand with chambers of commerce and business interests,

including the tourist industry. Indeed, a cultural center inevitably becomes part of the larger machine, the State Machine.

In a nutshell, I was content that I'd made the key concern in front of the "*All the Arts for All of US*" Executive Director that she would NOT accept my art. Her essential response to that was nothing but an ad-hominem non-response: "nasty." Also, the protest, at least, had energized my mind and produced this oh-so "nasty" essay which, needless to say, I sent to the arts apparatchiks at the Cultural Center, the poetry apparatchiks at the *Cape Cod Poetry Review*, and the corporate media apparatchiks at the *Cape Cod Times, Barnstable Patriot,* and *Provincetown Independent*. Not one of them responded.

Table of Contents

G. Tod Slone, PhD, lives on Cape Cod, where he was permanently banned in 2012 without warning or due process from Sturgis Library, one of the very oldest in the country. His civil rights are being denied today because he is not permitted to attend any cultural or political events held at his neighborhood library. The only stated reason for the banning was "for the safety of the staff and public." He has no criminal record at all and has never made a threat. His real crime was that he challenged, in writing, the library's "collection development" mission that stated "libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view." His point of view was somehow not part of "all points of view." He is a dissident poet/writer/cartoonist and editor of The American Dissident.

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