THE CITY AS ENCLOSED UNIVERSE:
ART, CULTURE, ENTERTAINMENT AND THE URBAN PUBLIC

Dr. Mattia Carratello

PROPOSAL FOR A WHEELER AWARD

Period for which funding is requested: April 2004

Abstract:

In spring of 2003, the Board of Undergraduate Studies approved a third undergraduate honors program, Philosophy, Politics and the Public. Like the Honors Bachelor of Arts, PPP grants an honors degree in a program that crosses departments and colleges as well. The unifying theme of “the public” that lies at the center of this new program calls upon the full range of expertise found in Xavier’s core departments. As such a unifying concept, “the public” at once suggests the practical activities of our political and social life in common, as well as the more imaginative and abstract dimensions of shared public imagination and consciousness embodied in literature, the arts, religion and philosophy. This program is unique to Xavier University and exists no where else in the academic world.

This proposal seeks support in order to bring Dr. Mattia Carratello to Xavier for a week in April of 2004 to lecture on these themes. This will be the first major scholarly event to be sponsored by the new Philosophy, Politics & the Public honors program. As such, it will serve to establish the mode of discourse and the imaginative perspectives of inquiry that will characterize the program’s life both inside and outside of the classroom. Dr. Carratello’s own intellectual approach has led him to develop impressive expertise in the literatures of both Italy and America, in history, philosophy, psychology and politics. In keeping with the conceptual ideals of Philosophy, Politics & the Public, he will bring resources from all these quarters to bear on his subject, and thus will provide the students (and faculty) with a valuable model for how one ought to proceed in the creative inquiry into human public experience.
In his influential *Delirious New York* (1978), contemporary urban architect and theorist Rem Koolhaas describes Manhattan as “the 20th century’s Rosetta Stone”, a laboratory where modern public consciousness and its accompanying architecture “could be pursued as a collective experiment”. In them, modern public life finds both its material embodiment and imaginative iconography. The purpose of this Wheeler proposal is to secure funding for Dr. Mattia Carratello to visit Xavier University and to share his scholarship and expertise in art, modern urban landscapes and public life with our students, faculty, and the wider community that our university serves. In a series of lectures, class visits, and informal discussions, Dr. Carratello would address issues concerning this important dimension of “the public”, namely the influence of physical urban space on the formation of shared (i.e., public) consciousness. His focus will be on the historical emergence of the American city as providing a public space or “stage” within which the events of modern life are enacted. His presentation will combine both popular and academic themes and sources. Taking Koolhaas’ lead, Dr. Carratello will begin with such aspects of modern public consciousness as the birth of the amusement park in Coney Island, New York; the resultant act of putting the urban crowd on a public urban stage, and the manufacturing of happiness accomplished through the idea of amusing the millions in such defined public spaces. Dr. Carratello will also examine the ritualized public celebrations of World Fairs and public parks embedded in these urban spaces, and in a more provocative and innovative manner, he shall propose that one can approach the emergent modern city as a kind of prototype theme park. His presentations will go on to speculate about the relationship between public urban spaces and corresponding “spaces” in the public imagination. Dr. Carratello’s talks will be supported by reference to the works by contemporary architects, writers and critics including Koolhaas, Stephen Millhauser, O’Henry and Delmore Schwartz, and will make use of supplemental imagery as well.

Since the summer of 1997, the Loyola University Rome Center has served as the host venue for Xavier’s Summer Honors Program in Rome. My original vision for the program when I designed it included the desire to immerse our students in the cultural treasures of that remarkable city; a city in which artworks burst out of their cloistered museums to become part of public spaces and shared imagination. I had the good fortune to meet and hire Dr. Mattia Carratello to offer such a course for our students. Since June 1997, Dr. Carratello has offered his class to close to one hundred Xavier students. In it, he presents 2500 years of art history by characterizing the city of Rome itself as a vast, public aesthetic space. By superimposing the architecture of the Colosseum or St. Peter’s Basilica for example on the surrounding modern avenues, markets and businesses, a unified public sphere is created in which aesthetic value permeates the experience of the whole. Similarly, a collective, shared public consciousness is cultivated in those who conduct the affairs of their daily lives in these remarkable locales. Life and art interpenetrate not only in the physical geography of Rome, it is reproduced as well as a state of mind that shapes the consciousness of 21st century visitors to this city. Thus, Dr. Carratello contextualizes his art course for our students in this way, in taking the city and its buildings as part and parcel of the aesthetic experience itself. Our students, in turn, routinely comment upon their profound awareness of the unique public

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states of mind that the experience of Rome kindles within them; as students of the cultural past, as heirs to Roman civilization, or as contemporary Christians.

Dr. Mattia Carratello holds a Ph.D. in Contemporary American Literature from the University of Rome. In his doctor's thesis, he explored the use of the forgery metaphor in both contemporary American and European literature. In April of 2001, he presented a public lecture on this theme at Xavier University. He has studied at the University of Illinois as a Fulbright scholar and does editorial work for the renowned Fanucci and Einaudi publishing houses in Italy. He currently edits Praz, and also serves on the editorial board of Malavoglia, both of which are literary reviews published in Rome. In addition, he is a regular contributor to EFFE! another review which monitors developments in contemporary American literature for an Italian audience. Each of these reviews is, in its own manner, an important conduit for contemporary American literature in Italy, and Dr. Carratello is well known in Italian cultural circles for his work in bringing American literary culture to an Italian audience. He is a prolific writer and creative commentator upon trends in the Italo-American literary world. He has organized international conferences on F. Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Pynchon at Rome. His presentations have ranged over a wide variety of topics dealing with American literary representation. In addition, Dr. Carratello is himself a practicing performance artist as founder and performer in Progetto Vox Libris, a multimedia performance ensemble combining music, fiction and the visual arts. In this context, Dr. Carratello has performed this combination of music and literature in numerous public settings throughout Western Europe.

During Dr. Carratello's visit to Xavier, he will interact with faculty and students in several different contexts. First, Dr. Carratello will offer a public lecture dealing with the modern city as a space that engenders specific types of public life and consciousness. The audience will include the Xavier community as well as interested individuals from the wider Cincinnati public. Secondly, and more significant to our teaching mission, Dr. Carratello will visit and participate in several classes including Dr. Colella's Freud & Philosophy (PHIL 388) and Dr. Finkelstein's courses in Poetry (ENGL 221). Most importantly, he will converse with the nineteen freshmen currently enrolled in the freshman honors block course for Philosophy, Politics & the Public majors taught by Drs. Korros and Colella (HIST 134.BL & PHIL 290.BL). Finally, we plan more informal discussions with interested students and faculty to be held at the Honors Villa. In this way, his presence at Xavier will enrich the academic environment at multiple levels -- from students, to faculty, to the surrounding community.

It is my hope that the Wheeler selection committee will see fit to fund this remarkable opportunity for the Xavier academic community. Dr. Mattia Carratello has done much already to enrich our students and faculty. This grant will make it possible for him to reach a wider Xavier audience with his talents and unique intellectual point of view on the contemporary American public imagination. What is more, his presence among us under the aegis of the new Philosophy, Politics & the Public honors program will emphasize the multi-disciplinary tenor of this new program while at the same time underscoring its commitment to adopting rigorous and imaginative perspectives of the complex, multivalent conception of "the public" dimension of contemporary human experience.
Statement of Program Director

In the seven years during which I have known and worked with Dr. Mattia Carratello, I have found him to be a man of impressive intellect and professional achievement. Educated within the highly competitive Italian system, recipient of a Fulbright award to study in the United States, Dr. Carratello has established himself as a leading authority on the contemporary American literary world in Italy. He has served both as translator and critic of this material, and has presented as well as published his work in prestigious venues all across Europe.

Since 1997 Dr. Carratello has been enriching the educational experience of Xavier students in his Seminar on The Art of the Three Romes (ARTS 112.W1S), offered on site in the city of Rome during the Summer Honors Program in the Humanities. I have attended his course on a daily basis several times now, in 1997, 1999, 2001, and most recently in Summer 2003. His classes are always carefully designed, conscientiously prepared, and delivered in a lively and engaging style. As an extemporaneous lecturer, Dr. Carratello is quite remarkable. In these moments, our students are treated to witnessing a mind at work on the spot, composing miniature lectures on particular artworks that involve philosophy, history, political struggles and aesthetics as well.

In both our statement of mission as well as in our academic vision, we at Xavier have committed ourselves to preparing students to be active fashioners of their world. Mindful of the global nature of the society that they shall enter, it is essential that we open as many channels as possible for experiencing that wider world that lies beyond the campus, our local city, and our national shores. In part, we make strides towards accomplishing that goal by bringing intellectuals of other nationalities to our own community for formal and informal scholarly interchange. It is especially instructive when these visitors examine contemporary American experiences from their own perspectives, as it challenges our students to rethink the factors that shape their own identities and ideals. Dr. Carratello's visit will provide our students and faculty with the opportunity to converse with just such an intellectual. His deep intellectual interest in the public mind, especially as it is shaped and constituted by art and architecture, together with his fascination with the American urban landscape promises to open up new and exciting areas of inquiry for the students in PPP, and for the members of our academic community as a whole. In short, this proposal is consonant with both Xavier's mission statement and academic vision, and it fits squarely into the purview of the Philosophy, Politics & the Public honors program in terms of conceptual content, interdisciplinary methodology, and imaginative engagement of the core issue of "the public".

E. Paul Colella, Ph.D.
Director
Philosophy, Politics & the Public Honors Program
Projected Budget:

Roundtrip Airfare -- Rome/Cincinnati (approximated) $1000.00

Housing at Grace & Glory Bed & Breakfast $110/night x 4 nights = $440.00

Meals $50.00/day x 4 days = $200.00

Honorarium $350.00

Advertising $200.00

(Includes the preparation of a brochure for the public lecture, and other flyers for the informal talks)

Entertainment $300.00

Total Requested: $2500.00