

SUNDAY OPINION



GERMANY, CIRCA 1938: Adolf Hitler received a 1-pfennig royalty on the sale of every stamp that bore his likeness.

Designs on power

By Steven Heller

WHAT A SCANDAL it would be to see Adolf Hitler's portrait hanging in Berlin today or tomorrow. Of course, it could never happen because German law prohibits the public display of celebratory portraits of Der Fuehrer, as well as Nazi signs and symbols like the swastika.

In Russia, hanging portraits of Josef Stalin in public is discouraged (although not unlawful), and since the fall of the Soviet Union, monuments to the brutal dictator have mostly been torn down. In Italy, Benito Mussolini's lock-jawed visage has long been removed from national view, although in his hometown of Predappio a shrine containing his tomb and a souvenir shop replete with Il Duce T-shirts, postcards and bottles of wine annually attracts a fair number of curious tourists.

In China, however, where the Olympic Games opened last week, there are no legal, ethical or moral restrictions against revering Mao Tse-tung, the Great Helmsman, despite the tragic outcome of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, which wreaked havoc on China during the second half of the 20th century and led to the deaths of tens of millions of its people.

Not only is Mao's official depiction, with his Mona Lisa smile, by the painter Zhang Zhenshi still looming over Tiananmen Square, where it has hung since the 1950s, but his face remains on much Chinese currency (although not on the new 10-yuan note created for the Olympics) and on many postage stamps. Although the Olympic logo and graphics are as removed from turgid Chinese socialist realism as can be (and Mao is not to be found anywhere on sanctioned Olympic souvenirs), busts, porcelain figurines (Cultural Revolutionary Hummel-ware) produced by Red Guard cadres, posters and other Mao-era souvenirs are plentiful at many flea markets in and around Beijing.

What's more, reproductions of Mao badges and Little Red Books, which were produced in the millions during the Cultural Revolution, as well as Mao clocks, watches and cigarette lighters are available through street vendors and more high-tech websites devoted to such kitsch.

When Germany was defeated in 1945, the Allies declared Nazi graphics to be contraband. But in China, the Communists remained in charge, and the logo, flag, and heroic icons remained in place after Mao's death. Despite attempts to desecrate the famous Tiananmen placard — in 1989, three men were jailed for throwing black paint during pro-democracy protests, and in 2007, another man attempted to set it ablaze — Mao's status as a graphic icon has outlasted the leading early- and mid-20th century dictators, continuing into the 21st century if only as a branding alternative to the Chinese panda.

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CHINA, CIRCA 1968: Porcelain figurines of Mao Tse-tung were given to officials as souvenirs.



CHINA, CIRCA 1968: Metallic disks with Mao's image were hung in homes and offices.



ITALY, CIRCA 1935: Benito Mussolini appeared on many forms of printed media.



RUSSIA, CIRCA 1935: Official portraits of Josef Stalin in the Socialist Realism style never showed him in civilian clothes.

How my energy fueled a scandal

By Sarah Miller

IBLAME myself. It is totally my fault. Well, maybe it's just my energy's fault. But wait — do we control our energy? Don't we just, like, attract what we put out? Anyway, I have really powerful energy, and I refused to respect it, and now it's too late.

What I'm trying to say is that it's my fault that Rielle Hunter had an affair with John Edwards. It's my fault his display of moral laxness let down his supporters, let down the country. It's my fault he cheated on his cancer-stricken wife and betrayed his three children.

Let me explain. I, like every other New Yorker who valued their life, moved to Los Angeles in October 2001. Almost immediately, I rented a room in a house in Benedict Canyon, owned by a friend of a friend, and lived there for almost a year. When I moved out of that room — and I don't mind telling you at this point that Harrison Ford did the built-ins in the den and possibly some of the kitchen cabinetry — Rielle Hunter moved in.

The homeowner who had been a friend of a friend had, by virtue of my stay, become a close friend, so I was still over at the house a lot. Rielle padded in and out in Ugg boots and flared yoga pants, and in a voice that contained strange elements of surfer-ese and lockjaw, gave unasked-for information about her life's journey and personal health. She would tell us how she'd had an amazing yoga practice



TANNEN MAURY EPA

JOHN EDWARDS: Is his disgrace really just an "energy" crisis?

that day, or give an elaborate description of some braised root she'd eaten for lunch. I think I said to my friend once, "What a wack job," but that was the extent of my relationship with Rielle.

Then, one afternoon about five years ago, I arrived for a party at the house. For better or worse, I have a near-perfect recollection of what followed.

I had barely poured myself a drink when Rielle came bounding up to me. Her eyes weren't just glowing. They were kind of spinning in her face. I am almost sure that she was not drunk: This was how she always

looked, only at this moment, she looked more that way than usual. "Hi, sweetie" she said, laying two fingers on my wrist. "It is sooo amazing to me that I am living in your room."

"Is it?"

I tried not to make it obvious that I was backing away from her. I am a Yankee, and the unsolicited use of the word "sweetie," particularly combined with physical contact, makes me extremely tense. "I can't imagine why."

She gave me a sort of coy look, like she knew I knew what she was talking about. "Aren't you rich and famous?"

I seriously thought she had me confused with someone else. "I'm

Sarah Miller," I said, thinking this would clear everything up. "I live in Echo Park now. I'm a magazine writer. I have a cat with one eye." Truly, I had nothing else to say about myself.

She continued to give me that coy look. "Didn't you write an essay for the book 'The Bitch in the House'?"

I had, like most people who write for a living, completely forgotten about an essay I had written some months earlier that had wound up in Cathi Hanauer's anthology. "Yes," I said, and added, because I thought it might bring to the conversation a sense of measure it was sorely lacking, "That article paid for maybe two months of my car insurance. It would have paid for three, but I got a point."

She looked up, her face lit with happy incredulity. "You wrote that article that was published in an actual book that is in stores, in the room I sleep in. In the bed I sleep in." The homeowner had told her I wrote in bed. "It's amazing," Rielle said. "I can feel your energy in there."

"But ... I have been gone for so long," I protested. "Surely my energy has decamped as well."

This had no effect on her. She kept staring at me, that weird glaze still over her face. "Oh, no," she said. "You have really strong energy, and I can feel it in there, and it's telling me what I want to be."

"And what is that?" I asked, knowing that it was probably too much to hope that what she wanted to be was the person who would get me another drink and then go away.

"I am going to be famous," Rielle

said. "Rich and famous. I am going to meet a rich, powerful man."

I was by now leaning against the kitchen cabinetry, and the fact that it was holding me up made me almost certain that Harrison Ford's virility had gone into its construction. "Wow," I said. "How are you going to do that?"

Rielle slid a toe out from under the tip of her flared yoga pants and poked me with it, playfully. "I'm going to manifest it," she said.

I couldn't play along anymore. "Good luck," I said. "I just ... I don't really believe in stuff like that."

She backed away from me now, a conspiratorial smile on her face. "You don't have to," she said. "I'm just going to keep using your amazing energy, and you'll see."

FOR THE remainder of the year or so she lived there, Rielle continued to prattle on about how amazing it was to live in a room that had been inhabited by a famous published writer. My friend tried to explain how I had been a writer before moving in there. She even found herself shouting at her one day, "Sarah is not famous," and afterward feeling guilty, as if she had put me down. Rielle was not to be dissuaded. She was convinced that this room had been magical for me and would be magical for her.

I'm glad it was magical for one of us.

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