n a Friday night at 7:30, 12 hours and 17 patients since the day began at Dr. Fredric Brandt’s Manhattan office, all seven examining rooms were still in full swing. The lasers were pulsing, the syringes kept coming, and the good doctor, wearing navy blue Prada stirrup pants, a black Prada belt with a seat-belt size buckle, metallic Gucci sneakers, and apple green Alain Mikli glasses—a look part Flash Gordon, part Ziggy Stardust—was full of beans. Only his white Dolce & Gabbana shirtdoll, half untucked and smeared with traces of some emollient, betrayed his blistering pace.

“Dry cleaning’s part of the overhead if you want to look like a runway model at work,” Brandt told me cheerily. Preternaturally youthful-looking at 58, he has an unlined and jowl-less face, courtesy of self-administered Botox and Restylane injections, liberal use of hydrating and exfoliating solutions, and laser treatments that tone and tighten his skin. His golden blond hair shows not a glint of gray, thanks to colorist Kyle White of the Oscar Blandi Salon. And at 5’11”, his frame, nourished by egg-white omelets, pomegranate seeds, and Ashtanga yoga, holds at an unvarying 155 pounds. Between his lifting spirit, his spry step, and his utter fixation on youthful beauty, he is cosmetic medicine’s Peter Pan.

Singing, “Squirt, squirt, squirt went the needle / Plump, plump, plump went the lips” to the tune of “The Trolley Song” from Meet Me in St. Louis, Brandt bounded from appointment to appointment. “So what are we doing today?” he asked one woman whose face was slathered with cold, goopy numbing cream in preparation for whatever teeth-gritting cosmetic procedure was to come. “A bisele of Bo?” Brandt asked, using the Yiddish word for “a tiny amount” and shorthand for “Botox.”

In 2006, almost 11 million cosmetic procedures were performed in this country, ringing up more than $11 billion in fees, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. But this data left me wanting more: Where was the human-interest side? Who were the living subjects crunched into these numbers? I—a seasoned consumer, staunch defender, and longtime voluntary lab rat for professional cosmetic interventions—felt it was incumbent on me to flush out the findings, which is how I came to spend two days tailing Dr. Brandt, a man who, with a loaded syringe and needle, would rival Michelangelo, were he not a dead sculptor but a living cosmetic dermatologist.

I temporarily stepped outside my usual role as a habitual user of injectables, forever chasing the intact collagen fibers of youth. Besides myself, I wondered, what sorts of patients—in Brandt’s office they’re tellingly referred to as “clients”—will pay as much as $7,000 for a full face of injections, not once, but up to three times a year? (I’m waiting an extra month for my next round because, according to my loved ones, my cheeks are starting to become bulky-looking.)

One thing I knew: These women were die-hard beauty bums. Just after 9/11, a mother, 68, and daughter, 43, who live in Michigan but come frequently to New York for Brandt, couldn’t get a flight out. Rather than miss their appointments or
rebook them for a later date, they opted to drive some 700 miles to make it—on time, no less.

With Brandt’s permission as well as his clients’ (who shall all remain nameless), I chronicled the goings-on at his two offices, between which he divides his time—two weeks in Manhattan, two in Miami—as a cosmetic-dermatology candy striper. Donning an unglamorous pair of baggy black scrubs—Brandt’s staff uniform—I fell in, bringing up the rear of the conga line of “girls,” as the nurses call themselves, who follow Brandt from room to room, arranging laid my gaze as a psycho-socio spectatrix and dermatological taxonomist.

The Middle-aged Virgin

She was a 53-year-old Upper East Sider, a senior executive at a financial firm, and a first-time patient. It was hard to believe, not because she looked younger than her age, but because she looked 10 years older—or what 10 years older would look like if 50 weren’t the new 40. Dressed in a simple white shirt, black pants, and beat-up black mules and carrying a no-name black bag, her brunette hair in desperate need of a good cut, she was clearly low maintenance.

But at a recent NARAL luncheon, she’d had an epiphany: All the women in the room had looked great, she said, which made her acutely aware of her sorry state. She decided that it was time for a “boost.” Her husband was all too gung ho. (Ouch.)

“I have the face of a gerbil,” the woman announced to Brandt. Despite this brutally honest self-assessment, she was scared to death. It wasn’t the needles that terrified her or that she might look “different,” altered but not necessarily better. Her fear was altogether more profound: “I wouldn’t want to seem narcissistic, that is all I think about,” she said.

Her equivocation clearly stemmed from a misguided Puritanical Guilt Complex. Given my long history with manufactured cosmetic enhancement, I wanted to assure her that improving her appearance wouldn’t corrode her belief that what’s inside matters most or corrupt her moral fiber (much).

In the meantime, Brandt was hard at work, sinking Restylane-jacked needles into her face while he explained, “It’s not wrinkles that make a person look old, it’s the collapse of the rounded surfaces that reflect light and lend fullness to the upper face and cheeks, with a tapering toward the lower face, like an inverted triangle. That’s the shape that makes a woman look beautiful and younger. In older women, the lower part of the face gets heavier, while the upper part gets hollowed out. The Restylane can reverse that change.”

Instead of using plain straight needles, Brandt bends the tips 30 to 45 degrees. He delivered the fillers at an angle under the patient’s skin, adding volume to the woman’s cheeks and chin, distributing the material closer to the surface in a fan-like fashion in order to blend the edges of the filler agents with her new facial contours. This process made them appear natural and gently sloped.

By adding dermal fillers on both sides of the woman’s nose and around her cheekbones, the injections did double duty, lifting and firming up her lax lower face, and pulling up and smoothing the deep nasolabial folds known by the cloying euphemism “marionette lines.” When he finished, an hour had passed and the red biohazard waste bin was spilling over with empty vials of Botox and used syringes.

“What I would suggest next is to fill in the outline of your lips,” Brandt said, stepping back for one last look. “But you’ve had a lot of needles. Let’s leave your mouth for another day.”

What a gentleman. He knew that any virgin, middle-aged or otherwise, needs to be broken in slowly, be reassured there will be a next time, and have reason to hope for something more that will still be new and special. Thus, when the woman stepped into the elevator, she had a change of heart. Suddenly liberated from her freshly plowed-under moral compunctions, she stuck her leg into the closing doors, popping them back open, and rushed Brandt’s receptionist.

What’s the alternative? Pull a Greta Garbo, become a recluse at 36? Better to coat all the mirrors with Vaseline.
The Work in Progress

For the past five years, this Upper East Side psychologist has maintained monthly appointments with Brandt. When we awaited the doctor, I sized up her fashion sense, which had Barneys written all over it: dark Marni skirt, black Miu Miu gold-button-studded belt, black Prada heels, and a caramel Bottega Veneta bag.

While her outfit was fab, there was something off about her face. It looked ageless, a thing off about her face. It looked ageless, a

The Chinny-Chin-Chin

Two years ago, when she was only 31, this SoHo-dwelling ballet philanthropist nipped her crow's-feet in the bud and has refused to let up, thanks to Botox injections from Brandt. While some might think her battle against Father Time is a bit premature, and even though statistics indicate that most cosmetic procedures are performed on women over 40, this woman represents his fastest growing market, says Brandt, describing the 30- to 39-year-olds currently flooding his practice.

"Truthfully, you do see the first signs of aging in the mid-thirties," he says. "People are realizing they don't have to wait until they look really old to do something about it. I've had women in their twenties come in, and we have to send them away. They ask for Botox to prevent wrinkles!" You might not get crow's-feet until you're 60—so why bother starting when you don't even know where the wrinkles will form? It makes more sense, Brandt says, to use sunscreen, good skin care, and other protective measures to keep your skin looking young.

As for the ballet philanthropist, between her platinum pixie haircut, apple cheeks, bright blue eyes—which remain crow's-feetless—and perky 5'4" figure, she could pass for a Junior Miss, were it not for a cruel vestige of her heredity: her double chin. She explained that several months ago she brought Brandt a picture of herself in her twenties so he could see her cheeks. They had long ago deflated, and she wanted them back. Little by little, with each visit, he'd been building them up with Perlane.

"Sixty-one," she answered.

"My mouth dropped. How could she be a mere four years away from a senior-citizen discount? Was it human growth hormone? Cryogenics? I stood up and walked around, peering out the window over East 34th Street, picking up an Us Weekly, all the while trying not to make it obvious that I was angling for a glimpse behind her ears.

"No scars," she said, bursting me. "Never had a face-lift. It's all Fred."

"What are we doing?" Brandt asked, popping in on cue and pecking her cheek. Rummaging in her bag, she pulled out a magnifying mirror and showed him a teensy depression, no bigger than a pencil point, on the side of her face.

She explained that several months ago she brought Brandt a picture of herself in her twenties so he could see her cheeks. They had long ago deflated, and she wanted them back. Little by little, with each visit, he'd been building them up with Perlane.

Was she deranged? What woman in the seventh decade of her life wants to look like a co-ed? Then again, maybe when I'm her age I'll want chipmunk cheeks too. A sqrt of Juvéderm did the trick on the microdent.

Next, Brandt injected Sculptra into her temples because she didn't like the indentations. He also used a laser to zap a few broken blood vessels around her nose.

"How about some laser toning?" she suggested to him.

"You don't need it. Your tone is so good. You're a vision!"

"I'm a work in progress," she corrected.

"How will you know when to stop?" I asked.

"There is no stopping," she said. "I come to maintain what's been done so I never look bad." I couldn't help but think of a gerbil—not the gerbil-faced lady but the kind in a pet store that runs on a wheel, round and round, going nowhere but never giving up, not until it drops.

The Penitent Cheater

Nervously jiggling her foot and fiddling with an iPod, the patient, a 44-year-old woman, was reclining in the examining chair, waiting for Brandt to appear.

"Nothing lasts in my lips, maybe because I smoke," she said loudly, oddly eliciting no response from the normally chirpy nurses, who remained suspiciously mum. What had this woman done to become a pariah?

She told me she lived in the Meatpacking District and owned a fashion business. Judging by her look—unbrushed raven hair, oxblood nail polish, no makeup, an ankle-length washed-denim Prairie skirt, brown suede boots, a gray hoodie unzipped to reveal three sheer, layered pastel tanks, and a formidable white-diamond Rolex jangling, bracelet-like, around her wrist—I suspected her enterprise involved grunge revivalism, Rodeo Drive-style.

"I know exactly what you mean about your lips," I said. "I have the same problem—but with my entire face. It's overly animated, which means the muscles are constantly contracting, and that causes the fillers and stuff to break down and wear off too soon. Two months after I get my Botox, my forehead looks like it's got guitar strings tattooed across it all over again."

"My problem was I had to have the Restylenes," she said furtively, cupping her mouth so the nurses couldn't hear her. "It was an emergency."

What kind of an emergency could call for Restylane? I wondered. I brought my face close to hers to express bonding and empathy, an interrogation technique I learned from Law & Order.

"I just joined Soho House, and I wanted to look extra good in case I ran into my ex there," she explained. "But I couldn't get in to see Brandt, so I went to my old dermatologist from when I had acne. I let her inject me with Restylenes."

So that's why the nurses were dissing her! She was a traitor.

"The other doctor was cheaper," the
Was she deranged? What woman in the seventh decade of her life wants to look like a co-ed?

my face is coming back to life. Like Rush Limbaugh running low on Oxycodeone, I waste no time scrolling through my mental Rolodex of beauty docs, shopping for one who hasn't seen me in a while and thus won't turn me away.

Suddenly, Brandt swooped into the room.

"Okay, ladies, what did I miss?" he asked.

"I'm telling her The Story," the patient said.

"Oy, what a shande!" he said, using the Yiddish word for "shame."

This charmer of a patient was the last thing from a victim. She had the chutzpah to return to the dermatologist who had done the botched job. She had admitted the results were less than fabulous and refunded the woman $1,000 because she said she'd have to go back to Brandt.

The problem was that the doctor injected the Restylane too superficially, leaving palpable lumps, Brandt said. So a week earlier, Brandt had injected the cheater's face with an enzyme called Hyaluronidase, which successfully dissolved the lumps, and now she was back for a Restylane redo. Wearing aqua-colored medical magnifying goggles over his green Miklis, Brandt peered intently through both sets of lenses at the crescent hollows under her eyes.

"Syringe, please," he said, and began methodically reintroducing the filler, inserting the needle under the patient's skin, pushing the plunger ever so slightly, the droplets released making her beautiful again.

"I wish this was permanent," the patient said, sighing, after I gave her the mirror.

Hadn't she learned her lesson? I asked myself in disbelief. This patient should serve as a walking neon sign warning all cosmetic dermatology junkies about what can happen when you wing it with any ol' doctor. She was lucky to have gotten off so easily. Had the procedure been permanent, every day for the rest of her life, whenever she looked at her reflection, she would always have regretted, and could never have forgotten, that she had been unfaithful to her man.

Welcome to Miami

Once one has visited Brandt's office in Miami, it's clear that his New York outpost lives up to the city's reputation as one that never sleeps; fast and intense, the scene seems all work and no play. But in Miami, the staff—the whole environment, really—appears to make play out of work.

During the wait to see Brandt, his staff offers clients "antioxidant water booster," a customized green tea served either chilled or hot in flavors such as lemon and pomegranate. All around the office, baskets brim with little black packets for the taking: samples of Brandt's creams, lotions, and gels from his skin-care line. And that's not all: Edible goodies abound, including special low-fat, low-sugar granola squares made by the office skin-care analyst, Germaine Butler, whom Brandt affectionately calls "Lady Germaine."

With 24 rooms in all, the Miami office is nearly four times the size of Brandt's Manhattan outpost; it's an oasis of shiny white surfaces, high-modernist interior design, and splashy contemporary art. There are aesthetician offices for facials and microdermabrasion; a nurse practitioner who does laser hair and tattoo removal and operates two new devices—the Aluma, a radio-frequency machine that is supposed to quickly and painlessly tighten the skin, and the Isolaz laser, which vacuum-cleans clogged pores; and lastly, Lady Germaine, who—charged with the Visia Complexion Analysis System, which uses computer-generated photographs to measure a patient's facial wrinkles, pore size, skin texture, and sun damage relative to others in her age group—maps out personalized skin-care regimens based on products from Brandt's line.

Barely Legal

Among Brandt's sunshine-state clientele, there is a female phenotype indigenous to South Beach, the coastal magnet for the surgically sleek and the breast-implanted. She may or may not be of legal drinking age or even the age of sexual consent. Her thirtieth birthday is in any case a good way off.

Observant traits include sun-drenched skin not yet showing the ravages of her reckless UVA exposure; long, loose hair, either stiff with dry saltwater or shiny, supple, and a little bit greasy from the Hawaiian Tropic oil that her beau has massaged into her shoulders; and a figure—from good legs to rounded bottom to narrow waist—sculpted into shape by nightly salsa dancing.

The particular example presenting herself to Brandt was 20, Hispanic, and, had it been up to me, would have been padlocked from the premises. Certain things should be outlawed, like meddling with the appearance of a woman graced with nature's perfection (full-body laser hair removal being the obvious exception).

However, this woman was just like the rest of us: hyper-self-critical and panting to participate in the alluring artificial-beauty movement. Thus, she had cooked up two complaints, the first being her hair, which wasn't as thick as the mop-tops of her closest family. Worse, when she shampooed it, she claimed it fell out so copiously that it clogged up the shower drain.

The other problem was on her hips and upper thighs. Although their contours were lovely, neither excessively voluptuous nor excessively boyish, across the surface of her bronzed skin a small school of silver minnows appeared to be swimming by: stretch marks, the unsightly result of rapid adolescent weight gain, which as a young adult she had now lost. However, their visibility had caused the young woman to sink into a depression for which a psychiatrist had prescribed 30 milligrams of Celexa, an impressive dosage that nevertheless did little for her flattening serotonin levels. The worst of it was that she felt forever tied to wearing a sarong over her bathing suit in order to keep her stretch marks under wraps.

Brandt was unusually subdued. I wondered whether we were sharing the same thought: Was this patient nitpicking for flaws to gain sympathy and comfort? Her hair looked as good as a Garnier Nutrisse ad. And her stretch marks? Oh, come on.

Then again, maybe Brandt was experiencing a rare feeling of failure. Ninety-nine times out of 100, he can wave his magic wand of needles and work miracles. But here, all he could do was silently run his hands through her dark tresses, pulling out no hanks and clumps but only a few silky threads. Did I detect a whiff of boredom on his part? His sole recommendation to the
patient was Biotin, a vitamin supplement for hair loss, and a blood test to rule out thyroid problems (the result: negative).

Just before my thirty-sixth birthday, I got an eyelift, paid for by Mom.

As for the minnows in her skin, the only way to beat them back would be the old-school way: a prescription for Renova, a Vitamin A compound cream to increase collagen and improve skin texture.

“No lasers?” the patient asked, sounding completely crestfallen.

“They won’t work on dark skin,” Brandt said sorrowfully.

“What about those miso injections that I keep hearing about?”

“Mesotherapy? It’s supposed to treat cellulite, but there aren’t any clinical studies to prove its efficacy, so I’m not behind it. I’m sorry,” he added, the weight of an anticlimactic appointment pressing down on everyone in the room. “But the Renova will help,” Brandt said, brightening up. “It’ll take anywhere from three months to a year to see results. And while you’re using it, you can’t go in the sun. It makes your skin more sensitive to sun damage.”

“But I go to the beach every day,” she said, her eyes now welling up. “That’s my life. That’s why I came here. So you could get rid of my stretch marks and I could finally look good in a bikini.”

As if she didn’t already.

Mother Botox

“My favorite is when you do my ears,” the 59-year-old patient said, blissfully relaxing in the examining chair, her silver Tory Burch sandals gleaming.

“They’re nice and chubby now,” Brandt reassured the woman, injecting Restylane into her earlobes, which, after a lifetime of heavy, dangly earrings, had become as flaccid as an elephant’s.

“That’s the only place I like chubby,” she said.

Her daughter, 34, laughed. She had accompanied her mother on the three-hour drive from their Fort Myers home. The mother had been a patient of Brandt’s for the past four years, but today would mark her daughter’s entrée to his Neverland of needles.

“She’s the virgin one who’s never been done,” the mother said, thumbing at her daughter. Though she was still baby-faced and could easily wait another five years, it was wise of her mother to encourage an early start. That way, they could shore up the memories of who had which injections and pick apart the pupu platter of rejuvenating possibilities—the kind of girl talk that makes an al fresco lunch at the Lincoln Road Mall taste even better.

My mother had been good to me that way. Just before my thirty-sixth birthday, I got an eyelift by plastic surgeon David Hidalgo, paid for by Mom. In fact, she practically gave me the leg up onto the operating table, insisting I tough it out and go ahead with dermabrasion, a procedure to sand off of the feathery lipstick lines around my mouth, which Hidalgo had recommended. I was scared because my mother had had it done during one of her face-lifts, and I had watched how agonizing and disgusting
The Primal Scene

Being a terminal narcissist, I could only remain behind the mirror for so long. After a whole morning of watching Brandt’s Manhattan patients getting poked and plumped, stuck and smoothed, I was wracked with envy. So, during my lunch, I raced upstairs to dermatologist Roy Geronemus (he’s in the same building as Brandt) and had him laser away all the broken capillaries on my face. Brandt was too booked to entertain me, besides, I was supposed to be “working for” him! It just wouldn’t have been professional. Still, I just had to get in on all the action I was witnessing.

Then, at Brandt’s Miami office, I greedily accepted Lady Germaine’s offer to analyze my complexion. The results confirmed that my face was almost wrinkle-free (the needles, the lasers, the peels, the creams—all working! Yippee!), but the UV damage beneath the surface (otherwise known as the biological half-life of adolescent sunbathing with an aluminum oxide applicator) during the ’70s was so severe that I wanted to check myself into a crypt. Permanently.

The Visia results left me with no choice: On my way home, the minute the airplane began its descent into LaGuardia I flipped open my cell phone, shrugging off a flight attendant who curiously tapped at my shoulder, insisting that I was interfering with the navigation system. How could that matter, now that I knew of the latent wrinkling I was facing?

Because Brandt wasn’t due in town for another two weeks—a duration seemingly so interminable that the mere thought of it caused me to hyperventilate in a brown paper lunch bag—I once again yielded to my inner Heston Prynne and made an appointment with another dermatologist, my longtime friend David Colbert, MD. The time had come for Fraxel laser treatments, the last hope for the hopelessly sun-damaged, or so I’d been told—and, more importantly, want to believe.

Because really, to believe, no matter how blindly, is the fundamental trait of the cosmetic dermatology client: She believes that looking younger will make her feel better about herself; that her boosted self-confidence, plus the luster of her cosmeceutically infused skin, will sustain her sexual desirability; that lip plumpers aren’t just an antidote to shriveling up in old age but an affirmation of life and a subconscious (okay, maybe not so sub) denial of death, especially when a bright lipstick is applied.

Of course, the “she” I’m speaking of is me. But when I held up the looking glass to the women in Dr. Brandt’s office, their reflections (no matter the postprocedural bleeding, bruising, and swelling) bore an unmistakably beatific expression.

The one that wants to tell you a truth you might not want to hear: All this talk about “maintenance” is pure dissimulation. Honestly, I have never reached a point where my pursuit of being bright-eyed and pink-cheeked has leveled off. No matter what I do to myself, or how much I have done, the five or ten years that a dermatologist initially succeeds in sloughing that Hug-a-back in proportion to my increasing age. The odds are, however, getting steeper, the comeliness harder to reach.

But what’s the alternative? To pull a Greta Garbo, becoming a recluse at 36, leaving the world an illusion of eternal pulchritude but never getting out of your pyj’s? Better to coat all the mirrors in the house with Vaseline and cover the lightbulbs, Blanche DuBois–style, with paper towels (paper ones are the always most flattering, should you need to know).

I refuse to buy into growing old gracefully, whether in hiding or in plain sight. My mother is my inspiration: At 71, she has pledged to stick with Brandt until the day she needs a walker and is too frail to maneuver it through her office walls. As a woman choosing a codicil to my living will: Skip the DNR and send me out, instead, on a final Botox bender.

Army Brat

Decorated general arrives for a visit and many, many boots suddenly go thumping in his direction, she rolls her eyes at this “rock-star-iris.” More often, though, McFate sincerely tells me how much she respects the politeness and competency service breeds. “These guys are so dedicated, so smart, and they try so hard. They’ve got the heart, you know? To be an Army man is to believe in some fairly simple yet difficult-to-attain virtues: freedom, fairness, patriotism, renders assistance when it’s required. You may think they’re deluded, but more than anything, these guys want to win, and they know you’re not going to win with a bullet—you’re going to win with a kiss. They’re trying so hard to learn a new way to fight in the middle of a war.”

These days, nothing provokes McFate’s own pugnaciousness like anthropologists who think her angel-on-the-shoulder, “win with a kiss” rhetoric is nonsense—and that cozying up with the military is her own weird way of working out issues with her bohemian upbringing: “I’ve been accused of prostituting the science. I’ve been accused of being in this for the money. I’ve been accused of being unethical. I’ve been accused of being stupid. I’ve been accused of being fat—all kinds of things,” McFate says, her normally low-key patzer sharpening. It’s true that these charges have all been made on Savage Minds and other blogs where anthropologists go to blow steam—with, yes, sometimes surprising savagery—and that the American Anthropological Association has issued a statement disapproving of the Human Terrain Teams (HTT).

But it’s also true that McFate has a knack for inflaming the debate she sits atop, giving as good as she gets. With bile that Rush Limbaugh would admire, she charges that these “Ivy Tower academics” are unduly “concerned with keeping their hands clean,” that they’re just trying to claim “a political and moral higher ground.” Defending her choice to work with armed forces to The Wall Street Journal last summer, she suggested that her brand of in-the-system activism was better than “waving a big sign outside the Pentagon saying ‘You Suck.’” At the anthropological group’s 2006 meeting, George Mason University professor Hugh Gusterson disparaged McFate in a talk, she reportedly approached him and whispered in his ear, “Hugh, I know why you’re so cruel to me. It’s because you want me.” (Though this story has “spread like wildfire in the community,” one anthropologist told me, McFate insists she merely said, “You must have a cold, if you’re this mean to me.”)

Anthropology, as McFate well knows, is a discipline struggling with its own identity. As funding for long-term study of indigenous cultures dwindles, anthropologists are increasingly taking their research skills to corporations, foundations, and government, where they’re largely free (unlike doctors and lawyers, who need licenses to ply their trade) to operate by whatever ethical codes they choose. Even academic anthropologists realize that in this Internet age there’s something poignantly antique about their desire to control how their scholarship is applied. So it’s tempting to write off their objections as the embittered gnashing of “a moribund discipline” that, in fact, has a long history of engagement with the military. As the political anthropologist and military’s embarrassing nickname—“the handmaidens of colonialism”—springs from the British
government's practice, starting in the early twentieth century, of using ethnographic research to shape policies. Catherine Lutz, a Brown University anthropology professor, who helped start a petition against projects like McFate's, says it's "very seductive" for invading Iraq was to secure long-term access and minds, to help armed forces deliver schools. "If you're going to get a college campus," she says, "you've got to keep it open." That's because, in her opinion, the Bush administration's real reason for invading Iraq was to secure long-term access to the country's oil; the professed interest in exploring the souls of the people is just a "PR line." She says, "I'm trying to be honest, and I'm trying to be fair. But it's very alarming to suddenly find you're a public figure, and people expect you should do this and that," she says, looking genuinely whumped. After McFate says she's finished for the day, I speak with Sean, who's taking a break from writing in his office. A braveny, thoughtful guy, he takes up where his wife left off. The anthropologists' uproar over the HTTs is "a proxy for their antiview sentiments," he says, "which, ironically, [Mitzy and I] share." The real issue is that for all her subtlety of mind, McFate can't seem to grasp that anybody could fail to see the wisdom of embedding scholars with soldiers. If she at times bitter incredulity toward her opponents weren't so deeply felt, it might, in fact, seem disingenuous. "In Washington," says Jaci Lyden, "for every position, there's an opposite. One has to hold back a little of oneself. It's that old saw: 'If you can't take the heat, don't stand in the kitchen.'"