

Schwarzenegger Syndrome

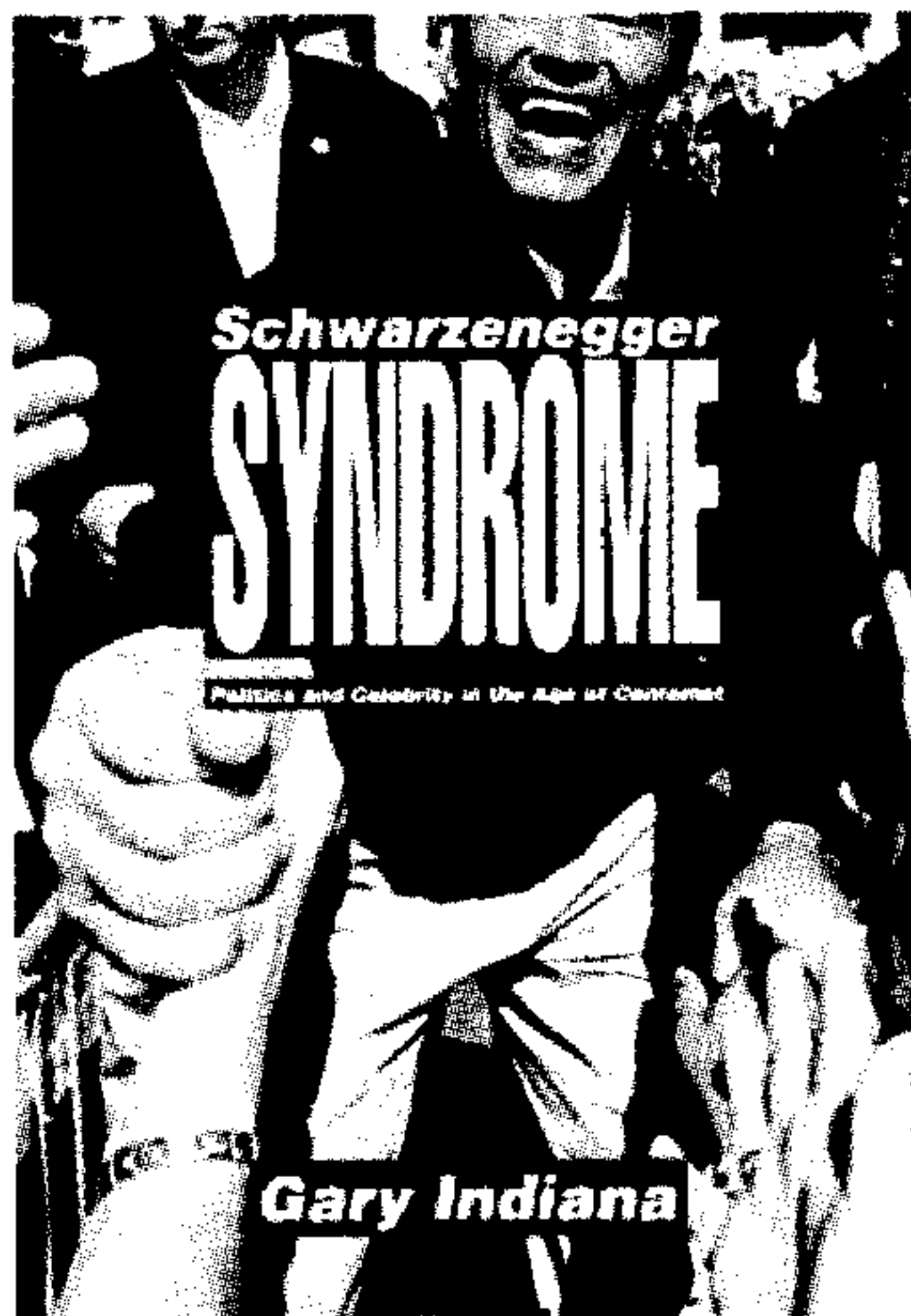
By Gary Indiana.

New Press, \$19.95.

Schwarzenegger Syndrome, a furious and handy little book on California's 2003 recall election that made the megastar governor, ostensibly represents Gary Indiana's return to nonfiction after a fertile stretch of novels—among them his 1997 masterpiece, *Resentment*, in which an ensemble of fame-seeking Los Angeles grotesques vie to exert control over each other since they can't get control of themselves. But the events analyzed in this political study, though quite real, fulfill the satirical world imagined in *Resentment* to such a tee that *Syndrome* could be read as the novel's sequel. As the author notes here, treating the absorption of politics into celebrity worship as inevitable, "Fame as a goal in and of itself is the will to power at its most atavistic extreme."

Early on, Indiana vividly conjures up the obscenity of the 2004 Republican National Convention, where Schwarzenegger's speech functioned, in the author's words, as the "cum shot." What follows, however, is no mere vilification of the governor but a coolheaded explanation of how his seemingly unlikely political success has become possible in an "image world" that takes "the promotion of famousness as the apex of human endeavor."

Indiana tracks the development of Arnold's persona in movies that "glorified force as the preferred method of problem-solving," and suggests that the actor cultivated that image with an eye on his political ambitions. He expertly



cuts through the irony that the GOP conventioners' idol actually stands for "a mixed, secular bag of unimportant progressive reforms" and embodies the "Hollywood values" that many of his supporters reviled. But Indiana also points out that Schwarzenegger's politics are incidental to his ambition, and understands that it is instead the governor's projection of a "personal brand" that has won him political adherents. Indiana's conclusion starkly lays out implications that reach far beyond the California race. It's no small feat that anyone who reads *Syndrome* will be singularly prepared for the Senate campaign of Martha Stewart, or the confirmation hearings of Russell Simmons.

—Jonathan Taylor