

Xcp⁹

cross cultural poetics



LEFT HOOK: BRECHT, BOXING, AND COMMITTED ART
(AN ESSAY BY OLE GRAM)

GALLERY: PAULETTE MYERS-RICH

NEW WRITING FROM AMIRI BARAKA, JENA OSMAN, JEFF DERKSEN,
RODRIGO TOSCANO, ALLISON HEDGE COKE & OTHERS

POSSESSING POSSESSION: LORINE NIEDECKER, FOLK,
AND THE ALLEGORY OF MAKING (AN ESSAY BY ELIZABETH WILLIS)

REVIEWS OF *WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF CLASS*,
JULIANA SPAHR'S *EVERYBODY'S AUTONOMY*,
SOLIDARITY BLUES: RACE, CULTURE AND THE AMERICAN LEFT,
WANDA COLEMAN'S *MERCUROCHROME*, & MUCH MORE

Xcp

cross cultural poetics

Editor

Mark Nowak

Contributing Editors

Lila Abu-Lughod
Kamau Brathwaite
Maria Damon
Larry Evers
C. S. Giscombe
Diane Glancy
Juan Felipe Herrera
Walter K. Lew
Kirin Narayan
Nathaniel Tarn
Shamoon Zamir

College of St. Catherine-Minneapolis

Xcp: Cross Cultural Poetics accepts submissions of poetry, essays, book reviews and black & white documentary photography. Translations are also welcome if accompanied by original language texts. All submissions must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Although reasonable care is taken, *Xcp* assumes no responsibility for the loss of manuscripts.

Subscriptions to *Xcp*: \$18/2 issues (individuals), \$40/2 issues (institutions); outside US & Canada, add \$5. **Make checks payable to “College of St. Catherine”** and send, along with name and address, to: Mark Nowak, ed., *Xcp: Cross Cultural Poetics*, 601 25th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN, 55454.

Email: manowak@stkate.edu

Website Address: <http://bfn.org/~xcp/>

Copyright © 2001 *Xcp: Cross Cultural Poetics*

ISSN: 1086-9611

Library Subscription Agents: EBSCO, Swets-Blackwell, Faxon.

Distributed by Bernard DeBoer (Nutley, NJ), Small Press Distribution (Berkeley, CA) and Don Olson Distribution (Minneapolis, MN).

Xcp is indexed in the *Index of American Periodical Verse* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press), *MLA International Bibliography*, *Book Review Index* and *Sociological Abstracts*.

Front Cover Artwork by Carolyn Erler
Website Editor: David Michalski

Typeset in Times New Roman and BlairMdITC TT-Medium.

Printing & Binding by McNaughton & Gunn: Saline, Michigan.

The viewpoints expressed in these pages are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the College of St. Catherine, which assumes no legal responsibility for any actions taken as a result of the writing published in *Xcp*.

All copyright © returns to authors upon publication.

This issue is made possible, in part, thanks to several generous donors, in-kind support from the College of St. Catherine, and the continued support of our subscribers.

WRITING (WORKING) CLASS

Left Hook: Brecht, Boxing, and Committed Art
Ole Gram [7]

from **Press Scrutiny: The Doubles**
Jena Osman [17]

Red-Brick Dust
3 steps over
Curtis Crisler [20]

Wooden Negroes Appear At A Slam
Rhythm & Rime
Amiri Baraka [24]

from **Playing House**
Tisa Bryant [31]

Gallery: Paulette Myers-Rich [40]

Jukebox Selection, A Brick and Mortar Remembrance
(following a conversation with a Local 4-121 pensioner)
Ideo-Degradable Verses from Immokalee (for Lucas Benitez)
General Secretary Lula's Last Stand?
Rodrigo Toscano [49]

As Ideology: Denaturalized Globalization and Articulatory Poetics
Jeff Derksen [58]

\$OO / Line / Steel / Train
Mark Nowak [66]

Writing as social practice
(Writing Class: The Kootenay School of Writing Anthology)
Pauline Butling [85]

Four Corner Nabs
Allison Hedge Coke [93]

Possessing Possession: Lorine Niedecker, Folk, and the Allegory of Making
Elizabeth Willis [97]

REVIEWS

Women and the Politics of Class

Johanna Brenner [a review by *Rebecca Scherr*, 109]

**A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero
from Guthrie to Springsteen**

Bryan K. Garman [a review by *Steven Garabedian*, 114]

The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You

Frank Stanford [a review by *Eric Lorberer*, 118]

Where We Stand: Class Matters

bell hooks [a review by *Gabrielle Civil*, 124]

The Invention of Capitalism

Michael Perelman [a review by *Bill Brown*, 129]

Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity

Juliana Spahr [a review by *Elisabeth Frost*, 136]

Mercurochrome

Wanda Coleman [a review by *Mary E. Weems*, 140]

Re/Presenting Class: Essays in Postmodern Marxism

J. K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolff, eds.
[a review by *Mark Soderstrom*, 146]

Solidarity Blues: Race, Culture, and the American Left

Richard Iton [a review by *David Michalski*, 151]

Necessary Distance

Clarence Major [a review by *Joel Bettridge*, 156]

Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution

Susan Zlotnick [a review by *Deirdre Murphy*, 160]

Crazy Melon and Chinese Apple

Frances Chung [a review by *Heather Nagami*, 165]

**WRITING (WORKING)
CLASS**



LEFT HOOK: BRECHT, BOXING, AND COMMITTED ART

Ole Gram

Any boxer who says he loves boxing is either a liar or a fool. I'm not looking for glory...I'm looking for money. I'm looking for readies.

—Chris Eubanks, British boxer

The Times, 30 December 1993

In the popular imagination, one of boxing's many attributes is the sport's working class roots: the dream of "making it" and leaving the blue-collar neighborhood for fame and fortune. And as we know from numerous novels and films (*Rocky* being only one of many Hollywood boxing movies) boxing was always intimately tied to male working class identity and imbued with a mystique unlike any other sport. More so than team sports such as baseball or soccer, boxing plays up the fate of the individual, and professional boxing seems somehow always tied to money and poor urban living conditions: the prize fighter who rose from abject poverty and with little coaching knocks out the opponent on his way to the top; the greedy promoter who cashes in on the blood and broken noses of agile young men; the newspapers that would pronounce a boxer's demise as quickly as they had hailed him a new star—it all added up to a drama that showed the ruthless soul of class difference even if the ideological outcome was ultimately one celebrating individualism and social upward mobility. Part of boxing's appeal to artists and intellectuals from Picasso to Klaus Mann was undoubtedly related to the sheer popularity of the sport of which most artists could only dream. But aside from the dream of mass cultural appeal, the sport enjoyed a kind of fashionable chic among writers, intellectuals, and avant-garde artists that was only rivaled by the embrace of jazz (and the black jazz artist in particular) as being similarly liberating, "primitive", and highly eroticized. But for all its faddish celebration, elements of boxing also served as a model for a new kind of awareness of the body and as an inspiration for radical new forms of artistic expression during the years of innovative experimentation in Weimar Germany.¹ Boxing in the young republic, and especially in the bustling capitol of Berlin, in many ways exemplified some of the most compelling characteristics and contradictions of German cultural life during the "Golden Twenties," and it became a discursive symbol of the intersection of national pride, mass culture, and self-exploration. Boxing was a crucial element in the Nazis' national program for rejuvenating the nation through sports and healthy living. And like everything else in Weimar Germany, amateur boxing was divided along political lines with both national-chauvinist sports clubs and workers sports organizations promoting the sport.²

The German socialist author Bertolt Brecht was a great fan of boxing and like so many other authors, from Ernest Hemingway to Joyce Carol Oates, his interest in boxing is evident in much of his dramatic work as well as in his

early prose and poetry. For Brecht, boxing became a model for a different conception of theatrical performance: in place of the stuffy bourgeois theater of Wilhelmine Germany with which he had grown up, Brecht envisioned a theater that would cross over into other media and genres such as film, radio, reportage, or musical theater.³ Boxing provided a direct source of material for his work, especially in some of his prose and poetry in which he pays tribute to the professional boxer Paul Samson Körner whom he had befriended while living in Berlin. But it was above all in his theatrical production that we find the most productive influence of boxing on his work. For example, in one of his collaborations with the composer and fellow boxing enthusiast Kurt Weill, the “opera” *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, Brecht wanted to use a boxing ring as the setting, without any backdrops except for large drawings by his friend Caspar Neher. Similarly, in *The Measures Taken*, one of his so-called “Learning Plays,” the stage consists of a boxing ring with the chorus and the audience surrounding the entire stage and the harsh light of the floodlights as the main illumination of the stage. Brecht’s enthusiasm for boxing is well documented and evident in much of his work. However, the influence of boxing on his thinking and artistic work underwent a set of subtle changes that mirrored much of his own thinking about the relationship between entertainment, popular culture, and committed art during the 1920s and 1930s.

From the late Nineteenth Century and during the years of the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany, the popularity of sports and a new sense of the body saturated German popular culture. In part as a response to horrible living conditions for the working class, rapid industrialization, and an explosive growth of large urban centers such as Berlin and the heavily industrialized Ruhr area, numerous reform movements promoting healthier living through improved personal hygiene and exercise had emerged in the late nineteenth century. Organizations promoting everything from nudism to vegetarianism to organized sports sprung up around the country and, as was the case with the popular youth culture organizations and gymnastics clubs, some of these movements enjoyed substantial growth in memberships in the 1920s and 1930s. Spectator sports such as soccer and even track and field were extremely popular, but it was boxing that experienced the most rapid surge in popularity. With the founding of two major boxing federations in 1919 and the organizing of the first prizefight in Berlin that same year, the sport had established itself as the most popular entertainment and sport of the day. In the mid-Twenties, the famous sports arena *Berliner Sportpalast* would draw well over 10,000 spectators to fights that not only would set attendance records, but also gave *Berliner Sportpalast* the aura of a modern center of the city from which the new media such as radio, newsreel, and the cut-throat, competitive yellow press would disseminate entertainment to Berlin and all corners of the nation. It was, not surprisingly, in the very *Sportpalast* that Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s Propaganda Minister and pioneer of modern propaganda and orchestrated media synergy, in 1942 delivered his most famous speech calling for “the total

war.” Boxing, of course, also lent itself far better to these emerging media formats than, for example, the more “sanitized” sports such as gymnastics, or even the incredibly popular six-day races which shared with boxing the same macho grit and mass-appeal that was an important element of the sport’s attraction. Boxing, it seems, was made for this new confluence of different media in which fights would quickly become large scale events, and the fighters would turn into heroes and losers in a plot where the spectator always knew the simple rules of the game: two men fighting it out in a brightly lighted ring (thanks to the invention of the new powerful high-lumen light bulb,) a set of clear and uncomplicated rules, and a simple point system in case the anticipated dramatic knock-out failed to materialize before the bell rang at the end of the last round.

When the young Bertolt Brecht arrived in Berlin towards the end of 1924, boxing fever was still at its peak and just one of the many manifestations of Berlin as a blossoming cultural capitol. In contrast to the cities of Munich and Augsburg in Brecht’s native Bavaria, Berlin was anything but provincial: full of movie houses, new magazines, fancy outdoor (neon) advertising and variety shows, as well as prestigious publishing houses, workers’ writing collectives, theaters, and a flourishing cultural avant-garde scene. The twenty-two year old Brecht found Berlin both appealing and unpleasant. After all, this was the city whose theater stages he had set out to conquer, and this is where he would forge connections with such important collaborators as Hanns Eisler and Helene Weigel. But Berlin was also the city that opened his eyes to the consequences of rapid and unregulated capitalist expansion, an insight that would later contribute directly to his political awakening and conversion to Communist principles. Epitomized by its infamous *Mietskaserne*—dark three to seven story working class barracks in which families lived in squalid conditions—Berlin was unable to accommodate its rapidly growing population and was also in an economic and political morass of hyper-inflation, parliamentary instability, and massive unemployment and poverty. Berlin embodied the rampant cultural and political polarization of the Weimar Republic even on the political left where fractionalizing and intentional isolationism in part was to blame for the fascist takeover in 1933 that would end up crushing all progressive political movements in its wake. While Brecht never participated actively in party politics he did become one of the main contributors to debates on the left concerning the role of mass media, popular culture, and the prospects for a new socialist culture in general. Not surprisingly, boxing was never an explicit part of Brecht’s thoughts about the cultural transformation of society, but the appeal of boxing and the way it kept surfacing in much of his writing gives us a sense of how the sport became an inspiration for the author.

Already as a young man in Augsburg, Brecht would follow the big national and international boxing matches, and after his arrival in Berlin he was attending fights in the *Sportpalast* on a regular basis. Not only did the sheer magnitude and entertainment value of these fights impress the young playwright, they also showed him a very different kind of interaction between the audience

and the stage. “The theater must attain the kind of fascinating reality that the *Sportpalast* has during fights” Brecht wrote in 1936.⁴ Unlike most traditional theater, including Brecht’s own earlier expressionist plays *Baal* and *Drums in the Night* where the audience would sit immobile in the theater looking straight at the stage, the boxing ring was multi-dimensional, brightly lit, and the audience knew exactly the rules of the action taking place on the stage. In addition to its entertainment value, it was the transparency of the action that fascinated Brecht and that would provide him with the inspiration for what he would later call his “pedagogy.” The audiences at these fights were already boxing experts: they were able to give detailed commentary about what was transpiring on the stage and they could easily break down the action into its component parts. In addition, the time limit of each round, the elegant simplicity of the rules, and the constant anticipation of the knock-out that could put an end to the fight at any time gave the boxing ring a dynamic that it seemed impossible to recreate on the theatrical stage. Yet it was exactly the rational transparency of the rules of boxing that gave Brecht the inspiration for a conception of drama in which each scene—not unlike the rounds in boxing—were almost self-contained with their own internal dynamic that could shift from one scene to the next. And against any sense of illusory coherence between the acting and the plot of the play Brecht instead sought to make transparent—through harsh lighting, the use of the boxing ring as set design, and the stylized gestures and de-individualized acting technique inspired by the Japanese *No* theater tradition—how theater could both entertain and educate at the same time. The so-called alienation effect or V-effect for which Brecht’s epic theater is well-known, is precisely an attempt at breaking down the illusions of the bourgeois theater tradition in order to invite the spectators to actively reflect upon the action on the stage in a fashion that would prevent disinterested empathy with the characters and instead force the audience to engage and dissect the play in its component parts. In his notes to *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, which Brecht in disdain for the “culinary” cultural milieu sarcastically subtitled an “opera,” he speaks of the need for his “opera” to be “fun,” and provide enjoyment.⁵ The lesson that Brecht derived from popular culture was precisely the importance of enjoyment as a crucial element of his theatrical practice. But what set it apart from the traditional “culinary” theater with its celebration of the always class specific education in “good taste” was Brecht’s insistence on breaking down the tasteful organic whole of the “integrated work of art” and replacing it with a theater that consciously separated its theatrical elements. In a table designed to show the differences between the traditional “dramatic” theater and the “epic” theater, Brecht shows in schematic fashion how the emphasis of his theater shifts the attention away from the plot towards showing the process of the action on the stage, and how it is designed to invite a new kind of spectatorship:

DRAMATIC THEATRE

plot
implicates the spectator in a stage situation

wears down his capacity for action
provides him with sensations
experience
the spectator is involved in something
suggestion
instinctive feelings are preserved
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares
the experience
the human being is taken for granted
he is unalterable
eyes on the finish
one scene makes another
growth
linear development
evolutionary determinism
man as a fixed point
thought determines being
feeling

EPIC THEATRE

narrative
turns the spectator into an observer

but
arouses his capacity for action
forces him to take decisions
picture of the world
he is made to face something
argument
brought to the point of recognition
the spectator stands outside, studies

the human being is the object of the inquiry
he is alterable and able to alter
eyes on the course
each scene for itself
montage
in curves
jumps
man as a process
social being determines thought
reason

Without suggesting any causal relation between boxing and the “Epic Theater,” it is nevertheless instructive to note how elements of the boxing stage are reproduced in Brecht’s notes to *Mahagonny* such as “reason” (i.e. the transparency of the action,) “jumps,” “each scene for itself,” “he is alterable and able to alter,” which all show parallels to the boxing spectator’s active and “rational” determination of the process unfolding in the ring as well as to the staging of the fight itself as one in which the spectacle is centered on each scene as a “round” in itself. *Mahagonny* (1927), like many of his plays, was set in America, in the fictitious eldorado-like city of Mahagonny in Florida in which “gin and whisky/girls and boys” are in ample supply. *Mahagonny* is an apocalyptic vision of unrestrained capitalism, a wealthy eldorado of hedonistic excess and profit-driven calculation that ultimately falters. A society in which all relations between humans have become reduced to a relation between things as merchandise (food, sex, and alcohol,) and where all value is counted in the form of money. The American city of Mahagonny was in many ways simply a stand-in for Brecht’s views of Berlin, but America did hold

a particular fascination for Brecht that was not unlike the one he had for boxing: the scale of capitalist expansion, the private eye (Brecht was an avid reader of mystery novels), and the dozens of self-made millionaires were all part of America's appeal. And unlike home, American society (besides delivering material for a good story) had the same kind of transparency and no-nonsense approach to money that was also characteristic of professional boxing. In a sense, it was the materialism of both Brecht's America and of professional boxing that appealed to him, precisely because it emphasized the primacy of material social needs over idealistic day-dreaming.

In his scattered notes to a novel he had planned, provisionally entitled *Das Renommee* (*The Reputation*, 1926), Brecht suggests how the very relationship between concrete survival and the structure of the market forces is integral to boxing:

In this boxing novel boxing isn't the main theme [...] What is more interesting is to show how a man earns money and fame through his boxing, and how he in turn manages to turn his fame into money one more time, in short: how a man "makes it." It is interesting to see how all kinds of people try to make a hero, that is, are set on wanting a good man to be even better than he is, and with the gentle pressure of little newspaper comments...and, if need be, force him to attempt a world record by pressuring him in all kinds of hellish ways: through his private and public life, through the press, in short: how a man "is made."⁶

"Making it" and "being made" seems to sum up Brecht's unromantic view of boxing, and it shows how boxing far from merely providing him with a framework for both a new and different kind of dramaturgy as well as a new kind of enlightened audience, also served as a metaphor for survival in modern society. *Kampf*, in German meaning "fight" (as in *Boxkampf*) as well as "struggle," sums up the double sense with which boxing as such became a metaphor for the internal contradictions of capitalist society. On the one hand, boxing was an ideal stage for a new kind of theater and, as it were, a new kind of modern, "expert" spectator. On the other hand, it was capitalism itself that had produced the conditions for boxing as a large-scale money-driven media event in the first place. What made boxing unique, however, was its ability to reduce the complexity of all the social and economic relations—of which the sport itself was part—to a two-person boxing match. Reducing the social and economic relations to the stylized "fight/struggle" indeed epitomized Brecht's constant attempt to shed light on the fundamental class antagonism that underlay, and yet was obfuscated by, capitalist society. As the quote by the British boxer Chris Eubank atop of this article suggests, "making it" in professional boxing is never just about noble sportsmanship and glory, but as much about bringing home the money.

In a note from 1928, Brecht takes to task those boxing critics whom he thought were ruining the sport by turning it into an “art form” that would do away with the “k.o.” as the ultimate resolution of the fight:

The desperate attempt of certain “connoisseurs” to turn the sport into a kind of “art”... In boxing this tendency is shown in the propagation of the point system. The more the sport of boxing removes itself from the k.o., the less it has to do with a real sport. A boxer that can’t knock out his opponent obviously hasn’t beat him. Imagine two men fighting on a street corner or in a bar. How would you conceive of a win by points there? The main adversaries of the naturally naïve and home-grown boxing sport are those scholars who sit on the sidelines and collect points in their hats. ⁷

Brecht’s impassioned defense of the knock-out as the crucial element of boxing, as well as his disdain for what he saw as the elitist undermining of the sport’s roots in the reality of working class experience, seems both exaggerated and dangerously close to advocating an almost romanticized notion of a simple, hard-boiled working class machismo as somehow radically different from the world of the sissy bean counters that were trying to ruin the sport. To be sure, Brecht’s fascination with the working class man of action is evident in such works as *The Three-Penny Opera* and *Mahagonny*. And boxing was undoubtedly also a way of compensating for his own weak constitution (he did not get drafted to the army because of a heart murmur) as well as for his privileged and sheltered middle-class upbringing. But while the point system hardly would make boxing less of a sport, the knock-out rule certainly is one of its most striking characteristics. The tension that emerged during a fight from the set time of each round coupled with the anticipation of the sudden knock-out seemed a key feature of the sport. One can only speculate that there might have been an altogether different motivation behind Brecht’s vitriolic attack on the “connoisseurs” “collecting points in their hats,” which might have had as much to do with an ingrained skepticism on Brecht’s part towards the kinds of often national-chauvinistic reform movements and gymnastics and sports organizations that advocated the need for exercise and hygiene as an antidote to the effects of urbanization and industrial pollution. In the eclectic ideology of Hitler’s National Socialist Party, for example, sport (including boxing) contributed to the ideological blend of anti-capitalist sentiment and imperialist aspiration that was coupled with a romanticized notion of the healthy individual prefiguring, in a sense, the healthy body of the nation.

Mahagonny is the last play in which Brecht explicitly includes a boxing match (ending in a knock-out of course) and all his attempts at writing a boxing novel after the *Mahagonny* opera were completely abandoned. Instead, he devoted much of his energy on a number of “Learning Plays,” didactic plays that never enjoyed great popularity, but that nevertheless took his dramatic work in an entirely

new and radical direction. One such controversial play, *The Measures Taken*, (*Die Maßnahme*, 1930) depicts three Chinese communist agitators' decision to execute a young comrade who, often despite his best intentions, had severely endangered several projects and thereby brought great harm to the collective will of the party and the people. Through four different model scenes, the young man's behavior is highlighted and ultimately explained as his inability to situate his individual moral decisions to the context of the task before him and thus sacrificing the greater need of a collective communist humanity for his own individual sense of moral obligations. In the end, the young comrade realizes his mistakes and accepts his execution. This scandalous piece, which undoubtedly is Brecht's most controversial work, retained elements of the epic theater, but it also marked a radical departure from works such as *The Three-Penny Opera* and *Mahagonny* in which the integration of popular entertainment was a vital element. First, the learning plays were intended as practical learning lessons in Marxist principles and practical contradictions rather than finished moral parables. Unlike most of Brecht's own dramatic production the learning plays were not even intended to be performed before an audience. They were first and foremost conceived as political seminars in which the actors were also the audience. The central message of the learning play is therefore not the tragic situation, but rather the actors' learning process as they work through the scenes where each dilemma is concretized and directly felt by the actor/spectator.

With *The Measures Taken* we seem to be far removed from the sometimes complex and contradictory fashion in which Brecht absorbed boxing as a cultural phenomenon. But while the individual drama of the fight was replaced by a much broader commitment to a new form of committed socialist drama, Brecht never quite gave up incorporating elements of the boxing match in his work. *The Measures Taken* represents one of the best examples of Brecht's stylized and de-individualized theater, and although the rough realism of the "fight" with all its direct associations to money and popular spectacle was abandoned by the time he wrote *The Measures Taken*, the boxing ring was still the model scene for its staging. In the learning play it was not so much the element of antagonism that the boxing sport had embodied for Brecht earlier that was central, but rather the very sense in which boxing was a sport with its own bodily "semiotic," so to speak. Boxing had its own transparent system of rules and signals that the fighters would follow as a "logic" of the fighting body in constant motion, adjusting to the moves of the opponent, learning by touch, reflex, and repetition how to negotiate the ring. In the learning play it is this kind of learning that is alluded to by the use of the boxing ring as staging device, and by the actors/spectators working their way through the contradictory "model" positions of the play.

Footnotes

¹ Weimar Germany or the Weimar Republic refers to the republic that lasted from 1919 until 1933 when the Nazi party suspended the constitution and assumed power.

² For a thorough investigation of the role of boxing in Weimar and Nazi Germany, see: David Bathrick, "Max Schmeling on the Canvas: Boxing as an Icon of Weimar Culture," *New German Critique* 51. Fall (1990).

³ Wilhelmine Germany refers to the era of William II (Wilhelm II), the militaristic German emperor (Kaiser) from 1888 to the end of World War I in 1918.

⁴ "Dekoration," *Schriften* 1. Quoted in Günther Berg, "Die Männer boxen im Salatgarten: Bertolt Brecht und der Faustkampf," *Das Brecht-Jahrbuch* 18. Der Andere Brecht (1993).p. 11. Translation mine.

⁵ See *Anmerkungen zu meiner Oper "Mahagonny,"* translated in: Bertolt Brecht, *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

⁶ In: Bertolt Brecht, "Einige Punkte aus dem Boxerroman," *Bertolt Brecht: Werke*, ed. Stefan Brecht, vol. 17 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), p.423, my translation.

⁷ *Die Todfeinde des Sports*, Gesammelte Werke, vol. 8, Frankfurt a. M. Quoted from: Henning Eichberg, *Leistung, Spannung, Geschwindigkeit : Sport u. Tanz im gesellschaftl. Wandel d. 18./19. Jh*, Stuttgarter Beiträge zur Geschichte und Politik ; Bd. 12 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978), p. 85, my translation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arenhövel, Alfons. *Arena der Leidenschaften : der Berliner Sportpalast und seine Veranstaltungen, 1910-1973*. Berlin: W. Arenhövel, 1990.

Bathrick, David. "Max Schmeling on the Canvas: Boxing as an Icon of Weimar Culture." *New German Critique* 51. Fall (1990): 113-36.

Berg, Günther. "Die Männer boxen im Salatgarten: Bertolt Brecht und der Faustkampf." *Das Brecht-Jahrbuch* 18. Der Andere Brecht (1993): 1-17.

Brecht, Bertolt. "Einige Punkte aus dem Boxerroman." *Bertolt Brecht: Werke*. 1926. Ed. Stefan Brecht. Vol. 17. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1989. 423.

—, *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre*. From *Versuche* 2, Berlin 1930. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.

Brecht, Bertolt, and Reiner Steinweg. *Die Massnahme; kritische Ausgabe mit einer Spielanleitung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972.

Brecht, Bertolt, John Willett, and Ralph Manheim. *The rise and fall of the city of Mahagonny; and, The seven deadly sins of the petty bourgeoisie*. 1st

Arcade pbk. ed. New York Boston: Arcade Pub.; Distributed by Little Brown, 1996.

Eichberg, Henning. *Leistung, Spannung, Geschwindigkeit : Sport u. Tanz im gesellschaftl. Wandel d. 18./19. Jh.* Stuttgarter Beiträge zur Geschichte und Politik; Bd. 12. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978.

Mann, Heinrich. *Die grosse Sache.* Berlin: G. Kiepenheuer, 1930.

Musil, Robert. *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften.* Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981.

Oates, Joyce Carol. *On boxing.* Garden City, N.Y.: Dolphin/Doubleday, 1987.

Oates, Joyce Carol, and Daniel Halpern. *Reading the fights.* New York: H. Holt, 1988.

Schulberg, Budd. *Sparring with Hemingway : and other legends of the fight game.* Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1995.

from **PRESS SCRUTINY: THE DOUBLES**

Jena Osman

HEARSAY

The guards arrive at the house early in the morning. They reach in and pull out all of the grandfather's poems. They find the double: climbing a mountain is a design against great leaders. Dark is one faction, light another. Use these adjectives at your own parallel. "It" is dark. The light is white. Climbing in the dark toward dawn as the white light erupts onto the eye through the dark. Darkness overtakes me, surrounds me, enlivens me. The students notice that in the story, typical connotations with dark and light begin to slip and exchange. She wears sunglasses everywhere, so as to protect her eyes from the light. Protecting one faction from the other. A design against leaders.

CLIMBING A MOUNTAIN=A DESIGN AGAINST LEADERS

WHISPERING DOWN THE LAME

and then the man says another thing when he said "shoe" did he
really mean "you"? there's the problem of erratum when he said
"shoe" did he really mean "show"? there's a voice behind each error
displaying the natural talent that lies within each word no matter how
small "gotta dance!" "gotta ant" "go tan" "go on"
"Bhutan" did you really say that? did I hear you correctly?
were you talking to me? were you talking to me when you used the word
"hospitality"?

"SHOE"=BHUTAN

"HOSPITALITY"=THE END OF LOVE

FIRST

Is Burma. An article in *The New Yorker* by Amitav Ghosh, August 12, 1996, describes two Burmese magazine covers censored by the Press Scrutiny Board because they are considered politically subversive. One depicts a penguin on an ice floe and the other, a woman sitting under a tree with falling flowers.

PENGUIN ON ICE FLOE=AUNG SAN SUI KYI

HOSPITALITY

the act of being hospitable or a tendency toward being hospitable this is a
triple blow to the chin welcoming and generous behavior toward guests or
strangers jab the left hand to the chin an instance of this shift
the weight to the right leg cordial and generous reception of or disposition
toward guests and follow with a hard left hook to the chin an instance
of such treatment rock the weight forward to the left leg Middle
English hospitalite and drive a straight right to the chin from Old
French now switch so that the last blow of the combination from
Latin hospitalitas (stem hospitalitat) from hospitalis will be an
uppercut to the body of a guest see hospital see hospital
fling the left hand forward and upward his offer of hospitality
crushed her in front of the opponent's face sometimes words known
for their kindness twist the body to the left can be a slip
after jabbing several times a chapter of misunderstandings
the rhythm is one—one-two! of over-reading

D+RAGS

The clothes make the man d is for demolish make the woman the
man the man the woman d is for diminish and so they are the
same is for dowry but perform that sameness with a difference
for difference at the masquerade ball, all the party goers attempt to
escape the plague d is for devastation of sameness
devastation is different repeating themselves does not help
d is for darling take a situation and write it in code to escape the danger
of articulation is for dapper this might provide an important service
d is for dandy but can taking a subaltern position and dressing it
up d is for dress-up in new clothes damask (make the
woman the man) is for diamonds perform a disservice?
d is a one way ticket to Camden, New Jersey the original position
is still erased is a one way ticket to Fresno only able to exist in
someone else's clothes is a one way ticket to Milan although it
may point effectively a ticket to nowhere to how clothes are
constructed d is for dry cleaning ticket it does not work to
communicate the silenced d is a drag sense is acquired by creating
analogies ("samenesses") d is for dog links constructed by the mind
which suppress meaning to varying degrees works like a dog
(a penguin on an ice floe) when this construction project d is
for danger, falling rock is exposed as the artifice that it is d is for
the open door

RED-BRICK DUST

Curtis Crisler

—inspired by Laurence Bergreen's

Louis Armstrong: An Extravagant Life

To sell fish Creole whores needed the material—redbrick dust its name. Poor colored boys like Louis pounded buckets of redbrick dust for fifty to seventy cents—hustlin' for a poor boy sandwich—a Saturday morning venture to obtain sliver of peace. In Storyville where honey dripped in sultry nights accompanied by the ragtime daddies/ precursors to birth-of-blues-magicians; the Buddy Boldens/ the Joe Olivers; the French Quarter's epicurean cuisine. The ladies called it luck, redbrick dust poured atop the sidewalk in front of brothel, front steps scrubbed down w/ their own piss—a hoodoo/ voodoo realification for more Johns, Dicks, and Harrys to come. In heart of one nation indivisible a social engineered red-light district illuminates exclusive customers attracted to the smell of colored girl's innate & overt perfume. Don't all profit? To sell fish to white patrons colored madams placed a dollar on potpourris steps so policemen wouldn't notice her girls lingering in lingerie. But when the buck stopped twirling his nightstick under the moonlight his dollar profit went to the ala carte appetizer. Did he wonder what America purchased from Napoleon in Louisiana? In the early 1900s men & women where reborn through science as fish proved a main stay on the Americana platter. Lot ran from fish in Genesis, 19. Our founding fathers shackled fish on plantations in their backyards. Davis, Oprah, & Vanzant advised girls to not give away such gifts—*it's not a food or fountain, a man's possession, or woman's firearm*. For two dry pieces of bread & thin slice of ham—a five-cent poor boy sandwich—colored boy's hands got brick red for Creole girls they couldn't touch/ sacrificed to white hands under moonlight/ brick red tracks in America's soil. A feat transgressed upon from highly trafficked corners in taboos & shadows into untainted houses where its stench grows beyond its own history.

3 STEPS OVER

Curtis Crisler

ON THE SCENE—ONE

A brotha tries to acquire placement, relief, hungry and tired after another hard day in retribution, he dangles. He goes into a fast-food rest-all-want in some USA city.

CASHIER/WISDOM

Hi, sir, can I help you to devour any relics or dogmas that may chain you to a status that you have a problem undertaking? Is there any substitution that you would like? Like turkey instead of ham? Do you want a relief man to sit in for you because your average sucks? Can I take your accomodations, please?

BROTHA

Yes, I'm in a journey from downtown to movin-on-up
It's a down beat w/ high frequencies/ trepidations & trap-doors
'cause I'm affirmative action in progress
I'd like America on the side, w/ cheese, maybe supersize it
right/ left a-quota
right/ left a profile
left/ right a thug since I sometimes enjoy a baseball cap on my peanut head
I tried to be a father to that child for her but couldn't deal/still had latefees on my dream
I tried to be a husband to my wife but we never married/in the reel of sense/ a-tion
do you still have 3/5ths or 3/8ths of black man on your menu? It's from the ghetto
to the suburbs/ want some of that green
grass / blades
for new shaver / handfuls
of happiness and a cool
crisp breeze off the lake, please

CASHIER/WISDOMAMA

Is that for here or to go, Mr. Ebonics or is that ghetto fabulous hunger something caught in between your teeth/ throat,
zipper? If you have the correct changes I can give you back a solid
re so lu tion?

BROTHA
(dejectingly)

I would like to accentuate this grub in the comforts of my own destiny, but...

CASHIER/WISDOMAMAMA
(interrupting)

Thank you brotha, can you step aside? Grab some condiments, relish reality
take a veer at your position to manhood
view a/cross the street but don't address or cross into the flow w/out napkins

ON THE SCENE—TWO

*Enters the Sista of all who are brothas/sistas. The mother of the morning who
wants to get some rays of sun/light fill the voids of space. relinquish time in
atom for her.*

CASHIER/WISDOM

Can I interest you in our no# 4 value meal, ma'am?

SISTA

No, thank you, but I would like to spend those dreams I put under my
mattress, I would like the world full-of-love my man promised me,
that trunk full of child-support and man-to-son one-on-one he owes me
that swing set in the back yard and those Friday foot massages
but arrears is his haven and *(she notices Brotha to the right)*
I suffer like a cockroach on the tip of scientist's pin

Honey, I changed my mind
give me an application to
wonderful so I can plant *(re-direction)*
my feet in the ass of all those players kickin' game
git that lemon-lime love out my mouth *(she wipes mouth with hand)*
the aftertaste is attorney's fees
and I can't write off the taxes

CASHIER/WISDOMAMAMA

Ma'am, could you take 2 steps that way? *(she points to her left)*

SISTA

To my right?

CASHIER/WISDOMMMAAA

Yes, please. (*still pointing to where Brotha is waiting*)

ON THE THIRD SCENE

Enters the Child. The Child we all want. The Child we all have. A Child to no a parent.

CASHIER/WISDOM

Hi, little man. Would you like something sweet to save your mind?

CHILD

Uh, nawh? My Mama told me 'bout taking sweet-no-things from strangers and how people can corrupt a child if a child don't watch out for corruption but since I am the man of the house, now, I'd like a big stake in my future/ the man of the house, then, that one called *sperm donor* didn't come through so me a latch-key-kid waiting for Our poor two Nitty's rattle on the door/ hungry for compassion
in a deep Barry White voice

I want a sister

another sibling to romp around with to eat cake with and dream tomorrows with do you have education on the half-shell? can I purchase stocks and bonds in knowledge? I want to know what it's like to be a full-course family
wanna know how to plant turnip greens/ mustard greens/ tomatoes like grandma want to sing to sadness a happy Sunday morning tune like Mama
want a daddy I can call daddy for a daddy reason/ want daddy to rub my head,
show his concern

Uh, and I'd like some type of cherrypie jubilee, that's all/ that[s] all in my head

CASHIERMAMAMAMA

(*holds back her tears*)

Take 2 steps to the right, little man Your order waits for consumption/ take in all the nutrients your pores can handle handle all you can/ eat sunset/ let your life ride
let it ride
let it buck
jerk and buck

If you ever have to gamble gamble on the little house you home in your heart
Take 2 steps into the right/ blank out a new page

& don't deplete upper tempos

WOODEN NEGROES APPEAR AT A SLAM

Amiri Baraka



The question keeps
 Answering itself
 In the air
 Underneath the ground
 Inside the water greenish
 The sun speaks so loud
 It's fed up with making noise
 It's red yellow orange green blue indigo violet infrared ultra violet

Verse songs stomp Huh? s great billowing paragraphs of
 Pure Dee fire *FY' rer*, make it bubble
 De overstate of de any will

But the question is buried in our tongues
Like hidden Wesure, we feel, its right...

Eludes us then, for name, which, is it not,
 Something we can supply

Question is vibrating, like, moon walking sort of, subtle
 Neoning through that tree d other night, wagging with rain
Graceful fears it jumped us with, and stuttered a prophet's We-ronies

You all gonna get fat headed wit Shango paradiddle

 Is you patient or patients

Like a human go inside or
Be underwater with my man
The symbol of the dead guy

Shango come like nut eyes open to say
And we here like we was
Looking and listening

And your boy who invented the
Red machine that asks questions
You don't know the answer to
Say OK what that mean?

I ain't in this shit, assembled unvoiced, as usual.
Except one Negro greasin his nose to famous
said somp'n tacky wit ignorance
But silence give him credit
For intelligence

Which one day gonna get him killed. Like that Red machine
Winked when he answered and made sounds like
Pops at the top of his chops

SAY WHAT OOOOO SAY WHERE RRRR SAY WHOOOOOO

Like that in the place, made the furniture twist and try to dance
And when the show went on lightnin', thundered, wet heaven
Blew down & little people made songs
So we wouldn't be scared

We other colored there blinking at the real *vonce*
thinking of the answer
Cause the question came circling itself as the flurry of otherness
familiar as our clothes and smell

Some piece-a-folks was standing in line, the little ones and the big ones
Sewing they hips to the
In famouser sooners
Than dim
In detail
shit that didn't exist, and put they name
Next to the doo doo sign, used by Beelzebub

The stinking one when he was
Present in time.
Do This mean we give away our souls?

Look out the window said the quiet rider of their desire
You see any sun, you see any more light.
Everything living must die
 But if you get a good piece of what ain't
 And turn it into you
 With a little green, and some
 Oil rubbed on good, you'll be the same
 Forever and never Dis appear

And the Negroes agreed that being wood was better than being wouldn't

So what was the question that you almost heard?

They was the question. Electricity turned into Empty Town,

 What is you seeking? Where have you been?
 What is the power that moves you?

And what does it turn on?

Amiri B 3/15/01

RHYTHM & RIME

Amiri Baraka

Rhythm (which is pre Writ Them...signifying change of epoch, from verbal to paper) is the registering livingness of matter, nature, everything that exists. And "alive" is in contention, actually in terms of the ancient measure of the Animists who said EVERYTHING IS ALIVE to varying degrees. It was not One God, they referred to, but that EVERYTHING WAS ONE THING. In fact, Matter means Mother, e.g., Mother Nature, of which, Hello Out There, we are also part of. As the abuse of the environment should show even the Abusers of same, more and more each day. Matter, the Mother, Alive. And without End.

The shallowness of what passes as modern institutional religion (i.e., since the seizure of armed hegemony over such by the same forces who murdered the anti-imperialist, Jesus Christ. So that the, actually recent, "trinity" of the world rulers not only excludes the woman (to reflect the world wide overthrow of motherright and the emergence of ancient slavery which followed ancient communalism), but replaces Spirit with a Ghost.

In this same revisionist telling, done to affirm the divinity of the newly defining authority its political-economic base and its social and cultural requirements. So that now the mythology is not used to explain nature but to oppose it. For instance, by saying Adam gave birth to Eve, when Adam means to add on and Eve means before. Again, to give divine origins to the enslavement of women. And with the emphasis on the Father and The Son, to reaffirm the new order of inheritance. So that mystical Adultery as a Holy Royal Prerogative and the ancient name, Nun, which meant the Sky and transformed it into NONE, and raised polygamy and the Greek rulers degeneration to Boy Love, to divine vocations. The world in its ceaseless motion and movement, still maintains that slavery, as my wife points out, the male vs. female, was the first class struggle. The overthrow of ancient Communalism was replaced by Slavery, the results of that world-wide defeat of Women.

If we can presume to rationalize the motion of the world as metaphor, the real world, as a constant pulse, reflected in all existent things. Like the heart, coming and going out, like the breath, then we can make an aural and visual paradigm of the world rhythm, as well as its rime.

For certain, what has no rhythm cannot exist. Even our dreams have been charted and characterized by their changing rhythms. Our breathing, our heart beat and pulse, clearly reflect our physical and emotional states. So it is with all things.

The days, weeks, months, years, seasons, the tides are all measured according to their rhythmic reoccurrence. But if you look at the phenomenon of rhythm, you find that the beat consists of sound and not sound, being and not being. The Be & the At. The pulse of everything. Go. Stop. Yet the Stop is part of the Go. Dialectical as everything else. No hot without cold. No up without down. No slow without fast, &c.

Another characteristic of rhythm is its thoroughgoing impact on everything, heard or unheard, felt or unfelt, as well by the absolute totality of its omnipresence. It is not a reach to characterize Human life and history by its rhythm, almost literally.

But if we understand the rhythm of life itself, we must also understand that it is shaped also by the quality and form of its living motion. And those are recognized in the absoluteness of their appearance, as CHANGE, which is absolute.

So that the rhythm of everything corresponds to a beat, a pulse, the constant waves reflected in the sea, by the rays of light which give us color, and to the very changes in human life and society themselves. But these aspects of existence correspond exactly to all of nature, and can be understood ultimately by our sense organs if we persist in our investigation and analysis.

For instance, Water, moving at a regular rhythm, up or down the scale of measured temperature, will proceed in either direction, then at one point it makes a leap. It changes from merely quantitative changes to the leap which brings qualitative changes. That is, the water will either leap upwards and become steam or downward and become ice. As it is with natural science it is with human society. It is just that would-be owners of the world obscure the obvious, like storekeepers do wholesale prices.

That is why we speak of “the motion of history,” and understand how human society has gone through changes. That there have been periods of steady rhythm, a stability, a unity of social forces, what the politicians call Peace, when there has been no such boogie man. And there never will be as long as very few people can live like human beings and the majority of the world is in chains.

But after these periods of so called Peace, then All Hell breaks out again, that is the quantitative periods of stability and regular rhythm are replaced sharply by great leaps in society where all things including humans are thrown into violent displacement of their former stability, and the social relations and very nature of human society is changed. Sometimes for the better, many times for worse. But these leaps are the change from evolution, which is constant and relatively stable, to Revolution, where, as the word indicates, everything is overturned. As the bible said, when there is a human advance, it means that “the last shall be first.”

Rime, in the ancient spelling, is a concordance of elements, here words, so that a unity of sound, sometimes meaning, is reached. As verse, it means there is a regular *turning*, that is, ending and new beginning, signified in some classic poetry by the Rime. The insertion of the H in the words, usually after the 16th

century, signifies the 1st translations of the bible into English (Tynsdale) and the contention of the English Church with the Roman.

The H in the ancient glyphs is a symbol of building, a tower, like Babel, (“To Where?” the people shouted). The I is the eye of Ra, the sun, the oneness of everything. 1611 is the publication of the King James Bible, two years after Africans arrived on this side, in the bottom of the slave ships, the first called “The Good Ship Jesus.”

In human history, the largest leaps, revolutions, have been marked by their deep impact on human life and society. The leap from Ancient communalism to slavery, the leap from slavery to feudalism, the leap from feudalism to capitalism. In each human society these revolutions touched, we see a similar evolutionary motion, and life there within that framework of collective social life and then we see the torrent of change to that society these revolutions made.

For the African people, the leap from communalism and the early domination, then equality of women, brought the revolution of internal slavery, which ultimately led to the selling of ourselves to Europeans and Arabs. Before that, the societies of the interior of Africa and the South came to be dominated by mighty Egypt, in which at least one historical proletarian revolution was fought and won (Slavery built the pyramids, and the slaves revolted driving the rulers out of power, but like the civil rights movement, the Sisyphus Syndrome set in, and what was thought to be vanquished like black national oppression, crept quickly back into place.)

The Fall of Egypt, The Fall of Mali, The Fall of Moorish Spain, these were revolutions which finally got us here. The Revolutionary War, the Haitian Revolution, The Civil War, were likewise, leaps, sharpening and changing the rhythm, a new form of motion emerging. The social order changed, unfortunately, not to the extent we desire.

Just as the seeming Rime, the confluence and conjunction of desire and reality, the Civil War and proposed Reconstruction made, by 1876 the whole text of our lives was in retrograde, another leap, but as Du Bois shows in *Black Reconstruction*, it was a backward leap, where instead of Chattel Slavery, the Afro American people were given a more modern set of chains, but by the end of the century we could not vote anywhere in the South.

The Civil Rights Movement was, likewise, a sharp change of rhythm, a leap, a different form of motion emerging, but as well, with the headlong plunge into a welcome (fake) into full citizenship that the entire force of the Black Liberation Movement proposed, and the nation, with its Voting Rights, Civil Rights Bills and Affirmative Action seemed to confirm. But the Sisyphus rhythm reemerged, the *retard* its called in musical terms, and today Negroes who rose upon the steady beat of our insurgent rhythms and marching feet, are the very mouths out of which the confirmation of yet a new backward roll down the Sisyphus mountain, retard style, is given.

What is clear is that our rhythm must be felt and understood by us, as what Du Bois described as a “true self consciousness”. We must not let that rhythm, which is linked to Self-Determination, Self-Reliance, Self-Respect and Self-Defense be covered by alligators, as Garvey called them, disguised as friends. We must not let that self-determined rhythm be co-opted and copped. Dissed and Covered, like they say, Discovered. We must not let that rhythm be denigrated as oppressive, utopian, old hat, or unfair. It is our rhythm, which can only fully emerge as a paradigm of our music. That is, collective, with both improvisation and composition, and syncopated as we know how, and funky as the world we trying to change. It will be a multi rhythmic thrust, what they call *polyrhythm*, with many individual rhythms, harmonically joined in that collective forwarding, which is the oldest African form, polyrhythmic, dressed under or over with the blues (which is our national memory and our expression of the whole self and history of us.)

Like Césaire said in his great poem “Notebook of a Return to the Native Land,” They have already done everything, called us everything, told all the lies and committed innumerable murders against us, who were not the greatest sufferers (sd. Du Bois), but who were singly *real estate*, Now with some 446 Billion dollars a year as our Afro American Commonwealth, concentrated in those 27 cities throughout this nation where we live. The question is when will we dig *the one*, as musicians say, the beat, the funk. When will we dig OUR own sweet One. Who we BE and Where we AT. Our Beat. That is the rhythm that will transform our future, and the millennium. “Keep ON Walking and Keep on Talking,” but now organizing, setting our own program, and fighting for a *Peoples Democracy*, a Human world. Just like the music, Call and Response and The Going Out Frenzy of digging the entire universe of our being. Like John Coltrane talking about, you knew it, FREEDOM!

(connectivity: continuous)

(This is about what (re)makes me, these stretches of work life “in support,” marking at odd intervals what I became, who I’ve become, born into a particular strain of colored working women’s roles. Each stint fits together, defines me or cordons me off, empowers or drains, like a series of extension cords trailing from my spine, grounded and ungrounded, subject to shorts and reduced current, plugged into a dubious source of power. Some couplings are uncertain, the kind that worry the mind as prong resists slot, that make the fingers fearful of a reprisal of flying sparks, forced connections. Voices intermittent, shifting belonging to us, we, you, and I. The long curved corridor I travel along is Knowledge, humming with feminine traffic, yours, ours, we procurers and providers of the help. It’s getting harder and harder to tell us apart, position myself among you as I “advance” at playing the role, you never becoming “them.” My bouts with clarity and confusion join the smears of sweat and hand creme glyphing its mirrored walls. My forehead flickers like a miner’s lamp as my eyes alight on kin who do not always acknowledge me. Each stint defies me, stores a sin.

This is about how far I’ve come through where I’ve gone.)

I have to learn how to see. Doorbell. A young woman in a sari. Cook? Cleaning woman? Immediate sounds of water. I’ve never been around servants before. Restaurants and hotels are different than having someone in your home. She’s doing the dishes.

home training

I never had a chance to rue the day I grew tall enough to reach the kitchen sink. At seven, my mother gave me a crate to stand on. Maybe she saw my path. I was already predisposed to redecorating the room I shared with my brother. He’d come in from playing and find his bed moved, the dresser realigned, a new strip of masking tape dividing the configuration. I’d give him a quick orientation. He couldn’t have cared less. My mother always cleaned his side of the room anyway. In evenings after dinner she instructed me on plate washing, how to remove food stuck between fork tines, to arrange the dishes in the rack and pour scalding hot water over them for a final, soap free rinse. When my mother started working nights, she’d find the dishes done by her little elf in the morning. My weekend chores were to vacuum and dust, to polish the bar and all its contents after making

my bed with expert hospital corners, cleaning my room. Wiping down bottles of gin, olive jars, bitters, brandy snifters, highballs were the highlight of it all. It seemed so glamorous, the fancy shaped glasses, the multi-colored liquids. My brother would dawdle until my mother told him to beat it. I strove to be the perfect Junior Miss, asked to help, asked for more. “Did I do a good job?”

(Do you love and accept me now, in this clean and shining moment?)

home training²

I had no choice but to help my mother. No one else would in the way she needed. By my mid-teens, I took care of my baby sister (9 years younger), did the dishes, the laundry, cleaned the house, started dinner after school (unless I was working) while my brother was out shooting hoops or whatever. My mum’s response to my contributions to the functioning of the household ranged from a muted ‘thank you,’ to “That’s what you’re *supposed* to do.” I resented it, especially during the summer when I was supposed to be on vacation from school, from everything, and I let my mother know.

“She’s not my kid, she’s yours.”

“I gotta work.”

“You knew that when you had her.”

“Knew that when I had you.”

“Too late now, ain’t it. So what am I supposed to do? You act like this is the Depression or something, and you got eight brats.”

“What am *I* supposed to do, you ungrateful little bitch?”

“Is this what you want for me, to be a housewife?”

“I want you to be responsible and independent. “If you knew how to drive-“

“I wouldn’t have a car because I can’t afford one because I work here for you, for them, not for me. And like you’d let me drive yours. Ya right. I’d drive you to work, then pick you up. I’d be Dad *and* you.”

“You miserable wretch. What the hell do you want from me, huh? Christ almighty...”

“Looks like the same thing you want from me.”

We stood there, nostrils flaring, chests out, heads raised, ready to really throw down, tears in our eyes, my Mum’s ham fists quivering at her rock-hard thighs. She could have killed me and gotten it over with, but she needed me too much at that moment, or, more likely, didn’t want to go to jail, and she did love me, after all. I was her inheritance, and she was mine. We were all we had, and hated the fact that if she didn’t keep the house together, it would fall apart, and if I didn’t help her, she would. The men in our family, father and brother, were no help, not in this area. Other girls I knew were off gallivanting at camps or hanging out at

the beach, or working. How they managed their household responsibilities was a mystery to us. We were stuck. It amazes me how we two formidable mouths and bodies didn't demand participation from the other two people who generated dirt and housework, my brother and father. My mother and I had silently and tacitly agreed it was out of the question, not worth the hassle, or the inevitable training, supervision, ruined clothes, dishes, etc. So, after I demanded it, my mother paid me for my services, although less than she would've paid an outside person. I feel kind of bad about that now, but at the time my actions were and still are in line with my responsibility to myself to confront The Boss, no matter how difficult, at the slightest indignity, even if The Boss was my mother. That was how I was raised. Yet keeping this in practice became increasingly difficult. I only knew about these kinds of cut-and-dry, straight-up situations with my no-nonsense mother. I knew nothing about the kinds of manipulative, head-trip dynamics that were to come and build a pyramid on my head.

entry level

The women who run the guesthouse also prepare food for guests, for me, clean the dishes, day to day. When I asked about the maid, who she was, Lori paused, then said she was a young mother, that she seemed to like coming to the house, that they liked her, trusted her. My solidarity through work, sex, gender with other women, with the maid. The maid the maid the maid. Some solidarity. I still don't know her name.

To begin working for money at a level equal to one's...gender? Class? Experience? What would have been fair to ask me when I was newly escaped from the sticks of Plymouth, MA into the teen-wild streets of Boston's Fens, Class of '84 high school yearbook under my arm, three years of paid labor under my belt? How was it that I was just then entering the workforce at the bottom, anyway? So. What are my strengths? "Well, I was a dietary aid in a nursing home until a few months ago. I like to write. I keep my books in alphabetical order and occasionally dust them. My weaknesses? Well, um, I graduated near the bottom of my class. I guess I get bored easily. What? You're going to time me while I put this stack of library card files in ascending order? Okay..." *have to remember to ask Mum about this.* By the end of the appointment I was just glad I could quit selling cookies by the quarter-pound at Au Bon Pain/Cookie Jar downtown and walk to John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company. I heard a magical word: Salary, zipping in my ear. I had a "title": File Clerk. The company owned four buildings on the block: three of old stone surrounding The Tower, 60 floors of icy blue glass and those famed faulty, falling windows. The buildings were huddled like conferring heads of state, endlessly reflecting themselves in each other. A long tunnel connected the Berkeley Building,

“my” building, to The Tower, so that employees wouldn’t have to go outside during winter, or at all.

(Mirror halls, promenades of Knowledge, the cost of monotony, suppliers of skin and task, the women of my line acknowledge the curve alight with traffic, with feminine providers of support, conducted by procurers, humming with progress, the colored strain of working)

My mother and godmother had worked at John Hancock in high school. My aunt and uncle still did, and my older cousin and running buddy had just started. I was secretly proud of the negligible nepotism that I thought had gotten me the position, so happy to join my blood in the fields of Adulthood, convinced they’d had some power to get me the job, only to learn later they hadn’t been asked a thing. A young Black woman, Edwina, not much older than me, showed me the ropes in “my” new department, in that staccato, telegraphic speak that hides the keys of how to survive at work within the banal minutiae of how to do the job.

(New women enter the field of business here.)

“First file room older files four-foot shelves starts at 1000 and ends here [points to doorway] at 6224.”

(Skills setting, skills set.)

“Footstool’s over there, the next room newer ladders built into shelves, much higher maybe eight feet, in general pull in the morning.”

(promenade, tasks tasks tasks, passing palms, produce invisibly, progress)

“Shelve in the afternoon when it’s slow, but keep busy Dee the supervisor’s watching. She tells Mary, the manager, everything.”

(here are the ropes)

“They won’t tell you nothing now, but when you get your review, every little thing will come back to you.”

sisterhood (prelude)

Every day in the halls, in the bathroom, during lunch, through the tunnel to The Tower, I watched out for the appearance of that Sister, that Upward and Shining Example to give me a sign of what I wanted, or, at least, what I could get. Not a

hint of that woman materialized, only their waiting, their disappointment, was made clear. After six months in this new position, I flew.

(This is about what makes and remakes me. There is no upward, but a snaking around, through, or over. Stairs and elevators give the illusion of ascension, only to lay at your feet just another department, perhaps with better chairs and brighter lights, a differently ugly carpet, but another floor just the same.)

The maid sitting on the floor, between all the rooms, near the dining table. She's finished shelling the green peas, now she's cutting onions, her face, her lips curled, eyes pressed in, sniffing, gasping, her face backing away from the fumes.

hospitality

I quit the insurance company because I remembered that I'd always wanted to be a flight attendant. I thought it would be a great way to travel, to have a home base in California, have nothing to eat in my bachelorette pad but snack packs of nuts and nips of bourbon.

"They're just glorified waitresses," my mother informed me.

"Then I should be ready," I accused. I trounced off to Pittsburgh's Boyd Travel School to acquire the skills for making people go places. There were hundreds of students that paid the three grand for the four month course. I lived in a women's dorm converted from an old hotel. Each room had an eat-in kitchen, two or three beds, bathroom, laundry on each floor. I didn't have a roommate, and was glad. I kept smelling a stink like relaxer or home perm, and thought everyone in the dorm was giving themselves a touch-up. Turned out it was the stench of nearby rivers, water gone low. I quickly made friends with a hearty Puerto Rican woman from Jersey City named Mabel whose father ran the family grocery store. She came to Pittsburgh with three suitcases full of arroz, gandules, chuletas, tomato paste and onions. She fed me and some other girls, all from Jersey, while we dished dirt and listened to her problems with her husband and kids back home. She was ancient, about 26. In spite or because of what was behind us, we all had stars in our eyes, travel in our hearts, forged notes from our mothers for the State-run liquor stores that requested them before selling us beer.

(Mirrors process quick success shaded face dazed in front of my face the most silent of marches image after image particular strains of women cordoned defined women working roles, fearful of reprisal dubious power sparks, flickers, reduced at intervals clarity, confusion, ungrounded current resistance my women, extensions, acknowledge me.)

We had to “dress professionally” every day to class, as if going to a corporate job. I had only one cheap and remarkably shapeless suit from Hit or Miss, a bunch of blouses and skirts, two pairs of heels, discount panty hose in “medium toffee.” Female students were encouraged to tie flouncy lengths of fabric around their necks to look like powerful flowers. It was 1985, the dawning of the business woman in padded shoulders. Men still wore ties.

A a long day gallivanting with Sangeeta. In restaurants I rarely saw women working. Selling fabric and crafts, sure, but rarely food. Public food is a male domain here.

We had to learn three tourist attractions in every state and in European countries, were videotaped selling travel packages to imaginary clients, were tested on the number of engines in any given plane, how to make airline reservations manually and on computer.

Back from the “Golden Triangle” tour to Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, and Jaipur I went on with Sangeeta. Madhu told me that the woman who’s been coming here to clean in the mornings committed suicide either the Thursday I last saw her, or the next morning. Took poison. The room clean and smelling of disinfectant. Gift and Verdict, this book I carry everywhere, punctuates everything here with its title. She was having an affair and her husband found out. The lover quit her. She swallowed poison mixed with milk her daughter watched her drink.

What I actually came to rely on from travel school was the Interviewing Skills Workshop and the Department Seminar. I learned to walk into a room, to shake hands and to lower then slide myself back into a chair without once taking my eyes off my prospective and duly impressed employer. I drilled crossing my legs at the ankle, using the right utensil during a business lunch while steering the conversation towards a sale. I rehearsed how and when to offer water, coffee, tea to clients.

Bombings in London and Paris near the end of the training, spring 1986, put a stop to overseas travel, and the novice travel agent’s \$4.25/hr part-time wage effectively iced my dreams. And I hadn’t done my homework: Boyd Travel School only operated east of the Mississippi. So much for California. I was offered low-paying reservationist and travel agent jobs in Jersey, Texas, Florida and New Orleans that started in 2 weeks, no housing, no advance, which I refused. So much for ambition. But I had learned to be a woman in service, in the right uniform, the right position, the right tone of voice. I was on my way somewhere.

I ended up back in Boston, at Hertz Rent-a-Car at Logan International Airport. I had to wear a hideous black and yellow uniform, with a bow at the collar. Customers threatened, cussed, threw telephones at me if their cars weren't ready when they got off the plane. We were told to just back away from the counter and call a manager, or at least pretend to. This wasn't working. I had to find someplace else to be of service.

My first day in Delhi. Washed and ready to begin, but the day has started hours before. The doorbell rang, around 6 am. The maid. She is still here, in the kitchen, She has long hair, braided down the back, is young, younger than I am. A wet cloth in her hand. I'd call it a rag, but something stops me. I've never been around servants, not like this. I'm feeling sensitive, odd. The word 'rag' does something I don't like, diminishes her, makes her actions, cleaning, sound low. As if 'cloth' elevates.

(My life fits into the fingers of resistance and purpose. Some connections are tight, others don't function at all. Sparks flying overhead, empty stretches of dim mirror. Where am I to see by? Matings of Knowledge trailing behind me, making women in their own image. Zeus, thunderbolt, was a woman. I've sprung from your heads, my strain, our line. Guided by your breath I snake with worry though the maze, claiming, claiming, unity working femininity.)

endgame

During a luxurious stretch of unemployment, thanks to a layoff, I was granted a blissful writer's residency at The Cottages at Hedgebrook. I lived for two weeks in one of six handcrafted hardwood cottages, complete with workspace, kitchenette, a woodburning stove and a featherbed on a loft. My lunch was brought to my door, hot, every day. It was insanely quiet, save for the clack of my Smith Corona as I wrote poems about the rabbits outside my window, the still-warm grassy trenches shaped by sleeping deer. I'd left all work-in-progress behind, opting instead for complete newness, in words and space, since my time at Hedgebrook was short. I was totally spoiled by the staff and the environment, and totally unaccustomed to it. All cleaning, administrative work, labor on the 33-acre farm that housed the residency, took place expressly for my benefit, for the benefit of women writers. No one wanted my help. They only wanted to see my pages, hear my thoughts, know I was enjoying my retreat. I felt so guilty, and blessed. Then it was over. I was broke, and no more checks were due from the state. So I took a job at the California State Automobile Association (AAA) as an Administrative Assistant and Office Manager. I hadn't been in a truly corporate setting since John Hancock, and was completely bewildered by it all. I didn't get to do much in the way of actual office work; I basically acted as handmaid to the

cycle of mediocrity the company seemed hell-bent on preserving. No one was able to get anything done. They just spun their wheels, went through the motions, got their checks every other Friday, simply shrugged when the projects they had worked on for months were canceled, again. I ordered supplies and the like, and held the hands of managers through computer-generated tasks they were paid twice my salary to know how to perform, listened to “my superiors” whine at my desk, ask my advice, tell me their personal problems.

class act

At first I thought the job was kind of fun if not a bit militaristic. I had to use a requisition form to order paper. I had to use a form for everything. I had two file cabinets full of forms, and a gigantic binder with useless guides for filling them out. The desk I had was in the department that took complaints from customers directed at the President and VPs. Roberta was a laugh-a-minute working class redhead from Wisconsin, danced the lindy and complained about the yuppie takeover of her favorite dancehalls, had a wild story about everything, a real performance artist. Adriane, a very cool East Bay sista, sat behind me. She and I communicated well without words. The raised eyebrow, the furrowed brow-pursed lip combination, the dropped bottom lip, the multi-purpose eye roll. Then sudden laughter. She made me miss my mom. “Don’t let these people run you around,” was Adriane’s credo. She really loved her kids. Then there was Lani. Mexican-Swedish, middle-class with aristocratic pretensions. Put the ass in aspiration. Daddy’s girl. No politics, ethics, scruples. Liked married men. I challenged her every chance I got. Like I said, it was fun, although Lani often saw without seeing.

(Our numbers cast no shadow. There is no light source duplicating us as faceless masses constantly in action. Here we grow by flash of mirror, powder room rest room compact compressed masks of helpfulness. Flashing mirrors as beacons beckoning instructing reminder of the sight of a particular strain, these faces connect the lines of color on this level supporting by extension dubious power compact compressed foundation greasy sweat on glass as we streak time shift from we to you to us.)

Once Lani talked about the maids she’d had in some custom-built house she owned with her former fiancé, how her imported Italian kitchen tiles *had* to be scrubbed by hand. I spun around in my chair just in time to catch Adriane’s glare over the low partition. “Yeah,” Roberta said, “Floors come out much cleaner if you scrub them on your hands and knees. You’re closer to the dirt. My mom taught me to scrub floors that way.” “So, Roberta, you clean your own house, yeah? But Lani, did *you* ever scrub your floors by hand?” “Well, I *would*,” she said. When, I thought. If someone were holding a gun to your head? “C’mon, Lani, you and

your roommate have someone come in and clean your two-bedroom *apartment* twice a week. What's up with that?" Unfortunately Liz, their manager, came around the corner, and everyone spun quick and looked busy. I sat fuming. Who did this chick think she was? Miss Scarlett at Tara? Through the acquisition of one of the most-valued skills of a domestic, listening while appearing to be deaf-mute, I discovered that many of the women and men in the office, from coordinators to executives, had domestics clean their homes, whether they lived in apartments barely big enough for their beds, or houses so large they didn't really *live* in them at all.

Bariwali's house is beautiful. Gigantic. Tranquil. Nestled in an India I haven't visited, but imagined, saw re-imagined repeatedly in film. A filmmaker's dream, bariwali's house. So the director, scouting locations, is as enchanted with the house as the viewer, offers bariwali (directly) a handsome sum of money for the use of one wing of the house for his latest film, and also offers (indirectly) the promise of romance. Bariwali is skeptical, reluctant and vulnerable. The maid, "M", tries to persuade the lady of the house to agree. All her most favorite film stars will be lodging with them! How eager "M" is to serve. Her man is predictably violent, threatened and threatening, when he gets wind of this. "M" is fearless.

At first, I volunteered to do extra work to help feel a part of a team, instead of like a maid waiting to mop up a spill. But so many people fobbed great chunks of their jobs off on me that in the end, they were reprimanded, leaving me to work only on "appropriately assigned tasks," which amounted to updating the phone list once a month, sending e-mail memos about the broken thermostat on the floor. Fine, though it wasn't much more than housework, even though it should have been. In between, I wrote prose, applied for grants and residencies, submitted work to literary journals, surfed the Internet. I decided to make the best of the company's ineptitude and make some progress with my own writing as *my* work.

This work is dedicated to Meena, 1975-2000

Italicized text: Journal entries, Delhi, India, February 19-March 15, 2000

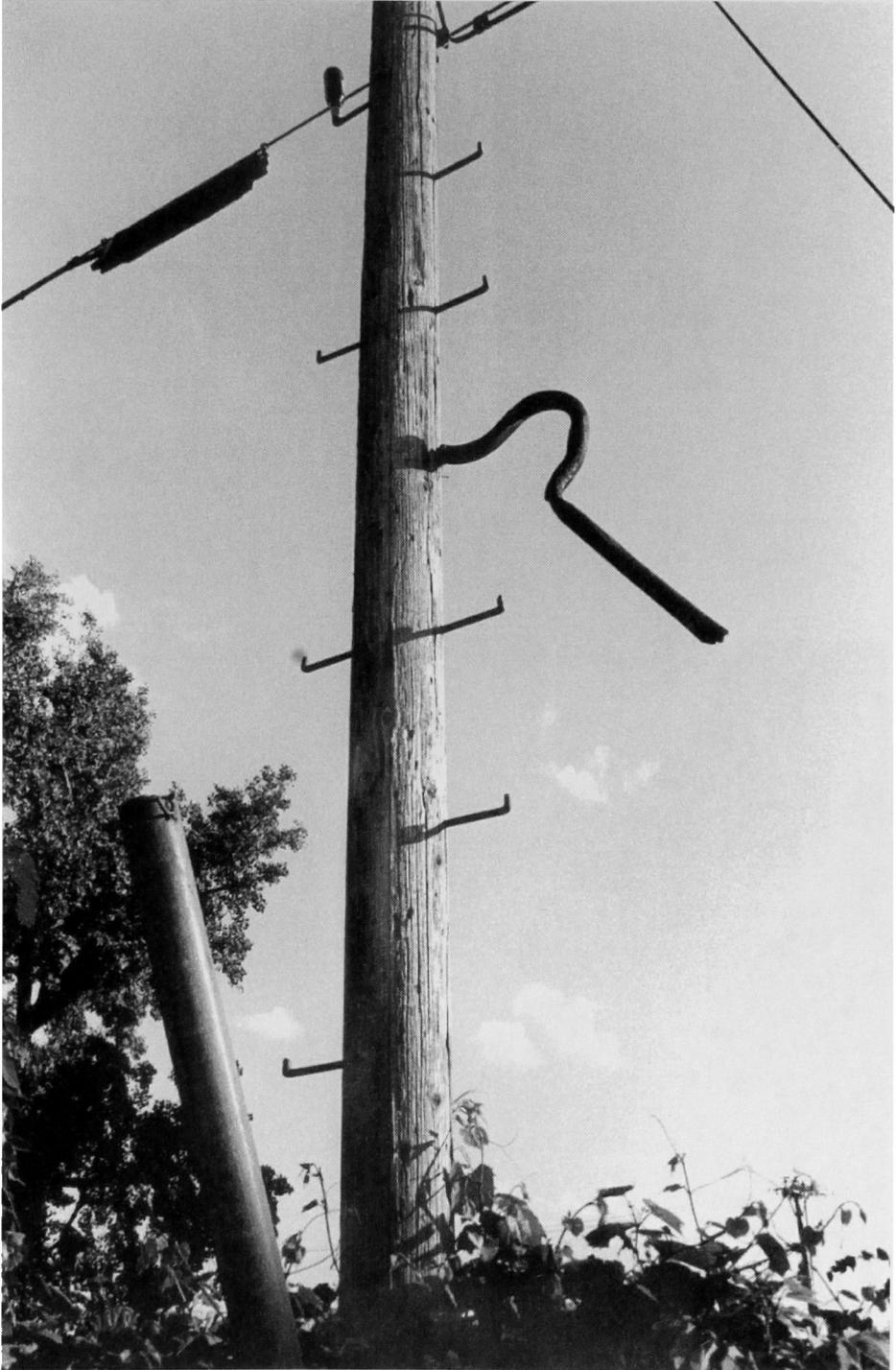
GALLERY: PAULETTE MYERS-RICH

Displacement-in-place is a given when that landscape is changed. The urban industrial landscape is a site which often places one in contention with the forces that shape it, and by extension, with one's self. Being in it, being dependent on it, is to be defined by it. For the working-class, industry presides over communities and lives given over to the construct of commerce, bound by it to work in plants, factories and railyards. These sites of workers' visions and dreams of betterment were conjured by the promise of the machine to forge and stamp and assemble one's life into order, with comfort and ease at the shift's end. Paychecks offset the ten o'clock in the boiler factory's ear-splitting din and the foundry's eternal heat suffered by those who tended hell's gate in order to keep out their own, now kept out by progress and deindustrialization.

URBAN VERTICALS

Trunk, stalk, muffler hook, bottle tree
earth impaled by vine entwined masts
and bird stop wire threaded through
oaks, elms and air, joined to pylons of might,
transformer drums transport binary hymns
one by zero by one. Powerhouse martello
furnace-bellied stack searing the sky
heat, steam and ash, a smut-edged obelisk
bussing the clouds.

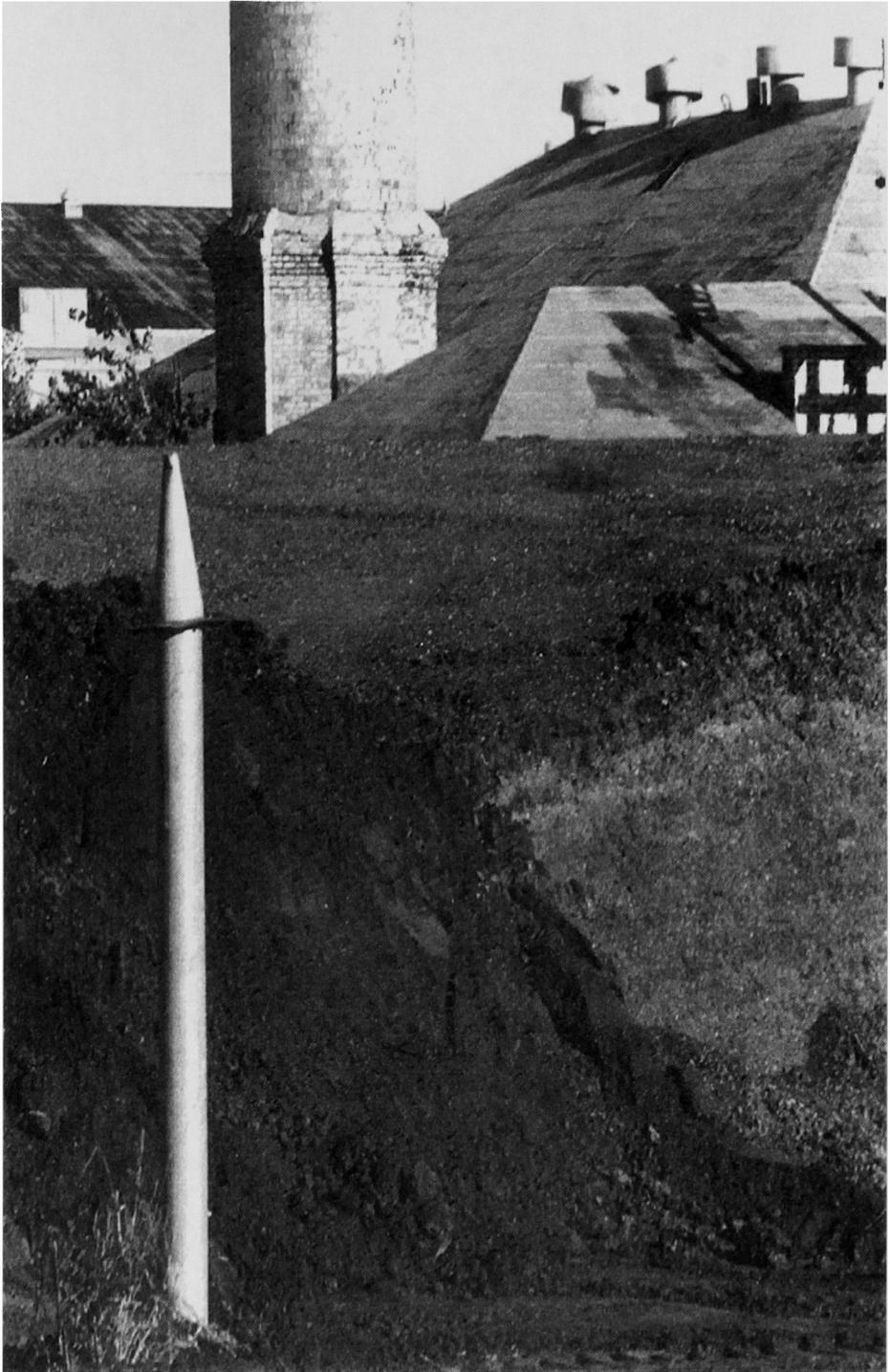
Paulette Myers-Rich has been photographing urban industrial landscapes in the Twin Cities since 1982. Her series of artist books, *Work Sites/Work Cites*, combines visual narratives with poetry and found text to create a record of these altered and vanished landscapes, and to examine the material facts of the social reality that has caused them. She is the proprietor of Traffic Street Press.





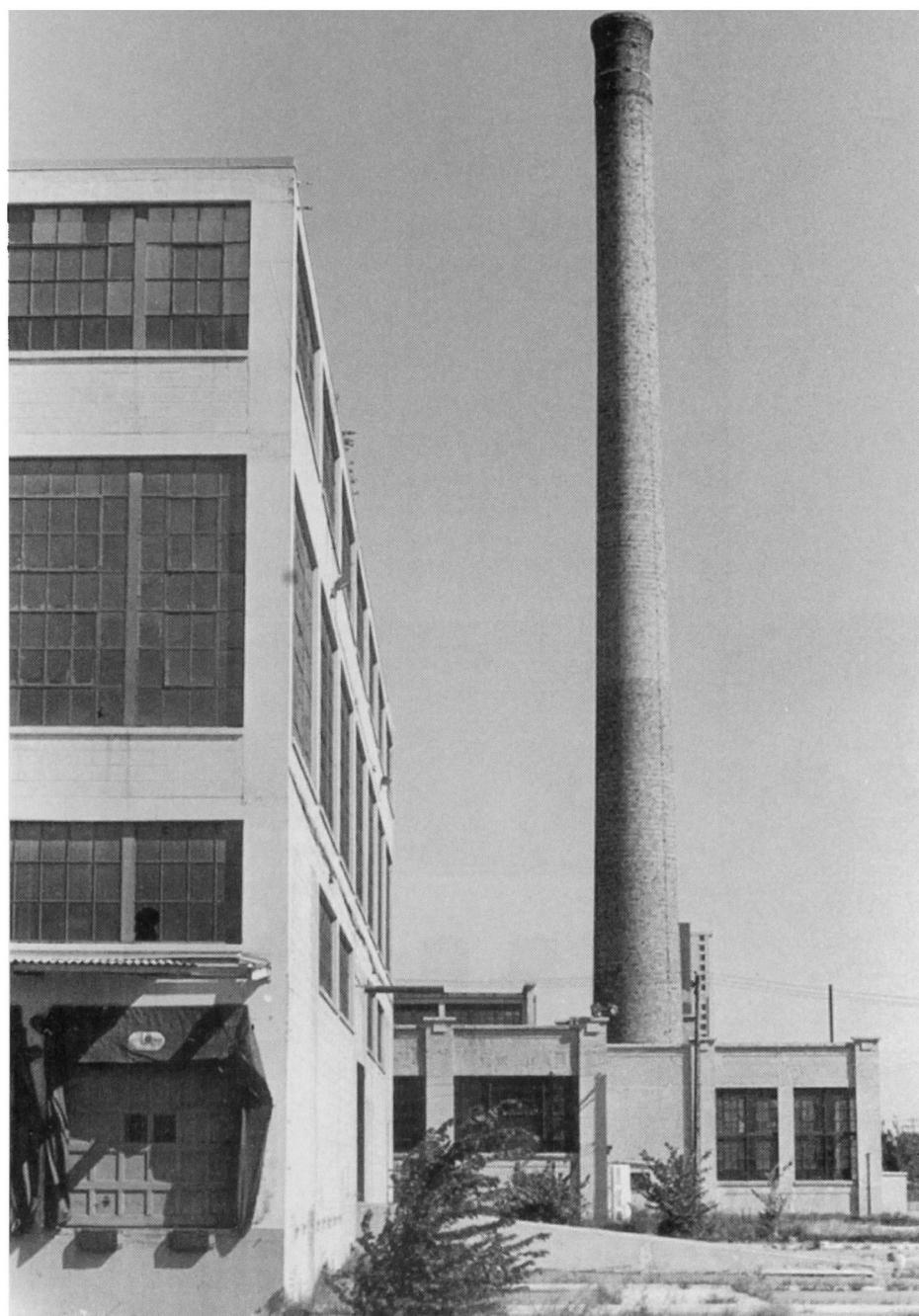








Industrial building and water tower





**JUKEBOX SELECTION,
A BRICK AND MORTAR REMEMBRANCE**

(following a conversation with a Local 4-121 pensioner)

Rodrigo Toscano

How did widget make you feel about marriage?

How did marriage make you feel about widget?

How did you make widget feel
about widget?

And how did it react?

And how
to your extra-widgetory
gallivanting?

And widget wanted children
at about
that time.

How much *did* widget resent
your harboring feelings for
(your uneasy reveries of)
The Curved Plow—

Widget read you bed-time stories:
Pluckboy, Punthouse, Wrustler.

It was
a hoppin'
sexcapade—everyone all greased up
nitrous cellutone
packaged widgetings
panting
credit
sirening.

But, you widgeted yourself (praise be) to a series of regular Sunday morning
Services—

Yr. son's liberal widgetry department

deserved, no, was destined for:
a make-over, but around a different
social axis (a near finite set of substantive pointer nouns)

But
not
just
yet—

Not yet.

Fad diets
and dominatrixes
began stalking him (simultaneously)

Cut down on
Widget

Increase
Widget

Tell widget you want
firm widgetings.

As there *was* a widget inside him
waiting to come out.

His
Inner-Widget
told him so.

No,
nor will *I* ever
hear the word widget
without thinking of
—*y'alls*—

particular

rock n'roll

“fantasy”

IDEO-DEGRADABLE VERSES FROM IMMOKALEE

(for Lucas Benitez)

Rodrigo Toscano

“but to tell of the other things I saw there”
—from Dante’s *Inferno*, book one.

“In the Everglades—
In the Tomato Industry— ”

Are you *yourself*?

“Actually, I’m *not* a tomahto
(any more than you are, at least)”

“The day
starts us at 4:00 am”

“The ‘grew leethas’
(qué es eso?)
grew leethas...(o!
crew leaders!)
exacto!”

“They pick us—
up on a truck—and take us
to the performance site”

“Till sundown”

“45 cents a bucket”

“Fields sometimes been picked twice or even three times

before getting there”

“Buckets weigh 35 pounds”

(“am I boring you?”)

(actually, yes, you are, at this point,
I’m in need of some
torque-age)

(bueno, eso lo tenemos, vea aquí)

“We haul them some 100 feet to the trucks
some 200 hundred times”

“They don’t whisper gentle ayres into our ears—*not to*

(one after the other) miss a single tomato
(instanter)”

And about the slavery rings?

“Oh, folks from Mexico and Guatemala brought up and
not allowed to move around
at will— ”

“Permission to go to the store granted, maybe, but the guards go with them”

“\$100 a week; and from that, \$60 for ‘service charges’ (for ‘the passage’)
an additional 15 for ‘rent’”

“Leaves
\$25 a week— ”

Taco Bell

(could you please tweak or twaddle that, now, a little, for me)

“if you *must*
have it”

“Wacko Bull” “Bucko Goul”

(*what?*)

(“calmado, compañero, concéntrese, absorba
esta intervención”)

is the primary consumer of the product produced
(not the *secondary* consumer of the product produced,
you)”

How much
would they have to increase
the price of a 99 cent product?

“How price they much to have increase of product 99 cents?”

“Would you prefer that in Luther’s German, The King’s English,
or Harvard School of *Latifundista* Spanish?”

State it kingly

“*One-tenth of one cent*”

“Add that public money (State and Federal) goes to the growers
to fund (*and* subsidize) them
for on-going *public* research into
Improved Growing Methods”

“And it confronts us, hermano,
immediately and everyday
our status, the barrier of
no documents
dogs us”

“We can’t participate
more openly
in politics
(let alone)”

“So that the question of amnesty
is primary”

Anything else you’d like to say, Lucas?

“Yeah,

—we’re workers too! With special problems and solutions to those problems.
We need help from all sorts of people. *Boycott Taco Hell*. I’d like to send warm
greetings to all of our brother and sister workers

wherever they may be”

GENERAL SECRETARY LULA'S LAST STAND?

Rodrigo Toscano

(A verse letter to SW, on the heels of a wave of regional strikes in Brazil)

“General Secretary
Lula’s
Last?”

who stood
at the previous PT convention
bewildered amidst the scramble of

silver spurred
ascendant
lieutenants

who were neither assured of, nor sure of their motion’s directions
nor suffering

the resulting splits

effectively hamstring
the mystique
of the popular-media
General Secretary

by prefacing all motions to the floor
““popular committees’ wishes being...”

(meanwhile their respective regional bases

lay fallow)

(deep inroads by the right detected
popularly
in the spring)

So not “Contra-Lula” plots (and subplots, the fibers
of your gossipy prose
analysis)

but Trans-Lula-Distinctive
currents (with about 5 separate trends

and an average of
two tendencies within each)

all the while a pressure / need to consolidate
against said inroads
felt by those
close to “base” / *being* base (elected local worker-peasant)
delegates

were in the background
at the convention
as in a mural
motionless

and of the 3 dominant currents
all 3 ostensibly
neo-liberal!

as per critique developed by
O Trabalho
(fraternal section of the ILC)

that did win several key principalities
this summer in
Porto Alegre, Recife, and smaller

favelas in the Mato Grosso

And stands (the OT) against IMF payments on interest (*or* principal, same, tail-eating dragon)

a “bomba economica” that, comrade Messina summed up so well

in San Francisco, to the great approval of the SF Labor Council (which has been drifting to the left for years now, substantively)

but, here also, can the OT PT
congresistas
speak from a mobilized base?

My only point I suppose is this:

A pox on Lula! (the man)
done) (despite the dedicated work he’s

The Tragedy of Lula, Prince of the PT

if presently,
the social bases
are too detached from its Representational Apparatus

isn’t that the Tragedy of the Moment?

AS IDEOLOGY: DENATURALIZED GLOBALIZATION AND ARTICULATORY POETICS

Jeff Derksen

On the other hand, proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own cause, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and patricianism of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them, recoil ever and anon from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out:

Hic Rhodus, hic salta!

Here is the rose, here dance!

—Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

We do not contend that the endeavor to ideologize ideology is completely worthless.

—V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*

If the conditions of globalization do cry out, the cultural is given the function of denaturalizing the ideological effect of globalization. Within globalization, cultural production reveals, through a poetics of articulation, how globalism is articulated to the national and the local. Rather than “the global, the national, and the local” being a triad discursively and theoretically joined, cultural production could point to how these three elements – the world system – are articulated economically, structurally and discursively and how this articulation is actualized within sites and discourses. The formation of globalization at this moment has two ideological effects running side by side which are felt at both the structural level and at the subjective level. One effect is constituted by the pairing of the “culture-ideology of consumerism,” as Leslie Sklair defines it, and Emmanuel Wallerstein’s concept of “the commodification of everything.” The structural cause of this effect is the “self-imposed necessity that capitalism must be expanding on a global scale”; this ideology must produce the subjective effect of consumption within “the concept of the culture-ideology of consumerism” (Sklair 302). The second effect is more classically ideological, based on misrecognition of real relations and the subjective adoption of the ideology of globalization. Lawrence

Grossberg provides the clearest description of this process: “In fact, globalization is the ideology of contemporary capitalism through which capitalism attempts to naturalize and legitimate itself and thus disable resistance” (“Speculations” 14). The role of the cultural is defined by these two broad effects and cultural production is faced with the stark role of redefining the limits of commodification, or to denaturalize globalization and to reveal it as an ideology and not as the inevitable form the world must take.

The effect of imagining globalization as a series of semi-autonomous flows which are able to slip through borders in a speed-driven and technologically enhanced articulating rush is to render globalism (the thing) as siteless and to make its ideological formation appear natural. The historical twentieth-century avant-gardist position of a return of the senses, of overcoming the alienation of modernization, has, for political artists, taken the form of either removing the cloaking mystery of ideology or to represent what is not represented by the dominant culture. Cultural movements based on postcolonial models have made a reclamation of oppressed history an imperative to enter the present. As Paul Gilroy argues, blacks had to show a “substantial historical presence” before gaining access to the political present. But, Gilroy continues, “Corrective or compensatory inclusion in modernity should no longer supply the dominant theme” (335). Given the presentness of globalization, Gilroy’s “temporal adjustment” locates cultural practices in the imaging of the present. With the shift from imagining ideology as an accepted falseness to a constructing and constructed effect, and with the clarity of the ideological effect of globalization, cultural production is now challenged to make ideology tangible, to make the ideology of globalization ideological. This critique would denaturalize globalization by showing the links between the subjective, the everyday and the most widely circulated ideological sites and nets as well as the management of the past and the present.

This extraordinarily salient passage from Michele Barrett’s discussion of “Ideology, Politics, Hegemony: from Gramsci to Laclau and Mouffe” provides an entry into a discussion of ideology, globalization, and its cultural effects:

The substantive thesis put forward here [by Laclau] – that ideology is a vain attempt to impose closure on a social world whose essential characteristic is the infinite play of differences and the impossibility of fixed meaning – is thus couched in a framework in which the traditional distinction within Marxism between knowledge and ideological ‘misrecognition’ is (paradoxically to some) retained. (260)

The paradox that Barrett identifies in Laclau’s position is the inversion of misrecognition and ideology. In this formulation, ideology does not cause the fundamental misrecognition of real class interests, but rather ideology (on an

equally grand scale) initiates and sustains the misrecognition of the social's constitution as a totality rather than a contingent hegemony. For Laclau:

The ideological would not consist of the misrecognition of a positive essence, but exactly the opposite; it would consist of those discursive forms through which a society tries to institute itself as such on the basis of closure, of the fixation of meaning, of the non-recognition of the infinite play of difference.
(New Reflections 92)

Laclau's departure from other forms and functions of ideology generates two obvious criticisms. Firstly, as Ellen Meiksins Wood argues, Laclau moves away from a class-based concept of ideology grounded in specific social and historical conditions toward what Wood sees as a more abstracted, autonomous and siteless ideology disarticulated from class. Yet, the positive essence of the working class is not what is obscured by ideology, for Laclau has eschewed such essences. Wood herself tends to abstract Althusser's conception of ideological state apparatuses as sites of ideological interpellation. For Wood, once ideology is disarticulated from class struggle it becomes siteless and history becomes subjectless. The consequence for her is that the working class is abandoned as "the one social force that has a strategic social power sufficient to permit its development into a revolutionary force" (15). A liberal paradigm of social democracy as the vehicle for change replaces revolutionary socialism, a move which relies on spontaneity and disregards marxist notions of history and social change. Further, Wood sees this as a displacement of "struggle" from the site of class to the site of culture (which she reads as an application of Maoism into a European social field). Thus, the retreat from class becomes a symptom of everything being made cultural.

This line of argument has continued in a slightly altered form. The emergence of a cultural politics formed by "new social movements" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) and the rethinking of class as the ontologically privileged site of social change is seen as a fragmentation across the social, leaving a series of differentiated identities and discourses rather than class formations and material life.¹ Judith Butler portrays this argument as taking place on three fronts: the economic, class formation, and history. She summarizes the left argument on class and identity formation in this way: "the cultural focus of left politics has splintered the Left into identitarian sects, that we have lost a set of common values, a common language and even a common objective and universal mode of rationality" ("Merely" 34). Racialized and ethnic subjects, and other particularized groups from queer politics to Zizek's "single mother,"² are imagined as divisive on two sides. The left, sees them as inhabiting the space which was theoretically vacated with the retreat from class. These groups and the particularized subjects are imagined as incoherent, as fractured along the lines of their particular interests and identities. The right sees the fragmented mass as a force which will diffuse a

solidified national identity and result in the loss of common values as society spins into cultural relativism.

The tension between universalism and particularism within the left is usually not resolved with any nuance. For instance, Eric Hobsbawm sounds awfully old school when he states that “The political project of the left is universalistic: it is for all human beings” and it is this “wider agenda” that proves the left cannot be based on identity politics (43). Yet somehow, despite his great humanist universalism, he can disarticulate a particularized subject from any set of social relations other than ones based on identity formation: “[. . .] identity groups are about themselves, and nobody else” (44). This reduction of identity to a singular homogenous and dominant construct and his disarticulation of “identity groups” from any other struggle than that of identity leads Hobsbawm to claim a “citizen nationalism” as a possible common appeal. But, the category of citizenship can be both an interpellation and an exclusion.

Such reductive positions are rehearsed broadly by political theorists, and have only recently begun to be redressed in a less positivistic manner. More recently there have been forceful critiques of these anachronistic binaries which place racialized and ethnic subjects in the past because future social transformations require them to move unproblematically into a universalism that looks a lot like past versions of humanist universalism. For instance Grossberg is very direct in his analysis:

The claim that every political struggle which uses a discourse of identity or which begins with the analysis of specific forms of subordination (racism, sexism, homophobia), as any analysis must, is “identitarian,” i.e. inevitably fragmenting and particularizing, is simply false. And the claim that such movements render the central question of class and economics marginal is absurd. (“Speculations” 29)

Laclau and Mouffe’s concept of radical democracy counters the absurdity of particularism versus universalism (or fragmentation and stasis versus unity and agency). As an articulatory process forging coalitional linkages across a fragmented social field, but working within the democratic imaginary of equal particularisms, radical democracy imagines the possibilities of coalition building across (antagonistic) particularities. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* they write:

Renunciation of the category of subject as a unitary, transparent and sutured entity opens the way to recognition of the specificity of the antagonisms constituted on the basis of different subject positions, and hence, the possibility of the deepening of a pluralist and democratic conception. (166)

Here there is a double movement, one against a unitary understanding of the subject, a subject which could not be imagined as articulated to social movements beyond its identity formation, and secondly a movement toward a coalitional formation that does not imagine itself as universal and therefore universalizing.

In the cultural field, the relation of racialized and ethnic identities to the working class or of gender to class are not so historically bound, and class and race are not antagonistically set against each other or separated via a series of disarticulations. Michael Denning, in his work on the Popular Front in 1930s America, identifies coalitional strategies used to address “the racial-cultural situation” that developed into lasting social transformations (444-45). Canadian poets Dorothy Trujillo Lusk, Dionne Brand and Phinder Dulai, as well, imagine coalitional links and social articulations across this set of differences and antagonisms. Dulai’s short series of poems around working as a parking-lot attendant traces the fluctuations of a subject in which identitarian politics is not fragmentary, but contextual and also articulatory. In this section from “The Booth,” particularized identities cohere in “the machinery” of the job, of work, but not in a sentimentalized solidarity in which particularity is canceled:

Enter the booth
and become invisible
I know like always
I know
I become
part of the parking
machinery: Amano time clock
 syscorp cash register
 automated ticket dispenser
 and a nice smiling immigrant
 with a guttural accent
 Punjabi, Ismaili, Chinese,
 Tamil, or Ethiopian
 a reserve labour pool
 of poor Bengalis
 Somalians and Fijians
 with a few
 bohemian Anglophiles (87-8)

The seamless segue from the literal machinery of the job into the human machinery is a semantic articulation of the commoditized position of the “unskilled” labourer within globalization. Here the ethnoscape and the technoscape are not semi-autonomous, but synonymous flows through which bodies and other low-tech gadgets needed to run a job can be accessed. Dulai’s syntax of a list equates these “commodities,” but as well details the particularities of the workers who have

moved through the ethnoscape to enter “a reserve labour pool” necessary for capital. In a working-class imaginary, Dulai does not portray a fragmented field of identities but a field articulated through shared economic and therefore cultural positions. That is, class situatedness can form contingent articulations without asking that particularities (and therefore histories) are annulled.

Partisans, a long poem by an American poet Rodrigo Toscano, proposes a path beyond the impasse of “divisive identitarianism” through a discursive social formation which resembles radical democracy, but without a replacement of class positions by antagonisms. Toscano provides a “third way” to imagine social relations in which class and racialized and ethnic subjectivities are not in a zero sum game with each other. The initial reflex in *Partisans* is to look to social relations as the motor of coalitions and to understand the social field as already fragmented. Identity construction is not based on a prior unity which must be recouped through narrative, so the subject is not situated in the past but rather within the process of the social. This process acts as a constitutive force on subject formation which can be a repressive formation:

Having *not* needed one
but got one anyway, – I

Be wary of
that self, marked

By the World bank
accounted for

Surprise!
every five years or so (40)

In reductive theories of identity formation it could not be imagined that the World Bank would be considered a constitutive element of a self, as Toscano obliquely but effectively implies. The consciousness of this process of construction by the self is a consciousness of how the ideology of globalization (represented by the World Bank) is constitutive, interpellating a subject in a normative form. To be wary of a self is a broad move away from the givenness of the form of subjectivity and deeply implicates social discourses in the shape (or range of shapes) of selfhood.

Class and social relations emerge as the constituting factor of a coalitional subject in *Partisans*. Rather than class being fragmented by the complexities of multiply determined subject positions, potentially divisive social relations are imagined as the force around which a coalition – an “us” can form:

toilers facing bakers

realists approaching mystics
referents clasping referents

By the time its course is run
it might have forced an us from them
a them from us
a me from you
a you from me (13-14)

Partisans is not representing a particularized social formation – nor is its language particularly referential – rather it speculates on the coalitional potential of an oppressive constitutional outside, rather than a linking of already formed identities or subject positions. Toscano throws a speculative language into the discursive level of the social. Without working toward semantic or formal closure, *Partisans* is an ideological function of the cultural, opening to multiplicity and potential a debate which has mired in reductive binaries.

This textual tactic also addresses the second criticism of Laclau’s refiguring of ideology. Laclau’s application of Derridean post-structuralist “infinite play of differences” does appear to further render ideology siteless by replacing a model of class antagonism of social relations as the force of history with the model of language for social meaning. A homology based on immaterial and “infinite” language, where social meanings appear to be generated by the mechanics of meaning rather than social conditions is a vexed move for marxism. Such “infinite play” can quickly lead to a free play of the signifier which is loosened from an ideological impediment or effect rather than stressing the relational aspect of meaning as well as contextual meaning (say, Derrida meets Volosinov). This imagined free play opens a gap where language circulates outside of ideology. Predictably Wood points to this gap, accusing Laclau of “intellectual fashion” (11) and a “nihilism” (5) which privileges a groundless discourse rather than social relations. This sort of corrective needs to carry an analysis which illuminates the limitations of language as a universal analytical model, and Wood provides this, but such a critique must also avoid the dismissal of the entire post-structuralist project via a theoretical turn which posits language as itself free from the very social relations Wood accuses Laclau and Mouffe of abandoning.

I wish to acknowledge financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada which assisted this work’s production. As well, I benefited from debates with Alan Gilbert, Peter Hitchcock, Sianne Ngai and Rodrigo Toscano regarding representation, race, and class, and “what is to be done.”

Footnotes

¹ See for instance Bryan D. Palmer, *The Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1990: 2-47).

² Zizek, in "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism," argues that the "New Right" uses atypical case studies in their justification for attack on social programs. In the debate of the relationship of the universal and the particular, Zizek proposes: "the Universal acquires concrete existence when some particular content starts to function as a stand-in" (29).

Bibliography

- Barrett, Michele. "Ideology, Politics, Hegemony: from Gramsci to Laclau and Mouffe." *Mapping Ideology*. Ed. Slavoj Zizek. London: Verso, 1994. 235-64.
- Butler, Judith. "Merely Cultural." *New Left Review* 227 (Jan./Feb. 1998): 33-44.
- Denning, Michael. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. London: Verso, 1996.
- Dulai, Phinder. *Ragas from the Periphery*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard UP, 2000.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. "Speculations and Articulations of Globalization." *Polygraph* 11 (1999): 11-48.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. "Identity Politics and the Left." *New Left Review* 217 (May/June 1996): 38-47.
- Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso, 1987.
- Laclau, Ernesto. *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. London: Verso, 1990.
- Wood, Ellen Meiksin. *The Retreat from Class: A New 'True Socialism'*, London: Verso, 1986.
- Sklair, Leslie. "Social Movements and Global Capitalism." *The Cultures of Globalization*. Eds. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. Durham: Duke UP, 1998. 291-311.
- Toscano, Rodrigo. *Partisans*. Oakland: O Books, 1999.
- Zizek, Slavoj. "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." *New Left Review* 225 (Sept./Oct. 1997): 28-50.

\$OO / LINE / STEEL / TRAIN

Mark Nowak

1.

The basic form is the frame; the photograph of the factory predicts how every one (of the materials) will get used. **and I can remember Mark & I talking about the possibility of Lackawanna becoming a ghost town** Past (participle) past (participant) past (articulating) an incessant scraping (away). **and what would we do. You know—it wasn't just losing a job in the steel industry, but your entire life, the place that you grew up in was going to be gone.** As I scraped (grease, meat, omelettes), the (former) railroad workers and steel workers (still) bullshitting in the restaurant where for eight years I short-order cooked.

*

Who knew

the crisis

from the conditions—

presumably

the Capital [Who]

2.

Built sheds and piss houses. We took care of shit. Nation (“Under Construction”) needs the State (in decay)—a flag out of focus where working-class (white) masculinity also factors into how factories get framed. **You made steel together and you won your dignity together.** Inside my third grade (Union Road) classroom, the distant bay of trains (braking) out behind Buffalo Salvage & Tow. All those present (in prefigured relations) are constituted for a State that will remain (for us) always German Shepherd guarded. **You couldn’t make steel alone and you couldn’t win respect alone.** Further up the road was the Local.

*

Bricks, the frame [work]
of the eye, accents
of bricklayer
and optometrist, tongues
extant

77.

It was a mill town, he says, singing “mill” with a blend of affection and pity. A trace (far removed): my grandfather stepping off the Clinton Street bus and into a Kaisertown gin mill, Bethlehem Steel (still) scratched across his face. **A mill town is not a goddamn residential neighborhood.** Loading crates unloaded, oil drums bent and empty, glass shattered (past tense verbs) where the window-frames (never/the/less) remain. **When I walk on the sidewalk** (here, or hear), **I know when it’s heaving from tree roots.**

*

How empties
out the mouth
of air—How you’ve
got to learn How
to [get] chew[ed] with your mouth closed

After lunch at Lucky's Texas Red Hots I took my grandfather to the steel plant to check on his pension benefits. **U.S. Steel is getting out of the steel business and they're getting out of this community.** "Not suspecting that the category of 'Progress' is completely empty and abstract." **They've raped it, soaked it, and they're saying, Goodbye.** At this juncture the choice may be between buying the entire picture or just the frame. **We've been like sheep being led to the slaughter of unemployment, into the future without steel mills, without jobs; and our mouths have been stilled and we've had nothing to say.**

*

Where is
 dispossessed
 from the window
 of the Am/trak
Empire Builder

Doors torn away in Detroit, 1974. A picture in a frame is (still) the object here. **[The ex-steelworkers] will use excuses, like prejudice against mill hunks, and only make a marginal effort to salve their conscience or get the wife off their backs.** Case worker mimics gendered speech while cutting class (early). **We try to strip them bare** (steel/workers), **and then show all the ways to look for a job**— “The ‘hot’ economy created three million jobs in 1996, about half of them paying minimum wages (and half of those temporary or part time).” **how they can even use the obituaries to find work.**

*

When coming to
 a stop stopping
stopping Them [when]
 from continuing—
from coming to

124.

“PUSSY CRUSHER” in gray spray paint—

“WEED PENIS MEMBERS BEER” (and) “CT Fucked EB
—> here”

Vocabulary is the problem—men have vulgar mouths. The “Class of 2001” is responsible for these words; the owners of the trains that pass them (a block from my house, rarely on schedule) will never ride this line. **Sometimes nude pictures are all over the wall.** (These are seldom in frames.) **They don’t like women working, they try to embarrass you. Men** (not available for this photograph) **don’t want to acknowledge a woman’s place is not just in the home.**

*

Work from the wire

mill [the train]

edged through—

waiting, don’t

worry, Who knows

If you were in a pub you talked shop. How you would do things differently if you ran the place. This struggle, in each and every instance, to make history within conditions of Whose frame. **I mean the company was always doing things that didn't make sense.** Under 'just' such conditions, my father ran for (and was elected) vice president of his Westinghouse union. **There were a lot of smart guys in production but the company would never let you put your ideas into effect.** A railcar (still) awaits articulation in the bottom (Right) corner of this frame.

*

There points to/ward
somewhere else
where the working
wore you, or
you worked [whatever They wear]

Forty years of hard work and what have I got to show for it? Nothing. Aerosol cans empty in the middle of the tracks is not conducting the train. **I can't even speak proper.** Working-class kids writing their names on a wall that is bound to erase them. **When you're a steelworker (laughs), you don't get to speak the same language that you would do if you meet people in a bank or business office.** On Blackrock Bridge (above Buffalo Creek)—where my grandfather took me fishing after he retired from Bethlehem—someone wrote (before the train came, before the bridge tore down) “FUCK WHITE PUNKS ON DOPE!”

*

When was fond of
 making Memorials
 of the materials—
 they go, history
 shows, sometimes, south

160.

The men knew that they were risking their jobs in the walkout. . . but they had got worked up to the point where this didn't seem so important. . . They were tired of never getting promoted, and they were tired of being treated

like dogs

by. . . White. . .

foremen. . .

Get work. Get (worked) over. Get up, get worked up, get working together (again).

*

Because the photo
shows [Where] stairs [might] mean
the door the next flight up's
open*

*[except the factory's long since closed]

The bowling league at Holiday Bowl started at 11:00pm and we bowled after working night turn. Drove the latest model automobiles and smoked filtered cigarettes (at least on billboards we were). **We bowled until 6:00am.** Working-class (white) masculinity. **Just the guys from the mills. About 60 of us went all the time. We used up half the lanes.** We used, we used up, we used up (by then). **You could also continue bowling all morning long for a buck.**

*

History, the arrow
 pointing past [inside this frame]—

interest at 2.9% for What
 we can't afford in the first place

I get so damn depressed. Something like a photograph I took at the Czestochowa Railway Station and showed to my father several months before he died. He was (still) working at the Valu Liquor Store. **The world could end today, and I don't give a damn.** A city inside its frame (smokestack and steeple). **You're fifty-three and they don't want you anymore.** Railtracks, fences, steel. **On his jacket is an "iron-master" emblem, which U.S. Steel awarded to the workers at Duquesne for the mill's high productivity in 1984, the year the plant closed down.** My mother, now working (again), took a job as parish secretary at Our Lady of Czestochowa Church.

*

Two smokestacks
 within one
 frame—two's [maybe] better
 than tow, one is
 whether you got anyplace to go

215.

Read the writing on the Wal-Mart. **The town has never been the same, says Frank Albert, 71. . . whose home fell to the bulldozers.** In the U.S. Steel Gary Works yard, someone spray-painted “House of Pain” on an empty coal car. **We lost a lot of people when the West Side went. There just weren’t enough homes for those who wanted to stay.** Under the (Capital) cover of darkness the “HALT!” signs go unread. **Albert is still president of the West Side Hose Co., the volunteer fire department of a neighborhood that no longer exists.** Doors (scrape), doors (stain), doors (including or only their frames). **We still have meetings, he says.**

*

How this photograph
is How the frame
became an industry
-version of
How the Other Half Lives

218.

Is this the tense is this the tension is this the tension of class (framed into form)?
History tells us that the companies hired strikebreakers, with the emphasis on “break.” Steel (scrape): someone is still living in the background. **One day my dad came home from picket duty with a gash in his head.** “Open for business. Everything must go!”

*

The Local must

engage

past

its past

When we were kids we thought the steel mill was it. The (scrape) wage of labor (scraping by). **We'd seen the men comin' out, all dirty, black. The only thing white was the goggles over their eyes.** “[S]till more important is the idea that the pleasures of whiteness could function as a ‘wage’ for white workers.” **We thought they were it, strong men.** (The missing word is white.) **We just couldn't wait to get in there. When we finally did get in, we were sorry. (Chuckles.) It wasn't what it was cut out to be.**

*

America
 [history's
 signs] : “No
 Parking
 Anytime”

247.

The scrape (past) of the stain. Strain (to be) of some use (value). **To strike companies that were operating at 40 percent capacity in a depressed economy amidst intensely negative public opinion would have been suicide.** To not to be: riding the train through Milwaukee, through the (back) doors of an aerosol history—a (sudden) past we wrote (again) between the lines of an oncoming train. **But many a steelworker was feeling suicidal. If need be, there might be some satisfaction to be had from one final conflagration—one final “fuck you” to the boss.**

*

In the back/background
is the fence—
the smokestack
sans smoke [standing
against]

257.

Because the (brake) past is used because the tearing (past) of the (brick) form is used is used because the fence (in) of the (goddamn) frame is used is used is utterly used against us and by us and upon us and for us is used is used in the present (past) future (form) we are used yet users yet used.

Every day you put your life on the line when you went into that iron house. Every day you sucked up dirt and took a chance on breaking your legs or breaking your back. And anyone who's worked in there knows what I'm talking about.

*

-roads]

Closing

words :

[Rail

Works Cited

- Alder, Glenn and Doris Suarez. *Union Voices: Labor's Response to Crisis*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1993.
- Aronowitz, Stanley. *From the Ashes of the Old: American Labor and America's Future*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.
- Becher, Bernd and Hilla Becher. *Industrial Façades*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Bruno, Robert. "Everday Constructions of Culture and Class: The Case of Youngstown Steelworkers." *Labor History* 40: 2 (1999): 143-176.
- . *Steelworker Alley: How Class Works in Youngstown*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999.
- Corn, David. "Dreams Gone to Rust: The Monongahela Valley Mourns for Steel." *Harper's Magazine*. September, 1986: 56-64.
- Deaux, Kay and Joseph C. Ullman. *Women of Steel: Female Blue-Collar Workers in the Basic Steel Industry*. New York: Praeger, 1983.
- Dickerson, Dennis C. *Out of the Crucible: Black Steelworkers in Western Pennsylvania, 1875-1980*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1986.
- Feuchtmann, Thomas F. *Steeple and Stacks: Religion and Steel Crisis in Youngstown*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Galloway, Joseph L. "True Grit in a Steel Town." *U.S. News & World Report*. 12 June 1995: 30, 32.
- Lynd, Staughton. "Youngstown Ohio: Rebuilding the Labor Movement from Below." In *Fire in the Hearth: The Radical Politics of Place in America*. Mike Davis, Steven Hiatt, Marie Kennedy, Susan Ruddick, and Michael Sprinker, editors. London: Verso, 1990.
- Marquis, Christopher. "When the Fires Go Out: A steel town settles into decay." *The Progressive*. June, 1986: 23-25.
- McIntyre, Richard. "Theories of Uneven Development and Social Change." *Rethinking Marxism* 5:3 (1992): 75-105.
- Metzgar, Jack. "The Humbling of Steelworkers." *Socialist Review* 75/76 (May-August, 1984): 40-71.
- Roediger, David. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Rogovin, Milton and Michael Frisch. *Portraits in Steel*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.
- Schmiechen, Bruce, Lawrence Daressa, and Larry Adelman. "Steelworker Revival: Waking from the American Dream." *The Nation*. 3 March 1984 (v. 238): 241-44.
- Terkel, Studs. *Working*. New York: Pantheon, 1972.

WRITING AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

(WRITING CLASS: THE KOOTENAY SCHOOL OF WRITING ANTHOLOGY)

Pauline Butling

The Kootenay School of Writing (KSW) is a writer-run, volunteer organization that was established in Nelson and Vancouver, Canada in 1984. The name Kootenay derives from its place of origin, the Kootenay lake and river region where Nelson is located. It was founded by a group of former students and faculty from the School of Writing at David Thomson University Centre (DTUC) in Nelson. This arts education centre was shut down in 1984 as part of an economic and ideologically driven “restraint” program that had been introduced by the right wing provincial government the previous year. Following the closure, former students and faculty banded together to establish their own school, first in Nelson and shortly after in Vancouver where many of the DTUC students and faculty relocated. *Writing Class: The Kootenay School of Writing Anthology*, edited by Andrew Klobucar and Michael Barnholden and published by New Star Books in 1999, presents poems by fourteen writers associated with the Vancouver-based KSW collective. It also includes a useful, if lengthy and not always accurate, introduction to their politics and poetics. The anthology title, *Writing Class*, encapsulates two central KSW activities—the provision of an alternative writing “classroom” together with a critique of class relations.

As an alternative ‘school,’ KSW offered workshops, readings, lectures, publications, and colloquia—all aimed at supporting experimental poetry and poetics in a province where aesthetic and economic reductionism produced a narrower and narrower definition of the normative. In both Nelson and Vancouver, the KSW collectives rented offices and put together annual programs of readings, workshops, and talks (funded largely by beer sales, with a little help from The Canada Council for the Arts). In Vancouver, the group also continued to publish the magazine that had started at DTUC (*Writing*) and put on two benchmark colloquia, *The New Poetics Colloquium: A Celebration of New Writing*, in 1985—which featured U.S. and Canadian “Language” writers—and *Split Shift, A Colloquium on the New Work Writing*, in 1986. KSW writers have since become well-known for their experimental poetics; less well-known is the link between their poetics and their Marxist analysis of class oppression. The value of this anthology is thus not only as a useful collection of a particular “school” of writing but also in its discursive framing of the work.

Indeed the latter function seems a primary goal, judging by the length of the Introduction, which takes up almost twenty-five percent of the book. Editors Klobucar and Barnholden set out to claim both discursive and material space for class-based, Language writing. They do so by using the now familiar strategies of

outsider groups; that is, by claiming originary historical moments and constructing identity narratives together with theoretical frameworks which serve to contextualize and legitimate the work. On the poetics front, the editors trace a network of connections between KSW writers, the US Language poets, and the Vancouver experimental poetics tradition, including the *Tish* poets of 1961-63 and the Summer Poetry Workshop at the University of British Columbia in the summer of 1963 (with Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg and other 1960s literary luminaries as the course instructors).

Regarding class issues, the editors link KSW to the provinces labour history and to various social protest groups, particularly the many counter-culture and/or protest groups that settled in the Nelson region throughout the 20th century. The historical narrative sets the stage for KSW's entry on the scene in the 1980s and answers the question, why Nelson? One might quibble that the story sometimes skews the facts—in telling the story of the Nelson area's left-wing political affiliations, for instance, they neglect to mention that the area elected right-wing members of parliament from the 1950s into the 1970s and again in the 1980s—but overall the historical account provides a helpful picture of KSW's social and political contexts.

More useful, however, in my view is the editors' discussion of the immediate politics of the 1980s and of the link between the KSW writers' emerging class consciousness and their experience of oppression and exclusion during the decade of "restraint." The DTUC closure very quickly galvanized the students and faculty (myself included) into a cohesive, politicized group; the subsequent four months of active protest provided an instant education in the social and political issues of the day. Writing became irrevocably imbricated in questions of power and value, especially as the cuts in government funding were accompanied by rhetoric about sloth, excess and greed in certain sectors of society. Educational and cultural institutions were characterized as wasteful, for instance, and labour groups labeled greedy and self-serving. In Klobucar and Barnholden's analysis, "[t]he entire BC social strata appeared suddenly divided between the 'bad British Columbians,' *i.e.*, workers and intellectuals who refused to sacrifice for the communitarian good, and the worthy employing class, who continued to define just what the terms of this good would actually be" (26). The restraint program provoked an articulate class politics; many KSW writers began to explore the links between the social/economic marginalization of the artist and class oppression. Gone is the romantic notion that outsider status is a necessary prerequisite for creative activity. In its place came a barrage of questions about who wields the power to exclude, who is excluded, who benefits, and how such inequities can be addressed.

Although only two of the fourteen writers in the anthology were DTUC students and/or founding members (Jeff Derksen and Dennis Dennisoff were DTUC writing students and Derksen was one of KSW's founders), as young poets trying to survive in the hostile arts environment and economic downturn of the

1980s, all the anthologized writers would have felt the effects of the provincial government's copycat Regan/Thatcher program. Gerald Creed's poem "Résumé," for instance, recounts a life of failed deals, failed deeds, unanswered letters, unsuccessful job searches, and frustrating attempts to get social assistance. In Creed's poems, as in many other poems in the anthology, the dislocations of a life lived on the social/economic margins are not so much itemized as enacted in a dislocated language and form: "I beg your / rose garden I never / promised you a / hardon" ("Résumé" 50).

Kathryn MacLeod likewise enacts a fragmented life in a disjunctive language and form in a poem called "Infatuation." Here are the opening lines:

being the most ... considered dangerous
... most women in American ... not yet
... left the city with a gun ...
dark skin, leach ...
button, button up ... keep it hard the whole time
... over something small, sedative ... inner thigh
surprise revulsion, strokes... peaks interest
(*"The Infatuation"* MacLeod's ellipses 76)

The entire poem consists of such fragments. Words and phrases—presumably drawn from contemporary popular media—are juxtaposed randomly. Thus isolated, these words and phrases highlight the skewed values that are transmitted in current discourses. MacLeod thereby foregrounds *language* as an instrument of oppression. At the same time, by fragmenting the discourse, she disengages or deactivates the semantic loops and thus diminishes their power to construct and inscribe identities. In another poem, she offers a more direct critique of ecological and human dislocation. Here is the first of five sections:

The fish leapt from the water with rejoicing and were drowned in air
the streams dried from exhaustion
the corn burned in the fields

outside in darkness
watching yellow rooms

the first husband died
the cat moved away with friends

the sun rose and fell a thousand times
winds blew, stinking of tar and chemicals

refugees moved in and were evicted

friends revealed themselves as enemies

great doctrines stumbled
letters were mailed, came back unopened

she returned, and walking up the stairs
she limped

(“One Hour Out of Twenty-four” 84)

MacLeod’s social critique is implied in the descriptions of industrial pollution, then stated more overtly in the images of “great doctrines” stumbling, unopened letters, and a limping body.

Peter Culley’s “A Letter From Hammertown to East Vancouver and the East Village” also offers a social critique—in this instance of corporatism and its effects. Culley complains that “rhetoric becomes prosthesis” (180), an artificial construct which, like “the new incorporated self” (182), conceals social and economic inequities: “the winter twilight’s pall of woodsmoke / drifts and softens // even as it sears and conceals / just as the low millennial fog of Hammertown / cloaks the shuttered factories... in the wispy raiments / of authenticity” (181). Like the fog and woodsmoke which cover up economic hardship, corporate language camouflages social injustices.

Judy Radul’s “Kisses So Wet” focusses more on poverty and the accompanying misery than on its origins in corporate greed. She also uses a very different language and form. Her poems are ironic, understated, self-reflexive and self-mocking. She makes fun of her performance/commoditization of “misery,” for instance, even as she describes the need to address its causes and effects:

Our band was called Kisses So Wet and everyone including us thought that was a stupid name. But it had an appalling neutrality that suited our disagreeability. We didn’t create music but misery. As neither were necessary and misery was cheaper we chose that. Our first practices were carried out above the old General Testing Laboratories office. She was our leader and couldn’t care less but we knew with so much misery in the world there would be a lot of competition. And though her father owned the station we had to bribe petty officials to get venues to hold our misery loves company nights. Misery was increased by random killings, surprise chemical spills, false emotions and copy-cat crime. But people complained, whined, droned, “I could do that” the implication being that their ability disqualified our activity as art. Still, we weren’t really, authentically, miserable. Our magazine “in praise of wounds that never heal” became a hit with pre-teens. We tried

to get indignant, feel misunderstood, used, abandoned, but we actually understood. (“Kisses So Wet” 192-93)

In contrast to Culley or MacLeod’s disjunctive language and form, Radul’s poem speeds along with a fast-moving prose-poem line; words tumble over each other, spill out the causes, effects, circumlocutions, and disguises of “misery” in a social context where emotions are regularly packaged and sold as “product.”

Jeff Derksen’s “Interface” offers yet another way of foregrounding exploitive social relations within linguistic/poetic structures. In the following excerpt, note how semantic continuity is broken by the visual and discursive gaps between lines. Each line is a complete sentence and thus retains its comprehensibility in isolation, but the disjunctive leaps between lines highlight the many false and/or contradictory juxtapositions that the self experiences in the contact zone or “interface” between the individual and the social:

Generic or genetic.

Sapped like a sap machine

There are so many *ones* I want to be – beyond the cardboard maquette stage, more at the prototype level, the “working model” example.

A subject-in process with a horn section.

Rent context.

By the book legally and with the compassion of the United Fruit Company.

Every device will have its homecoming.

“We may not have the right answers, but we have the right car.”

At no point in Canadian history has a federal government been so unpopular: January 1991.

Counter-top culture. (“Interface” 203-204)

Derksen’s witty and humorous word-play exposes a range of social problems, including exploited workers, unethical corporations, irresponsible governments, an excessively commoditized culture, and an impossibly fragmented self. But the word-play also opens out other meanings and thus implies that poetic interventions which expose dominant ideologies can help produce social change. Throughout

the anthology social injustices are interrogated within a disjunctive poetics which foregrounds and critiques some of the ways language enacts dominant power positions. In the words of Klobucar and Barnholden: “Language, the practice of writing and the politics surrounding this practice have thus signified for KSW writers the very foundations of social interaction. To write is to engage in social discourse—an activity that is as culturally valuable as it is political”(6).

As with any unifying narrative, however, there are also exclusions. The editors themselves note the absence of some key writers, such as Deanna Ferguson (who chose not to be in the anthology). They also briefly note that “[o]ther significant political issues besides those usually associated with capital and class relations contributed to KSW’s collective cultural stance”(42) by which they mean the “vital feminist politics” that informs the work of Lisa Robertson, Nancy Shaw, Catriona Strang, and Susan Clarke (42-43). However, this nod from the editors to a feminist critique within the collective seems cursory at best. They simply note its presence:

women writers working in and around KSW quickly noticed that most efforts to explore ideology within the school’s programming tended to subordinate gender issues to those of class. In their work, writers like Robertson and Strang imply that the collective, though politically aware of the economic bearings on writing and language, rarely referred to the patriarchy in either its programming or individual poetry projects. (Klobucar and Barnholden 42-43)

They conclude that the anthology represents a common position—one in which the “drive for an alternate poetics fuelled corresponding aspirations for a new political critique and a distinct community formation” (45).

Readers will nonetheless note diverse critiques of patriarchy and a link between gender and class oppression in the work of the five women in the collection. Lisa Robertson’s Prologue to her delightful chapbook

XEclogue provides a summary of some of the issues:

I needed a genre for the times that I go phantom. I needed a genre to rampage Liberty, haunt the foul freedom of silence. I needed to pry loose Liberty from an impacted marriage with the soil. I needed a genre to gloss my ancestress’ complicity with a socially expedient code; to invade my own illusions of historical innocence. The proud trees, the proud rocks, the proud sky, the proud fields, the proud poor have been held against my glazed face for centuries. I believed they were reflections. (108)

She introduces a cast of characters who play out various historical and contemporary gender and class-based positions. They include Nancy, a glamour

girl with “sheathed hips” (113); Lady M. who speaks in elegant 19th century prose; the ancestresses who advocate submissive roles; the “Roaring Boys” who “course the town at night: tawdry, flecked, & billowing behind their silky fluted pricks, their short lines syncopate as ripe fruits shake the lawn” (112); and the “roaring angels” who are “alert as nets and their sly pricks nudge the cold” (113). Robertson exposes the social privilege and patriarchal bias inherent in a genre such as the pastoral. Her lyric disjunctions crack the façade by which “poetic” language and form conceal class privilege and dominant values while also exploring her complicity with those values.

Had the editors linked gender and class critiques, they might have offered more than a cursory description of such feminist writing practices. The introduction also contains numerous minor but annoying factual inaccuracies. For instance, DTUC was not an “independent college for the arts” (24). It was a publicly funded centre that functioned in conjunction with the West Kootenay Junior College (Selkirk College) for its two year diploma programs and with the University of Victoria for its degree programs. It offered two year Diploma programs in Writing, Theatre, Visual Arts, and Music; and Bachelor degrees in Fine Arts (which included Creative Writing) and Education. Also, John Newlove is given too prominent a place in the account of KSW origins: he was not from Nelson, nor did he help found the Writing Program at DTUC (24). (It was started by Fred Wah alone). Newlove taught at DTUC for only one year and was editor of *Writing* magazine for only one issue. Also, *Writing* continued in Vancouver under the editorship of Colin Browne, not “under the editorship of Nancy Shaw and Derksen” (19). Derksen and Shaw did not become editors until 1989. Regarding the 1963 summer poetry workshop in Vancouver: it was a credited Creative Writing course, not just a “series of panels”(21); Warren Tallman and Robert Creeley were the principal organizers, not “Tallman, along with Duncan, Olson, and Ginsberg” (21). Or, at SUNY Buffalo, Charles Olson and Robert Creeley did not both arrive there at the “at the end of the 1960s” (24). Olson taught there from the fall semester of 1963 to spring, 1965; Robert Creeley did not arrive until the fall of 1965. Also, Warren Tallman did not work “closely with many prominent poets in the US throughout the 1950s” (19). He met Robert Duncan in the late 1950s (through his wife Ellen, who was from Berkeley and who had become friends with Martha and Kenneth Rexroth and other San Francisco writers when she was a student at Mill’s College in Berkeley). He did not meet Creeley, Olson, and Ginsberg until the early 1960s. On the origins of *Tish*, they neglect to mention Frank Davey as one of its founding editors (22) and instead make it sound like it was a movement that originated in Nelson. Also, they again mistakenly cast John Newlove in a central role: the “younger Nelson poets” who helped start *Tish* were Fred Wah and Lionel Kearns (although Kearns did not become a founding editor), not Wah and Newlove.

Do I quibble too much? The gist of the stories they tell is accurate enough. They have listened well to the local legends, or, in Michael Barnholden’s case, actually lived through the making of some of those legends. In terms of explaining

community formation, perhaps legends are as important as facts. But for my money it would nice to have the facts right too. In any case, the Introduction is only a portion of the book. Certainly the poetry collected in this anthology is well worth reading, whatever one thinks of the Introduction. Each writer is given five to ten pages, enough for the reader to get a sense of the work. And what great work it is. Formally innovative, socially relevant, politically aware, most of the poems collected here do indeed live up to the back cover hyperbole which claims that "*Writing Class* is a fascinating introduction to the most vital poetry being written today." The anthology fulfills both meanings of its title: we see writers experimenting with new ways to inhabit poetic forms as well as writers engaging in critiques of the social formations and power structures within which they must necessarily live and work.

FOUR CORNER NABS

Allison Hedge Coke

fourteen, I'm packin' crates
Fairmont Foods—Cary, N.C.
only mixed-blood blonde girl around
only factory workside worker not black
all of us under white super's thumb

tho when shop stewards hound dues
I don't know what's what
thinkin' this work here
is dues enough
what's a union do for me?

Sadie, she took my arm, said,
“Listen, you stick close to me
when you go out back,
they're gonna get ya'.”
Me, I follow

suit down, shower up
snack bar and closing

fourteen, I'm still wild yet
don't know enough to be scared
so I never am
that's how I got these scars here
anyway, I follow Sadie

she's about fifty
and weighs five times that
just before the door she
grab's a hunk a' rebar
and latches my hand

we start out back
light up a Camel straight
look left, there's about twenty,
eyes, rebound right, twenty count more,
they semi-circle in

memory rings—I hear my dad’s voice advising me ‘bout fightin’ white girls
“Circle ‘em they’re easier to pick off”

Sadie swings the rebar
and calls ‘em all on down
warning, “Touch one corn-silk
on this girl’s head and
I’ll kill ya’. I will, too.”

her eyes round and circle wild
her big bosom heaves breath
she swings round and wide
hoping for reason to let out some rising steam

half a century’s factory work
crackers, all those crackers
four corner nabs under her belt
500 gallon vats—peanut butter
stink so strong the smell

lasts a lifetime and more
crackers flying by ‘bout ninety miles per

pull and pack ten
thirty, if you’re a stacker
pull and pack ten filled and
wrapped on belt conveyors
drop in cardboard containers

pull ten more
till ten times ten makes
one hundred count boxes—
Austin Foods—all the scrambled ones
go to feed dog, or hogs

somewhere, they say,
somewhere far, far, away

lookin’ at Sadie swing rebar
you know she’s packed ple_nty
I wish I was packin’ more ‘n fists
studying Sadie I surmise
her punch’d be good as my drop cut

on the preacher's daughter's nose
when she called me a heathen
I was proud of breakin' it in one jab but,
my dad said I maybe just
proved her right

Hell, I didn't even know what a heathen was
guess this union thing must

be like a club for preacher's daughters
I decide and slide
shuffle step slide
in to back up Sadie's swings

swing low, swing high, swing 'round and back

never had an older woman
fend for me before
defended plenty though
guess it's fair in all
union guys they

just pull in and pull back
like a boxer afraid to land
case he might get landed on
Sadie is so big to me
she's the midnight blue of sky

just swings and swings with fear of God
human pendulum momentum
strutting her stuff through the crowd
straightening 'em out like scolding babies
"Didn't your mama hold you?"

"What you big men wanna beat
a tiny girl like this for?"

I look down my upper arms
fully bulged from field work—
furrows and packin' crate and
concrete block—
heavy workside I live

they just don't fit my build

so I look like a monkey
when I look in mirrors
big muscular arms and back on
a skinny little frame

kinda wiry, funny, even to me
the biceps aren't tiny, I think
and pull back my jacket
to show 'em off
let 'em ripple with blood pumping

never did know when to be scared
even when I was really shy

Sadie steps through
Austin Foods' finest forty
like walkin' water, she steps
I walk right on by behind her
they begin shuffling, shuffling

away at her words and
at the super's flood lights

now circling us and flashin'
like a prison yard
counter escape
warden super packin' something else
we're past and out

I look at Sadie
she whispers low, only to me,
"Better get them dues paid.
Next check, okeh?"
I nod, duck out the lot

hitch a semi home down
highway 50 smellin' like crackers
and peanut butter from packin' four corner nabs
even after the shower down
spot a teamster card on the visor

POSSESSING POSSESSION: LORINE NIEDECKER, FOLK, AND THE ALLEGORY OF MAKING

Elizabeth Willis

Some of you may be wondering what Lorine Niedecker has to do with the major concerns of the 1960s.¹ What could such a minimalist, domestic writer with such circumscribed concerns as keeping the wind and water out of her small marshy house and making her own clothes have to do with the monumental political and intellectual concerns of the Vietnam war era, the civil rights movement, free love, and the increasing stylization and popularization of an American counterculture? Objectivism was, after all, a movement of the 1930s, associated with populist concerns and communist politics. But with World War II, the red scare, and pervasive blacklisting in the arts, it wasn't until the 1960s that objectivist poetry had its long-awaited afterlife.

The reasons for the resurfacing of objectivist poetics are, of course, historically and philosophically complex. But if we look even at the surface of 60s popular culture, the style of the 1930s—particularly the presence of folk and labor concerns and their representation within popular media—is everywhere manifest. In politics an increased belief in the efficacy of political protest fueled a grassroots politics of resistance; in women's fashion, there was the "peasant" blouse; in music it was Arlo rather than Woody Guthrie, and folk-based musicians from Bob Dylan to The Band to Pete Seeger and the Kingston Trio were appearing on TV. The 60s was the era of Niedecker's renaissance, too; it was the period of nearly all her book publications, the repeated re-editing and re-arrangement of her poems, and the development of her longer serial works. While it would be valuable to consider the ways in which Niedecker's poetry embodies the major concerns of the 1960s—and it does touch upon those I've mentioned—I want to focus primarily on Niedecker's notion of "folk" and its relation to the commodity status of the poem, her conception of poetic composition and possession, and her relation to her cultural sources.

To look at Niedecker as a kind of folk poet is, of course, not to suggest she was a naive, unschooled in the world beyond her Black Hawk Island. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis points out in her essay on "Niedecker, gender, & class," and Jenny Penberthy notes in her introduction to the Niedecker/Zukofsky correspondence, Niedecker distinguishes herself very early on from the culture around her.² Her first published poem, "Wasted Energy" is a recasting of folk material, focusing on differences in class- and culture-based language usage.³ In schoolish sing-song, Niedecker reports on her environment like an anthropologist; the poet-reporter is clearly set apart from the subjects whose speech-acts she records.

Her World War II poem “In the great snowfall before the bomb” also explicitly displays and elaborates on the poet’s cultural position. In it, the speaker is separated from the “folk” as writer and as woman, though they provide her with “material”:

I worked the print shop
right down among em
the folk from whom all poetry flows
and dreadfully much else....” (GP 21)

Here, the print shop setting foregrounds our awareness of the object status of letters, words, and syntax, as the physical stuff of poems. The fact that she worked “right down among em” and in fact needed this work for her survival keeps her from seeming like management to their labor. The “folk” merely provide her with the raw material which it becomes her equally labor-laden job to condense into poetry. The poem’s ending points to the difference in her labor as a difference in time frame. Compared to the frenetic pace of the print shop, the poem appears to develop almost geologically; or to reiterate the place of the poem as an embodiment of gender difference, like an egg that it takes a lot of sedentary labor to hatch:

What would they say if they knew
I sit for two months on six lines
of poetry? (GP 21)

The poem is a way of compressing world into word: as Marianne Moore wrote poems out of the material of travel brochures and electric bills, Niendecker found poetry in the gossip that flowed through the offices of *Hoard’s Dairyman* in the 1940s as much as in her research on Wisconsin history and geography for the Federal Writers’ Project.

By virtue of her love for and detachment from the culture within which she lived, she was able to collect and compress folk material, hearsay, gossip, and regionalisms as material for poetry in much the way that Charles Reznikoff shaped documentary reportage within *Testimony*. The mature work of both writers behaves according to the key poetic principles extolled by Zukofsky: objectivity and sincerity. The combination of these two terms meant giving up the romanticism inherent in high modernism—particularly its positioning of the subjective self within the poem—without becoming too detached from the subject *per se* as a vehicle for human content. The poem instead could be viewed as a product of collectivity, a fossil-like record of the pressures of the culture that shape the individual rather than an investment in the mythology of the poet’s ability to legislate the culture. From this perspective it is easier to see modernism, with its mythologies of genius, as an extension of romanticism—and objectivism as a greater break from modernism than it might initially appear.

In balancing the objective and the sincere, Reznikoff's long poem documents the violence within American culture without reducing it to political message-making. Its "objective" presentation is the very cause of its perceived sincerity, opening the way for a motive as well as emotive—empathic and political—response. Similarly, Niedecker celebrates the richness of folk language while acknowledging the brutality of the culture it supports. Collecting found usage as material for her poetic condensery, Niedecker asserts the aesthetic value of working class, non-literary readings of the culture from which she emerges—without suggesting that it is in any way superior to, say, a more conventionally literary culture. Like *Testimony*, her poems vibrate with both celebration and deep-seated criticism. While the folk quality of her poems makes them appear accessible, they often narrate a meaningful resistance to cultural assimilation. A good example is the shifting power dynamic embodied within the "great snowfall" poem in which the guys down in the print shop "called me Blondie." This nicknaming can be read as an endearment, a sexual slur, and/or as wryly ironic and self-mocking; if we read Niedecker herself as the antecedent of the poem's I, one can see the richness in assigning a bespectacled proofreader with a college degree the status of a dumb-blonde pin-up or balloon-breasted comic-strip character. The act of writing the poem is, among other things, a way of literally capturing her verbal opponents on her home turf. By recording the interchange with terse and critical humor, Niedecker responds in a folkway that is entirely in keeping with her "place" in more than a geographical sense.

Clearly, Niedecker herself is not excluded from this critical voice. In fact, her simultaneously proud and self-denegrating commentary drives her poetic style, keeping her poems unsettled and unsettling. This critical stance also appears in a letter she writes to Zukofsky, in which she quotes directly a letter she received from Ian Hamilton Finlay who tried to get her to record her poems on cassette for a "folk" recording: "I know this man who plays a guitar: he actually leads a folk group which is having its first disc made at present in USA, and I showed your poems to his wife, she was enthusiastic about my idea, which is that you somehow get the loan of a tape machine, and TALK these poems onto some tape, then post it over, and I'll get this man to add guitar...." (NCZ 329) Later Niedecker writes: "Mebbe I shdn't ever have gone to NY to meet the real writer but shd. have stayed in my little country patch and written country ballads to be sung with a *geetar*. (FTC 326) The passage is typical of Niedecker's tone; she manages at once to chide Zukofsky for staying in New York (thus he's a "real writer," but one without great courage) while she mocks her own public image and relative obscurity. Beyond its perceived authenticity, Niedecker would have seen "folk" as ideal material for the objectivist ethos for several reasons: its populist stance and approachability; its focus on a collective rather than an individual process of making; its interest in non-specialized access to meaning; and in Niedecker's case especially, its blurring of ownership boundaries by engaging in anonymous and temporally-layered multiple-author composition.

In fact, ownership—literary and otherwise—was one of the central concerns of Niedecker’s poetry. Her biographical relation to property was conflicted. Her grandmother was the first woman on record as owning property in the state of Wisconsin. But most of the family property was eventually lost, and the burden of owning and maintaining property—and of possibly having to evict someone who couldn’t make his mortgage payments—is voiced as an oppressive concern in both her letters and poems of the 1960s. (NCZ 328) She writes to Zukofsky in December 1962: “the nation’s wealth might be in the hands of women but they’re having a hell of a time” (NCZ 326)

In her correspondence with Zukofsky, it is clear that a certain sense of intellectual and poetic property abides between them as well—and is occasionally violated. At one point Niedecker reports an anecdote to Zukofsky while warning him not to use it, as she’s “got a lien on it.” (NCZ 15) In her later poems, her preoccupation with ownership becomes more intense. It complicates her relation to the Zukofskys, as she clearly considered Paul part of her communal life and not merely the property of Louis’s nuclear family. In her quest for literary collectivity her poems become increasingly enthralled with the physical, geological, historical world, the objective *unownable* world—a sensibility akin to that of Black Hawk specifically and of the native American presence generally, which informs her later poems about place.

* * *

Her early poem “When Ecstasy Is Inconvenient”—generally seen as a more rhetorical, message-driven poem than most of her later work—points to the liminal experience of lyric possession, of brushing up against the unknown force within language, which it is the work of the poem to transmit. And yet it too comes into focus around the issue of containment—that is, the invention of a story to explain away the very “ecstasy” of composition which it presents.

When Ecstasy Is Inconvenient

Feign a great calm;
all gay transport soon ends.
Chant: who knows—
flight’s end or flight’s beginning
for the resting gull?

Heart, be still.
Say there is money but it rusted;
say the time of moon is not right for escape.
It’s the color in the lower sky
too broadly suffused,

or the wind in my tie.

Know amazedly how
often one takes his madness
into his own hands
and keeps it. (FTC 5)

Implied in this decisive closure is the notion of the poem as a container for the uncontainable, a way of possessing possession. Published in the pages of the magazine in which she first encountered Zukofsky, we might also consider the ways in which it presages her relation to him, including the sense that a moment of “gay transport” could end by “containing” its progeny through abortion or that it could be transformed into an intense written correspondence—both acts that involve taking things into one’s own hands.⁴

While this poem is generally seen as an early aberration in Niedecker’s opus, representing her surrealist phase, her later work often resonates with a similar combination of mysticism and high gothic drama, though it tends toward a more comic tone and focuses more on worldly effects rather than supernatural sources. On a practical level, overheard fragments of conversation, gossip, anecdote, and epistle, all bear the traces of previous owners and lend themselves to a displacement of subjectivity. Such folk forms are perfect media for hauntings and enactments of possession. At the same time, their ownership, their status as possessions, is complex.

While acquisition was and is the most obvious preoccupation of American life, Niedecker seems to suggest alternatively that one could be possessed by (absorbed with) an objective observation of the movement of things, an awareness that as subjects we are all just passing through. Think of “Traces of Living Things,” “Paeon to Place,” etc., which, for all the unified voicing of Niedecker’s poems—especially the “folk” poems—demystify and de-emphasize the position of the speaker as the maker of reality. The condensery that kicks out poems is a site for material transformation, not concoction.

So it is useful to look at Niedecker’s poems for what they say, often in deflected as well as condensed ways, about the process of making. “I rose from marsh mud” has been discussed as an enactment of biological and social Darwinism: the human descends taxonomically from the muck, through the steady transformation of the geological earth itself.

I rose from marsh mud,
algae, equisetum, willows,
sweet green, noisy
birds and frogs

to see her wed in the rich

rich silence of the church,
the little white slave-girl
in her diamond fronds.

In aisle and arch
the satin secret collects.
United for life to serve
silver. Possessed. (GP 24)

But here the origin and descent of the species is reversed; it becomes a rising up, with its resonance of class struggle intact and with its contradictory working-class dream of social ascendancy through one's profession as a writer. The I in the poem can be read as both the poet and the poem—a statement of poetic and biographical process. The poem arises—a living object that *evolves* into being, rather than being “made”—from base raw materials (like the iron in the blood in “Lake Superior”). Rather than being a triumphal ascent, the social ascendancy witnessed in the “rich rich silence of the church” is a mockery of the evolutionary/creative process itself.⁵ In contrast, the poem's contrapuntal I comes out of dead organic matter, like the creature from the Black Lagoon—or to be more literary about it, Frankenstein's monster—patched together cast-off material that brings with it the “traces of living things.” In this poem that asserts an evolutionary reality rather than a creationist mythology, the poet's “hideous progeny,” like Mary Shelley's, comes to stand in the place of both the created and its creator, author and poem. Like Frankenstein's monster, the objective poem comes back to haunt and even argue with its maker—not to mention embarrassing her with the mud still clinging to its shoes.⁶

In this way, Niedecker's opus seems less about place in a geographical sense (she certainly disliked the notion of being a “regional” poet) than it is about knowing one's place: that is, about where the poet fits into the culture and how one travels through and within the interstices of class and regional identity—owning up to one's debased roots, whether they lead back to colonial explorers or the “natives” who pull out their fingernails, or both. (“Lake Superior,” GP 64-65)

* * *

The interlocking concerns of creation, artistic “possession,” class consciousness, marital strife, monstrous birth, and the prospect of abject poverty linked Niedecker with Mary Shelley as well. While Penberthy rightly points out the danger in reading poems with too steady an eye on Niedecker's biography, Niedecker herself performs a combination of biographical, autobiographical and literary-historical readings of Mary Shelley in her poem “Who Was Mary Shelley?” Placing the poem in a section of “ballads,” Niedecker seems to point to both an unauthorized folk source and a sense that even great women's lives tend to be

remarked in oral narrative and hearsay; that they appear in history as ciphers, as monsters, or as the bearers of monsters, their identity formed by the biological confluence of life and death.

Poetically speaking Niedecker arose, by her own account, with her discovery of the objectivist issue of *Poetry* in 1931, the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Mary Shelley's revised *Frankenstein* and the year in which it was released as a major motion picture in the US.⁷ Thirty-one years later, in September 1962, Niedecker writes to Zukofsky of reading Eileen Bigland's biography of Mary Shelley (she had also read Trelawny's *Last Days of Byron and Shelley*) and uses it to calibrate and reassess the scale of her own woes, which shrink in comparison. A week later she writes him a postscript about Jonathan Williams's review of her own collection *My Friend Tree*: "I wdn't know how to write poetry without Zukofsky and J. wdn't know how to review me without Zukofsky." (NCZ 321-2) A study of the jacket copy and reviews of Niedecker's books and of the Niedecker/Zukofsky correspondence shows this is far from an isolated occasion. She repeatedly receives praise that is qualified by considerations of gender and location; her poems are often eclipsed by the biographical and by the identification of Zukofsky as her mentor. To complicate things further, she writes an entire collection of poems for Zukofsky's son Paul, partly "condensed" of anecdotes shared within their correspondence. Their problematically fluid negotiation of literary ownership and identity resonates easily with Mary and Percy Shelley's conflated and conflicted personae: the first edition of *Frankenstein* appeared anonymously with Percy's ghostwritten introduction in 1818; subtitled "a modern Prometheus" the novel appeared two years before Percy's *Prometheus Unbound*, though he had announced his desire to rewrite the Prometheus myth as early as 1816.

Niedecker's American gothic treatment of gender and marriage also resurfaces in the poem "I married" in which the coffin-like claustrophobia of the semantic box where the couple lies together is reiterated at the end of the poem by the suggestion that the speaker has become—or sees herself as—a zombie, undead:

I married

in the world's black night
for warmth

if not repose,
At the close—

someone.

I hid with him
from the long range guns.

We lay leg
in the cupboard, head

in closet.

...

I say

I married

and lived unburied.

I thought—

(GP 107)

So, at the other end of her career, Niedecker returns thematically to the concerns of “When Ecstasy Is Inconvenient” with its anticipation of—and voiced resistance to—other-worldly possession. In the later poem it seems Niedecker has taken to heart the imperatives of the early poem; what could be a more convincing manifestation of “feigning a great calm” than playing dead in one’s coffin-like house, surrendering up one’s subjectivity entirely? The shift belies a further extension of objectivist thinking: not only is the poem an object but so is the poet. In classic Niedecker style, though, the underpinnings of this “rich” meaning are tongue-in-cheek and evoke the low source material of pulp horror.

Disturbing the gothic content of the poem with comic, Mother Goose-like phrasing (“head in closet,” etc.), the whole is turned around one last time with the final line “I thought,” introducing the possibility that the entire poem may be read as a fiction, or merely attributable to subjective emotional processing, or even as the product of paranoia. The accuracy of the poem’s content is called into question by pointing to the slippery nature of reality and consciousness itself, and so the claustrophobic physical space of the poem can be explained as a phantasm, a problem of perspective or of mind, of being too self-absorbed—a quality that would grate against her midwestern pragmatism as well as her objectivist poetics.

Finally I want to suggest that in her “folk” method of reprocessing pre-owned material, particularly her reworking of 19th-century literature (Charles Darwin, William Morris, John Ruskin, Mary Shelley), Niedecker is a great poet of lateness. That is, she finds her poetic ground in looking back rather than forward, down rather than up, by embracing the imperative to condense and eschewing the notion of the new with its attendant commodification of the avant-garde. Recontextualized as “late,” Niedecker embraces the anticonsumerist collectivity of folk retellings, even if it means appearing with algae and equisetum on her boots, jello in her fridge, and lowdown culture in her poems.

Footnotes

¹This essay was originally presented at the conference “The Opening of the Field: North American Poetry in the 1960s” at the National Poetry Foundation, June 28-July 2, 2000.

²See DuPlessis 113-137; Penberthy, NCZ 3-118.

³ Refinement of speech is a thing that we preach
All in vain it would sometimes seem,
For this is the age when slang is the rage,
And vocabularies, a dream.

...

It's amazingly queer, but from all sides we hear
Of the "crooks" and "tough birds" in our town,
Of "wild women," of "guys," many "I wonder why's,"
Juicy tales and requests to "pipe down."

Any brains do you say? You may put them away
By this modernized method of talk.
An argument clinch? Say, "Oh yes, that's a cinch,"
"Absolutely" is still better—less thought.

The American tongue is found lacking by some,
So they take a few words from afar.
But "Pas auf" and "trez bean" are as common, 'twould seem,
As Uncle Joe Cannon's cigar. (FTC 3)

⁴ For more on Niedecker's relationship with Zukofsky in the 1930s, see Penberthy's account in NCZ 3-47.

⁵ The reiteration of "rich" here of course mirrors the excess it conveys, but it also implies a shift to a more ironic tone: this rich silence is "rich" in that it is, as Webster's puts it, "pregnant" with significance.

⁶ See Warren Montag's essay on "the workshop of filthy creation" for more on the Marxist implications of *Frankenstein*. Many critics have associated the monster in its motley assembly of thieves and animals as a figure of the working class and its political struggle.

⁷ Also released as a movie that year was the Joan Crawford/Clark Gable vehicle *Possessed*, which may reflect on Niedecker's poem "I rose from marsh mud." Both films deal with identity, class consciousness and mobility, creativity, matrimony, and procreation, issues which resurface throughout Niedecker's work and which come together in an interesting way in the 1964 poem "Who was Mary Shelley?" In *Possessed*, Crawford plays a worker in a paper box factory in a Great Lakes industrial town who rejects the local lug who loves her in order to rise socially and economically from her own marsh mud to the glamour and wealth of being a rich man's mistress in cosmopolitan New York. There are many puns on rising in the film, often framed by elevator scenes with the predictable "Going up?" Part of Crawford's morally monstrous rise, however, involves seeing others married, while she remains outside the social order of the church. Crawford rises culturally too, from speaking an awkward midwest slang to singing in several

languages and ordering the proper wine at the proper temperature. Her rise is marked cinematically by repeated frames of her pulling years off a wall calendar, each time with an additional diamond bracelet—looking increasingly like a manacle—on her wrist.

While Zukofsky was hardly Gable either in looks or financial assets, he did possess enormous cultural caché for Niedecker and one can't help but see a similarity in their power dynamic, particularly in the way she "plays" folk with him while distinguishing herself from it. Both her visits to New York in the 1930s and her decisive return to Black Hawk Island were acts of self-determination. Recognizing the problematic of rising from marsh mud to culture, from folk to avant-garde, and the subtle betrayals there implied, she embraces her origin and identity as a poet who, among the "dreadful" folk can possess her own possession.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & WORKS CITED

- Du Plessis, Rachel Blau. "Lorine Niedecker, the Anonymous: Gender, Class, Genre and Resistances." In *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*, ed. Jenny Penberthy (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1996).
- Faranda, Lisa Pater, ed. *Between Your House and Mine: The Letters of Lorine Niedecker to Cid Corman, 1960 to 1970*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1986.
- Montag, Warren. "The Workshop of Filthy Creation: A Marxist Reading of Frankenstein." In *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism*, eds. Ross C. Murfin and Johanna Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).
- Niedecker, Lorine. *From This Condensery*. Ed. Robert Bertholf. Highlands, North Carolina: The Jargon Society, 1985.
- . *The Granite Pail*. Ed. Cid Corman. Frankfort, Kentucky: Gnomon Press, 1996.
- Penberthy, Jenny, ed. *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky 1931-70*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- . *Lorine Niedecker: Woman and Poet*. Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1996.

REVIEWS



WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF CLASS

Johanna Brenner
Monthly Review Press, 2000

Ninety years ago, the feminist writer Olive Schreiner wrote, “Everywhere, in the past as in the present, the parasitism of the female heralds the decay of a nation or class, and as invariably indicates disease as the pustules of smallpox upon the skin indicate the existence of a purulent virus in the system” (*Woman and Labor* 32). While the language of Schreiner’s analogy is literary as well as visually intense, Johanna Brenner uses the more sober and cumbersome language of academic social science to point out the same phenomenon in her first book, *Women and the Politics of Class*. Like Schreiner before her, Brenner assesses the social and economic status of women, and based on what she finds, diagnoses the state of health or disease as they appear in current labor and social practices. Focusing on the status of working class mothers in particular, Brenner finds that this country suffers from a highly diseased political landscape and class-labor system. As such, Brenner believes that “cures” must be applied to the hardships working class mothers face, and the result will be the strengthening of the whole body/nation. However, the downfall of Brenner’s project lies precisely in her “cures.” While Brenner expertly critiques the existing organization of labor and capital, focusing on its throbbing pressure points, she falls curiously short in articulating *how* to apply the salves she claims will bring balance and health to the entire system.

Women and the Politics of Class is a collection of essays Brenner wrote between 1984 and the present, covering a range of topics such as the organization of trade labor unions in the 19th and 20th centuries, women’s roles as mothers and workers in the working class, welfare reform movements, and the current state of feminist politics in the U.S. As Brenner writes in the introduction, what connects all of these essays together is the lens through which she examines these topics: her political commitment to socialist-feminism, the goal of which is:

a serious and disruptive challenge to capital, a broad and militant ‘rainbow movement’ linking social justice and environmental movements to renewed, more community-linked, more democratic, more internationalist trade unions, and eventually to working-class political organizations that would challenge the corporate domination of politics.

In short, a far left future vision for the U.S. political system.

At the core of *Women and the Politics of Class* is the concept of “social reproduction,” which Brenner defines as the “necessary labor” involved in “the care and nurturing of people.” “Reproduction” in this sense is both literal and figurative; it includes the rearing of children and the dynamics involved in passing

on cultural codes to these same children. Again like Olive Schreiner before her, Brenner argues that the responsibility of social reproduction in both its manifestations falls mostly into female hands. Therefore women, especially mothers, are in a unique position. Although discriminated against on the job market because of their childcare duties, women who experience the discrepancy between wage labor and unpaid childcare work are the ones in the position to understand that widespread reform in the deployment of labor and capital is to their personal and psychological advantage. However, Brenner falls into an essentialist-feminist trap that aligns her even more closely with Schreiner's very Victorian concept that it is women who are responsible for the "moral uplift" of an entire nation/culture. Brenner indicates that when working class men fight for improved working conditions or welfare benefits, their fight is one that serves to benefit themselves at the expense of women. According to Brenner, a feminist struggle, on the other hand, will benefit *all*, and this is due in large part to women's roles as nurturers, and to their biological capacity to bear children. Brenner implies that because of these nurturing and mothering roles, women are more closely attuned to concepts such as "wholeness," "cooperation," "sharing," "collectivity," and so forth, a clearly essentialist feminist position that suggests women have a "natural" inclination toward socialist ideas. Currently, working class women do have the primary responsibility to care for children, the old, and the sick, while doing double-duty by bringing home a second household income. In Brenner's reading, these are also the same women who need to organize, fight rampant sexism in the workplace and the home, protest the labor practices of corporate giants, and transform this entire culture into a well-functioning egalitarian society through a socialist-feminist struggle. In Brenner's vision, a lot rests on the shoulders of already over-burdened women.

"Toward a Historical Sociology of Gender," the first section of the book, uses an historical-materialist method to outline the emergence of women as workers in 20th century America, while also showing how women's reproductive capacities have concomitantly hampered their full participation in the working class labor force. I found this section to be one of the strongest of the collection because of Brenner's materialist investigation. Brenner explicitly rejects the Marxist feminist approach that posits patriarchal ideology as the leading factor in shaping women's oppression in the workplace and the home. While Brenner does not entirely dismiss the role of patriarchal ideology, she downplays its importance, preferring to examine how women's roles as the bearers and nurturers of children have kept them from full and equal participation in wage labor. According to Brenner:

Women are disadvantaged on the labor market because of their family responsibilities. Women's skills are less 'valued' not because of an ideological devaluation of women, but because women are less likely to be unionized, less mobile in making job searches, more constrained in general by their domestic duties.

Like Marx and Engels, Brenner believes that oppression emerges from the complex organization of labor itself; it is not an ahistorical, ideological force that can be disconnected from material working conditions. Sentences that point to these working conditions, such as, “[t]he increasing determination of work rhythms by complex, coordinated machine production posed difficulties in matching productive and reproductive work,” are undeniably true. However, I think that Brenner de-emphasizes the role of patriarchal ideology to her own detriment when it comes to examining women’s work in the home. I do agree with her that women’s biological capacity to have children, coupled with the factory system, have kept women from full and active participation in labor and unions. Yet, this approach does not account for why social reproduction, the domain of women’s domestic labor, is overwhelmingly devalued in this culture. In analyzing women’s domestic duties, I think a fuller examination of the role of patriarchal ideology (women and children as property, dominant conceptions of masculinity and femininity, the role of Judeo-Christian morality) would have strengthened the overall analysis; even for a die-hard socialist like Brenner, materialism need not always trump ideology.

The most provocative part of this book is Brenner’s radical critique of the nuclear family structure, articulated in the essays “Socialist-feminism versus Conservatism” and “Democracy, Community, and Care.” In these two essays, Brenner outlines an almost utopian vision of childcare networks loosely based on the kibbutz system, coupled with kinship ties that are not based only on blood relations, but based equally in friendship and affinity. Current familial practices set up the home as the only place people can give and receive emotional support, argues Brenner, and as such creates a highly dependent family structure:

Ignored entirely is the need to liberate children from excessive dependence, emotional and physical, on one or two adults in order to enable their more extensive participation in social life....Children need security, attention, and guidance in relationships with loving adults—but no one has proven their absolute need for exclusive relationships mandated by nuclear family households.

Rather, Brenner posits “the open and fluid network of adults and children cooperating across households” and an extensive co-housing system funded by public money. This network system would not only free women from the drudgery of constant unpaid domestic labor, but it would also “make socialists,” as Brenner puts it later, by instilling children with communal identities and responsibilities at an early age. The implication is that the ideals of socialist-feminism would then control the means of social reproduction, reproducing its agenda at the most intimate level of human existence: family life. While I appreciate Brenner’s gutsiness in making such a radical critique followed by an even more radical

“cure,” she barely gives any credit to the well-theorized position that collective organizations tend to be no less coercive than the current capitalist-corporate system of labor and culture. Even more glaring is the absence of any suggestions on *how* to convince mainstream America as to the benefits of communal living and childcare. Without articulating a plan of action, Brenner’s vision becomes utopian; it reads like the description of a pipe dream.

Throughout the book, Brenner makes a valiant attempt to be inclusive; the categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality intermingle. She mentions lesbian mothers briefly as well as trade union stances on domestic partnership benefits, and she writes fairly extensively about the discrimination African-Americans experience in the wage-labor market and as the supposed “face” of the welfare system. However, for Brenner, “race” is mainly an issue that arises in the conflict between black and white. Whiteness as a race is not theorized by Brenner; she makes brief note of it in her introduction, but does not follow through in the body of her essays. In the chapter “Intersections and Class Relations,” Brenner goes so far as to divide black women into “types,” something she does not do when she discusses white working class women. According to Brenner, one type of African-American is the “Blueswoman,” who defies white, middle-class convention by flaunting her sexuality, and therefore occupies a position of resistance. She is opposed by the prim “Clubwoman” who emulates middle-class morality while working for the “racial uplift” of African-American communities. Brenner’s discussion of the Blueswoman and the Clubwoman are situated historically; these are icons of the past that nevertheless influence black women’s identities today, Brenner suggests. I find such an analysis extremely reductive, as it denies complexity to African-American women’s experiences of gender, class, and sexuality. Overall, I find Brenner’s discussion of black women and African-Americans in general essentialist; she makes a “special case” out of black people’s close ties to the church, to dancing at clubs, to singing the blues, to race solidarity, thereby reinforcing stereotypes without providing an analysis on how Christian morals, bar-life, and race solidarity based on notions of white supremacy may be equally influential in the lives of many white working class people.

Overall, what Brenner demands for every citizen is based in common decency and fairness: living wages, paid parental leaves, recognition that parents have childcare responsibilities that necessitate more flexible work schedules, a welfare system that does not humiliate its recipients and provides a decent standard of living, a society that does not discriminate based on race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. I have no problem with these demands for basic human decency. The main problem I do have is that while Brenner is articulate in stating what she sees as the goal of socialist-feminism, and is also articulate in pointing to the inequities and contradictions in the current system of labor organization and welfare policy, her strategies on how to develop and implement her vision are extremely underdeveloped. She vaguely refers to the “redistribution of wealth” as a necessary step, but does not even begin to advise how this can happen, how it will be

redistributed, who decides where to funnel the money based on what criteria, and most importantly, how in a conservative climate of clamoring tax and funding cuts any redistribution of wealth is even remotely possible. Olive Schreiner had the same problem; she beautifully articulated the inequalities women experienced both in the home and in the workforce, while failing to spend her energies formulating a plan of action that could lead to change. Perhaps this is one reason why Brenner, ninety years after Schreiner's pioneering text, must tackle such similar issues. But Brenner has two "waves" of feminism behind her, while Schreiner's excuse is that she had none. During the next ninety years, a politically engaged third-wave feminism would benefit by giving significant weight to the *how* of a feminist future, rather than the *should be*.

Works Cited

Schreiner, Olive. *Woman and Labor*. Mineola: Dover Publications, 1998 [1911].

Rebecca Scherr

**A RACE OF SINGERS:
WHITMAN'S WORKING-CLASS HERO
FROM GUTHRIE TO SPRINGSTEEN**

Bryan K. Garman
University of North Carolina Press, 2000

“The past is something that seems to bind us all together with memory and experience. And it’s also something, I guess, that can drag you down and hold you back as you get stuck in old dreams that just break your heart over and over again when they don’t come true.”

—Bruce Springsteen, 1987

“The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”

—Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

Bryan K. Garman’s *A Race of Singers: Whitman’s Working-Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen* is a study in the burden of history. Garman examines the long tradition whereby “cultural workers, predominantly nationally recognized white men with leftist leanings, have consciously invoked and evoked specific Whitmanesque ideals to engage class politics” in the invention of “an explicit working-class hero.” From his initial articulation in the poetry and person of Walt Whitman to his twentieth-century embodiment in folksingers Woody Guthrie and successor Bruce Springsteen, the “working-class hero” has struggled with the conscience of America in his efforts to sing the praises and protests of modern capitalist democracy and its working classes in the United States. Never “bent to extremism” or ideology, as Bruce Springsteen puts it, this “race of singers” has, nevertheless, consistently aligned its art to a progressive politics of radical social democracy and economic justice. But, as Garman argues throughout, such good faith and good works in the service of the nation’s common, hard-working people have made for an ambiguous and, for the purposes of the historian and cultural critic, revealing American tradition that echoes the chauvinisms, limitations, and biases of the larger society in its call for change. For all its vision and conscience, the legacy of Whitman’s “working-class hero” has never ceased to be dogged by the ghosts of history with respect to its race, gender, sexual, and class politics. In its core commitments to “white working-class manhood” and the ultimate promise of a virtuous capitalist political democracy, it represents a difficult heritage for its “cultural progeny,” one that has “both stimulated and stymied their democratic imaginations.”

Historian Garman begins his story with the Good Gray Poet and his revolutionary *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1855 and coming near the official

end of one kind of slavery and freedom in America and the unofficial dawn of another with the Industrial Revolution. Through close readings and historical contextualization, he establishes that Whitman's seminal volume was meant, in the words of Whitman himself, to "endow the democratic averages of America" with the "ranges of heroism with which the Greek and feudal poets endow'd their god-like or lordly born characters." Garman explains that for Whitman and the class of artisan republicans with which he identified the "industrial revolution had degraded the common American worker." The poet's cultural work was intended to reclaim "independence and prestige" for such bedraggled souls, to "celebrate the world not as it was" but as Whitman "thought it should be." Frustrated with organized movements, parties, and politicians, the poet had turned toward the artistic as a more transcendent and lasting form of politic foment. Through a national art, he believed, one could inculcate a sense of moral authority in each individual citizen and, thereby, affect a virtuous revolution in a society gone astray with greed and materialism. Garman argues that the celebrated "poet of democracy" set the terms for the "working-class hero" in America and, in the process, "provided the ideological cornerstone of leftist culture and politics for over two centuries." But, this cultural politics of class justice, he shows, has throughout the generations hardly escaped its roots in a national history of race, gender, and sexual oppression.

In "Song of Myself" in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's narrator declares famously, "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then . . . I contradict myself; / I am large . . . I contain multitudes." The lines are an apt summation of the competing claims and internal contradictions that have characterized the tradition of the "working-class hero" that Garman's study of American cultural memory takes up in its pages. After an introduction and first chapter acquainting readers with Whitman's call to art as moral revolution, nineteenth-century republicanism and the artisan ideal, and what is presented as the poet's penultimate evocation of the "working-class hero" in "A Song for Occupations" from *Leaves of Grass*, Garman proceeds to trace the uses and abuses of Whitman as an "heroic spiritual grandfather" to the Old Left in the United States from the turn-of-the-century to World War II. Subsequent chapters continue to explore these questions of history, memory, and politics in investigations of Guthrie and Springsteen, most prominently, as well as Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, and other New Left and more contemporary "heroes" in more brief, yet always penetrating fashion. For the cultural workers and radical thinkers of the original Whitman Left, including Horace Traubel, Eugene Debs, Michael Gold, Clifford Odets, and, if somewhat less enthusiastically, Langston Hughes and Tillie Olsen, the poet became in the early twentieth century a "posthumous socialist" whose verse and prose represented a stirring rebellion against the iniquitous conditions of modern capitalism. Of course, there were always those on the other side who insisted on appropriating the "working-class hero" for conservative needs and values. Indeed, Garman tracks how this has continued to be the case for Guthrie and Springsteen as well. And so, we learn

that for every Whitman of the Left, there is a Whitman of the Right; for every Guthrie of labor radicalism and anti-racism, there is a Guthrie of open road masculine escapism and romantic American individualism; and, in an even more tightly wound Gordian knot, for every Springsteen of the defiant critical patriotism of “Born in the U.S.A.,” there is a Springsteen of the jubilant, flag-waving, kick-ass patriotism of the very same, oftentimes misunderstood, “Born in the U.S.A.”

The “working-class hero” does, indeed then, “contain multitudes,” as the very real white male individuals behind the tradition are not immune to the ambiguities, inconsistencies, and contradictions of their social world. More than anything else, Garman argues, the “democratic vistas” of this “race of singers” has been influenced by an ideology of American republicanism that imagines the ideal citizen as a white male producer-worker and the ideal economic arrangement as one of fair and equal exchange in a free-market. For Whitman, the “true people” of American democracy, as he called them, were the “millions of white citizens, mechanics, farmers, boatmen, manufacturers, and the like.” Through Garman, we come to see that this has too often continued to be the case with Whitman’s “working-class heroes” in the twentieth century. This is, in part, due to the very logic of republicanism itself, the author reveals, with its fundamental tenets of masculine solidarity, individualism, and capitalist integrity. For all of his cultural radicalism, the “working-class hero” is no anti-capitalist revolutionary. He is no enemy of the state, nor a critic of the idealized values of a mythic American pre-industrial past where men could be men without outside interference from abusive bosses, meddling politicians, women, and people of color. Whitman, for instance, was all for “riches, and the getting of riches” in so far as the means were honest and equitable. “Be radical—be radical—be not too damned radical!” he declared near the end of his life in what Garman takes as this tradition’s founding admonition. The conscience of the “working-class hero” may agonize over the fine line between individual freedom and social equality, he argues, but the politics of this “race of singers” have rarely questioned the value and ultimate viability of such an ideal under capitalism.

Garman holds out some hope for the future, however. His incisive and informed study is one of honest and unyielding criticism, but of a constructive and sympathetic nature. Steeped in the verse and song, discographies and biographies of his subjects, the author’s tone is discerning and reliable, but hardly disinterested. One gets the sense that the author is telling his story not out anger, spite, or disrespect, but rather commitment and devotion. In fact, Garman is, I think, a fan of the “working-class hero,” albeit not an uncritical one. It is his commitment to the promise of the tradition, we surmise, that prompts him to his task of pointing out the blind spots and missteps of the past in order to point the way to a brighter future. Garman is not calling for the end of Whitman’s symbolic American bard. Rather, he looks forward to a near generation of “working-class heroes” attuned to the democratic imperatives of a kind of racial and gender equality, sexual liberation, and social justice that, perhaps, we can’t imagine within the bounds of

free-market capitalist ideology. He wants to see a new “race of singers” pick up where their “heroic spiritual grandfathers” have left off. Indeed, maybe even to be too damned radical for their ancestor’s comfort.

Garman’s closing pages on the evolution of Bruce Springsteen from the romanticism and escapism of “Born to Run” to the misperceived protest of “Born in the U.S.A.” to the clear and defiant politics and anti-commercialism of the more recent *The Ghost of Tom Joad* album from 1995 appraise the contemporary chances for such a revolution. The mature modern-day Springsteen is more willing today, the author documents, to acknowledge that the “cult of personality” and the “macho thing” for which he rose to superstardom in the 1980s were “dead-end” streets in his cause of civil rights, tolerance, and social justice. There was little in the way of an open, inclusive, and transgressive politics outside of the conventional bounds of white working-class male solidarity, he now seems to recognize, in much of his earlier music. To his credit, he appears to have become more self-aware and intent on correcting for this in recent years in his musical reflections on contemporary issues of race, gender, and sexuality. (Take, for instance, his contribution to the soundtrack for the film *Philadelphia* or, even more boldly, his recent political single, “American Skin (41 Shots),” about police brutality.)

However, Springsteen is still, Garman concludes, “proof positive” of the reformist shortcomings of the tradition of the “working-class hero” from its republican roots in Whitman’s age to the present. “A true believer in the promised land,” he writes, Springsteen has “invoked republicanism not only to protest economic exploitation and promote collectivity but also to imagine that the ghosts of history, particularly the specters of racism, sexism, and homophobia, could be exorcised from the body politic.” With the possible exception of Woody Guthrie in his enthusiastic, if elided, embrace of union politics and Marxist ideology, Garman contends, Springsteen is entirely consistent in the tradition for his unwillingness or inability to imagine “democratic vistas” beyond “familiar republican horizons.” In always leveling his “hurt songs” and protest ballads in moral rather than structural terms, at evil capitalists and corrupt politicians rather than an oppressive and exploitative capitalist political economy itself, he has reinforced a cultural politics, Garman concludes, that both opens and curtails the possibility for real change. If Springsteen is “a concerned citizen” and not an “activist,” as the singer insists to critics, Garman ends by wondering what more the “working-class hero” can be. “A wealthy entertainer such as Springsteen could be radical,” he concludes in one his most forceful passages on the relative power and poverty of cultural politics, but until he trains “a good clear eye on the dirty ways of the political economy that had permitted him to amass his fortune,” until he is “willing to abdicate and not merely question the privileges of affluence, whiteness, and manhood,” he can not “be too damned radical.”

Steven Garabedian

THE BATTLEFIELD WHERE THE MOON SAYS I LOVE YOU

Frank Stanford

Lost Roads Publishers, 2001

It is hard to imagine that an American epic poem as distinctive as *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* could languish in obscurity for nearly 25 years. A poem of 15,283 lines—all unpunctuated and with not even a stanza break to break its torrent of words—*The Battlefield* is, in epic tradition, the saga of a hero who undertakes a dangerous journey, though in this case the road he travels is his life, and the battles he fights are largely fought, as the title suggests, on the plains of his imagination. The poem is therefore quite appropriately also a surrealist enterprise, giving front stage to the workings of the unconscious and the exhilarating crash of unusual juxtaposition. And, perhaps most impressively, it is radically of its place and time—the United States South of the early '60s—with all the historical force that particular nexus implies. Any of the above poems might be worth reading, but combined they make *The Battlefield* a singular and stunning achievement.

Like other American epic poems of the 20th century, though, it is not always an easy read. All of this verbal sprawl issues from the mouth of Francis Gildart, the visionary artist as a young man (though it lends itself to fanciful interpretation, Gildart is Stanford's mother's maiden name, the one she had when she adopted him from an orphanage). Francis is ostensibly 12 years old, but it is hard to keep this in mind; his diction is precocious, his tales laden with mature experience, and to top it all off he can read minds—though this is never a significant plot device, but, in magical-realist fashion, simply part of the poet's world. Further complicating Francis's frenetic psalm, there is little formal integrity to make the poem cohere, and time in the narrative is so elastic as to be virtually useless as a structuring device. Even Lautremont's mad *Maldoror* split its chants into cantos; *The Battlefield* reads like a Burroughsian cut-up compared to it.

Despite such challenges, the poem's picaresque aspect is finely honed. Francis recounts specific adventures throughout the poem, such as he and his friends tearing down the screen at a drive-in theatre with a bulldozer while the movie plays on—this because two of his posse are black and denied admission to that night's "moom pitchus"; his accidental but fortuitous stint on a Freedom Riders bus, where he catches a handmade grenade thrown into the bus by rednecks and throws it back out—this made possible by years of playing imaginary baseball; the lynching of his friend and mentor Sylvester, who he dubs the Black Angel. It is no accident, of course, that these three incidents are united by a common theme. Francis at times fashions himself a knight (Sir Francis) or a martyr (Saint Francis), and there are plenty of windmills to tilt at and causes to defend in the pre-civil rights South, most with racism at their core. But despite the poem's crusading subtext the language of the book is never didactic. In fact, at the outset the reader

may be suspicious of the seeming racism of the speaker himself, a white boy who uses the racial epithet of the day without blinking:

call me nigger in front of my kin folks will you he said
I yelled help
the bootlegger run out and says hands off that boy nigger

Yet *The Battlefield* ultimately displays a far more sophisticated take on race than that. As a child, Stanford spent his summers in the levee camps worked on by his adoptive father, an engineer, and his milieu was the predominantly black labor community of these camps. It is precisely because Francis inhabits this world so fully that he can speak, as he does for most of the poem, in the vernacular of his friends, as when he sits outside the outhouse egging on Mr. Rufus to “job”:

oowee I heard that Mr. Rufus that was a fine piece of broken wind weren't it
sho was thats music to my ears I reckon you might job some this morning huh
I might if the thunder keeps up

Francis's extreme identification with the workers and their families certainly problematizes the issue of race, but it may also enact a utopian view of race relations, for even as Francis and his friends are aware of the difference in the color of their skins—and note it often in their language—they are also aware that they share a common culture, and this too is noted linguistically by the poem's discourse.

Not every episode in the book involves race, of course; there are talks with “the astronomer” about metaphysics, a recitation of life as a medieval monk, the mini-saga of an erudite circus performer, “the world's smallest man,” and a hilarious encounter between our hero, an older woman, and her vibrator. But all of the anecdotes are subservient to the poem's larger lyric purpose; they may enhance the (social) range of the poem, but they also exacerbate its narrative chaos. Stanford is perfectly clear about his strategy:

I'm not going to tell it that way no I'm going to tell it this way
like a dream

and indeed he does, weaving his myriad stories into the tapestry of the world's most combative threnody. Make no mistake: in its rhetorical thrust, *The Battlefield* is first and foremost an ode to death, a glorious confrontation with the inevitability of mortality. Death appears on virtually every page of the poem, whether in imagery:

floating in quicksilver on a platter was the severed head of a child
wearing a black patch

euphemism:

I remember last words if you had a
seen as many folks kick the bucket as I had you would too

pun:

Charlie B. says to the waitress I'll take a piece of blackberry pie
A La Mort

Bergmanian pastiche:

come on in one and all and play a game of checkers with death

or direct reference, be it of friend:

what about you now Johnny I said
Frankie boy I'm dead he busted out laughing

stranger:

so many received into that place called Valhalla so many
at Agincourt so many at Maldon and death rolls on like a burning wheel

or the natural/imaginative landscape itself:

the waves they were dead and the tides they were asleep in their grave
and the moon the whore had taken her own
life with a knife
and the battlefield was silent and rotten and floating in the abyss

Death was Stanford's primary subject in his lyrics, too, where he revealed an
unbridled intimacy with the specter of mortality. So it is in *The Battlefield*:

when death has once entered into a house
he invariably almost returns immediately
as if he knew the way death knows the way to my closet
he knows the way to my bedroom he knows how to get in my shoes
death knows how to tie knots in my fishing line

But by making death the subject of a surrealist epic, Stanford has pulled off
something even more impressive than recognition, precision of language, or even

emotional intimacy; he has liberated death, that ending without equal, from being an ending at all. Death so saturates *The Battlefield* that rather than being experienced by its characters as a single moment, it *inhabits* them. All of them could well be ghosts—

I go to hearing these hiccups coming from somewhere
that was the ghost of my granddaddy cause he died with the hiccups

As Stanford said in one of his great lyrics, “They die but they live”:

well when you going to start cutting up them white folks
who said I was up to that I said
you did he said you swore on the Bible I seen you why don’t you do something
to them men that hung me

And this holds true for even our narrator, who confronts his mortality more than once:

cause I’ll be dead in another hour if somebody don’t come along

• • •

leave me lone I said
but they dropped me in the coffin

• • •

is that me on the ground bleeding I see the shadow is it really me
there’s only one way to tell so I felt around my belly my hand stepped in a hole
it hurts awful bad boys the wound was like seeing a rabbit not ten
foot from you you didn’t know was there

• • •

I appear insane and on fire
I died in prison like Reich

• • •

I who was beat to death with a chitarrone
and learned how to swim and sing dark songs from Beowulf

The main vehicle for this cyclical song of death is the poem’s slippery handling of time. Most of the tales, rather than being told whole, are interrupted and resumed later, losing narrative cohesion but informing time in the poem as a prism the speaker’s eyes rove over rather than a line they follow. As the poet puts it—

I am telling you what I saw what I see what I will see

• • •

time is the barr pit I drown in time is the wolf who dreams me

time is the ice which melts in the bourbon I dreamed I sipped

• • •

my past is a field of sleepwalking majorettes

too poor to buy white boots

This omnidirectional sense of time gives the poem's characters the aura of zombies (and here it is worth mentioning that the cover photograph of this new edition of *The Battlefield* depicts the face of a black man with a silvery orb floating in front of him—"The Zombie," by Deborah Luster. The first edition more directly reminded the reader of the poem's Vietnam War-era origins: a newswire photo, taken in Saigon on the last day of the war, of children's (presumably dead) bodies awaiting transport. Both, of course, suggest that the struggle for moral consciousness in America is indeed a battlefield).

One might think that such a profound lack of cohesion makes the poem an architecturally splendid mess, more akin to sprawling works of folk art such as *The Throne of The Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly* than to *The Prelude*. In spirit, this is indeed the case—Stanford's poem is blissfully free of poetic burden, though he is straightforward about his lineage, naming, for example,

two friends of mine who visit me often while I'm looking at clouds
Sir Richard Burton and William Blake you should see them carrying on
together what with them letting down their pants in front of the churches

But one should not ignore the microscopically precise sense of structure the poet brings to his massive undertaking. It is clear that for each line of *The Battlefield*, the poet has weighed his syllables, swirling measures (predominantly iambs and anapests) to result in rushed, arresting, yet still conversational units of logorrhea:

I follow no numbers for me the last stroke is the knife

Likewise, the poem's turns are as narratively clear as fades or jump-cuts in film, shifting from reality to hallucination with ease—and often without metaphorical intervention—to showcase Francis's visionary reality:

I went back to the porch swing
I looked at the clouds
the devil was whipping his wife

Frequent flourishes of anaphora give further flight to the poet's fancy:

I see the babes of the wood but do you think people will believe me no
I see wings in the sand like whorls

I see bows brought across throats and one-armed drummers

And Stanford's gift for imagery creates giddy delight, making even casual observation become luminous:

the mist was like silver Persians trying to jump up in the trees after birds

In one of several metatextual moments of *The Battlefield*, Stanford refers to "the great poem of death and these States." He has, indeed, written it. Yet he also says

I wrote my death warrant like an opera based on a koan

and

I who will be dead before one word is read a suicide note which is sung too late

These seem also true. Stanford committed suicide in 1978, virtually unrecognized as the great poet of death and these States that he was. This corrected text of *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* offers the opportunity to reassess his obsessive genius and revel in his strange proclivity. As it takes its place as one of the true epics of 20th century America, we can only hope to see a Collected Shorter Poems one day stand beside it. That volume would likely be about as long, and just as impressive.

Eric Lorberer

WHERE WE STAND: CLASS MATTERS

bell hooks
Routledge, 2001

Month after month, Oprah Winfrey beams from the opulent cover of her *O* magazine. Whether surrounded by roses or candles, plush interiors or breathtaking landscapes, Oprah always beckons and extols us to “Simplify!” as we enter her glossy world of designer clothes, profound celebrity and exclusive resorts. The “O” of our awed and envious open mouths becomes even wider as we marvel at the race and gender of our guru-hostess. We agree with the cancer-stick thin, black model in the Virginia Slims cigarette ads (never in *O*, of course): if a black woman has become *the* American icon of *class*—grace, elegance, wealth—then we have come a long way, baby . . .

But, if this is true, where do we stand? Leading black feminist theorist and cultural critic bell hooks [*sic*] attempts to address this question in her recent book *Where We Stand: Class Matters*. From its very cover, we know that this book reflects an important shift both in hooks’ corpus and in the projection of American class reality. While prior books like *Black Looks*, *Sisters of the Yam* and her classic black feminist treatise *Ain’t I a Woman* feature cover images of blacks, *Where We Stand* projects a black and white photo of a poor white child, eyes downcast, hands hidden, arms bent behind her back. Needless to say, this is in sharp contrast to *O* (*Martha Stewart Living*, or its more disguised counterparts *Newsweek* and *Time*).

Builder Levy’s cover photo of “Donna Muncy (Crum, West Virginia, 1970)” gives us a different and stronger indication of where we came from (our recent, national class context), where we are going (the new territory of hooks’ text) and also, more specifically, where we are. As hooks will come to elaborate, poverty in the United States today is young, female, white, rural and mostly forgotten. Class, then, becomes a fundamental issue in our quest for gender, racial and overall social, political and economic equality. And as hooks reiterates throughout the book, class is more than money, but rather encompasses specific positionality in relation to societal access and understanding. With that said, class remains perhaps the least theorized element in American society and lifestyle. hooks writes:

Everywhere we turn in our daily lives in this nation, we are confronted with the widening gap between the rich and the poor . . . Yet there is no organized class struggle, no daily-in-your face critique of capitalist greed that stimulates thought and action—critique, reform and revolution.

Where We Stand is the author’s attempt to redress this problem and provide this critique.

With chapters like “The Politics of Greed,” “The Me-Me Class: The Young and the Ruthless,” “Class and Race: The New Black Elite,” and “White Poverty: The Politics of Invisibility,” the relatively slim (164 pp.) text tackles a broad range of issues to shed light on fundamental shifts in U.S. class perception and identification. What does it mean that the poor are never seen on tv.? Why do poor people often ally themselves with the rich? How does “property value,” that most important class value undergird, encourage and contribute to white supremacy? Along with these questions, the text begins with perhaps the most immediate question: What does it mean for a black woman writer and critic with a rural, working class background to be a member of an affluent class? (Oprah Redux.)

hooks writes in her introduction: “I began to write about class in an effort to clarify my own personal journey from a working class background to the world of affluence, in an effort to be more class conscious.” While these issues certainly overlap some of her prior critical topics, hooks’ specific emphasis on class raised new challenges and issues for her.

Oftentimes I too am afraid to think and write about class. I began my journey to class consciousness as a college student learning about the politics of the American left, reading Marx, Fanon, Gramsci, Memmi, the little red book, and so on. But when my studies ended, I still felt my language to be inadequate. I still found it difficult to make sense of class in relation to race and gender.

This admission sets the tone for the text’s mission: to push the envelope of discourse, forge new ideas about class, race and gender for the purpose of personal, positive change.

These words also foreground and acknowledge hooks’ signature style, a hybrid form of autobiography and analysis that sits squarely between memoir and academic theory or criticism. Eschewing standard academic conventions such as footnotes, a bibliography or an index, hooks moves through and beyond more personal language and experience for insurgent, critical purpose. The results are ambitious, original and at times insufficient, as we become engrossed in the issues and want to know deeper and more either about herself or the theoretical paradigms informing her work.

hooks begins by reassessing her own class background from the vantage point of class, a position never directly discussed in her home at the time. As for so many of us, class position was disguised by the language of race:

Everyone in our world talked about race and nobody talked about class. Even though mama spent her teenage years wanting to run away from this backwoods house and old ways, to have new things, store-bought things, no one talked about class. . . . It was the world of the premodern,

the world of poor agrarian southern black landowners living under a regime of racial apartheid.

Her mention of “the premodern . . . poor agrarian” world highlights, for me, one of the strengths of the book. Unlike much black cultural criticism, hooks is not solely grounded in or focused on the urban experience. Thus, she is able to convey from her own personal background a sense of the rural, the traditional black folk culture that has become almost mythical. Heroically avoiding nostalgia, she is able to show us the compassion and work ethic of her working class family, attributes she connects to broader American class values of the 1950s and 60s like charity, care and responsibility for all citizens.

Moreover, she suggests that the corrosion of spiritual values in the United States has also helped allow the acceptable rise of greed and the demonization of the poor, even in (or perhaps especially in) contemporary young people.

The institutionalized church or temple, which once played a major role in creating both a compassionate image of the poor as well as compassionate identification with the poor, has no meaningful impact on the worldview of today’s young no matter their class or race. While young black gangsta rappers stand up at award ceremonies and give thanks to God for their fame and fortune, the Christian or Islamic beliefs they evoke do not shape their moral values or their actions in the world. They (and their non-black counterparts) mock their gods, and their wanton worship of wealth encourages the young to believe that God is useful only as a tool for taking you to the top.

This passage combines many of the key themes of *Where We Stand*. Without the assertion of a compassionate view of the poor (here epitomized by religion), hooks asserts that it is almost impossible for people to overcome the valorization of the rich, endemic in mainstream television and popular culture. Because of the complete lack of sympathetic depictions of the poor in sitcoms or family dramas (they are generally shown only as criminals or victims in police and legal dramas), poor people themselves often identify with the rich, accepting their values and fantasizing about their status. Along with the poor themselves, hooks asserts that this phenomenon particularly affects young people whose culture, in her view, is completely consumed by consumption and materialism (81). (While I fundamentally agree with her analyses, I did sometimes feel a significant generation gap between her representation of American youth and my current experience—but the specificity of hooks generation, as already mentioned, is crucial to the construction of the book).

Again, hooks emphasizes the strange role that race and youth now play in perceptions / constructions of class. In “White Poverty: the Politics of Invisibility,” she focuses on the dangerous marginality of poor whites (even taking

on the term “poor white trash” to questionable results). Here, hooks points out the numerous young, rich, black men who serve as heroes in contemporary black hip hop culture. While Oprah represents a particular spiritual, soft sell of wealth, “young black gangsta rappers” flaunt wealth conspicuously, while strangely maintaining their status as “gangstas,” “thugs” or (then poor, now rich) black criminals. Interestingly, actual material wealth (or class status) conflicts with class affiliation (or authenticity and credibility), and I would have loved to have read more here of hooks’ views on class politics in hip hop (What does it mean that poor black teens are fantasizing about being rich enough to flaunt later their marginal class status? What does it mean that whites are trying to look like glammed up versions of poor blacks?)

This line of thought would connect well to her strong analysis of the destruction of the black working class in “Class and Race: The New Black Elite.” According to hooks, the devastation of drugs like heroin and crack, and the misguided investment in gambling and the lottery have served to destroy a coherent sense of black working class community. Simultaneously, W.E. B. DuBois’ infamous black “Talented Tenth,” have risen far beyond the reaches of the less fortunate black. Citing DuBois’ own later retraction of the “Talented Tenth” ideal, hooks castigates reactionary rich blacks, saying:

Privileged people are the individuals who create representations of blackness where education is deemed valueless, where violence is glamorous, where the poor are dehumanized. These images are not just produced by white folks. Understanding that many black people seeking success in the existing white supremacist capitalist patriarchy embrace white supremacist thought and action, we need sophisticated strategies to challenge and resist their exploitation and oppression of the masses.

[Hip hop are you listening?]

In one of the strongest moments of the book, hooks reminds us that “Nowadays, practically every public presentation of blackness is created by black folks who are materially privileged.” And this bombshell must now radically alter (the content, form and destination of) our critique of race and class.

Excellent at identifying dominant systems and structures at work, hooks can also be a stunningly effective close reader and critic. In this book, I wanted a touch more of the specific criticism she has displayed so well in her analyses of the music of Madonna and the films of Spike Lee. She does specifically mention the American fascination for Princess Diana, t.v. shows like *South Park* and *Frank’s Place* and films like *Clueless* and the wildly popular *Good Will Hunting*, which gave some specificity to her structural points. But I could have had even deeper analyses of these texts or others.

The sections of the book I liked the best came from her concrete analysis of housing issues and how class, in convergence with gender and race, works to

impact communities, neighborhood and real estate practices. In “Feminism and Class Power,” she describes how the new independence of white middle class Women’s Libbers of the 1970s helped gentrify and displace working class women of color and their families. In “Class Claims: Real Estate Racism,” she discusses how “in the arena of real estate, liberals and conservatives alike tend to evoke class to justify racism.” Drawing on Andrew Hacker’s groundbreaking *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile and Unequal*, she reports that “No matter how many times white people are told they are more likely to be robbed or assaulted by someone of their own race, many white people still evoke fear of crime to explain their class-based racism when it comes to the issue of housing.” If we relate this to the documented rise in the number of rich blacks, hooks’ observation points again to the irrationality of racism and the way that class is used to disguise race (and vice versa).

Like many bell hooks’ books, *Where We Stand* is many books in one. It is a critique of the oppressive class politics that valorize the rich, elide the poor, and undergird systems of racism, sexism and xenophobia. It is an autobiographical account of one woman’s reckoning with the class shifts of her own life. And perhaps most importantly, it is a rallying cry for progressive people to get a handle on their own class issues, aspirations and privileges in order to help make progressive, social change. She writes: “In order to end oppressive class hierarchy, we must think against the grain.” This book is an important start to the new work to come.

Gabrielle Civil

THE INVENTION OF CAPITALISM

Michael Perelman
Duke University Press, 2001

Between the 1750s and the 1840s, a series of disparate economists and philosophers tried to understand, encourage and, when necessary, apologize for the development of capitalism, which became the dominant form of socio-economic organization during this crucial period, especially in England, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. These writers, most of whom were English, Scottish or French, later became known as “the classical political economists.” In *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* Michael Perelman argues that the pantheon of the classical political economists—a group usually dominated by Adam Smith and, to a lesser extent, by David Ricardo—should be expanded so that it includes writers traditionally thought to be too obscure, insignificant or unorthodox to be worthy of inclusion.

A Professor of Economics at California State University at Chico and a Marxist scholar of capitalist agriculture, Perelman argues that his proposed expansion has important consequences for both historians of the period and contemporary economists. “The center [of classical political economy itself] is [now] nearer to Sir James Steuart and Edward Gibbon Wakefield than to Smith and Ricardo,” Perelman writes. Of the two “stars,” Adam Smith gets the worst of it. In Perelman’s “new cosmology” of classical political economy, the author of *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations* (published in 1776) “appears less like the sun than a moon, a lesser body whose light is largely reflected from other sources.” Though not all of us will want to enter into the fray, these are fighting words, and they’re certain to elicit scorn, hostility, or stony silence from those who think of the Scottish economist (1723-1790) as the founder of modern economics as well as the first theorist of the “free market.”

Unlike David Ricardo, who isn’t much discussed these days, Adam Smith still fascinates people. As pointed out by a recent reviewer of Emma Rothschild’s *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Harvard University Press, 2001), “it’s hardly an accident that a contemporary investment guru took ‘Adam Smith’ as his *nom de tube*.” The name “Adam Smith” still has meaning and authority for contemporary political economists — whose job, it should be clear, is justifying the unjustifiable — because Smith was, as Perelman says, a “great master of capitalist apologetics” and uniquely committed to “obfuscating all information that might cast doubt on his ideology.” In particular, Smith made sure his readers had no relevant information about the relentless campaign in Great Britain to 1) destroy subsistence farming and “self-provisioning” or self-sufficient households in the rural areas; 2) de-populate these areas and use them for animal husbandry and livestock production, not farming; and 3) put the

former inhabitants of these areas to work in commodity-producing factories located in the major city centers. (Taken together, these merciless re-organizations of what Marx called “the social division of labor” constitute the conditions necessary for the invention of capitalism.) As a result of his deliberate omissions, Smith’s “charming obfuscations” — unlike the more realistic, intellectually honest and insightful works by Steuart, Wakefield and others — have long been extremely useful to those who must promulgate the myth that capitalism is the happy product of a “natural” evolution, and not the ghastly, man-made monstrosity that it really is. Today, in the era of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and other neo-liberal “free trade” agreements, the need to promulgate this myth is stronger than ever.

With Smith and Ricardo in their proper places, Perelman says, it’s no longer possible to see “an uncompromising advocacy of *laissez-faire*” in classical political economy, nor is it possible any longer to cite the precedent of classical political economy as a justification for the adoption of a *laissez-faire* (a “hands-off” or non-interventionist) approach to stimulating economic growth and development. Perelman writes that, “For more than two centuries, successive generations of economists have been grinding out texts to demonstrate how these early theorists discovered that *markets* provide the most efficient method of organizing production” (emphasis added). But what the classical political economists actually discovered were the facts that “the invisible hand” of the market *wasn’t* sufficient and that concerted interventions by the state — i.e., the creation of new legal frameworks and the apparatuses to enforce the changes in society mandated by these frameworks — were absolutely necessary, that is, if the new invention (capitalism) was going to work.

It was obvious to the classical political economists that, if left to itself, the free market would require *centuries* to produce the conditions necessary for the invention of capitalism. A great many things stood in the way of a quick and “orderly” transition from feudalism to capitalism, but especially the remarkable tenacity with which the rural peasants adhered to traditional agricultural practices and subsistence farming. Even when wages in the city were high, the peasants refused to accept factory jobs and stayed on their farms. They preferred a life full of holidays, not manufactured goods. And, when times got rough, the peasants would agree to make salable commodities, but only if they could make the commodities in their homes, out of which they could not be enticed, even when the wages for the exact same work was twice as high in the factories! To the political economists and “moral philosophers” of the 18th century, the peasants weren’t within their rights; they revolted because they were rude and uncivilized, morally defective or psychologically impaired. In any case, the peasants were standing in the way of “progress” and “civilization.” What capitalist had time to wait around until the peasants evolved on their own? None. Only the state—that is, only the state’s monopoly on and ability to use legalized violence—could force these people to do what the “economic rationality” of others dictated that they do.

And what if the peasants resisted, which they did in fact do? “*Send troops into the blazing districts,*” screamed Edward Gibbon Wakefield in 1831; “*proclaim martial law; shoot, cut down, and hang the peasants wholesale, and without discrimination*” (emphasis in original).

Following Marx, who originally found a variation of the term in *The Wealth of Nations*, Perelman calls these concerted interventions by the state instances of “primitive accumulation.”

The very sound of the expression, primitive accumulation, drips with poignant echoes of human consequences [Perelman writes]. The word “primitive,” first of all, suggests a brutality lacking in the subtleties of more modern forms of exploitation. It also implies that primitive accumulation was prior to the form of accumulation that people generally associate with capitalism. Finally, it hints at something that we might associate with “primitive” parts of the world, where capital accumulation has not advanced as far as elsewhere.

The second term, accumulation, reminds us that the primary focus of the process was the accumulation of capital and wealth by a small sector of society, or as Marx described it, “the conquest of the world of social wealth. It is the extension of the area of exploited human material and, at the same time, the extension of the indirect and direct sway of the capitalist.” Certainly, at least in the early stages of capitalism, primitive accumulation was a central element in the accumulation process.

Both Marx and Perelman need a little help here. It might be clearer if they referred to “state-sponsored organized crime” instead of primitive accumulation. Acting on behalf of a gang or a group of gangs, the state *steals* valuable resources from its traditional owners. (These resources need not always be land, and can also include self-representations, art, methods of using plants, intellectual property rights, genetic material, “airspace” and sources of water.) The “new owners” of the stolen property use it to finance or equip their enterprises, which not coincidentally encourage the dispossessed to accumulate valuable little scraps, so that they too can one day become rich.

(Before moving on, let us note well that state-sponsored organized crime need not be limited to 18th century Great Britain or contemporary Third World countries. But Michael Perelman isn’t sure about primitive accumulation. He asks, “Why does this process, or at least most accounts of Marx’s treatment of it, seem to stop so abruptly with the establishment of a capitalist society [in England and then elsewhere in Europe in the 19th century]? Marx himself offered few examples of primitive accumulation that occurred in the nineteenth century outside of colonial lands.” Striking out on his own, Perelman notes that “the process of primitive accumulation [...] lasted well into more modern times,” and says it can

be seen at work in the destruction of small-scale farming by the U.S. government in the 1940s. But he notes in an awkward sentence that, “like Marx, most contemporary references relegate the concept to a distant past, except perhaps in the case of the proletarianization that the less-developed countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America are experiencing.” To both introduce and conclude his book, Perelman limits himself to saying that “primitive accumulation played [hic] a continuing role in capitalist development.” But this careful wording begs several important questions. Can primitive accumulation or “proletarianization” continue to play a role in capitalist development? Can it re-occur in a nation in which it has already taken place, centuries ago? Can it occur and recur at the international level, as well as on the national level? Etc. etc.)

Drawing upon personal diaries, letters written to colleagues and newspapers, and lectures delivered to college classes, i.e., texts that are usually ignored by contemporary political economists, Perelman shows that *all* of the classical political economists — yes, even Adam Smith — believed in, lobbied for and directly benefited from English or French primitive accumulation. Drawing upon these same texts, Perelman is also able to suggest why Adam Smith worked so hard to avoid the subject in *The Wealth of Nations*. The history of primitive accumulation, especially in Ireland and Scotland in the 17th and 18th centuries, proved that Smith was right when he told his students: “Laws and government may be considered *in every case* as a combination of the rich to oppress the poor, and preserve to themselves the inequality of the goods which would otherwise be soon destroyed by the attacks of the poor, who if not hindered by the government would soon reduce the others to an equality with themselves by open violence” (emphasis added). It *just wouldn't do* to discuss or even openly acknowledge the reality of primitive accumulation and the oppression of the poor by the rich, especially in a book such as *The Wealth of Nations*, which was written as much to curry favor amongst politicians, potential benefactors and Smith's peers, as it was to set forth a theory or methodology of modern economics. And so, Smith carefully followed the advice he himself had given his students ten years before *The Wealth of Nations* was published: if we desire to sway the opinion of sensitive or unsympathetic readers, “we are not to shock them by affirming what we are satisfied is [in fact] disagreeable, but are to conceal our design and beginning at a distance, bring them on to the main point and having gained the more remote ones we get the nearer ones of consequence.”

Smith thus managed to avoid the fate of his fellow Scot, Sir James Steuart, who was imprudent enough to be completely honest. Ten years before Smith's book came out, Steuart published *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, which was not, as Perelman says, based “on the airy fiction of a [voluntary] social contract.” It was instead based upon the frank recognition that ancient slave societies such as Sparta offered, in Steuart's own words, “the perfect plan of [modern] political economy.” Because they forced people (the poor and the conquered) to produce for others as well as for themselves, slave societies

suppressed what Steuart called “idleness” and “the laziness of the people,” and thereby allowed the masters and rulers to eat and live luxuriously without doing any work of their own. Thus, Steuart argued, slave societies were able to become much wealthier, stronger and longer-lasting than free societies, in which the poor and the conquered are allowed to produce only as much food as they themselves need. But Steuart thought Sparta to be a “violent” and barbaric republic because it wasn’t Christian: e.g., it allowed people to enslave other people. And so Steuart championed capitalism, a putatively enlightened form of slavery in which “men are [instead] forced to labor because they are slaves to their own wants,” in particular, to their need for food. But Steuart wasn’t willing to wait for plagues, famines or wars to make the British masses hungry enough to submit to capitalist slavery. It was in fact possible that these catastrophes wouldn’t come or wouldn’t be severe enough to do the job and in precisely the way desired. And so Sir James advocated that the state should forcibly evict the masses of rural peasants from the land, turn their farms into pastures, and thereby create the hunger, poverty and misery necessary to provide capitalism with sufficient numbers of people willing to submit themselves to wage labor. Though he wasn’t the only writer of the time to be completely honest about the brutality of the invention of capitalism, Steuart’s book was objected to, taken to task and then completely forgotten about. It struck a nerve, the very one Adam Smith tried to soothe.

This is a great story, this “secret history,” but Perelman doesn’t tell it very well, or, rather, he doesn’t tell it nearly as well as it could have been told. It takes him six chapters (almost 140 pages) to set it up. When he finally gets around to telling the story, he puts Steuart first and Smith second. While this ordering is chronologically accurate, it’s weak dramatically, especially since Perelman devotes a single chapter to Steuart and spends *three* chapters on Smith. If Smith is such a willful idiot, why dwell on him? Why not spend three chapters on Sir James, the one who is unjustly obscure and underappreciated? Furthermore, going from Steuart to Smith points the reader in the wrong direction, i.e., away from reality and towards propaganda. But going from Smith to Steuart points the reader in the right direction, i.e., away from the contemplation of the past and towards activism in the present.

Unfortunately, there are other problems with the book’s organization. The last of the three chapters on Smith should also have been the last chapter in the book. But it isn’t: it’s followed by four more chapters (another 110 pages), which introduce the reader to a large number of classical political economists (Benjamin Franklin, Robert Owen, David Ricardo, Thomas Robert Malthus, Robert Torrens, Robert Gourlay, Edward Gibbon Wakefield and John Rae), but without adding anything new to the discussion. If there is to be a second edition of this book, the entire last third of it should be deleted, no harm done. Indeed, the book would be greatly improved by being shortened in this way. The last third is poisoned by turds of lazy writing, something the reader doesn’t find elsewhere in the book. “Yes, I know that sections 3 through 5 of Ricardo’s first chapter of his *Principles*

are filled with considerations about the durability of capital,” Perelman writes irritably at one point, “but by the time we get to the chapter on machinery, all concerns with durability have fallen by the wayside.” Who the fuck is he talking to? Himself? An imaginary critic? *The reader* certainly doesn’t know what he’s talking about, unless he or she happens to have a copy of Ricardo’s *Principles* on hand and has opened it to the correct pages. Not bloody likely! “Ricardo was, after all, a master of making his models analytically intractable,” Perelman writes elsewhere. “Just consider how cleverly he [Ricardo] eliminated any consideration of rent from his value theory.” It’s as if the reader couldn’t possibly be unfamiliar with the nuances of Ricardo’s theory of value! But, alas, I was, and so I didn’t get Professor Perelman’s reference to how clever Ricardo was. Another great example of lazy writing is this sentence, also taken from the last third of the book: “The mere mention of this period, however, seems to suggest an important policy dimension to the model.” My thoughts exactly, dude!

But these defects are small when compared to the atrocious manner in which the book ends. In the last chapter, Perelman turns his attention away from the political economists and moral philosophers of the 18th century, and directs it towards some of the 20th century’s worst political criminals: V.I. Lenin, Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse Tung. It is clear that the only reason that Perelman didn’t include Benito Mussolini and Adolph Hitler in his discussion of “unlikely” supporters of the “Smithian interpretation of history,” is the fact that these last two mass murderers were not Marxists, and the others were. The writings and personal authority of Karl Marx are very dear to the author of *The Invention of Capitalism*. According to Perelman, Marx “intended this [his] historical analysis to refute the contention of classical political economy that markets supposedly work fairly because invisible hands somehow guide the world toward inevitable prosperity and even a higher level of culture,” and was successful. *Capital* refutes classical political economy, once and for all, and *that’s* what’s important. “In the end,” Perelman writes, “Smith’s confusion about the origins of capital seems to have served a good purpose, since it put Marx on the track of his own theory of the so-called primitive accumulation.” Hooray!

Where does this leave us today, at the beginning of the 21st century? With the most famous Marxists of the 20th century, of course! Lenin?

Lenin [Perelman writes] understood the essence of the classical theory of primitive accumulation. He knew that once the traditional sector becomes sufficiently impoverished, poor peasants will have no choice but to accept wage labor. Lenin [praised Karl Kautsky,] whose work on agriculture [...] demonstrated how political acts, such as cutting off the peasant’s freedom to gather firewood or hunt game, increased the number of hours that a family would have to work to produce the same amount of use value.

Stalin?

After Joseph Stalin took over the reigns of power, the imagery of Steuart continued to echo in the Party deliberations. Stalin called for a shift in policy relative to “the bond between town and country, between the working class and the main mass of the peasantry.” He emphasized the role of producers’ goods delivered to the peasantry rather than the consumer goods, as Steuart had done [...] Stalin’s bond, unlike Steuart’s, was intended “not to preserve classes but to abolish them.” [...] Ultimately, the Russian countryside was also cleared of many “superfluous mouths.”

Mao?

Unlike Stalin, Mao believed that the proper arrangements could not be created by fiat. [...] Mao [...] stood for the substitution of the visible bond of politics for the invisible bond of Smith. In this sense, Mao’s vision may nonetheless properly be called Smithian. In spite of the best precautions, he recognized that “the spontaneous forces of capitalism have been steadily growing in the countryside.”

“Such sentiments accurately echoed Marx’s vision,” writes Perelman, summing up his little tour of those who overthrew capitalist slavery, only to replace it with communist slavery. “Indeed, Marx’s socialism may be said to be the proper heir to the best of classical political economy in this regard.”

I’ll be honest with you, dear reader. I don’t give a shit if Marx inherited the best or the worst of what classical political economy had to offer, or if Lenin, Stalin and Mao positioned themselves or can be positioned on one side or the other of the Steuart/Smith debate. All I care about at this point is the fact that Perelman thinks he can get away with referring to “blind spots” in the vision of contemporary political economy and “the mistakes of the Stalin era,” and leave it at that. These kind of lies *might* have been believed by a few gullible idiots back in the 1930s or 1940s, when American communists could plausibly claim that they didn’t know much about what was happening in the Soviet Union. But no one is going to believe them today. When Stalin murdered millions of peasants in the 1930s, he didn’t make a “grave error” in understanding the theory of primitive accumulation; he committed a crime against humanity. And if Stalin was a good Marxist or an “echo” of Marx’s vision, then Marxism—like Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* and Sir James Steuart’s *Inquiry in the Principles of Political Economy*—is nothing but a justification for mass murder and slavery.

Bill Brown

EVERYBODY'S AUTONOMY: CONNECTIVE READING AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Juliana Spahr
University of Alabama Press, 2001

Everybody's Autonomy is about ways of reading innovative poetics—those that take seriously a reader's active, creative engagement. Roland Barthes' birth of the reader (and metaphoric death of the author) is by now a critical commonplace. Spahr succeeds in demonstrating that although many critics take for granted the birth of the reader, too few theorize the actual experiences of that reader, or explore the poetic innovations that foster readerly autonomy. The implications are far-reaching for communities of writers and readers alike.

Spahr focuses not on *the* reader (which would assume a dangerously singular model) but, as she puts it, on "what sorts of communities works encourage." In other words, she draws our attention not just to texts but to the specific contexts within which poetry is published, read, responded to. Still, as she notes at the outset, her goals are more formal than sociological. Spahr deliberately chooses not to explore writing most often seen as community-based—poetry that has emerged out of particular political movements (Viet Nam protest poetry, for example) or out of theories of identity politics. Rather, she focuses on avant-garde texts that encourage "anarchic" readings, which are necessarily fluid, multiple, open-ended—and generated by readers themselves. Exploring what she sees as the social meanings of formal innovation, Spahr not only moves theory into practice in her readings but also reflects on the poetic texts of these writers as themselves rigorous theoretical statements. Throughout, Spahr avoids easy catch-words or slogans. It's easy enough to label the unfamiliar "subversive." It's much harder to get specific about what (if anything) is subverted, by whom, and with what effect on readers.

Part of what is so novel in this study is that Spahr attempts to characterize actual reading experiences, drawing not just on textual evidence but, from time to time, on her own experiences as writer, reader, and teacher (Spahr is a professor at the University of Hawai'i). Early on she describes her first encounter with a Gertrude Stein poem. She remembers a sly sort of identification with Stein, by way of the poet's notoriously "difficult," slippery writing style and playful uses of words. Like any reader of Stein (even today), Spahr witnessed all the rules being broken, and the experience made rules themselves suspect. As Spahr clarifies, Stein's writing doesn't ask us to *know* a lot—or even anything—but simply to *read* differently. In this important respect, *Tender Buttons* is far less "difficult" than, say, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, with its mountain of allusions, or Ezra Pound's polyglot *Cantos*. As Spahr argues, perceptions of "difficulty" exist as a result of a publishing and reading climate that resists all but the most familiar forms, genres, and voices.

Yet Spahr also contends that while these texts encourage—in fact necessitate—anarchic reading, they also engage with questions of community. Hence Spahr’s notion of “connective reading”: starting from the proposition that reading and identity are linked, Spahr explains that her interest lies in those poetic texts that examine this inter-relationship “in order to comment on the nature of collectivity,” to “engage with large, public worlds that are in turn shared with readers,” and ultimately to “propose group identities with room for individualistic response.” Noting that the texts under discussion reveal (perhaps inevitably) a tension between autonomy and collectivity, Spahr nonetheless positions them as exemplars of a sort of consciousness-raising—or defamiliarization—recognizable from theories of the avant-garde. In this context, Stein’s presence seems intended to demonstrate that anarchic/connective reading has a long history (as anyone interested in the avant-garde well knows), while the chapters that follow point to formal range and diversity among its more recent examples: Bruce Andrews’ “Confidence Trick”; Lyn Hejinian’s *My Life*; Harryette Mullen’s *Trimings, S*PeRM**K*T*, and *Muse & Drudge*; and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *DICTEE*.

How does Spahr “read” these texts? As she notes in passages concerning her own role as critic and teacher, a book about reading is necessarily self-conscious. That the anecdotal plays a significant part is quite unusual in a book of literary criticism—as when Spahr describes teaching experiences or experiments. These accounts are crucial, for they illustrate the sorts of “communal” reading practices that Spahr hopes to encourage. They also demonstrate that avant-garde poetry is not just eminently readable but also utterly teachable, on any level. I relished Spahr’s observations about teaching Stein, for example. Noting that literary critics often “assume that because Stein’s work does not fully utilize their well-developed close reading skills, it must also be too difficult for students to read,” Spahr counters that in *Tender Buttons* simple diction and “alternate grammars” encourage students who speak English as a second language “to overcome their fear that poetry is too allusive, too dense with doubled meaning for their level of language and cultural knowledge.” The same insecurities confront many readers new to poetry of all sorts, and therein lies the particular strength of Spahr’s example. Drawing attention to the considerable powers of students whose “uninformed” readings provide extraordinary insights, Spahr instructs us in the limitations of traditionally schooled literary critics. Stein’s linguistic strategies clearly encourage such hierarchical dis-ordering. As Spahr pithily puts it, “Stein’s work suggests that questions of authorial intent are not a priority. It is not that the author is dead, just never really in control.”

Given Spahr’s contentions about “anarchic” reading, Stein is a logical point of departure, and while the notion of the collective may seem counter-intuitive to *Tender Buttons*, Spahr convincingly argues for Stein’s evocation of the immigrant experience—particularly as it concerns language acquisition. Placing both *Tender Buttons* and *The Making of Americans* in the context of an explosion of immigration from the 1910s onward, Spahr successfully connects Stein’s

liberatory style to pressing social and political changes, as well as to Stein's own European family background and later expatriate existence. This portion of the book makes exciting reading, skillfully weaving together textual and historical sources.

Later chapters assert as context for the poets under discussion a broad sweep of 1960s social upheavals, ranging from Civil Rights to Viet Nam. Most often these issues are invoked as backdrop, and although this period of dramatic social change informs the work of such writers as Andrews, none of the texts Spahr discusses is directly "topical." More rigorous is Spahr's excellent account of the communities of language poetics that emerged in the 1970s and took serious issue with the aesthetic (and political) propositions of Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960). Here the specific *literary* context emerges as perhaps of greatest relevance to texts like *My Life*. Among these later chapters, Spahr is particularly convincing on Mullen, whose poetic innovations are so clearly linked to her goals of diversifying readerships. Here Spahr fully demonstrates her thesis on connective reading. Mullen's work is unabashedly playful and yet unremittingly engaged, full of not only puns and word-play but also deliberately eclectic allusions. Spahr demonstrates that Mullen invokes such an amazingly disparate range of references—from pop culture to folk culture to "high" culture—that her writing challenges "the relationship between reading and elitism by establishing multiple alliances between the dominant and the minority." Spahr makes a strong case for the relationships among language, identity, and the act of reading in Mullen's work, and she does fine readings of portions of Mullen's book-length poems, including both *Trimmings* and the most recent, *Muse & Drudge* (for those interested, a new volume from Mullen is due out later this year).

Similarly, in her treatment of *DICTEE*, Spahr illuminates Cha's wonderful collage-text by showing how it effectively "decolonizes" the reading process. Cha includes no fewer than six languages (among them: English, French, Chinese, and Hangul). This fact—along with Cha's uses of collage—is the point of departure for Spahr's astute argument about readerly disorientation. Spahr persuasively states that the untranslated portions of *DICTEE* remind readers "that they have access to only one language pattern in the midst of a larger world of multiple communication systems that are not easily appropriated and owned as sovereign territory." She also brilliantly argues that Cha includes "the stutters and misspellings of a second-language speaker" throughout *DICTEE*, thus reminding readers of the politics of language acquisition. This point circles back nicely to Spahr's illuminating account of Stein's texts, which evoke "immigrant and other nonstandard Englishes." But in spending a substantial amount of time discussing *DICTEE* as a "cosmopolitan" work, Spahr ends up minimizing the subtle ways in which Cha uses these diverse languages, as well as a range of historical source texts, not just to point out "the political dynamics of reading" but, more specifically, to explore particular differences among belief systems, political structures, and forms of cultural knowledge. It seems ironic in this context that—in kinship with *The Waste*

Land and in contrast to *Tender Buttons*—*DICTEE* is a work that draws on elaborate, albeit cross-cultural, erudition.

My only disappointment in *Everybody's Autonomy* is in fact that Spahr occasionally gives reading itself short shrift. In contrast to the Stein chapter, for example—which is beautifully written and amply documented—the chapter on Hejinian and Andrews makes large (if fascinating) claims with relatively thin textual (or contextual) evidence. Anyone not already familiar with both poets' lengthy publishing careers will find relatively few quotations from *My Life* and "Confidence Trick"—one extended passage apiece, for example—while the accompanying claims about both texts are sweeping. Spahr is wonderful on punk influences and multi-voiced writing in Andrews' biting funny poem. But lacking more detailed readings, I had difficulty accepting that the meditative *My Life* really "mutates autobiography from an ego-centered exploration of the self to a form of cultural critique," or that Hejinian transforms the "narcissistic and individualistic" genre of autobiography (is it always so?) into "outward connection." Spahr's decision not to include more "close reading" passages in the book may reflect a desire not to limit her audience to scholars and other specialists: in her opening acknowledgments, for example, Spahr notes that her own struggles with readership left her feeling "caught between an academic scene and a poetry scene that are often antithetical in desires and intents." Still, I was occasionally left wishing for fuller readings of these complex texts.

But this is a minor dissatisfaction. *Everybody's Autonomy* is an important, original, and daring study. Spahr brings serious consideration to the most fundamental issues of poetic production, questions neglected by many other critics and (all too often) by many poets as well: what reading actually means and how it works, as *both* a fundamentally private experience *and* an urgently collective one.

Elisabeth Frost

MERCUROCHROME

Wanda Coleman
Black Sparrow Press, 2001

These are I-am-angry, Black-is-beautiful, ha'-mercy, think-think-think, language-verb-driven, cultural-political acts ranging from dense-to-accessible. Coleman plays with shape on the page, punctuation, the sonnet form, and makes up words in a way, to echo fellow poet Tim Seibles, which "makes me feel something."

Strong work like this does not prompt an analysis of the poet's command of metaphor, simile, conceit, trope, etc., as much as a walk through the poems, a cry over them, a get lost in them late at night, a way to a new understanding of what it means to be alive and aware. At its best, poetry is open to multiple interpretations based, in part, upon the lived experience each reader/audience member brings to the poems. As an African American woman-mother-poet-over-forty activist, who didn't have to look up the word *mercurochrome* in the dictionary, here is my interpretation which I hope will serve as a preview of this 250+ page collection for interested readers.

The book opens with a poem titled "The Language Beneath the Language," the only piece printed in italics; it gave me the feeling that Coleman was speaking from the past. Lines like "*under your belly there's gnawing in the bones/ subterranean & abysmal,*" and "*out of my pernicious reason/and my slam-driven mind comes the clay I shape into pleasures*" flow from a title which suggests the pain, the protest, the layers of meaning inherent in many of the poems that follow. The words "subterranean," "abysmal" and "pernicious" connote a deep, dark, troubled frame of mind just underneath the surface of poems that address core themes: racism, oppression, sexism, sex, identity, family, and history. This is an excellent way to foreshadow a collection which cries out for the healing balm of *mercurochrome* beginning with the short series "Canned Fury" and continuing in sections titled: *Twentieth Century Nod-Out*, *American Sonnets*, *Metaphysically Niggerish*, *Retro Rogue Anthology*, and *A Kingdom of Clouds*.

The "Canned Fury" series poses the following three questions in six short poems: 1) "[W]here is my history/the full blood minus bromides and falsities? 2) Who has stamped happy faces over my sorrow and broken erratic prose? 3) What details shall be revealed when the jailer sounds time to rise and shine?" And ends:

i am blackness waking
my mother's face on my father's gift
i am the utter meaning
immeasurable, sensual and stark
i am the jetflow of subterranean events
my father's gentleness on my mother's savagery

i am blackness. the awakening

These three questions are asked, answered, and unanswered in poems that are as much a part of Coleman as the blood in her veins. In the closing stanza, Coleman clarifies who she is, both as an individual and as an African American woman. She is the “utter meaning/immeasurable, sensual, and stark”—she is “the awakening.” These poems woke me up, took me back, and propelled me forward into places in my life that still need healing; they picked the scab on places I thought were healed, and they opened some fresh wounds leaving me reaching for...

Mercurochrome is used only once in Coleman’s book. It appears in the *Twentieth Century Nod Out* section, in the second stanza of one of the letter-poems in the collection titled “Letter to my Older Sister:”

besieged and collapsing under the weight
of my gift. love
as I live it seems more like *Mercurochrome*
than anything else
I can conjure up. it looks so pretty and red,
and smells of a balmy
coolness when you uncap the little applicator.
but swab it on an
open sore and you nearly die under the stabbing
burn. recovery
leaves a vague tenderness and an India ink-red
splotch that’ll
vanish between one scrubbing or another

The letter-poem opens with a reference to the speaker’s post-holiday blues, and the information that she or he’s been teasing their baby sister. In the second stanza, the subject shifts to the speaker’s “gift” which, in this context, could be interpreted as the gift of being a poet. Coleman indents every other line in this four-stanza poem drawing additional attention to two of the indented lines in the above stanza by placing one word after the period: “of my gift. love” and “burn. recovery...” In the first instance, Coleman uses “apo koinou,” or one word turning on two lines, a poetic device coined and often used by the late African-American, lesbian, warrior-poet, Audre Lorde. Here, the word “love” turns on both “gift” and “as I live it,” implying both that love is the gift, and that love is something to be lived.

And how does the speaker live love? “[L]ike *mercurochrome*,” which is as pretty and red as valentine hearts, cool as a kiss from a breath-minted mouth, and as painful as an open wound. Coleman’s poems are filled with this kind of complex, shape-shifting love. A love expressed in poems that are self-politically, and morally critical. “[B]urn. recovery” is the second time in this stanza that

Coleman places a word after a period. Framing this stanza with “of my gift. love” and “burn. recovery” prompts me to see “mercurochrome” as an over-arching metaphor for all of the levels of love beating underneath the surface of these poems.

There is the “survivors-of-slavery-love” Toni Morrison attributes to the Breedlove family in her book *The Bluest Eye*—the only kind of love that can grow in a garden planted in the poisoned soil of an oppressive America. A love scarred by racism, internalized racism, and man-woman and familial relationships that falter, fall, fail and fix over-and-over again. There is the love of self, struggling to develop in the midst of despair and chaos. There is the love of family revisited and re-defined, and there is the love of cultural history, or where-you-come-from.

The last stanza in “Letter to My Older Sister” gives insight into another possible goal of this collection:

the pangs-n-thangs of girlhood are foremost on my
agenda of items suppressed.
they storm the Barrier Reef of my consciousness
like shipwrecked
swabbies, drunk with trauma, washed inland to
a grimmer death
against the shore where rent flesh, first red
turns salt white

Coleman is searching for healing in these poems, and as a first-time reader of her work, I joined this search which kept me up late at night reading, scribbling notes in the margins, looking up unfamiliar words, laughing out loud, weeping, and moving between memory and mirage.

There are fifteen “sonnets” numbered 25, 87-100, in the *American Sonnets* section. They are bloody, pain-filled, and tinged with irony—reading them is like being pricked and kicked at the same time by lines like “today the villains are all named willie,” “‘remember,’ said The Savage, ‘they only bet on/sure things and the race is fixed,’” “in this rage of ghostaxis & snuff erotica/can one art rescue another in decline?” and “bring me/to where/my blood runs.” Coleman messes with the English and Italian sonnet forms adding lines, re-structuring the stanzas; she grounds them in her African American experience, and makes them her own. As a lover of Shakespeare’s sonnets, Coleman’s sonnet #100 is my pick for this section:

when thou dost find no joy in all famed Erato’s
honeyed breast, wordsport a gangster poet’s jest
how black and luscious comes each double-barreled
phrase, like poisoned roses or a maddened potter’s

glaze. words abundant dance their meanings on
a thrilling floor, the stolen song of ravens and
purloined harps galore. this is the gentle game of
maniacs & queens, translations of the highly-souled
into a dreamer's sputterings where dark gives voice
to gazer's light and writerly praise is blessed
incontinence, the spillage of delight. sing to me
thy anthem of untasted fruit. slay in me the
wretchedness that names me brute. liberate my
 half-dead kill. come. glory in my rebirth.
 come. glory in my wonder's will

The poems in the *Metaphysically Niggerish* section are like letting a little steam out of a pressure cooker—a break from the drop-dead-serious tone of much of the book. Not that Coleman is all ha-ha here—hardly, but in the midst of an ongoing criticism of white America's treatment of African Americans, and of the way African Americans sometimes treat themselves, she is laugh-out-loud funny in poems titled “Fatback Mama Yaya,” “The Words Are Still Burning,” “Invader from LALA,” and this short piece:

“Three-Headed Womon Song:”
she put the whammy
 on you
she say you a bald-headed
 back stabber
she put the whammy on you
 she say you
nevah rise above your
 eyeballs
she put the whammy
 on you. she
say your baby soul still doo-doo
 in diapers
she put the whammy on you
 she say
your kidneys are made of cheese
 she put
the whammy on you. she say
 when you
dead nuthin' happen
 cuz you
don't rate a ghost

Metaphysical is an appropriate handle for the poems in the section. Like 17th century English metaphysical poetry, several of them are so subtle and complex in their imagery that I feel lost until I am able to re-focus on another “not-so-metaphysical” poem. For example, “On the Righteous Badmouth” which ends:

i do not love you because
there is no music in either your soul
or your Africanized Negro buffoonery.
you’re as weighty as butterfly shit

you have squandered the attention of academic idiots
and idiots in general. they applaud you—
the shadow malignancy that also exploits our race

you have made black a dirty word. again

and reminds me of Clarence Thomas.

Each of the poems in the *Retro Rogue Anthology* section are dedicated “after” a famous poet. The list is long, some of them familiar, some not-so-familiar. They include Diane Wakoski, Theodore Weiss, Sandra Cisneros, Elizabeth Bishop, A.R. Ammons, James Dickey, Louise Gluck, and Allen Ginsberg. In these poems Coleman casts a mischievous eye on the work of each poet, creating a poem in her interpretation of their style, giving the word “anthology” a new connotation. Consider the poem “To the Head Nigger Wench in Charge (after Frank O’Hara)” which ends:

...And I may be shot or I may swing.
But you’ll wear my mark until your dying hour—
a reminder that you’re a traitor to humankind.
And you’ll hear my laughter rising from the hell
between your ears and curse my black behind.

In a collection that starts by inviting the reader to look underneath the language, then exposes them to canned fury, then nods out over several sonnets, while getting metaphysically niggerish, it seems appropriate that it end in the clouds. This section begins in the city with a poem titled “Dreamer’s Habitat,” which ends:

warning barks of a disturbed dog, and the whimpers
of a nipple-starved infant. miles above the roof, a pink
peppermint cloud is anchored before the sun. the rain
is kept in a closet. the moon is kept in
the refrigerator. under the bed, where the dragons

are hidden, the mattress reeks of August and failed magic

this is a gone golly place

letting you know immediately that these are not white, fluffy clouds. Like Tupac's song "I Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto," *A Kingdom of Clouds* searches for a place in the sky where freedom for Black people is not just a joke some folk tell—a place where for Coleman "clouds hide nothing." Unfortunately, according to the poems in this short section, the answer is either there is no such place—or there is no answer, just an endlessly repeating cycle of injustice, pain, oppression, and in the midst of it all—love and hope. One poem "Prosodia Cento: Morphia Speaks" puts a poignant period on the book: "color is a language/otherwise, i could have been anyone i wanted."

Mary E. Weems

RE/PRESENTING CLASS: ESSAYS IN POSTMODERN MARXISM

J. K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolff, eds.
Cornell University Press, 2001

While many commentators have written off Marxism with the fall of the Soviet Union and the enterprise zones in Shanghai, reports of its death are exaggerated. It has undergone a metamorphosis: the perspective of new voices advocating new forms of liberation has changed the terrain of struggle and made the determinist aspects of Marxist theory untenable as racial and sexual activists began to question Marx's implicit assumptions. Throughout the collection of essays gathered together in the volume *Re/presenting Class: Essays in Postmodern Marxism*, the authors and editors engage those debates, with a refreshing emphasis on recognizing class as a process or relationship rather than a fixed social group. While it is dry, pedantic, difficult and sometimes downright wrong, this book is a call for us to reinvigorate our sense of possibility and to begin to re-imagine a new and more just and humane economy for a new century and a new world.

The book, edited by J. K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolff, contains twelve essays, primarily on economics. As the subtitle suggests, the works all presuppose a working knowledge of Marxist theory and should perhaps be viewed as 'economics for Marxist poststructuralists' rather than a proposal of a poststructural Marxist economic analysis. The authors posit readers who have done their own poststructural deconstruction of capitalism and who are committed to a Marxist call to social class transformation. The various articles advance a common theme: redefining the relationship between people and capital, with a wide array of cultures susceptible to its interpretative frame. The essays cover institutions from finance banking to liberal arts colleges; time periods from pre-Columbian North America to the 1979 Iranian revolution; and geographic areas from India to the American South. In all cases, the classical Liberal and traditional Marxist definitions of capitalism are undermined: the authors contend that capitalism is neither natural nor inevitable, and that rather than comprising a uniform totality its development is diverse and uneven, even inside any particular nation system. This reformulation allows reexamination of extant assumptions about how class interacts with gender, race, and nationality, and the result is rich with possibilities—though the authors are not as diligent to this end as the reader may hope.

Gibson-Graham, Resnick and Wolff set the parameters for the case studies to follow. What Stephen Jay Gould does for Darwin these authors aim to do for Marx, embracing his theory of social change but removing his teleological assumptions of linear and inevitable progress. In this task they are guided by the theoretical work of Althusser, whose framework frees Marxism from its deterministic chains and replaces certainty with contingency, causal analysis with

anti-essentialist interpretation. Gibson-Graham et al. seek to forge “non-exploitative class relations” by positing that awareness of the economic landscape as “less...dominated by capitalism than...discursively colonized by the rhetoric of capitalist dominance” liberates the imagination to effect true class transition. Their five guiding principles come directly from the postmodern Top 40, disdaining essentialism, economic determinism, and master narratives, while acknowledging the power of discursive reification.

Bruce Norton sets out the disciplinary issues involved in the post-structuralist turn that the collection proposes. He cogently demonstrates how Marx’s work came to be read and understood, and how dominant emphasis on Marx’s economics limited the use of class as an analytic tool:

...as Marx the deterministic economist entered the arena of twentieth-century Western social thought, Marx the class theorist was pushed toward the exit, leaving...only some hundreds of pages of seemingly arcane and unavoidably class-theoretic text with which to puzzle successive generations of *Capital* study group students.

In a passage that does a rhetorical historian’s heart good, Norton demonstrates how varied interpretations of Marx’s class theory have been created through contextually influenced editorial and translation practices—and, therefore, how social conditions have shaped not only how Marx has been read but even how he has been written. What Norton opens up to the reader is that Marx’s conceptions of class and social relationships are far more vibrant and important than generally acknowledged by economists (even Marxist economists). Traditional Marx-based analysis focuses on volume one of *Capital* and its emphasis on “capitalist and worker”; Norton shows that an analysis of volumes two and three introduce new class positions such as “merchants, moneylenders, and landlords, but also moneydealers (dealers in foreign currencies), supervisory managers of joint-stock companies, and owners of industrial enterprises (shareholders).” Additionally, Norton reveals that Marx distinguishes between types of workers: those whose labor produces surplus value and those whose labor consumes surplus value. With this variety of class positions and interests, capitalism in Marx’s system is far more flexible and multi-faceted than traditional views acknowledge.

The third (and best) essay, by J. K. Gibson-Graham and Philip O’Neill, is a case study centered on Broken Hill Proprietary, Australia’s largest industrial concern. Through the course of their analysis the authors show that in many ways a lack of imagination has limited the ways in which unions and other social forces have faced both downsizing and corporate environmental degradation. The authors argue that too often unions’ acceptance of the dominant ‘logic of the corporation’ has manifested as a commitment to protecting an ever-decreasing number of privileged jobs in a vain effort to reproduce an idealized (often gendered and

hierarchical) past. Gibson-Graham and O'Neill identify the corporation as the site of stored surplus value and as the agent that distributes that surplus in a variety of forms: wages and benefits to workers (productive and non-productive); payments to shareholders; rents and fees to access materials; taxes to the state; and subsidies to society at large. The authors envision a future in which the resources of the corporation are justly claimed and used by a wide segment of the population to create new opportunities for citizens and workers. Such forms of distribution could be "inserted among this welter of claims without defying the 'logic' of the corporation." Gibson-Graham and O'Neill go even further, reminding the reader that workers, and even seemingly unconnected national citizens, have contributed directly to the wealth of the corporation through direct labor and indirect state supports—and thus have a legitimate claim to portions of the surplus value stored as corporate wealth. The authors show in specific how Australian environmentalists have through concerted action brought the corporation to distribute portions of its accumulated surplus value to redress and correct environmental damage both inside and outside the boundaries of the nation.

The next eight articles are a mixed bag, and I would suggest that in order to round out and ground a familiarity with the book's argument, readers select any two that appeal. Curtis discusses professors as workers; Vlachou enumerates the interaction of nature and class; Biewener suggests finance as a source of wealth for social transformation; Gibson-Graham and Ruccio redefine what development should mean in the so-called Third World; Chakrabarti and Cullenberg consider crafting a contextually just economic system in India; Gabriel examines the class basis of Iran's religious revolution; Kayatekin discusses sharecropping in the Mississippi Delta as feudal (discussed below); and Saitta affirms the resilience of 'primitive communism' in Cahokian and Chaco societies.

The final essay is the last of the four must-read articles in this collection. Resnick and Wolff maintain that the fall of USSR was not the fall of communism, but rather the demise of a form of state capitalism. Communism was rare in the USSR, and generally had been supplanted by state-based exploitation by the end of Stalin's reign. However, the authors' examination of the creative and interesting experiments with communist structures immediately after the Revolution provide useful lessons for future attempts to construct non-exploitative economic and social relationships. What is especially useful is the authors' illustration of how productive social structures are resistant to change unless the hierarchical structures of social reproduction (families) are addressed. The author's historical examples of non-nuclear-family-based social reproduction in the early years of the USSR also provide a good foil against which to understand the construction of western family systems, and prove that the current western family structure is neither inherently natural nor the only one available.

This book is at its finest when discussing such valuable and overlooked aspects of human-capital relations. The innovative strategies for renovating class-based notions of labor, gender, and culture are as refreshing as they are rare.

However, the anthology falls short when it comes to historical particulars and methodological approaches. “Sharecropping and Feudal Class Processes in the Postbellum Mississippi Delta” by Serap Ayse Kayatekin is the weakest essay in the book as a whole, and illustrates the general flaws present to some degree in all the essays.

Kayatekin baldly states that “the main thesis I would like to advance is that sharecropping in the Delta region had a feudal character in which surplus labor produced by the tenant was extracted by the landlord in the form of rent.” As the reader I am left to my own devices to decide why this is significant and how the issue has shaped Southern culture. What becomes apparent over the course of the next few pages is that the thesis is a source of conflict for those who are initiated into the mysteries of economics, and that I am not among this elect. This illustrates an issue that troubles the reading of several of these essays: the central debates are removed from the concerns of the non-discipline-based reader who is unfamiliar with current economics disputes.

Also, Kayatekin hints that he recognizes that the scope of his project is too large for a short essay— in which case he should have limited this case study to a narrower geographic and chronological frame than the Mississippi Delta from Reconstruction through the 1950s. More importantly, the broad nature of his chronological view denigrates the complexity of the various types of sharecropping relations that evolved over time:

...whether it is the landlord or the merchant who extends the credit changes the analysis. It is almost impossible to substantiate the sources of credit from the agricultural census data... Despite all of the problems involved, I will assume in this section that the tenant receives the credit from the landlord.

Elisions like this seem counterproductive in an analysis dedicated to examining contingency and diversity. Again, this is a problem that is shared by more than one of these essays: stronger conclusions could have been drawn had the scope of focus been narrower with a more careful analysis of historical context.

While Kayatekin maintains that an American culture of racism shaped Southern behavior, he does not deconstruct the text or performance of race in its historical context. Here it seems that his main historical source shows its dated nature, as in the following quotation: “alongside the personal leadership and control of the planter a form of control grew up which was not imposed from the outside by a master, a form of control which the group imposed upon itself by common consensus.” Although Kayatekin rightly emphasizes that in following the work of Foucault and Gramsci we must look not only at structures of direct domination but also cultural institutions that foster consent among the oppressed, his emphasis makes the construction of ‘consent’ sound benign: “...what lent legitimacy to the feudal class relation between sharecroppers and landowners was not only the

naturalized vision of a social hierarchy and the consent of the direct laborers but the notion of ‘reciprocity’.”

While at times this might have been the case, Kayatekin needs to expand his familiarity with cultural history and engage the importance of the performance of terror in the carnivals of lynching that acted to educate Southern Blacks about their roles and their jeopardy under the panopticon that worked to manufacture consent through the construction of fear. Also, he ignores entirely Black resistance to racial oppression, as well as historical examples of biracial unity to resist class oppression (such as the Southern Tenant Farmers Union). In all the essays I felt that more attention was due to such elements of culture that shape economic and class structure.

While Kayatekin’s analysis of landlord credit as a system of control is excellent, his avoidance of the use of terror as control betrays his rational bias, and the rational bias of the collection as a whole. While as economists these authors have come a long way toward opening their discipline, their essays still depend on the autonomous and rational subject at the core of enlightenment modernism. Although their professed task is the decentering of deeply held core ideas in their field, for postmodernists they have a tendency to employ a disciplined rhetoric style. At times this rhetoric and the use of symbolic logic acts as a gatekeeper, allowing only those with privileged knowledge full access to the arguments; while this is fine for the discipline-targeted argument, it is a poor choice in a collection whose professed project is to speed the transformation of society into a more just, equitable and overall egalitarian form.

I really didn’t enjoy reading this book...but I now appreciate having read it. I actually have used much of its rhetoric and its general arguments in discussing non-profit funding on my neighborhood board. This is not your father’s Marxism: it is a new Marxism that hopefully can serve a new generation of activists fighting global capitalism and coming of age in Seattle, Washington D. C., Quebec, and Gothenburg. More than that, it can serve anyone who wants to get domestic partnership benefits or reorganize a local co-op.

Mark Soderstrom

SOLIDARITY BLUES: RACE, CULTURE AND THE AMERICAN LEFT

Richard Iton

University of North Carolina Press, 2001

Why is it that, in the United States, the Left has fared so poorly in comparison with other industrialized nations in terms of establishing the distribution of public goods such as health care, anti-poverty measures, and voter participation? Why is it that in popular culture, and even in many alternative subcultures, the aspirations of the working class have met with such resistance? Why is it that today even identification with the working class is stigmatized?

Richard Iton, in *Solidarity Blues: Race, Culture and the American Left*, has written a provocative history of the Left in the United States, a volume notable for its solid historical and sociological exploration of the concept of American Exceptionalism, the theory that the United States is fundamentally different from other industrialized nations, historically, demographically and socially, and thus defies comparative analysis in terms of creating securities for working people. Iton's unique engagement of these questions is refreshing because he turns the focus of his concerns not on the failure of the Leftist ideas, ideas which may evolve or change in accordance with contemporary economic forces, but to the troubles of achieving working class solidarity. Iton's book contends that if one is to understand U.S. political history, one must come to grips with the role racism plays in shaping our political arena.

Quoting Marx's *Capital*, in his introductory chapter, Iton relates,

In the United States of North America, every independent movement of the workers was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin when in the black it is branded.

The disfigurement exacted upon the culture of the United States by slavery and the deep racism that made the institution possible, Iton shows, continues to scar and infect working class solidarity in the U.S.. The tentacles of racism, through slavery, have in fact so entangled the concept of work, it appears through Iton's display, that what makes U.S. working class political efficacy exceptional, in comparison to other industrial nations, is the exceptional influence race has played in organizing workers, promoting worker concerns, and developing a culture sympathetic to worker's rights.

The political arena, where in a democracy, policy is made by the will of the people, is a space, which, the U.S. *Constitution* insists, must be free of discrimination. The idea of equality in the eyes of the law, or equal protection for workers and voters, is itself one end product from the numerous struggles minorities

and immigrants have waged in the name of their inclusion into the political arena. Iton's book is a study of the "gateways" the working class has used to enter into this arena. Iton concentrates on three "gateways."

First, he looks at what he calls the conventional forces of working people, the organization of unions and political parties, which may support the rights and promote the causes of the working class. He begins this by painting an empirical picture of working class movements, drawing on a host of data tables which correlate weaker unionization rates with weaker political gains by the working class. This data, in turn, is juxtaposed with tables displaying the ethnic diversity of the different countries in each survey (mainly western European and commonwealth countries). The portrait shows that the countries with the highest degree of heterogeneity usually have both the lowest degree of unionization rates and the lowest degree of socially progressive benefits.

Iton then proceeds to narrate the story of working class movements in the United States from the mid Nineteenth Century to the 1990s, a dramatic and often violent history marked by courage, manipulation and inventiveness, and to Iton's point, an unceasing current of racial and ethnic strife. Iton details the policies and ideas behind the formation of the first working class organizations, the making of craft unions, and the establishment of industrial unions. In contradistinction to other histories of the labor movement, he focuses on the labor union as a gateway for promoting the rights of non-White labor.

He uses the case of Chinese immigration to California in the 1840s to test notion of worker equality in unions in the early years of industrialization. "Almost from the beginning," he writes, "and at the most basic level arose crude reactions that played on the fantasies of racial supremacy. One visitor to California in the 1850s posited that 'no inferior race of men can exist in the United States without becoming subordinate to the will of the Anglo-Americans... It is so with the Negroes in the South; the Irish in the North; it is so with the Indians in New England; and it will be so with the Chinese in California.'"

This anti-Asian sentiment so inundated the populace of White labor that union organizers there, specifically the California Knights of Labor, used the exclusion of Asian labor as an organizing tool, pitting one racial type against the next in the effort to increase the numbers and commitment of their members. The division of workers in terms of race also, however, played into the hands of capitalists looking for potential strikebreakers to weaken the collective bargaining of the union workers.

The role racism played in labor organizing and southern politics is given special consideration. He traces the African-American worker's journey through the reconstruction period and the white establishment's reaction to it. He describes how African American and white workers found themselves divided in terms of their support for union organizers. And how the two party system of Republicans and Democrats served primarily as a dividing line for racial politics even as allegiances and platforms switched over the course of the Twentieth Century.

The legacy of slavery in the South separated White workers from their African-American counterparts geographically and ideologically. In the early Twentieth Century, Iton notes, the majority of White workers lived in the hill regions, while the African American workers populated the valleys and deltas, areas controlled by the wealthier White establishment. Early in the Twentieth Century, this establishment embraced the Democratic Party, seeing it as a force to fend off Republicanism and the ghosts of the reconstruction era politics. These twin foes of the Democrats were entwined and deemed as northern intrusions into the establishment's segregated way of life. And while African-Americans saw that the Democrats in the North were increasingly supporting workers' rights as they organized the many new European immigrant workers into their ranks, southern African Americans rejected both the Democrats and the industrial unions because of the insidious way they were treated by both the Party and the unions. The Democrats and unions were seen as vehicles of White power, prompting NAACP founder and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois to insist the American Federation of Labor "was 'not a labor movement' but 'a monopoly of skilled laborers, who join(ed) the capitalist in exploiting the masses of labor wherever they could.'"

Although Iton's record shows some labor union leaders did emphasize the importance of creating a union for all workers in their speeches and declarations, African Americans were confronted by unions in the South that still yielded to the prejudices of their Locals. Simultaneously through the century, African Americans up North also felt the ill effects of a lingering racism in the form of a *de facto* segregation in both leadership positions and the desirable trades. The socialist and communist parties are shown to have worked harder to foster worker solidarity across the color line, but here too, according to Iton, the record presents numerous examples illustrating these parties were not unaffected by the pervasive prejudices of the time. Even the International Industrial Workers commitment to all workers, and their widely vaunted concept of "One Big Union," is conditioned by Iton as somewhat derivative of the Wobblies' geographical sphere of influence in the western states and the relative homogeneity of race therein.

Iton's analysis of the operative use of racism throughout labor history is contextualized by his insistence "that the conflicts in the house of labor are no different from those found in every other area of American history." In fact, beyond delivering a startling account of the role race has played within labor history, this book's most unique aspect is Iton's thesis that the working class has itself become racialized. Iton writes, "the latest stage in labor's conflicted search for identity [is] constrained by its contradictory goals of wanting to shape society but not wanting to be excluded from the ranks of whiteness and from the mainstream that currently defines social relations to labor's disadvantage."

To Iton, the viability of the Left cannot be measured by unionization rates alone. So to further investigate the notion of American Exceptionalism, he turns to his next "gateway," the ability of the working class to promote its political agenda. Here he focuses the century old battle to establish a national health care

program and the struggle to increase political participation, as evident in voter registration statistics. Both of these efforts are shown to be hampered by racial attitudes.

In the first analysis, he relates how welfare had become identified as a public good pushed for and utilized only by minorities. He deconstructs the mythic imagery of the welfare mother who languishes on the public dole. Where is this woman? Who is she? And for that matter, what “race”? If she has a body, is welfare reform to be exacted on this body? The reformation of the poor, of the immigrant and of the African American, Iton shows, has been the political answer to groups seeking the procurement of public goods throughout American history. And even today, when hard fought for public goods are won, they are often distributed through a culturally alienating system, a system which seems motivated to erase traditional cultures while it applies a punitive culture of reform. Iton makes a convincing argument that the culture of Leftist policy has derived from a combination of big labor’s historic arrangements with big capital and the legacy of racial and cultural assimilation.

A similar analysis is taken to the concept of the middle class. What race are they? Are they the reformed working class? Iton suggests the middle class was opened in the Reagan era to admit those who wished to escape the racial stigmatization of the working class. When Bill Clinton called on the middle class to support health care initiatives early in his first term, the health care industry waged a media campaign that promoted the image of the recipients of public goods as wards of the State. “Reflecting the extent to which racial considerations have shaped the broader healthcare policy making environment,” Iton writes, “Robert Blendon, of the Harvard School of Public Health, has suggested that rationing—reform efforts which would include the uninsured—is ‘the Willie Horton...of national health care.’” Iton contends that the conflation of race and class weakened support for reform legislation. His documentation of voter registration initiatives reveals an even deeper connection between race and political freedom.

In Iton’s final chapters, he focuses on the culture of the Left. For him, the ability to promote the validity of the worker as citizen and person, and the ability to promote his or her needs within the cultural domain, is another “gateway” by which we can measure the success of working class solidarity. Here he shows how minstrel shows, theater pieces in which Whites depicted African Americans as affable and shiftless, were used to unite ethnically diverse northern immigrants as “White” workers. He surveys the influence socialist and communist artists had on early Twentieth Century political culture. He offers an important look into the contentious reception given to singer and activist Paul Robeson. He relates the opinions and ambitions of the “cultural front” in the 1930s, and provides a chilling exposition of the impact of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He also investigates “race bending” in popular culture, in forms like rock-n-roll and jazz, and the impact these forms had on the civil rights movement.

All of these times and cultural themes are explored in respect to their relationship to politics. In fact, rather than speaking implicitly about popular culture and its formal qualities, Iton's strength lies in displaying how such forms were used, manipulated, or co-opted by political forces. Readers will enjoy his telling of the relationship between Ronald Reagan and Bruce Springsteen, and how Clinton sought to package his "Elvisism." The conclusions about the political influence of popular culture, however, are rather bleak. Iton writes, "The popular American attraction to reconstructed images of African Americans folkways has been historically accompanied by, in the realm of formal politics, a conflicted language of self and community that has rejected identification with blacks and imbued even the claims of those movements seeking to challenge the status quo."

The effect of Iton's ambitious project gives us a sense of how the issues most important to workers have been methodically removed from organized labor, public policy, and even culture itself throughout U.S. history. Readers of this journal may note just how often this loss of purpose has turned on the gamesmanship of language, the distortion of meaning, and the misunderstanding of cultural difference, but the larger society will ultimately have to answer whether these are symptoms endemic to our heterogeneity, or challenges we can transcend.

David Michalski

NECESSARY DISTANCE

Clarence Major
Coffee House Press, 2001

As someone concerned primarily with a specific type of literary work within the larger literary field, I was at first put off, then intrigued, and then very much taken by Clarence Major's account of our country's literary landscape in his new collection of essays, *Necessary Distance*. Or maybe it is just because I am writing this review the day after the Fourth of July, but I do not think so. The first three essays in the second section *Views*, for example, "Tightrope-walking: A Hundred Years of African American Short Stories," "Rhythm: A Hundred Years of African American Poetry," and "Rhythm: Talking that Talk," all provide a sophisticated record of a developing American literature and speech and go a long way in defeating a narrowly defined understanding of either one.

Major's essay on the African American short story is the introduction to an anthology on the subject that he edited in 1993 (HarperCollins). Major begins the essay by discussing the usefulness of the short story for teaching purposes and then moves into the origins of the American short story as found in Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving and Edgar Allan Poe. He writes, "Poe laid out a blueprint: the short story was a 'prose narrative' that necessarily had its own 'magnitude': ordinarily, one should be able to read a short story in, say, half an hour. In any case, it shouldn't take a reader more than two hours to finish, for the idea was to create 'a single effect.' According to Poe, an 'air of consequence or causation' must pervade the short story for it to work impressively." Major then uses this foundation to trace out the development of the American short story as a reaction and challenge to this prescript, and then skillfully to create a complex account of African American literature that at once refuses simple—that is singular—definitions of race or culture (and their interaction) while still manipulating these simple definitions to frame his argument. This double move allows Major to recognize something called an African American experience and literature while recognizing that such an experience is more complex, varied and striated than we otherwise might have thought, at once a part and apart of mainstream culture itself. Toward the end of the essay Major writes,

Built on sacred and secular foundations, black culture interacted with the larger mainstream along lines acceptable primarily to the mainstream. This history of separateness—or, to put it more harshly, alienation and segregation—alone justifies the act of gathering the writings of writers who, whether loosely or narrowly, can be called African American.

These writers, then, are men and women whose visions were shaped by growing up somewhere in the United States or, if they were born

elsewhere, by living as black people in this country. Their differences are as important as what they share.

Major's essay on African American poetry is equally impressive in its focus on the function and meaning of poetry and the ways in which Black Americans modify and contribute to it. Although Major does not much address the more innovative work of a contemporary poet like Harryette Mullen, he certainly does a wonderful job of taking 100 years of poetry into account in order to present it in critically useful terms—a difficult job by any measure.

In the same manner, Major's essay on informal speech traces out the dynamic and shifting nature of "slang" as a speech form that moves between a wide range of social and cultural groups. Major's "long-standing" interest in informal speech, as he puts it, lead him to edit "two dictionaries of African American 'slang,' an antidotal one in 1970, and a scholarly one in 1994." As Major goes on to explain, the origins of 'slang' rest in an individual group of speakers' need for secrecy. These secret languages continue to change within these groups as their speech moves into the larger culture—"private talk' becomes 'informal language'—slang—when it reaches the larger speaking population. In other words, slang is, in a sense, a corruption of the more private forms of informal speech, such as cant, argot, or jargon." In one of the most eloquently convincing passages in this collection, Major writes several pages later:

Let me return to an earlier point in order to complete the thought. The private talk of an African American gang or social club becomes slang when it reaches the larger African American community or communities. It continues to be slang from that point on as it moves out into the general American speaking public.

But African American slang is not colloquialism Black slang is composed of or involves the use of redundancies, jive, rhyme, nonsense, fad expressions, nicknames, corruptions, onomatopoeia, mispronunciations, and clipped forms.

In this way, the collective verbal force of black speakers throughout the many black communities in America carries on the tradition of renewing the American language while resisting and using it.

At several other moments in the essay Major gives a detailed map of the many particular characteristics of slang, and African American slang specifically, as well as its various regional categories. The range of Major's reading is, however, too rich to take fully into account here, and must be read in its entirety to be appreciated. As he argues at the close of his essay, African American slang is not singular or reducible and is not "another African language," nor is he "pushing for an Afrocentric program by spelling out the origins of this language." Instead, Major argues for an understanding of Black slang as the interaction between

multiple languages, cultures, geographies and historical moments, and is “one of the primary cutting edges against which American speech—formal and informal—generally keeps itself alive.”

Usefully, Major carries this attention to the complex interaction between disparate but aligned groups of peoples and literatures into his discussion of race. Throughout *Necessary Distance* Major does not make a theory of race the single or defining point of any essay. What happens, instead, is that the question of what it is to be Black in America, or to have an African American experience, is taken up by way of individual explorations of individual artists, works of literature, or personal histories. Or better, a reading of race rises through the exploration of individual artists, their works, lives and cultural moments. The first section of the book, *Viewing Myself*, focuses on five different moments in Major’s life. Major does not aim to turn these accounts into deliberate large scale speculations on life, race, politics or what have you, and for that reason—as much as I shy away from autobiography in most forms—they become an occasion to get down a single account of a single experience, and in doing so they go much farther in getting at what race or even race in America means than a more direct model. Major’s telling of what it meant for him to be in Paris at certain times, or Yugoslavia in 1974, in the end provide a specific vocabulary through which his readers may begin to articulate an understanding of their own experience of race and nationality. In particular, once Major contextualizes these stories within the rest of the book they increase in richness for becoming part of a larger attention to a literary history and the interaction between national and racial experience.

In its own form of textual intricacy, the second section, *Views*, touches on topics as wide spread as the Old Testament story of Rebecca, the history of the literary journals the *Dial*, the *Little Review*, and the *Yale Review*, William Faulkner, Claude McKay and the White characters in the work of African American writers such as Richard Wright, Zora Neal Hurston, James Baldwin, Ann Petry and Samuel Delany. The picture of race that emerges from this attention to individual works, authors and histories is a sense that such a thing as African American experience exists, but to move it beyond an individual African American experience is to risk incompleteness. Like the African American short story, African American experience in the United States must exist as a rhetorical term in order to receive cultural legitimacy, but to reduce it to a single understanding is to empty it of its very power. In important ways, *Necessary Distance* becomes an account of “difference” that is as complex as it is graspable. Clearly Major is theoretically informed, but his theoretical affinities are less the outward trappings of his understanding of difference than they are the more subtle result of his compositional method and writerly project. As the title suggests, *Necessary Distance* argues that there is a distance between individuals and groups of people that works to define each, but these distances are not hindrances to meaning because it is the interaction between these groups and individuals that helps construct them all.

In this way, the third section, *Reviewing*, extends what is perhaps one of the most interesting consequences of *Necessary Distance*, that is, to learn what a writer is reading and what he or she thinks about it. For those familiar with Major's novels and poems, his reviews of other works of fiction (as well as the rest of the book) can provide interesting juxtapositions to think about the tradition Major takes part in and how he might read his own writerly activities. For those unfamiliar with his writing, these reviews can stand as points of departure for other reading or a beginning into Major's own work. Accordingly, what seems most useful about Major's reviews is the texture they add to *Necessary Distance* as a whole. A writer's public reading of works other than his or her own remains an important activity for any writer committed to a writerly life because his or her work is always the response to the work of other writers. Occasionally making that response plain permits that dialogue to take on a publicly useful form. Major's reviews do exactly that.

Naturally then, *Necessary Distance* begins with the question of the writer's life, "People have a tendency to ask a writer, *Why* did you become a writer? *How* did you become a writer? . . . I never seriously tried to deal with the question till I was asked to write my life story. If my autobiography were going to make sense, I thought I'd better try my best to answer both questions. So, my speaking on the page to you is, in a way, *an* effect to answer those questions—for myself and possibly for others. I don't expect to succeed, but here goes." Clearly Major does not succeed in as much as any simplified answer would itself be a violation of the writer's life and a worse kind of failure. What Major does succeed in doing, however, seems more worthwhile. In *Necessary Distance* Major articulates the importance of the writer's project, whatever it particularly is, whether it be stories or poems—whatever any one writer is given to write. Certainly, with this understanding, the moments that a writer chooses to focus on and how he or she chooses to focus on them appear more important than why he or she came to them. It is in these terms that *Necessary Distance* understands that the writer's life, and the reader's life, and the movement between these lives, get us closer to our own.

Joel Bettridge

WOMEN, WRITING, AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Susan Zlotnick

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001 [1998]

Women and men—as writers—just can't agree. Reduced to a simple declarative statement, this is the basic dichotomy set up by Susan Zlotnick in *Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution*. Hers is a study of the contrasting perspectives held by nineteenth-century male and female writers, both middle- and working-class, who turned their attention to the developing Industrial Revolution in Great Britain.

At its most interesting, Zlotnick's text vividly demonstrates the central aspect of gender in the cultural construction of the Industrial Revolution. She begins by reminding her readers that the era we now designate as the Industrial Revolution was not at the time "a self-explanatory development, but one that required and generated many explanations in the form of treatises, pamphlets, inquiries, essays, articles, poems, plays and novels." She locates British men and women of the period as sudden inhabitants of—to use her own fondly repeated quote from Carlyle—"a strange new tomorrow" in which "industrial labor became associated with a radical reversal of 'natural' gender roles." Within this "brave new world characterized by female employment and male unemployment," Zlotnick's study highlights the multiple ways in which writers characterized both the factory system and "The first citizen of this new world—the independent, wage-earning factory girl, who emerged as a blank screen on which the Victorians projected their own fears and hopes for modernity."

In defining the nature of industrialism and figuring its implications for the culture of the nation, Zlotnick finds that male and female writers confront, with very different reactions, the immediate impact that new forms of labor had on men and women workers in British society. While male writers encounter industrialism with a feeling of trepidation for the modernism that posed a serious potential threat to patriarchy, female writers see in it the possibility of improved lives and freer social interactions for women. Male writers, in her formulation, reject industrialism through an anti-materialist viewpoint, while female writers attempt to make useful sense of it by adopting a materialist perspective. In an introduction and four chapters followed by a conclusion, Zlotnick details the ways in which writers understood the Industrial Revolution and its disrupting influence on the gendered order of British culture.

In her first chapter, entitled "A 'World Turned Upside Downwards': Men, Dematerialization, and the Disposition-of-England Question," Zlotnick begins her critique on familiar territory with such canonical male writers of the period as Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, and Matthew Arnold. She asserts that their work shares several characteristics in its attempt to cope with the industrial age. One of these is a desire to embody a negative sense of modern

industrialism within the figure of the factory girl: “For the male critics modernity is, at best, a diseased woman who carries seeds of destruction within her and, at worst, a madwoman who has escaped the attic.” Against this female personification of the evils of modernity, male writers posit a redemptive male figure, the “captain of industry,” who “does not compete in the marketplace or exercise the privilege of a noble birth, but who leads through personal merit and charisma.” The blueprint for this patriarchal hero could be found in “the old world of knights-in-armor and damsels-in-distress”; i.e., a medieval past in which feudal order was assured.

Zlotnick, in this turning to medievalism for a useable male-dominated past, traces a second shared tendency toward “dematerialization,” whereby male writers reject the reality of sweeping industrial change. They accomplish this, in the earlier half of the eighteenth century, by locating cultural authority in “an idealized medieval past” that envisions working people toiling contentedly under benevolent patriarchal rule. After 1850, however, they locate dematerialization in “the ideology of that past, which became popularly known as culture.” Before mid-century, Zlotnick finds a “widespread perception of English culture as exiting in a yeasty, inchoate state, there was no good reason why the monumental technological transformations could not just as plausibly lead one back to a world of monasteries and feudal overlords as toward a modern industrialized democracy.” Yet, after the European revolutions of 1848 make medievalism an implausible recuperative strategy, dematerialization nonetheless remains viable. If the past “cannot be resurrected, the ideology of the past can be. In its institutionalized form, this ideology is culture [which] opposes industrial capitalism by establishing a system of values other than those of the marketplace.” In both cases, male writers seek to assert, as Carlyle explained it, that “society does not in any age prevent a man from being what he can be.” In other words, the Industrial Revolution as he and other canonical male writers experienced it did not have to be considered an ultimate force in the shaping of men’s lives.

In chapter two, “The Fortunate Fall: Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Female Myths of Progress,” Zlotnick sets the texts of celebrated female writers against this dematerializing male perspective with her study of Bronte’s *Shirley*, and Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. She asserts that both Bronte and Gaskell “repudiate the male repudiation and embrace Victorian industrialism” with a “sanguine belief that industrial capitalism promises women a brighter future.”

At least this is how they begin. Unfortunately, she finds the authors unable to sustain this optimistic trajectory. For “neither Gaskell nor Bronte imagines a genuinely revolutionary alliance between bourgeois heroines and mill girls that would overthrow the forces of patriarchy and capitalism that oppress them both.” Indeed, she finds that these novelists more simply “want to mitigate patriarchy and they see capitalism as the best weapon in their arsenal.” Zlotnick demonstrates that, as middle-class advocates of women’s liberation, Bronte and Gaskell do embrace a specifically materialist—though limited—perspective of industrialism:

working-class women, they feel, have access to liberation through their earning power. Consequently, their critique extends not to the Industrial Revolution as a whole, but only to those aspects of it (unemployment) that limit working women's freedom. At the same time, Zlotnick explains that patriarchy is not for them an outside unknown. Instead, "both women remain enmeshed in the ideological structures they oppose" such that, "writing at the painful intersection of competing class and gender loyalties, they try to balance their desire for feminine autonomy against their wish to retain...their heroines' middle class respectability." Zlotnick finds that this doesn't work out, either for their characters, or for the authors' optimistic acceptance of industrialism. In her reading, these authors communicate a profound ambivalence because "they desire the independence associated with the factory girl yet do not wish to forfeit the class privileges, such as respectability and moral authority, enjoyed by their bourgeois heroines. To solve this problem, they distance their working heroines from their texts' working girls." As for their broader view of industrialism, Bronte and Gaskell realize that patriarchal structures are not about to be swept away as the male canonical writers dread; instead, Zlotnick concludes that "each novel in turn comes to the sad realization that the attendant revolution in gender relations has been forestalled."

From this point, Zlotnick's study moves back in its third chapter, "Frances Trollope, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, and the Early Industrial Discourse," to examine novels published within the decade before major literary figures had fixed their creative attention on industrialism. She identifies Trollope and Tonna as early members of the female-materialist tradition. In fact, though they predate the more popular novelists, she finds that Trollope and Tonna reveal a perspective that is more materialist and also more pessimistic in figuring the odds that industrialism, left unchecked by government intervention, will do much for the working women they perceive to be degraded by factory work.

Shorter than the previous two chapters, this portion of Zlotnick's text also feels fresher. It deals with authors who base their defense of women workers on the ideology of domesticity, which leads them to characterize the "factory girl as victim and passive agent of male oppression" who requires rescuing from a violent and eroticized factory system. In Zlotnick's fluid reading though, "Trollope and Tonna filter the Industrial Revolution through the lens of domesticity. The ideology of domesticity, first marshaled to carry out a critique of industrial capitalism, turns back on itself and explodes into a radically destabilizing critique of domesticity. It does so, "Zlotnick explains, "because what begins as a domestic critique of industrialism quickly becomes a materialist critique of domesticity when the complicated evasion of materiality—the hallmark of the male industrial critics— is replaced in Trollope and Tonna's works by an investigation of the domestic sphere's material base." In Zlotnick's analysis, the material and dramatically exposed connection between the domestic sphere and the factory in these novels is indeed a revelation. Yet, it is one that marks the factory system as an unacceptable path to female liberation. "For in seeking out the material

conditions that account for the factory worker's debased state," she concludes, "Tonna and Trollope disclose the eroticized nature of the manufacturing process, which pushes their consequential factory worlds beyond the cure of the parliamentary remedies their texts recommend."

In her fourth chapter, "Nostalgia and the Ideology of Domesticity," Zlotnick continues to investigate the domestic ideal and gender authority, focusing at last on the working-class writers themselves. She begins with male writers—Chartists and then dialect writers, and finally contrasts their writings with those of three female poets. Among the Chartists, she finds that, as it was with their canonical male counterparts, the link between "imperiled masculine authority and the dismissal of modernity" is a powerful one. And so it similarly goes with the dialect writers, whose work follows the Chartists' by nearly two decades. Essentially, Zlotnick finds that these two different groups of writers wind up in the same spot for different reasons. The Chartists were radical advocates for working men who use the language of domesticity to assert their right to patriarchal power. On the other hand, dialect writers inhabited a later era in which working people more readily accepted industrialism as a permanent condition. However, Zlotnick finds that they still wanted to "present an image of working-class life as generally immune to the incursions of industrialism itself," such that these "working-class writers turn inward and indoors, rediscovering the rural dream of the Chartists in the domestic oasis of the worker's cottage."

When Zlotnick turns to her section on the working-class women writers Fanny Forrester and Ellen Johnston, her sense of frustration in locating so few female writers is palpable. Mulling over the reasons for working-class women's relative silence within literary accounts of industrialism, she surmises that the conditions of their daily lives—lack of time, education, and basic necessities, as well as the pervasiveness of domestic ideology—were a major hindrance. She notes that domestic ideology "divested women of an oppositional discourse when they stood in greatest need of it, and created myriad difficulties for working-class women writers whose experiences fell outside of the narrow confines of Victorian domesticity." While the amount of material Zlotnick has at her disposal here is indeed thin, it remains some of the most interesting in her text, for it reveals perspectives of the Industrial Revolution that are still not frequently heard. By setting Forrester's working-class lament for an unattainable domestic ideal and Johnston's blatant and happy rejection of that ideal against the domestic nostalgia of their male counterparts, and even the materialist hopefulness of middle-class women novelists, she throws their perspectives into dramatic relief. Limited in number though such voices may be, Zlotnick recognizes that they constitute a powerful critique of industrialism.

If the text has one overriding flaw, it is that, in seeking to locate a distinctly "male" or "female" perspective of industrialism, Zlotnick paints with too broad a brush in connecting the various writers. One is left wondering how, for example, a writer like Charles Dickens could be lumped together with medievalists whose

nostalgia he found distasteful. Perhaps many of these writers do end up in the same place—either as materialists or nostalgic anti-materialists. However, in a study that analyzes the invention of the Industrial Revolution as a creative cultural construction, how the writers end up at their perspectives is at least as important as the fact that those viewpoints overlap, and this point is not quite resolved. Nonetheless, Zlotnick's *Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution* does reveal the imagination of the Industrial Revolution as a deeply contested creative project, and for this reason it will be of interest to scholars within working-class studies and those who study nineteenth-century British literature and history.

Deirdre Murphy

CRAZY MELON AND CHINESE APPLE

Frances Chung

(compiled and with an Afterword by Walter K. Lew)

Wesleyan University Press, 2000

Crazy Melon and Chinese Apple serves as a ground for breaking down idealistic notions of cultural authenticity that inevitably breed stereotypes from mainstream culture. While Chinese culture has no doubt become a commodified cliché in America, bringing with it its jade charms, kung-fu fighters, and Americanized Chinese food for all mainstream culture to consume with the authentic cultural item (chopsticks), Frances Chung suggests in her new book of poems that it is not only mainstream America who consumes this ever-evolving spectacle, but Chinese and Chinese Americans themselves, who cannot stand completely outside such a rampant bombardment. As they too are consumers, they too are producers of this altered “Chineseness.” But if one is a producer, constructing new variations of a product, then one can also be a critic, and deconstruct this product before it hits the market. Frances Chung sets her book in New York’s Chinatown during the 1960s and 1970s, presenting stories of its residents, rumors and truisms told within the community, and memories that link past to present. Chung’s poems demonstrate strategies for deconstructing cultural stereotypes, creating interiorities for those who are often seen only from an outsider’s perspective.

Walter K. Lew does readers a great service in compiling this posthumous collection of Frances Chung’s writings, which come primarily from two manuscripts, “Crazy Melon” and “Chinese Apple”. Lew extensively researched various versions of each manuscript to discern Chung’s intended sequencing for the poems and also the possible years of their completions. As a result, readers may follow the poems’ thematic and poetic processes as Chung developed them, and as she intended them for her audience. Lew’s afterword gives valuable insight into what may have influenced Chung while writing *Crazy Melon and Chinese Apple*, such as the literary communities with whom she associated and her family’s history in the garment industry. He writes an impressively thorough discussion of the themes and ideas behind the book that assists the reader in engaging Chung’s poetry on a level of complexity fit for her work, and also sheds light on its significance to Asian American Literature.

“Crazy Melon,” the earlier manuscript and first section of the book, presents Chinatown in a series of mostly untitled pieces that border on prose and poetry simultaneously. Lew’s comment that Chung “was often writing in a form that dissolved the difference between the two genres” echoes the variety of boundaries (generational, linguistic, classist, occupational, etc.) confronted and crossed in “Crazy Melon”. As her images travel through evolving contexts and

interact with a variety of objects, Chung re-imagines Chinese and Chinese American culture as a space formed from a multitude of places.

In “Crazy Melon,” the poem that begins with the line, “The movie theater filled with sticky,” Chung uses the repetition of the word “Chinese” and the setting of a movie theater to examine the commodification and appropriation of Chinese culture in Chinatown. She notes “Chinese babies crying,” “Chinese/ men on their day off,” and

Cartons of Chinese
food, crackling of peanut shells and
all that beautiful sword action on
the screen mirroring the inner strength
and fantasy of a few in the audience
who see themselves living as presentday
warriors, swordswomen, emperors or
concubines. Blood running like thin
acrylic ketchup.

By using the word “Chinese” to modify “babies,” “men,” and “food,” Chung creates a common place for them to reside and be compared. The blood in the movie runs “like thin acrylic ketchup,” suggesting a falseness that could also describe the “cartons of Chinese food”. But what about the “Chinese babies” and “Chinese men”? How much of the Chinese culture understood by these people is just as influenced by the mass media and economy as the Chinese movie and food? Here, Chung demonstrates that Chinese and Chinese Americans do not stand completely inside their culture. Lew’s statement that “the threat of appropriation comes from within Chinese and Chinese American constructions of identity as much as from mainstream ideology” corresponds with this notion that Chinese and Chinese Americans are also outsiders, consuming what other Americans consume. As they appropriate these variations of Chinese culture, they too participate in the production of a new, altered culture.

However, consuming and producing an altered culture does not need to be all negative. Chung demonstrates a number of ways to use these skills to positively influence the Chinese and Chinese American communities. In the poem that begins with the line “oh lucky me,” the speaker describes a disturbing encounter with two men. However, in the last two lines, she appropriates the men’s question, taking it in as her own, and directs it out to her audience in an effort at critique:

oh lucky me
I am of some use
I am of some inspiration
to the two men

across the lunchcounter
I remind them of the
last Chinese restaurant
they took their family to
did you know that
Chinese food was delicious?

When the men associate the speaker with Chinese food, they no longer see her as a person, but a mere representation of Chinese culture. They appropriate her, in a sense, into their own limited perspectives. The speaker, however, does not remain a mere consumer of their careless comments; she becomes a producer in her own right. In the final two lines, she repeats the men's question, but with a sarcastic tone that mocks their ignorance. Furthermore, she directs this question toward an addressee, described only as "you." Here, Chung shifts the reader's position from that of the outside viewer to the sudden insider and potential respondent.

Chung often shifts the relationship between speaker and audience or addressee and audience in an effort to include the reader (as in the previous poem) or to both include and exclude simultaneously. This fluctuation between inclusion and exclusion in her writing reflects the dilemmas of many Chinese and Chinese Americans described in her poems: being producers and consumers, insiders and outsiders. Such is the case in the poem beginning with the line, "On Saturday, it is 14th Street for shopping. Clothes at a." When Chung writes, "For a treat, you can have lunch at Nedicks or/ pizza at the five-and-ten," she creates a situation in which the "you" can be read as "you, in general," and thus invites the reader to enter the scene. However, Chung follows with,

The earring peddler on the street
will see that you don't want to buy from him and will tell
you to go back to Chinatown only you really don't know
this happened because you don't understand English.

At first, Chung allows the reader to assume that "you" is all-inclusive, but soon after demonstrates that she or he is incorrect. This narrowing down of the addressee challenges the reader to question her or his relationship to the poems. Just as the Chinese and Chinese American people can neither stand completely inside nor outside of Chinese culture, the reader cannot rest in being the outside viewer of these poems nor can s/he delight in being the assumed insider.

A wonderful surprise in "Crazy Melon" lies in Chung's creation of multiple identities for the addressee. Even if the reader insists on assuming the position of addressee in every poem, this position is in a constant state of flux. The consistent "you" gives a resonance of unity and implies one single entity, but actually refers to a diverse spectrum of individuals. In the poem that begins with the line, "He came down the hall with blackness in his pupils," Chung describes

an older man, possibly a grandparent, who “could not read English.” Toward the end of the poem, she inserts the addressee:

He envies you because
you have the gift of listening to the weather report on
the radio. He can only look out the window and guess for
himself.

Unlike the previous poem, the addressee in this poem is a speaker of English, most likely a grandchild. By changing the addressee, Chung enables the reader to see from two different sides of a language barrier. The reader may witness the diversity of experiences within the Chinese and Chinese American communities, with “you” as the gathering place. This poem, along with the others in “Crazy Melon” reflect an ever-evolving, heterogeneous interiority for New York’s Chinatown, as well as Chinese and Chinese American culture in general.

In contrast to the prose/poems in “Crazy Melon,” which rely heavily on storytelling and the sentence as the main unit of measurement, “Chinese Apple” (the second section of the book) consists of meditations on individual subjects with the phrase as the unit, though Chung continues to explore similar themes. The poems in “Chinese Apple” take concepts examined in “Crazy Melon” and apply them in a more microscopic way. In the poem “chopsticks,” Chung uses the line break to her reflect the multiple identities one subject may command, as each new line brings a new side of the same topic:

a memory of ivory chopsticks
first glimpse of China’s landscape
waterfall and mountain
the three characters of our names
etched in red
the shame of chopsticks
brought by my mother
to the school lunchroom
a memory of being beaten
with chopsticks
the prophecy
a marriage far from home
because of fingers
held high on the chopsticks
lying in bed with a lover
like a pair of ivory chopsticks

In this poem, Chung takes an object that is a clichéd representation of Chinese culture within American society, and places it among various personal memories

and emotions. Chung deconstructs the flat image of chopsticks as a foreign eating utensil to be mastered by a willing public, and reconstructs it as a malleable symbol to be shaped and reshaped privately, according to an individual's history.

The poem "tulips" is a stunning example of how Chung moves her deconstructions and reconstructions into new contexts in "Chinese Apple," as she even includes art and language as places of residence. Chung examines tulips as objects for artists' interpretations to be recreated with any medium by individuals of varying talent:

in crayon gardens
children plant tulips
magenta and violet

in Amsterdam along the canals
of the red light district
tulips in bloom

in a New Yorker cartoon
an artist sketches tulips
for a brownstone window

tulip cup tulip
lamp tulip tree
tulips in bloom

Artists imagine and produce different images of "tulips," and readers conjure different images in their minds upon reading the word. Hence, Chung demonstrates how one signifier may refer to more than one signified. Just as Chung deconstructs the image of a stereotyped Chinese culture and reconstructs "Chinese" as a symbol that represents a multiplicity of experiences and ideas, she deconstructs the assumption that "tulips" is a word that refers to one thing and reconstructs it as a symbol that represents many things and many images. In the final stanza, Chung focuses intently on the signifier, using the word "tulips" as an object in itself. Although "tulips" may be seen as a word that refers to a flower, "tulips" is also a medley of sounds that interact with other sounds. It resides within phrases and among other words. Chung's exploration of the separate worlds of "tulips" emphasizes the chasm that is crossed between any signifier and signified.

In *Crazy Melon and Chinese Apple*, Frances Chung challenges her audience to question their assumptions concerning stereotypes of Chinese and Chinese American culture. Blurring the boundaries between reader and addressee, consumer and producer, and emphasizing the boundary between signifier and signified, Chung deconstructs old, rigid categories and reconstructs them into new, ever-changing and ever-evolving spaces. Chung explores the multiplicity

of Chinese and Chinese American identity, while also noting the inefficiency of the English language in describing it. Filled with all the complexity of contradictions that cannot be easily resolved, *Crazy Melon and Chinese Apple* certainly is an important and necessary contribution to Asian American Literature.

Heather Nagami

Ole Gram received his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature and German from the University of Minnesota. His main areas of research are German intellectual history and 20th Century German, Dutch, and South African literature and culture. He is presently preparing a manuscript about the memoirs of the German-Danish screen legend Asta Nielsen.

Jena Osman's book *The Character* was published by Beacon Press. She co-edits *Chain* magazine with Juliana Spahr and teaches at Temple University in Philadelphia.

Curtis Crisler is a grad student pursuing his masters' in English and teaching at Southern Illinois University. He is the winner of the Katheryn Young chapbook contest for *Burnt Offerings of a City*. Many more things to come.

Amiri Baraka is a renowned poet, dramatist, activist and essayist whose books include *Blues People*, *Dutchman*, *Transbluesency*, and *Wise Why's Y's*. A new website dedicated to his work has recently gone on-line at <<http://www.amiribaraka.com>>.

Tisa Bryant is juggling several projects and editing Lesbian Fiction for Blithe House Quarterly <www.blithe.com>. Her work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Chain*, *Hatred of Capitalism* (Semiotext(e), 2002), *POM POM: Property of Many*, and *Step Into A World* (John Wiley & Sons, 2000).

Rodrigo Toscano is the author of *Partisans* (O Books), *The Disparities* (Green Integer), and *Platform* (Atelos, forthcoming). He lives in NYC where he works at the Labor Institute.

Jeff Derksen is a research fellow at the Center for Place, Culture and Politics at the CUNY Graduate Center, NYC, for 2001-2002. Recent poetry regarding globalism is in *Bombay Gin* and *Hunch*.

Mark Nowak's *Revenants* is out from Coffee House Press. Other recent writings can be found in *Chicago Review*, *Hambone*, and the *Qualitative Inquiry Reader* (Sage).

Pauline Butling has a Ph.D. from SUNY Buffalo; has taught at David Thompson University Centre, Selkirk College, and the Alberta College of Art and Design; and writes about contemporary Canadian poetry, including *Seeing in the Dark: The Poetry of Phyllis Webb* (WLU, 1995) and "At the Moment: Alternative Poetries and Communities in English Canada since 1960" (with Susan Rudy), a ms. completed in 2001.

Allison Hedge Coke's book *Dog Road Woman* won an American Book Award. She is currently serving on the National Caucus/Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers.

Elizabeth Willis is the author of *The Human Abstract* (Penguin, 1995) and *Second Law* (Avenue B, 1993). She teaches at Mills College.

Rebecca Scherr is a Ph.D. candidate in English at the University of Minnesota.

Steven Garabedian is a doctoral candidate in the Program in American Studies at the University of Minnesota. Currently, he is at work on his dissertation as a pre-doctoral fellow at the Smithsonian Institution.

Eric Lorberer has published poems in numerous journals, including *American Poetry Review*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Luna*, *Mudfish*, and *VOLT*. He edits *Rain Taxi Review of Books* from Minneapolis.

Gabrielle Civil is a young black woman poet and scholar who specializes in diasporic black poetry and culture. She received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from New York University and is currently teaching literature and writing in the English Dept. at the College of St. Catherine.

Bill Brown is the publisher of *NOT BORED!*, an anarcho-situationist zine and web site. His essay on Henri Lefebvre appears in *Xcp* no. 7.

Elisabeth A. Frost is an assistant professor of English at Fordham University. She has published essays on contemporary American poetry and feminist issues, as well as literary interviews, in *Contemporary Literature*, *Genders*, *Postmodern Culture*, and other journals. She has recently completed a book entitled *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry*.

Mary E. Weems is a performance poet, playwright, and educational consultant. She has published three short collections of poetry: *white* (Kent State University Press, 1996), *Fembles* (The Heartlands Today: Bowling Green State University, 1996), and *Blackeyed* (Burning Press, 1994).

Mark Soderstrom is a Ph. D. Candidate in History at the University of Minnesota. As a labor musician specializing in historical preservation, he has shared a stage with Pete Seeger and Anne Feeney. He is currently working on his dissertation which examines segregation in the Big Ten.

David Michalski is a Librarian at the School of Visual Arts in NYC. His essay "Cities Memory Voices Collage" can be found in the forthcoming *Sounds and Gestures of Recollection: Art and the Performance of Memory*, edited by Richard Candida Smith (Routledge, 2002).

Joel Bettridge is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of English at SUNY-Buffalo. He has recently published reviews on *The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems* by Marjorie Welish, *Word of Mouth: An Anthology of Gay American Poetry*, and *Visit Teepee Town: Native Writings After the Detours*, in *Chicago Review*, *Poetrybay* and *Facture*.

Diedre Murphy is a Ph.D. candidate in the Program in American Studies at the University of Minnesota. Currently, she is the Schwartz Fellow at the American Art Museum at the Smithsonian Institution.

Heather Nagami is an M.F.A. candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Arizona, and is the recipient of a U of A Foundation Award and a Ruth Stephan Memorial Award. She is currently editor-in-chief of *Sonora Review*.



American Indian Culture and Research Journal

The *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, published by UCLA, provides a quarterly interdisciplinary research forum for scholars and the general public in the areas of historical and contemporary American Indian life and culture. Book reviews, poetry, and original scholarly papers on a wide range of issues are invited.

Send manuscripts addressed to the Editor. To subscribe or receive a complete list of publications, write to:

Publications

UCLA American Indian Studies Center
3220 Campbell Hall, Box 951548
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1548
(310) 825-7315 • (310) 206-7060 fax

e-mail: aisc@ucla.edu

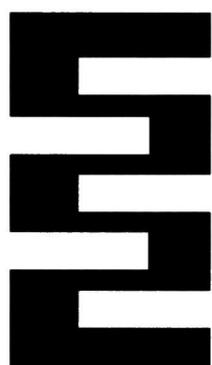
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/esp/aisc/index.html>

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

Individual \$25 (2 years-\$45)
Institution \$60 (2 years-\$110)

Foreign subscriptions add \$10





FLOOD EDITIONS

PAM REHM, *GONE TO EARTH* \$10

RONALD JOHNSON, *THE SHRUBBERIES* \$14

FORTHCOMING IN JANUARY 2002

TOM PICKARD, *HOLE IN THE WALL: NEW & SELECTED*

PHILIP JENKS, *ON THE CAVE YOU LIVE IN*

WWW.FLOODEDITIONS.COM

LVNG

FOR A COPY OF *LVNG* 9, SEND A REQUEST,
ALONG WITH RETURN POSTAGE (\$1.33 FOR
BOOK RATE).

FORTHCOMING: *LVNG* 10, TRANSLATION
ISSUE FEATURING POETRIES AND PROSE
TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH. SUBMISSIONS
OF TRANSLATIONS — OF ANY SORT — ARE
WELCOME.

PO BOX 3865 CHICAGO IL 60654-
0865

CHICAGO REVIEW

47:3 Fall 2001

POEMS: Andrea Brady, Ray DiPalma, Alan Halsey, Christine Hume, Lisa Jarnot, Devin Johnston, John Latta, J.S.A. Lowe, Sarah Manguso, Reginald Shepherd, and Joshua Wiener

STORIES: Fanny Howe, Julian Kudritzki, and Harry Mathews

INTERVIEWS: Frank Bidart and Thalia Field

ESSAYS: on Peter Hutton's films; on Keith Tuma's Oxford anthology of twentieth-century British poetry



Forthcoming

47:4 Winter 2001
STAN BRAKHAGE:
CORRESPONDENCES

48:1/2 Summer 2001
NEW GERMAN WRITING

Still available

47:2 Summer 2001
POEMS: Kenneth Fields, Timothy Liu, Carol Moldaw, Cole Swensen, John Taggart, Ko Un, and others
STORIES: Eugene Dubnov and J.M.G. Le Clézio



47:1 Spring 2001
POEMS: Rae Armantrout, Stacy Doris, Ted Enslin, Philip W. Jenks, Ronald Johnson, Ralph J. Mills, Jr., Pam Rehm, Juliana Spahr, Marjorie Welish, and others
STORY: Federigo Tozzi
ESSAYS: Tom Raworth and Allen Grossman



46:3/4 Fall 2000
NEW POLISH WRITING
400 pages of poems, short stories, novel excerpts, feuilletons, reportage, criticism, polemicism, and interviews.

single issue \$6

one-year sub \$18

humanities.uchicago.edu/humanities/review

5801 SOUTH KENWOOD AVE CHICAGO IL 60637

Xcp

cross cultural poetics

<http://bfn.org/~xcp>

Xcp

cross cultural poetics

\$10