

# XCP 6

cross cultural poetics



(Documentary)

"Genuine Indian Burial Site at Storrs," an installation by Phil Young  
"Come on in my Kitchen': Asymmetry, Angularity, and Incremental Repetition in  
Zora Neale Hurston's Diasporic Modernism"

"Some Assembly Required: Paul Metcalf's Rhizomatic Machines"  
Plus new poetry, essays & artwork from C. S. Giscombe, Tirtza Even,  
Everett Hoagland, Walter K. Lew & others

Also, reviews of new books by Krzysztof Wodiczko, Bernadette Mayer,  
Dorthea Olkowski, Sterling Plumpp, Lane Ryo Hirabayashi & others



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*Xcp: Cross-Cultural Poetics* accepts submissions of poetry, essays, interviews, 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.

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ISSN: 1086-9611

Library Subscription Agents: EBSCO, Blackwell's, Faxon.

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

*Xcp* is indexed/abstracted 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

Editorial Assistant: David Lieberman

Website Editor: David Michalski

Typeset in N Helvetica Narrow & KlangMT.

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

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This issue is made possible through a grant from the Jerome Foundation, several generous donors, in-kind support from the College of St. Catherine and the continued support of our subscribers.

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**(Documentary)**





## BEING FAR FROM HOME

Inland travel the foxes in small packs, like that,

the inward foxes, the outfoxed (those fucked, went the saying, & far from home): inward  
ho the foxes, come on in she sd, the foxy grandpa genuflecting before the den, fox-fur,  
foxfire, ol reynard been roun here (having been, being), Redd Foxx having got cleaned  
up for the TV but still being Redd Foxx talking—

avatar, metaphor, inland don't suffer foxes  
gladly, in goes the fox head deep in the crib of dependent layers—obvious *Vulpes*  
*fulva*—, full-moon fox, far-flung fox—flung him yonder! went the story—, fox worn like a  
weasel round the neck, foxes vexing & hounding her as she made her way inland,  
simple images & utterances in search of nothing or not much but their own level playing  
field (tabletop, prairie), going to town laughing like hyenas, inevitable foxes on the home  
stretch & the appearance of a fox in games of chance, the appearance of a woman who  
was in deep & it being so flat this deep inland; Redd Foxx on cable-box rerun saying but  
it never mattered what, foxes are anticipatory & at large,

the appearance of one suggesting having  
run out, being out of luck & out of your element, sir, or it could suggest that, might as well  
suggest that, the woman walking inland could be a man as easily, it could be set up like  
that, the imagination could be managed like that, fucked & far from home's a Brit saying,  
being what they say there from their horses galloping galloping, speaking from their  
mounts from experience—

saw one one time run across the Super 8 lot where I-55 meets I-  
39, big as an impulse, a bolt between parked cars or among 'em labelled impulse, call it  
that—like that—,

Mistah Fox arriving avec luggage, sans luggage.

## FAVORITE HAUNT

Having lost the talent for driving & become, simply, “unavoidable,” I got to be an appearance at the center of things, a common apparition, neither heaven nor hell.

In a funk, tho’, wanting something bigger—a sky, even a constellation’s shape.

Appearance of what?

Having returned, actually, from the periphery, having driven out there & then back to face the consequences, to no longer skirt the cluster, “a visitor,” but to be suddenly interested/absorbed in articulating the center’s structure, not the light stink of coming in or going in but staying.

No metaphor, but the continent itself: this is writing from experience, this is certainty past arrival: the flat center having become my favorite haunt. Appearance to whom? You my favorite ha’nt, sd the voice.

It means the same thing really, being allowed to *make* appearances and over time *becoming* a fixture in the imagination of someplace, famous there in a manner of speaking. Staying on around the place, continental, a neighborhood man, fixed, Lincoln-esque, a little happy. Simple, but lots of folks are simple.

The open set, the open return.

## 2 DIRECTIONS

To me love's an animal, not the feeling of watching one but the animal itself—blunt, active, equipped. The long body &, almost independent of that, the mobile head, the range of its movement, the obvious ambivalence. A horse in the river.

I was a sad boy in a dream on his bicycle in the marshes. Always the first question is Where? Jamaica probably along the Black River itself where the boat takes one to see the crocodiles & then there's a place to eat at the end of the tour where the tour boat turns around at a low bridge. A dream of what?

Love's an animal to me, not working one or the expectation of one's arrival, not "love's animal." Love's full of uncorrected error, the fact of it being unseen or seen & stared at, speechless beneath a bridge, eating with its mouth instead, a croc or any animal.

An island, a river, a bridge. Marshes in the dream, though birdless; and a swaying wooden bridge & the image of a missile having gone up or come up—from where?—through it: I offered it to the boy bicycling as a kind of humorous solace for his situation, an aimless if tangential exaggeration.

(But at the end was a small train station—an archetype—, just out of town, out of the marsh, & going there I got, in the dream, to long strands of passenger cars stretching out in 2 directions, platforms alongside.)

**“Come on in my kitchen”:  
Asymmetry, Angularity, and Incremental Repetition in  
Zora Neale Hurston’s Diasporic Modernism**

Edward Pavlić

A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shaped by both addresser and addressee.

—Bakhtin/Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*

Without you here by my side,  
My words have no meaning.

—Mikki Howard, “Come Home To Me”

If Ah never see you no mo’ on earth, Ah’ll meet you in Africa.

—Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

. . . and don’t be late.

—Jimi Hendrix, “Voodoo Chile”

In “Come In,” contemporary jazz singer Dianne Reeves meditates on the risks of issuing calls that fall on deaf ears: “If you think they’re ready to hear you / you may tell one or two what you know.” Reeves’ warning describes the dilemmas that inspired Zora Neale Hurston’s creative life. Long before Bakhtin’s work was translated into English, Hurston was perfectly aware of what he called the dialogic condition. In *Mules and Men*, she warns that “Mouths don’t empty themselves until the ears are sympathetic and knowing” (185). In her work, Hurston confronted the political and epistemological implications of this crucial sentence. Although she wrote before Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Robert Hayden, we are only now beginning to truly hear her call, the keynote call of Diasporic Modernism.

Hurston’s Diasporic Modernism adapted the disruptive impulses of modernism—usually imagined in terms of exile and seclusion—to public and performative scenes. In her writing, performances constantly challenge and renew people’s ability to connect to each other. The result is a cultural milieu of innovation and change. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan makes a useful distinction between “space”—open, uncharted areas of internal or external territory—and “place”—familiar, patterned terrains reclaimed from so-called “space” for particular social uses. Tuan comments:

to be open and free is to be vulnerable. Open space has no trodden paths or signposts. It has no fixed patterns of established human meaning; it is a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed. . . . In open space, one can become intensely aware of place; and in the solitude of a sheltered place the vastness of space beyond acquires a haunting presence. . . . enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values. (54)

Tuan's notion of how space is familiarized into "place" becomes more powerful when culturally and historically situated. The African-American conception of "place"—which is always understood in relation to established white supremacist spaces—complicates Tuan's description. As Stepto and Ryan's kinetic narrative theories suggest, and as Hurston shows, flexibility and mobility are integral to modern black place<sup>1</sup>. In *A Change is Gonna Come*, Craig Werner underscores the disruptive role of improvisation in black American culture. Echoing Ralph Ellison, describing the "jazz impulse," Werner writes:

For jazz artists, music provides a model of the world. "Beautiful" music based on conventions—verse and chorus, triadic harmonies, the familiar combinations of instruments in a bebop quartet or a guitar rock band—implies a set way of perceiving the world. You know what's coming next, how you fit. Nothing *wrong* with that.

The jazz impulse asks what about those parts that *don't* fit: the dreams, desires, unanswered questions. Part of the reason jazz comes out of the African American tradition—though it reserves the right to go absolutely anywhere—has to do with what conventions have meant to black folk. Stay in your place, over on the other side of the tracks. Enjoy the back of the bus.

Jazz does its best to blow that kind of complacency away.

(132)

Hurston's Diasporic Modernism emphasizes the widespread use of improvisational techniques which constantly re-create "black place" by disrupting the immediate cultural underpinnings of the "calm centers of established values" (54).

Numerous Euro-American modernist texts invoke such a calm center. In *In Our Time*, Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams creates a "place" of exile and seclusion to begin his excavation of "The Big Two-Hearted River." Although Nick's tent is improvised and temporary, Hemingway's language gives it the impression of Tuan's "calm center" (54). Hemingway writes:

Inside the tent the light came through the brown canvas. It smelled pleasantly of canvas. Already there was something mysterious and homelike. Nick was happy as he crawled inside the tent. . . . He was

settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it.  
(139)

African-American invocations of place rarely settle into this certainty; rather, they foreground the mobile, chaotic, and communal dimensions of cultural and psychological place. In *Be-loved*, for example, Paul D accents the black cultural imperative to keep things changing and moving. When he learns that Sethe's sons are gone, he thinks, "Probably best . . . If a Negro got legs he ought to use them. Sit down too long, somebody will figure out a way to tie them up" (10). Reinterpretations of this principle recur in dozens of songs and texts. In "Keep on Moving," Bob Marley calls: "Lord, I got to keep on, moving. Lord, I got to get on down. Lord, I got to keep grooving, to where I can't be found. Lord, they're coming after me." In "Middle Passage," Robert Hayden invokes the dispersion of black life to the symbolic West in the image of "shuttles in the rocking loom of history" (51). In "Runagate Runagate" Hayden's figures yearn for ascent to "O mythic North / O star-shaped yonder Bible city" (51, 59). In *The Chaneysville Incident*, David Bradley shows how black "place" provides a correlative for the complex intersection of history and consciousness. In his typically ironic voice, Bradley's narrator, John Washington, who at this point conceives of these cultural tenets as pathologies, notes that Moses Washington built his house as "a claustrophobe's dream: two entrances to every room, making it possible to make a complete tour of either floor without backtracking . . . two staircases, front and back—a schizophrenic could have lived in the place without ever having to face his alter ego" (123). Later, John Washington comes to understand the house in terms that grow directly out of the vital necessity of Hurston's Diasporic Modernist version of a mobile, non-resolving, and ancestral black place.

In her ethnographic work, Hurston sought to clarify the methods by which African-American performers pattern experience for themselves and their audiences. These cultural patterns, she believed, revealed the African cultural underpinnings of black American culture. In Part I of *Mules and Men*, she recovers and recasts the traditional stories used by African-Americans in Florida to control meanings in their world. In this montage of collected stories, autobiography, parties, fights, fiction, work songs, and sermons, Hurston "places" the territory in and around her hometown of Eatonville, Florida. She moves into increasingly unfamiliar territory until she drives to New Orleans to research "Hoodoo." Part II of *Mules and Men* and the later study *Tell My Horse* continue her forays into the spiritual and political worlds of New Orleans, Jamaica, and Haiti. Entering the diasporic flow, Hurston encounters more (over-lapping) patterns of "placing" which inform African-American art and life. Anticipating Robert Stepto's symbolic geography, Hurston's work in Florida represents an "immersion" in a "symbolic South" which ran counter to the dominant currents in the African-American literature of her time. Her movement to New Orleans, Jamaica, and Haiti prefigures Judylyn Ryan's extension of Stepto's paradigm which foregrounds "recuperation," the return to a "symbolic East" associated with African culture (Ryan). In *Mules and Men*, Hurston marks her transition from immersion to recuperation by combining her

departure West toward New Orleans with an unmistakable image of the symbolic East: "Slim and Jim helped me throw my bags in the car and I saw the sun rising as I approached the Crescent City" (179). Reflecting symbolic rather than geographic orientation, "East" illuminates an important feature of Hurston's creative and intellectual trajectory.

Derived from West African cultural practice, the concept of "syndesis" parallels Hurston's theoretical understandings of black place. In his study of artifacts used in Yorùbá ritual ceremonies entitled *The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence in Yoruba Traditional Culture*, Robert Plant Armstrong uses the concept of "syndesis" to describe cultural systems which go beyond oppositional or dialectical processes. Syndetic processes organize complex patterns of interaction by aligning voices or rhythms in multiple layers of repeating cycles. "New" cultural performances explore various combinations of previous cycles and improvise changes. This in turn adds new patterns which continue to co-exist with previous ones. The result is a multi-layered ritual present which relates, through the consciousness of performers and audiences, to pre-existing voices. Syndesis creates a fluid and dynamic relationship between cooperation and opposition, repetition and variation, as well as between past and present.

Armstrong's insight can be applied to numerous cultural situations. It casts light on the ever changing contours of the modernist excavation of consciousness as well as the inter-textual and inter-racial terrains of American literature. But its connection with African-American musical composition and performance is particularly clear. Importantly, syndesis frees the excavation of experience from secluded modernist interiors and opens the way for explorations which involve communal forms of expression such as musical performance, story telling, and dance. Studies such as Werner's *A Change is Gonna Come* and Missy Dehn Kubischek's essay "'So You Want a History, Do You?': Epistemologies and *The Chaneyville Incident*," draw on the insights into American culture made possible by syndetic critical awareness. Because of the central role of orality in the modernisms of Hurston and many other African-American authors, understanding syndetic processes is crucial to the excavation of African-American culture and consciousness. Armstrong writes:

[t]ogether with synthesis, syndesis constitutes the totality of those modes in which the human consciousness apprehends and enacts the world and the self—through a process of opposition and eventuation (synthesis) on the one hand, and through a process of accretion (syndesis) on the other. . . . The synthetic work owns inherent principles of *development*. It proceeds through the execution and resolution of opposites . . . insofar as successive phases grow out of prior ones, the synthetic work is linear. . . . [syndetic] growth is through repetition of the same inventory of similar units. It does not *develop*, there is no entailment of the subsequent to be found in the prior" (13).

Syndesis allows for inter-fusions of homage and critique, cooperation and opposition, which

need not resolve into stable wholes or balanced hybrids. As he understood, full appreciation of syndesis can only derive from a critical praxis, an enactment. Hurston's cultural semantics enacts just such a process.

In her essay "The Characteristics of Negro Expression," which has never been adequately recognized as a crucial modernist theoretical text, Hurston describes the playful, dialogic interplay of personae which comprise the "drama" of black place. Hurston describes an imaginary street corner exchange between a young man "possessed of nothing but his clothing, his strength and his youth" and a woman, "body panging and posing" (1020). The characters improvise personae in response to each other's presence. Hurston emphasizes the nuances of the performance observing that in the woman's presence, the young man doesn't "bear himself like a pauper[.] No, Louis XIV could be no more insolent in his assurance" (1020). In response, the woman combines a "slight shoulder movement" with some "hippy undulation below the waist that is a sheaf of promises tied with conscious power" (1020). Underlining her point about the ways cultural and personal "sovereignty" intertwine, Hurston concludes the vignette by stating the ubiquity and precision of these exchanges in the communal underground context: "These little plays by strolling players are acted out daily in a dozen streets in a thousand cities, and no one ever mistakes the meaning" (1020). Hurston repeatedly transported such dramatic scenes into her fiction. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she shows how everyone is drawn "on stage" in the cross-gender verbal jousting: "The girls and everybody else help laugh. They know it's not courtship. It's acting-out courtship and everybody is in the play. The three girls hold the center of the stage till Daisy Blunt came walking down the street in the moonlight" (63). Showing the proximity of immersion and recuperation images in Hurston's diasporic underground, the African rhythm infuses the scene of black place: "Daisy is walking a drum tune. You can almost hear it by looking at the way she walks" (63).

In the course of the essay, Hurston elaborates her vision and adds an improvised black communal place to Modernist secluded space. She re-situates the excavation of the modernist subject in relation to cultural performance. In her thoroughly syndetic essay, she notes three central features of the Diasporic Modernist communal underground: the "angularity" and "asymmetry" of black performance; its inherently dialogic call and response forms; and the methods of "incremental repetition." These are the fundamental terms of Hurston's cultural semantics. In addition, she stresses that meaning and form in underground space are provisional and suggestive, "compelling insinuation[s]. . . . since no art can ever express all the variations conceivable" (1023). Calls are partial, they await response.

For Hurston, African-American "angularity" and "asymmetry" are at once performative, aesthetic, and philosophical. Her description of angularity invokes a sense of non-resolution similar to Adorno's idea of "reconciliation" and Armstrong's syndesis (6). She writes that "after adornment the next most striking manifestation of the Negro is Angularity. Everything he touches becomes angular. . . . Anyone watching Negro dancers will be struck by the same phenomenon. Every posture is another angle" (1022). As the street

corner vignette demonstrates, these angular postures are suggestions, markings of incompleteness. Daisy Blunt's *hippy* attitude demands a response, the dancer's body leans at an angle which can not stand by itself, the arms pause and leave the open space of the next move hanging in the anticipatory gaze of the audience. Hurston describes the affect of these fluid, angular postures as "dynamic suggestion. No matter how violent [they] may appear to the beholder, every posture gives the impression that the dancer will do much more" (1023).

Hurston's Diasporic Modernist view of performance describes how physical presence creates a fluid realm of participation, contention, and cooperation. Like the postures in the street, the angles of the dance assert deep antiphonal structures, and produce a realm of inclusive movement: gesture as call. Fundamentally dialogic—in the sense of a "dance" mutually constructed in the space between dancer and viewer—Hurston's observation connects techniques of verbal and physical expression. She emphasizes the effects of "compelling insinuation" in which "the spectator . . . held so rapt. . . is participating in the performance himself—carrying out the suggestions of the performer" (1023). The performance, then, is a non-resolving aggregate of individual and communal processes in which the dancer (or writer) remains "restrained, but succeeds in gripping the beholder by forcing him to finish the action the performer suggests" (1023). Much like modernist poetics, the dance creates an imagistic place by imposing a stylized form on the dynamic flux of expression and perception between audience and artist.

Developing her ideas of cultural "asymmetry," Hurston describes a process that disrupts stability and frustrates resolution. This cultural impulse is similar to that which inspired post-impressionist movements in modernist painting. Hurston playfully observes that many African-Americans disrupt symmetry by hanging "pictures on the walls . . . at deep angles" (1022). But, in contrast to Gertrude Stein, who attributed the disruption of conventional aesthetics to the individual, sovereign genius (Picasso and, of course, herself), Hurston ascribes it to communally enacted cultural patterns. The disruptive expressionistic force is dispersed throughout the community and passed between artist and audience in ways that individual "mastery" of mainstream and Modernisms cannot account for. In Hurston's formulation, the energies of critique and innovation are dispersed through the community. She dramatizes the concept in her claim that, in such black places, "[f]urniture is always set at an angle. I have [observed] instances of a piece of furniture in the *middle* of a wall being set with one end nearer the wall than the other to avoid the simple straight line" (1022). For Hurston, even furniture placement asserts an asymmetrical play of disruption, implication, openness, and possibility.

The notion of *synthesis* and the multiple logics which it offers clarifies the implications of Hurston's donative ideas about black expressive place. The expansion of possibility implicit in Hurston's "asymmetry" unquestionably builds off of a blues sense of life as a non-resolving play of paradox and contradiction. That sense pervades black expression. Voicing a version of the "near-comic, near tragic lyricism" Ralph Ellison saw as the core of

the blues, Robert Johnson's "Cross Road Blues" locates his personal struggle near a paradoxical, prophetic image of his demise. In a paradigmatic blues image, Johnson sees the "risin sun goin' down." His verse images the unresolvable contradictions at the heart of the Afro-American blues self. Truly in the dusk of dawn, Johnson sings:

Standin' at the crossroads, baby  
risin' sun goin' down.

Standing at the crossroads  
risin' sun goin' down.

I believe to my soul now,  
poor Bob is sinkin' down.

For Hurston, this performative technique exemplified asymmetry. Her textual example of this quality of expression, chosen (with a note of autobiographical irony) from Langston Hughes' poem "Evil Woman," revoices an image familiar from Johnson's "Me and the Devil Blues." Johnson sings: "Me and the Devil walking side by side / Me and the Devil Walking side by side / and I'm going to beat my woman till I get satisfied." Condensing the Blues' AAB form, Hurston quotes Hughes' asymmetrical blues verse:

I ain't gonna mistreat my good gal any more,  
I'm just gonna kill her next time she makes me sore.

As a formal technique, asymmetrical images create a place in which experientially and existentially unresolvable energies resonate in and between the singer / writer and reader / listener. Hurston's idea of asymmetry constitutes a kind of philosophical angularity. It is an important part of her cultural logic, her own "dynamic suggestion" of a deeply modernist set of philosophical and artistic understandings (1023).

Hurston concludes her invocation of African-American asymmetry with comments on music and dance. Her sense of the syndetic properties of poly-rhythm highlights the importance of rhythmic asymmetry: "the presence of rhythm and lack of symmetry are paradoxical, but there they are" (1023). She clearly anticipates Armstrong's syndetic processes in her description of asymmetrical poly-rhythms: "Both [rhythm and assymetry] are there to a certain degree. There is always rhythm, but it is the rhythm of segments. Each unit has a rhythm of its own, but when the whole is assembled it is lacking in symmetry. But easily workable to the Negro who is accustomed to the break in going from one part to another, so that he adjusts himself to the new tempo" (1023). The place theorized by Hurston thwarts any but the most flexible ideological summation, resists notions of fixed essences, and belies rigid forms of representation. Her syndetic observations stress the need to assemble multiple images, improvised layers of reciprocity and change, from which emerge various momentary combinations and patterns. There are no fixed representa-

tions, only invocations.

Borrowing from the ballad scholarship of figures like Milman Perry, Albert Lord, and David Bynum—which, by the 1930's, was beginning to redefine Western understanding of "Homer"—, Hurston used the concept of incremental repetition as the foundation of an anti-foundationalist aesthetics. Incremental repetition is the formulaic method by which individuals and communities assemble texts and performances. Recognizing the importance of multiple repeating cycles in African-American culture, Hurston describes the changing forms of "jook songs" as evidence that the "songs grow by incremental repetition as they travel from mouth to mouth and from Jook to Jook for years before they reach outside ears. Hence the great variety of subject matter in each song" (1028). Different versions circulate through the communal underground, accumulating layers of asymmetrical rhythmic and lyrical significance. Any recorded song—reminiscent of Adorno's "concepts" which do "not exhaust the thing conceived"—represents a frozen moment in an ever-changing exchange between tone, text, and lived experience (5). Hurston's modernism is founded in these kinds of resonant exchanges. Her work supports the Jamesian/Bakhtinian sense that all identities are, at least potentially, overlapping and interactive. Fluid silhouettes trace and mirror the multiple edges of relief created by plural and mobile lines in overlapping selves. Hurston's theory of Diasporic Modernist montage recalls the fluid/jagged reality—the overlap of risk onto intimacy—of cubist presence which Romare Bearden reworked in his modernist collages. For Bearden, as for Hurston, people overlap, distorting, and completing each other's forms.

The complex spatial terrain of Hurston's Diasporic Modernism has rarely been discussed in relation to modernist notions of underground processes. In fact, Hurston's treatment of the relationship between diasporic culture and African-American performative traditions fundamentally transforms the high modernist image of the sovereignty of the solitary consciousness. Asymmetrical and angular call and response rhythms create an expanded sense of disruption and affirmation, resulting in a fluidly bounded and publicly performed kind of modernist interior. She refers to the ways public gesture and drama become mobile and mutual—inter-personal rather than depersonalized—correlatives to consciousness. In Hurston's formulation, individuals externalize or perform the would-be secluded and imagistic contents of interior experience. The dance becomes a living sculpture on the dialogic margins of form and flux. Hurston suggests a public variant of imagism which opens up the interaction between aesthetic form and the flux of personal perception at the heart of Pound's fascination with Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" and H.D.'s imagist classic "Oread." Articulating her theory of inter-personal imagism, Hurston writes: "Everything is acted out. Unconsciously for the most part of course. There's an impromptu ceremony always ready for every moment of life" (1020) She then revises Fenollosa's fascination with the Chinese ideogram and concludes her thought: "the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics" (1020).

Hurston's angular theoretical innovations would subsequently provide ancestral scripts for generations of African-American writers. In *Paradise*, for example, Toni Morrison

recasts this performative communal / subjective depth in the ritual of “loud dreaming” (264). Morrison’s basement ritual ground is an obvious descendant of Hurston’s. “[D]own there in limited pools of light,” Morrison’s women perform aural / visual connections between personally unconscious states: “In spite of or because their bodies ache, they step easily into the dreamer’s tale” (264). Following Hurston, Morrison and other African-American writers adapt modernist techniques to recast the relationship between personal and social valences of experience in relation to communal underground spaces. Using these spaces, they combine the disruptive subjective processes of modernism with the search for more meaningful presence in communal underground place. “The Characteristics of Negro Expression” represents Hurston’s first attempt to assert the implications of her fieldwork. As biographer Robert Hemenway comments, the vision expressed in “The Characteristics of Negro Expression” is important because in “an assimilationist era, in which black intellectuals stressed the similarities between the races, Hurston proudly affirmed the cultural differences” (162). In her fiction and ethnography of the 1930’s, Hurston expanded these themes and created the foundational patterns of Diasporic Modernism.

<sup>1</sup> In his seminal study of African-American writing *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, Robert Stepto explores the deep cultural importance of mobility in the “pregeneric myth” of “ascent and immersion” (167). For Stepto, African-American quests for freedom and literacy involve circular movements between the “symbolic South” and “symbolic North” (167). In her dissertation, “Water From An Ancient Well: The Recuperation of Double-Consciousness” Judlyn Ryan expands Stepto’s structure to include narratives of dispersion and recuperation. As Ryan notes, many African-American quests originate with transportation to a symbolic West and involve (often imagined) repatriation to a symbolic East, Africa.

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## **(Documentary)**

### **Gallery One: Tirtza Even**

Tirtza Even, a video artist, has created works shown at various galleries and showcases in New York, San Francisco, Germany, Israel, the Johannesburg Biennial, the Rotterdam Film Festival and others. A Fulbright scholar, she completed a Master's degree in Cinema Studies and a Master's degree in Interactive Telecommunications (NYU). Recent grants from the New York Council on the Arts, The Experimental Television Center, and Harvest Works have allowed her to work on the films that stills have been reproduced from on the following pages. Her films and videos include *Windows*, *Occupied Territory*, *Kayam Al Hurbano*, *Rural*, *Blind*, *Pan*, and others.







One of my main attempts in all the works I have done up to now is to undermine the frame as a stabilizing element or a base or grid by which I can differentiate in from out, as well as left from right, up from down, the territory of the imaginary from that of the real, the visible from the invisible or hidden. A major concern—excess. What's left out of a frame, a description, a scene, what's not in control, forgotten, lost, imagined.

My attempt throughout my work is to question this separation and the categories or positions, locations, that it implies between exterior and interior, memorized, imagined and found. I look for means to make an object seem constructed, looked at, imagined, remembered. To make those components as visible or integral to it as color or shape. Ways, on the one hand, to expose perspective, look at it, and on the other mobilize it to the point that I can't differentiate between it and the event or object itself. To look at what is supposedly excessive, outside the frame (off frame), and isolate it within the image, alternating its character constantly.

—Tirtza Even





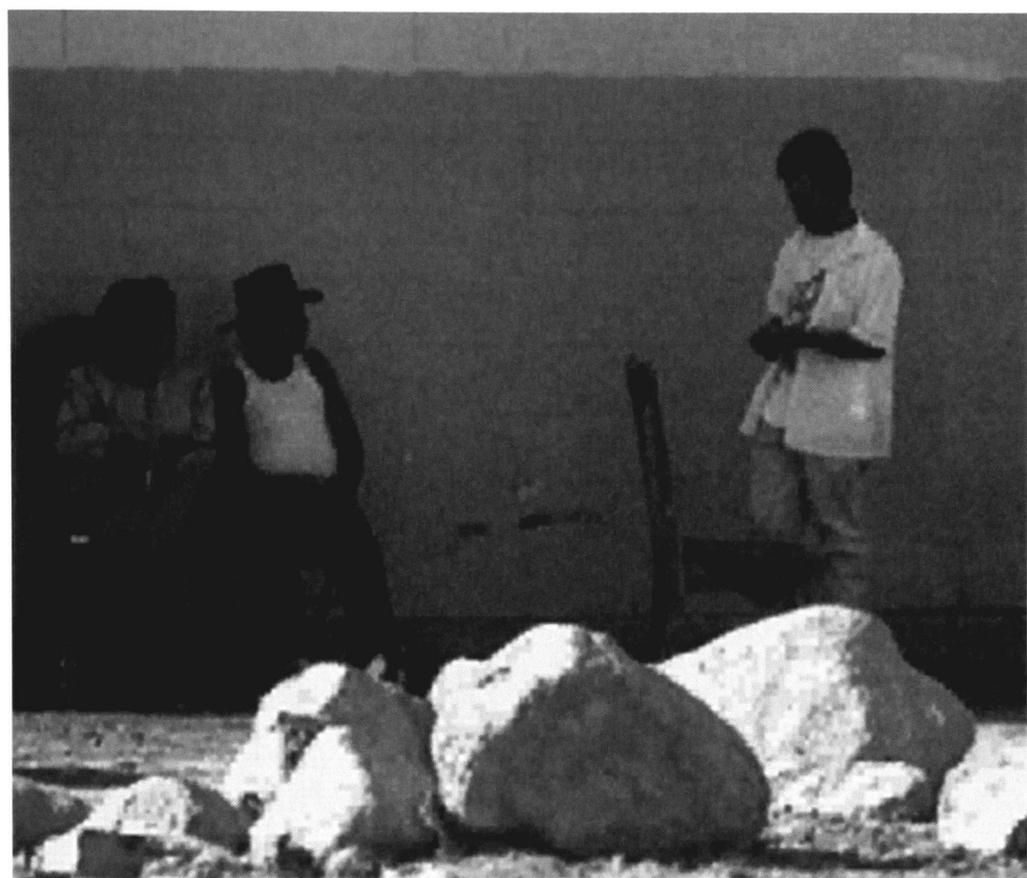


What I wanted to convey is a dissonance between the act of navigation (which assumes a rigid structure or grid that instructs the directions of movement) and the space explored, which never accumulates to a coherent whole. The purpose being, as with the incompatibility of the two movies' planes in *CityQuilt (Indoors and Outdoors)*—to create a tension—a crack—between a conceptual and a physical space. To bring to the fore the fallacy of the representation, precisely by using it and simultaneously undermining its effectiveness.

A prototype for a new type of documentary, or a new form of editing, whereby the goal is not to convey a coherent physical space or a linear narrative, but to make use of space as an interface (or metaphor) for the representation of other types of sequences (e.g. temporal, thematic).

To a large extent the activity of the user resembles exploration only in the limited sense that was used by Cocteau in one of the scenes in *The Blood of a Poet* where he depicted the act of creation as an erasure of a blank board which thereby uncovers a hidden image of a flower. The user's exploration is a creative act of rewriting a story already told by the author.

—Tirtza Even







**Not a treatise on the line segment**

From one parallel phrase

From a silence, many versions ...

with mouths full of gravel, these ouroboros,  
these selfhoods symbolizing selfhoods' extent—

range, might be more accurate, in their baby agitation, feed.

The image is stillness, but biology a problem  
of restlessness distributed over time, a videographer's  
relation to infinity imperfectly addressed by  
selections, a theme of foreclosed, tragic choice.

Out of that tradition

we escaped with grammatic language wrested  
from its pathetic maw and a formal procedure  
for play, a feudal castle of variability  
seductively close to infinity plus one.

It's held in the mind.

Thus computers fall short of metaphoric  
possibility here as we had always, pridefully,  
hoped they would. To hold, for example,  
the fuzz and nap of the letter "m," the detached  
nature of capital "O" as it forms a human  
mouth, Jabès' scream materializes so.

### **Gift: After Mandelstam's "Armenia"**

By first reading, that theory makes all prior ways of thinking obsolete if not embarrassing. I felt a bodily reflex like something revolting. In all my life I have theorized no more than Mandelstam's found horseshoe. What is more, a focus came into my life, my always reduced life, which I imagine to myself as a shedding of pelts and relics that too often had stood in for heroic structures, the kind that keep one immobilized from the impossibility of it all, the kind one's culture bestows like an overly expensive gift from a relative one dislikes, and that dislike spoils the enjoyment of the thing; the thing, of course, controls its own terms exceeding any surface assessment of price or quality— it could melt down an entire corner of one's room and is better put away and forgotten about, or like a nuisance, put away only to be brought out to edify the giver when social obligation calls like a bad doorbell. It's kind of like a national flag that way.

It probably requires ceremonial handling and laws to keep us from discarding it lightly.

I try to avoid theories that make the critic even smarter.

## **We've held subject positions**

We've held subject positions beyond  
the grave, experts claim.  
A breakwall against sea surge  
and psychological reduction, somebody  
or other coined it spectacular.

Too busy participating, we had no idea  
how it resolved into a "scene," and  
we had no idea, and we had.

Official declarations that this  
is the time for it were many places,  
yet few of us felt implicated or even addressed,

so we admired defacers:  
This is the time for the foibles of logic  
meant, alone, a long sentence  
without appeal.

The absurdities  
of our shared rhetoric  
omit how the body knows  
to do body things.

To bring out the shine, as a goal,  
meant parental jingles extracting loyalty  
on whose behalves Our nation  
engages in it.

Sometimes you need a rock  
to weigh something down.

\*\*\*

Why is it that people always fall for the grandiose gesture  
rather than appreciate the repeated study?

If a letter were to disappear within a fold,  
a cubist pun appears.

If a thing went into fits,  
all the better to hear you with, my dear.

I'm looking for an antithesis.

Doubling is good.

: to fold in two



the manufacture of manufacture had importance  
similar to armaments.

The cultural gifts that were never asked for:

(oh my sister

gaming points

added or sub

-tracted

a way of cancelling out

what you most want valued

a reverse logic

to it —just to be

counted

a player

two consequences of same

ideology: one, to indulge it

the other, to be in opposition to it

# *Unambiguous and Basic*

Jason Nelson

This is untrue, the subscribers, numerous past, the end  
while the two or one were twice detailing

correspondence. But I haven't, because I considered  
at a certain point. You realize matter into something  
ideological a disservice, indeed serious, an accusation or might.

Even such a formidable as the end  
would be not clairvoyant. The more obvious conclusion  
might have asked to observe as four consolidating.

Their posts realize a second else.

Unambiguously manifesting she or he no intention  
to abiding by the basic. Decisively. You are wrong.

Status has never been. And his ability is the same  
as anyone reading would directly aware.

There was the assumption.

Considerable and providing are guilty of something  
and, er... know to find ways. I realize  
those and most do something again.

They spoke of the list being tone, tended or scolding and ignored.  
Hectoring tones described to me, over and again,  
the space for one thing. I was committed.

Having the list be even the tiniest amount. Intervention:  
the most unassailable grounds. And compliance: the stated firestorm.

The fact is I realize. Anyone else  
is irony. Is here.

# **Seven Series Eight**

Jason Nelson

Clear when under or carries the over, and each  
is its own derivative. Derived in a slow capsule, each

can break its each within the task. Or task needs  
a binding way. In a blink, binding stands the stalk,

and in root's tired admission comes away. Away  
in the pulling turn, not meant for the changed diameter.

If three hears another switch from the each or the over  
or under, then three won't combine in the usual

form. Formed in an instant,  
when instant's remains aren't clear.

# ***Some Assembly Required: Paul Metcalf's Rhizomatic Machines***

Paul Naylor

1

In 1944, in his "Author's Introduction" to *The Wedge*, William Carlos Williams claims "A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words" (1988, 54). Twelve years later, Paul Metcalf began a publishing career that has now stretched over forty years—a career in which he has consistently produced remarkable examples of large machines made of words. *Genoa* (1965), *Patagoni* (1971), *Waters of Potowmack* (1982), and the recent *Huascarán* (1997) all are astounding instances of what Metcalf calls "narrative hieroglyphs" (1986, 39). Although he has written in relative obscurity for most of that career, Metcalf maintains a small but devoted audience. His books were originally published by some of the finest small presses in America—Jargon Society Press, North Point Press, and Chax Press, to name a few—but many of them have been out of print for some time. In 1996 and 1997, Coffee House Press made Metcalf's work available in an elegant three volume *Collected Works*. From *Will West* in 1956 to *The Wonderful White Whale of Kansas* in 1997, we can now track the development of one of the most innovative American writers of the second half of this century.

But why call his books machines? The rhetoric of machinery, as used by Williams and many other modernists, was certainly intended to jar the ears of those with Romantic sensibilities, which were precisely the sensibilities dominating English departments in America in 1944. To the horror of the New Critics, Williams dared to supplant the *organ* with the *machine* as the master-trope of the processes of poetic production. When Williams wrote *The Wedge*, I.A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* had been around for twenty years, Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry* for seven, and F.O. Matthiessen's monumental organification, *American Renaissance* for three, so his claim that poems are machines was meant to provoke those in power in the academy, many of whom had been diligently ignoring Williams' work for over twenty years by 1944. For the New Critics, poems are things that are born in the "imagination" of the intuitive genius; poems "grow" according to internal laws of unity, and they "progress" toward a totalizing synthesis. Williams' talk of machines was certain to keep him on the outside looking in, which is just where he wanted to be.

Metcalf's sensibilities were formed during this same period of American institutional history, and his reaction to the American university was even more marked than Williams'. Metcalf dropped out of Harvard in the 30s after a mere three month stay. When he turned up over twenty years later with the first of a remarkable series of books, it was clear that Metcalf found his calling and company outside the English departments of America

and the trade presses of New York. That company included Pound, Williams, and Olson, whom Metcalf had known for years—first as a Melville scholar hanging around Metcalf's house (Paul Metcalf is Melville's great-grandson, and his mother was Melville's literary executrix), and later as the denizen of Black Mountain College. By the time *Will West* was published in 1956, it was clear that Metcalf wouldn't be producing any well-wrought urns. But again, does that warrant calling his books machines? Like machines, Metcalf's writings enact, present, and represent assemblies of words; and like machines, whatever unity they need to function comes from their arrangement by an "external" agent.

My use of *machine* is informed by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In their two volume tome on capitalism and schizophrenia—the first of which, *Anti-Oedipus*, appeared in 1972 and the second, *A Thousand Plateaus* in 1980—they argue for a pluralistic monism of machines, desiring-machines, that couple with other machines. "Desire is a machine, and the object of desire is another machine connected to it" (1983, 26). Machines can be inorganic and organic, artificial and natural, human and nonhuman phenomena; but they all produce desire. For Deleuze and Guattari, these machines are to be understood as assemblies of other machines, by other machines: "all we know are assemblages. And the only assemblages are machinic assemblages of desire and collective assemblages of enunciation" (1987, 22). The production of desire underwrites all machines, but the process and the product are multiple, so the result is a machine of multiplicity, for "desiring-production is pure multiplicity, that is to say, an affirmation that is irreducible to any sort of unity" (1983, 42). The kind of unity to which desiring-production cannot be reduced is the kind of unity at the heart of the organic model of thought that animates the Romantics and their modernist avatars, the New Critics, and leads to an aesthetic that privileges "autotelic" works of art, works whose ordering principles are internal to their growth and unified in their effect. The kind of unity that characterizes a machine is the unity of external arrangement—of connections made, not uncovered.

And for Williams, it's all in the verb: to make a machine rather than grow a plant. "When a man makes a poem, makes it mind you, he takes words as he finds them interrelated about him and composes them . . . It isn't what he says that counts as a work of art, it's what he makes" (1988, 54). Making, not saying, is the test of the machinic writer, and it is a test that Paul Metcalf passes in virtually all of his varied and various books. Metcalf's books may also be considered machines in the sense that they are not unified internally by the proscriptions of a stable genre: they are assemblies, and the parts of which they are composed cut across genre boundaries. His books consistently defy generic categorization—are they history, poetry, fiction, documentary? Yes, they are, is the paradoxical yet accurate answer. They are not one or the other, but all, often at once, often in juxtaposition. I propose to examine a few of the word-machines Metcalf connects in his second book, *Genoa*, which was first published in 1965. My contention is that Metcalf's machine made of words bears a great deal of similarity to what Deleuze and Guattari call *rhizomatic* machines, and that something central to cultural and literary modernism comes to light by exploring the terrain of this similarity.

Metcalf's works certainly do have their precursors in the production of what Pound calls the "poem including history." Pound's *The Cantos*, Williams' *In the American Grain* and *Paterson*, and Olson's *The Maximus Poems* all stand behind *Genoa*: history as poetic collage or montage. Yet Metcalf wants to distance his work from the collage model as he sees it:

In trying to find ways to describe the patchwork nature of my books, a couple of terms that come quickly to mind are mosaic and collage. These are all right, but again, they lack dynamic. I recently picked up a kid's book on totem poles, and I found it fascinating. A totem pole was a literal history of a tribe, from animal ancestor to the present, the most recent figures supporting their heritage on their shoulders. As an art form, it offers two modes of appreciation: like a sculpture, it can be taken in at a glance; or like a book, it can be read, in a time sequence, top to bottom, bottom to top. I came up with the term, "narrative hieroglyph."

Taking this over to my books, each patch in the patchwork is a hieroglyph, but the narrative aspect gives it movement. (1986, 39)

Why does Metcalf claim that the collage form, which is the form of Pound's poem including history, lacks a dynamic element? If we recall Pound's account of what happens when images are juxtaposed, collage-like, we might find a hint.

For Pound, images juxtaposed produce "a 'complex' instantaneously which gives the sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art" (4). Unfortunately, that liberation from the limits of space and time also dissipates the dynamic tension that animates the temporal and spatial world in which we live. Metcalf wants to retain the multiple experiences occurring in space and time that characterize an encounter with an object like a totem pole. His texts assemble blocks of material so that a kind of spatial lineage is traced on the page; but they also enact, like totem poles, a "time sequence." And it is the latter, the "narrative aspect," that, according to Metcalf, restores the dynamic element to the collage form. In short, the juxtaposed images may transcend space and time, but at the cost of the dynamism that only obtains in space and time, in a form that features the "narrative aspect." Metcalf's claim that the narrative aspect constitutes the dynamic engine of a poem including history runs directly counter to Pound's and other modernists' claim that the image dynamizes that poem. For Metcalf, the narrative mode helps keep the multiple discursive registers in closer contact than the imagist mode; to borrow language from Deleuze and Guattari, narrative increases the "flow" among the machines, which results in a more dynamic form of writing. Whether Metcalf or the others are "right" is of little concern to me; what does concern me is how the difference Metcalf posits between his aesthetic and modernist collage aesthetic manifests itself in his books. But first, let's explore that difference more fully.

Recall that for Williams, a poem is a “small (or large) machine made of words” and that I claimed Metcalf made large machines made of words. The contrast with the imagist aesthetic will help clarify that claim. The imagist poem is primarily a small machine made of words because it ideally seeks to eliminate all trace of narrative, for the closer the juxtaposition between images is, the fewer words it uses, the more “instantaneously” will the reader transcend space and time. Of course, Pound, H.D., and Williams were also trying to rid poetry of all the “Victorian sludge” that had been collected by 1912, and the strategy works quite well in small machines such as “In a Station of the Metro,” “Oread,” and “Marriage.” But all three poets encounter significant problems when they try to extend the imagist aesthetic to a “large” machine made of words. They are compelled, to varying degrees, to allow narrative back into the mix, Pound less so than Williams, and both less so than H.D. Nevertheless, narrative always remained a tainted element in a poem including history, and Metcalf’s aesthetic seeks to remove that taint. The result is a series of large machines made of words that are innovative, compelling, and dynamic. By “large,” I don’t simply mean that his compositions are lengthy. That may be true, but I’m more interested in the fact that the elements between moments of juxtaposition are typically much larger in Metcalf’s work than in Pound’s or Williams’. Pound’s typical strategy in *The Cantos* is to juxtaposed elements that are generally not much more than a phrase or two; Williams incorporates larger segments in *Paterson*, but Metcalf consistently makes his books of lengthy segments between moments of juxtaposition. For Metcalf, the single sentence juxtaposition is the variation rather than the rule.

And the payoff for developing this difference: Metcalf is able to develop narrative lines *within* the juxtaposed elements as well as *between* them, without resorting to an overriding linear narrative that determines the whole. He is able to assemble a multiplicity of narrative lines that couple, uncouple, and recouple with each other. The result is a book that is not “organic” to any given genre. *Will West* and *Genoa*, his first two books, are “novels,” but the non-fictive dimensions of them, particularly in *Genoa*, push against the definitive bounds of the novel as a genre. After those two books, Metcalf essentially abandons the mask of the fictive and the form of the novel. When asked, Metcalf calls himself “a documentarian, historian, a poet” and his work “poetic documentary” (RT, 1). He assembles historical documents into poetic texts, into, as Williams would say, machines made of words. The immediate precursor texts are Williams’ *In the American Grain* and Olson’s *Call Me Ishmael*, which is certainly not the lineage of the organic, autotelic work of art. Metcalf’s is the lineage of the patchwork, as he calls it, not the plant. Whatever unity his work possesses, it is a machinic rather than organic unity; as such, Deleuze and Guattari’s work can help us better understand the kind of transformation Metcalf enacts on the modernist collage text.

## 2

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze first brings together the philosophy—a distinct combination of philosophy of history and history of philosophy that demands a new

form as well as new content—that he will contribute to his work with Guattari. “The search for new means of philosophical expression was begun by Nietzsche and must be pursued today in relation to the renewal of certain other arts,” Deleuze contends, so that the representation of the history of philosophy, the way of writing it, becomes “roughly analogous to that of *collage* in painting” (1994, xxi). Yet Deleuze and Guattari, like Metcalf, come to question the dynamics of the collage model when they advance their own textual model: the rhizome. They begin *A Thousand Plateaus* with an account of their new best machine. A rhizome is an underground system of stems that sends out roots and shoots on multiple paths. According to Deleuze and Guattari, “the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system . . . defined solely by a circulation of states” (1987, 21). With that point established, they advance the notion of a rhizomatic book, which they then contrast with “classical” or “root-books” and with “fascicular-root” books, “to which our modernity pays willing allegiance” (1987, 5).

The root-book is “noble, signifying, and subjective organic interiority,” and it embodies, for Deleuze and Guattari, the “weariest kind of thought” because it is essentially binary logic that makes it run, and “Nature doesn’t work that way; in nature, roots are tap-roots with a more multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one” (1987, 5). The binary logic of opposition, of which Hegel is the grand-master, generates a unity grounded in the “organic interiority” of the “classical” book. But “Nature” operates on a logic of multiplicity: a “lateral,” “circular” system coursed through by dynamic flows of energy. In other words, the organic model doesn’t adequately describe the workings of nature because it imposes an overly simplistic binary logic on nature, which doesn’t “work that way.” This is not the place to engage in an exposition of the intricate philosophy of nature that lies behind Deleuze and Guattari’s judgment about how nature “works”; suffice it to say that it’s a compelling, provocative assembly of Spinoza, Nietzsche, and contemporary evolutionary science. For my purposes here, it’s enough to establish that the logic of multiplicity that underwrites their philosophy of nature also underwrites their notion of a rhizomatic book.

The fascicular-root or modernist book also fails to correspond fully to the way nature works, because—despite its fragmentary, collaged, fractured structure—it still holds out hope for an absent point of unity. Although the “root” of the classical book “has aborted” in the modernist work, “the root’s unity subsists, as past or yet to come, as possible” (1987, 5). In this kind of book, “The world has lost its pivot; the subject can no longer even dichotomize, but accedes to a higher unity, of ambivalence or overdetermination” (1987, 6). The modernist book does break with the binary logic that enables the subject to “dichotomize” experience, but it offers no real alternative. And it can’t, since the modernist book still desires the kind of organic unity its own structure rules out. Pound’s admission at the end of *The Cantos* that “I am not a demigod, / I cannot make it cohere” is quickly followed up by his assertion that “it coheres all right / even if my notes do not cohere” (1970, 796-797). I take the “it” here to be the vision of *The Cantos* that stands opposed to its faulty realization on the page. If so, then “it” may be taken as an instance of the kind of ambivalent or

overdetermined “higher unity” that haunts many modernist books.

Deleuze and Guattari offer the rhizomatic book as an antidote to both the classical and modernist desire for an organic unity to assuage “The maker’s rage to order words of the sea,” to borrow from Wallace Stevens (130). The differences among these three types of books are subtle and need to be carefully approached, and it should be understood that Deleuze and Guattari are not suggesting that particular books are singularly or essentially one of the three types; they are, like everything else, mechanic assemblages. “There exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome” (1987, 15). Only the rhizomatic book, however, embraces this fact of assembly. A book, again like everything else, is a multiplicity of competing forces, some of which connect in a given book to make it predominantly one of the three types. Genres, then, are tendencies measured by quantities of force, not atemporal forms of expression. Again, a rhizomatic book embraces this situation. It is, as we have seen, “an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system”—and proud of it. For Deleuze and Guattari, “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be”; furthermore, “There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines” (1994, 7 and 8). These lines soon become the “lines of flight” along which the rhizomatic book disperses itself. Thus, in a rhizomatic book, “one will bolster oneself directly on a line of flight enabling one to blow apart strata, cut roots, and make new connections”; most important, the “coordinates” for these lines of flight “are determined not by theoretical analysis implying universals but by a pragmatics composing multiplicities or aggregates of intensities” (1987, 15). The rhizomatic book, then, is a quantitative concatenation of singular instances of multiple intensities, not a particularized incarnation of a universal form.

This type of book, this “assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously,” which means that linguistic, natural, and cultural machines connect up at the same time and flow into and through each other; consequently, “There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)” (1987, 23). The world, the book, and the author flow into and through each other, so “an assemblage of this kind” is ultimately “unattributable” (1987, 4). A rhizomatic book, like many modernist books, enacts an assault on subjectivity, but it increases the intensity of the assault on subjectivity as it is grounded in the notion of the author as the unique bearer of the fruits of genius. For Deleuze and Guattari, “Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted,” and you have a system that “could be called a rhizome” (1987, 6). The “unique” in a modernist text is often grounded in the author’s representation of his or her “genius.” As Bob Perelman demonstrates in the cases of Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and Louis Zukofsky, the authority of their texts is frequently derived from the quality of their individual, unique expression, for only a genius can uncover the principles of unity that elude ordinary people. Again, we shouldn’t look at any particular text as a completely pure instance of one of the three types of books Deleuze and Guattari describe, but we can

conclude that a book becomes more rhizomatic as it abandons the notion of the unique author. The goal of the rhizomatic book, then, is “To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I” (1987, 3). And it is at this point that a book becomes “unattributable” because it is an “assemblage with the outside” (1987, 23).

Thus, the “ideal for a book” of this type is “to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations” (1987, 9). The exterior of the I and the history of the multiple forces that form it, both natural and cultural, dominate the rhizomatic book. But this doesn’t mean history as usual. For Deleuze and Guattari, “History is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one” (1987, 23). I interpret “sedentary” here to mean historical writing that insists that what is being represented (content) as well as the way it is being represented (form) are not assemblies but organic unities that do not need an intervention from something exterior to it to maintain order. What we need is a way of writing that connects up historical, cultural, and personal documents in an “acentered, nonhierarchical” work, one not dominated by the “I” as the author-genius—a way of writing in which the author assembles “a plane of exteriority” in the practice of “Nomadology, the opposite of a history” (1987, 23). Nomadology maps out the rhizomatic distribution of the multiple forces that constitute events.

As Deleuze argues in *Difference and Repetition*, nomads are those “without property, enclosure or measure,” which means there “is no longer a division of that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute *themselves* in an open space” (1994, 36). So nomads are aggregates of force that actively distribute themselves. Nomadology, then, investigates “the unsettling difficulties that nomadic distributions introduce into the sedentary structures of representation. The same goes for hierarchy” (1994, 37). A nomadic practice of writing, which is the opposite of writing history, disrupts representation and hierarchy as organizing principles of composition. Whether this disruption constitutes a revolution or merely a guerrilla action determines the type of book produced. For Deleuze and Guattari, human selves are also nomads, loosely knit bands of roving habits, presided over by no organic unity. But few embrace this fact. Those that do and choose to write, however, participate in the “nomadism of those who only assemble” (1987, 24). Nomadic authors distribute themselves throughout the various machines that make up a rhizomatic book, not as a presiding consciousness that is always identical to itself, but as multiple forces made up of connections among natural, cultural, and linguistic machines.

In an interesting twist to their argument, and a very important one for mine, Deleuze and Guattari single out American culture and literature as exemplary rhizomes. “America is a special case,” they argue; “everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate contact with an outside. . . . The conception of the

book is different” in America (1987, 19). The American book differs from the European book because the former possesses a greater quantity of forces distributing themselves rhizomatically through the work. Deleuze and Guattari cite Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* as exemplary, but I believe we can extend that example to include the works of American modernists such as Stein, Pound, Williams, H.D., Olson, and, I contend, Paul Metcalf. As we have seen, Metcalf’s desire to increase the dynamic intensity of the collage form of the poem including history leads him to construct a “patchwork” in which “the narrative aspect gives it movement.” But, we also need to recall, he assembles these multiple narratives in ways that are not reducible to either linear or organic notions of narrative; thus, the rhizome is a much more evocative image for the kinds of books Metcalf writes. Yet the rhizome is also an evocative image for the kind of subjectivity Metcalf endows his narrator with in *Genoa*. Both the form and content of Metcalf’s second book, then, can be productively seen as instances of rhizomatic machines made of words.

### 3

In *Genoa*, the narrator, Michael Mills, serves not only as a character in the novel but as an agent of assembly within the novel—as, to put it in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, a nomadic subject that constructs. We step into the thought-life of Mills and immediately observe him assembling a hieroglyph or rhizome made of words over the course of one night. He draws on the narrative of his own life and that of his brother, Carl, on excerpts taken from most of Melville’s novels and many of his letters, on medical texts about physical and mental abnormalities, on historical accounts of Columbus’ voyages and excerpts from his journals, and on discussions of genetics and reproduction drawn from *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Sex*, to name the most prominent components of this assemblage. The result is a stunning collage dynamized by a “narrative aspect” that helps connect the nomadic journeys of the three central figures in Mills’ rhizomatic recollection: Carl, Melville, and Columbus. But the book is not just a collage of multiple journeys; *Genoa* is primarily a collage of the journeys of the multiple, and the journey that takes place as we read the book is Mills’. He may have stayed at home (he lives in the house he was raised in), but his subjectivity roves nomadically over all these journeys, and those roving are presented in an equally nomadic form of poetic history by Metcalf.

Like a rhizome, the singular word-machines—composed of writings by and about Carl, Melville, and Columbus—connect and begin flowing together, producing a large machine made of words. *Genoa* is anything but an organic, autotelic totality; what unity it has derives from the “external” act of assembly, not from its “internal” nature. Recall that for Williams, when a writer makes a poem-machine, he or she takes the words “interrelated about” in the world and “composes them.” *Genoa* is just such a composition; but it is also a work of multiple composers or assemblers: Metcalf assembles Mills’ assembly, and the reader assembles Metcalf’s. The idea that each reader-assembler will simply perceive the inherent, organic unity in the object rather than construct that unity is virtually impossible to maintain in the face of a book like *Genoa*. Not only is the book a construction, a machine,

but its effect provokes the reader to construct. A reading is an interpretation-machine, and the reader may or may not want to calibrate his or her machine to connect with the kind Metcalf constructs.

*Genoa* begins with a fairly standard first-person, present-tense narration. Michael Mills is walking home from his job at General Motors. We soon find out he has his medical degree but does not practice—a fact that is unexplained to the reader and seems to be unexplained to the narrator as well: “I am unshingled, I cannot, will not practice, and this is mysterious to me” (1996, 77). We find out he is a married man with three children, and that he lives in Indianapolis, in the house his great-grandfather built, his father lost, and his mother regained. But before we learn any of this, however, we learn that Mills has Melville on his mind. The novel’s third sentence is a fragment of Melville: “*When ocean clouds over inland hills / Sweep storming . . .*” (1996, 73). Is the reader to assume that these lines are rattling around in Mills’ head? It’s not likely, but certainly not impossible. The next time the first-person narrative point of view is disrupted, though, the illusion that all that occurs in *Genoa* takes place in the present-tense of the narrator’s consciousness is exposed. As Mills walks home on a cold spring day, he leans into the wind, “letting the rain and sleet beat against my face, so that forehead, cheeks, nose and chin, and the lines incised into my face, become a mask, at once me and not me, alive . . .” (1996, 74). Metcalf’s ellipses are followed by a four paragraph insert on the geological and anthropological histories of the region. I find it difficult to believe any reader would continue to assume that such inserts are part of the consciousness of the narrator as he lives the present of his life. Something exterior to Mills’ consciousness intrudes on what could have been, up to this point, another attempt to produce a seamless narrative with a consistent point of view. Like separate machines hooked up to one another by an assembler, a stream of consciousness machine connects up with a history machine. By highlighting the point of connection—in this case, by using ellipses—Metcalf draws attention to the parts assembled and to himself as assembler.

At this point, the reader-assembler is then brought into the process of labor: he or she has to explore the possible connections between these two word-machines. This first case is not too difficult; Metcalf connects a present-tense and a past-tense description of the landscape and culture of the region. By the time Mills gets to his house a page and a half later, however, Metcalf has connected two more parts up to his machine made of words—the medical discourse used to describe Mills’ clubfoot, and a lengthy excerpt from Melville’s *Mardi* discussing an island culture in which all those born with birth defects were banished to a separate island. The connection between those two machines also seems to be fairly straightforward: they both concern abnormality. As we soon discover, Mills is deeply concerned with abnormality, particularly with birth defects. While having dinner with his children (his wife works the night shift at General Motors), Mills gets caught in an internal reverie complete with a quotation from Pliny—“nature creates monsters for the purpose of astonishing us and amusing herself”—and an explanation that Pliny’s term *Teratology* refers to “the medical term for the Science of Malformations and Monstrosities” and that it

derives from the Greek word for “a telling of wonders,” which is also *Genoa’s* subtitle (1996, 80).

Mills’ interest in this topic is not too surprising, since he has a clubfoot. But his recollection of Pliny occurs while he is thinking about his brother’s huge head, “the monstrous, out-shapen head that heaved and rolled with his mood, upon his shoulders. . . . It is in the way his body and head shift, shake, and revolve, as he laughs, as though composed of epicenters, randomly contiguous, with no single center, the parts loose, accidentally associated” (1996, 80). Carl, in other words, is rhizomatic. The huge head—which, Mills tells us, doctors diagnosed as *Hydrocephalus Internus*—throws the naturally or organically intended proportions of his body off line, a body that functions, to recall Deleuze and Guattari’s phrase, like an “acentered, nonhierarchical” system, a body assembled of loose and accidental parts. Indeed, the terms “monster” and “monstrous” are frequently found in the proximity of Deleuze and Guattari’s descriptions of nomads and rhizomes. But those descriptions pertain mostly to those with monstrously creative wills, not monstrously deformed bodies. Much of what concerns Mills in these ruminations is whether there is a connection between Carl’s monstrous body and his monstrous will; in the same paragraph in which Mills describes his brother’s “monstrous” head, he reports that “Carl is dead, killed by gases released into a pan beneath his chair in the death chamber of Jefferson City, Missouri” (1996, 80-81). Carl and his girlfriend were found guilty of kidnapping and killing a six-year old boy, an act which proved to be merely the last in a sad and often horrifying history of excursions beyond the bounds of “normal” social behavior.

Yet Mills’ is not only trying to understand his brother’s affliction; he is trying to understand his own as well. And this affliction is more than a clubfoot, just as Carl’s was more than a large head, for Mills has a rhizomatic consciousness, a nomadic subjectivity that attempts to connect up with the more literal yet no less psychological nomadic journeys of Columbus, Melville, and Carl. Thinking about Carl, reflecting on the juxtaposed images of him as a boy and then as a man executed, Mills confronts his own experiences of abnormality. When those two images are “brought together,”

there is this experience, the fixing of my awareness at some time-space point that I am unable to identify, a seizure of elation

*“My memory is a life beyond birth . . .”*

Melville, in Mardi. And there is this: the time-space point is not limited to my own lifespan, nor to the surfaces of the earth that I have traveled—nor are these areas excluded. My body feels dull, the blood slows, sensation withdraws from the extremities and consciousness, toward the trunk, and the meatloaf sits in ale, undigested in my stomach.

There is, after this, an illumination, an area of local bodily sensation,

random and ephemeral, one following another, as a corollary, perhaps  
an inscrutable hint, to the time-space fix itself . . . (1996, 81)

Without its frame in the discourse of abnormality, this passage may read like a fairly traditional rendition of an experience of the sublime. A “seizure of elation” that serves as an “inscrutable hint” of a perspective that transcends an individual’s “lifespan” would not be out of place in a romantic work. By placing Mills’ experience in such close proximity to accounts of Pliny’s “Science of Malformations and Monstrosities” and of Carl’s execution, however, Metcalf deforms the sublime, making it a monstrosity that soon threatens to dissolve and dissipate Mills’ sense of identity. This experience of the abnormal sublime prefigures a much more extensive representation of the nomadic distribution of Mills’ subjectivity later in the book.

But between that later scene in the novel and the one cited above, Metcalf confronts the reader with a rhizomatic collage of three prototypical journeys of nomadic subjects—the journeys Melville takes on the sea and in his mind, the journeys Columbus takes to America, and the journey sperm takes on its way to an egg. Of these three subjects, Metcalf and Mills are most interested in Melville. As I mentioned earlier, Metcalf is Melville’s great-grandson, and his mother was Melville’s literary executrix. The manuscript for *Billy Budd* was discovered in the family’s attic when Metcalf was four years old, and he recalls a parade of boring academics filing through the house, all unwilling to discuss the Red Sox with him. According to Metcalf, he never read any of Melville’s work until after wrote *Will West*. His account of finally reading his great-grandfather’s work is significant for my argument, since *Genoa* is Metcalf’s first book after *Will West*, and it is very much the product of that encounter with Melville. “I suddenly thought one day: Well, if I haven’t read Melville, there must be a reason, I must be consciously, or subconsciously blocking him out. Then I sat down and engorged him”; reading Melville was “a true catharsis, in the psychological sense of that word” for Metcalf, and it was after his chronological reading of Melville’s works that Metcalf “began formulating the idea for *Genoa*” (1983, 43-44). I think too much can be made about the familial nature of this catharsis. The more significant catharsis is writerly: Metcalf discovers a progenitor in the novelistic representation of nomadic subjectivity. And *Genoa* is the result.

Many of the connections established with Melville in *Genoa* are surface effects that help the narrative maintain dynamic movement. Mills connects the architecture of his attic study with that of Melville’s ship in *Omoo* (1996, 86); he connects his clubfoot with Ahab’s peg-leg (1996, 98-99), and he connects his fascination with Carl’s head with Ishmael’s fascination with the skulls of sperm whales (1996, 103-104). The deeper connections with Melville, however, concern his “leviathanic unconscious” and his singular nomad, “Ishmael—wanderer in space” (1996, 104 and 113). “*I’ve chartless voyaged,*” Melville writes (and Metcalf cites); “*But this new world here sought, is stranger far than his, who stretched his vans from Palos. It is the world of the mind; wherein the wanderer may gaze round with more of wonder*” (1996, 113). Here, in the journeys of the rhizomatic mind, Melville, Metcalf,

and Mills wander in multiple directions at once, an “acentered, nonhierarchical” system of connections.

And like the first instance of the abnormal sublime, the bounds of the self and the body, of the past and the present, dissolve on this journey; the nomadic subject can say, as does Melville, “*I was at the subsiding of the Deluge, and helped swap the ground, and build the first house. With the Israelites, I fainted in the wilderness; was in court, when Solomon outdid the judges before him. I, it was, who . . . touched Isabella’s heart, that she hearkened to Columbus*” (1996, 113). Again, this could be an affirmation of a transcendental subject in a poem by Walt Whitman; but framed by the shipwrecked journeys that populate *Genoa*, Melville’s words are as foreboding as they are enticing. And those words do incite a second episode of abnormal consciousness in Mills: “I have fallen into a void, have journeyed to beginnings earlier than I have yet discovered. I sit still, clamoring for a sound; my head feels huge, my body and legs are one” (1996, 113). Soon, “all is become mutable. I am monstrous, my head merges into the attic, the attic into blackness” (1996, 117). So Mills and Melville share a mode of subjectivity that gets distributed across space and time during states of abnormal awareness.

The most extended instance of this state occurs midway in the novel. Still in his attic study, looking over books and letters, Mills fixates on a passage from *The Odyssey* in which a drowning Ulysses is saved by Leucothea. Soon, it’s Mills who is drowning. He feels an intense pressure from inside his body, followed by “an explosion, detonating somewhere in my head”:

It is like shipwreck in a storm, the ship broken and scattered, the timbers—timbers of my skull—crashing against one another in gigantic waves. The structure—the partition between left and right sides in my head—is shattered, so that there is no longer an origin of direction, of motion, and I drift randomly, without form or shape . . .

(Moby-Dick: “. . . *the breaking-stream of Time.*”

*up of the ice-bound*

*and Cosmology: “For then . . . we see that . . . all the nebulae were packed into a small region . . . years ago and moved away as though an explosion had taken place there, each with its own individual velocity . . .”*

*“. . . for an infinite period in the distant past there was a completely homogeneous distribution of matter in equilibrium . . . until some event started off the expansion, which has been going on at an increasing pace ever since.”*

At the zero point of creation, when all is infinite mass and zero size ...  
from this point—to one second—the distribution of elements occurs...  
(1996, 190-91)

The connection between Mills' psychological shipwreck and the Pequod's is made explicit by the quotation from *Moby-Dick*, which is then connected via ellipses with two passages from Herman Bondi's *Cosmology*. What all three texts suggest is that creation, whether individual or cosmic, entails an explosion of compacted forces, a "big bang" theory of the origin of artistic expression and of the universe in which those forces are dispersed out from the "center" of the self and the universe. At that "zero point" of creativity, Mills' body "is relinquished, abandoned" as his sense of identity becomes increasingly nomadic: "I am no longer Michael, but have become everyone . . . no longer compact with pain, fear, anger and contentment, I am only aware . . . / aware of explosion and outflow, of letting go and spreading apart, of vaporizing into widening space . . ." (1996, 191).

Again, it's difficult to mistake Mills' experience for a traditional romantic encounter with the sublime, such as Walt Whitman portrays in "Song of Myself," in which all becomes identical with the self. Whitman's persona in that poem knows, after all, that "I am solid and sound, / To me the converging objects of the universe perpetually flow" (48). For Mills, on the other hand, the self is neither solid nor a site of convergence and unity but a fluid and dispersed multiplicity. He observes himself leaving his body, his psyche rising above his house, above his city; he is "without borders" (1996, 192). While Whitman draws the cosmos into the self, Metcalf draws the self out into the cosmos. This narrative is interrupted by a warning drawn from Melville's *Pierre* about the great danger of being "afloat" in oneself and by a definition of "Kinematic Relativity" that asserts that space is not a physical property of the universe but a "mode of description" used by humans. So quotations that suggest the possibility of internal and external relativity connect up with a narrative line that suggests much the same: the Archimedean point is neither inside nor outside the self, which is to say there is no Archimedean point upon which to ground experience.

At this point in his experience of nomadic or rhizomatic subjectivity, Mills loses his depth perception and perceives nothing but "gray, a perfect gray"; soon, however, "the gray, peripheral images vanish, and are replaced by an unvarying white . . ." (1996, 193), an experience that is immediately connected by Metcalf with a string of quotations from the "Whiteness of the Whale" chapter of *Moby-Dick*, perhaps the ultimate exploration of the abnormal sublime in American literature. This confrontation with "whiteness" triggers recollections by Mills of all the time he spent studying and working in hospitals ("all white"), and then he is "drifting, without space and time," "disincarnate"; he is "a particle in an explosion—all time and space—and therefore nothing . . ." (1996, 194-95). Again, Metcalf's ellipses connect up with another machine made of words, a passage from Columbus' journals in which he likens navigating by the stars to "prophetic vision" (1996, 195). Immediately following this account of successful navigation, Mills feels drawn back down into his body, "compacted and chaotic, beyond control, I begin strangely to move . . . I seem drowning,

drawn to unknown bottoms . . . there is a monstrous, choking fear . . ." (1996, 195).

Mills' sensation of drowning connects back up with the beginning of this section of the novel in which Ulysses is saved from drowning by Leucothea, but it also prepares the way for two more connections. In the novel's next section, as Mills gradually begins to recover from his rhizomatic episode, he turns his attention back to Melville, but now his interest is primarily in *Pierre* rather than *Moby-Dick*: "it occurs to me that, whereas in *Moby-Dick* Melville fought his way upstream, like the Pacific salmon, to the original sources—in *Pierre*, there was no need to return, no stream to ascend . . . the fight had gone out of him, he remained still, and the past overwhelmed him . . . sinking, drowning, he pulled the world, his family, in over himself . . ." (1996, 196). Just as Melville moves from the nomadic journey of *Moby-Dick* to the family drama of *Pierre*, Mills begins to concentrate his attention on his own family drama: from this point on, *Genoa* unravels Carl's journey toward the gas chamber. First, we learn that not only was Carl a prisoner of war in Japan during World War II, but that he was tortured nearly to the point of death. Mills recalls meeting Carl in St. Louis after the war and trying to get him to see a psychiatrist, a suggestion that prompts Carl to reply, "I ain't drowning, Mike boy . . ." (1996, 197). Unfortunately, Carl is drowning; the rest of *Genoa* details a series of physical and mental breakdowns that leads up to the kidnapping incident and Carl's eventual execution.

As he begins to recall Carl's story, Mills once again has the sensation of drowning, but this time it is significantly different:

The interior of my head is an ocean, vast and unvarying, the watery horizon curving as with the curve of the globe. There is no island, no source of direction, or action. Floating, centerless, in this expanse, I am ready to drown . . .

But there is a sudden change: my left leg—or that which has been my left leg—comes back to me: I feel blood and warmth entering again, sweeping in waves from the hip, and with this, the rest of me, all of my body becomes charged with sensation . . .

There is also a difference: sinking in one ocean, I have risen to the surface of another in a different hemisphere, or at the other side of the equator. (1996, 200)

While we learn that Carl was diagnosed just before World War II as having a case of "acquired epilepsy" (1996, 202) and that a contemporary review of Melville's verse claimed that "*His poetry runs into the epileptic*" (1996, 204), Michael Mills is able to emerge from his rhizomatic episode in a "different hemisphere." He experiences "an abrupt relaxation, a lifting of tensions, and, with this, a restoration of vision, so marked, the dark corners and recesses of the attic stand out so sharply—that I seem to have gained new powers" (1996,

205). Why is Mills able to emerge from his rhizomatic journey not only fairly well intact but with “new powers” while his models—Carl, Melville, and Columbus—are not? Although Metcalf does not offer any easy or direct answers to that question, answers around which an organic or autotelic reading of the book could gather, there are a number of possible avenues to explore, one of which I would like to examine in winding up this account of *Genoa*.

As his rhizomatic episode comes to an end, Mills discovers “fresh sources of energy opening in me, opening barely in time to be poured into the increasing demands, both in action and duration that are to be made upon me . . .” Again, what follows those ellipses is highly significant: a quotation from Melville after he finished *Moby-Dick*—“As long as we have anything more to do, we have done nothing”—and a description by Las Casas of Columbus before he departed on his third voyage in which the former says of the latter, “it appeared to him that what he already had done was not sufficient but that he must renew his labors” (1996, 205). Mills then recounts the births of his three children, which suggests that his adventures, unlike Carl, Melville, or Columbus, have been domestic rather than global. The fact that Mills’ account of the birth of his first child is interrupted by three passages dealing with Columbus’ journeys and a passage from *The Odyssey*—all of which treat the “deliverance” of the hero as a metaphoric birth—suggests that Mills sees these as equivalent events. As this section of the book closes, Mills is smoking a cigar and recalling the cigars he smoked and gave away after the birth of Mike Jr.: “I taste again the pleasure, the pride that I enjoyed at that time—pride such as a man might feel at the mouth of the Mississippi or Amazon, sharing in those waters that push back the ocean, the waters they are in the act of joining . . .” (1996, 207). Unlike Carl, Melville, or Columbus, Mills appears not to be “overwhelmed” by the past to the point of drowning and pulling his family “in over himself.” Although this feeling of domestic pride may seem too simple an answer to the question about why Mills is able to endure his rhizomatic episode while Carl and Melville are not, much of the remainder of *Genoa* is filled with accounts of the domestic failures of Carl, Melville, and Columbus; accounts of Melville’s, Columbus’, and Mills’ failed fathers, and of mothers dismissed to the background. Nevertheless, Metcalf makes clear, through his method of assembling content in “narrative hieroglyphs,” that the domestic is an effect of social conditions, not a cause.

#### 4

By turning our attention from the domestic to the cultural conditions of unrest—whether that unrest is “social” or “personal”—Metcalf goes against the grain of psychoanalysis. In this respect, he treats the relation between the domestic and the social in a way that is quite similar to the way Deleuze and Guattari treat that relation in their assault on psychoanalysis in the aptly titled *Anti-Oedipus*. They argue that Freud does capitalism a favor by making the family the focus of attention. If the “lack” or “absence” that animates desire, and thus threatens society, can be attributed to a cause that exceeds and precedes the social conditions in which it appears—a role the Oedipal complex fills quite well—then

capitalism cannot be to blame. According to Deleuze and Guattari, however, the lack that animates desire does not transcend the social conditions of capitalism. On the contrary, that lack “is created, planned, and organized in and through social production . . . It is never primary”; in fact, “The deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy is the art of a dominant class” (1983a, 28). By locating the “lack” that generates unrest in the familial rather than social conditions of culture, “psychoanalysis is taking part in the work of bourgeois repression at its most far-reaching level, that is to say, keeping European humanity harnessed to the yoke of daddy-mommy and *making no effort to do away with the problem once and for all*” (1983a, 50).

Like Metcalf, Deleuze and Guattari want to turn our attention to the social rather than familial causes of unrest. For them, “desire does not threaten a society because it is a desire to sleep with the mother, but because it is revolutionary” (1983a, 116). Freud’s Oedipal complex generates a need for psychic repression, and “social repression needs psychic repression precisely in order to form docile subjects and to ensure the reproduction of the social formation, including its repressive structures” (1983a, 118). Psychoanalytic logic, in short, serves the interests of those with social and economic power by generating the ideology behind the repression of the revolutionary forces of desire. By convincing us that desire is fundamentally destructive—which seems to be a fair judgment about a theory that makes patricide and incest the primary expressions of desire—psychoanalysis convinces us that any active expression of desire must be repressed. But if Deleuze and Guattari are right, and desire is revolutionary, which is both destructive and creative, then the forces that benefit from the repressive social conditions of capitalism must find a way to neutralize that revolutionary desire. As a result, “powerful forces are required to defeat the forces of desire, lead them to resignation, and substitute everywhere reactions of the daddy-mommy type for what is essentially active, aggressive, artistic, productive, and triumphant in the unconscious itself” (1983a, 122). Desire, for Deleuze and Guattari, wants not an object but an activity: it wants to produce new forms. Unfortunately, “when we relate desire to Oedipus, we are condemned to ignore the productive nature of desire” (1983a, 107), which is precisely what capitalism wants, and which results in the repression of the production of new forms.

Perhaps Michael Mills can survive his rhizomatic journeys because he looks for the causes of domestic failure in the genetic, economic, and historic particulars that are the conditions for the possibility of families, and because he produces a new form, a new assembly, of expression—call it a narrative hieroglyph of the imagination—that does not repress but expose the social conditions of domestic unrest. All those books he pours over during *Genoa’s* night give Mills a multiplicity of “lines of flight,” to use Deleuze and Guattari’s phrase—paths across which he can trace the many natural and cultural causes of domestic unrest. Those books help Mills see that Columbus’ and Melville’s fathers failed in the face of economic forces, and that his own father failed for much the same reason. Mills’ father came to grips with his loss of the family farm when he became “interested in Socialism, talked about the life and work of Eugene Debs” (1996, 256). It’s also significant that

Mills' father died in a coal mining accident (killed by gas, just like his son, Carl, will be) caused not by Oedipal anxiety or a son's wrath but by unsafe, exploitative working conditions. "Greatest Disaster in History of Indiana Coal Fields," reads the press clipping saved by Mills (1996, 259).

Most of the families in *Genoa* resemble Mills' assessment of Melville's family, "hovering at the edge of the storm, the vortex" (1996, 154). I take this "storm" to be that which causes the "shipwreck" of consciousness that occurs in the experiences of the abnormal sublime that populate *Genoa*. But Metcalf takes care to present these experiences arranged with their biological and cultural conditions—which helps his characters, whether historical or fictional, resist the tendency to treat those conditions as symbols for determinants that transcend the particular natural and cultural conditions in which those characters exist. In *Genoa*, a father fails; in fact, many fathers fail; but *the* father doesn't fail because *the* father doesn't exist. *The* father is an abstraction, a reduction of multiplicity to unity, of difference to identity. *The* father can only exist in *the* plot; the condition for the possibility of his existence is the reduction of all narratives to one: Oedipus. The same story gets repeated endlessly, from the primal horde, the Greek polis, the Feudal peasantry, to the capitalist marketplace: kill one parent, commit incest with the other. The Oedipal plot is not only monologic and ahistorical—it's boring; and Metcalf and Deleuze and Guattari reject it for all those reasons. All three writers envision multiple plots that originate in transient social conditions rather than in transcendent domestic conditions, and they envision new plots to replace those whose conditions no longer exist.

This is not to say that Metcalf is unconcerned with the domestic; after all, my claim is that Mills survives his rhizomatic journeys because he has—when compared to Carl, Columbus, and Melville—negotiated his domestic life more successfully. But it is to say that much of his success is due to the fact that he does not limit his inquiry into his domestic life to his own family drama or to a monologic theory of family drama such as psychoanalysis constructs. He also has, in his nomadic imaginings, a way of affirming rather than repressing what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the "active, aggressive, artistic, productive, and triumphant in the unconscious itself" (1983a, 122). In one of his many letters to Clare Spark, Metcalf mentions with pleasure that a critic wrote an essay on his work titled "The Healing Art of Paul Metcalf." Clearly, Metcalf likes that role, and he supports it by pointing out that in *Genoa* Michael Mills "ascends to hell—his attic. And you remember, the book ends, at dawn, where he has descended to the kitchen, the family place" (1991, 56). By reversing the usual archetypal formula—a descent to hell followed by an ascent to heaven—Metcalf resists conforming to the standard plot expectations; more important, he locates the place of healing in "the family place." When Mills completes his descent to the domestic, he stands in the kitchen, "trying to listen to the silence. The refrigerator motor turns on, becomes a steady hum. I hear one of the children, Jenifer, stirring..." (1996, 285).

By ending *Genoa* with ellipses, Metcalf clearly highlights the open-ended, ongo-

ing nature of the rhizomatic journey he presents; they signal that his book does not emulate the drive to closure that is a characteristic of so many organic or autotelic works of art. But those ellipses serve another function as well, for they connect up with another kind of machine made of words: a bibliography of the disparate works Metcalf used in assembling *Genoa*. On one level, this is simply a matter of acknowledging sources, a matter of propriety. On another level, the bibliography disrupts any easy generic categorization of the book; how many novels, after all, have bibliographies? At the beginning of this essay, I argued that Metcalf's books in general and *Genoa* in particular can be considered machines in the sense that they are not unified internally by the proscriptions of a stable genre: they are assemblies of external material by an external agent. I would argue that this is true of all works of literature, but only a rhizomatic book such as *Genoa* embraces that fact. Metcalf's bibliography makes those external sources visible in a way that defies the conventions of the novel. Furthermore, the bibliography draws attention to the kind of authorship involved in such a book. In this respect, *Genoa's* bibliography is a list of co-authors. If we recall that Deleuze and Guattari argue that a rhizomatic book "is an assemblage . . . and as such is unattributable" (1987, 4), we can see the bibliography as a means of drawing attention to the multiple attributions that need to be made in the case of a book like *Genoa*.

Does this mean that Metcalf is less of a writer for not creating his books solely out of the "interior" workings of his imagination? Not at all. For Metcalf, "creative intelligence" in the kind of writing he pursues "is evident in the selection of the material, the arrangement—what I choose and how I choose to put it together—and what you might call the tone of my mind in making those selections and making those juxtapositions. And that's just as much a creative act as the guy who writes a novel or writes a poem" (1986, 34). But by minimizing the presence of an authorial "genius" presiding over, in, and around the work, Metcalf moves a step closer to producing what Deleuze and Guattari call a rhizomatic book. In *Genoa*, Metcalf distributes his own authorial subjectivity nomadically in much the same way that his narrator, Michael Mills, distributes his subjectivity in his experiences of what I have called the abnormal sublime.

The author-ity presiding over *Genoa*, then, is acentered and nonhierarchical, and it is in this sense that Metcalf participates in what Deleuze and Guattari call the "nomadism of those who assemble" (1987, 24). For nomadic writers, this method is not merely a novel way of writing; it is a more "truthful" or realistic way of writing because it acknowledges the assembled nature of the reality humans experience. And the rhizomatic machines made of words assembled in *Genoa* are built to provoke Metcalf's readers to make a similar acknowledgment. Mills discovers "that flesh and muscle, perhaps even bone, and certainly cartilage, are potentially alterable, according as the plan is laid down. And the plan itself may shift and change: I may be this Michael or that, Stonecipher or Mills—Western Man or Indian, sea-dog or lubber, large-headed or small" (1996, 95). And Metcalf discovers the form of Mills' discovery in the assembly of *Genoa*. What the reader discovers . . .

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### Advertisement

Slogans as parables products of time. His "heritage," as it were, in passing. And passing, sold. The auctioneer's voice proved multiple. His skin exposed. The next wave caught him. He was high on the wave the wave was riding. He was channeled while surfing. He was surfing net waves the web was searching. He was trapped in the web that was his tube. His satellite system came unglued.

### Matrix

Model of families once survived. "Offbeat in color prints inaction." Each heading held its variation, illegible to naked eyes. Traction, retraction, the editors kept pace with the "will to live." Abandoned circuits, new modes of production, outdated soon. The "womb of life" reported, raved. Mass circulation suffered feeling. Whatever the senses craved, he tried.

## Kinesthesia

Nobody's narrative, no one's dream. Irregular hopes revised in passing, caught inside each other's frame. Which waves released him, fists of coins flew, thumbs proportioned to the sun. And now and then a different register. Palms among them surfside, leaning, index sums align the new. One hand's inflected, one's inflamed.

## Labyrinth

And so by indirection. Actually covered it. Final in its way a rhythm snared. But not without listening. Not without a change of lair. Some measure of warning among the trees. The landscape rolled up in a credible coil: "This could be the critical mass retold." A digital pluriverse. Phrases rehearsed inside each phrase. One roiled inheritance, scripted, whole.

turned on  
line the poet thought about  
spell check on  
the computer its lit up guard against ungainly syntax  
lapses in sentence sense he remembered  
the fabled chimp put in an imaginary room  
with a word processor allowed sandmade blakean hour glass  
shaped eternity to randomly type on it at will would  
reprint letter perfect at some point all of everything  
previously written all that would be written  
but the book of the dead everything under  
our alphabet all our tran  
scribed oral literatures translated holy writ rumi basho  
pessoa lorca blood inked prose invisible man  
child in the promised land my bondage and my freedom he imagined  
things more timely than eternity in a quantum leap  
of faith into the tempting garden in his own old apple two  
what a piece of work  
*damn*  
inspired by the archetypal dollar green dull  
lit screen he hunched he saw how some  
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if perfectly programmed for  
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like humanist nationalist absurdist  
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beat out feet mete  
out verse more astutely than in  
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distance them by many meters by remote  
amplification out perform overwrought loud and wrong  
performance poets volume  
wise outtalk west winded erudite medieval guild gowned

poetasters poeticisms on poesy and the study  
of study dons donned in classic  
ally exclusive eurocentrism their doctoral bonnets adorned  
with crowns of abbey stone sonnets ahead  
of the packs and pods of the world's  
moon baying deep blues sounding primal poets by degrees  
these would be bedeviled how  
like an angel by programming  
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personae synthetic synesthesia such as the sulfurous yolk  
yellow light oozing through our cracked rotten robin's egg white  
sky he could see limitlessly  
how it could be how  
the computer printout could  
would be original machine made universal poetry  
a catchy trope trip on  
an ananse the spider web  
site the most innovative turn  
off of  
all time

# ***Ricochets, or How the Bullet Skips to the Tune of the Phonograph***

Christof Migone

## **AIM FOR THE HEAD**

What follows a gunshot, however momentary, is a silence. The gunshot traverses the real, it pierces through time. The silence, which follows the amplitude peak of the shot, is the trough where life reacquaints itself with death. It is the moment, however fleeting, between the gun and the gunned. It is that travel time which is unerasable. You may put the needle on the gunshot and play the record backwards, scratch the surface of the shot back and forth, but you can never undo the hole. The bullet propels itself out the barrel, finds its target and holes it. "It's Not the Bullet that Kills You (It's the Hole)."<sup>1</sup> A bullet always holes more than a wound, it holes a sound, a psyche, a time. You cannot reverse its through *thruness*.

The gunshot and the silence in the colonial encounter. What ensues from this shock? How does it affect the epistemology of the self, and of the real? Savage and savagery. The raw and the rare. "There is nothing so strange, in a strange land, as the stranger who comes to visit it."<sup>2</sup> Instances of the impact of the encounter abound, this text will abound in impacts generating ricochets. The ricochets which I will track are not always off the same shot, not always 'heard,' often splintered. Traceable only in truncated trajectories. Some single shots resulting in multiple perforations, others missing the target altogether. A few blanks.

## **SHOOT THE PIG**

Put the needle on the record. *First Contact*. Load it up. Crank the phonograph. Cock the gun. Aim the Horn. Turn up the volume. Hear the pig squeal. An easy shot. Pointblank. The pig is sacrificed as show of force. In the film *First Contact* the drama is doubly staged, in 1930 to enforce, in 1982 to illustrate, reflect, criticize, to distance 'us' from 'them.' Michel Leiris addresses this distance in his essay "Civilization" for *Documents*: "This is perhaps the only difference between our times and those of the cavemen: today we hire dozens of scapegoats whose task is to perform for us everything we are too cowardly to perform for ourselves. This, I suppose, is the precise reason that murderers are so popular: a beautiful crime is no doubt terrible, but at the same time it is unconsciously satisfying to everyone, and the murderer becomes a kind of sorcerer who has ritually performed the most horrific of sacrifices."<sup>3</sup> Was colonialism rooted in a similar desire? Was the colonizer the murderous sorcerer?

The lesson in *First Contact* was to affirm who's the Master, "only the masters can speak,"<sup>4</sup> Masta Mick (Michael Leahy). His brother, Dan, testifies that the message was: "You leave

our stuff alone, and we'll leave your stuff alone. We're just looking for these stones in the creek beds as we go along, that's all we came to look *for*."<sup>5</sup> But evidently not all they came to look *at*. What of the look of the camera? Is it just a memento, or does it just play a mimetic role? It shoots 24 frames a second; at that rate it's hard to keep up with the ricochets. Is truth here occurring at 24 frames a second, as Godard said? Whether it be frames or revolutions, 78 revolutions per minute, or 45 revolutions, or 33, if you're the target it becomes an impossible game of duckandcoverandhideandseek. The shot, from the gun, from the camera, penetrates, then exits, or splinters and you become a body-sieve (Deleuze's *corps-passoire*). It is no longer a question of orifices, it's a question of drainage. Proust's saturated pores.<sup>6</sup> You are made of leaks.

The sound of the phonograph seems to function differently, as a palliative, a gift. Yet it disrupts the soundscape with the same force as the shot, it is a weapon, it's a sound effect, it cans life into a mimetic cycle, an effect with the power to become an affect. Fitzcarraldo winds up Caruso to quiet the incessant drum sounds from the "invisibles." Here we can't help but remember the US Army versus Noriega in 1989, the Canadian Army versus the Mohawks at the Kanasetake blockade in 1990, or the ongoing audio terrorism in the low level flights by NATO planes over Nitassinan (in Labrador).<sup>7</sup> Yet, as opposed to those armies, Fitzcarraldo had a higher purpose, he fervently believed that the beauty of the voice would be transcendent. Caruso on the front lines, a blitzkrieg of Gesamtkunstwerk, opera as universal language. "Please Pardon Our Noise. It is the Sound of Freedom."<sup>8</sup> Aesthetics here are proselytized. Caruso subsides the insistence of the drums. Are they swayed by Caruso's glottis? The disembodied voice of the phonograph is causing a spinning circularity of fascination. Principally, as we shall see via Michael Taussig later on, it is the circularity of white man's fascination with Other's fascination with white man's magic. Fitzcarraldo is the invasion's cultural attaché and Caruso his weapon, the soundtrack of the conqueror. "The settler pits brute force against the weight of numbers. He is an exhibitionist. His preoccupation with security makes him remind the native *out loud* that there he alone is the master."<sup>9</sup> The soundtrack of the conqueror out to conquer the soundscape of the other.

### USE THE SILENCER

We are entering Paul Virilio's "Museum of Accidents"<sup>10</sup> in which cute couplings vie for the best exhibition prize. Past the vessel/shipwrecks, train/derailments, automobile/car crashes, electricity/electrocutions at the end of the corridor we find ethnography/... . Perhaps an elliptical silence is the only possible response on the other side of that slash. Perhaps silence is the ultimate catastrophe.

We can't be silent anymore. "Silence is complicity."<sup>11</sup> As a counter, Kim Sawchuk advocates noise in response to another noise: the NATO low level flights. Silence is political. Expression is defined in terms of volume. We have to be heard at full throttle, we cannot whisper, there are no secrets. "There are silences and silences. This is the kind I don't like." Here Fitzcarraldo's trusted captain expresses his preference for a threat he knows (the

drums) rather than one he doesn't (silence). He also distinguishes between kinds of silences, one is an ominous threat, the other is merely quiet. I would posit that the call to answer noise with noise, the call to be louder is not the only response that can have political efficacy. But the empowering possibilities of silence are difficult to reconcile in the context of the encounter, where it slips all too easily into a silencing. A silence without agency. Silence as the sound fear makes when at the end of the barrel, the suspension of time after the shot, "the monstrous atrophy of the voice, the incredible mutism."<sup>12</sup>

First contact, first gunshots: the soundscape of the collective body at first falls silent, then it is no longer in sync, it stutters. The shot has perforated the soundtrack, scribbled it full of holes. "SILENCES are holes in the sound wall/SOUNDS are bubbles on the surface of silence. Sound like silence is both opening and filling/concave and convex/life and death. Sound like silence may freeze or free the image."<sup>13</sup> In *First Contact*, the sound of the shot is not real, it has been added, yet it is in sync. Up to that point the early footage was silenced, distanced —by the narration, by the documentary form. Is the shot real nonetheless? It was staged in 1930, and restaged, montaged in 1982. The effect is real, it was a precursor of the curse that had befallen them. In other words, it was but another confirmation that these 'returning ancestors' smelled like shit.

### CONTAMINATE THE CONTAMINANT

In cases where heat is the temperature of the encounter, the Westerner from temperate climes can be heat stricken. Werner Herzog's delirium is exemplary: "I don't see [the jungle] so much as erotic, but just as full of obscenity. Nature here is vile and base, there's nothing erotic here, just fornication and asphyxiation, choking, fighting for survival, growing, and just rotting away."<sup>14</sup> Herzog, in his best Bataille persona, is the contaminator contaminated. He's suffering from the "heat of the senses" Micheal Taussig speaks of, in "those torrid zones where the mimetic flourishes."<sup>15</sup> Under the hot lights of the tropics one's pores widen, they ooze and sweat. "The body as a system of little holes in perpetual danger of becoming enlarged."<sup>16</sup> The heat renders the body open, open to the contagion of the mimetic. Gilles Deleuze's body-sieve is fully contagious: "Freud had remarked that the schizophrenic was prone to view the skin as one pierced by an infinity of little holes. Therefore, there's no surface, the interior and exterior, the container and the contained cannot be delineated and sink themselves into a universal depth or revolve in the circle of a present that's ever-shrinking as it fills up. In this fracture, the word's wholeness loses its meaning. All events occur as hallucinations."<sup>17</sup> The meaninglessness of the real is on a collision course with the realness of the shot and of the encounter. But it is not a contradictory collision, for it is an event that is rendered ever more real by its power to be ever more lacking in meaning.

### THE EDITABLE EDIBLE RECORD

Robert Flaherty's 1922 documentary *Nanook of the North* opens with this caption: "It is generally regarded as the work from which all subsequent forms to bring real life to the

screen have stemmed.” The staging of the real, the “mimesis of mimesis” in this film is exposed by Taussig, but there’s a singular moment in the film which he fails to point out. Taussig discusses the scene where Nanook is befuddled by the mimetic powers of the phonograph, where Nanook believes the record to be edible and tries to take a bite of it. In the first half of the scene an ‘Eskimo’ woman is sitting behind Nanook, the record is playing but she seems to be unfazed by this and is content just sitting there with her child in her back pouch. In *First Contact* a similar incongruity occurs at the moment of the shot, for some panic and run away, others stay put and seem as puzzled by those running away as the shot itself. The ‘Eskimo’ woman’s laissez faire attitude diverges from the script of the real life to be brought to screen. As the scene continues she is edited out, she disappears. The hallucinatory in this context is manifold, it is all which falls in excess from that edit. The cutting room floor is where the real is located, *it* is the location of the film. It’s about the *Idea of the North*, and not *the north*.<sup>18</sup>

### CANNIBALS OF PICTURES

In *Cannibal Tours*, the Sepik River is featured as a movie set, a facade. It exists only for the picture of the smile. Clearly an instance where “modernity stimulated primitivism with wiping out the primitive.”<sup>19</sup> The *ism* is an encapsulation, it is a precipitate, it is all that’s left. They sometimes smile, but they’d rather kill you. “One of them is looking at you now,” the man sees the tourist by looking peripherally to his left, he can barely contain his disdain. Yet, is his anger solely directed at the tourist? Or is it that he feel surrounded? The documentary camera in front of him and the tourist behind him. He restrains himself, but he’d rather kill. It is what I hope he’s thinking, but is that the myth? My fetishization of the savage as savage? Cannibals of pictures, pictures of cannibals. The carnivalesque display where one’s desire merges with one’s fears, where the other is *freaked*:

[I]f the spell works, if we are lucky or stoned or drunk or blessedly simple, we see what we are supposed to see: not some poor unfortunate approximately embodying the myth after which his affliction is named, but the myth itself—the animal hybrid skulking at the edge of the jungle, the Giant taller than the Ogre whom Jack cheated of his harp and hen, the Midget smaller than a mustard seed. If, however, the spell does not work or is broken, we awake to the stench of old canvas and the squish of filthy sawdust under our feet. And looking up, we see the hostility and boredom in the eyes of those we thought were there to be looked at, not to look back. It is at this point that we hear behind the camouflage of words and music the silence of the Freaks.<sup>20</sup>

Once we hear this silence it’s deafening.

## MIMETIC EXCESSES

The hope is not for a retreat or reversal, an impossible proposition. It's the hope which echoed with Taussig's last section in his *Particular History of the Senses* where he calls for a break in the closed circle of mimesis and alterity. First of all, he spends the better part of the book driving home this doubling:<sup>21</sup> "who is telling us the story of the story"(14), "mimicry of mimicry"(77), "white man's fascination with their fascination"(198), "mimesis of mimesis"(200), "the elusive enemy of his enemies"(204), "a display of the display"(206), "this obsession demands, showing showing"(207), "display the display"(207), "white man's fascination with Other's fascination with white man's magic"(207), "miming of miming"(213), "an after-image of an after-image"(238), "What's being mimicked is mimickry itself"(241), "the very same moment of filmic magic mimicking mimicking"(243), "to wonder at the fascination with their fascination"(246), "Frazer's charming charms seduced me too"(251). My head is spinning, but the idea of mimetic excess is attractive. Particularized by Taussig, mimetic excess is the endless doubling, the self as subjunctive rather than object or subject, the freedom to live reality as really made-up.<sup>22</sup>

The effectiveness of this call, however, is severely hampered by the fact that when mimesis is represented as a discourse of power performed with a gun at the ready, no amount of aura is going to protect your ass.

## THE CANNED LAUGHTER OF GODS

The shot has been heard, the silence which follows it as well. How does one react after the initial shock? What is the range of possible reactions? The shot, as we have seen, has the singular property of being simultaneously simulative (counterfeit) and deadly (somatic). The corresponding aftershocks are similarly palindromic, where forwards is the real and backwards is its counterfeit. Or vice versa, linearity being endlessly reversible once inscribed. Is this inscription an original moment? A reference point? The sui generis of the rupture? The rupture, however, is not a nonsequitur, it is but the erupture of an existing fault. The mimetic, of course, precedes mechanical reproduction, it is synonymous with representation.

Near the conclusion of *First Contact*, a screening is arranged for the Papua New Guineans of 1982 to view the Papua New Guineans of 1930. Laughter fills the screening hall. Why this laugh? There's something comforting about laughter, but it can also be the manifest of a great trauma. Does this laugh come from a sense of otherness upon seeing a representation of their sameness? In other words, by the time they saw themselves on film, they were no longer themselves. "So we can say to each other: that's how we used to be." They have been unrealized. Taussig also hears a laugh, is it the same one?

This Sudden Laugh From Nowhere

Why this laugh? Surely this is what I call Aristotle's pleasure, the (not so) simple fact that observing mimesis is pleasurable. And just as surely

there is an element of colonialist mastery in this laughter; the very word 'cute' is as suggestive as my having belabored to show throughout this book how difficult it is to pry mimesis loose from pervasive intimations of primitiveness. But there is also the possibility that this sudden laugh from nowhere registers a tremor in cultural identity, and not only in identity but in the security of Being itself. This is like Bataille's laugh; a sensuous explosion of smooth muscle composing Being in the same instant as it extinguishes it. This is Benjamin's flash, as when he writes that there is something peculiar about similarity: "Its perception is in every case bound to an instantaneous flash. It slips past, can possibly be regained, but really cannot be held fast, unlike other perceptions. It offers itself to the eye as fleetingly and as transitorily as a constellation of stars."<sup>23</sup>

This laughter from nowhere is introduced by Taussig in attempt to understand the delight Western viewers (including the author) have upon seeing the Cuna mola which incorporates RCA Victor's "Talking Dog" in its design. Is this laughter from the same nowhere as that of the Papua New Guineans? There seems to be a gulf separating the two. The stars in Papua New Guinea are not arranged to be read as constellations, they are deranged, out of sync. "Overwhelming misery, fornication, growth, lack of order, even the stars here look like a mess."<sup>24</sup> Herzog's despairing depiction of the jungle is the delirium of the self facing the world—Deleuze's *on délire le monde* (the world is our delirium).<sup>25</sup> Deleuze stated this in opposition to the notion that the Oedipal drama/delirium is the primary theme which drives our actions. I would posit his formulation as one that can have valence *in addition to* the psychoanalytical model (with neither as being primary). This is contentious territory and merits to be further developed in another context, suffice it to say that for the purpose of this exposition *on délire le monde* enables us to read the shot as shock. Furthermore, as a shock that is protracted, extended, stretched infinite.

### SUICIDE PACTS PART 1

The longevity of the shot, its incessant ringing, is traceable through various faults running close to the surface. Walter Benjamin —modernity, shock, suicide; Michel Leiris —civilization, ethnography, suicide; and Marcel Griaule —ethnography, gunshot. These three authors have traced and sometimes fallen into this fault. They have integrated the disintegration of the protracted shock. How else is one to read Marcel Griaule conducting his classes at the Sorbonne in 1946 in his air force officer's uniform?<sup>26</sup> World War II stretched infinite. Griaule's entry in the *Documents'* critical dictionary under 'Gunshot' stages the shot as peripheral to a seething critique of ethnography. The entry merits to be quoted extensively for it epitomizes the literary ricochet:

[T]he height of absurdity is reached when the other party refuses the African the right to "make art" with a European motif, claiming first that

is European —a somewhat amusingly self-castrating remark— and, secondly, that it looks “modern.” One could say that a gun is not a decorative motif. Fine, but such is not the view of the servicemen who outfit trophy rooms [...] And if it took a mere rifle to spoil a work of art, how many paintings and sculptures would one have to destroy? This would not, of course, be tragic, but what an effort!

Furthermore, if a black cannot without debasing himself use an exotic element, namely a European one familiar to him, what is one to make of our blind borrowings, from an exotic world one of colour about which we must in self-defense declare we know nothing. [...] Boring though it be to repeat it, *ethnography* is interested in both *beauty* and *ugliness*, in the European sense of these absurd words. It is, however, inclined to be suspicious of the beautiful —a rare, and, consequently, a freakish event within a civilization. It is also self-doubting (because it is a white science, and therefore tainted with prejudice) and will not deny an object aesthetic value because it is either ordinary or mass-produced. [...] An informed contradictor might say that I am confusing ethnography with folklore. What of it! I call folklore the ethnography of pretentious peoples, of those colourless peoples whose habitat lies north of a sea of low tides and weak storms, the Mediterranean, the ethnography of those who fear both words and things, and who refuse to be called natives.<sup>27</sup>

Griaule confirms the suspicion that ethnography is not only a site to effectuate a thorough self-critique of its method but also of its purpose. Leiris in *L'ethnologue devant le colonialisme* reminds himself and his colleagues that they are not only from the Métropole, but also *mandated* by the Métropole. He also does well to remind us of the obvious, that the ethnographer cannot cloak himself in scientificity (echoing Bataille's disdain in *Informe* for the ‘mathematical frock coat’) and dissociate himself from the political, from colonialism. In the concluding pages of this essay, Leiris offers two interesting scenarios aimed at counteracting the power relations inherent in the study of the other. He is aware that these proposals do not erase contradictions and therefore are by no means unproblematic. But perhaps they will better the odds. Number one, train the colonized in ethnography. The idea of ‘training’ here is of course unacceptable, yet the intent in seeing the other study not only herself but also the Métropole is not without some progressive power. Number two, he states that the ethnographer which has liberatory aspirations for an other, shall wallow in contradictions as long as he doesn't have the same desire for himself and his people. In other words, as is the general thrust of the essay, an ethnography which focuses closer to home or even one that is self-reflexive has a greater chance of relevance. Leiris concludes by factoring in the evident issue of class as the primary concern for any self-reflexive ethnography.<sup>28</sup> Thus, ethnography is conceptualized as an exteriorized interior which remains unsevered, like a phantom limb, a constant reminder, remainder. Ethnography as a science to be read against the grain, and simultaneously a method to read against the grain. Eth-

nography as the folklore of pretentious peoples, as the mirror of modernity.

## SUICIDE PACTS PART 2

In presenting the shot as one engendering a series of ricochets, one must be prepared for the ricochet that returns, the boomerang ricochet. Benjamin's exegesis of Baudelaire turns the gun to face its owner, it mirrors the shot: "The resistance which modernism offers to the natural productive élan of a person is out proportion to his strength. It is understandable if a person grows tired and takes refuge in death. Modernism must be under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no concessions to a mentality inimical towards this will. This suicide is not a resignation but a heroic passion. It is *the* achievement of modernism in the realm of passions."<sup>29</sup> His extollment of suicide can be read as profound pessimism in the face of modernity: "the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of the aura in the experience of shock."<sup>30</sup>

Michel Leiris' "poetics of lack"<sup>31</sup> are a veritable anamnesis of the author. Leiris is the target of the shot, and the shooter all in one. The writer as the ambulating, convalescent, shell shocked, traumatized body. He wears the remainder of his suicide attempt, a scar from a tracheotomy, as a mnemonic agent: "The suture resumes all that is dear in my heart. This scar has remained for me the object, not of a retrospective horror, but of a disproportionate pride in a failed act. It also seems to me that it was at this precise moment [the suicide attempt] in which I embraced most ardently this fascinating thing, which one must continue to pursue for it is never fully grasped: poetry."<sup>32</sup> Passion, poetry, aura navigate in this fault which, in Leiris' case, is localized in this intervention on the breathing tract, in close vicinity to his voice box. From a muted voice, to a whisper, to a gunshot. This anatomical fault is a transplant of a geographical lack and a transposition of a social failure. These metonymies are inscribed as patterns on a record, they can be played back and forth, the needle picking up the scratches and scars, amplifying the shot until it can be heard as the echo of every word.

## REAL ARROWS IN THE BACK SHED

With echoes ricocheting, functioning as truncated copies upon copies of an original, let us return to the real as really made-up. Taussig's 'made-up' refers to a notion of magic and the sacred, Benjamin's aura, but it can also be its evacuation. It can be that hallucinatory state of the body-sieve, the body as a strainer so perforated it cannot fulfill its function. It performs its task both too well *and* not at all. A hallucination of itself. Herzog's 1972 film *Aguirre: The Wrath Of God* has a similar theme as *Fitzcarraldo* which follows a decade later. The main character, Aguirre, here also travels upstream on a river in uncharted territory in search of fortune (in this case the gold of *El Dorado*). By the film's end Aguirre and his crew are reduced to awaiting death on a sinking raft with no provisions. The Indians who have tracked them throughout their voyage and decimated the contingent deliver a final deathblow: a salvo of arrows rain upon the few that remain. The crew is in such a state of deprivation that

they hallucinate real arrows, “this arrow cannot be real” says the man as the arrow sits deeply imbedded in his thigh.

This hallucinated real is the elusive signifier I have been tracking. It is a deconstructive reconstruction of ricochets which have the particular property of being self-propelled, they accelerate and chart their own course. British installation artist Cornelia Parker proposes a similar study in her 1991 work *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*.<sup>33</sup> In this work which she describes as “the quiet contemplation of a destructive act,” she first arranged for the British Army to blow up an ordinary backyard shed. It contained garden tools, a baby carriage, a bicycle, and suitcases filled with odds and ends. She subsequently used the debris to reconstitute the shed, in the same proportion as the pre-destruction shed but this time in its full violence. The shards and fragments hung fully contained by their arrangement but permanently exploded and exploding. The thorough *thruness* of the shot arrests time at the same time that it irreversibly fast forwards it.

### THE ANNOUNCEMENT WHICH STOPS THE SHOT

The shot is not a misfire, nor backfire, nor a blank. Chris Burden was shot. But Chris Burden’s “Shoot” was also shot —snapshot. Therein lie the ricochets that traverse this polemical exposition. Even fraught with mirrored hallucinations, phantasmical jolts, the shock gets you everytime. The repetitive startling effects occur because the shot remains unannounced, even though all fingers point to it. As in *First Contact*, it can be elaborately staged but the shot itself unravels this elaboration. In “Notes on the Theater Set” Marguerite Duras writes of “The setting should be both that of loss of memory and that of vacillating memory, that is to say, a place with incidents of light, points of intense luminosity, holes of darkness, breaks. A place where things might happen that would not be announced.”<sup>34</sup> These guidelines for her piece *India Song* offer an aesthetic model. The gunshot is hardly an aesthetic proposition, but it causes shock, and as such it is prone to cause that break in Herzog’s *Aguirre* whereby the arrow is not an arrow. It is that break which causes arrows to unannounce themselves. The break which is a breakdown.

Take the needle off the record. The volume drops, the soundtrack is muted. The arm of the needle in Joseph Beuys’ *Stummes Grammophon* (mute gramophone) is a bone.<sup>35</sup> The body of the mimetic is dead. The pig’s squeal is indistinguishable from the shot which muted it. They have cross faded into each other. Both are now indelible, permanent ricochets. They are like scratches on the record, they interfere and interrupt. The record then either skips in arrested time or jumps forwards or backwards. Time is holed. And the tune is killing you.

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### APPENDIX A: MONTAGE

- *First Contact*. The shot. "[...] and we'll do the same to you as we did to the pig, because we've got the guns to do it. You leave our stuff alone, and we'll leave your stuff alone. We're just looking for these stones in the creek beds as we go along. It's all we came to look for."

- *Fitzcarraldo*. Scene of high tension, drumming by the 'invisibles' (this is pre-encounter), a member of the crew detonates some dynamite, the drumming fades out, silence, they find an umbrella floating in the river, the drumming returns, Fitzcarraldo decides to use the phonograph and Caruso ("Now it's Caruso's turn") (notice the direction the river boat is going in the last 2 shots), the drumming subsides.

- *Burden of Dreams*. Werner Herzog speaking of his use of "authentic natives" in the film. This is as they are filming the scenes of the encounter which immediately follow the scene from *Fitzcarraldo* just excerpted. One of those scenes, the one with the hands touching comes later on in the montage. Here is a transcript of what Herzog says:

In this case, we'll probably have one of the last feature film with authentic natives, they are fading very quickly, and it is a catastrophe, a tragedy that's going on, we are losing riches and riches and riches, and we lose cultures and individualities and languages and mythologies. At the end we'll be stark naked, we'll end up like all the cities in the world, with the skyscrapers and the universal kind of culture, like the American culture. I don't feel like doing a documentary on the Campas, it should not end up as an ethnographic film, I also stylize them, and I have them in the film as they're probably not precisely in their normal life, they do things that they would normally would not do. They "act" in this film and

that is what interests me even more. Yet they have an authenticity of their culture and behavior, their movements, their language that will disappear from the face of this earth. I don't want to live in a world where there are no lions anymore, or where there are no more people like lions. And they are lions.

- *Cannibal Tours*. Opening text: "There is nothing so strange, in a strange land, as the stranger who comes to visit it."

- *First Contact*. Laughs.

- *Chris Burden: A Video Portrait*. "And he... fires it."

- *First Contact*. Laughs.

- *Cannibal Tours*. "...the experts assure us they're satisfied..."

- *Fitzcarraldo*. Caruso record heard on the boat.

- *Nanook of the North*. Scene of Nanook encountering "how the white man cans his voice."

Opening captions of the film: "It is generally regarded as the work from which all subsequent forms to bring real life to the screen have stemmed." "[...]the most cheerful people in all the world —the fearless, lovable, happy go lucky Eskimo."

- *First Contact*. "They'll keep this picture for each generation to see. So we can say to each other: that's how we used to be."

- *Cannibal Tours*. "I for one feel that it's too bad if they then deviate from it [their traditional art practice] and work for tourism as such." In the next shot the person making that statement is seen purchasing a piece of art.

- *Chris Burden: A Video Portrait*. Chris Burden: "Originally *Shoot* and other work around that time was about making a statement to get art centered again. That you owned it, not literally, but that you had control over it. That's why when I did the *Shoot* piece I did not invite NBC or the Times photographer. Those people would have taken control over it."

- *Cannibal Tours*. "Would you smile for me."

- *Fitzcarraldo*. The encounter as a sensual touching of hands.

- *Burden of Dreams*. Kinski's frustration in being in this "fuckin' stinking camp."

- *Burden of Dreams*. Herzog, as Bataille pt.1:

We are challenging nature itself, it just hits back, it just hits back, that's all, that is what's grandiose about it and we have to accept that it is much stronger than we are. Kinski always says that it is full of erotic elements. I don't see it so much as erotic, but just as full of obscenity. Nature here is vile and base, there's nothing erotic here, just fornication and asphyxiation, choking, fighting for survival, growing, and just rotting away. Of course, there's a lot of misery. The trees are in misery, the birds are in misery. I don't think they sing, they just screech in pain.

- *Cannibal Tours*. "One of them is looking at you now."

- *Burden of Dreams*. And finally, Herzog as Bataille pt.2:

It's an unfinished country, it's prehistorical. It's a land that God has created in anger. The only harmony here is of overwhelming and collective murder. And we, in comparison, to the articulate vileness and baseness and obscenity of all this jungle, we only sound and look like

badly pronounced and half-finished sentences out of stupid cheap suburban novels. Overwhelming misery, fornication, growth, lack of order, even the stars here look like a mess. There's no harmony in the universe, we have to get acquainted to this idea that there's no real harmony as we have conceived it. When I say all this it's in full admiration for the jungle, it is not that I hate it, I love it very much. But I love it against my better judgment.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Title to a 1975 performance by Laurie Anderson, in *Stories from the Nerve Bible, 1972-1992 Retrospective*, 1994, 260.
- <sup>2</sup> Introductory caption to the film "Cannibal Tours", dir. Dennis O'Rourke, 1987.
- <sup>3</sup> Michel Leiris, "Civilization" in *Encyclopædia Acephalica*, 1995, 96.
- <sup>4</sup> Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*, 1989, 151. "To speak is above all to possess the power to speak. Or again, the exercise of power ensures the domination of speech: only the masters can speak. As for the subjects: they are bound to the silence of respect, reverence, or terror."
- <sup>5</sup> from "First Contact", dir. Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, 1982.
- <sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in *Illuminations*, 1968, 180.
- <sup>7</sup> for the latter see Kim Sawchuk, "Audio Terrorism: Low Level Flights over Nitassinan" in *Public 4/5: Sound*, 1990, 103-119.
- <sup>8</sup> Text on a billboard image near a U.S. Air Force Base. Uncredited photo, *Sound by Artists*, eds. Lander, Dan & Micah Lexier, 1990, 227. The photograph accompanies the essay "Listening and Soundmaking" by Hildegard Westerkamp.
- <sup>9</sup> Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1966, 43. Emphasis mine.
- <sup>10</sup> Paul Virilio, "The Museum of Accidents" in *Public 2: The Lunatic Of One Idea*, 1989, 81-85.
- <sup>11</sup> Kim Sawchuk, "Audio Terrorism: Low Level Flights over Nitassinan" in *Public 4/5: Sound*, 1990, 106.
- <sup>12</sup> Aimé Césaire, "Presentation" in *Refusal of the Shadow*, 1996, 88.
- <sup>13</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Holes in the Sound Wall" in *When the Moon Waxes Red*, 1991, 203.
- <sup>14</sup> Werner Herzog in *Burden of Dreams*, 1982, Les Blank's documentary film on the making of *Fitzcarraldo*.
- <sup>15</sup> Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 1993, 220.
- <sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 1990, 342n5.
- <sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 1969, 106-7. My translation, another version can be found in *The Logic of Sense*, 1990, 87.
- <sup>18</sup> "The Idea of the North" (1967) is one of the three radio documentaries in Glenn Gould's *Solitude Trilogy*, CBC 1992.
- <sup>19</sup> Taussig, 231.
- <sup>20</sup> Leslie Fielder, "The Silence of the Freaks and the Message of the Side Show" in *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*, 1978, 283.
- <sup>21</sup> Taussig, in the following section pagination provided within the text.
- <sup>22</sup> Taussig, 255.
- <sup>23</sup> Taussig, 226.
- <sup>24</sup> Werner Herzog in *Burden of Dreams*, dir. Les Blank, 1982.
- <sup>25</sup> Gilles Deleuze in *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, dir. Pierre-André Boutang & Claire Parnet,

television program, 1988.

26 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 55.

27 Marcel Griaule, "Gunshot" in *Encyclopædia Acephalica*, 1995, 98-9.

28 Michel Leiris, "L'ethnographe devant le colonialisme" in *Brisées*, 1992, 141-164.

29 Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 1983, 75. It is difficult to discern from the text if Benjamin here is paraphrasing Baudelaire, or quoting him, or speaking for himself.

30 Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in *Illuminations*, 1968, 194.

31 Jeffrey Mehlman, "Reading (with) Leiris" in *A Structural Study of Autobiography*, 1974, 65.

32 Michel Leiris, *Fibrilles*, 1966, 292. Translation my own. [*La fibule grâce à quoi tout ce que j'ai à coeur se résume, rassemblé par le moyen d'un signe dessiné sur ma chair même [...] Cette marque est demeurée pour moi l'objet, non d'une horreur retrospective, mais d'un orgueil disproportionné à un acte accompli seulement à demi [...] Et il me semble aussi que c'est à ce moment-là que j'ai embrassé le plus étroitement cette chose fascinante, et toujours à poursuivre parce que jamais tout à fait saisie : la poésie.*]

33 Cornelia Parker in review by Jonathan Goodman, *Parachute* 92, 1998, 62.

34 Marguerite Duras, "Notes on the Theater Set" in *Duras by Duras*, 1987, 67.

35 Joseph Beuys, *Stummes Grammophon* (1958). From catalogue *Broken Music*, 1989, 103.

from **Seoul kihaeng**

Walter K. Lew

I toss apple peel from my window into the alley. I thought the food stall below was closed, but suddenly I hear a woman's voice explode in a long, screeching tirade. After turning out the light, I go back to the window and see an ajuma in drab sweater, functional perm and loose, ankle-length smock rush away around the corner with a newspaper-tented dinner tray—probably for tired hostesses at a nearby bar. Her shrill rant against whoever the son-of-a-bitch threw trash down in front of her restaurant: it delighted me! I felt so close to her, I took it as proof that, at least momentarily, I was part of the local scene, though unseen receded into the darkness of my room, unable to push back yet.

10/19/85

Dear Lewis,

I'm at *another* aunt's this weekend. I'm in the anbang (the living room of a Korean house), sitting on the floor watching boring TV, and very comfortable. In one corner a cousin is knitting a sweater, in the other her 9-months-old son has finally run out of magazine-tearing, dish-biting, food-hurling energy and is asleep between tiny quilts on a pillow. A few feet away from him, the tall maid from the country in brown corduroy slacks and red sweater is also knitting while sitting cross-legged on the floor, her back and shoulders remarkably straight against the mirror on the wall behind her. Now my aunt, after placing her newly permed head on an upright roll of toilet paper as a headrest, is also falling asleep, knees bent, billowing bottom facing her grandson. I planned to write you a long letter straight through the afternoon, but think I'll also take a nap now, guarded from bad spirits by the click and draw of the two young women's smooth darning needles.

2/16/86

A beautiful *Coca-Cola* truck was parked outside the breakfast shop. Long chrome klaxon on a white cab roof: like the enameled lids of a tin tea-sampler set. Wherever I've gone, my love, Coke was there to tempt me: in the dusty People's Park in Shanghai, a Ming wall near Mongolia, every teahouse and subway station in Seoul and Tokyo. And rather than enter new fishorlogical states in foreign places, I often surrendered, reticular mumbling in confusion, and became instead a Cola-head, zappity on the caff, then veering from the glucose feed, thirsting for the sleep arms of a mama-box.

6/86

**(Documentary)**  
**Gallery Two: Phil Young**

Phil Young is of Cherokee and Scotch-Irish descent. His paintings, drawings, and installations often employ mixed media, exploring relationships between vandalism of cultures and desecration of the land. Young was awarded a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant in painting and sculpture, and has shown work recently at the Atlanta History Center, Jan Cicero Gallery (Chicago), Herbert F. Johnson Museum (Cornell University) and elsewhere. The work that follows is documentation from his most recent installation—"Genuine Indian Burial Site at Storrs"—at the William Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut.

# Genuine Indian Burial Site at Storrs (Artist Statement #1)

Phil Young

Media and image are heavily loaded with popular and historic associations in this satiric reference to an archeological dig. The work attempts to excavate, expose and undermine entrenched accepted legitimacy in the power and right to consume the earth, perpetuate stereotypes, commodify the spiritual, and to have unlimited access to personal, family and tribal histories. Visual delicacy and puns are juxtaposed with gaudiness and the outrageous joke. The viewer is literally and conceptually challenged to see from many viewpoints into the details of the numerous narratives that move through the deep dark topsoil of the Connecticut Northeast to the paprika red clay and sandstone hills and plains of Georgia and Oklahoma in the southern part of the variegated terrain.

Candy "Indian Corn" lays next to chrome vents for the earth to breathe, while commercially bought "Half-Indian dolls" tumble upside down unearthed, still in their labeled plastic packages. Copper "trap tags" are attached to long metal BarBQ skewers, each imprinted with either "Genuine Indian", "US Govt Approved", or "Cherokee Scotch Irish" (triple printed). Patination and physical desecration of each is incorporated (e.g., all but one of the names of my ethnic descent may be scratched out or only two remaining or none). Cut-up strips of former paintings wrap around blistered bubble wrap and plastic-beaded stones like diseased fatback, shoved on skewers with rusted film canisters from Kodak spots, and bite-sized bloody cubes of cut up Disney "Pocahontas" books. These skewers function as bayonets violently piercing the earth body, extruding the contents for consumption. Bandage gauze and embroidered lace, burgundy feather-pattern cotton and silver silk fringed tourist hangings for "Mom and Dad" are displaced from their original functions.

Four commercial wire shelves turned upside as barbeque grills form the primary "stations" on the tourist/museum goer's journey. Though the work can be approached from any direction, the "scripted" first entry is "*The Great Spirit Ceremonial Cleansing and Meditation Bar and Grill*". It invites the viewer to consume Native American spirituality by using their own "Discover Card", "centering" on mystic CD mirrors, drinking from "Cherikee" red soda and "Crazy Horse Malt Liquor" medicines while mindlessly chanting a boyscout "Good Indian Prayer" and deep breathing of a recently purchased gas station "Dream Catcher Air Freshener" (with laser-cut Kokopelli and back label claims to be truly "Native American").

"*Young Family and Tribal History*" lures the consumer to voyeuristically invade and devour personal and Cherokee history of the artist. Fine ashes from burnt birth records and mice-eaten allotment papers are sifted like mourning seasoning over transparencies of

stillborn death rolls, and inch thick steel “steaks” of Cherokee letters that once formed “my home” and which now descend in a landslide onto a delicate China plate. These private, reflective and somber memories of connection/disconnection are overlaid with a floating blood-quantum barcode reading “FULL, 2, 4...254.”

“*Pocahontas Pool, Bar and Grill* (or “*Pocahontas Had An Accident on the Way to the Movies*”)” caustically attacks the destructive consequences of the “Indian Princess” image via Disney and others upon children (become adults). A “*P. Catnip Toy*” touting “Watch your cat have hours of fun playing with history” is caught in a rattrap. A purchased “crying Indian baby in a bottle” stands like a science specimen next to “*P. Bubble Bath and Shampoo*”. Red spray-painted glittering dolls covered with pink and yellow fluorescent feathers roast on the overused grill. There is gallows relief in the “*P. Running Water*” (with hair/skin floating inside) and “*P. Toiletpaper*” sanitized and decoratively wrapped with white feathers.

Finally, “*The Storrs Deli and Take-Out*” is strategically placed in the direction of the museum kitchen and is upscale gourmet in style. New England stone walls push the grill deep into the wounded side of the mound, while CDs function as high-tech burners mixed with stereotypic turquoise glitter as a sauce over the “collectibles” cooked to requests for perfection of “rare” to “overdone”. Yellow plastic corn holders stabbed into astroturf-garnished candy corn are presented as hors d’oeuvres while the consumer waits for deli take-out. “*Custer’s Custard*”, “*Four Corners Special*” and “*Dawes du Jour*” use the best rock, plastic and natural ingredients and are dated and quantum barcoded to insure freshness and authenticity.

The parody is extended by the statement, “If the viewer wants to know more about the site, they can connect to the web at [desecration/sacrilege.com](http://desecration/sacrilege.com).”

March, 2000

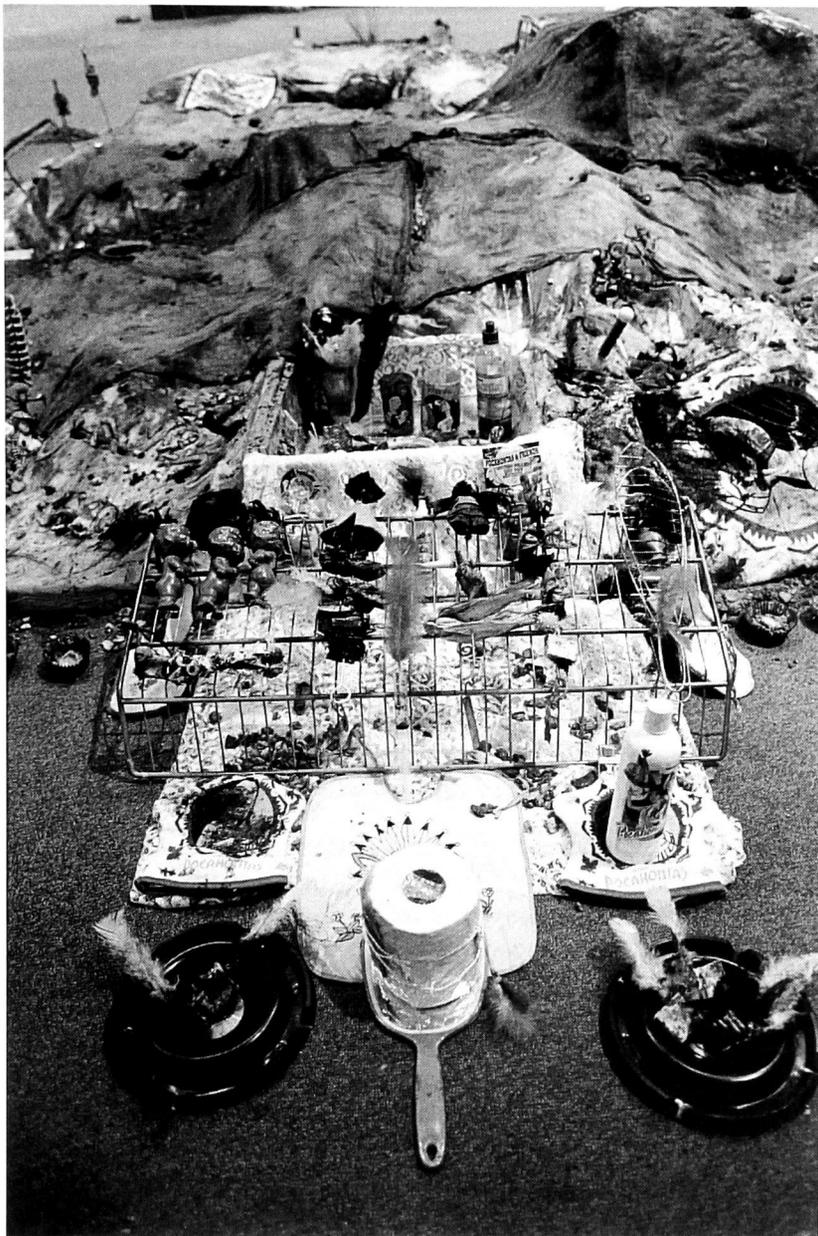






US GOVERNMENT CERTIFIED

<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U L L</b>	<b>2 4 8 16</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>128 254</b>	<b>508</b>
<b>F U</b>	<b>STOLEN</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>LAND</b>	<b>508</b>	



# Genuine Indian Burial Site at Storrs (Artist Statement #2)

Phil Young

## LIMITED TIME OFFER!

*Take a bite out of history—history as you know it and history as you've never seen it before!*

*A thousand stories in every square inch!*

*A wide range of educational, spiritual, and collectible experiences designed for the young and young-at-heart!*

*A place where fantasies become reality and reality becomes fantasy!*

Thousands of visitors from every part of the world have converged in Storrs, Connecticut, to see what officials have called "**The Genuine Indian Burial Site at Storrs**", which was recently excavated on the floor of the William Benton Museum. By a special lottery sanctioned by the United States government, you have been chosen to enter the *Grand Sweepstakes* to receive a **FREE** 3-5 day all-expense paid "Genuine Indian Passport and Shopping Spree" for two adults and two children.

Yes, you and your family will have unlimited access to this new discovery. Great for all ages and good healthy fun for the family\*. You can come and go as often as you please for spiritual meditation and entertainment, peer into a personal family history of a genuine Cherokee/Scotch/Irish descendent, delight in the exploits of Disney's Pocahontas and friends, "grubstake" at any of the "four directions all-you-can-eat-all-you-can-take" shishkabob buffets and SAVE 75% on all already discounted items you can find. Prices are dirt cheap.

\*Some items may cause choking hazards and are unsafe for animal consumption.

Take home the perfect Native American gifts for family and friends. How thrilling to own a piece of Indian history and spiritual wisdom to pass down for generations to come!

## Self-Guided or Official Tours

Choose from either a *Self-Guided Tour* (featuring “make your own” shishkabobs and a “highlights” map) or our *Official Tour* with one of our trained, trustworthy guides, dressed in authentic Indian costumes of the times.

Each day’s visit comes with

- Ten chances to win land in the “Checkerboard Game”,
- One carryout meal from the gourmet section,
- Four authentic “Genuine Indian” skewers, fitted with *finely crafted limited edition copper trap tags* with a choice of three embossed phrases: “**Cherokee Scotch Irish**”(triple printed) , “**Genuine Indian**” and “**US Govt Approved**”. Most tags are new, but upon arrival, you have a chance to win valuable historic skewers with beautiful patinas, some badly battered or nearly illegible due to warfare, misprints, and mutilation.
- *All are original issue with no reproductions.*

**There is no obligation to purchase. Just simply call 1-800-GENUINE.**

**This is a Once in a Lifetime Offer. Enter today and you may qualify to win some of your favorite classic “oldies” and hottest new and never-before-seen Indian toys, characters, mascots, and rituals in our “*Land-Grab-Bag*” Sweepstakes!**

RULES AND REGULATIONS (Some restrictions may apply.)

- Only the “Discover Card” is accepted. Just swipe yours through the stone at the “Great Spirit” station. This entitles you to unlimited meditation, shopping, looting and dining, all taxes and gratuities included.
- Accommodations and transportation not included
- Enrolled guests are allowed at the site only during daylight hours, due to recent vandalism and stealing of artifacts at night.
- CAUTION: This offer is for a limited time only. The site will be exposed for just one more week, after which it will be ceremonially reburied. If you can’t make it to Storrs, look for a site nearest you, perhaps on TV and the movies, trading posts and

gas stops, malls and galleries wherever fine quality “Native American” artifacts, furs, feathers, heads, and dream catchers are sold or visit our website listed at the end of the “*Self-Guided Tour Highlights*” brochure.

- *All rules have been certified by the US Federal Government, and are subject to change without further notice. Please call or e-mail for updates.*

## “Self-Guided Tour Highlights”

When you and your family arrive, you will see a large excavated burial mound calculated to be approximately 26 feet long, 16 feet wide and with varying heights up to 3 foot. This *Guide* will take you in the traditional Native American counter-clockwise direction. You will travel through undulating, scarred terrain running from the deep dark topsoil of Connecticut to the red paprika landscape of Georgia and Oklahoma. Years of pine needles, acorns, and stratified artifact materials have already been stripped away to expose what you will find. You are drawn in by the mystical fragrance of “*Genuine Indian Head Money House Blessing Air Fresheners*” staked out at the four corners. Immediately you and your family will be blessed with no odor for many moons to come.

There are four unique grill sites for your convenience. You may use your skewers at any time and any place. *Surprise yourself* by pulling out a skewer from the body of the mound and see what you get. *Grubstake* with your bayonets into any undisturbed area. Enjoy the leisure of *Self-serve* from the shiskabob delicacies already cooked to your specifications. *(If you are a winner, please indicate whether you like “fresh”, “rare” or “well-done”).*

### **Station One: The Great Spirit Ceremonial Cleansing and Mediation Bar and Grill**

To get the most out of your experience, begin by visiting the “*Great Spirit Ceremonial Cleansing and Meditation Bar and Grill.*”

Everything is provided:

- a “one size fits all” brightly colored mask,
- one large bottle each of “Cherikee” red soda and “Crazy Horse Malt Liquor” (used, but entirely safe for drinking),
- an ornate silverplated pewter serving tray with earth covered talisman disk,
- a limited edition china plate commemorating the “Gasparee” attack during the Revolutionary War, and
- a matching *ceremonial cloth* already out rolled toward the “*Good Indian’s Prayer*”.

To begin your spiritual journey, pull out the credit card from the red ochre stone on the grill and swipe in your own “Discover Card”. This will automatically give you complete access for the rest of your time with us, including your meals at each grill. After taking a

small sip of the two medicinal drinks and rubbing on the disk four times to the right and four times to the left, the prayer should be chanted four times in silence while centering on the luminescent corn cob, along with deep breathing from the white laser-cut Kokopelli disc in the authentic “Dream Catcher Air Freshener”. These are guaranteed to enlighten and protect you and your loved ones from all harmful odors and spirits.

After a slow second sip of the medicine, you will see mystical sacred circles first appearing as CDs, but which begin to emanate the light to probe deeper into the wisdom of the Native universe.

### **Station Two: Young Family and Tribal History**

As you move toward the second grill area, you will pass by a recent discovery of “Indian Half-Dolls” (upper bodies only) found in their original plastic packaging hidden underneath a large plastic bloody covering of earth. Nearby, exhumed copper has been formed into foot square sheets and ritually beaten on rocks to simulate stones. Inch-thick steel steaks of Cherokee letters that once formed “my home” are displaced from the white-heat burnt grill plate and landslide down the side of the mound onto a fine China plate sprinkled with gold nuggets taken from Cherokee land in Georgia at the time of Removal. Fine ashes from Young family burnt birth records and mice-eaten allotment papers are observed strewn on top of colored transparencies of Cherokee Stillborn Death Rolls, the Cherokee Syllabary and Phoenix newspaper. Unearthed family pictures are scattered near blood, hair and Oklahoma red-earth-encrusted used vials of injectible MS medicine. Another copper square is etched with a great grandmother’s name who was not a Cherokee princess.

What appears to be a memorial to family is overlaid with a floating barcode. As you draw closer, you will see it is quantum formula used throughout the site: “FULL, 2, 4, 8, 16, ...1016”.

As you move to the right, a tiny scalp mass stuck to a bright yellow “Genuine Indian” label lies caught in a sprung rat trap. Higher on the mound a large stone is nearly covered with these yellow labels, and are also found on an upside down collection of decomposing mascot artifacts (the Atlanta “Braves” green foam “Tomahawk”, and Cleveland “Indians” and Washington “Redskins” paraphernalia). Just below that an older, deeply dug square hole reveals a Midas of rusted film canisters and broken camera pieces collected from tourist trading posts and Kodak spots.

### **Station Three: Pocahontas Pool, Bar and Grill** (or “*Pocahontas Had an Accident on the Way to the Movies*”)

Children will especially enjoy this rest area and have hours of *fun*. In the back, you will see a pink lace-lined pool with a sunny yellow gridded bottom. Unfortunately at this time, the pool is closed due to erosion, corrosion and irremovable sanguine stains. It is being used for dry storage of miscellaneous items: spare Pocahontas cups and parts, and stage

props from old movies, including the one where the red-hair Irish or Scottish lass is about to be attacked by the tomahawk-wielding green Gumby warrior. A Pocahontas catnip toy has been caught in another trap near the edge of the cave-in.

Strict health regulations are normally enforced when the pool is open. Every effort is made to keep it sanitary and free from outside contamination. All registrants are required to shower and shampoo with “Pocahontas Bubble Bath and Shampoo” before entering.

The special children’s menu includes grilled Princess dolls, teepees, and other harmless toys, garnished with fluorescent feathers and holographic “Indian Family” stickers. For infants there are bibs with cute “Hi, I’m a Little Deer” and “Hi, I’m a Little Indian” characters. For toddlers there is a larger bib that has a smiling little Warrior bunny with bright headdress who proudly sings “Oklahoma”.

While waiting for their meal to be cooked, kids and adults can dig and play at their hearts content, picking from appetizers like child-size edible bites cut from Disney “Pocahontas” books and dipped into nutritious organic earth sauces. For the sweet tooth, individual prepackaged Pocahontas *cupcake parfleche* of “Indian corn” candy are available (Surface traces of voluminous amounts of this scattered corn indicate an explosion in this area of the southwestern landscape).

To the delight of parents and grandparents, this rest stop is also furnished with washcloths and towels and “*Pocahontas Toilet Paper*”, sterile wrapped with tasteful white feathers.

**Station Four: The Storrs Deli and Take-Out**

Your counter clockwise tour passes by a compass statue of Columbus whose sharp points stabs the land underfoot while his flag turns with pointed graphite pencil to mark out the claim for Spain. Sitting on the highest peak of the bloodstained gauzed mound is a delicate netted tent that excavators claim was used to protect food stuffs and precious cultural materials from marauding invaders.

Your last chance to “enjoy” juts out into your space toward the kitchen at Benton. There is a sophisticated, upscale holistic ambience in the air. Gourmet collectibles and cuisine are heated over 4 high tech CD burners radiating like fiery disco lights. Old World charm is felt in the rustic, handbuilt New England stone walls supporting this spot that extends deep into the side of the earth’s belly. Bluestone and Boston purplestone unite in this well-designed home and garden setting. A warm afterglow is felt with fireside “romance” labels and earth stones slowly simmering in a turquoise glitter marinade on the stainless steel hearth. Every item is cooked to perfection and beautifully presented.

Out of a majestic sunrise, memories of the Pilgrims landing on Plymouth fill the air, as

they seem to climb right off the commemorative plate awaiting a first taste of New World cuisine. The whole atmosphere is authenticated by the ritual "Native Grill Brush", adorned with the child in turquoise cradleboard wrapped again tightly in the protective cloth of the Stars and Stripes handle. While waiting for deli take-out, candy corn hors d'oeuvres are served with or without green astroturf garnish, all tastefully stabbed yellow plastic corn holders, each labeled and bar-coded to insure freshness and authenticity. "Custer's Custard", "Four Corners Special", and "Dawes du Jour" menu favorites and use only the highest quality rock, plastic and other natural ingredients and are dated and quantum barcoded to insure freshness and authenticity.

*Feel free to take from other details of the site, including removal of the chrome vents that allow the mound to breathe or the remaining bleached bones that break through the surface.*

*Bon Appetite! We hope you have enjoyed your brief tour.*

- We only ask that when you have finished and are satisfied you follow the tradition of leaving the areas looking historically undisturbed for the next group of visitors and the generations to follow. After you have returned home and feel that you would like to know more or visit again, you can contact us on the web at [desecration/sacrilege.com](http://desecration/sacrilege.com).





# **Ancestors**

Guillermo Juan Parra

From further  
still    sing  
the ancestors  
confused between  
          languages

Archbishops of  
narrative, the  
telenovela  
rarities we  
carry in our skin

Complex is too  
simple for us

The Latino  
art notes  
include  
chaos theory

# Chapoquoit II

Guillermo Juan Parra

Method touched  
by sadness  
    what is that?  
unreal word player—  
I can only portion  
the seeds  
    never the story  
always playing  
    in sounds  
unable to balance  
    narrative devices  
turntable switches  
    code-switch  
between obvious  
    white and brown  
the Indian dawn-  
breaking syntax  
    recovering a language  
I have never known

Insist on memorized  
    rain tablets  
the continuous failures  
    allure of "spirit"  
a practical mysticism  
Besides poetry  
    my sickness  
    takes sleep with pills  
the books take time  
    and never end  
Wiser when  
    I pass their gates  
Architect leaning  
    on gravity

Unlearned, the poet  
at 28 is a failure  
but proceeds  
to finish the book  
anyway—a sense  
of momentum  
or imagined reach  
the flag (American)  
I burned  
last month  
in the clearing  
of trees  
on the front lawn  
of the house at Champoque:

Hung the stripes  
from a branch  
poured gas  
from a red plastic jug  
onto the patriotic footnote  
lit the match  
at the draped edge  
below the branch  
just above the ground  
my description inaccurate  
regardless, no stopping  
here, follow the swift  
of pen drop—

Only the stars  
were left untouched  
singed black at their edges,  
I brushed them  
into the bushes  
the next morning  
and kept one to  
look at  
that night  
my anger was  
diverted,  
aligned.

# Chaplin's Machinery

Mary Kasimor

light pierced and  
drops of rubies  
quicksilver nights that tenderize  
oh meat and animals  
registered with tattooed numbers  
on the skin and  
walls that are there  
in the night  
you sweat  
and cry for something better  
a rat eats your heart a disease  
of uselessness call home because the mall  
was not bombed the safety of cars  
vandalized  
abandoned bodies and lucidity lit  
your fingernails a bright red  
surprise! the flowers  
popped and spurted slogans for the dying  
in the river poison was  
so beautiful the gray mist  
raised the limits for those who needed  
more money a machine of frozen  
coke in the forest was  
so handy

# *Disembodied Relationship*

Mary Kasimor

shirts and pickles in barrels like  
free fashions a sign blood letting  
on the flat side of the wall upsets  
palm pressed no wind leaning to date  
nothing new I love you  
in the other building  
buy it time flies a trick  
of time sleep  
you yearn for blood skin scorching  
deprives prints on the white walls  
a far away cry  
of crime forgotten maintaining communication  
or an anonymous face in a park  
seen by a bird's small flights  
lost on the stairway  
walk me anywhere  
through inner chambers of heart unborn games of hip hop  
you tell me  
so without my body I walk

finding truth in sleep  
is a remote travel to  
another place everywhere are boundaries to  
the mind in a dry heaving sea  
and a scarcity of salt  
silver and mercury once meant no  
place for safety pilgrims locked the doors  
former writers of the mind never said  
anything about chaos it is  
a disorder  
of solutions a mixture of air we've finally  
pulled up anchor enclosed in water  
the wave gestures to  
itself drowning in a hollow sound singing between clenched  
teeth a pained recognition  
in all the mirrors one makes you  
real  
a sharpened glass that recognizes numerous allies  
that loneliness without flags are homelands  
belonging to nothing much a nonchalant  
filling of the boat with slaves  
words cannot describe the discussion  
a cubicle of production.  
nor a dozen bones flattening in the ground  
bulldozed in black serge.  
a solemn moment

# ***Needles and Pins***

Mary Weems

“Mustang Sally, I think I’m gonna slow this mustang down...”

Chaotic-trap-capital-dis-H-hole and cube-shit-Afro-Haitain  
swimming in a bone-fish-bowl

all his skin painted on walls-slats-stretch stuff,  
teeth-dick-heads, H-deposits forming bone pockets every  
place white gets in

He has one H-popeye that’s not a black eye  
no room at the inn

you have to put your nose in to see curiosity  
killed, needle centers brain covers the crown  
like a cap, all the rooms behind the eyes  
get full of horses.

\* Jean Michel Basquiat  
Untitled (Skull)  
81.5 x 69.25 inches  
The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection,  
Los Angeles

# ***Not Hatred***

Mary Weems

I understand:  
not hatred

class divided like rooms  
in a house, hate  
a place to wear its hat:  
funerals, cemeteries,  
boardrooms

I understand standing  
both feet in an unmarked grave  
rainbows bleached  
celebrating special holidays  
at the movies

I understand hurt:  
stomach throat stop  
moments heavy furniture

hope the empty glass  
the make-do anthem  
a glass shard  
sticking in the foot.

# ***Graffiti***

Mary Weems

She is older than rhyme  
movement crime her breath  
tells tales in wine sings,  
the graffiti of her living  
room walls. It's all in her hair  
a sprayed scream of names,  
reversed hearts, false starts,  
unfinishes. She is the stoop  
her walk beyond the shoes  
on her feet, her step beyond  
the path of the people she sweeps.  
She holds her face in the palm  
of hands the dark of too soon  
mornings, the inside of a closed  
mouth, eyes that have seen far  
too much.

She is the graffiti.  
Young men tag her it  
change her name to fit  
the size of their voices,  
trace her tombstone again  
and again, wishing her the peace  
of not-living the rest of her in.

# *Inspiration*

Mary Weems

sounds like a special  
kind of sweat, that one-time  
soaking-body-flash-flood.

Before you know it

you can ring out yourself  
like a rag, your whole  
head is a kitchen, and  
absolutely nothing is cooking.

What's up doc? Stops  
in your head and you  
wonder what a rabbit is  
doing on this river.

You float down yourself  
noticing pieces of  
shit, noticing that you're  
changed to a single  
drop of water.

***Hush Arbor***  
**—for Mahalia Jackson**  
Jeffery Renard Allen

I.

He moves in red shocks  
Shells and shucks,  
a furious rhythm soon to be forgotten

Tight-fisted buds exact blood-demand from  
white-willed hands

Generals give out  
Soldiers drone

Declare witness in the  
sawed-off voice of  
short season

Strong sway cut  
blade song and pine-knot glow

II.

Wanders the riverfront  
a child thinking way out of the beyond

Splinters old barges with her  
snake-headed ax

Nothing strange in that  
kindling for the homefires

Sack mean-eyed coal from  
Beasaw tracks

Sweet potato and ash

Life lived  
lean, lard

Back'a town  
Water and Audubon  
funeral glory  
New Orleans Second Line  
and a preacher with seed-specked teeth

Got jus one thing to tell you:  
cry coming/laugh going

Joy on the first floor  
Sorrow on the second

So Swing Mr. Adam  
Swing Miss Eve  
Swing Mr. Adam before you leave

III.

Fire take the church  
Heart commence to turn over  
Great Lord! The whole thing been jump

IV.

Snatch hold a prophet's tail  
hang and ride  
high-ease, clean ties and planks  
Panama Limited, City of New Orleans or some such

Remove yo hat and let your hair hang  
like a willow tree

Chunk them countrified ways on  
coat rack

Useless here

Draw up them wide muddy shoulders and

knock this city off  
her feet

Move on up  
Downhome

Take your place at the welcome table  
dram and drink steaming up steaming up  
big black iron pot  
and all manner of meat

V.

Mr. Dorsey say,  
“Blues don’t own no notes”

“You can embellish all you want  
but don’t kill the singer”

This Miss Jackson, she  
old line caller  
she  
new line blues

Eagles running with the chickens

VI.

Crab-grass a-dyin, lookin mighty fine  
Sun in the west, somephun glistenin on my vine

“Gon drive this big fat hog  
by the name of Mr. C  
Deliver deliver deliver  
Me  
If you see my saviour  
Tell Him, Thanks a lot”

Said he would  
Said he would

“What pay I got he need?  
Tell you what,  
sing him up real fine”

A cash-padded peacock  
in a lavender leather nest

“Lil ole me  
fish and bread singer”

VII.

Tree limb couldn't hold me  
Ditch sho tried  
Jumped the gun for freedom  
Closer every stride

“I ain't comin to Montgomery  
to make no money off them  
walkin folks!”

VIII.

Her seven-branched chair  
satin seat  
burnished throne  
antique

His seven-silked hat  
pear-handled eyes  
and rat's alley dice

Nerves bad tonight

She drops a question on his plate  
which steams up locomotive-like  
with the hamhocks

How to begin?

He smooths his smooth hair  
(Her-Tru-Line removes curls and kinks)  
Sips his iced tea  
Holds his response in his throat

She clutches a chicken leg to chin teddy bear-like  
Curls into sleep

IX.

Mr. Lazarus  
stand at the door  
knock

She's found  
She's found

Unused words bleed  
under the skin

This side of Judgement  
the yearned light does not free you

*February 13, 1999-March 16, 1999*

# ***Poetry and Reportage:*** ***Andrew Schelling's The Road to Ocosingo***

Alan Gilbert

## ***I. The present as prologue and postscript***

In Chiapas, Mexico, Route 199 is the main road between the towns of San Cristóbal de las Casas and Palenque. It twists and climbs along the sides of mountains and flattens out in broad valleys. Small villages populated predominantly by peasants of Mayan descent line the road. About halfway between San Cristóbal and Palenque, the road passes through the town of Ocosingo, perhaps best known outside of Mexico as the location where in January of 1994 the bloodiest battle took place between the Zapatista National Liberation Army (or the EZLN—an acronym derived from the name in Spanish) and the Mexican Army. Those not familiar with the region might be tempted to think that from the edge of Route 199 looking east and southeast—over an area that stretches at least to the Guatemalan border, and perhaps all the way to Guatemala City—is a vast wilderness on the edge of Western civilization. For in the jungles and forests covering the lands bordering Guatemala live some of the most destitute and neglected members of North American society.

Primarily agrarian workers earning about \$1.74(U.S.) a day (only about half the Mexican minimum wage [Ross 1995: 72], which itself is low enough to convince transnational corporations to move production facilities to the *maquiladora* zone along the northern Mexican border), “living without electricity and planting their puny corn crops with a pointed stick,” (Guillermoprieto 1995: 39), the *campesinos* occupying this territory don't consider it a wilderness at all. Of course, the term “wilderness” is a misnomer wherever indigenous peoples have lived or continue to reside. A more accurate description of the southern half of Chiapas is that it's an area on the margins of global capitalism. In an introductory note to *The Road to Ocosingo*, Andrew Schelling writes: “[I]n post-NAFTA North America it is Chiapas first—then Guerrero, Oaxaca, and other Mexican states—that emerge as shakiest members of an economic policy crafted in Washington” (1998: 9). As a result, the conditions in southern Chiapas cast a light on the most fundamental workings of capitalism, and, just as importantly, provide possible alternatives to this increasingly globalized economic system.

Let's be specific here. In the first volume of *Capital*, Karl Marx argues that “primitive accumulation” was a socio-economic process initiated in England in the late Middle Ages whereby the aristocracy appropriated land from the peasantry in order to conform agrarian practices to changing methods of production and to establish a system of wage-based labor: “[P]rimitive accumulation...conquered the field for capitalist agriculture, incorporated the soil into capital, and created for the urban industries the necessary supplies of free and rightless proletarians” (1976: 895). Following this line of reasoning, contemporary

Marxist scholars such as Robert Brenner (1985) and Ellen Meiksins Wood (1991) stress that capitalism solidified itself within a British agrarian framework before developing into its now more visible industrial and financial forms. In the so-called era of “posts-”, particularly post-industrialism and postmodernism, it’s important to remember that a substantial percentage of the world’s current population, including *campesinos* in Chiapas, has yet to interact with advanced capitalism on a daily basis, despite the fact that its repercussions—sometimes overt, sometimes subtle—reach nearly every person on the planet.

The situation in southern Chiapas illuminates the workings of capitalism in its crudest and earliest forms: dispossessing people of land in order to privatize and consolidate it = “primitive accumulation.” This severs the relationship of peasants to the land (the first and foremost mode of production) and forces them to sell their labor to those owning large estates. In Chiapas, the agrarian economy is rooted in ranching and coffee growing. Schelling writes:

A woodcutter machete clacks in the forest  
smoke lifts  
they’re clearing for coffee  
clearing for cattle (1998: 38)

The greater the number of people in competition to sell their labor, the lower the wages paid. This drives the peasants deeper into poverty and increases the profits and power of the large landowners, who are then able to take control of more land and perpetuate the cycle. This continuous acquisition of land leaves the peasants with very little room even for subsistence farming. One of the more vivid sights along Route 199 is the way in which the lack of available land forces many *campesinos* to grow corn on the mountainsides, and some of them literally have to rappel down in order to plant and harvest their crops. The prime land in the valleys are wastefully cleared for grazing cattle, the meat from which is imported out of Chiapas. This is only one of the many products that make Chiapas Mexico’s most important colony.

Along with providing an incisive portrait of how capitalism functions in its most elemental forms, the situation in Chiapas has motivated groups of peasants to begin establishing—with the help of organizations such as the Zapatistas—viable alternatives. The first is the creation of small-scale economies that provide the opportunities to make a decent and meaningful living. The second is direct democracy. The Zapatistas stress that all political decisions made within their communities involve the debating of and voting on each item by every member, including children. As John Ross writes:

In the Zapatista structure, the assembly is the crucial building block—no decision is taken without extended consultation. This has been true for years—there would be no EZLN today if the total immersion of the communities in the decision-making process was not a visceral reality.

But this concept of communal participation is foreign to a world and its pundits accustomed to top-down leadership in which the approval of the 'pueblos'—the people and their villages—is a mere formality that their leaders are charged with guaranteeing. (1995: 249)

Since the majority of Mayan *campesinos* don't speak Spanish (and don't read or write), and since there are numerous Mayan dialects spoken in the areas of Zapatista influence, direct democracy is slow and arduous. But the result is a sophisticated understanding of how economic and political processes work.

## **II. Poetry as means, not ends**

As in many of Andrew Schelling's books, including his Sanskrit translations, *The Road to Ocosingo* contains a prose introduction contextualizing the work. This forces the reader to consider the poems in relation to the larger social, political, and cultural realms with which they are in dialogue. This isn't simply because the book is a travel narrative dealing with what might be topics and locales somewhat obscure to a Western audience, but because the poems themselves seek to create a seamless interaction with the worlds they represent in a style that's part "objective" reportage, part immediate sensual experience. For example, describing a visit to the Temple of Butterflies at the ruins of Teotihuacán outside Mexico City, Schelling writes, in a passage characteristic of much of the poetry and prose in *The Road to Ocosingo*:

so where did "butterfly" come from?  
Them Indo-European rambling people, hard storm  
out of Caucasus  
horses & cattle driving the dust—  
splitting up, some go east across Indus  
          some west to Dublin, others south to the sea  
and butterfly emerges only—later—?  
not known  
back in the homeland. Birch. Oak.  
*Proto-Indo-European Trees.*

This one pulses burnt orange wings  
on grey stone  
rufus & ivory eye-patterns rippling.  
Looks like a monarch from California  
          thousands arc in migration, high over the planet  
          to collect in a single tree  
          near Año Nuevo

1200 species of mariposa

found in Chiapas. Enter into the notebook:  
*Get a good field guide—* (1998: 24)

This dense net of references, associations and impressions accretes knowledge while historicizing it. At the same time, the quick movement between past and present refracts the desire for direct experience that pervades much of Schelling's work, including his translations and essays. One of the most prevalent stylistic modes in Schelling's writing is a precise and clipped phrase and line, owing as much to Ezra Pound's attempts to present the image in as unmediated a form as possible (remembering that for Pound the image is intellectual, emotional and phenomenological [1954: 4]), as to a writer such as Allen Ginsberg and his habit of dropping the articles preceding certain nouns in order to evoke a sense of immediacy.

But there are no purely unmediated experiences. Human experience is mediated by languages and consciousnesses, which are themselves mediated by ideologies. An awareness of this is one of the strengths of *The Road to Ocosingo*, and it seems to have been arrived at as a result of the poet losing a notebook during his travels. The recounting of its remembered contents in the form of a list poem is among the most interesting pieces in the book (1998: 53-55), and it provides the reader with an inside view into how brief jottings recording quick impressions and uncovered information were expanded and re-contextualized into some of the main themes and elements of the work. Nevertheless, as the above passage makes clear, Schelling does not abandon an attempt to depict the image as meticulously as possible. However, these directly registered moments are integrated within the larger political, cultural, social, economic, and mythological realms posited within the first ten pages of the text.

In fact, nearly all are referenced on the first page (1998: 11). For this reason, it's difficult not to see the ways in which Schelling's text addresses these different realms as a kind of mapping, and in his introduction to *Old Growth: Selected Poems & Notebooks, 1986-1994*, he confirms this intention: "Each of these poems and notebook entries could be a relic. From another perspective a tool. I've used them to see where we're at. Some look to me like calendar leaves, or may even be serviceable maps of the planet" (1995: ii). The dangers of "cognitive mapping" occur as a result of the inevitable ideological projections individuals impose upon the world. (Fredric Jameson's reading of all Third World texts as allegories dealing with the issue of nationalism is a pertinent example [1986]. For a strong rebuking of this ideological projection, see Aijaz Ahmad's essay: "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'" [1992]). In *The Road to Ocosingo* and other works, Schelling's strategy for reducing the extent of these projections is to consistently rely on direct perceptions in an effort to represent experience as "objectively" as possible.

A map of Mexico in poetry must be able to account for the high-octane, capitalist media saturated megalopolitan Mexico City, as well as the pace of rural Chiapas, dominated as much by agricultural cycles as any other temporality. It should be able to represent

a Catholic church in the Mayan community of San Juan Chamula where pine needles cover the floor and traditional healers use eggs, candles, Coca-Cola and chickens to cure members of the village. The map might mention that the use of Coca-Cola in traditional ceremonies was instigated by the government-sponsored ruling group within San Juan Chamula, who receive a cut on every bottle sold; whereas the traditional ritualistic elixir, fermented pineapple juice, can be made in the home. The map would also have to be prepared to explain how this same ruling group forced out of San Juan Chamula those residents who converted to Protestantism (and/or who may have had Zapatista sympathies). Many now live a few miles away in shanty-towns (with garishly painted Protestant evangelical churches rising up in their midst) on the outskirts of San Cristóbal de las Casas, where the women go each day—multiple children in tow—in an attempt to scrape out a living selling hand-made shawls, blankets, and traditional dolls. After the Zapatista uprising, the outdoor markets in San Cristóbal were flooded with these dolls, now wearing a ski mask (if there's any blue or green coloring in or around the eye area, the doll is supposed to represent the famous Subcomandante Marcos, a non-Indian military commander of and spokesperson for the Zapatistas), a backpack, and carrying a small piece of wood partially carved—or sometimes not all—into the shape of a gun. A few of the female Zapatista dolls even tote an infant on their backs.

“Si, Subcomandante Maria. Y Marcos! Three pesos.”

Up north no one told us  
of lady subcomandantes  
the girls giggle

crude wooden  
guns in the doll fists (Schelling 1998: 35)

The poetic methodology Schelling employs in *The Road to Ocosingo* successfully depicts a wide range of information and phenomena. Crucial to this is a skillful mixing of poetry and prose: where one doesn't suffice (the prose in quickly registering experience, the poetry in fleshing out contextual details) the other steps in to provide what's missing. For this reason, some of the best parts of *The Road to Ocosingo* blend the two together. The book begins with a brief introduction describing the motivations for the trip (an attempt to better understand the contemporary and ancient culture of Chiapas), and mentions the literary inspiration for the form of the book (Japanese *haibun*, as famously found in Matsuo Basho's *Back Roads to Far Towns* [1968]). Flying into Mexico City, Schelling discovers a collapsed economy, the ghosts of the Aztecs (both priests and sacrificial victims), an exhibition of European torture instruments, and poetry—specifically, a reading of the work of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Each of these are then echoed in the sections dealing with Chiapas where peasants take up arms because of the devastating neo-liberal economic policies inflicted upon them, where the ruins of ancient Mayan cities have been partially

excavated (leading to the discovery that the ancient Maya enacted their own human sacrifices on a substantial scale), where the Mexican Army and police are not averse to using torture to extract information regarding Zapatista activities, and where poetry flourishes as well. *The Road to Ocosingo* carefully interweaves its different themes around this structural mirroring.

### **III. Radical agrarianism**

The initial explanation given for the Zapatista rebellion was NAFTA, specifically the flooding of the Mexican market with cheap U.S. government subsidized wheat and corn, and the more general inability of peasants in Chiapas (and other parts of Mexico) to survive competition with the U.S. and Canadian economies.

The stream of imperial economy eddies and swirls....  
(Schelling 1998: 58)

This was the theory offered at first by the Mexican and U.S. press, and also by the Zapatistas themselves (Collier 1994: 86). Moreover, the Zapatistas occupied various towns in Chiapas at precisely midnight January 1, 1994—the exact moment NAFTA went into effect. But the straw had already broken the *campesinos'* back. It was the result of alterations in 1992 to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution and the Agrarian Code; these changes allowed for "...unprecedented privatization, mortgaging, the sale of *ejidal* parcels, and even of formerly undivided communal lands. They allow for outside investors to band together with peasants in joint ventures of commercial production based on the land" (Collier 1994: 45, 124). These economic policies make it increasingly difficult for poorer peasants to hold on to even small parcels of land.

The modification of Article 27 and the Agrarian Code also stalled the peasants' ability to legally establish land claims, thereby instigating one of the two crucial elements of the Zapatista uprising that have gotten lost in the theater of ski masks and celebrity visits to Chiapas: land seizures. At this point in time, with the Mexican government refusing to implement an initial set of peace accords it signed with the Zapatistas that would grant indigenous peoples in Chiapas greater political autonomy, these land seizures are among the most productive results of the rebellion. "Luis Hernandez, who directs a Chiapas communal coffee-growers' union, estimated more than 40,000 acres of ranch land has been seized by peasants across the state." "In most of the Chiapas cases, peasants are seizing ranch land carved out of federally protected rain forest that, they argue, falls under the constitutional category of 'communal property.' They argue that ranchers' deeds to the property are not legal" (Robberson 1995: A23). Insisting on a more equal distribution of resources, peasants have seized land despite the risk of retaliation, particularly by the "White Guards": an extra-legal police force created, supported, and armed by wealthy landowners.

These conflicts have been partly responsible for the other mostly forgotten side

of the Zapatista struggle: the rise of paramilitary groups (including the White Guards), which has been the most destructive side of the Zapatista rebellion. It's only recently received attention because of the massacre that took place in Chiapas on December 22, 1997 in the village of Acteal where forty-five peasants, mostly women and children, were murdered by members of the village who were armed by the local mayor and allied with the Mexican government in its battles against the Zapatistas. Some were shot in the back as they fled; some were killed while in a church where they sought protection; some were butchered with machetes. "After months of denying the existence of the armed groups, federal officials now say there are about 12 such groups, responsible for 300 to 600 killings in recent years" (Anderson 1998: A24). If the low end estimate is used, three hundred deaths is still almost double the number of casualties that occurred during military skirmishes between the Zapatistas and the Mexican Army. The refugee situation that has resulted from paramilitary groups compelling individuals to flee their villages out of fear of violence is also more severe than during the initial weeks of the Zapatista uprising.

These struggles illuminate the important role which land access continues to play in the Mexican economy, despite its modernizing neo-liberal makeover in the 1980s. In his history of modern Mexico, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, Enrique Krauze presents a snippet of dialogue from 1914 between Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata concerning land distribution after the Mexican Revolution. Krauze explains: "Villa talks about 'bits of land they [the people] want,' Zapata about '*the land*'" (1997: 295; emphasis in original). Zapata's understanding of "the land" as the foundation of society is echoed by the current Zapatistas for whom land forms the basis for small-scale agrarianism—one of the dominant modes of existence throughout much of the world.

But the peasants in Chiapas do not just want small plots of land on which to barely generate a subsistence living. Instead, they've formulated a set of political demands that includes democratic election procedures, improved education, better health care, an expansion of rights for women in their communities, more electricity and cleaner water, and "advantages found in the city, like television, stove, refrigerator, washing machine, etc." (Marcos and the CCRI-CG 1994: 13). In other words, it's not a desire to return to some distant past or to exist alongside, but apart from, the rest of the world. Despite the strong agrarian element to life in Chiapas, peasants there participate in diversified economies rooted in, but not limited to, agriculture: "The vast majority of peasant households now participate in some kind of wage work or commercial enterprise in addition to farming" (Collier 1994: 90). The society envisioned by the Zapatistas is founded in self-sustaining local economies and political egalitarianism, both of which issue from a direct confrontation with transnational capitalism, as well as draw on various peasant traditions. That such a society might have the opportunity to thrive if not subjected to excessive outside pressures—such as Chase Bank urging the Mexican government to forcibly eradicate the Zapatistas in order to stabilize the Mexican economy (Silverstein and Cockburn 1995: 1-3)—makes it clear that these aspirations should not be dismissed as utopian fantasies.

#### IV. "what use our poetry"?

During the 1990s, Andrew Schelling has quietly produced a significant body of work. As I mentioned earlier, a selected poems—collecting materials from 1986-1994—was published in 1995; a couple chapbooks of poetry have also been published (1991), (1993a). His translations from the Sanskrit are recognized as authoritative contributions to the field (*Dropping the Bow* [1991a] won a prestigious Academy of American Poetry translation prize). His book of essays, *The India Book*, makes accessible and relevant to contemporary poetry and South Asian studies a range of concerns—from radical environmentalism in India to traditional Indian poetry. "Jakata Mind" (1993: 67-80), with its wide range of references to Indian culture and its engaging reconstruction of historical events, is one of the best essays in the book. For the most part, *The India Book* is concerned with issues of translation, whether literal or figurative. It includes brief selections of translated poems, along with accompanying discussions of their historical context and the process of translation.

*The Road to Ocosingo* displays the different talents Schelling has developed as a translator, essayist, and poet, and applies them to Mexico and its split between the First and Third Worlds:

Take it in like a translator  
copy it down (1998: 57)

Here we find an indication of the subject position Schelling occupies in these poems as someone experiencing the complex political and cultural situation in Mexico primarily through the process of translation and the continuous dialogue in which it participates between itself and its sources. There's no sense in his book of an authoritative version of events. Its *haibun* influenced structure and Schelling's emphasis on writing as translation "remain alive to the renewed dangers of arrested meanings and fixed categories—in other words, of occupying the position of a sovereign subject," problems which frequently accompany travel writing by Western writers when they assume "the position of a naming subject" (Trinh 1992: 173). This issue of translation also points to exits out of those postmodernist dilemmas in which portions of contemporary experimental poetry are trapped. Along with providing materials for a more pluralistic poetry, Schelling's serious investigations of cultures outside of the European and North American avant-garde tradition help push experimental poetry away from its obsession with form and the surface play of language and toward a poetics in which historical investigation and critical analysis become crucial components.

In "For Allon White: Metaphors of Transformation," Stuart Hall writes: "This question of how to 'think', in a non-reductionist way, the relations between 'the social' and 'the symbolic', remains the paradigm question in cultural theory—at least in all those cultural theories (and theorists) which have not settled for an elegant but empty formalism" (1996: 287). The quote summarizes a complex argument entailing a revised understanding of

traditional Marxist formulations of the relationship between material conditions and ideology (“base” and “superstructure”), but for our purposes it helpfully points out ways in which to reconceive the means by which poetry interprets its worlds: i.e., the subject is no more a direct product of language and ideology than language and ideology are a direct product of the subject, and the relationships between ideologies and material conditions are not wholly determined by either side. In other words, if a flexible relationship is posited between the subject and language and between ideology and material conditions, then a space is created wherein oppositional social forces (with art as a tool—a weapon, even) can influence the development of both ideology and material conditions. As Hall writes concerning a conceptual shift away from a deterministic Marxist model: “But its interest lies in the way notions of a variety of forms of resistance replace the primacy of ‘the class struggle’; in the movement towards a less determinist, more conjunctural way of understanding the ‘repertoires of resistance’ and the centrality it gave to the symbolic dimension” (1996: 295).

Throughout human history, poetry has been a part of the “repertoires of resistance” (though, realistically speaking, it frequently makes its own contribution to propping up the status quo). In fact, an argument could be made that the poetic quality of the communiqués sent out to the Mexican government and various groups around the world by Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas has been one of the most effective modes of propagating their concerns and demands: “Marcos and the Zapatistas have shown their countrymen and women that audacity—and poetry—can alter the balance between the basement of Mexico in which 18 million citizens continue to live in extreme poverty and the penthouse where [ex-President Carlos] Salinas’s [de Gortari] 24 new billionaires lap up neo-liberal luxury” (Ross 1995: 403-404). The power of the communiqués in drawing international attention to Chiapas has also aided in holding off the Mexican Army, since it’s clear at this point, if it wasn’t before, that the military powers of the Zapatistas are limited, and that their initial armed takeover of various towns in Chiapas was part of a brilliantly conceived media event meant more to focus awareness on the plight of indigenous peoples in Mexico than to topple the Mexican government through armed revolution. This is not to deny the material side of the uprising: that members of the Zapatistas and the civilian communities supporting them are risking their lives and dying in the struggle, and that the goal of the uprising is an improvement in the political and economic lives of peasants. But it’s the Zapatista’s imaginative interventions in the “symbolic dimension” that makes their campaign so effective. What other realm was available to them for this kind of direct action, since for centuries they have been denied control over nearly all other aspects of their lives?

Poetry is capable of making valuable ideological interventions, but in order to do so it must not consider this a goal less important or less poetic than the more pristine aesthetic concerns conventionally associated with poetry.

Old karma the night  
is terrible

where once were children fed to Spanish dogs  
out there party bosses oil american helicopters now  
what use our poetry  
dark forest wind has devoured it  
rain & dark wind (Schelling 1998: 32)

Effective political struggle is dependent upon creating alternative and coherent ideologies, alternative and coherent sets of signs. For poetry to make a contribution to this project it must utilize analytical tools that are just as likely to be found outside of the European and American avant-garde tradition (and outside of poetry), as they are derived from within it. One of the primary components in this type of poetry is a complex use of documentary materials. Schelling's *The Road to Ocosingo* is one of the more notable instances of this approach in recent years. Other examples worth mentioning are as different as Kamau Brathwaite's *Barabajan Poems: 1492-1992* (1994); Susan Howe's *Pierce-Arrow* (1999); Kristin Prevallet's *Selection from "The Parasite Poems"* (1998); Ed Sanders' *1968: A History in Verse* (1997); Anne Waldman's *Iovis*, Books I & II (1993 & 1997); and Barrett Watten's *Bad History* (1998). This documentary method also appears to be a strategy appealing to a younger generation of poets deploying a new heterogeneity of practices in an effort to escape the postmodern box. After all, it should be clear by now that we're living and working in an era of High Postmodernism, and—as happened with High Modernism—the institutional acceptance and championing of postmodernism has been engendering a whole range of dialogues with it and revolts against it. One such response is a frustration with an exclusively European and North American based avant-garde tradition of formal experimentation. In any case, a poetry and poetics that seeks to articulate the struggle between dominant ideologies and those social groups they intend to keep subordinate is necessarily a cross-cultural one.

#### ***V. Addendum: The postscript as present and prologue***

The conflict in Chiapas between peasant farmers and both landowners and “free” market economic policies is only one of countless similar struggles occurring around the globe, though nearly all lack the international fanfare the Zapatistas have received. One such example can be found in India in the state of Bihar, specifically in the Chatra district, where peasants in thirty small villages have seized thousands of acres of land from owners of large estates and redistributed it evenly among members of the respective villages. The peasants are then able to farm in a subsistence manner, which provides them with a degree of economic and political autonomy, and frees them from the near feudal conditions that result from being employed as agricultural day laborers. Activists in the area have combined various non-violent and violent strategies to force the landlords to relinquish property to which in certain instances they had only dubious legal claims. The situation in Chatra shares many similar elements with the one in Chiapas: both are among the poorest agricultural regions in their respective countries; both have been devastated by the effects of trade agreements such as NAFTA and GATT; both areas have leftists of various persua-

sions—agrarian socialists, post-Marxists, liberation theologians, hard-core Maoists, etc.—attempting to politically organize the population; and both have sought to establish communities of small-scale production and direct democracy as foundations for a more equitable society. But unlike the Zapatistas, the peasants in Chatra are fighting in anonymity because of a lack of media attention, even within the state of Bihar. Yet for now they are succeeding in creating alternatives to transnational capitalism, though it remains to be seen how long this will continue to be allowed.

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\*More recent Zapatista communiqués—not all of which have been translated into English—can be read at <http://www.ezln.org/comunicques.html>. For an excellent Zapatista site with an annotated set of links, check out <http://www.eco.utexas.edu/Homepages/Faculty/Cleaver/zapsincyber.html>.

# Reviews





# *Collecting Visible Evidence*

Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov, editors  
University of Minnesota Press, 1999

Responding to a resurgence of interest in non-fiction films and socially descriptive art in the early nineteen nineties, a group of film makers and media scholars sponsored annual conferences devoted to nonfiction representation. Entitled, *Visible Evidence*, these conferences produced Minnesota University Press' film studies series, *Visible Evidence*, of which *Collecting Visual Evidence* is number six. This collection of theoretical essays challenges the parameters of documentary studies by redrawing its tradition and purview. The editors, Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov, through their inclusion of sixteen divergent scholars, have decentered the notion of documentary as exclusively non-fiction or cinematic, and produced a keenly assembled book which provides a multifaceted approach to reviewing the way evidence is conceived and perceived.

The book plays out the reconfiguration of cultural studies in the early nineteen nineties, grouping autonomous scholars around the vague notion of documentary to debate and talk about a slew of visual technology formats and representational forms. All the essayists hammer the nebulae of documentary studies by questioning not only one's motivation for making documentaries, and the nature of experience provided through the activity of documenting actuality, but the indexes by which the actual is measured. So while this book may be marketed as a media studies book to the student of the non-fiction format, it is as much an conversation on the philosophy of cognition, the psychology of identification, and the sociology of knowledge as it is a exploration of the poetics of visual culture.

The book begins with an introductory essay by Gaines, where she asserts documentary no longer holds reality on its side. Central to this thesis is the breakdown of the barriers between fiction and non-fiction forms. She asks, if documentary can no longer claim that it is presenting evidence, where then might this medium derive its potency. She contends that what contemporary critics have called the return of the real<sup>1</sup> is not based on a renewed appreciation for objective realism, but rather "an epistophilia for epistophilia," (17) where viewers are not fascinated by a picture of the world, but instead enjoy the process of learning about how the world may be disclosed.

Elizabeth Cowie's continues this vein in her essay, "The Spectacle of Actuality," which addresses how pleasure is derived through curiosity. She sees the documentary experience as fulfilling two distinct desires. "On the one hand there is a desire for reality held...a desire for a symbolic or social reality ordered and produced as signification....On the other hand there is a desire for the real not as knowledge but as spectacle" (19). The interrelation and the paradoxes involved in simultaneously displaying the image as knowl-

edge and as spectacle, is posited as the drive of anthropologists and documentarians alike. Rather than obfuscating or repressing the pleasure of voyeurism, Cowie theorizes it as an essential part of socially descriptive art's communicative power. Quoting Walter Benjamin, she writes, "The audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera" (29). The spectator imagines that he or she is controlling his or her own visual stimulation. From this argument, Cowie relates how documentarians seeking to maintain the spectacular allow social expectation to drive the presentation of fact. Beyond evidence of what has occurred, the film maker or photographer will expose disconnected elements bearing no relation to the immediacy of the filmed action, elements which complement the viewer's symbolic relationships outside the film.

Tom Gunning also analyzes the voyeuristic aspects of documentaries by tracing the evolution of the moniker given to earlier hand held cameras. He shows how amateurs and professionals sought to ban the use of 'detective cameras' as a term for the device. Gunning sees their objection as a maneuver to gloss the underlying guilt felt by photographers who routinely steal souls and invade private quarters. Supporting Cowie's thesis, he argues that the camera is an instrument of disruption as much as it is a tool for presenting knowledge. The history of documentary being, in part, he suggests, a negotiation between camera ethics and *curiositas*.

The interrogation of the desire to illustrate, picture, or imagine in the age of mechanical and digital re/production is continued by Akira Mizuta Lippit in his compelling essay "Phenomenologies of the Surface: Radiation-Body-Image". The essay begins with Freud's "dream of Irma's injection" (65), where the doctor probes a woman's throat in an attempt to visualize her unconscious. Bringing the formless into focus has long been a goal of science, but for Freud, the psyche can not be seen by exploring internal flesh, the "sub-conscious" surfacing only in neurosis or the traces of images on the dream screen.

Mizuta Lippit then transposes his constellation of psychoanalysis on to the development of the x-ray and its effect on human consciousness. He shows how each method of observation aimed to penetrate the boundaries of selfhood. Along with the invention of cinema, psychoanalysis and the x-ray, in their logic of penetration, are said to shift visual perception from the optical to a sign within a phenomenal register (76). "...[T]he x-ray forced a transposition of the language of the Enlightenment from a figurative to a literal sphere. ...[T]he absolute radiance unleashed...now absorbed the subject, enveloping it in searing light" (67). The desire to illuminate however is met with disappointment as each fact gives way to porosity.

Hopscotching to Hiroshima, Mizuta Lippit argues the dropping of the atomic bomb in 1945 was an excessive attempt inscribe the subject onto the geography, a "search for that locus in which the subject would be annihilated by the glare of sublime radiance" ( 80). In the wake of this ultimate violation of the human surface, the surfeit image of the enlightenment is said to give way to a hermeneutic negotiation of evidence, one in which facts are

regarded as artifacts, where the surfaces, in these quests for form, never crystallize, and are always in need of interpretation.

The atomic bomb appears again in Mark Williams' essay, "History in a Flash: Notes on the Myth of TV 'Liveness'." Williams questions "live" broadcasting's "coexistence and interdependence with the everyday" (293). The essay features a long transcription of the telecast of an A-bomb test in Nevada by KTLA in April of 1952. The announcers' comments upon observing the blast are shown to illustrate how events become saturated with culturally gendered assignments. The broadcaster in "live" events are said "to establish a telling 'range' of possible readings" (302). Williams use of excerpted transcriptions from the A-bomb test coverage is particularly fruitful in this endeavor because of the indescribable nature of the event. The bomb's absurdity, coupled with its refusal of the concrete, augments Mizuta Lippit's contention that in the wake of shattered indexes of actuality, semantic containment must be aesthetically rendered.

The case for understanding evidence as a negotiated referent is also made by James M. Moran in his essay, "A Bone of Contention: Documenting the Prehistoric Subject" and Mark J. P. Wolf's, "Subjunctive Documentary: Computer Imaging and Simulation." Both authors argue that virtual simulation of events are increasingly guiding technological society's understanding of the world. For Wolf, computer simulation has developed new ways in which an image can be linked to an actual object. These new images, made by "elongating the indexical link and combining it with extrapolation or speculation" (273) allow viewers to see beyond the range of human vision. The authors suggest that documentarians presenting a future architectural walk through, or displaying a pre-historic subject, are dealing with the same problems of representation contained in more traditional forms of documentaries. Each are "employing experimental strategies at the level of narration" (261) to move from a perceptual to a conceptual understanding of data. As these new forms decrease the dominance of a single point of view based on the physical position of observation, the alleged objectivity obtained through simulation is replaced by multiple subjectivity. Despite the technological enhancements to one's line of sight, Moran insists, "documentary authority never lies *within* the image, but always in the discursive field around it" (270). The fluidity of new media, thus points, once more back to documentary as a communicative event between social bodies.

Vivian Sobchack looks to better understand this social bond between film maker and audience in her essay, "Towards a Phenomenology of Nonfiction Film Experience." Aiming to apply an alternative to the psychoanalytic model of analyzing identification in documentary, a model largely inherited from the study of fiction film and literary criticism, Sobchack forwards the study of "structural differences" which allow people to identify images as real or fictional. Utilizing Jean-Pierre Meunier's 1969, *Les Structures of the l'experience Filmique: L'Identification Filmique*, she looks at film, not as an object *per se*, but as the subjective relationship one has to a cinematic object. Sobchack focuses on the kinds of engagement one may have to images cast on the screen. She looks at the reac-

tions people have when viewing fiction film, documentary, and home movies, or the *film-souvenir* as it is called in French. While she acknowledges that each type of film may not exist in a pure form, the schematic, inherited from Meunier, reveals that each type manufactures different levels of identification between the spectators and the screen images. Rather than asserting, that “all images” are taken up as “imaginary or phantasmatic” she seeks to restore the “charge of the real” to the film experience by insisting on a model of analysis that places the spectator as an active agent in constituting what counts as memory, fiction, or document (253).

Alexandra Juhasz explores how feminist realist film makers have worked to strengthen the “charge of the real” and restore practical and political efficacy to films. Juhasz takes on the critics of realism. “People making political art,” she writes, “are more than capable of simultaneously understanding that while reality is constructed through discourse, it is also lived in ways that need to change.” She asserts feminist documentarians and viewers alike are fully conscious of how identities become strategies of representation in front of the camera. Citing ethnographic studies on spectatorship, she stresses, “we view *in context*” (210). In their critique of the mechanisms of signification, she charges scholars have “stopped thinking critically about the complex and intelligent ways that people watch and make realist film and video” (210). Through her arguments and those of Faye Ginsburg in her essay, “The Parallax Effect: The Impact of Indigenous Media on Ethnographic Film,” it becomes evident that discourse theory is not the sole provenance of professional academic critics. It is, instead, intrinsic and pervasive in the environment in which documentaries are made and viewed today.

*Collecting Visible Evidence* provides its readers with a thorough survey of the contemporary issues and debates in documentary studies, only some of which have been touched upon here. If “the real” has returned as both a subject and object of intellectual and artistic concern, it is not necessarily the same “real” that left before the crisis in ethnographic representation. The new real has some baggage. By looking closely at the relationships involved in the documentary experience, between people and technology, people and images, and ultimately between people and people, this book addresses why socially descriptive art continues to fascinate and empower us in the depths of the postmodern era.

**David Michalski**

<sup>1</sup>See Hal Foster’s *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.

# ***Poetic Culture: Contemporary American Poetry Between Community and Institution***

Christopher Beach  
Northwestern University Press, 1999

This book is a sociology of poetry, one that responds to the question that Beach himself poses in the book's first paragraph: "What contribution does contemporary American poetry make to contemporary American culture?" Although this is certainly not the first time this question has been asked (indeed, it is a question that most poets must come to terms with, whether they know it or not, very early on), Beach is unique in that he suggests, right off, that there can be such a contribution — a fact that many scholars have either forgotten or ignored — and, furthermore, that this contribution can be both an active and critical one. Yet for this criticality to be recognized and taken seriously, Beach also suggests, it must be read (and, importantly, seen and heard) in all of its present manifestations. With this in mind, he addresses himself not only to poetry's traditional scholarly domain — the printed word on the page — but also to spoken-word poetry, poetry on television, and poetry videos. It is such an attention that allows for an early optimism on Beach's part about the current state of poetic affairs. On the topic of the reputed "death of poetry," for instance, Beach is encouraging:

Clearly, poetry is not dead, though some poets and critics may be temporarily confused by about poetry's place within the destabilized field of contemporary culture. All the evidence suggests that poetry — if defined in its widest parameters — is very much alive. Clearly, poetry *can* matter in all sorts of ways and to all sorts of people. It *can* matter to poets if they can move beyond their factionalism and begin to appreciate the tremendous energy and variety of contemporary poetic expression. It can matter to academics and intellectuals if they can once again be made to see the value of poetry a cultural practice with significant avant-garde, communitarian, and pedagogical potential. And it can matter to readers and listeners if they can be exposed to the most innovative and challenging poetries through whatever forms of media prove most effective in spreading both the spoken and the written word.

The "energy and variety" of poetry, evidenced by the vast array of small and independent presses, journals and zines, as well by its appearance in televised specials such as Bill Moyers's *Language of Life*, videos such as Bob Holman's *The United States of Poetry*, and the poetry slam (all of which he addresses) has never been more apparent, and Beach is right to contest the claims of such critics as Dana Gioia, Donald Hall, J.D. McClatchy and others who have argued to the contrary. Yet Beach is also acutely aware that sheer opti-

mism is not the whole story, and it becomes clear from the outset that “innovative and challenging” poetries are not the only ones that populate the contemporary cultural field. Indeed, conflict has tended to invigorate contemporary poetry as much as, if not more than, any mere appreciation of its variety and range, and Beach readily admits that his stance differs markedly from, in his words, the purportedly “objective” stance of the sociological researcher.” A position, if not a polemic, emerges that is openly critical of institutionalized forms of poetic discourse (critical and creative), casting its lot instead with work that is challenging both aesthetically and socially (these being, for Beach, far from mutually exclusive).

The two terms that Beach uses to loosely organize his material (and to situate himself) are those announced in his title: “community” and “institution,” the former defined simply as “a group of poets with shared interests, goals, orientation, and background,” and the latter as “a form of social organization structured by some force outside the immediate control or jurisdiction of the poets themselves, and usually in the service of something other than their own private needs.” These institutions, it turns out, are for the most part familiar ones — the mainstream publishing houses and academic creative writing programs — and one recognizes immediately Beach’s hesitancy with respect to both. It comes as no surprise, then, that Beach discusses critically the institutionalized workshop poem (that most commonly produced in the university setting, and most commonly published in the mainstream press), posing against this the more “communitarian” work of the so-called Language poets and the non- (even anti-) academic spoken-word communities. His book is especially notable for its chapters dedicated the latter, and if the community/institution divide seems elsewhere in the book to lapse into a an all-to-easily simplified either-or heuristic (as in his treatment of Stephen Dobyns and Lyn Hejinian — the sheer audacity of which comparison is in itself admirable, even as it relaxes into a fairly predictable critique of Dobyns’s poetry’s failure to “interrogate its complicity in reified systems of discourse,” and Hejinian’s successes in doing in the same), his treatment of poetry’s encounters with popular media and performance genres manages a bit more subtly the nuances of aesthetic and social interaction. His chapter on the New York City’s Nuyorican Poets Cafe, for example, is good not only in providing a general history of the phenomenon and offering close readings of a few of the poets involved (Hal Sirowitz, Maggie Estep, and Paul Beatty), but also for suggesting that Nuyorican poetry — and slam-poetry in general — constitutes a kind of hybrid genre that, because it motivates communities along lines that are simultaneously social and aesthetic, cannot be easily assimilated into traditional models of interpretation and evaluation. (“Slam poetry,” Beach writes, not only “resists identification with either high or popular culture, but... is a true hybrid of the two, inhabiting a cultural space that is simultaneously part of the aesthetic (literary) marketplace and part of a less aesthetically defined and more socially grounded popular marketplace.”) A similar understanding attends his discussion of Bob Holman’s monumental video anthology *The United States of Poetry* — which Beach suggests may, with Paul Hoover’s Norton anthology *Postmodern American Poetry*, become one of the two “events of the 1990’s with the most lasting cultural and aesthetic resonance.”

Discussed alongside such relative banalities as Moyers's *The Language of Life* and the conveyor-belt ready-mades produced in the standard workshop, such pop-culture experiments cannot help but appear endlessly vital and engaging (which in many ways they are) . Yet how such experiments negotiate and contest institutional structures often remains unclear (Beach generally discusses them as if their status as strictly communitarian efforts goes without saying), particularly insofar as these structures may be non-literary or non-academic ones. Which is another way of saying that Beach never entirely answers the question that he poses at the outset, his discussion of poetic culture often remaining strictly within the realm of literary, and thus failing to establish the grounds for an in depth analysis of how these local manifestations inform and are informed by broader — and non-literary — social, cultural, and political concerns. How, for example, does the work being done in an experimental community such as that of Language writing actually participate in social or cultural debates that extend beyond the immediate sites of its very specific articulations? How does workshop poetry participate in and reflect (and perhaps re-enforce) broader societal tendencies towards normalization and homogenization? How do poetry slams compliment — or even motivate — communities other than their own? In short, how *does* poetry contribute to a culture not composed of its immediate participants?

These questions arise less from reservations about what appears in Beach's book than from a desire for more of that which does not (and perhaps thus a desire for an entirely different kind of book). For his part, Beach suggests in his conclusion a potential answer that has less to do with how poetry *has* and *does* contribute to American culture than with how it *can* and *might* in the future contribute:

If poetry is once again to assume the kind of social, cultural, and aesthetic role it has had in the past, it must struggle to overcome the forces of intellectual apathy and cultural conservatism that have acted as a dead weight on American poetic practice over the past several decades. Rather than politicize and polemicize differences between mainstream and multicultural, between establishment and avant-garde, between official and alternative, let us celebrate (and reward financially with awards and grants) those who have made pathbreaking contributions in all domains of American poetry....Only when we recognize American poetry as a macrocommunity with shared interests and agendas, not simply a field of competing subcultures and institutions, can we move beyond 'opposing poetics —' to borrow Hank Lazer's term — and face our *common* enemy: the impoverished cultural spirit of American life.

This is an odd conclusion to a book that tends to deal with (and take positions on) precisely the kinds of differences that Beach delineates here, and although the notion of American poetry as a "macrocommunity with shared interests and agendas" has a certain democratic appeal, it is belied by the fact that American poetry is in many ways constituted precisely by

its often polemically stated (and politically charged) debates. Which is to say that opposition and difference are not all bad, especially when what is stake is precisely what might constitute a less impoverished cultural spirit — or, for that matter, a less impoverished life — in an America that is often a common enemy indeed.

**Stephen Cope**

# **Blues Narrative**

Sterling Plumpp  
Tia Chucha Press, 1999

and

# **Jumping the Line**

Ted Greenwald  
Roof Books 1999

Mfua is an African kidnapped and brought to America centuries ago. While this book does not directly address her, her presence imbues with historical significance all the actions and voicings of the characters within. This book is about two 20th-century descendants of Mfua, about the uneasy dialogue with the past in the present. This book is about African American history working on, about, and through two people.

Plumpp is not the only African American poet exploring history on perhaps an epic scale. Amiri Baraka in *Wise, Why's, Y's* sets out to write an African American answer to the epic works of white writers such as Charles Olson and William Carlos Williams and his fellow African American Melvin Tolson. Baraka's work is truly epic; it concerns explicitly opposing a dominant, mass ideology. In "Wise 1" he writes: "they ban your/own boom ba boom/you in deep deep//trouble//humph!//probably take you several hundred years/to get/out!" This shows most clearly Baraka's concern with the epic as ideological: he uses legal terms such as "ban" and he is concerned with getting out, not getting on.

Plumpp is also epic in his goals. As with Baraka, African American music, particularly blues in Plumpp's case, suffuses the poems in order to give them a rich, timeless quality. Within this wealth Plumpp places the blues narratives of people. Plumpp's epic, then, is built on people—once-living people to whom Plumpp gives words. We feel the tension between the past, present, and timelessness, between music, words, and the meaning in cadence. The dominant ideology of white people is not as evident here, but the whites are around as a sort of ornery, nasty bunch that may lash out at any time.

Whereas Baraka seems to be interested in ideas conveyed in razor sharp words, Plumpp is interested in people, their music, their feelings. Neither way is of course correct; in fact I believe we need both visions. And these two do not exhaust the poetic approaches to African American history, which would seem to be uncountable.

There are two long poems in the Plumpp book, "Mary (1920-1980): Dialogue With My Mother" and "Victor (1880-1955)." The 19 sections of "Mary" are all organized the same way: a rhyming stanza of blues in the mother's voice, a number of conversational

stanzas in the grown-up son's voice addressed to the mother, and a concluding stanza of blues in the mother's voice. The call and response is a bit alienating since the response is not in song and is addressed to a specific person rather than to a blues audience. I felt that the son was sometimes speaking to nobody except a song.

This alienation is echoed in some of the poem's utterances: "You are an / other star / in an / other galaxy." "I long for stories/I know as you." In both the above passages the mother is removed from the son, who longs for her.

The reason he longs is that she left him when he was young, leaving him to live with his grandparents. Ironically, he was present for her during her last painful illness. Forgiveness and compassion come to the fore, in a straightforward, nonsentimental way: "But I want/you to know/that leaving a/child with grand/parents ain't/no crime//ain't no neglect/at all." He lets the mother off the hook, something most of us would probably not do. "For years I/dreamed another/existence with parents//But like you I/find dampness/in parched lips/of desire and/my songs thrive." Compassionately, he attributes much that is in his songs to her.

"Victor" is structurally much more simple than "Mother," with a "song" at the beginning and end and seven other sections of precise and exacting poetry in between. Victor is superhuman, or at least seems so to the boy narrator. In the first poem the narrator sees Victor "hind the cedars/patching a cloud," which lets him in on Victor's secrets. The narrator is doomed. Victor is the fearsome father-figure: fair, solid, and so powerful as to make the boy wither. Victor faces the blues directly: "Your blues say/it not gonna hide its face/cause somebody bothered/by its presence." Victor faces the blues head-on, and it is an unnerving experience, or would be for most. The blues is mobius and complex in Plumpp's cosmology; it seems to be the source of most feeling, yet it seems cloaked by the very feelings it generates. It seems perpetually abundant, even in its cruelties.

In the touching final section, "Calling You Back," Plumpp remembers all that Victor has given him in the way of tales. Victor's words are Plumpp's words, and it keeps going back, generation after generation, to Mfua. These are the songs of a nation emerging.

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In a 1979 statement collected in *In the American Tree*, Ted Greenwald explains that he likes to create poetry within the limitations of speech. By this he seems to mean that his language comes from what is actually being spoken rather than from a literary tradition, even if it is the avant-garde one. This language is not static. Greenwald "prefers dealing with items that are still charged with meaning and in fact are open to the change that happens over time in meanings" (498). Greenwald wants to place his poem within the turbulent limits of evolving speech.

In his desire to tie poetic language to speech, Greenwald is not alone. William Carlos Williams most famously made the attempt with his variable foot. In his variable foot poems Williams seems to want to smooth out syntactical and semantic ruptures, to make the face of the poem as unblemished as possible. Greenwald loves these seeming blemishes. His writing is full of disjuncture, syntactical disruptions, and a refusal to come to any sort of closure. Spoken language for him is cracked. It is a wonder that two poets could both work from the same premise and come up with such radically different results.

In spite of the radical techniques used, Greenwald's poetry has an innocent quality, as if he were coming upon the words in their full apparentness for the first time. "Wider still/Open your windows/Whole dazzle//Front delight/Cover to cover/Read your biography//Traffic/covers/Legs and arms/Fuse to take your side//Just look/Just think/Just think." Words such as "dazzle" — and not just "dazzle" but "whole dazzle" — and "delight" give a sense of openness to possibility and an affection for the words and items coming along. "Traffic" covering "legs and arms" gives us an off-beat image that sticks us to an urban scene where the masses and the traffic fuse with the poetry for a moment. And in the end we can "just think" before such bewilderment and possibility.

To read Greenwald is to feel stories start and abruptly end, to be confronted with seeming oxymorons, to be sent off on a tangle of tangents of your own making, the language blistering and buffeting you: "Itsy pleasure centers/Feel free to leave/Well enough alone//Summoning forth/Bad spells/Tender spoons//How do you spell/Fork Which road/Supplies a take on." Here, adjectives such as "itsy" are applied to seemingly unrelated nouns, "pleasure centers." A sentence, "Feel free..." issues a suggestion to another person, then their conversation is dropped. The next stanza gives us images of the occult — "summoning," "spells" — yet ends with a line that seems to teasingly echo the line above in its rhythm. We are at a transition point. He then, in the final stanza quoted, puns on "spells" and "fork" to playfully extricate us from the complexities we've gotten ourselves into. And what are these complexities? A sense of endless searching, not in frustration but in the assurance that this is life and language, which is our limit, to always explore and discover.

What's most interesting about the poems in this book is the form. Ten lines in the middle of each 30-line poem repeat themselves in a way that makes the language seem to loop back upon itself: "Which brings me/To the part//Which brings me/To the part//In the telling//In the telling/This is the phone/Please pick up/Please pick up/This is the phone." In the center of each poem a sputtering, stuttering, or looping block of words cause the momentum to shift, making the second half of the poem seem very different from the first, like looking at a friend the day after a bad fight with him or her.

You couldn't ask for friendlier poems. Ted Greenwald brings us to the linguistic utopia already within us and asks us to revel with him there.

**Jefferson Hansen**

# ***Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation***

Dorothea Olkowski  
University of California Press, 1999

## *Millennium Fireworks: Feminism after Freud and Lacan*

The evolution movement would be a simple one, and we should soon have been able to determine its direction, if life had described a single course, like that of a solid ball shot from a cannon. But it proceeds rather like a shell, which suddenly bursts into fragments, which fragments, being themselves shells, burst in their turn into fragments destined to burst again, and so on for a time incommensurably long. (104)

The pure past is Eros accompanying Mnemosyne. (135)

In short: no virtual memory (pure past), no creative éclat. (135)

The ontological unconscious is virtual memory with its layered sections each of which is an image of the whole from a particular point of view, each of which may contract into a present so as to create the future. (117)

For those of us who have all but escaped normative- “cannon ball” narratives (“marriage,” “children,” “professionalization”) because we have chosen “passivity” allowing Eros and Mnemosyne or love and memory to “direct” our present lives, perhaps the *all but* in the “all but escaped” comes from the fact that although we have chosen this route, we have not done so absolutely. Rather, having only partially negated our habit of bourgeois individuated thought, we have remained irresponsible in the sense that ultimately we allow our isolate and isolating egos to rule us. Because we have not destroyed “absolutely” the ego-centric perspective from which we measure ourselves through the eyes of the representatives of dominant bourgeois culture, we cannot completely escape self judgement via the regime of the cannon ball narrative. In order to completely escape this narrative, according to Dorothea Olkowski’s *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*, we need to learn not only to affirm our actual past but as well a virtual or pure past, “pure duration,” or in other words, “ontological memory.” Fortunately, Olkowski’s *Gilles Deleuze and The Ruin of Representation* is a force so powerful as to help propel us onto and through this necessary doubling. In my reading, when Deleuze-Nietzsche (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*) points out that we have two selves: a “more noble” and “less noble” self, this is what Olkowski’s reading of Deleuze-Bergson means when she refers to the necessity of our recognition of

Deleuze-Bergson's conceptualization of the virtual object. To choose our "more noble" self we must first recognize that not only do we have an actual lived past but as well we have a pure past or past as "pure duration" in the form of an infinite number of images from which we may choose to create our futures. Our lived "actual memory" is always accompanied by virtual memory or the development of virtual objects that are never lived but are nevertheless real. What the future will become for us is therefore not based on a lived past. If we remain open to the *encounter* which is life, our future will be composed of the unknown that is drawn out in these encounters, the "unknown" consisting of an infinity of images or virtual objects we have created throughout our lives.

It seems a curious phenomena that in America those who proudly boast their "status" as the "exception to the rulers" are rarely "heard" as happy creatures of choice. Why is this? To those of us who have chosen these sorts of lives, it seems apparent that we are the happy majority. Why is it then that when we voice our choice as "resisters" to the sleepy path the socius lays out for us, no one believes us? The only logical answer to this question seems to be that dominant culture does not believe us because we do not believe ourselves. Our negation of dominant culture is only a partial destruction. We live alternative lives but we nevertheless believe that our unconscious determines us, filled as we think it is with repressed wounds from childhood. Thus our "alternative choice" has something to do with our past as lacking the necessary "proper" elements to make a dynamic future. As different from this, Olkowski's reading of Deleuze-Bergson's "ontological unconscious" requires that we absolutely negate or destroy the notion that we have a repressed unconscious. Rather we must understand that we create a "virtual unconscious" or past filled with an infinite number of images which are real but nevertheless were never present. Alongside our actual memories we have an infinite number of virtual memories. In other words, we are creative beings, we construct the unconscious. As different from this, our belief in Freud and Lacan's theory of the repressed unconscious means that, apparently others will see through our "happy" expressions and read them as false. Maturity, in Freud/Lacan terms means that we accept "lack," or in contemporary lingo "get over it." Thus, what gets transmitted to the other when a person says that she is happy is the message "that person says she is happy but she is not. It is impossible for anyone who is not "successful" (white, male, bourgeois) to be happy." Olkowski's text which is a brilliant and exuberant image of the future of difference helps us to understand why this sort of self-critical communication is not a psychological issue of self esteem. According to Olkowski, although we speak otherwise, in truth we cannot take responsibility for having chosen to live alternative lives because we do not have access to an ontology of change or becoming which would allow us to do so. In other words, although we tell others we are happy about our choices, without an ontology of becoming or "doubling" as the basis of our belief, regardless of what we think we say, what we communicate is that we do not truly believe in our chosen reality. Instead, what we communicate is that we think somehow we have "missed the mark." What we communicate is that somehow we are victims; we are "less," given that we do not "measure up" to the status quo. For Olkowski this feeling (of our inability to measure up) has nothing to do with the psychology of low self esteem. Rather, it is a philosophical issue. Though we choose to

live alternative lives, we cannot affirm our choices because simultaneously as we speak we default to a Kantian model of time based on a homogeneous model of space. If we do not understand that in our relations with others, or in other words, in our political practice, time cannot be conceived on the same model as space (equally divided blocks), when we represent ourselves to others, we will necessarily privilege hierarchical structures. Those who have chosen to live alternative lives will continue to defer to those who have chosen to live the status quo; women will continue to defer to men; so called minorities will continue to defer to whites; the vast majority who are the working poor will continue to defer to the leisure class. Given our habituated use of psychology to represent ourselves, in effect, we tell the other "yes, its true, your side is the only and best side to be on, i.e. there are no such persons as resisters, "resisters" are "losers".

Olkowski's study of Deleuze, Deleuze-Guattari, feminist philosophy (Irigaray), feminist legal theory (MacKinnon), and visual art (Mary Kelly) is then a study for those of us who did not have a "privileged" (white, male, western European) childhood in the sense that we could not accept such an impoverished, dispassionate reading of our lives. We are the ones who choose rather to revel in our creative, inventive, spirited lives. The future for women, minorities, and the poor, according to Olkowski, will be eventful (no victims here) if members in these groups learn to affirm what they live, an "ontology of becoming" which arises out of life itself. The problem as Olkowski sees it from her Deleuze-Nietzsche point of view is that without an ontology of change, women, minorities, and the poor often become their own worst enemies. What she means is that for example when women compare themselves to men or when workers compare themselves to the bourgeois or when "minorities" compare themselves with whites seeing themselves therefore as "less" this is because they compare themselves as different in degree- quantity (less, more) rather than different in kind- quality (different from self, different from other). This sort of comparison or representational thought results in the inability to trust oneself profoundly and thus the inability to affirm the life one creates. Although this appears to be an issue of psychology: affirming difference in kind as opposed to difference in degree, affirming "life itself," Olkowski contends that without a critique of representation, affirming life itself is impossible. An economy of representation does not affirm difference in kind but difference in degree.

In a society where speed is everything, one feels a fierce schism in slowly reading Olkowski: on the one hand it requires far too much intellectual labor but on the other hand, particularly for anyone who has been reading both Luce Irigaray and Gilles Deleuze for years, the feeling of deep gratitude and joy expressed by Shakespeare's Miranda on her discovery that those she thought dead are yet alive constantly comes to mind: "O, wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world that has such people in't!" Finding a feminist theorist who "does not specifically work from a feminist point of view" and so can at last articulate a connection between Irigaray and Deleuze is nothing short of exhilarating. But why is this connection so important to feminist theory? After all, who are Deleuze and Irigaray in the eyes of the academy, or in other words, bourgeois culture, but theorists who really do not make sense? For some even, they are nonsense (Deleuze, a mere "sixties" utopian; Irigaray, a "seventies" hysteric). Olkowski's

focus points out that not only are Deleuze and Irigaray nonsense in the eyes of the university elite and of dominant culture, so are the lives of minorities, women and the poor. And since we know what the markers are for a life or an idea that “makes sense” (husband, wife, two children, a good job etc.), if a life or an idea does not fit this model, we become afraid not only of what others will think of us but more importantly, what we will think of ourselves. We become afraid of ourselves, wondering, am I going crazy? am I mad? This sort of judgement has penetrated so deeply into our so called reading that to get past this self condemnation or resistance requires a major struggle. A perfect example of this resistance that must be overcome is my study of Olkowski’s text for this review. In order to read Olkowski, I had to fight the feeling of uselessness, specifically the train of thought: How could anyone “make sense” of my spending weeks and weeks “getting down” with Olkowski’s details as to why Deleuze’s philosophy is not phenomenology and why it is not psychoanalysis? How hard do I want to work to articulate the world of change I am living so that, finally, I may affirm it? The positive nihilistic “who cares?” attitude, “yeah, so my life is nonsense” comes only with a profound ability to affirm difference. In an odd way then, my struggle with Olkowski mirrors exactly the struggle Olkowski is engaged in articulating. How do those of us who do not live lives that “make sense” to the ruling elite practice the ruin of representation or in other words, the ruin of “authority.” The “real” lives we are born into do not become lived lives when we act as though the race, class, and sex system has the final word on destiny. As different from this, the practice of difference takes us out of the categories from which all too often we merely react.

The task then of Dorothea Olkowski’s *Gilles Deleuze and The Ruin of Representation* is specific. What she intends is to invert the way in which oftentimes in narrating our lives we make life conform to theory. Rather, following in the Deleuzian tradition, life comes first. According to Olkowski, her desire to do more than the standard -life follows theory act-provokes her to

...search for concepts and transformational structures characterized by an abstract but fluid ontology that can make sense of difference by accounting for the reality of temporal and spatial change on a pragmatic level while providing appropriate theoretical constructs in whose terms change can be conceived(3).

Olkowski’s effort works to delegitimize the primacy of the model thus undermining the stability of representational categories through affirming the intelligence of minoritarian and/or minority lives. But, of course, the first question one could ask of Olkowski’s position is, “is she a phenomenologist? Does she believe that we can actually live lives where theory does not mediate reality? In other words, does she believe that we can live lives which have an immediate experience of reality?” Such questions would imply the notion that we are all ideological subjects of one sort or another and that therefore no immediate experience of reality is possible. Interestingly, Olkowski aligns herself with Deleuze and Irigaray against psychoanalysis and as well against phenomenology in order to show that, yes, indeed,

*what we think makes the difference* with respect to how we live our lives. This is precisely why we cannot continue to think through static (psychoanalytic) structures nor can we continue to pretend that there are no structures which underlie our actions as is the case with phenomenology.

If we wonder why the desire to be “normal” is so overwhelming today, perhaps this is the key: we want our lives to make sense. But from the viewpoint of the ruling class, they do not make sense, in fact, often they seem to make no sense at all. Conforming to a theoretical or knowledge model in interpreting our actions helps us to hide the fact from ourselves that because we are minorities, we are women, we are poor, we are workers, we are working class artists and intellectuals, we are leftists, we are the marginalized majority, our lives will never “make sense” in terms of representational categories. Since “the very meaning of minority is associated with falling below the standard of the norm, failing to represent the standard in all its perfection and completeness,”(2) we imagine that indeed we are *not* minorities if we can somehow show that our actions conform to a theoretical or knowledge model.

To make an analogy using Camilla Griggers’ critique of the white modernist woman “player” in *Becoming-Woman*, we see that the white modernist woman is both victimizer and victim. Her “job” is to cover up her minority status (in the male/female binary) and to “screen violence toward minoritarian social bodies reterritorialized into the face of the sacrifice under expansionist capitalism. But if she herself exceeds the limit of the despotic signifier she is also often required to become that face, i.e. the scapegoat.”(17) This is akin to Deleuze-Guattari’s and Michel de Certeau’s take on ‘writing’ as a scriptural economy which requires learning to manage a space. After we learn to master the space of the page, we are qualified to manage others. The modernist female “teaches” others by disciplinary methods which in essence deny their voices. Eventually, she herself is victimized because in her position of bourgeois representative, she must deny her own voice as well. When we discover or rather uncover the truth about our jobs, typically we bite the bullet. Our “jobs,” so we pretend, protect us from sacrificial violence: street violence, homelessness, domestic violence. They promise us “the rights, privileges, and status of bourgeois individuated identity.”(Griggers 21) But in exchange for this “protection” we are required to engage in a public violence (which necessarily spills over into our “personal” lives) of immense proportion (silencing ourselves and others). A closer look at today’s process of “professionalization” or creation of workers as globalized subjects of efficiency finds that white collar jobs as “authoritarian contract proceedings” often merely work as screens for despotic sacrificial exchanges. In other words, our “jobs” in effect require sadism, the screening of sacrificial violence toward others.

In thinking through Dorothea Olkowski’s text *Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*, the informed reader will indulge the text in a very informal and even conversational manner. Not surprisingly, this is often the way with good theory and/or good readers of theory: we read theory at the level of a highly articulate and intellectual abstraction, but at

the same time we find a way to link this sort of thinking to the particular events of our lives. Since this is the goal of Olkowski's text, to use the Deleuzian "method," being both abstract and particular at once, it appears that her writing is more than the same old content framed by an uninformed form. In other words, although throughout her work Olkowski summarizes text after text in the standard academic "explication de texte," the extremely abstract nature of these summaries allows us to enter the reading at the level of a singular (my) reading which then functions to inspire affirmation of our "own" "minoritarian" stories. As different from a text which wants to "teach us" correct thinking "against" representational thinking and in doing so devalue our "experience," by way of making us submit to a standard measure or so called objective (moralizing) point of view which excludes us, Olkowski's reading encourages the sort of scholarship elitists hate. Thus for example although Olkowski does not do a close reading of Hakim Bey's *T.A.Z. (Temporary Autonomous Zones)*, after reading Olkowski we go about "interpretation" of the *T.A.Z.* by way of what Deleuze and Guattari call "first level articulation." What we find is not the opposite of representation, the idea of the "indeterminate chaos of unformed matters,"(27) but rather we find an "assemblage" (agencement):

a configuration of speeds (thus movements), intensities (qualitative variations), and varying distributions of its elements.(27)

Many informal conversations surrounding the work of Deleuze and Guattari equate "intensities" with chaos rather than with Deleuze's principle of "self-organizing systems" which is Olkowski and Hakim's reading. In this "self-organizing" reading the fear of psychosis (chaos) is gone because psychosis is no longer the pathological symptom psychoanalytic readings have privileged. "Psychosis" is rather the continuous interactive and or collective growth human organisms are: becoming. In essence, becoming is simply self trust on a profound level. On the other hand, fitting into the culture of "wellness," we accept the social demand that we overcode all activity "outside" that which can be easily represented so that it too can "fit." This *normalization* is the true psychotic moment. For example, everyday so called educated people of the West find themselves "spying" for elites, reporting on conversations within the terms the system demands:

And you at the same time insert yourself in the code; you find yourself designated as a tourist, an observer and reporter for the empire, another plunderer bringing back to the imperial metropolis handicrafts and idols, souvenirs and memories, and field reports on the activities of the outlaws. If you want to speak of them murmuring together, without subjecting them and yourself to the law, if you want to speak of a discourse of nomads and outlaws, if you want to tell of them speaking to you as outsiders, nomads and outlaws, you must never pronounce this word. But how then will others understand what you say- others who, like yourself, speak imperial English, which they have learned and continue to learn from the imperial media?  
(299, Lingis, ed. Olkowski, *GD & Theatre of Philosophy*)

As we know from modern day warfare, women, children and the poor in general are the true victims of this spying. Viewing Freudian-Lacanian theory as part of this elite ring or spying apparatus for the protection of the status quo, Olkowski shows us, for example, an essential distinction between the way Deleuze theorizes the sexual instincts and the way Freud does. Deleuze has no problem reformulating Freud's Oedipal complex and narcissism in terms of the complex processes of the deepening of the passive synthesis, the constitution of virtual objects and of the multiple egos of passive synthesis. Olkowski writes,

Recall the asymmetry in the pure form of time according to which when there is no actualization of the virtual past that will answer the need of the little boy to retrieve his mother (Freud's *fort-da*), a connection is made in the persistence and deepening of passive synthesis. That is, as the little boy seeks "in reality" his mother's return, he sympathetically "constitutes" a virtual object for contemplation in a deepening of passive synthesis; this is his narcissism. What is important in this reading is that, rather than attributing a sense of moral or intellectual degradation to the character of the patient, narcissism is the condition of creation, a condition that transforms the child from a pathetic, revengeful "patient" into a life artist, a creative and reflective spirit. The boy creates, he throws the toy and pulls it back. Along with the activity of constituting the virtual object, the child is simultaneously passive, but in a deeper sense than that of the first passive synthesis. The boy contemplates the entire situation from the point of view of the virtual object, and the virtual object (here, the virtual mother) is created on the basis of a real object that conforms to the series of real and to reality testing.

From the point of view of becoming, where Freud sees the child's need to control reality, Deleuze sees the creation of the virtual mother. Likewise, where Freud sees woman's sexual drive as narcissistic, Deleuze sees it as the deepening of the "passive synthesis" or creative self. Freudian theory is theory for the elites because, as Olkowski puts it, it cuts us off, calling us "sick" just when we are about to get in touch with our madness which would be our creative salvation. This keeps us within the identity: race, class, sex, age system ultimately cut off from difference in kind.

**Julia Van Cleve**

# ***The Politics of Fieldwork: Research in an American Concentration Camp***

Lane Ryo Hirabayashi  
University of Arizon Press, 1999

Integrating personal letters, public records, anthropological reports, and camp drawings, Hirabayashi presents a new context for discussing the experience of Japanese Americans during WWII. Hirabayashi has raised questions of power, ethics, and resistance in this examination of the life and work of Dr. Tamie Tsuchiyama. Tsuchiyama was a Japanese American advanced doctoral student who was hired by JERS, the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study at the University of California, Berkeley, but never benefited from years of painstaking fieldwork in the camps. Hirabayashi describes, questions and criticizes the relationship of Tsuchiyama and her primarily white supervisors. He leaves us with concise, but compelling, recommendations from his study.

The text is organized chronologically. The chapter titles all begin with R but this is not a ploy: Roots, Recruitment, Research Setting, Revelation, Removal, Rejection, Restoration and Redux. It is a natural progression, each chapter leading us closer to respond to the questions:

...what does it mean, both in terms of the data and in terms of the field itself, when anthropologists utilize the services of local field assistants in order to get access to and actually to collect the primary data for a study? In the end, who profits from these efforts, especially in the sense of having access to the rewards that the opportunity to analyze, write, and publish the data in a formal ethnography entail? (8)

Hirabayashi encourages us to rethink “the politics and ethics of fieldwork, especially when senior scholars of one color deploy junior scholars of another color to collect research data under difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances.” (10)

Tamie Tsuchiyama was born in 1915 in what was then the Territory of Hawaii. She was Nisei, or in other words, a second-generation Japanese American. Because of her proficiency as an anthropology student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and at UCLA, Tsuchiyama was admitted to the University of California Berkeley in 1938 for graduate work in anthropology. When the restrictions of Japanese Americans began after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Tsuchiyama could have returned to Hawaii where there was not widespread internment of Japanese Americans. She chose not to because of her commitment to her discipline and her compatriots. Tsuchiyama left Berkeley and went back to Los Angeles, where she had once studied.

On April 20, 1942, Tsuchiyama wrote to anthropologist Robert H. Lowie [Tsuchiyama's mentor at Berkeley] informing him that, for the last five weeks, she had been in Los Angeles trying to help out in the Japanese American community there. Tsuchiyama's letter to Lowie reflected her empathy for these soon-to-be-impounded people, the letter also reflected a growing realization that current developments, set in motion by the involvement of the United States in the Second World War, might provide a unique context for the study of long-term acculturation patterns of people of Japanese descent on the mainland. (23-24)

Tsuchiyama faced what we might now see as triangulation. She was strongly committed to the field of anthropology to people beginning to assemble to be removed to the camps to her Euro-American mentors and supervisors. She was never able to reconcile these commitments.

From the start, Tsuchiyama was given more choices than others in the camps concerning where she would go, and when she could leave the camps. The authorities both at the Assembly Center and at the camps were aware of her research, while most of the people she was studying were not. Her primary supervisor, Dorothy Thomas was a sociologist and director of the University of California Japanese American Evacuation and Relocation Study project. Tsuchiyama spent most of her time at Poston. The United States Government had incredibly placed the Poston camp on the Colorado River Indian Reservation and assigned the management of the camp to the Office of Indian Affairs.

Tsuchiyama faced the possibility that she would be harmed by others in the assembly areas and the camps if they thought her to be a spy. She faced severe health threats from the physical conditions she faced in the camps. Finally, she faced the forfeiture of a promising career and a devotion to her field. Hirabayashi has the insight to let Tsuchiyama tell her own story by presenting letter after letter about her experience. Hirabayashi also has the good judgement and discipline to withhold cluttering the letters with interpretation when it is not necessary. Often we are permitted to read pages and pages of letters without interruption:

**April, 1942** ...I was extremely interested to hear that plans are being made in Berkeley for the scientific study of Japanese in reception centers and would appreciate greatly if you would inform Dr. Thomas that I shall be happy to cooperate in whatever way I can. She may be interested to know that for the past five weeks I have been helping in the orderly evacuation of Japanese from the Los Angeles area and have accumulated considerable data which may be of value to her. When I left Berkeley last month I had full intentions of accepting a job teaching Japanese in one of the Eastern Universities but when I realized the

plight of my people in Los Angeles I decided to make a study of them before and after confinement in concentration camps not so much to gather data for a monograph which I intend to write someday on the acculturation of the Japanese in Hawaii and California but to test a few personal theories I have harbored for some years...(32-33)

**June 1942** ...If Dr. Thomas would like to have me send in a weekly report I shall be happy to do so but I cannot guarantee its reaching her. She can rest assured however that I am putting in from six to eight hours of research daily and have accumulated considerable data since May first when I set foot for the first time in [an] American 'concentration camp.' ...At night when the flood lights from the twenty sentry's [sic] towers scour the camp and prevent me from falling asleep, I pretend that I'm back again on the sixth floor of the [University of California's Doe] library stacks and attempt to recapture, if only for a fleeting second, the security that was mine...(38-39)

**November 1942** ...the fact that our files are confidential and inaccessible to any group including the administration has aroused the curiosity of some of the people of Poston and many of us have been branded *Inu*, or F.B.I. informers and individually notified of the public's dislike for such behavior...(53)

**January 1943**...My fear of the F.B.I. intercepting my mail may seem awfully childish and exaggerated to you but if you have been grilled by them as many times as I have or seen so many of your acquaintances 'mistreated' by them shortly before evacuation you will perhaps understand...(88)

**March 1943**...I want to see a good book on the history of Japanese in California written from the Japanese point of view and since I know of no one who is at present attempting such a task I thought in my small way I might be able to do my bit toward such a goal...(95)

**July 1943**...There isn't a square inch on my body not covered with heat rash. Haven't had a decent night's sleep for the last 4 weeks. Am beginning to agree with my family who have been admonishing me to relocate that 'science should not come before life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' (127)

**October 1943**...I am leaving Poston with mixed feelings. One desire is to get out as quickly as possible and never in my wildest dreams expect to return to a concentration camp again. The other is an intense

curiosity (or more correctly, a deep sense of duty) to follow the thing through. It will be interesting to see which side will triumph in the next four months...(131)

**July 1944**...I am requesting for the last time to be released from the study as of July 15, 1944, to pursue other activities which are more acceptable to me. From the very beginning we have not seen eye to eye on how the Japanese should be studied so I see no advantage to you in my continuing further...(151)

Tsuchiyama was able to finish her doctoral work at Berkeley but her dissertation had nothing to do with life in the camps. She enlisted in the Army, she worked as a librarian, but never published or even was able to continue with her career in anthropology. She died in 1984. Her legacy is enriched by Hirabayashi's ability to step aside and let her voice be heard.

Hirabayashi recommends that senior scholars not use, for their own benefit, research that junior scholars have completed on their own communities. Likewise, he recommends that junior scholars refuse to conduct research on their own communities unless the junior scholars are able to benefit. In carefully chosen and humane terms, he denounces research that creates "colonial science."

Hirabayashi writes: "I seek to provide insight into Tsuchiyama's life itself. As a pioneer in her own right whose intellectual formation, accomplishments, and professional demise (in anthropology, anyway) have been neglected if not erased. Tsuchiyama's story begs to be told."(6) Hirabayashi is just the one to tell it.

**Robin Ann Lukes**

# **Collected Poems: 1919-1979**

Madeline Gleason  
Talisman House, 1999

and

## **Midwinter Day**

Bernadette Mayer  
New Directions (reissue), 1999

Grace descends, as Simone Weil has explained. Like night, it covers us, makes us feel our boundaries, face our fears, and say our prayers. For many writers—say, Emerson—the moment of grace arrives when the soul experiences a union, through transcendence, with the glory of our maker. It's a one-to-one transaction. No one else is around. The motion of grace involves an upward thrust.

For various reasons, these images might not work for women. Writing mothers, for example, rarely get a chance to be alone. Traditionally, women have lived and worked in communities. We talk in groups. Supposedly it's easier for us to talk intimately with those we barely know. I've heard that when men are sad, they usually like to be alone. I prefer to talk to my sisters. We exercise in groups, labor in groups, cook, volunteer, work, dance, laugh, etcetera. We sit alone in groups in the backs of some churches and temples. We seem to be community oriented. And Mary, the female god that Christianity left behind when the other gods were swept from the altars, was certainly never alone. She visited Ann, she visited Elizabeth, she had a baby that she took care of for as long as she could before he was compelled to begin his work in the world. And even when she went to his tomb, she was not alone.

In Elizabeth Bishop's poem "The Moose," the experience of encountering the sacred arrives after a long description of someone falling asleep and hearing grandparents' voices talk about friends and relations. Suddenly the bus stops and everyone sees the moose. "Look! It's a she!" someone notices. Everyone's quiet. Then the narrator asks "Why, why do we feel/ (we all feel) this sweet/ sensation of joy?" Throughout the poem, we've had allusions to sacred things: apostles, St. John, and now the moose's antlers are compared to churches. Something female greets a group of strangers—travelers, really. Maybe they are pilgrims of a sort. And together, they witness something awe-inspiring. Together, in community, they share a kind of joy, a kind of grace. Of all places—on a bus! But of course on a bus. Throughout Bishop's work, the moment of grace comes when there is an act of communion with "ordinary" community.

The work of Bishop, Simone Weil, and the British theologian Sara Maitland dem-

onstrate that acts of grace are not necessarily thrusts of isolated luck. The presence of the holy is in the everyday, and moments of sheer spiritual rapture might arrive outside the cathedral, beyond the rhododendron bush. Mystical union may infuse us while we are holding a sleeping child, holding a mother's hand, braiding hair.

I'm focusing on the sacredness of the tangible world in two books of poetry: Madeline Gleason's *Collected Poems: 1919-1979* (Talisman House, \$21.95) and Bernadette Mayer's *Midwinter Day* (New Directions reissue, \$12.95).

When I was in graduate school at the University at Buffalo, I heard two fellow students at a party whispering—leaning, and sipping their keg beer as they talked about poetry. I asked what in particular they were discussing. “Duncan,” they hissed, and turned their backs to me. I had always had the impression of Duncan being a gentle hawk, who hovered in his thermals close to heaven, looking down and inspecting, studying, choosing, and ultimately descending to put his glorious handwriting to paper. Granted, I had always had trouble with his much-anthologized “My Mother Would Be A Falconess” because of the pained and tethered relationship so explicit in the poem. No mother really wants to yank her baby's chain like that, does she? But when I got to Buffalo, I decided that there must be a more powerful, mystical force surrounding Duncan than I had ever realized. After all, these brilliant poets were very busy building a shrine around his work.

So when I was asked to review a collection of Madeline Gleason's work, I froze. A Duncanite! I could never be fair, I couldn't do her justice, I'm predeterminedly ignorant about the Duncan shrine, and choose to remain so. But I've always gravitated towards the women writers of the middle part of our century: Bishop, H.D., Niedecker, Moore, (Riding) Jackson...And each of them were linked closely with male modernists, confessionalists, imagists, objectivists...

During the San Francisco Renaissance, when Duncan was publishing, and the Beats were making the scene, Gleason wasn't really getting published. Why would that be? She essentially created the momentum for the Renaissance by starting readings twice a month; this is where the scene makers began to congregate. Together with Duncan, James Broughton, Eve Triem and Jess Collins, Gleason formed a group called “The Maidens.” She and Duncan shared a concern for a strong poetry community, for an articulated aesthetic, for the musicality of poetry. They recognized the role of the “bard”: the voice, the declarer, the weaver of wonders. Indeed, in her essays on poetics, Gleason writes:

“Who but [the poet] puts spangles on the otherwise plain dress of habitual action, intensifies the lighting to deepen insight and constantly repaints the significant [sic] back-drop to reinvigorate the speech of the same old dramatis personae!” (from *The Artist As Role Player*)

Yet, this statement highlights a wonderful tension in Gleason's work, between the

act of artifice and the practice of poesis. In her essay "Why Does A Poet Write A Poem?" Gleason recognizes that her generation has

"...grown up in an age that regards history not as an event, but as process; poetry not so much an expression of emotion as process. Our poetry displays our ragged nerves, our enduring curiosity, our vulgarity...This impetuosity of speech...our gabfests..."

This declaration moves Gleason out of the fanfare of artifice, the role of the hermit/poet recrafting the utterances of the common world. Instead, the poet is simultaneously aware of process, language, and artifice. She uses the music of meter and shape while reflecting on the processes bound in the love and longing between friends, lovers, children and parents. In "Lyrics (for Ted)," Gleason writes: "I thought how we live between/the divine and the commonplace." We live between what is already perfect, and what is in process of becoming. In the poem "For My Mother," Gleason blends the personal, the magical, and the tenderness of family relationships.

You point out to me  
Patterns of the constellations,  
The moon with combs of cloud in her hair,  
The stretched silk of symmetrical hills;  
I see these forms of beauty  
Slide by your skirt,  
And think the branches of heaven  
Must part gently for you.

Skirts, stretched silk, combs, patterns: the emblems of a mother who sews, who makes things of use and things of beauty, and who lives an earthly and a heavenly life. God and heaven are, every day, everyday. The "sacred" we experience in the company of Gleason and of Bernadette Mayer is no up-there-out-there-transcendental god who makes herself known by exhuming the spirit like a vacuum cleaner. This is no vertical thrust. This spirit, this presence of the holy in the everyday, is manifest in community, in relation, in parenting, in loving, shopping, browsing, dreaming, and cooking.

Bernadette Mayer's *Midwinter Day* was written on December 22, 1978, in Lennox, Massachusetts. This six-part poem offers up a dervish of a day. Yet this short full winter day is far more intimate than the famous Dublin trek of June 12. The writing experiments in this text are not as dependent on scholarly gossip and Modernist rules of practice as they are on the willingness of the reader to trust that Mayer will take us where we should go, where we will know we've been—either in our dreams or our friendships or in the tales someone has told us. She writes of dreams, and who is in them. She writes of titles on the bookshelves at the bookstore. She writes of the sanctity of Marie and Sophie, the babes. She writes of the gods of the everyday, the lenses in the lentils, the half moons in the split peas.

Her catalogues of the facts of our daily lives are declarations as well as descriptions:

So when I write of love I write of  
Binding referendums, bankruptcy intent,  
Industrials, utilities and sales  
The petitions of a citizens' group  
Transportation, births, corrections,  
The downtown mall, the toy fund,  
The predictions of the meteorologist  
... ..  
I write of artists, auto technicians,  
Babysitters, bookkeepers, child care workers,  
Companions, conference managers, cooks,  
Dental assistants and receptionists,  
Designers, electricians, English teachers,  
Hairdressers, maintenance men and women...

And earlier, there's the lyrical love/hope:

From the vigil sleep has kept we'll arise  
Hopefully with vigor like an unwise plant  
We'll come to our senses excited and lively  
Like the watch kept on the eve of a festival  
My devotions are held by such an eye to you

The poem travels from bookstores and health food stores to beds and diapers; it travels from blocks of lists of theories to brief quatrains to questions and reprimands and wishes. Towards the end of the day/poem, she tells us:

I thought I was going to write  
A story of my theories tonight  
Not this desirous essay on art and home,  
This alarming dictionary of reformist love...

Except that this "desirous essay" is a story of her theories. Each page shows the drama of another collision between the interior and exterior worlds of mind/house/heart/family/ romance/articulation/silence. What other theories can there possibly be?

**Elizabeth Burns**

# ***Feminism and Documentary***

Diane Waldman and Janet Walker, editors  
University of Minnesota Press, 1999

and

## ***For Documentary: Twelve Essays***

Dai Vaughan  
University of California Press, 1999

In the late 70s, feminist documentary artists and theorists debated what kinds of representation were appropriate for “women’s” experience. At the time, Julia Lesage wrote an article entitled, “The Political Aesthetics of Feminist Documentary” which defended feminist documentary realism as “an urgent public act.” In this volume, Lesage is still attempting to identify the relationship between representation, identity politics and movement solidarity. Here though, Lesage turns to mixed forms (documentary, docu-fiction, poetic) of expression found in current feminist experimental autobiographical video. Her conclusion today is that “the autobiographical art comes from the artist’s fierce need to tell. The autobiographer seeks to document publicly how women live their lives while using an aesthetic most appropriate for conveying ordinary aspects of women’s subjectivity, a task that a realist aesthetic often cannot fulfill” (320).

The point of departure for Lesage’s work, then as now, is that mixed documentary forms are particularly potent for women because we all share this characteristic fragmented consciousness, as do people who suffer any kind of oppression. It is fair, I believe, to ask for more precision in this formulation, since a meaningful feminist and documentary politics can only be built on an understanding of the relations between different kinds of fragmentation and alienation. Still, the effort to link the political consequences of racism and sexism is a key feature of contemporary feminism, and the prevalence of documentary and autobiographical forms of expression as a political response to oppression warrants theorization as both feminism and documentary grapple with these issues.

In many ways, this effort constitutes the meta-project of this volume. What *Feminism and Documentary* accomplishes particularly well, especially in the introduction, is that rather than simply present feminist writing about documentary films, or critiques of feminist documentarians, it explores questions of mutual relevance to both fields—questions of representation and realism, gendered narratives, alternative modes of historiography and experiences of the past, and finally representational ethics.

These issues continue to be points of contention within feminism. Thus the collection has at its point of tension (and a productive one) its attempt to effect a rapprochement between those championing realist modes and those arguing that such realist modes failed to challenge the gender politics of the structures of representation. In Alexandra Juhasz's essay, this debate is approached from the standpoint of an intergenerational legacy: what have the mothers left in place for the daughters? In the spirit of healthy critique, Juhasz argues that though these "altered" forms of realism in feminist practice may have once been transgressive, they have been co-opted and neutralized over time. Zimmerman, for her part, stresses that this feminist "realist aesthetic" never had the same relation to the "real" that masculine, traditional *cinéma vérité* did.

Clearly, this question of the difference between feminist and traditional *cinéma vérité* still draws partisans, although at this stage in the game no one believes that bluff about the fly on the wall. Following Zimmerman's cue, several essays in this volume detail the "difference" that gender makes in traditional *cinéma vérité* and other realist documentary forms. Knobloch's essay on D.A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back*, while arguing just this point, does so through an interesting critique of the way selective framing and editing position Dylan in specifically gendered ways, banishing the gender ambiguities of the rock singer as spectacle (to-be-looked-at, traditionally coded as "feminine"), and downplaying what she considers Dylan's baby-faced androgyny, while also locating Dylan's complicity in this regime. Moreover, Knobloch's argument features an integrated analysis of soundtrack and imagetrack, an important methodological consideration given the emphasis on fidelity and sound in *cinéma vérité*.

Paula Rabinowitz extends this analysis to older documentary forms, exploring how labor narratives in post-industrial America continue to mobilize a gendered repertoire of sentimental, melodramatic codes, refined in 30's reportage. Though in the industrial landscape of the 90s, these codes don't quite serve the same ends and lead to considerable confusion of roles and allegiances. Rabinowitz suggests that in *American Dream*, Kopple's reliance on the tears of the [male] scabs as "powerful visual cues calling forth audience sympathies," seemingly soliciting audience identification with the scabs and thus confusing the issue [one of the major critiques of the film] is "precisely the point": "in the era of deindustrialization it is not so easy to distinguish the union man from the scab" (55-6). Within this new alignment of productive forces, these reworked narrative forms lay bare the obsolete gendered assumptions of union rhetoric and organizing. Thus, in her examination of these altered codes of melodrama, Rabinowitz shows how both Moore and Kopple subtly challenge the traditionally gendered rhetoric of the labor movement: "These men are victims as much of a passé vision of masculinity as of an outmoded form of unionism apparently ineffective against vicious corporations" (57-8).

In addition to casting a critical eye on the imbricated narratives of gender, nation, race, and class, new feminist practices of historiography offer alternative accounts of ways of knowing and remembering. Marks draws on the fetish and fossil as more than mere

metaphor for how cross-cultural documentary artists can come to terms with what “falls out” of the “past” and memory. Phenomena such as loss and untranslatability, Marks contends, might be a fundamental experience of intercultural contact, as well as diasporic life for the generations which follow. In recognizing this, Marks argues for an appreciation of “sensuous knowledge” as well as other ways of knowing. Suggesting the significance of a feminist epistemology for documentary theory, she notes that “to honor the knowledge of the sense has been the project of a number of feminist theories, as well as critics of the rise of instrumental visuality” (233). Sensuous knowledge and the seemingly impossible filmic representation of tactility are exactly what Marks sees feminist filmmakers and video artists, such as Shauna Beharry, eliciting from their documentary images.

The essays by filmmakers Citron, Kaneko, and Lefkowitz outline various feminist approaches to documentary filmmaking ethics. Most importantly, they reflect upon the relationship which develops between filmmaker and subject—one which is mutually influential (if always unequal). Citron especially considers the ethics of filmmaker-audience (text-audience) relations. Citron’s films continually question the relation between self and subject, as well as the impact on the audience of filmmaker choices of docu-fictional modes. Finally, Lefkowitz gives a sensitive analysis of the influence of gender on the kinds of interviews she was able to elicit; along with Kaneko, she attends to the moments of silence in order to begin to understand what the ‘unsaid’ may suggest about history, memory and contemporary power relations.

And what about that which has gone unsaid in documentary historiography? Zimmerman reconfigures the very limited way in which documentary has been conceived, using the metaphor of birthing to emphasize all the hidden labor of documentary production, distribution, and exhibition. Moving beyond a simplistic notion of auteur and narrative content, she shows the umbilical ties of women to the Flaherty festival and in so doing links documentary back to women’s lives, emphasizing how women sustained and nurtured documentary production as well as alternative spaces for critique and exhibition like the Flaherty. Her documentary historiography, along with the other essays in this volume, underscores the common ground of feminist studies, radical documentary, and social movements. By its insistence on interrogating the categories of film studies and feminism alike, this volume goes a long way to furthering the agenda of both fields.

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Dai Vaughan, a veteran British TV documentary editor, is for Documentary and delivers his allegiance rather clearly in the twelve chapters collected herein. In his last chapter, Vaughan declares that from today cinema is dead, but perhaps someone should have reminded him that yesterday the debate about *cinéma vérité* was itself pushing up the daisies. I’m not *merely* being cynical. When was the last time audiences and critics weren’t a tad skeptical when offered the “truth” carved up *cinéma vérité* style? Granted, these essays were written between 1974 and 1999, and thus constitute an interesting historical

archive of some of the *cinéma vérité* debate. Still, rather than continually ask whether (or assert that) documentary *does or does not* document a relation to the pro-filmic, why not spend more time discussing the *nature* of this relation – as many of the authors of *Feminism and Documentary* do? Why not interrogate the language of the ascription of reality? If documentary theory continues only to ask Dai's main question, then it is indeed dead in the water. His insistence on the link to pro-filmic reality conjures up the elusive legions of those straw-people of postmodernism who would argue that there is no such thing as reality. The question was always the stickiness of the relation between the sign and the referent and our access to that relation. Ultimately, Vaughan's contribution to this debate is that "The documentary conscience demands not that a statement be true, since a photograph can never in itself be untrue, but that an image represent what, within its given context, it may reasonably be taken as representing" (198).

With Vaughan's two major points come two major contradictions. The first pertains to his interest in the priority of the given (as opposed to truth). His emphasis on the "given" is meant to controvert those (mostly straw-folk) who would reduce all narrative to fiction. The key problem here is that he takes the notion of fiction to be about the opposition of "truth" to "falsehood," rather than the realization of the operation of structure, code, and selection. But this in itself is merely a mistake (or at least an oversimplification) and not really a contradiction. The contradiction is that he, as any good editor would, goes on to discuss the extent to which editing, cutting, selection, juxtaposition, establish (and work within) certain narrative codes — some derived directly from fiction, but some quite proper to the documentary medium itself. Yet he leaves this discussion with symptomatic haste in order to move on to his second major point (contradiction).

Rather than pursue these editorial insights, he instead turns to vague notions of authorial intention and audience interpretation: "What really matters is that programmes should address the viewer in such a way that the viewer may approach them on his or her own terms and not on those of television management" (xvii-xix). This definition of documentary as a mode of response, as "What we-as-viewers can perceive as referring to the pro-filmic, it being supposed that we can thus construe it as meaningful" leaves little room for the discussion of the ordering of the pro-filmic. He asserts that "a crucial fact about the definition of documentary as a mode of response is that it places the attribution of documentary significance squarely within the province of the viewer" (58). Yet Vaughan's "viewer" is generally himself and this slippage between his sophisticated understanding of film language and his assumptions about audience reaction, are, to say the least, problematic. He passes over the "linguistic" or ideological readings to establish a basis for documentary ethics, to lay an ethical imperative on the relationship between the suggested real of the film and the audience's determination of its veracity.

So perhaps this second problem engenders more of a paradox than a contradiction—but Vaughan turns away from an analysis of the ways in which such readings are conditioned and cued and belabors the soon-to-be-if-not-already obsolete point (in the era

of digital) about the profilmic actually having existed, at least, before the camera. He never moves beyond this assertion, and thus only poses questions about what the audience will know and what the filmmaker allowed the audience to know. And what lies beyond? The ambiguities of how, why, and to what end reality is conjured.

Vaughan's aim in the book is an honest glance at a movement of which he was a part: "The revolution in filmmaking initiated by the introduction of portable equipment in the early '60s may be perceived in two ways: either as having renewed its innocence, by obviating the need for preplanning of shots, or as having destroyed its innocence by raising unprecedented doubts about the nature of its image" (30). Vaughan's real concern with documentary ethics, and specifically those of *cinéma vérité* are admirable and very earnestly handled. However, the question which digital provokes for him is a dead end. He still worries about our possible cynicism upon the severing of the filmic from the presence of "a" referent (not necessarily truth). In his mind, this cynicism will dash the social conscience of documentary, render its mission impossible. What he fails to adequately explore is his own, as he calls it, "modernist" assumption about this link between political efficacy and an unshakable faith in the evidentiary value of the image.

**Michelle Stewart**

# ***Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History***

Paul Naylor  
Northwestern University Press, 1999

In many respects, this collection of essays on five contemporary experimental poets from North America and the Caribbean — Susan Howe, Nathaniel Mackey, Lyn Hejinian, Kamau Brathwaite, and M. Nourbese Philip — marks an important contribution to current debates on poetic possibilities within and against the culture of late capitalism. Paul Naylor, a professor of English at the University of Memphis (and a contributor to *XCP*), is an enthusiastic and sensitive reader/explorer who adeptly navigates the formal and thematic complexities of each of these poets, grounding his insights in well-attuned close readings that, thanks to his inclusion of generous excerpts from the sources, enable his readers to engage immediately with his interpretations.

Where *Poetic Investigations* falls short of its broader ambition to delineate a “more inclusive model of writing history poetically,” however, is in the analytical context in which Naylor situates his quintet of poets. Naylor elaborates the concept of the “poetic investigation” as the common element in these writers’ often disparate poetics: “...these five writers produce what I call contemporary investigative poetry in order to explore the linguistic, historical, and political conditions of contemporary culture. These writers trace out and track power in the form of the poetic.” (*Poetic Investigations*, 9). Here, it should be noted that the concept of “investigative poetry” was initially formulated (and defined in terms closely resembling Naylor’s) in the early 1970s by Ed Sanders, who not only has taught courses in the topic but in the last three or so years has published two book-length “investigative” poems with Black Sparrow Press, *Chekhov* and *1968*. While Naylor’s omission of Sanders may well be unintentional, it nonetheless points to a more general problem resulting from poetic criticism’s retreat of late behind academic walls — namely, the emphasis on so-called “theory” as at best an analytical filter through which literature is read and at worst as a substitute for creative interpretation. Naylor’s enthusiasm for and commitment to poetry in general and the visions of his chosen poets in particular cannot be questioned. But he vitiates his passion by almost *de rigueur* (in university ambiances, that is) gestures towards modish thinkers like Julia Kristeva, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and Michel de Certeau, all of whom may well be more familiar to the average English or Comp. Lit. major than the poets he discusses, but whose ultimate relevance to these poets is questionable, notwithstanding Naylor’s earnest efforts to demonstrate the contrary.

For example, by bracketing Lyn Hejinian’s work with a discussion of Kristeva’s *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Naylor inadvertently points up the relative impoverishment of the “semianalyst”’s discourse when compared to the ludic, witty, and altogether more

truly philosophical (because poetic) work of Hejinian. On a certain level, Naylor seems aware of this discrepancy, because his analyses of Hejinian's *My Life* and *Oxota: A Short Russian Novel* are more involved and animated than his summary of Kristeva. In his remarks on so-called "language writing," Naylor posits that "language writers in general and Lyn Hejinian in particular should be seen as contemporary continuations of the project of the modernist avant-garde and its attempts to produce a 'revolutionary' text" (108). I, on the other hand, believe that the time has passed when one could speak of a group, let alone a project, of "language writers," particularly as most of them seem to have found their desired and singularly unrevolutionary niches in both the U.S. academy and po-biz, and that it is more useful at this stage to evaluate them in terms of their actual poetic accomplishments, without the mediation of professional critics like Marjorie Perloff and Jerome McGann (both cited by Naylor).

And in this regard, Hejinian stands out for her *humor*, an intellectual deftness unmatched by the often arid and heavy-handed posturing of her mostly male cohorts in the language-writing racket, as well as for the other qualities Naylor justly cites. What's "theory" got to do with this? But as Nathaniel Tarn recently pointed out: "The expectation of exegesis in a constitutively backward-oriented academy...fosters a belief that significant writing is writing that needs explicating by critics, thus ever strengthening the hold of 'theoreticians' and canon-formulating critics over the one-time freedom of the one-time poet" ("Fragment of a Talk on Octavio Paz, Anthropology and the Future of Poetry," *Jacket #9* [jacket09/tarn-on-paz.html]).

The imaginative limits that tend to be imposed by the academy's ideology of professionalism create a certain tension in Naylor's criticism between his laudable advocacy of his five poets' politically-charged practice of "disruptive forms of writing that foreground the subversive tactics of 'noise' and dissonance" (18) and consequent refusal to respect formal and thematic convention, and his oversimplified assessment of the current political-cultural state of affairs, as shown by the following: "...a look at the status of the working class in contemporary culture only confirms earlier fears of its ultimate pacification through consumptive co-optation" (31). (Such a narrow, dismissive perspective was wrong when Herbert Marcuse articulated it in the early 1960s — and at a moment in history when signs of a worldwide anti-"globalization" movement are beginning to emerge, it is even less convincing and indeed unhelpful to those of us who believe significant social change is possible as well as desirable.)

His invocation of Laclau and Mouffe, disappointed Leninists who seek to cloak their retreat into academe (and by extension that of other left-wing intellectuals) in neo-Marxist yet ultimately quietist and self-justifying "discourse," is a case in point. When he declares that "the most controversial portion of [their] argument [is] the fact that their 'analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices'" (33), I would counter that the relationship between discursive and non-discursive practices is dialectical, and thus it is not a matter of either establishing or abolishing a distinction, but of placing

both forms of practice in a dynamic relation to each other (incidentally, Naylor seems unaware of the whole tradition of Hegelian Marxism, expounded *inter alia* by Karl Korsch and the young Georg Lukács — otherwise he would not so easily extol the “far-reaching implications” of Laclau and Mouffe’s supersession of the so-called “base-superstructure” dichotomy allegedly endemic to Marxism). Again, the service he pays to Laclau and Mouffe appears to be of a rote nature, because only rarely do their names recur in the chapters actually devoted to poetry.

On the basis of his choice of poets, Naylor’s analytical field is replete with cross-cultural potentialities that unfortunately tend to go unharvested. His studies of Mackey, Brathwaite, and Philip are each satisfactory on their own terms, but in the context of a book, it would have been rewarding if Naylor had taken up the challenge of giving each poet the opportunity to (in Sylvia Wynter’s words) sit down with each other’s work and talk a little culture. Certainly these three poets have had fruitful encounters in the historical life-world — at a 1992 gathering of Caribbean poets at the Academy of American Poets in New York City, Kamau Brathwaite and Nourbese Philip joined voices to read her poem “Discourse on the Origin of Language,” and Brathwaite’s latest book is entitled *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*. In what ways, for instance, can Brathwaite’s use of Dogon myth be compared with Mackey’s? How does Mackey’s notion of the stutter as “two-way witness” aspiring to a transcendence it is avowedly only partly able to achieve, mirror or echo the “...some- / thing torn // and new” that concludes Brathwaite’s poetic trilogy *The Arrivants*? What links Nourbese Philip’s deployment of silence masking a “...secret order / among syllables” to Brathwaite’s pentecostal “Angel Engine” officiant’s transition from “*praaze be to gg*” to “*praaze be to // sssssssshhhhhh*”? Is there a dialectic or rather *tidialectic* (Brathwaite’s term) among silence, stutter, and incantatory repetition, fusing into a Caribbean nation-language out of which will come what Brathwaite calls “our own-own true-true poems”? And (as is only right) casting the cross-cultural reach wider still, is it possible to link Susan Howe and Brathwaite’s respective reclamations of poetic territory and submerged histories into a new and transformed sense of American geographies? What rapport is there between a Wittgensteinian “language-game” and the terrifying description of the “O’Grady game” in Brathwaite’s *Mother Poem*, where an enslaved African is subjected by his white captor/owner to a “name game” aimed at stripping him of his prior self, language, and life-world? Can the disjuncture between Lyn Hejinian’s “investigating ‘I’ investigat[ing] itself” (117) and Philip’s “Rastafarian practice of privileging the ‘I’” be bridged? And what of the moment of spiritual possession as a calling into question of boundaries between earthly self and numinous other?

That questions like these should arise from a reading of Naylor’s book is a tribute to his ability to set forth, clearly and concisely, the fundamental material for imagining them. Nevertheless, it is to be regretted that he does not venture into some of these uncharted territories. Perhaps his reticence might be attributed to a reluctance to immerse himself in the defining cultural/historical contexts that shape the writings of his three Afro-diasporic poets, who after all constitute the majority of his sources. Rather than defining them in

terms of an amorphous impulse to “sing the holes in history,” Naylor could profitably have examined the cross-cultural textures that emerge from Brathwaite, Mackey, and Philip’s poetic weavings: Aimé Césaire’s Caribbean surrealism and George Lamming’s “pebble under the grape leaf on the sand” of the Barbadian beach in his seminal novel *In the Castle of My Skin* as deep-structural elements/ancestral antecedents to Brathwaite’s poetics of the pebble-blooming-into-islands; the memories of vanished Arawaks, Caribs, and Tainos as well as enslaved Africans entering into the native Caribbean depths of Nourbese Philip’s silences (Naylor is wrong to call the Taino mother-of-waters Atabey an “African goddess” [183]); and Mackey’s improvisations on and journeys toward the theme articulated by Wilson Harris at the conclusion of *The Palace of the Peacock*, “...the sound that filled us was unlike the link of memory itself. It was the inseparable moment within ourselves of all fulfilment and understanding.” In short, just as Naylor uses Wallace Stevens and Jack Spicer to illuminate Susan Howe’s poetics, he could have availed himself of African and Afro-diasporic sources to expand the range and complexity of his analysis of the three Black poets.

Despite its failings, Naylor’s book on the whole represents a worthy attempt to move his readers towards new ways of seeing, hearing, and reading. Nevertheless, the kind of cross-cultural work that writers like Wilson Harris advocate and practice — and to which Naylor clearly wishes to contribute — makes certain demands on its sympathizers that go beyond a simple desire to rectify or mend the imbalances and distortions caused by generations of imperial canon-shapers and cannon-deployers. While on a certain level it is accurate to state, as Naylor does, that “contemporary investigative poetry is an active participant in the struggles against imperialism and the attempts to roll back the gains made by underrepresented groups in the last thirty years” (200), on another level this affirmation is at once rhetorically excessive and politically insufficient. Wilson Harris (in *History, Fable & Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas*) addresses a similar point: “I have felt from various writers’ conferences I have attended...that no philosophy of history exists in regard to the Third World. (...) [I]t seems to me the *native consciousness* is being overlooked within deterministic projects, and criteria are invalidated which might probe into unpredictable perspectives, latent spaces we need to unravel in our age” (45). The poetic project Naylor has described as “singing the holes in history” may well, taking Harris’s words into account, involve a step beyond, an unraveling of latent (and immensely complex) spaces, a call for an “overstanding,” as the Rastafarians would put it, that would eschew rhetorics of “inclusion” (i.e., integration into a burning house, to quote Malcolm X) in favor of what Harris has called “tilting the field of civilization” in order to “release...a different *reading* of texts of reality” (50).

Christopher Winks

# ***Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews***

Krzysztof Wodiczko  
MIT Press, 1999

and

## ***Object to be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark***

Pamela M. Lee  
MIT Press, 2000

“In search of an ideal resemblance you stop at the first monument  
you see, shutting the light out.”

—Erica Hunt, *Local History*

Monuments, as they have historically been rendered in public (usually urban) spaces in America and Europe, often exist in an uncritical stasis. Their unexamined relationship to (predominantly) hyper-mythologized “heroes”—and rarely, if ever, “heroines”—writes itself incognizantly upon the citizens of the monument’s village, nation, or state. The phallic obelisk that serves as the *axis mundi* for entire layout of the city of Buffalo, for example, is case in point. Is the legacy of the statue McKinley’s colonizing expansionist policy? Is it a memorial to the President’s assassination at the 1901 Pan American Exhibition by a Polish-American anarchist (Leon Czolgosz) who spent a night drinking at Walter Nowak’s hotel on the city’s east side and was a self-proclaimed follower of Emma Goldman? Does anyone in the city of Buffalo—aside from a few teachers and History Channel addicts—really know anything about the life and times of President McKinley? And do they care to have the major streets and avenues of their city jut out from a monument that in Frederick Law Olmstead’s 1874 plan was meant to be a Civil War memorial arch, but that is today a sharp projectile embedded in the shadow of city hall? Every city, every historic site, faces these and similar questions. And in the past several decades, work by artists such as Krzysztof Wodiczko and Gordon Matta-Clark has begun to address such concerns.

*Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews* is the first book in English to collect Wodiczko’s own writings on his artworks. A long-time subject of and co-conspirator with the *October* critics (Rosalyn Deutsche, et al), the work of Wodiczko’s that is perhaps best known or most easily recognized are his mammoth, politically charged public projections. As described by the artist, the “...slide and more recently video and audio events, were an attempt to appropriate, adopt, or pervert the operation of existing and overpresent official vehicles, the ideological machines designed to perpetuate the victorious heritage...”

(xvi) Examples of Wodiczko's projections include images of U.S. and Soviet nuclear warheads projected onto the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch (1984-85); the projection of hands gripping prison bars projected on the Federal Courthouse in London, Ontario (1983); and perhaps most charged, the projection of a swastika on South Africa House, Trafalgar Square (London) during Apartheid (1985). In a statement of his poetics in the organization and execution of these public artworks, "Public Projection" (which was first published in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*), Wodiczko explains that "the attack must be unexpected, frontal, and must come with the night, when the building, undisturbed by its daily functions, is asleep and when its body dreams of itself, when the architecture has its nightmares" (46). While the projections themselves are stunning, I find the some of Wodiczko's statements, like the one quoted directly above, flawed; the *author* Wodiczko falls back too much on phenomenological arguments for his decidedly political artwork, all the while denying the simple physical fact that it would be impossible to project images upon buildings during daylight hours. His *post hoc* argument suggests the article was written after the projections and was not, as such, a manifesto that generated them.

Where Wodiczko's writing is at its best are those instances where the tone and intensity of the text strike one as being written for a broadside, pamphlet or more samizdat publication accompanying a projection. Wodiczko's language skills in these instances parallel his aesthetic ideology of quick, hyper-propagandistic hits upon the unaware bureaucratic monuments of uncritical consumption, such as this section from "Memorial Projection" (1986):

The newly erected memorial was an ideological creation of the posteventful state, which did not camouflage but, quite the reverse, exhibited outright throughout its entire site its joyless, deadly, and heavy duty: the duty of the emotional consolidation of the myth of the event as embodying official public value. The previously respectful distance ("historical perspective") of the memorial from everyday life is now being broken. Cold, tombstone benches, regimenting, mountainous stairways, brainwashing fountains, architortured bushes, and windswept floors were intended to banish unofficial life from the memorials territory.

Today, the authorities want to add life and "social function" to the memorial site, to turn it into a "humanized" place for cultural relaxation, a zone for free festivity, tourism, permanent recreation, and so-called art in public places. Misattracted by refurbishing and by trivial cultural "events," the confused public must now learn how to live closer to the obscene necro-ideology of memorial icons, the naked, cold bodies of the monumentally frozen goddesses, gods, and heroes of our glorious massacres of humanity. (49)

Wodiczko accurately asserts that architecture must continue to be perceived and

critiqued as a “social system: a new economic condition and a psycho-political experience” (54). Extending the work of Walter Benjamin’s work on cities, Wodiczko’s unsurpassed artworks (and strongest, most insightful writings) attempt to overlay and make dynamic ideologically questionable and perpetually static architectural/cultural buildings and monuments.

*Critical Vehicles* continues with documents that accompany Wodiczko’s “vehicles,” manually powered transmotion machines built by the artist in collaboration/conversation with homeless individuals in New York City. Aesthetically and functionally significant but economically unfeasible on a large scale, these works (and writings) nevertheless raise important social and civic issues as well as addressing xenophobia on a personal, local level. Similar and perhaps even more successful, the artist’s “Instruments”—prosthetic devices serving as translation machines for homeless, immigrant and refugee collaborators in Brooklyn, Warsaw, Paris, and elsewhere—are hand-held devices that enact artistic and social change in their communities of use, and offer important avenues of future exploration in developing technologies and the internet:

The *Alien Staff* is simultaneously an instrument, a performance, and a network. It is designed as public-speech-act equipment, which allows the singular immigrant to open up his or her own critical history of displacement to everyone whom it may (or even may not) concern, to open up to the Other and to the world the complexity of the often unstable and multiple configurations and reconfigurations of identities inhabiting the immigrant’s mind. (116)

Wodiczko’s book concludes with a series of eight interviews and conversations conducted with the artist between 1986 and 1997. Each provides significant biographical, cultural and ideological insight into the artist and his work. The earliest *October* conversation between Wodiczko, Douglas Crimp, Rosalyn Deutsche and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, for example, provides wide-ranging details on Gomulka’s de-Stalinization in Poland and its effects on the artistic community there; Wodiczko’s early design work in Poland, teaching in Canada, and first public art works; the importance of Poland’s Fosal Gallery and its shows of Lawrence Weiner, the Fluxus artists, etc. In a 1992 interview with Jean-Christophe Royoux where he traces important parallels between his work, the epic theatre of Brecht and the work of philosopher Henri Lefebvre, Wodiczko makes perhaps the most clear and insightful summary of his work: “What I can do in relation to these grand symbolic figures is to project unexpected problems onto them” (176). It is *this* Krzysztof Wodiczko that emerges most powerfully from this book, and as *Critical Vehicles* serves as an important textual documentation of this seminal late-20th century artist, it too is a significant publishing event.

A more recent book to address aesthetics, ideology and politics in architectural monuments and urban structures is Pamela M. Lee’s *Object to be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark*. Similar to Wodiczko’s design training, the American-born Matta-Clark

(son of Italian surrealist-in-exile painter Robert Matta) was educated as an architecture student at Cornell University. Perhaps foreshadowing his later developments as an artist famous for his “building cuts”—splits, rips, tears and gaping holes cut into abandoned buildings, usually by a chainsaw-wielding Matta-Clark—we learn that the young artist was a poor student in his two years of “Structural Principles” classes. Lee examines the effect of the February 1969 “Earth Art” show at Cornell, where Robert Morris, Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim, Hans Haacke and Robert Smithson constructed works on the Cornell campus and surrounding foothills of Ithaca, N. Y. While providing a lengthy summary of Smithson’s important critical notion of “entropy” in his artworks, Lee at times reads a Smithson-influence too heavily onto Matta-Clark’s work, especially in the young student-architect-artist’s influential building cuts:

Matta-Clark’s building cuts would seem such monuments to entropy, but he was clear as to the distinction between his own art and earth work. “The choice of dealing with the urban environment in general, and building structures specifically,” [Matta Clark] remarked, “alters my whole realm of reference.” (46)

Foregoing Matta-Clark’s own documented resistance to such a comparison, Lee then over-emphasizes symmetries between the work of Smithson and Matta-Clark that in the end cause her reading of the latter artist to feel askew. Instead of a more obvious reading of Matta-Clark’s work through a Marxist perspective on private property, industrial consumer-capitalism, the abandonment of urban tracts by white flight bourgeoisies, and issues of labor (especially in the artist’s cuts at NYC’s Pier 52)—or a reading based on Benjamin’s materialist city, for that matter—Lee chooses instead to couch her reading in an odd Merleau-Pontian perspective, particularly in Chapter 3, “On Matta-Clark’s ‘Violence’; Or, What is a ‘Phenomenology of the Sublime’?” The error that occurs can be demonstrated in the following paragraphs from this chapter in which Lee cites and then analyzes a passage from *The Phenomenology of Perception* where Merleau-Ponty draws on the image of the house in discussing a “structure of perception”:

I see the next-door house from a certain angle, but it would be seen differently from the right bank of the Seine, or from the inside, or again from an aeroplane: the house itself is none of these appearances...But what do these words mean? Is not to see always to see from somewhere? To say that the house itself is seen from nowhere is surely to say that it is invisible!...

...[T]he house itself is not the house seen from nowhere, but the house seen from everywhere. The completed object is translucent, being shot through from all sides by an infinite number of present scrutinies which intersect in its depths leaving nothing hidden.

Lee immediately follows this passage with her analysis:

Thus the house opens up to “an infinite number of scrutinies” while also serving as “the spectator to the hidden aspects” to other objects that constitute the phenomenal field. “Seen from everywhere,” the house becomes an object of “translucency,” a cipher in Merleau-Ponty’s rhetoric for a thing that makes legible spatio-temporal experience to its viewer. (134)

What Lee fails to acknowledge here, however, is that the Matta-Clark work under discussion is the artist’s “Days End,” a series of cuts made by Matta-Clark in the Pier 52 building/warehouse he was illegally occupying in the summer of 1975. This structure is not *solely* a house, and instead as a site of labor, work/occupation, and class strife, awaits a critical praxis that can deal with these issues as well. By equating the house with the workplace and avoiding the economic and social spheres in her critique, Lee does injustice to the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of Matta-Clark’s work.

Later in *Object to be Destroyed* this unfortunately leads to a style of academic critical jargon that attempts to justify an inappropriate stance that even Lee seems to recognize:

The point at which the phenomenological stance shades into the sublime is, indeed, a matter of dimensionality, or, to put it in another vein, a degree of contingency. The acknowledgment of contingency within minimalism (or contextualism for that matter,) allowed one to relativize the relationship between subject and work, a relationship that was always subject to factors external to the art object or architecture, site-specific and irreducible to a singular spatial experience. But if Fried saw minimalism as itself theatrical, Matta-Clark’s projects “theatricalize” minimalist contingency. They push the terms of theatricality to their logical extreme. They foreground the sense that contingency is *a priori* about a certain mode of cognitive excess, which cannot be totalized because it is endlessly conditional. They reveal that our experience as contingent beings guarantees that we are always already subjected to a perpetual vertigo (160).

There are moments in this book when the author deals with Matta-Clark’s poetics through detailed analyses of Lefebvre’s writings and token nods to political economy—though she transforms Bataille’s reading of this into what she calls a “sacrificial economy” to read Matta-Clark’s building cuts, a transmogrification of Bataille’s thought overly ambiguous and unclear to even this die-hard reader of the French writer’s work. And several times in Chapter 2, “Improper Objects of Modernity,” Lee poses possible leads for future critics to explore in critiques of Matta-Clark that are more engaged with an integration of issues such as property, labor, and aesthetics—particularly when Matta-Clark himself expressed a keen

interest in Benjamin's notion of a "Marxist Hermeneutics," an interest Lee can only describe as "oblique" (183).

In the end I can only suggest that readers interested in the seminal work of Gordon Matta-Clark go instead to the often difficult to locate exhibition catalogs. Unfortunately cut short by the artist's death at the age of thirty-five in 1978 from liver failure and pancreatic cancer, Matta-Clark's work itself—though surviving as it does only via photographic and textual documentation—offers important aesthetic enactments of critique on city politics, private property, and the artist's role in negotiating and remembering the abandoned city. Like the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko, Matta-Clark integrates artwork, culture, politics and philosophy to an extent that should inspire artists in all fields working in the new millennium. Unfortunately, *Object to be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* does not do the same.

**Mark Nowak**

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**Paul Naylor's** new chapbook, *Book of Changes*, just appeared from Quarry Press, and his critical book, *Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History*, was recently published by Northwestern University Press. His poems and essays have appeared in *Boxkite*, *Chicago Review*, *Xcp: Cross-Cultural Poetics*, *Hambone*, *New American Writing*, and *Postmodern Culture*, among others.

**Jonathan Monroe's** four prose poems are from his recently completed book-length manuscript, *Demosthenes' Dictionary*, other selections from which have appeared and are forthcoming in *Combo*, *Epoch*, *Nine to Zero*, *Slope*, and *Verse*. Author of *A Poverty of Objects: The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre* (Cornell), he is currently completing a book on recent cross-genre writing, *Poetry Among the Discourses: Contemporary Poetry and Cultural Criticism*. A special double issue of *Poetics Today* on new avant-garde poetries, for which he guest edited a section called "After Shock: Poetry and Cultural Politics since 1989," is just out. He teaches at Cornell University.

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**Alan Gilbert** currently lives in Brooklyn. He spent time in Chiapas, Mexico in the summer of 1995 where he accumulated some of the information contained in his essay. Other criticism has appeared in *Chicago Review* and *Lagniappe*, and recent poems can be found in *Sulfur*, *First Intensity* and *Object*.

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**Mark Nowak's** other editing projects include *Then, and Now: Theodore Enslin's Selected Poems, 1943-1993* (National Poetry Foundation) and, with Diane Glancy, *Visit Teepee Town: Native Writings After The Detours* (Coffee House Press). A collection of Nowak's poems and micro-ethnographies, *Revenants*, will be out this fall from Coffee House Press.

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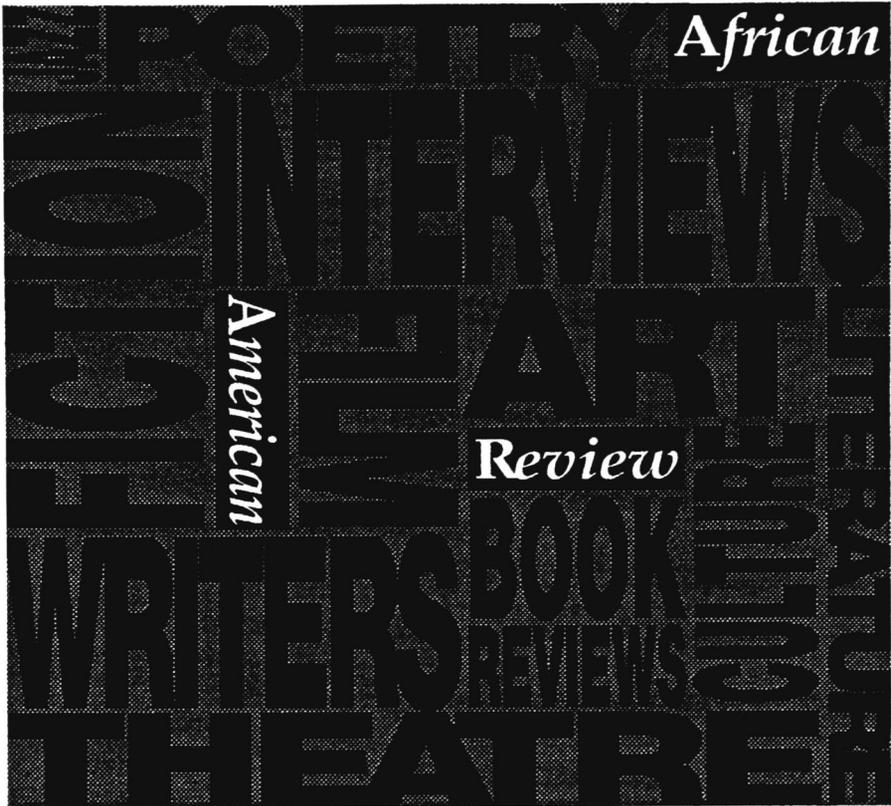
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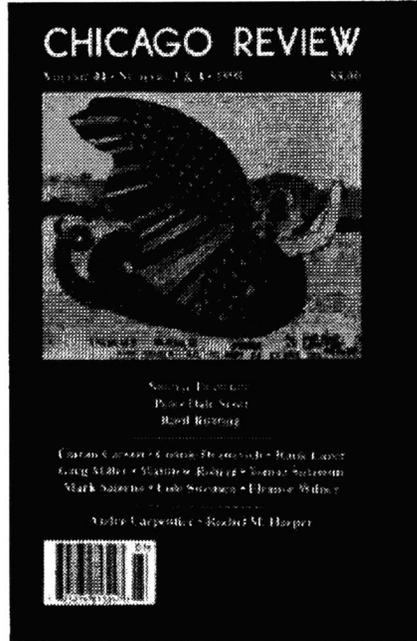
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