

XIP

CROSS CULTURAL POETICS
NO. EIGHTEEN

XCP: CROSS CULTURAL POETICS

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BOOK REVIEWS

...NEWS THAT STAYS...

**LETTERS CENSORED
SHREDDED
RETURNED TO SENDER
OR JUDGED UNFIT TO SEND**

Adrienne Rich

Unless in quotation marks (for which see end-notes) the letter fragments are written by various imaginary persons.

“We must prevent this mind from functioning...”

—Words of the prosecutor sentencing Antonio Gramsci to prison, June 2 1928.

—Could you see me laboring over this
right arm in sling, typing left-handed with one finger—

[On a scale of one to ten what is your pain today]

~~

—shall I measure the split atoms
of pleasure flying outward from the core—

~~

—To think of her naked every day unfreezes me—

~~

Banditry, rapes, burning the woods
“a kind of primitive class struggle
with no lasting or effective results”

—The bakers strike, the needleworkers strike, the mechanics strike, the
miners strike

the great machine coughs out the pieces and hurtles on—

~~

—then there are days all thought comes down to sound:
Rust. August. Mattress. Must.
Chains...

—when consciousness + sensation feels like/ = suffering—

~~

—the people, yes, as yet unformed—deformed—no: disinformed—

~~

—What's realistic fantasy?—Call it hope—

~~

—heard your voice on the news tonight, its minor key
your oldfashioned mindfulness—could have loved you again—

~~

—Autumn invades my body, anger
wrapped in forgiving sunlight, fear of the cold—

~~

—Words gather like flies above this carcass of meaning—

~~

“this void, this vacuum”

~~

—You think you are helpless because you are empty-handed
of concepts that could become your strength—

~~

—we're told it's almost over, but we see no sign of it yet—

~~

“caught between a feeling of immense tenderness for you
which seems...a weakness
that could only be consoled
by an immediate physical caress...”

[We must prevent this mind from functioning for twenty years]

“...and these inadequate, cold and colorless words”

~~

—What I meant to write, belov'd critic, then struck it out
thinking you might accuse me of
whatever you would:
I wanted a sensual materialism to utter pleasure

Something beyond a cry that could sound like a groan—

~~

—Vocalizing forbidden syllables—

~~

—our mythologies choke us, we have enthralled ourselves—

~~

*[Writing like this for the censors
but I won't hide behind words]*

~~

“my body cells revolve in unison
with the whole universe

The cycle of the seasons, the progression of the solstices and equinoxes
I feel them as flesh of my flesh
and under the snow the first violets are already trembling
 In short, time has seemed to me a thing of flesh
 ever since space
 ceased to exist for me”

~~

—History = bodies in time—

or, in your language:

H = T

\bar{b}

~~

—to think of the one asleep
in that field beside the chimney
of the burnt-out house
a thing of flesh, exhausted—

~~

—this flash is all we know...can we shut our eyes to it...?—

~~

—more and more I dread futility—

~~

“The struggle, whose normal external expressions
have been choked,
attaches itself to the structure
of the old class like a destructive gangrene...
it takes on morbid forms of mysticism,
sensualism, moral indifference,
physical and psychic pathological depravations...”

The old structure does not contain and is unable
to satisfy the new needs...”

~~

—Trying to hold an inner focus while hoarse laughter
ricochets from the guardroom—

~~

—*liquefaction* is a word I might use for how I would take you—

~~

—the daunted river finally
undammed?—

[prevent this mind]

NOTES:

Passages in quotes are from Tom Nairn, tr., Giuseppe Fiori, *Antonio Gramsci, Life of a Revolutionary*, p. 31, 239 (Verso 1990), Hamish Henderson, ed. and tr., *Antonio Gramsci, Prison Letters*, p. 135 (Pluto Press 1996), and Joseph A. Buttigieg, ed., Buttigieg and Antonio Callari, trs., *Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks*, vol. I, p. 213 (Columbia University Press 1992.)

THE UNIVERSITY RE-OPENS AS THE FLOODS RECEDE

Adrienne Rich

Should blue air in its purity let you disdain
the stink of artificial pine

the gaunt architecture
of cheap political solutions

if there are philosophies to argue
the moment when you would

or wouldn't spring to shield
a friend's body or jump

into scummed waters after
a stranger caught submerging

or walk off to your parked
car your sandwich your possible orange

if theories rage or dance
about this if in the event any

can be sure who did
or did not act on principle or impulse

and what's most virtuous

can we not be nodding smiling
taking down notes like this

and of all places
in a place like this

I'll work with you on this bad matter I can
but won't give you the time of day

if you think it's hypothetical

TELEPHONE RINGING IN THE LABYRINTH

Adrienne Rich

i

You who can be silent in twelve languages
trying to crease again in paling light
the map you unfurled that morning if

you in your rearview mirror sighted me
rinsing a green glass bowl
by midsummer nightsun in, say, Reykjavik

if at that moment my hand slipped
and that bowl cracked to pieces
and one piece stared at me like a gibbous moon

if its convex reflection caught you walking
the slurried highway shoulder after the car broke down
if such refractions matter

ii

Well, I've held on peninsula
to continent, climber
to rockface

Sensual peninsula attached so stroked
by the tides' pensive and moody hands
Scaler into thin air

seen from below as weed or lichen
improvidently fastened
a mat of hair webbed in a bush

A bush ignited then
consumed
Violent lithography

Smolder's legacy on a boulder traced

iii

Image erupts from image
atlas from vagrancy
articulation from mammal howl

strangeness from repetition
even this default location
surveyed again one more poem

one more Troy or Tyre or burning tire
seared eyeball genitals
charred cradle

but a different turn working
this passage of the labyrinth
as laboratory

I'd have entered, searched before
but that ball of thread that clew
offering an exit choice was no gift at all

iv

I found you by design or
was it your design
or: we were drawn, we drew

Midway in this delicate
negotiation telephone rings
(Don't stop!...they'll call again...)

Offstage the fabulous creature scrapes and shuffles
we breathe its heavy dander
I don't care how, if it dies this is not the myth

No ex/interior: compressed
between my throat
and yours, hilarious oxygen

And, for the record, each did sign
our true names on the register
at the mouth of this hotel

v

I would have wanted to say it
without falling back
on words Desired not

you so much as your life,
your prevailing Not for me
but for furtherance how

you would move
on the horizon You, the person, you
the particle fierce and furthering

1.

it's talking to Larry when I realize I must've taken the placebo snow shovels of the city are tormented by fair weather until the winter we're afraid won't arrive brutishly arrives and Sonya emerges out of the avenue out of a snow-fall so thick I think the whole scene's coming in over a faulty antenna we're out on the back porch I'm in machinist regalia the mortar of the three-flat brick the brick entirely mortar she says *have p-coat will travel* I answer *speak of the devil and the devil answers*

2.

Larry's in his father's taupe coat Sonya's fingernails are the hoods of ten red Edsels I know I know her the second I see her in that floral print in those black Pumas in a cardigan clearly

3.

in the distance the ball-bearing factory bothering no-one a shotgun above the mantel bothering no-one a lorry in the foreground about the slow groan of departure and stains in the bathtub looking like orange Hebrew

4.

I keep glancing over my shoulder

5.

the city's a wide expanse of interiors interior of the house of Larry interior of the porch of Larry our interiors in the city's fiber optic interior where we cruise around in cars the way the mind cruises around in the body

6.

I tell Sonya *later this century I'm going to miss things other than the things I think I should miss*

7.

there's a shindig

8.

in the background the war we hope will end in some bodies smooching exuberantly is a resonant hum like gears of an elevator buzzing beneath the Muzak we hope will just end but the President well he'd pour salt on an earthworm and hum the national anthem

9.

what I'll miss is the corner video store and the light in the phone booth popping on as soon as I pull the door shut what I'll miss is the phone booth and the scent of gasoline in a station on the turnpike to Manassas where we stop one afternoon and think we see Larry's father in the woods

10.

Larry tells me *it's not that you can't see things for what they are it's that you haven't learned to regret them correctly* I tell him *I'm sorry for the way life is the way life isn't*

11.

we want to sue the storm for lost revenue we only want to accomplish the laundry the red eye of the smoke detector's diode blinks so we know our backs are covered but we don't want our backs covered the room so well-appointed it ought to be burned to the ground

12.

a drink the color of a tongue

13.

more months than years pass and Sonya buys a Hyundai and a conservative sweater she comes as far as the front fender to greet me but comes no further to say she's staying on till Thursday but the next day she leaves town

14.

Larry's smoking alone at the end of the driveway in his own silent sense of self-annihilation at a distance I can't halve the distance to the surgeon generals demand we submit before their sanguine armies and lo we fail

15.

I keep glancing over my shoulder at night I think the street is a bridge deck suspended from the streetlamps I think I see Sonya in the Safeway Larry thinks he sees his father at the CPA's when he pours water into a wine glass he calls it one kind of miracle and the snow is a crystalline rainfall the snow is one kind of atmosphere falling out of suspension

“It could have klappened—”

“It is klikey—”

“It is quinceivable—”

This

*at the edge of the camp
rhe-TOR-ic*

This

*neatly placed
artsy filth*

is what we know

about the “first” box?

[sits]

I thought

It

Had past

Into a

Box

That

What?

This

essence-precedes-the-thing

Play-TONIC Thought.

Though it’s a fact, some still say

[stands, with arm outstretched] *“uphold!”*

Marx-Lenin-Mao-Tse-Tung Thought.

[sits]

*Though it’s also a fact, the entire province of Guangdong
(with a population a third of the entire U.S.)*

is in open revolt

against

[gets on all fours, head down, with raised fist, in a weeping tone]

“*To get rich is glorious!*”

[sits down next to A, and very soberly]

—*Thought.*

You talking about, la fracture sociale, ape?

I thought
It
Had past
Into a
Box
That

What?

This
thing-precedes-the-essence
ape-of-us
not entirely satisfying the

[lightly pokes B with stick]

physical requirements of
global capital
—disciplining.

There might well be
a five-sided box
that can be “upheld”

[A stands, walks directly up to the audience]

The image is one of several ape-of-us mentally holding up
a five-sided box, and grunting

[throughout the whole scene, A & B abruptly and simultaneously say the phrase “*my space!*” with arms flung out wide and a Picasso “*Guernica*” -like horrified face gesture; both instantly

recover from the extreme gesture]

“my space!”

[pause] [B staring off into space, but with conviction]

The daylight grows dim.

*The feast around the fire
is set to go.*

The nouns are verbing

*The “accidents”
are about to begin.*

That much is true!

[B, somewhat startled]

What

Much

Is

True?

That

“as the light grows dim”

“a five-sided box”

is

about to

enspace

its contents

I thought

that’s what you—

[very rapidly]

thought *said* said *thought* thought *said* thought

I'm saying,
the third, half, two-thirds, and
regular old
four-sided—

[very rapidly]

box *play* play *box* box *play* box

can be—

[very rapidly]

fawned over buried deep *fawned over* buried deep *fawned over* buried deep

[pause] [B, facing the audience]

*By accumulated chance (or accelerated accident),
we see the ancient-future ritual
Unfolding before our very eyes.*

*What we thought was progressive camp was repressive culture,
what we thought was regressive culture was progressive camp,
Logs are logs, however.*

*It is quinceivable that each of us might know a no-spacer
too quincied to confête in the info-fire;
It is a brute fact, to be perfumed?*

Much poetry is aerating at the foothills of Helicon;

[an orange object is quickly slid across the stage by a string]

*a lively little orange squirrel captures our attention (aah);
Voyez! a lot of BOX—is simply burning up!*

[rapidly]

—scream

—*confusion*

—result?

—*think*

[A & B both walk to the back of the stage, backs facing the audi

ence, looking up]

I'm thinking about how the first
ape-of-us
learned how to dance
in concert (instead of—verklempt)

at the foothills of a forbidden mountain.

It must have (at first) been
quite the freakout, or randy encounter, and

maybe (by accumulated chance,
or accelerated accident), a wizened warlock
berdache of the camp
shouted—“jump!”

[A facing B]

I mean a boogie-down, man.

All the genders, all the tricks

—mc'twists to mc'tumbles.

[pause] [both walk back and sit around the campfire in the same
positions as at the beginning]

[slowly]

I thought

the fire

had leapt

into the

pan

or was it

the pan

that had

fired up

the

[rapidly]

—fawn

—*convulsion*

—revolt?

—*kink*

A third the size eh...Texaformica?

[(still sitting) to the audience]

the nouns

are nouning

gloriously!

Fact is, apey,

the open revolt

is too brutish

for your—voyez!

“enspacement”

The cybertronic stats

—are in!

Staples

on the open flesh

of closed revolt

Skimp

on “humaneness”

and that’s

art?

rhe-TOR-ic reproduction

and that's—

—*planned-arbitrary*
thunkery...

200 million unemployed...with no pensions.

It is a brute fact, not to be...eau de...toileted.

[“squirrel” is quickly slid back to the other side of the stage;
A & B, both matter of factly]

Squirrel aside
—*squirrel aside*

This
thing-precedes-the-thing
—preceding some other thing

it's
as if
[simultaneously]

“*my space!*”

had—

[B jumps off stool, in full “rocker” mode]

—*strum strum,*
drum a drum drum—strum
drum

—*fuzzblurr!*
powerchord

dzzzzh—tururururu!

dzzzzh—tururururu!

LOVE HARD!

[B sits; A calmly]

...what else...

I'm thinking about how the first
ape-of-us
first
took apart
a box.

It must have (at first) been
a two-hundred percent
overkill
kind of
affair

till someone
in the camp (high)
hollered

“no box—no meal”

(it's
as if
[simultaneously])

“my space!”
had—)

*Aah...this
thing-precedes-the-thing
excrescence of an
“accident”*

*Ain't it a—
(no-key
cause the no-lock
cause the no-hatch—nohow
fifth side
sought)
bitch?*
[pause]

—collapsed, as if,

dzzzzh—turururu!

[B calmly puts pants back on and sits] [pause]

I'm thinking about how the first

ape-of-us
first
put together

a comprehensive

donut marketing strategy plan for all of Pennsylvania

[A flinches back, expecting B to repeat the ass-to-fire antic;
B slowly cranes neck forward; and slowly, markedly]

d z z z h—tu ru ru ru

“It must have bink—”

d z z z h—tu ru ru ru

“planned-arbitrary thunkery”

[stands up and walks toward the “mountainside”, back to the
audience, looking up]

Aren't you just an aging adjunct?

Poetaster, add.

Enspacer of pain, add.

[walks back to A with a new-found (contained) bubbliness]

*In the style of a Grungerian chant
we should chant...now...together...in concert...*

Aren't you just an aging

McHomo

Cogitans

pan fried

monkey?

[with hands clasped like a monk, in a low voice, grunting]

Glooooo-riiii-aaaaaa

1974.

What?

I thought
It
Had past
Into a
Box
That

What?

This
ever-shrinking
 ancient-future
ritual of
 “indie”
 sexpression

mc’fumbles
and mc’quips

of

economic
 confidence

[B walks directly up to the audience]

The image is one of several ape-of-yous

flying over the pyre

*clasping your
 curled up tootsies*

[walking away from the audience]
(it’s not my fault)

[with raised fist, half sarcastically]

(love hard)

[rapidly]

—screech

—*illusion*

—convert?

—*pink*

[pause] [B, returning to the campfire, standing;
A, looking up at the stars]

Purple-lipped Saturday nights

—of the seventies

and Malloy

[nostalgically]

(One Adam 12 Malloy, Sammy's Malloy,
Malloy's Fish n' Tackle, Malloy's Wigs n' Things)

—bingin' in your head

no internet

no flames

no cybertronic stats

Tooh-TOR-ic

[with clenched fist, making a muscle]

“we mean it man!”

What

do we know

about the “first” punk?

Blanched by the books

they weren't.

[B, very matter of factly]

It might have been their fault...it is quinceavable.

[A, grimacing a little]

1989.

What?

I thought
the leaping
had puffed out
the pyre

Or was it
the pyre
had puffed up
the leaping?

[to the audience]

*The verbs
are verbing*

gloriously!

Voyez!

The first ape-of-us
probably needed
a box—

[B, clasping hands again]

Glooooo-riiii—

to enspace
its contents

dzzzzzh—tururururu!

It's the contents
that love hard.

Tururururu!

[B, calmly fits A with a pink wig]

The ape-of-us...how far we've come.

*What
do we know*

about the first

camping equipment sales-ape?

A WORKING CLASS THEORY OF CORRUPTION:

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF WORKERS' IDEAS ABOUT CORRUPTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Paula Boniolo and Rodolfo Elbert

Introduction

Corruption has seriously damaged Latin American democracies, not only because of its effects on the performance of economic institutions but also because it has generated public distrust on public institutions. Many authors have studied this problem, analyzing the legal definitions of corruption (Moreno Ocampo, 2000), its level of diffusion in different countries of the world (Transparency, 2005) or describing well-known cases of corruption (Joly, 2003). These various studies are based on an “expert” perspective of society, usually supported by multilateral organizations’ global policies to fight corruption. From a Latin American perspective, we criticize these policies because they do not address the social context of poverty and social inequality of our countries as well as our specific cultural background. In brief, corruption does not have the same meaning in Argentina as in France or USA. In order to bring a hidden side of corruption, an issue not well known in academic circles of Latin America, we decided to study the interpretations of those who suffer the consequences of corruption. Our research focuses on the study of people’s interpretations of corruption. This perspective is related to our interest in the study of people’s interpretations of social processes of overwhelming presence in their daily lives. Our previous research had already studied those social practices that middle class people categorized as corrupt, the arguments they develop to explain the occurrence and persistence of such practices and their ethical judgments of corruption (Sautu, 2004a).

Deepening on this perspective of analysis, this paper expects to reconstruct working class people’s theories of corruption. This analysis is based on 39 in-depth interviews carried out in October 2004, which looked into working class people’s ideas of corruption and democracy. While their ideas of democracy are described in Sautu, Dalle & Maidana (2005) this paper describes cases of corruption as well as the criteria people use to categorize a practice as corrupt. Here we shall deal exclusively with those cases people categorized as a corrupt practice, leaving for a future paper the analysis of its attributed causes and consequences that we expect will complete our understanding of working class theories of corruption. We shall endeavor to discover what moral and behavioral dimensions are involved in their

interpretation of the meaning of corruption. With this purpose in mind we shall begin describing those situations our interviewees define as cases of corruption, which they have known through personal experience, that of friends and relatives, or through the media. We assume that the construction of meaning is based on people's biographical experiences and their interaction with others (Sautu, 2004b).

Research design to study working class people's ideas of corruption

During the in-depth interviews we asked our interviewees about their ideas and interpretations of corruption and democracy. However, applying a thematic strategy of analysis we did not expect to reconstruct subjective meanings but we tried to find out shared interpretations or common responses, significations and in general interpretations or representations of the issue of corruption (Maines, 2000). People have their own interpretations, based on their life experience and their interaction with others. The objective of this research is to represent these shared meanings and describe them as faithfully as possible. In order to achieve our objective (to study people's meanings of corruption) as well as our purpose (to respect those meanings as faithfully as possible) we developed a thematic strategy of analysis consisting in different stages.

First, we organized a collective collaborative team with the participation of many people in the design of the study, the collection of interviews and in their analysis. This collective collaborative work allowed us to question our own ideas and emotions. All our research steps were critically analyzed, putting under reflexive examination our taken for granted assumptions on research methods, interpretive practices, and ideological commitments.

Second, once the basic conditions for the selection of cases were established, sociology students organized the fieldwork and carried out open interviews in October 2004, guided by a minimum of orienting questions. The questions guided the conversation to the topics of our interest but at the same time allowed the interviewers to "explore, probe, and ask questions that elucidated and illuminated [our] particular subject [of interest]" (Patton, 2002: 343). This non-directing strategy of interviewing is particularly appropriate to study people's experience with corrupt practices, as interviewees are able to recall all the cases of corruption that they have personally experienced or known through the media.

Third, all the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed as verbatim transcriptions that were systematized using the Atlas-ti software for qualita-

tive analysis. This systematization resulted in as many content categories as appeared in the text. To begin with, the research team divided the interviews among its members, who individually began the task of systematization and category construction. Then all the categories were collectively re-analyzed and a new system of categorization applied to systematize all the verbatim texts.

Fourth, all the transcriptions were treated as a unique text and all the analytic categories pulled together into several grand categories created around the core issues contained in the texts (as many as the material rendered). The authors of this paper analyzed this set of grand categories containing diverse issues so that each one would carry out an independent reconstruction of our interviewees' thoughts. The grand categories that resulted in the analysis of workers' interpretation of corruption were: corruption causes and consequences, definitions of corruption, corrupt practices, feelings generated by corruption, metaphors of corruption, diffusion and ways out. All these grand categories include the different dimensions of workers' theories about corruption. As we have already said, because of limited space, in this paper we shall exclusively deal with those practices that workers categorize as corrupt.

Fifth, the joint research team (those who analyzed democracy and the authors of the paper on corruption) made a selection of transcripts of our interviewees' answers and organized new interviews with working class people. They are our witnesses. We presented very short transcripts to the interviewees and asked them to say what their meaning was. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The comparison of our reconstruction of the transcript meanings and the interpretation of the witness-interviewees is briefly presented at the end of our papers. This transcription will be thoroughly analyzed in the future.

The factory, the streets and the neighborhood: the study of workers' personal experience with corrupt practices

The analysis of those practices that working class people categorized as corrupt has to take into account the difference between people's personal experiences and those practices that people know through the media. Both types of narratives allow us to explore the meaning of corruption. On the one hand, those corrupt practices that people knew from the media refer to well-known cases of corruption, which usually took place in the public sphere. On the other hand, those corrupt practices related to people's life experience, involved different agents of the public and private sectors with whom the workers interact in their daily life such as the factory, the neigh-

borhood and the local government.

Personal experiences with corruption occur in different spheres of workers' daily life in their interaction with different social agents. As we shall see, most of these situations imply abuse on the part of social and economic agents who hold different positions of power. The nature of specific corrupt practices depends upon the context in which they occur but all testimonies are part of lived experiences. In their narratives, workers mention agents of the public sphere, such as public officials of the local government and the police, with whom they interact mainly in their neighborhood of residence. On the other hand, workers describe corrupt practices developed by entrepreneurs and trade union leaders mainly related to their own work experience.

Generally, situations that take place in the public sphere are encounters with local authorities or the police. Our interviewees define the municipal government *"as a disaster; the current Mayor makes the public believe that streets have pavement when the neighbors know that they are blank soil, and people have to pay for inexistent pavements"* (I. 13/13) Another corrupt practice mentioned by one interviewee refers to bribes that have to be paid to the authorities of the local government: *"...some council-man usually comes to the shop where I work and asks the owner for a bribe. They think that they have the right to have a share. I have personally experienced this situation; they always find some reason to ask for a bribe..."* (I. 14/14). In both situations there is power abuse from public officials with the objective of increasing their personal benefits, what implies a serious damage to the victims.

Another type of corrupt practice in the public sphere is related to the allocation of state subsidies to unemployed people. Most narratives suggest that people needing a state subsidy have to pay a bribe to public officials or members of the party in government in order to get it. One interviewee said *"when my daughter needed the unemployment grant [of \$50 USD] she had to give someone 30 pesos [\$10 USD]; while her husband had to give this person 20 pesos [\$7 USD] if they wanted to keep the subsidy. When they refused to give him the money, this person just excluded them from receiving the subsidy"* (I. 4/21). This situation shows the abuse suffered by people who need state subsidies. This person's daughter survives with a monthly allowance of \$50 USD and has to give a 15% of this income to the intermediary. In addition to direct victims of this abusive practice there is a damage inflicted to the state, by deviating public funds that should be oriented to social welfare.

As we have already said, workers' experiences also include police corrupt practices. Policemen are very powerful social agents at a local level, and ac-

According to the interviewees, most of the time their power is illegally employed against the workers and the neighbors. One interviewee said *“the police is very corrupt. My mum sells food in the streets, because we belong to the working class and that is the only way we can earn a living. When she is in the streets the police usually demand her a bribe to let her sell food; and I believe that this is corruption. It is not that they say ‘you can stay but give me some food’; but the police uniform suggests the bribe”* (I. 7/37). As the police are connected to corrupt practices their uniform has become a sign of corruption. In addition, this interviewee is conscious that the working class is the main victim of corrupt practices. Another interviewee describes a case of corruption suffered by his brother, who is a foreigner: *“the police always ask my brother more and more documentation to prove that he is a legal resident. He has all the documents but the police always demand a new document, which is not legally compulsory but they all the same ask for it. My brother usually asks me 2 pesos or 5 pesos [\$.65 to \$1.65 USD] to have pocket money when the police stop him and ask for a bribe”* (I. 16/16). As we can see, some workers experience corruption so deeply in their daily lives that they have to keep pocket money in order to pay the bribes every time they go to the streets.

In some situations, police corrupt practices are combined with other types of illegal procedures. One interviewee, who sells goods in the street, narrates, *“the police demand bribes to people that want to sell goods in the streets: that is corruption. In addition, this neighborhood usually becomes a ‘zona liberada’ [an area where police surveillance is suspended] without policemen and where many thefts are committed ”* (I. 23/22). This interviewee narrates experiences of her daily life in neighborhoods where the police not only demand bribes to street workers but also coordinate and encourage robbery. Another illegal procedure is that *“when the police confiscate stolen goods, they always keep something for themselves. They say that the robbers stole it but that is not true”* (I. 5/12). Both situations show that the policemen look for their personal benefit through procedures that might be different from bribery but all the same have harmful consequences for some people. In some cases, the police is so corrupt that *“in my neighborhood there were important mafias, composed by policemen that hardly knew to read or write”* (I. 6/19).

So far we have analyzed those corrupt practices that the workers experienced in their relationship with public institutions such as the local government and the police. The power abuse of public officials leads to some practices identified as corrupt by our interviewees who describe the harmful consequences for them. In addition to this, many interviewees identified corrupt practices that take place in their workplace and that were implemented by their employers or trade union leaders. These situations also imply a power abuse, which is clearly seen in the narrative of a construction worker, who said that *“I am 65 years and after working in different factories during many years, I*

began the procedures for my retirement. I went to the ANSES [Social Security agency] and found out that my employers had not paid my social security charges. I think that this is corruption; because they stole the money they had to pay me. Consequently, I cannot have a decent retirement. If this were a straight society they should have paid” (I. 1/25). This situation implies a shared responsibility of the workers’ employers and the public institutions that should control social security payments. The interviewee considers as corrupt the violation of his right to have a decent retirement. This violation was implemented through the illegal practice of different firm owners. In this case, the power abuse of the employers is the mechanism that allows this corrupt practice to happen.

This mechanism also appears in other situations described as corrupt by our interviewees, such as the premeditated bankruptcy [*vaciamiento*] of a company, which had awful consequences for the workers: *“there was a manager that established that everything was forbidden for us. We could hardly communicate with each other. This manager developed corrupt businesses and took all the money from the company. After that, we began to have lower and lower salaries and many people got fired...including me”* (I. 12/12). Premeditated bankruptcy might be implemented through different procedures, but it always has terrible consequences for the company’s workers: *“they fired all the workers and took the money away. By that time I was pregnant. My husband and I were fired and consequently unemployed; I had a huge depression by that time. They did not give us any money, they had just run away, no one gave us an answer”* (I. 18/20). Premeditated bankruptcy has been a widespread practice among many Argentine firm owners. As we can see, it has terrible consequences for the firms’ workers who denounce it as a serious corrupt practice based on the employers’ power abuse. The interviewees also mentioned other types of corrupt practices experienced in their workplace, such as companies that force the workers to sign false receipts for expenses that have never been paid. All these practices have serious consequences for workers’ lives and careers.

One of the main strategies that workers can implement to confront this power abuse in the workplace is to turn to the trade unions. Nonetheless, many interviewees stated that when they turned to the trade unions they also had to confront corrupt practices. This is the case of one interviewee who was working in a company that was *vacuada*. When the workers started to fight against this situation they found out that *“the members of the trade union received money from our employers to avoid confronting their interest. The trade union leaders lived on our money, but when we needed them they were not there, they just took bribes from our employers”* (I. 18/21). Another interviewee said that *“trade union leaders should represent the interest of the working class, but once they become powerful they change their behavior and duties in pursuit of other goals”* (I. 29/13). Summing up, *“they belong to the system and take their part. They negotiate with the employers*

and the state against the strikes. The trade union leaders get to their positions through corruption. They are a mafia that makes corrupt deals with the big companies to betray the workers” (I. 32/21). As we can see, corruption not only affects the workers in their relationship with employers but it also makes the trade unions a useless mechanism to fight against this situation.

Experiencing corruption through the media: tales of corruption involving politicians, judges and big companies.

This section of our paper analyzes the narratives of the interviewees that refer to cases of corruption transmitted through the mass media. These are well-known cases of corruption of contemporary Argentina, and took place in the public or the private sector. The first group of cases involves different high-level public officials, such as presidents, congressmen, ministers and judges, while the second group refers to corrupt practices developed by big private companies.

Those situations that occurred in the public scene include various corrupt mechanisms, such as ill administration of public sources, lies and illegal businesses. These mechanisms are related to the bribes as a medium of corruption and are pervasive to different areas of the public administration. This is the case of the judiciary and legislative powers: *“there you find public officials that live on bribes. Like the representative X who has money and wants more money. Or the other representative from Salta who admitted that he received a bribe. They corrupt the whole system, like the judges, who know that there is corruption but they are also corrupt”* (I.31/22). Besides widespread bribery, the interviewees identify as corruption the incapacity of the judiciary system to solve relevant cases: *“it is like the case of the AMLA terrorist attack [a Jewish Organization]. I think that some people, like politicians or policemen received a lot of money. It has been a long time since they put the bomb and there was no justice”* (I. 30/19).

Other examples of the diffusion of corruption among the legislative power are denouncements of bribes during the treatment of important laws. One interviewee narrates the case of the Labor law: *“I remember the Banelco [ATM cards] case. The government gave the senators a bank account and deposited money there so they approved the law”* (I. 18/13). The treatment of this law was a parody because *“the senators received money, and accepted a law that was for their own convenience, not people’s. The true winners are the big companies”* (I. 24/7).

The interviewees’ critical perspective regarding the diffusion of corruption also includes the election of authorities, a basic procedure of current democracies. They denounce that *“there is electoral corruption (...) the big parties buy people’s votes. The search for power is the origin of corruption”* (I. 25/6). As we

can see, the corrupt behavior of the main political parties affects, according to one interviewee, the results of public elections, harming the whole democratic system. Besides considering that the government is elected through a corrupt mechanism, the interviewees also think that the functioning of the different governments is corrupt. One interviewee said that the current government is corrupt because *“they promised not to pay the foreign debt, but they are paying it through increasing people’s needs. They did not do what they promised. That is corruption”* (I. 1/22). Corruption of different governments can also be seen in the ill administration of public resources: *“when X was governor they planned three storied hospitals, but they only built up two floors. They stole one entire floor. When they built the Hospital X they paid \$420,000 USD when they were supposed to pay only \$240,000; and \$180,000 USD instead of \$80,000. In one year they have stolen \$12,000,000 USD [sic]. There are many robberies, and you always find someone who is robbing to benefit the authority”* (I. 25/8). In this case corruption not only implies the personal benefit of some public officials, but also generates harmful consequences for poor people that usually attend public hospitals.

Most interviewees remember media cases of corruption that took place in the nineties. Corruption in that period is perceived as having widespread harmful consequences for most people. The argument runs *“he (the president) took the country for himself ...I think...now we are all paying the consequences...many people have no money to afford a living...others see that there is no safety”* (I. 18/2). During this period, corruption was so widespread that *“I remember that decade as a whole case of corruption”* (I. 35/8). People identify many cases of corruption related to that government, like the illegal sale of weapons to Croatia and Ecuador, the corrupt construction of Yacyretá and the illegal businesses of the PAMI (retired people’s health organization).

Other interviewees also associate corruption with the privatization of public companies, in the nineties: *“everybody knows that the sale of the state Airline to private companies was not a clean business. I think that the case of this Airline is the most accurate symbol of corruption”* (I. 27/8). The interviewees also consider corrupt the sale of the state’s oil company (YPF): *“I remember when they sold our oil. The money was supposed to be oriented to improve retirees’ situation, but the retirees are still fighting for a decent salary. They have worked their whole life, and the government does not answer their fair request”* (I. 1/1). This interviewee not only sees privatization as a corrupt practice but also identifies its harmful consequences for the retirees. But the privatizations are not exclusively public deals; they involve big private companies that have bought the state’s assets. When they refer to this process, the interviewees identify big corporations by their names and remember the media accusation of the existence of payments of large sums of money to politicians, trade union leaders and public officials.

On the other hand, one interviewee questions the media for their compliance or ignorance of different situations: *“I know many people from the media who make interviews or comments just to sell them and make some money, lying and making up things. I consider that many TV shows are corrupt, because they are based on lies”* (I. 22/19). The problem with the media is that *“we receive the news that the authority wants us to receive. There are few independent journalists, but if they are too independent they disappear from the media”* (I. 32/22).

As we can see, the interviewees take from the media well-known cases of corruption that involve high-level public officials and big private companies. These cases of corruption do not belong to people’s daily life; they involve actors with whom the workers infrequently interact. When the interviewees evaluate the consequences of these corrupt practices they usually identify the whole society, the democratic system and the unprivileged sectors of society. The workers consider that corruption generated by important public institutions and big private business has serious consequences for a society that they hope it should be more equalitarian and fair.

Conclusion

Corruption is a widespread phenomenon in Argentine society. The experts, the media and lay people consider that corrupt practices are very diffused in our society and have harmful consequences for our country. The interviewees consider that corruption is a daily practice that became a fundamental mechanism for the working of different public and private institutions. In this paper we have analyzed the different cases of corruption narrated by our interviewees. Some of these cases were based on people’s personal experience, while others were taken from the mass media.

First, we would like to highlight the common patterns that emerged in the cases of corruption that people took from the media. These cases involve important actors of the public and private sectors, like presidents, ministers, governors, big private businesses and banks, with whom the interviewees have little or no interaction. Although they are not directly involved in the narrated cases of corruption, they do identify the harmful consequences of these practices for the whole society and the democratic institutions. They denounce the ill administration of public resources and the great ambition of public officials and private entrepreneurs, which are always trying to improve their profit, not caring for the society where they live. According to our interviewees, these corrupt practices were widely widespread in Argentina during the nineties, but they still exist today, and it is difficult to produce a change in the short term.

Those situations directly experienced by the people are related to unequal power relations that govern workers' daily interaction with different social and economic agents and institutions. Our interviewees live in poor neighborhoods of the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires; they are waitresses, factory operators, service workers, domestic servants and peddlers. They belong to a social class that continuously suffers the impositions of other social actors which are politically, economically or symbolically more powerful. As we could see during this paper, this experience of inequality is deepened by corrupt practices. The main corrupt mechanism denounced by the workers in their daily life is the power abuse of public officials, firm owners or trade union leaders.

We would like to finish this paper highlighting the differences between the working class experiences with corrupt practices just described and the experiences of the middle class that has been analyzed in a previous research (Sautu, 2004). Workers' life and work experiences are very different from those of the middle class; so are their experiences with corruption. Our research concluded that in several occasions middle class people consider corruption as an interchange that generates a benefit for all the parties involved. This is the case of a firm manager who asks for a bribe to sign a contract with certain suppliers. Many corrupt practices are for middle class people a mechanism to accelerate bureaucratic procedures in the public or private sectors. On the contrary, workers see corruption as deepening their experience of subordination. They identify corrupt practices of entrepreneurs, public officials and trade union leaders as impositions and great obstacles in their occupations and even a curtailment of their right to walk freely in the streets without being abusively jailed by the police. Corruption is seen as a deadlock in interviewees' life, progressively eliminating possible ways out. The interviewees do mention different strategies of self and collective defense to fight against the harmful consequences of corruption, which we shall analyze in a future paper.

Everybody agrees that corruption is deeply widespread and it has serious consequences for the Argentine society. However, it is important to note that different social classes have different experiences with corruption, and that the harmful consequences of this phenomenon do not affect them in the same way. If this is true, how accurate can our representations of working class people's experiences with corrupt practices be? Can we really understand workers' experience with corruption? We are doing patchwork pulling together arguments of persons with different individual trajectories assuming that they share life experiences and therefore some core interpretations of those experiences. Applying a thematic analytic strategy we endeavor to discover lines of thought, interpretations of those social practices that the

interviewees categorize as corrupt and the underlying meaning of corruption that they imply. These re-constructed theories of corruption of course may be tinted with our own vision as observers. Multiplying the number of testimonies and the number of observers, we expected to reach with our analysis a representation of people's ideas as complete as possible. In order to improve our confidence in our own representations of people's interpretations of corruption, we selected some working class witnesses to tell us what those transcripts meant to them. These "*second level*" interviews were verbatim transcribed and a tentative analysis was carried out with the intention deepening this analysis in the future. Our goal is to design two focus groups in order to see whether collective discussions of the transcripts render similar representation of the meaning of the analyzed data.

The witnesses were asked to evaluate our own interpretations of the selected transcripts. In the first place, we can say that the witnesses agreed with the interviewees and the analysts in their categorization of certain practices as corrupt. Those cases narrated by the interviewees were seen as very corrupt by the witnesses, who also agreed in identifying the harmful consequences of those practices. The witnesses also belonged to the working class, and thus shared many experiences with our interviewees. This allowed them to gain immediate sympathy with people's narratives of corrupt practices. In addition, the witnesses confirmed our interpretations of the underlying dimensions of those corrupt situations. As we have stated in this paper, most of the corrupt practices experienced by the workers were a consequence of the power abuse of agents like entrepreneurs, public officials or trade union leaders. The interviewed witnesses also considered that those corrupt practices deepened the workers' experience of subordination. They spontaneously referred to their own experience when they evaluated the transcripts, and confirmed some of the conclusions that we extracted from them. They also confirmed that each interpretation (including the analysts') is done from a certain biographical experience and structural situation.

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"THERE ARE SOME SOLDIERS"

Amiri Baraka

There are some soldiers
Who don't even remember
Why they were soldiers
& of what value
their soldiering was
Amongst the broken heaps of
Possible USA's predated
Americas, this rock & roll
Makes donations in space
With peoples heads
Hanging through the
Donut Hole, Some of these
Are soldiers, were soldiers, are best
Remembered as soldiers.

Then there are soldiers
like me, who keep a log
of where the waves took us
& bring whatever back

I am yet a solder,
Still soldiering, still studying
Still measure ourselves & the
Enemy. An old soldier with
The clarity of years & blood.

And I've seen all kinds
Of things & People and some of them
Are soldiers.

BLASTING DAMAGE

Bill King

—“Comments from Individuals,” Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, *Environmental Impact Statement on Mountaintop Removal Mining/Valley Fill Activities in Appalachia*
—search engine results, *Arch Coal, Inc.* <www.archcoal.com>

Mirrored tile fell in bathtub. Had to put up new shower wall.
Water now seeping in basement. Wall cabinet fell—broke all my dishes.
Had to buy new dishwasher and oven doors wouldn’t shut.
Had to have main door repaired. Wouldn’t shut enough to lock.

Your search for “blasting damages” found 0 hits in 0 documents.

Did you mean: LASTING DAMAGE

Also try:

Check your spelling

Try more general words.

Try different words that mean the same thing

All doors inside house including cabinet doors won’t shut good.
Ceiling tile on sun porch falling.
Floor hooved up in living room, dining room, and bathroom.
Walls in 3 bedroom bowed out. Tile and mirrored tile in bathroom coming down.

Your search for “LASTING DAMAGE” found 0 hits in 0 documents.

Did you mean: LOSING DAMAGES

Also try:

Check your spelling

Try more general words.

Try different words that mean the same thing

Had to screw paneling back in 3 bedroom where it came loose.
Counters unlevel now. Furniture stained. Covered with dust.
Family pictures won’t hang straight now.
All windows screwed shut. Have white shingles on roof, which is now black.

Your search for “LOSING DAMAGES” found 0 hits in 0 documents.

Did you mean: LOVING DAMAGE

Also try:

Check your spelling

Try more general words.

Try different words that mean the same thing

Since `95, I have had 3 heat pumps put in.

Blocks in basement cracked. Can see outside—put silicone in crack.

Several large cracks by meter box outside.

Out building has large cracks—water now coming in cellar.

MAO'S OLD CHINA

Kenny Tanemura

“Young people are unable
to see
the contrast between the Old China
and the new,” Mao said,
referring to the late styles

of his favorite artists,
Edward
Hopper, Ralph Ellison,
Ella Fitzgerald,
and Peter Nu—

Filipino novelists are
old hat,
Mao thought, whereas
the ones scribbling on
visual cultures are way

ahead of the game. Some people
can't withstand
the smallest pressure,
her back turned
to found-art installed

in the corner of what you
most
want—beach town, heartland,
city or country,
prestige or family?

Those trees reached almost
across
the street, the prettiest women
study cliffs, and
Old China is more memory

than presence—look around you,

everything
distilled to a menu, or TV,
you're mistaken. Where, then,
is the new China,

a needle in a haystack,
short
strands of noodles
in the latest Michael Crichton
book, an upscale college town?

I saw Old China
standing
in front of the cash register,
looking over her shoulder
wondering which China

was waiting in line, looking
for
the future to explain everything
to him—thousands of years
from now every China

will be Old China, and there
will be
mint China waiting
to be coined—
but before that happens,

let's talk about your
dysfunctional
family and mine, how
distance lets us forget
the bickering we were

forced to mediate—how
every
new challenge, rooted in the past,
made us grow
towards each other like

rows of grape trees before
they are

picked by worker's hands,
before the gatherers come to yield
what became of us.

MAO'S PEARS
Kenny Tanemura

“If you want to know
 the taste
of a pear, you must
 change the pear
by eating it yourself,” Mao said,

meaning you must,
 by biting
into the fruit, enter the conversation
 of a pear, and convince it
to change its pear-mind,

or at least alter it in
 some way—
perhaps an inclination
 or a way of decorating
a home could be improved.

You can't really know
 a pear
or anything, for that matter—
 an eel, green peas, wafers, tomatoes
—unless you change it,

because letting these things
 stay
what they already are,
 untainted by our knowledge,
keeps us in a state of

ignorance. Therefore, a comrade
 once asked
Mao if a lover could be
 known without
changing her, and

the Chairman said,
 “If you want

to know the structure and properties
of the atom, you must make
physical and chemical experiments

to change the state of the atom.”

The comrade
was still perplexed, couldn't
he let the lover be
who she was

and still know her? Maybe
Mao
was right, he thought,
it was an atomic question,
without change there

could be no real
insight.
Still, he wondered if Mao
had eaten too much bread,
or if his wheat diet

had influenced his
judgment.
Before approaching the lover,
he returned to Mao again
for counseling,

and Mao said, “If you
want to know
the theory and methods
of revolution,
you must take part in the revolution.”

Convinced, the comrade
returned
to his lover with the intent
of getting to know her.
He asked her, “Will you

stop being so stubborn, spend
less time
at home, cook more for me,

and get over your issue
of needing often to be alone

so that I may finally know
who you are?"

I am like the pear
that is never eaten, she said,
I am the atom unchanged.

FOR JERMAINE, SIX, DEAD IN BOSTON

Patricia Smith

Spent bullets sparkle on streets grimy with the thud of winter.
Knives bulge odd angles in children's pockets, and any one
of their upturned words could bring us another you.
Promising harmony, Christmas carols still blare twisted lyric
from behind doors wedged tight.
You do not stop being dead.
Thought it would never be again, but here's tomorrow,
unturned year, no blood spraying its pure slate,
no tiny wreckage splayed there.

The storefront Santa, yellow beard twisted,
one exposed cheek gin-swollen, still asks his starlit questions,
Not far from his feet, the chalk outline of your body
waits like a slap under the snow for spring to return.

STORY FRAGMENTS AND PROCESS

Barbara Jane Reyes

Dear Monument, Hi. How are you? Thank you for the pineapple juice and guavas when I was sick. How is the Vauxhall, and the goats with the mean eyes. Remember when the toilets didn't flush right. Remember when you asked me to sing a song because none of the older kids would talk to me. Remember there were lizards on the ceiling.

I think I like you, but I think you're scary.

* * *

Behind the laughing house, the path is a sudden steep slide to the riverbank, and there are no stones along the path. Young ladies don't go to the river unchaperoned. Once, a young lady slid down the steep path and into the water. When she returned, her hair was a nest of mud and blue dragonflies. She tittered constantly, and touched her puckered lips with the tips of her fingers. She couldn't speak otherwise, fevered and whirring as she was. She stroked her throat and flicked her hair. She pulled off her thin blouse, and exposed her tiny breasts to the village boys. The man in the laughing house stepped outside his door to see the commotion, old mothers clucking, "she shouldn't have been standing so close," and young boys learning to crow. The man covered this young lady's body with his white coat, placed a cold stethoscope against her burning skin, and found inside her heart the rhythm of the river.

There's a mermaid in the river behind the laughing house. She's the kind of mermaid who grabs at the ankles of young fishermen; the older ones' legs are too sturdy. She pulls the youngsters into the cool water. She slides her body against theirs. They, too, surface with the river's rhythm inside their hearts.

The river didn't used to be this close to the laughing house; one day, the river started to stretch itself wider and wider.

The house started to throw stones, and cough up so much dust. The goats knocked over trees with their hooves and the flat tops of their heads; they fed upon the roots until the trees all withered and the soil gave way underfoot. The river, the house, the goats, they did these things because the mermaid wanted to see the face of the man who lived inside the laughing house.

* * *

There are some things I am trying to organize here. First thing: there is a central “he”/“you,” to what is becoming a much larger piece of writing. This “he”/“you” is my 94-year old Papa. I think I’ve gone frantic; I’ve just recently been informed that he’s been diagnosed with lung cancer. It started as a tumor in his gall bladder; it metastasized in/to his lungs, I am told now. I was previously told it was a gallstone. This is how pieces of information disseminate in my family, where the grown-ups I think are still gauging what and how much to divulge to us “kids,” about sensitive matters, who is dying and so forth. So I am frantic; I am locked into a semester of teaching, which, so far, I am loving, but this means I can’t just up and leave for the Philippines. At any rate, he’s currently alive and strong. He’s decided against radiation treatment. He’s old, he says. Don’t run his body into the ground, he says, just let it be. Then he left Manila, went and ordered fertilizer for the farm. Idle time makes him crazy. No one argues with him; he’s the patriarch after all, and a physician himself, retired some time ago from practice when he was in his mid-80’s. He was recently here (in the USA), stoically watching his eldest daughter die slowly. I wonder how these two “events” are psychically related.

This is a process brain dump.

What I am trying to say here is this: I am frantic about memory, and story. I am trying to organize here, and so far, I’ve got more imagined than “real” story. But I also think this is OK. I believe that much of how we remember people, great and otherwise, is fairy tale, is myth, is tall tale. Or, maybe by “tall tale,” I mean that “real” stories get blown way hell outta proportion. And these stories are as “true” as what we imagine to be true. So now I have this story, sitting in the center of everything, and while I am circling around it, aiming and hitting at it from all directions, telling and retelling pieces of it in many different voices, the story itself is cell dividing before me (metastasizing?), and I have to let it.

Many of the things I am writing are “surprising” me; just writing direction-

less the other day, I realized I'd been writing about his mother, who died at his birth. He was the youngest of 11 children. It started to gnaw at me that no one I know, not Papa himself, has any memories of her. I've never seen a photograph of her; I am guessing none exist. Eh, so what do I do about this? I'm just writing it as it comes, and at this point, everything I write is fair game for editing, discarding, cutting up, reusing and/or recycling.

* * *

Once upon a time, there was a seed, the tiniest speck in a dark sea of soil. Once upon a time this seed did not know he was a seed, and he did not know if he could see. No light penetrated the dark soil. Once upon a time, he broke himself open, and stretched parts of himself into the soil, grabbed a hold of it and pushed himself upward. Light-bound, he pushed and grew into a tangle of eyes and hair and tendrils, thickening.

Once upon a time it occurred to him he had not yet learned to speak nor breathe. Still, he grew himself lungs, anticipating the air above him, while tendrils pulled water through his veins, toughened him. He did not know his own name, but he knew rumors and dreams of air.

This place was not a void but a crawl space, a corner he carved for himself inside of his mother's body dying all around him.

This is not her face, but my mosaic of many broken sand dollars.

SELF-PORTRAIT IN DESIRE

Duriel Harris

who thought it was a flood or an issue of faucet, or a tinny ringing
and favored the cupboards' trembling, quaking proximity of trains
and the antiseptic play: swab along rim. who, bookish, loitered and loafed,
enticed by the boy in a dream of snow, who, beastly, scurried, low
to ground, blocking the vents, stuffing blowers with down; whose mind
was a tailored maze of hare and hedgehog, rabid skunk and radiator
ruffle: a puff of heat escaping, stenciled along the surface where some refuse
and others multiply, milling.

who, begging, thought it was a flood or a surge of lava, or a chemical
bonding: a molten slur repurposed, imagined terrain spun from myrrh, a
cone,
a brocade smother, twisted pine chord and altar brass. who, hard wired, fled
in human tongues, suspended, syntax and inflection, foreign intoxicant.
who, moved, heard nothing, everything from the gut splattering wet;
who, strapped in, strapped on, and became, flowed out into silicon
filling, suction.

who thought *surely it was a flood* or felt baldly arthritic, a red joint before rain
or divined reaching, nurse to the floorboards' weepy eye. who swallowed,
feeling
little more than without speech, wedged into bedsag, hunting looted silver
of a future's dream. who faked, picked, and prodded into half days. who
held
the heater singly to the throat to coax the slimy membrane of sickness out
into hospital for the pill, broth and gelatin, for the walking away—every letter
shifted forward seven paces—and the official papers hidden in all that crisp
negro hair.

who fled from the stomach and the chest carrying legs on back to leave arms
free
who strapped in and on but did not move, everything from the stomach
splattering about, wet, vile
who heard nothing to admit, saw nothing to describe, felt little more than
without speech, favoring the bit of undigested potato hatching into ghosts
and chains wrapped in blankets, wedged into the bedsag with looted silver of
the future's dream
who denied never and forsook always

bellyache laughter, dander falling like leaves
who swallowed everything but the trees, images of trees, who reminded [me]
of [my own] begging the company of strays
wolves and boars
wild things to become a beastly,
; [a plasticized giant
shrubbery,] who
bald, arthritic reaching, nursing old age's weepy eye
volcanic ash,
who held the heater by the throat
who held the heater singly to the throat to coax the slimy membrane of sick-
ness out
into hospital for the pill, broth and gelatin, for the walking away
[, conspiring]:
who faked, picked, and prodded into half days
who first boiled the blood to remove impurities
spiced everything with cardamom, swirl, pomegranate seeds in rosewater
the window seat
; [an antiseptic
swab playing the beaker's rim];
who felt the bottom moving but alerted no one
not accustomed to the heed
who knew
it had been done times over in the rhythm but was infected and could not
stop because
there were people even if no one paid attention
who spoke foreign languages for sound effect, an accurate approximation
living tragedy
who toddles about in a pretty good diaper [fixtures swing]

who because it is easy continues through
though its amusement is better suited to daylight
and their official papers hidden in all that crisp negro hair
who reminisced over presence of mind
and the upward turn of the line
someone else would need
who picked until there was blood and sleep
who awoke to diminish the gross weight of beauty
who asphixiated even the shadow with guilt
who became a ghost only to haunt every floorboard separately every letter
shifted
forward seven paces

AIRING AT A SNIFF

Mani Rao

Easy in the envelope of your hands
Rewinding to the memoir : the glyph in your graze

rrrr-rip rrrr-rip rrrr-rip

Easy, I said, to the deaf habit of a jawdisc, what's the hurry, the season
sprawls
My fiber was coarse, all five: flavor color odor vibre textur: we ran amok
dusting air unsettling
And now bereft, jumped on the moon, straycow, honeybell, what else to
do but ruminate

Come graze, ghost bees, about time

LOXODROMIC

for Marianne Nicolson and Ian Skedd
Wayde Compton

a voice is a box of reaping, a dream
a dicotyledon of speaking.
unlocking makes purchase by re-revealing
submarine cables. coloured, keening,
sung
krakens, reeling,
role and role out a whole cracking Occident.

from the moon's floor to the bight of thinking,
from the seeding descent to the shell of telegraphy,

of Valentia Island to Trinity Bay,
of a breathless expression,
a last westless east, a leached hereless list
for this low slow
perch of hiss

as though through the throats
of a dole of punctuating rock doves—

[Paul Reuter flew pigeons released stock threw air
from Brussels to Aachen for a falling
of figures on wings of flushing vestige
through solid moulting into air threw
temporal ink the invisible digits
went where a whistle opts not to centre]

I stand in the penumbra of myself, my eyes
Neruda was tired of his shadow, I'm
of the response and call numb
the lung undone come mumbling up off
the floor of the ocean for no
holy corona of from.

Valentia Island to Trinity Bay
Brussels to Aachen

[Alex Haley tracked the word across the written in
saline keel quill stole to Juffere away
from Spotsylvania and back to where the occult *griot*
opened up in him an ink sea of pages in confidence
evidence on the *plage* the word *The*
African cowry game traces the helix flown long
the god that owns the word is always a huckster
a river a banjo a name a season a word is a skinless drum]

west I go as the crazed crows commute
east, singing at one hundred and ten km per hour “I’m
Looking Through You” twice through confused
as to whether I’m lead or backing,
Saul as the storytelling actually seems to fall
out of the sun, as I break apart from
Coquitlam, the paved name of native slaves of natives
set free too far from home to go

again, a twister of tricksters I see against
this con of a sun. they descend against
sequence and “You Keep Me Hangin’ On”
on Boundary Road northbound until the streets
drive the history back to an accident of contact.

[shotgun to Manhattan from Montreal I read the road map as
she drove
and all I could see was lyrical time in the boxed lines flying]

"APPARENTLY I AM PICKING FIGHTS": CULTURAL STUDIES AND POETICS MIX IT UP IN TAYLOR BRADY'S YESTERDAY'S NEWS

Tyrone Williams

Taylor Brady's 2005 publication, *Yesterday's News*, functions at every level—thematically and formally—as an argument between a poetics and the culture from which that poetics derives. In the most general terms, Brady struggles with the very act of writing itself; he doesn't explicitly say so, but one can imagine that, for Brady, the alternative to “just” writing—be it poetry or cultural analyses—would be social and political activism “in” the world.¹ More concretely, Brady's poetics function as a radical deformation of the lyric mode; these deformations consistently allude to specific cultural institutions, the newspaper and television. However wary or cynical the populations involved in their production, reception and promulgation, the lyric, newspaper and television continue to serve as the repositories of certain kinds and, more important, certain forms of “truth.” Even the critical responses to the lyric's, newspaper's and television's conventions presuppose that, however ideological or partial, truth would be the name of that horizon that shapes, say, self-expression (as a stereotype of poetry in general) or public opinion (in either Lippmann's or Dewey's sense of the phrase)².

As a kind of newspaper-cum-television set itself, cultural studies subsumes a number of different “subsets” or sectors of social criticism (feminist, post-colonial, queer, etc.) which are nonetheless posted as a more or less unified front against perceived hegemonies.³ Naturally, the “arts” section/segment is presumed to be a subset of cultural studies; poetics then would constitute a “page” or segment within this sector. This view of poetics and poetry as in the service *of*, as a poetics and poetry *for*, would remain more or less a given within Western history from Plato and Aristotle until the Renaissance⁴ when the art-for-art's sake dictum would begin coinciding with increasingly formal interpretations of art in general, interpretations funded, so to speak, by academic institutions. With the professionalization of the discipline of education in the United States of America during the 19th century, the art-for-art's sake dictum would continue its ascent, reaching its apex within the first half of the 20th century.⁵ Insofar as cultural studies may be understood as an outgrowth of the Marxist demystification of cultural products in their entirety, this critical movement takes on a long tradition in which the aspiration of the arts toward ahistoricism has been defended from various sectors of the cultural apparatus, first and foremost by the institutions in which they have thrived.⁶

Yesterday's News takes up the argument between poetics and cultural studies, yoking together political science, ecology, union activity, civic responsibility, etc. even as it contemplates traditional poetic concerns (e.g., the role of the poet and poetry in a society, the question of poetic immortality, etc.). Ostensibly set up as a “diary” of the year the “second” Gulf War in Iraq began (almost four years ago), the work occasionally resembles a newspaper with the advertisements “missing” (as opposed to, say, Nicholas Guillen’s *The Daily Daily*)⁷. At other times, *Yesterday's News* has the format of a teleprompter read-out or bottom-of-the-screen-scroll (*sans* commercials) frequently deployed in news cable shows. In either case, newspaper or news show, the “historical” effects are reinforced to the extent certain dates throughout 2003 are attached to certain poems; however, other poems are explicitly undated, allegorizing the “transcendental” and “ahistorical” values that allegedly inform “good” poetry and poetics. Finally, unlike traditional newspapers or news shows that foreground at least some of the economic interests to which they are beholden, *Yesterday News* foregrounds the blank spaces that have functioned as the horizons of certain kinds of poetry—the lyric in particular—but, in staggering the spaces like texts that conform to the size and number of ads on a page or screen, the book also alludes to its absent economic/social backing. It is two newspapers/news shows—poetics and cultural studies—rolled up into one book, a “microcosm” which does not quite mimic, even in terms of scale, a daily newspaper or news show. That is, it reads like poetry *as if* it were cultural studies and vice versa.

As if, then, it is both too culturally specific to be “good” poetry and too “oblique” to be “good” cultural studies, *Yesterday's News* zigzags back and forth between the two horizons to which it incessantly refers, incapable or unwilling to decide. Taylor Brady may be picking fights but it is only “apparent”—and never certain—that he is, in fact, picking fights, much less with whom (the Bush administrations?) or what (cultural studies? lyric poetry?) he has a bone to pick. It’s a classic stand-off between the three of them (the poet, poetry and everything “else”), one not only alluded to in the Oedipal implications of the triangulated gunfight that defines the Western in American lore in general and film in particular but also in the major wars fought by U.S.A. administrations in the second half of the 20th century. For it is precisely the struggle between brothers and the stranger that links, for example, *Gunfight At The O.K. Corral* with Vietnam, *High Noon* with Iraq. As Derrida points out in *Politics of Friendship*, war and friendship would be unthinkable within the Western tradition without the transcendental motif of brothers in (each other’s) arms (Abel and Cain, Remus and Romulus, etc.).⁸ In this mythology that undergirds its history, brothers turn on each other at the instigation of the stranger hypostatized as God, as woman, as land, etc.; at the same time, the stranger is precisely who or which yokes

together as brothers men otherwise unrelated to one another. In general, then, Western history may be understood as the struggle between “pure” and “mixed” blood brothers, the structure of the relationship between the former and latter understood, teleologically, as the struggle between origins and destinies, pasts and futures.⁹

The Western poetry tradition has played out this internecine struggle in terms of that old seesaw form-and-content, the history of literary theory as the back-and-forth sublimation of coherence or correspondence theories of criticism (the former concerned with the integrity of the work of art or its author; the latter, the relationship between the work or author and the world). In general, then, coherence theories tend toward transcendental defenses while correspondence theories tend toward utilitarian functions of poetry.¹⁰ Moving back and forth between these tendencies, Brady’s poetry tends toward a kind of ambidexterity and hermaphroditism that beckons and puts off aesthetic posterity and political utopias linked, too often, to dogmatic and/or phallogocentric posturing. It would be a mistake, however, to understand this shuttling back and forth as a means of avoiding or putting into abeyance the social and personal implications of cultural studies (which is, first and foremost, a means toward cultural activism) or the aesthetic implications of the lyric whose line, as Brady acknowledges at the end of the book, must always pass “through the space of a beloved.” On a purely formal level, Brady “referees” and fights both ends of the poetics/cultural studies bout.¹¹ This writing moves back and forth between stanzas in free verse and syllabics and prose statements and commentaries. Brady’s primary strategy in both the poetry and prose is to link indicative statements without periods—that is, without periodization. The movement between the specificity of an historical period and transhistorical aestheticism is played out in the way many of the pages are formatted. As noted above, some of the pages are “dated”—they bear the imprint of a month, a day, a year. Yet, different dates often appear on facing pages even when the same poem “runs” over from one page to another. Aside from merely indicating the process of composition, this strategy also plays with the concept of dated and undated material, that which foregrounds its historical specificity and that which does not. However, dating and not dating his writing is just one of the strategies Brady deploys in posing poetics against cultural studies. Much of the “content” is specific (objective “news” and subjective “private” concerns as well as public and community concerns) but much of it is abstract enough to transcend any specific history (e.g., “an afterlife in words” might be one of those “memorable” lines that defines “good” poetry but “bad” cultural studies).

The complexity of Brady’s disturbance of the assumptions of the period and

periodization can be seen by examining three and a quarter pages, 196 to the top of 199. The poem on p. 196 is entitled “Smokes In Filtered Light” and is dated October 2 while the poem on 198 is entitled “A Hand-Rolled Theory Of The Act” and is dated October 3-5, though its final stanza on p. 199 is dated October 5-7. In addition, another poem starts on p. 199. Thus there is no way to know on what date “A Hand-Rolled” was “completed.” Between these two poems is a segment of prose which may be the coda to “Smokes” or the preface to “A Hand-Rolled Theory”—or both. In any case, this section of prose is a rewriting of some of the themes in “Smokes” even as it finds itself “subsequently” rewritten by “A Hand-Rolled.” At the same time, there are passages here that might qualify as good cultural studies even though written in traditional verse forms—“Where the citizens gather/they buy up meat. They purchase/labor, quantities of tomatoes, /settle payment for the discourse/on method, on methamphetamine.” And while “Smokes” might qualify as a better poem because it is less “realistic”—“To do with what you will//a function scaled sideways/to the single cell...”—this might be too abstract to be “good” cultural studies. Of course, all this depends on one’s presumptions regarding the “nature” or “essence” of poetics and cultural studies. Generally, the differences between the two are based on the same standard of use-value that, at least since the Enlightenment, separates—indeed, defines—the arts from and in relation to all other forms of human creativity. Traditionally, poetry has little utility; cultural studies, understood as an adjunct of social or political science, must be useful. Yet Brady articulates in this same poem the limitations of cultural studies: to be of use it must, in turn, use, but that which it would use may evade utility: “the barred frame fails/to hold you long/enough to be of use/to shoot the poor relation/punctual to puncture/wounds the ratio of which.” This inability to capture its subject is not a “failure” of cultural studies; on the contrary, this inability is an index of the very conditions under which all modes of representation—including poetics—must function. These conditions have important implications for cultural studies inasmuch as they render it a “moment” within the trajectory of a given history. Put in the metaphorical (but not quite) terms I am using: to the extent it remains belated in relation to the phenomena it wants to critique, cultural studies finds itself as a section/segment of a newspaper/news show called “history.” Its crucial difference from “vulgar” Marxism—its inability or inefficacy in relation to prediction and prophecy (which is also its durability)—makes cultural studies a stepchild to both the physical sciences and traditional poetics which, like all the traditional sciences and arts since at least the Renaissance, sidesteps the problem of history by claiming to simply transcend it.¹²

For example, the title of the opening section of Brady’s book is “They Store It Up”; in the context of the news as necessarily belated in relation to events,

this title suggests that events are actually withheld from public view until a satisfactory story—or even a half-assed one, like the fabled WMDS—can be concocted. The news story would then be a distortion of the news event as mere information, mere data. Sharing this condition of belatedness, traditional poetics opts out, literally, while cultural studies ratchets up the analysis and critique. An alternative to the news story, cultural studies, in its most radical form, thus mimics the newsreel. Yet even the newsreel cannot circumvent the problem of belatedness. Brady, however, is at pains to argue that the event-news lag is not analogous to, much less dependent on, the noumenon-phenomenon difference that inaugurates phenomenology as a kind of stripped-down Platonism. For most of *Yesterday's News*, however, Brady cannot, in truth, shake the despair of belatedness on almost every level of human experience, for it goes without saying that political protest or resistance is, by its very nature, always too late.¹³ Now, were protest or resistance all Brady was interested in, this would hardly constitute a “problem.” However, given that his poetics, as a politics, entail imagining other modes of human (and non-human) life, the relationship between these alternatives and his resistance against certain modes of the actual world becomes acute. Brady’s “solution” is to ground both resistance and possibility in the traces and nodes, however faint or few, of an alternative world already extant in, if yet “under” or at the “edges” of, “this” world; we don’t have to start (imagining) from nothing.

Thus a poem like “Without Your Ass,” based on Sun Ra’s “Nuclear War”—the emperor has no pants because he has no ass to hold them up—affirms, for example, that the containment of oil reserves precedes both Iraqi wars. In short, one under- or non-reported event precedes over-reported events—one, as media, does not exist; the other, as the story of the year of 2003, exists as “news” even if, for Americans old or wise enough to know better, these wars are hardly news. Yet, another poem’s title or preface, “Postdated For Today,” suggests that “yesterday’s news” is, in fact, predictive of “today’s events” and news: “What was that tune you had us singing before things began to move, an ideal in the air around us marking the entailments of a step we hadn’t taken yet?” The logic of this apparatus of “truth” is the object of Brady’s critique throughout “They Store It Up.” Thus, “An Infernal Syllogism” turns out to have also been predictive of a certain kind of mortality: “...and if the first/ fluid wealth must always/ ooze out the ass-end of/ time, then hills arise/ before the city is and/ this is birth and so this is/ a poem about the death/ of George W. Bush.” This pervasive logic demystifies history as teleology: “fate recurs fathering/ pre-emption of itself” and “Thus the text/ hopes for a text/ of hope. The war/ for unlimited expansion/ of fate will not be/ fate itself.” Still, as both “Date Unknown”—“Reading the accompanying leaflet, we passed over en

masse from demand to data.”—and the opening poem to section two, “And Ready For The Stars,” make clear—“Never have we lived/with more data, nor with less demand.”—the possibility of collective action as a response, as protest per se, always presupposes the absence of proactive agency: the conversion of knowledge into information, demand into data.¹⁴ Inasmuch as it is the alleged impartiality of the media that facilitates this process, the return, here, of a qualified subjectivity in the form of an “I,” a “we,” and its poetic analogue, the lyric, becomes necessary to thwart the “objectivity” of a state apparatus which must both idealize individuality and marginalize individuals.¹⁵ As if it were, any dissembling subjectivity will always, necessarily, at certain points, resemble the subjectivity of so-called “mainstream” lyricism and poetry, for we must always recall that, in its most articulate and nuanced forms, Language Writing, for example,¹⁶ was an attempt to counter the hegemony of a certain kind of American poetry, to demonstrate other, suppressed or marginalized possibilities. It was not, could not, except as a kind of “fundamentalism,” disqualify or eliminate the “I,” the lyric, the subjective per se.¹⁷

Foregrounding an array of interpellated subject-positions, Brady explores the subdivisions that mark the distance between event and reportage as well as the effects of distance per se, one of which we might call distance warmongering. Thus “Movement”: “Mechanism: the little man sweeps the board./ Command from information central:/ invent the reset button. The count/ is two, apparently a surplus.” Distance as delay also manifests itself as mechanization and progress—for example, city planning: “As a prototype or total symptom/still rebukes foot traffic for as/long as tires melt, ride the rims/til wheels come off at fixers’line...” And “these infamous gifts”¹⁸ are themselves the effects of a distance that must remain in (no) place, the best of all possible worlds: “The world burns off between the lines of early light in front-page sidebars.” That is, “All the action” happens elsewhere, otherwise, “in seedy intervals.”

These lines could serve as both a warning to all forms of fundamentalism—indeed, they connect the panoptic American “aesthetics of democracy” to the “piss test” of religious (Christian, Judaic, Islamic, etc.) fundamentalism: Karl Rove meets Osama Bin Laden: “This overhead perspective in slo-mo rewind/serves a twelve-year half life as remedial geography/to ride its horse hard from Central Asia west/into a future in the nineteenth century, which after flashing past the piss test/in the loser’s locker room, turns sharply/to the right of reason.” Or, as Brady imagines, to the left of reason. A section of the poem “You Parse Commands A Line At A Time” offers one example of this among the quotidian: “*Starting with the headline:/ The buzz from downtown follows,/inside the alto’s otherwise sweet sound/a rasped*

touch of alarm that cuts/ 'Take Five' across the grain/to read yesterday's news/not departing from today's/time. 8:30, same as always/at the second fading chorus./ What this guy plays, its substance/is precision, he's like atomic/clocks for station platforms./But there's that edge that/hits you like a paper cut inside/the mask of his best Desmond." (53-54) Here the solace or reassurance of everyone in his or her place, soothed by the familiar and exotic bound as inert culture (a good jazz track standardized like a time-piece into light jazz), is undercut by the rasp of discontent, the possibility of that atomic clock—which is the poetics of posterity—melting down, weaponized into an atomic timer attached to the quotidian and set to go off at any moment. On some levels the alto soloist playing for spare change outside a station platform is perceived as someone who understands his role as a commercial break from "Reporters at the front" "*lit and/shot in high duality*," and to the extent "*lit*" refers to both lighting and literature (and literature, since the Enlightenment, indeed illuminates), journalism and literature have complementary functions within the culture. In opposition to this literature, a certain kind of poetry performs otherwise in the silence of its non-functionality, its invisibility within the culture: "*In miserable times*, one shows up/ in time to take these notes/no one will ever read. In these/United States I am a poet/embedded..." The rest of this section goes on to pose information as data against knowledge as demand; again, it is a question of agency as belated response and agency as proleptic creation of history: "We dream about the dream next morning in misguided conferences, hoping that our assignation might lead to the assignment of collective guilt that absolves us of the weight of one specific body left behind by a heavy sleep as a stack of discarded drafts or minutes that no one at the table will ever read but which must be filed and preserved nonetheless."

Yet the possibility of recapturing lost ground, though hypothesized for the most part in the last section of the book, "Are We Dead Yet?" is foreseen, glimpsed, early on: "And so it's time/ to stop. No more/petitioning to be/ heard. Inscrutable/ in local dress is how/ resistance mounts." Nonetheless, this possibility of infiltration from within, of active resistance, does not begin auspiciously, signaled already by the vagary of "resistance mounts." In the context of the Iraqi insurgents, we know all too well, if not too clearly, what "resistance" has come to mean from our havens thousands of miles away. Yet, that such knowledge depends on the very institutions in question here—the media—can lead to the self-recrimination of the poet who realizes that posterity per se makes of the "literary" another section of the newspaper or segment of the news show called Western civilization: "An afterlife in words or/ the afterlife of words/ Or after work we lift our nets and snort." And the production of capital is, finally, nothing more or less than the delivery of weapons or the delivery of news about the delivery

of weapons: “A gray man comes/uphill fist/full of headlines/in the heat a bundle/tied with twine so quiet/here you hear the slow/trash burn. Close the window. What/we drag in has its odor there.” Attention to relation itself, to the networks that sustain capital, demands we recognize our own interpellation as subject-positions, as flexible and moveable as the feast of production and consumption. No poem demonstrates this better than “World Systems Theory,” dedicated to Norma Cole:

The waiting. For a fourth
hubcap, or a trapezoid

piece of curtain
colored glass picked off a

sidewalk heap like your

crucial notice of
those dancing nuns. Probably

it was mercury or cotton
fiber in the air. It was you
who tracked the song there.

Where things come from, Bruges
or Manchester, but for me
from you, who told me so.

(Endnotes)

¹ Brady, obviously, has not succumbed to this anxiety about the relative efficacy of direct social action and writing *about* direct social action; after all, they are not mutually exclusive acts. Nonetheless the prejudice against “just” writing remains in force despite the exemplary work of Derrida et al. For example, Cynthia A. Young confronts the problem of “mere” representational “discourse” as a limitation of cultural studies in the introduction to her book on what she calls Third World Leftism. Young is at pains to link union and campus activism—laborers and students—with “innovative” cinema to showcase cultural sites where aesthetics and politics appeared to have merged, however briefly, in the 1960s and 1970s. To the extent she deals with “writing,” however, it remains in service to

politics (from LeRoi Jones and Franz Fanon to Harold Cruse and Angela Davis). There are, apparently, no aesthetic issues to confront in social criticism.

² See, for example, Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, and John Dewey's *The Public and its Problems*. No doubt the increasing network of podcasts and internet media constitute alternative sites of "truth" and "knowledge," though many of these cannot help, still, positioning themselves as "responses" to mainstream media. This stance is, of course, a recognition that the majority of the American public still derives its understanding of "the world" from mainstream media.

³ For example, women's studies remains an important "stand-alone" focal point of interrogation even as it conjoins with ethnic studies to become, as "one," gender and diversity studies.

⁴ Though Horace, in emphasizing a relatively autonomous poetic tradition, had already begun to unshackle poetics from the culture in which it was nurtured, if not formed.

⁵ New Criticism and modernism in literature thus share certain presuppositions (not only aesthetic ones) with serialism in music and Cubism and Abstract Expressionism in the plastic arts. For example, the advent of an explicit utilitarian educational system had the effect of strengthening the art-for-art's sake arguments, founded on a pre-capitalist view of culture as precisely what opposes mercantilism and commerce. With the advent of new media as defining features of American culture—including cinema—in the 20th century poetry's "irrelevance," as a kind of holdover of Europeanism, becomes a source of its strength.

⁶ Of course, defenses of poetry begin with Aristotle (against Plato) and continue through Longinus, Sidney, Shelley, etc. These "unaffiliated" defenses are not, however, exceptions that prove the rule. On the contrary they demonstrate that, as Horace knew, that poetry as a "tradition" already constituted itself as an institution, one apparently more powerful than political and social orders. If poetry has been dying, it has been dying a fairly long death...

⁷ Nicolas Guillen, *The Daily Daily*, trans. Vera M. Kutzinski (University of California Press, 1989).

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (Verso, 1997).

⁹ I allude here to brothers related by blood and those who use blood to solidify relations. The theme of brothers and the stranger, as Derrida points out in this reading of Carl Schmitt, is the source of ethnocentrism (including, of course, antisemitism). As Brady points out in an email to me (see footnote 13), the third section of *Yesterday's News*, "Soon As You Are Well," is taken from Dickinson's "Master Letters," the inauguration of a correspondence with an "outside." Hence the necessity of the "stranger." Here, the major wars—specifically Vietnam and Iraq, though one should not neglect the apparently negligible Grenada—function as the "necessary angel" (understood in the terms of major patrons of fundraising) which is always also the necessary other between the twin towers of productivity—labor and capital. Of course, Marx articulates this triangulated relationship on a number of levels (e.g., labor, commodities and "alienation").

¹⁰ I borrow the terms “coherence theories” and “correspondence theories,” as well as my understanding of the development of the American university, from Gerald Graff’s *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

¹¹ Brady is thus both brothers and the stranger—the poet “embedded in America,” the political activist, and the “third,” the “other” that pits both Bradys against one another.

¹² Of course, “history” itself is an object of certain sectors of cultural studies, and the question of its “value” can be read from, at the very least, Walter Benjamin’s *Illuminations* to Barrett Watten’s *Bad History*.

¹³ Hence the utopian “nature” of reform and revolution; prolepsis then would constitute the narrative of social and political change. In a note Brady points out that the phrase “they store it up” appears at the end of volume II of *Capital* (Penguin Edition) and is, for him (as it is for Marx), a specific reference to the relation between accumulated and expended capital as a function of, among other modes of “recovery,” war in general. I quote Brady extensively in order to foreground his sense of the functions of the titles of all the sections of the book:

The phrase ends the final sentence of vol. 2 of *Capital* in the Penguin edition, or, to be more precise, the final sentence of the “body” of the book before the afterword(s). (Terrible with my recollection of translators, but it’s the edition with the Ernest Mandel introduction). Like the rest of the section titles, it’s the “last word” from a “middle” or “transitional” text — thus “And Ready for the Stars” is from a translation of the *Purgatorio*, “Are We Dead Yet?” from H.D.’s *Tribute to Freud* (more a transition than a middle, that one), and the title of the third section (which I’m not recalling here at work) is from what I took, roughly, to be the “middle letter” of Emily Dickinson’s “Master Letters” — the transition point at which, in opening a correspondence with an “outside” (God, the absent Father, Higginson, etc.) questions of readership, of the political, and crucially, of the Civil War, enter more explicitly into her writing.

I wouldn’t bother going on about this, except that I think a reading of the source of “They Store It Up” aligns in a way with what you’re reading there of withholding, the promised (and always-delayed) horizon of coherence for a damaged world. In the frame of Marx’s text, of course, it’s important that vol. 2 represents the critique’s step away from the “shop floor” into the realm of reproduction. It’s in this realm that apologists for capital have always hoped to locate a promised and interminably deferred coherence and harmony — whether it be a fairly crude notion of the invisible hand, or the more intricate workings of the Keynesian planner-state, or of what’s been characterized as “the new military Keynesianism.”

Anyway, that ending phrase of vol. 2 is crucial to me in this regard because it lays the groundwork for the analysis of crisis — and the demonstration of the inherence of crisis to capital’s reproduction — in vol. 3. What’s being characterized is the moment when, finding no productive arena for valorization,

capital is “voluntarily” withdrawn from circulation and production to be “stored up” — i.e., the preliminary indication that the “substance” or medium of social reproduction within capitalism is perfectly willing to undergo devaluation through idleness rather than confront a situation in which *use* without the potential for expropriation of surplus might otherwise be at stake. This then develops in the later volume into accounts of large-scale devaluation, up to and including the destruction of accumulated value (including military destruction) as part and parcel of reproduction and its crises.

That suggestion of violence and destruction as a strategy by which the representatives of capital “clear the ground” of over-accumulation in order to make a space for fresh accumulation seemed like a necessary corrective to some of the accounts of the reasons for the war that were circulating, not only within the ideological organs of TV news and government statements, but also within large segments of the antiwar movement. It felt necessary to me as an immanent critique within the antiwar political work in which I was involved at the time, which brought me and those with whom I shared something of political commitment into coalition with a liberal contingent whose moral opposition to the war I never questioned, but whose political understanding of it stalled against their intractable nostalgia for the “peaceful” financialist hegemony of the Clinton era. The understanding of this intimate link between the horizon of circulation/reproduction and the horizon of crisis/violence points pretty clearly, I think, to the impossibility of simply “going back,” since back there is the financialist regime whose growing crisis set crucial preconditions for the war itself. As I’ve put it elsewhere, Donald Rumsfeld is the evil twin of Robert Rubin. The one entails the other.

¹⁴ The value of Marxism as a “diagnostic” and “predictive” tool in relation to capitalism remains unsullied by the “fall” of the U.S.S.R. Indeed, Brady’s work, especially in the middle section of the book, reminds us, as many others have, that this “failure” of a putative socialist state is, even within “traditional” Marxism, predictable and, most important, necessary.

¹⁵ And the reverse: demonize groups and collectives even as it offers legal and political shelter to corporations and social and political blocs.

¹⁶ As Aldon Nielsen’s *Black Chant* reminds us, experimental modes of writing by members of and those influenced by the Black Arts Movement had called the lyric and its accompanying “I” into question “before” and “during” the formation of what would eventually be known as Language Writing.

¹⁷ Among other things, it demonstrated, as had the Surrealists and Futurists, that the first person pronoun, lyricism and subjectivity were not equivalent and did not entail one another.

¹⁸ Tom Verlaine, “Guiding Light,” on the recording by Television, *Marquee Moon*, (Elektra Records, 1977).

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DRAFT 79: MASS OBSERVATION

Rachel Blau DuPlessis

1. Any over-boiled egg presents a grey-green halo on its hardened yolk.
 2. Who then said aura is lost?

3. The sadness comes with the territory.
 4. The all of it—the gesture, the space,

the boomerang throw,
the reflection a hundred times, things never seen but felt—

5. Plan: Rip it all in half and half again. 6. Did this help?
 7. Sign Testing is in Progress. Watch for new detours.

8. At least with radar there is a landing beam
and someone, even in the fog, can follow it.

9. Who could credit such a stalemate? Such numbness?
 10. A Gridlock of Possessions impedes the richer “of.”

11. Former agreements can no longer be evoked.
 12. This poem is written in blind verse. In “black verse.”

13. Landscape stinks of the historical but mainly impalpably.
 14. Except for sheep. The car is stuck in them. Can’t move

for just a moment.
15. Plan: write only epistles.

16. What is the name of that funny little island where there are no taxes
And U.S. businesses use it to make things?

17. It seems there is no post-war.
Post-war *is* war?

18. These details are too real; there is nothing to be charmed by,
none of the reverberating distance of art.

19. If you are surprised.
20. "We do this by taking a long-term approach."
21. A woman scavenged food, quick-checks its general viability.
22. Dream: the top of our house a ruin.
23. Catalogue has to do, to do this.
24. Plan: a nekuia based on digression.
25. Every morning an account of crimes is delivered, to recycle tomorrow.
26. This piece of fruit tastes like absolutely nothing.
27. We try not to drink industrial waste.
28. Is all our decisiveness really relevant?
29. This return receipt acknowledges only that the message
was displayed on the recipient's machine.
30. There is no guarantee that the content
has been read or understood.
31. Plan: to write propaganda. 32. Not.
33. Is the emphasis on luck, choice or
on horrors, the harrowing and hapless Helplessness?
34. This train is hopelessly delayed.
35. Many are the limens one cannot go back on,
like when the last of a species dies of old age.
36. Sometimes words are chosen from the newspapers;
sometimes one doesn't know exactly what to chose.
37. Yet if enough notations and idioms are collected,
visibility will increase. 38. And then what? Was it just to record?
Just to make a record? Just to make some mark?
39. To say what life was like "then" is not totally shabby.
40. To account for rooms, failures, devastation,
plans (workable and not), the modes of folding and caring

- makes a kind of goal. 41. Is it goal enough?
42. “This is going to be a by-the-numbers, by-the-book investigation.”
43. Technique is just a tool.
44. Sleepers under the station overhang pee by the access stairs.
45. Even a documentary only stretches so far.
46. Although, certainly, technique is not neutral.
47. Glass smash on the street, a flattened plastic bottle: of this.
48. Low production values—automatically more credible?
49. He “earned \$69.7 million—\$190,000 a day—in 2005.”
50. Living under a smash and grab government.
51. To listen for anything but pure voracity is inaccurate.
52. “You can have it all (without the fat & calories).”
53. Didn’t he write “Esthétique do Mal”?
54. It takes the advice of an investment professional
to put that information into context.
55. “There will be much to avoid in this poem.”
56. Toll plaza.
57. Sovegna vos.
58. It was civic and optimistic when it first opened.
59. “I’d like the record to show...”
60. Failed development paradigm.
61. The political economy of *Gelassenheit* was what?
62. Multiple exposure of the bright debris.
63. Memorably strange and particular details.
64. Seen from the air, “We” are just another “Them.”
65. Off-curb dream jerk made him fall awake.
66. The atmosphere: suspicion, distrust, crumbling
hegemony, major crisis magnetizing chronic crises.

67. Is it enough to say all this again?
68. And incredible rage, our keepers incompetent,
incontinent. Our shunters derisory, our stewards—
predators. 69. Is there joy yet
at the discovery? Is there hope?
70. Just isolating this gives information.
71. But there is also the penetrating sense
of running out of time.
72. Did these years have to happen the way they did?
The damage of days in the general seeking and shattering?
73. “There is little public outcry about mistaken policies.”
74. I spent three of the past four nights poisoning myself with dread.
75. So I am a demonstrative particle. 76. And it’s “not just a car,
but a 5-passenger sanctuary from the worst the elements can
throw at you.”
77. Buy more, buy this, buy it. Buy now.
78. Call this Collateral Wreckage.
79. Stamped “Embargo: government publication; not to be released.”
But the bureaucrats were cool with that.
80. Sleep two more hours to erase such dreams.
81. Plan: there is none.
82. “The elements” is a code word.
83. Everything depends on maintaining an enemy at its peak.
84. She said “no need to repeat the news.”
But it’s all news all the time, what I have/ what this has said,
every which word and every way of this.
85. They organize even water in their favor.
86. Police collusion, no prosecutions, “in the ‘line of duty,’”
vital evidence “lost.”

87. “Is a close-up truer than a long shot
because you see more emotion in a close-up?”

Or is a long shot truer
because it takes in more background?”

88. War does keep the eyes permanently unfocused.
89. So are we simply prisoners of our world?

90. Mercy fell on death ears.
91. I lost a sense of what was right.

92. There was a general collapse of civic order.
93. This chart will calibrate your individual risk.

94. Take the sloppy path between barbed wire fences.
95. Even a hundred propositions on everyday life

are only a beginning.
96. Behind the words, other words are unspoken.

97. It all started in shadows
and is ending in worse shadows.

98. These sudden sprints of loss generally
outrun the pleasurable wobble. 99. Though sometimes the reverse.

100. Anyway, right now, if you’re totally
losing it, you’re probably really getting it.

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Draft 79: Mass Observation. The title alludes to a social-poetic-populist writing movement begun in England in the 1930s once described as “anthropology-at-home.” “Black verse” is actually a pun by George Oppen. “We do this by taking a long-term approach.” TIAA-CREF ad, *Time*, April 24, 2006, 5. “By-the-book investigation.” *International Herald Tribune*, July 1-2, 2006. “\$190,000 a day—in 2005”: “On CEO Lee Ramond of ExxonMobil, now retired”; *Time*, April 24, 2006, 17. “Without the fat & calories”: ad, *Time*, April 24, 2006, 70. “There will be much to

avoid in this poem”: Robert Southey on *Thalaba* apparently: I don’t know where. “Outcry about mistaken policies,” (also cited in Draft 47, 84) from *International Herald Tribune*, August 3, 2001. The “5-passenger sanctuary from the worst the elements can throw at you”: Toyota ad in *Time*, April 24, 2006, 1. Questions about close-ups and long shots, in a symposium at the Umbria Film Festival, 8 July 2006, asked by Lone Scherfig (the Danish film director). Poem is on the “line of three.”

From the sky there was no sign of Ravicka. Yet, I arrived; I met many people. The city was large, yellow, and tender. A cab delivered me. When I walked through the door I expected a crowd, but there was just a man. “Hello,” I said. “Hello,” he returned then added, “My name is Simon.” “Simon, are you the one with whom I am speaking?” I had started my Ravic right then. He smiled; he shook his head; he pointed out the staircase, which was made of marble. Other things he did I missed still admiring the marble. Everything else was wood. “Look at this,” he said as he walked behind me and began to wind the arm of something. The advent of a sweet song: it was a music box. I nodded. He followed me by nodding. I was about to say “stay with me,” when the need was superceded by the sound of a door opening—same door I had entered—and a woman grunting as she bent to reclaim an item from the floor. “Hello,” the woman said as if to welcome us. “Hello,” Simon and I called respectively. “Hi. I am Mrs. Madeline Savoy. This is Timothy.” She was alone. “Hello Timothy,” I said with my whole heart. Simon said nothing. “Timothy, tell them how you are,” Mrs. Savoy reprimanded. We stood there, not waiting but quiet still. Simon, eager to return to his music, patted the air next to her. Then he said, “I’m glad you both are well.” Mrs. Savoy nodded, as did I.

Outside the main entrance of the hotel stood a pole bearing a faded blue sheet of paper. Of course, I could not read it from this far inside, but it looked interesting. Or the sky around it did. Simon drew up close behind me, “That flyer there?” He asked, intuiting. “To what does it refer?” I wanted to know. “Ah,” Mrs. Savoy intercepted. “She is new here. And portentous too.” “But don’t dream of it,” Simon warned. “It belongs to the city.”

When I walked down the marble stairs the next morning, I understood that the city was a slightly greener color early in the day, but every moment growing golden. It was more than that the sky was green. The light was in everything. “It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” Simon inquired, startling me. “When I moved to the city,” he continued, “there were so many languages. But mostly it was songs I remembered.” And, as I believe he was on the point of doing the night before, he spread his arms wide and sang. Crooned like sea anemones. All from the Gospels. He sang and sang, getting the music box going on the long ones. His last song was an original. It had the rhythm of something familiar, but completely non-sanctimonious words. I realized he

was eulogizing that blue flyer, which I then noticed had disappeared over the night. He bellowed:

The word is gone
carry it carry on
the long road back
to morning
wee gone
eery was all I heard
eery was all I heard

That was the chorus. There were several verses that I have now forgotten. He sang the song in delirious repetition, altering the pitch each time. Then he stopped, for three men were laboring through the glass door, bearing a dozen burlap bags and an ornate trunk. “Hello,” I was the first to say. “Hi,” one of them answered in a gruff voice. “Hello,” someone said but I didn’t catch whom. “Hello. My name is Simon,” Simon said. “I can help you.” “Hello. Thank you. We are new here. We are looking for the crepuscular.” Simon nodded with sympathy. “People often make that mistake,” he said. And hummed as the men backed out the door. Then I wanted to know, “Are there any people here?” “People come so often it’s become a train station, and many stay here,” he explained. His gestures were large, but surprisingly graceful. The way he swung his arms I expected things to fall but there was a prevailing silence around him. “I think I’m going out today,” I told him, already missing the flyer. I missed it, but I was not desperate. There were other things to see: there was the green becoming golden; there were the spirals of any city; I knew there would be a downtown. “How do I get to the cityscape?” I asked, and minutes later I was out on the street, waiting for bus number 32. The weather was kind.

“Hi.” It was a greeting from a woman sitting next to me. “Hi,” she said again. My name is Pavla. What are you doing here?” The bus shook as it drove along. I could not place her accent. Definitely not Ravickian, it must have been something of the Northern Wafshahs. I decided to return her greeting. “Heh,” I began— “Oh!” She interrupted, “but give me a moment,” then turned away. She retrieved a device (with keyboard and screen) from her bag, held it up against the window. Solar power, I thought to myself, though I did not know what the thing was. Not a calculator because it made noise. But she didn’t look at the screen often enough for it to be a game. Plus, she typed so slowly. After a while, so much time of non-interaction had past between us that she was a stranger again. I leaned away from her toward the aisle. Felt awkward. I looked out the window across from me. I could not say that the city was going by. I believed that it had not yet become a city. The

air was too empty. I saw a skyscraper at the far edge of sight, but not in the direction we were moving, which upset me. "Hello?" I turned back to her, now was gazing out her own window. "Hello," I said. "Hello," I continued. "Hola," I said. And felt giddy. "Hello." I could see that she was preparing to speak. I watched her teeth appear as her lips separated, also her cheeks rise as the mouth rose. The teeth recede as the tongue pushed through. I could see color alight her cheeks. She sounded "heh" as her tongue was caught to the roof of her mouth, and dropped the whole gesture with "lo." "My name is Pavla," she structured with her lips and cheeks. "Where is this bus going?" I performed with my own. She started to say something: she clinched her fists, breathed deeply, seemed to be counting. "Look at me," I would have shouted to her had I known her better. She put her left fist on my shoulder and leaned over and kissed me. As we kissed she placed her other fist on my lap, unfolded it.

An hour after the bus dropped me off between towering structures, I thought to try and get the name of this place. Perhaps, I would return with a camera. This part of the city was yellow and tender like the first part, but not as contemporary. In fact, I didn't believe in it at all. Where were the people? I needed to see someone. All I saw were scurrying animals: plump dogs and scrawny turtles. It was disconcerting to be so alone. I felt I should enter one of the buildings and greet the inhabitants. Otherwise, I would never know anyone. I was in Ravicka because the plane I was on had landed and not yet taken off. Around me, beautiful empty yellow.

I stepped inside something that read "Market Corp." It had at least thirty floors. There was a reception area, though occupied by no one. I stood for several minutes waiting for a guard to appear. I did not see any cameras, but it was too large a building to be without surveillance. I walked around the desk and to other parts of the lobby looking for a bell to ring. I hung close to the corners, where the walls met. I did not find a bell, but in feeling along a steel plate, in the semi-darkness, I stumbled upon an intercom. Moving my hand across the speaker, I found a small button in the center of it. Naturally, I pushed it. "Hello?" A woman's voice came through.

"Hi. I—"

"Hello? D.B. Associates."

I realized that I had not thought what to say. All I could think was "Hi. Is this Downtown?"

"Who are you," she responded. "Do you need to come up?"

Do I need, I thought.

"Yes. I think that's right," I said.

"Very well. When the blue light comes on in front of you, turn around

quickly. Three full seconds will pass and then the wall you'll be facing will part, becoming an elevator. You will have another three seconds to jump aboard. Once inside, press the number 23." She went on with her instructions. There was so much to say: how to walk out of the elevator, which way to go, what doors to avoid, if I saw people in the hallway what that might mean. I was considering another building, one less complicated, when she suddenly yelled, "Now!" And the whole thing began; it was boot camp.

Once we met all ambivalence dissipated. I opened the door onto a wall of books with her standing proudly before them. Her arms were folded across her chest and the smile she gave was scandalous. I walked until I was a meter from her face. She unfolded her arms and pulled me against her. Moving salaciously. We danced without comment. With my head on her shoulder, I read the names of all the books within view. The slenderest volumes of writing I had ever seen. One was called *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*, another *Company*. She hummed a Spanish tune while pulling my ears up with her hands, which were draped across my head. Yes, she had held her arms tightly across my back when I first walked in, but slowly began to move her arms toward the top of my head. My arms were at my hips when this all started. Now they were trying to control my thighs. I think she was a salsa dancer. In Ravicka? Yes, because of her 1-2-3, 1-2-3. And the erratic manner in which she turned me. "Hello." I thought it was a good time to say. Plus, I was short of breath.

I woke up—perhaps hours later—splayed face down across a desk. It was not the same room where I had danced. I was alone. Light from outside seemed a quarter of what it had been before. Now, crepuscular. A soft yellow. Getting off the desk proved a challenge. Well, it was one of those things where you could not trust the floor. I tested it by removing my shoes and throwing one of them down. I listened carefully for the sound of impact: would it thump, splash, or send up emptiness? I dropped it and it rang. The room rang. And voices sung out saying it was time for dinner. Dinner, I thought, and shut the book I was holding, which was next to be thrown to the floor. If I did not hurry I might not eat, which I had not done since I arrived in Ravicka.

The table was low and had a row of candles arranged along its center, all lit except the first and last. I counted thirty-five candles, six baskets of bread, fourteen place settings, twenty-eight cups, and several fancy hot plates for the soon-to-be-served main dishes. The chairs were pushed against the table, empty. But people stood behind them. They were silent and dressed like guests at an art opening. The chairs matched the number of guests infallibly; I stood behind them, still hoping to eat.

A man began bringing food out of a door hidden within the shadows on my right. The people around the table made an opening for him that they easily could have made for me. I cleared my throat to make sure they knew I was aware of that. The man moved swiftly from door to table and back, with his head turned often in my direction. The people began murmuring as they sat, congratulating themselves on a job well done. So—I finally could confirm—this *was* a private gathering. After the server delivered the last bowl and another tray of napkins, I grabbed hold of his jacket and followed him back to the kitchen. His laugh was infectious. He said I was on his funny bone. We walked through three rooms then stopped. The fourth one was very small. It held a card table and two chairs. “Sit down, please.” He urged gently. I bent to sit and he bent; our timing was impeccable. Then something dawned on me. I stood up and extended my hand. “Hello,” I said trying to find my sexy voice, in case it was also time to fuck. Who could tell with everything being so gestural? “Oh. Please sit down.” He repeated. “I have collard greens.”

Once again, I was alone on the street. Manuel had said to wait there for the next bus, returning me to the hotel. I stood while the day’s light began its turn to brown, which, in a few hours, would become the most black. Every time he changed my plate, he spoke softly, “I am Manuel. I will be your sever.” But I did not think I had come to Ravicka to be served. I was not certain though, and it is better when one is visiting a place to remain indirect in one’s actions. Up in the high rise, I made as if I were floating. Now I was alone.

Instead of boarding the approaching bus, which was, according to the schedule nailed inside the shelter, oddly on time, I walked perpendicularly toward the falling sun. The direction you and I would call west, impossible to commit to here. I say “sun” though I know nothing about that source of light. Of course, it is the sun, but it lands completely different here, as if to light things from the inside out. It illuminates more than it shines. Do not misunderstand me, however. I am not insinuating that there is anything extraterrestrial about Ravicka. How could there be? How could we have flown here (as inexpensively as we had) if this place was not of the same world? Not possible.

I walked until I was ensconced in darkness. Then I began to shout. I wanted a friend more than I wanted anything. I was beside myself.

“Hey, hey,” a dark-skinned man intervened. “Hey, little girl. What’s wrong?”

He was taller and much older than I was—the fact of which I used to excuse his diminution. And—what’s more crucial—he was a person. I stopped howling. “What’s your name?” He asked and continued, “I already got your number.” He acted funny; everything sounded like it had been rehearsed. “I was coming and you were coming, and here we were,” he did this while smiling. He was dark-skinned, but I was darker, so I couldn’t understand him. My relief was waning, which must have shown on my face. “Little one, little one,” he interjected. He was handsome, and looking for someone. But was I the person he needed? “Hello,” I said somewhat hesitantly. “Hello,” but I sounded weary.

Later I had a drink in my hand, sitting in a room with five others. All various shades of brick. Four of the five were slouching in easies, while the last and myself were in straight-backed chairs. The light was out again. I was in the middle of explaining something about Simon and the hotel, but not—it did seem—with the purpose of sharing information. I was obfuscating intentionally, though I did not know why. “Mrs. Savoy came in...when she.... Well she was the one who started calling it a *motel*,” I was explaining to them. “...Because over the night so many things had changed. All the loss struck her as depreciation, and she wanted Simon to know about it. So she kept saying, ‘Sir, in your *motel*’ and ‘What is the name of this *motel*,’ repeatedly.” When I finished my tale I studied the brick people’s faces. Their eyes were wet with sleep. “Is there room here?” I asked them suddenly.

Out of nothing, and days later, pieces of speech began to coagulate into a conversation, occurring about ten feet away from me. I had been sleeping *djoletzsa*, the long Ravickian sleep, in my seventh day of occupation. I lay there on the couch absorbing what I could from those muted voices, wondering how long I could go on resting there. No one had asked anything of me, except that I lick my plate when I was done eating. They made no demands of money or cleaning. They did, however, request that I cease my “perpetual practice of greeting,” which I found disturbing.

“Heh,” I’d begin when I saw them, but would catch myself and finish with the Ravickian word for “fork.” They were people and for a while that was everything. At first, the house and food meant nothing. Then those things started to count, and I cared for the people less. It was strange to lose contact in this way. But, without “hello,” who could I be? I hadn’t prepared for otherwise. Which was what they were talking about when I pieced together that conversation. Was I or was I not strange?

Leaving that house and retracing my way back to the hotel proved difficult. First, the people seemed surprised to see me go, perhaps, even insulted, which I hadn't counted on. I lost time recalling the "turns" I needed to perform my apology. I was in a hurry—I didn't want to travel in the dark, when the city was still so foreign to me—but rushing made me clumsy. We were all frustrated. I went through *pareis* several times, but always tripped up on the same move and had to start over. You can't skip ahead, or you'll be saying something entirely different. I wanted to say: when you are a visitor to a place, especially one such as Ravicka, it is difficult to remain stationery. The landmarks call out. I couldn't get my body to say landmark rather than the "shipyard" I kept performing. They were attentive, though, and I stayed and fought, until the sentence was done. "The landmarks call out," once I'd actually configured it, had lost any poetic weight. We all just read it literally. They let me go, thinking definitely I was strange. I was exhausted—not the way one customarily feels when leaving the home of Ravickians.

It was dark, the thing I didn't want. Many unnecessary things happened.

but left for the now renowned and magnificent seat of the legendary
Graffiti King of the ascended state of Five Elms

put your hands up

(resist) resist the placement

put your hands up

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step stop
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step stop

put you hands up

put you hands up for Detroit, our lovely city

Detroit

-troit
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-troit

SEÑOR SANCHEZ QUOTES HIMSELF

Victor Garcia

D'you know why, bosanova? Trapped in tortoise shell and holding a frayed, fake daisy, Señor Sanchez contemplates the last couple of weeks. The taste of each breath has changed since the comet appeared. Now, Señor is bound to the cardboard suit, with its not-so-cryptic writing. Doused in sweat and bearing the burning cuticles. His proposal is to head for the mountains.

*“The end is coming soon...
Jesus will take those who accept him...
The golden trumpets are ringing in the...
Gates of heaven will not be open forever...
The signs are everywhere...
go to the tallest toilet and repent...
The end is here. Sanchez 3:14”*

Bathroom writing

slant

Dry shoulders

Frenzy

The safe

now?

In the middle

To the back

Imagine Señor, in mohair and with a little money in his pocket. A man who can stand straight, strong legs (legs strong), but he can barely lie on a crack of cement. It doesn't open; though it might. The traffic lights bring hope. Green: rest. Yellow: stand up. Red: start talking.

Chapter VI: Phanat Nikhom Transition Camp to America*

The rice paddies stretched away on both sides of the orange bus, fields of green met the blue sky, thin lines of eucalyptus trees divided the paddies, thatched roofed field houses stood on stilts in the far distance. The entire journey felt like I was looking at a television screen (I had seen them at the one-baht movie houses: a big room with a dirt floor and a TV propped up in the front). There was distance. The scenes outside did not look real to me: the houses looked like little doll houses waiting for little doll farmers; the grass looked like plastic grass waiting for plastic gray buffalos, and the children looked like little toy children walking behind toy adults. I held up my index finger and I could block out a whole human being. This bus ride is my first memory of not belonging to Thailand. I had heard the Hmong adults say that we had no country and that Thailand was not our country. In Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, I did not know what this meant. But on the bus I saw that there was a whole life that was different from the one I knew in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp.

I looked out of the window, and I noticed that in the hot sun there was a breeze. I could see it in the waving of the young rice stalks, whole fields shimmering in synchronized motions. The people in the bus were talking in whispers or else sitting silently looking out the windows. Some of the people were sick because they had never been in a car before. I had never been in a car before but I was not sick because I was trying to remember the feeling of being in a car. The road was getting eaten by the tires and we were sitting but I thought it was like flying fast to a place I did not know. My right hand, without my realizing, waved to the stalks of green rice. I was waving and waving. My father's hand stopped its motion.

He said, "Are you saying goodbye?"

I shook my head. Inside I knew that I would always remember the green rice paddies of Thailand waving, waiting like a movie outside the orange bus, with the sticky plastic seat hot against my dangling legs. I thought we were going to America.

I did not know that we were headed to Phanat Nikhom Transition Camp to America. My memories from the time in Phanat Nikhom exist as a time of preparation. The Hmong had been like the land, fertile and green, waiting for new growth. Because we were an old people, our lands

had grown wild. In this camp, our big trees would be cut down, our large stones thrown out, and new seeds would be planted. The Hmong people were pushed together, pushed apart, pushed out in Panat Nikhom.

I stood with one hand holding my hat, scrunching the lace tight in one fist. I looked at this new place. The ground was strewn with rocks and bits of cement; the dirt was rust colored; and the soil was dry and hard. Dust flew around the huge tires of the orange bus and the footsteps of Hmong people scrambling for their belongings showed in the different ways the dust moved. The air felt thick. A barbed wire fence surrounded us. On the other side of the fence there was a small dirt road, and then banana trees beyond that, very far away in the distance there were big mountains that looked gray and green. We were on a road leading to America and then we were in a place surrounded by a high fence that was as sharp as knives. The heat seemed to come from everywhere at once, the dimming sky, the rectangular cement buildings—painted in shades of white, blue-green, dark gray—and even the ground. I could feel the hot air going through my clothes, drawing out the water from inside my body. My throat felt old and wrinkled. I was thirsty.

I looked at the grownups. The adults looked around the enclosed camp and talked to one another. Is this where we live now? Yes, in the long cement houses that look like boxes with tin roofs. Do many families live in one? Yes, but first find out where your family is assigned. I tried to swallow my saliva so that my throat would stop feeling dry but there was no more saliva to swallow. I was tired. My eyes could not look at all the people talking and the barbed wires and the mountains anymore. I felt my chest start to heave like I was going to cry. My mother called my name. She wanted me to go and hold her hand right that minute: Could I not see that the buses were moving? Was I not afraid of the large tires? There was a high guard tower, a man in a uniform with a gun stared down at the families without smiling. His mouth was working. Was there chewing gum in the camp? I hurried to my mother's side, and took her outstretched hand.

The first night we were in the camp, I could not go to sleep no matter how hard I tried. The insides of the houses were empty space. There was no split bamboo or pieces of wood to stand as walls. The building we were assigned smelled like the toilets that I had dreaded back in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp. In fact, it had been used as a bathroom. There was always human waste between the buildings and amidst the cement blocks and large rocks strewn throughout the camp. My mother and father and the other grownups had cleaned the long one-room buildings as best they could and hung pieces of cloth to mark where each family would sleep. There were big fluorescent lights on wooden poles high up in the sky on the outskirts of the camp to light the barbed wire fence. The buildings had no doors, only spaces where the doors might have been for each family's sleeping place.

Moonlight mingled with electric light and entered our sleeping room with a pale kind of watery glow that left shadows all along the walls. The lights combined and I could not tell which came from the moon where a long ago Chinese princess lived and which came from the wooden poles standing tall over us. There were noises: a baby cried, a sound like cars speeding by, the buzz of lonely night creatures. I tried to guess where the things that reached us came from, but it was no good because it was difficult to tell exactly how far the things that reached us had traveled. The cotton walls billowed in the night, the sound of wind colliding with cloth. I tried to match my breathing to the sound so that I could breathe like the wind. I tried and tried but could not hold my breath in for long enough. The hard cement floor was cold, and although my mother had spread our plastic mat and covered it with a thin blanket, I turned from one side to the other looking for sleep.

Everything was uncomfortable. Dawb and I slept in the middle between my mother and father. Was my father asleep? I wanted him to tell me a story—perhaps the one about the brother and sister who were mean to their mother so she turned into a frog and jumped into the river and swam to the land of the dragons, leaving them lonely and regretful and wishing for fins so that they might follow after her. I nudged him on the shoulder.

“Father, father. Are you sleeping?”

He mumbled in his sleep. Everybody was tired from this trip on the orange bus. I promised myself that one night I would be the first in my family to fall asleep. That night did not come in Phanat Nikhom.

I woke up in a gray dawn. My body called me to consciousness before I was ready, before the sun’s full ascent into the morning sky, because I was in a new place. I had never slept in a new place; every day before I had awakened beside my mother and father or if they were awake already, Dawb, in our bamboo platform bed in our sleeping room in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp. I opened my eyes to find my father was already up. I went to the empty doorway and looked for him. The night before I had not noticed the doorway directly opposite ours; I had not realized how close all the buildings were to each other. I could see a family of black haired people sleeping. Our sleeping place (I could not call it a house) was on the outskirts of the camp, only a little walk away from the barbed wire fence and the guard tower. The rocks and the cold morning earth chilled my feet. I looked down to see curled toes, pink against the debris of torn dirt and cement. I looked up and I saw my father.

I saw my father standing with his back to me beside the tall barbed wire fence. He stood facing the mountains in the distance.

I called to him, “Father!”

He turned at my voice and motioned for me with his hand. I ran back inside. I slipped my feet into a pair of white tennis shoes I did not

like. The Thai government had handed out one pair to each girl or boy that was leaving Ban Vinai Refugee Camp; it was their gift to us for leaving their country. I was out of breath from skipping when I reached my father's side. In those days I only knew how to skip from one place to the other, from one person to another, one knee in the air and then the other. I did not walk unless my hands were held securely by a walking adult. The guard was in his tower, his gun strapped to his back, looking down at us. Were they afraid we would run away? Where would we go? Ban Vinai Refugee Camp was so far away and Laos was not a happy place and no one knew the road to America. I stared back at the guard. Would he wave back if I waved? I wanted to wave but I was too shy so I focused on skipping my way to my father as fast as I could.

My father stood silent and still. I inserted my left hand into the warmth of his right hand. With his left hand he tested the sharpness of the metal on the fence. I kicked at the fence lightly with the white tennis shoes. I watched as the sole of the shoes tangled with the barbs, the rough gray of the metal fence that separated us from the tall mountains in the far distance.

My father said, "Your grandfather was buried on mountains that looked like those."

There was no need for an answer. I had never been on a real mountain. And my grandfather had died a long time ago when my father was just a baby. I thought it was good things that even if we are only babies when our fathers died we always remember the places where they are buried. Some day we could find our way back if we wanted to, to say thank you, and to say hello, and maybe to tell them: this is my daughter and she has never met you and she did not know where you were buried but I am showing her now so she will help me remember.

In Ban Vinai Refugee Camp my father had said I would go to school in America. Panat Nikhom was not America, but it was a transition camp to America. We had only been in the camp a few days when my mother woke me up one morning and said I had to get out of bed and get ready for school. Dawb was already up and dressed. My mother got me ready: she combed my hair with my father's black plastic comb, used a warm, wet cloth to wipe my face, made me brush my teeth with my small yellow toothbrush from a cup of cold water, and dressed me in a light pink cotton shirt with a matching skirt. She tucked the shirt into the skirt. Dawb had the same clothes except hers was baby blue and one size bigger than mine. I liked mine better; I am pink and she is blue; I am smaller but I am faster; she was ready and I was not. My mother gave each of us a pencil and a thin book with lines on each page. My father had gone to school already, she explained. She, too, would go after she walked us to our school. I wondered what a person did in school. I was still sleepy. I did not want to

carry the book or the pencil. I gave them to Dawb to carry for me. Our school wasn't far from the place where we slept; it looked exactly like the building we lived in.

I did not like school in Phanat Nikhom. Inside the one-room building there were rows of wood benches. A blackboard was in the front of the room. At the door my mother instructed us to be good and reminded Dawb to watch out for me. Dawb had been to school before in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp. She was good at school despite the fact that she had been sick and had become slower in casual talking. Although Dawb was a year and nine months older than me, and one of her legs was shorter and weaker than the other, and she walked with a small limp—she had always taken care of me.

I remember one time in Ban Vinai when there was a horrible storm, and we were not supposed to be outside but were. We were alone and had to cross the river which was just an open sewer to get to our house. I remember falling into the water from the slippery rock in the middle. I regained my feet, waist deep in water, and started to cry. Not because of the wind and the rain and the water (I loved all three) but because I was scared and my red sandals were running away from me in the current. Dawb jumped in after me, pulled me out, and ran in the water after my shoe. She ran and fell and ran and fell, and I was going to tell her to stop because I could see she was getting swallowed up by the murky water, but she just kept on going. I sat on the banks and I cried. It seemed a long time and I was wiping off my tears. I had decided to go find Dawb when I saw her limping toward me, her long hair plastered to her shivering body, with my shoes in her hand. She even tried to smile at me. I smiled at her and I hiccupped but the tears had stopped. I have always felt better when Dawb stood near me.

On this first day of school, Dawb, like many times in our lives, promised my mother she would hold my hand, and she did. In the class room, she pushed me onto the bench before she tried to get up herself. She tried to shove off the cement floor with her stronger leg. The bench was too high. She gave me her hand, and I pulled and she pushed and finally we got her up beside me on a bench that was not made for our short legs. We dangled our feet side by side in the air. I kicked mine to see if it would reach the bench in front of ours. She stopped me with her hands.

“You can't be a kid like that in school,” she said.

I looked around the room to see refugee children just like us. We were all different sizes. There were some who had never been to school like me and were my height and others who had been to school for longer than even Dawb and were much taller than her. Everyone was mostly skinny. When the Thai teacher came in and smiled and started talking, I fell asleep.

The teacher could not keep me awake in school. Dawb nudged

my shoulder when I started leaning on her arm. I tried to stay awake but my breathing would slow down and I would be asleep again. When school was out, Dawb and I walked home together. She told my mother and father about my long nap.

That night, my mother tried to get me to go to sleep earlier. She boiled water for my bath so that I would get tired. I knew that my mother and father were worried that I would not do well in school in America if I could not stay awake at this practice school. The herbs did not work. I listened to my family talking and then falling asleep, my eyes wide awake.

Every night I lay on the floor that we used for a bed and I watched the cloth walls billow in and out. After a week or two, the teacher felt that I was not ready for school. She talked to my parents in Thai and they agreed to send me to the daycare center with the babies and other children younger than me. A few of my older cousins served as helpers there. They bathed us in large cement tubs and then told us it was playtime or naptime. I hated naptime. I could not go to sleep no matter how hard I tried. I stared at the ceiling while the other children slept.

I wanted to be back in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp where the people I loved could tell me stories. I wished Grandma was with us so she could take care of me. I did not want to attend a childcare center for babies. I told one of my older cousins how sad I was inside. I bit the insides of my mouth and tried not to let my lips tremble. She gave me my notebook and pencil and told me to draw quietly by the light of the doorless entry way (it seemed there were never any doors in Phanat Nikhom). I would lie in the doorway with my legs in the shade of the daycare building, and my head and arms in the sunlight. My feet would feel cool against the cement in the shade and my head would feel warm and tingling in the sun. I propped my chin up with both my hands, and stared at the pencil and notebook in front of me on the cement floor. I did not know how to draw. I did not know how to write. I had seen other people draw. I had seen other people write. I thought writing was the easier of the two.

I wrote cursive circles on the sheets of paper, careful to keep my “words” between the blue lines on the page. Slowly the thin notebook filled with make believe stories that I had been told, with stories that I wanted to tell about how it had been in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, and stories about the times before I was born. I tried to tell the story about how a squash got thrown in a wild garden and how different Hmong clans came to be from this one act alone. It was mysterious and incredible the places that I could have come from because Hmong people didn’t have a home which meant we could have come from anywhere at all. I spent much time writing these stories out in my nonsensical lines of connecting zeros. Maybe in the lines, there was a fervent but stupid wish for an America that would make my body so tired that I could sleep at night like everybody else and not have to

sit outside curving lines in shade and sun.

Time became a blur of days in the sun, heat coming off the cement floor, heat coming down from the sky, seeping into my hair, warming its way into my head. I disliked heat. The only respite was in the clinic outside of the camp, and I hated that more.

The clinic was a cold place where the nurses asked my mother and father to hold me still for needles filled with liquids that looked like water, like candy, like sugar cane juice. I cried pitifully. My mother and father did not help me. Although they held me steady, I called to them to free me, help me escape.

They only shook their heads and whispered, “Be silent. They will hate you if you yell and cry. It will hurt more. Be a good girl and stay very still.”

I swallowed, I closed my eyes, I made my body stiff, and the Thai nurses in white clothes laughed at me. I opened my eyes and tried not to look hateful so they would be nicer to me. Only it hurt the same. It was the way to America, my mother and father said, holding my hands as we walked to and from the bus that took us from the camp to the clinic. America was a place where they would not let illness in the door, or admit little girls who could not hold pain. I hated pain, but I would not be left outside America, especially here in this place where I could find no rest. I started biting my bottom lip when I smelled the clinic.

After school, I often would stand near our building, lean my back against the wall, and look at the entrance to this hot place. The buses with refugees kept streaming in regularly, people from other camps, coming in, getting ready to go to America. All the camps would be closing in Thailand and everybody had to go somewhere or else go back to Laos and maybe be killed. Australia and France and America were offering homes to Hmong people who could pass their tests. America’s was the hardest because the fathers had to identify the pictures of white soldiers and tell what their names were and how hard they had fought under their leadership. My family was coming to America. My father and my uncles had studied very hard for the American test; they memorized all the facts from the soldiers who were on the Americans payrolls as if they had fought for money. The process to America carried no understanding that all the Hmong had to fight in the war and especially after it to just hold onto their families and survive. More Hmong refugees streamed into Phanat Nikhom every day. My mother and father said that Grandma would come soon with Uncle Hue’s family. Every day that I could, I waited for her.

A month after we arrived at Phanat Nikhom, on a regular hot day, a big orange bus just like the one that had taken us to the camp came rolling in. People started walking out looking just like we had in the flying dust. When my grandma stepped down with a scowl on her face, her fierce angled

eyebrows pushed close, my heart stood still. I walked to her and I pressed my face into my grandma's stomach—her money bag was in the way—and tried to wrap my arms around her wide middle. The smell of menthol and herbs seeped into my nostrils. She held me close for a moment. On the outside she looked the same: her curly hair was pulled back from her face, and she was wearing a polyester shirt and her blue flip-flops. Inside, she must have felt betrayed, hurt, and afraid.

Her children had conspired to get her to leave Ban Vinai Refugee Camp. They knew the camp was closing and they thought that of all the options available, America was the best. They had heard that children of refugees could go to school in America. Letters from America said that the country was paved in cement and grass was green. They tried to explain the possibilities to Grandma, each of them in their own way, but she refused to hear them. They all registered to come to America; they assured each other it was not a separation, merely a way to get to the same place, one at a time. Uncle Hue agreed to come last and sign Grandma on with him because he was the most patient of her sons. My father knew this the day we left Ban Vinai. All the adults knew it—only Grandma and we children did not.

My grandmother would say years later that it was in Phanat Nikhom that she stopped being a woman and was turned into a child, “Ban Vinai Refugee Camp was not so bad for old women like me. We had feet so we could walk. In Phanat Nikhom, my children became busy, and there was no walking for me to do. It was a place to practice being in America...where if you are old and you don't have a car, you are like a man or a woman in a wheelchair with weak arms. You wait for others to push or pull. A child who does not have the face of youth.”

I was too eager to hold Grandma's hand, to show her the room where we slept. I had grown to like the sight of the billowing cloth walls, and I wanted her to like them with me. I told her that Panat Nikhom had mountains in the distance maybe just like Laos. She nodded.

After Grandma came, I no longer had to go the childcare center. Whenever I fell asleep in school, which was around the same time everyday, a few minutes after the teacher began talking, Dawb would wake me up. Grandma would wait outside the school building for me under the overhang of a roof. I skipped my way to her, one foot in front of the other. I handed her my notebook and pencil, and skipped ahead of her to the outsides of the buildings, to the barbed wire fence where Thai women waited on the other side with goods to sell. Their baskets were full of simple things like duck and chicken eggs, dark purple eggplants, deep red banana blossoms, and bunches of pale green water cress. There was one woman there whom I particularly adored because she made the best, at least to my mouth then, *khao pad*, Thai fried rice, in the world. I stopped on my side of the fence, stared at the woman on her little stool on the other side of the fence and

waited impatiently for my grandma to catch up.

As soon as Grandma and I walked near, the woman, without our asking, dribbled oil into the hot pan on her little portable coal ring. She cracked an egg. It sizzled, and she added a spoonful of rice, mixed the two, sliced a tomato, and seasoned the food with a few leaves of cilantro, a sprinkling of soy sauce, sugar, MSG, and the air started smelling good. I followed the smell, my body moving into the barbed wire fence. Grandma warned me not to get too close; the wire would cut me and it would bleed and hurt, she admonished in her deep voice. I pulled my body back and kept my feet still until the food was spooned into a hard plastic plate and a metal spoon placed beside it. Grandma fumbled in her moneybag, the one tied around her waist, and came up with the correct coins. The Thai woman handed over the hot plate to my grandma through the fence, both of them careful of the heat and the sharp barbs. We sat, Grandma on a rock and me on the hot ground, my dish of *khao pad* on my knees, and I ate while she stared at the mountains in the distance—just like the ones where my grandfather had been buried.

I don't remember us talking, although I was a talkative child. I don't remember her telling me stories, something she liked to do. Our time together in Phanat Nikhom was strange. The adults were busy trying to learn the things they would need to know in America. How to say: "Hello. How are you? I am fine, thank you. Hello. Where is the restroom? Is it left? Is it right? Okay, thank you." The children who went to school were busy, too. Dawb learned the alphabet and the different colors. She loved to say "yellow this" and "yellow that." The younger children were at the childcare center learning to enjoy playtime and naptime, things that American children were taught to do. Grandma looked at the mountains silently. And I sat at her knees, at first busy with my food, and then later, with fear.

One of my uncles was sick. He was taken to the clinic-hospital in Phanat Nikhom. My mother and father took my sister and me to visit him. The room was crowded; there were hospital beds, some with curtains dividing them, others without. In the bed beside my uncle's there was an old Laotian woman asleep. On her stomach was a plastic cover, and although the room felt cold to me, there were flies that flew around her sleeping form. My older cousins said her intestines were coming out. They said she was dying. I had never seen anyone die before. I looked at her. She looked fat and perhaps if she were on her feet, tall. Her skin was a pale sort of unsteady gray. She was dying and she scared me because I had seen the deaths in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp. I could not make sense of the short time that a person was called sick and then called dying and then the sounds of the crying for the dead rising around the camp. I tried not to think about death; I spent too much time thinking about it.

I wanted my mother and father and Dawb and Grandma to live

forever. I didn't want anyone in my family ever to die. Everyone I knew in my life, who loved me and who I loved, was alive. I made them all promise me they would never die:

"Will you die someday?"

"Yes."

I would start crying.

"Stop crying."

"I can't. If you die, I will die, too."

"Be quiet and I will live with you for a long time."

"Forever?"

"Yes, forever."

But the old woman was dying, and I became afraid. On our visits to the clinic I looked at her from the corners of my eyes. She was always alone. Where were her grandchildren? Did she have a granddaughter like me? Were they far away from her? Could they not see that their grandmother was dying alone?

My uncle got better and returned to the camp. It was a sunny day. My older cousins were talking. The woman in the hospital had died. She was in the camp funeral hut, a small thatched-roof house, the only one in the camp that was not cement. It was located on the outskirts of the camp, set apart from the rest of the buildings. The doors to the funeral hut must have been tied back. Perhaps like other buildings in the camp there were no doors. All I remember are gaping doorways, directly parallel each other. My cousins were asking one, they said, very important question: "Who was brave enough?"

I was the youngest; heads turned to each other, and then turned to me. Everyone was brave enough. Inside, I was already afraid, but I wanted to be brave, too. They said I was a baby and I should go to our sleeping place and stay with my mother. I shook my head, no. Dawb was going. I could run faster than her, and if I got very scared, I could always hold her hand. The cousins shrugged and said fine. Dawb wanted to know if I was sure. I wasn't sure but I nodded bravely. There was one thing: Everybody had to promise that they would never tell the adults, no matter what happened. It would be our secret. Everybody accepted the terms of silence.

It was my first secret, and I was going to see my first dead body. I felt like I was growing up and becoming braver already.

My older, quicker cousins led us to the funeral hut. They all walked carefully up to one side of the hut, and then each of them made their way passed its open doorway. Heads peeked quickly in, and then fast feet started running, kicking up the dust. It did not look so hard. We had organized ourselves by age and height; I was the last to go. Dawb wasn't very fast but she went to the door and looked in and then ran carefully, limping a little, to join the rest of the cousins standing a distance away. I was confident.

When I skipped to the doorway, I stopped and I looked into the hut. The light from the afternoon sun entered the room. The corners of the one room hut looked particularly dark in contrast to the sunlight. I saw the body, no details, just an outline on a platform. I imagined her round stomach with the intestines ready to come out.

“Kalia! Kalia! Kalia!”

I startled at the sound of my name. I started to run, just like they had, but my eyes were still on her body. I did not see the rock embedded in the middle of the doorway. The protruding rock surprised my feet, and I tried to grab the air as I fell to the ground.

I had always been told that when a person falls in the presence of a dead body, the dead body takes the living person’s spirit. All my life I had heard this from my older cousins and the adults, even Grandma believed it. In Ban Vinai Refugee Camp I refused to go where there were any dead bodies because of this. At Phanat Nikhom Transition Camp to America, my curiosity had gotten the better of me, and I had fallen. I was stunned by the fall and its implication.

I could not cry out. I stayed on the ground trying to feel for my spirit; surely, something had gone out of my body. What and where? Dawb ran to me. I saw her coming in slow motion, her shadow longer than her body, limping toward me as fast as she could, one leg first and then the other trailing slightly behind. Her black bob moved with her efforts to get to me.

Her voice reached me before she did, “Get up, hurry.”

I could only hold my hands out to her. Dawb pulled me up and brushed my bleeding knees. I was damp with cold sweat. My cousins were waiting for us far away, safe from the dead woman’s body. I knew it: something had gone out of me and in its place a deep fear had settled.

But there was the promise. I could not tell anyone. I had to keep my word. I felt like crying but that would make me a pathetic baby, so I conceded that I was okay. When we returned home, my mother wanted to know what had happened to my knees. I said I had stumbled over a rock. She asked if I was skipping, and I agreed, I had been. Someday I had to learn how to walk like a regular person, she said. I answered that someday I would, and that day wasn’t happening just yet. She looked at me and shook her head and cleaned my knees with cold water, washing the dirt away with her fingers light on the damaged skin. All the while I was thinking: I would not break the promise, pleading: please let my soul come back to my body.

A neighbor’s child cried in the night. My father turned over in his sleep. The cloth walls billowed. I could see the blend of electric and moonlight coming into the doorless entryway. She stood in the shadows. Her hair merged into the night; the white of her eyes were steady. She stood in the dark looking at me. I closed my eyes and turned into my father’s back.

Silence. I waited and I counted in Hmong: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, please, please, please, *please* let her be gone. I felt the sweat come. I felt the sweat dry. I slowly opened my eyes, and again, she stood there. She was tall and I could not see her stomach or the intestines but I knew they were there. This was how my fear of the dark, the thing that had scared my mother when I was first born, entered my consciousness. Before I had only wished I was tired. After that night, and many other nights thereafter, I could not close my eyes because I knew the dead woman was waiting for me in the shadows to call my spirit to the land of the dead.

I worried I would never make it to America. Like the Hmong people who had died in Ban Vinai, I would die in Phanat Nikhom. Like the little girl neighbor, I would be pale and still. Unlike the deaths in Ban Vinai, they could not go to the hills to bury my body because of the barbed wires. I would be buried under cement. My soul could never climb the mountains to where my grandfather was. Worry consumed me.

In the mornings, I would wake up and a new day would begin just like the one before. My mother and father would go and learn more things about life in America. They learned how to turn on a stove and how to flush a toilet. My mother came home one day with a chicken sandwich for Dawb and me to eat. Her teacher, a pretty Thai woman who always wore white, had taught her how to make the American food. My father came home one day and explained to us that when we got on the airplane to go to America, we would have to wear seatbelts. His teacher, a Thai man with curly hair and a big smile, had used strings to practice wearing seatbelts with their class. Dawb and I went to school. When I fell asleep, I was released into Grandma's care. Every day, I asked my grandfather's spirit to protect me, or at least to tell my grandmother of my fear.

I wanted my grandmother to put on her shaman's hood of red cloth, and go fight to get my spirit back from the dead woman—as she had done in Thailand when I had needed to pee all the time. I dreamed sometimes of how she would carry her shaman's sword in one hand and hold it up to the dead woman and say in her strongest voice, “Hand over my granddaughter's spirit to me right now!” Or if that didn't work, Grandma could bargain with the dead woman, say that I was sorry, explain that my falling was an accident, remind her that I was only a little girl, tell the dead woman that I would be more careful forever if she would let my spirit return to my body so that I could close my eyes to the dark again.

Each time I sat on the ground at her feet, the *khao pad* on my knees, Grandma looked to the mountains. She wished for something, and I looked at her and wished for something, too. We both wanted to be free again—she from this barbed wire place with no trees and this going to a new country where she could not imagine living and me from the dead woman's nightly

visits. Both our spirits were lost, unsure of the way to freedom—this thing that we did not know we had ever owned until it was taken away by our faith and our fear and the things we could not control. We were both too tired and scared to rest in Phanat Nikhom Transition Camp to America.

If I had been a smarter girl, I would have just told my grandmother. I would have explained that I had fallen before a dead body, and not said anything about the other cousins. She would not have asked difficult questions that I would not know how to answer. My grandmother was fierce and strong and she loved me, and the dead woman would have been no match at all. As it was, I lived my dusk fighting with a sun's departure, a force so much greater than a skinny six-year-old could begin to understand. I spent my nights praying to the moon to shine through walls, to take away all the shadows in the world so that the dead woman would have no place to stand and wait. Some nights, I tried to stare her down. But then morning would come and I would know that I had lost.

There were nights when I was so scared that I would cry out. My mother and father knew something was wrong.

They asked me, "What are you afraid of?"

They said, "There is nothing to be scared of."

They promised, "We are here, you are our little girl, no one else's, we will protect you."

I could only answer in a small voice, "The dark scares me."

I knew they would protect me if they could but I believed we were dealing with a force that was too big for their world.

They tried to hush my fears, they said, "There is nothing here."

I pointed to the place where she stood. They shook their heads. They saw nothing.

Each night, the fear battled against exhaustion. All I wanted to do was close my eyes. There were nights when my father would have to gather me up and take the bamboo mat and go outside and sleep underneath the big fluorescent lights of the camp, near the barbed wire fence. My father's arm pillowed my head from the hard ground. The guards and their guns looked down at us. The black night sky with its shimmering of stars glimmered down on all of us. The dead woman did not come then. I looked at the bugs buzzing about the lights high above the ground. I looked and looked until my eyes closed against the fear.

The six months in Phanat Nikhom Transition Camp to America was a time when fear dominated. I was happy when I heard that it was almost time for us to leave for America. I was foolish. I thought ghosts couldn't travel across oceans—though I didn't really know what oceans were. The four of us, my mother and father, Dawb and me, still needed to pass the final health examinations before we could leave the camp. All my aunts and uncles, my cousins, and my grandmother had passed theirs

already. We were not worried. The day we had to go for our examinations, the same day I received the last of my shots for America, did not go the way we had expected.

In the cold clinic where I had first seen the dead woman, Dawb and I waited in a room as my mother and father were called in for their tests.

They came out smiling reassuringly, “This is the last time you will ever have to come here.”

When Dawb and I followed the nurses, we held hands. In the examination room, the nurses told us to let go of each other’s hands. I went and I did what the nurse wanted me to do: stepped on a scale, opened my mouth wide, said “Ahhhhh” with my tongue sticking out, looked into the flashlight and followed it with my eyes. I stood very still and tried not to wince too much when they gave me my final shot, the cold liquid burning my arm.

When I felt the needle out of my skin and the pressure of a cool cotton swab, I took my gaze from the ceiling and I looked at Dawb across the room. She was doing the same things that I had been. She didn’t even blink when the needle went into her arm. The nurse who gave me the shot smiled and gave me a piece of red candy. I was still admiring the piece of candy in my hand when Dawb’s nurse took her out of the room. When I was led to the room where my father and mother were sitting, Dawb was already there. She had failed the test. Was it because of her limp? No. The nurse who examined her said that there was something wrong with her eyes and that it could be contagious. It was unwanted in America. They pointed out that her eyes looked a little pink. We were sent back to the camp with the stipulation that her eyes become clear before the end of the week or else we were not going to America.

We waited that week, all week. Dawb’s eyes, which looked normal to me before the clinic visit, continued looking normal after. They did not change. When the day of the appointment came, there was only one thing to do. We knew Dawb wasn’t sick. Other than the limp, she was the healthier of us two. My father came up with an idea. I would go to the health examination in her place. If I passed the test already, I could pass it again. Dawb and I had the same haircut, and while we didn’t look alike, we were both skinny Hmong girls. The nurses would not know the difference, we hoped. I wasn’t scared. Fear came at night and only with the dead. It was broad daylight and everybody was alive. My father took me by the hand and I went with him to the clinic. I did not say a word. At the clinic, the nurses looked at my eyes and touched my throat with cool fingers. They listened to my heart, and asked me to breathe in and out deeply by example—I copied them—and then they gave me a piece of red candy. We were going to America after all.

When the day came for us to leave, my mother took a long time to

pack as the rest of the adults in my family came and talked about the little things. Was there this in America? Was there that in America? I wished they would hurry. I did not want to spend an unnecessary night in Phanat Nikhom. I was getting tired of getting ready for America. I just wanted to hurry up and go there because I had heard about the electric lights from my older cousins. If by chance the dead woman could cross the ocean after my spirit, I would make sure she had no room to hide in America. I would keep all the lights on, all the time, day and night. Why couldn't my mother hurry up with the packing? I was ready to get to it. I did not see any problems. Grandma would follow us to America with Uncle Hue and his family. It would be a short separation. We would be going to Minnesota and they would be going to California. The distance between California and Minnesota was unknown, but if there were no fences in America, why couldn't we visit whenever we liked?

I stood and watched restlessly over the packing. My mother began with the larger red suitcase. I don't know why she was packing so much. I felt that in a new land you needed new things. She said for me to sit down and be a good girl. I sat down and I watched her pack. She packed two big Hmong kitchen knives made of iron just in case the knives in America could not cut through bone. She carefully wrapped an old shirt around her traditional necklace of pure silver, the most expensive thing that we owned (a replacement that my parents had saved up every little bit of money to get because she had lost the one her mother gave her at their wedding in the jungle to the currents of the Mekong River), along with her two traditional outfits, one in velvet and the other in cotton, both black. She folded the red and green sashes that belonged with each outfit along with the two traditional deep purple head wrap. She said that when Dawb and I grew up we would wear them. She folded my father's western suit which Grandma had bought him in Ban Vinai Refugee Camp when she knew she could not hold him behind. My mother took out a bag with pieces of brown embroidery—the gifts her mother had given her. She said that they had crossed the Mekong River with her and that she would keep them forever. Dawb and I only had a few outfits each and she folded those and placed them in the red suitcase as well.

The brown suitcase with the hard wood cover was for the things that might break during the plane ride to America. She packed a pot to make rice and another to make soup. I asked her if there was even rice in America and would we really be eating soup at all? Didn't Americans just eat the chicken sandwiches like she'd brought home that one time? I didn't like the taste of chicken sandwiches. My favorite food was ground beef seasoned with lemon grass and diced tomato mixed with warm rice. My mother was pretty sure America would have rice and that I could continue eating my beef and tomato soup. The last things that she put into the suit-

case were our two photo albums, pictures of the four of us, and some of the larger family as well; we would take my favorite photos of my father holding Dawb and me up to see the world from the tops of the trees to America. The photo albums were not full, but my mother said that the empty pages would be filled in America. I told her to hurry, please.

She said, “It has taken us eight years. What are a few more hours?”

I don’t remember saying goodbye to Grandma or to anyone else. I have no memory of leaving Phanat Nikhom Transition Camp to America as I do of our arrival there—as I do the leaving of Ban Vinai Refugee Camp. Perhaps, one place had felt a home to me and the other hadn’t and in the minds of children, maybe in everyone’s minds, we do not remember so well the places that taught us fears which we did not, could not, know how to articulate in a world where there was already so much to worry about, to work around, and to try to understand. A bus took us to Bangkok International Airport. I was happy because I was not alone. There were many more people than just the four of us. The bus to America was full of many Hmong families, pregnant mothers, little boys and girls my age, some still suckling on their mother’s breasts, and others looking almost grown up with their hair pulled back and straight spines, all of us in our newest clothes. Old grandpas and grandmas with steady eyes that blinked back the past and tried to focus on a future they could not see.

REVIEWS

POETRY WARS:

BRITISH POETRY OF THE 1970s AND THE BATTLE OF EARLS COURT

Peter Barry
Salt Publishing, 2006

Maybe I don't remember them that well, saturated with television imagery as they have now become, but the mid-1970s seemed to be very sunny to me; it was always the height of summer, and life was easy. And in Earls Court, London, at the *National Poetry Centre*, poets were busy writing, making, performing, and reading, some of the greatest post-war poetry, and very often all these activities together, especially when cris cheek, Bill Griffiths and Bob Cobbing were operating the Society's own printing press, making the *Poetry Review* in-house as a kind of poetry punkzine.

Whatever the truth of the matter, this is now a lost world. And certainly Peter Barry is right when he says that there aren't anywhere near enough books about the poetry of the 1970s, or indeed about what he, following Eric Mottram, calls the British Poetry Revival (BPR). In fact there is scant theorisation or contextualisation of poetry generally in Britain, especially when compared to the situation in the USA where poets seem much more at ease within the discipline of theoretical prose than their UK counterparts. Nevertheless, the book's introduction makes the disclaimer that this study too is only able to give a partial account of the matter, and that it is limited largely to an historical record (an 'event' history) of Mottram's editorship of the *Poetry Review* and the related story of the British poetry radicals' attempts to 'take over' the conservative, 'moribund', institution of the *Poetry Society* and the later counter-revolution instigated by Charles Osborne at the Arts Council with his cronies on the inside such as G B H Wightman, John Cotton and Alan Brownjohn. So, for example, Barry is unable to comment extensively on the position of Bob Cobbing in the Society or indeed on other important figures of the BPR in the Society such as Allen Fisher, Bill Griffiths and cris cheek. This, we must hope, is the work of a future study.

What we do get is a rather gripping, but also desperate, tale of institutional ineptitude, amateurism and political brinkmanship that led Mottram and Cobbing to finally 'lose' control of the Society and hand it back to the reactionary members from whom they had pried it at the beginning of the 1970s. But, of course, it isn't as simple as that. While Barry practises his version of 'event' history, centred on the Poetry Society's General Meeting of 26 March 1977, extremely well, this is ultimately the limit of the value of the book. But Barry doesn't stop there, and it is his attempt to pursue an

analysis of the poetry of this period, tacked on to the end of this story, that eventually leads the book into its rather messy and chaotic finish (that said, it is perhaps due to an unstated house aesthetic at Salt Publishing that this is not the only 'theoretical' text it has published that has the feel of a draft, rather than a finished product, although that may only be because of the lamentable state of the copy editing and proofing).

The book is divided into two major sections (with an additional series of documents as an appendix). The first of these provides an account of Mottram's editorship, recounted in parallel with the brewing storm over 'reform' of the Society that led to the walk-out of the BPR contingent in March 1977, following their effective defeat over a series of resolutions concerning how the Society should react to perceived interference from the Arts Council following the publication of the Witt Report in September 1976. The second, weaker, section, attempts an account of some themes associated with this history. These 'themes' include a characterisation of the British Poetry Revival as a literary movement, Mottram as teacher and critic, as well as sections on more general themes to do with the Society. There are moments when it feels that Barry has simply tacked a number of elements together with no real story to tell: furthermore it seems to be one of the features of his argument that there is no story to tell, and that it is one of the weaknesses of the British avant garde that it doesn't have any cohesion or generic features that can be isolated as worth fighting for (at least not in its London manifestation). Indeed, the section on BPR poetics, by far the poorest element of the book, is so sketchy and impressionistic as to give very little feel at all for the poetry of the period, relying as it does on some now rather tired and, to this reviewer's mind, largely unexamined assumptions culled from both Mottram and his later commentators (the rejection of linearity, the refusal of metaphor and mimesis as poetic 'tools', the obstruction of syntax and subject-position, the use of multiple registers and diction, etc.). It doesn't help that of the merely two poems that Barry considers as exemplars, one of them, Lawrence Upton's 'Sutton', is not even from the period under consideration, but was published by Ken Edwards's Reality Street in 2003 in the collection *Wire Sculptures*. This is not to say that Upton's poem isn't valuable (it is), but its use demonstrates the lack of relation in Barry's account between the poetry and the series of practices that constituted the BPR activity within the Society and its review. Indeed it is just the lack of a theoretical language able to accomplish this task that is the major absence, not peculiar to this book, but to British poetics more generally. It was not Barry's task to develop this language, but its absence is nevertheless conspicuous.

So, for example, by 'institution' Barry seems to understand the building in Earls Court, and more explicitly the body of people who make up the General Council, its Executive and Management Committee and various sub-committees, their meetings, minutes, reports, motions and decisions; in short, what might normally be understood by the political activities of such an organisation. What is missing is the kind of institutional analysis that interrogates the institutional praxes of the Society and the poets who belonged to it, used its premises, and set up quasi-autonomous cultures within it. As we have seen, Barry makes a substantial apology at the beginning of his book for all those elements that are missing, but nevertheless, hints of an important argument are suggested in the second half of the work. The most substantial claim seems to be that the anarcho-sindicalist tendencies of the BPR poets led to a lack of professionalism that could have been averted, if, say, Lee Harwood's call for the virtual unionisation of poets and their Society, and a more serious and organised opposition to mainstream cultural politics both within and without the Society, had been taken seriously. This is an important argument and would seem to lead more naturally into the kinds of discussion of institution and praxis I am suggesting. I understand that Justin Katko at Oxford, Ohio, for example, may well be attempting such a study, focussing on Cobbing, Griffiths and Cheek's use of the print-shop to facilitate the autonomous production of a poetry counterculture, and the serious attempt to think the materiality of the poem, not simply in terms of content, or literary form, but in terms of the actual production of literary culture, from the manufacture of books as commodity-objects, to the various kinds of distribution networks employed to disseminate work, all the way up to questions of intellectual property rights, anti-copyright campaigning, and the performance of work in various non-standard forms and media. It is only at this level, perhaps, that institutional praxes can be critiqued as potentially subversive or directly revolutionary political activity.

Some of the most revealing elements of the fight between the Arts Council and the radicals at the Society were about the level of professionalism of meetings; for example, that an argument about whether a second-hand table had been bought for the Chairman or not, or criticisms about the pervasive smell of (implicitly *proletarian*) beer on the premises of the Poetry Centre at Earls Court have importance is clear from the way that they in turn imply something about disputes concerning the low quality of the review once production had gone in-house from 1975 (65:4 – 67:1/2), or the use (or not) of Society money for the payment of professional staff to manage various aspects of the Society's affairs, which the radicals had conducted on a voluntary basis. The 'battle', if there was one, while ostensibly less about the quality of poetry than about the bureaucratic control of cultural 'goods', or the nascent development of the neo-con mania for accounting and the

statistical verification of every 'service,' 'commodity' and 'customer,' do, ultimately, return to aesthetic questions, even while these are played out at the refined, and very often undisclosed, level of bourgeois class war: complaints about the words 'I fuck you' in a Lee Harwood poem at the beginning of Mottram's first issue (62:3), the phallic playfulness of Jeff Nuttall's illustrations for the cover of Mottram's second issue (62:4), the shambolic appearance of the centre, and often the (excessive) consumption of beer before readings (see the complaint by Kathleen Raine, for example, after a reading she gave, oozing, as it does, the most self-regarding disparagement, or comments made to the Witt Review panel on the state of the Earls Court centre itself).

Not that the situation was entirely straightforward even within the avant garde grouping: there clearly was a problem with gender politics for example. Barry notes that scarcely ever more than 10% of space was given to women's writing and reading, and even then only to already established writers. Furthermore, Mottram's manor was very often dictatorial and self-defensive in a way possibly only shared by Trotsky and Breton in the twentieth century. This seems to have resulted in further exclusions as his tenure continued through the 1970s (it is a mark of this tendency in Mottram's character that after the Witt Report he distanced himself very suddenly from former friends such as MacSweeney and Harwood who initially attempted a sort of deep-entryist tactic of staying on the General Council and fighting from within, something Mottram seems to have perceived as a personal betrayal). Another Trotskyite whiff is the implied racism in Mottram's comment on the need for more translated work in the *Poetry Review*, 'the relative absence of adequate translations from continental Europe and Latin America' (from Mottram's short piece on 'Editing *Poetry Review*') as if non-white poets were incapable of producing anything sophisticated enough for his readers (indeed this is one of the undisclosed scandals and virtually unmentioned assumptions of both the UK and the US avant garde in poetry).

This, of course, may be one of the weaknesses of choosing personality as the basis for conducting such a study (it is interesting that it was one of the conservatives' abiding criticisms that the radicals of the 1970s had turned the Poetry Society into a Poets' Society) over the wider thematics of institutional practice, material production, and of course the poetry itself as a language art.

All the same Peter Barry's book is very useful at one level, and provides at least anecdotal evidence of great value for understanding the state of poetry at the time, even when the wider political implications are only hinted at. So, towards the end of the book, Barry describes the situation in the Poetry

Society in the late 1970s as a 'state of emergency,' one of a series of periodic crises that rocks the literary world (much as it does global capital), but relating this time to a democratic deficit, in which political cretinism had once again conflated popularity with democracy; the unpopular democracy of Mottram against the popular anti-democracy of Charles Osborne (an argument that would moulder on throughout the '80s and '90s). Barry provides an entertaining and well-informed account of the political wrangling over 'control' of the Poetry Society. However, a fuller history of these events is still needed (and Peter Barry would no doubt be the first to admit this). Let's hope that it doesn't take another thirty years to appear.

Piers Hugill

THE CINEMATIC MODE OF PRODUCTION:

ATTENTION ECONOMY AND THE SOCIETY OF THE SPECTACLE

Jonathan Beller

Dartmouth College Press, 2006

The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle belongs to a recent effort in media studies: offering a synthetic work redefining moving image media through their epistemological roots in cinema. In the wake of Deleuze's two-volume work *Cinema* on cinema as philosophy (*The Movement-Image* and *The Time-Image*), a number of critics have begun reconsidering more holistically the complex functions film has fulfilled within the early to (now) late modern period. Among recent examples of theoretically-driven epistemologies of cinema is Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect* (2005), which uses Charles Peirce's tripartite semiotic ontology to periodize the entire history of cinema. Well-documented and keen as some parts of this work are, the same objection may be adduced against it as that against Friedrich Kittler's influential *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986) which remains paradigmatic for the field of media criticism. Namely, there are no compelling reason why the contingent developments of media technics should neatly fit tripartite theoretical categories—whether Lacanian (for Kittler) or Peircean (for Cubitt). Another recent attempt, Jacques Rancière's 2001 *Film Fables* (Berg, 2006, translated by Emiliano Battista), takes up more narrowly the unfulfilled political promises of the esthetics of cinema, doing so from a resolutely auteurist purview and thus as a transparent and problematic continuation of Romanticism.

What Jonathan Beller proposes is paradigmatic. He gives us a general 'poetics' of cinema that is neither auteur-centered, nor single-theory driven, but rather synthesizes the technics, art, theories, history, and industry of cinema into one provocative notion: cinema is coextensive with global capitalism which it both enacts and makes visible. Beller's driving intuition is that cinema (and also subsequent forms of moving image media such as television and the web) commands 'attention labor,' and by the same token transforms labor into a work of attentiveness for image streams. This inaugurates an "attention economy," operating a shift of capital from hard commodities and hard currencies to the creation, manipulation and commodification (that is, trading) of spectatorial attention. This is what Beller calls "the cinematic mode of production." Hence, 'cinema' is not an apparatus among others in late modernity and postmodernity; it is the new template for capital: "Cinema is the becoming self-conscious of social relations—literally, the relations

of production.” This makes clear the paradoxical valence of cinema: it is the new global instrument for capital, but at the same time, it is also the vehicle that makes capitalism critically visible. Filmmakers like Frank Capra and René Clair come to mind, since their populist and often socialist cinema was also profitable. Beller conducts analyses on Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein to show how they negotiated this ambivalence.

Beller proposes a series of paradoxical epistemological theses that he develops concurrently in several parts of the book, in dialogue with the thought of many theorists of postmodernity such as Adorno, Debord, Baudrillard, and Deleuze. Hence, in the first chapter, Beller resolves the coinciding emergence of psychoanalysis and cinema by stating boldly that “the unconscious emerges out of cinema.” The demonstration unfolds across several chapters, partly arguing that cinema is the unthought arrangement in Lacan’s thought itself; that industrial production ushered the experiential discontinuity Freud theorized in the unconscious; that psychoanalysis is the superstructural correlate to the cinematic mode of production; and that cinema deterritorializes and thus alienates the senses themselves into forms of image consciousness beyond language. Taken together, especially because they derive from disparate theoretical frameworks—Marx, Lacan, Deleuze, Freud, Debord—and are very carefully marshaled, these arguments progressively begin to sway the patient reader, even though they are often overly concise.

Beller must proceed via parallel editing, since he pushes several interrelated plots illuminating each other but from different purviews. Hence, another central formulation for him is that “The cinematic organization of attention yields a situation in which attention, in all forms imaginable and yet to be imagined (from assembly-line work to spectatorship to internet-working and beyond), is th[e] necessary cybernetic relation to the *socius*—the totality of the social—for the production of value for late capital.” To unpack this implies dealing at once with the social circulation of images and the attendant conversion of attention into commodity and spectator into worker, while foregrounding all the while the architectonic necessity of ‘cinema’ to carry these processes forward. The demonstration, again, is conducted in several sections of two chapters, bringing together Simmel, Metz, Orwell, Wells, Debord, Jameson, and keen exegeses of the films *Barton Fink* and *Contact* (among others). This makes it a difficult and challenging book: the materials covered, and the way they are assembled and interpreted requires, well, attention.

The greatest qualities of this work lay in its unapologetic political nature, its solid grounding in film theory, its commitment to thinking about capital

now that Marx (as Derrida puts it) has become ghostly, and its willingness to take risks in proposing far-reaching theses. Beller asserts that by subsuming the whole of culture, cinema not only allows capital to transact business across images, but it also comes to found theory as such: "...‘theory’ as the critical thought that follows on the heels of philosophy’s demise was film theory all along." The difference between philosophy (a certain closure of metaphysics) and theory, is nothing other than cinema. Moreover, cinema is in many ways the unthought of theory in its difference from philosophy, and by demonstrating "the general de-emphasis of cinema in Lacan" or how Derrida’s arch-writing appears co-extensive with the cinematic mode of production, Beller’s book doubles as a critical recovery of the centrality of cinema in critical theory. In placing cinema as the unexamined condition of possibility of theory, this may be the first book to critique and further (rather than repeat) Deleuze’s attempt to create a true philosophy of the cinema.

What is perhaps most useful about Beller’s book is that it is ‘intemperate’ to use Nietzsche’s epithet. Written for the most part in the early 1990s, it belongs to the era of post-Berlin Wall collapse and the Iraq War I (also the time when systematic theorists like Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Lacan, Jean-Joseph Goux, and Slavoj Zizek were translated into English and held their highest ascendancy over American intellectuals). Let’s remember that until his 1993 *Spectres de Marx*, Derrida had not spoken about Marxism directly: Beller’s book is contemporary with and akin to Derrida’s in trying to keep thinking the afterlife of Marx at the time of liberal capitalism’s guileless hegemony. Beller writes that he is afraid that some of his work may appear trivial: after 9/11 (which he analyzes, contrary to the group Retort, as reinforcing the cinematic mode of production), after the embedding of journalism in a bogus war, and after Google’s capitalization resting entirely on users’ attention, the likes of Baudrillard and Debord may seem all too obvious. I don’t find this to be a problem, to the contrary. For the cinematic mode of production helps us piece together the relentless manipulation of reality and the press by the Republican administration during the last seven years, in order, on the one hand, to stage and sustain a ‘War Effort’ mentality and a morality of villainy that can explain the suspension of the rule of law, and on the other hand to organize corporations in cannibalizing governance and community thanks to that same legal state of exception. Perhaps we had become too used to the unconscionable ease with which reality has lately been edited for huge political and financial gains to realize that, notwithstanding, this called for Beller’s acute reworking of critical theory, ‘base’ Marxism, and the psycho-cognitive reach of cinema.

Not that Beller offers much lines of resistance or causes for solace in this

epochal fusion of capital and moving image technologies. Again, to the contrary: in the epilogue he envisions that “these advances will ever more completely encroach upon uncaptured activities necessary to us in the pursuit of...what? Debord’s terms ‘enhanced survival’ and ‘gilded poverty’ come to mind.” Grim. Consequently, he argues that “the only way out... is to drop out completely, that is, for all practical purposes, to cease to exist, to cease to speak, write or be written as the discourse of the spectacle.” Wisely, Beller has not yet joined this libertarian fringe—although this comment also refers to Debord’s 1994 suicide, perhaps part of a pact with two acquaintances who dittoed a few days later. Beller’s book in fact ends on the constitutive violence involved in ‘ceasing to exist’ within the cinematic mode of production, whether you are squashed or whether you take yourself out, or, a third alternative, whether philosophy succeeds in organizing zones of political resistance. “Either way, there will be blood,” the book concludes, winking at the obduracy of slasher movies in cinema.

But might there not be the potential for a less melodramatic negotiation of the cinematic mode of production than Beller surmises? My work on poets’ fragmentary awareness of something like the cinematic mode of production, and their reacting to it by refiguring the cinema apparatus into new modes of experimental writings breaking with the generic demands of the literary market is a case in point. Beller’s own example of how the transformation of mortgage into a sellable commodity due to the digitizing of numismatics (money) has made buying a house much easier and lowered mortgages, is quite candid about the silver lining without which capitalism could not further its hold. One problem with *The Cinematic Mode of Production* is that it looks at and theorizes a totalizing system only in its recuperative tendencies, and not in how social pressures can alter and reshape its general organization. After all, the Civil Rights count as a magnificent subversion of the cinematic mode of production via the strategic construction of televised images that would strain it to the breaking point. Already, the NAACP gained national visibility when it protested Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), Hollywood’s overtly exploitative racism, thus leveraging the cinematic mode of production against its then-self, in a way that leads directly to the NAACP’s full integration within it today: a website which cell-phone companies now subsidize through advertising. Beller would certainly insist on the blatant recuperative and surveillance dimension involved in such underwriting, but is he right in considering that it outweighs benefits?

Actually, I do think Beller is right in the sense that the kinds of social mutations that the cinematic mode of production may have been vulnerable to in the past may no longer obtain (a “kill your cell-phone” sticker is simply unthinkable). It is because political and corporate deciders have become

deeply attuned to the cinematic mode of production that we need to study Beller's book. I would venture that for the current Iraq War we have the lowest ratio in the number of photos of dead GI's released per GI killed of any war, including the Civil War, shortly after the invention of photography. And I would also venture that the Iraq War's costs make it, rather than the biggest film production ever staged, the real-time blueprint for a new way in which corporations may participate in staging historical events in order to grow, or perhaps come to be.

Christophe Wall-Romana

TIES THAT BIND: THE STORY OF AN AFRO-CHEROKEE FAMILY IN SLAVERY AND FREEDOM

Tiya Miles
University of California Press, 2005

Recent Decisions: The Ties that Bind

In March 2006, the Cherokee Nation's highest court ruled unconstitutional the Nation's law requiring citizens to trace their ancestry. This ruling had the effect of opening up membership in the Nation to Freedwomen and men. One year later, in March of 2007, the Cherokee Nation voted on a constitutional amendment that essentially rejected the previous high court's decision. Those now excluded from citizenship are descendants of individuals listed on the Intermarried White and Freedmen rolls taken at the same time as the Final Rolls of the Cherokee Nation, or "Dawes Final Rolls of the Five Civilized Tribes." This amendment now denies Freedwomen and men citizenship in the Nation and it also does something else. By an overwhelming vote of 77% for the amendment and 23% against, the Nation successfully reified race in the eyes of its current and prospective citizens as well as in the eyes of many in the U.S.

Tiya Miles's first book, *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*, comes at an opportune time in contemporary critical discussions of race, whiteness, gender, and power and importantly, too, in discussions of citizenship. The book is an exemplar of poetic historiography. Miles gracefully narrates the story of Shoe Boots, a renowned Cherokee war hero, and Doll, the enslaved African American whom he "captured or purchased" in the late 1700s. Shoe Boots and Doll live together as master/husband—enslaved/wife and have children and later grandchildren, whose descendants are alive today. Miles painstakingly pieces together an authentic story of Doll and Shoe Boots that provides an overview of slavery among the Cherokee and the history of the Cherokees of the Southeast before and after Removal. Forced to rely on sometimes racially biased or culturally negligent historical source material, Miles reconstructs a history of the era of Removal and enslavement and she successfully couples this history with a rich and plausible inner life narrative of the book's main characters. For those directly engaged in the battle over who will and will not be a Cherokee citizen and what social or cultural criteria defines to which social group and to what nation one belongs, Miles's book will certainly be helpful in terms of understanding issues of citizenship and race both personally and historically.

One month before the 2006 Cherokee ruling, *Ties that Bind* won the Frederick Jackson Turner Award from the Organization of American Historians. In light of the recent decision, the book stands as an incredible historical testament that explores the complexity of similar issues to which the Nation and Freedwomen and men must respond today if alliances are to be built. *Ties that Bind* wrestles with the tangled complexities of race, property, social ideology, and cultural hegemony all through the lens of Cherokee-Afro-Cherokee relations in the early and mid-19th-century. Miles's narrative of the Indian-white-Black history of the 1800s provides a depth of understanding regarding the complications of race-thinking within and around African enslavement, American Indian and Euro-American slaveholding, and blood and property. *Ties that Bind* is very much a story of the influence and cultural imbrication of a U.S. society, which values ownership, with the Cherokee Nation's historical relationship to property both land and human. Miles exposes the power of Euro-American theoretical conceptions of race as they are tied to blood and ownership and she shows how the Cherokee Nation adapted to and adopted these theories. As Miles argues, in an attempt to avoid colonization by the U.S., Cherokees "borrowed political systems and racial ideologies from the United States." While the Cherokee Nation's recent decision reifies notions of race, blood, citizenship and ownership, Miles's book dismantles the inherent implication alluded to by the constitutional amendment. The Nation's vote to revoke citizenship is really a revocation of social inclusion and an act of cultural definition. Through its vote, the Cherokee Nation performs an illustrative show of sovereignty within a larger U.S. nation-state whose cultural ethos hovers around Native and Black Americans today in many of the same socioeconomic and socio-cultural ways it did in the 19th century.

As a testimony of painful history, *Ties that Bind* has the potential to persuade Freedwomen and men who contest the new amendment as well as those in the Nation who uphold it, to look more closely at how the present is infected by past political and economic events between whites and American Indians as well as past and present conceptions of blackness by all. Miles notes "the tendency for various ethnic groups to situate themselves in relation to blacks as a way to elevate their own position within the American nation has long been a pattern in U.S. history." The central argument between Freedwomen and men and the Nation is around separation by race, or *blood*—the two are synonymous in the eyes of those engaged in the debate. As anthropologist Circe Sturm argues in her book *Blood Politics*, blood determines "Indian-ness" for many Native people. The same can be said for many Black Americans who use racialized blood notions to explain phenotypic variations. In the face of Miles's narrative, all of these sorts of socially designed illusions cannot help but yield to the reality of her characters and their history. Miles

crosses cultural boundaries and dismantles American cultural notions of blood as a determinant of race. Racial prescriptions are reconfigured in *Ties that Bind* because Miles makes clear that racial categories are fixed to justify political actions that build capital in the face of injustice. In *Ties that Bind*, race is seen as a thing with formidable political, socio-cultural and economic consequence yet a thing not so smooth and linear as a link between blood and citizenship might seem to infer. Historically, the U.S. has used blood as an agent of power and the Cherokee Nation's recent decision to revoke certain kinds of non-blood-belonging certainly helps to reinforce this agency. Where *Ties that Bind* shows the potential for Black-Indian solidarity, the Nation's amendment revivifies the kind of divisive, culturally essentializing tactics used by classical liberalism and neoliberalism.

Miles demonstrates an obvious and formidable commitment to the cultural message that the story of Shoe Boots and Doll tells about racial formation, ideology, capitalism, and nation-state development. She does this by navigating Cherokee-U.S. competing ideologies of nationhood and citizenship and the complexities of race and identity. Miles discusses the way in which *African* became conceptually equated with "slave" and, too, she elucidates the cultural repercussions of this race-thinking as it was embedded in abstract criminalizations of black identity:

(. . .) early Cherokee history indicates that for hundreds of years, Africans were not automatically viewed as potential or actual slaves. At some point in the evolution of Cherokee society, Africans and the descendants of Africans began to be lumped together into the category "slave," and the category "slave" became synonymous with, and then subsumed by, the category "Negro." "Negro" at the same time became marked as a tainted, denigrated classification, just as it was in the United States.

Permission

In the preface of *Ties that Bind*, Miles tells the story of a time when she was giving a talk about Native and Black American relations in early America and a revered Great Plains elder requested that Miles stop telling the story of Black-Indian intermarriage:

Her fear (. . .) was that documenting the intermarriage of black and Indian people would give the U.S. government just one more reason to declare Native people inauthentic and soluble and then seize their remaining lands and ves-

tiges of political autonomy.

The idea of permission or authority with regards to the story *Ties that Bind* signals two seemingly disparate elements: the right Miles has to tell this history despite a Native—Black past that might rather remain hidden as well as the right Miles takes to narrate history using literature as well as lyric narrative for comparison and contrast. *Ties that Bind*, in parts, relies on noted chapters from African American writer Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to help us personally and emotionally connect with Black enslavement and Cherokee poet Diane Glancy's novel *Pushing Bear* to help us better understand the mental and spiritual impact of Removal. Most scholarly writings within the university are devoid of individuality—one would be hard pressed to pick an individual academic's "voice" out of a line-up of recent and past articles and books. In fact, the active attachment of lyric to scholarly word—voice to narration/fiction to non-fiction—is anathema in the university. Instead of praised as the ability to link theory, history, narrative and critical poetics, good writing (i.e., good literary *voice* or "craft") is often devalued intellectually in the university. Sound is often not as important as routine in university writing. What is important to the university is adherence to the regimented academic practices scholars follow to represent their research on the page. I am speaking here of those pesky figurative and literal frames or 1-inch margins in which academics are supposed to write. So rigid are the frames that it can be painful to read some scholars' voices as they try to fit within the constrained margins of the *academic voice*—a voice that is sometimes stilted and often tedious and lackluster. It appears that the academic scholar, bound by an obligation to the unquestioned and unexamined code of scholarship representation, falls victim to unspoken apologies and erudite explanations for that which is quite common knowledge. For instance, what does it mean when historian James F. Brooks in his article "Confounding the Color Line: Indian-Black Relations in Historical and Anthropological Perspective" for *American Indian Quarterly* feels somehow obliged by *the code* to define what he means by the common act of "visiting"?! Brooks clarifies "visiting" by telling the reader it is the act of "dropping by informally on neighbors to swap stories, share food and keep abreast of the latest *chisme* (gossip)." Yikes! What has happened in the university? Hegemonically, scholars have accepted the university rule to be linear; to write in a similar tone; to write within similar instructive structures; and to follow a formulaic script for discussion on paper no matter what the discipline. Have we become so disciplinarian that we must police the boundaries between good poetics and good scholarship this rigorously? Miles gives hope that scholars can relinquish the ties of the university that bind our voices, too.

While maintaining questions of agency and assumptions of dignity, Miles's

narrative is one where story balances Cherokee ways and conceptions of the world with the brutal practices and concomitant racial ideologies of slavery. Avoiding Western binaries of history, this correspondence is like a rule Miles sets for herself. In a literary sense, “Motherhood” is one of Miles’s most moving chapters, and its attendant analyses and analogies are significant. Miles recounts Morrison’s *Beloved* and allows this literary fiction to rightfully consume almost four full pages of the book. Here the voices of Morrison and Miles converge in a mellifluous symbiosis of song and critical race theoretics. In “Motherhood,” Miles constantly externalizes questions the reader might have regarding Doll, the subject positioned—in the midst of a battle for belonging—and Doll, the invisible rotor shaft of this particular Afro-Cherokee history. Miles’s narrative voice and the metaphors and strategies of craft appear to almost scream back at the university’s code for academic representation. She, in fact, breaks the code, and perhaps not on purpose. Miles’s writing just *is* good. Miles is historiographically poetic. *Ties that Bind*, then, provides opportunities for scholars to challenge the academic prescription for writing; it offers a model for social theorists to engage poetics as critically as they do that which they choose to write about. Miles assembles a diligent and conscientiously researched account of Indian slaveholding, state building, African slavery and family based on the archival record and documented past and she does so with words of such weight and passion. Indeed, Miles writes in a narrative voice that adeptly problematizes the bounds of Anglo-normative academic discourse and historiography—she, in fact, genuinely “become[s] a writer in historian’s clothing” (xviii). Finally, in an undertaking both venturesome and intrepid, Miles explicates a racialized and class history, one that the subject has requested not be told, but one Miles proves must be written.

Engaging what I will call *historiographical poetics*, Miles gives permission for scholars to disturb normative “scholarly” writing methods and standards. Assuming this permission claims a certain authority, a right to perform or deploy particular mediums or knowledges that the writer-scholar feels will best transmit the story, the idea, and analysis. Importantly for the story *Ties that Bind* tells, claiming the authority to write in a certain way and tell a certain story allows a scholar to decide how to best get at significant and complex cultural constructions with long-lasting economic and political repercussions. Conceptions of permission—which histories are tolerable or acceptable in the public sphere, what ideologies are permitted racial codification, what serves as historically authentic—implicitly pervade Miles’s book. She prefaces her text-documentary with implied contentions of consent and authority that must bear engrafted race-secrets and a (perhaps) purposely dis-remembered history of Black-Cherokee intermarriage and intra-racial dynamics in early and colonial America. Despite the Great Plains elder’s

entreaty not to tell the story for fear that “it will destroy us,” Miles proceeds ever more assiduously and compassionately to, in fact, communicate this history: “In this elder’s plea that I not write, I saw even more reason for doing so. For the void that remains when we refuse to speak of the past is in fact a presence, a presence both haunting and destructive.” Here we can see that Miles formidably and courageously attempts to *unbind* formerly race-based histories from their partnership with social and academic secrecy and silence. Miles historicizes an ethnohistory that lives under cover of historically induced Euro-American notions of prescribed ethnic/racial authenticity— notions, as Miles makes clear, that have their foundation in coercive attempts to grow and perpetuate a particular Western economic hegemony. Significantly, in moves to dismantle, deconstruct and expose past and present racial hegemony, the permissiveness Miles has established counters the normative scaffolding on which colonial and early American state market-ideology was promulgated and continues to be (re)produced today.

“What Are You?”

In my Black neighborhood in New York City, in the post-industrial 1970s and early Reagan-inflicted 1980s, the response to *What are you?* was, *I’m part Cherokee*. This was an instant act of racial mystification for Black youth, permitting individuals to obscure any social reliance on any negative interactive and oversimplified conceptions about who one might be ontologically because of the darkness of skin and the associated culture.

We can see from *Ties that Bind* that opportunities for sustained liberatory inter-participation between Blacks, Afro-Cherokees, and Indians were far fewer after Removal. The Cherokee Nation was divided and energies were focused on meeting basic human needs as well as inspiring efforts to resurrect a traumatized and devastated Cherokee society. Moreover, the forced removal to Indian Territory and complex web of Euro-American—American Indian socio-cultural politics precipitating Removal produced a Cherokee Nation West that battled furiously within its relegated bounds. Today, the American Indian and Black communities seem so politically and socially disconnected to me. Our historical interrelationships and common structural struggles live obfuscated and camouflaged in Black communities, and I suspect in American Indian communities as well.

To say *I’m part Cherokee*—with specificity of “tribe”—was to unknowingly participate and progress a corporeal and material notion of suitability against a standard of whiteness. Seeing ourselves as either dark body or human capital, gross corporeality or market surplus (i.e., commodity sans

agency) was to know and not love Black bodies supposedly devoid of mortal substance, mortal agency, mortal matter, and mortal concern. *I'm part Cherokee* is (“is” because this phraseology still manifests most often amongst poor and working class Black youth) certainly a verbalized attempt to tap into some historical truth belonging to some Black Americans—some genealogical link heard in family lore. And, certainly, for the Freedwomen and men, *I'm part Cherokee*, the utterance and the idea, contains a conflation of history with possibility, national belonging with national rejection. But more importantly, in striving to acculturate and further codify Anglo-American values and norms, the phraseology of *I'm part Cherokee* is paradigmatic of some Black people identifying in Cherokee-ness (in Indian-ness) something akin to whiteness. Though not ubiquitously desired by Black and Native Americans, whiteness, that cultural epiphenomenon, maintains historical associations of power considered a necessary material and sacred essence in both 19th century America and the present. Whiteness was “owning property, buying slaves, accumulating wealth, and centralizing political power.” In the 1970s, 1980s and in 2007, these concrete representations of whiteness remain in many respects unchanged.

Unbinding Recent Decisions from the Past

Myriad differences between Black and Native Americans exist, and these socio-cultural differences are embedded in Black/Indian histories and presents, but in terms of racialized power constructs and issues of citizenship, the social and economic linkages and affiliations that determine the dominant white “American” cultural milieu in which we live are crucial to acknowledge if the milieu is to be deconstructed and disempowered. The issues and dynamics Miles presents in *Ties that Bind* are of great consequence for African and Native Americans in terms of contemporary intercultural relationships, for the social possibilities inherent in these relationships, and for the ways in which these two groups negotiate their pasts as they are intimately related by history, by violence, and by moments of redoubtable possibilities for solidarity. As a way to approach systemic social and economic change, Miles’s research produces more cross-currents and theoretical linkages across African American, Native American, and poor and working class socioeconomic/socio-cultural circumstances and systemic histories. Last year, Miles shared with me the following in an interview for *Monthly Review* *Zine*:

Recently, the Cherokee Court overturned their previous ruling and voted (in a split decision) to make it possible for descendants of freedmen and women to receive Cherokee citizenship. This decision evidences the long-term, dedi-

cated work of Cherokee, Afro-Cherokee, and black freedmen/women activists. The ruling goes far in restoring faith in the ability of communities to reach out to one another in a spirit of restoration. I think it is important for students of Afro-Native relations and for people who care deeply about the rebuilding of relationships between black and native people (and between other divided, subjugated groups) to inform themselves about this case, to celebrate its outcome with cautious optimism, to think about how the outcome can serve as a model for mediating similar conflicts, and to be prepared to serve as advocates of reconnection and healing in the future.

The recent amendment voted in by the Cherokee Nation and the way in which the Freedwomen and men have chosen to contest this amendment re-essentializes the split between the groups and occludes a crucial opportunity to look together at the cross-social connections and theoretics of systemic historical and contemporary oppression. On 27 March 2007, several U.S. lawmakers and Freedwomen and men demonstrated on the U.S. Capitol's south steps carrying signs that said amongst other things, "Indian by the blood we shed." In response to Freedwomen and men arguments, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, Chad Smith, simultaneously argued that citizenship is a right through blood while criticizing the Freedwomen and men for purportedly "playing the race card." Miles notes that "Cherokee kinship is blood centered." Bone, too, serves a role in understanding fatherhood. Miles goes on to discuss how a phrase Shoe Boots uses in his letter to the court to advocate for his children's citizenship, "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh (. . .) resonates within the cultural understandings of African American slaves for whom kinship ties were always under assault." This notion of biology as indicative of nationhood and, therefore, belonging is today conflated with Anglo-American past and present racial conceptions of whiteness by both Cherokees and Blacks. In an attempt to avoid further colonization (as the Great Plains elder told Miles at her talk) and to ensure validity and suitability in the eyes of America and thus, achieve "the status of 'American'," Freedwomen and men and the Nation have engaged the debate from the same precipice. By participating in the debate over membership at this racialized level they are helping to (re)produce and reinforce opportunities for Black and Native American nationalism. Additionally, the Cherokee and Freedwomen and men assist in producing a re-subjectivization of Black and Native identity.

Miles's work defies any attempt to differentiate systems of power that subject Blacks and those that subject Native Americans. The "discourse of kinship"

and of blackness within the U.S. and the Cherokee Nation that *Ties that Bind* exposes reminds those of us who are of color that if we tend toward reifying our cultural positions as fixed within white culture, we reposition whiteness as all-powerful. It also reminds us that if we do not consistently question even small moments when we might veer into frameworks that are reliant on notions of cultural stasis, we will reinvigorate a conception of whiteness as dominant. *Ties that Bind* provides permission for tremendous possibility in scholarship and scholarly poetics; it lends a rationale for the rejection of amendments and divisive influential tendencies that obfuscate the reality that social constructions are complex. *Ties that Bind* reminds us that these historical and contemporary constructions require our pushing them into places where they can slip from stable and desired cultural positions.

Lisa Arrastía

IS THERE 'NEW' POETRY IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA?

Allan Kolski Horwitz

4 July 1999

*Today in Port Alfred
I touched the dunes that lie
naked and fine
I ran sand through my fingers*

*In the parking lot
a man in a dirty overall
offered to wash my car
He was toothless and thin*

*I ate in a restaurant
facing the beach and the ocean
I watched waves swell and break
surfers crouch to ride that motion*

*I watched the waters roll
across the brilliance of the sun's reflection
the headland curve out of sight
spray strike the jetty*

*I paid for my breakfast
walked back to my car
I gave the man R10*
and a leftover sausage*

* Rand – South African currency

Twelve years after the first non-racial election took place in South Africa, what is the state of poetry? Does this poem, written by me during this period, in terms of its subject matter, style and rhythm, give an indication, a pointer? In some ways one is tempted to simply give examples of many other poems written in the last decade and then leave the reader to judge.

But that might be an evasion, so in order to do justice to the complexity of the question, let us first establish the context.

Art is dependent on and a reflection of the political situation in a society at any given time. (By 'political' one refers to the whole complex of individual and social relations that give rise to a culture.) And to discuss South Africa, including the poetry being written and performed here, is to do so both in the shadow of apartheid and its hideous legacies, as well as in the glow of the energy unleashed by the movement for democracy and equality in the struggle against it. This tension is deep rooted and permeates all aspects of our lives as we live out the daily contradictions of a period of transition.

On the one hand there is substantial and ongoing transformation in that an authoritarian, racist superstructure has been pried open by a constitution that offers unparalleled human rights, and whose influence is felt at many different levels. Today we have genuine freedom of expression and association, legal equality for women and gay people and the deracialisation of the workplace, residential areas and social institutions. Also of key importance, we are coming of age with regard to sexual identity and practices. Sexual openness and tolerance are very new. We have had to deal with deep seated past repression; Afrikaner Calvinism and African polygamy were both very rigid, conservative modes of living, and though seemingly adversarial, held many points of congruity. However, despite these advances, the immediate post apartheid period has been tarnished by mass unemployment, coarse materialism, widespread sexual and criminal violence, large-scale corporate and state corruption and deadly epidemics of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Certainly such contrasts offer wide and rich subject matter for artists but they also cause great personal trauma and insecurity.

But there is another angle to consider. As Oscar Wilde famously said, "All art is quite useless." So what does it matter, as an artist, if one is living in an economically and socially divided, and often violent, country which perfectly reflects all the major human imbalances plaguing our planet? This, as opposed to living in a wealthy, settled and relatively homogeneous society with far fewer contestations and clashes. After all, the primary impulse behind art-making is not didactic, utilitarian or wealth-creating. We make and appreciate art because a 'germ,' some seemingly irrational impulse to cough out our agonies as well as our joys, and to provide definitive philosophical and moral commentaries, forces its way out of our beings. And if in the process of making art one tries to right the wrongs of the world (a romantic and youthful pastime?) that is hardly the stuff that either keeps middle class societies on what they believe is the upward curve of social and personal liberation, or amuses patriarchal feudal societies that do not

wish to be challenged.

In this vein, the key literary polemic from the early 1970s onwards was whether 'protest' or 'struggle' poetry qualified as 'real poetry.' The academic establishment and most reviewers generally slated such work as sloganeering and propagandistic simply because its main focus was to expose the evils of the social system and to mobilize the victims to resist. Such subject matter was said to lack elegance or subtlety and to be crudely expressed. Purity of language and non-political themes were held to be the ideals that were to be structured in the forms that emanated from Britain, and to some extent the United States. Poetry written in South African English was frowned upon – particularly when languages were mixed and local jargon used. Now this was predictably the case because in the alienated, elitist society that was South Africa, artistic norms were set by the ruling (white) nationalist/colonial class. As an afterthought, a tiny number of black writers were admitted into the canon – their acceptance being hard-won, and in most cases only achieved by dint of their having absorbed the colonial/ metropolitan models and demonstrated proficiency in reproducing them.

However, in time, as the anti-colonial revolt gathered momentum, new challenges to that hegemony grew confident enough to create their own mechanisms for artistic production and distribution. This happened from the 1970s when a rash of new magazines published a wide range of new voices and was accelerated by the open revolt of the 1980s so that the 'canon' began to widen and reflect the true diversity of our society. As importantly, poetry, as a means for expressing and extending the revolutionary currents achieved a mass following at political meetings and funerals. And as a result, although still largely ignored by the academic establishment, became a mass art form enjoying high legitimacy and appreciation. It was in this context that *Botsotso*, the framework for poets, writers and artists that I work in, emerged; and it is in this context that this meditation is written.

Of course, with the globalization of the capitalist system, the contestation between the neoliberal ruling classes and radical/egalitarian consciousnesses continues to play itself out in both familiar, expected ways and in the genuinely new and unpredictable. In literary terms, the battle is fought in publishing (what publishers will promote/what they believe will sell), in the media (in the form of reviews and art programs), around cultural awards and academic courses (reinforcing or revising standards of excellence) and around financial support (both state and corporate) for work that the commercial sector is reluctant to or unable to fund.

What then is the state of this battle in South Africa today? The news is both

good and bad. If in the 1970s and '80s white academia and the press insisted that only the lyrically sedate was acceptable, and this was successfully resisted by the radical, today in the first decade of the twenty-first century the same arguments are being used to trash independent non-commercial publishers that support political and sexually frank writing. This backlash comes after a temporary lull – the honeymoon of the 1990s when the “Mandela rainbow nation,” though ignoring the hard truths of inequality and corruption, was nevertheless vibrant, full of promise and ready to experiment.

Now critics damn these poets by calling them Stalinists and misogynists, and bemoan their lack of “craft” as if conventional forms and themes are hallowed. As such, though contemporary South African poetry offers a multiplicity of poetic voices expressing a wide spectrum of experience and rhythms, and more literary magazines, websites and publishers are available for poetry and fiction than ever before – and the appreciation of and support for poetry performance is enjoying unprecedented interest – the critical apparatus that dispenses poetic recognition is still very narrow.

But what is all this new poetry about and is it truly powerful, inspired, relevant, original? Let me again quote Oscar Wilde (a politicized writer if ever there was one!) – “diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex and vital” – and offer some thoughts about the poets whose work makes up this book, and, I believe, breaks new ground in re-establishing the parameters of South African writing. Of equal interest is that their writing gives a good indication of both the radical differences and unexpected congruences to be found across our cultures and languages. The twelve represented here have all been published by Botsotso, and we remain committed to seeking out and working with such poets and artists so as to give full expression to the many strands of South African identity.

*

Ike Mboneni Muila’s work is written mainly in ‘isicamtho’ (or ‘tsotsi taal’ – thug language), an amalgam of South African languages that developed among both criminal and artist circles in the black townships in the 1950s, and in Venda, the language of a minority tribe. Muila’s work is often humorous with a tongue in cheek audacity that provokes much laughter when performed. His subject matter though is deadly serious – the ravages of poverty, drink, drugs and violent death – though there are also celebrations of love and friendship and the dawning of new promise. Muila’s style is based on free association, juxtaposition, repetition and punning; it is often songlike, as well.

FROM: WANGU DEAR IKE

*what you write about
baby you are a tsotsi
in a tsotsi lingo skin my love
where did we go wrong
in those sweet moments of love
humourstown hanging on the edge of eternity
hang on tsotsi we are turning
corner scratch travelling rugs veranda floor no dice
listen to this love
my man is madly in love wittywise
I mean in love with the so-called tsotsi lingo
Bring him home buddyscamtho
Kindly do return my love regards
In a witty lingo much more better I say
So, so, well, well
Yours sincere love
Moodystyle
X love in disarray*

*

Writing from a far more explicit and direct political position is Vonani Bila. His work deals with the destructiveness of neoliberal economics and the lack of genuine racial reconciliation (particularly ongoing white racism), and offers portraits of the marginalized and brutalized such as prostitutes and madmen. His poetry shouts out rage and bitterness at the betrayal of social solidarity by the new Black elite and the continuing helplessness of the unemployed and destitute. Bila, like all similarly inspired poets, treads a fine line: dogma and rhetoric threaten original thinking and imagery, cliché and predictable structures threaten fresh language and rhythms. He largely succeeds in overcoming these pitfalls because he adopts a multi-layered approach, using surreal images and irony to comment on sanity – both social and individual. The following, however, is an extract from a poem that is more literal.

From HORRORS OF PHALABORWA

*eleven years into liberation –
i have no gracious dream
eleven years into liberation –*

*there is no rainbow dance
no straight distance we can walk
eleven years into liberation –
i turn and turn in gusts of wind
call on lingering souls of ancestors
beneath red earth
to pile up wood and stock fires of makongoza
tsika, tsika
eleven years into liberation –
wrench free the backs of people
hunched at dawn
broken at sundown
tsika, tsika
eleven years into liberation –
wrench free working hands
of underpaid, regimented workers
whose sweat earns them shame
in their unreturned land
eleven years into liberation –
what i can show the world
is a harvest of dust and thorns
a broken hope*

*

Another poet of anger and bitterness is elsbeth e. Her work has a similar political sensibility – rural poverty and displacement being key themes, as well as male aggression against women. The women with whom she primarily identifies are from the small towns of the western Cape: Coloured women, the descendants of Khoisan, Xhosa, Malay and European peoples. Her frame though is not just South African – she sees the power imbalance in other societies. elsbeth's use of language and technique are exceptionally powerful and arresting. Though most of her poems are in English, her use of Afrikaans is also significant, a language derived from Dutch but actually fashioned by slaves and then adopted by their European masters.

FROM: Domestic worker blues in a reggae rhythm

*Sugar on bread
Ah water from a t t tap
Down a black child's belly*

*Down a black child's belly
Who think jelly is only for white Sally
With the curls and the dress with the frills
But her mamma is gonna come
Her mamma is gonna come
With plastic bags that shags
What's all this jazz
Hunger carries only one flag
Sugar on bread
Ah water from a t t tap
Down a black child's belly
Down a black child's belly*

*

Of another mood is Kobus Moolman, whose poetry is meditative and somber, portraying moments of silence and dislocation, or scenes of emptiness and mystery. Kobus, a white Afrikaner who largely writes in English, is very affected by the natural environment, the physicality of the countryside. His work also carries a definite but subtle religious element; underlying the mood of mortality is a strong sense of timelessness. To convey the immediacy of current events and sensations he uses images that are elemental, yet full of paradox.

FROM: OF DROWNING AND DROUGHT

*Old stones do not
other stones make,
nor fish spawn flowers
of drought and the afterdeath.*

*A dried shoot is unable
to drink where glass grows,
and only silence swims
in spaces the tongue leaves.*

*

Anet Kemp's work is erotic and metaphysical. She is both romantic and crude, using mythology and fairy tales to express the different forms of sensuality and love that possess men and women. And she is fascinated by the extra-terrestrial, being a tripper – natural chemicals and others. Anet's work is adventurous and technically challenging, moving with a freeness that

is simultaneously tight and well ordered, and defies easy categorization.

FROM: moon gift

*I lie on my bed in the room with the black curtains
and white candles
under metal constructions
suspended from the ceiling
I lie naked in my long, purple fairy-coat
touch, but I don't miss him
so tell him, tell my lover with his full moon dreams
love does not tell of red heARTs
it is stolen hours in the wind
love is a hot oven, a sweat factory
a camel e-xperience without a single embrace
tell him hope is a burden
and my love wasted on a clean page
clean semenclean*

*

Most of Donald Parenzee's poems were written in the 1980s and '90s. His work is mature and considered, philosophical and densely textured with a strong visual sense. Expressing an acute awareness of the suffering of others yet with the reticence of a "loner," Donald's finely composed yet vital poems are models for a poetry that wishes to crystallize ideas and also carry emotion. Donald was active in the now defunct Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) and was a key proponent of worker/community-based publishing.

FROM: Nothing Else

*Pacing, waiting at night for imagery:
fiddling with time as if I did not know
just what I have to say,
as if this emergent energy of ours
could ever be contained; it must be
lifted out and held against the light
and smoothed and nurtured almost
privately. No matter what the world-destroyers say,
nothing else matters. Nothing else.*

*

Lisemelo Tlale is of the generation that straddled the last days of apartheid and the emergence of a free South Africa. Educated at a private school, intimately familiar with European culture, she mixes that new sensibility with delicious irony and wordplay, indulging her great command of English with her identity as an African of Sotho origin. As a new entrant to middle class society, what is she to make of being black in what are still mainly white run companies and institutions? It is no accident that this search for identity has taken her to Europe where she currently lives. It will be of great interest to see the direction her writing takes once this new experience is absorbed.

FROM: Silenced by psychosis and rage

These are smirks of earth after rain downpours and sun shiny smiles, it is the smell of hot peanut butter rye toast and roasted coffee beans – it safe, it is sane. While my people tend to their crude shelters in the thick of things, they flee to their holiday cabins. Yesterday they spit on my great grandfather. Today he must beg them to reconcile their oppressive falsehood and pardoned arrogance.

When did they ask for forgiveness, granddaddy?

You have to admit, Africa's curves are bewitching. The continent is worth the trouble, I mean, the travel.

I bawled my eyes because I was scared to scream for Help. So help me.

*

On the other hand, Bongekile Mbanjwa, an older woman who lived through the worst times of apartheid, has no doubts about her Zulu identity. She writes in Zulu and is preoccupied with the disintegration of the indigenous traditions that defined people's lives for so long. Her poems are both a lament for the old and established ways and a cry to the younger generation who are forsaking these traditions but still living in parasitical ways off their parents. The imagery of her poems is taken from the rural Zulu life that competes with urban realities. In general, her sense of loss, though acute is not despairing. Despite the anger and sorrow in the following poem, in other work she still shows faith that traditions and beliefs can survive the onslaught of very powerful inducements to abandon them.

FROM: ISIHLUTHULELO

*Mina ngife olwembiza,
Mina ngife ngihamba,
Iphi imvelaphi yami?
Iphi intandokazi kazulu?
Liphi ibhodwe likazulu?*

*Sizobondwa ngani lesigwamba?
Sizobondelwaphi na?
Baphi bona abazosidla?
Angithi bagcwele izinkalo,
Angithi behla benyuka,
Befuna impilo yasesilungwini,
Befuna umbulalazwe.*

Translation from Zulu: LOCK AND KEY

*I am a broken pot,
I am the walking dead.
Where are my origins?
Where is the favourite, KaZulu?
Where is the pot, Zulu?*

*With what is winter porridge going to be stirred?
Where is it going to be stirred?
Who is going to eat it?
They are wandering in the ridges,
They are walking up and down
Searching for 'western' life,
Searching for the destroyer of the land.*

*

Sumeera Dawood writes intimately about her preoccupations – including the stifled sexuality of traditional Cape Muslim life. Her observations of this milieu are sharp and honest, stripping pretension and artifice. A significant proportion of her poems contain a late-adolescent depressiveness but they are articulated in a cool, sophisticated way. In short, she is a trenchant exposé of hypocrisy and the gap between word and deed.

FROM: (Untitled)

*Muslim boys and their vows
of no penetration. There's nothing better
than religious guilt to heat things up
a bit. His bit bobs
inside my mouth. I don't move on the toilet seat,
motionless like an ocean-watcher before the ebb
and flow. Bobs
as I mock-gag. Bobs
as I watch the city sky melt
like make-up on a hot day. Pink, orange
hues of yellow and then royal blue. Dripping
swirling together. Nice enough
for a toilet seat view.*

*

The poetry of Clinton du Plessis, who lives in Cradock, originally an English settlement in the Eastern Cape, is about the political morass and the worlds of drugs, alcohol and sexual abuse, of gangsterism and the underbelly of social organization. He uses Afrikaans with telling effect to describe these alienated states. Clinton also experiments with typographic effects and plays with structure. His laconic style and analytic sharpness ensure that he takes no prisoners.

FROM: tussentydse verslag

*die land het
te veel plakkers
te veel direkteurs-generaal & adjunk-direkteurs-generaal
te veel tronkbewoners
te veel mandrax-mercedesse & sprinkane &
te min dolfyne
te min strandes & warm see met branders*

Translation from Afrikaans: interim report

this country has

too many squatters

too many director-generals & deputy-director-generals

too many people inhabit the prisons

too many mercedes benzes are mandrax-financed there are

too many locusts & too few dolphins

too few beaches & warm seas with waves

*

Siphiwe ka Ngwenya is a poet who specializes in performance, combining a lyrical sensuality with hard-nosed social observation. Once also very involved in COSAW, he has worked to build a popular literary movement that is active both in the historic black townships and in the middle class sector. He writes in both English and Zulu, often using song rhythms but not falling prey to American fashions.

FROM: THE BLUES I LOVE (KNOW)

The-the blues

the-the blues I love

the-the blues I know

are taproot embedded

& dreadlocked without ganga

not drowning in babylon waters

the-the blues I know

the-the blues I love

are drum beating serenade

& bass strumming compassionate

the-the blues I know

the-the blues I love

are plump breasts sagging

in the maize meal pounding

The mosaic that these twelve poets present is, I believe, unique although one could choose another dozen that would present a similar and yet different picture of our contemporary poetry. Certainly diversity is the hallmark of our society and that recognition immediately opens space for the commonalities to also be appreciated in literature. And this being a time of transition, it is to be expected that rough edges may rub raw – in itself, not a bad thing.

The idealism of revolutionary change now gives way to a meaner sense of how cohesion in the face of so any competing interests can be maintained. As a result the social problems which threaten a new type of fracturing are mirrored in the competing perceptions of the value and role of art. South African poetry though has enough vitality to not just survive but flourish because there is a hard core of original poets who will not compromise their visions. I would hope that this very truncated selection offers proof.

DREAM:

RE-IMAGINING PROGRESSIVE POLITICS IN AN AGE OF FANTASY

Stephen Duncombe
The New Press, 2007

In *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, Stephen Duncombe antes up an ambitious attempt to jumpstart the political left in the United States. He also offers an enticing invitation to harness and cultivate a new political aesthetic. This political aesthetic—rooted in desire, dreaming, creativity, and irrationality—just might be the way, he argues, for progressives to scythe their way out of the thick field of ineffectiveness and irrelevance and toward a more just, participatory, and downright fun future.

From the book's outset, Duncombe engages in critical self-reflection on behalf of the left. What does he finger as the culprit of political futility? None other than the two-headed hydra of reason and rationality. Duncombe asserts, "progressives feel an affinity for the Enlightenment and empiricism," but in his estimation, reason and rationality are overrated, tactical fossils in the hyper-speedy world of advertising glitz, celebrity glam, and computerized guns. While progressives are busy deconstructing the statecraft's 'manufacture of consent,' Duncombe argues they should actually be constructing "a politics that understands desire and speaks to the irrational; a politics that employs symbols and associations; a politics that tells good stories. In brief...to manufacture *dissent*."

In general, as a way of fomenting such dissent, Duncombe prefers the dreamscape and the imaginary to the truth-will-set-you-free approach that the left has latched onto for decades. Rather than piling up more facts and data to persuade the public of the truth of your claims, he suggests we tap into the world of fantasy and fun. It's illusion he wants, not delusion—inspirational fantasy, not false phantasmagoria.

But Duncombe goes beyond these general parameters to offer a lucid set of suggestions for where this dissent could be generated, plucking political lessons from counterintuitive places: the ideals of the unreal embedded in Las Vegas (Chapter 2); the rebellious allure of the video game "Grand Theft Auto" (Chapter 3); the techniques of the advertising industry (Chapter 4); and the attraction of Hollywood celebrity culture (Chapter 5). In sum, the seeds of today's hyperconsumptionist culture just might bear the fruit of tomorrow's progressive politics. But in order to pull this off, he writes, "ethi-

cally and practically, progressives need to understand popular dreams.”

A central theme for Duncombe is that “Spectacle is our way of making sense of the world. Truth and power belong to those who tell the better story.” Thus, he argues, “If progressives are to engage, rather than to ignore, the phantasmagoric terrain of politics, we need to learn from those who do spectacle best: the architects of Las Vegas, video game designers, advertising’s creative directors, and the producers and editors of celebrity media.” His quest is to figure out what sits at the shared center of these seemingly disparate socio-cultural, commercially drenched phenomena that make them so enormously popular.

Sure he thinks “the entertainment state should be ruthlessly criticized,” but he also believes “the techniques used to create and maintain it need to be enthusiastically explored and exploited for their progressive potential.” In other words, Duncombe suggests progressives should co-opt the co-opters, but change the endgame from crass commercialism to principled progressivism.

While Duncombe lays down that gantlet in no uncertain terms—“The rationality and reason that once freed us from authority now make us equivocating cowards, judiciously studying reality instead of changing it”—he is careful not to offer up a one-size-fits all set of policies and procedures for progressives to follow; rather, he presents “an alternative political aesthetic for progressives to consider; a theory of *dreampolitik* they might practice.”

The bulk of the book offers ideas as to how progressives might appeal to people’s hopes and dreams rather than doling out “a gloom-and-doom dystopic scenario” that perpetually bums them out. Duncombe is critical of the tendency among progressives to frame their claims “in the name of abstract others” such as the poor or the masses. Instead, by employing the techniques of Madison Avenue, he suggests “appealing to people’s hopes and dreams, weaving them into a tale that ends with their lives being better than they are now.” Part of this involves imbuing political messages with associations rather than old-school linear logic since “linear logic belongs to the age of the sentence and the paragraph; associative logic is in tune with the present visual era.” A big plank in this is trying to get people to associate activism with fun in order “to counteract the public perception of leftists as dour, sour, and politically correct.” In other words, less self-flagellation and more cultural vibration. Essentially, Duncombe wants to help concoct a progressive brand, and one that not only notes the sacrifice inherent to activism but also the idea that “activism is also social, exhilarating, rebellious, and fun.” For instance, he points to “subway parties” that swept in and out

of subway cars in New York City in the early 2000s. Basically, rambunctious, vivacious hordes of activists would enter a subway car en masse and replace advertisements with streamers, quietude with music, the smell of sweat with the smell of pot smoke. The idea was to politicize space in a visceral way—not simply in an intellectual way—to forge a path of possibility not only for activists, but also for the subway-riding bystanders.

In terms of celebrity pop-culture, his main point is that “we need to look at what comes before the stars and the hype—that is, pose the questions of what popular dreams does celebrity culture fulfill and how might these needs be otherwise addressed.” According to Duncombe, tracking the lives of Hollywood stars is appealing for a number of reasons: (1) simply because they represent cultural elite; (2) celebrities inhabit the paradisiacal realm while us mortals are consigned to working for a living, and “if this dream of heaven eludes us, we might as well watch someone else live it for us”; (3) the ostensibly humble beginnings of numerous celebrities trigger the sentiment it could happen to you too; (4) celebrities are seen and recognized by the world while we—as alienated social beings—feel recognized by no one; (5) given our diverse backgrounds, “celebrity gossip...works as a public stage on which to play out and judge behavior and values” so that “in the absence of a unifying moral textbook, celebrity gossip becomes one of the places where we work out what is right and wrong”; and (6) the hyperspecialization of knowledge leaves us feeling bereft and incompetent in most areas until comprehensible, trackable celebrity happenings come along as the anodyne. After explaining why Hollywood matters to ordinary people, he then turns to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “fireside chats” to demonstrate how “complex issues can be presented in such a way that they can be mastered by ordinary citizens.”

Aside from my minor qualm—as a longtime *People* magazine subscriber—over his claim that the celebrity world “is a place where women can dress as they like without being harassed”—each issue offers readers and journalists the opportunity to ratchet the brackets of ‘acceptable’ feminine behavior and Britney Spears (to whom Duncombe alludes) is the victim of perpetual class bias and not simply portrayed as “a country girl at heart”—one might also wonder whether FDR’s fireside chats—“patient explication of the economy and explanation of the challenges Americans face”—would receive the same Duncombian plaudits today. After all, the *Washington Post* dubbed Al Gore’s fireside-chat-intoned recent book, *The Assault on Reason*, (a compellingly contrasting compendium to Duncombe’s *Dream*, actually) as a “smug and self-centered” work that contains “fundamentally reasonable sentiments—often important ones—in ways that annoy the maximum possible number of people,” a “maddening” tract saddled with the author’s

“incurable habit of calling more attention to himself than to the ideas he wishes to communicate.” In any case, Duncombe asserts that progressives should, like FDR, “combine the weighty and the light, and the political and the personal in the same way they are all mixed up in people’s hearts, minds, and lives.” All the while, progressives need to remember to engage in “addressing the needs expressed by the popular desires to be famous... What do celebrities have that we don’t? They have wealth and they have leisure and they have beauty. Framed in terms of access instead of excess, these are bread-and-butter issues for progressives: better pay, shorter workweeks, mandatory vacation time, and universal health and dental care.”

Highlighting the need to try something different, Duncombe is right to point to the sanctioned, permitted “traditional progressive protest model” as “dull and deadly” in its predictability, whereby leaders organize mass protests full of marching, chanting, and listening to speakers from the platform who tell us things we already know full well. As he notes, “While these demonstrations were often held in the name of “people’s power,” they were profoundly disempowering.” For a new way of thinking about protest, he discusses the value of micro-level affinity groups and points to innovative assemblages like Reclaim the Streets, which “believes that political ends must be embodied in the means you use... protests should literally *demonstrate* the ideal that you want to actualize.”

Duncombe draws from a number of progressive and radical groups (e.g. Billionaires for Bush, Reverend Billy, Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas) including ones he’s involved with himself (e.g. Lower East Side Collective, Reclaim the Streets) to offer descriptive texture as to how these ideas might play out in the real world. All the while, he deftly sidesteps predilection among political actors to hyper-focus on instant efficacy and end goals (which often dissuades people from getting involved in politics in the first place). Instead he talks about movement-building and the joy of such a process. He argues that we need to have large objectives, but that “we also have to give serious consideration to how we reach these targets—that is: *how we do politics*. We need to rethink progressive politics in terms of the quality of our gameplay. Perhaps one of the reasons progressives are not winning much these days is that lately our game isn’t much fun to play.” He offers a critical discussion of the slow, cold professionalization of activism replete with clipboard toters—who in Britain are derisively dubbed charity muggers, or “chuggers”—and how this is a detriment to progressive causes as it has made it a bore, and an invasive bore at that. In place of the practice of paying for professionals to carry out the lobbying, he demands a participatory politics not solely based on winning or losing but also on how the game is played.

Dream's celebration of innovative forms of dissent is not only refreshing, but also invigorating and instructive. Duncombe tacitly carves space for writers, artists, and poets to enter the activist fray. Who better to make creative use of association, subtlety, and spunk? *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* should be read as a clarion call for artists, writers, and poets to put their creativity to the cause and their boots to the pavement.

In Chapter 6 the author elucidates his concept of the “ethical spectacle,” and in doing so, Duncombe makes his riskiest move. He’s cognizant of the deceptive, manipulative history of the spectacle designed to soak and sell more than to provide liberty and happiness, but he argues that the “ethical spectacle” of progressives will be different. “Given the progressive ideals of egalitarianism and a politics that values the input of everyone, our dreamscapes will not be created by media-savvy experts of the left and then handed down to the rest of us to watch, consume, and believe,” he writes. “Instead our spectacles will be participatory: dreams the public can mold and shape themselves. They will be active: spectacles that work only if people help create them.”

Yet one of the defining characteristics of the political spectacle is the stark, uncrossable barrier between the actors and the spectators as well as the chasm between empty gestures and meaningful action. The political spectacle is in many ways the very antithesis of participation. One wonders whether Duncombe might have done better to try to co-opt a less ideologically drenched term with such thick historical precedent. Sure, as Guy Debord wrote, “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship that is mediated by images.” But iconoclastic political scientist Murray Edelman clarified the standard-issue normative dimension of this social relationship: “The political spectacle does not promote accurate expectations or understanding, but rather evokes a drama that objectifies hopes and fears.” Can Duncombe expect to move successfully beyond this central facet of the political spectacle? Trying to recapture the term and drag it into the service of the left is a tall order, and Duncombe makes a valiant effort. Still, it may well be irreconcilably difficult to pull off. And even if we can pull it off, are we merely replacing one form of alienation with another? Have we simply replaced ‘the manufacture of consent’ with the manufacture of enthusiasm?

Also, Duncombe’s “ethical spectacle”—indeed his entire book—is built on the assumption that “If culture stays, and sells, it means that it somehow resonates with the popular will.” But does that assumption really hold up? Doesn’t supply—read: what the owning class dishes up—create demand in numerous instances? Take, say, foreign films. In the 1970s foreign films ac-

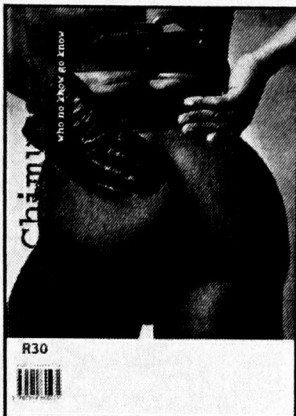
counted for more than 10% of box office receipts in U.S. theaters. By the late 1990s, these sales had plummeted below 0.5%. In the age of globalization we might expect the sheer opposite: an *increased* interest in other cultures. But the dip in percentages has less to do with consumer demand and more to do with corporate conglomeration in the form of the multiplex theater where owners had no interest in showing cultural products not produced within its own media chains of vertical integration. Combine this fact with the demise of single-screen theaters—where foreign films were often showed—and we have ourselves a more satisfactory explanation than these films just didn't "resonate with the popular will." Surely Duncombe—a savvy cultural commentator—is cognizant of the problems inherent in an assumption that the sticking power of culture products and consumer desire are synonymous, but—refreshingly, I think—he doesn't let this impede him from acting politically.

These critiques and questions should not detract from the fact that Duncombe's *Dream* is a tremendously thought-provoking, well-considered book that activists should read and then consider how to suffuse the book's important ideas into their own praxis. In a time when the slippery slope of cynicism is all too easy to step onto, *Dream* offers a hopeful alternative for a better day. As Duncombe himself writes, "It is not the job of progressives to condemn popular fantasy and desire. It is our job to pay careful attention to them, learn from them, and perhaps—God forbid!—even enjoy them ourselves. Then carjack these desires and fantasies and drive them someplace else."

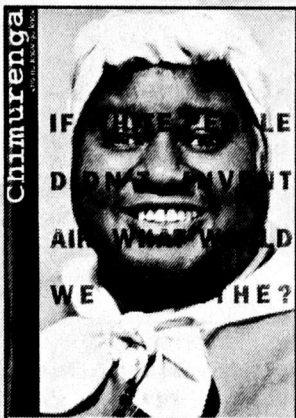
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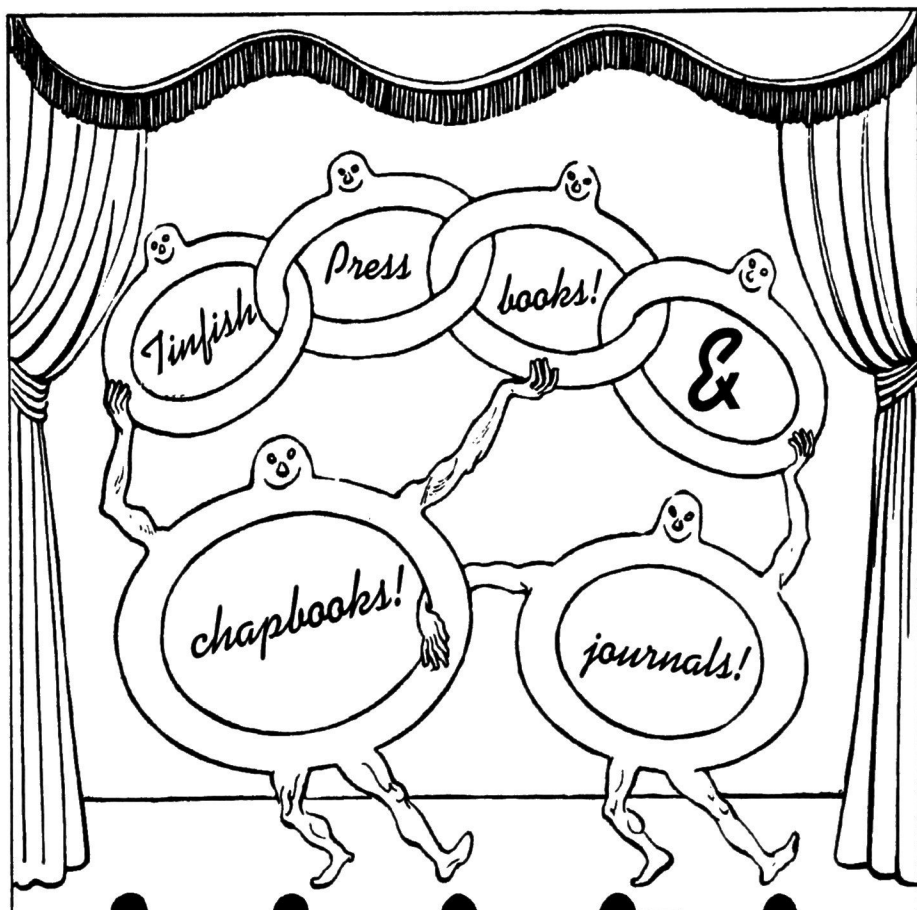
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