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Regarding Feelings and Forms

RACHEL ALPHA JOHNSTON HURST

Eugenie Brinkema. *The Forms of the Affects*. Duke University Press, 2014. 347 pp.

Elsbeth H. Brown and Thy Phu, eds. *Feeling Photography*. Duke University Press, 2014. 397 pp.

“Affect is not the place where something immediate and automatic and resistant takes place outside of language. The turning to affect in the humanities does not obliterate the problem of form and representation. Affect is not where reading is no longer needed” (Brinkema xiv).

“To love a photograph is no more – and no less – than to feel it” (Brown and Phu 354).

As a psychoanalytic cultural theorist, thinking about these books together ensnares me in my familiar oscillating trap: between the visceral imagery of Freud and the hygienic schemas of Lacan. Reading Freud is to vicariously *feel* his theories of psyche; I am seduced by this provocation of idiosyncratic feeling. Lacan, on the other hand, gives a form to these theories that does not provoke this imaginary response and instead often situates it in the impersonal schema. Essays in *Feeling Photography* – though not all – thrive in the realm of the idiosyncratic, drawing the reader in to their images through that singularity.¹ If tried through Brinkema’s argument in *The Forms of the Affects*, they would be found guilty of flattening affects and feelings through “the premise that affects and feelings are the forgotten underside of the affective turn” (xiv). Yet while certain examples of Brinkema’s method of close reading for form are exhilarating,² others push the reader away; the effervescence just isn’t there. But let me back up a bit.

Feeling Photography, edited by Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu, is a lovely collection of essays that takes up the question, “What does it mean to *feel* photography” (2; my emphasis)? In the introduction, the editors make the case that since Victor Burgin’s assertion in *Thinking Photography* (1982) that theorists of photography need to dis-

¹ See for example, Shawn Michelle Smith’s “Photography between Desire and Grief: Roland Barthes and F. Holland Day” and Diana Taylor’s “Trauma in the Archive.”

² *Psycho* and *Open Water* in particular.

tance themselves from previous interpretive methods founded in “personal thoughts and feelings,” there has been a resistance to acknowledging and theorizing feelings in relation to photography (quoted in Brown and Phu 2). The lucid and concise introduction gives an admirable overview of the tensions since the 1970s between materialist theoretical approaches advocated for by Burgin and the feeling-laden theory of photography advanced by Roland Barthes. Further, the editors formulate a genealogy of the crisscrossing paths of the art of photography with the science of affect, the debate regarding the artistic value of photography, and the example of reform photography. Tracing these paths offers new readings of the history of photography that reveal the multiple ways in which photography and feeling are connected. Indeed, the editors make the case that even when it was disavowed, feeling has never been far afield from photography.

The collection itself is divided into three sections: “Touchy-Feely,” on the tactile-emotional dimensions of photography; “Intimacy and Sentiment,” on the capacity of the photographic surface to evoke these two concepts; and “Affective Archives,” which attends to the displacement of feelings from institutionalized archives and the flourishing of feeling in non-institutional sites. The sections are clearly delineated from one another, yet have a pleasing thematic and theoretical overlap as well; for example, the haptic quality of photographs is one that facilitates our intimacy with photographs, and the touch (or its absence) is visceral in the archives section. The essays approach the topic of *feeling* all sorts of photographs from an admirably diverse range of perspectives, including psychoanalysis, feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory, aesthetics, and semiology.

“Touchy-Feely” opens with a striking essay by Shawn Michelle Smith that juxtaposes the parallel queer theoretical projects of Roland Barthes and F. Holland Day to establish a methodology of “affective intentionality,” in Barthes’ words, a way to see photographs that does not reduce them to the reading and retains their affective power. This essay sets the tone for the collection as a whole. This method of seeing photographs is one that cuts the thread connecting signifier and signified, particularly through desire and grief, exemplified by the *punctum*; but Smith argues that these particular readings also provoke the “radical resurrection of the index” (44), holding both our feelings and the subject of the photograph beyond the material object. Dana Seitler’s “Making Sexuality Sensible” draws on Kantian aesthetics to think through the photographic work of Tammy Rae Carland and Catherine Opie as they create links between sensation and sexuality, as well as various periods and movements within art history. “Sepia Mutiny: Colonial Photography in and Its Others in India,” by Christopher Pinney, examines sepia toning in historical and contemporary photography as a chemical process that establishes a tactile and emotional connection, as well as a slow time (71). Through the layering of colour and warmth, these

feelings of difference are mobilized in subtle ways by contemporary photographers to resist, rather than reify colonialism as their historical antecedents did. Elizabeth Abel's "Skin, Flesh, and the Affective Wrinkles of Civil Rights Photography" queries the "seamless web of photography, activism, and visibility" (94) to consider what affects are mobilized in sit-in photographs and photographs of police brutality that move beyond outrage at the "bare truth" and instead invite the viewer into the photograph's frame as participant. While this section is arguably the most immediate – the tactile-emotional dimension of photographs is one that anyone who has held a photograph in their hands can connect to – it is also curiously distanced, as the common threads that connect the essays are not immediately apparent. The editors provide a thorough overview of this section in the introduction to the collection, summarizing that this section helps the reader think about the photograph's indexicality as not just about the subject of the photograph, but also about the emotional, material experience of touching/holding the photograph. This is clear enough, but it gets lost in the experience of reading the intriguing essays in "Touchy-Feely;" the collection would benefit in general from the inclusion of brief epilogues to each of the sections, to summarize and highlight salient themes, and this is especially apparent in this section.

The following section, "Intimacy and Sentiment," is the strongest in the collection and contributes powerful interpretations of vernacular photographs (identification and personal photographs), as well as professional photographs in popular media (journalistic and women's magazine photographs). The essays in this section demand a second reading, as they are exciting to read, and at least I was keen to find myself at the end of the authors' analyses quickly – I was not disappointed by a second reading, which revealed nuances missed the first time. Tanya Sheehan's "Looking Pleasant, Feeling White: The Social Politics of the Photographic Smile" traces the genealogy of the now-ubiquitous smile, challenging the widely espoused view that the photographic smile emerges with new technologies that enable short exposure times. Instead, through an astonishing array of images framed through racist tropes of watermelons and smiles, Sheehan unfolds a story about the relationship between "white feelings" and "black feelings" in the United States, where the former are structured around the regulation of the latter (152-153). Lily Cho's "Anticipating Citizenship: Chinese Head Tax Photographs" similarly takes a pervasive photographic convention (the emotionless identification photograph) and makes it dazzlingly strange through her analysis of a collection of 2,400 photographs affixed to Chinese Immigration 9 certificates in Canada from 1910-1911 (160). She argues that the intentional decision to present an emotionally neutral expression in these photographs – only two individuals in the entire collection feature smiles – anticipates a the demand for the ideal (potential) Canadian citizen to be emotionally neutral (Cho 175-176). Kimberly Juanita Brown's "Regarding the Pain of the Other: Photography, Famine, and

the Transference of Affect” is an unpacking of South African photographer Kevin Carter’s biography in relation to the subject of his Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph, a starving Sudanese child stalked by a vulture waiting for her inevitable death. Brown’s essay is a stunning ethical response to the displacement of feeling and subjectivity from the child to Carter, who came to be understood by mainstream media as victim of his own violent photographic practice (he completed suicide shortly after winning the Pulitzer Prize), erasing the subjectivity of the dying girl. And finally, Marlis Schweitzer explores photographs of ballroom dancer Irene Castle, particularly those by Ira L. Hill from 1913-1915, to argue that these photographs established new modalities of feeling as modern in her “Accessible Feelings, Modern Looks: Irene Castle, Ira L. Hill, and Broadway’s Affective Economy.” This essay examines a fascinating precursor to modern celebrity culture by exploring how the circulation of photographs of Castle established a new, modern femininity that was marked by the audience’s ability to form affective identifications with her.

“Affective Archives” destabilizes Foucauldian approaches to archives as loci of knowledge production, which the editors characterize as “dispassionate” (Brown and Phu 19), and shift instead toward Derridean analyses of the affective dimensions of archives as sites of absence, desire, forgetting, and difference. Such an approach also locates the archive as something that is not solely institutional, but queer and singular. Diana Taylor’s “Trauma in the Archive” unfolds the notion of the traumatic archive as performative through the work of Pedro Matta, a survivor and tour guide at the Villa Grimaldi torture and extermination camp near Santiago de Chile. Taylor’s writing is superb, giving the reader a sense of the embodied experience of being with Matta in his archive, on a tour structured like trauma that holds the potential to “activate a powerful reaction” in the visitor to move out of the trauma into action (250). Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer analyze the re-use of institutional photographs by artists Christian Boltanski and Marcelo Brodsky as archives of loss and attachment (respectively) in “School Photos and their Afterlives.” In “Photographing Objects as Queer Archival Practice,” Ann Cvetkovich weaves a lovely argument about the intimate affiliation of photography with archives and feelings. She argues that the work of Tammy Rae Carland and Zoe Leonard challenges the concept of the archive, transforming it into a queer and ephemeral art practice. Lisa Cartwright’s “Topographies of Feeling: On Catherine Opie’s American Football Landscapes” is a very strong essay in this section. In it, Cartwright focuses on Opie’s landscape and topographic photographs as evocative of the curious intermingling of pride and pleasure with the violence done to young men’s bodies transitioning into adult masculinity, even more so than the portraits of bodies that are also a part of *High School Football* (2007). Finally, David L. Eng’s chapter “The Feeling of Photography, the Feeling of Kinship” is an appropriate final essay before the book’s epilogue, examining how intergenerational trauma – repressed within the institutional archive – erupts in transformative

archival and historical practices like Rea Tajiri's "documentary of affect" (325).

The Forms of the Affects addresses a parallel yet quite different set of circumstances to those grappled with in *Feeling Photography*. Eugenie Brinkema's fearless monograph situates itself within an epistemological moment of a "meta-turn" toward affect; that is, a turning towards the turn to affect (xi). The book opens with a series of ten premises, several of which are disruptive in the best way, revealing as repetitious and paradoxical the formula for theoretical examinations of affect as singularly conceived of as movement, intensity or force (xiii). Asserting that turning toward affect must not be conceived of as turning away from language and reading, Brinkema makes the case in these early pages that the way to divert the cyclic calls of "We urgently have to attend to X!" (answered with a conceptualization of affect that is general, vague, and dull, based in the subjectivity of the individual theorist) is to engage in the specifics through close reading (xiii). In the preface, Brinkema situates the abandonment of form – characterized in Lone Bertelsen's and Andrew Murphie's statement that "affect is not form" (xiii) – as premised on a misleading binary whereby form is passive and rigid, and affect is active and volatile. Such a conceptualization, she asserts, impoverishes both. As noted in the epigraphs, the possibilities offered by a formal analysis of affect in particularities are washed out by a sea of vague generality, based on the subjectivity of the theorist as the analytical toolbox, and leaving much of the force of the analysis as out of language.

As a corrective, Brinkema offers her readers a method for such a formal reading of affect in film. She does this through theoretical elaboration of the forms of four affects – grief, disgust, anxiety, and joy – and application of this discursive framework to closely read six films – Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997), Peter Greenaway's *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (1989), Chris Kentis' *Open Water* (2003), and Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma* (1970). The most enticing part of this book is imagining how reading film for the forms of its affects might unfold for various other examples, new and familiar; the book itself reads as an invitation, not a hermetic loop. For example, one of the more thrilling analyses occurs at the beginning of the book, of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), a film which has been read and re-read multiple times in scholarly and popular contexts. Really, Brinkema couldn't have chosen a better example to demonstrate how her method opens up new terrain to better understand what form can do. Through a compelling reading of the tear (that may or may not be a tear) that falls from the lifeless eye of Marion Crane, Brinkema shows us a central tenet of her method. After tracing a genealogy of tears in Western thought, she makes the point that the origin point of Marion Crane's tear is ambiguous, and we also cannot understand that tear as existing for the spectator (20). There is more to the tear than a "hermeneutic demand" (Brinkema 20) to locate meaning (truth/deceit in the tear); the tear itself is a *structure* that folds upon itself (Brinkema

21-22). Marion's tear is lifeless and wholly exterior – it does not point us to her interiority, and is a textual form of “affect of self on self” (Gilles Deleuze in Brinkema 23). What this means for the theorist performing this kind of close reading is that it is critical to understand affect as belonging to no individual, as de-subjectified, and as without a body: “any individual affect [is] a self-folding exteriority that manifests in, as, and with textual form” (24-25). This method, Brinkema maintains, releases the form into the service of unrestrained readings for affect, and envisions forms themselves as affective.

As noted at the beginning of this essay, the application of this method yields some breathtaking results. The form of the tear that is not a tear in *Psycho* is a gripping example (crying), as is anxiety's form of the solid line that is chaotically broken (*Open Water*). Brinkema's reading of the latter film as “a frame around the heavy time of waiting for a certain imminent death” (210) is completely successful in demonstrating how the affects of a film reside not in the depiction of the psychological interiority of its characters, but instead in the film's structures. *Open Water* is a thriller about a couple (Susan and Daniel) on a tropical vacation, who are inadvertently abandoned in the open ocean by a scuba boat due to a counting error by a member of the crew. The film's time is predominately spent on the couple floating in the ocean from late morning to dawn the next day, futilely hoping for rescue and visibly/invisibly surrounded by curious sharks. Both members of the couple die; a shark bites Daniel's leg and he bleeds to death later on the day they are left at sea, and the next day at dawn Susan releases Daniel's corpse, removes her flotation vest and allows herself to slip beneath the ocean's surface. This film is perfect to help illustrate the effectiveness of escaping from an analysis of the characters' psyches and into the formal elements of film in order to read for affect – Susan and Daniel are psychologically flat characters, so the temptation does not arise to probe too deeply into their words and actions. Instead, Brinkema focuses on the formal elements of the number (time stamps on the film, miscounting the number of scuba divers, an inauspicious selection of vacation dates) and of the horizontal line that separates the ocean from the air (rendered intermittent by the ruptures of the sharks and the couple, who breach the line of the visual by emerging above or dipping below); both of these are utterly indifferent to the existence of Susan and Daniel. The cinematic staging of Susan and Daniel's abandonment is a “drowning of form,” according to Brinkema, where anxiety's structure of inertia and intermittency – a nothingness – is made apparent (209). The form of the film is a space where nothing happens in time but the breach of the line, and where the couple must disappear beneath the line into nothingness.

I cannot overstate the originality and comprehensiveness of the theoretical elaborations of grief, disgust, and anxiety in particular; each draws out new insights from well-read texts that are challenging to arguments that reappear in studies of affect.

Brinkema's analysis of grief in relation to the formal properties of light is particularly striking. The productive and generative capacities of loss are often held alongside more devastating consequences in memory and trauma studies. Drawing on Freud's theory of the distinction between mourning and melancholia – where mourning is the normal “working through” of the lost object, and melancholia is the painful and pathological experience of loss without an object – the latter comes to be positioned in contemporary theory as a valorized locus of creativity and movement. But Brinkema shows us how Freud's distinction was not so clear to Freud himself, and that the blurring together of mourning and melancholia in his writing (becoming what she calls “mourninchoia”) has had ongoing consequences (66). Likewise, grief and mourning have been distinguished from one another in contemporary thought – grief as an interior, and mourning as an exterior, expression of loss – yet at the same time used as synonyms. Brinkema argues that the way out of these binaries and conflation is through a close examination of light and illumination; that cloudy grief is passive, undialectic, and unresolvable, an event separate from the clearing of mourning (as a more active and attentive event), and that photography is a medium capable of holding grief. Building on Joan Didion's sentence that the movement from grief to mourning is to “let them [the dead] become the photograph on the table,” Brinkema explains that the capture of a moment of light in the photograph figures grief as painful and unresolvable, and the photograph is a space of holding the irresolvable and receiving the finitude of loss (75).

Understanding grief through photography as “a problem of the transmission and capture and staging of light” (75), Brinkema reads a scene of still luminosity in Haneke's *Funny Games* as the cinematic staging of grief as heavy, non-transformative, and undialectical in the following chapter. *Funny Games* is a horror film about a bourgeois family (mother, father, son, and dog) at their country home who are taken hostage by two sadistic men who torture them through physical as well as psychological violence. By the end of the film, all members of the family (canine and human) are dead. Brinkema's discussion of the form of parental grief focuses on a ten minute long tableau scene after the son has been murdered. However, unlike the previous reading of the tear in *Psycho*, and the subsequent reading of the line in *Open Water*, the intriguing analysis of light in the slippage between the concepts of mourning, melancholia, and eventually grief builds up to something that isn't quite delivered in the reading of *Funny Games*. While Brinkema carefully explains that the film is structured as parental grief is (a very convincing analysis), the significance of light often disappears in the shadow of other formal elements like the pose, the tableau, and photographic staging.

Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu's *Feeling Photography* is an exciting contribution to the field of photography theory, and exists within a recent tide of scholarship focusing on the nexus of photography and affect; for example, the work of Sharon Sliwinski

and Elizabeth Edwards, as well as the special issue of *Photography and Culture* edited by Thy Phu and Linda Steer. This collection will be of interest to a very wide range of scholars in the humanities, and not just those that study photography – the book offers a range of ways to think about the function of photography as it often exists unanalyzed at the margins of a variety of social and cultural phenomena. Potential readers will be pleased to know that it contains 16 pages of colour plates; however, the selection of photographs was a bit puzzling, as there is an overrepresentation of certain artists (Catherine Opie, Tammy Rae Carland) and an absence of photographs that would be valuable to see in colour in the book (for example, the photographs of Marco Brodsky as well as Kevin Carter’s photograph have a different affective force when in colour). The diversity represented in the objects of study, theoretical approaches, and styles of writing make this collection a very good possible course text for a graduate course especially, but also for an upper-year undergraduate course on photography. Likewise, Eugenie Brinkema’s *The Forms of the Affects* is an innovative book that will surely be of great interest to scholars of affect and film studies in particular, but the possibilities for her method will also be useful to those in visual studies, literary, feminist, and queer theory, philosophy, and cultural studies more broadly. This is not a book for a general audience, but rather a specialized audience from the graduate level onwards. The book has a generative ebb and flow, in the terms of its liquid structure: Brinkema empties her affects of their familiar meaning through impressive theoretical work, and then through close reading lets the new understanding fill in the forms of the affects in her chosen films. I was amazed at Brinkema’s modest selection of images that are impeccable for capturing the forms of the affects in the films discussed. The book is beautifully designed; I would be remiss if I did not mention at last the transitional spaces of interlude near the beginning and end of the book that offer connections and divergences between its themes and chapters, as well as the negative space created by introductory passages before each affect. These books will be of great interest to an intersecting and wide range of audiences studying and teaching affect theory.

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Inconveniently Yours

KARL JIRGENS

Thomas King. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 287 pp.

Thomas King's book was released shortly before the final Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings held in Edmonton (March, 2014) and more recently, in Ottawa (June, 2015), at which survivors of Canada's Indian Residential Schools recounted abuse, suffering and hardship (1). In ten chapters, King's *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* provides a succinct but deep genealogy of the maltreatment of North American Indigenous peoples.

The first chapter, "Forget Columbus" provides a brief but illuminating history of massacres, genocides, and other unwanted truths. King's cultural anthropology pursues how one society can attempt to vanquish another, and then translate that near annihilation into a pleasant story, a romantic novel, or a celebrated by skewed history that overlooks any atrocities committed. As tour-guide, King contrasts Indigenous accounts, with histories generated by non-Indigenous colonists. One could consider the story of the Lone Ranger replete with the questionable characterization of his native companion "Tonto," as compared to King's skewering of that story in his own novel, *Green Grass Running Water*. King explains how self-congratulating legends that purport to value life have greater cultural currency. Consequently, historical and pop-cultural versions of the past perpetuate cultural stereotypes that overlook brutalities that were committed against native peoples. In spite of distorted histories, King still recalls the North West Rebellion, Batoche, or Little Big Horn. King goes on to reveal how the Thanatotically inspired U.S. government has continued to pursue similar aggressions abroad in sites such as in the Bay of Pigs, Phnom Pen, and Baghdad (25).

The second chapter, "The End of the Trail" analyses myths surrounding the purported demise of North American Indigenous peoples. The inconvenient truth is that Indigenous peoples remain among us, but the invented myths are strong. King notes Hollywood's preference for dead Indians over live ones. He tracks representations of Indigenous people through various Hollywood clichés that serve as substitutes for verité. King provides a genealogical trace of cultural history by considering novels such as James Fennimore Cooper's *Deerslayer*, or John Richardson's *Tecumseh* (28-30). He considers how U.S. coins, postage stamps, and paper currency misrepresent

native culture. He observes that in Hollywood, two types of “Indians” are portrayed, the “blood thirsty,” and the “noble savage” (34). Typically, both types are dying. The signification of “dead Indians” as cultural stereotype is revealed in expanded form as a massive simulacrum, re-duplicating a Romanticized predilection for lost cultures. Re-writings of history are typical of dominant societies that would prefer to erase the unpleasant facts of imperial aggression, but inconvenient names like Louis Riel, George Custer, Gabriel Dumont, Sitting Bull, and Crazy Horse endure. King takes time to remind us of important cultural figures, such as comedy and film legend, Will Rogers (Cherokee), and Jay Silverheels, who played Tonto on the television show, *The Lone Ranger*, explaining that “Rogers was an Indian who didn’t get to play Indians, and Jay Silverheels, an Indian who only played Indians” (44). As such, neither Rogers nor Silverheels were perceived as worthy role models. King also turns to more recent successes lauding film and stage actors such as Graham Greene (Oneida), and Gary Farmer (Cayuga), among others. He reminds us of directors who make important documentaries, including Phil Lucas (Choctaw), and Alanis Obomsawin (Abenaki). King’s lengthy lists of individuals and historical incidents are invaluable, and provide crucial groundwork for anyone curious enough to investigate further.

The third chapter, “Too Heavy to Lift,” outlines two massive governmental agendas, the first aimed at isolating Indigenous peoples on reservations, the second aimed at assimilating them and white-washing their cultural heritage. King notes that the Residential school system was coupled with broader forced removal, displacement, and relocation of native peoples. Accompanying this agenda is a history of broken treaties with the Metis of Ste. Madelaine in Manitoba, the Mi’kmaq in Nova Scotia, Inuit at Hebro, the Nutak in Labrador, the Sayisi Dene in Manitoba, not to mention violations involving the Aishihik, Champagne, White River, Ross River, and Pelly River in the Yukon; Gwa’Sala and ‘Nakwaxda’xw of B.C.; Mushuau Innu of Davis Inlet, among others, all arising out a governmental policy aimed at “appropriating” aboriginal land (91-93). King account raises questions concerning language and rhetoric. He notes that the term “appropriate;” often acts as a euphemism for “steal.” King documents further displacements across North America aimed at making room for hydroelectric projects that destroyed hunting and fishing resources, flooded villages and sacred sites, and forced further relocations among Indigenous communities at the Missouri River, Churchill Falls, Grande River, Kemano, Cheslatta, Grand Rapids, Chemawamin, Glen Canyon, and Columbia River, among others (93). These displacements were part of “Plan A,” aimed at annihilation.

Chapter 5, “We are sorry,” moves deeper into “Plan B,” aimed at assimilation, and excavates the horrid truths concerning overcrowding, physical abuse, poor clothing, malnutrition, rape, murder, tuberculosis, child labour, and mass deaths in the Residential school system, all stemming from in an effort to “kill the Indian and save

the man” through religion. We are reminded that Duncan Campbell Scott, then Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs, noted an average mortality rate at Residential schools of 30%, and a higher mortality rate in Alberta at 50%, only to dismiss those deaths as part of the “final solution of our Indian Problem” (114). Echoes of the Nazi annihilation of Jews in World War Two resonate. King’s data in this chapter and throughout the book is extremely well researched. For example, he cites the 1926 “Meriam Report” in the USA which reveals abuses of native rights, and the much later Canadian Hawthorne Report (1966) which blames natives for their own financial malaise, claiming they failed to take advantage of nearby resources. Assimilation through religion and education ultimately failed as part of “Plan B.” Meantime, some 150,000 native children ended up at residential schools, and nearly 50% lost their lives there. King curiously asks what reactions there would be if such deaths happened in suburban inner city schools across Canada (120-21). The litany of half-hearted apologies from religious groups and governmental bodies following these massive systemic failures belie sincerity in face of the reality of these histories.

The sixth chapter, “Like Cowboys and Indians,” covers native resistance in reaction to the ongoing “abrogation” of treaties across North America (134). King contextualizes these struggles against a backdrop that includes his personal experiences of protests against the Viet Nam War, peace rallies, Expo 67, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the Chicago Convention, Montreal separatist riots, N. Scott Momady winning the Pulitzer Prize and the American Indian Movement’s (AIM) engagement at Wounded Knee. He traces early organizations that eventually lead to the Assembly of First Nations, and observes that by 1990 most of AIM’s activists were either in jail or had their lives destroyed by governmental sanctions. King rationalizes AIM’s compulsion to make demands, instead of waiting for “blind justice” to make a “fair” decision that would never happen. King contends that waiting for justice is too often “A fool’s game” (158).

Chapter 7, “Forget About It,” turns to the next phase in dominant cultural attitudes that would prefer to forget the past. Here, I turn to my own subject-position (Latvian-Canadian) and to note that the attempted erasure of the past is common practice among imperial nations. Political analyst, Henry Meyer (2007) notes that the Russian Federation prefers erasing the Gulag Archipelago from its history even though a minimum of 20 million died in the Gulag, but current Russian history books which are required reading for Federation school-children understate the deaths to about 2 million (1). Understatement is a common linguistic device in a global war of rhetoric that would prefer to sweep many attempted genocides under the rug. King observes that North American history books understate the attempted cultural genocides of indigenous peoples, and instead turn to less controversial topics. We are asked to forget Wounded Knee, the murder of 300 Lakota women and children by the US 7th

Cavalry, The Trail of Tears, mercury poisoning at Grassy Narrows, residential schools, the slaughter of the buffalo, the 1969 White Paper, and Leonard Peltier, among other facts and events (160). Extending investigations by specialists on native culture such as Gerald Vizenor, King's research provides an invaluable and comprehensive account of past mis-deeds. For example, since annihilation and assimilation failed, King reveals the next goal as the elimination of "status Indians" (167). He reminds his reader of the 1991, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which made 440 recommendations, including the right to self-determination, as well as a unique form of dual citizenship, while recommending the abolition of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to be replaced by the Department of Aboriginal Relations and the Department of Indian and Inuit Services. The document proposes that a meeting to determine adequate housing take place within 10 years, and that natives be included in any of the Canadian government's future plans regarding First Nations governance, health, housing, education, women's rights, Metis' rights, and economic development. In case you're still curious, King reminds his readers that the commission was ignored along with other commissions on the Status of Women, Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Capital Punishment, the Electoral System (171). While the Royal Commission recommended the equivalent of a "distinct social status" for natives, King reminds us how Elijah Harper stopped the Meech Lake Accord because it proposed to recognize Quebec as a "distinct society" while ignoring Aboriginal people. In his re-historicization of governmental policies in this chapter, King reveals their systemic and institutionalized racism.

Chapter 8 offers a trick title, "What Indians Want" but notes that what really matters is what non-natives want.

Here readers learn why native sovereignty was never allowed, why there exist arguments over legal definitions of "native," and what challenges face Indigenous people in establishing an economic base (204). For King the heart of the matter of all of these is the matter of land ownership. King observes that "North Americans, all along, believed the private ownership of land would turn Indians into Whites, while Native people have learned that the control of land can allow us to remain ourselves" (213). The land itself is fundamental to the spiritual values and ethos of native peoples. King reminds us that from a native perspective, land is part of their cultural heritage and it should be sustained, not exploited to the point where it becomes unusable.

Chapter 9, "As Long as the Grass is Green," notes that Indigenous people retain their identity and culture through land. Even amidst numerous broken treaties, King notes that the land contains the languages, stories, and histories of Indigenous people as well as providing water, air, shelter, and food. Land is included in ceremonies and songs, and land is home. King contrasts non-native attitudes toward the land through

the example of the Alberta Tar Sands. He observes that the production of each barrel of oil requires at least three barrels of fresh water, 90 percent of which never makes it back into the watershed. The waste water ends up in enormous tailing ponds covering over fifty square kilometres, and, so poisonous that they kill on contact. “It is only a matter of time before one or more of the earthen dams that hold these ponds in place collapse and the toxic sludge is dumped into the Athabasca River” which would lead to ecocide (219). King explains that eliminating potential ecocides is challenging because that from a Native perspective, Indian land is Indian land, but from a quasi-legal North American perspective, Native land belongs to the federal government and is on indefinite loan to a particular category of Native People. Recent sites of contestation over land reveal continued abuses, Ipperwash, Stoney Point, Kinzua Dam in the Alleghenies, Oka, the Treaty of Medicine Creek, the Puget Sound War, and the Shaughnessy Golf and Country Club debacle in Vancouver. Such contestations involved attempts at seizing indigenous land without regard to treaty rights.

Chapter 10, “Happy Ever After,” examines two so-called indigenous land-claim “victories:” the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement. He contrasts the complex economic realities of “fee simple” and “trust land” with reference to Alaska and Nunavut (253). “Fee simple” involves ownership statutes where the owner holds title to and controls the property. In this case, the owner makes decisions about how the land is to be used without government oversight. However, “trust land” involves land owned by an individual indigenous person or a tribe but the title is held in trust by the federal government, which means that decisions about how the land might be used involves the direct oversight of the federal government. While land was issued to indigenous peoples through treaties, in many cases, the manner in which the land was to be used still remained in the hands of the Canadian or U.S. federal governments. King explains that under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANSCA), 44 million acres of land and \$963 million was assigned as “fee simple” land to the indigenous peoples (254). King observes that this land transfer arrangement seemed worthy at first. However, few people realized that under the ANSCA arrangement, tribal lands would be broken down into fee-simple pieces with the result that “Native people who had been part of a communal whole suddenly found themselves adrift as private landowners” (255). King reports that within one generation much of the land was lost and the people had scattered. There was no “happy ever after” in this case.

King’s tour through the history of North American Indigenous peoples and their mistreatment is densely packed but eminently readable. Towards the end of the book, King recalls a 1987 Memorandum of Agreement establishing Gwaii Hanas National Park Reserve and the Haida Heritage Site as sacred land. This was a small but important victory asserting that native culture is dynamic and resilient, but also hard

pressed (251). Appropriately, this book is dedicated to grandchildren, and their children's children for generations yet to come, or what is called "the seventh fire." The notion of the "seventh fire" involves a way of life that plans seven generations ahead. Those who are curious, might consider this long, sad, history of the inconvenient Indian, and by learning from it awaken their senses to a more humble attitude of mutual respect, and egalitarianism. But such awakenings can only arrive for those who are curious and eager to know. Knowledge of the past can be troubling. This book "curiously" asks why nothing was done to stop centuries of oppression. The recent findings and recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission indicate a profound lack of awareness and accountability involving the suffering endured by indigenous peoples. In the spirit of reconciliation, and given its assembly of key historical facts, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* should be compulsory reading for all high school and post-secondary school students across North America.

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Diagramming the Colonial Imagination: Black Subjectivity, Capitalism, and Modernity

JASON MICHELAKOS

Lindon Barrett. *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity*. University of Illinois Press, 2014. 264 pp.

Lindon Barrett (1961-2008) was a Professor of English and African American Studies at the University of California, Irvine from 1990 to 2007 before moving to the University of California, Riverside. He was a distinguished scholar and the author of *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (2009), published by Cambridge University Press. *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity* (2014) is unfinished, published after Barrett's tragic death, and edited by Justin A. Joyce, Dwight A. McBride and John Carlos Rowe. The book is comprised of an introduction written by John Carlos Rowe, five chapters, and an epilogue by Justin A. Joyce and Dwight A. McBride. Both the introduction and epilogue provide editorial interventions and a substantive roadmap to the monograph. The editorial team makes clear that Barrett's unfinished manuscript consisted of four chapters, and that aside from missing an introduction and conclusion it is probable that two more chapters would have been added to the finished work. The fifth and final chapter of the book is an essay Barrett had prepared for another publication.

Notwithstanding the opaque prose and sometimes fragmented historical trajectory of Barrett's analysis, *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity* offers an inimitable contribution into how the conceptual treatment of "racial blackness" – as considered through its reified cultural, economic, literary, philosophical, and political registers – shaped the relationship between Euro-American colonialism, capitalism, and modernity. *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity* can be divided into two parts, the first of which undertakes a genealogical analysis of infra-human subjectivity in the Atlantic plantation paradigm to explore how the polysemic discourses of "racial blackness," gleaned in the epistemic machinations of colonialism, capitalism, and modernity, consolidate sovereign power for the slavocracy and ultimately groom the emergence of modernity's white supremacist nation-state *par excellence* (The United States); and the second, which considers how the discursive morphology and material technologies of "racial blackness" that helped shape the

capitalistic market economy, negotiate an isomorphic dynamic between the colonial imperium and the rise of Western modernity through the autobiographical slave narrative.

Barrett demonstrates how “racial blackness” is not just a Manichaeian hypostasis of the colonial imagination to typologize an infrahuman subject and justify a diffuse spectacle of sovereign and disciplinary violence through manoeuvrings of acquisition, displacement, genocide, and coercive labour exploitation, but an aporia that effectively ruptures the epistemological fluency of race. Barrett locates the “discontinuity” of “racial blackness” in the legislative apparatus of the United States by revealing how the constitutional entrenchment of slave-labour, fugitive slave laws, and general economic and political disenfranchisement of the racialized black subject effectively belies the *fata morgana* of liberty, equality, and fraternity espoused in the “American civic.” In this respect, Barrett’s conceptualization of “racial blackness” functions as a grid of colonial intelligibility through its capacity to commission not only an ontological erasure, but the animation of a racialized *being* that is transposed to capture, commoditization, and subjugation. Barrett also illustrates how unreachable and hollow intercessions of bourgeois morality, civilization, and propriety are served up by the modern political state.

The first chapter of Barrett’s monograph, “The Conceptual Impossibility of Racial Blackness: History, the Commodity, and Diasporic Modernity,” carries out an examination of “racial blackness” in the Atlantic slave trade and Euro-American planocracy between the sixteenth and nineteenth-centuries. Barrett’s shibboleth for the market economy, the “ideally infinite arena of ideally infinite exchange,” is an epistemological abstraction that has waxed the abstract ideological logic of the capitalist economy – acquisition, exchange, and utility – into the governmental fabric of the modern political community. Chronologies of colonial conquest, displacement, genocide, and labour exploitation are explored throughout the chapter to provide context to the social, legal, and political management of race in the United States. For Barrett, the growth of the geopolitical capitalist economy born from the Atlantic arena reconfigures the nature of sovereign power from an interest of monarchical government to one where the disciplinary rationality of the “modern civic” comes to express itself through procedures of state racism. This chapter offers a robust historical analysis of slavery, capitalism, and modernity, vis-à-vis Alexander Butchart, Richard Dunn, David Elits, Paul Lovejoy, Achille Mbembe, Sidney Mintz, Ann Laura Stoler, among others.

The second chapter, “Making the Flesh Word: Binomial Being and Representational Presence,” examines how the concept of “binomial being” in the 1789 autobiographical slave narrative, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas*

Vassa, the African, betrays Western modernity's presentation of a transparent, essentialist, and unitary black subject. Barrett's nuanced reading of the autobiographical slave narrative reveals how the bifurcated subjectivity of Equiano/Vassa obfuscates the naked violence of modernity. The "binomial" structure ultimately problematizes the ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological coordinates of racial identity for the "modern civil subject."

Chapter three, "Captivity, Desire, Trade: The Forging of National Form," turns to a more protracted analysis into how the antebellum fugitive slave narrative stations "racial blackness" as an organizing principle of white supremacist American state-craft through homologies of political disenfranchisement, juridical exclusion, economic marginality, and physical violence. Barrett refers to the Fugitive Slave Acts (1793 and 1850) and to landmark court decisions like *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* (1842), *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), and *Ableman v. Booth* (1859), as well as to larger macro-political events such as the Northwest Ordinance (1787), the Missouri Compromise (1820), and the Kansas Nebraska Act (1854) to illustrate how contestations of juridico-political power shaped the racial personality of the United States.

"The Intimate Civic," which is the final chapter of Barrett's original manuscript, considers how the ex-slave narrator navigates the heteromorphic experience of his or her autobiographical testimony. The ex-slave narrator's identity is problematized by a compelling declaration of *sui iuris*, which projects an anti-colonial *logos* of agency, freedom, and *being*, while at the same time having to succumb to the violent subjugation under the modern state, in Giorgio Agamben's terms, as *homo sacer*, by repeating the details of their psychic and somatic trauma. "Racial blackness" as the *raison d'état* of civic modernity in the United States, which includes practices of xenophobia, dehumanization, and repression, demands the sacrifice of the ex-slave narrator's body to the West's normative raciological grammar. The racialized body is then recovered as an "artifact" for liberation.

Along with a continued analysis of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, the third and fourth chapters of Barrett's monograph navigate a diverse catalogue of autobiographical slave narratives, which include the following: David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly to Those of the United States of America* (1829); Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831); Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) and *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); William Grimes's *Narrative of the Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave* (1855); and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).

The supplemental and concluding chapter, “Modernism and the Affects of Racial Blackness,” surveys the Harlem Renaissance through George Schuyler’s “The Negro-Art-Hokum” (1926) and Langston Hughes’s “The Negro Artist and Racial Mountain” (1926). Barrett considers how these two works undertake a critical response to the normative conventions of Western modernity, and its concomitant currencies of culture, technology, art, aesthetics, and consumerism, to carve out spaces of African American identity and knowledge.

The greatest achievement of Barrett’s monograph is his genealogical approach to identifying the relationship between racial subjectivity, capitalism, and Western modernity through the autobiographical slave narrative. While Barrett identifies how “racial blackness” operates as an “epistemic discontinuity” within the cartography of the mercantile/capitalist Atlantic economy and Western modernity, the diachronic and conceptual dimensions of infrahuman subjectivity are given a limited treatment. A more exhaustive historical consideration of how Eurocentric discourses of religious, cultural, and scientific racism equated blackness with primitiveness, contamination, and expendability would have broadened the genealogical arc of “racial blackness.” This could have been achieved by interrogating how *dispositifs* of racial subjectivity, such as the Curse of Ham, the Spanish obsession with pure blood, and climatic theories that identified black peoples as suited for plantation labour, for example, spawned diverse systems of hierarchical classification. This complex etymological archive of “racial blackness,” as a discursive and material field of the colonial imagination could then explore how contestations of creolisation, syncretism, and hybridity further inscribe the racialized body.

While Barrett identifies how the necropolitical economic rationalization of the slaveocracy to capture, incarcerate, transport, commoditize, and ultimately exploit enslaved African peoples throughout the Caribbean and United States was a function of sovereign and disciplinary power, he overlooks how practices of colonial governmentality also realized an “epistemic discontinuity” within Western modernity. The “discontinuity” of “racial blackness” is located not just in the macropolitical disciplinary procedures of American constitutionalism (surveillance, containment, and punishment) that negate liberalism’s appeal for liberty, equality, and fraternity, but in the microphysical permutations of governmental plantation management in the nineteenth-century (desire, incentive, and security) that offer the enslaved access to marriage, medical care, increased provisions, financial rewards, and intermittent relief from the hardships of field labour to encourage childbirth on the plantation. Colonial governmentality in this milieu of amelioration transitions the juridico-institutional and ethico-political scope of “racial blackness” under slavery to a more polyvalent managerial bulwark that can reinforce protocols of capitalist exploitation

after emancipation.

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Spectral Places, Subjectivities and Politics

JULIANA MARTÍNEZ

María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, eds. *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*. Bloomsbury, 2013. 569 pp.

With an all-star Table of Contents that includes Giorgio Agamben, Arjun Appadurai, Ulrich Baer, Jacques Derrida, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among others, *The Spectralities Reader* compiles the founding texts of what the editors call the “spectral turn,” as well as the more salient critiques that have fuelled one of the more productive debates in the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts over the last twenty-five years. In the introduction, María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren define the spectral turn as the change that occurred at the end of the twentieth century when ghosts ceased to be perceived “as possible actual entities, plot devices and clichés of common parlance” and became “influential conceptual metaphors permeating global (popular) culture and academia alike” (1). *The Spectralities Reader* deals with this rise of the ghost as analytical tool. However, while advancing the notion of the spectral turn, Blanco and Peeren also distance themselves from previous uses of the term “turn.” They highlight that, by definition, the spectral cannot produce a stable epistemological discourse and therefore urge us to read the spectral turn “not only as a turn *to* the spectral, but also as the spectralization *of* the turn—its unmooring from defined points of departure, notions of linear progress, and fixed destinations” (32). Thus the plural “spectralities” in the title. The spectral turn needs to acknowledge that the ghost as such cannot be known, and is never constituted by a single object of knowledge (9).

More cartography than chronology, *The Spectralities Reader* is divided into six sections that aptly navigate the most prolific debates sparked by the spectral turn: 1) theory about the concept of the spectral itself, 2) politics, 3) technologies of vision and media, 4) gender, sexuality and race, 5) space and mapping, and 6) history and historiography. *The Reader* also includes a general introduction and six section introductions written by the editors. In the general introduction Blanco and Peeren mark the publication of Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1993) as the point of departure of our spectral journey, and the catalyst of unprecedented academic interest in all things spectral. While the editors acknowledge important antecedents like the work of Terry Castle in *the Apparitional Lesbian* (1993), and Anthony Vidler’s

The Architectural Uncanny (1992), Derrida is credited for rehabilitating the ghost using precisely the two systems of thought that in the first part of the twentieth century produced some of the most scathing criticism against it: psychoanalysis and Marxism. As Blanco and Peeren write, in *Specters of Marx* “the ghost ceases to be seen as obscurantist and becomes, instead, a figure of clarification with a specifically ethical and political potential” (7).

“The Spectral Turn,” the first part of the volume, reflects on the spread of spectrality as a cross-disciplinary instrument of analysis from the 1990s to the present. The articles in this section show “the existence, survival, scope, uses, and effects of what appears as ‘the spectral turn’” (32). Because of its foundational character, the most salient contribution to this segment of the book is the interview with Jacques Derrida conducted by Bernard Stiegler in 1993 and published in *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews* (1996). The interview has the advantage of condensing Derrida’s thought on spectrality and haunting in a more accessible way than his longer works on the subject. Most importantly, the editors highlight the notion that Derrida’s alternative ontology is not only a theory, but an ethics; they frame haunting as a way of thinking sustained by a welcoming relationality that demands responsibility and accountability.

A major strength of the book is balance. To achieve this, Blanco and Peeren offer texts that question or complement each other. In this first part of the volume, Jeffrey Andrew’s introduction to *The Spectral Turn* and Roger Luckhurst’s excerpts from “The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the ‘Spectral Turn’” point to the limits of Derrida’s theory. For example, Andrew’s text challenges Derrida’s unacknowledged reliance on western, Judaeo-Christian thought, while Luckhurst criticizes “the generalized economy of haunting” (35) that he perceives in Derrida’s work and calls for more emphasis for historical and site-specific analysis.

“Spectropolitics: Ghosts of the Global Contemporary” addresses “a politics *of or for* specters” (93). This section stresses that the ghost is culturally specific, and cautions against the rise of a “spectral Esperanto” (92). The essays in this section argue that cultural and historical rooting is key so that the spectral can perform a much-needed “reconceptualization of the frameworks of postmodernism, postcoloniality, materialism, nationalism, and globalization” (20). Taking cultural, historical and geographical specificities into account, the spectral becomes a productive theoretical tool that allows a more comprehensive understanding of the operations and effects of globalization, and underscores how these processes make certain subjects prone to social erasure. The highlights of this section are the excerpts from Achille Mbembe and Arjun Appadurai which invoke spectrality *in* and *from* a non-western historical and academic context. Both of these texts remind us that “there are no truly global

ghosts” (97), and that in matters of the spectral, careful contextualization and site-specific analysis is a must.

“The Ghost in the Machine: Spectral Media” looks at the sociocultural impact of technologies primarily associated with vision and hearing, and explores how their development and consolidation was, and still is, profoundly linked to discourses and practices associated with the supernatural. The articles in this section historicize the scientific revolutions of the mid- and late nineteenth century, explore its relationship to the innovations of our current time, and focus on how even though they seek to dispel the ghost by reaffirming the notion of a disenchanted world through the privileging of a scientific form of knowledge, their modes of working are in themselves spectral and thus bring the ghost back.

Tom Gunning’s “To Scan a Ghost: The Ontology of Mediated Vision” is perhaps the most comprehensive essay in this section. By way of a thorough exploration of the history of the “phantom” in visibility studies, Gunning explores the crisis of the senses that the specter continues to produce *despite of* and *through* technology. “Modes of Avisibility: Psychoanalysis - X-ray – Cinema,” Akira Mizuta Lippit’s fascinating microhistory of 1895, also stands out. In 1895, the three inventions mentioned in the title revolutionized science, but, more importantly, according to Lippit’s reading, they constitute *phenomenologies of the inside* that challenged previous notions of what could and could not be seen. By altering the limits of the visual, these scientific innovations initiated a new era of spectral projections that not only “changed the terms by which interiority was viewed, conceived and imagined” (203), but also redefined the meaning of the visual itself.

Part Four shows how the categories of gender, sexuality, and race are not only spectral themselves, but also stratify spectrality, underscoring that the categories of gender, sexuality and race are “non-limitative examples of how instantiations of ghosts and haunting are linked to the histories and social positions of specific subjects” (309). This adds layers of complexity to the specter by framing it as a more differentiated concept that would make it more relevant “to the specific past, present, and future struggles for recognition, respect and justice of those identified as non-masculine, non-heterosexual, and/or non-white” (20).

“Ghostwriting”, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s 1995 landmark response to *Specters of Marx*, opens the fourth section of the volume. In what is one of the best-known and more pertinent critiques of Derrida’s seminal book, Spivak points out that *Specters of Marx* is centered on masculinity and overlooks how capitalism specifically exploits the labor of subaltern women. In contrast, Spivak proposes to mobilize the spectral as an analytical tool with the potential to “redress the silencing exclusion that char-

acterizes particular hegemonic histories and traditions” (311). The last essay of this part, Renée L. Bergland’s “Indian Ghosts and American subjects” provides a fruitful contrast to Spivak’s article. By studying the prevalence of Indian ghosts, both in the western imaginary and in the Native American communities, Bergland claims that the ghost neither allows for a challenging of the status quo, nor makes the voice of the marginalized audible. Instead, it consolidates the exclusionary matrix that precipitated the founding of the nation-state and props up the status quo.

The fifth section, “Possessions: Spectral Places,” deals with the spatial dimension of the spectral. The essays selected show that focusing on the temporal disruption of the spectral is important but limited, and that this aspect cannot be separated from the realm of space. This part compiles a powerhouse of contemporary thinkers. Anthony Vidler, Ulrich Baer, David Matless and Giorgio Agamben inscribe haunting into our—individual and collective—experiences of space, and remind us that each place has its own history that both haunts *it* and haunts *us* in particular, differentiated, ways.

The last part, “Haunted Historiographies,” focuses on the notion of historiography as such. It “explores that ethical and political play that the writer/teller of both place and event must engage with in order to produce a responsible account of what has transpired” (483), and pays special attention to the entanglement of the production of history with notions of possession, the gothic and the uncanny. Alexander Nemerov’s “Seeing Ghosts: *The Turn of the Screw* and Art History” is the essay that most adeptly illuminates these ideas. By returning to Henry James’s classic story, Nemerov provocatively argues that the governess of the tale could be taken as model for the art historian, because the governess, “like the historian, searches for something that may or may not reveal itself” (485). Through her spectral search, the governess leads the way for what a responsible, self-conscious process of history-making would be like, and highlights the many ways in which “the process of writing history is in fact a haunted (and haunting) practice (483).

This wide range of topics should not confuse the reader and lead her to think that the spectral is an all-purpose theoretical proxy. Blanco and Peeren acknowledge that one of the biggest concerns with the spectral in general, and with their own book in particular, is that in recent years the ghost has become so popular that the concept has been over used to a point in which it “threatens to break as it is stretched too thin” (166). This excessive usage of the concept can be exemplified in a 2010 exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York titled *Haunted: Contemporary Photography / Video / Performance*. Blanco and Peeren argue that the works compiled in the exposition had little in common and were a case in point of the trivialization of the term. To avoid this anything-goes approach, the editors use another work from

the exhibit as an example of their methodology and purpose. In “Untitled” (1989) by Cuban-born American visual artist Felix González-Torres, Blanco and Peeren see a means to visualize their conception of the spectral. The editors claim that like González-Torres’s work, *The Spectralities Reader*

provides a tentative—by no means impenetrable—casing for a collection of texts that interconnect and are ordered, but could well be shuffled and rearranged. The puzzle pieces, in turn, convey our desire to stress the multiplicity and heterogeneity of recent conceptualizations of spectrality, which originate in different disciplines and approach ghosts and haunting from numerous angles in order to elucidate a variety of cultural objects, histories, and socio-political issues. (18)

And they are right. *The Spectralities Reader* provides a thorough compilation of the main texts that have both consolidated and questioned the spectral turn in the last twenty years. By reprinting foundational texts alongside their most incisive critiques, and welcoming the voices of a diversity of scholars from non-western traditions, as well as those who question the andro-heterocentric scope of academia, *The Spectralities Reader* is a valuable tool for anyone seeking to better understand the depth and reach of the spectral turn in both academic circles and popular culture. Furthermore, *The Spectralities Reader* is an indispensable volume for anyone who is interested in specters and is willing to be haunted by them.

Juliana Martínez earned her doctorate in Romance Languages and Literatures from the University of California, Berkeley. Professor Martínez specializes in the representation of violence in Latin America in both film and literature, focusing primarily in Colombia. She also works on gender studies and queer theory within the Latin American cultural production. She currently teaches at the Department of World Languages and Cultures at American University, Washington, DC.

Leftist Politics on the Couch

SIMON ORPANA

Charles Wells. *The Subject of Liberation*. Bloomsbury, 2014. 245 pp.

When was the last time you left work early for an appointment with your Lacanian analyst? This is not the set-up to yet another Žižekian attempt at instructive humour, but rather one of the possible implications of Charles Wells' argument for how Lacanian psychoanalysis can help us define and move towards a more liberated society. What starts as a rigorous and insightful reading of Žižek's *The Ticklish Subject*—one that adopts Lacanian character structures to address the leftist divide between “perverse” identitarian politics and “hysterical” class-oriented Marxism(s)—develops, in the second half of the book, into Wells' novel Lacanian solution to this divide. The result is a provocative intervention into the ideological and affective deadlocks that beset academic discourse on the left.

Wells maps out this dilemma in his first two chapters. Here, the “old leftist problem” whereby attempts to challenge the dominant socio-political order risk ultimately strengthening and reinforcing it, is linked to the universalist Enlightenment project of defining a privileged political subject (workers), and a key emancipatory conflict (class struggle). Wells follows Žižek's Lacanian lead, associating this position with the character structure of the hysteric who, in the deadlock between Law and desire, sides with the former over the latter (27). In contrast, the “new leftist problem” of “how to avoid taking up a position of oppressive power in the effort to induce the Other to accept liberation” is linked to the Lacanian perverse character structure and associated with postmodern identity politics (25). For the pervert, every attempt at universalism harbours a secret will-to-power under the guise of Law, while for the hysteric, the pervert's transgressions fail to address the true barrier to emancipation, which does not reside in the Law as such but in the secret complicity of prohibition and enjoyment (28-29).

This mapping might be accused of oversimplification: does the contemporary left really fall into two broad camps, each limited by its suspicions about the other's position? Do actual people not harbour a mixture of perverse and hysteric tendencies, along with other possible character types? Though not explicitly addressed in the text, Wells' Lacano-Žižekian schema anticipates this response, which is actually the pervert's scepticism of universalist categories, and so we are delivered back to the heart of the very deadlock in question. A vote for the usefulness of this schema thus lies in its

capaciousness: its rejection is anticipated by its very categories, compelling the reader to at least see the argument through. Furthermore, though Žižek's tendency is to side with the hysterical position against the pervert, Wells' approach turns a psychoanalytic eye on Žižek himself to chart an agile path through the described impasse.

Noting that Žižek (in chapter 5 of *The Ticklish Subject*) addresses Judith Butler as his Other—as the most sophisticated contemporary author to articulate the perverse position opposed to Žižek's universalist hysteria—Wells highlights Žižek's own ambivalence; both solutions, in Žižek's account, are wrong and worthy of critique, but one position (the hysteric's) is less wrong than the other (35). Reading Žižek's address to Butler through the lens of Hamlet confronting his own doubt as to his mother Gertrude's desire, Wells positions Žižek as staging what we might define as his (Žižek's) primal scene: because Žižek's Other (the identitarian leftist exemplified by Butler) ultimately refuses to “hear” the hysterical position that holds to a universal subject and plan for liberation, the hysteric (Žižek) is forced to repeatedly “act out” his excessive doubt—to actually perform this doubt as a self-critical stance towards his own hysterical position (34). Žižek's Lacanian somersaults in service of class politics simultaneously perform the deconstructionist doubt and ambiguity that they address. However, as Wells points out, this strategy leaves Žižek in a bind insofar as, by attempting to mollify his opponent through performing her own theory, Žižek simultaneously becomes blocked from the resolution of his own quandary: “So long as the Other remains deaf to Žižek's message, so must he” (34).

The solution, whereby a spirit of emancipation is redeemed out of the “failed and guilty body” of the left through an act of addressing the Other, is developed in the second half of Wells' book (chapters 9-16), which offers a template for rescuing both perversity and hysteria from their inner contradictions (21). Before making this intervention, Wells usefully details how the leftist division structures contemporary ideological formations, and why psychoanalysis comprises a privileged set of theoretical tools for addressing this situation. Chapter 3 provides an instructive tour of Jean Laplanche's theories of seduction and masochism in order to elucidate the intersubjective nature of the unconscious—which arises in response to the subject's anxiety as to the desire of the (m)Other, whose actions are, in turn, overdetermined by her own mother's anxiety-inducing desire, and so on (44-47). Chapter 4 uses Žižek's idea of the “institutional unconscious” (the unwritten rules that accompany the official social mandate) to explain how the affective economy of traditional ideology allows subjects to identify with their social role while still indulging in otherwise forbidden, sadomasochistic enjoyment, inflicted on vulnerable others. Chapter 5 offers the psychoanalytic response to unconscious, discriminatory desire, traversing the fantasy to recognize that the “big Other” who guarantees one's social role is ultimately self-contradictory and ignorant.

Chapter 6 turns towards contemporary, “liberal, tolerant multiculturalism” which promises a freer and more tolerant society but conceals sadomasochistic enjoyment in the imposition of “politically correct” measures, all the while ignoring the depoliticized context of global capitalism that makes this regime possible. In revisiting this chapter, the recent example of the fall from grace of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s former superstar, Jian Ghomeshi, offers interesting resonances with the complex Wells describes. The short Chapter 7 launches a scathing critique of this position of “reflexive sadomasochism” whereby seemingly progressive, contemporary subjects attempt to shield themselves from the true coordinates of their enjoyment, and the actual effects of their actions upon others. Driving further nails into the coffin of “postmodern ideology,” Chapter 8 details the “unholy conspiracy” between what Wells calls “(pseudo) fundamentalism” and (seemingly) tolerant, liberal capitalism. Like Žižek, Wells see these two positions as dialectically entwined, self-reinforcing responses to the eclipse of traditional ideological authority: in the case of fundamentalism, the big Other who has been evicted from the symbolic realm returns in the Real as a direct authority, while in the latter the absence of symbolic authority causes a proliferation of “small big Others in the Real.” Wells provides interesting and instructive examples of this proliferation of folk devils, from insistent, petty harassment to the posited evil geniuses of conspiracy theories (102).

Surprisingly, it is a quality of actual (versus ersatz, contemporary) fundamentalism that will return in Chapter 13 as the defining trait of the reformed, post-analytic perverse character type; the indifference of true fundamentalists to all Others who do not share their particular fixation is the exact opposite of the mutual fascination that (pseudo-)fundamentalists and (seemingly) tolerant liberals harbour for each other (105-7). By admitting that advocacy for this or that particular group necessarily contains an exclusionary gesture due to the particularizing nature of enjoyment itself, identity politics can shed its paradoxical intolerance of intolerance, the disavowed pleasure taken in a sometimes heavy-handed policing of discourse and activism. This does not mean giving up on solidarity and coalitional politics, but rather allows these projects to be undertaken from a position unburdened of the resentment and disavowal that often hinder us.

In these chapters Wells clears up many of the conundrums that Žižek’s Hegelian-Lacanian acrobatics have often raised for me, and Wells’ book, if it ended here, would be a very useful contribution to Žižek scholarship and an aid to readers of *The Ticklish Subject* in particular. However, Wells’ articulation of the postmodern deadlock, though initially driven by an attempt to systematize—to discern, or possibly to impose, an underlying structure to the convolutions of Žižek’s thought—ultimately

leads Wells to abandon Žižek's solution to the leftist problem (the idea that hysteria and perversion are both wrong, but the former is less wrong than the latter), and to form his own response.

In its second half, Wells' book emerges as a performance of the very theory he is writing: out of the failure to find, in Žižek, a solution to the leftist deadlock emerges a novel perspective that, in fine dialectical form, solves the antinomy by examining and transforming the presuppositions upon which it is based. This innovation begins in Chapter 9, where Wells asserts Žižek's idea of social antagonism as a "diagonal division" that exists not only between, but also within social groups in what might be described as a fractal manner, extending from the macro level of social totality "all the way down" to the micro level of the self-divided individual psyche. This chapter is important for guarding Wells' psychoanalytic model from being relegated to the realm of the purely individual; because the divisions that structure larger society are reflected in, and ultimately the product of, self-divided psyches, the political dimensions of psychoanalysis as essential to collective social transformation are secured (120). Furthermore, by taking antagonism as a fundamental principle structuring both individual psyches and larger society, Lacanian psychoanalysis allows for a unique "meta" perspective on politics, as Wells highlights when he points out that "what makes political perspectives antagonistic towards one another is precisely the difference between their specific fantasies of how to do away with the antagonism that divides them" (121).

In Chapter 10, Wells adopts Lacan's theory of the four discourses as four distinct ways of addressing one's Other in relation to the problem of antagonism in the Real. Here, the discourses of the Master (which takes the form of imperative), the Hysteric (interrogative), and the University (declarative) are mapped onto the character structures, with the hysteric's eponymous discourse harbouring the secret desire for an "adequate master," while the pervert adopts the discourse of the University, cloaking his desire in superego injunctions buttressed by expert knowledge. In response to these hidden deferrals to authority, the discourse of the Analyst (which corresponds to no particular character type, but has structural similarities to that of the pervert) uses silence to confront both the hysteric and the pervert with the need to take ethical responsibility for his or her character. To further articulate the unique strength of the analyst's position, Chapter 11 ingeniously introduces the Hegelian logic of the short circuit, "in which form and content are interrelated" (145), a move that becomes important for rescuing Žižek from charges of radical decisionism in Chapter 16, and that, I would add, prevents Wells' Lacanian vision of liberation from slipping into the mode of chronic deferral that characterizes the deconstructionist's obsessive stance (critiqued in Chapter 2).

Chapters 12 to 14 describe the “post-analytic” subjectivities that the hysteric and pervert assume once they have traversed the disavowed contents of their respective political fantasies. The form/content short circuit dictates that, though the analyst’s discourse of silence opens a purely formal, necessarily contentless space of freedom in which a subject is forced to take responsibility for the choice of his or her own character structure, the very form of this space demands that the choice produced will be an ethical one. In other words, once truly confronted with the space of terrifying freedom privileged by the analyst’s discourse, any subject (whether pervert or hysteric) cannot but choose in a way that extends the same space of freedom to his or her Other(s). It is this fact that rescues Žižek’s hysterical position from radical decisionism (in which any choice whatsoever, even for repression and evil, would have to be sanctioned). And it is this same confrontation with “subjective destitution” that transforms the pre-analytic hysterical type into the post-analytic analyst—the one who realizes that the single privileged subject and narrative of history is the universal subject who must occupy the space of radical decision, deciding for him or herself the name of the key antagonism that structures social reality (158). While the post-analytic hysteric thus becomes “the analyst” who guards the space of radical, open decision, the post-analytic pervert becomes “the lover”—the one who has decided upon her or his fidelity to a singular, necessarily partial and imperfect revolutionary subject, with sublime indifference to all other considerations.

The remaining two chapters detail the larger social implications of Wells’ theory, introducing the idea of “the universal right to psychoanalysis” (Chapter 15) and a nuanced articulation of “Bartleby politics” based on the post-analytic hysteric’s refusal of mastery (Chapter 16). Wells’ Žižekian fidelity to antagonism in the Real helps turn the internal limit of leftist thought—the stumbling block of the impossibility of non-oppressive political unity and cohesion—into the very conditions of liberation for society as a whole, offering a new way of “relating to the impossibility of political unity or liberation that would be preferable to, and more liberated than, the one we have now” (7). Perhaps not surprisingly given Lacan’s accounts of the circular nature of drive, this manoeuvre delivers Wells-as-post-hysterical-analyst very close to where he started: to Žižek’s fascination with the pervert’s (Butler’s) position of radical openness to the heterogeneous Other. A key difference emerges, however, in that, having traversed their respective fantasies, a way is now opened for the pervert and hysteric to hear/understand the traces of their own positions in that of the Other.

Wells’ solution to the leftist deadlock asserts Lacanian analysis—the discourse of the analyst—as a means by which leftists of various stripes might transverse the fantasies that tether them to postmodern ideological structures, and thus jointly reconstitute the left’s position as a vanguard of progressive social change. In this process, the hysteric’s fixation on working class struggle is stripped of its particular historical

inflections to become fidelity to the (necessarily empty) structuring principle of antagonism itself (presumably opening a space for exploited workers to figure it out for ourselves), while the pervert's contortionism in service of impossible inclusivity is transformed into focused attention on one particular subject and struggle (allowing one, for instance, to love the working class—or another revolutionary subject—despite all failures and foibles).

This performative and transformative process whereby each character type effectively takes on the characteristics of the other might resemble Carl Jung's use of the ancient Greek term *enantiodromia*, or the tendency of things to turn into their opposites. However, Wells' deployment of the logic of the short circuit rescues his account from a merely circular, a-historical oscillation between opposites: the fact that the form of the psychoanalytic decision inflects content ensures that the very act of deciding has a reflexive, transformative effect on the content being decided upon (146-51). This progressive, historical element can be further emphasized by noting that Wells' treatment of character types and their transformations, though they are presented as totalizing structures that cover all of human possibility, are, like the Oedipus complex, also the insistent products of social relations under particular historical conditions. As such, the Lacanian character types (articulated via the four discourses) might very well offer the contemporary keys to a concerted, left-led social transformation, after which new possibilities for subjectivity and social organization could give rise to very different constellations of problems than the ones *The Subject of Liberation* so productively addresses.

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Queering the Politics of Life and Death

CHRISTINE QUINAN

Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco, eds. *Queer Necropolitics*. Routledge, 2014. 216 pp.

In the opening to his celebrated essay “Necropolitics,” Achille Mbembe invokes a series of questions that offer a corrective to Michel Foucault’s established notion of biopower:

But under what practical conditions is the right to kill, to allow to live, or to expose to death exercised? Who is the subject of this right? What does the implementation of such a right tell us about the person who is thus put to death and about the relation of enmity that sets that person against his or her murderer? Is the notion of biopower sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective? War, after all, is as much a means of achieving sovereignty as a way of exercising the right to kill. Imagining politics as a form of war, we must ask: What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power? (Mbembe 2003: 12)

Now a decade after Mbembe’s groundbreaking work, the recently published collection of essays titled *Queer Necropolitics* takes up similar questions, this time with a queer slant; that is, it maintains a clear investment in “queering the necropolitical and of interrogating claims to queerness in the face of death, both spectacular and banal” (2). Co-edited by Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco, this timely volume provides a new framework for analyzing life and death in an ever-increasingly neoliberal environment that folds in some previously othered others while marking other others for social exclusion and extinction. It actively draws upon queer theory, gender studies, social movement theory, critical race studies, postcolonial theory, legal studies, sociology, and media studies, and stands to make significant contributions to these fields in its own right.

In their engagement with the politics of life and death, Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco are, like Mbembe, clearly invested in asking who gets to live and who must

die (or who must live and who is let die), but they push this even further. While approaching this question through a queer lens might suggest to some a narrowing of focus, the collection effectively opens up the field of inquiry to more possibilities, both critical and speculative. The co-editors summarize both the stakes and the timeliness of this work's emergence: "This book comes at a time of growing interest in the necropolitical as a tool to make sense of the symbiotic co-presence of life and death, manifested ever more clearly in the cleavages between rich and poor, citizens and non-citizens (and those who can be stripped of citizenship); the culturally, morally, economically valuable and the pathological; queer subjects invited into life and queerly abjected populations marked for death" (2). Certain (queer) bodies are cultivated for life and (re)production, while others are marked for death or are let die, constructing a dangerous line between legitimate subjects and illegitimate non-subjects. As this volume makes clear, among these "non-subjects" are, in particular, queer and trans people of color who experience racism, homophobia, and transphobia along with other forms of oppression and subjection, including xenophobia, sexism, poverty, ableism, and criminalization.

In their introduction to the collection, Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco lay out how the concept of necropolitics can be taken up in order to examine the acceleration of premature death "for those who are unassimilable into liberal regimes of rights and representation and thus become disposable" (1). In this sense, the volume positions itself in relation to growing debates on the place of rights discourses, which, although late-coming to LGBT politics, have become formative of notions of "progress" and "progressiveness." Similarly, the text makes a statement on liberal gay politics' lack of engagement with coloniality and related questions around militarization, securitization, and incarceration. Indeed, many contributors (e.g., Sarah Lamble, Sima Shakhari, Morgan Bassichis and Dean Spade) show how queer complicities are central to neoliberal regimes of productivity and LGBT-related legislation.

Despite its professed focus on both the spectacular and the banal, *Queer Necropolitics* maintains a particular attachment to uncovering everyday death worlds, daily practices that result in the exhaustion and diminishment of certain populations. Tensions between inclusion and exclusion are also central to the volume, with a clear warning made by the editors early on: inclusion itself can be a deadly endeavor. Many essays in the volume (particularly chapters by Aren Aizura, Elijah Adiv Edelman, and Jason Ritchie) attempt to respond to this notion of deadly inclusion as evoked in a question posed in the introduction: "If modern genders and sexualities (both dominant and subordinate) have been formed against constitutive Others whose primitivity is signified as perversity – and as a failure to perform proper gender binaries – what is at stake in seeing inclusion through or into these identities?" (3-4). Here, citizenship and border control (both physical and symbolic), particularly under conditions of

settler colonialism and occupation, become key thematics that undergird many of the volume's essays.

Drawing upon Jasbir Puar's (2007) articulation of "queer necropolitics," the collection takes as its point of departure the idea that, as eloquently stated by Posocco in Chapter 3, queerness marks "a terrain of biopolitical articulation in late liberalism and more specifically a reconfiguration of the terrain where subjects and populations whose rights-bearing capacities have remained in question... dwell" (81). "Queer" is taken up as an anti-identitarian move, countering a focus on identity categories like 'gay,' 'lesbian,' or 'transgender' and challenging heteronormative, homonormative, and transnormative assumptions and privileges. Posocco continues:

Queerness here connotes those whose bodies are marked by racialized and sexualized technologies and produced through the *dispositifs* of race and sexuality for death, including social death. The emphasis is on how queerness disrupts networks of power, access, control, normativity, and most importantly, necropolitical networks. In this view, queerness no longer fits within temporal structures of unhampered access to futurity. On the contrary, the temporalities of queerness are oriented towards the past and the (always deferred) future tense of justice *à venir*. (84)

Queer necropolitics, then, serves as both a theoretical point of departure and "a concept-metaphor that illuminates and connects a range of spectacular and mundane forms of killing and 'letting die' while simultaneously radically reimagining the meanings, purchase and stakes inherent in 'queerness' as a category of analysis and critique" (4).

The book as a whole also takes inspiration from Orlando Patterson (1982) and Lauren Berlant (2007) and their respective theoretical interventions. Patterson's "social death," formulated in relationship to slavery, is a process of alienation and exclusion of the slave from the community, and relies on a suspension of personhood and belonging, whether through institutions like law or social structures like rituals and symbols. Berlant's "slow death" refers to "the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence" (754). Together, they provide a helpful theoretical framework that highlights the importance of combining historical perspectives with analyses of present-day neoliberal policies that drain social resources and further marginalize precarious populations.

A preface by Sunera Thobani sets a rigorous and critical tone that forces an acknowledgement of the fact that "sovereignty is not abstract. It has a particular name, a face,

an address, a geographical coordinate. Its face is white, it remains housed in white bodies, it is located in “Westernity” (xvii). Indeed, as Thobani rightly signals, *Queer Necropolitics* intervenes by pointing out “the deadly workings of power” (xviii) in this racist and imperialist order. Throughout the collection, a variety of geopolitical locations are closely analyzed, including Iran, the United States, Guatemala, the United Kingdom, the Philippines, Palestine and Israel. Methodologically, the volume is also rich, as contributors make use of ethnography and auto-ethnography, empirical fieldwork, film and visual analysis, textual analysis, and archival research, amongst others, to formulate larger arguments.

The edited volume’s nine essays are divided into three sub-sections, with the first entitled “Death Worlds.” This notion of “death worlds” again takes us back to Mbembe, who puts forth the concept of necropolitics and necropower “to account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creating of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (Mbembe 2003: 40). “Death worlds” refer to not only physical death but also to social and political death. In these first three chapters (Che Gossett on AIDS criminalization and black radicalism, Michelle Martin-Baron on US military funerals and masculinity, and Silvia Posocco on transnational adoption circuits), this opening section also calls up previously mentioned social death and slow death, each chapter offering a view into the making of death worlds and their vitalities and ontologies.

From the making of death worlds, the collection moves to the second section, “Wars and Borderzones,” which, as its title suggests, focuses on violence, spatiality, and movement. Mobility and containment become key vectors of analysis in these chapters that draw on an assortment of cultural artifacts, including Sima Shaksari’s examination of the figure of the Iranian transgender refugee in Western media, Jason Ritchie’s analysis of Israeli representations of Palestinian queers, and Aren Aizura’s putting forth of the notion of “trans necropolitics” through a critical reading of three recent films. Each of these chapters adds to a forerunning discussion of how the “seductive erotics of war are precisely what facilitate the necropolitical distinction between queers destined for life and those discarded for death” (13).

The final section, “Incarceration,” is invested in uncovering how (queer) complicities are also intimately tied to necropolitics. Not only are prisons “key sites for the vitalization of queer identities” (16), but punitiveness has also become the mark of “gay-friendly” societies that map homophobic attitudes onto specific communities constructed as “backwards.” This point is eloquently made in Sarah Lamble’s chapter, which examines how hate crime laws belie queer investments in punishment and

sexual citizenship. Puar's work (2007) certainly seems a necessary precursor to many points made in this section, with homonationalism proving a helpful concept to evaluate mainstream LGBT politics' bolstering of state practices that target racialized and religious others (e.g., 'war on terror'). In the following chapter on the criminalization of trans feminine bodies of color in Washington, DC, Elijah Adiv Edelman takes this a step further with the concept of "homonecronationalism," a timely intervention that highlights "how the technology of letting live and letting die functions to *serve and promote* homonationalist projects in the reproduction of viable queer citizens (e.g., those fulfilling the requirements of homonormative ideological reproductivity) from those otherwise considered included within LGBT rights paradigms" (175). The volume appropriately closes with Morgan Bassichis and Dean Spade's chapter, which argues that the American project is built upon anti-blackness and that non-black queers uphold these violent racist and imperialist ideals, partially through pursuits of (the fantasy of) formal legal equality.

While there exists a large body of post-Foucault work on biopolitics – and now as well abundant scholarship on necropolitics thanks to Mbembe's more recent study – this collection is particularly innovative in its queer take on the topic. One point that could be overlooked but is worth highlighting is the editors' brief noting of the "worrying tendency to dismiss queer and trans of colour critiques in particular as identitarian, pre-theoretical and inferior" (4). Indeed, this is, in fact, one of the key contributions that this volume makes to a body of scholarship that, quite worryingly, becomes more and more skeptical of research about – and from the perspective of – marginalized genders and sexualities, particularly those of color. Dismissing such work as essentialist or identity-political is a cop-out to examining the ways in which discrimination and oppression shape processes of subjectivation and academic inquiry. In this sense, the editors' active solicitation of contributions by gender non-conforming authors and on trans-related topics should be taken as an important political statement and scholarly intervention.

Queer Necropolitics is poised to make a notable contribution to ongoing discussions of biopolitics and necropolitics – of life and death – offering an intervention into topics ranging from AIDS activism to transnational adoption, from military funerals to the prison industrial complex, from homonationalism to necronationalism. All in all, co-editors Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco – along with each of the chapter authors – make a much-needed intervention that furthers discussions of queer vitalities and ascendancies, particularly the idea that some queers rise and are accorded rights *on the backs of* racialized queer others. On the whole, the following questions posed in the introduction haunt each of the essays: "What new techniques of governance can be mapped in a context of power which increasingly speaks the language of women's, gay and transgender rights, protection and diversity? What challenges arise from these

complicities and convergences, and how are they best addressed?" (1). Indeed, these questions may necessarily go unanswered, but they must continue to be posed, over and over again.

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What's New? Boris Groys in Translation

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Boris Groys. *On The New*. Trans. G. M. Goshgarian. Verso, 2014. 208 pp.

It may seem contradictory to release a translation of a work which questions ideas of “the new” some twenty-two years after the German original. Yet the belated English publication of Boris Groys’s *On The New* (2014), demonstrates the text’s endurance according to the very means encouraged by Groys himself: by crossing the threshold into “valorized” culture. A German philosopher and critic of Russian descent, Groys’s many writings have recently enjoyed a renaissance in the English-speaking academy. This latest edition responds to the circumstances of artistic production in the heyday of postmodernism and its critique, complementing contemporaneous English-language works like Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1987), and Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism; Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1992). Groys’s text also offers a valuable perspective on more recent attempts at grappling with the cultural legacy of the historical avant-garde in titles such as Alain Badiou’s *The Century* (2007), or Jacques Rancière’s *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2006). Moreover, *On the New* is useful for readers seeking to situate Groys’s own recognized attempts at offering precise definitions of the relationship between (Western) postmodernism and (Eastern) post-communism, as he has done in another recently translated work, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (2011).

Encompassing greater breadth than his other works, *On The New* is Groys’s dedicated effort at reconstructing the architectonics of invention under particularly difficult circumstances. It foregrounds the complexity of producing artistic work that is capable of absorbing cultural value as a laudatory object belonging to the cultural archive. Groys’s description of the exchange between production and value is especially useful if we consider that hyper-mediated cultural environments of global scale were largely disdained by critics of postmodernism for having made creativity an all but impossible criterion of art. Notable, however, is the way in which Groys’s own critique refuses the symptomatic readings that dominated the field of cultural theory at the time of the book’s original publication. By emphatically refusing to *diagnose* the conditions of postmodernity through such readings, Groys more effectively challenges the primacy of alterity and the aesthetics of disenchantment that have since come to stand

as postmodernism's most elementary and significant outcomes. In other words, Groys is successful here in cementing his variance with the epistemic claims of postmodernism, but without in turn rejecting their reality or impact. By provoking his readers to reconsider the capacities of innovation, Groys challenges us to acknowledge how the course of innovation determines value, and to further assess the resistance or transformation of such value under the pressure of the new.

Groys's book is divided into three unequally distributed sections. The first section outlines a history of the new, and begins with a series of chapter headings that reveal the author's suspicion as to numerous false attributions of newness—whether by “the new's” association with alterity, utopia, difference, or freedom. In seeking to determine what the new *is not*, Groys manages effectively to destabilize a familiar allegory of discovery that has long been used to solidify beliefs surrounding modernity and its origins. Integral to this allegory is the assumption that prior to the onset of modernity, the new was completely undesirable, “condemned” (22), as it were, because of its presumed fraternity with degraded, profane, worldly, or secular time, and its allegiance to forces that obfuscate and contort established traditions that both define and preserve human communities—though, it should be noted that Groys speaks only of traditions from Europe. Nevertheless, while the shift to modernity is allegorized as a violent elimination of these established traditions, Groys's historical re-narration reveals how they were paradoxically retained and repositioned in the guise of a future anterior. With the onset of modernity, Groys's claim is that newness itself was re-valued as being “anterior to all historical time” (24), just as the mythical past had been regarded in antiquity. The value moderns placed on futurity and its association with the new thus returned, unsurprisingly, for Groys, to valorizing primitiveness, and from this vantage point, the new could then be established with reference to an “extra-cultural reality” that sits above and beyond the archive of culturally valorized objects (132). This extra-cultural reality is nothing less than a sublime alterity, an otherness the likes of which cannot be imagined except under particular and unyielding circumstances. Personified by figures of the historical avant-garde, this identification of the new with a perpetually hidden reality became the unattainable marker of cultural production. An important difference for postmodernism, however, is that the value previously accorded the new had all but lost its capacity to arouse a sense of collective optimism. Groys, writing in the heyday of this period, is thus keenly focused upon challenging the fatalistic association of the new with epistemic change. If there is any real change to speak of at this juncture, Groys reasoned, it is precisely in the growing number of melancholic responses to the impossibility for the new to be revealed at all.

Indeed, Groys's argument is distinctive for the way it refuses to entertain the tendency among contemporary cultural critics to regard innovation with a sense of disenchant-

ment, rejecting in turn the belief that innovation can cajole the real or the true out of hiding. More specifically, by dispelling the notion that all innovative works must be measured by degrees of authenticity, Groys manages to remove himself from our disenchanting inability to imagine the present as an age that can potentially catalyze the new. Accordingly, Groys exclaims that “the new is not just the other, it is the valuable other” (48). To put it another way, Groys maintains that a different sense of value can be encouraged, both beyond and in contravention to the measure of authenticity that otherwise serves as an anchor for objects of value. In the second part of the book, entitled *Strategies of Innovation*, Groys discusses specific works that are capable of retaining their value *as new*. Such retention is a process, he writes, in which “valorized” culture is transformed by its structured relationship to the realm of the “profane.” For Groys the profane realm offers up a “reservoir” (64) of materials for the artist—a mix of objects and ideas that may be considered dangerous, transitory, banal, or simply other. As the artist combines this material with established items from the cultural archive, there is an immutable but productive tension in the object, and this for Groys is what ultimately *constitutes* innovation. Established culture is profaned in the same moment that the profaned object is transformed into something of value. Importantly, however, the aesthetic practice of transformation that Groys describes is not tinged with the kind of heroism that may be detectable in the historical avant-garde’s process of valuing objects. According to their artistic practice, Groys maintains, the profaned object takes the role of a mediator between the unconscious of the artist’s creative act and the sphere of *universal* value. The valorization at issue for Groys, on the other hand, is the kind that enjoys an exclusive relationship with the cultural archive against that with extra-cultural reality. What replaces this reality is a type of exchange that follows a logic that is similar to fashion. In its capacity as inauthentic, for example, the valorized profane of fashion refuses claims to universal value, and yet it still demonstrates the ability to locate tensions in a specific object.

The most extreme tension will appear as an impossible distinction between the two realms in a single object or “work,” which is subsequently made to be valuable by the critic. To communicate this tension, Groys’s argument relies heavily on the narrative of a broad transition within Western modern art towards the aesthetics of “ready-mades,” which clearly demonstrate their capacity to represent “both value levels” (87). Groys provides several examples of ready-mades throughout the book. For instance, he reads reproductions of *Mona Lisa* to signify neither a total overcoming of values (as professed by the historical avant-gardes) nor their complete devalorization (as lamented by the postmoderns). Rather, the relationship between the “original” *Mona Lisa* and its “trashy” (66) reproductions result in making a unique work of art that is eventually deemed worthy of cultural preservation. Efforts at revaluation here are similar to those performed by Kazimir Malevich’s *Black Square*, a favourite of Groys’s in part because it draws attention to the value hierarchy between high art and

mass culture in a way that refuses to validate any belief that the artist enjoys secret perceptions of the object. Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* brings this tendency to its fullest expression by revealing that the artist chose his object on account of it being "strategically necessary" (102) for contemporary culture at the time. For Groys, Duchamp turned the urinal upside down and emblazoned it with an erroneous signature as a way of profaning a culturally validated belief in artistic freedom. As such, Groys argues that Duchamp's juxtaposition does not signal the "end of art" (91) as so many critics have insisted, but that it rather reveals an exchange between the profane realm and the cultural archive. On this basis, Groys suggests that Duchamp's contribution potentially demonstrates the work of *negative adaptation*—a process of making that does not convey art's truth so much as it signals truth's suspension by the profane.

Readers of Groys in English may be grateful for his effort to salvage the constituents of innovation in a time of saturated global capital, and yet for the same reasons, his overall position on the state of contemporary art might appear to be limited or simply dated. For Groys, "innovation is carried out mainly in the cultural-economic form of exchange" (139). In the third part of the book entitled *Innovative Exchange*, Groys once again tries to bypass postmodernism's obsession with imagining the profane realm through a figure of *scarcity*. The logic of the obsession according to Groys is grounded in the presumption of cultural activity that works to simulate the profane in order to accelerate the process of exchange, with the imminent threat of erasing the profane entirely and replacing it with a cultural archive that is driven to tyranny. Groys unsurprisingly rejects this "ecological counter-argument" (110) on account of its belief in a universal profane that is rendered scarce and therefore inaccessible by the cultural conditions of global capitalism. Groys is rather dedicated to situating the profane historically as the placeholder of innovation, thus encouraging solutions to the contradictory means by which art's value is determined in the present. For instance, if we accept that the profane has truly evaporated with the massification of culture, it stands to reason that we should also dispense with the archaic notions of authorship that are endemic to transforming such material into something valuable. In fact, this particular insight may be Groys's most important contribution in the book: that of pointing to the reinforcement of conventional views upon authorship, and to the hallucination of scarcity on which those views are perpetuated and reinforced. In other words, Groys deftly indicates an ongoing crisis whereby artists are driven to paranoia over ensuring their cultural worth on the basis of the originality and authenticity of their contributions. He writes, "no one now wants to entrust his [*sic*] originality to the future or to let others trespass on the cultural domain" (43). Given these circumstances, Groys encourages a productive understanding of the relationship between contemporary art and market capitalism by rejecting any residual attachments to authorship as a category of innovation. He writes, "it is precisely work with existing texts and images which makes it possible expressly to demonstrate the

intra-cultural originality of one's own work" (44).

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A Latent History of Everything: Hillel Schwartz's "Reverb: Notes"

JOHN MELILLO

Hillel Schwartz, "Reverb: Notes." In *Making Noise: From the Big Bang to Babel and Beyond*. Zone Books, 2011. 349 pp.

Hillel Schwartz's 2011 history of noise, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond*, offers—through more than 900 pages of sonorous, often punning prose—nothing less than what the titles of its three main "rounds" suggest: a history of sound "everywhere," "everywhen/everyone" and "everyhow." In this review, however, I will examine the book's 349 pages of endnotes, entitled "Reverb: Notes," that, because of printing costs, could not be included with the published text. Instead, they are available as an online PDF from Zone Books. This basic rupture between text and end-text indicates, in my reading, that the notes can function not merely as an educational supplement by which "assiduous readers" might check up on Schwartz but also as a work worth seeing and reading on its own terms. As the reverberating continuation of the "main" text, "Reverb: Notes" collects, curates, archives, and arranges the citational substrate of *Making Noise*. However, it also presents an implicit argument about the poetics of scholarship, the task of the historian, and the power of noise. The endnotes, in other words, have a logic of their own that simultaneously borrows from and exceeds the genre of scholarly investigation. I hear the endnotes as an epic poem—in Ezra Pound's sense of "a poem containing history"—that must be reckoned with not in the guise of a mellifluous lyricism (the style at work in the main text of *Making Noise*) but rather as an exhausting performance of indexicality. Severed from simple bibliographic reference, "Reverb: Notes" plays upon the force of the index as both a function and a figure. Simultaneously a veiling and a revealing, "Reverb: Notes" searches for and finds noise within our contemporary culture of search and research.

Before reading any particular note or the notes as a continuous whole, we first receive instructions:

No place of publication is given for university press books, and no publisher other than a university press is given for works published before 1965. The origi-

nal year of publication is provided in [brackets] where chronology is vital to arguments in the text. Many of the published sources I cite have since become available online; I furnish URLs only for those sources available exclusively online and current as of January 31, 2009. Spellings have been silently modernized except in titles and in poetry; English spellings are retained in quotations from British Commonwealth sources. Since there is no bibliography, I have eased the task of assiduous readers by indicating with (n.) the endnote number of the original full citation for subsequent short-titled references more than seven notes distant. (1)

Terse, simple, direct: however, it is interesting to note that the rules for reducing the length and repetitiveness of the endnotes imagine the limitations of space that a codex demands, so we continue to use these notes as if they were part of a physical book. The reference to the codex as a form, and the miming of that form within the "digitized" end-text, paradoxically engenders a form of reading against the discontinuous and repetitive procedure that note-checking typically involves. That is to say, rather than skipping from page to page, from text to note, one finger on page 154 and another on page 356, rather than the notes strictly following the itinerary of the "main" text, we can read—and are asked to read—these notes as if they were a continuous work, an itinerary of dislocation within a system of listings that proceed number by number, entry by entry, for 349 pages.

Read in this way, we can hear the rebarbative, weighty, overwhelming, and scholarly apparatus of "Reverb: Notes" pushing against the main-text's playful, talkative, and digressive style. While *Making Noise* onomatopoeically maps concepts to words and words to concepts from sentence to sentence and association by association, it stylistically matches its argument: noise is no mere epiphenomenon or by-product but rather "a player on the historical scene" (28). The active voicing of noise in the main-text becomes in the endnotes catalog, number, list, bibliographic information, abbreviation, and occasional comment. We have all the information spelled out in *Making Noise* reduced to citation, but this is not merely a skeletal double of the main text:

193. Jelle Z. de Boer and Donald T. Sanders, *Volcanoes in Human History* (Princeton U, 2002) 138–56, assigning Tambora a Volcanic Explosivity Index of 7, greater than the 1883 Krakatoa eruption (at 6) and exceeded (in human experience) only by the Indonesian eruption of Toba (at 8, or "mega-colossal") around 64,000 B.P.; Hubert H. Lamb, *Climate, History, and the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (L: Routledge, 1995) 247, 298–99; C. Edward Skeen, *1816: America Rising* (U Press Kentucky, 2003) q. 1 Jefferson, 2–9, 13; Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (Oxford: Woodstock, 1989 [1817]) q. 88, 93, q. 99, q. 153, 165; Robert Gittings and Jo Manton, *Claire Clairmont and*

the Shelleys 1798–1879 (Oxford U, 1992) 26–29; John Polidori, *The Diary of Dr. John William Polidori*, ed. William M. Rossetti (Folcroft: Folcroft Lib, 1975) 62–66, 107, 213; George Gordon Byron, Sixth Baron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–1818) Canto III, stanzas 25–31 for Waterloo, stanza 92 for storm. In contrast to Byron's lyricism, the battle had been fought across a muddy, smoky plain where soldiers could not see ten yards ahead, where small rockets shrieked along the ground, where "Wounded or mutilated horses wandered or turned in circles," neighing loudly, and wounded men lay in heaps, screaming, so that "The noise was deafening" and victory itself an acoustical chaos: Gareth Glover, ed., *Letters from the Battle of Waterloo* (L: Greenhill, 2004) 99, 104, 110–11, 133, 150. (61)

From volcanoes to the deafening noise of battle via poetry... In this example note, we can follow the itinerary of the main text, but we also have the benefit of more information (the Volcanic Explosivity Index), exact page numbers (99, 104, 110–11, 133, 150), and a correction of Byron's view of the Battle of Waterloo. While the style of *Making Noise* sets up a mimetic poetics in which the language of history mimics the continuous discontinuities of noise as a human invention, the poetics of "Reverb: Notes" reduces reading to abstraction. The abstract tokens of structure, number, and punctuation blend with the texts of titles, names, and places; semi-colons, commas, and colons then suture these textual elements in clipped, broken, and yet static rhythms. This abstract poetics—a whole system for navigating information inside and outside the text—falls out from the demand that endnotes exhibit a fidelity of text to text. Rather than what one might consider a "vertical" connection between concept and style (Alexander Pope's dictum that "the sound must seem an echo to the sense"), we have the "horizontal" connection of citation to citation, number to number. Language becomes an index to more language, not the privileged site for a listening experience.

And yet, the end-text does not simply index the array of books that make the language games of the main text possible. It overwhelms the contained genre of the scholarly endnote and points to a range of excesses that illuminate the historical and phenomenological problem of noise. We initially feel these counter-acting effects in the sheer weight of information. Here, the "grunt work" of history is laid bare. All the standard procedures of citation are there but in hypertrophied form. Each numbered paragraph of citation after citation produces a complex of effects: 1.) a proper citation indexing a source, 2.) a set of keywords or an abstract logic connecting the citations within the paragraph (we might call this, after Pound, an "ideogram"), 3.) an act of historical reconstruction (the historian sifting, examining, and aligning texts to make an argument), and 4.) a kind of stubborn durational performance (we can almost hear the historian grunting as he compiles and piles text after text of historical,

theoretical and cultural documentation). Seen through this complex, Schwartz's narrative becomes itself merely an after-effect, a belated suturing of the poet-historian's painstaking collection of the "word-horde." This heaped up language precedes the textual "hearing out" of noise (*Making Noise* 17). The "main" text reveals itself only by veiling its reverberating "end"-text. *Making Noise* thus follows a fantasy of inductive method that the collection of citations projects. It is a summation of a vast number of subjects, objects, theories, and documents. In a way, Schwartz has enacted a cultural symptom detected by the poet Kenneth Goldsmith: "The act of listening has now become the act of archiving. We're more interested in accumulation and preservation than we are in what is being collected.... Our task is to simply mind the machines." ("I Love Speech" 288-289).

But Schwartz is very much interested in what is being collected—noise. These notes toward noise are not only a portrayal of the work of doing history but also an argument for the density and ubiquity of noise: noise is "everywhere" and "everywhen." As such, a metonymic logic structures the enormous number of texts on display in "Reverb: Notes." They figure a "beyond" that exists outside of the very set of phenomena that they enumerate. These are notes as "notes toward." That is to say: just as "Reverb: Notes" is formatted as an outside—a mere "reverberation"—of the main text, it also produces a kind of indexical arrow () pointing to another "outside:" a noisy infinity uncontained by the logics of sequence, change, cause and effect that structure historical argument.

In his 1982 book *Genesis*, the philosopher Michel Serres claims:

Noise cannot be a phenomenon; every phenomenon is separated from it, a silhouette on a backdrop, like a beacon against the fog, as every message, every cry, every call, every signal must be separated from the hubbub that occupies silence, in order to be, to be perceived, to be known, to be exchanged. As soon as a phenomenon appears, it leaves the noise; as soon as a form looms up or pokes through, it reveals itself by veiling noise. (13)

What Schwartz constructs in the endnotes is a version of historicity conditioned by this paradoxical anti-phenomenonality of noise: how does one listen to the unlistenable, how does it enter into history? The answer lies, at least partly, in the archival art of accumulation and the rhetorical art of naming. Where and when does one find documentary illustration of a phenomenon named noise? Everywhere and everywhen: from religious books to scientific treatises, from travel writing to philosophical tracts, from environmentalist literature to war machines. The art of acquiring everything—or at least seeming to acquire everything—allows the historian to ride the centrifugal force of noise: to displace it even as one discovers its meanings. Noise

remains an empty indication, even as testimony after testimony names its forms and functions. And so “Reverb: Notes” becomes, in the name of noise, a somewhat dedifferentiated mass of documentary sediment.

But at the same time that this bibliographic apparatus veils noise within and as history, it also reveals noise as what Lisa Robertson calls “the historicity of non-meaning” (*Nilling* 63). Presented as a non-developing, unmeaning actuality in time, noise simultaneously cancels out and marks duration’s movement. The historicity of noise indicates, then, an irreducible messiness within history. A historical event can never be only and wholly itself. It is mixed, muddled, and confused with an insensible mass of contingent and insignificant human and non-human acts that continue to reverberate in and through time. We typically think of such acts as the unheralded and abstract stuff of “everyday life,” but noise could provide a more extreme principle of preservation-in-loss that holds onto the concrete non-meaning of such a history. For instance, for Charles Babbage every action leaves its vibratory traces in the atmosphere:

The air itself is one vast library, on whose pages are forever written all that man has ever said or woman whispered. There, in their mutable but unerring characters, mixed with the earliest, as well as with the latest sighs of mortality, stand for ever recorded, vows unredeemed, promises unfulfilled, perpetuating in the united movements of each particle, the testimony of man’s changeful will. (*The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise* 112)

What a combination of fantasy and historical imagination! Schwartz takes it up. The history of noise must contend with a latent history of everything, archived everywhere, in book, land, sea, and air. Noise, existing at the edge of phenomena, makes this grand, all-encompassing claim, and so Schwartz feverishly collects texts in a way that parallels Babbage’s impossibly remote archive in the air. From “C. Mackenzie Brown, ‘Purâna as scripture: from sound to image of the holy word in Hindu tradition,’ *H of Religions* 26 (1986) 68–86” to “Monica A. Harris, illus. Susan Estelle Kwas, *Wake the Dead* (NY: Walker, 2004),” from “om” to death, “Reverb: Notes,” simulates the “all-encompassing” and mimes “every” route by which noise can emanate from history and history can emanate from noise.

At the same time, the notes present the exhaustion of such an “exhaustive” account of noise. We are given an apparatus of reference and cross-reference that undoes any totality that might begin to accumulate. Douglas Kahn has called noise the “continuous grating sound between the abstract and the empirical” (25), and “Reverb: Notes” continuously measures this distance between categorical expectation and particular result. The metonymic figuration of noise remains always tantalizingly partial: *this*

sound or *this* action produces noise within such and such parameters of listening. Specific sound-shapes, durations, concepts and contexts *can* manifest and appear within the untotalizable shadow of noise. And so every entry in "Reverb: Notes" also predicates specific events, concepts, opinions, myths, sounds, etc.—all potential ways into a shifting phenomenology of perception that could search for, find out, and cite noise. Scale matters here in a different way: it is not only that the overwhelming weight of these many citations metonymizes "everything" but also that the necessity to specify more and more areas of research and zones of concrete detail increases the sheer number of sources, accounts, and categories. There is a difference between 80 and 800 pages that highlights the failure of figuring noise as any one thing—even as an "anti-phenomenon," the figure of the unfigurable.

"Reverb: Notes" shows, then, both the dream and the nightmare of the exhaustive account. An inspired edifice to both the historian's task and his chosen subject, the endnotes both exalt in and cast doubt upon the exhaustingly partial world in which we live. A paean to hypermediation and information overload, "Reverb: Notes" also expresses the joys of failure in a world in which everything can (supposedly) be archived, preserved, and stored for future use. Noise, as an elemental turbulence and disruption that simultaneously nestles within and escapes this thick citation-world, reveals an unmaking at the heart of making, a way out of the weighty address by which 349 pages of citation can call up an endless cycle of reference and deferral, and a way into a particular history that can dream meaningless duration and irreducible complexity.

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Geopolitics of Hope, Despair and the Arab Spring

RANBIR K. BANWAIT

Hamid Dabashi. *The Arab Spring: the End of Postcolonialism*. Zed Books, 2012. 272 pp.

In *The Arab Spring: the End of Postcolonialism*, Hamid Dabashi provides a compelling study of the global geopolitical implications of the Arab Spring. The string of uprisings known as the Arab Spring is commonly marked as beginning on December 17, 2010, when a Tunisian man, Mohamed Bouazizi, self-immolated to protest the seizure of his produce cart. This incident sparked widespread dissent in Tunisia, and culminated in President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fleeing the country within the span of a month. The Tunisian protests launched a chain of momentous events in the Middle East and North Africa, leading to a series of uprisings in countries such as Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Sudan, and Morocco. Writing in response, Hamid Dabashi characterizes the Arab Spring in terms of an affective shift, arguing that the uprisings signal a move away from a politics of despair in the region toward a politics of hope. Written as these events unfold, Dabashi's *The Arab Spring: the End of Postcolonialism* is a timely response to a significant historical moment of the twenty-first century, hopeful in its vision, and theoretically nuanced in its approach.

Dabashi does the important work of historically contextualizing the Arab Spring in a postcolonial trajectory, suggesting that the uprisings contest the postcolonial aftermath of despair that gripped many Middle Eastern and North African countries following colonialism. As he points out, "colonialism begat postcolonial ideological formations: socialism, nationalism, nativism (Islamism); one metanarrative after another" (xxi). Understood in this way, postcolonialism is simply a reinvention of colonialism, writ in other terms. In contrast, Dabashi identifies the Arab Spring as a beginning point for imagining alternatives to the protracted effects of colonialism. This, in fact, is a decisive aspect of Dabashi's analysis: that the Arab Spring signals the "end of postcolonialism." Explaining further in a key chapter of the text, Dabashi argues for the end of postcoloniality as an ideology formation (155). He notes that the beginning of the postcolonial period—presumably marking the end of European colonialism—witnessed the birth of postcolonial conceptions of political sovereignty and nationality. In other words, the postcolonial gave rise to ideologies such as anti-colonial nationalism, Third World socialism, and militant Islamism (159). And these,

according to Dabashi, are merely by-products of the same colonial modernity that produced the postcolonial moment in the first place (159). The Arab Spring, however, highlights the epistemic limits of postcoloniality—its self-exhaustion—while the uprisings’ open-ended potential offers the possibility of imagining alternatives to postcoloniality.

Dabashi asks us to juxtapose the end of postcolonialism with the movements’ open-ended potential, not simply as a theoretical exercise, but to make space for an interpretive and critical vocabulary for responding to the uprisings, and to avoid the tired clichés typically associated with Middle Eastern geographies. Indeed, even as Dabashi asks us to rethink our understanding of the term “postcolonial,” he also outlines how the Arab Spring calls on us to re-evaluate our conception of “revolution.” Situating “revolution” in its historical context, Dabashi notes that the uprisings in the Arab Spring fail to conform to the typical understanding of revolution inherited as a legacy of the French and American cases (59): “‘Revolution’ in the sense of a radical and sudden shift of political power with an accompanying social and economic restructuring of society—one defiant class violently and conclusively overcoming another—is not what we are witnessing here” (5). Key to Dabashi’s argument here is the notion of “an ‘open-ended’ revolt,” which he argues, helps us to “read [the uprisings] in the language that they exude and not in the vocabularies we have inherited” (63). By being attentive to the new language of revolt, Dabashi asserts, we will avoid “assimilating” the Arab Spring into the known tropes of nationalism, socialism, Islamism and Orientalism (63).

Dabashi’s vision is hopeful, seeing in the Arab Spring the possibility of countering hegemonic, “Western” narratives about the Middle East, and opening a space for the historically rich and culturally complex experiences that have always been present in these societies. This is what Dabashi understands as cosmopolitan worldliness, the “actual worldly experiences that have historically existed but that have been overridden and camouflaged” in Western discourses about Middle Eastern geographies (115). The Arab Springs’s terms are at once “inconclusive and open-ended,” he writes, and these terms pose a challenge to both militant Islamism as “domestic tyranny” as well as “globalized imperialism” (11-12). Central to the process of retrieving cosmopolitan worldliness is the concept of delayed defiance that Dabashi sees at work in the uprisings. Delayed defiance for Dabashi signals the measured emergence of a new geography of “freedom, social justice, and human dignity,” imaginative forms that are already cultivated, he contends, in literary and artistic forms of creative expression (226). This process is a gradual one that Dabashi thinks will be cultivated over time, and thus part of a lasting set of political transformations in the region.

Other sections of the text are dedicated to deconstructing the regime of knowledge

that sustains the West's ideological construction of the rest of the world. Understanding geography as a socio-political, imaginative, and deeply fraught category of power, Dabashi argues that the Arab Spring represents a transformative geography, one that challenges what the West presumes to know about the "Middle East," or "the Arab and Muslim World" (45). But the transnational proliferation of the protests—taking place in locations from African to non-Arabic to non-Muslim countries—also challenges the very term, "Arab Spring" (46); the uprisings both exceed and transform the term's meaning. In contesting assumptions about the Middle East, democracy, and racialized subjects' ability/inability to govern themselves, the Arab Spring is "the inaugural moment of . . . a new historical [and] . . . emancipatory geographical imagination" (55). Addressing a wide range of topics and texts through the disruptive conceptual and political force-field convoked by this event, Dabashi develops novel ways of deconstructing the Western epistemic project, and its construction of the Middle East as an object of knowledge:

What we are witnessing unfold in the Arab Spring is an epistemic emancipation from an old, domineering, dehumanizing, and subjugating geography—the geography that anthropologists have mapped out for colonialists to rule. By reclaiming a global public sphere and restoring historical agency, the world is finally discovered to be a planet (54).

The Arab Spring is a thoughtful and incisive analysis of forms of political dissent and activism across the Middle East and Northern Africa. Focusing on different nations in his chapters, Dabashi attempts to chart out the broader implications of the uprisings. In one of his final chapters, for instance, Dabashi offers a wide-ranging study of issues of race, class, gender, and labour migration in the region (175). Dabashi draws attention to the active role that women played in the uprisings, challenging dominant stereotypes of silenced and repressed Arabic and Muslim women (182). He points out that women have been at the forefront of the protests, as agents in the public domain, even as they became targets of gender-based violence by various state-based and nationalist actors. As key agents in labour migration, women also have a role to play in defining a public space that is situated between "the contradictory forces of labor and capital" (202). Although Dabashi's analysis of labour migration further nuances his study of the socio-political and economic forces at work in the region, he perhaps overstates the Arab Spring's potential to contest "the globalized perception of Arab and Muslim women" (182). For even as women and girls created—and continue to create—new forms and figures of agency within the Arab Spring, a globalized politics of representation continues to misrepresent women in the Middle East.

In sum, Dabashi's *The Arab Spring: the End of Postcolonialism* offers a probing reflection on the transformative potential of the Arab Spring. For Dabashi, its unfolding

geography carries immense potential; and yet, as the Arab Spring and its aftermath continues to unfold, ongoing conditions of political, social and economic unrest, extreme violence, and displacement in countries such as Syria and Egypt, have led to the Arab Spring showing signs of becoming an Arab Winter. Acute conditions of violence and loss in the region reflect how hope folds into despair, prompting the question that a reading of Dabashi's book today in turn continually provokes: how might a geopolitics of hope renew itself?

A Queer Time for Television

R. GABRIEL DOR

Amy Villarejo, *Ethereal Queer: Television, Historicity, Desire*. Duke University Press, 2014. 203 pp.

In *Ethereal Queer*, Amy Villarejo confronts the visibility of LGBT characters featured in recent programming, and the scholarship around these representations, by rejecting the notion that today's television operates in a particularly queer time. Rather, for Villarejo the medium fundamentally and historically operates in queer time. In marshalling this argument, Villarejo she combines and television history and critical theories of queer temporality, drawing from an archive of programs, productions and personal memories.

The book's Introduction sets forth the twin ambitions of exploring both "a more robust and rich sense of the queer archive than that which informs much current writing on TV" (5), and of specifying "the apparatus, the complicated temporal and spatial system that is television, asking how television's changing time and spaces organize and respond to also changing queer times and spaces" (6-7). Likewise, Villarejo explains that twin "genealogies inform my method," both a "poststructuralism that chips away at the problematic of representation," as well as feminist scholarship which emphasizes "television as one of the – if not *the* most – gendered and sexualized repetition apparatuses of modern technoscience, *the* modern implantation of gendered and sexualized social time" (7).

Villarejo stresses the temporal operations of the television apparatus in social, sexual and subject formation.

At the core of the book's overall argument is the strong phenomenological claim that we live as and on television, with layers of memory and image consciousness that I will explicate, but that the specificity of the apparatus demands that this "we" be thought of in deeply gendered and sexualized terms. To put it more bluntly, television, each time we watch, takes over our time in a way that enfold all aspects of socialization. (10-11)

Under the subheading "Living as Television," Villarejo reveals the adolescent production of her own queer identity during a Los Angeles childhood "saturated with television" (12). An episode of *Starsky and Hutch* set in a gay underworld enables Vil

larejo to imagine nostalgic identification with her younger seventies self via a “queer encounter, where gayness becomes a matter of calculating time” (15) between the two detectives.

The early chapters, “Adorno’s Antenna” and “Excursis on Media and Temporality,” delve into the media ontologies of Theodor Adorno, Andre Bazin, Mary Ann Doane and Bernard Stiegler, interrogating the language of “realism” and “liveness” associated with cinema and television. While acknowledging the overlaps of these two media forms, Villarejo nonetheless insists on specific industrial, textual and viewing conditions of US broadcast television. Banality, domesticity and commercially sponsored programming structure the disciplinary apparatus of everyday television according to rhythms of anticipation, nostalgia, repetition, scheduling, segmentation, and serialization.

Distinguishing the “ways in which we experience time across media,” Villarejo argues that “the very mechanisms of adoption differ, according to the organization of the temporal and formal structure of adoption” (79). With its adoption into the home, “*industrializable* in the sphere of television invariably means ‘domestic’” (80). Television and family are domesticated together into the temporal rhythms of everyday life: “Processes of recognition, expectation, remembrance, anticipation, repetition, assimilation—in short the very processes of adoption—take place in families and through kinship networks established on and with television as family time” (80).

With reference to Adorno’s theory of stereotypes, Villarejo looks to the queer margins of domestic formats of the early medium, finding moments of implied homosexual crisis within the family-dominated fifties sitcom archive. She excavates “Adorno’s reading of two examples, both taken from *Our Miss Brooks*—the comedy series begun on radio and extended to television” which “can be understood to be queer, insofar as Adorno reads the Arden character as a modern-day Joan Rivière (intellectually superior and judged for it) and insofar as the second example involves a cranky woman and her cat, a nonnormative couple whose significations often slide into ‘lesbian’” (50). In her own viewing of another episode of the same series, Villarejo reads a rhythm of queer courtship in a series of repeated gift exchanges between the unmarried teacher played by Eve Arden and a stereotypically lesbian store clerk:

The gift here, if there is one, is always enveloped back into a relation of exchange, further revealed to be (equivalent to) affective extortion, always gendered and sexualized... As is immediately clear, this sequence transcodes the exchange of commodities *into* the exchange that is not of but between women read as queer. (61-2)

Through a complex play of innuendo, selective visibility and masquerade, this episode suggests the potential of retrospective viewing to queer the dominant heteronormative family ideal of midcentury television.

The heart of the book, hinted at in the Introduction's nostalgia around the *Starsky and Hutch* episode resonant with Villarejo's LA childhood and emblemized by the haunting cover image of queer television icon Lance Loud, is the chapter "Television Ate My Family," on seventies sitcoms and the rise of PBS. This is when the domestic medium, like the author's younger self, begins to come out of the closet, with explicitly gay characters and storylines in series such as quality network sitcom *All in the Family* and public television docudrama *An American Family*.

Villarejo reaches the crux of her argument with a question: "But what of queer time in 1970 or thereabouts? Why is it that by the 1970s, gay men had generated a whole new procedure of disclosure and a foundation for 'gay liberation' called 'coming out?'" (95). Wait for it: "I think the answer has to be TV" (95). Villarejo unpacks in Eve Sedgwick's epistemology an endless series of closets, "the repetitive and exhausting temporality of the procedure of coming out (one must calculate, decide, and utter anew and again, each time and forever)" (96). These temporal routines of sexual identification follow the rhythms of television.

An American Family's Lance Loud, touted as one of the first to come out on TV, appears not to have come out directly at all. Focusing on the second episode of the 1973 PBS docudrama, Villarejo transcribes an extended Central Park dialogue with Lance's mother, Pat, who has come to visit from the family home in Santa Barbara, "in order to experience the stunning temporal complexity of queer adolescence and the process of coming out, which can be a very different matter from the utterance, 'I'm gay'" (103). There are cultural and conversational allusions in the scene where he and his mother discuss his queer suburban childhood against his queer urban coming of age. For Villarejo, "that moment, misread as 'coming out,' is not a proud declaration of identity but a refashioning and reprocessing of a troubled, alienated, lonely queer childhood lived almost wholly in self-conscious emulation of Andy Warhol" (116).

This mobile Manhattan conversation, meandering with the tracking shots following their promenade, displaces gay identification onto the absent presence of Warhol, from Lance's silver-haired youth rebellion, to the bohemian queer milieu of the Chelsea Hotel, and, most disconcerting to Pat, to the experimental drag theater he forced her to attend. "Subsequent citations of this sequence in *An American Family Revisited* and in the final episode, moreover, edit it significantly to eliminate the stumbling, inarticulate, stunted nature of Lance's disclosure and Pat's encouraging

yet uncomfortable response” (103). It is only in later renditions, editing, restaging, and reframing through voiceover memories, that this moment is solidified as coming out. Villarejo’s reading of the temporally complex television dynamics of deferral and delay in disclosure underscores her observation that “Lance’s own mode of living is retrospective” (116).

In *An American Family*, Loud reunites his divorced parents and longtime television fans through a final return to television to document his death, thirty years later, in “a time of HIV/AIDS infection that has not yet ended, and therefore remains our own” (118). Lance Loud lives and dies through television, and by extension, so do we, in the recursive melodramatic archives of recorded memory, what Villarejo identifies with “television time, or rather times: a mesh of temporalities of real life, recording, transmission, repetition, and seriality in which Lance lived, in which we all live” (118).

Villarejo reconstructs a queer archive of temporal networks which interpellate her reader as both subject and object, self and other, of television history and theory. Like the author, I also grew up in Los Angeles watching female camp on eighties sitcoms with my equally closeted best friend, enjoying a sanitized queer homosociality as the AIDS crisis taught us we needed to be men, and not to be gay. I came out as queer, not gay, around the time and under the influence of nineties culture and *Tales of the City*, mapped in the chapter “Queer Ascensions,” which looked back to an imagined urban oasis of seventies San Francisco against prevailing HIV-related homophobia. Like my fellow queer media scholar, I also share a nostalgic love for Lance Loud and identify with the lesbian cat lady stereotype, reflecting “a world in which masculinity and femininity refuse to map neatly onto categories of modern queer life” (132). My queerness is socially constituted as a hermeneutic product of overlapping academic genealogies, television archives and cultural imaginaries which render hers legible and enables a specific connection to “our shared experiences and desires, here named queer to nominate something that television has produced from its early years that was not yet assimilable as gay or lesbian and something encompassing enough today to gather many of us under its inquiry” (155). As a reader I am implicated through my own personal experiences which overlap with Villarejo’s, not universally queer but specifically so in shared social, cultural, generational, and geographical positions. Subjects more distant in age, location, education, and status likely differ in their constitutive experiences of television and queerness.

At times Villarejo’s largely unracialized medium specificity succumbs to the totalizing raptures of Western television ontologies, whether the captivating white melodramas on screen or the Euro-American social philosophy of media temporalities and spaces. As Villarejo herself writes, “queer forms of life congeal differentially in the spatio-

temporal modalities of television” (154). What neither the mode, nor the object of television study itself can fully capture is the range of socially embodied lived experiences adapting and adopting the screened simulacra in ways that marginalize, embed, implement and colonize mediated pleasures and memories. Finding oneself alone with television, or with writing about television, creates its own solipsistic phenomenology, a Cartesian split of intellectualized television and embodied experience that Villarejo’s queer method tries to deconstruct, as when she reminds: “But the actual and the virtual are not separate domains” (145).

Queer theory and media studies have become embodied, intersectional and increasingly cross-border. Villarejo addresses race and globalization in particular reference to “queer migration and cities of the global South” (149). Despite such gestures outward, the writing still claims certain diffuse universals, ideological problems and speculative fictions as lived social realities less than dispersed processes of change and dislocation. The argument relies on the historical premise of the American television apparatus, a potentially exclusionary and hierarchical model of how the medium of embodiment functions in everyday multiplicities. Where television is not experienced as it is *here*, in the Western academy, but in geographic places and cultural spaces where the archive itself differs in function, content, access, meaning, and visibility, how does one become queer?

In the final pages of the concluding Coda, Villarejo makes the meaning of “ethereal” explicit, referring to the ether of wireless broadcasting:

In the ether, transmissions may be overcoded, but they are never fully determined. In moving from ether to ethereal, then I am looking upward and playing with a range of meanings, from a descriptive sense of pertaining to the ether to more celestial aspirations or ascensions to the very sense of the impalpable I have been pursuing here. (155)

In privileging the ethereal over the embodied, the study largely sidesteps the hypersexuality of pornography as an object, mode, genre, corpus, or field of queer media study. The longstanding FCC-enforced television taboo against sexual visibility and commercial eroticism was trumped by the rise of premium adult cable networks beyond the foundational regulatory scheme for broadcasting, part of the post-network-era proliferation she addresses in relation to Channel 4’s *Tales of the City* (1993). Villarejo remarks on the “serial’s changed relationship to sexual explicitness and nudity” in Showtime’s soft-core sequels, *More Tales of the City* (1998) and *Further Tales of the City* (2001) a more uncensored ratings-oriented niche market franchise than the original UK quality production which aired on PBS: “It’s my sense that the series starts to rely on increasingly silly plotlines and a lot of naked bodies to hang on to its

viewers" (151). In parentheses, she slyly acknowledges simulation of adult filming in the first week of production, including sex scenes shot in "an actual bathhouse," such that "the crew came to believe that they were shooting pornography" (150).

The pornographic appeal of post-network television suggests a more naked queer desire, extending beyond cable to DVDs, adult websites, and mobile digital technologies of social and sexual networking. Scholarship of pornography and new media can build on Villarejo's foundational study of sex and time in the television apparatus to theorize how these other cultural forms of gendered desire also adapt, modify and converge with the "ethereal queer" in more explicitly racial and sexual networks.

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The Bureaucratic Pleasures of Policing Sex

MARCIA KLOTZ

Jennifer Doyle. *Campus Sex, Campus Security*. Semiotext(e), 2015. 144 pp.

Campus Sex, Campus Security is not exactly an academic book, though it treats academic themes, and certainly matters of the academy. With a style that slides from the journalistic into the aphoristic and the lyrical, the book at times has the feel of a feminist manifesto from an earlier era, at others that of a jeremiad. As an investigation into recent shifts in campus culture due to the prosecution of Title IX cases, *Campus Sex* seems destined to be read alongside Laura Kipnis' recent and controversial work, which made headlines for arguing that the vilification of erotic relationships between students and faculty essentially infantilizes the student body, renegeing on a feminist tradition that fought to recognize grown women's sexual sovereignty. I will have more to say about Kipnis' relevance shortly, but for the moment, let me focus on the topic both scholars address: a shift in how Title IX statutes are being applied on college campuses across the United States.

Title IX, for those unfamiliar with it, is a generally straightforward statute of Civil Rights legislation that was added to the U.S. Education Amendments of 1972, stating:

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.¹

While this seemingly innocuous statute lay relatively dormant on college campuses for three decades, it has recently become the central pillar of a whole new architecture of administrative policing of campus life. Doyle traces its newly muscular role to an influential letter sent by the Department of Education to administrators of college and university campuses in 2011-12. Laying out the basic guidelines of Title IX, the letter portrays U.S. campuses as being in a state of sexual emergency, with abuse and rape rampant everywhere. The letter calls on administrators to diligently ensure a

¹ The full text of the amendment is available online at <https://www.justice.gov/crt/title-ix-education-amendments-1972>.

“feeling of safety” on their campuses, to protect against sexual assault and to guard against harassment and retaliation. So far so good; those certainly sound like worthy goals. But in applying those standards, something has gone terribly wrong.

Doyle opens her discussion with the famous image of Sergeant John C. Pike, his demeanor frozen in the studied nonchalance of a professional termite exterminator, unloading the contents of a pepper spray can into the faces of hooded protesters peacefully sitting on a sidewalk on the U.C. Davis campus in November of 2011. This seems an unlikely starting point for a discussion of Title IX, but Doyle connects some interesting and unexpected dots. It turns out that Pike was called to his task by the university’s chancellor, Linda Katehi, who was worried that the campus occupation might invite “non-affiliates” to Davis, specifically Occupy activists from Oakland. “The issues from Oakland were in the news and the use of drugs and sex and other things,” Katehi reportedly explained, “and you know here we have ... very young girls and other students with older people who come from the outside without any knowledge of their record ... if anything happens to any student while we’re in violation of policy, it’s a very tough thing to overcome” (Reyesno Task Force, as quoted in *Campus Sex, Campus Security*, 15-16).

It’s that phrase, “in violation of policy” that links Katehi’s motivation to Title IX. Universities found to violate this statute are placed on a watchlist of the Office of Civil Rights, which can entail serious consequences, including a loss of federal funding. The chancellor’s fears swirled around the possibility of a violation engendered by a sexual assault, sliding down a metonymic chain that linked Occupy protesters on the Davis campus with those of Oakland, and Oakland with black people, outsiders, as the phrase “university non-affiliates” implies, who are in turn linked with rapists. On the other side, Katehi imagines the university population as a vulnerable group of “very young girls” for whose well-being and sexual innocence she holds herself responsible, as stipulated—in some undefined manner—by Title IX. In attempting to avert one kind of imaginary scandal, she thus invited another.

This case provides the opening example, and in many ways lays out the definitive structure for an evaluation of many other famous campus scandals of recent years, sexual and otherwise, ranging across a wide variety of cases. Doyle discusses the 2014 *Rolling Stone* coverage of the University of Virginia woman who reported being gang raped at a fraternity, then later retracted her story; the 2011 Rutgers incident in which a man surreptitiously videotaped his roommate having sex with other men, after which the gay roommate committed suicide; the Penn State riots of 2011 following disciplinary action against a popular coach for his failure to take action against an assistant coach who was showering with pre-pubescent boys in the locker room. She also discusses cases in which students and faculty, apparently viewed as “non-

affiliates” or outsiders to campus culture, are violently assaulted by police officers for failing to present identification that is not demanded of white students or faculty.

While most of the stories Doyle cites will be familiar to anyone paying attention to US college news over the past five years, the conclusions she draws are nuanced and interesting, neither vilifying the offenders nor excusing their actions. Instead, she calls attention to the paucity of analysis both in university responses and in popular media accounts of what happened. In the case of Dharun Ravi, for example, the young man who videotaped his roommate hooking up with other men in their shared dorm room, she points out that his motivation in setting up his camera revolved around a desire to watch the tape afterwards with friends. “[W]hy he wanted to watch that, with friends, is not something that can be explained by either the word ‘bullying’ or even the word ‘homophobia,’” Doyle argues; “[i]t has something to do with the sociality of sex, and the sexuality of friendship” (56). An appropriate response to this incident, and to the others described in the book, would thus require a more discriminating interrogation of desire, an application of *sexual intelligence* and curiosity into the meaning of the incidents that transpired. Instead, administrators and the media often jump to portray the accused as a “monster,” especially if he happens to have a name or physiognomy that can be cast as racially or ethnically other.

Title IX moves through these stories like an adrenalized heartbeat, animating and revving up responses through the erection of a whole administrative apparatus that surveils the student body, inhibits classroom discussion of potentially injurious topics, disciplines faculty relations, polices, interrogates, and punishes. Title IX has a drive of its own in this story, always moved by the fear of an intrusion, a sexual assault on a student presumed to be defenseless. “Title IX is the administrative structure through which the university knows what exposure feels like, what vulnerability is. *It is the sex of bureaucracy,*” Doyle proposes (24). This is a fascinating concept—the notion that bureaucratic entities are sexed, that they maintain a kind of libidinal drive. And if we apply the same sexually intelligent approach that Doyle calls for elsewhere to the case of academic bureaucracy itself, the portrait of sexual drive these various examples paint appears somewhat complicated: obsessive and paranoid in motivation and sadistic in practice. In their insatiable drive to identify potential threats, in the clear pleasure they take in punishing and nullifying the “non-affiliate” other, the harasser, the sexual offender, the monster, campus administrations have lost all equanimity, sense of fairness and balance. They have themselves become monstrous harassers.

This is where Doyle’s book comes closest to Kipnis’ two recent essays, “Sexual Paranoia Strikes Academe” and “My Title IX Inquisition,” both of which appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2015. In the first of these, Kipnis likewise claims that the university infantilizes the student body, treating all students as that “very

young girl” in need of protection. In welcoming Title IX-driven revisions to university policy, she argues, faculty, students and administrators have sacrificed a vision—hard-fought by an earlier generation of feminists—of women as sovereign sexual agents. The new protections treat students as hothouse flowers, Kipnis argues, policing sexual relations between faculty and students, and even classroom discussions, in a manner that assumes students to reside in a prolonged state of tutelage. Kipnis herself came under attack for the publication of “Sexual Paranoia Strikes Academe,” however, when students invoked Title IX to charge her with fostering a “rape culture” on campus. The second article, “My Title IX Inquisition,” describes her own surreal interactions with the bureaucracy of Title IX investigations. She was shocked to discover how little due process governed the proceedings: she had no right to learn what specific accusations had been leveled against her until she was required to respond to them; she had no right to an attorney; no right to refrain from responding to all questions put to her. In short, the citizen rights we take for granted in our relations with the legal authority of the state seem to stop at the gates of the university.²

This aspect of Title IX’s role on college campuses is missing from Doyle’s book. While *Campus Sex, Campus Security* showcases the libidinal drive of Title IX and its inability to adequately comprehend the complexity of many sexual dynamics, Doyle has nothing to say about *how* it has been put into practice, or the concrete rules (such as they are) that govern these investigations. This lack is somewhat baffling, because Doyle herself has personal experience with that investigative apparatus and seems to bear the scars of her encounter with it. Her book opens with a prologue in which she describes how she filed her own Title IX charges against a student who was stalking and harassing her, then leveled a second complaint against the administration for how the first charge was handled (she never explains the nature of that secondary complaint). Ultimately, Doyle found herself under scrutiny in an administrative hearing for her own scholarship, which, for those readers unfamiliar with it, skillfully treats sexual politics from a queer and feminist perspective. Her canny critique of sexual issues apparently disqualified her as a victim of harassment; she was not the “very young girl” that Title IX was designed to protect. In this case, the sadism of Title IX bureaucracy appears to have been leveled against the accuser, rather than the accused. She speculates that the hearing dragged on far longer than necessary while “the committee dined on the misery of my situation as the sensational story of a ‘feminist accused of harassment’” (9).

Doyle provides only the barest sketch of this event, deliberately choosing not to relate the details of her personal narrative. I, for one, wish she had. There are places where

² Kipnis is currently writing a book about the prosecution of Title IX cases in the United States, titled *Stupid Sex / Higher Education*.

I can feel the pain of her own experience haunting the story she is telling, as in this passage, describing the experience of harassed victims everywhere:

One inventories one's pain, outlines one's confusion and frustration, usually in a context in which one does not know if one has been heard, acknowledged, believed. One gets used to not being heard. One either clams up, or speaks like a hysteric—a repulsive verbal diarrhea spreads over every conversation. (34)

The use of that “one” here feels overdetermined; it is not clear whether she is ventriloquizing the pain faced by a victimized student, or whether she is describing her own experience. Similarly, there is an unusual stridency in her tone when she adopts a first-person plural voice at the conclusion of the book to describe a number of violent break-ups of Occupy protests on U.C. campuses:

We gather, we surround, we ask, we are surrounded. The police do something incomprehensible. They fire PepperBalls into—at—the crowd.... They spray us, in our faces. They throw us to the ground, drive a baton into our sides, whack our hands with their sticks and break our fingers, they drag our friends, our teachers, our students to jail. By their hair. And we scream. (99)

The “we” here, clearly intended to express solidarity, adopts the perspective of bodies the speaker does not inhabit, eyes stinging from pepper spray, fingers broken, and hair dragged out by the roots. But in doing so, the book loses its focus. While the Davis protest may show clear links to Title IX policies, it is not clear how they relate to police responses on the other campuses to which this passage refers. That first person plural pronoun thus appears as a kind of flight, a foggy substitute for a more grounded description of Doyle's own very real bodily encounter with the Title IX apparatus. The final effect, at least for me, is that the book at times loses the incisive, balanced tone that makes her language so persuasive in some of her more academic titles, such as the brilliant *Hold it against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (2013), a work in which the narrative voice remains embodied and present throughout.

Nevertheless, *Campus Sex, Campus Security* is a book that deserves to be widely read and discussed. It is a serious wake-up call, an important intervention into a major shift that is taking place in higher education today. In the praiseworthy interest of reining in sexual harassment and rape on college campuses, campus citizens have become complicit in allowing Title IX to mobilize university administrations into a frenzy of activity that has sacrificed due process and basic fairness. It is time for university unions, faculty governance bodies, student rights organizations, and civil rights groups to recognize the nature of this overreach and to start fighting back. Doyle's book represents an admirable call to arms in that battle.

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Beyond the Real of Capitalism

DERRICK KING

Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge, eds. *Reading Capitalist Realism*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014. 260 pp.

Reading Capitalist Realism is an important and timely intervention into the nature of contemporary realism and the ongoing crisis of capitalism. The editors have assembled a powerful collection of essays that interrogate the critical capacity of the term “capitalist realism” to explain both contemporary ideological formations as well as current literary and cultural forms. In their theoretical introduction, Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge convincingly argue that capitalist realism provides more interpretive leverage than competing terms such as postmodernism or neoliberalism. While postmodernism names a period that seems to be decidedly over and neoliberalism fails to capture the “role of representation and belief in *producing* that which becomes reality,” capitalist realism describes both the intensification of global capitalism’s accumulation strategies as well as their representational logic (5-6, emphasis in original). The concept of capitalist realism thus allows us to conceptually oscillate between the realms of the economic and the cultural by naming the mediation between current technologies of capital accumulation and the production of ideological hegemony. The strength of the phrase lies in its flexibility to describe both an ideology as well as a wide array of cultural modes. The essays in the collection therefore cover a wide range of topics, including contemporary fiction, film and television, key Marxist theoretical concepts such as reification, and our current political situation.

The first section of the book, titled “Novelistic Realisms,” contains the most sustained focus on realism as a contemporary literary form. Andrew Hoberek’s chapter “Adultery, Crisis, Contract” conducts an inspired reading of the recent media obsession with adultery and adulterers: rather than simply existing as a mere distraction from “more pressing economic issues,” Hoberek claims that the fascination with adultery is in fact “a displaced register of those issues” (42). The form of the “contract” thus provides the mediatory mechanism between interpersonal violations of marital fidelity and the systemic violations of the capitalist system, transforming new variants of a classic realist genre—the novel of adultery—into a narrative vehicle to represent capitalist crisis (42).

Alissa G. Karl’s essay “Things Break Apart” likewise explores the larger allegorical

resonances of a narrative trope, arguing that representations of embodiment in the neoliberal novel are a key site of mediation between the individual and the deeply contradictory manifestations of the state and the nation under neoliberalism. Karl focuses on the way in which figurations of the body, especially “ill, injured, and wasting bodies,” function as a representational device for both capitalism’s “violence to individual bodies” and “the deterioration of older tropes of social cohesion including that of the liberal body” (71). Her perceptive readings of novels by James Kelman and Ali Smith reveal how bodies are “permeable and insecure yet also scrutinized” (72) in ways that invoke both larger geopolitical issues and the violence done to individuals who are either “extraneous to or ‘clipped’ to fit capitalist relations” (81).

The final essay of this section, Phillip E. Wegner’s “Things as They Were or Are,” periodizes Russell Banks’s 2004 novel *The Darling* in order to demonstrate how September 11, 2001 brings about the end of the “cultural and political possibilities” of the 1990s, and ushers in “a baleful new sense of capitalist realism” (108). Wegner argues that while Banks’s 1998 historical novel *Cloudsplitter* gives expression to what the philosopher Alain Badiou names an “event”—or an “improbable impossibility” capable of opening history to radical transformation (103-104)—*The Darling* demonstrates how the post-9/11 hegemony of capitalist realism not only stifles such potentiality in the present, but also reveals the process by which “its very real presence in the past is occluded as well” (108). Wegner’s essay thus serves as an important reminder of the stakes of both cultural production and theoretical analysis: it is only by remembering that capitalist realism is capable of foreclosing these utopian moments that, as Walter Benjamin put it, we are capable of “fanning the spark of hope in the past” (quoted on 108).

One of the strengths of this volume is its expansive reach: by conceptualizing realism as something beyond a mere literary mode, *Reading Capitalist Realism* can better map the contours of contemporary culture. Indeed, the authors in the “Novelistic Realisms” section also frequently gesture toward genres outside of realism proper: as Hoberek puts it, “it is almost as though the realist novel... must turn to genre fiction to represent forms outside of it” (47). Thus Hoberek discusses *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* in terms of the “late imperial romance” (47); the descriptions of bodily disintegration in the James Kelman and Ali Smith novels analyzed by Karl cannot help but suggest the horror genre; and Wegner explicitly invokes the science fictional “alternate history” genre when analyzing *Cloudsplitter* (103). The second section will continue this line of analysis, once again demonstrating that examining forms outside of the realist novel can provide insightful new theorizations about both contemporary realism and the capitalist system.

In the first essay of “Genres of Mediation,” Leigh Claire La Berge turns her attention

to the fifth and final season of *The Wire*, revealing that while the season is ostensibly examining the institution of the news media, its real interrogation is “realism itself, and particularly realism in its serial form” (127). Her analysis demonstrates that this season’s major plot strand—a fabricated serial killer that allows the Baltimore police department to obtain funding to investigate drug-related crime—both “kills the series by exposing the structural limits of the realist mode” and “reconstructs the series by rendering visible its own conditions of production, circulation, and reception” (132-133). *The Wire* then self-referentially demonstrates that “all narrative constructs,” especially capitalist realism itself, are ultimately for sale as commodities, a revelation that La Berge reminds us is also “utopian” in its insistence that there is “no going back,” only “forward into new forms, new genres, and new epistemologies” (134).

J.D Connor’s complex portrait of contemporary Hollywood film production deftly juxtaposes textual analysis with production history to demonstrate how films like *Déjà-Vu* and *Source Code* “internalize” these production histories and offer us an “allegory of the relationship between the world of [their] stories and the world of [their] production” (161, emphasis in original). Drawing on Deleuze’s Bergson-inspired readings of the relationship between time and money, Connor demonstrates how, in the contemporary cinema of finance capital, “configuration[s] of virtual and actual temporalities” in the film themselves (147) not only “reflect,” but also “think through” their relationship to their own “funding systems” (150).

Finally, Caren Irr explores a similar self-allegorization in William T Vollmann’s non-fiction *Poor People*, which she reads as a “metamodern” text that interrogates the conditions of the prose documentary and its ability to represent the category of “the poor” (180). Irr explains that Vollmann’s ethical standpoint is problematic because it is unable to represent capitalism as a structure and thus forecloses the “site of ‘politics’” (182), making his project the “dialectical antithesis” of scholarly approaches to the poor—most notably that of Jacques Rancière—that reveal “the contradictions underlying a purportedly seamless global capitalist reality” (188). Irr concludes, however, with the powerful suggestion that perhaps Vollmann and Rancière “express essentially the same problem”: the desire for a new collective “culture of communalism” (189-190). It is important that both La Berge and Irr end on utopian notes; indeed, their explorations of forms of realism outside of the novel seem to open a site for the desire (if not yet the realization) of new forms of collective life.

The essays in the final section, titled “After and Against Representation,” are likewise engaged in an attempt to open up the apparent closure of capitalist realism as an ideological formation. The first two essays do so by exploring the usefulness of “representation” as an epistemological category. Michael W. Clune responds to interpreta-

tions of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* as a form of capitalist realism by modeling an anti-realist (or anti-representative) hermeneutic allowing him to read the novel as "an example not of capitalist realism, but of a frankly imaginary capitalism" (201). Clune suggests that what he calls Gibson's image of "a market without corporations" might provide the left with a powerful figuration of political possibility that is "beyond market realism" (210). Timothy Bewes approaches the question of representation by turning to one of the key terms of Marxist theory, arguing that Lukács' theory of reification has been misunderstood by many contemporary scholars who treat it as "a representational rather than logical category" (214). Bewes explains that reification does not describe perception or representation; it is rather a "problematic" that explains the "ontological propensities of capitalism itself" (214). Putting it this way allows Bewes to imagine the "possibility of nonreified representation," which he demonstrates through readings of J.M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello* as well as recent theoretical concepts like Catherine Malabou's notion of "plasticity," both of which escape reification by being both "a representation and a *model of representation*" (234, emphasis in original).

In a brief afterward, Richard Dienst reminds us that "what motivates the exercises and experiments in this volume is not *fidelity to reality* but *rather a commitment to history*" (250, emphasis in original)—a proposition perhaps borne out most strikingly in Joshua Clover's "Communist Realism" and the included conversation between Jodi Dean and Mark Fisher. In the volume's rousing final essay, Clover reminds us of the truth that has undergirded all of the previous essays: that, as Marx might have put it, the point is not to simply interpret realism, but to change it by abolishing capitalism. Clover's essay thus offers a critical examination of the term "capitalist realism" itself, suggesting that "we err in associating [capitalist realism] with literature, or with cultural production in general, except as a kind of limit and scourge" (242). Rather, Clover claims, value itself is capitalism's Real and therefore what must be abolished by an as yet unimaginable communist realism: "communism achieves its realism by doing away with the real of capital" (245). Mark Fisher—whose theorization of "capitalist realism" in his 2009 book of the same name is a key influence for many of this volume's authors—likewise provides a utopian figuration that seeks to move beyond capitalist realism. For him, "post-capitalism" names "the emergence of something new, something that hasn't taken shape yet, something that can build on the modernity that capitalism constructs and thwart it at the same time" (38). Finally, Jodi Dean stages an opposition between "capitalist drive"—or the displacement of desire onto the "repetitive circuits" of communicative capitalism—and "communist desire," which reinstates "the gap necessary for desire" (31-32). It is then "the desire for collectivity" of communism itself that will enable us to overcome capitalist realism (33). In the final analysis, then, the project of theorizing capitalist realism also opens up spaces for new articulations of communist praxis, giving us the ability to imagine

a future in which we might see the end of capitalism (rather than simply the end of the world).

So not only does this collection productively trouble the boundaries between textual forms and theoretical categories, but it also reminds us that, try as it might, capitalism has not yet completely closed off our historical imaginations. Indeed, all of these essays have attempted, in some way or another, to open horizons beyond the Real of capital. *Reading Capitalist Realism* is then not only a crucial intervention into the questions of contemporary realism within literary and cultural theory, but also an important intervention into contemporary political and utopian thought. If capitalist realism “denotes the site upon which the limit of the imaginary is constructed” (6), this volume also reminds us of the importance of remaining faithful to what Wegner’s essay calls the event of the “improbable impossibility,” or the radical transformation of our bleak world for the better.

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Discovering the World

MICHAEL MAYNE

Luciana Castellina. *Discovery of the World: A Political Awakening in the Shadow of Mussolini*. Trans. Patrick Camiller. London: Verso, 2014. xiv + 194 pp.

Autobiographies by radicals are essential histories of political eras and of individual roles in collective struggle. As these portraits reveal the dialectics of growth and transformation, they prove that we can make our own history, even if not always as we please. They also provide a mode of insight into the ways social movements function as catalysts for political consciousness, especially when these lives parallel momentous shifts in political orders as neatly as Luciana Castellina's.

Castellina's adolescence coincided with World War II and Italian political upheavals. She traveled throughout the country during various stages of national hubris and foreign occupation; her stepfather served as a military lawyer; her family secretly harbored Jewish relatives. Castellina was 14 when Italy surrendered to the Allies; she was 15 when the German occupation of Italy ended; she was 19 when Italy joined NATO in 1949. Luckily, in 1943 Castellina began a "political diary," which she sustained for five years (2). Castellina uses this record as primary material for *Discovery of the World: A Political Awakening in the Shadow of Mussolini* to "reconstruct the stages of my early political development" (3). Little is included from the diary itself, and her reflections mostly avoid the tedium of accomplishments, famous people, and childhood memories. Instead, Castellina narrates the evolution of her political self by contextualizing entries with the wisdom of experience. Castellina was an important leader of the Communist movement in Italy and Europe, and *Discovery of the World* is an explanation (partly for her grandchildren) of why and how she became a revolutionary. The result is brief, keen, amusing, and often fascinating. *Discovery of the World* provides an instructive and generously personal perspective on education, anatomies of oppression, postwar feminism, organizing in democracies, and the life-cycles of perennial movement crises.

Like many revolutionaries, Castellina's childhood did not portend a radical adulthood. Her immediate environment was comfortably middle class, and she describes the wider social environment as initially complete: "the Fascist regime was the only context I had when I reached the age of reason" (3). However, enough sand worked its way into the Fascist oyster. Castellina depicts her family and schooling as two "contradictory lines": while her teachers emphasized Italian race glory and fascist truth, her relatives were generically non-fascists, and members of her mother's family

were officially labeled “mixed” (half-Jewish), which forced name changes and, later, hiding (6). Art and cinema provided additional contradictions. Fascist films unintentionally suggested “the world was much more complicated” when they introduced her curiosity to words like “Soviet Union” and “Communist,” and she became fascinated by modern painting when “Fascism and provincialism” restricted access (15-6, 78). Leftist groups hosted the best exhibits, and work considered degenerate by the regime “became a symbol of liberation” (77). Contradictions like these challenge the ostensibly apodictic narratives of hegemony, though this creative tension usually needs support to become constructive. Castellina recognizes negation, but she could use a system to understand its production. As she puts it, “My agony is that is I do not have ideals” (37).

Italy itself supplied the sharpest juxtapositions shaping her worldview, and the most urgent questions for her then concerned the dilemmas of national identity and political affiliation. Her family was based in Rome, they spent their summers in Venice, and she moved to Verona during the war. The “bigotry and conservatism” she found in Verona shocked her; Rome and Venice “seemed part of a different century” (14). This ugly milieu encouraged its negation: “since the young Veronese ladies were loyal to the regime, I felt bound to consider myself a little anti-Fascist” (15). The political affect she cultivates here would bloom as the war wound down, even though she lacks the knowledge and the agency to work out her questions. “Why should we now respect Badoglio?” she asks in late 1943 (37). “Or should we perhaps be for the king?...What the devil is Italy?” “I don’t know what to answer,” she concedes, “and the fact that I do not have to choose because I am female and adolescent makes me even more desperate” (ibid.). With her “political thinking no more than an adaptation of school reading to the new context,” events intervene, and the concrete ground of national reconstruction facilitates a different perspective (50). The diary documents how “muddled pieces of knowledge began to acquire a clearer form...and how the events of the turbulent early months after the Liberation somehow took on a systematic shape” (71).

One event succinctly dramatizes the unscripted process of discovery that results from negation. Castellina’s entry on 4 May, 1945, begins: “Today was an earthshaking day; I’m totally confused at the end of it” (82). She joined the front line of a protest march to Rome’s Piazza dell’Esedra “against the Communists and Socialists, who allegedly want to abandon Trieste to the Yugoslavs.” They were greeted by a counter-demonstration of “workers, and pretty muscular ones at that.” Fights broke out, and Castellina was ironically hit in the head with a flagpole bearing the royal emblem. In the process of retreating, she encountered a smaller rally:

They were Communists and Socialists: the best informed, people whispered to

me. They had come straight from the nearby PCI headquarters, which had apparently been attacked by an armed gang under a certain Captain Penna Nera; I knew nothing about him, but it seems he had been at the head of our demonstration. I stopped to listen, a good distance away. I confess that, as they spoke, I was gradually becoming convinced that what they said made sense. (83)

“These are things I have never thought about,” she admits (84). “I should go and see those Communists at Il Tasso to understand things better.” Less than two weeks later, she notices an important shift in her political consciousness: “I’m beginning to have doubts about my privileges, which until now I’ve taken for granted as if they were a fact of nature. Of course I’ve used the word equality thousands of times, but I’ve never drawn inspiration from it for ideas of any consequence, never applied it to myself” (88-9). Here, she is 15 years old.

Castellina soon attends Communist Party meetings and events regularly. At 16, she accepts an invitation to speak to a mildly hostile audience about Cubism, where she presents an affirmation of abstract art that she considers her “first political gesture” (98). She is part of a movement and a generation “‘seized’ by history, by the reality surrounding us—even if the road ahead was slower and more tortuous for those, like myself, who had not been old enough to experience the Resistance” (99). This community provides a radical alternative to the nationalist rhetoric of the old regime still resonating in the latest *Risorgimento* of postwar Italy. Communism’s “collective dimension helped me to find a way out from the circle of self-reference and even to rediscover the meaning of patria....The love I began to feel for neighbors quite remote from my social ghetto...gave me back a sense of solidarity” (100). She stops capitalizing the “p” of “patria” in her entries as the indefinite homeland explored through her activism usurps traditional habits of nationalism.

Castellina’s testimony extends Antonio Gramsci’s 1930 discussion of state authority when leaders lose legitimacy. Eight years into Mussolini’s rule, Gramsci was talking about our ability to contest hegemony and the “so-called ‘problem of the younger generation’ that Italy faced after World War I: whether or not “the simple exercise of force” could prevent radical alternatives (276). The Fascist Party unified political and economic forms in a force of martial order, corporate statism, and scripts of a singular national spirit. Gramsci recognized that as long as the problem is reduced to traditional social formations, we ignore its only solution: “the possibility and necessity of creating a new culture.” Fascism was maintained precisely by the suppression of the communist community Castellina discovered.

Castellina nurtures her awareness by immersing herself in the study of economics, philosophy, history, and social movements. The more she learns about the world, the

more she recognizes sharp incongruities, including the difference between her knowledge and those close to her: “I have realized that a whole mass of people, including so many of my traditional friends, live as if it were twenty years ago, outside time.... They don’t realize how important the social question is right now, or that bourgeois conventions and principles must be abolished” (122). She worries about not being able to comprehend the present crisis, but she appreciates the significance of her engaged integration with this social ground: “I was in the very midst of that world...my essence was not something other than what I did but included it” (124). Rejecting a positivist conception of identity and accepting authenticity as a process rather than a rule, she sees herself in the state of becoming rather than the act of completion: “I think I am more like I will be, but I will no longer be like I was or dreamed of being, like I thought I could always be” (142).

Sometimes Castellina misses the security of self-certainty and fears the “overwhelming estrangement” of kinesis, but even the most personal contradictions reward her with the vistas they reveal (177). These vistas echo Grace Lee Boggs’ own autobiography of a radical life, where she underscores the power and necessity of dialectical reason for communists and fellow travelers:

[I]n times of crisis or transition in any organization, movement, or society, it is a matter of life and death for the organization, movement, or society to recognize that reality is constantly changing, that the contradictions present in everything are bound to develop and become antagonistic, and therefore that ideas or strategies that were progressive and mind-opening at one point have become abstractions and fixations. (60)

“So over the years,” Boggs advises us, “I have always kept my ears close to the ground, testing ideas in practice and listening closely to the grass roots for new questions that require new paradigms. As a result, new unforeseen contradictions have challenged rather than discouraged me, and I have never felt burned out” (46). Boggs and Castellina’s emplotments of their pasts teach us how praxis, the purposeful activity by which we participate in history, can transform individuals and draft creative futures. They remind us that the site of the social always includes the potential for a new collective form, for a new negation that creates space for radical reflexivity and the optimism of new conflicts.

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The Interface is the Message

ANDREW VENTIMIGLIA

Lori Emerson, *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound*. University of Minnesota Press. 2014. 222 pp.

In *Reading Writing Interfaces*, media theorist Lori Emerson demystifies the enchanted world of modern digital devices. As recent technological innovations, from the ubiquitous tablet to fully-networked smart appliances, proliferate in a seductive variety of shapes, sizes, and colors, Emerson exposes the ideological project at the heart of this digital transformation. For techno-futurists and digital utopians, the omnipresence of devices, purported to integrate seamlessly into our increasingly interconnected lifeworlds and programmed to meet, and even anticipate our needs, suggests a perfect symbiosis between digital design and human desire. Undermining these visions, Emerson claims that the dream of ubiquitous and largely invisible technological enhancements permeating our lives does not enable a utopian extension of human ability but rather, in the words of Adam Greenfield, “deprives the user of meaningful participation in the decisions that affect his or her experience” (6).

Emerson develops her compelling argument not simply through an institutional or economic analysis of technological innovation, but rather by exploring the work of poets and artists, from contemporary digital and hypermedia artists such as Erik Loyer and Jason Nelson back to unexpected literary predecessors like Emily Dickenson. In so doing, Emerson aims to delineate a shared genre of media poetics dedicated to exploring, dissecting, and criticizing dominant media forms. Emerson characterizes media poetics as an artistic strategy of “hacking” media interfaces (whether the contemporary Graphic User Interface or pen and paper) in order to “turn them from transparent carriers of meaning to objects meaningful in themselves” (126). Only through an awareness of the material specificity of the interface, she argues, can we effectively account for the ways specific media shape user activity, awareness, and cognition. Emerson’s project then simultaneously contributes to a range of fields—literary studies, media theory, critical information studies—and shows how poets and artists skillfully enact critical commentary on, and expose the ideology of different media. Central to Emerson’s account is a sustained engagement with the ways that key media scholars like Marshall McLuhan enact their own poetics in order to foreground the centrality of the media interface in the process of meaning-making for the reader/viewer/user.

This project is also a work of media archeology, a field developed by Friedrich Kittler, Siegfried Zielinski and others to destabilize teleological histories of media development (which, they argue, enshrine a liberal utopian ideology of technological progress) and to expose the nonlinear development—the Foucauldian ruptures, the discontinuities—in media history. As with Kittler and others, the hope is to find in dead and defunct technology the glimmer of alternative media futures. Instead of tracking the progression of digital media toward ubiquity and transparency—a dream exemplified by the Natural User Interface, and later the Google Glass project—Emerson attempts to think new media differently by looking at forgotten discourses about the potential and promise of digital media. When Emerson tracks the history and development of the modern Graphic User Interface (GUI), for instance, she notes the transformation of a notion of “transparency,” from one that indexed an opening up of the architecture of the computer (making its structure visible) in order to make it flexible and configurable for the user, to one denoting an architecture that was black-boxed and made invisible in order to make the computer “intuitively” easy-to-use irrespective of the person using it.

Emerson’s media archaeological orientation not only shapes her research—constructed through extensive work with long-defunct hardware and software—but also the narrative structure of her book. Emerson tells the story of the development of interfaces backwards, starting from our current moment in which invisible interfaces dominate and the dream of ubiquitous computing reigns supreme. She then works her way back in time to key transformations in computer design in the 1980s and, further, to the history of the typewriter, concluding with Emily Dickenson’s experiments with paper as a particular type of reading/writing interface. The book concludes by returning to the present in a postscript on search engines. In each of these periods, Emerson attends to key literary and artistic movements and tracks their awareness of their unique media forms, moving from early computer poetry on the Apple II, through typewriter concrete poetry and onto Dickenson’s fascicles: self-published poetry booklets that were meticulously pinned together and bound by string.

This structure, which moves vertiginously from the comfort and familiarity of contemporary interfaces, to the increasingly distant media experiments of the past, is crucial to her overall scholarly project. By moving backward, Emerson produces “a friction from reading new media interfaces with, into, and against old media interfaces—a friction that not only troubles the distinction between new and old but also follows in the steps of instances of (activist) media poetics throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that similarly work against the grain of writing interfaces” (129). By doing so, she refuses a simple reading of past artists of media poetics as historical “precursors” to today’s experimental digital artists who play with notions

of (im)materiality, interactivity and nonlinearity. Emerson insists that there are profound and meaningful differences between the types of engagement taking place at different historical junctures. At the same time, she suggests that these artists are united across their respective historical moments by a shared awareness of the interface (here meant expansively as the material technology that mediates between reader and writing) as something that should never be taken as neutral or transparent. These artists recognize that the interface “works on us, delimiting reading, writing, even thinking” and Emerson puts the myriad artists and their media in relation to one another, revisiting older media so that “we can make our current media visible once again” (130-1). The end result is that we learn to see anew the reading/writing interfaces we use every day and “look, once again, at our interfaces rather than through them” (130).

In this respect, *Reading Writing Interfaces* also works as an unexpected and rather effective apology for Marshall McLuhan’s uneven legacy. Emerson repurposes McLuhan’s expansive definition of media to foreground the ideological implications of technologies and their prosthetic effects. Through McLuhan, she resists the “sleight of hand” enacted by modern interfaces that make the medium seem to disappear as it is increasingly relied upon, pointing instead to the ways that these devices actually delimit rather than extend individual agency. Thus, for example, Emerson analyzes how the computer screen displays a predetermined set of human-computer interactions from which the user must choose, but which are presented as though they are the full range of possible interactions (84). In McLuhan, Emerson also finds a media archaeologist who, like herself, is “finely attuned to the literary” and whose earlier, largely neglected works such as *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* enacted their own poetic writing, which was influenced by, and in turn influenced concrete poetry in the 1950s and 1960s (89). McLuhan, like Emerson, identified his literary heroes not simply as experimentalists but as activists who probe new and old media alike in order to make visible their shape, syntax and power.

Scholars and literary activists thus work together as media hackers, testing the limits of the media form in which they operate. This approach, effective as it is in linking actors through space and time through a shared techno-political project, does produce some hermeneutic challenges for Emerson. The subjects that constitute the bulk of her literary analysis—digital and hypermedia artists, concrete poets, Emily Dickenson—are all united by their desire to “push the limits of readability and interpretation” in their works as a means through which they can make the interface visible to the reader (99). In other words, these artists’ skill is their ability to turn media form into content or, as Emerson puts it earlier in the book, “to express the medium itself” (21). For these artists, the interface is the message.

Emerson recognizes her analytic work is thus reduced from one of literary interpretation to one in which, “critics have very little choice but to simply describe the unfolding experience” involved in reading or interacting with the different works she champions. Further, the import of each work is, by its very nature, ineluctably tied to the unique interface (the tablet, the typewritten page, the fascicle) in which it was originally presented. These are works that are resolutely unfungible. These factors leave Emerson’s readers on the outside of the very experiences that constitute the heart of her scholarly intervention, a dilemma only exacerbated by the book’s mute screenshots of interactive and multi-sensorial works like Mary Flanagan’s “[the house],” or the concrete poetry of Steve McCaffery or Dom Sylvester Houédard, whose vitality exists in the materiality of typewritten ink on paper. However, these limitations are not shortcomings of the book; rather, the reader’s awareness of them speaks to the success of Emerson’s project foregrounding the unique characteristics of each interface, including the academic monograph printed on acid-free paper and published by a university press.

In this respect, *Reading Writing Interfaces* fits alongside other compelling recent works like Lisa Gitelman’s *Paper Knowledge* or Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker’s *The Exploit*, which simultaneously describe and enact a keen understanding the specificity of different media forms and the complex systems, predecessors, and platforms that work together to produce the “interface effect.” Emerson’s work has the cumulative effect not only of recognizing how digital media carries its own materiality—an unequivocally important intervention—but also of destabilizing past media forms like the paper-bound or bookbound text that heretofore felt stable, even knowable (154). This double effect, commenting simultaneously on the sediment of settled history as well as the breathless techno-futurism of some aspects of digital studies, is what enabled media archaeology to generate such a wealth of valuable texts over the last twenty years. This work collectively participates in the legacy of McLuhan’s ideal artist who functions as a “future historian,” using the past to discover “the unnoticed possibilities of the present” (91).

Emerson’s book also works as a supplement to socio-cultural and legal scholarship analyzing recent transformations in the digital sphere, in which the rich possibilities originally imagined by the personal computer and the internet—its flexibility, its openness, its generativity—are being increasingly foreclosed. *Reading Writing Interfaces* can be situated alongside techno-legal analysis by scholars, including Jonathan Zittrain, Siva Vaidhyanathan, Tarleton Gillespie, Jessica Litman and others, which points to the ways in which the earlier creative and democratizing potential of the digital sphere has been closed off by a potent combination of changes in hardware and damaging reforms in the realm of intellectual property law. These scholars add depth to the picture painted by Emerson by adding that her literary heroes—the art-

ists who experiment with and expose the limitations of new digital technologies—are themselves increasingly limited by both the devices that they use and the law that renders tampering with devices illegal and punishable as a criminal offense.

Emerson's postscript on 'The Googlization of Literature' uses current experiments in the construction of artwork through search engines to gesture toward the critical role of the law in digital activist poetics and to suggest future avenues of research for herself and others in the field of media and digital culture. For instance, her analysis of Tan Lin's 2008 project *HEATH* or *plagiarism/outsources, notes towards the definition of culture, untitled Heath Ledger project, a history of the search engine, disco OS* and John Cayley and Daniel C. Howe's *How It Is in Common Tongues* recognizes how future experiments in digital poetry, by "writing through" the growing mass of online data available through the internet, may be violating both copyright and increasingly constraining licensing agreements. Without diminishing the importance of the connections Emerson builds between eras, the legal and political connotations of these artists' work differ in scale, if not in kind, from earlier artists engaged in an activist media poetics.

For these artists, developing true literacy in the algorithms, protocols, and software that invisibly shape our digital lives—a necessity for producing the kind of art that foregrounds the interface for the reader—might now involve not merely artistic invention, but acts of hacking, piracy and technological circumvention outlawed by the current iteration of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Emerson recognizes this challenge for future artists in her conclusion, noting how question of access will be central to future artists and activists. Ironically, "that supposedly antiquated device, the book, is fast becoming a safe haven for readingwriting because its particulars cannot be tracked, monitored, indexed, fed into an algorithm, and given back to us as a commodity" (184). Here too, Emerson is aware of the unique poetry of this quixotic turn of events in the adolescent years of the twenty-first century. The future of digital activism may lie in the material of the bookbound.

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