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“obituary” by billy little

The Protagonism, Multiplicity and Ambivalence of Popular Power in Argentina: A Review of Marina Sitrin, *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina*.

AK Press, 2006

By Sebastian Touza

In December of 2001, when much of the debris from the collapse of the WTC was still on the ground and the air bombing campaign was raging over Afghanistan, news of very different kind came from a part of the world. Argentina had remained somewhat in the darkness in the previous years, except for those following in business magazines the celebratory words reserved for its administrations. Commentators used to consider the South American country an example of how to successfully combine liberal democracy with a speedy downsizing of the remains of the welfare state—and how to do it with the apparent general consent of the population. Big was the surprise—both to neoliberal pundits and everyone involved—when, after a decade of privatization, deregulation, labour “flexibilization” and elimination of social programs, all of them secured with an increased dose of repression, the protagonism of the Argentine people surged in an explosive way.

Argentines lived 2001 as a mounting spiral of struggles, growing in extension and defiance. The outburst that would mark a transition to a different phase did not come until the night of December 19th, when people filled the streets demanding that “all of them must go!” The “them” of the demand did not have a clear referent. “Them” were the professional politicians, but also the forms of representative democracy that separate politics from daily life. “Them” were also the bankers, transnational corporations and national capitalists. “Them” were the police and the mass media. There was not a unified “us” confronting “them”. People were united by what they wanted to depose.

The insurrection continued without interruption on the 20th, as the tens of thousands occupying the streets withstood the fierce repression unleashed by president Fernando de la Rúa hours before submitting his resignation. For the next year or so (it is difficult to say when it began to slow down), the creativity of the masses was set free. People advanced over public spaces creating unexpected forms of grassroots organization, launching solidarity projects and combining together the fragments of an economy that did not follow capitalist principles. The power of the multitude was such that even conservative newspapers felt compelled to treat these social experiments with respect. Politicians had trouble finding ways of reconstructing the representative system for what had been set in question was much more than particular men and women. The events carved so deep into the flesh of the social body that the set of neoliberal guidelines that every

politician had embraced with religious devotion in the 1990s has, since 2001, stopped functioning in Argentina as *pensée unique*.

It is very difficult to mark the precise point where it all began. One might refer to the creation of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, the organization of the mothers of the “disappeared” by the military junta that ruled the country from 1976 to 1983. Or perhaps one could cite the organization HIJOS, created by the children of the disappeared in the mid-1990s. The unemployed workers’ movements, which appeared in 1996, organized tens of thousands who had been laid off by privatization and deregulation. Known as *piqueteros* for their practice of blocking roads, these movements soon became complex territorial networks spread through the neighbourhoods where the poor live. At the same time speculative bosses who wanted to escape the crisis by moving their capital overseas were shutting down private businesses. Faced with the prospect of unemployment, workers were taking over those factories, shops, hotels and clinics, all run under their control. While the political void created by the riotous popular rejection of candidates to succeed the deposed president was still expanding, neighbours began to meet at street corners and squares to see where to go from there. By the second week of January 2002 the city of Buenos Aires alone had more than one hundred assemblies meeting sometimes every day.

Many more experiments appeared which did not fit into these categories. In the first months, each neighbourhood assembly, recovered factory and *piquetero* movement was a living organism, open to explore and innovate in the ways of constructing values and relations of solidarity against the background of devastation and individualism left by years of neoliberal policies. The borders of each of these experiments were porous. Joint activities were frequent. Initiatives were contagious. *Protagonism, multiplicity and ambivalence* were the dominant characteristics of those days. Protagonism because there was a palpable desire to not accept the sad fate reserved for citizens of representative democracies and consumer societies as spectators. Multiplicity because popular protagonism demonstrated that nothing was written in stone. Presidents and ministers could be fired, the apparently solid arm of institutions could be twisted, and it was all made possible by the collective desertion from the roles people had accepted as “decent” citizens and selfish individuals. Finally, there was ambivalence because a premise of the dynamic of the movement was that nothing, not even the forms of participation and grassroots democracy that were being experimented with, had a stable identity. When movements stopped being different from themselves they become predictable, capable of fitting within the categories constructed by scholars, journalists and policy-makers and thus they could be domesticated.

Argentinean writers have been prolific in their coverage of these events. They have authored

some remarkable contributions to the understanding of the foundations of politics and democracy. Even though much of what happened could not be explained outside Argentina’s turbulent history, the events had universal significance in that they revealed, on one hand, weaknesses of the seemingly waterproof alliance between representative democracy and free-market capitalism and, on the other, human capacities for love, friendship, solidarity and organization that could illuminate new forms of struggle elsewhere. Not much of this literature has made it into the English language, but numerous writers, artists and filmmakers from Europe and North America have been traveling to Argentina in the past years to collect the stories of the groups, movements and people, who were surprised that others so far away were paying attention.

Marina Sitrin has been one of such visitors. Her book *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* seeks to portray the multiplicity and protagonism made visible by the Argentine commotion, while, at the same time, it explores how to convey those struggles in a way that keeps them multiple and protagonic, not as dead vignettes of a history book or as frozen case studies in a social sciences essay. Sitrin acts as interviewer, editor and translator of numerous conversations she had with a wide range of people. Before the English translation appeared, *Horizontalism* was published in Argentina by a press that has functioned under workers’ control since the revolt of 2001.

The result is an impressionistic picture of the three or four years after the revolt. The quilt-like structure of *Horizontalism* is knitted with over a hundred fragments of interviews, not always following discernible sequences. The fragments sometimes recreate conversations between two, three or more speakers. Probably with the exception of the introduction, written by Sitrin, and the first chapter of interviews, the book can be entered at any point. And it really does not make much difference where you start. It is as if the representation of multiplicity needed to undermine the order of precedence of reading, from left to right, beginning to end.

Sitrin’s role as an editor has consisted in selecting the fragments and organizing them around keywords. The initial chapter, in which the fragments of conversations deal with the context of the rupture of 2001, is followed by chapters on horizontality, *autogestión* (self-management), autonomy, creation, power, repression, women, protagonism and dreams.

Horizontality is, in Sitrin’s view, the notion that sums up the “use of direct democracy and the striving for consensus” that can be found across the most varied movements in Argentina (vi). There is horizontality not just because in these struggles people have striven to avoid hierarchical relations, but more simply because the politics of these movements is characterized more by listening to others and creating new relations than by having well-defined plans about where to go with

the movement. Horizontality stresses the democratic character of the communication involved. It is a radical departure from *vertical* forms of organization. Sitrin does not want *horizontal* to become a category whose borders are clearly defined: it “is a living word that reflects an ever-changing experience” (3).

The Argentine protagonism achieved certain celebrity among activists elsewhere because of its capacity to create a series of alternative institutions and its ability to run those projects through horizontal communication, consensus and non-hierarchical decision-making. However, horizontality is not the origin of those institutions. For there to be horizontality there has to be, in the first place, a collection of individual wills desiring to do something about a certain situation. Horizontal communication does not manufacture rebellious wills. It is, rather, what may happen when these wills come together. As one of Sitrin’s interviewees points out, horizontalism “is a tool, not an end in itself” (46). Direct democracy is not the *true* form of politics, whose *false* form would be representative democracy. Rather, it is the living process in which the forms of protagonism are not pre-established.

Similar points could be raised about two other “keywords” used by Sitrin: *autogestión* and *autonomy*. The use of these keywords has to be traced to the very interviewees. For in Argentina there has been a tendency among most of the movements to regulate themselves according to the ideal of what they would like to be as movements. When expressions such as *horizontalism*, *autonomy*, *unemployed workers’ movement* or *neighbourhood assembly* became categories within which the different movements saw themselves falling, the mess of creation began to be sacrificed to favour the clarity of the ideal. For what is politics if not a collective thought that keeps meanings open, continuously unseating established representations and debunking the truths that we hold in common? The diffusion of keywords, far from opening, creates secure barriers around apparent conceptual gains. Activism does not need to construct houses with language. Rather, it has to defend the houses made of concrete forms of affect. It needs to create vivid spaces in which those in struggle can manage their “own time and space”, according to their own tempo, their own conditions, as another of Sitrin’s interviewees puts it (163). Thus, the kind of power to be cultivated is not the kind that can be “accumulated” toward taking power, but power as a capability, which only arises from creating inhabitable by generating affection and love (54).

Sitrin’s “horizontal” style of presentation seeks to grasp a sense of the multiplicity of radical forms of life whose creative capacity made these forms of protagonism difficult to tame by the experts in rebuilding representative democratic consensus. However, even a “horizontal” narrative needs to be grounded by using certain keywords, the same concepts whose pre-eminence has undermined the capacity for creation in multiple directions that used to characterize the movements Sitrin is seeking to grasp. The multiplicity of protagonism does not tolerate the sober clarity of the concept. Rather, the moment when activists began to emerge as specialists in *autogestión*, *autonomy* and *horizontal* was also the moment when the movement became repetitive and dull.

If the most salient qualities of protagonism are not the horizontal and autonomous ways in which it communicates and organizes, but rather its capacities to remain creative, open, alive—in other words, capacities that resist even the most “horizontal” forms of representation—then not much can be achieved by experimenting with a horizontal style of presentation. It is because these capacities exist that protagonism might choose to organize autonomously and in non-hierarchical ways, not the other way around. As the work of some Argentineans writing on the events has

shown—most notably Colectivo Situaciones and Ignacio Lewkowicz—the narrative styles that bring us closer to the new protagonism are those that discuss both the events and the difficulty of narrating them. These almost poetic, aggressively non-academic pieces both resist the security of the concept and emit contagious vibrations at a frequency that even those living at significant distances from Argentina can relate to our own desire to act in our situations.

Sitrin has covered an impressive amount of ground. She brings us close to a rich variety of voices from piquetero neighbourhoods in the suburbs, workers occupying sugar plantations in the north, a tile factory in the south and medical clinics in Buenos Aires, squatters in Lomas de Zamora and Jujuy, media collectives and neighbourhood assemblies. *Horizontalism* has to be praised for collecting the voices of those on whose affect, love and friendship depends, whether protagonism, multiplicity and ambivalence live or die.

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Phyllis Webb and the Common Good: Poetry / Anarchy / Abstraction
By Stephen Collis
Talonbooks, 2007

Reviewed by Andrea Actis

It is March 2009, there’s been weirder and heavier snowfall this year in British Columbia than in Providence, RI, where I now, weirdly and heavily, go to school, my neighbours (neighbors) think they have a Socialist president, and two books on Phyllis Webb now exist in the world: Pauline Butling’s *Seeing in the Dark: The Poetry of Phyllis Webb* (Wilfred Laurier UP, 1997), committed to reading for and between the “feminist contexts” of Webb’s work (“to make her pivotal to a politics of social change in which ‘new’ subjectivities are garnering increased visibility and value,” Butling prefaces [ix]), and Stephen Collis’ recent *Phyllis Webb and the Common Good*, which commits to reading for and between the contexts—via the tripartite (as I think he might be thinking it)—of *Poetry / Anarchy / Abstraction*.

When shall we break this vase of perfect silence into the scattering chips of dialogue! [...] (“And Again the Theme of Perfection and Destruction”)

This couplet is from one of Webb’s unpublished early (still vaguely but self-consciously vase-like) poems that Collis, a Vancouver poet, editor, professor, and frequent and gracious visitor-pilgrim to Webb’s current home on Salt Spring Island, includes in his study. The book comes together in three sections—“The Poetics of Response”, “Poetry and Anarchy” and “On Abstraction”—with an introduction titled “Disinterest” that Collis uses to position himself as a radically *interested* critic (writing less about Webb than with her, along with such other/Other poets as Robert Duncan, H.D., Laura Riding, George Oppen and Robin Blaser, “towards the idea that the poem is not a hoardable commodity but a shared response-ability” [17]), as well as a brief afterword, “After Webb”, in which he urges that “[i]t must remain an interesting mystery, rather than a problem disinterestedly solved—the reasons Webb left poetry for painting” (208). All the same, Collis’ reading throughout for what he names “[t]he *tendency towards abstraction*” in Webb’s oeuvre does end up locating and/or producing this tendency as “the key trajectory of Webb’s literary career—the cause and substance, even, of her characteristic reticence and silence” (180). From Webb’s early, historically modernist “high-priestess mood or voice” (as Smaro Kamboureli

once described it^{*}), to the later, palpably “deconstructive” *Naked Poems* (1965), to her mid-career musings and anti-musings in *Talking* (1982), to her late-career, historically postmodernist *Hanging Fire* (1990) and its more “apocalyptic vision” (Kamboureli again), to her final book *Nothing But Brush Strokes: Selected Prose* (1995), what is the process or self-injunction, Collis asks, by which Webb’s “talking”—and the status and readability of her lyric necessarily—becomes ever more provisional, opaque and finally abstract and “nothing but”? What are the relations, more broadly (Collis everywhere admits these are huge questions, asking anyway after “*the ontological status of the poem itself*” [21]), between poetry’s formal manifestations or determinations and the ethical/political orientations that are attending, making, breaking, scattering, or choosing altogether to silence or withhold them? Between “chips of dialogue” and a certain configuration, or non-figuration, of paint chips?

As an undergraduate student I wrote a little on Webb, on what John Hulcoop once registered as “the existentialist impulse” (this is actually Webb’s characterization) of her early work, which gradually managed, as some tell the story (with varying inflections, degrees, and of course very sorry misintentions of sexism), to turn itself inside-out “from the purple rhetoric of a private past towards the present made public in spare poems which exhibit something of the quality of abstract paintings”[†]. I wanted to reinscribe this movement, back then (and maybe a bit now, too), under the sign of what Simone de Beauvoir’s political, feminist and autobiographical writing would figure as an ethical and social “conversion”—in Webb’s case, out of a kind of solipsistic, formal “bad faith” (yikes!)—not diagnose Webb’s fluctuating moods through the nebulous, heavily mythologized personalities of “Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Camus ... and perhaps Lucy Jones, Miss Webb’s existential psychiatrist in Paris” (as Hulcoop’s roster frames the family of influences). But I also noticed how Butling’s book on Webb’s revisionings of Western patriarchal discourse strategically and responsibly resisted any “evolutionary metaphor of growth and development that seems always to invade the work of a single writer” (ix), and so I got rather nervous about how I was thinking. In *Phyllis Webb and the Common Good*, however, Collis does seem to need (like me and old Hulcoop) to make meaning of Webb’s literary development, to “find a bridge backwards” to various stages or moments in Webb’s writing and activist engagements from her present reclusions into abstract painting. Here Collis cites, for example, Edward Said’s notion of “late style” to suggest how “the artist ‘abandons communication with the established social order’” to create “works [that] constitute a form of exile” (161).

Yet Collis imagines all this in ways that strike me, paradoxically, as both more teleological and less teleological than either Hulcoop’s or my own. Perhaps I feel and say this in part because Collis isn’t afraid to use the word “teleology”: “Webb’s teleology is *towards abstraction*” he is happy to tell us (161). On the other hand it is clear that what “teleology” means for Collis does not entail a program for reading “within a modernist/humanist critical context” that would uphold Webb as “an exemplary female version of the self-expressive subject”—this is what Butling, associating such a program with her past-life New Critical training, would warn against (110). On the contrary, instead of being ideologically antithetical to the smashing of any well-wrought ceramic vessel and the “scattering” of its “chips of dialogue” (what Butling might prefer to see, or specify, as a multiplicative increase in the “visibility and value” of marginalized “subjectivities”), Collis’ reading for the teleological makes dialogue—even or especially its failures—the end term for Webb’s writing process. It is a “movement from the (lyric) self to a multitude

of others” (89), as Collis relates it, with the occasional (if not inevitably useful) reference to Hardt and Negri, and more consistent references to Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Being Singular Plural* and various other philosophers of alterity (including some of those other/Other poets mentioned above). With Webb’s abstract painting—some colour samples of which are reproduced in the book and convincingly integrated into Collis’ argument—the poet enters again “a perfect silence” but this time with a legible or demystified surplus; it is now a silence that can be read to account for all the dialogue making-and-breaking of her previous commitments and labours in provincial politics, public broadcasting, educating, reviewing and, for instance, the serial poem (wherein “individual lyrics are ‘federated’ into a centreless whole” [93], Collis points out). Collis situates this movement in the wider scheme: “Webb’s work is a bridge one can walk across to a more complete understanding of the fractures, rifts, and shifts in twentieth century North American poetry” (19), he wagers—particularly if we are interested in how the work “mirror[s] changes in the methods and approaches of the twentieth century avant-garde” (20). As Collis will theorize of Webb’s *not-writing*, however, “it took the complete abandonment of poetry for painting to enable her full exploration of abstraction and the material reticence and intractable otherness of our modes of representation and communication. As an anarchist,” he adds, “...an irrevocable split with representation seemed inevitable” (180).

Collis’ reading of Webb’s project for its anarchist propulsions and demolitions—for the anarchist “subjectivity” of her lyric, which “simultaneously projects and protects both autonomy and collectivity” (40)—is everywhere informed, properly, by the problem of property. As he summarizes in his chapter on “Poetry and Anarchy”:

The crucial distinction between the individualist and communist versions of anarchism falls upon this question of property: the individualist stream reveals its roots in Locke’s sense of the self as indisputable private property and the ground of individual rights and freedoms; the communist stream in arguments over “primitive accumulation” and the enclosure of the English commons, arguing, with Gerard Winstanly and the Diggers, that the earth is a “common treasury,” singularly plural and open to all to share. For Riding poetry’s problem lies in its too-close links to the private self: it “seems to say: keep out. This is a private performance.” For Duncan, the poem is an open-field commons to which we are all (potentially) permitted to return. But Duncan also reveals that the poetic commons is also, always, in danger of appropriation and totalization—threatened by our egos’ attempts to crown ourselves kings (or queens) of the meadow. (107)

Elsewhere, following a quotation from Herbert Read on “[t]he question of the relation of the individual to the collective”, Collis points out that “[t]here is, in fact, an anarchist *spectrum* which, while never abandoning the individual, nevertheless stretches from a coarse atomism at one extreme, all the way over to a fully elaborated communism on the other” (91-92, emphasis added). Collis’ move, then, is to situate Webb as “[a]mbiguously of both realms” (107)—which may be seen to correspond with his (possibly contentious) earlier suggestion that what strictly feminist readings of Webb tend to “miss” is “what Webb herself calls a ‘contradiction’ [Andrew] Marvell”—not to mention the anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin, whom Webb undertook to study and respond to with her (never completed) “Kropotkin Poems”—“is resisted but he is also embraced. There is as much plunder as awe at work. A declaration of both horizon and companionship” (63). Collis appeals to Webb’s

poem “The Days of the Unicorn” to illustrate this tension or contradiction—a tension perhaps not yet realized or able, historically-speaking, to be “envision[ed] [through] a postmodern poetry”, though Collis would claim it anticipates this “futurity” (90):

I remember when the unicorns
roved in herds through the meadow
behind the cabin, and how they would
lately pause, tilting their jewelled
horns to the falling sun as we shared
the tensions of private property
and the need to be alone.

I know this is scarcely credible now
as we cabin ourselves in cold
and the motions of panic
and our cells destroy each other
performing music and extinction
and the great dreams pass on
to the common good (107-08)

It is to “the common good”, then, that Collis ascribes the cooperative (and apparently accumulative, or more properly *disaccumulative*) work of poetry, anarchy and abstraction in the context of Webb’s formal development. Yet any “question of an anarchist aesthetics”, he is also careful to acknowledge, is and must remain “a thorny one, in part because of the fraught debate over the very notion of seeing a political (social) valence to the aesthetic (and the equally vexed issue of maintaining an either/or distinction—either social or aesthetic, political or cultural, base or superstructure—but never both at once)” (109). Nevertheless, Collis is able to locate Webb’s anarchism—both writerly and painterly, both its contents and its forms—in what he calls her “*sharing* of the ‘impasse’”: “philosophically unwilling to *force a program* upon the social field,” he observes, “anarchists often find themselves left with little recourse than biding their time and/or working through small-scale, face-to-face affinity groups” (123)—so “the great dreams pass on.”

Listen. Do you hear the *I* running away again from the man in the green hat? Look again. *I* is off and diving into Fulford Harbour to run with the whales. *I* spout. *I* make whalesong. Passengers on the ferry swarm to starboard to see me disporting myself. *I / we* know they are out to get us. Yes, they are mad for education. They’ll pen us up at Sealand and we’ll die. We don’t build big and we can’t shoot. *I* commits suicide in the watery commune, the vocal pod. *We* swims on. (Webb “Performance”, in Collis 41)

In his introduction Collis contends that “[p]oems are tokens of the between, the milieu in which self and other, author and reader, meet and exchange” (29); such relations, he later shows, enable a gift economy to survive that “implies the opposite of [Harold] Bloom’s ‘anxiety of influence’ theory: the other (prior poem) does not invoke ‘the immense anxieties of indebtedness’, but is a *gift* that we recognize in our response” (34). As for abstract painting, here we have another kind of “*being between*”; but it “is still communicative,” Collis maintains, “still a telling, a sharing, a giving, a joining, a being together in the artefact of our meeting. The language poetry aspires to is a proto-linguistic proximity, a marking of horizon and companionship—and the abstract painting marks this same space” (208). It too swims on.

A professor (not Collis) once asked me why it is that contemporary writing on poetics so often surfaces “in the appreciative mode”. I couldn’t quite tell to what degree she didn’t appreciate the appreciative mode of my own writing but my guess is that she wanted more plunder than awe from me. Graduate school is helping me work on that. But Collis’ “response” to Webb’s “gifts”—his unabashed “admir[ation]” for her

work (208) and his self-conscious performance of an anarchic reading—is a way of doing criticism that I will always feel responsible, in some way, to do. Towards the end of her book Butling offers a survey of published writing on Webb, endorsing “several contemporary instances of criticism that foregrounds its own processes and contexts even as it also takes process and context as the topic for discussion in the poems” (110). It could be complained that Collis takes this foregrounding to an extreme, at times letting his appreciation run into an almost impressionistic or eulogistic mode. But he makes no apology: “... criticism is supposed to be anything but enthusiastic,” he concedes (14), yet to set one’s enthusiasm outside the realm of the common good would probably be improper too.

* Smaro Kamboureli, “Seeking Shape. Seeking Meaning: An Interview with Phyllis Webb.” *West Coast Line* 25:3 (Winter 1991/92): 21-41. [39]

† John Hulcoop, “Introduction” in Phyllis Webb, *Selected Poems: 1954-1965*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1971: 1-33. [29]

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Insurrection/Resurrection

By John Curl with photos by Ken Light and graphics by Bruce Kaiper
Working Peoples Artists, 1975

Reviewed by Charles Watts

This idea is so simple and good, it’s strange that only advertisers have used it successfully in North America: if you have something to say, don’t just put it in a book, SAY IT IN PUBLIC! PRINT IT IN LARGE LETTERS ON A SHEET OF PAPER OR CLOTH AND POST IT IN A PUBLIC PLACE. AFFIX IT DURABLY TO A WALL, A POST, ANY FREE-STANDING SURFACE. *Insurrection/Resurrection* shows once again that poems are not meant to be confined between the pages of a book. That the idea seems such a novel one is a measure of how far our public space has been co-opted by the possessors of the media of exchange. People need poetry, and how can they “usually” get it? By resort to the “publishing game” and the “book market”. By indulging in another form of commodity fetishism. Many people can’t afford the indulgence. Blake would have covered the public buildings of London with his visions had the city “fathers” “indulged his fantasies”—and what do we have now? The sordid dreams of capitalist pimps, politicians, entrepreneurs blight every street and roadway. You can say anything you like, in printed letters three feet high, so long as it doesn’t conflict with capitalist ideology—for a price. Well, that’s not good enough for the masses. We need a public poetry, printed and declaimed in the public place; we need to junk the narrow range of buying and selling. In places where the class struggle has heightened, and the people have come out in the street to speak and resist their oppressors, there you’ll find the people’s words on the city walls.

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An Exchange Between Sam Greenlee and Lawrence Ytzhak Braithwaite (7 April 2007)

Dear Brother,

Thank you for the thoughtful and insightful analysis of *The Spook Who Sat By The Door*. What many people miss is that the book and film are based on the solid foundation of African American folklore that were the bedtime stories told to my brother and me by my southern maternal grandparents; the Brer Rabbit tales, in particular.

Every few weeks a new hysterical response to a new genocidal plot as revealed by many of the contributors to this network [Luv4self] that include “the n” word among other means of psychological warfare. The current urban myth is that Disney Studios intends a release of *Songs of the South*, a cinematic depiction of the Brer Rabbit tales collected by Joel Chandler Harris, a reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution* and published in 1800. There seems to be no indication that any such release is imminent.

The Brer Rabbit tales are a direct descendant of the Dahomean fables that feature the African hare as protagonist in conflict with a hyena and lion as antagonists. In slave America, the hare becomes a jack rabbit and the hyena and lion become Brer Fox and Brer Bear. Intrinsic in the tales is that the predated survive the predator through intelligence, cunning and guile as the predator needs no more intelligence than that required to hunt, kill, eat and procreate. Predators are dumb by definition; witness the Iraqi fiasco and its defenders.

In the West Indies, the counterparts of the Dahomey-derived fables are the Ashanti tales of Ananci the spider and in the southern states he becomes the center of the tales of Aunt Nancy. While the Ananci fables of the Ashanti are widespread in the West Indies, they are rare in North America; possibly because when whites discovered that while Cinque was not Ashanti, the bulk of his rebellious followers were Ashanti warriors. There is historical evidence that in the aftermath of the Amistad trial; many slave owners refused to buy Ashanti as slaves.

My all-time favorite fable is that of Brer Rabbit and the tar baby, in which Brer Rabbit is captured when stuck in the melting tar of the tar baby, and begs to be impaled on the thorns of a briar bush. Once he is thrown inside and therefore safe, he announces that the briar patch was his birthplace; reverse psychology at its ultimate.

The urban counterpart of Brer Rabbit becomes Stagolee, the ultimate street hustler. In Washington, Dan Freeman becomes Brer Rabbit and in Chicago he becomes Stagolee in a Brooks Brother suit. The “trickster” is a revered figure in both African and African American folklore.

I wonder how many of the people posting complaints about *Songs of the South* have actually seen the film. However, facts are never allowed to get in the way of people that seem to believe in “oppression, oppressor and white supremacy” and that Wonder bread is a white folks plot to kill us through malnutrition. A people that dismiss the native oral history of folk tales and fables are doomed to see themselves through other’s eyes. There is little doubt that our literary ancestors, that include Wright, Killens, Walker, Brooks, Hughes and, above all, Zora Neal Hurston, who studied and collected southern Black folklore while pursuing a doctorate at Columbia University were steeped in the rich and vibrant folk lore of our African American ancestors.

Nobody has ever oppressed me; although many have tried. Call me Brer Rabbit!

peace mr greenlee,

i thank you for your response to my work and applaud your reinterpretation of yours. it is always an honour to have the artist—the black griot—and/or writer feel so moved by a commentary or review that they feel they are move to respond—and in such a respectful and informative and elo-

quent apologia as you have, sir.

folklore and mythology often plays a great role in most diasporic if not all diasporic works—be it overtly or covertly = subtexte—as is missed by the afrobourgeois with rap/hip hop—as was the case with jazz prior that = ellingtonian “jungle music”—the afroeurasian mcluhan

the medium cool

bluesy

shaking something or other what makes the capital an “ism”

I am sure your underlying motif of the afrikan trickster is one example as covert and imbedded subtexte—as can be said of your response—as was the case with orson wells when we discover that his film of magic and tricksters was the trick itself—the other would be the structural patterns, tardids = repetition and crossfading and samplin’ into massive basic of sankofa used in the review of your novel *the spook who sat by the door*.

one is text book recited as nostalgia

the other embedded and utilized as living and vital = the practical

the beat of the homeland is so imbedded in the hearts of elementals that the lore becomes—only covert and digital in its binary translation form from one system to the other via the sound of the massives.

1.2

1.2

“Yo, yo it’s the unspoken word

You not heard, get your brains open

Controlled emotions freewill

As the same token

Keep a sword tucked sharp inside your personal

We can bust a shot or we can bust a verse or

two” - the rza

the brer rabbit mythology/folklore that you write so eloquently about which motivates your novel is self evident upon your new analysis—and yes brute force is often the way of fools unless it is defensive—the violence of the oppressed and that of the oppressor is a reality—not a sign of weakness nor surrender nor is it victim (hood) think—as once we saw in the original cut of brer freeman who uses his slave folklore wits to dodge the master via weapons training and bombing the mayors office and other acts of extreme black liberationist violence to engage the enemy—not as would the new version reveal which renders all as simply another trick by the bourgeois to use or misuse the proletariat in order trick the enemy and advance the SELF (interest)

“Fuck you Analog niggaz we be digital” - ibid

this enemy is still present today as we see crew of eager ameri-neo-afrikkkans set and ready to assist or sit back and watch amerikkka colonize afrika and have themselves—dashiki and pastiche afrikan culture and faith and all—replace the indigenous afrikans as did their (as they would feel) “hopefully” new neighbours israel did for europe.

the red

the green

the yellow

the black

and

the stars and afrocentrick bars of colonialism i can say that freeman, as he appears in the original (dis) engagement of decolonization, is far more appealing, like original warriors movie, never seen version of *the magnificent ambersons*, and early auden poem, than the director’s cut presented in today’s edition.

you see the early work of amiri baraka like *the toilet* often nails it—sometimes the rest can be a pleasant rhetoric.

with all respects

your humble and rebellious student

khoda hafez

ishaq (ly braithwaite

Zapatistas and the Confusion of Theory: A Review of Mihalís Mentínis, *Zapatistas: The Chiapas Revolt and What It Means for Radical Politics* Pluto Press, 2006

By Peyman Vahabzadeh

January 1, 1994 inaugurates a new era in social activism. On this day 10,000 members and supporters of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) occupied six municipalities in the southern state of Chiapas in Mexico and brought into the Mexican political scene a renewed attempt at reasserting indigenous rights as well as reforming Mexico’s corrupt and clientalist political system. Within a few days, following battles with the Mexican army, the masked Zapatista militants retreated into the Lacandon Jungle, the ancient home of the Mayan peoples, continuing their struggle through other means.

The six originators of what later became the EZLN had descended upon the communities of the Lacandon Jungle sometime in 1983. Over ten years later when they staged their uprising “against neoliberalism and for humanity”, their Maoist roots had deteriorated in favour of a strange but refreshing political discourse influenced by Mayan beliefs and an unusual pledge to democratic, participatory model of mass organization. These features, along with their clever and effective usage of the internet that gained the movement international support and global publicity, characterized it as the “world’s first post-modern revolution”, to quote *The New York Times*. The poetic communiqués of the EZLN, written by its charismatic military leader, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente in his “previous life”—he finished a master’s degree in Philosophy from the National Autonomous University of Mexico and taught there before his eclipse), rendered Marcos’ writings—over twenty books and hundreds of articles—bestsellers in several languages. The Zapatistas’ serious but canny and playful political strategy, not without defeats and U-turns, showed a politics based not on ideology but on rather non-derivative theoretical knowledge. In other words the Zapatistas came to challenge not only neoliberal capitalism and the Mexican political institutions but the existing ideologies and theories of politics in general and social movements in particular. This is where, in making efforts to analyze the Zapatistas according to the pre-established parameters of their theories, academics and ideologically-inclined activists alike encounter their own confusion. No wonder, then, that the EZLN inspired an enormous number of analytical works.

Mihalís Mentínis’s new book is an attempt at solving the puzzle of the Zapatistas. From the outset it should be noted that the book is his (supposedly) revised dissertation (defended on 25 May 2005) submitted to Manchester Metropolitan University under a different title (*Zapatistas: A Critical Analysis in Fidelity to the Events*). This is not a note in passing because in it there are the places where arguments do not entirely converge around the central problem of the book. Despite its many merits, the work fails to deliver what it promises, as it cannot clearly distance itself, as book, from the dissertation.

In Chapter 1, Mentínis offers a suitably detailed chronicle of the Zapatistas from their inceptive years in the early 1980s to the world-famous 1994 uprising and to this day when the EZLN has gone through successes and failures while governing a handful of Zapatista communities in Chiapas. The chronicle traces the ideas of armed resistance back to the 1968 massacre of student protestors in the Square of Las Tres Culturas in Mexico City—an event which, among other things, gave birth to a Maoist revolutionary group called Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (FLN) in 1969. Years later the contact between FLN and the indigenous peoples of Chiapas resulted in the

recruitment of indigenous members and in 1983 the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) was founded by a handful of former FLN revolutionaries. By 1988, Mentinis observes, two tendencies—reformist and revolutionary—competed within the group. As a result a political front of the Zapatistas, *Alianza Nacional Campesina Independiente Emiliano Zapata* (ANCIEZ), was formed (5). The tendencies later became defining ones in the turning points of the EZLN political decisions. The negotiations with half-hearted state representatives following the 1994 ceasefire did not yield the desired results for the indigenous people. By 1995 the Zapatistas declared that they had abandoned armed struggle and sought political solutions for Chiapas and for Mexico. Following a process of national consultation, in 1996 the EZLN decided on the establishment of a civil political force. In the same year the Zapatistas reached an agreement on Indigenous Rights and Culture with the federal government (18), while also holding in Chiapas the First International Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism to rally international support for their cause. 1,111 Zapatistas—each representing an autonomous community—marched to Mexico City in 1997 and in the same year the national wing of Zapatista Front of National Liberation (FZLN) was formed in order to organize Mexican civil society. The government consistently evaded the Zapatista demands. Following political turmoil and the falling peso the presidential election in 2000 ended 71-year rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party and Vicente Fox, from the National Action Party and a former manager of Coca-Cola in Mexico, became Mexican President. He had boasted during his campaign that he would solve the Chiapas crisis “in 15 minutes” (25). The march of commanders of 24 indigenous communities to Mexico City in 2001 gave Zapatistas further visibility but did not lead to any concrete results. The EZLN had failed to persuade the federal government to include the bill on indigenous rights in the Mexican constitution and the FZLN, the national political wing of the Zapatistas, gradually vaporized and lost support.

In order to arrive at a theoretical framework, Chapter 2 is dedicated to the analysis and rejection of four approaches the Zapatistas. The unconventional politics of the Zapatistas has invoked a variety of analytical responses including the Gramscian approach, the approach enabled by Laclau’s and Mouffe’s discursive theory, academic autonomous Marxist theory and the non-academic radical Left. For Mentinis these approaches suffer from certain but common shortcomings: “The first is the inability of these perspectives to account theoretically for the unique character of the Zapatista rebellion, resulting in ... lack of discussion of the subjectivity of the Zapatistas. ... The second problem is the uncritical approach to the Zapatistas ... that often results in an idealization of the movement” (31-32). The Gramscian influence has “saved” the Latin American left by giving it new directions in the 1980s (35) and such an approach is manifested through the Zapatistas’ attempt to create a “new ethico-political space and collective will” (36). The theory of Laclau and Mouffe has also enabled academics to view the Zapatistas as builders of a new hegemonic discursive field by creating alliances—relations of equivalence—for a “democracy to come” (41). For the autonomous Marxist theory (and

Mentinis provides a history of it) “Chiapas is just one of the targets of the global restructuring and reorganization of capital” (45). As such, the EZLN struggle becomes a metonymy for the global struggle in the vein suggested by Hardt and Negri in *Empire*. The non-academic leftists, such as Trotskyists and radical left, mainly criticize the Zapatistas based on their weak political strategy and vague ideology (50-51).

In these approaches, Mentinis identifies three main problems. “(1) the subsumption of the Zapatista rebellion within ready-made theories ... (2) the lack of an account ... of subjectivity ... and (3) the lack of an elaborated critical assessment of the movement’s discourse and practice” (54). These critical areas are important for the author as he prepares to form the theoretical foundations that would allow addressing these problems, in Chapters 3 and 4, by drawing on a variety of theoretical approaches from Castoriadis’ “project of autonomy” to Hardt’s and Negri’s “constituent power” (64) to the various elements derived from Situationist International and Alain Badiou. While his eclecticism at first glance seems justified, in these two chapters one finds the greatest disadvantages of dissertation-like book: that the book gets unnecessarily theoretically conflated (usually the detrimental effect of recommendations of supervisory committee members) and the reader can see the seemingly inescapable theoretical labyrinth that in the end does not serve this study as much as the author hopes.

From Castoriadis, Mentinis borrows the concept of autonomy—literally as a law that stands alone (from Greek “auto”, self, and “nomos”, law or injunction). The “project of autonomy” involves the creation of a “social imaginaries”: they “are imaginary in the sense that they do not correspond to any ‘rational’ or ‘real’ elements, and social because they are instituted and shared by an anonymous collective” (66). Thus, “the ‘project of autonomy’ can be introduced as an imaginary signification rooted in specific socio-historical conditions” (67). As a project that gives its own laws, autonomy entails a subject which aims at replacing the discourse of the other with its own (69). Then comes Negri’s notion of “constituent power” which, in Negri’s words, “emerges from the vortex of the void, from the abyss of the absence of determinations as a totally open need” (quoted in Mentinis 71). “The fact that constituent power opposes constituted power and cannot be reduced to it brings it in a continuation and circular relationship with revolution as resistance, rebellion, transformation, creation and construction of time” (72-73). The author uses these two guiding concepts (aided by an array of auxiliary ones) against the background of Hardt’s and Negri’s *Empire*—as a totalizing capitalist sovereignty that goes beyond nation-states and “encompasses all space and all time” (85). By drawing on the “multitude” as those immanent subjects resisting such imperial expansion (74-75) the first part of theoretical ground-laying comes to a close. The next chapter aims at the application of the already laid-out theories on the Zapatistas but it cannot do without seeking further aid from other theoretical approaches—namely Alain Badiou’s theory of “fidelity to event” and “evental situation” as well as the Situationists’ notion of “constructed situation”.

Here is where the book specifically aims at contributing—theoretically—to the study of the Zapatistas. After seeing the EZLN as a “project of autonomy” (Castoriadis) and “constituent power” (Negri) in the age of capitalist Empire, the author specifically reads the Zapatistas’ unconventional politics in light of Badiou’s concept of “fidelity to an event”. An event, for Badiou, “is a flashing supplement that happens to a situation, something extra that cannot be reduced to and explained by ‘what there is’, something beyond the law of a situation that cannot be dealt with and be accounted for by the usual ways of thinking and behaving, with reference to the instituted

language and knowledge” (91). Put simply, the event is the institution of the utterly new and truth emerges out of fidelity to event. Then by reading Badiou against the context of Negri’s theory, Mentinis argues—not without unwarranted eclecticism—that “constituent power is a necessary condition of an event so that there is an event only where there is constituent power; and since where there is constituent power there is also revolution, then it follows that where there is an event there is also a revolution” (93-94). I will return to this point later but I hope that the slippery slope of argument is clear here. In any case, through such an interpretation, Badiou’s fidelity to the event—as the unique and new self-institution—is given a twist, à la Negri, as fidelity to the revolution. To this is added the Situationist notion of “constructed situation” (97). After such painstaking efforts the author arrives at his analysis by first equating the event with constituent power. *The Revolution* is an event but not all revolutions are. For instance, the French Revolution is an event but not the Haitian Revolution; the latter, since it is modeled after an original act, the author calls “evental situation”. Another example is the Russian Revolution (event) and the Cuban Revolution (evental situation) (98). As such the Zapatistas are deemed to be an evental situation since there is continuity and rupture between their politics and the original guerrilla revolutionary practice (99-100). Lastly, three forms of construction of the subjects of fidelity are considered: the subject of resistance, the subject of constructed situations and the sutured subject (101-110).

Chapters 5 and 6 are where the author makes the most contribution to the study of the Zapatistas. These chapters are based on the author’s field work in the Zapatista communities and reveal several major problems in terms EZLN’s way of governing its autonomous communities. These illuminating chapters indeed challenge the much idealized images of the Zapatistas. The parallel tendencies between revolutionary action and reformism within the EZLN are shown nicely in that when the Zapatistas had hopes for their negotiation with the Mexican government they tried to distance themselves from revolutionary armed struggle, and vice versa (121-123). The Zapatistas’ notions of nationalism and the state are also discussed extensively. Moreover, the author spends several pages drawing on his first-hand observations to reveal the garrison-style of organization of a Zapatista school (funded by an American pro-Zapatista NGO) and the anti-democratic and patriarchal attitude at work in overseeing the everyday life of the communities. He also reveals the role that (mostly) American pro-Zapatista gatekeepers in the region—who work as peace observers or NGO workers within the Zapatista communities—in withholding from visitors the truths about aspects of life in those communities: truths that one could consider disastrous and objectionable (142-150).

One of the most valuable contributions of the book is to show how several aspects of EZLN’s captivating policies and actions are indeed rooted in the indigenous totemic belief called nagualism. The most vivid of these is the masks—one of the “coolest” things about the Zapatistas and especially their mystic and attractive front-man Subcomandante Marcos. “*Naguals* are animal co-essences that share a common spirit with humans” to the extent that “one’s own character, idiosyncrasy, ‘powers’, talents, weaknesses, and so on, are said to depend on one’s particular *nagual*” (153). This gives much power to the shamans. In the past, nagualism enabled Mayan insurrection against the Spanish (164). The Zapatistas must therefore be understood in this context: for example, a central figure of the EZLN, comandante David is believed to have shamanic power (165). Similarly, Marcos is believed to be “a god”, a shaman and a “Guerrillero Mesianico” (messianic guerrilla); he’s called Comandante Leon (lion being his nagual) (166). Moreover, contrary

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to popular belief that the balaclava is used to protect the identity of Zapatista activists, Mentinis shows that covering one's face is indeed a part of Mayan peoples' culture. For protecting activist identities, the ski masks are quite inadequate, since most communities are split between pro-Zapatista and pro-government residents and finding out Zapatistas' identities cannot be easier. The reason for Mayan peoples covering their faces when outside their homes is to protect their secret *nagual* from others since they believe that revealing one's *nagual* will make one vulnerable and often the fear thus instigated leads to murder. In fact the author reveals the sad truth about reality of high murder rates in Chiapas and the constant fear of murder within the communities. And that is one of the secret aspects of the Zapatista *Ya Basta!*—to stop people from murdering one another and to end such rampant fear.

Mentinis's rejection of the four analytical approaches (Gramscian, Laclau's and Mouffe's, academic autonomous Marxism and radical left) is based on the point that they try to force the novelty of the Zapatistas into their already established frameworks. What the four approaches, says Mentinis, "fail to see is precisely [the] quasi-eventuality of the Zapatistas that makes it impossible to explain the rebellion within existing, ready-made theoretical frameworks. The

Zapatistas force us to reconsider our categories, to invent new terms and new frameworks for understanding the revolt and move towards the future. This is an element of their quasi-eventual character too" (101). To remedy the problem, as we saw, he offers a fusion of various approaches that in my judgment does not succeed in delivering what he promises, not because these approaches are ill-equipped for the task, but because the originality and volatility of the Zapatista strategy—as well as Mentinis' wonderful observations of their cultural roots and their ups and downs—does not lend itself to the kind of analysis that Mentinis wishes to provide. In other words while the Zapatistas may eventually fail in achieving their objectives they have succeeded in providing new ways of thinking politics. And that is the source of astonishment and confusion of theory. The fact that the Zapatistas do not easily lend themselves to any ideology or theory—as Mentinis would say—precisely stems from their genuine and groundbreaking modes of action which are always more original than any theory can accommodate.

For example the EZLN has always acknowledged the adverse effects of neo-liberal policies on the indigenous peoples and has declared a war against neoliberalism and for humanity. Does understanding such an objective need theoretical justifica-

tion? Perhaps not but note how Mentinis tries to theorize this. As mentioned earlier, Badiou's fidelity to the event—as a unique self-institution—is brought in line, using Negri, with the fidelity to the revolution. Such a theoretical trickery is meant to serve the author's endorsement of Negri's theory by seeing the Zapatistas' unique revolt as a part of Negri's (immanentist) revolution of the multitude against imperial capitalism. Is such an observation not a consequence of theoretical fascination in that the author searches to verify Hardt's and Negri's theoretical postulates using the Zapatistas as empirical evidence?

Note also the issue of "how the working class has been, during the last decades and under the current political and economic circumstances, expanded so that it now includes a number of social sectors (peasants, workers, housewives, middle classes, etc.), a fact that raises the need for a strategy that unites all these sectors of the working class" (117). The "middle class" is now the "working class"? And why? Why do we need to retain the categorical solidity of the acclaimed historical agency? The "working class" became the agent of historical change simply by virtue of Marxist theory and in order to console theoretical anxieties about the lack of historical protagonist in an age of secularization when the messianic promise has become harder and harder to believe.

Andrea Actis studied English and Humanities at Simon Fraser University, is a former member of the Kootenay School of Writing, and currently lives in Providence, RI, where she will end up writing a dissertation that uses integral theory to help organize a history of dialectical criticism and/or that argues for revisions of literary "commitment" via Simone de Beauvoir's theory of ethical ambiguity. She likes the idea of reading *For a New Novel* with and against *The New Sentence*. Her "alive and watching": Sharon Thesen and the Eighth Type of Ambiguity" and "Description of a Struggle" appeared in the "The Sharon Thesen Issue" and "Less is More: The Poetics of Erasure" issue of *The Capilano Review* (3:5/3:7).

Lawrence Ytzhak Braithwaite (1963-2008): "Author of the novels *Wigger*, *Ratz Are Nice*, and *More at 7:30: Notes to New Palestine*, Lawrence Ytzhak Braithwaite (aka Lord Patch) likes to dub his prose like Lee 'Scratch' Perry and King Tubby chopped music & voice. Braithwaite has performed at Lollapalooza, The National Black Arts Festival, Prose Acts: Alternative Fiction Literary Conference with Dennis Cooper, Kevin Killian, Robert Glück, and Dodie Bellamy, and at the Kootenay School of Writing. His fiction has appeared in *Fourteen Hills*, *Role Call: A Generational Anthology of Social & Political Black Literature & Art*, *Bluesprint: Anthology of Black British Columbian Literature and Orature*, *Redzone* (Victoria's street people zine), Fernwood's *Sleeping Dragon*, *Velvet Mafia*, *Of the Flesh*, *Nocturnes*, and *Biting the Error*. His words and voice may be heard and read on the Hurricane Angel electronic and spoken word project 'luckily i was half cat', and Iskra's self titled debut lp, as well as his own solo works, including 'Clichy Sous Bois' and 'Mindwalk 31: Driving to Baghdad'. He lives in the Hood of New Palestine, Fernwood, British Columbia." An audio disc of Braithwaite's work as Lord Patch (myspace.com/lordpatchdub) is forthcoming.

Sam Greenlee is the author of *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* [reviewed by Lawrence Ytzhak Braithwaite in *Rain* 5:1], *Blues for an African Princess*, *Ammunition!: Poetry and Other Raps*, *Baghdad Blues*, "Be-bop man/be-bop woman" 1968-1993: *Poetry and Other Raps*, and *Djakarta Blues*; the film version of *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* was rereleased in 2004. His exchange with Braithwaite is reprinted from the Luv4self listserv.

Reg Johanson is a composition and literature instructor whose critical writing focuses on the critique of Standard English as a classist and racializing disciplinary practice, the political economy of cheating and plagiarism, the problem of radicalism within a national literary culture and the use of representations in the process of political decomposition. His poetry books include *Courage*, *My Love* and the forthcoming *Escratches*. Recent essays, "Straight Forward Approach: Annharte's *Exercises in Lip Pointing*", "Nothing to Lose But Funding: Recognition, Recuperation, and Decolonizing the Cultural Apparatus" and "A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy of Plagiarism, Grade Inflation and Standard English" appear in *Antiphonies: Essays on Women's Experimental Poetries in Canada*, N 49 19.45 – W 123 8.11 and the Working Papers in Critical Practice series. He is a founding director of Pacific Institute for Language and Literacy Studies and is Advisory Editor of *Parser* magazine.

Bill Little (1943-2009): "Zonko born NYC 1943, US Army ('E-5') 60-63, SUNY AB 1967-1970, student of Creeley, Duncan, Barth, Fiedler, Clarke, Canada 1974, editor, *Presence*, *Tens*, *Press of the Black Flag Raised*, *RAW*, publisher, Black Owle Press, Prose and Verses Press, My Dukes broadsides, Dojo

books, chapbooks include, *Failure*, *The Blue Book*, *Palinode*, *Funny/Quel Marrant*, *Not Funny*, *Angel Baby*, *Island Fever*. the mags i've published in are too numerous to list. I live on an island in the strait of georgia, eagles, salmon, heron and sea lions are an everyday ..., i've got a beautiful son and three beautiful grandchildren, please don't use spellcheck on my work, as Will Rogers said, 'never trust a man who only knows how to spell a word one way.' Took on the moniker Zonko 1971 as an early fan remarked, 'your poems make me zonko' provoking the eureka response 'my poems make ME Zonko'. the shadow nose the shadow rose the shadow stink." A book of selected poems, *St. Ink*, edited by Jamie Reid and George Stanley, was published by Capilano University Editions in 2008. "obituary" was circulated by Jamie Reid by electronic mail on 2 January 2009.

Sebastian Touza completed his doctoral studies at Simon Fraser University in 2008 with a dissertation, *Antipedagogies for Liberation Politics, Consensual Democracy and Post-Intellectual Interventions*, on forms of intellectual intervention that accompanied the rise of popular protagonism in Argentina since the late 1990s. His articles on Argentina's new social movements have appeared in *Latin America Connexions*, *Arranca!* and *Ephemera*. His collaborative English-language translations include the *Malgré Tout Manifesto* (with Pablo Mendez) and writing by *Colectivo Situaciones* (with Nate Holdren) including "A New Type of Insurrection", "On the Researcher-Militant", "Causes and Happenstance", "Something More on Research Militancy", "Altitude Sickness: Notes on a Trip to Bolivia", "Politicizing Sadness" and the book *19 and 20* (forthcoming). His Spanish translation of Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* is being published by *Traficantes de Sueños* in Spain and by *Tinta Limón* in Argentina.

Peyman Vahabzadeh is the author of *Articulated Experiences: Toward A Radical Phenomenology of Contemporary Social Movements* and *A Guerrilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy and the Fada'i Discourse of National Liberation in Iran, 1971-1979* (forthcoming). He guest edited the "Writing Rupture: Iranian Emigration Literature" issue of *West Coast Line* (36:3) and co-edited (with Jeffrey W. Robbins) the "Religion, Democracy, and the Politics of Fright" issue of *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*. His recent essays include "The Conditions of Subalternity: Reflections on Subjectivity, Experience and Hegemony", "Measure and Democracy in the Age of Politics of Fright", "Mostafa Sho'ayan: The Maverick Theorist of the Revolution and the Failure of Frontal Politics in Iran", "Mustafa Shu'a'ayan and *Fada'iyan-i Khalq*: Frontal Politics, Stalinism, and the Role of Intellectuals in Iran", "Reflections on A Diremptive Life and Four Theses on Origins and Exile" and "Of Hegemonies Yet to Be Broken: Rhetoric and Philosophy at the Age of Accomplished Metaphysics". His poems, short stories and interviews have appeared in English, Persian and German.

Charles Watts (1947-1998) was curator of the Contemporary Literature Collection at Simon Fraser University (1980-1997) and author of *Bread and Wine, with Pythagorean*, "Questioners of the Sphinx: Melville, Vedder, and Orientalism", and the thesis *The Vortex Nature of Ezra Pound's "Rock-Drill": American Historical and Economic Elements in Section: Rock-Drill, and Annotations to Cantos 88 and 89*. With Ted Byrne he edited *The Recovery of the Public World: Essays on Poetics in Honour of Robin Blaser*. His last unpublished writing was lost after his death in 1998. The review of *Insurrection/Resurrection* is reprinted from *May Day* 1:2 (1976).

The expanded “working class” as well as Hardt’s and Negri’s “multitude” are indicative of theoretical insecurity when theory emerges to advocate social changes in so far as its theoretical blinds allow vision.

I fully understand, respect and share Mentinis’ advocacy for a better world, his retrieval of the subject and the decision (exemplifying that of Marcos) “to become a guerrilla; the abandonment of a sutured life for a revolutionary life, a life with not possession” and his “struggle is for a nationless and raceless socialism” for which he is “armed with a desire for revolution” (187). What I do not understand is the claim that “what is urgently needed in order to pave the way for a future event is a new theory of revolutionary action” (180). Knowledge of theory is great but it does not necessarily yield genuine action. New modes of praxis emerge out of the sheer power of life, the futurity of human existence and the conditions under which one becomes conscious of one’s life and experience. All theories end up lagging behind such unharnessed power and must submit to human creativity and action. If nothing else, the Zapatistas must have taught us just that, regardless of what the futurity of their action has in store for them in the years to come, and that to become revolutionary you first need to reflect on your experience.

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Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization.

Edited by Mark Cote, Richard J.F. Day and Greig de Peuter.

University of Toronto Press, 2007.

Reviewed by Reg Johanson

These essays offer diverse analyses of how neoliberal capital has changed the university, how these changes have developed a new kind of intellectuality and the locations and spaces where pedagogy has, or might, confront and provide alternatives to the world that neoliberalism is making. Despite the editors’ contention, in their essay “Academicus Affinitatus: Academic Dissent, Community Education, and Critical U”, that “whatever strategies we adopt, it is imperative for us to continue to defend the university as a site of critical inquiry”, for many contributors the university seems more likely than ever before to remain an institution of reproduction, rather than transformation. In the anthology’s first section, “The Contested University”, Nick Dyer-Witherford, Ian Angus, Jerry Zaslove and Stuart Hall, among others, offer accounts of the ways in which neoliberalism has transformed the university, and assess the university’s potential as a site of radical pedagogy.

The post-Second World War “interlude”, as Ian Angus calls it, in the universities was not without its contradictions, which have been exploited by neoliberal capital to decompose the alliances and gains of the period. As Stuart Hall points out, the opening-up of the university in the post-war years transformed its previously “elite, male, white” character, but also coincided with a decrease in state investment, which has put pressure on working and learning conditions and has forced universities to seek funding from corporate interests. According to Jerry Zaslove even though the student movements of the sixties were

the only authentic social force that could name and oppose schooling as part of a system that seemed to be repeating Europe’s capitulation to fascism, [...] the culture of extremes during the Cold War was lived out in both the desire for a radical pedagogical turn, and a desire to open the doors of the university to more students. The critique of the university danced in

tandem with economic necessity to broaden the university to include more students, more of everything. The extremes of mass culture and the knowledge industry met.

The result is a “Wal-Martiversity”, as Zaslove calls it, where education is rationalized to corporate demands for specific outcomes.

For Ian Angus the mass university was the product of a bargain with the state and capital: universities and the intellectuals they employed would be given money and space but their criticisms of society must remain “academic”. Respect for the separation of “spheres of society”—economic, academic, political, military—was part of the deal. But this separation was violated by the university’s involvement in, on one side, war research, and on the other side, by the emerging critique of the “knowledge factory”, of the university’s role in the reproduction of a specific socio-economic order and the suppression of the possibility of producing others. The gains of this period—strong tenure rights, very little contract work, academic freedom—have been under attack ever since.

For Nick Dyer-Witherford it is the growth of “cognitive capitalism” that characterizes the history of the university since the 1960s. According to Dyer-Witherford, “capitalism went cognitive in the 1960s and 1970s not only because computers and biotech innovations were available, but also because high-tech options became attractive as responses to the massive unrest that was besetting industrial, Fordist capitalism—strikes by industrial movements, the emergence of the new social movements, and guerrilla wars in Vietnam and elsewhere.” The result was a greater “integration of universities and business, which was vital to the development of high-tech ‘knowledge industries’”, and in which capital becomes more intellectual and intellectuals become not only more productive but also more entrepreneurial.

These accounts, unlike some in the anthology, do not end in calls for the “return” of a “public university”, which the authors recognize was always only a myth. However, as Angus says, “there was always a minority for whom the corporate function and even the citizenship function were questionable as such”, suggesting that the activity of the university hasn’t always or necessarily been about reproduction. And Zaslove argues that “while the system has adjusted itself to the coming of the ultramass university”—that is, recomposed itself against the threat to its order that mass education has the potential to become—“the utopian impulse to make radical pedagogy into an image of a critical institution has not been entirely misdirected in its original form, nor has it entirely dissipated”.

However, the line of thinking I am most grateful for in this anthology leads out of the university. Although “being free in a classroom might be as close to a portable radical utopia as one can get”, Zaslove argues that “where the utopian pedagogy of the classroom would lead, no *university* can tell us. No pieties about liberal studies, no humanities as citizenship, no remixing of interdisciplinary studies as a new technology of knowledge, has the answer.” For Zaslove “the real question” is “in the global market, where is the critical education public sphere? And who is excluded from the education that at one time was assumed to be open to all? Those outside can be labelled the new global proletariat, the new exiles.” These are the migrants, the slum dwellers, the maquiladora workers, those pushed off land and out of jobs by the new enclosures. “If it is to be a vibrant force”, Zaslove argues, “a utopian practice must address the discarded, the victims of the excesses, the ones who qualify only as an afterthought, and those who don’t qualify at all for entry into institutions built by a now calcified neoliberal ideology. Not with ‘human rights’ or ‘multiculturalism’, but with what I would call the ‘displaced radical pedagogy’ of those who stand

at the door of the future and carry the weight of the world.”

Dyer-Witherford, on the other hand, does see the university as a potentially viable site for radical pedagogy. The cognitizing and networking of the universities has put the means of production in the hands of the labourers/students: “The great irony of cognitive capitalism is that it has failed to adequately contain and control the network that is [its] greatest achievement.” For Dyer-Witherford, “the networking of the universities, while in some ways deepening academia’s integration with cognitive capital, is simultaneously creating opportunities for students to test the limits of this subsumption.” As a result of this integration, “the conventional distinction between the university and the ‘real world’ [...] is becoming less and less relevant.” On this account, struggles against neoliberal capitalism are also struggles in and against the neoliberal university.

The anthology offers two very different subjects of utopian pedagogy. Are they Zaslove’s “new exiles”, the people Stuart Hall characterizes as “the multitudes” who are “doing the shit work of global capital, [...] servicing it, feeding it, washing its windows late at night, cleaning its offices and looking after the children of global entrepreneurs”? Or are they Dyer-Witherford’s new “mass intellectuals”, the “immaterial” and “cognitive” labourers that have been produced by globalized, networked capital? It would seem obvious that the answer is “both”. Writing from the perspective of the “global north”, the theoreticians of the “general intellect” privilege immaterial and cognitive labour. In Part Two of the anthology, “Rethinking the Intellectual”, Franco Berardi’s “From Intellectuals to Cognitarians” argues that labour has become increasingly “intellectual”:

in the second half of the twentieth century, following mass education and the technoscientific transformation of production that came about through the direct integration of different knowledges, the role of the intellectual was redefined. No longer were intellectuals a class independent of production; no longer were they free individuals who took upon themselves the task of a purely ethical and freely cognitive choice; instead the intellectual became a mass social subject that tended to become an integral part of the general productive process. Paolo Virno uses the term ‘mass intellectuality’ to denote the formation of social subjectivity tied to the massification of intellectual capacity in advanced industrial society.

Berardi calls these mass intellectuals “the cognitariat”, who “represent the social subjectivity of the general intellect.” According to Dyer-Witherford, the term “general intellect”, from Marx, refers to “the increasing importance of machinery [...] and in particular the salience of both automation and transportation networks. [Marx’s notion of the general intellect] can be seen as a prefigurative glimpse of today’s ‘post-Fordism’ or ‘information capitalism’, whose production teams, innovative milieux, and corporate research consortiums yield the ‘fixed capital’ of robotic factories, genetic engineering, and global computer networks.”

From the perspective of the “global south”, Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis have criticized (in *The Commoner* 12 [Spring/Summer 2007]) this privileging of the general intellect, pointing out that “capitalist accumulation has thrived precisely through its capacity to simultaneously organize development and underdevelopment, waged and unwaged labour, production at the highest levels of technological know-how and production at the lowest levels.” A similar critique comes from within the anthology in the interview with Mariarosa Dalla Costa. For her, the globalization of reproductive and affective labour, primarily done by women and primarily low-tech, is the critical terrain of struggle. The fact that “the conditions of the labour of reproduction

have worsened for the overwhelming majority of people in advanced countries and even more so in developing countries” is a result of neoliberal economic policies. New enclosures in the form of the Structural Adjustment Programs of the IMF and World Bank in the global south have caused mass migrations, famine and war. Against Berardi and Dyer-Witherford, who see the networked, cyborg mass intellectuals as revolutionary agents because they are technological, global and diffuse, Dalla Costa proposes a critical reversal of perspective: “I maintain something that might sound heretical for those who [believe] that globalization is an ineluctable fact—that there is a need, in many respects but beginning with the agricultural and nutritional one, to relocalize development and ruralize the world again.” Because “the expropriation of the land, local cultivation, the local diversification of crops,” and the production of export crops are crucial issues for both the developed and nondeveloped world, “it is time that the debates around the money-form and technology were united [...] with those of the land and of agriculture.”

Other articles in the second section offer critiques of academic research and political militancy as well as new possibilities for the form and location of pedagogy. Guido Borio, Francesca Pozzi and Gigi Roggero, in “*Conricerca* as Political Action”, and the Argentinian collective Colectivos Situaciones, in “On the Researcher-Militant”, propose new figures of the activist-researcher-intellectual-pedagogue. In Borio et al, this new figure is the “coresearcher” who does “coresearch” (*conricerca*); in Colectivos Situaciones, it is the “researcher-militant”. These new figures are critiques of academic research, of the intellectual, and of the militant.

For Borio et al, *conricerca* is “a production of knowledge that is ‘other than’, an experiment in organizational practices, and a space of resubjectification.” It is a form of research in which “one has no certainties, when that which is made an object of knowledge, and how to intervene in it, is not known.” The Colectivos argues that the researcher-militant must remain faithful to “not-knowing”; she is antipedagogical, that is, her work is not based on explication but on the discovery of what is not known: “It is not about teaching, nor is it about disseminating key texts; rather it is about looking into practices for a new sociability [...] Research-militancy develops through workshops and collective reading. Together, these produce the conditions for thinking about and disseminating productive texts.”

Unlike other contributors to *Utopian Pedagogy*, Borio et al reject the notion that there is any such thing as a “leading figure” in contemporary struggles. To the extent that neoliberalism has imposed “a despatialization of forms of labour and workers” there is no worker nor space that is central. Instead “a certain subject is not politically central exclusively insofar as it works in a strategic place within the overall systemic plan, nor only because it is quantitatively great in number: it becomes central when it is capable of producing conflict, of breaking given equilibriums, and of generalizing its own struggles”.

Colectivos Situaciones makes a distinction between research militancy and both academic

research and political militancy. Unlike academic research, which is “linked to the market and to scientific discourse, [...] research militancy is the quest for sites where those same knowledges can be composed with popular ones [...] It tries to generate a capacity for struggles to read themselves, and to capture and disseminate the advances and productions of other social practices.” And unlike the political militant, “the researcher-militant is a character composed of questions and is not saturated by ideological meanings and models of the world [...] The goal is neither to politicize or intellectualize the social practices. It is not a question of managing to get them to make a leap in order to pass from the social to ‘serious politics’.”

For Colectivos, academic researchers and activists “idealize” and “objectualize”, positing their knowledge of things as external to themselves. They do this “without interrogating themselves about their own values—that is to say, without having a subjective experience that transforms them.” They remain blind to themselves: “They can construct consistent knowledges of the situation so long as, and precisely thanks to, their being outside, at a prudent distance.” In Borio et al, the transversal movement of the coresearcher is not only about creating knowledge for the subjects of the oppressive system and thereby offering the potential for the “resubjectification” of others—the coresearcher must also resubjectify, becoming “functional for the system but also negating [her] function for the system [...] in this process there is the possibility of constituting a *form of social cooperation that is ‘other than’* and politically counterposed to the capitalist political character, that structures autonomy and constructs individual and collective counterpaths of liberation, all the while subtracting territory and undermining the progress of the systemic perspective.” Here, cooperation and power confront capitalist cooperation and power; it is a constitutive process, a “counter-accumulation of know-how and particular abilities directed towards the achievement of precise antisystemic goals.”

The third section of *Utopian Pedagogy*, “Experiments in Utopian Pedagogy”, offers a wide range of specific instances of forms and locations of pedagogy beyond the university. Brian W. Alleyne, in “The Making of an Antiracist Cultural Politics in Post-Imperial Britain: The New Beacon Circle”, documents forms of black cultural production and antiracist organizing and education that challenge the terms of official British multiculturalism. Shveta Sarda in “Before Coming Here, Had You Thought Of A Place Like This’: Notes on Ambivalent Pedagogy from the Cybermohalla Experience” discusses a project in the slums of New Delhi in which students of a computer education program make and share knowledge of their neighbourhood—mohalla—through digital media. Richard Toews and Kelly Martin-Harris report, in “An Enigma in the Education System: SFU and the Secwepemc Cultural Education Society”, on their experiences as teacher and student in an educational partnership between Simon Fraser University and the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council. Sarita Srivastava, in the excellent “Let’s Talk: The Pedagogy and Politics of Antiracist Change”, argues that “con-

trary to their intended outcomes, the pedagogical practices and philosophies in antioppression or diversity workshops often produce people of color, queers, and other marginalized participants as the objects of knowledge”. “The goal”, she claims, “becomes knowledge about race that is produced by and about people of colour—knowledge for whites to scrutinize, reject, or express gratitude [towards]”. Imran Munir’s essay about secular Pakistani peasant struggles against enclosures, “The Subaltern Act! Peasant Struggles and Pedagogy in Pakistan”, is pertinent as Pakistan becomes more central in the struggle against neoliberal capital and its wars.

Utopian Pedagogy suggests exciting possibilities for pedagogy outside of the university, but implies an untenable future for pedagogy within it. Should radical pedagogues fight for another university, within another, more just, state structure? Or should they begin to smuggle as much out of the neoliberal university as they can, like gangsters might distribute cigarettes or liquor (or books or computers) off the back of a hijacked truck? As a teacher in the post-secondary system myself I am aware that while the content of my courses—the things I say, the readings we do and the conversations we have—might be radical or encourage radicality, the structure in which we work undermines or vitiates real transformation and liberation. At best I can say “there are alternatives”. I cannot be or do those alternatives. At worst, my radicality can be recuperated by the neoliberal university, as one more “choice”, “point of view” or “lifestyle” on offer for the tuition dollar, bolstering the illusions of liberal democratic freedom. I may be merely providing my students with that highly recuperable skill: “thinking outside the box”.

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“obituary”
By billy little

after decades of passion, dedication to world peace and justice, powerful friendships, recognition, being loved undeservedly by extraordinary women, a close and powerful relationship with a strong, handsome, capable, thoughtful son Matt, a never ending stream of amusing ideas, affections shared with a wide range of creative men and women, a long residence in the paradisaical landscape of hornby island, success after success in the book trade, fabulous meals, unmeasurable inebriation, dancing beyond exhaustion, satori after satori, billy little regrets he’s unable to schmooze today. in lieu of flowers please send a humongous donation to the war resisters league.

i’d like my tombstone to read:

billy little
poet
hydro is too expensive

but I’d like my mortal remains to be set adrift on a flaming raft off chrome island

The Beat of Frances Street: Squatting in East Vancouver

A 48-minute documentary filmed during the late and final stages of the 1990 Frances Street Squats. The first half contains footage of everyday life in the houses and presents responses to the question “why do you squat?” by fourteen residents. The second half focuses on internal arguments over the use of barricades against imminent police assault and documentation of the assault itself (including commercial news footage) and community response. By Eleven Foot Productions.

Digitized from VHS and available online: www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZ1qSwo3kmE
Or for download as an AVI file: www.mininova.org/tor/1415557
www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frances_Street_Squats