

PEDAGOGY OF THE DEPRESSED

Dear Editors:

.....I wanted to take up those remarks of yours on tactics, which are crucial. Myself, I blinked twice when I saw J. H. Prynne being nipped for 'contradiction' (indeed yes, it's just one morass of savage condonements with that fellow) but then cited approvingly, in the next gasp, for his comments to Brooks Johnson. Christopher Guest's great Joan Baez tribute number (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NafrFdBXfrk>) comes inevitably to mind: *pull the tregos, negros.....*! Cuz the fact is, if any of those angry and righteous Croatanians ever came within ten meters of Gonville and Caius college, demanding an end to its rent-gouging and its protection of a fascist slimeball like John Casey, then J.H would shin up onto the roof and open fire on them with one of Joseph Needham's Qing Dynasty Bronze Cannons, quicker than Jumpin' Jack Fuckyal. The critique of privilege (which means: the way one *reads*), lisped from the mouths of the privileged, has its limits, and people like JHP appear to be perfectly cool about Cultural Revolutions, as long as it's someone else's brains being knocked out. So choose your allies carefully. Quixotic alliances might feel strategic in the moment, but come to be binding, sooner or later. Alliance is not the same thing as critique, though, and there is no Sancho to catch us when we fall off, so better watch out. Now, especially, for we are having canons of all sorts pointed at, on, in or up us, each and every day and from so many directions that the poetical field has been turned into a disciplinary *machine de guerre*. That those who hold the main force should then seek to array themselves in battlesdress of honorable combatants is not surprising, and as you know, in the wake of the *Jargon of Resistance* comes a great deal more: sweltering arrogance, aggressiveness and *amour propre* unbeknownst to former times because the sheer weight of numbers and the means of communication now at everyone's disposal means what it says: disposal. Of the weakest. Who are the strong?

It's a war of numbers, and the dissentient are outnumbered: basically, everyone wants a pat on the head from Charles, Marge or Kenny. Even, as you noted, in China. Thus, the declension into one main narrative driven by *petits-maitres* like PennSound Al. That there exists a class which decides on how things are decided, I do not doubt. What is decided? Every single utterance is served by assertion, a bid for recognition, powered, I suppose, by Power itself, an instrument for good or bad. In this case, though, there's no transparency of debate: nobody votes, it happens overnight, and suddenly, next morning, you see all these pieces on x or y (are names necessary at this point?) as the Next New Part of the Curriculum. But with the advancement of the few comes the occlusion of the many. Does a bloated and talentless leech like Caroline Bergvaal really have as much to say, for example, as Lissa Wolsak? Of course not, but you'd be hard-pressed to argue in the other direction, that is, to swim against the stream that imagines itself to be a counter-current. But it's because of all this that tactics are important: you, we, must not allow them to invert their war-games into our street-brawl. We are not so easily provoked. It may be useful to quote from *Pedagogia do Oprimido*:

'In cultural invasion (as in all the modalities of anti-dialogical action) the invaders are the authors of, and actors in, the process; those they invade are the objects. The invaders mould; those they invade are moulded. The invaders choose; those they invade follow that choice - or are expected to follow it. The invaders act; those they invade have only the illusion of acting, through the action of the invaders. All

domination involves invasion - at times physical and overt, at times camouflaged, with the invader assuming the role of a helping friend. In the last analysis, invasion is a form of economic and cultural domination. Invasion may be practised by a metropolitan society upon a dependent society, or it may be implicit in the domination of one class over another within the same society. Cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders. In their passion to dominate, to mould others to their patterns and their way of life, the invaders desire to know how those they have invaded apprehend reality - but only so that they can dominate the latter more effectively. In cultural invasion it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the latter becomes. For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority. Since everything has its opposite, if those who are invaded consider themselves inferior, they must necessarily recognize the superiority of the invaders. The values of the latter thereby become the pattern for the former. The more invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, dress like them, talk like them. The social 'I' of the invaded person, like every social 'I', is formed in the sociocultural relations of the social structure, and therefore reflects the duality of the invaded culture. This duality (which was described earlier) explains why invaded and dominated individuals, at a certain moment of their existential experience, almost 'adhere' to the oppressor 'Thou.' The oppressed 'I' must break with this near adhesion to the oppressor 'Thou', drawing away from the latter in order to see him more objectively, at which point he critically recognizes himself to be in contradiction with the oppressor. In so doing, he 'considers' as a dehumanizing reality the structure in which he is being oppressed. This qualitative change in the perception of the world can only be achieved in the praxis. Cultural invasion is on the one hand an instrument of domination, and on the other, the result of domination.'

No wonder then that the dominoes fall so quiescently when it comes to an invite from the Dark House or a free trip to China. Are these people actually able to *view their own websites* in The People's Republic? (No). Maybe they could have a word with Li Zhimin, their servile factotum over in Guangdong, and the Great Firewall might relax its restrictions each morning, for five or six minutes, so they can sneak a look. Or maybe they really just don't care, since their main achievement-- keeping their thumbs firmly in the ears of the beholder-- is already accomplished. Yeah, maybe now they can afford to kick back, play a little golf and wonder what kind of cancer they're going to get.

Trouble is: *they are the cancer* . Even this late in the day, to watch Perloff suddenly come upon Veloso or the Tropicalia movement as an 'authentic' avant garde (authentic, meaning: stamped and sealed by her approval) is very odd: it is like watching a duchess climb out of her sedan chair to give pennies to a street musician. You would not know from her, would you, that real live poetry has been swirling though the many folk currencies of the North Atlantic and beyond for decades now, from Dylan to Hip Hop? Over in Ukania Plc, one of their useful idiots, Peter Middleton, can usually be relied on to fly the flag for their latest fads and adventures, but meanwhile, right under little Peter's toffee nose, a major American poet has been composing work of the utmost power and subtlety in the sung medium which folks like Middleton only pay regard to, if at all, in their off-hours.. (I refer to :<https://www.faber.co.uk/9780571328574-sundog.html>

But late as it is, there's still time for the occasional pronouncement, and in the usual *avant* manner: *sub rosa* but *ex cathedra*, *a capella* but *viva voce*, *pange lingua* but *al dente*; *in camera* but *sub judice*, even *sub jaundice*, as across the ocean in Cambridge, the over-the-wire-but-under-the-radar boys take their final, pitiful revenge. *Only we know the truth!* Every other art form is corrupted, you see: yea, so filled are we with truthfulness that we cannot comprehend the texts of our own stupefaction. Oddly, though, the © sign has managed to survive that blast, and we sure know how to keep a beady eye on our archives, our legacies, our acolytes and our quislings. The British have always been good at this, because in a ghetto tea party, there's nowhere near enough imaginary cake for you not to have, and nearly too much never to go around. The many must serve the greedy few: that's why we're all M-a-a-rxists, dear.

Who are we chanting about? Well, there's brave class warrior Keston Sutherland describing 'how we can live together in a more profoundly generous way' in the *hawt* pagefill of The New Yorker. (<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-radical-poet-in-the-age-of-google-and-guantanamo>). Not with him around we can't. His writing? A whoopee cushion under a farting corpse. To listen to this hyper-thyroid wretch prating about Marxism is a swift shot of Thorazine on Shutter Island. Then there's Drew Milne and his 'band of modernists' (as Bob Archambeau laughably calls them), answering his emails and not bothering to look up when interviewing a (female) candidate for the Judith E. Wilson Chair in Poetry in Cambridge. And then, of course, electing his own wife to the job! Even Jorie Graham got flayed for pulling shit like that, so: well played, laddie! (Now go and McFuck yourself). And, as always, we shouldn't leave out the ladies: Sara Crangle and her *gangsta* modernistas at Sussex stage a conference on Anna Mendelssohn (<https://centreformoderniststudiessussex.wordpress.com/upcoming-events/anna-mendelssohn-symposium/>) to celebrate the Ealing Comedy terrorism of the Angry Brigade as some form of divine political meta-theatre. Murder as seminar! Apparently a car-bomb is fine, but remember, Sara: it's you in the driving seat. Meanwhile, outside your lecture room, people freeze to death on the streets.

They will not freeze us Let us put an end, to these bulbous white males of both sexes, all busy in the defence of nothing. They know all the tunes, but their faucets flow with dust. Their phonics are tinnitus; let them be the *incus*; by all means. *We are the hammer*. Down with their history: they wish to be its Angel, but will settle for Abraham Cowley. Let the British slide into the North Sea, and let the timorous, canine French follow them. And, here in Pittsburgh, watching their fate colour ours, let us observe our own *Gotterdammerung*:

A voice cried: "Here they come!" then: "It's the Gods!" Four or five individuals emerged from the mob and took their places on the stage of the lecture hall. We all cheered, weeping: it was the Gods, coming back after centuries of exile. The stage made them taller: they threw their heads back and thrust their chests forward in haughty acceptance of our homage. One of them was holding a bough of the kind no doubt required by the simplistic botany of dreams; another made a broad gesture with his hand, which was a claw; one of Janus's faces looked apprehensively at the curving beak of Thoth. Stirred perhaps by our cheers, another one—I'm no longer sure which one—broke out in triumphant but incredibly harsh clacking, complete with gargles and whistles. From that point on, things began to change. It was all due to our perhaps precipitous suspicion that the Gods did not know how to talk. Hundreds of years of living like animals on the run had atrophied their human dimension. The moon of Islam and the Roman Cross had been merciless with these fugitives. The decadence of the Olympic bloodline was evident in

their beetling brows, yellowed teeth, patchy half-breed or Chinese whiskers, and bestial protruding lips. Their clothing spoke not of genteel poverty but of the flashy bad taste of the Lower City's back rooms and bordellos. A carnation bled from one buttonhole; we detected the outline of a dagger under a tight-fitting jacket. All at once we sensed that they were playing their last card, that they had grown sly, stultified and cruel like ageing beasts of prey, and that they would destroy us if we allowed ourselves to be swayed by fear or pity.

We drew our heavy pistols (in the dream, they just appeared) and cheerfully put the Gods to death.

(Borges, Ragnarök)

The only truth these people hold to be self-evident is self-evidence itself: is that what lyric poetry has come to mean? Edward Dorn, you knew they were never *semidiós*. Jack Spicer: your vocabulary did this to them. Tom Raworth, your flicker machines strobe a thousand lectures halls: did you want that? Howard McCord, they're not even wrong, are they? Barbara Guest, they ignored you until it was too late: do you forgive them?

How then do we frame anti-narratives that surround their non-dialogical instruments with voicings and contentions that take back the power of the many from the hands of the few, restore the dignity of all common and modern poetries as vital arts and even as anti-poetries, since *La poesía morirá si no se la ofende, hay que poseerla y humillarla en público. Después se verá lo que se hace...???*

Firstly, we must begin to *speak of them in the past tense*, as if their moment *is already gone*. Tiresome drones like Steve Evans claim to do so, but it's a bit like the Pound Era: it never actually *ends*. Still, we must want to consign them, as they have consigned us. The escalating boredom of life inside their monoculture appals us; it is sustained by a university system already crumbling. Good, let it. The tenured classes treat the unindentured with mordant disdain. When did you ever hear Judith Butler make a pitch for a decent wage for her sisters inside the glasshouse?

Yup, Time is 'Up'. Time is past. The many fractures of lingual and dialectical difference, both in the US and Europe, can no longer be regarded as the feeble offshoots of some 'main' stream which sees everything beyond its gaze as mere 'translation'. And so, secondly, we must *drown them*, as they have sought to *drown us out*: we must *flood them with more and more information*, which will disturb their unshakeable slumber. Their networks:- they are choked with plastic and suffocated herring. We are all prostitutes, but you, Caroline, you Christian: you charge too much. You Peter, you Robert, you Drew, Jeff, Redell, Denise, you Marianne: we're not buying. As the light in your windows begins to fade, now is the morning to kick over your filthy traces. You have rooted the operating system and gained nothing but advertising: good. We prefer tin cans and string. We send forth new branches, not *Demography!* When did *you* ever believe in that?

And when we root, it is to the core. Indeed, we save the serpent in our midst, for it requires dissection. Mm-mm, ah yes, we thought so, now we can name it: it is *Artis Alibi Albinus*: not so rare. But the Whiteness of the thing! It is: *the alibi of art*. Excusing all else, transcendence palmed off as radical immanence, it is the self-excuse that makes of us unwitting warriors on the ramparts, the Wall against the All. Redemption!! It is the will to power pretending powerlessness. Fred Jameson made the rokiest of all errors when he mistook *tactics* for *strategy*:

I have so often deplored the revival of antiquated branches of philosophy—ethics, aesthetics—in a postmodern situation of de-differentiation in which, on the contrary, the various subfields of such a discipline should be asked to fold back on each other and disappear (and perhaps along with them, philosophy itself), that it is a pleasure to be able to include political theory among them as well. It should be obvious that the withering away of the state inevitably brings with it the withering away of that thinking whose object is essentially the state as such (the polis). (An American Utopia).

But with the wittering away of Jameson himself, his shrill pronouncements, ever grandiose, take on a grander urgency: far from being 'subfields', far from 'folding back' onto anything, we need the wisdom to know *what is wrong with us*. With us. The state is not withering; only a strong political ethics will tell us how whimsical, how *aesthetic*, these feeble *pronunciamenti* are.

Therefore, Editor, do not do likewise! The dying Master sees only into his servant's broken looking glass. In the critical twilight, if you're not a Truther, then you must be a crisis actor..... Dear Sir! until I wrote those words, I was a humble Hispanist, a male-child breached in Amerika, over the border and beyond the clouds! I had not known, that language undid so many! The poor Scotchman Jameson and his pitiful anti-ethics; his kinswoman Retallack and her ridiculous 'poemethical wager': two White Queens and only one chessboard! Cheeseboard?? All are punished! O Village People, pregnant in adversity with stratagems stillborn- *so many, the tactics; so short, the time!*

And yet we must move, in time double-quick, or else we are condemned to life inside *their* village. *Or else: there is no village --*

*Would you like to go with me
Down my dead end street
Would you like to come with me
To Village Ghetto Land*

*See the people lock their doors
While robbers laugh and steal
Beggars watch and eat their meal - from garbage cans*

*Broken glass is everywhere
It's a bloody scene
Killing plagues the citizens
Unless they own police*

People, you don't own the police. No Charles, you don't do it in different voices. Marge, Kenny, Caroline, Keith, Trevor, Sean, Steve, Peter, all of you: *you are the police*. There is no village anymore and there is only one ghetto. Its name is ubiquitous, its name is otherwise. It is *the Aesthetic Alibi*. *Behave as cheaply and meanly as you want, man: art's eternal*. But from now on, Art ain't. From now on, that zone is marked for clearance. There is no Art before art, not anymore. Standing behind you, we see your one-legged supports, your broken promises, your made up alibis. *The aesthetic alibi will no longer stand*. Not ever, not even broken in mind. Please don't get up.

Because you, you will never stand for anything but *yourselves*. And so for Pound we keep a weather eye; Heidegger we watch. Neruda, MacDiarmid; we know what your 'necessities' became. But you others we also see, smirking passively at the daily murder! We have no mind for you, no voice. We need no shapes in charred-coal lockstep, dancing in the flames. We write what we are. There is nothing to transcend, *except you*. Instead of frame-dragging, *frame breaking*. Destroy that filthy machinery, that allows each poem to compose the reason for a life lived badly, a life wreathed in sneers. For, make no mistake, Fortress *Avanguardia* is built on *gelt* and layered on *guilt*. Maintained by ignorance and the dark celestial choirs of misplaced self-importance, it is over, my friends, the horse is inside the wall, its head rests on your silken counterpanes.

And so to you we say: *No thanks!* Or else: *Go ahead: please continue!* Because we do not admire you, we only wish to assist. Take your time. Here, let us help you. Not up: down. But remember, we do not love you. We do not like the way you have corrupted solidarity into 'friendship', then drowned even that fragile craft in the oceans of collegiable self-seeking. Every Champion is a *Miles Gloriosus*. Heroical? To whom? We do not accept your governance, because you were never gubernatorial. Helmsman: your skirt is flapping, your pants are on fire. Your war is provisional; you strike out other poets, more shall take their place. The only sirens that you hear these days are those of the LAPD. Boys, Girls, your files are closed, your flies are open For all you people, a caucus race will only ever be *Caucasian*.

For We are the war. We are Classical. We are not you. Truthful you never were, envisioned you never shall be. Your notions of collectivity are hallucinations; your poems are *trucage*. And from that cage you stare at *us*? Bird thou never wert. You preach to us? Always, only, ever: about how *busy* you are, how always in demand? Pity you we do, but soon you shall have relief. Soon, You shall be *Were*, for we will see what you are. Your 'resistance': a waste of voltage. Your experiments? Not even wrong. When real art appears, we cheer: when Cecilia throws out wool, our hearts knit together: when Kamau calls from the racetrack, we smile and tear up our tickets. When Renee Gladman speaks, we hold back breath, exhale in unison. We shall. We have to. Because *we can*.

And so it is that we resist you, because you have given us no choice; we resist you from out of the will to pass beyond resistance; from out of the need to take back *nothing* from the unlikes of you. We say these things because we must; finally, we say them because we need to cease saying *we must*. If we wish to do what we are, then we look instead towards the dark powers of The Confidence Man himself, who may be three parts Joker Man but *seven parts Winnebago*. Trickster makes this World, and she makes us, not you. She, too, is *They*. Her brown eyes are ours; her rags are our rags, her scars our common *welt*. You do not take us in, we take ourselves back, and like Frank O'Hara's sun, we *rise darkly*.

Dear Editor, I do not doubt that some have seen your practice merely to be flaky pastry, two parts corn syrup and one part anarchism. Myself, I do not do so. Let the harpoons be sharpened. Which of us is not little when we do not answer back? Therefore, Sir, I hope to be supportive. And you: do you expect to be insupportable? I hope so. *For nothing else is left*. Meanwhile, let us end this poor exchange as sanguineously as possible on a cold day. I am as sickened as you by what is happening all around us, but therein lies another key lesson: even before we lose it, we must first *consume* our lunch.

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