

ELEVEN EDIT

As a sand-bag against the rill of ordinary *Quidisme*, here is QUID 11: THREE U.S. POETS, a showcase issue with an agenda. The idea is deceptively simple. You take three poets whose work you admire and who merit more widespread acknowledgement *in Europe*, you give to each poet a little room to fire away, you add two essays on the work of each of these poets, one by a reader from the U.S. already familiar with the work, one by a reader from Britain not at all familiar with it and presto! the issue is about 25-30 pages and stapled in the top left-hand corner. But, the NOW WASH YOUR HANDS sign combusts edgily, the line drawn under your job description leaps out and lassoes storm-clouds; *this is more than I had bargained for* you say into the nearest vacant speech-bubble, leaving your mouth behind in your criminal face. Because what happens is something else. You end up with THIS, with QUID 11, a document with certain priorities. Among its priorities is the head-on recognition of a certain dialectic. That dialectic is now hosted by the United States. The dialectic is ancient as Anaxagoras in the bright flush of his youth: as the imperial power of a nation and the real extension of its violent imperium increase, so also do the powers of abstraction in the national language to which the national poetry can be raised. A national language like "American English" which is cross-enlivened and multiplied by other languages present within the same society is not any less singular or monumental on that account; rather, multiplicity becomes itself a singular predicate and monument-aspect of the national language, in line with U.S. ideology as a whole. Can the same thing remain true of poetry's differences also: is poetry in this way bound to duplicate itself as a monument and paean to the political economy in which its owners are sustained? One considerable and vital task now facing U.S. poets—and, you know, *we're all U.S. poets* in some sense—might be a confrontation with abstraction *per se*, a fire-drill inside it. What chunks of material life are shaken out. Why were they there in the first place, obscured by the refusal of transparency; what makes them tick faster. How can the national language be denied and not simply avoided, not simply trussed-up beneath abstract light-shows and cameos of linguistic arbitration. I am nobody to say this, I watch and sometimes love U.S. poetry from the middle distance, these are not prescriptions so much as diagnoses that the poetry of Laura Elrick, Heather Fuller and Carol Mirakove force into the head slantwise and at a brutal tangent stick out through the mouth, stroking the back of the eye articulately. Material life shakes out from their work in riots across the page, speech of the heart's stunt-double, putting the right questions in right-wrong or right words. Or does it. Does it not instead become stationed beneath a new screen, folded back into the national language-manifold for later and later, kept on standby like the world it cagily proposes. Time will tell, and we are time. And, blurb-talk does nothing for their poems, is mirrors in a bag: here are some of their poems.

Keston Sutherland
 Gonville & Caius College
 Cambridge, CB2 1TA
 England
 kms20@hermes.cam.ac.uk

See a list of QUID back-issues at www.barquepress.com

ANDREA BRADY: FORMALLY CONVICTED: A REVIEW OF LAURA ELRICK

In her *History of the Modern Fact*, Mary Poovey (30) explains that double-entry bookkeeping, a 'system of writing' which emerged out of (and borrowed the status and credence accorded to) rhetoric, 'produced effects that exceed transcription and calculation. One of its *social* effects was to proclaim the honesty of merchants as a group. One of its *epistemological* effects was to make the formal precision of the double-entry system, which drew on the rule-bound system of arithmetic, seem to guarantee the accuracy of the details it recorded.' The invention of double-entry bookkeeping was, in this sense, one of the most important events in Western European history. The adoption of mathematical principles, which themselves seem transparent and incapable of corruption, to describe financial transactions, underwrote the fiduciary claims and actions of its users. It also made clear and transparent language essential to the conveyance of scientific knowledge, to the claimed rationality of civic interactions, and to the conduct of business.

Laura Elrick's poem 'TOW to MOUTH' imposes the number 8 on some of the stock phrases of political management by the 'Percent humanitarian', between the spaces and on the words themselves. The symbol of eternity, and also a figure for two links in the chain fence which she references here and in 'Dream Helmet', this number represents the interference of quantifiable data in the relief of actual human need. 'TOW to MOUTH' is concerned with distributions of time—'one quarter of one day fer sleeping, one third of one day fer working, one quarter of one quarter of one day fer commuting'—and the quality of the off-cuts of this consumed and waged time. Is there enough, after work and the satisfaction of basic human needs, left to *organise*? But this use of the number also participates in Elrick's general inquisition into the fictions of clear speech, especially the language of business. While corporations develop their own highly metaphoric idioms, the false precision of that language alienates its users from one another. Elrick seems to suggest the opposite trajectory of Poovey's argument about seventeenth-century businessmen's *lingua franca*. That is, the confusions and artificiality of corporate language reveals the dishonesty not only of the institutions that develop it, but also of the political officials (including the MBA President) who adopt it and its false rational neutrality.

Elrick uses both form and explicit reference to reproduce in poetry the alienation of the 'perma-temp'. Her protagonists move between the reception desk and the artist's colony, or Bed-Stuy underemployment and a wished-for job at 'some uni'. In 'Dream Helmet', an oracular boss is 'part GIANT' who speaks with 'impeccable grammar': an example of which Elrick gives as 'Sheerest replicate do they build as shiny house upon that hill!'. The worker's own use of damaged or dialect language in 'sKINCERTY' points especially to alienation from other workers: 'Was proving hard to makey friends at work, even (so I says to myself I says *she aint*' no Queens Karen) even in the same decarpment.' Nonetheless, the 'I' is both residual in these poems, and implicit even in the subtitle of *Dimensions of Calm*—'(participatory yearnings)'. This parenthetical desire for transformation is entangled, as the poet is also, with the violent usages she critiques. The pliability of her poetic voice, able to move fluently between forms of speech often dictated by class, is both a liability and a source of empowerment.

In 'Dream Helmet', an argument in French between the speaker and a friend, and in 'TOW' the phonetic transcription of a black American dialect ("listen ahngonna be honest wichu"), emphasize the persistence of alternate modes of speech and localized idioms, even if their invocation seems rather suspect. For, while the possession of French linguistic skills signals a class privilege, African American speech patterns mostly present an economic disadvantage—at least for prospective employment, though this may now be changing. Of

course, Elrick knows this, and uses form to bring to our attention the way fragmentation of speech communities undermines the basis for collective organisation. Her frequent recourse to parenthesis, for example, creates a sense of syncopation—rhythms dependent on exchange and listening—and of censorship. However, a few of her most striking and salient propositions claim the space of complete sentences, as in ‘TOW’:

that planned obsolescence drop dot.coms on transatlantically
liquidated infrastructures

that hyper-tiered indies jostle for globs of managerial diffusion to
wield over perma-temps

or, as the conclusion to *Dimensions of Calm* reads, ‘Were policy different, mortality might be.’ But for the most part her poems scatter themselves around the page, implying that for Elrick the totality of capitalist reality can be best opposed by mimesis of its alienations on a formal level. This is, of course, not a radically innovative idea, but it must be very deftly executed if it is not merely to replicate the disempowerment and reification it seeks formally to critique. That Elrick has to qualify her ‘CLICK (as in pistol cock)’, not only differentiates that noise from the click of a computer mouse—perhaps a felicitous association here—but also hints that some of her more elliptical phrases can’t carry enough weight.

Dimensions includes several pages of three-line units, dropped into diagonal rows, many of them reflecting grouped and separated identities:

| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| | Women— |
| | Children—things |
| | a Dozen |
| | Oil Floats— |
| | Bloats |
| | American Man: |
| collect | |
| Boyish Laid Back | |
| C.O.Ds | |

These small units are, in many instances, summations like the ‘a-historical news | briefs’ which are heard by ‘passionately baffled ears’. Dealing with limited information passionately is a necessary skill, one which Elrick’s poems seem to want to impart to their readers. These units are also contrasted with the italicised prose spaces at the bottom of the page, which are often prone to more sentimental, subjective reflections on the sound of rustling leaves as a lower-case ‘i’ wanders the street. The space for traditional poetic reflection, then, is poised in opposition to (and, the poems seem convinced, in obsolescence compared with) the small efficient units, themselves constituting a kind of trickle-down economics of prosody—or, as Elrick writes, ‘Funnel acute to one quadrant’, the region of those ‘hyper-tiered indies’ who take managerial positions in the aftermath of the dot.com collapse.

That said, Elrick’s poetry doesn’t often suggest a particularly fine grasp of the elements and use of prosody. Her formalism is constructivist, and occasionally relies on the gamy forward movements of onomatopoeia and homonymy. This can seem rather opportunistic, shortening the poem’s possible range rather than extending it—as when ‘a peer (apparel?) appears’.

However, her penchant for fast talk doesn't eliminate some moments of sonority, as in this cityscape:

molasses plant

smokestack there as park plaque
 A welder
 sparks to blaes.

Finally, of the selections of her verse which I have read (and I look forward to reading more), the most successful seemed to me to be 'Serial Errant', a sequence depicting the miseries and pragmatics of incarceration. Elrick's vigilance to gender inequality, and especially to the explicit violences perpetrated against women sexually, is coupled here with analysis of the institutional language and political interests which dictate prison policy.

The statistics alone indicate how urgent an ethical problem is presented by co-operation (even on through the payment of tax) with American penal policy. With 6.6 million people in its prison system (or one in every 32 adults) and 1.3 million in jail, the United States is the world's biggest jailer. This has not produced a reduction in crime; US Crime rates are now comparable to those of the 1970s, but the incarceration rate is four times higher—producing a 300% increase in the number of inmates since the 1970s, according to a University of Texas study. 46% of those incarcerated are black, and a recent study by the Sentencing Project estimates that 1 in 10 African American males in the age group 25-29 is in state or federal prison, compared to just over 1% of white males. If black male inmates in local jails are added to this total, the proportion rises to nearly 1 in 7—a staggering proportion with devastating effects on the health of African American communities, as well as being a devastating indictment of the racism inherent to US judicial and correctional structures. Moreover, as a result of state-based disenfranchisement laws that restrict voting rights of felons and/or exfelons, an estimated 13% of black males will be unable to vote in the November 2002 elections. Arguably, this unconstitutional policy already affected the outcome of the US Presidential race, and contributes further to the disenfranchisement of entire communities and the decline of US democratic principles.

Elrick pays special attention to the economic utility of prisons. Her interest in the outcomes of labour focuses here on prisoners as a workforce, who are

delightful to work with—no cars to break down,
 no family emergencies, no
 calling in sick.

These remarks, made by a 'Tour guide In a crisp white shirt', advertise the prison as a dystopia with its peculiar advantages. 'It's just like a small community out here', the tourists are told. By contrast, the locations of these correctional facilities are often depressed, 'Ritalin-ed locales'. Prisons are therefore prized as additions to the local economy, offering employment, and increasing the constituency used to determine federal spending *without* adding to the voter roles (and thus not threatening to shift primarily conservative voting patterns away from right-wing career politicians). Elrick's poem is particularly cognizant of these problems, though her ironic references often seem wholly sympathetic to the plight of the incarcerated, without attending to the equally real problems faced by deprived communities outside the prison walls.

The poem's most striking and politically powerful moment, for me, is its opening, which explicitly describes the assault and penetration of women prisoners by prison medical staff:

'One example one woman special needs in a nightgown "pleading her belly" shackled to a bed was prepared for arrest. (Steely instrument flogging the scalding cunt) with a uniform's claim to neutral'

The instruments of this invasive examination are not only surgical, but also verbal and formal; 'From childbirth immediate the context of employment the unfit mother the diagram the discharge summary', she continues, alluding not only to moralised classifications but also to the forms and procedures which regulate relations between wardens and prisoners. Elrick's criticism of this clinical language again foregrounds the relationship between restricted speech and authority. But her dramatic enactment of the examination of the prisoners, and the degradation of their rights—especially in the experience of childbirth—is both accurate and necessary.

As an essay on CellPals describes conditions in one of the prisons that Elrick mentions (Crane), 'In most prisons, guards have total authority, and the women can never take care of their basic intimate needs in a secure atmosphere free from intrusion. In the name of security, male guards can take down or look over a curtain, walk into a bathroom, or observe women showering or changing her clothes.... At Crane prison, approximately eighty percent of the staff is male and there are open dormitories divided into cubicles. In one section the cubicle walls are only four feet high and there are no doors or curtains on any cubicles anywhere at Crane. The officers' desks are right next to the bathroom and the bathroom doors must be left open at all times. Male guards are also allowed to do body shakedowns where they run their hands all over the women's bodies.'

Such invasions of privacy and personal rights is, unfortunately, an accepted and expected consequence of overcrowded, ill-equipped prisons-for-profit. Put into a continuum with the other objects of Elrick's poetic scrutiny, it reconfirms the lessons most famously articulated by Foucault: (reductively,) that the production of the individual subject occurs under discipline. As a poet, Laura Elrick challenges the authority that implements that discipline, and hopes to offer some of the tools for replacing the prison with the community centre, the barred and fragmented individual speaker with a shared and truly social language.

**TAYLOR BRADY: ACOUSTICS AND POLITICAL ECONOMY—LAURA ELRICK'S
"DIMENSIONS OF CALM"**

so much 'dimension' in a street. it was total. was it felt?

Readings of "Dimensions of Calm" fail with a particular and forceful clarity. Legibility – the tendential unity of the poem's total space – at every turn runs up against specific contradictions, determined resistances within what I've chosen to call the poem's voicings. What I'm aiming at in the application of this term, borrowed from music, to Elrick's writing is a sense of the reverberant space *between* voices. The problem of how to think this space is one of the central issues opened up for contemporary poetics by Elrick's text.

The poem is composed of what a more familiar approach might characterize as fragments of voice. Partial utterances leak from board rooms of the "oil barons" to bump up against the language of intimate sexual space and its gendered violences; the documentary lyricism of a poet's walk through the city gives onto a field of political slogans; and mediatised noun phrases—capitalized in both the orthographical and political-economic sense—butt heads with the communiqués of military geopolitics. These utterances are ultimately spatial: they carry with them the indices of their own particular locations within the circuit of capital, and serve to align the more heterogeneous space of the poem, in which the "resonant characteristics" of these various spaces set up patterns of mutual reinforcement and destructive interference, with an approach to the global horizon itself.

I'm tempted to characterize the poem's rapid movement from one socially situated utterance to another as a cinematic technique, akin to intercutting or montage. In cinema, of course, it's questionable whether such techniques, more than three-quarters of a century past their modernist heyday, retain any critical force. And to allow such techniques to fall back from film into literary aesthetics would seem on the face of it even more bankrupt (cf. Fredric Jameson's *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* on the Victorian novel of what he calls "synchronous monadic simultaneities," and its genetic relation to cinematic montage). What Elrick's method achieves, however, is not simply a return to the outmoded Dickensian providential narrative that lurks behind cinematic modernity, but the nearly literal forward application of cinematic technique to a literary field unaccustomed to it. This return of simultaneity to writing by way of cinema forces the providential frame to recede radically.

In this sense, the postmodern doxa which asserts the primacy of discourse collage to formally innovative poetics has prepared a technique for Elrick, if not yet a method. The signal difference here—one's sense that "Dimensions of Calm" *does* develop a method decidedly critical of mere carnivalesque heterophony—lies in the fact that each of the quasi-utterances out of which the poem is made has its own claim on how best to structure the overall space in which we hear it: the voice of the "oil barons" resonates not only in the boardroom, but has as its project a total, global reverberation. Meanwhile, the outbursts of resistance in the poem, taking place immediately at the level of micropractices, cannot be adequately read against this limited horizon – their very juxtaposition with the language of capital poses the question of their ultimate spatial relation to the world system. Our received understanding of the poem as a discourse collage tends to neutralize these struggles, opting instead to prepare the various language-acts of the poem for inclusion in a formal meta-space which will settle *for them* the question of their mutual arrangement. Elrick's dissonant chorus of utterances and quasi-utterances, by contrast, approaches the thought of such a total space as the central *problem* of the poem.

One way to conceive of this method, absent the reference to voices¹—which might set some experimental-verse teeth on edge—involves attending to the way in which discourse-collage here approaches its readymades. Elrick's focus is at least as much on the *madness* of the poem's constituent materials as on their *readiness*. That is to say, the question one is always prompted to ask is one of production before it becomes one of appropriation or expropriation, e.g., 'Under what circumstances, in what space, can I imagine this act of language having been produced?'" Here is where I locate the particular value of an acoustic reading of space in Elrick's writing, despite its obvious affinities with cinematic techniques. One is put in mind of Glenn Gould's fantasia, in his essay "The Prospects of Recording," of a symphony that, thanks to the close-miking techniques of modern sound reproduction, would be constructed of individual instruments playing in different places and at different times, each interacting with radically distinct room acoustics. The cognitive and aesthetic stakes of such a performance would depend in large part on the listener's ability to produce a space for hearing, reading back, as it were, from the individual sounds to their productive context, and then forward again to a "map" of the interactions between these different listening chambers.

By similar means, Elrick's poem approaches what is for Jameson the fundamental problematic of contemporary culture—the question how to map a set of global relations of domination and struggle that one knows to be present, but which operate at a level of scale so monstrous as to exceed representation²—by means of a kind of echolocation. One intuits a space which *must* allow the interarticulation of these various discursive positions, and their underlying positions in class struggle. In the lack of such a space ready to hand for representation, i.e., with the providential frame no longer given, or more importantly, finding itself at issue, the reader sets about the task of imagining how to produce a new kind of space. That this kind of space would have to be urban seems given, since nothing else would allow the dense proximity-effects through which these voices enter into such direct contact and contradiction. That it is emphatically *not* the space of our present global cities, whose murderous stratification, well-policed class boundaries, and imperial stance toward their international hinterlands militates against the kinds of contact their existence makes possible at a purely formal or potential level, seems equally evident. Thus, the poem announces, the task of reading must include a reading of the city—and the task of making the city thus legible would seem to entail as its necessary condition the more arduous task of first *remaking* the city. The limit of coherence for what I am calling the social acoustics of the poem is precisely the internal limit of current social constructions of space.

In this sense, the specific moment of articulation within the poem often turns out to be larger than the poem itself. Here the concept of an internal limit to coherence re-emerges as a problem of poetic form: the aesthetic object has for content the contradiction between artistic closure and social struggle, but is itself situated within the field produced in that contradiction. For "Dimensions of Calm," content is precisely that which cannot be contained. The problem posed by the writing's form is also a problem *for* form, and can only be addressed by modes of collective struggle that carry us far beyond "the poem itself." Here the radical failure of the poem, its constitutive lack of fit between form and content, in

1 Here I should note that my early attempts to place this work under the heading of the "vocal" were met, quite correctly, with some skepticism by Elrick herself during a conversation earlier this year. I hope that the context of my use of "voice" in this essay makes it clear that I do not mean simply a representation of unmediated natural speech. Rather, my sense of the term is closer to the Voloshinovian "utterance," that is, an act of language produced from a specific collective position in social space.

2 Elrick's work toward answering this question is of course quite different than that proposed by the films considered in Jameson's book, especially those "first-world" films which allegorize the world system by way of conspiracy narratives. Nonetheless, Jameson's brief discussion, in the context of Brian DePalma's *Blowout*, of the postmodern disarticulation of the sound track from the image track makes for suggestive reading here, opening the possibility that where conspiracy films struggle visually to produce a figure for that which is real but unrepresentable, this eruption of what Michel Chion calls the acousmatic voice figures such an "absent-but-operative" totality by producing a lack of figuration.

rendering its own dimensions perceptible becomes the ground of the very cultural and political work onto whose horizon it opens.

This is nowhere so clear as in the fifth and final section, in which the outward markers of collage and heterophony – different spatial dispositions of lines on a single page, shifts from verse to prose, variable margins, etc. – have vanished in favor of a relatively stable, irregular lyric stanza that marks the poem's nearest approach to the “voice of poetry” as something unitary and coherent. Perhaps paradoxically, it is here that the reader finds a fundamental contradiction structuring the unitary “voice” itself. Thus the “impossible” relation between lyricism and militarized capital is posed as constitutive of the lyric moment in all its particularity:

when the occupied
 “regrettable”
 wind
 blows in

*

Zoned

*

stones
 peaceful that is
 no-fly

Having seen the poem's clearest attempt at the single lyric voice founder on this contradiction (with a signally clear-headed deliberateness, to be sure), one reads back into the opening sections with a new focus. This reading is more alert to the ways in which those “individual voices” were perhaps already at odds with themselves, to how syntax, rhythm and enjambment did more than simply juxtapose each voice with its opposite number, but at a more radical level produced voice itself out of this very opposition. Within a social totality whose constitutive basis is contradiction, the truth of the continuous, unitary subjective voice *is nothing but its interruption by the “other voice.”*

To indulge in a final musical analogy, I think in this connection of Xenakis' string music, in which dissonance is not simply a relation between individual tones, but something intrinsic to tone production itself. Those long glissandi, percussive attacks, and scraped strings emphasize the outer, dissonant partials in each articulation of sound. The individual musical utterance is not only rendered partial by fragmenting against the resistance of some other sound, but also and more deeply by being itself internally “partialized.” The relation between partial voices within Elrick's “voicings” similarly goes beyond external opposition to locate a kind of speculative identity of such opposition with the single voice itself. In “Dimensions of Calm,” the difference between continuity and interruption, between signal and noise, is not diametrical but dialectical.

LAURA ELRICK: SERIAL ERRANT

1.

When she was arrested she was arrested without sanitary pads no place to put her children but under established law immediately after giving birth. This still bleeding after the dry cleaner this paperless producer that damn-lucky-job-her-kids-up-front-in-a-playpin let go. Arelis said to her when she was fired she said you should thank God for this baby God gave to you when it comes

*at Rikers
at Crane
at Sing-Sing*

Without consent without established knowledge seeking prenatal though inadequate before this had her urine searched her discharge summary was a copy was a copy given to the police. One example one woman special needs in a nightgown "pleading her belly" shackled to a bed was prepared for arrest. (Steely instrument flogging the scalding cunt) with a uniform's claim to neutral

*at Lompoc
at Soledad
at Summit*

The targeted group is expected to generate through each personal history of insufficient prenatal (and this importantly) now seeking it no place to put her children is targeted for testing. So tested disregard to ensure the public safety from crimes against person...] property against...] unhealthy birth an aberration threatens the orderly transmission. On gave the head its birth the floor she

*at Wallkill
at Big Spring
at Fort Dix*

From childbirth immediate the context of employment the unfit mother the diagram the discharge summary. Promiscuous / Stockpiles to force shortage. If unable to deliver antibiotic borders. On board in a great storm in holding cells chained to corpses packed spoon fashion human cargo. What the Boardroom shoves through the portholes to sea

*at Bare Hill
at Hale Creek
at Terminal Isle*

2.

Is she excited?—It means—(*tilt*)—Worked hard for—

He asked you to—It's best to—Is she excited?—"Wide-eyes"—

Keep it—It's OK—Up to you—It's—Is she exciting?—

Add it to—PICS—(*cart*)—Please—

Tell me—When we arrive at—Exaggerated body language—

(*Single mother*)—What's written here—"Can you read?"—

3.

Towns used to *sue* to keep prisons out
 (*This won't hurt a bit now, just a little...*)

Innoculation:

"We need
 J-O-B-S jobs...

and a CURE (citizens united
 for the rehabilitation of
 errants)

to keep our uh...heh heh...
hotels full."

Crack / Down but
market's a
gangsta

Ritalin-ed locales
 desperation gettin
 up / in / yr / face
 employs

and implements a
 two-faced embrace
 and diligent's not a
 pretty thing

Tour guide In a crisp white shirt:

"They're delightful to work with—no cars to break down,
 no family emergencies, no
 calling in sick."

Prison blues—
 (jeans)
 convict-made
 for ya

out on Industrial Boulevard, the road rolled out
and on past

a cookie factory
a machine shop
a minimum adjacent female intensive confinement center

"It's just like a small community out here."

circuit board
gamuts
under work lamps peering
through microscopes

subsidized compass to
pig farm's (profit) bred
magnetism

clerky peap chicket sales
fr strike-time, if barred
telemarketers, if cup gloves if

sitting in the touch-up line at

"Can I
help you?"

Regionally dependent
entrapments

to neutralize
dangerous persons by bettering
"rights"

The smoldering decades
soldered

Cointelpro to

A *true* story, if you wish.

Little 'plants'
 in the ballot
 box of
 drugged soldiers

"Some of our work went to China, the rest to San Quentin."

4.

Just a clutch of lesser powder white jail times in a capsule called
 poetically don't *talk* to me in that tone of *voice*. Can't/quick/pitchit/
 cuffed/nightfeet/grow fainter. *who's there?*

An ideal match plus (martini while)
 Identity liberates colour from relation.

and their
 reply was silence. Naturally, sharing its luckier talents. This is called
 artful abdication, rich "sobriety", or

I had thought you genuinely qualified
 speared flesh of gin-soaked export crop.

scouring the ground for tiny rocks dropped in a hasty hand-off,
 surveillance coverage near total near to from lofty light (renovated)
 heights. Can you *imagine?* Grievance remanded to green room
 to navigate gallery-speak

"deal?"

**KRISTEN GALLAGHER: AMERICA'S SCUPPERNONG LACUNA & HEATHER
FULLER'S DOVECOTE.**

In *Dovecote*, disrupted and perambulatory conscious states repeat and transmit according to the forgotten corners (“beneath the Pentagon”), where the State repeats and expands. This world is rich, and also with poverty, insecurity and violence. One can recognize in Fuller’s new book an objectivist sense for what Oppen called “the small nouns,” a world of things in relation. Throughout, *Dovecote* brings difficult local particularities into singular light.

The material world of *Dovecote*, its form and facts, comes from a dwelling *among* and a “compulsion to pick up the left behind.” As if emerging from beyond the edge of some post-traumatic oblivion, Fuller’s language comes shot through from quarters of the cordoned off, “sheltered,” vagrant, and barbed.

There is actually a section where each poem is dedicated to a form of barbed wire. “Quarter” is a set of 5 one-page poems accompanied by detailed drawings of the 5 types of barb and its name. From “Crandals Champion”

Crandals Champeen
is a type of barbed wire and
I am eat up with bloodshed
of country road entanglements
on the wine train of brothers.

the misunderstanding of the day
was a broke shovel on the quarter house

He opened the door and the devil just walked in

(27)

“Quarter,” “quartering,” “quarterhouse” all repeat within this book. In this case, the house cut into quarters or slave or servant quarters. Otherwise throughout the book, general separation with considerable between. From ghettoization, quarantine, exile, and jail, to “Downtown Bidness Improvement Districts” (49) and “shut down / the tungsten mine for now but / not for children playing” (29)—entanglements are not only *in* the wire, but on either side. So “eat up with bloodshed” comes from various causes. It could as easily be from “the wine train of brothers,” if one associates “train” with its vernacular use for gang rape (to pull a train on). But whatever it means, “Quarter” maintains a varying degrees of humor, harm and haunting. Guarding against further entanglements, anyone might become “barbed.”

Hailing from (among other places) the Southeastern U.S. (“The South”) and then the DC poetry scene, Fuller’s attention to the fallout from imbalance of power is acute. *Dovecote* has a subtly Confederate stance. Take Fuller against Civil War Northern General Sherman’s *Memoirs*, written as he literally set most of the South on fire, ending the Civil War in total devastation for what lay beneath DC: his casual attitude, reporting to Lincoln “sacked and burned” for every town the Union invaded; his consistent passages to the effect of: “mistake to assert ... that because they dwelt on the banks of this mighty stream, they had a right to control its navigation”; and there is his feminization the South, imagining Jefferson Davis escaping North dressed in women’s clothes....

In the poem, from *Dovecote*, "Blood Program,"

we don't go there anymore Pentecostal
with the mill kids but still the hazard
under the wine tree blotto slaven and scuppernong
lacuna in the thing that caught up and dragged in
the southern last capitol of narrative

The phrase "scuppernong / lacuna" magnifies a particularly Southern end of the violence this book engages. Scuppernong is a grape native to North Carolina, now grown in many southern states of the U.S., used to make jam and homemade wine. It is described in the OED as being the color of blood, and is said to have sprung from the bloodstained earth where a young girl was pierced by an arrow.

Scuppernong lacuna—A blank space which is of a southern grape—An open space where a wine tree once stood? A dent in the grape? A blind spot or forgotten episode due to drunkenness on scuppernong wine? Memory blocked out by drink? By blood? A bruised eye? Taken together with phrases like "The purple eye night watch" (from "Blood Program") and "a pony of wine to wash the blood" (from "Quarter"), the scuppernong lacuna might be the mark left by the barbed particularities of life in poverty or among violence or the memory of.

The everyday actions and afflictions of a people who—no matter what your understanding of the U.S. Civil War—fell under the rise of U.S. federal power, can speak to the quality of that rising state; they also suggest its greatest threat, the part of the imagined whole that the imagined whole wants to sweep under, repress, or leave drunk and damaged by the side of the road.

What Fuller does with narrative has similar effect in Reznikoff's *Testimony*. Its highly condensed language and short-circuited syntax, give not just a sense of "talk" but more the spliced talk of a feeling living in inarticulable dearth and danger. As a witness, one can only graze over the "afflictions a hound the naked eye can't see." One has to be veiled in this world to see it, to have one's eye put out by it.

Remember Theodor Adorno's dictum: "the splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass." As it was in *perhaps this is a rescue fantasy* (Fuller, Edge, 1997), the eye in *Dovecote* is almost always punctured, poked, purple, torn. Examining the evidence, the everyday violence, the necessary narrative, does much to undermine the image/narrative of a unified America. I suspect Reznikoff knew that. It is almost as if the eye becomes the vehicle for the amount of blood it encounters. The bruised eye, blanks and blind spots from constantly re-encountering a way of life one did not wholly choose, in a political economy where one is radically Other, the damage done played out among what might otherwise have been loved ones. American blind spots among what could be American cousins.

Cote is a group, usually of animals. Dovecote, then, a gathering of birds of peace. Perhaps gathering the lost, the detritus, the sawdust from the building of what stands—enough to suggest a reversal, a bringing back the dead. Perhaps to "lie down with the dogs to draw the sickness out." Perhaps also a note to poetry, an earth-bound witnessing enough to "put your vision / ary out."

IAN PATTERSON: HEATHER FULLER, *DOVECOTE*

The promise of transformations held out by the title of Heather Fuller's second collection is an edgy one. The resonant shifts between 'dove' and 'cote' generate a buzzing subtext of 'vote', 'dote' (but not love), 'cove' and 'code'; 'vecto[r]' and 'do' are there too, though both are problematised in the poems that follow. Her first book, *perhaps this is a rescue fantasy* (Edge, 1997) has a terrific suite of eight photoenlargable placard poems, each with its rectangular border, all sonnets, all contained in the idea of enlargement as public voice, and into public voice, which also worked partly through a restless shifting of the everyday into other everydays, the TV remote into remoter forms of control, revealing the kitsch in kitchen and the super vision of supervision. Technically familiar tropes but handled with a grace and precision which is necessarily political (a word that has to be considered in quite a wide relation to both books). "I begin roughly absorbing testimony..." begins 'Revisit' in the first book, giving ghostly substance to a feeling I had had all through my reading of *Dovecote* that I was being reminded of Charles Reznikoff. Not that there is any essential similarity, but some of the impetus is similar, and unattended voices speak here with a comparable authority, though more bizarrely and more fleetingly.

The fact that the sense of voices is so insistent works both to present and to question the social. The book opens with a sequence called 'Apostal Decision (Time Sensitive)', prefaced by a direction to a URL, which (appropriately enough) is no longer there. So you have to find some other link to the artwork and writings of Perreault Daniels (easily enough done) to get some flavour of the context of its production. There may have been an original letter (cf the title) to which these letter poems are a response, but the idea of a messenger, of somebody sent out (an apostle) is no less helpful in opening up the sense of evidence, of things seen and heard, that animates so much of the book. Walls, tense, room, death. But not a dead letter, let alone word or phrase, in sight. Time sensitive exposures, full of echoes and cross references and fragments of street objects. The epistolary structure confers an intimate and simple tone (I thought of W.S.Graham) more purely focussed on its material than most of the poems that follow, which are a mixed bunch, trying different approaches, different organising principles, different approaches to the formal, taking a variety of occasions as their starting-points.

(And the postcard?)

Heather Fuller's poetry has clearly been wandering purposively about her down-at-heel neighbourhood for years, collecting phrases, spoken or overheard, not as a visitor but as an inhabitant, as someone whose working day meshes with the difficult lives of the casual, the poor, the mad and the dispossessed. The impulse is to create a space with these poems in which the probably random juxtapositions of scraps of utterance can resonate with a degree of self-respect, while at the same time creating conceptual contexts for them.

How this works is various. One example is provided by a poem called 'h rs y' (p.65) which uses the simple device of leaving certain vowels out of certain words as a way of slowing down the reading, emphasising some of the terms, reminding the reader of the activity of decoding and its implications (as in my reading of the title [say, 'do eco e'] above), and installing moments of uncertainty in our habitual reading process. An earlier version was published in *Philly Talks* as 'h rsay', foregrounding a much more directive vacancy; the addition of heresy as a possibility opens up a whole new line of epistemic topography.

Another illustration would think of the conceptual space as constructed out of narratives or scraps of narrative, as in 'Blood Program' or 'Quarter'. This is partly from the use of narrative

tenses to evoke incidents, cumulative and parallel by the end of the poem; and in 'Quarter' given added and specific focus by the brands of barbed and razor wire which provide the poem's sectional titles with the power to arouse a sense of defensive vulnerability which feeds right back into the bruised snippets of local and country life themselves.

I don't want to imply that the discourse of these poems is homogeneous: they argue with themselves too, taking advantage of puns and ambiguities to promote cross purposes, making the most of chance occurrences in people's talk and using the currents thus provided to soar above the circumstance to show how the argument is not poetic cleverness but intrinsically situational. The cross purposes very likely represent problematic encounters, as between bureaucracy or authority and those on the street most liable to exasperate it. Sometimes the poems emphasise this by looking like objectivist poems, with many lines arranged singly or in pairs, but I'm not sure the denser forms don't work at least as well. 'retro fit' (another poem that has been beneficially restructured since earlier publication) displays its lines in a continuous paragraph of prosy elegance with short dashes the only punctuation, overlaying the original jagged edges with more persuasive continuities while still making the overlays react against each other electrically enough to get hostilities into the reading effect.

One of the benefits of Fuller's way of prising open familiar locutions deserves comment. Take the not particularly surprising but definitely enjoyable lines

the woman in love with the Kaiser
was not mad at all she
made believe I believe

which play on the phrase in an expectable way: where this differs from most other potential exemplars I can think of is in the provision of the relationship with another person. The making believe, the eliciting of belief, has had a social dimension. There has been a misjudgement, perhaps an injustice, retrospectively intimated. So language makes the world but not in circumstances of its choosing, nor in circumstances of the poem's (or poet's) choosing; an agreeably retro philosophical position, which shapes the politics of the book, as spatial relations at least.

These are, in a sense or two, 'left' poems. As opposed to 'found' poems, for one thing. Their raw material comes from the perverse animation of the abandoned; discarded phrases and abjected song lyrics, erased slogans, mutterings and graffiti vie with dispassionate or desperate observation. But they create space for a politics of the left, unassertively but insistently. The political bleakness of the locale is seen with deep verbal humour, hollowing out a productive vacant cavity in the idea of a language community, poetry as mental caries. Nonsense belongs with the rubbish, and it too is allowed its proper weight (or weightlessness) in this book, part of a method for examining the operation of a civic as well as an unconscious surplus of meaning. Politics of the penniless, again, in a different register.

One of the last poems in the book is one of the most eloquent. Even its title, 'heirloom concertina', is a brilliant summary of history and space and the work of human being in its constant processing of itself as precisely that. It's a shorter Proust. The concertina's plangent melodies as they echo back through the pages of this book don't fool anyone, least of all Heather Fuller. It's all in the folds and the fingering. This is a serious book.

HEATHER FULLER: FROM *EYESHOT*

Are they famous.

The poets not among poets writing millennium poems.

But watching Derek Jarman.
Some metonymy for what you lost among them.

At the free film series some will take the liberty of jacking off.
In the back there among them taking liberties.
Having lost.

What are you watching. Angry
I am watching a blue screen
which I must watch to say *Point taken*.
At a loss and taking the liberty to take a point.
Or jack off.

Where are you among them.
You who chooses your words.
Taking liberties.

At a loss one may choose *auto-erotic*.
The security guard may choose *Not again*.

No loser he.

—

Later our minds on the Brando documentary across the street
positioned to open a documentary
on the Beatles' first trip to America.

Both films also providing for jacking off and almost pictures
trying to have something to do with memory.

But Rod & I prefer Brando for not trying to make history
and for just eating his steak for the camera.

The Beatles are camera-shy and chat
with precocious child fans and these are
the memories we're left with.

Missing in the complete picture.

—

Among us
Buck is foraging off U Street and finds a box of antique postcards
for which he pays a lump sum for this box containing
images such as cats walking upright

suitable for framing.

Many among us covet this box because we have
a few pictures of dead poets and none of us among them.

The man at Time & Again says people will come in
to choose a surrogate family from antique photos.

Mostly they will pick mother father sister brother
but the other day somebody came in and wanted
an entire family of aunts.

There were spinster aunts standing in front of
a teaching college or topiary
and dowager aunts with lapdogs
and aunts who could easily have been
mothers or sisters and none of them related
but to the costumer they were a family of aunts and
he bought them all.

Which brings to mind androids getting too smart
for their circuitry and figuring out the photos
surrounding them are not family portraits at all
but engineered at the android plant
so then Harrison Ford has to kill off the androids.

Harrison Ford who will not allow them their surrogate
memory.

But will play the same role again and again
in different clothing.

Flawed warrior on the side of some sense of justice
under the pleasure dome.

In Hans Solo, raider, Amish,
futuristic hitman, or fugitive clothing.

No loser he.

-

And not the poet losing it.

In a photo from Las Cruces.
Whatever is in the midwife's tonic
the midwife doubling as a doctor.

The poet full of poison brought to the midwife.

And in the photo the poet and the tonic.
Which the midwife calls green chile and a second opinion calls
peyote.

But there's no time for second opinions
the poet full of poison.

Now full of peyote.

And all along in the photo looking like green chile

but is it authentic.

And the only poet in the complete picture of poets
sweating off peyote and not dying and not the dead
poet in the complete picture of poets.

Among us in the landscape as I see it.

And whom you can't convince to go to the movies.
Liquid sky and all for quaintness.

But will trot out the photo of the tonic for second opinions.
The photo with a seat at the table.
You sitting down with the pathology of the photo.

As Wim Wenders and the pathology of the image.
The period films of the future in
Technicolor dreamtime.

Wenders and his ensemble casts obsessed.

Film after film
with sickness.

Tho it is the sickness of images parading.
Claire was obsessed with her own dreams
tho it was an obsession with watching her dreams on a handheld TV.
Printing them off this digital TV as photos.
Photos of dreams.

Where are you among them.

Dreaming off peyote in a photo you dream.
And Wim Wenders crossing over
referencing Edward Hopper and at a loss.

Don't let this tonic leave Las Cruces
in a mason jar it wasn't traveling and so a photo.

Cutting boundaries for second opinions.

On a metastory of Hopper
in a metastory of
the career of Wim Wenders.

-

Where are we among him.

In the pathology of poets.
And hard living.

Which is poetry.
And not famous.

As if to cut boundaries that are not photos.
In the landscape as I see it.

Despite a return of the tableau.

Hal Hartley too with his ensemble.
Concerned with different combinations of people
at different times
in the same places.

Often the bathroom.
In period films before their time literally.

As if you are on a Tour of Homes but
really the tour is a coffee-table book
showing rooms but the same rooms.

So you think you may have lived in those tableau.
And Hal Hartley's poets and grifters and sex offenders could be in your bathroom.
Skills for Hal who's not in the bathroom.

This gift for verisimilitude.

And where are you.

-

Among a Hal Hartley poet.
Engaging in bodily functions slapstick

the tableau slipping
and at a loss.

And now and then auto-erotic but what's in it for you.

In the back of the theater taking points.

Some are confused the blue screen is not the *Blue*
in the *Blue - White - Red* trilogy and point taken.

That *that Blue* is a narrative of some loss as is Jarman's
but not as blue as Jarman's blue as it is quaint.

And reviewers saying see *Blue* before seeing *Red* but *which*
blue and I am angry taking points and after seeing blue

cannot see *Blue*.

-

Is it a period film
among spice girls.

In the complete picture of poets
is this the period poem among spice girls.

Baroque and not famous in the complete picture of poets
not to speak of dismemory rather a desire for memories

in the landscape as I see it

and so this picture
is the problem of pictures.

In the complete picture of poets a poet is missing.

And so taken
no image will revive her.

Neither sci-fi nor gothic.
Not fantasy or someone's sense of justice.
In the period film of the future.

As if to cut a boundary.
Not the landscape as I see it.

Baroque and in tableau.

And is not a cult film.

As John Waters and camp.

Is not cult.

But becomes kitsch.

Camp becoming kitsch.

In the landscape as I see it.

And where are you.

Among them.

Tramps, dykes, dance contest winners, Virgin Mary
fetishists, strippers, junk food addicts, foot fetishists,
macrame artists, thrift store fashion consultants, Divine,
and photographers co-existing under the pleasure dome.

And you can't shake off Valerie Solanas
there in the middle of a John Waters film
who isn't Valerie Solanas in the Waters film
but is the woman who played Valerie Solanas in a non-Waters film
but to you she's Valerie Solanas
there in a Waters film
playing a discoverer of random new photographic talent.

She is the actress whose image

is indelible to the cult of
Valerie bleeding into someone else's film.

As Harrison Ford in Amish clothing
may as well be Hans Solo
bleeding into someone else's film.

Quaint but no cult around him.
Tho a cult around her

And not quaint.

**BRIAN KIM STEFANS: SUZANNE DATHE, GRENOBLE, FRANCE—CAN WE
WIN?¹ ON CAROL MIRAKOVE'S POETRY**

Some kind of argot—

not entirely given over to the track star at Mineola Prep model—these poems are *worked*—but nonetheless somewhere in the sprawl of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, jacked-in but running freely through the night that could be day—"muscle a language / monumental / & free"—trying to move forward—avoiding the *snipers*—scanning the *roadside*—refiguring the spectacle less as a saturating, unlocatable ethos but as an array of robotic effigies, the divisible choruses of ad agents, secret agent men, agent oranges, and agency debilitators choked up by the nefarious database and becoming Senators—I guess one might suggest she turns it [the language game, or Debord's "game of war"] into a video game, L.A. freestyle, fusing Flash sprites from this herecleitian noise—but she's hired the best animators (pals of David Choe), best screenwriters (that would be the poets she's read and emulated, several including Rod Smith and Heather Fuller from DC days) and her software has pledged strict allegiance to grassroot copyleft principles—the "anxiety of influence" of choice for code writers once known as "hacks"—

[I plug allergens... into the engines... of Audiogalaxy Satellite... and the repository... from which I stream... one *frisson*... undivided... with listservs... and Rasputina... for all...]—etc.

Our speech will occasionally be struck by a flying neutrino and the social glue of the lyric will turn into shards—"chewtoy colliding somewhere with dust"—we somehow get back into it, thanking the machinery [melancholy?] of the page, especially Nurse Ratchett's syndicated tab key (keeping the runaway spaces in check)—high school disciplines including Projectivism (Olson, but I champion Morley) and performance poetry's post-hip hop [?] "new fusion" [!] yawp, but also Pound's clear imagistic coins and Bernstein's sonic dada empurplement—to wrest control and even a momentary classical stasis from a datachick's tendency to mallarmé one's way across the white amidst the throes of chance which are really the underlying op sys gone sluriously bonkers—

The heartfelt themes mingle freely with the ironies—the "TV mantis / placing her neck on the guillotine" with the "fuck you I pray / for a big soundtrack"—the rape with the camp—[these are poems from 3 cities, as Carol has informed me in an email: DC, LA, and NY—so there's something following her everywhere]—we call these... "metastases," in Wilkinson's sense, the sites of pain that appear in different poems and draw our attention to the borders of the lyrical-corpus-as-somatic-graph as they are limned by acute punkts—

Fake punk bands, two of three eyes on the market, seem to want to say: anyone over 25 looks so old—but we are all over 80 and struggle with a deforming language of impressions, experience, and cultural obsolescence [*their* omniscience]—that nature's legs lag behind the further we grow from the Modernist moment and self-creation is more individualized than ever, which is to say the older are farther from youth but closer to the old, sterling Futures shared by a mobilized communal imagination. Now [*these are the conversations my friends and I have*] there seems a dearth of major dreaming in the follow-up generations, one symptom of which is that they can't find utopian moments when bringing it down a notch—"devoid of drapes / and bedspreads / the clock's on pause / the window part of / the outside

¹ "Suzanne Dathe, Grenoble, France" is the first name on an anti-war email petition that I received about 30 times over the course of the week leading up to the writing of this article on 10/11/02.

/ eyes the surface / this / just beneath just / beneath "—that New York strategy ["habitus?" asks R. Toscano] of being the darkest, hippest thing on earth though writing about flowers, Sunday morning and loving Jimmy Schuyler—[z.b. I saw Richard Hell at two St. Mark's memorials this month, for Kenneth Koch and John Wieners, which isn't surprising but might be chaos theory for some with doctoral dividends]—and conveyed through language uncluttered by mannerist elaborations [I'd like that to be the good new magic but I'm waiting for the overture to end...]—American plain-song, of course, a clean slate for micro-tonal aesthetics...

[the other folks in my office aren't talking to me because they see I am reading these poems—
I suppose I always am because they don't talk to me even when I'm not holding 8.5 x 11 soon to be A4 sheets
—it's too bad—
—I'd tell them of the mirakove worker and the minus signs that became an em-daschle in my Word autoformat mode...]—

Of course I'd like to mention William Carlos Williams, the poem as a single motion—in Mirakove's case, perhaps a spill, or a butoh-like abandon in which the body is given over entirely to gravity (Min Tanaka, when asked about his jump: "I didn't jump, I fell"), but with an electric animé splendor—so that at the finale of "extensity: to Mina Loy" there is that WCW trick of ending a poem with one little pocket of divergent activity ("this was / Icarus falling") quite often closing on a gerund or adverb: "tumbling / seductions / that would also be made / of glass & flower / vengefully." This "leaves them wanting more" but also continues the activity of the poem beyond it, deeper into the pit of the entropic flowerpot or contemplating the emotional and moral elements that have become LIVED because we have shared the wandering—like the camera drawing back at the end of a feature (for instance, *Easy Rider*, our Fonda-ness enflamed)—something still happening, it's not strictly death, so why stop the camera now?

I write "an argot" above, meaning I guess those criminal or inner-city languages that surface like pearls in which neologisms and nicknames are pretty much the same thing—"sucktank / abducted weapon / at the stucco"—and reflect some sort of urban verbscape of "snipers," "vixens,"—as I suggested earlier (drawing from the same poem "girl in dunes"), Mirakove is hardly a meditative poet in any conventional sense nor a language poet—there are constant and never indifferent negotiations between the will to self and the impositions of the world's image banks—one can certainly not do without the other (and Carol, that's her name, has long been the snappiest, but also most giddily recombinatory, dresser on the NY scene)—Baudelaire loved artifice as did Oscar Wilde but New York vatics tend toward the newspaper realism of faded black jeans and poems of the catholic self, simply because Dada is everywhere and there is hardly need to dress up when everything's on the verge of becoming a readymade

(so you thought—not any longer—though the seventies will be back sooner than you'd like as this year's budget crisis unfolds—piles of garbage and subway fare hikes, David Bowie kissed on the lips singing "I am a DJ," etc. etc.—probably not as interesting, but yet fodder of an urban apocalypsis's imagination, more readymades—)

now that the dot com bust has also revealed to us how uninteresting our fashion sense has been [and how interesting the 20th century can be!] we'll like that artifice spirit coming back, but with cybernetic tensegrity, grafted to the soft tissue between the bones, a "guttered ballerina," as nothing can be plain anymore—"the 'Nineties' tried your game / And died, there's nothing in it" (Pound).

Words just sort of drop in in this non-linear lyric writing—no base tone, always ready to spring—Mirakove

it's so possible to be indifferent, the first thing the fake punk bands do, elevating middle-class indirection to a cardboard socialite platform (an enervated Alex Katz), but there's something to be said for a poem that won't suffer indifference after having already rented it kühl loft space deep in its agitator's heart—"it doesn't pay to not be complex, muting in an ear leaves chained an archived document to affront shellac, she is susceptible to faith"—and in another poem: "you were bored out of long whatever's," or "you distracted your distraction without careless closeness away from that beginning"—it's hard to start where one is I suppose—

there is nothing natural about this "argot," I think she made it up.

KESTON SUTHERLAND: FOR CAROL MIRAKOVE

In the history of self-possession we have the misfortune to have woken up in, things have reached what may be a critical point. How now can we claim to possess our lives? How in the deepest thick of commodity culture, proceeding in the endless wake of socialism through life like a stream of piss through a sea of glue, are we able to say that these are *our* lives? The retreat of Hölderlin into the “asylum” of poetry is impossible, it took up long ago the place offered to it by the great *Lonely Planet* among the *Himmelskräfte*. So where's our retreat? Is there a place that we own, where to be self-possessed still means more than to be calm and undisturbed?

A shift has occurred in the meaning of the problem itself. The history of self-possession is wrongly thought still to be the history of the self; when we talk about whether we own our lives, the assumption is that we are talking first, and essentially, about what life is. But such a conversation is impossible for as long as we fail to notice that *possession now means more than life*. Mirrors are *essentially* a component statistic in the economist's Total Factor Production spreadsheet. The United States has openly downgraded even its domestic political franchise to a form of entertainment pure and simple, something that defines the free individual negatively as the individual free of real influence; but Americans are nonetheless singled out by their possession of this franchise and all the civil perks dependent on its nullity. As the *owners* of this gimmick-franchise we are alive and kicking, which is to say that politically we are a corpse with its legs burned off. Life means less than possession, as the new victims of capitalism's war in “the Middle East” are perhaps more beautifully aware than we poets ever can be, despite the great merits of our cultural studies departments. When we talk about the history of self-possession and its present crisis, this must be the first fact. Self-possession as a problem for ethical consciousness has crossed over from the history of the self into the history of ownership.

When did this happen? By “Wordsworth's time” the transition was well underway, and Wordsworth is among its first cultured despisers. For him in 1805 there existed still the possibility of “A self-possession felt in every pause / And every gentle movement of my frame,” though only under strict conditions: the scene had to be set exactly according to the self-exclusion edict of primitive capitalism, and had to include (a) a deserted “public way,” free of the gentle movement of commodities by freight vehicles (b) the deep quietude of some kind of “night” (c) a “steep ascent” up which “slowly” to “mount,” i.e. a path diverging from the public way that is inaccessible to freight (d) “an exhausted mind, worn out by toil” that is not the toil of wage-labour (e) “peace” of the local and immediate variety. If you don't believe me, see *The Prelude* IV 363-399. Self-possession in these conditions is of course totally pyrrhic. In the real world, the sun never sets on the U.S. empire, and there's no ascent so steep that you won't find part of a junk-food chain at its mighty crest. The meaning of Wordsworth's self-exclusion scene has crossed over into the history of inexorable self-inclusion in the capitalist *Gestalt*. He laid out as *realities* the conditions for self-possession that we now recognise as *cancelled possibilities*. This was a terrific achievement.

We are in the habit now of talking about the future and what it belongs to. The range of options is fascinating. For some, it belongs to “the children”—that execrable concept-token regularly used as a kind of euphemism for “I accept and am actually not bothered by the fact that adult humans are all, categorically and irredeemably, a bunch of corrupted liars unfit to live in the next-decade-but-one.” In her book *WALL* Carol Mirakove boxes up and ships out another answer: “The future belongs to organizations that can search massive quantities of disparate data.” It is not her *own* answer, of course. As the notes tell us, it's from *The Data*

Warehouse Challenge: Taming Data Chaos, one of several examples of the belles-lettrism Mirakove was subjected to while working as a systems analyst for MCI Telecommunications Corp. By this reckoning, the future—or what is left of it—is like the Africa of the early nineteenth century: a grand *terra nullius* lying in wait for the heroes of commerce and their philanthropist wives. And perhaps it really is so. Just as for Heidegger “hearing” and “keeping silent” are possibilities belonging to discourse, so for the data analyst the future is a possibility belonging to himself and his clients. It need not happen, this “future,” but if it does, we’d better make sure we’ve got the equipment to sift it into our bank accounts. The innovative poet may find herself faced with a similar problem.

The problem is still self-possession. Why tame the chaos of data? In order to domesticate it—that is, to make sure it leaves no unwelcome stains hidden behind the couch? What kind of *domus* are we able to have? Whatever it is, Carol Mirakove is a terrific poet thrashing through language toward its exit sign. The theatre of peace in which we play cameos to these data-transactions cannot stage her poetry. In an interview with Gary Sullivan she says: “The speaker is opposed by the wall, the speaker is part of the wall.” This wall, the title of her book, is Guy Debord’s “concrete unfreedom.” Mirakove’s comment suggests that for her, what opposes us is the whole in which we are ourselves a part; this whole is unfreedom. Elsewhere among his thoughts on spectacular social relations Debord writes of the variety of alienation in terms that might equally well describe the variety of poetry: “Differing forms of a single alienation contend in the masquerade of total freedom of choice by virtue of the fact that they are all founded on real repressed contradictions.” This alienation is proper to, or possessed by virtue of, an age of “boundless economic development” which defines those who submit to it—that is, everyone in the world—through “a ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs.” Poetry’s own ceaseless manufacture in the bedrooms and muzak booths carved into the wall that opposes us, the wall that we are part of, will satisfy only the “pseudo-needs” which poetry itself dreams up, if it continues to ignore that its own “freedom of choice”—whether imputed to the author or the reader—is a masquerade. Carol Mirakove’s work really thrills me when I think about this problem.

It is work in which the idea of a self-possessed mind, made visible in the outlay of critical instinct in a quick-shifting prosody, is kept alive at high speed. Mirakove sees that the only way not to be acquiescent is to be quick. Her poems switch and cut forward, out-running rather than simply abandoning the dictates of logical connection across syntax. There is a desire shot throughout them that no orderly arrangement of stanzas could contain; lines drop like the rubble of destroyed concrete down the page, exactly and intimately. The voice running for primacy throughout them, linking the stacks together, is at points a mimicry of dispossession “strategically speaking / a spreadsheet,” at points the open cry of sexual happiness or its opposite, “silent in the gang bang.” It is “convinced” and also breaks off and shuts down, letting its questions trail into the silence following structural collapse. It does what it’s told, repeating to itself its “little fears” and hopes for a promotion, following the city’s instructions to “flesh [itself] out,” organising by destroyed rote “the violence of speech / and everything else.” What gives this voice its power, its speed too accurately impressive for the convoy of pseudo-needs in hot pursuit after it, is Mirakove’s prosody. I want to stress this above all. There are perhaps points in *WALL* at which the flicker of narrative or reflection, kind of like a picture flip-book with most of the pages missing, is doing little by way of argument or proposition. But Mirakove’s prosody makes even these parts of the book dynamic; the succession of neutralised speech-acts becomes in the rush of prosodic downfall once again charged and polarised, with the jump from line to line making its own insistence that we can still really be positive and negative in our intuitions, that the refusal to continue a line is a real action *against* its cancelled possibility, and that in the unfreedom of this quick negation we *can feel what it is like to be self-possessed by knowing the lack of self-possession*. It is Mirakove’s prosody, above all, that makes this feeling real.

WALL is not a revolutionary book, in the sense that it doesn't stage a coherent critique of existing conditions or too violently urge us to climb out of them. Hardly any books of poetry ever do this—the American tendency, viewed from afar, seems to be toward the suppression of critique by its rhetorical organising structure, a kind of spectacular let-down with all the signs pointing accusatorily at each other. This has its own value. Or perhaps not its *own*, exactly. I think *WALL* is set apart from this tendency by its prosodic dynamism. Its lack of critique has the revolutionary potential of what Debord called *the grand style* firmly at its core. This is because a critique is not simply lacked, but is too slow to keep up. The fundamental bodily idioms are all on speed, lacing the page with themselves, back again. If they were stopped, so that the critique could catch up—if language were slowed to the rates of accumulation that *reading* is designed for, and for which *speed-reading* is a kind of laziness—we might indeed have a critique worth possessing; but we would be no closer to the history of life for which, plugged in like toasters in the vacuum of the history of possession, we can board the direct angel in Mirakove's poetry, with our very own return tickets.

[20 words for Jan 22]

metal America powerlines
 around and inseparable : filter
 boredom aluminums
 a spotlight
 autobody boxed up
 coldcut
 graffiti ripe
 brickstained & magnetic

[24 words for feb 19]

sponge monkey barren coated
 clamps a throat takes
 a splint
 sucktank
 abducted weapon
 at the stucco
 rave
 lick the brut
 triumvirate: racket
 spice blobs blood