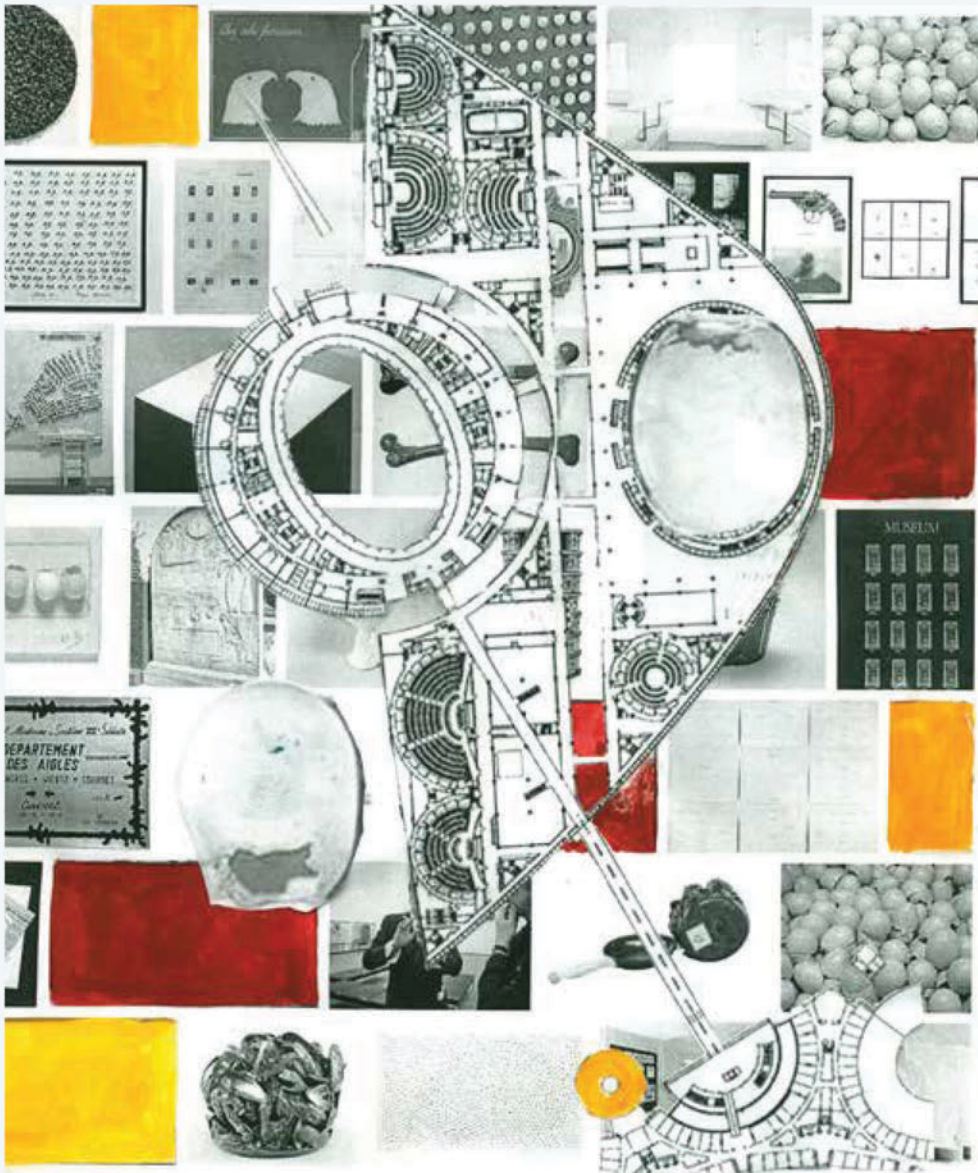


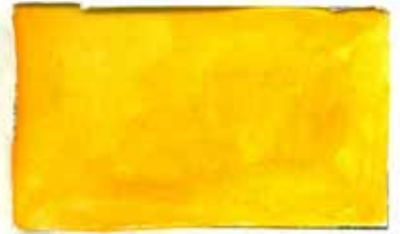
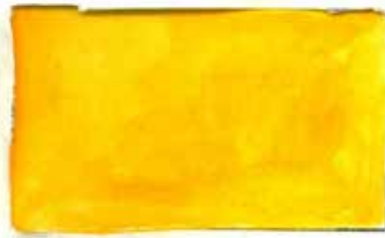
GALLATIN RESEARCH JOURNAL



6
issue

GALLATIN RESEARCH JOURNAL

Issue 6 | 2016



Gallatin Research Journal

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Contents

- 9** A Theory in the Flesh: Enacting Intersectional Feminist Praxis in *This Bridge Called My Back* by Brenda Lau
- 23** Illusions of Togetherness by Patrick Bova
- 37** The Unbodied Doll by Grace Linderholm
- 51** Gender and Violence in the Gold Coast's Slave Castles: Past, Present, and Future by Mariah Young-Jones
- 63** Student Debt and Higher Education: Challenges and Interventions by Sophie Lasoff
- Cover Image** by Grace Linderholm

Letter from the Editor

Anyone who is familiar with past issues of the *Gallatin Research Journal* may notice that the issue they hold in their hands offers itself forth a little differently in terms of its form and content. We have many students in Gallatin and our stellar graphic designer to thank for this metamorphosis. We've been given much to work with. This year, the Gallatin Research Journal received over a tripled pool of submissions compared to those of our past issues.

Out of this pool, here's what we've gathered: "A Theory in the Flesh: Enacting Intersectional Feminist Praxis in *This Bridge Called My Back*" examines the exigency of carefully reading and situating the call for praxis and intersectional feminism found in *This Bridge* both within and beyond academia. "Illusions of Togetherness" analyses the site of the European Union's Parliament building and other alleged monuments of internationalized or globalized status as structures that, perhaps not so coincidentally, evoke the biblical Tower of Babel. "The Unbodied Doll" reads the ethically challenging images and writings that form Hans Bellmer's doll or *poupée* series. "Gender and Violence in Gold Coast's Slave Castles: Past, Present, and Future" thinks through the stakes of the theatrics and performance of guided historical tours of former slave castles in Ghana, specifically concerning the narration of rape. And finally, "Student Debt and Higher Education: Challenges and Interventions" offers a cogent analysis of arguments concerning the impact of student debt within and beyond the walls of the university.

In common with past issues of the *Gallatin Research Journal*, we have attempted to select papers that we hope reveal the often fascinating interstices of interdisciplinary work—papers that felt as if they had been written for Gallatin classes, whether or not this was indeed the case. On this note: thanks again to those students who submitted their work and the professors who recommended papers. And finally, I would like to thank our editorial board and contributors.

Sincerely,
Arielle Friend

A Theory in the Flesh: Enacting Intersectional Feminist Praxis in *This Bridge Called My Back*

Brenda Lau

Published in 1981, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* is a collection of prose, poetry, letters, essays, and more that centered on the marginalized experiences of U.S. women of color. The assembled writings in *This Bridge* aimed to collectively raise awareness of and challenge hegemonic models of Anglo-American feminism that had monopolized the production, dissemination, and ownership of mainstream feminist knowledge, thus limiting—or completely barring—women of color from accessing and participating in the creation of this knowledge. The writers of *This Bridge* urged Anglo-American feminists to scrutinize the classist, racist, and sexist prejudices deeply imbedded within the discourse of their feminist campaigns. Moreover, the text was revolutionary by introducing an intersectional feminist framework that utilized differences between women as the underlying principle of solidarity, a concept that had yet to emerge in the feminist academy until the early 1990s. To this day, *This Bridge* remains one of the most cited works within feminist academia. However, the academy has also housed the epistemic appropriation of *This Bridge's* teaching of praxis in order to unseat its positioning in the feminist theory canon, thus ignoring the anthology's impact in challenging and transforming hegemonic models of Anglo-American feminism. This essay explores how the theoretical knowledge produced in *This Bridge* has constructed—and continues to construct—a bridge linking feminist theory to and from feminist praxis, a tool for transformation which extends its utility beyond the confines of the academy as, paradoxically, a theory in the flesh.

Co-edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge* was one of the first U.S. feminist literary works that brought together the voices of black, Chicana/Latina, Native American, and East Asian women writers in the same literary space, spanning across various sexual, racial, ethnic, economic, spiritual, and academic backgrounds. Although most of the women featured in *This Bridge* identified as first or second generation Americans, children of immigrants or immigrants themselves, the locus of their feminist framework remained borderless. The breadth of “their” feminism was transnational and the message was global for women of all cultures. In the preface to the first edition of *This Bridge*, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa wrote: “We want to express to all women—especially to white middle-class women—the experiences which divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences within the feminist movement. We intend to explore the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions. We want to create a definition that expands what ‘feminism’ means to us.”¹ Women of color like Moraga and Anzaldúa were oftentimes excluded from mainstream Anglo-American feminist circles because of their multiplicitous identities. For the rest of this essay, the term “third world feminism” will be used to refer to the (conscious) political agendas of third world women that worked to undo the singular concepts of solidarity based on gender alone that characterized Anglo-American feminist praxis. In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Chandra Mohanty offers this working definition for “third world women”:

This is a term which designates a political constituency, not a biological or even sociological one. It is a sociopolitical designation for people of African, Caribbean, Asian and Latin American descent, and native people of the U.S. It also refers to ‘new immigrants’ to the U.S. [. . .] What seems to constitute ‘women of color’ or ‘third world women’ as a viable oppositional alliance is a common context of struggle rather than color or racial identifications. Similarly, it is third world women’s oppositional political relation to sexist, racist, and imperialist structures that constitutes our potential commonality.²

1 Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, introduction to *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), xxiii.

2 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*

The Anglo-American feminist model of “solidarity through common oppression” failed to cater to third world women because oppression also manifested through racial, class, and sexual frontiers. By proposing this model of third world feminism, Moraga and Anzaldúa expressed that they were not creating a *new* type of feminism, but rather working to expand, unpack, and consciously critique the exclusionary practices of mainstream feminism. Moreover, these third world women celebrated their destabilized identities instead of revoking them. “I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. What am I? *A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings*. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label [. . .] who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me,” writes Anzaldúa in *This Bridge*.³ However the hegemonic forces producing these social margins/deviances remained a hotbed for criticism. In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval writes, “U.S. third world feminism rose out of the matrix of the very discourses denying, permitting, and producing difference.”⁴ This same philosophy of “solidarity through difference” can be found in anthologies, which bring together works and writers from different backgrounds with the same purpose.

Before the publication of *This Bridge*, a few feminist anthologies in circulation, such as *Sisterhood is Powerful*, were inclusive of women from various classes and educational backgrounds, yet these works failed to address race as a viable determinant of difference. On the other hand, the women featured in *This Bridge* defined their differences beyond race, submitting works in various literary mediums, language, and levels of scholarship, or lack thereof. The writers in *This Bridge* “were aware of the displacement of their subjectivity across a multiplicity of discourses: feminist, lesbian, nationalist, racial, socioeconomic, historical, etc. The peculiarity of their displacement implies a multiplicity of positions from which they are driven to grasp or understand themselves,”⁵ writes Norma Alarcón in her essay *The Theoretical Subjects of this Bridge Called My*

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 7.

3 Gloria Anzaldúa, “O.K. Momma, Who the Hell Am I?: An Interview with Luisah Teish,” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 228.

4 Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 43.

5 Norma Alarcón, “The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism,” in *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture and Ideology*, ed. Hector Calderon

Back. Differences must be challenged in order for new alliances to be formed between women of various backgrounds. Audre Lorde, in her essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” writes, “Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. For difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic.”⁶ Because the oppositional framework in *This Bridge* has been recognized by the academy, its underlying theoretical principles are made legitimate *through* the academy, further construing the hegemonies in which Anglo-American feminism is also legitimized. Furthermore, *This Bridge* is featured within the feminist *writing* canon but seldom under the feminist *theory* canon. In *Writing Women’s Communities*, Cynthia Franklin addresses *This Bridge*’s idiosyncrasies, “given its contemporaneity and indeterminacy of genre, [it] fit[s] canons neither of theory nor literature, yet it was clearly responding and at least partially addressing itself to the academy, particularly to academic feminists.”⁷ In its inception, *This Bridge* was intended for pedagogical use in both the academy and outside of it, acting as a bridge between these two spaces, belonging to neither, yet its exact praxis lay in being used as a theoretical source.

Why use the image of a bridge? The idea came to Cherríe Moraga as she and Barbara Smith were leaving a meeting with a women’s studies group planning a conference on racism. During the meeting, it occurred to Moraga that the few third world women present had to consistently “teach” the white majority of the group how to formulate the praxis of their conference. Ultimately, Moraga and Smith left the meeting emotionally (and physically) exhausted, dejected by their seemingly “assigned” role as “instructors” to the white women. Moraga recalled saying that she felt “tired of being some bridge” to which Smith responded that a bridge “gets walked over.” In a 1982 interview with Lorraine Sorrel of *off our backs*, a feminist news-journal, Cherríe Moraga further explained, “[The reality of] being a bridge [. . .] It is very laborious, very

et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 140.

6 Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 99.

7 Cynthia G. Franklin, *Writing Women’s Communities: The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Multi-genre Anthologies*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 4.

painful, and it hurts the muscles [. . .] the bridge is an extension, a gesture, a connection rather than severing. And the whole idea is there too, of making it physical, theory in the flesh.”⁸ By performing as “instructors” to white women, third world women become the token “inclusive” Other; their peripheral existences ultimately define their intrinsic feminist value. An exchange of ideas seemingly follows, but it is ultimately a one-way transaction, a single sided conversation that operates under the guise of a dialogue, where third world women dispense “knowledge.” While this “knowledge” seems to be defined by its subjectivity, it is assigned “third world knowledge” which is rendered “objective” by white feminists who, in turn, have subjectively interpreted this knowledge. The challenge for the third world woman: If she is a bridge, stretching from one shore to another, and if the gap beneath her increases, must she continue stretching to make the two ends meet? How does she reclaim the knowledge that has been stolen from her? She writes—and she demands to be read.

But can this authoritative voice in *This Bridge* be problematized? In the foreword to the second edition, Cherríe Moraga writes, “Three years later [since the first publication], I try to imagine the newcomer to *Bridge*. What do you need to know?”⁹ She goes on to further contextualize the global political climate of the early ’80s, citing the U.S. military interventions in Nicaragua, apartheid in South Africa, and the escalating political repression in Pinochet-controlled Chile. Another reading of this passage is to direct Moraga’s question towards the reader, the hypothetical newcomer. Who are you, the reader, listening to? What sorts of knowledge do you, the reader, want to know from me, the speaker? And do I, the speaker, speak, because you, the reader, are listening?

And how is the third world woman heard? *This Bridge* has been printed four times, each time by a different publishing press. The first, Persephone Press, was a lesbian-feminist collective run by white women. After Persephone stopped printing *This Bridge*, Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde began discussing forming their own publishing platform which would later become Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

8 Lorraine Sorrel, “*This Bridge* Moves Feminists.” *Off Our Backs* 12, no. 4 (1982): 11.

9 Cherríe Moraga, “REFUGEES OF A WORLD ON FIRE Foreword to the Second Edition” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, i.

Its mission was devoted to publishing works by women of color seeking to highlight and raise awareness of their lived experiences. By founding a publishing press that catered to the needs of the marginalized, these women of color were able to create agency by building a platform for their voices, “begun and kept alive by women who [could not] rely on inheritance or other benefits of class privilege to do the work we [women of color] need to do.”¹⁰ In “Another 1981,” Cynthia Franklin notes, “In some cases the writers, publishers, and editors of these anthologies overlap [. . .] these presses are run not to make a profit, but to provide an avenue for women otherwise silenced by mainstream presses.”¹¹ Barbara Smith adds, “[*This Bridge*] is a catalyst for consciousness because the information is between the covers of a book,”¹² assigning bridge-building power to *This Bridge* through its claiming of an intrinsically devised third world feminist knowledge. By acknowledging the validity of the statement that third world women were valuable to the preservation and continuity of feminist endeavors, they were able to cross from one perception of themselves to another, perhaps from the oppressed to the liberated. This consciousness-raising act was one of *This Bridge’s* agendas in building up the identity of the third world woman. As they “walked” over the bridge, they crossed the gap that told them otherwise, that third world women could not write, could not theorize, and did not belong in the academy. However, their success as writers did not come from being recognized in mainstream publication(s), but in recognizing themselves as writers, artists, and creative collaborators having enacted their praxes through their writing. “The criterion for admission to these anthologies is not literary excellence or influence, as in canonical anthologies, but the contributor’s elaboration of the identity the anthology is constructing—or, in some cases, the issues or contradictions a contributor raises concerning this identity.”¹³ Gloria Anzaldúa, about this author identity, wrote, “The danger in writing is not fusing our personal experience and worldview with the social reality we live in, with our inner life, our history, our economics,

10 Barbara Smith. “A Press of Our Own Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press”. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 10, no. 3 (1989) University of Nebraska Press: 11.

11 Franklin *Writing Women’s Communities*, 33.

12 Smith. “A Press of Our Own Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press,” 11.

13 Franklin. *Writing Women’s Communities*, 9.

and our vision. What validates us as human beings validates us as writers.”¹⁴ Write, regardless of who was reading. Write, because one felt. Write, because an audience did not legitimize the authenticity of the pain caused by racism. In the end, writing was the ultimate de-silencer of third world women’s voices.

However, *This Bridge* still has not managed to escape the confines of the academy. Although many of the authors in *This Bridge* expressed wishes to see the anthology in use beyond these bounds, there has been little that has led to exposure in non-academic environments (I myself first encountered *This Bridge* in a Latina Feminist Studies seminar). *This Bridge* has been pigeonholed into the theoretical, confined to the classroom, locked within the discourse of the academy, whereas “praxis” is relegated to “real life” outside of the institution of the university; even in describing the locations of theory and praxis, I am consciously evaluating the words I invoke in describing their ideological positioning. Theory and praxis are locked into place by the hegemonic discourse of the academy—the two cannot separate from their designated places. Furthermore, each term is distinct in its binaries. Oppositions against racism, sexism, violence, and oppression are denied in discussions that are pre-packaged as innocuous, powerless in terms of the physicality of feeling emotion. Both students and non-students are told: you cannot bring your feelings into the classroom. Leave your qualms at the door. The antithesis of this praxis relies on disturbing the “objective” nature of the classroom by positing the subjectivities of emotions as a primary theoretical basis of knowledge. Moraga argues, “The danger lies in attempting to deal with oppression purely from a theoretical base. Without an emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source of our own oppression, without naming the enemy within ourselves and outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place.”¹⁵ However, to de-connote theory and praxis, the walls of the academy must be dismantled to allow for these binaries to be reconstructed without the “either/or” structure. The difficulty with locating *This Bridge* amidst this project is that the non-academic space in which it originates has been privileged for use within the academic world. Dismantling the academy threatens to dismantle the academic notoriety of *This Bridge*. Franklin writes:

14 Gloria Anzaldúa, “Speaking In Tongues: A Letter To 3rd World Women Writers” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 170.

15 Cherríe Moraga, “La Guerra,” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 29.

. . . Such an anthology crosses the boundary between theory and activism, and unsettles other boundaries separating academia and ‘the real world.’ While production of these anthologies is enabled by the university and by academic feminism, and while the anthologies may address themselves to academic communities, they simultaneously spring from and strive to reach specific, targeted communities of women outside universities. In doing so, they point to the reductiveness of seeing academic and non-academic communities as wholly distinct.¹⁶

Rather, there must be a repositioning of the academy and its antithesis, where the former is not primary and the latter is not secondary, where the constructed binaries of the two are not defined by their “lack” of each other. How does one grapple with this dichotomy? *This Bridge*, by the theory it offers through the experiences of its subjects, and the praxis shown by the writing within, faces a similar problem of escaping binaries. Cynthia Franklin writes:

One of the problems *This Bridge* faces in the academy is that because it is not in recognizable theoretical forms, its theoretical concerns can be dismissed in standard academic essays, critics rarely cite the work for its theoretical insights, but rather for its status as an object signifying the entry of U.S. women of color into feminism. Furthermore, for white feminists, *This Bridge* often becomes representative of the work of U.S. women of color, and a hierarchical dichotomy is established in the academy wherein white women who ‘do’ theory are considered superior to women of color, who ‘do’ this ‘other’ kind of writing.¹⁷

In other words, if theory is privileged for Anglo-American feminist academics, then the theoretical value of *This Bridge* is labeled a form of praxis, considered ideological “dirty work.” However, *This Bridge*, framing third world women as the central voice, positions them as the hypothetical “theoretical” subjects of which Anglo-American women must walk across, to shift their perceptions of third world women. The “backs” of third world women, already acting as praxis (through knowledge production), become further theoretical

16 Franklin. *Writing Women’s Communities*, 5.

17 Anita Valerio, “It’s In My Blood, My Face--My Mother’s Voice, The Way I Sweat,” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 42.

frameworks for Anglo-American feminists to build on and for *these* women to enact their praxes as a result of this teleological encounter. This relationship no longer remains a power struggle but an intersection in respective agencies, using difference (in experiences, in identities, in privileges, in praxes) as the abstract for social change. In *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy through Race, Class, and Gender* AnaLouise Keating deconstructs binaries of difference, suggesting that the either/or model further reifies oppositional paradigms:

Based on either/or thinking and dualistic (‘us’ versus ‘them’) models of identity, this binary-oppositional approach reinforces the status quo. Oppositional logic reduces our interactional possibilities to two mutually exclusive options: either our views are entirely the same or they are entirely different. In this either/or system, differences of opinion and differing worldviews become monolithic, rigid, and divisive.¹⁸

It is not enacting praxis in response to theory, nor is it citing theory to justify praxis, but it is using theory as the form of praxis, to have “theory in the flesh,” where the “physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity.”¹⁹ The need for a viable praxis is urgent: to instigate change, to raise consciousness, to access the physical realities of knowledge. *This Bridge* enacts a praxis of its own, embodying the struggles and triumphs of the third world feminist by communicating its inherently constructed identity as a bridge between pockets of knowledge. As Cherríe Moraga wrote, “Our strategy is how we cope—how we measure and weigh what is to be said and when, what is to be done and how, and to whom and to whom and to whom, daily deciding/risking who it is we can call an ally, call a friend (whatever that person’s skin, sex, or sexuality) [. . .] For the women in this book I will lay my body down for that vision. *This Bridge Called My Back*.”²⁰

18 AnaLouise Keating, “From Intersections to Interconnections Lessons for Transformation” in *The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy through Race, Class, and Gender*, edited by Berger, Michele Tracy, and Kathleen Guidroz (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 91.

19 Cherríe Moraga, “Entering the Lives of Others: A Theory in the Flesh,” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 23.

20 Cherríe Moraga, “Preface,” in *The Bridge Called my Back*, xix.

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Illusions of Togetherness

Patrick Bova

Despite ultimately lying in ruin, the Tower of Babel inhabits a paradoxical space that allows it to shift between every stage of its construction. Simultaneously, images of the Tower reflect startling verticality and crushing horizontality, near-completion and total destruction. As an architectural structure, Babel represents impossibility—a flawed project fueled by human toil and unhinged ambition. As such, it is curious to observe contemporary physical structures that draw upon the Tower of Babel as a visual and symbolic referent. Because Babel exists only in word and metaphor, architecture that directly signifies the Tower eerily situates itself in modern cityscapes.¹ What can be said of structures inspired by inevitable difference and separateness? Do edifices that reference Babel serve as shining beacons of global unity, or rather dubious acknowledgments of globalization’s futility?

In form and in function, the Louise–Weiss building of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France firmly stands as a contemporary Tower of Babel (see figs. 1 and 2). Designed by AS.Architecture-Studio in the 1990s, the building reflects “the dialectic between interior and exterior space, between fullness

1 It is important to address that our visual understanding of Babel most commonly derives from Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s two sixteenth century paintings of the tower (c.1563). Both Vienna and Rotterdam paintings depict Babel as a crumbling edifice still in construction. In their design, the architectural forms discussed in this paper draw clear inspiration from Bruegel’s paintings.

and void” in a “complex and fluid system.”² As it rests upon the riverbank like a landed spacecraft, the Parliament rises and falls in an orbit of circles and ellipses punctured by stark piers. The geometry evokes a certain fluidity or movement in the stationary forms. Visually, the building is incomplete; however, one can imagine each plane uniting in an upward progression towards completion, similar to images of the Tower of Babel. In its broken scale and amalgamation of various structural forms and referents, it represents “a paradoxical architecture.”³

The European Parliament’s (EP) Babelesque architecture converses directly with its function as a central meeting point for the European Union. In his critique of the institution and its building, Daniel Hannan argues that “the EP, in short, is the E.U.’s objective correlative: the thing that expresses, in physical form, the project’s abstract flaws.”⁴ Hannan—British MEP and a staunch Eurosceptic—sardonically observes the unnecessary grandiosity of the Parliament’s external and internal structure as a governing body, blasting it as “a little self-contained world” and a trivial “circus” of artifice.⁵ Though this contempt of the Parliament (and of everything related) boils down to Hannan’s staunch Euroscepticism, his critique of “the whole Euro-racket”⁶ illuminates a clear resemblance to the futility of Babel’s construction. He, too, dryly acknowledges the Strasbourg building’s resemblance to Bruegel’s *Tower of Babel*. Recognizing that the Tower stood as “a symbol of the overweening ambition of which human beings are capable,”⁷ the MEP likens the E.U.’s utopian desire for togetherness amidst linguistic and cultural difference to why the original tower was brought down by God. Considering the governing bodies in relation to the building through which they circulate and use, the obvious and symbolic Babel references hardly seem coincidental. However, when Fox News personality Glenn Beck called into question the striking similarities between the EP and the Tower of Babel, Architecture-Studio denied the resemblance.⁸ Instead, the designers professed inspiration from

2 “Europe: Project Stakes” Le Parlement Européen. AS.Architecture-Studio.

3 Ibid.

4 Daniel Hannan, “The Objective Correlative Of The E.U.,” *New Criterion* 33, no. 6 (2015): 29.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid, 3.

8 Segment from “Glenn Beck: Lessons From the Tower of Babel.” *Fox News*. 17 Nov. 2010.

the Coliseum in Rome. The resemblance to Roman architecture is understandable, but when considered for both its formal and functional qualities, the European Parliament is undoubtedly Babelesque.

Beyond its architecture, the EP functions as a supranational institution of European political unity; consequently, it is also the most multilingual parliament in the world.⁹ During plenary sessions, twenty four languages may be spoken, interpreted, and translated all at once. This promotion of multilingualism through the promotion of native tongues adds an interesting twist to thinking about the Parliament as Babel. In the original story, those building the Tower who had been united by their common tongue received punishment in the form of linguistic confusion and a diversification of language. With regard to the EP, it seems as though the Babel story unravels backwards, allowing “many voices [to become] one tongue.”¹⁰ The Louise-Weiss building’s resemblance to the Tower of Babel is uncanny, and its centralizing function for the European Union makes the image that much more questionable. Whether it optimistically proclaims that continuous work is necessary to maintain democracy or ominously alludes to a failed European state, one can only guess.

While the European Parliament building might represent a more “complete” image of the Tower of Babel, other iterations that structurally or symbolically reference the Tower are not as obvious. In a recently redeveloped section of East London, the ArcelorMittal Orbit shoots out of the now well-trodden ground of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (see figs. 4-6). As the brainchild of contemporary artist Anish Kapoor and designer Cecil Balmond, the Orbit was commissioned by London mayor Boris Johnson to serve as an icon for the 2012 Olympic Games. Evoking circulation and continuous movement in both color and material, the Orbit somehow achieves stability from its apparent instability. Speaking about the work, Kapoor suggested that “there is a kind of medieval sense to it of reaching up to the sky, building the impossible. A procession, if you like [...] a folly that aspires to go even above the clouds and has

9 “Multilingualism in the European Parliament.” *About Parliament*. European Parliament. (2015).

10 See Fig. 3. Due to my inability to locate actual provenance or source details for this image, I hesitate to situate it within my argument. Regardless of whether it was legitimately used as a poster by the Council of Europe, it is a unique source to consider due to its online proliferation on forums and fanatical Christian webpages.

something mythic about it.”¹¹ Kapoor also references the Tower of Babel in his description of how the sculpture requires public participation in a processional manner: the public visually digests the sculpture on the ground as well as physically ascends the spiral. Upon climbing the structure, a panoramic viewing platform contributes new dimensions to the work. The prospect of taking in London in one grand sweep of “harmonious visual totality”¹² provides only an illusion of singularity.

The Orbit quickly became a polarizing public art spectacle that incited confusion, outrage, and an onslaught of every apocalyptic adjective imaginable. Architectural historian William Curtis called the structure a “plutocrat’s self-indulgent plaything masquerading as public art,” in other words, a structural mess that could unintentionally be interpreted as Britain’s industrial downfall.¹³ Others, like architect Felix Mara, felt lost in the Orbit’s agonized looping and structural inefficiency.¹⁴ Kapoor and Balmond clearly succeeded in their desire to reinterpret “the tower,” thus developing an architecture devoid of recognizable signs. In his sociological analysis of the London Olympics and its effect on British society and urbanism, Phil Cohen understands the sculpture to represent an “architecture of narcissism” and illustrate the cultural politics of the games.¹⁵ Like a glaring skeleton, the Orbit becomes yet another flashing sign of the spectacle of global unity that rests at the heart of the Olympic Games.

As the Olympic icon Boris Johnson so desperately craved, the Orbit and its confusing ontology do not interfere with the sculpture’s utility. In an ebullient manner, the mayor explained that, “when you’re building a knockout park, and you’re asking the world to come there, there’s got to be some vertical expression of your ambitions there’s got to be an exclamation mark.”¹⁶ With this choice of words, it is difficult to avoid thinking about how Babel, too, ascended and fell from blind ambition. In one fell swoop, the Orbit attempts

11 Anish Kapoor, “Orbit,” 2012.

12 Phil Cohen, *On the Wrong Side of the Track? East London and the Post Olympics*. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2013), 44

13 William Curtis, “Outrage: Anish Kapoor’s Olympic Monument is a Confused Mess,” *Architectural Review* *Architectural Review*, May 2010.

14 Felix Mara, “Awkward Bizarre, Sublime,” *Architects’ Journal*, June 2012.

15 Ibid, 27.

16 Into Orbit: A Culture Show Special. Interview with Boris Johnson. *The Culture Show*. 2012.

to carve out the sky yet plummets back to earth, paradoxically looping through construction and destruction all at once. Unlike the European Parliament building, the ArcelorMittal Orbit projects a far more ominous tone regarding togetherness. By existing between the two Babelesque moments (pre- and post-destruction), the sculpture acknowledges its own impossibility.

Not all manifestations of the Tower of Babel rely on verticality and instability of form in their construction. Carved into the sloping rock of a hill in the slums of Caracas, Venezuela, El Helicoide de la Roca Tarpeya heavily rests upon its horizontality (see figs. 7-9). El Helicoide, meaning “the Helix” in English, was designed by Pedro Neuberger, Dirk Bornhorst, and Jorge Romero Gutiérrez in the late 1950s to serve as a beacon of modernism, architecture, and capitalism. Under the reins of dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez, Caracas became “a haven for foreign architects” as the ruler directed all of the country’s revenues towards modernization.¹⁷ Upon acquiring rights to develop La Roca Tarpeya, the hill upon which El Helicoide was built, the design team prepared to exploit the land for commercial benefits like never before. In essence, the structure would become a monument to consumerism with roads running upwards in a double helix towards its crest, crowned in a dome designed by none other than Buckminster Fuller. The monetary and public investments were huge, and subsequently, “El Helicoide was an instant hit, its shape and scale attracting the attention of architects worldwide.”¹⁸ As a symbol of modernist architecture and 1950s consumerism, El Helicoide was the future.

However, only a short while after construction began, it failed. Political changes and financial insecurity left the plans for the consumer center bankrupt with no leadership and the building a concrete skeleton. Since the initial plans for this modernist utopia fell through, the shell of El Helicoide has housed landslide refugees, twelve thousand squatters, served as a nest for illegal activity, and was the site of an attempted Museum of Anthropology that ultimately failed. Today, and for the past thirty years, it has been used as the headquarters for the Venezuelan intelligence police. As Celeste Olalquiaga so eloquently proclaims in her editorial on the site: “a place that was meant to be a highway to consumer heaven became

17 Celeste Olalquiaga, “Tropical Babel,” *Cabinet* 52. (Winter 2013/2014), 50.

18 *Ibid*, 52.

instead a stairway to hell.”¹⁹ While El Helicoide still exists today as a utilitarian structure, it lies in ruin—a stark reminder of excessive ambition. Here, its relation to Babel is the most striking. While its form clearly references Babylonian ziggurats and its coiling roads suggest a processional quality similar to that in the construction of the Tower, El Helicoide cannot exist as the Tower. El Helicoide fades away as Babel destroyed; a ghost of attempted consumer unity and control.

In construction, paradoxical flux, and destruction, the Tower of Babel retains a certain mutability and multiplicity of meanings that allows for innumerable representations. In varying degrees, the memory of Babel courses through all architectural structures and groups of people; a memory that is challenged, however, when structures become literal manifestations of the Tower. Today as in Genesis, absolute togetherness and unity render themselves impossible.

19 Ibid, 53.

Images



Figure 1 - The European Parliament, Louise-Weiss Building. Strasbourg, France.



Figure 2 - The European Parliament grounds. Strasbourg, France.

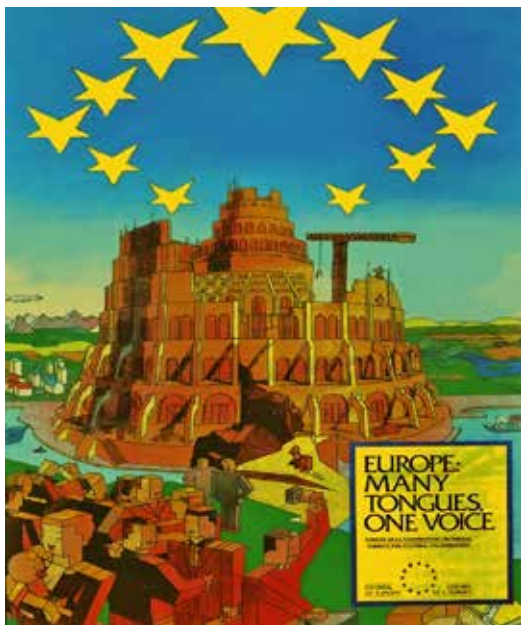


Figure 3 – Date and direct source of this Council of Europe poster are unknown.



Figure 4 - Orbit final model, Anish Kapoor and Cecil Balmond. 2011.



Figure 5 - ArcelorMittal Orbit, Anish Kapoor and Cecil Balmond. Steel. H: 115m. Queen Elizabeth Park, Stratford, London. 2012.



Figure 6 - The Orbit at full height, dwarfing the surrounding throngs of tourists during the Olympic Games, 2012.



Figure 7 - El Helicoide de la Roca Tarpeya, 2013.

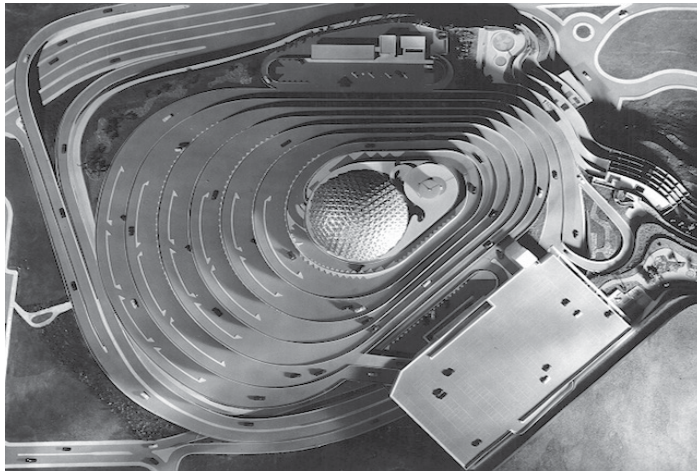


Figure 8 – Architectural Model for El Helicoide.



Figure 9 – El Helicoide in construction. 1959.

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The Unbodied Doll

Grace Linderholm

*“I define mannequin as: living statuary, fleshy symbol, breathing (though you will not detect this!) embodiment, feeling manifestation, sentient icon, tangible commentary on the quotidian, palpable form of the unguessed, concrete evocation of ephemera [...] rendering in a single pose an unalterable (once chosen) depiction giving shape, substance, meaning to the innumerable possibilities of our vulgar experience.”*¹

In 1933, Hans Bellmer began to photograph a hand-made, toddler-sized female doll with no hair (see fig. 1). This work would expand into a lifelong obsession. Bellmer’s “*poupée*,”² or doll (*die Puppe* in German), took many forms as a concept throughout the artist’s life, but all of these forms involved the hand-made, mutilated body of a pubescent girl. The form of the doll varied according to Bellmer’s whims. It might have four legs and no head, only a torso; or it might have breasts where its neck should be. But in all of its forms, the doll references the form of the mannequin through its scale and Bellmer’s use of the ball-joint.

The mannequin is distinctly uncanny as a void of personification. As a tool of advertising, it provides a site for frustrated forced projection. If one tries to see oneself in it, one is instead faced with a plastic

1 Gordon Weaver, “Mannequin,” *Agni* 50 (1999): 46-47, accessed November 18, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23007759>.

2 Hans Bellmer and Malcolm Green, *The Doll* (London: Atlas, 2005).

artificiality that emphasizes artifice. It entices by promising perfection and then withholds; it functions as one-way mirror into which we can neither see nor be seen. This object is reduced to the functional ends of advertising, which idealizes the body into plastic. Bellmer's doll twists this logic. The doll is acted upon by him, and the resemblance to a human form is turned into a Frankenstein of fetish. It is still the form of an idealized body, but it is Bellmer's vision that the doll conforms to. It is malleable where the commercial mannequin is not, but only to its maker.

There are so many possible meanings and demands to this object that is also a body! So many terrible possibilities for this form that exists to serve a rather ambiguous need. In a certain reading, the *poupée* can be seen as a hideous inversion of Galatea, for there is a sense that while Galatea might have slept in stone while her maker groped, chiseled, and reified her, Bellmer's *poupée* is conscious and trapped for every machination. How to assess such warped content? One possible account of the doll's appeal can be explained in the application of Berys Gaut's theory of ethicism. Ethicism is a logical system for evaluating the issue of ethics in art that may be, to a certain degree, immoral. Gaut's process is to assess art according to the hierarchy of prescriptions that the artwork manifests. If a prescription of the work is immoral, then it is a demerit to the overall success of the work.³ Gaut's method depends on the concept of a work having a hierarchy of prescriptions. No matter how multifaceted a work may be, there will be a facet of the piece that is dominant, or perhaps, we can say, the heart of the matter.

However, I contend that Bellmer's work, as a body of art that is functional rather than prescriptive, denies ethicism. There is a particular relationship that exists in Bellmer's doll between art and ethics. As I have outlined, the body of the mannequin always carries ideas of victimization, plasticity, and functionality. It is always a theoretical body; the ideas projected onto it by viewers are integral to its afterlife. This is doubly true for Bellmer's doll, which existed to act as a means to Bellmer's personal subjective and ideological ends. His work with his dolls (there were eight in total) took up his entire life. This work has a plethora of possible functions and readings. It critiques fascism, it critiques a dying economy, it critiques the commodity,

3 Berys Gaut, "The Ethical Criticism of Art," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 182-203.

it manifests an earnest yearning for childhood, it deigns to castrate, it denies the father, it seduces, it writhes, and it alarms.⁴ In this multitude of possibilities lies Bellmer's substantial provocation: that in his work, "Each specialist will understand [...] only those aspects which correspond to his particular field."⁵ The dolls may exist in the tradition of the mannequin as functional bodies, yet Bellmer's dolls are also meant to function as the artist's personal tools for *understanding* the unconscious and the erotic. With this in mind, it is impossible to apply ethicism to them. Hans Bellmer's *Doll* series does not give us prescriptions, but rather a series of experiments surrounding a personal fantasy.

To start looking at the ethics and aesthetics of Bellmer's work, we must first look at the possible concepts that it embodies, a few of which have been listed above. The *poupée* series catalogues the doll in an analytic attempt to see it in all poses, from all angles, in all ways—what Hal Foster calls "construction as dismemberment."⁶ The gaze of the camera on the body seems dysmorphic on top of the doll's already warped body. It is as if we are trying to see what the doll "really" looks like through hyper-exposure (see fig. 2). It is doubly reified by Bellmer's camera, as much as it is placed in a scene of "life" and documented like the living. This frustrated re-working of the artist's own creation creates the image of an impenetrable surface of a body, an unknowable humanity that is punished in its maker's attempt to know it. Bellmer frankly admitted to his drive to "master" his victims.⁷

In a kinder interpretation, the poses are equivalent to experimental poetry. The doll was thought to unveil new unconscious urges through Bellmer's attempts to realize the precise effects of the pose on the viewer. With each modification, the doll comes closer to manifesting a "physical unconscious."⁸ In Bellmer's own account, he created the doll to both rekindle and dismember the mystifying pleasure he felt

4 Bellmer and Green, *The Doll*, 8.

5 Ibid.

6 Hal Foster, "Armour Fou," *High/Low: Art and Mass Culture* 56. Spring (1991): 87, accessed November 21, 2015, <http://ezproxy.library.nyu.edu:2165/stable/778724>.

7 Bellmer and Green, *The Doll*, 6.

8 Ibid.

as a young man upon seeing his cousin Ursula naked. He dedicates the first doll to Ursula,⁹ and with this gesture, Bellmer ties the doll to his personal processing of memory, loss, and eros. Bellmer, while not quite a Surrealist, was a darling of the Surrealist movement. The doll certainly appears like a key in this realm: if it can be moved into the correct pose, it will unlock the unconscious.

La poupée's origin is tragic. The first doll was completed immediately after the artist fled his home in response to rising fascism and the death of his wife. Much of Bellmer's life occurred in response to fascism. He became an artist after quitting a job in industrial production out of fear of becoming a tool of the state. One of the more common arguments in defense of the *poupée* series is that its highest aim is a critique of fascism, a critique enacted through the female body. Therese Lichtenstein remarks that it would be impossible for Bellmer not to have been aware of the image of the idealized German woman that was circulated as Nazi propaganda. In her reading, Lichtenstein reveals that the theatrical display of passive femininity in the doll gives us space to consider "how cultural representations affect the formation of identity."¹⁰ To counter the female body that was made into a dominant concept during fascism's rise—the beautiful, strong, and impassioned image of the nationalistic woman—Bellmer's doll, while still conflating some kind of fetish of femininity, is a female body that lacks self-propelled movement, and so is entirely useless to the state in addition to being grotesque. The doll is neither a body nor a piece of propaganda. Bellmer hoped that the doll would "dispel those feelings of discontent which, in my mind, were normally linked with some useful purpose."¹¹ The doll's inert body could rather exemplify the horror of completely forced functionality under fascism.

So which pose, which possible thought, which *interpretation* of this body are we supposed to take as the most important? Which one will unlock its aims? An important tenet of Bellmer's vision was the relationship of the doll to the viewer, even if the viewer was Bellmer himself. By presenting his work as a book, Bellmer could force an individual relationship with the viewer, and a secret one, relegating his doll to

9 Bellmer and Green, *The Doll*, 12.

10 Therese Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 16.

11 *Ibid.*, 35.

the world of private fantasy. So deep, he felt, was the power of the doll, that it could “Invent new desires.”¹²

With their pick-your-poison nature, the images manage to question what it means to derive pleasure and satisfaction from a piece of art. For, while it is possible to imagine a viewer deriving sadistic satisfaction from the doll and its representation through dismemberment, it is hard to imagine this image ever heralding the serenity or peace of detached observation. It is distinctly *not* a Venus painting, whether by Botticelli, Bourgeois, or even Koons. Bellmer’s photography directly challenges established forms of eroticization. The images are clearly meant to be disquieting. Regardless of whether one accepts Gaut’s method, one can assume that the sensations of shock, isolation, and ambiguity are deliberate provocations on the part of the artist. So what function does this discomfort serve? Viewed as pedophilic, violent, and voyeuristic, the ethical content of Bellmer’s work would already be pronounced essentially immoral.

Gaut’s method of ethicism is one designed to find order among the multiplicities and chaos of art. In fleshing out the argument that each work will have a “highest level” ethical prescription, Gaut holds that fantasy can be a moral indictment. For example, “pleasure at imagined suffering”¹³ is still the projection of pleasure at suffering, pleasure operating as a direct result of suffering, even though this sadistic satisfaction may not be physically manifested. Gaut’s further argument about “emotional realism”—that emotions and reactions to imaginary things are still real responses¹⁴—would serve to completely condemn Bellmer as a pedophile, a sadist, a murderer, and a rapist. But the multiplicitous nature of the work again resists a singular definition. Is this fantasy Bellmer’s, or ours? For it is immediately encouraged that the viewer anthropomorphise the doll, despite its status as an object. Seeing the “body” of the doll in space isn’t actually fantasy at all. To read the doll literally is to analyze a series of photographs about a sculpture. It is the doll’s personification, and the personal relationship of the object to the artist that complicates that process. In the attempt to identify a “correct” reading, it is possible to turn to Bellmer’s perspective in order to find a reevaluation of the work’s immoral content. In such a deeply personal piece of art, the artist is present, and

12 Bellmer and Green, *The Doll*, 108

13 Gaut, “The Ethical Criticism of Art,” 199.

14 Ibid.

even may become a reference point for the work's morality. What, then, was Bellmer trying to *do*?

In fact, Bellmer's own words do not hide the depictions of violence and sadism. His language while describing young girls reads as longing and predatory. Bellmer wrote, "my indolence came to be accompanied by a vague fear that this pink realm would forever elude me. Admittedly, in subsequent years I sometimes captured a fragment of this dream in games with a woman who was willing to relinquish control."¹⁵ His narrative is one of pleasure as complete and total ownership. It is the reduction of the female body to a thing. Yet the fantasy element of the doll—its impenetrability, with all intended implications of that phrase—is its appeal. "Didn't [the doll] amount to the final triumph over those young girls [...] when a conscious gaze plundered its charms, when aggressive fingers searching for something malleable allows the distillates of mind and senses slowly taking form."¹⁶ (see fig. 3) The control of the body is extended to its creation. Its formation is its rape. And still—still—Bellmer is not acting on a living body, but taking his sadism, if you will, into his own hands.

Furthermore the doll can also be read in terms of addressing the bodily dysphoria of someone who longed for womanhood; such that the doll exists as the wish fulfillment of Bellmer's own desired feminization. In *The Anatomy of Love*, Bellmer describes a man's arousal for his wife while he is sleeping in a chair. The plate that his wife is holding in the dream echoes the imprint of the man's ass in the chair, and so, to Bellmer, this means that the man is actually aroused at the thought of *becoming* his wife.¹⁷ Therese Lichtenstein originally proposed the idea that Bellmer had body dysphoria. She notes that when speaking about his dolls, Bellmer is a "poor woman" who has already "birthed" eight of them.¹⁸ In accounts from Bellmer's own family, he enjoyed cross-dressing. Most relevant to the image of the *poupée* is the claim Bellmer makes in *Anatomy of the Image* that, "What is vital is that the image of a woman must have been 'lived' (experienced) by the man in his own body before it can be 'seen' by the man."¹⁹ In a later series of

15 Bellmer and Green, *The Doll*, 40.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid, 120.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid, 130.

double-exposures, Bellmer posts himself onto and into the image of the doll (see fig. 4). The process of creating the doll echoes the conventional thought of the artist as being one with their work: to judge the art, we judge the artist.

Nowhere in Bellmer's rhetoric does he contradict the power dynamic of the doll. The doll was posed experimentally to see what arrangements would be most evocative. Thus, although the possible prescriptive outcomes of the doll were many, the constant threat of manipulation drove the series. This frustrated attempt to get at the heart of the meaning of the doll begins to mimic the deconstructing format of the photographs. Bellmer's work begins to defy the idea of prescriptions, as the ideas embedded in it are presented not as moral statements, but possible lenses through which to evaluate it. Bellmer's potential use of the body as a surrogate is just that: a possible tool to discover multiplicities of meaning.

This use of form is entirely different from prescription. A prescription tells us what the work implies, or is supposed to compel us to think. A prescription advocates certain moral statements. Berys Gaut's system of analysis does not mean to imply that all art has a single meaning or intention. Rather, it asks us to see the structure of a piece of art's argument, and how those arguments and aesthetic constructions and devices can lead to a prescription for the viewer. But Bellmer's *poupée* does not make arguments. It poses hypotheses. The very form of the doll generated multiplicities, and so it avoids being didactic. With this form—the mannequin—that is useful as a tool and as a body of multiple purpose, comes the implication that the body of the art itself is something different than retinal or even conceptual art. It is a tool like a wrench is a tool. It is a tool like a mannequin is a tool for display and advertising.

But what, if anything, does the doll have to do with use? It is especially important to consider Bellmer's ongoing desire to deny any concept of usefulness in the face of fascism. The tool of the doll, as art, relates to usefulness and uselessness at once. Bellmer put this idea forth in all capital letters: "OPPOSITES ARE NECESSARY FOR THINGS TO EXIST AND FOR A THIRD REALITY TO ENSUE."²⁰ So while the doll serves a purpose, the way a tool serves a purpose, it cannot escape its form. It remains an altered body that can be projected onto and held up in comparison to its audience. The object will always

20 Ibid, 117.

be personified. A third reality, one where desire and fulfillment exist in the same moment, a reality in which the boundaries of desire are transcended, is specific to the form of the doll. It is a tool to achieve a new world. Fantasy cannot be reduced to binary ethics of right and wrong. The proposed reality of Bellmer's work is entirely his own interiority. The fantasy and scope of Bellmer's vision cannot be reduced to ethical or non-ethical based on a hierarchy of readings, or even an analysis of the supposed fantasy itself. The logic and structure of the work is illuminatingly circuitous.

Images



Figure 1 - Bellmer, Hans. *Die Puppe*. 1934.

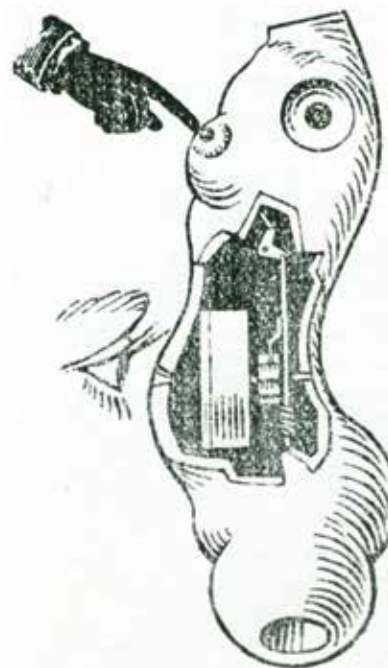


Figure 2 - Bellmer, Hans. *Die Puppe*. 1934.



Figure 3 - Bellmer, Hans. *Die Puppe*. 1934.



Figure 4 - Bellmer, Hans. *Die Puppe*. 1934.

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Gender and Violence in the Gold Coast's Slave Castles: Past, Present, and Future

Mariah Young-Jones

A visit to any of the major “slave castles” along present-day Ghana’s Gold Coast is a case-study in the theatrics of memory. Tour guides balance informative speeches on the history of the castles with performative moments that incite drama and imagination for the visitor. Upon one visit to Elmina Castle in Ghana’s Central Region, my tour guide led me into the male dungeon and then shut the door without warning to show how dark it was. In that moment, I was forced to imagine what it might have been like to have been enslaved, in the dark, utterly unsure of what was to come. As someone of the African diaspora (like so many other visitors to these heritage tourist sites), I was visiting to better understand my ancestry and heritage. In a way, I was expecting the connection between my present and past to be performed for me; although I was frightened by the tour guide’s sudden actions, this was also exactly the sort of performance that I had hoped for.¹ But visits to twelve castles along the coast also revealed an unexpected scene: at all but one castle, my tour guide would, upon reaching the stairs leading up to the governor’s quarters, say something to the effect of, “And this is where slave women would be taken to be raped by the governor.” Though I came to expect this during each tour, it was still one of the most shocking and disturbing parts of my visits to the castles.

Despite the ubiquity of this anecdote, little information exists in the archives and in the academy on

1 Anecdotal evidence in this paper is based off of my visit to Ghana in the Summer of 2015 under New York University’s Africa House grant.

the particular condition of slave women—and their relations with European men—within the slave castle. From travel accounts, official European documents, and some oral history, we can build an increasingly detailed landscape of life and society directly outside of these castles on the Gold Coast, but the specifics of what occurred within are largely a mystery. Some scholars are privy to this absence of knowledge, particularly regarding the plight of enslaved women. Sandra Richards calls the slave castle’s physical structure a “text both waiting to be read and provoking questions: Who prepared these women for their encounters with European officers? What did townspeople know, and how did they react to the palpable horrors of the slave castle?”² Much can be gleaned from a close analysis of the structures of the slave castles themselves, and though it is tempting to want to answer every question that arises, much can also be discerned from observing closely where and when these gaps in knowledge occur.

The focus of this essay will not be to test the historical accuracy of the accounts of the performance of rape in slave castles, although I find this an important historical inquiry. I am interested here in the symbolic work that the rape of slave women by castle governors and staff did to further transform humans into commodities. Furthermore, this question is one that I will read alongside attempts to understand what knowledge about the slave castles has endured (and why). This involves the politics of memory. If memory is an active project in which those who remember are simultaneously called upon to define and position themselves in either an intentional or subconscious way, then the memory of the rape of slave women has not endured by mere coincidence. It must hold meaning to the identities of those who have remembered it. So, the rape of slave women holds double meaning; it concerns the slaves and other inhabitants of slave castles along Ghana’s Gold Coast from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries *as well as* the visitors to those castles today. In both instances, the performance of the rape, whether in experiencing, witnessing, or imagining, establishes a productive terror. This terror both seeks to turn humans into commodities and to incite the imagination of visitors who are buying into an economy of tourism while also confirming their diasporic identity as someone whose ancestors have been violently severed from their “homeland.”

2 Sandra L. Richards, “What Is to Be Remembered?: Tourism to Ghana’s Slave Castle-Dungeons,” *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 4 (December 2005): 624.

TURNING HUMANS INTO COMMODITIES

If the process of castle governors selecting which slave women to rape is true to the stories that are relayed from castle tour guides to castle tourists, then this process was highly public and performative. According to the oral accounts relayed by castle guides, the female slave dungeon faced an enclosed courtyard, located on a separate wing from the male dungeon. The governor's quarters sat above that courtyard on the second story, spilling out onto a large balcony that looked down upon the courtyard. Women were routinely lined up in this enclosed courtyard and chained to a hook firmly attached to the ground. The governor would then emerge from his quarters onto the balcony, select a slave woman from above, and that woman would then be ushered up a set of back stairs that led directly to the governor's quarters.

If these accounts tell us anything at all, it is that the rape of slave women by European governors (and other authoritative figures within the slave trading enterprise) was not in any way inevitable, nor were any of the other living conditions of the slave dungeons. These conditions were part of a fully intentional effort to, as Stephanie Smallwood calls it, "turn captives into commodities."³ Slave food rations, types of shackles, water rations, sunlight exposure, and fresh air were all factored into what became a "scientific enterprise" to see how much suffering the human body could endure:

The littoral, therefore, was more than a site of economic exchange and incarceration. The violence exercised in the service of human commodification relied on a scientific empiricism always seeking to find the limits of human capacity for suffering, that point where material and social poverty threatened to consume entirely the lives it was meant to garner for sale in the Americas. In this regard, the economic enterprise of human trafficking marked a watershed in what would become an enduring project in the modern Western world: probing the limits up to which it is possible to discipline the body without extinguishing the life within.⁴

3 Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 43.

4 Ibid, 36.

Could the violation and rape of the slave women be understood, too, as a method of discipline? Without these violating acts, these women were already subject to conditions that could put them on the brink of death.

None of the other living conditions that enslaved men and women were subject to in the dungeons were particularly specific to gender in the way that the sexual violation of slave women was. What was it about women in particular that merited, in the minds of European captors, their further violation? Scholars such as Jennifer Morgan have discussed the ways in which gender figures heavily into processes of racialization. It was through the increasingly grotesque portrayal of African women, particularly through descriptions of their hyper fertility, that European white men could begin to imagine themselves as civilized and completely human; the African women were neither of these things. Travel narratives emerged as a bona fide genre of literature in early modern Europe, some of which were entirely fictionalized accounts written by authors who had never interacted with or witnessed African women firsthand. These narratives fueled European fantasies of conquest and domination.⁵ They also might have fully justified the sexual violation of an enslaved woman in the littorals. It is unclear whether castle governors had read such accounts before settling in their castle posts, but it is entirely plausible that they had.

As Pernille Ipsen has discussed at length, Dutch settlers at Cape Coast castle did take African wives who lived outside of the castle walls.⁶ Therefore the rape of women on the interior—or any other sexual relations between European settlers and African women within this space that ran the gamut between consensual and nonconsensual activity—cannot be understood through the typical explanatory devices enacted to make sense of interracial relations of this time period. Scholars like Ann Stoler and Ipsen have written extensively about the ways that indigenous women helped “acclimate” colonizing settlers to the customs, environment, and traditions of the land. Whether they were informally recognized as “concubines” or formally recognized as wives, these women served as liaisons between European settlers and their indigenous communities. European men “relied on African women for domestic and martial

5 Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 15.

6 Pernille Ipsen, *Daughters of the Trade*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

relations” for political reasons as much as possible social or romantic ones.⁷ But the women on the interior of the castle, the ones who were locked away in dungeons up to months at a time, had no community. They were likely captured because they were considered outcasts by their former communities, and they likely held no relation to the other women also in bondage.

African women, as I've noted, did hold value in the eyes of European settlers, but this value was largely dependent on whether the woman was or wasn't enslaved. The boundary of the castle wall also signaled whether Europeans were obligated to follow moral conventions. Interracial relations were a concern for Dutch chaplains, for instance, who seemed to prefer that they be codified in marriage.⁸ Another important consideration is the significant difference in worth between enslaved men and enslaved women during the earlier periods of the trans-Atlantic trade. Men were considered much more valuable than women because they were seen as more effective plantation laborers. The ratio of men to women who were sold into slavery caused such a societal imbalance that historians and anthropologists are now suggesting that the emergence of polygenist practices in some parts of Western Africa might have occurred due to the abundance of women and relative scarcity of men.⁹ It is possible that enslaved women were so devalued that there was less concern over what might or might not kill them.

In the Atlantic World, the slave castle inhabited a particularly volatile space; it existed between community and total exile, freedom and total bondage. Some have called it a “factory,” suggesting that some sort of transformative process occurred there. Because of its ambiguous nature, in which individuals who had been enslaved perhaps had not yet become *full* slaves, it was also a threatening and dangerous place for European captors. As much as the Europeans would have liked to think that their tactics rendered African slaves fully powerless, they knew that insurrection or even escape were constant possibilities. Their objective, then, was to quell the violence before it could even start. But the rape of enslaved women seems extraneous to this goal. It seems to exist outside of any moral, political, or social bounds.

7 Christopher Decorse, *An Archaeology of Elmina: Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast, 1400-1900*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 36.

8 Ipsen, 59.

9 Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 36.

REMEMBERING, FORGETTING, AND CRAFTING MODERN IDENTITIES

Today, heritage tourism is the third-largest producer of foreign exchange in Ghana.¹⁰ The some three hundred slave castles and forts that are dotted along its coast (and are dispersed across its norther regions) are the sites of collective remembering and healing. Some visitors who are a part of the African diaspora call themselves “pilgrims” who view this journey to the motherland as their “birthright.” But here, the dynamic between Ghanaian tour guides and African diaspora tourists is what really interests me. Almost immediately, visitors are confronted with the awkwardness of realizing that their guides are “the ones who stayed” or, even worse, that perhaps they are the descendants of those who were complicit in (or even profited off of) the slave trade. They are also confronted with the reality of the culture of silence surrounding the history of the slave trade in Ghana; outside of the castle walls, in many Ghanaian homes, schools, and places of worship, Ghanaians do not imagine themselves as explicitly a part of the trans-Atlantic legacy.

It is easy to misinterpret this silence as indifference, but Rosalind Shaw offers up another explanation for the way that memory is transferred into everyday life rituals, calling them “practical memories.”¹¹ The emphasis on the rape of enslaved women by European men might in fact be a sort of practical memory, one that draws clear distinctions between those who were out-casted through the diaspora, and those who, for one reason or another, were able to stay. Because the reality of the slave trade poses such a huge moral dilemma for Ghanaians and collective Ghanaian history, it is productive to think of slave castle guides’ oral accounts of the rape of slave women not only as oral histories, but also as mechanisms of practical memory. These mechanisms reassert and redefine Ghanaians as “the ones who stayed” and diasporans as the ones who were severed from community, raped, and enslaved. Saidiya Hartman discusses the ways in which those who were enslaved were already outcasts, rejected from their communities. If Ghanaians, already at a position of

10 Richards, 619.

11 Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 8.

moral ambiguity due to their potential complicity in the slave trade, are to make sense of their place in this history, it must be through a lens of 'insider' and 'outsider.' In the process, these practical memories fill in gaps that the archives left behind.

CONCLUSION

Scholars have noted that the ways in which populations that have undergone trauma respond to this trauma vary widely. Anne Bailey compares the transatlantic slave trade to the Holocaust, stating that: "somehow Jews do not see their victimization as a kind of *permanent* powerlessness. In fact, they see the memorialization of their escape from slavery in Egypt and their survival of the Holocaust as opportunities to assert their agency. It is as if, in remembering, they are reclaiming their dignity and sense of pride while also solidifying bonds in and among members of the Jewish community worldwide."¹² But this comparison can only be so fruitful. The line between "victim" and "perpetrator" becomes incredibly blurred when considering the long-term effects of the slave trade on African economies. Though some elites prospered at the time, it is now widely accepted that the collapse of African economies during the late nineteenth century is directly attributed to the abolition of the trade by European countries (and by Brazil in 1888). Additionally, we should be wary to assume that agency and powerlessness cannot exist simultaneously or that exercising agency must always result in a direct confrontation with the past. There is still much to be said about those who willfully forget as a means of survival and as a way to imagine new and better futures. But indeed, in some corners of the Atlantic, it seems as though it has taken longer for people to remember—for those who have chosen to do so. This does not mean, however, that the legacy of this history is not unconsciously subsumed in cultural practices or oral histories or traditions in other ways. Paying close attention to heritage tourism and the facets of this emerging economy might prove to be a ripe ground for understanding the Atlantic slave trade in new and unexpected ways.

12 Anne Bailey, *African Voices of the Atlantic Slave Trade: Beyond the Silence and the Shame*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 13.

The continuities between the purpose of slave castles during the slave trade and their purpose today raises questions of exploitation. At best, the obvious exploitation of slaves during the early modern Atlantic world that seems coincidentally related to the exploitation of tourists in the present day could be an inevitable reverberation of memory and trauma. At worst, these continuities are willfully or even purposefully created in a modern context in order to capitalize this trauma. However, the latter scenario suggests that the trope of the rape of slave women by governors and other colonial captors, held in captivity on the Gold Coast, holds some historical falseness. To assume that these rapes did not occur simply because they were conveyed by castle guides discounts the validity and even necessity of oral histories and “practical memory” and even recasts hetero-patriarchal structures of oppression that “blame the victim” or disbelieve the victim’s reliability—especially in the case of black women. As I’ve shown, it has been more productive to consider the metaphorical work that the rape of slave women does in attempting to commodify the slaves of the past and establish the identities of Ghanaians and diasporic visitors of the future.

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Student Debt and Higher Ed: Challenges and Interventions

Sophie Lasoff

In the introduction to Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's *The Undercommons*, Jack Halberstam writes that debt is linked to the "brokenness of being."¹ The system of higher education in the United States, plagued by precarious levels of debt, is indeed broken and facing a crisis of being. The inequalities manifested through student debt challenge us to choose between the university as a corporation and a public good. As universities are increasingly imbued with and reinforced by the ideology and structures of neoliberal financialization, this crisis is reflective of a larger crossroads in the dominant economic system. This paper seeks to trace the path of the neoliberal status quo, outline its effects on the university, and offer a potential re-route through real and imagined alternatives. By exploring the economic, political, and social dimensions of student debt, I hope to better understand how we arrived in the present situation, what this situation is doing to us, and what we can do about it.

DEBT: THE LINCHPIN OF NEOLIBERALISM

Zygmunt Bauman writes, "It is not the same to be poor in a society which needs every single adult member to engage in productive labour as it is to be poor in a society which [...] may well produce

1 Jack Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons" introduction to *The Undercommons*. (Brooklyn, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013), 5.

everything needed without the participation of a large and growing section of its members.”² In other words, it is one thing to be poor in a society of producers, and quite another to be poor in a society of consumers. With the rise of the new millennium, the global market has taken on advanced structures and mechanisms that pose new questions about the fundamental nature of economies. Today’s economic theorists such as David Harvey argue that the era of financial abstraction, powered by neoliberal ideology, has made way for extreme economic inequalities. I argue that debt is the linchpin of what Kapeller and Schutz call the “consumption-led profit regime.”³ As a financial mechanism and sociopolitical arrangement, debt has restructured American relations in profound ways.

In the final chapter of his *5,000 Year History of Debt*, David Graeber describes the economic state of affairs in turn-of-the-century America. By the end of the sweeping civil rights movements of the previous decades, “Everyone could now have political rights [...] but political rights were to become economically meaningless.”⁴ The subsequent Reagan-Thatcher years are often cited as signaling the shift to the neoliberal ideologies of corporate freedom and state austerity, paving the way for the Clinton years to sign the deal into law through measures such as the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act and the creation of NAFTA.⁵ This marks a unique turning point in America’s recent economic history; productivity continued to rise, but wages stagnated.⁶ According to both Graeber and Harvey, this stagnation was made possible by the neoliberal financialization of everyday life.

Harvey writes that unionized labor was “one of the major barriers to sustained capital accumulation and the consolidation of capitalist class power back in the 1960s.”⁷ Union-busting and the off-shoring of

2 Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998), 1.
 3 Jakob Kapeller and Bernard Schutz, “Conspicuous Consumption, Inequality and Debt: The Nature of Consumption-Driven Profit-Led Regimes.” *Metroeconomica* 66, no. 1 (2015): 53.
 4 David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*. (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2011), 192.
 5 David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24.
 6 *Ibid*, 14.
 7 *Ibid*, 85.

production allowed corporations to overcome this barrier, but financialization added a missing ingredient to the domestic consolidation of wealth. Increasingly, complicated financial instruments and investment opportunities allowed CEOs and stock traders to create productivity value without creating jobs. High-paid, value-added jobs were increasingly funneled into stocks, derivatives, and those who traded them: “Financial activity increased its share of GDP over the last forty years, but this transformation in the structure of the economy did not create new jobs to replace those lost to deindustrialization and offshoring.”⁸ A 2013 *New York Times* article described how the once industrial America became the new financial America:

Right now, C.E.O.’s are saying, ‘I don’t really need to hire because of the productivity gains of the last few years,’ said Robert E. Moritz, chairman of the accounting giant PricewaterhouseCoopers. [...] ‘The Federal Reserve has done a good job stimulating financial conditions and lifting the market,’ he said. ‘It’s been less successful in stimulating job growth.’⁹

The earnings and profits of corporations and CEOs became further and further delinked from the creation of actual value to the economy. Profitable financial markets decreased the capitalist’s motive to put long-term investments in resources and labor:

Non-financial corporations like General Motors, General Electric, and Enron also shied away from long-term investments in plant, equipment, research, and development. They, too, turned toward finance, garnering more profits from the interest they charged lending to customers and from financial trading than from the sale of their goods.¹⁰

In short, mass production no longer required mass labor.¹¹ In order to keep the system of accumulation running, the class of producers was rapidly transformed into a class of consumers—made possible in large part through structures of debt.

8 Julia Ott and Louis Hyman, “The Politics of Debt: How Labor Should Think About the Debt Question,” *New Labor Forum* 22, no. 2 (2013): 33.

9 Nelson D. Schwartz, “Recover in U.S. Is Lifting Profits, but Not Adding Jobs,” *New York Times*, March 3, 2013.

10 Ott and Hyman, “The Politics of Debt,” 33.

11 Bauman. *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 2.

Capital had effectively decreased its dependency on labor, but risked being left with an unemployed, underpaid, and therefore, under-consuming middle class: “One barrier to capital accumulation—the labor question—is overcome at the expense of creating another—lack of a market.”¹² Alternatively, the market could be expanded to those with lower incomes through yet another financial instrument: credit and debt. Effectively, “the gap between what labour was earning and what it could spend was covered by the rise of the credit card industry and increasing indebtedness.”¹³ Rather than demanding job creation and increased wages, people made up for falling living standards by “financing consumption through debt.”¹⁴ Although unemployment rose and wages stagnated, debt made it possible for Americans to buy houses while simultaneously “crowding out” new and existing businesses that could create jobs to pay for those mortgages.¹⁵ Through the financialization of both production and consumption, capitalists could not only effectively control both supply and demand, but could also reap profits on the backs of both.

Why were Americans willing, even eager, to substitute wage labor for debt? Queer theorist Jack Halberstam writes, “debt signifies a promise of ownership but never delivers on that promise.”¹⁶ In consumer society, people link their sense of identity to “normative participation in particular social formations.”¹⁷ If one is to participate in what are perceived as desirable social constructs (e.g. buying a home or going to college), it is necessary to engage in cycles of credit and debt. Questions of social status increase “desired level of debt,” and therefore in the long term, “interest rates redistribute income from workers to capitalists.”¹⁸ Moreover, the privatization of fundamental public needs calls into question whether a substantive choice is being made when taking on debt. In contrast to the pathologizing

12 Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 86.

13 Ibid.

14 Kappeller and Schutz, “Conspicuous Consumption,” 52.

15 Ott and Hyman, “The Politics of Debt,” 32.

16 Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 22.

17 Miranda Joseph, *Debt to Society: Accounting for Life under Capitalism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 15.

18 Jacob Kappeller and Bernard Schutz, “Conspicuous Consumption,” 56.

narrative of what Graeber calls the “non-industrious poor,” a significant portion of American debt is not for superfluous consumerism, but for literal survival.¹⁹ Not only is very little of American debt used for “discretionary spending,” but the leading cause of all personal bankruptcy is due to medical problems.²⁰ When debt becomes necessary for survival, the individual agency of choice is more of an erroneous narrative than an actuality. Similar to the Marxist notion of the illusion of free labor, “debt plays a hegemonizing function” through a false appearance of individual choice.²¹

In the short term, debt seems like a relief. Accordingly, the financial institution becomes the source of salvation. The result is a psychological and literal indebtedness to the bank, which effectively replaces the state as the benefactor for the extension of opportunity. Now, debtors are grateful to the bank—not their country or sense of commonwealth. In reality, the bank is deliberately hedging against its citizens, betting on their failure by packaging and trading loans at ever increasing speed and profit. Debt stimulates the financial economy’s necessary demand, allowing industries to raise prices and increase economic stratification. Nowhere else is this inflation and indebtedness so pointed than in the business of higher education.

EDUCATION COMMODIFIED

Being poor in a consumer society is inextricably linked to not possessing a degree in a consumer society. Families are trying to achieve what were formally middle class milestones, resulting in “zero sum tradeoffs” between home, retirement, and college.²² Driven by both the hope of getting ahead but also the fear of falling behind, students and their families find themselves investing in a higher education degree they cannot afford. Under the branding of self-realization and the right to go to a dream school, debt’s illusion of choice is powerfully coercive. Historian Elizabeth Shermer refers to this generation as “indentured students,” arguing that there is “questionable proof of consent” when seventeen and eighteen year olds

19 Graeber, *Debt*, 231

20 Ibid, 209.

21 Joseph, *Debt to Society*, 17.

22 Max Cohen, Caitlin Zaloom and Elizabeth Shermer, “History and Culture of Debt.” (presented at New York University, New York, NY, April 30, 2015).

sign binding agreements built on relatively false assurances, from both universities and the government, that they will be able to pay their education debts off. Moreover, American norms generally mark discussions of personal finance as a cultural taboos, while simultaneously assigning profound weight to money. The ingrained idea that wealth measures worth supports a level of self-blame when wages fail to live up to loans, and reinforce feelings of isolation. In the long-term, debt sold as a way of fulfilling self-realization ends up working against just that.

When education becomes a transaction, it becomes oriented primarily towards its payoff. In “Neoliberalized Knowledge,” Wendy Brown writes, “education is rendered a consumer good in which students invest.”²³ Presumably the return on investment comes in the form of job opportunity. Education becomes a highly self-interested project—an “individual means to an individual end.”²⁴ This transactional calculation transforms the student relationship with the university. A commonly expressed sentiment from today’s students is a questioning of whether their degree is, so to speak, worth it. The concern for value revolves around the commodity’s ability to produce job-worthiness, rather than thoughtful, meaningful agents in society. Brown writes, “The value of being an educated individual is reduced to its income earning capacities; being an educated public registers no value at all by this metric.”²⁵ Thus, education is only ‘worth it’ based on market-determined value. As a result, the student, the curriculum, and the university institution become susceptible to the dominant ideology of neoliberalism.

If teaching is “performing the work of the university,” the objective of the corporate university is to decrease costs of labor.²⁶ Harkening back to Harvey’s analysis, Halberstam writes, “The university works for the day when it will be able to rid itself, like capital in general, of the trouble of labor.”²⁷ The rapid elimination of faculty tenure, failure to recognize and permit unionization of graduate student workers, and the administrative agenda to accumulate profit through real estate and financial markets are all symptoms of

23 Brown. “Neoliberalized Knowledge,” In *History of the Present* 12, no. 1 (2011): 120.

24 Ibid, 119.

25 Ibid, 120.

26 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*, (Brooklyn, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013), 26.

27 Ibid, 29.

the university that thinks and acts as a corporation. Student debt makes the wheels turn as a financial means to financial ends. Through extreme indebtedness, the student fits quite nicely as the cog in the wheel of financial prosperity whose primary orientation is to generate and sustain a cycle of economic dependency and dominance.

The “ubiquitous, saturating market rationality” of the neoliberal market has reshaped the university in its image.²⁸ Driven by prestige, universities are enmeshed in an arms race of amenities, facilities, perks, and expansion—none of which have much to do with the quality of education. For the commodified university, luxury is associated with quality, and high price is a marker of prestige. Although the visual branding and expansion of universities are the more blatant aspects of the corporate university, market models also inform university governance and the production of knowledge itself. The locus of power at today’s universities has shifted from an academic to managerial paradigm through the inflation of administrative positions and simultaneous reduction of faculty positions and control. The “increased involvement by non-academics in academic matters”²⁹ and “diminished sense of shared purpose across the university among staff, faculty, and students”³⁰ results in a highly corporate model of university governance and conduct, in which administrators rank higher not only in salaries but also in authority.

As a result of this reproduction of market values, all domains of university activity are submitted to “principles of accounting and justification.”³¹ Programs and curriculum that are not regarded as “potentially commodifiable or directly profitable” are weeded out and diminished³². This creates what Brown refers to as a highly entrepreneurial environment, in which constituents of the university have to “protect and advance their own interests without regard for common or public ones.”³³ As fields of study are either protected, eliminated, or reconstructed by neoliberal value judgments, academics are forced to

28 Brown, “Neoliberalized Knowledge,” 119.

29 Ibid, 122.

30 Ibid, 121.

31 Ibid, 113.

32 Ibid, 122.

33 Ibid, 119.

professionalize to save themselves. The “increasing specialization and managerialist tendencies”³⁴ of the faculty promotes disciplines that “statically reproduce themselves and inhibit dissent.”³⁵ Halberstam argues that the suppression of the subversive intellectual prioritizes a highly market-centered construction of knowledge. As a result, “discarded local knowledges” are “trampled underfoot in this rush to bureaucratize and rationalize an economic order that privileges profit over all kinds of other motivations for being and doing.”³⁶ The professionalized university embodies and enacts an increasingly homogenized pathway to learning and success.

As the managerial governance of the university reinforces the “superiority of orderliness,” students and faculty alike begin to internalize this arrangement and sacrifice alternative epistemologies that “may be less efficient, may yield less marketable results, but may also, in the long term, be more sustaining.”³⁷ This trend signals a significant crossroads in the future of American education. We are faced with “a choice between the university as corporation and investment opportunity and the university as a new kind of public sphere with a different investment in knowledge, in ideas, and in thought and politics.”³⁸ The choice is indeed highly political. If an educated citizenry is “the soul and sinew of democracy,” then the neoliberal university is an affront to the functioning of the commonwealth.³⁹

INTERVENTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES

Halberstam resists the professionalization of the university by rejecting discipline-based pedagogy, which he says, “demands the presence of a master.”⁴⁰ This hierarchy of expertise pronounces positions of subordination and obedience, wherein students are socialized to meet the needs of economic arrangements.

34 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*, 29.

35 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 10.

36 Ibid, 9.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid, 8.

39 Brown, “Neoliberalized Knowledge,” 123.

40 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 13.

Thus, the process of socialization through education is a potential opportunity for intervention against neoliberal logics, including the normalization of debt. If university curriculum has itself become commodified through the process of indebtedness, then alternative curriculum has the capacity to intervene and reorganize those very logics.

One of the most deleterious effects of commodified education is the dissolution of knowledge production as a common good. Brown calls for a re-articulation and recovery of the humanities as not an elite mastery reserved for a particular economic class, but as fundamental to “public life and public values.”⁴¹ Advocates for the humanities are often trapped in the commodified framework of the “payoff” which insists that skills gleaned through disciplines like philosophy and literature ultimately make students more employable. Instead, Brown argues that our capacity to imagine, critique, and interpret meaning must be essential not only to our individual gain, but to the commonwealth. “Our task,” she writes, “is to make [students] into what people ought to want, what democracies need, what a habitable human and planetary future cannot do without.”⁴² The writings of Pacific Islander poet Selina Marsh illustrate this vital intersection between cultural expression and public meaning. She writes that poetry can act as a “reclaiming, redescription, or transformation of previously stigmatized accounts of group membership,” and therefore is oriented towards justice. Many academic fields share the “capacity of poetry to move and heal a constantly moving community that we now turn.”⁴³ This capacity is desperately needed to counteract the commodification of education, where unmarketable forms of teaching and knowing have been outcast and delegitimized. By promoting human and community-centered knowledge creation, the subversive intellectual can counteract the hegemony of market-centered knowledge production.

Noelani Goodyear-Kaopua is the founder of a charter school in Hawaii that practices what she

41 Brown, “Neoliberalized Knowledge,” 125.

42 Ibid.

43 Selina Marsh, “I Come Going From Place to Place From the Origin Notes Toward a Tradition of Fast Moving Poems,” *Ka Mate Ka Ora New Zealand Journal of Poetry*, 10 (2011): 3.

calls “sovereign pedagogies.”⁴⁴ This form of teaching and generating knowledge reinserts the broader structures of power, politics, land, and culture into educational experience. In the context of colonialism on native Hawaiian land, she believes that the socioeconomic inequalities that native islanders face are fundamentally tied to issues of sovereignty. She argues that sovereignty is “the power to define what counts as knowledge and to determine what our people should be able to know and do,” which in turn, “is a fundamental aspect of peoplehood, freedom, collective well-being, and autonomy.”⁴⁵ The pedagogical theory behind Goodyear-Kaopua’s charter school is useful when imagining alternatives to the neoliberal university. The economic dispossession of debt relies on similar logics to colonialism, in that it threatens social and cultural relations of humanity. Financial abstraction depends on a severance from cultural context in order to render things and processes—like human health or education—quantifiable. Graeber elaborates on this point:

The difference between owing someone a favor, and owing someone a debt, is that the amount of a debt can be precisely calculated. Calculation demands equivalence. And such equivalence—especially when it involves equivalence between human beings—only seems to occur when people have been forcibly severed from their contexts, so much so that they can be treated as identical to something else.”⁴⁶

Graeber contends that it is the abstracted nature of financial calculation that enables exploitation through debt. Goodyear-Kaopua’s charter school challenges the paradigm of the ‘ivory tower,’ and does not accept that education exists in a vacuum free from politics, land, and power. In order to resist the parochial, privatizing progression of American higher education, universities too must restore “literacy as a liberatory praxis rather than as just an economic expedient.”⁴⁷

Perhaps the problem is not debt itself but who holds our indebtedness. What would change if

44 Noelani Goodyear-Kaopua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2013), 246.

45 Ibid, 6.

46 Graeber, *Debt*, 212.

47 Goodyear-Kaopua, *The Seeds We Planted*, xi.

instead of owing our education to cold, calculating financial institutions and the neoliberal arm of the state, we were accountable to the community or to a sense of purpose outside ourselves? If instead of an entitlement to education as a means to employment, we were governed by a gratitude to the immense resources and historical knowledges that made our learning possible? By recasting “study” as a “mode of thinking with others” universities could generate the “knowing and feeling beings” that Brown calls for.⁴⁸ Halberstam writes that the pursuit of sovereignty is one that wants “not the end of colonialism but the end of the standpoint from which colonialism makes sense.”⁴⁹ For the indebted university, that which falls outside the pursuit of economic productivity is considered worthless—a lesson that is not new to capitalism at large, but one that now threatens our most precious and generative institutions. Resistance against student debt must pursue the end of an economic paradigm in which the commodification of education makes sense. It is vital that we fully reject the idea that the pursuit of knowledge is a product to be traded on a market. The university is the place of production of this most invaluable resource, and is, therefore, a critical pressure point in the neoliberal system that we can leverage on behalf of the common good. Referring to a school project in which students used an ancient irrigation technique to restore the flow of water, Goodyear-Kaopua writes, “The metaphoric and actual practice of rebuilding ‘auwai also underscores the interconnection of educational, economic, and ecological systems, reminding us that restoration of one goes hand in hand with restoration of the others.”⁵⁰ The battle for debt-free education is a fight on behalf of the commons and a bold affirmation of our interdependence within the human community at large.

48 Halberstam, *The Undercommons*, 11.

49 Ibid, 8.

50 Goodyear-Kaopua, *The Seeds We Planted*, 246.

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