

WILLIAM CLEVELAND (2008) *ART AND UPHEAVAL: ARTISTS ON THE WORLD'S FRONTLINES*. OAKLAND, CA: NEW VILLAGE PRESS. ISBN 0976605465.

SUSAN KOZEL (2007) *CLOSER: PERFORMANCE, TECHNOLOGIES, PHENOMENOLOGY*. CAMBRIDGE, MA: MIT PRESS. ISBN 0262113104.

GERALD RAUNIG (2007) *ART AND REVOLUTION: TRANSVERSAL ACTIVISM IN THE LONG TWENTIETH CENTURY*. LOS ANGELES: SEMIOTEXTE. ISBN 1584350466.

Gray Kochhar-Lindgren

As I compose this review in the summer of 2009, there is a crisis of political legitimacy disturbing the streets, mosques, and backrooms of Iran. This scenario is being closely watched around the world by those in power in London, Washington, Beijing, and in the capitals of the Middle East. It is not, however, being watched only by those bunkered in embassies and situation rooms; it is also, and equally importantly, being watched and participated in by netizens via Twitter, YouTube, and other social networking tools available to the globalized webwork. I am, at this moment, writing on an island in the Puget Sound and I am acutely aware of at least some of the sounds and images occurring in Tehran. This is emphatically *not* to equate the two scenarios since their essential differences—no one is threatening me with tear gas or worse—are multiply mediated as the images travel around the world, but it *is* to make a claim for new possibilities of the articulation between art and politics. One example of these nomadic bundles of transformative kinetic energy is Weapon-X's 'Time for a Change' music video, posted at, among

others, HuffingtonPost, MySpace, and YouTube. Situations and their sites change rapidly—and this ‘rapidity’ is always in need of analysis—and unpredictably as a kind of swarming occurs, generating its own logic of events. It is into this dynamic cultural and political scenario that I would like to insert these comments on *Closer*, *Art and Upheaval*, and *Art and Revolution*, for the questions raised by these books about the significance, trajectories, and impacts of art in its many forms are all travelling along the streets, through the underwater cables, and along the satellite pathways that are dispersing and gathering us in completely new ways.

Susan Kozel’s *Closer: Performance, Technologies, and Phenomenology* is an exploration of the body in touch with technologies of attachment, reproduction, and dispersion. Setting the stage with a discussion of phenomenology, primarily a loose reading of Merleau-Ponty used to revalorize the body as a source of authentic knowledge, Kozel examines her experience as a trained dancer as she creates performance installations around telematics, responsive digital architectures, motion capture, and wearables. The book concerns itself with what can ‘be discovered and created as we become closer to our computers and closer to others through them, when they become extensions of our way of thinking, moving, and touching. This book does not just offer an analysis or a critique; at the heart of it is a method for *how* to discover, create, and listen as we become closer to our technologies’ (xiv).

Although the introduction is difficult to wade through—it strikes me as the second version of a dissertation—the book becomes more fluid when Kozel explores her own dance practice in a section on the artwork of telematics.

In ‘Spacemaking: Virtuality and Materiality,’ Kozel notes that:

Virtual reality is a new materiality. For four weeks I performed in Paul Sermon’s *Telematic Dreaming*... Spending several hours a day over a period of weeks in virtual space allowed me to explore in greater depth the relation between my ‘cyberbody’ and my fleshly body, and gave me greater insight into some of the sexual and political implications of the technology. (92)

In the piece—which occurred in Amsterdam as part of a larger exhibit entitled *I+ the Other: dignity for all, reflections on humanity*—

two rooms set far apart, each provided with a bed, are connected only by video monitors so that Kozel can respond to the movement of her virtual partner in the other room and the other, in turn, can make a similar response.

Kozel reports that the smallest of movements became important (and this question of the scale of intimacy is a rich one), that a good `performance` is like good improvisation, and that there was a wide range of emotional responses from both herself and her partners. After two days, she began to experience neck and back pain and to imagine the `invisible side of her body: digestion, intestines, breathing` (95). She felt herself to be `pulled between the two extremes of an imaginary spectrum: the abjection of the flesh and the sanitization of technology` (96).

Over the period of her interactions, Kozel felt, at various times, attacked, sexually charged, curious, engaged, and disassociated. There was a very intriguing and extremely complex synergy at work between the physical-body and the image-body. When, for example, her image was hit in the stomach, `she` doubled over in pain and her virtual relationship with one male telematic `lover` `felt more meaningful` than their physical one. Throughout the project, her body was `extended` rather than replaced by the virtual. Telepresence, we might say, produces and exhibits different nodes and intensities of the experience of embodiment.

Kozel learned a great deal from the performance, including how sight, rather than hearing or touch, remained the governing sense of the piece; how the differently experienced substantiality of the self occurred when, thinking she was encountering the leg of another, she ran into the surprising bulk of her own; how the frontiers of her body expanded in unexpected ways; and how hard she had to work (however playfully) to rescript deeply ingrained gender and sexual codes. *Telematic Dreaming* brings together in one interactive, historically coded space the arts, science, and politics, which are, clearly, all taking new forms for which we do not quite yet have names.

As a trained and self-reflective dancer, Kozel takes us through a range of other telematic experiences with different technologies, but similar questions always arise about the conjunctions of the body, presence and telepresence, the identity and multiplicity of the subject, and about how the:

view of affect as referring to a passage from one state to another can be mapped onto mobile, locative media as they encourage or inhibit human exchanges. They are fluid, they are portable, they accompany us for hours, days, and seasons, which means they span moods and activities, cycles and rhythms of life ... Even with something as basic and ubiquitous as a mobile phone, our senses are repatterned. (298)

This is undoubtedly the case, and since it is, we are all faced with the fundamentally ethical-epistemological query about how art, science, and politics themselves will be reconfigured, as well as what force capitalism, with its knowledge about shaping desire and the products of and for desire, adds to the emerging social assemblage.

William Cleveland's *Art and Upheaval* travels to Northern Ireland, Cambodia, South Africa, the US, Australia, and Serbia to trace the work of artists across genres who are working to transform the political terrain so that memory, recognition, and a kind of healing might occur. The founding director of the Center for the Study of Art and Community, Cleveland is an expert practitioner of building these intersections in community sites around the world. Presented with this list of sites, the reader can easily identify the conflicts which the art addresses, and this image of art that emerges along tears where the skin of the body politic has been violently wounded is an image to keep in mind as we traverse all three of these books. In each of Cleveland's chapters, he gives a very thorough and eloquent explication of the participants, the processes, the successes and the failures—which are inevitable—and the ways in which the communities engage with their own profound fractures. I will focus here on the Watts Prophets, a group of poetic performers from Los Angeles that consists of Richard Dedeaux, Amde Hamilton, and Otis O'Solomon.

Cleveland begins his narrative when, in 1958, Richard Dedeaux arrives in LA, but the flashpoint that organizes the response of the Prophets is the Watts 'riot,' or 'rebellion,' that occurred on August 11, 1965, and during the ensuing six days when 34 people were killed, more than 1000 wounded, and 4000 were arrested. In the aftermath of these events, Budd Schulberg came to the area, and, at the Westminster Neighborhood Association, began a writer's workshop on 103rd street, called at the time 'Charcoal Alley No. 1.' No one showed up for the first three weeks, but then writers began to appear; the new Frederick Douglass house became its home and soon the 'Watts Writers Workshop was a permanent fixture—a true literary center for the community' (176). By the early 70s Dedeaux,

Hamilton, and O'Solomon had all been part of this scene for several years, working together on the performance of poetry, and, as they were preparing to read on July 13, 1970, in the Inner City Cultural Center, they were on the spur of the moment given the name 'Watts Prophets'.

Dedeaux wrote the lyrics that formed one of the tracks on the 1971 album, *Rappin' Black in a White World*:

I think they're trying to get something started
I'm talking about SNCC and us and the Black
Panther Party
Is anyone listening to what I'm sayin'?
cause it sure looks to me like dem niggers ain't
playin'

18 billion so far is the claim
of damage done by looting and flame
yet look around there ain't nothin' changed
I sure hope somebody is listening to what I've
been saying
cause it sure looks to me like dem niggers ain't
playin'

Cleveland comments:

In the early 1970s, these conditions not only persisted, but for many they had gotten worse. In actual fact, the most significant transformation taking place on the streets had been attitude. While in the sixties, many in the community had suffered in anonymity or pushed for integration and non-violence; the post rebellion stance, particularly among young people, was one of militant outrage. (189)

Cleveland notes how the Prophets worked with a wide range of different militant and non-militant groups, but did not 'lock in' to any of them, and, in tracing the development and cultural impact of the Prophets, he has also given us an alternative history of the emergence of rap.

Finally, however, with failing finances and the betrayal by their audio-visual technician, who had infiltrated the organization as part

of a deal with the FBI and eventually torched the Writer's Workshop, the Workshop itself fell apart and the Prophets had to once again reinvent themselves: 'the revolutionaries would become *griots*...' (196). After the Rodney King catastrophe, and having lost several family members to street violence, Dedeaux remarked to the prisoners with whom he had begun working, that 'Violence is everywhere. But art just cleans out everything so everybody is on the same page. That is why I go into the prisons. I say, One of you killed my child. I am working with all of you bad asses because I got a hole in my heart. We can work this out. I am here because you still have a chance to straighten things out. You've got to catch up now. But it's going to be hard' (197). Hamilton began, in 1998, working in the Nixon Unit, separate maximum security prison within Nelles Youth Correctional Facility and entered an 'archaeological expedition to hell' (202). Drumming, poetry, image, and a safe place: these were the elements of his own relationships with the prisoners.

From this work with violent offenders, the Prophets moved across town to help kick off the 2000 season for the UCLA International Performing Arts Series. 'The new work,' they decided, 'could be a collaboration between the community's 'grandkids' and the Prophets. The vehicle could be a kind of chorus combining the Prophets' voices with those of the hip hop generation—a Hip Hop Poetry Choir' (204). In 2004 they took the show on the road and went to Lincoln, Nebraska, in the American heartland, to form another Hip Hop Choir, and local high school students, or at least the 'secret poets' among them, began to write, speak, make rhythms. 'Over the course of ten days they have been prodded and cajoled by these three old men into doing something inconceivable. They have taken a terrifying and exhilarating journey to make something new, and put it out there for everyone. Along the way, they have risked being open and vulnerable to each other, but in the safe space provided by the Prophets, they have supported each other through the stumbling that comes with creating' (210). The way in which art leans into personal and political change is a theme which echoes in all three of the texts under consideration.

Gerald Raunig, in *Art and Revolution*, has written a sophisticated and philosophically informed history of artistic activism from the mid-19th century to our own period. Since both 'art' and 'revolution' gesture toward a number of different social formations—or what Raunig, following Deleuze and Guattari, usefully calls 'concatenation'—he is using the historical record not only to sift through the possibilities of how art and politics have interwoven

with each other, but also to think about what the most effective relationships might be to further the goals of liberatory politics. Concatenation, especially when aligned with the 'transversal,' succinctly expresses Raunig's position on the vexed history and possibilities that flow between art and politics.

Raunig gives us detailed histories of the Paris Commune, Gustav Courbet's experiments with being a politician, the German Activism of the 1910s, the Situationists and Viennese Actionism of '68, the PublixTheaterCaravan's wandering protests at the G8 and the neoliberal ordering of globalization, and a postscript on the immeasurability of borders—national and otherwise—in the aftermath of 9/11. All of these are extremely well-grounded and illuminating, but I want to focus on the concatenations that reverberate across many spaces, times, images, performances, and narratives.¹

As he begins his explorations of Wagner, Marx, Courbet and other early calls toward a politicized art, Raunig worries that slogans such as 'everyone is an artist' and its analogies engender an immobilizing confusion for both art and life. 'This kind of integrative conjunction of masses and art,' he argues, 'does not engender assemblages of singularities, nor organizational concatenations seeking to change production circumstances. Instead it deletes differences, territorializes, segments and striates space, achieving a uniformity of the masses through the means of art' (17). Instead, he prefers the 'temporary overlaps, micropolitical attempts at the transversal concatenation of art machines and revolutionary machines, in which both overlap, not to incorporate one another, but rather to enter into a concrete exchange relationship for a limited time' (18). The central question of the book, therefore, is: 'how can revolutionary becoming occur in a situation of the mutual overlapping of art and revolution that is limited in time and space?' (204).

In this version of relations, the revolutionary is not aimed at a new political body taking over the state apparatus, but, instead, on catalyzing a multiplicity of singular events that do not seek permanence but a kind of political insurrection that disturbs the power structure along a series of fault lines. Drawing the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Raunig notes that this form of art/revolution—and the slash, as always, is important—'moves across and through the middle, through a rampant and lasting middle, where things pick up speed. This movement across the middle means, most of all, that it does not go from one point to

another, from one realm into the next, or from the here and now of capitalism to the hereafter of socialism` (29). If revolution is insurrection as the `permanent production of singular images and statements` (59) and `disruptive monsters do not emerge from the sleep of reason, [but] permanently move in the concatenations of all possible experiences in between desire and reason,` then there is always the possibility of `something explosive that eludes determination` (134). This is the artistic/revolutionary moment, for it disturbs our habitual perception and enables something different than habit, or forced suppression, to occur as an event.

Transversality, in its turn, is the directed momentum of the concatenations that are always in motion. (They are not, in traditional language, simply static structures.) `Unlike centralist forms of organization and polycentric networks,` Guattari has explained, `transversal lines develop constellations that are a-centric, which do not move on the basis of predetermined strands and channels from one point to another, but right through the points in new directions ... rather lines that do not necessarily even cross, lines of flight, ruptures, which continuously elude the systems of points and their coordinates (quoted in Raunig 205). In a sense, art and politics change places; smuggling occurs across the borderlines. It is a traffic that flows both ways, that breaks out of this flow into multiple other tributaries.

In our media-saturated culture of innovation, this blending between art and politics, within and among communities involved in both, makes me less anxious about a phrase such as `everyone is an artist`, since it is this movement that enables so much of the art of our day, including much of Kozel's and Cleveland's work with audience and community members. All three of these writers are also practitioners at the highest level and are actively involved as singular points of multiplicity with the emergence of a thoughtfully courageous art practice that makes space for the unexpected and for the other. As Cleveland has said of the groups with which he has worked, and which can also be said of the numbers of gatherings evoked in the other two texts: `Despite their significant histories, they are very fragile. Most are focused on keeping their head above water. In the tyranny of the urgent, getting the story out has not been a priority... Taken together, I believe they constitute a body of experience and wisdom from which we can learn a great deal about how human creativity can help us heal the deepest and most destructive of our self-inflicted wounds` (9).

Healing, disruption, and the exploration of interfaces: which is art? Which is politics? Which is a provisional community bound together only by temporary alliances? How will all of these forces interact in Tehran, Tabriz, and Qom? What experiments are now underway to stage a shift of relations on a new media platform? A review is not the site on which to undertake a thorough explication of such complex questions, but I can say, without hesitation, that all three of these writers are constructing transversal concatenations. These concatenations, too, will be fragile, but they will create implications and open work spaces that will traverse the arts, sciences, and the politics of communities in Iran, here on the island, and across the distant nearness of telepresence.

Related websites:

William Cleveland, www.artandcommunity.com

Susan Kozel, *Mesh Performance*:

www.meshperformance.org/mesh.html

Gerald Raunig, *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*,

www.eipcp.net

Notes

¹ Aileen Derieg, the translator, remarked to me in an email about her word choice:

As I wrote some time ago on the *Furtherfield* blog (<http://blog.furtherfield.org/?q=node/234>), using the English word 'concatenation' to translate the German 'Verkettung' was something that I had serious doubts about. The German word 'Verkettung' (linking something together to form a chain) is very concrete and immediately comprehensible. Even though 'concatenation' technically has the same meaning, to me it seems much more distant and abstract.

In fact, I very much like `concatenation` instead of some other more concrete possibilities, for it makes us think again about the relationship between the so-called concrete and the so-called abstract, about determinations and indeterminations, about chains and chaining, about links and breakages.