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The cover image is a detail of a 1973 photograph from the US National Archives taken by David Falconer for the Documerica series, a project to "photographically document subjects of environmental concern" funded by the then-new Environmental Protection Agency. The photograph depicts a line at a gas station during the OPEC embargo. Permanent URL: catalog.archives.gov/id/555457.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

There is a question I have often asked myself over the past year-and-a-half: What is the mandate of an open-access American Studies journal based in the Nordic countries under the current circumstances? Put simply, where does the ongoing catastrophe unfolding in the United States leave us?

A little over a year into Donald Trump's "shambolic"[1] second presidency, we have seen the shocking and disastrous consequences of his cruel, idiosyncratic, corrupt, and self-serving brand of leadership both within the US and abroad. The news cycle feels distinctly dystopian: the administration has wrought unprecedented damage on democratic norms and institutions within the US, where It has violated (and continues to violate) basic civil and human rights and the rule of law. Outside the US, it has upended longstanding global alliances and norms for its own narrowly nationalistic and ill-conceived purposes. With its ally Israel, the administration has started an illegal, costly, and open-ended war of choice against Iran, which has generated an energy crisis that has often been compared to the 1970s "oil shocks," and which continues to create economic chaos. Since coming to office in January 2025, Trump's administration has pursued an agenda of shrinking federal agencies to a bare minimum, vastly increasing presidential power, and replacing nonpartisan civil servants with loyalists—an agenda with clearly neofascist and authoritarian undertones.

A crucial pillar of the Trump administration's war on democratic values is its ongoing attack on academic freedom. This attack has included last spring's assault on the autonomy of major US research universities such as Columbia and Harvard.[2] It has also included a large-scale incursion into academic research agendas through the rescinding or termination of already approved research grants, as well as budget cuts and mass layoffs at government agencies responsible for funding research including the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. While budgetary woes and "government inefficiency" are most often cited as the reasons for staff and funding cuts and administration interference, the administration seems to have no trouble justifying its other expenditures, including the almost $33 billion it has spent on the war against Iran, the currently proposed allocation of $1billion for its White House ballroom vanity project, or the $1.776 billion dollar slush fund it has proposed for rewarding political allies who claim to have suffered harm under Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, including the rioters who were prosecuted and imprisoned following the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol.

Meanwhile, restrictions on travel and visas and well-publicized cases concerning international travelers undergoing harsh treatment at US borders have led international researchers to become reluctant to undertake—and in some cases even to boycott—research-related travel to the US. Fear and self-censorship among international researchers has been documented both within and outside the US, and in some cases non-US-based researchers are even reluctant to collaborate with US colleagues at all. A year ago, Norway moved to open itself to US researchers who found themselves under threat, and other European nations such as Belgium,

the Netherlands, and Denmark have followed suit. The parallel that most often comes up in public discussions of such a "brain drain" is with the US offer of asylum to leading public intellectuals fleeing Nazi Germany in the 1930s, which led to an exodus that eventually included scientists such as Albert Einstein and Leo Szilard, philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, and writers and cultural producers such as Bertolt Brecht, Thomas Mann, and Billy Wilder.

The Trump administration's attacks on academic and scientific institutions have a clear ideological motivation: they are driven by a hostility toward the values underpinning scientific, social scientific, and humanistic teaching, research, and knowledge production in an open, democratic society. Such an agenda is suggested by a glance at the list of banned words—including "Black," "climate crisis," "ethnicity," "Native American," "LGBTQ," "racism," "sex," "trauma," and "women"—that have either been scrubbed from government websites or used to determine the removal of information from them, or else invoked in decisions to repeal or decline federal research funding. Not coincidentally, several of the words on this list are also keywords for articles that appear in this issue.

In times such as these, what can a journal such as *American Studies in Scandinavia* do? In my view, the best answer to this question is to keep doing what we already do, including the following:

1. Commitment to open research principles. In an interview, Peter Suber, Senior Advisor on Open Access at Harvard Library, outlined practical steps open access publishing can take in "defending free, neutral, and objective research" under the current circumstances: he suggests placing research in open access repositories housed on non-governmental infrastructure, preferably in multiple locations and in multiple nations. As a fully open-access scholarly journal published on a non-commercial platform, *American Studies in Scandinavia* remains committed to the standards associated with Diamond Open Access publishing: it is led by scholars themselves and "owned" by a scholarly organization (the Nordic Association for American Studies); it is fully non-commercial, and thus free of cost for both authors and readers; it aims to be fully transparent in its editorial structure and review process; and it is wholeheartedly committed to academic freedom. Publishing under a Creative Commons 4.0 license means that the journal's materials are freely available for anyone wishing to read and disseminate them for non-commercial purposes.

2. Commitment to an inclusive, revisionist, and critical American Studies paradigm. In its task of critically engaging with national narratives, an American Studies methodology is well positioned to support feminist, decolonial, anti-racist, and queer- and trans-positive research agendas, as well as critical inquiry into forms of inequality and dispossession past and present including the historic and contemporary effects of transatlantic slavery, Indigenous genocide in the Americas, white nationalism, and hetero-patriarchal power structures. In contrast to the current shoring-up of national borders in the US (as well as in European nations), American Studies continues to value open cultural exchange across national as well as disciplinary borders. Importantly, *American Studies in Scandinavia* is located outside the US, enabling it to retain a critical vantage that may become increasingly difficult to maintain from within the US. The journal is in no way beholden to or reliant for funding on the US Government, including its embassies. Its publishing agenda continues to be set independently and on an ever-evolving basis by the increasingly global community of researchers and teachers who submit to, publish in, review for, edit, produce, and read it. *American Studies in Scandinavia* continues to embrace the

principles of equity and inclusion, academic freedom, scholarly collaboration across borders, and democratic values. The journal stands with the European Association for American Studies, the British Association for American Studies, and other such organizations that have stood up for academic freedom and open science.

Representing this undeterred collective project of voicing critique while fostering democratic inclusivity, the articles presented in the current issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* cover a range of vital topics. Leading off the issue, Reetta Humalajoki's "*Seeing Indian in Chicago*: Photographic Resilience in an Urban Indigenous Community, 1958-1980" takes as its starting point a 1985 exhibition of photographs at Chicago's Newberry Library, which included images made by Indigenous photographers Ben Bearskin, Leroy Wesaw, and Dan Battise. Humalajoki argues persuasively that the images made by these photographers included in the exhibition subtly worked to challenge harmful stereotypes regarding Native Americans, and also to resist the assimilationist tendencies of the period of termination and relocation, which coerced its participants to adopt "American" lifestyles. By contrast, Humalajoki maintains, the photographs she examines allowed Indigenous photographers to "present life in Chicago through Indigenous eyes—not 'seeing Indians' but 'seeing *Indian*'" (7).

Next in the issue, Aurora Eide's article "The Sapphic Gardens of Elsa Gidlow: Queer Nature in *On a Grey Thread*," winner of the 2025 Nordic Association for American Studies Orm Øverland essay prize, examines Gidlow's overlooked 1923 collection of poems *On a Grey Thread*, claiming that the collection responds to what she calls the "nature paradox": the idea that "on the one hand, early twentieth-century sapphic women were seen as biologically abnormal and as wild predators (i.e., too natural), but on the other hand, they were treated as sinners who commit crimes against nature (i.e., too unnatural)" (24). Contesting this paradox, Eide claims, Gidlow's poetry—which anticipated by decades her own radical gardening practices at Druid Heights, an artists' retreat she founded in the San Francisco Bay area—reclaims more-than-human nature as a space where sapphic desire can thrive.

Next, Kaisa Ilmonen's article "Intersectional Cultural Memory as Memory Activism in Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise*" engages with Cliff's novelistic rewriting of the US Civil War period and its aftermath as an act of "memory activism," which leverages a notion of "multidirectional memory" to produce an alternative archive that resists the exclusivity of conventional national narratives by unearthing a speculative history that restores the presence of Black, queer, and Indigenous figures—many based loosely on actual historical figures—to the historical narrative. Ilmonen makes a compelling case for an "activist" interpretive project as a dialogue between text and reader, a project of "reading *for* something, in this case for multiplying the representations of US history, as memory activism takes place in the dialogue between the text and the reader's interpretation" (44).

The issue's final article, Morten Feldtfos Thomsen's "Mindless Consumption or Hopeful Anarchy? 1980s Slasher Cinema Goes to the Mall," returns us to the scene of the Regan-era shopping mall to examine two cinematic representations of that space as a location for cinematic body horror: *Chopping Mall* (1986) and *Phantom of the Mall: Eric's Revenge* (1989). Thomsen offers a historically astute reading of these two cultural artifacts to contend that the mall as they present it can be understood as "a place of both mindless consumption and hopeful anarchy" (63), a place to embrace capitalist values, but also to rebel, even violently, against Reaganite "law and order," with its militarized policing of social and commercial space, and ultimately against the dispersive logic of consumer capitalism itself.

The issue also includes two book reviews: J. Michelle Coghlan reviews Andrew Hartman's *Karl Marx in America* (2025). Coghlan situates Hartman's contribution vis-à-vis recent books on nineteenth-century radical social movements to draw out the implications of engaging with such earlier radicalisms in our own fraught historical moment. Erin Kathleen Small Capistrano reviews Patrick McKelvey's *Disability Works: Performance after Rehabilitation* (2024) to situate for us its contributions to the fields of performance studies and disability studies.

I am grateful to a number of individuals for their assistance and contributions in bringing this issue together. First, Jenny Bonnevier, President of the Nordic Association for American Studies, deserves special thanks. I would also like to thank the other members of the journal's editorial board: Nina Öhman, Stephen Darren Dougherty, Marianne Kongerslev, Karin Molander Danielsson, and Kim Khavar Fahlstedt. Also deserving of special thanks are Oscar Winberg, the journal's editor for history and politics, and Jordan Howie, its book review editor. Per Pippin Aspaas and Johan William Højlund Jacobsen, of the University of Tromsø's Diamond Open Access program, as well as Claus Rosenkrantz Hansen at the University of Copenhagen Business School Library, also deserve special thanks. In addition, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers who have worked to ensure the high academic standards of the articles in this journal. *American Studies in Scandinavia* continues to be a community-led project and, as such, a space of hope in dark times.

Justin Parks
Tromsø
4 June 2026

Notes

1. This adjective seems to me to be the most accurate descriptor for the administration. It has been applied by Barack Obama, Reagan speech writer Peggy Noonan, and international relations scholar Janice Stein, among many others.

2. I have also addressed issues surrounding academic freedom, including the threats to the autonomy of Columbia and Harvard, in my Editor's Note in last spring's issue.

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SEEING INDIAN IN CHICAGO:

Photographic Resilience in an Urban Indigenous Community, 1958-1980

ABSTRACT: In the summer of 1985, the Newberry Library hosted a photography exhibition titled *Seeing Indian in Chicago* featuring photographs taken by members of the American Indian Center's camera club. Pairing these photographs with archived oral history interviews of the photographers, this article explores the multiple meanings and interpretations vested within these images through their exhibition for audiences visiting the Newberry Library. Taken between the late 1950s and the early 1980s, the photographs capture life in the decades following the conclusion of the federal relocation program, which was geared towards assimilation, moving Indigenous individuals and families away from their homelands to work in urban areas. The photography exhibition, then, worked to display the adaptation and resilience of this community as both Indigenous and familiar mainstream Americans while also subtly challenging stereotypes of "Indians" that visitors to the exhibition likely held. As such, this article contributes to the growing scholarship challenging victim narratives of Indigenous urbanization.

Keywords: Indigenous urbanization; sovereignty; photography and visual culture; Chicago; cultural resilience

From 22 July to 21 September 1985, the Newberry Library hosted a photography exhibition titled *Seeing Indian in Chicago*, which displayed the work of members of the American Indian Center's Camera Club. Taken between 1958 and 1980, the photographs were housed in the Hermon Dunlap Smith gallery, which was open to the general public. During those three months in 1985, visitors to the Newberry were introduced to images of American Indians as participants in contemporary urban life—images they were unlikely to see elsewhere. Most remarkably, the *Seeing Indian in Chicago* exhibition documented the early years of a vibrant and active Indigenous community in the heart of Chicago, established during an era in which the United States federal government explicitly aimed to acculturate American Indians by relocating them to urban areas, away from reservations and ancestral homelands. This article will demonstrate the significance of the *Seeing Indian in Chicago* exhibition, both in documenting the resilience of Chicago's American Indian community during a period of heightened settler-colonial policy and in subtly subverting deep-rooted "Indian" stereotypes.[1]

Relocation, launched in the early 1950s, was designed to move Indigenous individuals and families away from their reservations and into urban areas. The basic principle behind the policy was that "Indians," separated from their communities and provided with paid employment, could be successfully integrated into modern American life. In essence, the policy aimed, alongside termination—the removal of the federal trust status of tribes—to assimilate individuals and families into mainstream society. The program expanded throughout the 1950s; in 1956 Congress approved a threefold increase of relocation funding, and by July of that year, around 12,625 Native people had relocated from reservations to cities through the program (Fixico 142). While Indigenous movement to urban areas had already occurred well before the start of the relocation Program, the policy significantly shaped this migration, increasing numbers, channeling people to specific cities, and impacting their experiences there. The program also reflected dual assumptions underpinning federal policy in this period: first, that even the mere act of leaving reservation lands would lead to the eventual assimilation of Native people into mainstream American society; and second, that urban spaces could not be *Indigenous*. Rather, city life would counterbalance Native cultures and foster the adoption of "American" lifestyles.

Moreover, Indigenous individuals and families continued to move to urban areas of their own volition throughout the second half of the twentieth century, despite the waning of the federal relocation program in the 1960s. Before World War II, most Native people lived on reservation lands, but by 1990, over two-thirds of the Indigenous population was located in cities (Jackson 35). The number has continued to grow since, and as of the 2010s, at least seventy percent of Native Americans resided in cities (Blansett et al. 1). Despite the reality of Indigenous communities emerging in US cities since the mid-twentieth century, much scholarship on urban Indigenous communities characterizes these as "little more than the collateral damage of settler colonialism" (Thrush 111). Indeed, early historiography on urban Indigenous experiences tends to focus exclusively on the relocation era, and most established literature on the period presents victim narratives of the formation of ghettoes, racial discrimination, alcoholism, and high return rates to reservations (Fixico 134–57). More recent scholarship has challenged these analyses. As historian Douglas K. Miller puts it, victim narratives of relocation obscure the lived experiences of Native people, who "bent relocation to their own purposes and influenced its outcomes in unpredictable ways" (4).

This article contributes to the growing literature that highlights the "beauty, sophistication, and resilience of Indigenous lives and communities" in cities (Blansett et al. 3). In focusing specifically on photography by members of the American Indian community in Chicago, it also responds to historian Ned Blackhawk's 1995 call for new "conceptual and methodological tools for understanding contemporary American Indian experiences" (20). It demonstrates that photography is a significant methodological tool for understanding urban Indigenous experiences, working as a form of both documentation and expression. The *Seeing Indian in Chicago* exhibition provides an exceptional insight into the self-identification of the members of one of the longest-standing urban American Indian centers in the United States today. Compiled of photographs taken over several decades, the images selected for the exhibition offer indications not only of how these Native photographers viewed themselves and their community, but how they wished to present themselves to the predominantly white, middle-class visitors of the Newberry Library.

The thriving of Chicago's Indigenous community is a story of adaptation and persistence in the face of settler-colonial policy geared toward assimilation into mainstream American society. The American Indian Center of Chicago was initially established by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Citizens' Advice Bureau in 1952 as the American Indian Club, based on the idea that mutual support between Native people in urban areas would ease assimilation, more quickly acquainting newcomers with work, life, and events in the city (LaGrand 138). The revamped All-Tribes American Indian Center was opened in September 1953 with Thomas Segundo (Tohono O'odham) as Executive Director and a predominantly Indigenous board. The center's mission statement was vague, stating that it would "promote fellowship among the Indians of all tribes living in metropolitan Chicago" (LaGrand 140). Despite initial BIA involvement, the center developed according to the needs and for the purposes of its Indigenous members, growing into a hub of social and cultural activities, which included a basketball league, Boy and Girl Scout groups, powwows, craft fairs, and the Camera Club.

Photographs taken by members of the center capture the community's development, adaptation, and resilience in visual form. Historians have demonstrated the significance of photography for the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, as it holds the collective memory of that era (Hamdan 110). As Leila I. Hamdan writes, photographs "have the power to expose and create alternative narratives that have the potential to subvert the lacunae within dominant histories" (110–11). While a photograph should not be considered a simple representation of a static truth, it can challenge accepted narratives surrounding an event, a place, or a community. Many photographers of the Civil Rights Movement saw their battle in "spatio-symbolic terms" (Trodd 26). By framing and capturing a moment on film, the photographer's artistic imagination can work to remove the gap between reality and hopes for what reality *should be*, challenging the historical memory of an event (Trodd 27). As implied by the title, the exhibition allowed Native photographers not only to present how they hoped their community would be perceived and remembered, but also to present life in Chicago through Indigenous eyes—not "seeing Indians" but "seeing *Indian*."

In the popular imagination, speaking of American Indians and photography together commonly evokes nineteenth-century salvage ethnography, which claimed to document a vanishing race. The most famous example of such work is Edward Curtis's frontier photography (Deloria, *Playing* 118; Faris 19). For mainstream Americans, even in the late twentieth century,

"Indians" were typically seen as incongruous with urban life and contemporary technologies, even cameras (Deloria, *Indians* 145). Visitors to the Newberry Library in 1985, then, were presumably used to thinking of Indigenous people as the *objects* of photography, as the observed rather than the observer. The members of the American Indian Camera Club, although they were neither professional artists nor necessarily activists, counteracted stereotypes even in simply taking up the hobby of photography. Although the images were displayed to all visitors of the Newberry Library during the exhibit, they were not initially taken with an "outsider" audience in mind; instead, photographers documented their lives for themselves, their families, and their community. As such, they engaged in what Taskigi/Diné photographer Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie has called "photographic sovereignty," creating images through their own perspectives and avoiding the "over-romanticizing and simplification of Native existence" (41–44).

While the photographs were not initially taken with the audience of the Newberry Library in mind, within this space they took on multiple potential, complex meanings and interpretations. The Newberry Library is a research institution, housed since 1893 in an affluent area of Chicago across from Washington State Park ("Newberry Library History"). In contrast, the American Indian Center moved between various locations in North Chicago, where the majority of its members lived (LaGrand 145). The exhibition was part of the Chicago American Indian photography project coordinated by the library, which aimed to create an archive of photographs taken by members of the community. It was an offshoot of the American Indian Oral History Project, which was run by the then-brand-new D'Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian (now the D'Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies). The oral history project, funded by the Illinois Humanities Council, aimed at documenting experiences of relocation and fostering a broader awareness of the history of Native people in Chicago (López, "Native").

An advisory group selected photographers to be included in the Chicago American Indian Photography Project, in the end choosing three Native and three non-Native men (López, "Seeing Indian"). The final exhibit was the product of collaboration between the American Indian Center and the Newberry Library's staff and curators. Before the exhibition was opened, meetings were held with American Indian community members to view the selected photographs and help identify individuals appearing in them. While it is known that the exhibition was housed in the Hermon Dunlap Smith gallery of the library, the archived photographs and exhibition labels do not indicate exactly how or in what order the photographs were exhibited. The opening ceremony was attended by over four hundred people, at least half of whom were American Indians from Chicago. The event honored the community with a moment of prayer and included performances by dancers and singers (López, "Seeing Indian"). Nevertheless, due to the location of the Newberry Library, it is safe to assume that a large proportion of viewers over the course of the three-month exhibition were likely white, middle-class Americans. The exhibition was regularly listed in the *Chicago Tribune*, as well as in multiple local newspapers (see e.g., the 'Exhibits' listings of the *Chicago Tribune*, *Cardunal Free Press*, *Northwest Herald*, and *The Herald*).[2]

This article draws on archived oral history interviews conducted with the Native photographers in the early 1980s to contextualize the images within their lived experiences. Their names were Ben Bearskin, Leroy Wesaw, and Dan Battise. Battise, a member of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe, was born in 1917, in—as he put it—"'piney woods' country between the Indian village and Livingston, Texas" (Battise 2). A World War II

veteran, he moved to Chicago after he was discharged from service and developed a career in the city as a plumber, and later as an industrial laborer for a steel company (*Native Voices* 53). Ben Bearskin (Ho-Chunk) moved to Chicago in 1947 and became very active in the early Native community there, acting as board chair of the American Indian Center for some years and even establishing a short-lived activist organization known as the Inter-Tribal Council (LaGrand 64–66; Miller 138). He was also part of the local arrangements committee for the famed 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference, which brought together hundreds of representatives from different Indigenous nations to draft a political statement titled the *Declaration of Indian Purpose* (LaGrand 171–73).[3] Leroy Wesaw, a member of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, was born in Michigan in 1925 and moved to the city in 1950 to settle with his Chicago-born Mohawk wife Pat. Wesaw had various jobs throughout his time in Chicago, including truck driver, salesman, shipping clerk, and chemical worker (*Native Voices* 67). Wesaw gained a bachelor's degree in 1978 through the Native American Education Services College in Chicago (*Native Voices* 50). Notably, all the photographers were men, reflecting the influence of patriarchal mainstream American society on the images of the Indigenous community displayed in the exhibition.[4]

How did *Seeing Indian in Chicago* portray life in the American Indian community to the visitors of the Newberry? In what ways did the exhibition challenge prevalent views about Native people? As this article will show, the three Native photographers featured in the exhibition exercised a sort of "photographic sovereignty" (Tsinhnahjinnie 41–44), presenting their community as both maintaining a thriving pan-Indigenous culture and identity *and* as recognizably American. The photographs show these two aspects as intertwining and overlapping naturally, not as existing as a binary or in tension with one another. Rather than projecting an exact or uncomplicated window into American Indian life in Chicago, the exhibition's photographs subtly critiqued and challenged the prevailing stereotypes of Indians as either relics of the past or militant, disorderly, and drunk.

Insider/Outsider Images in the Exhibition

While the main focus of this article is on images by the American Indian Camera Club, the exhibition did not exclusively feature Native photographers. Photographs by German American Peter F. Weil, Japanese American Joe Kazumura, and Filipino American Orlando Cabanban were also displayed. Kazumura lived near the American Indian Center and was a member of the Northwest Camera Club while Weil was the supervisor of the Photoduplication Department at the Newberry Library and an experienced photographer. Cabanban was a professional architectural photographer and friend of the AIC and photographed the center's events for over fifteen years. Since photographs by non-Indians were included, the exhibit's title of "Seeing Indian" carried a dual meaning, suggesting both documenting Native visions of life in their own community *and* the ways in which non-Natives viewed Indigenous people in Chicago and the relationships they built with them.

Though it proposed to challenge viewers' perceptions of urban Native people, the exhibition in itself to some extent contained an insider/outsider dichotomy. The difference in perspective is clear in some of the photographs chosen for the exhibit. Kazumura and Weil's shots were taken at American Indian Center powwows and other public events, and they prominently feature movement, dancing, and regalia. It is not clear how exactly photographs were selected, or where each was displayed. The photographer's name is attached in the bottom right corner of each exhibit label, but it is unclear who wrote the

texts. The images were also displayed alongside their short biographies and headshots. While there appears to be no record of how the images were arranged within the exhibit—whether chronologically or by photographer or theme—a viewer of the exhibit could have distinguished Kazumura and Weil's photographs from the others with relative accuracy.

Figure 1. Joe Kazumura, "Men's Fancy dancer at the 1982 American Indian Center powwow at Navy Pier." Photo Courtesy of the Newberry Library. This image is not included under the article's Creative Commons licence.

Kazumura's photograph reflects the type of images by non-Native photographers that were featured (Kazumura 13–14; see fig. 1). The young male dancer was captured in motion, though neither the type of dance nor his specific Indigenous nation is specified. His face is slightly blurred in the image, catching not only the expression of focus in his closed eyes, but also a feeling of movement. The sense of motion is also communicated by the array of shifting fringe and feathers in the young man's powwow regalia. The motion and regalia of the image work to reinforce a romanticized image of American Indians, fostering a fascination with "exotic" Native powwow culture. However, situated within the *Seeing Indian in Chicago* exhibition, the image also transposes this "exotic" dance to a well-known Chicago landmark, Navy Pier, highlighting the urban presence and persistence of Indigenous cultures. As such, these non-Native photographs of Chicago's urban Indian community could both challenge and reinforce the expectations of the audience.

This is not to say that Kazumura and Weil were complete strangers to the Chicago American Indian community. Kazumura's biography mentions that while he lived near the American Indian Center, he attended many events and "became particularly interested in photographing Plains Indian costumes" (Kazumura 2). Weil's biography for the exhibition states that his involvement with the American Indian community began when he was asked to photograph the 1971 opening of the D'Arcy McNickle Center (Weil 2). Many of his exhibition photographs are of that founding event, as well as of a powwow conducted during the 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference. Weil thus evidently had some interest in the political action of urban Native people, as demonstrated by a couple of images showing American Indians and supporters deep in conversation. For instance, in a photograph from the McNickle Center opening, Weil shows fellow exhibition photographer Ben Bearskin talking to Richard McPhearson, another member of the urban American Indian community (Weil 9–10; see fig. 2). The photograph is taken from the side, and the men are looking intently at one another as McPhearson speaks, a hint of a smile on his face. But since the men are shown in a moment of close discussion, hunched slightly toward each other—neither taking note

of the camera—the viewer is distanced as an outsider from their conversation.

Figure 2. Peter F. Weil, "Richard McPhearson and Ben Bearskin chat between songs during the McNickle Center's founding event in 1971." Photo Courtesy of the Newberry Library. This image is not included under the article's Creative Commons licence.

It is this sense of distance that distinguishes the images by Kazumura and Weil from those taken by members of the American Indian Camera Club. For instance, Ben Bearskin's photographs contain only two images of American Indians in powwow regalia. One of these features three men dressed in regalia, one of whom is playing a large drum and singing (Bearskin 3–4). Based on Bearskin's photographer biography, the men may have been members of the Chicago Drum singing group in which Bearskin himself was active. Critically, the accompanying exhibition label states that "Dave Fox, Ely Powless, Willard LaMere strike a pose." This makes clear to viewers that the photograph has been set up and does not reflect the day-to-day reality of Chicago American Indians. Unlike the documentary-style photographs by Weil and Kazumura, here the photographer planned the setup and framing of the image. It sets a scene, with its subjects neither looking at the camera nor at each other, but rather at undetermined points out-of-shot.

Bearskin also included a portrait of himself in powwow regalia, wearing a beaded headband with feathers in the back, and a beaded belt and cuffs (Bearskin 5–6). The image evokes Edward Curtis's ethnographic photography, with Bearskin staring forward, expressionless. Yet this photograph was labelled "Ben Bearskin in 1960 posing for the camera club," foregrounding the sense that the image was carefully staged. While such images may thus at first glance appear to present an exoticized image of Native people as cultural "Others," their framing and exhibition labels make evident that the images are photographic experiments, not documentary snapshots. Bearskin's agency is clear; the photographs fulfilled a specific purpose—practice for the Camera Club.

Orlando Cabanban's photographs complicate the insider/outsider dichotomy that otherwise permeated the exhibition. While Cabanban's photographs—like Weil's and Kazumura's—were largely focused on AIC powwows, day camps, canoe races, and other events, he additionally photographed broader community organizing. Included in the exhibition was his photograph of a 1971 sit-in demonstration at the BIA's offices in Chicago, which was arranged by the Native American Committee, an activist group formed in Chicago during the era of increasing Indigenous activism known as the Red Power movement. In the image, a group of young people and teenagers are assembled in an office, with some sitting at or on desks and others standing huddled close together wearing or holding warm jackets, looking past the camera at something beyond the frame. Everyone in the photo appears settled and calm, either smiling or frowning slightly ("Returning and Renaming").[5]

Yet even with the inclusion of this protest image by Cabanban, the photographs by the three Native photographers stand out in contrast to the photographs by non-Native photographers in

their representations of the broad spectrum of daily life within the American Indian community. Not a single exhibition photograph by Bearskin, Wesaw, or Battise shows dancing. Their images instead foreground family ties, home life, and the streets and parks of Chicago. Though some photographs were taken at powwows, these feature friends and community members either smiling and posing or preparing for the powwow (Battise 7–8, 17–18; Wesaw 3–4). This major difference in subject matter in these photographs reflects a refusal—whether conscious or subconscious—to reproduce imagery exoticizing American Indians in Chicago.

The photographers' position as insiders is also evident in the varied activities of the American Indian Center captured in the photographs. Bearskin was a leading figure at the Center. During the 1961 American Indian Chicago Conference, Bearskin was the chair of the AIC's board of directors and gave a calumet ceremony at the opening dinner of the conference (LaGrand 173). Bearskin's photographs, including a group photo taken at the center in the early 1960s at its original LaSalle Street location, reflect this involvement with the AIC (Bearskin 7–9). The photo features some of the original board members including Ernest Naquayouma (Hopi), as well as Father Peter John Powell, an Anglican priest and scholar who worked actively with Chicago's Indigenous community (LaGrand 144). The seventeen men and women posing for the photograph are dressed in suits and formal dresses and streamers line the ceiling of the Center, indicating that the photograph was taken following a party or celebration.

While the exhibition label merely states, "Community gathers at LaSalle Street Indian Center," a note with information provided by Powell in 2001 shows that the photograph was taken during the visit of the Principals of Bishop Hare School in Mission, South Dakota (Bearskin 8). The note states that the Principals, Mr. and Mrs. John Artichoker, Sr., who were both Native—likely Ho-Chunk—are seated in the front row of the photograph. Mrs. Artichoker is wearing a large, shining cross around her neck. While this background is interesting, and explains the decorations in the room, viewers of the *Seeing Indian in Chicago* exhibition would not have been aware of it. For them, Bearskin's image would have shown a community gathering not unlike those of other local communities, particularly for church-going Chicagoans.

Though it carried additional significance for those who remembered the event, it is precisely the *ordinariness* that Bearskin's photograph communicated to the white, middle-class visitors of the Newberry Library that is significant. In 1960, the Bearskin family had encountered racist violence on moving to the affluent and predominantly white neighborhood of Humboldt Park. Returning home from an AIC event, the family found their windows broken by stones, with a note signed by "The Whites" having been left behind, referring to them erroneously as Mexicans. The incident led to the Bearskins being evicted, with their landlord presumably fearing further damage (Miller 138–39). Bearskin's photographs contain no hints of the racism his family experienced in Chicago and instead focus on the community he and his family were part of fostering through the AIC.

Familiar "Americanness"

Considering Bearskin's experience, the photographers were undoubtedly aware of the prevalence and harm of stereotyped and racist imagery. The photographs of all three subtly addressed and challenged prevailing stereotypes surrounding Indians by foregrounding the familiarity of their everyday lives to viewers. Interviewed in the 1980s, Leroy Wesaw described the moment when he realized such imagery was impacting his daughter (*Native Voices* 99). She came

home from school bursting with excitement because her teacher had said there were Indians living in their neighborhood—but she had not realized she was one herself. This surprised Wesaw: "I had to sit down and teach . . . tell [her] she's the Indian she's talking about. . . . And she said, 'Well Dad, how can you be the Indian you don't got feathers growing out of your butt like them on T.V.' Stereotyped Indians, even to my child. I was an Indian and automatically I would figure, she would figure, she was the Indian. We all don't grow feathers" (*Native Voices* 99). Wesaw's photographs show his daughter in her teenage years, participating in activities at the AIC, and he also mentions that she later worked in the center's day care system (Wesaw 17–18). As such, this moment from her elementary school days may have been a wake-up call for Wesaw to more overtly foster his children's identities as American Indians. Wesaw, who maintained strong ties to the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians throughout his time in Chicago, led the AIC's well-known Canoe Club. Wesaw described the club, which participated in races in Chicago and beyond, as not only good fun and exercise, but a method of "preserving our Indian heritage" (Low 153–57).

As Wesaw's interview and leadership of the Canoe Club indicates, he did not see feathers and powwows as the defining characteristics of his community, or of what it meant to be an Indigenous person in Chicago. Most of the photographs taken by Wesaw, Battise, and Bearskin worked, in practice, to counteract images of Native people as "exotic." In addition to powwows, the exhibit particularly showcased the AIC's basketball team and Boy Scout groups. Basketball was popular amongst the members of the center and it was a personal passion of Battise's—he himself played as a teenager in high school in Texas (*Native Voices* 53). One of his images included in the exhibition was the cover of *The Chicago Warrior*, the Center's newsletter, which featured his photograph of eight basketball players (Battise 3–4; see fig. 3). The image thus not only portrayed the basketball team as relatable and recognizably American youths, but as part of the larger organization of the American Indian Center and a source of pride to the wider urban Indigenous community.

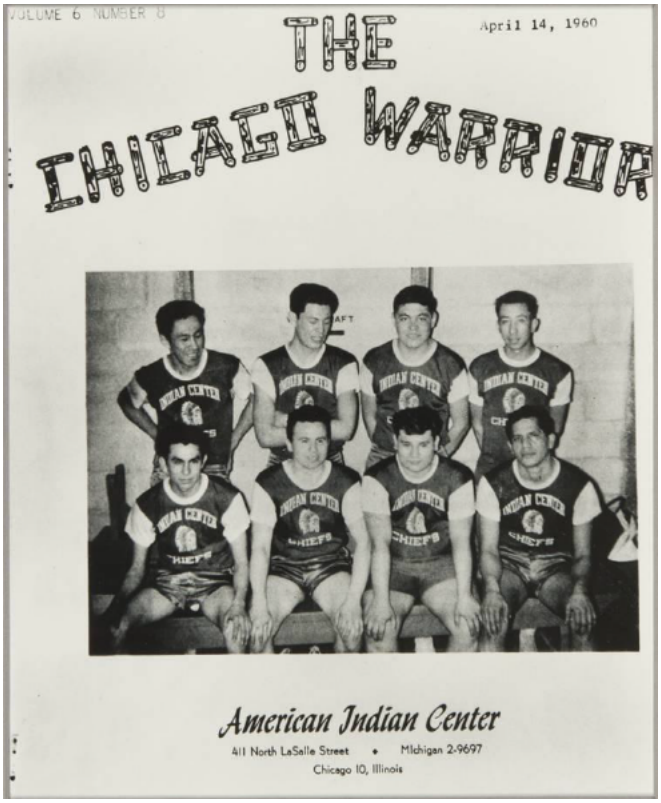

Figure 3. Dan Battise, "A cover of the American Indian Center Newsletter, The Chicago Warrior, 1960." Photo courtesy of the Newberry Library. This image is not included under the article's Creative Commons licence.

Strikingly, in the image the team members' jerseys were adorned with the name "Indian Center Chiefs" and a mascot. Though the image is not very clear, the outline of the mascot appears similar to typical Indian "chief"-themed sports logos, featuring the profile of a man in a feathered headdress. The American Indian Center was an explicitly pan-tribal institution, with members from Native nations all over the country. The choice of mascot with a Plains-style headdress, then, did not reflect any cultural uniformity amongst the basketball team, but rather

was an emulation of mascots popular at the time. While such mascots are the cause of significant controversy and protest today, in the early 1960s they were common motifs in American sports. In choosing such a team name and mascot, the Indian Center Chiefs reclaimed "Indian" imagery for their own purposes.

In the context of the Newberry Library exhibition, Battise's basketball team photographs served the purpose of presenting a safe image of modern "Americanness" to the middle-class visitors of the Newberry Library. In another image by Battise, the basketball team wears black tops with the white text "WARRIORS" printed on them (Battise 5–6). They are accompanied by four female cheerleaders with their dark hair fashioned in 1960s beehive style, wearing skirts and white sweaters with a black capital letter W. The cheerleaders are clearly adorned in the popular fashions of the day, and are virtually indistinguishable from any other group of American cheerleaders.

A sense of "American" familiarity is equally prominent in one of Bearskin's photographs, labelled "Leroy Wesaw and Ben Bearskin with the American Indian Center boy scout troop" (Bearskin 10–11; fig. 4). Not only does the photograph include fourteen unnamed boys who were members of the Boy Scout troop, Bearskin and Wesaw themselves are visible in the background. Indeed, Wesaw was a Boy Scout Master for the AIC (Low 149). Looking closely, we can see that some of the boys are holding a sixth edition of the *Boy Scout Handbook*, which was in use from 1959 to 1965 ("Boy Scout"). Standing in front of a flag with the word "CHICAGO" emblazoned on it, the boys, in their neat uniforms, look like a typical American Boy Scout troop. On their own, such images may even have worked to support federal claims that relocation aided in the assimilation and acculturation of Native Americans into mainstream society. Within the context of the "Seeing Indian" exhibition and the many photographs showcasing the enactment of a pan-tribal Indigenous identity in Chicago through powwows and other AIC events, the photographs instead communicated a sense of a hybrid identity as both American *and* distinctly Indian.

Figure 4. Ben Bearskin, "Leroy Wesaw and Ben Bearskin with the American Indian Center boy scout troop." Photo Courtesy of the Newberry Library. This image is not included under the article's Creative Commons licence.

The early 1960s timing of the photographs selected here, however, reflects more than just pride in the community and their similarity to other Chicago inhabitants, but also a nostalgia for past times at the center. In his 1980s interview, shortly before the exhibition was hosted at the library, Battise described the center as having seen better days, stating, "when I joined the Indian Center in 1954, I used to observe how everything was done so that I could assist too. It was good in those days. I volunteered to help. . . . Everything went different, I mean all the way" (*Native Voices* 204). This sense of nostalgia attests to the longevity of Indigenous presence in Chicago—by the early 1980s, this was no longer a new and budding group, but rather an organization that an entire generation had already passed through and was handing over to younger members. To an extent, the exhibition as such presented an ageing generation harking back to the good old days. Wesaw expressed

similar views in his interview, saying he was no longer as involved with the center as he had been in the past. One of the most impactful images from Wesaw's collection is a simple shot of the original sign for the American Indian Center, taken some time in the 1950s (Wesaw 5–6). The photograph was featured on the AIC's website into the 2010s and has become a symbol for the development of urban Indian communities in Chicago and beyond.

Resisting Red Power Imagery

The *Seeing Indian in Chicago* exhibition was certainly influenced by this generational gap. Beginning in the 1960s, Indigenous youth across the country became involved in activist groups, contributing to the growth of the Red Power movement. In this era, the direct-action protest group known as the Native American Committee splintered off from American Indian Center activities (Furlan 176). The image of the "militant Indian" no doubt pervaded the minds of many Chicagoans. Within Chicago, a variety of activist groups were active in the late 1960s and 1970s, protesting local issues such as sub-standard housing and discriminatory evictions. The most visible of these groups, the Chicago Indian Village, led by Mike Chosa (Chippewa), occupied land across from Wrigley Field, as well as the Argonne National Laboratory in Fort Sheridan, and finally, in 1971, an abandoned Nike missile base (*The Divided Trail*; Furlan 176). The occupation was plagued by bad press, with some reports claiming that participants abused alcohol and behaved aggressively. Finally it culminated in a two-hour violent battle with Chicago law enforcement and the arrest of twelve protestors, an event widely reported on by the local press (LaGrand 234–40).

As I mentioned above, only one image of a Native American Committee sit-in protest, taken by Cabanban, was included in the exhibition. The image of Native youths sitting and standing in an office space served to counteract prevailing stereotypes of militant Indians from that era, and instead presented members of the Native American Committee as calm, neat, and organized. Cabanban's collection of photographs for the broader Chicago American Indian Photography Project included at least one other image of a BIA office takeover, as well as an image from O-Wai-Ya-Wa Elementary School, a community school run by the Native American Committee, but these do not appear to have been included in the *Seeing Indian in Chicago* exhibition ("Returning and Renaming").

Interestingly, the images taken by Native photographers included within the *Seeing Indian in Chicago* exhibition include no signs of any form of protest or direct-action activism. Instead, they work to subtly counteract the media imagery around these Red Power protests, emphasizing the similarity of the Chicago American Indian community to its surrounding urban society. Indeed, while Bearskin was involved in more moderate political organizing in the 1960s, Wesaw and Battise evidently steered clear of Red Power activism. Battise, a war veteran, commented on the Red Power movement, referring to his own experience of combat in the Second World War: "I'm an older person and I fought the war, and I fought to protect the people. The war is dead; we did it; nothing can run over us. We got power already; we can stop anything. Maybe they were just trying to make their voice known. I believe in a different way myself" (qtd. in LaGrand 237).

In fact, a couple of exhibition photographs appear to address the negative media portrayals of Indigenous people in Chicago indirectly. The image below, taken by Battise, was accompanied by the label "Harvey Sun and friend in 1958" (Battise 11–12; fig. 5). The image captures an Indigenous man and a police officer standing side-by-side, the latter with his arm around the former. The location of the photograph is not stated, but

an intersection, some traffic, and passers-by are visible in the background. That this image was included amongst the twelve photographs of Battise's featured in the exhibition indicates that it was significant, despite the police officer's not being named. In his youth, Battise struggled with alcohol abuse, until an exchange with a police officer put an end to it. As he put it, "[i]n my drinking days I told off a policeman. I was driving too fast etc., I used to get away with it. That's bad isn't it? I stopped drinking alcohol for good then" (*Native Voices* 128). Moreover, this is one of the only photographs in the exhibition showing a member of the Chicago American Indian community in the company of a white person. It was not a coincidence that this image of a smiling police officer was chosen for the exhibit, projecting positive relations between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous authorities in the city. In this light, the inclusion of Battise's photograph could be considered a conciliatory move on both a public and a personal level, projecting an image of the Chicago Indian community as law-abiding citizens to the visitors of the Newberry Library.

Figure 5. Dan Battise, "Harvey Sun and a friend in 1958." Photo Courtesy of the Newberry Library. This image is not included under the article's Creative Commons licence.

Wesaw also had a history of alcohol abuse. When he was interviewed in 1980, he noted that he started drinking at the age of fifteen, long before he arrived in Chicago: "When I first came into Chicago it was hard to hack, coming out of the woods as I did. Moving into Chicago with this constant activity. It was pretty rough, especially with, we had two kids, another one on the way. I was working all the time, but I used to have my bouts with booze" (*Native Voices* 116). Eventually he checked in for two weeks of treatment at County Cook Hospital. Wesaw described his struggle as stemming from the pressures of city life after having grown up in rural areas and attending an Indian boarding school in Michigan. The high return rate of relocation participants indicates that many Native people shared this difficulty in adjusting to urban life; it has been estimated that up to seventy-five percent of relocatees returned to reservations, at least temporarily (Fixico 149).

Figure 6. Leroy Wesaw, "Young girl getting a drink at DePaul American Indian Center function." Photo courtesy of the Newberry Library. This image is not included under the article's Creative Commons licence.

While the Native photographers featured here chose not to display the hardships faced in the

city explicitly, some of their images belie the exhibition's construction of a wholly positive experience. Wesaw's photographs do not directly reference his initial difficulties in Chicago and his battle with alcoholism, but he did include an image in the exhibition that subtly challenges the stereotype of the "drunken Indian." The image shows a girl in a fringed dress standing on her tiptoes to reach a water fountain (see fig. 6). At first glance, the photograph appears to be a simple image of a child taking a break from the hustle and bustle of the AIC function. However, in the upper right corner of the photograph, a hand-written sign is visible, taped to the brick wall of the hallway. The sign reads, "NO ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES ALLOWED!!" The girl is farther away than the sign and does not take notice of the photographer. As such, the framing of the photograph to include the sign seems purposeful, and conveyed a message to visitors at the Newberry counteracting prevailing stereotypes around alcohol abuse. Since the subject of the photograph is a girl so young she had to stretch to reach the water fountain, it also indicates to viewers that future generations within the American Indian community were being brought up in a safe and respectable environment.

Resilience through Community, Culture, and Family

Counteracting stereotyped imagery, the little girl's dress plays a particularly important role. Her clothing makes clear that she is Indigenous without the viewer's even having to read the exhibition label. It also reflects the most significant aspect of the work of these Native photographers. While Battise, Bearskin, and Wesaw's photographs pushed against the boundaries of stereotyped imagery in the media and "exoticized" outsider views within the exhibition itself, they simultaneously foregrounded the identity of community members as *American Indians*. Alongside images of urban American familiarity and good relations with surrounding communities, the majority of the photographs foregrounded community, culture, and—most importantly—family.

Both Battise and Wesaw photographed AIC craft fairs in addition to taking pictures of friends and family at powwows. In one of Wesaw's photographs Battise himself stands at his stall at an American Indian Center Folk Fair, grinning and surrounded by beadwork (Wesaw 7–8; see fig. 7). While these fairs were open to the public and not just members of the American Indian community, Wesaw's photographs mainly feature Indigenous youths in fashionable clothing posing for the camera, holding items like canoe miniatures or shopping bags (Wesaw 9–10, 13–14). In these photographs, the juxtaposition of smart suits and trendy winter coats within the setting of a folk fair emphasizes that Indigenous arts and culture were an integral part of their lives as modern Chicagoans.

Figure 7. Leroy Wesaw, "Dan Battise at American Indian Center Folk Fair." Photo Courtesy of the Newberry Library. This image is not included under the article's Creative Commons licence.

Significantly, such images also demonstrate unity within urban Native communities that encompassed many different Indigenous nations. While the specific nation of each of the photographers is stated in their biographies in

conjunction with the exhibition, the labels accompanying specific photographs do not mention tribal enrollment. Nor do they explicitly note who is Native within the images. Viewers who were community members would be able to make such distinctions themselves, and the information was not relevant to outside viewers. Rather than singling out tribal nations and emphasizing the diversity of Indigenous cultures, almost all of the people photographed were presented as members of a cohesive American Indian community within Chicago.

As I have discussed so far, the Native photographers involved with the *Seeing Indian* exhibition included photographs from powwows and folk fairs, as well as other AIC activities such as the basketball league and Boy Scouts. Battise, Bearskin, and Wesaw's photography also shares a foregrounding of kinship and family. Battise's photographs include two portraits of his daughter, as well as varied images of American Indian men and women, including no particular details of the date, time or place, just smiling for the camera (Battise 7–10, 13–24). Bearskin's photographs include one of himself with a toddler, a friend posing with Bearskin's children, and a heart-warming shot of a group of laughing children gathered around a birthday cake (Bearskin 12–17). In addition to his images of friends taken at folk fairs, Wesaw's photographs include one of a group of young children smiling and a shot of his daughter with some younger girls, all wearing beaded headbands and necklaces (Wesaw 13–18).[6] These photographs demonstrate that for these Native photographers, their American Indian identity was most dependent not on the outward performance of Indigeneity, but on the community and kinship networks they created and maintained throughout their lives in Chicago.

Even the images taken at powwows and other American Indian Center events were predominantly focused on the people within the photograph, not on their clothing or visual cultural signifiers. Kinship is a core value to Anishinaabe people in the Upper Great Lakes region, who uphold the authenticity of their identities as American Indians through the connections maintained with tribal homelands and reservations (Jackson 158). For the American Indian community in Chicago, maintaining such links to one's own nation was often more difficult—particularly for those like Dan Battise, whose homeland was a thousand miles away in Texas. As he recounted, maintaining his own language was challenging:

> We speak Indian in our family home. We know our language. We speak English most of the time, only I speak Indian. The children try to speak Indian. One of the girls really knows how to speak Indian well. She was too small when we went away and she doesn't remember how to speak Indian too well now. The other daughter was born here. My son speaks Coushatta-Alabama. We speak the Coushatta-Alabama language. I speak English, German, French and our own Coushatta Indian language. (*Native Voices* 139)

Battise's comment shows how much he valued his own language, continuing to pass it on to his children no matter how challenging this was. When this statement is placed within the context of the many photographs of community members from other tribes, it appears that for Battise, having been part of a vibrant pan-tribal community was particularly important in maintaining an identity as both an American Indian *and* a member of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas.

As the photographs of Battise, Bearskin, and Wesaw show, despite its initial strong ties to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the American Indian Center of Chicago fostered the building of new types of kinship networks within a community

comprised of Indigenous people from all over the country. As the photographs demonstrate, it was their families and these friendships that primarily upheld their identities. Whether they were engaging in powwows and folk fairs, sports leagues or church events, it was the *people* involved who made the Chicago American Indian community resilient in the face of assimilation. The community faced challenges, with the American Indian Center struggling to secure funding and having its legitimacy challenged by Red Power groups (LaGrand 194). Members of the community faced adversity on a personal level as well, as some struggled with unemployment and alcoholism. But this was not the image of Chicago American Indians that the exhibition represented. Within the context of the *Seeing Indian in Chicago* exhibition, their images challenged prevalent media portrayals and the exoticization of Native peoples, and instead showed themselves and their community as both Indigenous and modern Chicagoans. While the discerning eye might grasp hints of this background, the photographs of Battise, Bearskin, and Wesaw foreground Native resilience through their community, asserting photographic sovereignty in creating their own visual narratives.

From September 2024 until January 2025, some of the *Seeing Indian* photographs were again displayed at the Newberry Library, as part of an exhibition hosted by the Indigenous Chicago research project, which was a collaboration between the Newberry, local Indigenous nations, and the American Indian Center.[7] Here the photographs were not the main focus of the exhibit, but were instead placed within the broader context of the long history of Indigenous people in the area today called Chicago. The Indigenous Chicago exhibition was a major endeavor led by members of the Chicago Native community, the Newberry Library staff, and Indigenous Studies scholars. It reflected "the dynamic and complex aspects of Native life in Chicago from the seventeenth century to the present," presenting maps, material items, artwork, and photographs from the Newberry's collection alongside new work by contemporary Native artists ("Exhibition"). Comparing the *Seeing Indian in Chicago* photography exhibition from 1985 to the expansive effort of 2024's *Indigenous Chicago* demonstrates a shift in how institutions in the United States include, develop resources for, and communicate Indigenous histories. Whereas *Seeing Indian in Chicago* presented Native families as predominantly recent relocatees to the city, in *Indigenous Chicago* relocation was introduced as just one phase of an enduring story.

As part of the *Indigenous Chicago* exhibition, the *Seeing Indian in Chicago* photographs contributed to delivering the message, "Chicago is, and always has been, a Native place" (*Indigenous*). In portraying the American Indian community of Chicago during the years of and immediately following the termination-era relocation program, the photographs challenged narratives of Native victimization and urban displacement. Now in the present, as part of the broader *Indigenous Chicago* exhibition, they take their place as part of the multivocal history of Native people in Chicago. Both in the 1980s and today, these photographs convey to non-Native viewers a message not just of Native existence and resilience in urban spaces, but also of their vibrant lives and active roles in shaping life and creating community in the city.

Notes

1. A note on terminology: in the period in question, "Indian" and "American Indian" were the most commonly used terms by members of the American Indian Center of Chicago to refer to people from diverse Indigenous nations from across the United States. In this article I use these to reflect the community's own terms in that specific time period. Where I speak more broadly, I use the umbrella terms "Native" and "Indigenous."

2. Unfortunately, despite an extensive search, I did not find any reviews or articles on the original run of the exhibition, so I was unable to gauge how Chicagoans received and reacted to it.

3. The AICC was hosted by the University of Chicago and organized by anthropologist Sol Tax and members of the National Congress for American Indians. The conference was organized to prepare a unified American Indian statement on federal policy.

4. If you are the copyright holder of any photographs in the article and believe you have not been properly identified, or you do not wish for your materials to be available here, please contact the author and journal to have it removed.

5. Cabanban's photographs have not been digitized, and so were largely unavailable for use in this chapter. Cabanban's collection is extensive, but it is unclear how many of his photographs were featured in the exhibit itself. Two of Cabanban's photographs can be viewed on the *Indigenous Chicago* project website, but according to the inventory of the *Seeing Indian in Chicago* exhibition records, only the image of the NAC's protest was featured in the exhibition. (See "Returning.")

6. I have chosen not to include identifiable names and photographs of children at family events within this article out of respect for the privacy of those still possibly living, whom I was unable to contact to obtain their consent.

7. An online audio-visual tour of this exhibition can be viewed on the project's website (see *Indigenous*).

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THE SAPPHIC GARDENS OF ELSA GIDLOW:

Queer Nature in *On a Grey Thread*

ABSTRACT: In 1923, Elsa Gidlow published what has been hailed as the first lesbian poetry collection in the US by an openly queer woman: *On a Grey Thread*. This understudied collection weaves together images of nature and queerness, and the garden becomes a site that fosters sapphic love. In this article I use a queer ecological framework to show how *On a Grey Thread* responds to the "nature paradox" of the modern era, which simultaneously constructed lesbians as wild predators (i.e., too natural) and as sinners who committed crimes against nature (i.e., too unnatural). Through close readings of her poems and an analysis of the collection's structure, I argue that Gidlow's poetry disrupts these paradoxical accusations and reclaims the role of nature in the lives of modern sapphic women. Her poetry anticipates the philosophy of Gidlow's queer community Druid Heights, established three decades later: that poetry is a pathway to connection between the human and the more-than-human.

Keywords: Elsa Gidlow; *On a Grey Thread*; Druid Heights; queer ecology; sapphic modernities; queer gardens; LGBTQ+ communities; queer modernism

Introduction

Elsa Gidlow (1898–1986) was a lesbian poet who left a milestone mark on the map of queer literary history, but her voice has yet to be recovered.[1] She stands out from the modernist crowd as an author who unapologetically embraced her sapphic way of life through poetry, community, and gardening. Her philosophy of queerness was intrinsically tied to her relations with the more-than-human world, and she never regarded her sexuality as inferior or unnatural. Reflecting on her relationship with another woman in 1922, she said that "we took it for granted then that we were free to be our *natural* selves" (Gidlow, *Elsa* 144; my emphasis). In 1923, Gidlow published what has been hailed as the first lesbian poetry collection "for general circulation in the United States" by an openly queer woman: *On a Grey Thread* (Rexroth 20). Twenty-four-year-old Gidlow had at this point in her life never owned a garden. Surrounded by the roaring metropolis of New York City, she turned to nature motifs to express a desire for sapphic connections. In the modern free verse of *On a Grey Thread*, Gidlow celebrates gardening as symbolic of the sapphist's potential, anticipating her own future lifestyle. In the 1950s Gidlow planted the seeds of what would become a "countercultural mecca" among the redwood forests of the Bay Area (Youmans, "Elsa Gidlow's Garden" 106). Druid Heights, as she called the community, evolved into a queer haven for artistic expression and gay activism, all synced to the rhythm of the garden (Haiken; West). For Gidlow, the heart of life at Druid Heights was a deep connection with the land she lived on (and alongside) in partnership, and her pathway to this connection was poetry.

In this paper I use a queer ecological framework to show how Gidlow's poetry challenges antithetical stereotypes that were prominent in the early twentieth century: the image that lesbians were at once too wild *and* too unnatural. Through close readings of her poems "The Face in the Rain" and "Episode" from *On a Grey Thread* alongside an analysis of the collection's cyclical structure, I argue that her verse breaks down the dichotomy of wildness–unnaturalness to advocate for a more holistic understanding of sapphic modernities. Instead of reproducing a heteromasculine performance of "Nature" as a "world out there" (Morton 274; Pollini 26)—which would have dislocated the queer from the natural order—Gidlow reclaims the garden as a queer space founded on a partnership with nature. Her disruption of spatiotemporal dichotomies between cities and wilderness demonstrates how lesbian cultures of nature can, in and of themselves, articulate an avant-garde understanding of the sapphic identity as both inherent to the modern era and a counterpoint to heteropatriarchal demands.

Gidlow's philosophy that her queerness was deeply imbricated with nature in a manner that should be celebrated was a radical idea for her time. She wrote *On a Grey Thread* during an era when questions of nature and sexuality dominated the scientific scene and caused waves of anxiety in the US. While homosexual acts were still largely perceived as *unnatural* and immoral by religious and political institutions (Stein; Weinmeyer), the work of modern sexologists aimed to *naturalize* the "sexual invert" as a fact of biology (Black; Faderman; Smith-Rosenberg). As Michel Foucault and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have documented, this marked a cultural shift: homosexuality changed from a set of actions between people of the same sex into a marker of identity.[2] This shift gives rise to what I call the "nature paradox": on the one hand, early twentieth-century sapphic women were seen as biologically abnormal and as wild predators (i.e., too natural), but on the other hand, they were treated as sinners who committed crimes against nature (i.e., too unnatural). In this context, I read wildness as associated with threatening nature and unnaturalness as departing from

a nature treated as ideal, underlining the antithetical foundation of these images.

The first side of the nature paradox concerns stereotypes that tie the category of the modern lesbian to nature and wildness. During the early twentieth century, sexologists like Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, and Magnus Hirschfeld disseminated their research on "sexual inverts," and through this work the sexologists pleaded for sympathy on behalf of the inverts (see Black; Faderman; Smith-Rosenberg).[3] Ellis asserts that sexual inversion appears to be "natural" (v), and the argument that the invert was born that way became a "ready-made defense for homosexuality" grounded in nature and biology (Faderman 58). However, Allida M. Black contends that this led to further stigmatization of lesbians, who were pathologized as neurotic, pseudomasculine, and predatory (106). This cultural shift away from the nineteenth-century era of naïve "romantic friendships" (Faderman 11) led to a new perception of lesbians as vicious "wife-snatcher[s]" and as "pests to society" whose sexual powers could "wreck your home" (Oram 171–73). Lillian Faderman notes that turn-of-the-century American medical journals warned against "*wild* sexual practices between females" (51; my emphasis), and many women were influenced to internalize such behaviors as "diseased and dangerous" (Black 103). These social anxieties of degeneracy and wildness excluded sapphic women from the new order of modernity, which was defined by reproduction, the domestic sphere, and heterosexual marriage (Newton; Smith-Rosenberg).

The other side of the nature paradox concerns the centuries-old ideology of homosexuality as unnatural, or as a crime against nature—an idea that circulated in the US at the time of Gidlow's writing (and which conservatives continue to recycle today). The origins of this ideology can be traced back to Paul the Apostle's condemnation of nonreproductive sex acts that "perverted" nature (Stein 286). Sodomy laws have their roots in Pauline doctrine, and throughout the twentieth century the US government abused these laws to persecute gay men (Weinmeyer 916). While women did not suffer the same legal persecution, the heterosexual majority still treated lesbianism as immoral and unnatural, which is clearly exemplified by the public trial surrounding Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). Hall's novel was charged with obscenity in the UK and accused of portraying "unnatural offences" according to one 1928 newspaper ("The Banned"). In the US, the book faced a similar trial but was acquitted partially "because the text lacked sexual explicitness" (Taylor 251).

The conception of homosexuality as a symptom of urbanity is connected to ideologies of unnaturalness. Cities like New York and San Francisco saw a boom of queer visibility during the interwar urbanization, and Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson comment that this fueled the belief that a loss of contact with nature led to degeneracy (12–13). Consequently white heterosexual men cultivated a Rooseveltian ideal of US wilderness as a masculine space safe from "the corrupting influences" of urban "degenerate homosexuals" (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 14).[4] These contradictory images leave modern lesbians in limbo: they were constructed as wild and vicious, yet they were excluded from the wilderness lest they threaten the domain of heteromasculinity; they were considered unnatural and associated with urban decay, yet they were exiled from the domestic sphere and the modern "city for men" (Massey 233). So where did sapphic women in modernity belong—if anywhere?

Gidlow wrote *On a Grey Thread* in the aftermath of World War I in the US, a period defined by industrialization, an accelerating pace of life, and a surge of avant-garde literature (Berman 16). While "modernity" has contested meanings, I apply the term to this interwar period to

contextualize the shared experiences of what Marshall Berman calls a "unity of disunity" and "a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal" (15). Gidlow responds to this maelstrom through her countercultural "lived *experience* of becoming modern" that lies outside the binaries "of possibility and closure, dissolution and formation, excitement and terror," as per Berman's definition (Winning 18–19; italics in original). Joanne Winning's explication of "sapphic modernities" underscores the "deeply imbricated relationship between the expression of dissident sexual identity and the embracing and creation of the modern" (19). Winning mobilizes the term "sapphic" to include female-coded and same-sex-oriented identities, experiences, relationships, communities, and positionalities that repudiate "dominant cultural traditions" and represented a "counterculture" in the early twentieth century (18–19). In this context, I understand sapphic modernism as the queer literature produced by early twentieth-century sapphic women who redrew and challenged the parameters of masculine modernism. Both "queer" and "sapphic" are vague and open-ended on purpose, allowing for greater historical inclusion and fluidity (Doan and Garrity 4). However, I will also refer to Gidlow and her experiences specifically as lesbian because she embraced this label.[5]

My research on Gidlow situates itself in the small but strong wave of twenty-first-century scholarship that aims to counter what Adrienne Rich has called the "Great Silence" of lesbian existence (640). *On a Grey Thread* has received almost no literary critical attention, and Gidlow remains an understudied figure in queer and modernist studies. Cary Nelson's modernist recovery project from the 1980s only mentions Gidlow in passing (102), while contemporary studies of the queer poetry scene in the 1950s Bay Area acknowledge her name but gloss over her importance (Grundy 25). Nevertheless, historians such as Greg Youmans have begun to unearth Gidlow's story from the archives, and I aim to add to this emerging project by addressing queer sensibilities of time and space in Gidlow's life and poetry. *On a Grey Thread* represents a major contribution to the paradigm of sapphic modernism, and I argue that Gidlow belongs to a counter-canon of "bad" sapphic modernists who have been neglected and erased (Mao and Walkowitz). Unlike the work of canonical authors like Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and Djuna Barnes—whose sapphic modernism relies on satirical, convoluted language and codes—or the work of Radclyffe Hall—which embraces the language of sexology to plead for sympathy—Gidlow's pioneering voice unabashedly celebrates sapphism. This article strives to show what we can learn by passing through the gates into Gidlow's garden, absorbing her vision of cyclical growth, queer nature, and a prevailing hope in queer futures.

Figure 1. Elsa Gidlow in her garden at Druid Heights. Photo by Laura Wilensky.

Poet Warrior and Gardener: Situating Elsa Gidlow

Before I enter the poetic garden that is *On a Grey Thread*, I consider it imperative to provide some contextual insight into Gidlow's life and her relationship with the natural environment because her poetry cannot be separated from her queer way of life, her gardens, and her community. Gidlow was a lesbian poet, activist, and gardener who was referred to as "the poet warrior" by her friends (West 614). She was born in England but grew up in a working-class family in rural Québec. Her family struggled financially, and she never received any formal education. From a young age, nature was essential to her creative mind, and she remembered how her imagination found solace in the natural world: a great elm by the brook became "a sheltering friend" she could talk to (Gidlow, *Elsa* 2). Despite this, Gidlow moved from city to city and never owned a garden until her forties, when she bought a plot of land in the Bay Area (Youmans, "Elsa Gidlow's Garden" 108). She called her new home Madrona and began to cultivate the "wild hillside" in a gentle manner that made room for native growth (Gidlow, *Elsa* 294). "Gardening," she recounts in her memoir, "is perhaps not the word for what was appropriate at Madrona" (*Elsa* 294). Instead of imposing her will on the land, Gidlow worked *with* the land and nurtured a "partnership between [herself] and nature" (*Elsa* 294). These gardening rituals allowed her to synch her life to the rhythms of the seasons (Youmans, "Elsa Gidlow's Garden" 108).

Fifteen years later, in 1954, Gidlow co-founded Druid Heights[6] amid the forests north of San Francisco, a community that turned into a "countercultural mecca where writers, artists, and musicians gathered for parties and events and sometimes stuck around for long residencies" (Youmans, "Elsa Gidlow's Garden" 106). Druid Heights attracted many bohemians in the 1960s and 70s, including Allen Ginsberg, Neil Young, Dizzy Gillespie, and members of Fleetwood Mac (Haiken). Travelling to Druid Heights was considered "a pilgrimage" (West 614), and the countercultural hub attracted so many sapphic women it was even referred to as a "Lesbian Avalon" (Youmans, "Elsa Gidlow's Garden" 107). Druid Heights was not a separatist community of the kind that was typical in the 1970s (see Sandilands). The focus was on communal living rather than strict separatism and essentialism. People of all genders, sexualities, ethnicities, and religions were welcome so long as they sought an alternative lifestyle. More than anything, gardening—a *partnership* that connected the human and the more-than-human—became the heart of this "unintentional community" (*Elsa* 349). "The gardens are the joy of all of us," Gidlow reflects, underscoring how they favored organic methods that preserved native growth and encouraged self-sufficiency (*Elsa* 353). "Spontaneous poetry reading[s]" would take place in the gardens (*Elsa* 355), celebrating the seasons and fostering what Catriona Sandilands refers to as a "lesbian culture of nature" (132).

Nature remained the guiding force of Gidlow's philosophy and activism throughout her life. During the 1970s, she was interviewed in her garden for a queer documentary called *Word Is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives* (Adair et al.),[7] and she wrote essays advocating for lesbian liberation, including a pamphlet titled *Ask No Man Pardon: The Philosophical Significance of Being Lesbian* (1975). In this essay Gidlow appeals to "Nature" as "the Universal Mother" and contends that "Nature needs the Lesbian as she is. She needs me as I am" (*Ask No Man*). It is noteworthy that *On a Grey Thread*—Gidlow's first poetry collection from 1923—anticipates this queer nature philosophy decades before the establishment of Druid Heights.

The Sapphic *Flâneur* and "The Face in the Rain"

In *On a Grey Thread*, the garden motif is Gidlow's most radical tool of resistance. As a physical space, as an ideal, and as cyclical temporality, the garden leaves its mark on these pages. It is possible to read the collection itself as a garden, cultivated by Gidlow but not domesticated, free to bloom in unexpected places and take root on the most difficult of hillsides. *On a Grey Thread* is a collection of fifty-one poems in modern free verse split into six sections.[8] To cover the scope of the collection, I begin with analyses of the poems "The Face in the Rain" (*On a Grey Thread* 69) and "Episode" (47), before I turn my attention to the overarching structure, touching on several poems from each section. "The Face in the Rain" is a productive poem to open the conversation on nature in Gidlow's life because it builds a geographical bridge between the city and the garden. The poem is set in a buzzing metropolis—presumably New York City, where Gidlow lived in the 1920s—and the setting underscores how Gidlow's writing is never dislocated from the modern world, nor does it disregard its influences. Through her use of floral imagery and the sapphic gaze, Gidlow reclaims the role of the modern *flâneur* (see Munt). The garden bleeds into Gidlow's experience of urbanity, symbolizing a deep longing for sapphic connections in and with nature. Gidlow expands on this theme in "Episode" and other poems, foreshadowing her experiences at Druid Heights later in life.

"The Face in the Rain" reveals that *On a Grey Thread* engages with its historical context of urbanization, presenting a speaker who grapples with sapphic (dis)location in the modern metropolis. The first two of the poem's four stanzas paint a picture of a situation that will be familiar to readers both then and today—no matter their sexuality—of spotting someone attractive in a crowd:

> O form! O face!
> Elfin face in the crowd!
> Form, face, white throat,
> Pale throat wound with a scarf
> Poppy red,
> Blood-like, red,
> Pale throat wound with a poppy scarf
> Gleaming out of the crowd.
>
> Background of grey,
> A rain-wet street;
> Shuffling; shambling
> Beating feet,
> Past the corner where four ways
> meet. (*On a Grey Thread* 69)[9]

The speaker struggles with the ambivalent experience of the city as "the spatial context of modernity," defined by "its speed, its energy, and its sheer size" (Winning 20). The cityscape is a "[b]ackground of grey," the streets are "rain-wet," and the alliteration and heavy rhythm of the "[s]huffling; shambling / Beating feet" conjure images of an anonymous crowd that moves in a fast-paced and mechanical motion (*On a Grey Thread* 69). The crowd and the enticing face that stands out from it have been subjects of modernist writing since Charles Baudelaire. Walter Benjamin remarks that no other subject than the crowd was "more worthy of attention" to modernist writers (321), and Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" (1913) is an infamous example. But modern life amid the New York City crowds was no bed of roses for a young sapphic poet, and in the interview for *Word Is Out* (1977), the older Gidlow reflects: "I have felt probably less alone in nature and with nature than at any other time. I tend to feel alone and separate in crowds" (Adair et al.). When Gidlow deploys this familiar modernist motif in her poetry, she deliberately plays with the image made iconic by Pound, but to very different effects. While Pound and Gidlow both use natural imagery to describe the apparition of the faces in the crowd, Gidlow's sapphic rewriting of the motif posits the poppy

as an antidote to the loneliness and anonymity of the crowd.

The poppy is the most powerful motif in "The Face in the Rain," and it underscores how nature is Gidlow's key to resistance and her key to modernity. As I outline through my elucidation of the nature paradox above, interwar urbanization in the US saw a rise in stereotypes of lesbians as wild degenerates who were threats to (heterosexual) households in modern cities and suburbs (Oram 171; Faderman 46–47). This occurred alongside prevalent ideologies of unnaturalness that aimed to exclude queerness from natural environments (Stein 286). Gidlow's first-person speaker wrestles with these assumptions when she uses nature imagery to carve out sapphic belonging in the city. The speaker's gaze lingers on the "[e]lfin"-faced woman who wears a bright-red "poppy scarf / Gleaming out of the crowd" (*On a Grey Thread* 69). The red poppy, which stands out from the grey background, symbolizes female-to-female desire. The speaker is drawn to the vision of the woman in red through repetitions of words like "poppy," "red," and "throat" (*On a Grey Thread* 69), emphasizing the subtle eroticism of the encounter, or love "at last sight," as Benjamin phrases it (324). Framed through a sapphic gaze, the floral motif maps her desire onto the cityscape. It represents an antidote to urban loneliness, emphasizing a search for queer connections through nature. In other words, the poppy queers the typically masculine motif of the crowd associated with Pound and underscores that nature shapes what "sapphic modernity" means to Gidlow (Winning 19).

The speaker who observes and desires this "face in the crowd" (*On a Grey Thread* 69), while remaining unobserved herself, reclaims the role of the modernist *flâneur*. In the final two stanzas, the speaker underlines the impact of the encounter:

> O face, O throat!
> Crimson and white
> Splashed on grey:
> I have thought of nothing else all day.
>
> Misted streets,
> A scarf-wound throat,
> Fay-like face
> That seemed to float
> Through the crowd
> Like a wisp of song:
> I have thought of them all day long.
>
> (*On a Grey Thread* 69)

The *flâneur* is traditionally a masculine figure, a "stroller in the crowd" who "creates art out of the very stuff on the street" (Massey 234; Winning 20). This positionality embodies what Baudelaire has designated as "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent" (403). In Gidlow's poem, however, the positionality is that of a woman admiring another "[f]ay-like" woman "float[ing] / Through the crowd" (*On a Grey Thread* 69). Doreen Massey argues that the modern city was "a city for men" (233), and that the role of the female *flâneur* was impossible due to the gendered structure of the city (234). Sally Munt, on the other hand, challenges the "supremacy of the heterosexual male gaze" by providing direct examples of lesbian *flâneurs*, including Renée Vivien and Djuna Barnes (117). "The Face in the Rain" exemplifies how Gidlow contributes to lesbian disruptions of the male gaze in the city, building on her own experiences of living in New York City (*Elsa* 130–35). Gidlow's friend Kenneth Rexroth notes that unlike in the work of Renée Vivien, "there is no hint of the lurid stage settings of 'the love that dare not speak its name'" in Gidlow's poetry (20). Gidlow's disruption does not rely on "hostility," but comes from the complete confidence that she is "at home in the world" wherever she goes (Rexroth 20).

This disruption extends to masculine modernist forms. While "The Face in the Rain" bears a strong resemblance to Pound's "In a Station of

the Metro," Gidlow rejects the conservative content of the male modernists and Pound's specific Imagist call to keep the verse short, concise, and objective (Beach 26). Pound's style depends upon his authority as an unobserved male "stroller in the crowd" (Massey 234). His speaker removes the first-person "I" from the image, yet the heteromasculine claim to the cityscape and the natural world is evident. Gidlow's poem, on the other hand, is as a cheeky response to Pound's "[p]etals on a wet, black bough" (Pound 12). She intentionally adopts Pound's infamous motif but rewrites it into a subjective and sapphic experience of desire in the city. Unlike Pound's brevity, Gidlow's form floats on the page like a watercolor and demands space. More significantly, her speaker demands sexual autonomy. This feminine first-person voice upends Poundian expectations of masculine objectivity and presents an alternative encounter between the writer and her modernist subject, one which is fueled by queer passion. The reclamation of the female *flâneur* alongside rejections of masculine styles frames Gidlow's poem as an experiment in rewriting the parameters of modernism. Her gaze calls for sapphic belonging, and to Gidlow, the key to queer belonging in modernity is nature.

The Lesbian in the Garden

While "The Face in the Rain" has an urban setting, most of the poems in *On a Grey Thread* are set in or engage with natural environments. "Episode" (47)[10] centers on an instance of sapphic lovemaking in the garden and stands out as one of the collection's most erotic poems. In "Episode," the garden functions as a "middle ground" between the city and the wilderness that guides Gidlow's philosophy of the sapphic woman as both natural and modern (Marx 23). Leo Marx reminds us that the garden in the American imagination embodies what he designates as the "pastoral ideal," meaning a utopian landscape of abundance and freedom (3, 43). The garden, according to Marx, is "as attractive for what it excludes as for what it contains" (Marx 138). It must exclude both the filth and anxieties of the cities and the dangers of the "hideous wilderness" (Marx 43). The idealization of this "miniature middle landscape" (Marx 138), I contend, must be read in light of heteronormative power structures. If the construction of the modern lesbian labeled her both wild and unnatural, then the pastoral ideal of the garden must by necessity banish all forms of homosexuality from its perimeters. "Episode," however, disrupts heterosexual claims to the garden and rewrites the space as a safe haven for lesbian existence. The counterforce of the lesbian in the garden challenges the foundations of the nature paradox and provokes the reader to face how dominant notions of the "natural" and the "unnatural" have been used to exclude queerness from both natural landscapes and modern cities.

Figure 2. Elsa gardening at Druid Heights. Photo by Laura Wilensky.

"Episode" is a five-stanza poem that portrays the garden as an environment that fosters homoerotic desire. In the opening two stanzas the speaker emphasizes that a shift from the city landscape to the natural environment must take place in order to allow queer desire to blossom:

> I have robbed the garrulous streets,
> Thieved a fair girl from their blight,
> I have stolen her for a sacrifice
> That I shall make to this mysteried night.
>
> I have brought her, laughing,
> To my quietly sinister garden.
> For what will be done there
> I ask no man's pardon.
>
> (*On a Grey Thread* 47)

From the beginning Gidlow builds a tension between the settings of the busy streets and the quiet garden at night, the former being presented as spoiled with "blight." The speaker narrates that she has "robbed" this "fair girl" away from the deteriorating cityscape and into her garden, implying that the lush garden holds a potential for sexual freedom that the city cannot offer. Gidlow's word choices of robbing a fair girl from "*their* blight" (my emphasis) could be read as a parody of the urban lesbian "wife-snatcher," which was a stereotype that caused much anxiety at the time of Gidlow's writing (Oram 171). As she thieves an innocent girl from the heterosexual order and portrays the loss of her sexual innocence as a "sacrifice" that must be made, the speaker's tone implies a cheeky reclamation of this stereotype. This allows for the lesbian identity in the poem to be sexually coded—it is not merely naïve and innocent like the "romantic friendships" of the previous century (Smith-Rosenberg 270). Consequently, the poem embraces sapphic sexuality as "a symbol of female autonomy" (Newton 564).

In the second stanza, sexual anticipation builds as the women enter the "quietly sinister garden" (47). Unlike the unresolved potential for desire in "The Face in the Rain," Gidlow's feminine gaze in "Episode" turns desire into an explicit promise of pleasure, enabled by the shielding garden. While the hegemonic "pastoral ideal" would shut queer desires outside the garden gates (Marx 3)—as both too wild and too unnatural to belong to the ideal landscape—Gidlow unsettles this heterosexual idyll and claims the garden as a queer space. I want to highlight how the speaker introduces the setting: with a confident declaration that this is "my" garden (47). Moreover, the garden is described as "sinister" (47). The garden is perhaps not sinister to the women themselves, but to the outside world looking in, because Gidlow's queer subjects represent a threat to the heterosexual fantasy urged by "the rural myth" (Marx 229).

The lush garden in "Episode" acts as a safe counter-site where the women the poem presents can embrace their sexualities, shielded from any judgmental (male) gaze. In this way, I read the garden as a heterotopia: Foucault's place "outside of all places" ("Of Other Spaces" 24). Heterotopias are "real sites" within culture that are "represented, contested, and inverted," and often function as "enacted utopia[s]" (24). According to Foucault, the garden is perhaps "the oldest example" of heterotopias (25). Gidlow's garden holds within its bubble the inversion of societal norms, becoming a place where the (hetero)sexual order is upended and homosexuality is not only taken for granted but celebrated—an attribute that makes Gidlow's poetry a unique contribution to sapphic modernism. The garden exists as a real place—as the "smallest parcel of the world"—yet outside and aslant from the heterocentric society outside its gates (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" 26). This is illustrated when Gidlow's speaker declares that she does not accept male judgment in the garden: "For what will be done there / I ask no *man's* pardon" (47; my emphasis). The speaker refuses to apologize for her identity and actions. The heterotopic site

becomes a space that encourages sapphic desires and, in the words of Foucault, fosters a queer "way of life" ("Friendship" 138). "Episode" thus builds a bridge to Gidlow's lifestyle at Druid Heights—a countercultural site that also functioned as a heterotopia for this poet and her community.

Figure 3. Elsa's house at Druid Heights. Photo by Laura Wilensky.

The sexual union between the two women in "Episode" further rebuts stereotypical claims that lesbians are wild, degenerate creatures. Instead, Gidlow's feminine voice and wild flowers queer nature and the "nature of desire" (Stein 295). In the climactic moment of the final three stanzas, the speaker describes tender moves and delicate touches against the backdrop of the garden:

> I brush the rouge from her cheeks,
> Clean the black kohl from the rims
> Of her eyes; loose her hair;
> Uncover the glimmering, shy limbs.
>
> I break wild roses, scatter them over her.
> The thorns between us sting like love's
> pain.
> Her flesh, bitter and salt to my tongue,
> I taste with endless kisses and taste again.
> At dawn I leave her
> Asleep in my wakening garden.
> (For what was done there
> I ask no man's pardon.) (47)

I want to draw attention to the gentle yet direct word choices that describe the lover's body, with a repetition of the pronoun "her." The lover is portrayed as a feminine and soft presence. While the speaker previously reclaims the stereotype of the "wife-snatcher" in the opening stanzas (Oram 171), in these stanzas there is no trace of the "wild sexual practices," the degeneracy, or the violence that the American public was warned about (Faderman 51, 55). Gidlow's voice never succumbs to guilt or shame. Nevertheless, the adjective "wild" does appear, but in the context of the "wild roses" scattered upon the lover's limbs, which "sting like love's pain" between their bodies. The roses represent Gidlow's gentler take on what wildness means to sapphic modernities. Despite growing in a garden, on "man-made, cultivated pieces of ground" (Marx 85), the flowers are not domesticated. As in Gidlow's gardens at Druid Heights, there is room for wild blooms. Cultivating this kind of garden becomes more of a "partnership" with nature, rather than a domestication, to use Gidlow's words (*Elsa* 294). It relies on the notion of queer nature. The "wild roses" in "Episode" are sexually coded, merged with the women's flesh and the "sting" of their desire. In this way, imagery of wildness is not equated with predatory behavior or doomed love—as was stereotypical at the time—but rather with belonging and the potential for growth in harsh environments. In her autobiography, Gidlow continues this metaphor in response to what it was like to be queer in the 1920s: "it was a desert, a desert of men. A desert with some wild flowers, a few wild blooms" (*Elsa* 122). At the heart of this image lies both a resistance and a sense of loneliness—a lack of community. Despite this, Gidlow highlights the fact that deserts also "have their oases" (*Elsa* 122). In "Episode," these wild flowers have found

their oasis: a middle ground between the wilderness and the city where queer love can flourish on its own terms, and, more importantly, find other wild roses. In Gidlow's life, Druid Heights became her oasis, and nature became her resistance.

When Gidlow draws parallels between the wakening garden and the lesbian lovers, she further subverts the doctrine that asserts homosexuality to be a crime against nature. This Judeo-Christian belief—based on Paul the Apostle's analogy of seeding—asserts that all nonreproductive sex acts "pervert" nature (Stein 286). The setting of "Episode," however, affirms the garden as a landscape of queer productivity that undermines the image of the "unnatural use of human bodies" (Stein 286). Rachel Stein observes in a similar case that, although this lesbian productivity is different from traditional heterosexual reproduction, a homoerotic union that takes place in a natural environment subverts expectations and reiterates its own version of productivity: one founded on lush growth and "lively pleasures" of the body (294). "Episode" portrays this elegantly with its focus on tender touches and the "wakening garden" that surrounds the women "at dawn" (47). The union taking place from night to dawn can be read as a form of cyclical productivity, with the "wakening garden" symbolizing the wakening sapphic identities. Depicting this coming-of-age moment as cyclical rather than linear defies traditional notions of (re)productivity. By portraying what the dominant culture would deem "unnatural acts in nature," the "double transgression" of lesbian sex in the garden invites critical reflection on the damaging effects of the crime-against-nature ideology (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 16). Stein contends that this ideology has long been used to "violently dislocate homosexuals from the natural order and from natural environments" (293), and that nature spaces often become the ground for "homophobic violence" as a result, even today (292). Gidlow does not write in a vacuum where this violence is not a real threat. On the contrary, her unapologetic tone in the face of such threats positions her as a trailblazing voice in the field of sapphic modernist verse whose reclamation of queer nature was ahead of her time.

Gay Beads on the Grey Thread: Queer Temporality

Gidlow names her poetry collection *On a Grey Thread*, which references the opening poem, titled "The Grey Thread" (13). The emphasis on the grey thread as a metaphor for life speaks to the necessity of treating all of the poems as individual beads in a larger design. More than this, I suggest that we must see the collection itself as a cycle. In this section, I investigate the cyclicality of the overarching structure of the collection, looking at how the order in which Gidlow presents these poems symbolizes a journey between youth and old age, spring and autumn, life and death—and rebirth. Gidlow grounds her lesbian existence in the seasonal rhythms of nature and claims cyclicality to be integral to the queer coming-of-age process. This cyclicality marks queer time as an alternative narrative to straight, modern timelines. But even as her poetry continuously interrupts dominant "narratives of belonging and becoming" (Freeman xv), Gidlow's cyclical modern verse prompts us to ask: Can the sapphic be both at one with nature *and* articulate a modern identity?

The opening poem of the collection, "The Grey Thread" (13), sets the tone for her *vers libre* as a resistance to the grey linearity of heteronormativity and capitalism. The first of the five stanzas introduces the reader to the motif of life as a grey thread:

> My life is a grey thread,
> A thin grey stretched out thread,
> And when I trace its course, I moan:

How dull! How dead! (*On a Grey Thread* 13)

The image of the "grey thread" stretching before the speaker can be read as society's heterosexual temporal narrative for her: she is to marry a working man, give birth, raise children, and stay in the domestic sphere. The speaker expresses detestation at these prospects and resists in a queer manner. "But I have gay beads" (13), the second stanza begins, before she describes the colorful beads: "A blue one for my painted dreams," and "For love an odd bead / With a deep purple glow," and "A red bead for my strength," and many more (13). The poem's fifth and final stanza concludes with a quiet yet powerful declaration:

> My life is a grey thread
> Stretching through Time's day;
> But I have slipped gay beads on it
> To hide the grey. (13)

Wrapped in a 1920s double meaning of the word "gay," Gidlow's "gay beads" form a queer resistance that anticipates the colorful pride flag with all its significance at least fifty-five years before it appeared as a symbol of gay liberation. The "gay beads" on the "grey thread" of linear time open the door to an analysis of the tension between queer and modern temporalities. When read in light of Gidlow's life, her refusal to fit heteronormative timelines exemplifies the speaker's detestation of life as a "grey thread." Gidlow knew from an early age she would never "marry a man for support," nor give birth (*Elsa* 145, 41). On top of this rejection of society's "paradigmatic markers" of progress (Halberstam 2), Gidlow detested the very symbol for modern times: the time clock in the office (*Elsa* 133). Reading Gidlow's verse in light of her life adds nuanced layers of meaning to "The Grey Thread" that underscore her poetry's status as lived queer resistance. Gidlow lives up to her nickname: the poet warrior.

Gidlow's resistance to linear narratives runs throughout the collection, and she crafts colorful threads of queer time as a counterforce to heteronormative expectations. Elizabeth Freeman argues that modern time emerged alongside the birth of the homosexual identity, and that queer temporality came both from "within" and as a "counterpoint to modern time" (xii). Her ideas build on Jack Halberstam's, who argues that queer temporality produces alternative narratives *outside* of the heteronormative "paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (Halberstam 2). From the perspective of straight progression in modernity, queer existence can be read as a disturbing outlier because queer sexualities, as "reproductively sterile," do not contribute to socioeconomic progress (Stein 294). As the nature paradox suggests, early-twentieth-century lesbians were treated as unnatural due to their "sterile" sexualities (Stein 294). Simultaneously, the supposed threat they represented to heterosexual households (and along with it the destruction of straight timelines) contributed to the public anxiety that lesbians were too wild to belong to the new era (Faderman 50–51). Questions of nature and sexuality are thus inevitably tied up with questions of temporalities. Moreover, if modern temporality is defined by capitalist narratives of sequence (Freeman; Halberstam), the counterpoint to such temporalities can be found in cycles of nature, which focus on the flow of seasonal growth rather than on strict schedules. The opening poem "The Grey Thread" invites the reader into a collection of verse that embodies cycles of queer temporality as resistance toward the naturalization of straight timelines and the "clashing, thundering, polluting" side of modern life (Gidlow, *Elsa* 107).

This guides me into an investigation of the overarching structure of *On a Grey Thread*, where poems flow in a cyclical rhythm and synch Gidlow's lesbian existence to the turn of the seasons. Gidlow embraces queerness hand-in-hand with the

processes of growth, death, and rebirth found in her garden. *On a Grey Thread* is split into six sections with separate headings that mark different phases in the cycle, and the early sections focus on coming-of-age processes. After the opening poem "The Grey Thread," the collection moves into a section titled "Youth" (15), which contains five poems. The first poem in this section is also titled "Youth" (17–18), and thus the cycle begins with the young and inexperienced. The speaker of "Youth" brings the reader down below the crust of the earth in the first stanza: "I must go down / Down, down, / Below the crust of things," and the second stanza brings us deeper "Into the caves of life / . . . / Where the calm roots of wisdom creep" (17). I read the speaker as an impatient seed in the earth, waiting for springtime. To grow, the speaker first has to find "the caverns of truth" deep within herself (17). The seed could be a metaphor for a queer coming-of-age moment. The speaker discovers that she is different from the majority and that this can cause pain, as she narrates, "I know pain is waiting there / Eager to break me" (17). But in the end she accepts this truth with the declaration, "But I am strong" (17), and in the final stanza, she proclaims:

> Living is crusted with lies.
> I want life naked,
> Laughing and young.
> Not fettered, not tamed,
> But life unashamed,
> With the cry of Desire on her tongue. (18)

From a contemporary perspective, this journey reads like a coming-out story, a narrative that causes many people to feel "out of synch" with normative timelines (Freeman xv). When temporalities are regulated according to heteronormative frameworks, figuring out that one's sexuality or gender is different from that of the majority becomes a time-consuming process that puts "normal" adolescence on hold. This still rings true today, but in Gidlow's time it was even more so, as the identity category of the homosexual was a new and stigmatized creation (Faderman; Smith-Rosenberg).

More than merely a coming-of-age moment, the seed embodies the sapphist's birth and undermines accusations of unnaturalness. The second section of the collection is titled "Grain and Grapes" (25) and contains thirteen poems. The motif of the seed is particularly significant in two poems found in this section: "Roots" (32) and "Declaration" (40). In both poems the speaker is a voice from beneath the earth's surface. In "Roots" she is "crawling like a worm with unclean things" and describes herself like "a yearning voiceless root" (32). In "Declaration" she is "a seed in the dust" and "a live root bedded in night" (40). The speaker in "Roots" dreams of the sun "mellow[ing] my ultimate fruit" (32), while the speaker in "Declaration" yearns for the moment when she will "be done with night" and finally "thrill into flower" (40). Both poems are thematically linked with "Youth" (17–18), and all three of them foreground the fact that the beginning of the cycle is marked by a birth. But this is not a traditional, heterosexual childbirth. Opposing the strict "biological clock" of reproduction (Halberstam 5), this coming-of-age birth is tied to seasonal temporalities. These poems embody dreams of being born into the light, of seeing the sun, and of blooming into flower, all of which rewrite Pauline doctrine's seeding metaphor with queer defiance.

The contrast between queer temporalities and modern time, as exemplified by these sections, is never completely dichotomous. The collection moves from youth and innocence into sections that contain a more seasoned speaker. The majority of the collection's poems are found in the following sections, titled "Inner Chamber" (43) and "In Passing" (67), which contain twenty-one and ten poems, respectively. These poems focus on emotional experience and growth, and this is where we find some of Gidlow's most explicit

love declarations for women. In the poem "Constancy" (62), we are again introduced to the motif of life as a thread. This time it is no longer grey, but "electric golden" (62). As the speaker tells a girl, "I keep faith with love, not lovers," and asks her not to be jealous "if I kiss this girl and that" (62), the thread takes on a new meaning: "Love's the thread, my sister, you a bead" (62). Gidlow's poetry demonstrates the intricate relationship between the queer rejection of straight timelines and the creation of an alternative modern "way of life" (Foucault, "Friendship" 138). According to Winning, "to be sapphist is *indelibly* to be modern" (19; italics in original), and the constancy "with love, not lovers" that Gidlow expresses is arguably a modern expression of sexuality that breaks with conventions of both heterosexuality and monogamy (*On a Grey Thread* 62). The circular beads and the linear thread bring out the tension between queer temporalities and modern time, emphasizing how living awry with respect to societal expectations in and of itself is an expression of modernity.

The collection's focus on cyclical rebirth makes a strong case for the self-created modern lesbian. The poem "The Artist" (52–53) merges imagery of artistic production with sapphic love and the motif of time, underscored by these lines from the third stanza:

> Madonna . . . loose me and rise.
> We are brief as apple-blossom
> And I am heart-weary with thought of the end.
> Creation is all. (52; ellipsis in original)

Throughout the poem, the speaker aches to paint her lover—a religious reclamation of the Madonna—to capture her "eternality" and save her from the passage of time. The poem evokes queer love and cyclicality through the image of the apple blossoms, which are short-lived but bound to return next spring. The speaker is "heart-weary with thought of the end"—the end of the relationship, or life itself. But the underlying message can be summed up by the line, "Creation is all." Painting (or indeed writing poetry about) the lover will ensure her "immortality," her return with the spring blossoms. "The Artist" echoes Gidlow's philosophy of rebirth, and she opens her autobiography with a reiteration of this thought: "If we are alive and growing, we are continuously giving birth to ourselves" (*Elsa* 1). I thus understand modern sapphic creation as not limited to art and poetry, but encompassing a broader understanding of self-creation through community. Gidlow's queer identity rejects the stereotypes and ideologies that aimed to control her image of what a lesbian was or should be, in favor of a constant (re)birth of the self in line with the apple blossoms. Gidlow's idea of sapphic modernities relies on her initial acceptance of queerness as a modern identity (as something she was born as),[11] but more so on her belief in continuously giving birth to the queer self through relationships with the human and the more-than-human environment.

Finally, I want to highlight how the cyclical nature of Gidlow's writing centers on the idea that the end of her collection, as indeed the end of her life, is the beginning of something new. The last poem before the epilogue, "A Thought," ends on this promise of rebirth, emphasizing how the "songs in the far corners of my soul / . . . / will wait for another life, for more suffering, / To give them birth" (78). "A Thought" complicates the notion of queer rebirth as merely a form of liberation and self-creation; it also embodies queer history as a "living, open-ended present" rather than a "fixed and frozen past," to borrow Youmans's phrase ("Elsa Gidlow's Garden" 103). *On a Grey Thread*'s cyclicality invites us to see Gidlow's poetry and plants as a legacy that keeps finding new hillsides to grow on. The queer garden at the heart of *On a Grey Thread* echoes Gidlow's Druid Heights philosophy: "Poetry is the poet's way into the world, a path to connection"

(Gidlow, "Footprints" 47). This connection is not limited to the flesh and the earth, but encourages us to forge "new, queer forms of generational connection and remembrance" (Youmans, "Elsa Gidlow's Garden" 103). Gidlow's life and poetry inspire nonlinear bridges across the decades between the queer past and the queer future.

Conclusion

Elsa Gidlow stands out as one of few modernist writers who dared to openly and unapologetically embrace nature as queer and queerness as natural. *On a Grey Thread* invites us into a garden that celebrates sapphic desire alongside the turning of the seasons. My research has suggested that the "gay beads" from her 1923 collection lay the foundation for her community activism three decades later at Druid Heights (*On a Grey Thread* 13). Despite efforts to preserve Druid Heights as an LGBTQ+ historic district,[12] the National Park Service has left the site to decay, and the innovative architecture is composting back to nature (Haiken; Rocha). While I would be thrilled to see the site restored in accordance with Gidlow's final wish that Druid Heights should become an artists' retreat (*Elsa* 412), I have shown that this poet warrior's impact transcends time and place. Gidlow left a lasting impression on the people she met, and her story has the power to change queer lives across the globe today—as she has changed mine. To young and old sapphic women alike, her poetry is an antidote to loneliness and represents courage. Gidlow prepares the soil for queer communities to come together in the spirit of poetry and activism, and she teaches us to cultivate our gardens in line with her philosophy of queer rebirth. My own research is guided by this philosophy, and as I plant this seed I know the garden dedicated to Gidlow scholarship will germinate and prosper.

Today's polarized political climate makes it even more important that *On a Grey Thread* rejects stereotypes of wildness and ideologies of unnaturalness in favor of queer nature. One of the goals of the interdisciplinary field of queer ecology is to rewrite the way we view the (queer) past to destabilize the biopolitical power relations that link homosexuality with the unnatural. This could not be more urgent. With conservative forces on the rise in Europe and the US, the twentieth-century rhetoric that I have analyzed in this paper is constantly recycled to justify the persecution of queer people. During these uncertain times, both for queer rights and for the environment, I see Gidlow as a wild bloom in the desert, a gay bead on the grey thread. It is my hope that her story can continue to inspire us to forge connections through communities, nature, and poetry.

Notes

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2. See Foucault, *A History of Sexuality* 43–44; and Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* 2–3.

3. A female "sexual invert" is generally understood as a masculine soul in a feminine body (gender identity), which is different from homosexuality (sexual orientation). Nevertheless, sexual inversion became the most common explanation for same-sex desires during the early twentieth century, which is why it is useful to historicize the term (see Black; Faderman; Newton).

4. For more on how Roosevelt cultivated this image of masculine wilderness, see Slotkin.

5. Gidlow embraces the word "lesbian" in her autobiography *Elsa: I Come With My Songs* and in the *Word Is Out* interview from 1977 (Adair et al.).

6. Other co-founders of Druid Heights included Isabel Grenfell Quallo (Gidlow's partner) and the couple Roger and Mary Somers (Gidlow, *Elsa* 349–58).

7. Youmans has conducted research into this documentary's history and significance. See Youmans, *Word Is Out: A Queer Film Classic.*

8. The collection did not receive much critical attention in the 1920s, but Harriet Monroe wrote a short review in *Poetry* magazine in 1924. She states: "One finds evidence in this book that, in spite of sophomoric thinking, Miss Gidlow may prove herself a poet" (109). Monroe did not comment on the collection's lesbian themes.

9. In the 2021 Mint Editions reprint of *On a Grey Thread*, "The Face in the Rain" is printed without any line breaks, and the stanzas are only separated by indentation. The original text from 1923 included line breaks between the four stanzas in addition to the indentation of stanzas two and four.

10. In *Sapphic Songs: Eighteen to Eighty* (1982), this poem is reprinted under the title "For the Goddess Too Well Known" (4). I have decided to stick to the original title, "Episode," from *On a Grey Thread.*

11. The interviewer from *Word Is Out* asks her how long she has been a lesbian and Gidlow responds, "I never understand what that means, because as far as I'm concerned, I was born that way" (Adair et al.).

12. The NPS owns Druid Heights as part of the Muir Woods National Monument. In 2018, the site was deemed eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places (Rocha), which would have ensured preservation, but as of 2026, nothing has happened. In 2017, Michael Toivonen founded a group called "Save Druid Heights," which is still active.

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Intersectional Cultural Memory
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INTERSECTIONAL CULTURAL MEMORY AS MEMORY ACTIVISM IN MICHELLE CLIFF'S *FREE ENTERPRISE*

ABSTRACT: Cultural memory concerns the question of how we remember, and cultural memory studies examines the collective frames and cultural narratives that shape our individual remembering. This article examines the potential of intersectionality as a mode of cultural and collective remembering in Michelle Cliff's novel *Free Enterprise* (1993) and suggests that the novel is an attempt to rewrite US cultural memory, and particularly the history of the US Civil War, from a memory activist perspective. This article argues that Cliff's novel presents a narrative process that complements documented and foundational US cultural memory frames. While intersectionality has been gainful in the exploration of identities and social structures, this article specifically seeks the analytic potentiality of the application of intersectional cultural memory studies at a symbolic level. *Free Enterprise* offers an intersectional rewriting of the history of slavery and the US Civil War by centering the powerful activism of women, people of color, disabled people, and queer people, turning the reimagining of US cultural memory into memory activism.

Keywords: intersectionality; the Caribbean; women's writing; cultural memory; queer; the Civil War; memory activism

Our sense of the past, the way we remember, is not just based on our individual memory. Cultural memory studies, arising from the long tradition of Jewish Studies and the research field concerning nation formation, examines collective frames and cultural narratives that shape our individual remembering. In this article I take a novel approach in combining intersectionality with cultural memory studies, which has not previously been done in literary studies. For Astrid Erll, the term *cultural memory* names "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts" ("Cultural" 2). Erll, for one, reminds us that the matter of remembering is never just an individual and cognitive function: memory is shaped by social and collective frames. She illustrates her understanding of cultural memory by dividing it into dimensions, levels, and modes ("Cultural"). Cultural memory concerns the *dimensions* of historical events (which, as culturally defined ways of thinking, may be social, material, or mental); their *levels* (which can be either cultural and collective or embodied and individual); and the *modes* of how we remember (such as trauma, political history, myth, or family history) ("Cultural" 3–7).

In this article I will examine the "how" of cultural memory by interpreting Michelle Cliff's novel *Free Enterprise: A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant* (1993) as an attempt to rewrite US cultural memory, and particularly the Civil War, in intersectional and activist terms. *Free Enterprise* (re)imagines an intersectional mode of cultural memory and intersectional memory activism. I suggest that her revision of US memory politics and rhetoric is done with a textual commitment to the plight of minorities and in an intersectional manner that can be read as memory activism. Cliff (1947−2016) was a US author of Jamaican origins best known for her novels *Abeng* (1983) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), both of which depict light-skinned Creole girl Clare Savage's migrant identity as she journeys between her Caribbean home island, the US, and the UK. Cliff's third novel, *Free Enterprise*, depicts multiple storylines both historical and fictional around the Abolitionist Movement in the United States during the nineteenth century, as well as the US Civil War, the Underground Railroad,[1] and John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry.[2] The novel comments particularly on the ways those nation-constitutive events are currently commemorated. John Brown's legacy on its own is immense in the US: numerous movies, plays, books, statues, paintings, and other cultural artefacts have been based on and/or dedicated to him.

I argue that *Free Enterprise* can be read as an instance of *memory activism*, which, according to Aleida Assmann, reacts against "repressive structures of silence and injustice, recuperating events of the past for the sake of restorative justice and social inclusion" (3). In their articulation of memory activism, Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg connect it to strategic commemoration of the past to challenge the dominant views, and to remember "a contested past to achieve mnemonic or political change by working outside state channels" (5). Below, I will connect these ideas of memory activism to Michel Rothberg's idea of "multidirectional memory," turning these concepts from memory studies toward intersectional memory activism. Such a cross-reading of the novel incorporates alternative perspectives, from queer remembering to documentary archives and memories associated with national commemoration. While Cliff's radical literary practice has been involved with revising and reimagining the past, this radicality must be read and interpreted *as activism* in order to be memory activism. Activist interpretation means reading *for* something, in this case for multiplying the representations of US history, as memory activism takes place in the dialogue between the text and the reader's interpretation.[3]

Cultural memories concerning US abolitionist efforts are often described through white male heroes such as Brown, and are presented through a racial lens as a struggle between the anti-slavery North and pro-slavery South. By reading *Free Enterprise* intersectionally, this article demonstrates how the institutional and collective narratives of US abolitionism of the nineteenth century are woven together with feminist, gendered, queer, postcolonial, class-related, and disabled narratives of history. Cliff's novel provides intersectional versions of institutional narratives about the Civil War and other foundational US events, tuning intersectionality into a mode of US cultural memory. While existing studies on Cliff's novels have concentrated on postcolonial power structures, queer studies, or cultural, mixed, and ambiguous identities, my reading here acknowledges her radicalism in cultural-memory-writing, not only in relation to Caribbean studies, but also in the wider context of the Americas.

Stuart Hall argues that cultural identities are historically constituted, and that they depend on the versions of history we narrate. For Hall, cultural identities are produced by the retelling of past events and "the different ways we are positioned by . . . the narratives of the past" (225). Revisiting foundational memories that constitute US culture through intersectional remembering provides a new memory activist framework for exploring alternative cultural identities. *Free Enterprise*'s intersectional mode in retelling the past highlights the various subaltern forms of involvement in US nation building and the Civil War, whether by Jews, Native Americans, African Americans, Creole Caribbeans, women, queer people, or dis/abled people (sections of the novel are set at the Carville leper colony located in Louisiana[4]). Thus the novel makes the reader particularly aware of multiple systems of oppression, intersectional solidarities, and the involvement of marginalized people forgotten in institutional versions of the past.

Intersectional Memory in *Free Enterprise*

First articulated in a scholarly setting by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality originated from the long tradition of Black feminist social movements and literature. Intersectionality today is a research tool that conceptualizes multiple relational and complex workings of power connected to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, ability, age, cultural location, religion, or any such factor that is relevant to our social experience.[5] As Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix argue, "intersectionality focuses on effects which arise when multiple axes of difference—economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective, and experiential—intersect in historically specific contexts and in culturally specific locations" (76). Nira Yuval-Davis emphasizes that intersectionality does not merely consider identities or subject constitution, but analyzes how social divisions are created and take effect on the organizational (institutional), intersubjective, experiential, as well as representational levels simultaneously (199). The focus here is on the "representational" or symbolic level of cultural memory, which also positions and organizes our collective and cultural identities.

In subsequent writings, Astrid Erll revisits her understanding of cultural memory by defining it as a form of "travelling memory" that shifts the focus of "the stage of national memory studies" of the 1990s to a new understanding of cultural memory as a combination of cultural transactions, cultural exchanges, diasporas, globalization, world cultures, and global multiculture ("Travelling" 6–9). She emphasizes that cultures are no longer seen as single monads or separate entities, but as "translocal, creolized, global, or cosmopolitan" (9). Red Chidgey has previously connected intersectionality to activist memory studies, both being social justice paradigms that are tied to questions of "embodiment, recognition, visibility and erasure" (66). For Chidgey, intersectional memory praxis invites practitioners

to refine their relation to ongoing memory politics through a nuanced understanding of co-connected power structures (67). Cliff's *Free Enterprise* offers an intersectional approach toward foundational narratives that define US culture as it challenges ongoing memory politics. I argue that memory activist practice here is a twofold phenomenon highlighting both the radical textuality of the novel and the act of reading it as a reimagination of the Civil War in terms of gender, sexuality, class, and disability in a trans-American space.

For Vivian May intersectionality is also "a form of resistant imagery" (53) providing means for historical intervention. *Free Enterprise* makes its historical intervention by retelling various smaller histories that frame the institutional story of John Brown's famous raid at Harpers Ferry. The raid, which took place on October 16, 1859, in Virginia, is said to have been funded by Mary Ellen Pleasant, a hotel owner and woman of color from San Francisco, who is one of the historical characters of *Free Enterprise*. Mary Ellen's character in the novel is presented as a rich hotel owner, a millionaire of her time. She is involved in abolitionist struggles: her hotels are used as safe houses for Southern slaves seeking refuge, and the Underground Railroad makes use of them. In history books she is often remembered as "Mammy Pleasant," who was suspected of owning brothels. Shortly before her death, she is said to have dictated her biography and confessed to giving 30,000 dollars to John Brown for the purchase of weapons. In Cliff's novel, Mary Ellen Pleasant is one of the few who could free herself from the public expectations set upon women of color (see Ilmonen, *Intersectionality* 70; MacDonald-Smythe 158–59).

While the documented and official readings of history may emphasize only single-axis cultural memories (e.g., that the Civil War as a war to end slavery), Cliff's intersectional remembering unravels its layers through an intersectional matrix. Patricia Hill Collins has highlighted the roles of relationality and co-formation in intersectionality (225–52). Collins utilizes metaphors such as live jazz performance and the spider web-like Native American Okanagan cosmology to describe the interconnectedness of life—as "alternative ways of imagining social structure and our experiences with it" (247). Cliff's narration weaves the spider web around the history of John Brown and Mary Ellen Pleasant by creating fictional stories about Pleasant's parents and comrades, all of whom are rebellious in different ways.

In *Free Enterprise*, Mary Ellen's mother is a Native American blacksmith named Quasheba, known for her skills in "forging gunmetal" (129). Quasheba teaches her daughter ancient African rites and shares her knowledge as a gunsmith with Maroon communities hiding in the US.[6] Mary Ellen's father is Captain Parsons, who once smuggled Caribbean runaway slaves to the Northern States, and thus to freedom, in his ship the *Daedalus*.[7] Later in the story he falls in love with a native Carib man. Their memory fuels Mary Ellen's resistance. Mary Ellen's comrade and sister-in-arms, Annie Christmas—who is from "an island in the Caribbean" (24)—becomes the other protagonist of the novel. Annie is a very light-skinned Caribbean Creole, a displaced immigrant girl who drifts to America, and who is simultaneously privileged by her middle-class background and oppressed because of her ambiguous skin color. Annie does not accept her mother's values and dreams of passing as a privileged upper-class white woman, so she escapes to the US and changes her name from the original Regina to Annie. Mary Ellen recruits Annie to John Brown's raid (see Potocki 70–72; Ilmonen, *Intersectionality* 67–72.)

Free Enterprise chronicles the forgotten achievements of abolitionist women, trans* people, queer people, disabled people, indigenous Americans, and other members of different

kinds of minorities, building an intersectional archive for those who suffered and rebelled in the shadows of the icons of national cultural memory. Nada Elia remarks that the novel uses archives that are deemed as "fiction" by historians—"walks through gardens they planted, lingering memories of lullabies they sang to their grandchildren, bank accounts in their names, stamps in their passports" (73). These smaller stories compose intersectional activist archives that have the ability to multiply the reader's sense of the past as they practice memory politics. In terms of cultural memory, Erll writes that "from the people we live with and from the media we use, we acquire schemata which help us recall the past and encode new experiences" ("Cultural" 5). *Free Enterprise* provides a "schema" for intersectional cultural memory by composing a resistant imaginary and historical intervention for people belonging to minorities.

From Multidirectionality to Intersectionality

In defining his much-cited concept of "multidirectional memory," Michael Rothberg refers to Cliff's novels, among others (27). He describes multidirectionality as the "interaction of different historical memories," which illustrates "the productive, intercultural dynamic" between memories of the Holocaust and slavery (3). Rothberg highlights that these memories do not compete over the scarce resources of the public sphere—in which collective memories are articulated—but have the potential to "create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice" (5). The crucial point in Rothberg's multidirectional memory is that it acknowledges how remembrance both "cuts across" and "binds together" diverse cultural and temporal sites, creating new forms of solidarity (11) between those suffering from the legacy of the Holocaust or the history of slavery. However, Rothberg concentrates on solidarity between ethnic traumatic legacies. An intersectional reading extends this multidirectionality toward other legacies of cultural trauma, concerning, for example, able-bodiedness, gender, and class (see Ilmonen, "Intersectionality"). The intersectional understanding of multidirectional memory should not be only a two-way street, but a multi-level intersection.

Free Enterprise begins from the end of the story with the depiction of the aging Annie's lonely life in the Mississippi Delta area. Her friendship with Mary Ellen and her youthful years, with the participation in John Brown's raid, are presented to the reader in flashbacks. She has retreated to her little cottage after the traumatizing imprisonment and escape following the failed raid at Harpers Ferry. Annie's only human contacts are lepers isolated in the neighboring leper colony of Carville. The lepers are the most marginalized people, hidden from the eyes of others. In this concentration camp-like colony, the patients are deprived of their names, becoming only numbers. The stories told in the Carville leper colony comprise the most multidirectional and polyvocal part of the novel. In Carville, Annie participates in storytelling sessions with the lepers, who come from all kinds of backgrounds, who gather together to remember their own lives, names, and roots. They rebel against the memory politics practiced by the US Health Department. There Annie also shares her experiences following the raid. The lepers embody a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and during their storytellings they share not only their own tales, but also those of their people (Ilmonen, *Intersectionality* 163–72). These storytellings create a resistant and relational web of intersectional cultural memory. The legacy of John Brown is extended by memories of people of different races and ethnicities, disabled people, women, and queer people. The storytellings resemble the embodied memory work that Vivian May describes as "interventions in historical memory" when she argues that "history cannot be told in

the singular voice or via the lone iconic figure" (54).

Besides memory work, I suggest that the idea of the Carville leper colony highlights the ideological intersections of power in organizing marginalized bodies, especially the racist logic involved in displacing diseased bodies. The narrator of *Free Enterprise* tells the reader that Carville is a place where unwanted or abject bodies can be hidden "so as not to endanger the clean, as opposed to unclean, individual. Colonies were founded for this purpose" (38), and Annie is told that leprosy "flourished among the darker races" (40).[8] The memory of concentrating the lepers in camps also acknowledges the trauma of the Holocaust: by complicating temporality, the narrator elicits solidarity in commemorating violent pasts.[9] Carville's leper colony epitomizes Rothberg's multidirectionality by making the reader aware of the dark ideology of pseudo-scientific racism inherent in pathologizing sicknesses. In Carville, the disabled and sick body is categorized through racialized logic. Thus intersectional scrutiny reveals how different kinds of oppressive logics are enmeshed to pathologize otherness.

In the leper colony, Annie also meets Rachel de Souza, who becomes her best friend in old age. Rachel is a Marrano Jew[10] who helps Annie to overcome the traumas of earlier imprisonment. Annie confesses that "sometimes . . . too much of the time, I think all we have are these stories, and they are endangered. In years to come, will anyone have heard them—our voices?" (59), underlining the dominance of single-voiced history. The healing partnership of Annie and Rachel highlights the multidirectional solidarity not only between the Caribbean and the Jewish, but also female friendships in the novel. Finally, the road to Annie's healing takes shape as she confesses to Mary Ellen the violence she had to endure during her imprisonment after the unsuccessful raid at Harpers Ferry. The story of Carville's leper colony in the novel acknowledges—multidirectionally, yet in the intersectional mode—the memory of female resistance through the histories of disability, colonialism, the Holocaust, and pathological racism.

The history of the Marranos is further developed when *Free Enterprise*'s narrator turns the culturally foundational myth of "discovering" America into intersectional, multidirectional, and traveling memory. Rachel tells a Jewish version of Columbus according to which Marranos were following Columbus "at a discreet distance" in order to seek asylum for themselves (60). Besides the revised myth of Columbus, the narrator tells a story about a leper locked in an iron mask who is washed ashore in Mississippi:

> But what if this hypothetical, hungry, thirsty, being-driven-crazy man made landfall at the mouth of the Mississippi, or washed ashore like Robinson Crusoe, or Prospero, and began walking across the landscape of the United States of America in search of a blacksmith, leaving a trail of fingers and toes in his wake? (37)

As Udo Hebel claims, renditions of "landing scenes" have a special "ideological position as commemorative construction of pivotal moments of origin, foundation, and identity formation" in US literature and culture (51). The resistant memory of "discovery" does not commemorate Eurocentric Enlightenment, but is a crusade of sickness and contamination. By countering the myths of Columbus, Prospero, and Crusoe through a person with a disabled body, the narrator activistly aims their multidirectional gaze toward intersectional layers.

In Carville new solidarities are also forged through the intersectionality of cultural memory. A sense of solidarity-in-resistance becomes more graspable as a white leper woman residing in Carville describes the people she

once knew. They were marooned, outlawed people living in Ultima Thule (paradoxically, an Ultimate Border), which is an old mammoth cave:

> You could say these people were "in the silence". I don't think folks realize just how many settlements like this there were. Mostly in caves and swamps, both of which this country has in abundance. Unknown but known. I don't think any official records were kept. Maybe there were songs or something. Africans mixed with Indians, Cherokee and Creek and all kinds, half-breeds, quarter-breeds, whatever. . . . They called themselves Maroons. (63)

These people "in silence" do not reach the pages of documents alongside Brown, but their rewritten histories create an intersectional cultural memory of solidarity in oppression. As Isabel Hoving puts it, Cliff's tradition of resistance always privileges "affinities over differences" (29).

Queerly Intersectional Archives of Cultural Memory

Ann Cvetkovich follows the "ephemeral" and "unusual" traces of cultural memory that are absent from institutionalized documentation or opposite to official histories (8). For Cvetkovich, these ephemeral archives might be found if we turn to sexuality and intimacy, forms of privacy, and invisibility (8). Cvetkovich cites Lauren Berlant, for whom the public sphere, or the nation as a space, is "violently separated by racial, sexual, and economic inequalities that cut across every imaginable kind of social location" (qtd. in Cvetkovich 16). This public sphere also stages schemata for cultural memory. In the following, I will focus on Cliff's way of initiating ephemeral archives—in her case, queer and intersectional archives—that challenge the conventional understanding of the US Civil War. Cliff reframes national war memory through fragmented pieces of queer intimacy that render the mode of memory in her novel intersectional, as queerness, in her narration, is always co-constituted with race, class, gender, and ethnicity.

The narrative structure of *Free Enterprise* is fragmented by queerly intersectional archives of memory: as Annie's youth begins to take shape through the memories she tells in Carville, her storyline is interrupted by the sections depicting Mary Ellen's life after the raid, followed by her parents' histories, Captain Parsons's gay (his)story and Quasheba's Native American story. After that, the reader gets acquainted with stories told by lepers in Carville. Next, the reader encounters the story of two upper-class, white, female cousins in Boston, Alice and Clover Hooper, who are acquaintances of Mary Ellen's—and desperately in love with one another. In their story, the reader encounters the workings of class, and particularly the restricting nature of their upper-class status.

During the Civil War, Clover, who is a photographer, travels with Alice documenting the events of the war. Clover Hooper is also one of the historical characters of the novel, although her story is told anew. Marian "Clover" Adams (née Hooper) was the third daughter of a rich upper-class family from Boston's high society, and later the wife of Henry Adams, known in American history as a writer and member of the Adams political family. Marian also became the first noted female photographer in America. However, after her father's death in 1885, she slid into depression and committed suicide later that year. The story of Marian and Henry Adams has inspired many books and stories despite the fact that Henry Adams destroyed all the letters he had ever received from Marian. For example, it is said that Marian inspired Henry James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) (see *History of American Women*). Nowadays she is mostly known by the famous Adams Memorial at her grave, a mysterious and allegorical sculpture

commissioned by Henry Adams (see Ilmonen, *Intersectionality* 80n37). In *Free Enterprise* Cliff creates queerly intersectional memory archives beyond Henry Adams's story.

In the novel the passionate love between Alice and Clover crumbles because of the demands of their social roles: they are imprisoned by the social expectations imposed upon white womanhood. As Clover ponders her role as a privileged, educated, and wealthy woman, she is painfully aware that certain social arrangements pertain to her. She feels unable to fulfil her role:

> Accommodations would be made. She might even be kept at home. In a room where she would be forced to approximate a rounded, female figure. Maternal, feminine. Soft. She was not and it frightened her.
>
> She was too angular, everyone had noticed. Her breasts were boyish. Her hips unconvincing. And she was possessed of artistic pretensions. No woman she. (158–59)

The womanhood Clover thinks about is the particular kind of upper-class, Victorian, white femininity of her era. Both her race and her class standing affect her gendered identity. Clover's story foregrounds not the war as an object of documentation, but the *mode of documenting*, i.e., how and by whom the war is documented.

Even though both Alice and Clover are paralyzed by their white class status (the cause of Clover's death is metaphorically stated to be a "paralysis of the heart"), *Free Enterprise* also envisions queerly intersectional versions of the foundational US cultural memory of homesteading. Alice entrusts Clover with her dream of going out West, as she has read that many women have actually taken this path:

> She'd read of female couples, the most daring of pairs, dashing in their wide-brimmed hats, friends or cousins, travelling with the wagon trains. Women homesteading in the middle of nowhere, say prairie in Nebraska, no beginning and no end in sight, building from the ground up. Planting a cornfield. Raising a milk cow. Gathering eggs and slaughtering hogs. Shooting the eyes out of a rattlesnake. (97)

The traditional frontier romance hides female sexual experiences, as well as the abuse of women. The narrator documents the flipside of the masculine frontier romance by demanding a monument for those prostitutes who worked in the western saloons:

> All these gals deserve a monument. To their enterprising ways. To commemorate the diaphragms they crafted from eelskin (learned from their Indian sisters?), to the douches they brewed from alum, pearlash, white oak bark, red rose leaves, nut galls, the bittertasting teas expelling the child with ease.
>
> HERE'S TO THE WOMEN WHO SERVICED THE MEN WHO OPENED THE FRONTIER. (102; capitalization in the original)

As Agosto notes, Cliff's representations of women's bodies "as a type of historical document" (8) turns the generic frontier romance, and national way of remembering, intersectional. Thus *Free Enterprise*'s plotline becomes a choir of "othered" voices that reach beyond the single-axis version of US cultural memory: it is told in the *intersectional mode of memory*. Both Alice and Clover have tragic fates in the end. Clover commits suicide by drinking the liquids she uses to develop her photographs, and Alice retires from the world into her bedroom in the attic.[11] They are not able to see alternatives beyond the white, upper-class Victorian hetero-patriarchy that organizes their sexuality.

Erica L. Johnson calls Cliff's technique of complementing historical archives with voices of marginalized subjects "ghostwriting." Ghostwriting names the haunting stories of historical figures lost from archives and documents, but who are not for that reason nonexistent. Johnson explains that the ghostwriting genre represents "the past in the present, . . . creating a fiction founded upon historical fact" taking place "at an axis of history and fiction that can be understood as a journey in witnessing" (117). The ghostly presence of Carib people, the indigenous Caribbeans, is also queerly rewritten in *Free Enterprise*. This alternative archive of intimacy concentrates on the relationship between two men, one of whom is a native Carib and the other a free Black man. This relationship takes place in Montego Bay, where Mary Ellen's father, Captain Parsons, arrives in his ship. Parsons encounters the Carib in a tavern. At the same time, however, the Redcoats, British soldiers, rush in:

> The pictures on the red-gold skin moved as the Carib gestured. Their black eyes met, and they touched hands. And into this intimacy the Red Coats [*sic*] strolled, casually storming the room, interrupting two men falling into love, and before Captain Parsons could say good-bye, the moving pictures were still, and he was clapped into irons. (118)
>
> * * *
>
> He pictured the Carib blood running into the rum on the tavern floor. Just like that. Just like that a man with pictures on his skin had his heart explode. Captain Parsons could not weep for him in front of these men. (115)

The soldiers end up shooting the Carib through the heart and imprisoning Parsons, who is devastated that he cannot mourn his lover. The scene metaphorizes the imperialist chain of events as the native man does not survive and the Black man is clapped into irons. Radically enough, this metaphor remembering the encounters of the Americas is presented through queer intimacy and the foundational cultural memory is ghostwritten as intersectional.

The ghostwriting present in *Free Enterprise* is resistant and transnational in nature (Potocki; Johnson). Cliff's confluence of voices comprises several kinds of difference: her resistant cultural memory includes voices belonging to gendered, queer, disabled, ethnic, racialized, poor, and isolated people. The composition of these voices remembers the past in a fundamentally intersectional mode—as the touch of hands by a Carib man and Captain Parsons displays. US cultural history and the history of the Civil War become redolent with intersectional harmonies; as Hoving claims, Cliff is always searching for "the unheard music" (27).

Intersectionalizing Documented Histories and the Ethics of Aesthetic Representation

The narration of *Free Enterprise* develops its ethos of intersectionalizing the archives further by introducing the story of Mary Shadd Carey (1823–93), another of the historical characters in the novel. Carey was an abolitionist and is known as the first female publisher of color in the Northern states. Her family worked for the Underground Railroad and she was a supporter of John Brown's abolitionist struggles, as well as of full racial integration, and worked as a Civil War activist, recruiting volunteers for the Union army. She was also the first woman of color to study law and had her own newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman*, and she founded schools for children of color. In the novel, she is a schoolteacher whom Mary Ellen meets. Her teaching is based on the appreciation of speech:

> Miss Carey, the schoolmistress, had each of her students memorize, for recitation on command, a narrative in its entirety.
>
> "Books are fragile things," she explained. "What they contain can easily be lost. We must become talking books; talk it on, like Africans, children. Talk it on." (211)

Carey's character underlines the narrator's doubts about written history by reinforcing the themes of storytelling, oral histories, and complementary, ephemeral archives. Phrases such as "books are fragile things" and "we must become talking books" (211) conceptualize the coalition of dissenting voices inherent in Cliff's writing.

Ephemeral archives are also instigated in *Free Enterprise* to supplement the documented version of Lincoln's murder by John Wilkes Booth in Ford's Theater on April 14, 1865. War photographer Clover Hooper wants to take a picture of an ex-slave woman she finds living in the streets. The woman refuses the portrait but instead, for a silver dollar, tells her story (86–95). Aptly, this ex-slave woman is named Scheherezade, referring to the *Thousand and One Nights*. She calls herself "a spoil of war" like, among other knick-knacks, "the kente cloth swiped by an Amazon of Dahomey"[12] (90) that the Union army brought back.

It turns out it is Scheherezade who "held the reins for a man she later learned was Booth" (86). While Lincoln's assassination is the ultimate moment in US cultural memory and has been documented in numerous ways—Lawrence A. Kreiser states that "more books have been written about Abraham Lincoln than any other figure in world history, with the exception of Jesus Christ" (1)—in *Free Enterprise* the story is told by an ex-slave woman paralleled with her namesake, a storyteller capable of manipulating the powerful patriarch. Scheherezade confesses to Alice and Clover that "as long as I [was] his [her slave-owner father's] bright little monkey, I will be spared my mother's life" (93). Scheherezade's witnessing of Booth's action—and her testimony to a lesbian couple in a back alley with references to Amazons of Dahomey—fundamentally intersectionalizes the cultural memory of the Lincoln assassination.

The memory activism depicted by Cliff becomes "the historiography of adjacencies," to quote Johnson (126), as the novel listens to the choir of background voices from the past. These voices belong to the most marginalized figures behind Lincoln, Brown, and the semi-mythical General George Armstrong Custer, who, in *Free Enterprise*, is queerly depicted as "a rider with streams of golden curls" galloping through the crowds in Washington; "but no one felt truly endangered, such was the rider's beauty" (85). The adjacent or intersectional sense of the past is further highlighted in the queer story of Dr. Walker, one of the many minor characters in the novel. Mary Walker is a white female doctor whom Alice calls "the strangest creature" (172). Walker, who passes for male when cross-dressing, participates in the war as a surgeon at the front, specializing in amputations.

Cliff also highlights the wartime endeavors of women, which are often left unacknowledged. It is estimated that almost four hundred cross-dressed women participated in the US Civil War, with Mary Walker being one of them (Agosto 180n13). *Free Enterprise* thus gives historical credit to those ignored by American history, illuminating the blind spots of historical stages, as the official version has been made easy and entertaining by including only white values:

> The official version has been printed, bound, and gagged, resides in schools, libraries, the majority unconscious. Serves the common good. . . . The official version is presented to the people. With friezes of heroes, statues free-standing in vest-

> pocket parks, in full costume on Main Street, on auditorium stages in elementary schools. . . . The official version entertains. Illuminates the Great White Way. (16–17)

The politics of intersectionalizing cultural memory in Cliff's novel thus consists not only in the logic of adjacencies, but also in practicing memory activism by challenging "the Great White Way," the national mode of commemorating.

Besides the "Great White Way," the memory of earth, nature and environment is one of Cliff's many forms of confronting the documented archives. *Free Enterprise* includes a section called "Turtle Crawle," written in a mythical and poetic way and including both a female turtle's and a cayman's points of view:

> Cinnamon women dug pens where the river entered the sea. In these they domesticated great green turtles. White beach on either side of the crawle, where the turtles buried their eggs. The cayman slid around the crawle wondering why he too was not penned. He was not egg-bearing. He caught an arrow in the back of his throat, and the women dried his flesh over a fire and dried his skin in the sun. (121)

The cinnamon women are Caribs who "spoke only Arawak, a custom which began as an act of defiance. Many Carib women became Carib as a result of raids on Arawak settlements" (122).[13] The novel includes the history of nature and the animals, the Arawaks, the carvings in bone, and the salt caking the shores "when the world was soft and the people could leave hand and foot prints on the rock" (123). This is the history of "rock and shell"[14] present in the always intersectional web of cultural memory in Cliff's novels, echoing around and beyond written history. The narrator is left without sentences and grammar when she remembers what still remains of the Arawaks:

> pot**A**to
>
> hu**R**ricane
>
> tob**A**cco
>
> **W**
>
> b**A**rbecue
>
> hammoc**K**
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> a
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> n
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> o
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> e (124)

We still have concepts such as the hammock, where the cultural memory of the Arawaks remains.

Besides documented history, art and aesthetic modes of commemoration are also rendered intersectional in *Free Enterprise.* The narrator questions whether slavery can be a subject of art, and as such considered beautiful. The novel considers capitalism, and slavocracy, to be intertwined in many ways with the modes of cultural memory framing our collective memory politics. Later in life, Mary Ellen meets Alice Hooper, at that time a rich lady and a hostess of elite society. Alice has acquired a painting by J. M. W. Turner called "Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying—a Typhoon Coming On" (1840). In the novel, Mary Ellen is invited to comment on the painting, which literally depicts how the slavers throw overboard the bodies of enslaved people as the typhoon rises. The stormy sea in front of the ship is filled with body parts, framed by a fiery red sky. The bodies are thrown overboard before the storm, in anticipation of insurance money. Mary Ellen feels sickened as she thinks about the companies that granted this insurance money (73), noting that neither New

England nor the Northern states are innocent in the matter of slavery: "Too many New England fortunes . . . rest in the enterprise of slavery, in one way or another" (77). When one of the guests starts marveling at the colors of the painting, Mary Ellen has to leave. Later, Alice, feeling guilty after having invested money in something drawing on the violence of slavery, asks Mary Ellen: "Did the money, my money, paid to the art dealer on my behalf for the Turner constitute the dealer's profiting off the trade? . . . Am I also, given the painting is an investment, guilty?" (77–78).[15] The narrator of *Free Enterprise* demands that the reader reflect on racial and ethical questions at the intersection of the collective and representational levels of memory including how the institution of art, artistic representations, and the idea of the "fine arts" may also be intertwined with questions of class, race, gender, and other systems of social injustice. In this chapter of the novel, the narration is suddenly ruptured as the narrator turns to address the reader directly and states sarcastically that the Turner painting hangs in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The narrator remarks, "[g]o see it. Take the kids" (180), commenting on "the Great White Way" conveyed by US commemorative sites including memory tourism and historical (national) didacticism (Hebel).

Free Enterprise seeks to examine the ethics of commemoration in many ways. Before her suicide, Clover Hooper seems like an outsider in her own life as an elite wife and fills her inner void with her photographs. With Alice's help, she had photographed different kinds of marginal(ized) people during the Civil War, such as members of the "Buffalo Soldiers" regiment.[16] Later, these pictures are sent to the noted sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens on behalf of the all-Black 54th Massachusetts regiment led by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw. Saint-Gaudens has been commissioned to create a monument depicting the African American recruits, but he ends up commemorating their white leader.[17] Clover's pictures get lost and the artist does not consider them worth the effort of searching. Moreover, Saint-Gaudens refuses the help of an African American Sergeant, Lewis Douglass, one of the survivors of the 54th regiment and a son of the African American intellectual and abolitionist Fredrick Douglass (162–63). Lewis's plea to Saint-Gaudens is that "[i]t is important to me that my comrades be depicted to a man, individually, and not as background to our beloved colonel" (162). It becomes clear to the reader that Saint-Gaudens has no intentions to honor this plea.

The sculptor is also provided with the late Colonel Shaw's saddle as a model for his memorial. While Clover is devastated by the loss of her pictures, calling them the "only memento of that time" with Alice (164), Saint-Gaudens takes the "utmost" care of the saddle, soaping and rubbing it "religiously" (171). When his design of the memorial is ready, Saint-Gaudens describes it as follows:

> I have limited the design of the piece of portraits of sixteen soldiers, Negroes all, of course, in low relief, bayonets pointing up, marching in front and behind the Colonel, in much higher relief, on horseback. (171)

Free Enterprise highlights that national commemorative art is often unable to remember the actions of the Other. By reimagining the story behind Saint-Gaudens's Civil War Memorial, the novel practices activist memory politics: the legacies of both the Buffalo Soldiers and the feminist photographer Marian "Clover" Adams intersectionalize the institutionalized remembrance of the Civil War.

Conclusion: An Intersectional Sense of the Past as Memory Activism

Free Enterprise offers an intersectional rewriting of the history of slavery and the US Civil War by

highlighting the rebellious acts of people belonging to minorities behind and around the stories of figures such as John Brown, General Custer, and Colonel Shaw. Oral histories, letters, and retold founding narratives such as the "landing scene" highlight the co-existence of different versions of cultural memory. The novel's memory activism "resists the historical amnesia" of subaltern subjects (Rich 136) and offers a basis for a sense of community to those oppressed in different ways. The novel can be read as an instance of intersectional memory activism, inviting readers, as Red Chidgey argues, "to question to the historical roots on which identity and recognition claims are being made" (68)—a task more important than ever in the current cultural and political field of the United States.

As the narrator of *Free Enterprise* concludes, "when the smoke cleared the name officially attached to the deed was John Brown. Who has ever heard of Annie Christmas, Mary Shadd Carey, Mary Ellen Pleasant?" (16). Later, Annie compares an intersectional sense of history to a large tapestry:

> Our historical moment was lost, so our tapestry is dissembled. Oh, it exists piece by piece. Some pieces have been buried with those who have passed on. Some are forgotten, misplaced. Some may line jewelry boxes, gather dust in attics, be used as shoeshine rags. Who knows? (192)

Cliff's novel initiates a process of memory activism that challenges institutionalized US cultural memory. Returning to Stuart Hall's argument concerning cultural identities as products of the different ways we are positioned by the narratives of the past, I suggest that the novel's intersectional retelling enables, for its part, more diverse cultural identities. In the novel silenced, othered historical actions are reimagined in order to be re-membered: John Brown's raid is funded by Mary Ellen, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens's war memorial is based on Clover's pictures. The people in Carville form a transnational community, Rachel lives with the Maroons, Clover gets acquainted with the Buffalo Soldiers, an ex-slave woman witnesses Lincoln's assassination, the Native American Quasheba provides guns for fugitives, and the queer Captain Parsons smuggles Caribbean runaway slaves. The narration practices activist memory politics by rewriting US history in an intersectional mode.

Notes

1. Both John Brown and Mary Ellen Pleasant are historically known as operators of the Underground Railroad. It is suspected that Mary Ellen's hotel was a secret safe house in the railroad system. For more on Pleasant's biography, see Johnson.

2. John Brown (1800–59) was an American abolitionist who committed himself to ending slavery. He attempted to lead a raid on the federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, to arm slaves. The raid, however, was unsuccessful, and several pro-slavery southerners were killed. Brown was captured and executed by hanging on December 2, 1859. It is commonly agreed that the events at Harpers Ferry escalated the conflicts that later led to the secession that started the Civil War.

3. Merrill and Rigney define the interplay between 1. memory activism, 2. memory of activism, and 3. memory in activism. For them, the first instance means "the struggle to produce cultural memory and steer future remembrance" (998). To apply their definition, the first instance is Cliff's own radical writing, while the second instance, *memory of activism*, constitutes the narratives in the novel, and the third instance, memory in activism is the reader's interpretation for activist purposes.

4. Carville, Louisiana, was one of the two facilities treating Hansen's disease in the US from 1894 onwards. Much important medical research was conducted there, contributing to the understanding and identification of leprosy. However, the leper colony of Carville also employed some unethical practices, which are dealt with in the novel. The Carville facility was not closed until 1999. Today the facility is a museum.

5. For more on intersectionality's provenance, see Collins and Bilge; May; and Ilmonen, "Feminist."

6. According to Sheller, "the feisty female slave was commonly caricatured in Jamaican publications in the early nineteenth century with a character named 'Quasheba' who was known as an independent and outspoken trouble-maker" (91). Sheller argues that even though Quasheba's caricature includes aspects of racist parody, her character has also been a symbol of resistance for women of color.

7. According to classical mythology, the skilled craftsman Daedalus fabricated wings for himself and his son Icarus so that they could flee from imprisonment on Crete Island, where they were held by King Minos. Insightfully, Bénédict Lédént connects the ship to James Joyce's novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and its protagonist Stephen Dedalus, who declares on the last page of the novel, "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (87n5). Cliff's intertexts and subtexts, too, are transnational and multivoiced, highlighting that the novel's structure itself can be intersectional. For more on intersectionality in the novel's structure, see Ilmonen, *Intersectionality*.

8. Many studies of African American literature have addressed the tradition of racism in the history of Western medicine drawing on nineteenth-century "scientific" categorizations of race (see e.g., Gilman). White skin signified health, hygiene, and sanity while darker skin referred to sickness, dirt, and irrationality.

9. Alliances exceed chronology as Cliff's narration recomposes time in her rewritten cultural memory. For example, Mary Ellen meets a mysterious "hologrammatical man" whose "unborn eyes" have "herself reflected in them" (76). It turns out that this man is Malcolm X, a famous civil rights activist of the 1960s. Moreover, Annie, whose connections to Jewish culture are clear, refers to the motto *Arbeit macht frei*, which, decades later, came to symbolize the Holocaust (202).

10. Marranos are Sephardic Jews from the Iberian area (also known as "hidden Jews"), who were forced to hide their ethnicity and convert to Christianity while secretly preserving their own faith. Some Marranos are known to have travelled to the New World. The diaspora of Jews is often juxtaposed with the Caribbean diaspora in Cliff's fiction. For more on Judaism in Cliff's fiction, see Phillips Casteel.

11. In feminist studies of literature, the trope of a woman kept in an attic has become a metaphor of mental unbalance. The metaphor often includes the

idea of denying one's true identity or the distortion of one's identity process. For more on the "mad woman in the attic," see Gilbert and Gubar.

12. The kingdom of Dahomey ruled in modern-day Benin for about three hundred years from the seventeenth century onwards. The kingdom was known for its all-female army of Amazons.

13. Both Caribs (Kalinas) and Arawaks (Tainos) are considered Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean area.

14. This phrase comes from Barbara Edlmair, who uses it to refer Cliff's way of complementing written history with nature's archaeological history. For more on Cliff's way of dialogizing between several modes of history, see Ilmonen, *Intersectionality* 43–82.

15. For more on capitalism and the representation of art in *Free Enterprise*, see Ilmonen, *Intersectionality* 76–82.

16. The nickname given to Native American troops fighting in the Civil War. Later it became a name for all-Black regiments in the US army. The name is sometimes used as a generic term for all African American soldiers.

17. Both Saint-Gaudens and the memorial known as the Shaw Memorial are among the novel's historical facts.

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Mindless Consumption or Hopeful Anarchy?

1980s Slasher Cinema Goes to the Mall

ABSTRACT: This article investigates the formal and thematic significance of the mall in two 1980s slasher films: *Chopping Mall* (1986) and *Phantom of the Mall: Eric's Revenge* (1989). It first reads *Chopping Mall*'s story of young adults stalked and killed by security robots inside a mall as centering on a coalescence between "law and order" conservatism, corporate capitalism, and military power in the Reagan era. Although it is critical of this particular coalescence, however, the film does not reject capitalism, but presents the mall as embodying a potentially emancipatory synthesis of youth culture and consumerist capitalism. *Phantom of the Mall* conversely presents an image of the mall as a place of manipulation and control, embodying a corrupt collusion between political power and capital. While the film suggests that this collusion is particularly dangerous to youth, however, its reliance on a highly gendered damsel-in-distress narrative entails that its critical impulses are tempered by a reassertion of cultural conservatism.

Keywords: horror; youth culture; consumerism; capitalism; *Chopping Mall*; *Phantom of the Mall*

INTRODUCTION

Among the plethora of icons that make up the landscape of 1980s North American popular culture, there is perhaps none more easily associated with the excesses and absurdities of late-capitalist consumer society than that of the mall. Following the rapid expansion of suburban populations, and an increased cultural emphasis on consumer spending, the mall became central to the reconfiguration of America's commercial landscape in the 1950s (Cohen 257). Understood by many as embodying a new synthesis of commerce and community, it emerged not only as a symbol of prosperity and progress, but as "the distinctive public space of the postwar period" (Cohen 274). Over time, however, this image faltered and a less favorable one emerged (Cohen 274–78). By the time the mall became a staple of mainstream cinema in the 1980s—featuring prominently in youth-oriented box-office hits such as *Fast Times at Richmond High* (Heckerling, 1982), *Valley Girl* (Coolidge, 1983) and *Weird Science* (Hughes, 1985)—it was frequently an object not only of criticism, but of outright derision, viewed by many as "a reference point for everything wrong in American society" (Howard and Stobart 21).

As a place of mindless consumption, the mall arguably finds its most dystopian cinematic manifestation in the highly influential *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978) and the figure of the mall-zombie, forced by base unconscious desire to consume without end or agency (Harper). Reading the mall as a manifestation of excessive consumerism, however, seems almost too easy, and as Bailey points out, there is a different reading possible, even in Romero's darkly grotesque satire. Although it is no doubt presented as a place of conspicuous consumption, *Dawn of the Dead* also suggests that the mall contains some sense of shared purpose for those once-humans who return to it, and the film's critical stance is thus tempered by the articulation of "a more culturally complex position" from which the mall can be understood as "imbued with personal and social meaning" (Bailey 102).

Writing of the mall more generally, Backes suggests that it holds so central a place in the American imaginary precisely because of its curious double nature as simultaneously a reification of crass consumerism *and* a place addressing a real need for freedom: "[m]alls, for all the calculations of their designs, for all the goals of consumption and profits, are reappropriated by visitors into resistant and generative practices far different from the intention and purpose of the space" (5). As visitors thus "reappropriate the space to satisfy their own purposes in contemporary life," the mall comes to represent "the creation of personal narratives through new forms" (5). Backes thus ultimately argues that malls afford a form of *dislocation* that constitutes not a loss of self to a system of manipulation, but rather a playful release from the strictures of the reigning societal order. Malls in this way give visitors the chance "to invent their own reality, their own history, their own culture, their own future" (12–13). By allowing visitors to "mingle with the culture's iconography," they make possible new modes of experience and forms of thought that can potentially constitute "vivid disruptions of systemic order . . . that create a hopeful anarchy" (14).

In *Reading the Popular* (1997), Fiske similarly confronts two diametrically opposed understandings of the mall. Expressed in metaphorical terms, the mall is both a cathedral in which consumerism constitutes a new religion, as well as "the terrain of guerilla warfare" wherein cultural struggles consistently play out (Fiske 14). Arguing that the mall-as-cathedral metaphor is misleading, however, since it fails to encompass the struggles being fought and the forms of resistance possible, Fiske ultimately suggests that "[s]hopping malls are where the strategy of the

powerful is most vulnerable to the tactical raids of the weak" (18).

Building on this ambivalent understanding of the mall—as a place of both mindless consumption and hopeful anarchy; of religious devotion to consumerism and ideological guerilla warfare—this article investigates two 1980s slasher films featuring malls as central settings: *Chopping Mall* (Wynorski, 1986), and *Phantom of the Mall: Eric's Revenge* (Friedman, 1989).[1] Playing on the title of Fiske's influential book, it explores how these films "read" the mall and discusses the significance of these "readings" in relation to their main thematic interests and concerns. The fact that both films feature young adult protagonists, moreover, is central, and the article focuses to a significant degree on the question of how the films represent the relationship between youth and the malls in which their narratives unfold. A working hypothesis is that the malls in these films can be understood as symbolic representatives (and as literal concretizations) of capitalist popular culture, and that the films in this sense constitute vantage points from which to explore the complicated relationships between youth, popular culture and capitalism in 1980s North America.

Fiske's discussion of youth in relation to the mall is of particular relevance. Although he concentrates primarily on questions concerning gender, arguing that shopping can function as a form of resistance to patriarchy, his discussion of youth foregrounds the mall as a place wherein the continual struggle between youth and the reigning societal order manifests itself with particular intensity. Fiske largely sees this struggle as embodying the possibility of resistance, as he describes the mall as a place in which youths consume "images and space instead of commodities," thereby "asserting their difference within, and different use of, the cathedral of consumerism" (Fiske, *Reading* 17). As youths in this manner exploit their knowledge of the system in order to resist subjugation by it, they successfully instantiate a form of "oppositional cultural practice" (17). Viewing youth as appropriating the mall itself in order to establish a form of resistance to capitalist authority, Fiske's discussion of youth thus strongly emphasizes its capacity for challenging cultural hegemony.[2]

In contrast to this image of youth culture, however, others have characterized the mall's relationship to capitalism in more ambiguous terms. Among others, Frank (89–130) argues that youth culture has been a central engine of capitalist consumption since at least the 1960s, not only because of the expansion of the youth demographic that took place at the time, but because youth itself was discursively constructed as a highly desirable identity position to which consumption was key. As Frank suggests, youth in this period "became a consuming position to which all could aspire" (25), and the ideal of youth became a dominant cultural determinant (118). Rather than being defined by age, youth was conceptualized as a feeling, and the experience of "*youthfulness*," writes Frank, "became as great an element of the marketing picture as youth itself" (25; emphasis in the original). Moreover, the business class harnessed the transgressive impulses of the period's youth-oriented counterculture movements as catalysts of consumption, and in so doing cultivated a particular image of youth as characterized by change, creativity, and transgression as a method of driving up consumption (Frank 27). A new form of youth-oriented consumer capitalism thus emerged in the 1960s, as youth culture effectively became an engine of capitalism's expansion.

Much like the mall, youth culture has thus been subject to varying interpretations. While discussing which interpretation is the more accurate in historical terms falls outside the scope of this article, I will use these contrasting images as an

analytical framework through which to explore the representations of capitalism and youth culture in the films. Undertaking such an exploration within the limited context of the slasher film, furthermore, is particularly interesting because the genre's transition from exploitation subculture to mainstream popularity in the 1980s was closely connected to its increasingly insistent appeal to youth audiences.[3] Insofar as the slasher film's mainstream breakthrough was specifically as a youth genre, therefore, its representations of youth—and more generally its ways of speaking to and about youth—are fertile ground for exploring the role of youth within the context of capitalist popular culture more generally.

Chopping Mall (1986)

Adding more than a pinch of science fiction to the traditional slasher recipe, *Chopping Mall* replaces silent, knife-wielding assailants stalking suburban streets and summer camps with high-tech security robots run amok inside a mall. Although previous research—sparse as it is—has understood it primarily as a scathing critique of capitalism, this article argues that the rich satiric undercurrent beneath the film's overtly absurd premise centers more narrowly on a particular historical configuration of political, social, and cultural relations. Rather than an attack on capitalism, or capitalist modernity writ large, as Mann, for instance, argues, *Chopping Mall*'s primary target of criticism is the "law and order" conservatism of the Reagan era and its coalescence not only with corporate capitalism, but with a morally suspect idealization of military power. If *Chopping Mall* attacks anything, therefore, it is not capitalism per se, but rather a particular reconfiguration of the relations between political, economic, and military power.

At the time of the film's theatrical release in 1986, the United States had seen a steady expansion of criminal justice primarily centered on the "law and order" ideology of the so-called New Right, which the Reagan administration heavily endorsed and implemented (Platt 66). Emphasizing tougher punishments and an expansion of police and judicial power, the politics of "law and order" not only dominated political discourses about crime in the 1980s (Platt 67), but the policies implemented by the Reagan administration quickly transformed it into "a growth industry" (Platt 62). One of the key developments resulting from this was a massive expansion of privatized policing, security, and surveillance (Platt 62), as well as the continued growth of a police-industrial complex built upon the appropriation of military technology developed for overseas warfare for the purposes of applying it to "the problems of domestic 'order' in the U.S." (59). At both state and federal levels, the criminal justice system was thus reorganized around a "'military-corporate' model that emphasized technology (in weaponry, communications, and information systems), specialization, and managerial techniques of 'command and control'" (Platt 59).

Chopping Mall's murderous robots serve as both symbolic representatives and literal embodiments of this coalescence of "law and order" conservatism, corporate capitalism, and military power. One the one hand, they are commodities, designed, manufactured, and marketed to mall owners wishing to safeguard their businesses. On the other hand, their capacity for violence (as well as their visual appearance) clearly marks them as weapons of war.[4] Featuring taser, laser, and tranquilizer guns, as well as a set of powerful pincers and explosives deployment and detonation capabilities, they are designed to patrol the mall in order to ensure through violence the free flow of capital against any disruptions. Insofar as their capacity for violence thus makes possible their commodification in the first place, the robots ultimately embody the commodification of violence itself.

An exposition-centered prologue featuring representatives from the ironically named company Secure-Tronics briefing a group of storeowners about the new robots clearly signals the potential dangers of this particular process. After watching a promotional video in which one of the robots uses extreme violence to foil a jewelry theft, the storeowners are left more than merely perplexed. "What do your machines do? Besides killing criminals?" one of them worriedly asks. When told that the robots do not kill but merely detain people, another responds with disbelief: "I don't know. That guy looked awfully dead to me." In words rendered thoroughly ironic by subsequent events, a Secure-Tronics representative rejects all concerns: "The system is foolproof," he adamantly states. "Absolutely nothing can go wrong."

When lightning strikes the mall, of course, everything goes wrong, as the robots' programming to eliminate any threat to the free flow of capital is set at a hyperbolic pitch, superseding any other concerns and ultimately resulting in the elimination of everyone getting in their way, as well as in the destruction of large sections of the mall itself. As their "law and order" programming in this way becomes antithetical to their intended purpose, *Chopping Mall*'s robots come to embody not only a form of regressive conservatism, but a self-destructive militarization of capitalism itself, effectively tracing the complete short-circuiting not merely of the robots, but of the ideological paradigm they represent.

Caught in the middle are the film's main protagonists, a group of six early-twenties youths partying and hanging out in the mall after opening hours. Suddenly finding themselves in the robots' crosshairs, they are forced to defend themselves by any means necessary. Making use of various commodities sold in the mall, they engage the robots not only with automatic assault rifles, shotguns, and handguns, but with a range of improvised explosive devices made with propane tanks and gasoline canisters in what is essentially a very literal and hyper-violent version of Fiske's metaphorical "guerilla warfare." In order better to understand the significance of this war, however, it is necessary to investigate in further detail not only the young protagonists, but also the mall itself. Key in this regard is the opening credit sequence, which sets the stage for the film's reading of the mall and its relationship to youth culture. It begins with a succession of low-angle wide shots of the exterior and interior of the mall, emphasizing its tremendous size in a manner gesturing strongly toward the mall-as-cathedral metaphor. Following these shots come a variety of crosscut sequences focused on various patrons of the mall. Although a subset of these gestures toward momentary experiences of stress and frustration, the credit sequence predominantly revolves around playfulness and pleasure, generally depicting the mall as a place of freedom and community. Central in this regard is a pronounced focus on the dynamics of adults and children, establishing the mall as a space wherein the traditional distinction between these two identity categories is undone. One sequence, for instance, features an older couple observing a pair of teenagers kissing on a bench. Seemingly encouraged by this youthful display of physical affection, they soon begin kissing as well. Another example features a boy and his father arguing over who gets to play a videogame in the mall arcade, as another male adult exploits their distraction to jump the line and begin playing himself.

Recalling Backes's noting of dislocation, the opening credit sequence in this way depicts the mall as a place centered on a kind of playful release from the rules of adult authority. Even the consumerist imperative is here somewhat sidelined, as many of the people portrayed are not necessarily partaking in any form of consumption, but are merely enjoying themselves. One telling scene depicts a teenager none-too-subtly stealing a vinyl record from a music store by

smuggling it out under his shirt. Clearly comedic in tone, the scene suggests that within the context of the mall, such seemingly anti-consumerist behavior does not constitute a serious moral crime, but is rather a form of harmless youthful transgression.

Even allowing for a slight note of irony undercutting the celebratory tone, the sequence still presents an overwhelmingly positive image of mall life, and the moments of frustration and stress intermittently suggesting a sense of irony all relate specifically to adults struggling to fit in and keep up. Although it is ironic to some extent, therefore, the scene predominantly directs its ironic impulses not toward mall life as such, but rather toward out-of-place adults. Although some shades of grey do exist, therefore, the mall is depicted as a place of playful freedom and pleasure, wherein youth culture—not capitalist consumerism—reigns supreme. Indeed, the opening credit sequence presents the dissolution of existing hierarchies and distinctions in a distinctly celebratory fashion, and thus ultimately codes as positive the kind of playful transgressions on display.

Strengthening further this reading of the mall is the film's portrayal of its main young adult characters. Although most of them work in the mall, it is not primarily a place of business to them, but rather a place for socializing and maintaining friendships, and thus for establishing a community and building an identity. A scene introducing the film's main protagonist, Allison, and her friend Suzie clearly illustrates this. Although they are in the middle of working as waiters in an Italian restaurant, with an increasingly irate boss barking orders at them, they are focused primarily on their own conversation regarding a party planned for later that night. Although they are ostensibly presented as workers within the capitalist space of the mall, their youth identity allows them to resist this hierarchical class position, as work becomes a kind of distraction from what is really important and meaningful. In a similar manner, the introduction of the characters Greg, Mike, and Ferdy, who all work together in a furniture store, also suggests their priorities. When Ferdy interrupts the planning of the coming party because he cannot locate a fuchsia-patterned drape for an elderly customer, Greg's response is unmistakable: "It's Friday! Fuck the fuchsias! Tell the old bag to wait!" Rather than a place centered on the exchange of services and commodities for money, the young protagonists understand and use the mall primarily as a place for leisure activities. Their status as workers seems to matter very little as their youthful disregard for the rules governing the cultural economy in which they participate effectively effaces any notion of class difference or subjugation. Revolving largely around hanging out and having fun, moreover, their party is arguably the most obvious example of how the consumerist spaces of the mall are appropriated by a youth culture not necessarily interested in consumption. Instead, the mall is a foundationally social place wherein the building of a community becomes possible. It is not a manipulative engine of consumerist desire or worker exploitation, but rather a place in which young people can fashion a community of meaning, forming new identities through play and pleasure.

In this manner *Chopping Mall* establishes a kind of symbiotic relationship between the consumerist spaces of the mall and contemporary youth culture. Working as a metonymy of American capitalist consumer society, the mall arguably represents a version thereof wholly centered on the playful and creative transgressions of youth. This is further emphasized by the fact that the only two young adults not employed at the mall, newlyweds Rick and Leslie, are business owners who have used their wedding money to start an auto repair shop. Their first on-screen appearance is in the mall parking lot, where they are having trouble with their car. When Rick fails to

fix the car, Leslie steps in and does it instead, signaling not only that youth culture is not entirely beholden to the gendered norms of the adult community, but also that their business is centered around their personal talents and interests, rather than being purely transactional.

Hardly representatives of anti-capitalist sentiments, all of the young protagonists in *Chopping Mall* thus embody a creative and productive coalescence of capitalism and youth culture through which the differences between consumption, work, and capital are essentially dissolved. Rather than offering a class-conscious critique of capitalism in general, as Mann has argued, *Chopping Mall* presents two opposing versions of capitalism in order to disavow one while championing the other. In general terms, it juxtaposes a form of consumer capitalism in which the marketplace is driven by the demands, interests, and creative impulses of youth culture with a form of corporate capitalism in which the marketplace is instead dominated by corporations ideologically aligned with a culturally and socially regressive "law and order" conservatism. It is decidedly not the case, as Taylor argues in her brief mention of the film, that the mall is a place of "cleverly masked horror and unseen violence" with the robots working to reveal "the real horrors and carnage of consumption" (320). Instead, the robots function as a kind of invasion by "law and order" conservatism of the ideal capitalist space of the mall.

As both an allegorical and a literal confrontation between two ideological paradigms, the violent battle between the robots and the young adults is one of the key ways *Chopping Mall* articulates its rejection of Regan-era conservatism while simultaneously championing youth-oriented consumer capitalism. Because of this, it is worth exploring in further detail the characteristics of the violence through which it unfolds. When first confronted by the robots, whose all-out laser-attack almost completely disintegrates the furniture store in which the party is being held, the young adults attempt to avoid violence by escaping the mall. Realizing that new security doors installed at all exits make this impossible, however, they opt for direct confrontation with weapons and explosives. This proves less than successful, however, and ultimately results in Suzie burning to death when a Molotov cocktail devised by Leslie is blown up by one of the robots. Following this tragedy, they successfully set a trap for one of the robots by luring it into an elevator and then blowing it up with propane tanks. When their subsequent attempt to sabotage the main computer controlling the robots results in Greg's death, however, they once again attempt to avoid violent confrontation by hiding and waiting to be rescued. It does not take long, however, before the robots flush them out. Once again forced into a confrontation, they try a strategy of deception, setting a trap using an array of store mannequins and mirrors in order to confuse the robots. Although this does result in the destruction of another robot, both Rick and Linda die in the process. Following Ferdy's incapacitation, Allison is then ultimately left to confront the last remaining robot on her own. She defeats it by once again employing a form of deception, luring the robot into a paint shop and then blowing it up by igniting copious amounts of paint thinner with an emergency flare.

In this manner *Chopping Mall* depicts two diametrically opposed types of violence. While the robots' militarized violence ultimately serves to enforce a radically destructive "law and order" ideology detrimental to human society, the violence perpetrated by the young community is instead portrayed as emancipatory, that is, as being in the defense of human freedom. Centrally, the young adults consistently fail when they attempt to mirror the robots' violence, but conversely they succeed to some degree (but not necessarily without cost) by thinking creatively. More specifically, their particular form of

creativity here revolves around appropriating the artefacts and spaces of consumerist capitalism. If the mall is a carefully designed machine ultimately geared towards the facilitation of consumption, *Chopping Mall*'s young adults creatively repurpose a variety of its moving parts for their own emancipatory purposes. In metaphorical terms, therefore, their battle against the robots implicitly traces a confrontation between a destructive and regressive "law and order" ideology, on the one hand, and a creative, adaptive, and ultimately emancipatory appropriation of the material manifestations of consumer capitalism, on the other.

Arguably, this might constitute a form of what Fiske calls "excorporation," meaning, "the process by which the powerless steal elements of the dominant culture and use them in their own, often oppositional or subversive interests" ("The Popular" 510). It is worth noting, however, that their creativity does not rely on a rejection of capitalism, but rather on the creative use of its material manifestations. Ultimately, therefore, the young adults embody a creative coalescence between the transgressive creativity of youth culture and capitalism, and *Chopping Mall* in this way further strengthens the moral superiority of the youth community and its implicit alliance with consumer capitalism. Indeed, the film offers not merely a coalescence of youth and capitalism, but presents the latter as a naturalized extension of human creativity.

Although it is critical of the particular form of corporate capitalism dominant in the Reagan era, therefore, *Chopping Mall* does not offer an anti-capitalist alternative or attempt to imagine any possible modes of existence or experience outside capitalism. Instead, it rejects as morally corrupt one particular form of capitalism in order to affirm and naturalize another. Rather than being an anti-capitalist parable, therefore, *Chopping Mall* is a profoundly pro-capitalist parable whose rejection of the coalition between corporate capitalism, regressive conservatism, and military power dominant in the Reagan era serves as the foundation for its primary strategy of ideological interpellation, namely the complete colonization by capitalism of youth culture. *Chopping Mall*'s critical impulses, therefore, do not mark it as significantly aberrant from Andrew Britton's famous notion of "Reaganite entertainment." Although it resists the effacement of cultural engagement and the affirmation of militarized patriarchy ascribed by Britton to that particular cinematic movement, *Chopping Mall*'s critique of the coalescence of political power and cultural conservatism only constitutes a slight readjustment of the terms of its ideological commitments. Indeed, *Chopping Mall*'s insistence on the primacy of capitalist consumption as a natural extension of human creativity ultimately works to "recoup a longing for change and transformation in the interest of the status quo" (140).

Chopping Mall tellingly ends with an ascending wide shot of Allison and Ferdy embracing joyously in the mall atrium as the morning sun casts beams of light down upon them, suggesting not only that the symbiosis between youth culture and capitalism has been successfully reinstated as the reigning societal order, but even implying a sense of transcendence. With the two having engaged the robots in a dialectical struggle between antithetical ideological orders, the stage is now set for the ascendancy of the winner. Indeed, as the mall once again becomes a celebrated cathedral of consumerism with youth at its center, it seems almost as if the camera itself, and by extension the film's authorial system, becomes an engine of its ascendance. The final shot thus inscribes not only the film's idealization of youth-oriented consumer capitalism, but also its mode of ideological interpellation.

***Phantom of the Mall: Eric's Revenge* (1989)**

As its title suggests, *Phantom of the Mall: Eric's Revenge* is based (very loosely) on Gaston Leroux's worldwide bestselling novel *Le Fantôme de l'Opera* (1910). Instead of a nineteenth-century opera house, however, its titular character stalks a newly opened twentieth-century suburban mall, seeking revenge on the cynical real estate developers and corrupt politicians who burned down his childhood home, killed his parents, and left him for dead in order to build said mall. Despite severe facial burns, he still hopes to regain the affections of his former girlfriend, Melody, whose life he saved in the fire. She now works in the mall, and, like everyone else, she has no idea that Eric is still alive, nor does she know that the mall's owner and general manager, as well as the town mayor, are ultimately responsible for his tragic fate. As Eric begins exacting his bloody revenge, however, Melody and her friends soon come to suspect not only that Eric may still be alive, but that something sinister lurks behind the glittering glamour of the mall itself.

As this plot outline may suggest, *Phantom of the Mall* presents a much more ambivalent reading of the mall than the one found in *Chopping Mall*. Whereas the latter film idealized the mall as embodying a creative coalescence of youth culture and consumer capitalism, marred by the violently militarized "law and order" ideology of the murderous robots, *Phantom of the Mall* instead confronts the viewer with a bleaker reading of the mall as a place of calculated manipulation and control. Despite the fact that its production and release occurred at a time when the "law and order" ideology of the New Right arguably became even more politically prominent with the George H. W. Bush administration (Rostron 386–87), the film is not really interested in this particular historical discourse, nor in its political implications. Unlike *Chopping Mall*'s attack on a historically specific configuration of relations and discourses, therefore, *Phantom of the Mall*'s thematic interests concern anxieties related to capitalist modernity more generally, and its reading of the mall centers primarily on a morally corrupt collusion between capital and political power.

A key component of the film's more pessimistic reading of the mall is that its plot revolves around a conflict not between a young community and a violent killer, but rather between a young community, of which the killer is tangentially a member, and a corrupt and repressive system of power both metaphorically and literally embodied in the mall. Besides refashioning some of the basic narrative features of the traditional slasher formula, much of the film's camerawork also serves to underscore the ambivalent characteristics of the mall. Generally avoiding the metaphorical mall-as-cathedral imagery so prominent in *Chopping Mall*'s opening credit sequence, *Phantom of the Mall* predominantly places the visual splendor of the mall in the background, often imbuing even its more expansive spaces with a sense of confinement and restriction. Throughout the film, there is a pronounced absence of panning or tracking wide shots, and the mall is most often shown in static medium-wide shots of individual stores or floors. Both the architectural features of the mall as well as the cinematic frame itself are in this way used to create a sense of restriction and stasis. Instead of the expansive and open spaces typically associated with mall design, there is something distinctly constrictive and confined about the image of the mall established here. Rarely is the viewer given a real sense of its scope and scale. Even in one of the film's key action scenes, during which a mall security guard chases one of the young adult protagonists from the first floor down to the ground floor and across the atrium, there is a distinct lack of wide shots, with most shots being static or slightly panning medium wide shots. In a brief wide shot of the elevator descending toward the first floor,

half of the frame is tellingly obscured by a tree crowding the foreground, imbuing even this shot with a sense of restriction. Insofar as the film leans towards the traditional imagery of the mall-as-cathedral metaphor, which it does only very sparingly, it does so in a way that simultaneously obstructs it.

Consequently, the celebratory tone that dominated *Chopping Mall*'s image of youth-centered "mall life" is here largely absent, or, alternatively, is presented as a form of misdirection arbitrated by morally suspect characters. A clear example of this is the opening ceremony that follows the opening credit sequence. "We have finally succeeded in putting Midwood on the map!" says the mayor of the small town in which the mall has been built to a crowd of enthusiastic mall customers. "Today we have a new town center!" she continues. "We have new jobs!" Contrasted with these positive remarks, through which the mall is presented as a new place of community and prosperity, multiple shots from Eric's point of view instead foreground the mall as a place of foreboding darkness. Hiding in the complicated system of air ducts that regulate the mall's temperature, he secretly looks in through ventilation grids on the festivities from a space beyond the brightly lit avenues of consumption that make up the mall. Indeed, the only wide shot of the ceremony is from Eric's perspective, and is therefore obstructed by a ventilation grid.

If *Chopping Mall* began by presenting an idealized image of the mall, therefore, *Phantom of the Mall* instead begins by rendering this image more than tangentially suspect. Even more than its deconstruction of the traditional mall-as-cathedral imagery, this more ambivalent reading of the mall is articulated by the contrast between the ostensibly bright and rationalized spaces of consumer capitalism and the spaces beyond, as a significant part of the film's narrative unfolds not in the mall proper, but in the staff changing rooms and storage rooms, the ventilation ducts and airshafts, as well as other restricted areas where mall customers are not meant to venture, but which nevertheless underpin their consumerist activities. Here is where the Phantom primarily roams, moving unseen through the mall's "backstage" spaces in order to stalk and kill his victims while intermittently placing explosives at key points as part of his ultimate plan to blow up the mall. Much in keeping with its literary origins, the mall is here at least partly if not predominantly presented as a dark and labyrinthine space, a Gothic space rather than the carefully designed and rationalized space of consumption traditionally associated with mall design. Indeed, a central stylistic feature of the film is the coalescence of these two spaces, as one bleeds into the other with the Phantom functioning as an engine of their dissolution.

One of the key ways through which the film thus rejects the idealized image of the mall is by its inclusion of what mall design has historically worked to efface. In order to become a realm centered entirely on consumption, argues Friedberg, the mall must effectively "exile the realm of production from sight" (113). In this manner, the mall works through the careful exclusion of the social and political space in which it is situated. Friedberg writes,

> the mall is "imagineered" with maintenance and management techniques, keeping invisible the delivery bays or support systems, concealing the security guards and bouncers who control its entrances. The mall is a contemporary phantasmagoria, enforcing a blindness to a range of urban blights—the homeless, beggars, crime, traffic, even weather. . . . The mall creates a nostalgic image of the town center as a clean, safe, and legible place, but a peculiarly timeless place. (113)

In *Phantom of the Mall*, Eric ultimately comes to serve as an embodiment of all that is excluded

and repressed by the mall's consumerist spectacle, and his reign of terror ultimately works to bring it to the surface. A central feature of the film is its insistent transgression of the border between the visible and the invisible, and the revelation of the dark, manipulative forces beyond what is made readily available to perception in the mall proper. In both narrative and formal terms, particularly by way of its camerawork, *Phantom of the Mall* insistently rejects the phantasmagoric machinations of the mall as well as its production of ahistorical nostalgia. It insistently situates the mall within history, and Eric's revenge is in this sense a way of returning history and time to a place built upon its effacement.

Mirroring this more critical reading of the mall, *Phantom of the Mall* also rejects entirely the idealization of the youth-capitalism synthesis found in *Chopping Mall*, and consequently refashions the way in which the young characters relate to the mall itself. While the latter film celebrated the mall as an almost utopian space outside the rules of everyday life, providing both youths and adults with a form of escapist fun, *Phantom of the Mall* instead reveals this discourse of escapism as a cynical and insidious form of ideological manipulation. Returning to the previously mentioned ceremony opening the film, the mall owner and manager articulates a suspect combination of convenience and control by appealing directly to a specifically parental fantasy of escape: "Midwood, your time has come! No more shopping in the rain! No more trucking 45 miles to the Southern Mall! No thank you! No more 'Saturday night and where are my kids?'" He even emphasizes the final point by the addition of a faux sense of personal investment. "And on a personal note, as a beloved parent, it gives me great personal pleasure to share with you this, our wonderful mall!" Through these words, the film's primary antagonist presents the mall not only as a place of community and care, but also as a kind of haven within the town itself, protected not just from bad weather and traffic, but from the drudgery of everyday urban living—including the burden of parenting.

Much of the film's remaining narrative centers on the insistent unmasking of this illusion, as the mall is established as a place not just of manipulation and control, but of (often sexualized) exploitation wherein no one—particularly children and young adults—is safe. Revealed early on, for instance, is the fact that the mall security guards use the surveillance cameras to spy on women in the store changing rooms, among which are both Melody and her friend Suzie. Suzie is also sexually harassed not just by the mall owner's son, but also by one of the security guards. Even more seriously, Melody becomes the victim of an attempted rape in the mall parking lot, where she is attacked by a mysterious figure later revealed as a mall employee. And then there is the mall manager and owner himself, who not only cynically covers up the deaths of several guards and maintenance workers, but who is also perfectly willing to have Melody and her friends killed in order to safeguard his business. When it comes to murder, furthermore, a subset of the security guards is both directly and indirectly involved in either carrying it out or covering it up, further emphasizing the moral rot confronting the young adult protagonists. Even setting aside these examples of explicitly criminal behavior, the mall is still not a place to be trusted even in regard to is supposed function within a free market economy, as one of Melody's friends discovers subliminal messages hidden in the music playing at the mall encouraging consumption beyond means.

Wherever one looks, or listens, the mall is a place of dangerous and potentially deadly deceptions, embodying a wholly corrupted system that not only Eric, but all of the youths must ultimately resist. In order to understand the thematic significance of this conflict, however, it is necessary to investigate in further detail the particular

characteristics of Eric's revenge and the form it takes. As I discussed previously, *Chopping Mall*'s young protagonists defeat the robots through the creative appropriation of the material manifestations of capitalist culture. If their particular form of excorporation, however, was only partly subversive, Eric's is more foundationally so, as he performs a kind of creative and deadly appropriation not just of various commodities within the mall, but of other artefacts and features that are part of its daily operations. A security guard is killed with an arrow from a sporting goods store, for example, while a maintenance worker is killed by having his head pushed into a ventilation fan. In other instances, Eric utilizes a garbage disposal machine, an escalator, and a weed burner to kill his victims, and in what is the film's most overtly comedic moment, he kills the mall employee who attacked Melody with the help of a cobra stolen from a pet store. When he finally confronts the mayor, moreover, he throws her out of a fourth-floor window and down into the atrium, essentially utilizing the scale and scope of the mall itself as means of exacting his revenge. Incidentally, this is one of only three instances in which the film's camerawork clearly emphasizes the scale of the mall, tinging this traditionally idealizing imagery with a hint of irony that becomes quite literal when the mayor lands on a miniature model of the mall and is impaled on one of its towers.

Another significant example of Eric's method of excorporation is his use of the mall's surveillance cameras as a means of stalking his victims and keeping an eye on Melody. Having hacked into the security system, he has installed a large video wall using television monitors in his underground lair. Seemingly able to follow any action anywhere inside the mall, these technological extensions make him almost omnipresent. Careful consideration of much of the imagery seen on these monitors, furthermore, even suggests that a large portion of the footage has been obtained not with mounted surveillance cameras, but with a handheld camera. Although this might be written off as some kind of production misstep, or alternatively have been done for comedic purposes, it also implicitly underscores the camera's function as an extension of Eric's point of view. He *is* the camera in these instances, which suggests a dissolution of distinction between Eric himself and the mall surveillance system. In this manner, Eric's revenge is realized by way of a series of creative appropriations of various commodities and artefacts integral to the daily operations of the mall, and by extension to the operations of consumer capitalism. This particular modus operandi is clearly signaled even in the film's opening scenes, which depict Eric fashioning the Phantom's trademark mask out of a store mannequin's face.

Although it is subversive to some degree, however, Eric's violence is ultimately established as morally suspect. While his murders of various mall security guards and employees are legitimized to some extent by the film's portrayal of them as wholly corrupt, and even as perpetrators of sexualized violence, his murder of a seemingly innocent maintenance worker is more than a little questionable. Most obviously, however, Eric's endeavor to protect Melody from harm is ultimately rendered morally suspect through his inability to accept her choice not to resume their romantic relationship. It is made clear that Eric wants primarily to possess and control Melody, and he becomes angry when she rejects his advances, vowing to kill both himself and her in the planned explosion. If the mall, and by extension consumer capitalism, is especially dangerous to young women, which the film clearly suggests, Eric seems decidedly unable to resist, but rather reproduces and affirms this particular cultural logic, and his strategy of appropriation therefore becomes a means of control and violence rather than of emancipation. As such, the film not only calls attention to the larger cultural problem of sexualized violence against women, but also suggests its amorphous

and ubiquitous nature, as it is perpetrated not only by the amoral and/or indifferent adherents to a system of capitalist exploitation, but also by those whose actions may ostensibly appear as heroic emancipation.

Ultimately, therefore, Melody's friends must rescue her from Eric before they can expose the rot and corruption of the mall itself. Interestingly, they do so by mimicking his strategy of appropriation when they trick their way into the mall security office and use the surveillance cameras to locate Melody and Eric. Even before this incident, a similar pattern is evident when the characters Peter and Buzz use the surveillance cameras to identify one of the mall security guards as being responsible for burning down Eric's home. Peter is generally established as the primary catalyst of resistance, and as a particularly central character in regard to the foregrounding of emancipatory forms of resistance linked to visual technologies otherwise associated with control and dominance. Unlike the other young adult protagonists, Peter is not employed at the mall, but works as a journalist for a local newspaper. When he is first introduced, he appears predominantly to be a mouthpiece for the mayor, taking pictures of her public appearances and thus participating in her calculated image-production. As the narrative progresses, however, he becomes instrumental in exposing the criminal behavior of both the mayor and the mall manager, and is established as a symbolic representative of a form of critical journalism serving to hold political power and capital responsible to the public. In a telling scene, Peter covertly follows a security guard in an attempt to ascertain his identity, photographing him with the help of a ceiling-mounted security mirror, literally turning the mall's system of surveillance into an extension of the camera's investigatory gaze. Another scene sees him blinding one of the villains with the camera's flash in order to enable himself and Melody to escape danger. In general, his use of photography to resist the dangerous forces of the mall and uncover the crimes of the past is a central engine of narrative progression. In this manner, he arguably represents a form of critical image production with which the film's authorial system implicitly aligns itself.

If the robots in *Chopping Mall* represented a morally suspect utilization of technology, Peter's use of photography in *Phantom of the Mall* conversely represent its opposite, that is, a use of technology that is ultimately emancipatory. Contrasted with Eric's morally suspect strategy of excorporation, Peter's use of photography is established a superior method of resistance to the corrupt collusion of capital and political power. Eric's strategy of excorporation is thus rendered morally suspect and contrasted with a more legitimate and emancipatory form of resistance embodied in the other young adult characters. Both, however, essentially rely on the same strategy of resistance through the creative reappropriation of the spaces and commodities of consumerism.

Phantom of the Mall thus rejects entirely *Chopping Mall*'s idealized image of a union between capitalism and youth culture, instead suggesting that youth culture needs to resist capitalism and its dangerous machinations through its own forms of emancipatory creativity. Whereas *Chopping Mall*'s idealization of the union between youth culture and capitalism entails the effacement of class difference, furthermore, *Phantom of the Mall* not only explicates but expands upon this theme. As Fhlainn argues, many 1980s slasher films explored class issues via their depictions of lower- or working-class killers stalking and attacking middle-class teenagers, essentially centering their narratives on the violent consequences of the disenfranchisement of the working class. *Phantom of the Mall*, however, offers a killer victimized despite his middle-class background, suggesting that even the privileged members of the middle class—who otherwise

might be expected to survive and perhaps even thrive in a capitalist consumer economy—can easily become the victims of the corrupt collusion between capital and politics.

Thus even while it has a more critical view of capitalist modernity in general, suggesting a separation of political and capital power as foundational to human freedom, its critical impulses are at least somewhat undermined by its reliance on the highly gendered damsel-in-distress narrative to which it ultimately reverts. As the film ends with the mall exploding and the four young protagonists contemplating the rubble, Melody remarks: "I guess Eric finally got what he wanted." Peter smiles and kisses her. "But I got something better. I got you." With a final shot that lingers on the seemingly dead Eric laying in the ruins of the mall, the film foregrounds the dire consequences of a struggle for freedom that affirms rather than rejects the violence of the reigning ideological order. It simultaneously suggests, however, that the emancipation rendered possible through resistance is ultimately meaningful not because it serves a community, but because it makes possible the romantic union between the triumphant hero and the rescued damsel. Rather than suggesting a sense of "hopeful anarchy," therefore, *Phantom of the Mall* ultimately tempers its critique of capitalism with the reaffirmation of a highly gendered form of cultural conservatism. This is congruent with much slasher film research, which has argued that while the genre contains impulses challenging patriarchal gender norms—particularly its emphasis on female agency and its strategies of cross-gender identification (Clover)—it nonetheless struggles to entirely reject or subvert heterosexist hegemony (Rieser). Although it is slightly less overt, *Chopping Mall*'s celebration of youth culture follows a similarly gendered pattern as its closing ascension is underscored by the happy union of Allison and Ferdy, whose meeting as each other's blind dates ends with the distinct possibility of future romance. Even while acknowledging that *Chopping Mall* inverts the trope reiterated by *Phantom of the Mall*—here the girl "gets" the guy, rather than the other way around—the triumphant victory of youth is still clearly gendered in adherence to the strictures of capitalist patriarchy.

Conclusion

Much in accordance with their target audience, both *Chopping Mall* and *Phantom of the Mall: Eric's Revenge* champion youth culture, emphasizing the strength of community in resisting the reigning hierarchies of power. Their particular form of rhetorical address is thus highly compatible with their function as commodities within a particular system of cultural consumption centered on youth as the target demographic. Whereas *Chopping Mall* safely inscribes this community of youth within a capitalist framework, however, *Phantom of the Mall* instead suggests a more foundational rejection of capitalism. It does so, however, by invoking a socially and culturally regressive form of conservatism.

As I argued above, *Chopping Mall* rejects not capitalism in general, but the specific coalescence of corporate capitalism, regressive conservatism, and military power that characterized the Reagan era. Conversely, it champions an idealized, safely gendered and essentially classless coalescence of youth culture and capitalism. Despite its critique of cultural conservatism and its insistence that contemporary horrors cannot be divorced from the social conditions under which they emerge, it may therefore ultimately be characterized as participating in the particular form of ideology production associated with other forms of "Reaganite entertainment" of the era—slightly adjusting its strategies of interpellation in order to reaffirm its political commitments. This is to say that *Chopping Mall*, even while it is critical of Reaganite conservatism and its idealization of corporate capitalism,

ultimately suggests that youth culture must resist the former in order to refashion and reaffirm the latter. *Phantom of the Mall* instead rejects capitalism in much more general terms as being incompatible with a truly egalitarian and democratic community. While *Chopping Mall*'s ideological attack is fierce, it is historically specific, clearly contained, and ultimately tempered by its simultaneous affirmation of capitalism as a natural extension of human creativity. One might think of the film as rejecting the conservative ideology of the Reagan era while instead championing the transgressive energy of the youth-oriented counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It does so, however, by safely inscribing the creative transgressions of that cultural moment within a thoroughly capitalistic culture. Similarly, *Phantom of the Mall*'s attack on capitalism—despite its foregrounding of issues concerning class and gender—is paired with a discourse of socially regressive conservatism. Ultimately, therefore, the critical energies of both films are tempered by strategies which render them more or less ideologically safe for mainstream consumption. Despite their critical and potentially subversive impulses, these films thus paradoxically offer what might be described as a commodification not only of youth culture, but of the ideals of transgressive resistance and emancipation often associated with it. It is, of course, possible that audiences may embrace the former while rejecting the latter. Such are the choices before us when 1980s slasher cinema goes to the mall.

Notes

1. Both films were shot in the Sherman Oaks Galleria in Los Angeles. Several North American slasher films utilize retail environments. *The Initiation* (Stewart, 1984), for instance, is partly set in a wholesale market center; *Hide and Go Shriek* (Schoolnik, 1986) in a furniture store; and *Intruder* (Spiegel, 1989) in a grocery store. To my knowledge, however, *Chopping Mall* and *Phantom of The Mall* are the only North American slasher films set in malls proper.

2. In this regard, his analysis is generally compatible with much Cultural Studies research on youth culture emphasizing its capacity for resistance rather than affirmation. For more, see Cambell (1–30).

3. On this point, see Shary (60–220); Nowell; and Bernard.

4. Mann makes this point as well, arguing that the robot "more closely resembles a weapon of war than a living organism. It is squat, angular, and painted a metallic black with a single line of red running the length of its inhuman head. It moves on the kind of caterpillar tracks traditionally associated with armored vehicles" (98).

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Book Review
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BOOK REVIEW:

Andrew Hartman, *Karl Marx in America*. University of Chicago Press, 2025. 510 pages. ISBN 978-0226537481.

Karl Marx in America is an exciting and much-needed book, arriving as it does on the heels of, on the one hand, a brewing Red Scare in the US that is currently working to disrupt, even dismantle, the US system of higher education as we know it because of trumped-up fears about the evils of "cultural Marxism," and, on the other, a growing anti-Trump movement whose precise political demands and horizons are still taking shape. The ambition of Hartman's remarkable book is registered in its heft—some 510 pages—and the span of its chapters, which chronicle for us not just Marx's own engagements with American conditions over the course of his writings, but his transit through American thought and radical movements from the 1840s to the present day. The book's most important intervention is its assertion that America mattered to Marx and, in turn, that Marx left an indelible mark on America, despite the fact that he's so far been, as Hartman points out, "rarely considered alongside such luminaries as [Adam Smith, John Locke, and Thomas Paine]" (2). But equally dazzling, perhaps, is Hartman's commitment to telling the extraordinary story of the ongoing resurrections and transformations of Marx in his many American incarnations—from "Working Class Hero" to "Bolshevik," from "Prophet" to "Red Menace," from "Theorist" to "Specter Haunting Twenty-First Century Capitalism"—in a way that speaks equally forcefully to readers beyond the academy. That it manages to do so is truly no mean feat.

For the field of intellectual history, one of the prime contributions of this book is the way that it suggests, counterintuitively but nevertheless convincingly, that Marx's thought has underpinned (even structurally shaped) the work of a number of American thinkers who were hell-bent precisely on skewering his life and legacy. As Hartman aptly puts it, "[o]ur very understanding of America as it developed across the twentieth century is underwritten by a subterranean Marx" (249). But for my purposes the book comes most vividly to life in its final chapter, where it sketches for us the most chromatic portrait of not just how various thinkers have reinhabited Marx over the first quarter of the twenty-first century, but how Marx has animated the emergence—and more to the point, the "*socialist dreams*"—of a variety of political movements in our own time, from Occupy Wall Street and the "Time for $15" campaign to Black Lives Matter and climate change activism. Perhaps not coincidentally, this is also the chapter where Hartman spells out for readers his own turn to Marx and personal investment in telling us the story of *Marx in America*. As he writes, "[n]ot unlike countless people in this book, I turned to Karl Marx to try to make sense of the world and possibly change it" (455). This is also the chapter where the productive *messiness* of the actual working life of US radical movements comes most fully to the fore and, in turn, where we see not the diametrical rift between, say, anarchist and Marxist thought that we have long come to expect, but instead the way that these ostensibly warring leftist factions often work

alongside and at times co-animate one another, as, for example, when Occupiers in New York, Oakland, and Atlanta turned to the work of David Graeber, as well as to David Harvey, Angela Davis, and Slavoj Žižek; or when Black Lives Matter activists drew on the socialist and Black Feminist thought of the Combahee River Collective, as well as the ethos of *horizontalidad* championed by both the Zapatistas and OWS.

These unruly conjunctions complicate the categories to which we assign radical action and the precise lines of thought that might be said to underwrite their coming to be—lines that can, at times, seem otherwise rather ideologically firm in this book. But they also speak, I think, to the ways that seeing Marx as a more prominent force in American life than has so far been recognized—the key insight of this book—might *also* allow us to begin to more fully account for the ripples of his work in American radical culture that move *beyond* the borders of Marxism (or socialism) per se.

What do such ripples look like in practice at a moment before our own? Take, for example, the description that Margaret Sanger offers us of the radically cross-party sodalities that took shape in her small New York apartment in 1910, which is to say in those heady days ahead of both the socialist Eugene V. Debs sweeping six percent of the popular vote in the 1912 election *and* the Russian Revolution, which seemed to many radicals at the time to be the dawn of everything they had dreamed of, whatever their future party affiliation. As Sanger puts it in her 1938 autobiography:

> Our living room became a gathering place where liberals, anarchists, Socialists and I.W.W.'s could meet. . . . Any evening you might find visitors from the Middle West being aroused by Jack Reed, bullied by Bill Haywood, led softly towards anarchist thought by Alexander Berkman. When throats grew dry and oratory waned, someone went out for hamburger sandwiches, hot dogs and beer, paid for by all. The luxuriousness of the midnight repast depended upon the collection of coins tossed in the middle of the table, which consisted of about what everybody had in their pocket. These considerate friends never imposed a burden of either extra work or extra expense. In the kitchen everyone sliced, buttered, opened cans. As soon as all were replenished, the conversation was resumed practically where it was left off. (70)

Put a different way, attending to the wider gravitational force of Marx's thinking and the messier constellations it sometimes summoned forth in the everyday lived experience of US radicals seeking to overturn capitalism and remake the world is largely beyond the scope of Hartman's book, which is, after all, at its core an *intellectual* history of Marx in America, but its final chapter (and wider intervention) nevertheless opens up new vistas on how that work might begin to be undertaken.

Coming to Hartman's book as a nineteenth-century literary scholar and cultural historian, I now want to situate *Marx in America* alongside some recent work in my own field with which it seems quite powerfully to resonate. While Hartman does not explicitly engage with this radical turn in literary studies, *Marx in America* nevertheless seems to me to be speaking to it, and certainly making a contribution to the conversation these other books have launched within nineteenth- and early-twentieth century Americanist literary and cultural studies.

Over the past decade, several books have worked to overturn two critical commonplaces about the Left in America: namely, the idea that—*à la* Werner Sombart—we never had much of one, and that the story of the Left, such

as it was, is one first and foremost of *failure*. Holly Jackson's groundbreaking 2019 book *American Radicals: How Nineteenth-Century Protest Shaped the Nation* makes this case by chronicling the lives and experiments of a series of nineteenth-century American radicals who dreamed of overturning capitalism, evangelical Protestantism, and the nuclear family as they then knew and lived it, but so too by considering how Marx's early writings took hold in movements—such as abolitionism—now often remembered simply as "reformist." Her most important intervention, perhaps, for my field has been recovering the deeply anti-capitalist imaginary working across a variety of seemingly disparate American radical circles. As she puts it, "[d]rawn into one flash-point issue, they would soon find that it was inextricable from other oppressive systems. . . . As Wendell Phillips reflected after thirty years agitating for abolition, universal suffrage, and labor rights, he had been awakened as a young man to the fact that slavery 'had poisoned everything it touched.' It was a not a single institution but *the invisible, toxic framework of the entire society*" (xiii). Jackson's additional key claim is that the reason we are so prone to regard the story of American radicalism as one of failure is because many of its once unthinkable radical dreams—whether of the women-able-to-wear-trousers or the eight-hour-working-day variety—became invisible to us as such once they became a normalized part of everyday life. That process of erasure takes with it the long histories of struggle that went into their realization. But it also becomes the ground on which, Jackson argues, seeming radical failures at given prior moments more rightly become, in her words, "slow-release" radical successes from the vantage point of a slightly longer view.

John Funchion's important work, in his 2015 book *Novel Nostalgias: The Aesthetics of Antagonism in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature*, on what he terms late-nineteenth-century "left nostalgia" has helped bring renewed attention to the ways that US radicals returned to the recent past—and often, moments of seeming failure—to, as he puts it, "reanimat[e] the revolutionary past to serve"—rather than *evade*—"the exigencies of the present." This reading dovetails with my own work in *Sensational Internationalism: The Paris Commune and the Remapping of American Memory in the Long Nineteenth-Century* to recover how a seventy-two day uprising that might seem to be part only of someone else's history and, more to the point, a total failure, came to be celebrated, reimagined, and at times actually restaged each March in America as a joyous form of countercultural (and notably extranational) memory-making engaged in by a remarkably diverse set of US radicals, among them postbellum activists like Victoria Woodhull and Wendell Phillips, Social Gospel proponents like George Herron, Socialists like Daniel De Leon, Jack London, and Eugene V. Debs, anarchists like Benjamin Tucker and Emma Goldman, and Wobblies like Big Bill Haywood, as well as (of course) the CPUSA.

Finally, Jill Richards's recent book *The Fury Archives: Female Citizenship, Human Rights, and the Literary Avant-Garde* crosscuts modernist literary studies and histories of international human rights to offer a fascinating rereading of the insurgent possibilities of first-wave feminism and international socialism, and more broadly what Richards terms the "socialist and avant-garde radicalisms" of the early twentieth century. Richards's most powerful claim, one that builds on insights from Kristin Ross's work on May 1968, is that doing justice to this radical history requires us to abandon the retelling of its story from the vantage point of its always already having failed. As Richards puts it,

> [e]very radical political struggle in the following pages . . . inarguably, indisputably, *failed* in terms of its stated ambitions. But that failure, seen from the present, tells us very little. It could not necessarily be

> foretold by the participants involved. It says nothing about the working existence of politics on the ground or aesthetic formations intertwined with them. To begin with tragedy constructs a narrative based upon the ending that *was*, as though . . . every political action were always already pointing to that ending. At our present moment, it seems more useful to take up the *force of this antagonism* rather than the tragedy of its failures. (20)

A book of Hartman's astonishing scope cannot be without the occasional blind spots. Although there are glimpses in *Karl Marx in America* of a world outside the US that impinges on the radical US reception of Marx—the emergence of the USSR, Soviet tanks rolling into Hungary in 1956, the escalation of the war in Vietnam, the emergence of the Zapatista movement—these glimpses are rare, as it often keeps its focus fairly tightly bound within American borders and American historical developments. That makes a certain kind of sense given the immense swathe of time (and intellectual history) being undertaken here, but it also undercuts readers' ability to discern the degree to which international events—and internationalism as ideology and lived activist practice—are being lived and debated in any given moment. I was surprised by how little attention the Commune got here—despite how often Marxists (Lenin in particular) returned to it in their writings and how much its brutal suppression shaped how Bolsheviks and CPUSA members alike conceived of the forces arrayed against them. I was similarly surprised that May 1968 makes no cameo in the book's account of Marx's New Left return in the 1960s, and that Salvador Allende's Chile—whose working existence famously drew in a number of young American radicals such as Charles Horman, who wanted to see it unfold in real time, and whose brutal repression in turn was a profoundly formative moment for a generation of US radicals—appears here only with the mention of Augusto Pinochet's coup and the Chicago Boys' free market interventions in the country after 1973. Put a different way, to what degree can we tell the story of Marx in America (or of American radicalism, more broadly) as a story that unfolds principally *within* our own national borders?

It's also the case that the Russian Revolution itself, connected to but also beyond the story that John Reed told about it, captivated the "socialist dreams" of a wide range of radicals in its early days, and continued to do so for reasons that don't come into much relief here. This could make it harder for an unfamiliar reader to understand what first drew American radicals to the Communist Party in the 1920s, or even why admiration for the USSR might have been hard for some of them to let go of given that the USSR in its actual working (or imagined) existence tends to only enter the sightline as an always already repressive (even totalitarian) Stalinist state. What readers unfamiliar with this history would not be likely to have to hand, in other words, is the knowledge of the initial broad range of changes that the Russian Revolution ushered in—for example, the institution of no-fault divorce (1918), the decriminalization of homosexuality (1922, 1926), the legalization of abortion (1920), and the establishment of publicly-funded day care centers (1918)—which were warmly welcomed by US radicals within and outside the Party, many of whom had themselves been longtime campaigners for exactly such changes in the US as part of *or in addition to* their own anti-capitalist politics. Or take, for example, the 1935 CPUSA pamphlet *Women in Action* authored by Sasha Small, who would be later grilled by the House Un-American Activities Committee for precisely this pamphlet's incendiary promise that "[t]he Communist Party is the only party which fights for equal rights for women, equal pay for equal work, social insurance, all the everyday needs of working women, farm women, housewives of every nationality

and color" (55). Although *Karl Marx in America* does not take up these capacious hopes, Hartman nevertheless powerfully positions us to begin to see anew the way that Marx lived on in these pre-twenty-first century "socialist dreams" and continues to shape the struggles of our own moment in ways at once more profound and more subterranean than we otherwise might remember.

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BOOK REVIEW:

Patrick McKelvey, *Disability Works: Performance after Rehabilitation*. New York University Press, 2024. 344 pages. ISBN 978-1479824878.

Patrick McKelvey's *Disability Works* provides a cultural history of disability performance that interrogates the close but often ambivalent relationship between disabled artistic labor and vocational rehabilitation (VR). VR was the dominant paradigm for US disability policy in the postwar period. It emphasized employability as a pathway to normative success, typified by the independent white, heterosexual subject whose eventual employment "repays" the government assistance required for his rehabilitation. Proponents of rehabilitation claimed that it would make it possible "for disabled Americans to trade their dependency on public assistance for the rewards and privileges of productive citizenship" (10). To explore the relationship between VR programs and disability performance, McKelvey focuses on what he calls "disability works": "the performance institutions and practices that promulgated labor as either an aspiration for or a problem within disability policy and activism" (17–18). The book explores how "work" became a central preoccupation for both those artists that collaborated with government rehabilitation programs and those who had to grapple with rehabilitation's legacies. It proceeds chronologically from the implementation of the rehabilitation paradigm in the postwar period through its decline and afterlife in the 1970s and 80s. But it also explores how rehabilitative emphasis on productive citizenship was embraced and rejected by disabled artists in ways that do not neatly map onto typical histories of progress, in which a rights-based disability policy displaced vocational rehabilitation.

Chapters 1 and 2 chart the direct connections between the political and economic project of rehabilitation and disability theatre of the 1960s. In Chapter 1, McKelvey examines work by the New York City-based theatre organization Plays for Living (P/L), which was commissioned by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to create a series of plays promoting rehabilitation to the wider public. McKelvey shows how P/L constructed the ideal rehabilitated subject: one that achieves economic independence as the state withdraws its support. McKelvey connects this political project to the aesthetics of the plays, coining the term "functional imitation" to describe their "austere realism," in which nondisabled actors performed the roles of the rehabilitants in front of sparse sets with minimal props (41). The functional imitation at work in these plays links two "modes of abandonment": vocational rehabilitation's goal of the "withdrawal of state support" and the material and aesthetic constraints of "the austere stage," which abandons realism's traditional wealth of detail in favor of a spartan production design (55). Chapter 2, meanwhile, examines the collaboration between the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) and the US Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA). While the NTD supported the goals of the VRA by seeking to "put deaf Americans to work," it also served as a cultural ambassador for American rehabilitation policies abroad (71). The chapter focuses on the development of the NTD's "sign-mime" technique, a synthesis of sign language and mime that was aimed at making the performances "universally"

legible (i.e., legible to a hearing audience), which McKelvey connects to vocational rehabilitation's goal of internationalizing the capitalist American rehabilitation system. Rather than simply placing the NTD in the context of Cold War politics, McKelvey demonstrates how the broader conflict between the American rehabilitation system and a Soviet model of state care shaped and was shaped by the NTD's artistic trajectory.

Chapters 3 and 4 turn to the work of queer, disabled artist Ron Whyte in the 1970s, during a period in which the rehabilitative paradigm was supposedly in decline. Chapter 3 analyzes Whyte's creation of the National Task Force for Disability and the Arts (NTFDA), an advocacy organization that he imagined would help disabled artists "enter the mainstream" of arts and culture (126). Although the NTFDA never achieved what Whyte hoped it would, McKelvey reads the aspirations and unrealized potential of this "impossible enterprise" as a valuable example of how rehabilitation and its afterlife shaped the horizons of disabled art (124). Chapter 4 focuses on Whyte's collaboration with his friend and neighbor Gregory Battcock in an extended "epistolary performance" (140). McKelvey describes this exchange, in which Whyte, Battcock, and others sent letters and memos to each other (often on stolen or sometimes pornographic stationary) while posing as various institutional figures, as "bureaucratic drag." This concept plays on the multiple valences of the word "drag," capturing both the delays associated with bureaucratic paperwork (significant for those like Whyte, who had to confront the administrative paperwork required for the meager government support he received) and the camp performance of institutional legitimacy the collaborators enjoyed via their "stationary performance" (140). Both chapters are set in the context of the rise of disability activism in the 1970s, allowing McKelvey to explore how the "impossible enterprise" of Whyte's NTFDA and the "bureaucratic drag" of his and Battcock's epistolary performances "appropriated and refused economic independence as a crip political aspiration" (7).

Chapters 5 and 6 explore programs that existed in the 1970s and 80s, when disability arts were cohering as a distinct aesthetic and political field that existed in opposition to rehabilitative politics and poetics. McKelvey explores how these programs, while temporally located after the decline of the rehabilitation paradigm, still had explicitly rehabilitative commitments at their cores. However, he also finds within them emancipatory queer and Black countercurrents that resisted rehabilitation or pursued other rehabilitations. Chapter 5 explores the work of Rick Curry and the National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped (NTWH), which is framed as an essentially rehabilitative project, centering employment and economic independence as the key goals for its participants. The ableism of a traditional Stanislavskian approach to acting is also "rehabilitated" via Curry's training program, which insisted that the students' disabilities were key to achieving the authenticity associated with Stanislavsky's methodology. This training would prepare them not just for the professional theatre, but also for the affective labor required by the modern deindustrialized workforce. Chapter 6 then turns to the multiple "rehabilitations" at play in Alvin Ailey's New Visions Dance Project (NVDP), which provided dance training for blind students in the 1980s. For McKelvey, NVDP's focus on developing disabled students' "self-esteem" complied with a Reaganite focus on training disabled subjects to be independent entrepreneurs. By emphasizing self-esteem as a response to the withdrawal of accessibility and material support from the government, "NVDP registers the rehabilitative relocation of freedom from the realm of the material to the realm of the affective" (234). However, McKelvey also finds emancipatory possibilities in NVDP, in its inheritance of the legacy of "rehabilitative redress" that was central to Black modern

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dance. This "rehabilitative redress" addressed both the literal and the representational debilitations of Black populations by centering Black health and resisting racialized and normative frameworks for physical and mental health.

Throughout, *Disability Works* is marked by a rigorous engagement with archival sources, providing a vital perspective on an understudied period of disability performance and suggesting productive avenues for future study. However, some of the most compelling moments occur when McKelvey plays at the limits of the archive to find moments of resistance against both the normalizing force of the rehabilitative paradigm and the typical scholarly focus on the "successful" performance event. For example, Chapter 3 analyzes Whyte's never-realized plans for his SUPER-MARKET, an ambitious dream for a flexible performance, art, and market space for disabled artists. Chapter 4 supplements McKelvey's analysis of Whyte and Battcock's epistolary performance with an imagined scene in which Whyte moves from the administrative paperwork keeping him in a state of economic precarity to the more pleasurable and artistically generative correspondence with Battcock. Chapter 5 ends with a reading of a short sketch from a NTWH benefit performance, a camp parody of *All About Eve*, that exists only as a memory recounted by its author. These moments challenge McKelvey's readers to expand their definitions of the proper object/subject of performance studies and insist on the fruitfulness of bringing a theatrical imagination to bear on archival traces. At times, these readings shine as an almost artistic collaboration between McKelvey's scholarly imagination and the work of the original artists.

Disability Works is an engaging work of disability history and performance theory that pushes the boundaries of both. Positioned at the intersection of disability history, performance studies, and crip critiques of work, the book insists on the importance of each to an understanding of all. It presents a convincing case for the importance of theatre to a history of disability and labor in the US, as well as the importance of an understanding of labor (both able and disabled) for an understanding of theatre and performance institutions. Throughout, McKelvey shows how disabled artists and their labor were central to how America imagined (and reimagined) rehabilitation as first a national aspiration, and then as a sign and symptom of capitalism's constraints.

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