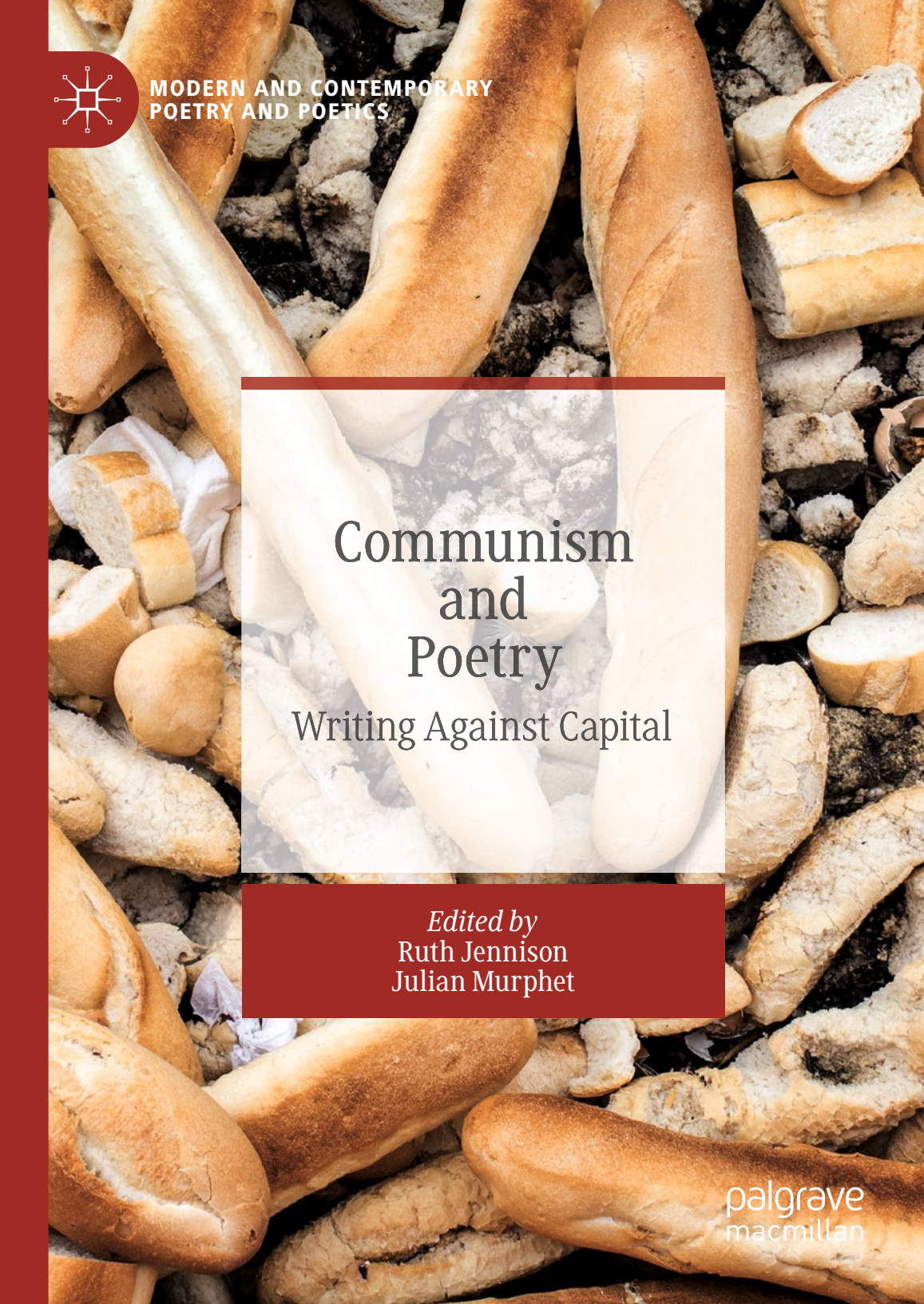
MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY
POETRY AND POETICS
Communism
and
Poetry
Writing Against Capital
Edited by
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Communism and Poetry

Writing Against Capital

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This volume is dedicated to those who put their minds and bodies on the line to bring an end to the rule of capital over all our lives.

Praise for *Communism and Poetry*

"A multi-national group of critics investigates and propels discussions of politics and poetry, rearticulating its critical errancy and radical histories, up to the immediate present with its intertwining of poetic realism, resistance and utopian urgencies. Controversies, critiques, insistences, and projections center this scintillating anthology that analyze poetry, in its socio-political, economic and ethical links with both capitalisms, communisms, insurgencies, and emancipations all in a striking and passionately interpretive 'history of the present.'"

—Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Poet, Scholar, and Professor Emerita at Temple University, USA*

"Now, more than ever, it is necessary that we take seriously the connection between poetry and communism, which is to say, the connection between the living breath and the unending criticism of everything that exists. By taking a broad, dynamic swipe from the contemporary landscape, Communism and Poetics: Writing Against Capital answers this urgent call. It should be heard as far and wide as the name of Marx himself."

—Anne Boyer, *Poet, Scholar, and Professor at the Kansas City Art Institute, USA*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Ruth Jennison and Julian Murphet

Communist Projects and Poetics

The world's first explicitly articulated experiment in communism—Plato's *Republic*—entertains an infamously uncomfortable relationship with poetry, the very medium out of which it is woven. Taking issue with the perceived "harm" done by the poets' stories and manners (to public morals, and to the individual soul), Socrates decrees that the communist republic cannot possibly tolerate the promiscuous mimesis of multiple identities that poets routinely perform, nor the general immorality of their narratives. Communism will depend, says Socrates, on the rational distribution of distinct functions throughout the population, and poetry too dangerously muddies those distinctions and threatens the orderly regulation of a *polis* freed from private property relations. Poetry, in that sense, is innately *improper* rather than anti-propertarian. To achieve and maintain the degree of social cohesion, the *ethos*, necessary to prevent the return of private property, to make it unthinkable, poetry must be proscribed as the bad conscience of an order of things predicated on falsehood, deception, and imitation, and not on truth.

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The communist republic never materialized in history, at least not in Plato's sense, but poetry has maintained its complex and difficult relationship with the state as such, on whose surpluses it has precariously depended (before, during, and after systems of private patronage), and to whose strained political tolerance it owes its uncertain license. Poetry's many official forms and modes have evolved in multivalenced relation to the state it courts, critiques, and often determinatively negates: genres, for instance, assume the shapes they do in accordance with a set of social and cultural principles (of propriety, decorum, and distinction) that stem from the state's established class relations; violations of generic propriety are always felt to carry a political charge. Furthermore, poetry is obliged to find a place within the given relations of production that allow it just enough freedom to move economically—generally, via the patronage of the wealthy classes, the paid employment of an institution (church or school, mostly, though sometimes a revolutionary organization), or as a commodity on the open marketplace of letters. Such accommodations further entwine the destiny of the poem within the destiny of the state. And yet the lingering problem first identified by Plato, of poetry's essential impropriety vis-à-vis the status quo, continues to test the patience of sovereigns and priests alike, and calls down upon it the periodic wrath of administrations striving to maintain the protocols of effective governmentality.

For that reason, the poem has often known a certain political errancy, even an exilic fate, and the "political unconscious" of its banishment from the first communist republic returns in dialectically transformed guises on the outskirts of the actually existing state. In the hands of anonymous rural laborers, poetry has, for centuries, both itemized and denounced the predations of private property relations upon the commons as such, and sent up uproarious utopian wishes in the form of ballads, broadsides, and drinking songs. John Ball's ventriloquism of the landless army he led in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 achieved its optimal form in a rhyming couplet in iambic tetrameter: "When Adam delved and Eve span / Who was then the gentleman?" These deathless lines reminded a devout peasantry, and a delinquent clerisy, that the first communism was that of Eden, and that a truly Christian commonwealth would be communist again, fertilized by the spilled blood of an entire landowning class. Other modes were less pious. The satiric monastic refraction of lively peasant fantasies in the tradition of "Cockayne" poems bespeaks what Mikhail Bakhtin called "the profound originality expressed by the culture of folk humor."[1] Indeed, we owe to poetry, both high and low,

most of the evidence we have that the peasantry always entertained strong communist proclivities, pitted against prevailing property relations in song and rhyme. Poetry is where communism has so often marshaled its imperatives and sharpened its sallies, on the lips of illiterate workers on the land, denied any political role in the state.

The advent of capitalism marked an epoch in the conjoint histories of poetry and communism. To the latter, it bequeathed the rational legacy of the Enlightenment, a modulation away from spiritualized utopian yearnings and rootedness in the lived experience of the commons, toward a politics proper under the impetus of the International Workingman's movement; while to the former, it offered the possibility of commercial independence from patrons, schools, and courts. That is to say, with capitalism, a spectral communism was materialized and integrated into the *dramatis personae* of modernity (parties, unions, organs, etc.), and poetry migrated further toward the mechanics of the market. Capital also uprooted millions of rural laborers from the land and cast them into urban landscapes of heavy industry and trade; increasingly, too, it insisted that their children become literate. The entire metabolism of literary culture, the economy, and the state, shifted in precipitous ways, ways that allowed for communistic outgrowths in the fault lines of poetic utterance. Marx himself launched his writing career as a poet irradiated by the examples of Shelley, Heine, and others; and Romanticism, in all its colors, stands revealed in retrospect as the singular poetical movement in which the modern communist impulse first issued its ethical decrees against the brutalizing juggernaut of capitalist accumulation.

In many senses, the longstanding terms of engagement were set by these foundational interventions: Blake, Shelley (whom Brecht called "my brother"), Rousseau, the early Wordsworth and Tieck, Heine and Ludwig Börne, John Clare, and a long line of others including Whitman and Rimbaud. What such poetry nurtured was capitalism's agenbite of inwit, where an outraged communist affectivity stood perpetual watch over the growing mountains of the industrially murdered and immiserated poor. Poetic romanticism cultivated the wherewithal to perceive in the eviscerated rural workforce more than the sentimental remnants of a vanishing lifeworld; it offered substantive and historically sensitive evidence of peasant resistance, courage, tenacity, and hope, even as it mounted its moral invectives against the industrial forces reducing the countryside to ruin. It inscribed a communistic phenomenology of the hinterland, its fields, lakes, and woodlands, open to all, but retrojected into that provincial childhood

from which most early-nineteenth-century intellectuals and workers alike had emerged. Romanticism thus discovered the means for a collective psychotherapy of the alienated urban citizen: a poetics of communal belonging to a way of life crucified and "repressed" by industrialization and the unchecked profit motive.

It is thus a historical paradox and conundrum that the *scientific* socialism of Marx and Engels should have sunk its roots in this entirely *romantic* anti-capitalism, which was never fully expelled from the rapidly evolving tradition of modern socialist thought and practice.[2] Indeed, it would be fair to suggest that, precisely insofar as it bent the stick toward positivism and rationalism, the Second International's root-and-branch rejection of poetic romanticism—its repudiation of intuitions and affects, passions, and spontaneous feelings (all of which would actually turn out to animate the great historical pivot toward the autochthonous enthusiasm of workers' councils in the Soviet theatre of revolution), in favor of bloodless quantification and statistics—cost it the German Revolution of 1919 (a hypothesis for which there is no better evidence than the extraordinary prison letters of Rosa Luxemburg, written from the depths of her despair over social democracy's snarling capitulation to Realpolitik). These letters, brimming with the most exquisite observations about birdlife and the vegetable regenerations of spring, as well as the music of Beethoven and the abstractions of Hegel, are the late efflorescence of an irreducible knot, between the scientific analysis of capitalism's debilitating effects on the life of the people, and the romantic conviction of a shared spiritual substance with the natural world. This knot is, precisely, *communism*—not as a self-consolidating pragmatism, but as a sustaining, ethically underwritten solidarity with the capacity of the working masses to determine their own destiny, within the limits set by an ever-changing ecology of vital forces, value systems, and technologies of the species.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 marked another important milestone in the changing relationship between poetry and communism, since now there existed a state dedicated in name and program to the institutionalization of communism. This confluence of state and communism—this entry of communism onto the stage of geopolitics and international relations—had a number of contradictory effects. On the one hand, it provided a massive legitimation of what had been poetry's longstanding subterranean keeping of faith with an ancient communist imperative inherited from pre-capitalist conditions, a drawing into the open of those more

or less clandestine relations between the "unacknowledged legislators" and the idea of putting an end to private property once and for all. This relation was no longer "unacknowledged," but the prerogative of the people's government itself. Thus, poets under the new government of the USSR were free openly to espouse their hitherto implicit communism; and not only free, but encouraged, licensed, paid to do so. But so, on the other hand, in an atmosphere of increasing isolation and the non-appearance of other national iterations of revolution, and a corresponding contraction of the aleatory aesthetics of 1917, these poetics would no longer grow organically from the material freely chosen by the poets. In a cynical inversion of Plato's original thought-experiment, the consolidating state restrained poetry to its own intensifying ideological and political contradictions, and in doing so, set hard limits on the freedom of the enthusiastic comrades of the avant-garde poetic cadres that had been the nonidentical twin of the workers' state at its original birth.[3]

Vladimir Mayakovsky's extraordinary life story remains the most vivid case in point—a passionate Bolshevik activist and agitator from 1909, and the world's leading futurist poet by 1914, he was galvanized body and soul by the events of 1917: "Revolution and poetry got entangled in my head and became one," he wrote.[4] One of the first group of artists and writers openly to declare their commitment to the Revolution, in 1917, Mayakovsky afterwards carried out numberless tasks for the Party, distributing leaflets, typing reams of propaganda, holding meetings, designing agitprop posters and cartoons, acting in films, whilst also writing and directing plays, and crafting enormous volumes of the most electrifying Russian verse of the early twentieth century. Embraced early on by the Party establishment for his indefatigable efforts and torrential talent, by the late 1920s, he was persona non grata with the RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), and shunned by Stalin, leading indirectly to his suicide in 1930. Yet, within a year, Stalin had opportunistically rehabilitated his name and canonized Mayakovsky as the official poet of the Revolution. His friend Boris Pasternak wrote that "Mayakovsky's face is etched on the altar of the century," ever since Moscow had "started to impose him forcibly, like Catherine the Great did the potatoes" on the very people he had worked so hard to stir up and scandalize.[5] From incendiary firebrand rebel, to pariah nonconformist, and finally to consecrated classical saint of the Soviet empire, Mayakovsky lived the full contradictory range of state communism's relationship with poetry, until it literally killed

him. This cultish process bears an uncanny resemblance to how Lenin would describe the ways in which the bourgeoisie manipulate the historical memory of "great revolutionaries":

> After their death, attempts are made to turn them into harmless icons, canonize them, and surround their *names* with a certain halo for the "consolation" of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping them, while at the same time emasculating and vulgarising the *real essence* of their revolutionary theories and blunting their revolutionary edge.[6]

Despite these sclerotic developments, the Communist Party, with its vast international outreach and its longstanding ties to organizers in labor movements as well as anti-imperialist and anti-racist movements the world over, now enjoyed that most privileged position of managing a state revenue, a fact that allowed it to invest in ideological warfare on an unprecedented global scale. Underwriting the material means of literary production through Party-run clubs and societies, including specifically poetic circles, meant establishing strong cultural beachheads in the most advanced capitalist nation states on earth. In the USA, for instance, the rapid proliferation of John Reed Clubs, named after the famed journalist who wrote up his experiences of the Revolution as *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1919), was sponsored by the CPUSA to support writers and artists of a Marxist disposition. Chapters in New York and Chicago made possible the publication of major works by Langston Hughes, Grace Lumpkin, Kenneth Fearing, and Richard Wright, among many others, and hosted important exhibitions and meetings to raise consciousness about the irrationalities and barbarisms of capital during its greatest crisis (the Clubs were active between 1929 and 1936). Through such means, poetry and communism were intertwined at the level of geopolitical strategy and class struggle, in an open and explicit effort to convert Shelleyan poetics (exhortation, execration, and the lingering possibilities of the ballad form) into immediate political advantage.

It was an effort with prodigious international repercussions, as poetry moved out of the parlors and common rooms of bourgeois appreciation, and into turbulent streets agitated by economic collapse and the guttering legitimacy of liberal ideology and statecraft, along with the fascism whipped up by that vortex. In innumerable national and local contexts, the indigenous communist parties and labor unions, backed by the towering institutional reality of the USSR, emboldened formally and informally aligned poets to

suture their experiments in rhythm and diction to the fortunes of the workers' movements. Any list of the poets who embraced communist militancy and found resources in that affiliation to expand the arsenal of poetic techniques, must be partial and merely indicative, but should obviously include, in Germany, Bertolt Brecht, Johannes Becher, and Volker Braun; in the USSR, Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Olga Bergholz, and (in his own way) Osip Mandelstam; in China, Mao Zedong, Guo Moruo, Xia Minghan, Tsang K'o-chia, and Ai Qing; in Japan, Jun Takami, Nakahama Tetsu, and Kitasono Katue; in Vietnam, To Huu; in the UK, Hugh MacDiarmid, John Cornford, and Christopher Caudwell; in the USA, Langston Hughes, Muriel Rukeyser, George Oppen, and Lorine Niedecker; in the West Indies, Claude McKay, René Depestre, Aimé Césaire, and the extraordinary Nicolás Guillén; in the countries of Central and South America, Garcia Lorca, Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, Luis Franco, Joachín Gutiérrez, Roque Dalton, and (in exile) Rafael Alberti; in Portugal, José Gomes Ferreira; in Italy, the immense examples of Pier Paulo Pasolini, Cesare Pavese, and Edoardo Sanguineti; in France, Paul Élouard, Louis Aragon, Robert Désnos, André Breton, and Benjamin Péret; in Greece, Yannis Ritsos; in Turkey, the great Nâzim Hikmet; in Norway, Nordahl Grieg; in Poland, Aleksander Wat; in Romania, Stephan Roll; in Lithuania, Julius Janonis; in South Africa, Jeremy Cronin; elsewhere in Africa, Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, and Marcelino dos Santos; in Pakistan, Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Habib Jalib; in Australia, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Dorothy Hewett, and Aileen Palmer; and in Palestine, Daud Turki and Mahmoud Darwish. Such a list does nothing but dimly suggest the extent of the communist influence on poetic production in the first half of the twentieth century, and for some time into the second. The profound links between the communist project, as an active political quest for power in any number of national contexts, and much of the most innovative and consequential poetry of the century, has led Alain Badiou to comment:

> Thus, the great poets of the twentieth century recognized in the grandiose revolutionary project of communism something that was familiar to them – namely that, as the poem gives its inventions to language and as language is given to all, the material world and the world of thought must be given integrally to all, becoming no longer the property of a few but the common good of humanity as a whole.
>
> This is why the poets have seen in communism above all a new figure of the destiny of the people. And 'people', here, means first and foremost the poor people, the workers, the abandoned women, the landless peasants.[7]

Indeed, the twentieth century, animated by what Badiou has called a wellnigh apocalyptic "passion for the Real," tempered an indissoluble bond between poetry, communism, and the "people" as such. With hard institutional backing from established communist powers, back-channel ratification from the Trotskyist opposition, and the willing participation of poets from every corner of the globe, this link could be said to *characterize* modern poetry as such, inasmuch as even the reactionary and elitist poetry of the period (by Yeats, Eliot, Stevens, and Pound, among many others) was obliged to parasitize the innovations of the left futurists and surrealists, and seethed with envy of the living, organic relationship newly established by the left between serious poetic utterance and a popular reception.[8] Just as fascism predicated its reactions on the successful instance of Bolshevism, reactionary modernism did the same on the example of the new social bond forged between poetry and communism.

This heroic century ran aground around 1980, foundering on the terminally declining rate of profit and escalating unemployment. For roughly 20 years between 1980 and 2000, a vulgar new Restoration, cultural and economic at once, violently re-established the legitimacy of unregulated capital and buried the living corpse of actually existing communism in the Eastern Bloc. This period, widely known as the postmodern turn, explicitly disabled the links established between poetry and communism, by banishing industrial production to other, cheaper labor pools, dismantling the institutions of organized labor, promoting slick new cultural technologies (color television, video, and the personal computer), issuing philistine philippics against the living memory of the communist project, and indulging in an eclectic historicism that no longer found purchase in the existential realities of the working poor. Its cultural logic has been diagnosed as that of late capitalism's financial turn; and one of the chief consequences of that turn has been a rapid demotion of the poem's pre-eminence as a bellwether of social antagonism and crisis.

The Present Conjuncture

Since 2000, however, the intoxicating fortunes of the neoliberal turn have provided little but misery. Financialization and deindustrialization—moving large sectors of the working population into the service and circulation sectors and gutting the industrial heartland—having proven more of a stopgap measure than a genuine reestablishment of the capitalist process of valorization, and with the tech bubble's inevitable bursting, the surest

sign of an irreversible tarnishing of the deregulatory common sense of the era turned out to be the emergence of a loosely affiliated global movement of the peoples. As the rate of profit fell, and unemployment and casualization climbed, the legitimacy of the political and economic powers that be was called directly into question, first by the epochal "Battle in Seattle"—a street-based insurrection against the summit of the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in that city, in 1999, which was followed swiftly by a global grassroots uprising against the War on Terror—and then in the extraordinary series of popular reclamations of city squares confederated under the slogan of "Occupy!" (2011–12), set in harmonic relationship with the historic revolutionary process that swept the Middle East under the rubric of the "Arab Spring" (2010–12).

Such a revival of politics in the new millennium has provided fertile ground for a renewed convergence of revolutionary politics and contemporary poetry. Some historical waypoints mark the immediate prehistory of this convergence: the aforementioned anti-capitalist global justice movements of the 1990s insisted on the centrality of the street as the place where struggle happens. This legacy has continued, broadened, and intensified in the present period. The generational passing of the Cold War means that the new militants are not only forcibly re-opening the street but are also once again debating questions of transformation and, more pointedly, the praxis of transition. The taboo against thinking beyond "austerity" and the ruling class monopoly on what happens tomorrow and thereafter has lifted, and matters of tactic and outcome have emerged once again as significant questions in the movement toward an alternative future. Anti-capitalists are explicitly renewing affiliations with definite political positions (increasingly *named* political positions—anarchist, socialist, communist, revolutionary, social democrat, anti-capitalist feminist, queer decolonizer, etc.). This robust relationship between tactical decisions and desired anti-capitalist outcomes confers tensile strength to the bond of political thinking and street practice.

The electrification of the contact points between mass immiseration and the rise of revolutionary consciousness has become a dynamo of political generativity. Readers of this volume are presumably familiar with the specific flashpoints that score the time of the new millennium, although of course these events will necessarily become historical and new fires will burn by the time we complete our writing, but the evolving constellation might at least include: the return of militant student protests; the second Palestinian intifada and the increasing victories of the global solidarity

efforts in support of the Palestinian-led movement of Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions; riots and demonstrations within the core western countries, often in response to racist state violence; various serious if unevenly fated experiments in electoral left regroupment (Podemos, Democratic Socialists of America, Syriza, etc.); the return of the feminist and queer movement to the streets; the rise of Black Lives Matter as both a movement and a program; and the urgently needed reappearance of organized, militant anti-fascist networks. These developments have appeared in tandem with the reawaking of labor, both in the form of militant strike action by more traditional sectors, such as educators and healthcare workers; and regional workers' centers, which amplify and support organizing of migrant and undocumented workers, and others long excluded from the organizing efforts of the larger union confederations: service sector workers and the ever expanding population of workers engaged in "informal employment," where wage theft and precarity are commonplace. What we notice is at once the impressive frequency of this sequencing, as well as its noncontiguous nature, its rootedness less in a revolutionary process than in the *event of the uprising*. It is this erratic character of the contemporary uprising with which we present-day ecumenical communists must engage. One current of contemporary communist theory and practice—communization—emphasizes, and seeks to protract, the event into the political unfolding of a classless society. Other currents have differing accounts of how transition might be catalyzed, from the revolutionary demands of prison abolitionists to those of feminists calling for the total communization of social reproduction—transformations that are incommensurable with the continuation of the capitalist mode of production.

We want to propose here that the present conjuncture between poetry and communism can be usefully understood through three coordinates, in the tradition of dialectical thinking.

1. Contemporary communist poetic form is a dialectical refraction of the specific "*eventful*" nature of post-millennial uprisings and their situatedness within a larger field of renewed revolutionary practice and thinking.
2. Anti-capitalist poets are developing experimental formal practices that encode not only the uneven and emergent ways in which struggle is articulated across the variegated spaces of the capitalist world, but also strategies for imagining post-capitalist relations between people, the products of their labor, and the language they use to

describe those relations; the longstanding rhetorical divide between the protest poem and the utopian poem is being superseded.

3. Poetry—specifically high modernist poetics—is no longer the form of literature most likely to confer and signal the acquisition of cultural capital. This development, in part, occurs as a result of the receding of New Criticism and its close reading methodologies in the academy, which persisted as the primary way that poetry was taught, even as the other literary forms were undergoing transformations in their reception and transmission with the advent of political, historical, anti-racist, and queer interpretive practices. This has freed poetry to become once again a popular form.

In what follows, we explore in more detail each of these aspects of the increasingly strong connective tissue between poetry, communism, and the events which constitute the global map of resistance. None of these formations and tendencies is, of course, reducible to the other, but we present them in their various tectonic alignments.

First Coordinate: Eventfulness

A useful way to frame this coordinate is to contrast contemporary communist poetics with those of the 1930s. While there are some exceptions, the epic poem, whose last iteration we might mark with Olson's *Maximus Poems*, belongs to the period in which the communist event unfolds (always in fits and starts and often unfortunately in reverse) as part of a sequentially understood process whose ending in a punctual proletarian revolution was that "consummation devoutly to be wished" by broad layers of historical actors and cultural producers. Louis Zukofsky's "*A*," William Carlos Williams' *Spring and All*, Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*, and their inverses in ideological fidelity to nativist and fascist movements, such as Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, present us with the modernist counterpoint to the anti-epic forms of the poets discussed in this volume. In the period where the insurrectionary event is understood as knitted to a mutualized goal, the epic form is a signature formal mediation of revolutionary, and specifically planetary-Marxist totalizations. By contrast, where the event remains primary, (which is not to say that actors within that event, communist and pre-communist alike, do not have orientations toward a post-capitalist society), and the communist project is not constrained by any notional consensus or a processual unfolding toward a specific telos, totalizing

thought is expressed in a greater diversity of poetic forms. Indeed, few will mourn the passing of the punctual telos of a communist transformation that was too often a cognate, however wondrous, of ideologies of capitalist modernity, both in its temporalities and its promises of advancement; but we wonder, as process and event converge once again, whether the epic will find itself revivified if wildly transformed. Keston Sutherland's work points toward such a possibility. Nevertheless, the current conjuncture, shaped as it is by continuous discontinuity, has seeded a poetics that does not eschew the desire to totalize, but it does so in ways that are formally very distinct from the earlier great modernist projects.

In contrast to other literary genres, whose forms, histories, and taxonomies are informed by their diverse relationships to the *representation* of the social totality, poetry's relationship to that totality is characterized by its formal emphasis on the disjunctive axes that coordinate the vivid particulars of its totality, rather than any propulsive strategy of narration. Contemporary communist poetry's signature strategy is parataxis, whether in neo-lyrical style found in the likes of Sean Bonney's work, or in the syncopated assemblages of Fred Moten. A productive question to ask may well be: what is it about the current political conjuncture that furnishes the conditions for this emphasis on relation rather than rendition or portrait? Difficulty in the form today consists less and less in the older modernist curation of allusion to classical or historical particulars than in the poem's assemblage of particulars whose relation it is the work of the reader to decipher. Perry Anderson has argued that the modernists found themselves triangulated by (1) the proximity of social revolution; (2) the massive transformation and expansion of technologies and rapidly expanding means of production particular to the rise of the bourgeois era; and (3) the persistent if residual cultural hegemony of the *ancien régime*—it is this peculiar convergence that gave rise to poems from the period where subways meet citations from the metaphysical poets. By contrast, contemporary poetry's emphasis on discontinuous relations between bodies, particulars, spaces and temporal regimes transcodes a very different set of historical forces. With the planet under the sway of full subsumption, we want to suggest a rather different triangulated convergence, building on Anderson's generative model:

1. the disjunctive proximity of *either* revolution *or* the complete capitalist destruction of the entire planetary lifeworld (socialism or barbarism redux).

2. transformations in the organization and form of labor outside of the Western core, where production today is concentrated, mean that the global working class, no longer immediately perceptible in the capitalist core, is larger than at any point in history and its world is contoured by death, precarity, and surplus populations. This disjunction between phenomenological disappearance, and a redoubled consolidation at the level of the Real, compels new strategies of class *presentation*, not representation.
3. the struggle to transform or hive out absolute space into differential space is increasingly the occupation of social revolts, matching if not exceeding, the number of struggles against the intensification of absolute and relative surplus value extraction (though these latter struggles are still dominant in the non-Western hemisphere). Circulation crosshatches the global economy with both real-time instant transactions as well as other longer-form commodity transoceanic and transnational movement by trucking, shipping containers, and drones. Capital continues to pursue the realization of its most impossible goal: the complete annihilation of space by time. Anti-capitalist poetry metabolizes at once this ever increasing interpenetration of capital's temporal and spatial regimes *and* the freedom struggles that place the occupation of space at the center of their strategies. When activists distend the time such that collective protest might "hold a space," their synchronization of durée and geography is in militant counter-logic to the ways in which capital antagonizes space and time. The poetry discussed in this volume is in part borne out of these actions to radically reconfigure space and time.

It is this new triangulation that furnishes the conditions for the eventful but not-yet-sustained nature of contemporary political eventful action and its poetic cognate in post-narrative assemblages.

Second Coordinate: Anti-Capitalism and Uneven Development

Late capitalism, like all iterations of capitalism, produces what Henri Lefebvre describes as simultaneous tendencies toward further homogenization and differentiation. As imperialists export their cultural products, there are few places left that are not saturated with the same commodities, built environments, gendered divisions of reproductive labor, and forms

of surveillance and incarceration. A global network of tension wires links this tendency toward homogenization to its opposite: differentiation and unevenness. In the areas that host the poets of this collection, this unevenness is most visibly articulated in geographical terrain, in landscapes that have been developed, under and de-developed, and redeveloped. What David Harvey calls a spatial fix describes a process that many regions of the developed world have experienced not just once, but multiple times. The intensification of heavy manufacturing in the US South, and its increasing abandonment in the central and northern regions of the country, is a fine example of this dynamic. Theorists of the relationship between literary form and unevenness have principally focused their attention on the ways in which transformations and hybridizations of the novel form screen various incomplete transitional historical processes, like those taking place in the former communist countries at present.[9]

In contrast to this focus on narrative form, we want to argue here that the escalation of both homogenization and uneven development is of especial interest in the analysis of the relationship between contemporary poetry and revolutionary politics. The current status of the lyric indexes how poets conceive of the subject's relationship to these twinned historical processes of homogenization and unevenness. A form at once abandoned and continuously renewed; confidently consolidated and riven by contradiction, the variations on the lyric in contemporary anti-capitalist poetry—often occurring in the same poem or sequence of poems—record subjects both birthed into monotony and repetition *and* in possession of the capacity to recognize themselves as emplaced in a wildly uneven global crosshatch of production, exchange, and circulation. The current lability of the lyric permits poets to register the subject as at once actor and effect, crucial for the convocation of a revolutionary orientation to a capitalism that produces uneven spatial, cultural, and political terrains in which political possibilities open and shut and open again with great unpredictability.

Because so many of the poets featured in this volume are engaged in street politics, they themselves experience the rapid shifts in consciousness scored by the uneven spaces and built environments of surveillance and the regular and abrupt restrictions of mobility enforced by the police. They are witness to city sectors and whole regions abandoned by capital altogether only to be rebuilt in response to the need for another spatial fix; tundras of advertisement; as well as those spaces deliberately reclaimed in militant response by anti-capitalists, often without permit, for action, protest, and

occupation. This return of collective direct action has led to the demise of a longstanding rupture in political poetry: the divisions between protest and utopia, and likewise, between agitation and propaganda. The relationship of the radical poet to the unevenesses of the spaces and temporalities of resistance is intimate; they produce textual maps of their actual experiences of the swarm, the occupation, the riot, the picket line, the kettled square, and so on. The resurrection of the mass action, no matter whether under the banner of immediate communization or demands-based calls for restorative justice, has created the possibility for spatial nearness between the poet and other bodies and voices. This resuturing of poet to street has revivified the question of what poetry can do.

Third Coordinate: Poetry After Modernism

Once the metric of an educated subject who was both a connoisseur of the aesthetic purity of the poetic mode and also a critic capable of explication without recourse to culture and history, the study of poetry enjoyed until recently a rather vaunted institutional status, separated from the tainted social forms of novels and drama. Even through the transformation of the university by student revolt and the slight democratization of access for the price of lifetime debt, poetry remained suspended in the amber of close readings, and students and scholars alike were expected to master this fairly routinized and nigh-mathematical approach to poetic language. As other forms of literary study became increasingly porous to interdisciplinarity, cultural studies, alternative genealogies, post, neo- and decolonial studies and material histories of race, sex, gender, and disability, poetry remained a confined laboratory of close reading skill acquisition. Only in the wake of the sequence of resistance we have charted above did poetry begin to emerge as a place where politics happened, and struggle was recorded. Revolutionary poetics like that of Amiri Baraka, Adrienne Rich, or Diane di Prima, were either not taught at all, or taught by the oppositional departments outside of the field of "literature": Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, and African-American Studies. The pressures that exploded poetry out of its rather singular status as the conveyor of cultural capital were multiple and contradictory: modernism was subjected to critique by younger generations of scholars who explored these aesthetic formations as mediations of various capitalist regimes. Movements by students of color, and anti-capitalist, and anti-war activists demanded alternative reading models and the exhumation of various politicized peri-canons; and, on

the other side, capital's needs for an apparatus of largely legal professionals who possess close reading skills diminished. Poetry was uniquely poised to respond to these transformations; despite the active suppression of its radical trajectories, mass cultural forms of hip-hop and pop music readied a generation of students who understood poetry as primarily a popular form. The ability of contemporary poetic form to adapt to new subject formations, including those produced by and well trained in the radical adjacencies of technological and lateral cognitive mapping of internet culture, makes it especially attractive to subjects whose experience of the world is one of asymmetry, unevenness, and contradiction. Furthermore, the difficulty of sourcing high modernism's allusions, whose acquisition signaled a curation of "the best of culture," has been virtually eliminated by the ability to swiftly locate obscure particulars or citations from literatures of multiple languages on the internet. Poetry has re-emerged as a stage for political positions, and where discontinuous but unabated insurrectionary events appear in verse form. Throwing off its previously elite status as a closed and perfect system, poetry has reconvened with the political event, in combustive and ecstatic fashion.

One last condition seems imperative to note here. It had been one of the peculiar characteristics of the post-World War II academy in the West (and elsewhere) that, in it, a certain Marxism tended to be tolerated in the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. This was, by and large, a Marxism descended not from the revolutionary left, but from the mandarin currents of Critical Theory conducted by the Frankfurt School—a Marxism oriented not toward political struggle and the self-activity of the working class, but toward the "hermeneutics of suspicion" as such, and particularly the demystification of bourgeois and fascist ideology in all its forms. This Marxism could thus flourish in a context shut off from active class struggle, which, after the coordinated assaults of Thatcher and Reagan and their neoliberal progeny, had been largely banished from the streets in any event; and in such a climate, it could cross-pollinate with a baroque congeries of other intellectual currents descended from existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and structuralism. Such a Marxism worked very well within the limits of an institutionalized pedagogy oriented toward the cultivation of humanistic "critical thinking" per se; though frequently under attack from the conservative and reactionary mainstream, it proved remarkably resilient and adept at laser-sharp deconstructions of late capitalist hegemony's multi-layered orthodoxies.

It is one of the ironies of such domestication that the sole concept paradigmatically barred from serious reflection in this scholastic Marxism was that of communism itself. The liberal academy could accommodate the critique of commodity fetishism, but hardly the militant espousal of a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism itself, or the imaginative incubation of serious post-capitalist social programs. Nor can this simply be explained by the absence of any real opportunities for successful communist intervention under the blanket consolidation of what David Harvey calls the "new imperialism" of late capitalism. Questions of revolutionary strategy in a period of glacial reaction point to a broader issue; the critical factor in the liberal universities was a structural amnesia around the entire tradition of Marxist political activism as such: the legacies of the First, Second, and Third Internationals (not to mention the Fourth); the political theories of Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, Castro, and any number of militant factions and cells; indeed, anything outside of a narrow, if extremely rich, seam of precious conceptual metals accreted around the first chapter of *Capital*, Vol. 1 and an anodyne version of Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, seemed to have been consigned to the "extreme" and inadmissible fringes of a discourse henceforth tailored to the polite "communicative action" of classroom and faculty meeting. This was a Marxism shorn of its communist militancy, and thus deprived of its most powerful pillar outside the academy itself: the global movements against capital and its degradations. Marxism as the science of communism had been supplanted by a scholastic Marxism that barely noted the collapse of the entire Soviet Union and the better part of the communist world itself.

The redoubled irony of this situation was recently noted by Fredric Jameson, who in a magisterial account of the stakes involved, asked:

> whether, today, in postmodernity and globalization, in the universal reign of the market and of a cynical reason that knows and accepts everything about itself, ideology still takes on its once classical form, and ideology-critique serves its purpose any longer. […] What is paradoxical is that the crudest forms of ideology seem to have returned and that in our public life an older vulgar Marxism would have no need of the hypersubtleties of the Frankfurt School and of negative dialectics, let alone of deconstruction, to identify and unmask the simplest and most class-conscious motives and interests at work, from Reaganism and Thatcherism down to our own politicians: to lower taxes so rich people can keep more of their money, a simple principle about which what is surprising is that so few people find it surprising any more, and what is scandalous, in the universality of market values, is the way it goes without saying and scarcely scandalizes anyone.[10]

Not vulgar Marxism, however, but its estranged affiliate whose demise had been greatly exaggerated, Marxist economics, has proven the lodestar of the contemporary left, and as the academic stock prices of such formerly unimpeachable luminaries as Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan fell precipitously around the time of the 2008 great financial crisis, a determinate rise in the fortunes of hitherto untouchably "dry" Marxist economic theory was undeniable. A sudden surge of interest was evident in value theory itself, in circulation and logistics, in the theory of combined and uneven development, in the theory of rents, in the decline in the rate of profit, in automation, in finance capital as a specific form of capitalist accumulation, in the periodical geographical dislocations of center-periphery relations over the longue durée, and so on: Marxism's "other" tradition—the tradition not particularly shaped by Theodor Adorno, Georg Lukács, or Walter Benjamin (let alone Brecht)—came rapidly into focus as the essential font of Marxist intelligence for the new millennium. That this has posed challenges to the articulations of Marxism and the humanities is an understatement; there is simply no working guidebook to the mediations now being demanded by the present historical conjuncture, as we struggle to emerge from the long shadow of the Frankfurt School, which went to such exorbitant lengths in demonstrating how a poem could refract and repurpose the detritus of liberal ideology in a formal war of position against the capitalist juggernaut.

There has consequently been something of a sharp turn toward "immediacy" itself (history will judge whether the severity of this turn was indeed required): the temptation to give short shrift to the "hypersubtleties" of a former Marxian hermeneutics, and insist urgently on the direct relations between, say, a modulation in lyric voice and the crisis of the stock market, or the impedances in the flow of a line and the less than perfect functioning of a contemporary logistical supercorridor. Marxist thinkers are grappling with degrees of critical starkness not visible since the 1930s—immediate correlations between factor "x" in the faltering economy, or the accompanying riot, and factor "y" in the surging lyric substance. And that is both inevitable and welcome, since the greatest crisis in Western capitalism since the Great Depression has understandably led to radical reconsiderations of the ungovernable relationship between part and whole. Yet, it does seem worth maintaining that communism itself is only ever going to succeed on the basis of a thoroughgoing confrontation with capitalism as an integrated, if radically inconsistent, total system, stretched across and embedded within a vast, planetary matrix of

institutions, states, supply chains, corporations, regulatory bodies, armies, police forces, and the brains and sinews of billions of laboring bodies. Enclaves of communist solidarity and achievement, however evanescent, are critical to the growth of militant consciousness and activism around the world; but without a full reckoning with the systemic multidimensionality of late, globalized capitalism, none of these incandescent nodes can truly ignite a communist revolutionary process. Immediacy is the dew glittering on communism's morning verdure; only a patient and dialectical struggle with the inconsistent totality of the system that causes its routine evaporation will illuminate the path to the supersession of this our punishing chapter of human history.

This has significant bearings upon poetry itself, and our extravagant joy in its rare successes, insofar as these successes turn on the poem's alignment with the struggle against the capitalist totality itself. How we argue for that alignment, what it feels like inside the movement of the poem, how it inflects a wavering voice or galvanizes a pattern of imagery, how it detonates some subterranean satiric impulse or short-circuits the rhythmic prerogative of its inherited form—all of this and more depends upon our agreed critical assessment of the poem's actual relationship with praxis and the structure of the real. Can a poem *be* communist? Is its communism a function of its *use* in extra- or para-literary contexts? Will only a communist world revolution tell us where, and when, the communistic properties of works of art lay potent and alive amidst the sterile signs of bourgeois triumphalism? Or do we have direct access, here and now, to the points at which poetry and communism dovetail into splendid figures of emancipation and exemption from the general poverty of forms? Perhaps these questions are unanswerable, or perhaps their present unanswerability is the form our conjuncture gives to how poetry and communism must be reckoned in their disjunctive synthesis today. All we can safely say is that, not this or that Marxism, not this or that moment of its ongoing historical development as the science of capitalism's overcoming, will be of service as we press the living body of poetry into the open wounds of class society, the better to cut the beast of reality along the joints: only Marxism's entire, synthesized historical body of knowledge will make that task both pleasurable and rewarding. To turn a poem into a scalpel, we will require the complete resources of a body of discourse that, for as long as we live inside the system that is its object of contention, will never be exhausted in its inner variety and dynamism.