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freedom to necessity, when it tries to systematize or conceptualize freedom, then
ence as such. In this instance, thought usurps freedom and fashions itself the
don itself to freedom, and not vice versa. But when thought does try to subject
groundless ground:
nothing other than the freedom of beings”

As a positive reality,’ [e]vil is the hatred of existence as such” (128). Since
freedom is ontologically prior to thought, and since thought cannot reduce free­
dom to necessity, causality, a natural right, or anything else, thought must aban­
don itself to freedom, and not vice versa. But when thought does try to subject
freedom to necessity, when it tries to systematize or conceptualize freedom, then
thought, as an emissary of evil, denies existence, it refuses to acknowledge exist­
ence as such. In this instance, thought usurps freedom and fashions itself the

to say of birth and death that ‘we can only think them’ means that we can
only think in them, and that freedom is at stake in them. Auschwitz
signified the death of birth and death, their conversion into an infinite
abstraction, the negation of existence: this is perhaps above all what
‘culture’ made possible (122).

Borderlessness as the determining and determinate ground of postmodern
thought, freedom as a natural right, a thought before freedom—these are the cur­
rent evils that plague philosophy. For Nancy, when such thoughts are the originary
precepts of philosophy, ‘culture’ once again makes possible, what with dread, the
undoing of freedom. Under these postmodern clichés, freedom is demoted to
non-originary thought. According to Nancy, “existence as its own essence is
nothing other than the freedom of beings” (23). With this definition in mind,
borderlessness becomes not a foundational precept: rather, it is a pre-thought en­
tity. Borderlessness (as a clearly defined thought), therefore, cannot be the begin­
ing of any systematic philosophical doctrine: on the contrary, borderlessness,
like freedom, can only be experienced before thought, outside of thought, on the
‘borders’ of thought, for groundlessness is the ground of borderlessness. And,
“[w]hat is groundless,” according to Nancy, “is also to the same extent, perhaps
more ‘profoundly,’ what comes-up from nothing, on nothing, what, instead of climbing
out of the abyss, freely rises up, suspended in free air, the simple pulsating of
a released existence” (133).

Though Nancy deftly argues his point, one is inclined to question his inflated

claims for freedom. At moments, freedom is described like the Jewish deity from
the Kabbalah, while at other times it appears to be a version of the Christian un­
moved mover who is apprehended only in the cloud of unknowing. Recently
Heidegger’s debt to the mystical tradition (in particular to Meister Eckhart and
Angelus Silesius) has been more carefully documented and these studies help
account for Heidegger’s rather mystical claims. Such a study would also prove
useful, not to discredit any of Nancy’s assertions, but to give them a fuller context.
Because this work is so intelligently argued and so profoundly insightful, it is
certain that it will be the impetus for many future studies in Continental philo­

Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change
Stephen L. Fisher (Ed)
Reviewed by Phil Jenks
University of Kentucky

Stephen L. Fisher’s anthology Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of
Resistance and Change can be read as a (postmodern?) response to the late 1970s
Appalachian classic, Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case.1
Whereas Lewis, Johnson, and Askins sought to delineate the relations of domina­
tion through theoretical spheres of culture, political institutions, and economics,
Fisher’s anthology seeks to formulate a more comprehensive notion of active dis­
sent. Colonialism is a fantastic book, but the authors all too often fell into a
Manichean trap of bifurcating between Us and Them. This process of essentializing
the Appalachian ‘native’ risks reifying a monolithic vision of what constitutes
Appalachia and subsequently problematizes any narrative of collective and indi­

vidual resistance.

It would seem that Fisher et al. seek to reconstitute the Appalachian narrative
in such a way that a multiplicity of powerful voices can be heard, thus challeng­
ing the legitimacy of singularizing Appalachia. Fisher seeks to dismantle the stereo­
type of the ‘Appalachian’ as a passive victim by documenting dissent in Appala­
chia. The book contains an introductory essay by Fisher, and fifteen essays by
activists and scholars in the field in three sections on “Grassroots Organizing,”
“Strategies in Labor Struggles,” and (my favorite) “Culture, Class and Gender in
Appalachian Resistance Movements." Fisher has also included an excellent concluding essay on the problems of neo- Populism, a detailed bibliography, as well as a directory of relevant organizations. Both of Fisher's essays are relevant and fascinating. However, the relevance or application of his neo- Populism essay to the contributions within the text is questionable.

The finest contributions to the text are often the 'retrospective' pieces on significant events. These pieces lack the grotesque nostalgia that one might initially suspect and are keenly aware of both the failures and successes of past political actions. Mary Beth Bingham's piece, "Stopping the Bulldozers: What Difference Did It Make?" charts her personal experience as one of about 20 women who blocked strip mining operations near the mouth of Clear Creek, Kentucky, in 1972. Her narrative is electric, conveying the group's energy and tension—the fear of violent company retaliation and the protesters' power of direct action. Jim Sessions' and Fran Ansley's retrospective, "Singing Across Dark Spaces: The Union/ Community Takeover of Pittston's Moss 3 Plant" provides Sessions' personal account of the Pittston Coal Plant four day takeover from inside the plant and Fran Ansley's account from the outside the plant's premises. These accounts provide the subjective interiority that is lacking in mechanistic metanarratives of colonial theory and crude Marxism. It would seem that these experiences are not true only unto themselves, but can effectively serve to inform the articulation of dialogical theories of social relations.

Many of these retrospectives and other accounts generally articulate a concept of what I call 'incrementalism.' When reflecting on the difference their action made, Bingham asserts the strength of well-organized incremental change—as opposed to more spontaneous single-issue work—while never discounting the value of their actions. In her essay "From Fussin' to Organizing," Sherry Cable also details the ways in which resistance moves from what she calls "individual" to "collective resistance." Cable praises a more mainstream approach to social change through legal means and challenges to city council members. This approach is also reflected in Chris Weiss' "Appalachian Women Fight Back: Organizational Approaches to Nontraditional Job Advocacy." For Weiss, "the elements of the strategy included filing administrative complaints under Executive Order 11246 ... filing law suits ... waging a well orchestrated media campaign." Richard Cuoto, albeit at a completely different level, also provides an historical comparison of spontaneous and purposive approaches to realizing democratic potential in his "The Memory of Miners and the Conscience of Capital: Coal Miners' Strikes as Free Spaces." The organic integration of the UMWA with communities over long periods of time becomes a key to success in striking. Where Cuoto differs is in his attempt to provide significant theoretical grounding for his assertions, relying heavily on Evans' and Boyte's notions of 'free space' as well as the significance of memory. It seems that a 'free space' (e.g. a union, family) must function out of memory so that they cannot be free-floating spaces, but historically contextualized—and it is through this context that the space gains its significance and 'freedom.' However fascinating all of this may be, Cuoto does not elaborate enough on the concept of 'free spaces.'

Although many radical activists may question the viability of trying to alter the conditions in Appalachia through governmental action, virtually none would question the viability of patient, arduous work. This development in the text has extremely significant theoretical implications because it is at this point that Fisher et al. make the best case for disrupting the stereotype of the Appalachian as victim and replacing it with the Appalachian as a historical agent. Many theorists have reduced the Appalachian to, as Mary Anglin put it, "the logics of capital accumulation." Anglin's piece locates the oppositional discourse of women at the Moth Hill mica plant in North Carolina within the framework of the contextually more palatable, less obtrusive discourse of Protestantism. Women who seemed powerless (many were losing jobs, hours were declining) in the workplace utilized the language of evangelical Protestantism to criticize the owners as being sinful and corrupt. Thus, despite the imminent threat of losing a job, "women openly contested gender politics." Power was asserted despite the 'powers that be' and served to vitalize the everyday life of the community. This form of power is the sort that is typically overlooked in mainstream social science insofar as it seeks to measure power in terms of visible results. Although Anglin's approach to power is not new to most (all?) feminists, it is refreshing to see how similar theories of power and dissent work within the Appalachian context. Anglin writes:

Our enthusiasm for working-class heroism has prompted us to look for dramatic confrontations within the workplace, to read defiance into workers' complaints, or to decry workers for failing to do more. Instead of this either/or position, I suggest we explore both the economic and political constraints that operate on factory relations and, equally important, workers' perspectives on what is desirable and feasible.

We find similar trends in Sherry Cable's piece, "From Fussin' to Organizing: Individual and Collective Resistance at Yellow Creek." Cable charts how 'fussin' or the "invisible transcript" such as backtalk, gossip, holding on to one's dialect, moonshining can be seen as "invisible resistance." This transcript is invisible to 'outsiders' and the full range of its power is determined internally. In other words,
it is autonomy amidst a lack of autonomy.

Alan Banks, Dwight Billings, and Karen Tice, in their essay, "Appalachian Studies, Resistance, and Postmodernism," provide insight into this paradox of resistance without falling into the political abyss of deconstruction. Banks, Billings, and Tice challenge the reader to theoretically contextualize the diversity of 'voices' within the text. Rather than embracing an essentialist metanarrative, they seek to adopt Jerome Bruner's notion of culture as "a forum for negotiating and renegotiating meaning." Importantly, the writers do justice to Henry Shapiro's deconstruction of the concept of Appalachia while addressing the fact that there's more to this place than just language—such as black lung. This discursive vision of culture is utilized by Stephen Foster in his great essay, "Politics, Form, and Knowledge." Foster's study is too complex (and fantastic) to go into detail here and I encourage the reader to read this essay. The citizens of Ashe County, North Carolina were fighting the construction of dams on the New River in Virginia. These dams would flood part of Ashe County. The citizens mounted an effective campaign by incorporating a radical resistance into a mainstream theme of patriotism.

But, what—if anything—is wrong with the book? Thus far, I have addressed some (though not all) of the fine contributions to the text. The question will be answered in two ways, by looking at the voices we hear too much of as well as the voices that are absent. John M. Glen's "Like a Flower Slowly Blooming" on Highlander Research and Education Center and Bill Allen's "Save Our Cumberland Mountains" reveal an entirely self-referential approach which balks at integrating the organizational actions into a broader forums for renegotiating meaning. Both authors suffer from a lack of theoretical reflection in their essays. Allen, especially, seems more interested in raking SOCM's founder, J. W. Bradley, over the coals than developing any theories of human relations, consciousness, political action. Bradley is portrayed as "obsessed" and "expected others to follow him in his quest." He "was a charismatic leader who understood only right and wrong; gray was not in his colorbox." Though Allen stops short of calling him a hellfire-breathing fanatic, the reader is left with one voice on this issue, one perspective.

As Hayden White notes (via Banks, Billings, and Tice), "every narrative, however seemingly full, is constructed on the basis of a set of events which might have been included but were left out."10 It would be interesting to find out if there are other sides to this portrayal of the founder of an amazing community action group.

Some suggest that Stephen L. Fisher should have ended the volume with Stephen W. Foster's piece. After all, with the exclusion of Richard Cuoto's excellent piece, we only find the rhetoric of new Populism in the conclusion. However, Fisher's "New Populist Theory and the Study of Dissent in Appalachia" is intriguing and painfully relevant. Although this is mild, it would seem that including this 'conclusion' in the introduction would have prepared the reader for this mode of reading the text. In a text that strives for diversity and plurality of voices, we learn that the flipside is that the voices may rise to a cacophony. Thus, I can see why Fisher wanted to apply an integrated theoretical debate in order to structure the text. But, for the most part, the contributions here are too good to suffer from this dilemma.

The volume has taken an embarrassingly 'new' step forward by finally addressing the issue of gender in Appalachia. Although we just got to touch on some of the gender issues (women's power at Moth Hill, the value of deconstructing masculine metanarratives), the text is full of contributions from women and men regarding this fundamental issue. Meanwhile, Fisher has made a mistake by excluding any description of (by his own words) "organizing efforts by African American citizen groups in Appalachian communities."11 Urban Appalachian migrants are also excluded. As Fisher notes, the book is a "first step" and this text will serve to dispel the notion of the Appalachian as passive victim. However, the notion that Appalachia is white will continue to flourish. Contributors Guy and Candie Carawan note that "away from the patterns of segregation in mountain communities, blacks and whites were able to share common experiences and gain a new appreciation of each other's history and culture."12 It would seem that the anthology would benefit from a similar policy of inclusion. Although the issue of race is mentioned in many of the essays, it is only 'relevant' insofar as race relates to the topic. Don Manning-Miller's piece, "Racism and Organizing in Appalachia" does address issue of racism, but it does not approach the interior sphere of racial identity and Appalachian identity based on accounts by African American Appalachians.13

Manning-Miller's essentialist/Enlightenment account of social change ("the essence of effective educational work against racism is simply telling white people the truth."14) rests comfortably on fallible assumptions. First, that there is a truth. Second, that telling white people this truth would give them a critical self-consciousness, resulting in positive change. When Manning-Miller's essay has ended, the reader has been exposed to an account of racism in Appalachia and that is significant. But a more dialogic approach, including the experience of African-American organizers, would have improved the text considerably. All this being said, the text is a fantastic "first step" as Fisher calls it. Whether the narratives provide fruit for reflection upon a new Populism is highly debatable, but we do
find the resonance of women and men resisting control, speaking their own language.

Endnotes


3 p. 185; Fighting Back. Cuoto, "The Memory of Miners."


5 p. 264; Fighting Back. Anglin, "Engendering the Struggle: Women's Labor and Traditions of Resistance in Rural Southern Appalachia."

6 In light of the previous critique of Colonialism in Modern America, it is important to note that Helen Lewis, Sue Kobak, and Linda Johnson addressed many of these issues in their essay from the volume, "Family, Religion, and Colonialism in Central Appalachia."

7 p. 273; Fighting Back. Anglin, "Engendering the Struggle."


9 p. 87; Fighting Back. Allen, "Save Our Cumberland Mountains."

10 p. 290; Fighting Back. Banks, Billings, Tice, "Appalachian Studies."


12 p. 257; Fighting Back. Guy and Candie Carawan, "Sowing on the Mountain."

13 Blacks in Appalachia, edited by William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985) does an excellent job in addressing these issues. As Cabbell notes in "Black Invisibility and Racism in Appalachia," one out of every fourteen Appalachians (or 1.6 million people) is black. See also, Black

Weaving the Threads of Life: The Khita Gyn-Eco-Logical Healing Cult Among the Yaka

Rene Devisch
University of Chicago Press, 1993

Reviewed by Angela K. Martin
University of Kentucky

Galvanized by the increasing popularity of Foucault’s work on disciplining regimes and sexuality, theoretical interest in ‘the body’ as a site of inquiry and analysis exploded in the decade of the ’80s. In the ’90s the trend continues, although in some disciplines, anthropology included, our focus has shifted from an emphasis on the body as a template for the cultural inscription of meaning, to the empirical elaboration of the corporeal body as generative of meaning.

In anthropology, this movement has been paralleled by another, homologous shift. Re-vamped in its latest incarnation with a healthy dose of practice theory (usually Bourdieu’s version), performance theory gained new popularity in cultural and symbolic studies in the early ’90s. The homology is found in the new theories of ‘embodiment’ that now seem to be resulting from this union. Leading theorists of embodiment, such as the anthropologist Michael Jackson, have thus noted that a theory of practice and the performance of ritual, for example, must be grounded in the socially informed body.

Rene Devisch’s book, Weaving the Threads of Life: The Khita Gyn-Eco-Logical Healing Cult Among the Yaka (1993), is the most sophisticated, if not the very latest, installment in the anthropological embodiment literature. In it, Devisch presents an empirical account (based on extensive participant-observation) of the