

Introduction

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It is with great pleasure that I introduce *Mosaic* 52.4, a general issue of special significance that features the work of Andrzej Warminski, Andrew Barnaby, Rebecca Haubrich, Adina Balint and Patrick Imbert, Andrew Kim, Jeffrey R. Wilson, Eric Bronson, Matthew Teorey, and Jen Hui Bon Hoa. In this context I would further like to highlight Andrew Barnaby's essay on Freud, Hamlet, and self-authorship; Rebecca Haubrich's work on Kafka, Celan, and Derrida in Babel; and lastly, Jen Hui Bon Hoa's work on Rancière and Derrida's *Dissemination*. Finally, I am thrilled to single out Andrzej Warminski's essay on the use and misuse of rhetoric in the work of Roman Jakobson and Gerard Genette.

Mosaic is very lucky to publish Andrzej Warminski's "Resistances to Rhetoric: Jakobson and Genette." I will not summarize Warminski's argument on the resistances to rhetoric in Jakobson and Genette, two literary theorists whom he describes as explicitly putting rhetoric to work in their theoretical projects. What I will do is provide a few pragmatic points for reading his work that I have gleaned over the years. First of all, this is classic Warminski. We are moved very quickly and ably through extremely difficult theoretical terrain by virtue of the medieval *trivium*. Vis-à-vis Paul de Man, there is a dose of interpretative policing, new light is shed on particularly critical passages we have all no doubt glossed, and de Man's work and his insights are

expanded upon and pushed through close reading, demonstrative example, the isolation of chiasms, and Warminski's unique brand of humour. Further, textual argumentation is shot-through with pedagogical demonstration derived from the classroom—in this case the summary steps of reading Jakobson are taken directly from teaching notes. Finally, catachresis puts in an appearance, the emergence of philosophical aesthetics is brought into the mix, and Warminski shows that the passage from grammar to meaning and world is always fraught, troubled by rhetoric, and ultimately inaccessible to reading.

Beyond this, Warminski's essay will read like first-generation Deconstruction, and as always upon reading such texts, we are reminded just how necessary it is to revisit these insights today. In reading Warminski on any subject, one cannot help but feel one's own projects wither, for the intense scrutiny he places on his subjects always bleeds into one's own work. This is primarily the case because Warminski works upstream from literary theory as we know and use it, consistently bracketing the work we do via rhetoric. It is in this sense that I always emerge from reading his texts as something of an aesthete, but with each reading I also become less and less a soldier of aesthetic ideology.

No doubt this is a puzzling way to describe the effects of reading Warminski's texts, but I think it helps introduce his critical work. *Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger* (1987), Warminski's first book, long served as a bedside breviary of mine and a model of how to compose and structure the perfect book—he would shrink from this thought. Nevertheless, there is no better description of reading theory to be found than his “Prefatory Postscript,” which reduces the problem down to three easy steps. With the book's subtle formalization of the problem of interpretation as distinct from reading, a formalization achieved by nesting the latter at the heart of the former, Warminski offers a road map for determining where resistance begins as a function of the aesthetic. In turn, the alliteration of the book's subtitle, “*Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger*,” points to the ends of reading, and how quickly reading bottoms out in a form of ironic textual resistance. It is as if the demonic laughter of catachresis—Warminski's favourite trope that is an “abuse of trope” and which lies at the limits of tropology—sounds out from behind metonymy as syntactical proximity to reveal a final threshold to be crossed (liv). Warminski's subsequent books, *Ideology, Rhetoric, Aesthetics: For De Man* (2013) and *Material Inscriptions: Reading in Practice and Theory* (2013), flesh out and expand upon this project.

In any case, what is always so compelling for me about Warminski's work is that the pragmatic experience of reading his essays always has a tangible purchase on the limits of literary theory that his texts seek to breach. The very large insights his texts

raise through the deeply occulted issues of rhetoric and reading he brings into visibility are always a function of close readings that are difficult to reconfigure outside of the specific textual contexts he takes up, and the micro textual environments which are so often his focus. The work plumbs the very distant horizons of critique that our own theoretical work should plumb but has yet to think. As a consequence, I always find myself content to adopt interpretative thresholds that are even one or two steps from the horizons he elucidates. To this extent, it is as if literary theory is my constant battle cry—that we are all legion, I suppose, and that the work we do is always preliminary to the critical work that his close readings perform. Clearly there was a time when Warminski, too, was symptomatic, but for the most part we read a cool and technically precise Warminski who works against the resistances to rhetoric and reading. It is for this reason I am tempted to say that his work is somehow post-theoretical, even though the critical effect his texts have on my own thinking is a strange cocktail of retrospective critique and prospective work to come. To put the problem far too bluntly, literary theory is always guilty of locking truth into place with aesthetic sutures it can know nothing of.

These resistances to reading happen again and again, and nowhere more seamlessly than in the context of public art, a recent and local example of which is featured on our cover. We show *Bloody Saturday* (2019), Bernie Miller and Noam Gonick's monument to the one hundredth anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike. That the language of the monument is sutured to the life-world of the street or the very different granularity of world historical events by virtue of the aesthetic is difficult enough to prove, let alone gain any distance on after the fact, but this is the work to be done. A beginning of sorts is provided by the precedent of L.B. Foote's famous photograph of workers overturning the streetcar on 21 June 1919. The tilt of the monument and the ideal perspective on it is strangely filtered through the image. There is the siting of the monument at the original intersection of Main Street and Market Avenue. There is the unveiling of the monument precisely one hundred years after the original event. And lastly, there is the fact that this time and place would seem to instance the ideological creep of gentrification that is symptomatic of the deepening crisis of Neo-Liberalism. Such correspondences materialize photographic evidence, reshape experience, literalize history, bend memory, smooth over inconsistencies, and variously suture language to world through what Warminski describes as an entire phenomenology of spatio-temporal logic.

Complicating and emboldening these ways in which *Bloody Saturday* sits within public space and the flow of history, one must also see the work as the result of the convergence and collision of Miller and Gonick's distinct working logics. On the one

hand there is Gonick's film practice, specifically his interest in labour and the historical repression of gay politics. Thus Gonick's black and white film *1919* (1997), which directs an almost vaudevillian lens on homo-erotics and agitation in a bathhouse coincident with the General Strike. On the other hand there is Miller's investment in thinking sacrifice, the problem of desire in the context of mass consumption, and the monument as an inherently fallen form, especially in his so-called collision monuments. Thus *Rediscovered Furlong* (2003), a crisp red Ikea sofa skewered with a filing cabinet, the former impacted by the latter like an object of defenestration. Collaborative work like Miller and Gonick's can be seamless, can reveal difference and show its sutures; no doubt the same would have been true of the collective action on 21 June 1919.

Thus what is most striking about *Bloody Saturday* is how stylistically wrought the work actually is—not in the extreme, but enough to get under one's skin. The monument sinks into the pavement, clearly a pragmatic issue and a question mediated by Foote's photograph, but also a theoretical decision, and one intended to literally embed the work in the street. Kids can run around it as easily as it can be used for selfies or ignored. The interpenetration of solids is another issue. It may signal "the deposition of sediment" over time (Miller and Gonick 2), but perhaps, equally, it gestures to a Chthonic origin? Especially at night, when the city sleeps and the streetcar is illuminated from within, it is as if the ground swells from deep within a molten core. The work is eruptive and seems inseparable from the world of dreams. Third, the scale is slightly diminutive—in fact eight feet shorter than the original streetcar. To my eye this functions both to foreshorten the time between a then and a now as well as functioning as a real enough mirror of the machinery of industry at the turn of the last century, and hence, an indication of the magnitude of capital now and the telescopic distance we have come. Ultimately, this gives the monument the feeling of a prop that doesn't quite make the cut. Finally, a lot pivots on the clean lines and slightly abstracted look of the illuminated windows. All the violence and crush of the mass of workers in Foote's photograph are lacking visibility, which is not to say that labour, violence, and class are absent, but only that these are present in other ways.

The monument, which is otherwise synonymous with male heroics and great deeds, does not find its ideal form here. As Jeanne Randolph reminds us, this is not a towering structure with "phallic phantasies" attached, but a far more plebian and horizontal edifice. Certainly the streetcar is readable as cipher for mass action, especially locally, but for the most part what we see is just mass transport. No doubt monuments in the contemporary moment are always up to some such pragmatic—I mean on the spot—re-definition of the primary form. Playing with expectations of site and history and event is what the monument must now do. In the case of *Bloody Saturday* this

public mischief is focused in the translucent windows. They move the visibility and raw power of the citizenry captured by Foote from the outside to an inside, and put them to work doing something far more secretive. Think pink. Think the rose-coloured idealisms of the twentieth century. Think the precarious “triumph” of democracy over communism, and think the limitations of all of these idealisms. What spectrum of otherwise repressed possibilities is given visibility by “rose-coloured” glass is the crux. What Robert Musil calls the “prime purpose” of monuments “to grab hold of our attention and give a pious bent to our feelings” is here given precise form. In proximity to both Gonick’s *1919* and Miller’s *Rediscovered Furlong*, it is as if the erotic desires of the bathhouse somehow blur with that desire dictated by the commodity, the wild hopes for a better life of workers and the forgotten dreams of a middle class.¹

Bloody Saturday is the reproduction of a streetcar, the double of a “light box,” a thing to run around, and an object cloaked in a uniquely conceptual packaging (Enright 18-19). It is also a monument to the general strike and a gesture to the dream of collective life that now lies buried beneath a collective dream of another sort—the problem of consumption, the image, and its place in the ever-accumulating spectacle of capital (Debord). Shot-through with what Marx describes as the “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (163) of the commodity, what does this half-buried ghost of a streetcar do if not neatly repackage local history in an up-scale form for public consumption? The corner of Main and Market, once the tipping point of mass strike, now edges, like urban environments everywhere, precipitously towards the film set. Neither is it a stretch to see the sculpture as a monument to film. The mirroring is specific. Not only might the six ton bulk be described as a magic lantern—the archaic predecessor to early cinema—but with the steady flow of traffic on the street behind, it is as if the light projecting from the windows projects the very stream of moving images roaring by. In effect, these “queer spirits”—we motorists and passersby—are lit up as phantasmagoric projections of this ghost from the past (Gonick). In short, the work tries to think the filmic underpinnings of everyday life, attempts to gain some little leverage on an event that is inseparable from our collective amnesia, and lastly speaks precisely to the spectacle of art tourism that is now a norm for the art precincts of urban centres around the world. In so doing, *Bloody Saturday* attempts to recover some small part of an archaic form of collective ritual that transports us back to the originary form of the aesthetic: tragedy.² But it is no less a game of ping-pong between Miller and Gonick’s practices for this.

Of course, things are far slipperier and more complex than a summary introduction of *Bloody Saturday* can hope to articulate, but it seems safe to say that in this provisional interpretation, a range of temporal and spatial attempts to think aesthetic

questions—i.e., chiasmic exchanges between inside and outside or continuities between 1919 and 2019—specific to the monument collapse into and blur with the question of aesthetic ideology where resistance to rhetoric and reading still remains a problem to be confronted.

NOTES

1/ See Benjamin. I have benefitted especially from T.J. Clark's review of the *Arcades Project*.

2/ See especially Nietzsche.

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