

Antliff's anarchist modernists are worth remembering, worth preserving as a cultural legacy, for the ways they resisted Wilson's voice, for the alternatives they proffered, alternatives like Robert Henri's declaration that his "love of mankind" was "individual, not national." One important service Antliff's book does for us at the turn of the twenty-first century is precisely to preserve these alternative voices and visions.

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David McNally, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labor, and Liberation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

This is a fashionable book with an untrendy message. Language and the body are perhaps the most captivating of subjects in the current theoretical moment. But McNally's purpose is a dissident one. He reminds us that for all the talk of bodies in what he considers, loosely, postmodern writing (which he labels as post-structuralist and deconstructive), the sensuous, material, productive body is an illusive non-presence: "linguistic idealism involves the subsumption of concrete bodies and relations – bodies, objects, social practices – under a set of conceptual abstractions." (3) It is not McNally's purpose to understate the importance of language, which he respects as the site of significant meaning. Rather, like other historical materialists who have challenged "the linguistic turn," he aims to reinvest language with materiality by connecting what is severed by collapsing substance into "text," an intellectual exercise that carries the interpretive and political cost of obscuring, even denying, the many "things" we seemingly, according to bourgeois ideology, cannot change, among them bodies.

Readers expecting an accounting of bodies at labour, in class struggle, resisting oppression, or engaged with historical movements, relations of love and sexuality, straddling biological need and the political unconscious, will not find it here. There is no social history of experience to be found in McNally's pages. Instead, what he develops is a rigorous theoretical accounting of the ways in which the materialist edifice, from Darwin through Marx to Walter Benjamin, reawakens an appreciation of the body's central place in human development, where both language and the struggle for liberation have parallel histories. McNally is particularly illuminating, albeit in ways that are relentlessly oppositional, with respect to Nietzsche's influence, encapsulated in the entirely bourgeois conception of an ideal-

ized, metaphysical “will to power,” which he counterposes to Darwin’s historicized and materializing accent on cooperation in the evolution of species. Study of the survival and adaptation of bodies provided something of a mid-Victorian laboratory for dismantling the ideological weight of feudal superstition and religious cant that hung like a millstone around the neck of rational, analytic thought well into the twentieth century. He moves from this invaluable introductory premise through discussions of linguistic theory’s suppression of the body from Saussure to Derrida and, after pausing in a chapter much indebted to the anthropological tradition to decipher the language-labour relation and overcome the tendency to dualism inherent in non-materialist theories of language, moves into discussions of the significance of Voloshinov, Bakhtin, and Walter Benjamin.

No short review can adequately convey either the nuances or contributions of McNally’s marshalling of what he intends to be a “dialectics of awakening,” by which the body and its languages are reconciled in an awareness of the struggle for liberations that free men and women from the tyrannies of capitalist exploitation and the plethora of neuroses that surround and suffocate libidinal bodies always standing, not in an original sin, but on the hard, primitive ground of that most powerful of alienations, the extraction of surplus upon which so much of “civilized” modernity and postmodernity rests. The book should be read carefully and generously by all those who take “postmodernism,” “materialism,” and social transformation seriously.

McNally himself could be more generous to those with whom he is aligned. Oddly absent from his wide reading and impressive citations are some key texts by contemporary Marxists whose concerns, if not directly related to those of this book, certainly offer as much in the way of congruent commentary as any number of non-Marxist works commonly referenced. There may be a message, buried in a footnote where McNally defines “his” tradition of “classical Marxism.” He mentions Marx and Engels, of course, and then Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci, whose presence he does not qualify chronologically. “The early years of the Bolshevik Revolution” are alluded to as a generic good, but Lenin and Trotsky are not named. The language of sectarianism, it seems, emanates from quarters other than the ultraleft “body politic.”

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