

Both collections would likely appeal to anyone pursuing history using poststructuralism in their analysis. I hesitate to call either collection Marxist as they break so thoroughly with Marx and Engels and rely instead on Althusser as the arbiter of the nature of Marxism. Neither text reveal Althusser as a leading member of the French Communist Party or his Stalinist leanings which seems at cross purposes with their claims of anti-essentialism. I do recognize that the editors and authors in the collections are attempting to redefine Marxism. That I do not accept their redefinitions is largely immaterial to their project. As pointed out in the introduction to *Re/presenting Class*, “since it is not possible to establish ‘objective’ validity outside the frame of a particular analytic regime or project, the question of choice between different theories or entry points involves not which is more accurate or true, but the consequences of choosing one rather than another” (5). I would argue that the consequences of choosing their mode of analysis is to take a step backward in Marxist theory leaving class struggle muted and obscured by jargon and over analysis not to mention offering little useful for workers’ actual struggles. If the 1990s has taught us anything it is the actual, not imagined, brutal nature of capitalism. These collections may appeal to those wanting to know what is current in post-structuralist analysis, or what an anti-essentialist class analysis entails. Beyond that I could not recommend either book.

John Henry Harter
Simon Fraser University

Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, eds., *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

To develop a collection assessing the status of American democracy is an ambitious project at best but one that is increasingly important as the U.S. and global capitalist interests dominate almost every political agenda. I read much of this collection during the first anniversary of September 11th and was constantly reminded by media reports of memorial events that there was little space for real, critical debate about this important milestone in the world’s most powerful democracy. Perhaps because of the September 11th context I was searching in this book for an analysis that would help me to understand how limited American democracy has become. I wanted some acknowledgement of how the discursive terrain has narrowed to virtually exclude all interests other than those of global capitalism. I wanted someone to address the increased polar-

ization of rich and poor, of white and non-white citizens of America. I wanted someone to give a glimmer of hope by shining light on the international social protests which attempt to disrupt both the discourse and the practices of multinational corporations and democratically-elected political leaders. With the exception of a few articles, I was gravely disappointed with the collection's ability to address the real crisis of American democracy and its impact on the world.

To be fair, this is a collection of post-modern writings on democracy and I realize that it would not provide materialist analyses of the state of American democracy. The co-editors clearly outline their purpose in the introduction:

we will not describe democracy in the terms of total freedom, good leadership, nationalist cant, protective institutionalism, rational rule, happy communitarianism, rigid formalism, transcendental formlessness, smug liberalism, or First Worldism. Instead, the contributors treat democracy as a constructed category in order to understand what conditions of thought and practice make it more and less possible, more and less livable, more and less emancipatory. (Introduction, 8)

Even from this post-modern positioning, I was ready for some insightful post-modern analysis which would provide me with further insights about the nature and limitations of contemporary American democratic culture.

There are a number of overlapping themes which emerge in this collection. Several of the authors assess American culture in an effort to assess the democratic health of the nation. They examine the historical legacy of Alexis de Tocqueville and Ralph Waldo Emerson and they also explore the importance of Will Rogers, Monica Lewinsky, and Princess Diana in the shaping of American democratic culture.

Some of the authors address the issue of exclusion from American culture. Joan Dayan explores the exclusion of prisoners while Richard Flores studies cultural imperialism along the Texas-Mexican border and the way Mexicans are used for their cheap labour but rejected as full citizens.

I most appreciated the articles that dealt with the real world of politics – whether that be the Independent Gay Forum, neo-liberal discourse, or the paralysis of the academic Left. Here, Lisa Duggan, Chris Newfield and Wendy Brown provide important contributions for how the Left needs to re-shape its politics in this new era.

Duggan provides a very provocative and important analysis of the conservative nature of the Independent Gay Forum. She persuasively argues that the Forum's acceptance of same-sex marriage is not a liberating political position but rather one that privatizes and apoliticizes same-sex relationships. This pro-

vides food for thought for those of us who want to align with Left and Queer politics. The liberal pursuit of individual choice which is so often advocated by the Left does not begin to address some of the conservative elements which underly this important debate.

Newfield provides new insights in his critique of neo-liberalism. He addresses neo-liberal claims that the market provides more choice and more individual freedom. He argues that the Left has been too quick to capitulate to these neo-liberal claims.

And Wendy Brown confronts the current paralysis of Left discourse within the halls of academia. She argues that the Left no longer has a vision of the future and she even admits that some of our “progressive” activities within the academy need to be revisited. She suggests that we academic Lefties have become defensive and moralistic because we lack a clear vision of the future we wish to live in. She uses her own experience within Women’s Studies as an example of a lively, engaged, and liberating academic politics that has now become uncertain of its path.

Together these 15 scholars of literary criticism, cultural studies, history, legal studies, and political theory provoke us to reassess the health of American democracy and to find it wanting: a vital debate which requires cross-fertilization from not just postmodernists but those who still engage in a materialist analysis as well. And the assessment would be even sharper if democratic scholars outside of the United States were invited to participate.

Margaret Hillyard Little
Queen’s University

Nicholas Griffin, ed., assisted by Alison Roberts Miculan, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell: The Public Years, 1914-1970* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Biography is inevitably retrospective. What men and women do in their final acts often determines how we judge their earlier deeds – or even their lives as a whole. For some, this can be a blessing: Winston Churchill outlived the military and economic blunders of his youth to become England’s fearless defender during World War II, which is how he lives on in public memory.

But for many others, the consequences of retrospective biography are much crueler. And few have suffered as grievously from this often pitiless practice as the great English philosopher Bertrand Russell. Never mind his fundamental contributions to analytical philosophy and mathematics, his Nobel Prize in literature, and his staggeringly prolific literary output. Despite his accom-