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'Meaning Strides Through These Poems': Ted Berrigan's *The Sonnets* and the Poetics of Sociability

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"MEANING STRIDES THROUGH THESE POEMS": TED BERRIGAN'S *THE SONNETS* AND THE POETICS OF SOCIABILITY

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ABSTRACT

In the field of modern/postmodern poetry studies, the Second Generation New York School of poets has been, and continues to be, an undervalued aesthetic movement. Following the now famous First Generation New York School – a literary and artistic coterie containing the likes of Ashbery, O'Hara, and Pollock – the poets of the Second Generation lived, worked, and often died in New York's Lower East Side and, in the process, emulated *and* altered the aesthetic of the First Generation. This thesis attempts to contextualize the achievements of the Second Generation New York School by focusing on the movement's de facto leader, the poet Ted Berrigan. Born in Providence, but raised in Tulsa, Berrigan is best known for *The Sonnets* (1964), a collection of poetry that relies on processes of assemblage and cut-up to effect a proceduralist poetry that, up until recently, has garnered little scholarly attention. It is my contention that *The Sonnets* is of monumental importance to an understanding of twentieth-century postmodern poetry because it reflects a Marxian attitude towards community collaboration, language as commodified linguistic object, and the role of the modernist poet as a bourgeois (and far too serious!) individualized maker-of-meaning. By explicating *The Sonnets*' subtle, yet poignant, socioeconomic critique, I am hoping that future scholarly attention will be given to both Berrigan and the poetic experiment that sustained him, the Second Generation New York School.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Jillian Weise, Dr. Walt Hunter, and Dr. Catherine Paul for their unwavering support throughout the writing of this manuscript. I would also like to acknowledge my friends and family for their continued support, and Clemson University for providing me with the necessary resources to continue my research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION

In 1965, at a party hosted by members of the Berkeley Poetry Conference, the poet Ted Berrigan gave one of the most important signings in the history of Second Generation New York School poetics. This signing was problematic, however, because it was not his original work at all, but a poetry collection written by Frank O'Hara. Considered the de facto ringleader and leading personality of the Second Generation New York School of poets, Berrigan's signing of O'Hara's work epitomized the appropriative poetics that reinforced both the playfulness of his sonnets and their more serious political discourse. For Berrigan, the act of signing another's work was a function of sociability in the community and thus a political act of mass-participation. The political importance of Berrigan's oeuvre has largely been overlooked in recent scholarship.

In most academic circles, a discussion of the New York poetry scene of the 1950s and 60s almost always revolves around the poets of the First Generation. When Berrigan is mentioned, it is usually to highlight the role the First Generation played in begetting a successive poetic movement. Berrigan is rarely identified as a creative force in his own right. This is not to say that First Generation work did not heavily influence Berrigan's oeuvre and the work of the Second Generation; it most certainly did. And it is not to detract from the poetic richness and significance of First Generation work. But when scholars and critics place Berrigan and company in the growing shadow of First Generation poetry they miss the overwhelming political importance of Lower East Side poetics. Like its First Generation aesthetic predecessor, Lower East Side poetics meshed

with the abstract painting and constructivist movements to give birth to an aesthetic of collage. Unlike the poetry of the First Generation, Second Generation New York School poets embraced more fully Marxist modes of literary production which, ultimately, infused Lower East side poetry with Soviet and constructivist aesthetics (Kane 128). Nowhere is this Marxian commitment to poetics more evident than in Berrigan's magnum opus, *The Sonnets*.

Published in 1964, *The Sonnets* utilizes abstract expressionism and Soviet montage film theory to construct an aesthetic of collage popularized decades earlier by Pound and Eliot. Specifically, Berrigan relies on montage techniques championed by Sergei Eisenstein, and the push/pull theory of painting advanced by German expressionist Hans Hofmann, to imbue the work with a leftist political agenda often overlooked by scholars. In *Procedural Form In Postmodern American Poetry: Berrigan, Antin, Silliman, and Hejinian*, Huntsperger claims "Berrigan's *Sonnets* manifests no obvious ideological commitment" (41). Likewise, Rifkin, in "Worrying About Making It: Ted Berrigan's Social Poetics," notes Berrigan's main impetus in writing the collection was self-canonization:

> With its poetic of citation and collage, *The Sonnets* enacted on the level of rhetoric the self canonizing maneuvers that were taking place at the conference's readings, panel discussions, and, most of all, cocktail parties. Berrigan wrote himself into the institution of the avant-garde by anticipating the moment when the institutions around poetry fold back into poetry itself. (643)

Of particular interest to us is Rifkin's acknowledgment of Berrigan's poetic insight. Berrigan did indeed situate himself within the avant-garde canon because he foresaw the moment when Second Generation New York School poetry reified the

institutional ethos of the movement's First Generation by recycling Ashbery and O'Hara in newer and newer contexts. But Berrigan also achieved canonicity (at least within the New York School) by anticipating the moment when "the institutions around poetry" (Rifkin 643) began to demand poetry's return to its democratic and communitarian forms, not simply its insistence on individual careerism as postulated by Rifkin.

What I am arguing is that *The Sonnets* functions first and foremost as a site of Marxian ideology that relies on the playfulness of appropriative discourse to subtly resist bourgeoisie notions of individualism. Crafted through a careful process of fragmentation, cut-up, and juxtaposition, Berrigan's sonnets employ Eisenstein's theory of Soviet montage editing and Hofmann's push/pull theory of plasticity to cinematize and order the poetic experience around communality. Embodying the Soviet aesthetic tradition, Eisenstein believed that meaning originated dialectically and that the collision of cinematic shots produced a synthesis between two seemingly disparate concepts. Hofmann's push/pull theory of plasticity likewise operates within the dialectic tradition insofar as opposite colors in his paintings are meant to collide to produce a sensation of movement. Thus *The Sonnets* could be understood in terms of Marxism's conception of material dialecticism and the "democratization of aesthetics," to use Benjamin's terminology.

Because of the collection's large number of sonnets (88 in total), I restrict my analysis in this section to "Sonnet 15" and "Sonnet 59," and to "Sonnet 32" and "Sonnet 48." These sonnets, as with most of the sonnets in the collection, rely on Berrigan's proceduralism to interact both thematically and physically. Through a process of cut-up

and juxtaposition, lines from “Sonnet 32” find their way into “Sonnet 48” and lines from “Sonnet 15” are implanted into and rearranged in “Sonnet 59.” These sonnets best utilize Hofmann’s push/pull theory and Berrigan’s own unique poetics to both reflect soviet montage *and* modify it.

This paper is divided into three distinct sections. The first section discusses the social origins of *The Sonnets*, illustrating how Berrigan’s involvement with the small literary magazines of the Lower East Side and with communal poetic practices in general produced what Rifkin calls a “poetics of sociability” (640) that is reflected in the collection. I will also rely on the work of Walter Benjamin to highlight the work’s Marxian processes of reproduction. The second section demonstrates how Berrigan’s sonnets deviate from earlier collagist, proceduralist, and serialist work, especially that of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and John Ashbery, in terms of content, political orientation, and creative atmosphere. The third section demonstrates how the sonnets rely on and complicate the dialectic processes of Eisenstein and Hofmann to create a Marxian aesthetic.

CHAPTER ONE

A MARXIAN COMMUNITY: PROCESS OF AUTHORSHIP IN THE LOWER EAST SIDE

In "*Angel Hair* Magazine, the Second-Generation New York School, and the Poetics of Sociability," Daniel Kane notes:

> Second-generation work manifested more clearly than previous groupings had done before that the place of the solitary and muse-inspired author could productively give way to a poetics of sociability that, at least temporarily and by virtue of the collective, could help create a truly alternative site of resistance against the literary and political establishment of the era (338).

Thus any discussion of Berrigan must first acknowledge the community of Lower East Side poets to which he belonged and the often-precarious politics to which he subscribed. Working and writing alongside poets such as Alice Notley (who was to become Berrigan's second wife), Anne Waldman, and Ed Sanders, Berrigan sought to establish a "political avant-garde" through the creation of small mimeograph literary magazines and communal readings in which the *collaborative act* of writing took precedence over the poems generated (Kane 123). This penchant for politically avant-garde modes of production was transcoded into Berrigan's "house magazine," *C*.

First published in May 1963, *C* sought to publish the work of lesser known Second Generation New York School poets as well as bridge the creative gap between the literary and broader artistic communities. Many issues featured the work of prominent painters such as Jane Freilicher and Joe Brainard on the front covers (Kane 105). In doing so, *C* transcended its role as a community arts magazine to become a cross-stitching of

various art movements ranging from Dadaism and surrealism to abstract expressionism and lyrical abstraction. The magazine exemplified the postmodern tendency of juxtaposing the intellectual with the pop cultural, a characteristic that would largely inform *The Sonnets*. In many respects, the magazine was a product of the diversity bound up in the communal and *revolutionary* aesthetic of the Lower East Side. *In All Poet's Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960's*, Daniel Kane acknowledges the role of the small literary presses in the creation of a communal aesthetic: "One finds texts throughout *C* magazine that in their own rough way fit into a tradition that used poetry to threaten perceptions of individual authorship and preformulated generic distinctions" (113). *C* therefore became both an instrument of collectivization and a statement on poetics.

Leftist Origins and the Processes of Change

C's emphasis on a poetics of redistributed authorship and mass communal conscious reflected Berrigan's leftist politics. A voracious reader of traditionally leftist writers such as Henry Miller and C. Wright Mills, and a friend of such subversive figures as Alan Ginsberg and LeRoi Jones, Berrigan's politics were rooted in the anti-capitalist, anti-conservative ideologies of the Vietnam-era protest movements. His concern for the alienated worker under capitalism and his disdain for a society predicated solely on wealth accumulation are illustrated in a series of letters addressed to his first wife, Sandy Berrigan. In an April 26, 1962 letter to Sandy discussing recent college dropouts at

Columbia, Berrigan surmises that "it is their [the dropouts] parents who are to blame, and ultimately it is capitalism that is to blame, and it is the 'American Way' that is to blame" (218). Furthermore, in a letter to Sandy marked March 28, 1962, Berrigan laments the passing of Marxist scholar C. Wright Mills, noting that his book on the Cuban revolution, *Listen, Yankee*- a work in which Mills argues that the U.S. misrepresented the Cuban revolution- was "one of the most important books I have ever read. It further awakened me to my own ignorance, which is partly due to the lack of information available to us in America " (114).

Berrigan's poetry after *The Sonnets* reveals his heavily nuanced leftist views. Published in 1971, "Red Shift" exemplifies Berrigan's concern with temporality and processes of change, processes that are set in motion by the vast capitalistic industrial complex that is the antithesis to the "community" Berrigan idealizes. The poem's speaker is alienated and displaced, forced to "drink some American poison liquid air which bubbles / and smoke to have character and to lean / In" (158) in order to survive under the increasing plutocracy. Likewise, in "Soviet Souvenir," the speaker reaffirms his commitment to revolutionary discourse by situating himself within an environment of socio-economic unrest: "Because she is direct in her actions and in her feelings / Under the puns of the troop, there are frescoes / On the rudder, which you set against a bracelet's fire, and / Which goes toward you with each beat. I find myself there" (141). Berrigan's obscurity is telling. The "there" where Berrigan "finds himself" is any material moment of elevated class-consciousness, rather than a single moment in a mythologized and unobtainable past.

Perhaps the poem that is most illustrative of his leftist, and often-contradictory views, is the long poem "Tambourine Life." Written between October 1965 and January 1966, "Tambourine Life" marks the beginning of Berrigan's transformation from a traditionally closed-form poet to a predominantly open-form one. Most important is the poem's use of sarcasm to highlight the politics of class struggle. Berrigan begins the poem by emphatically proclaiming, "FUCK COMMUNISM" before stating that "it's red white and blue / in the bathroom" and that it's "back to the wall" (Berrigan 48). He bombards us with both abstract ideology and concrete examples of Americana in the same opening lines, leaving us to wonder whether he is mocking the McCarthyist rhetoric of 1950's right-wing Americana or actually denouncing communism. Berrigan makes his position clearer as the poem continues in the same deriding tone, an appropriation of the voice of the "everyman," the Dylan-esque "Tambourine Man." In the section entitled "The Code of the West," the speaker transforms from the complacent product of "groupthink" to the voice of the revolutionary prophet: "The best way / to make yrself a monkey / is to jump down / (spin around) / pick a bale of cotton / if you don't understand / that / you will never understand / your country's history" (Berrigan 58).

"Tambourine Life" thus presents the views of a speaker angered by the stupidity of McCarthyist sentiment masked by the voice of the everyman proletariat. The poem is about class from the viewpoint of the underclass. And through the use of open-form poetics, Berrigan is able to construct a poem predicated on the collision of opposing lines: leftist thinkers such as Ed Sanders and Mayakovsky are juxtaposed with the seemingly innocuous day-to-day activities of average New Yorkers; "FUCK

COMMUNISM" is broadcasted next to the American flag in the bathroom. The dialectic, the tension between opposites, drives the motion in the poem.

Berrigan's preoccupation with dialectic processes of change is evident in *The Sonnets.* An avid reader of the famous process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, Berrigan makes "change" a central theme in a majority of his sonnets, going so far as to reify a pivotal concept of Whitehead's in "Sonnet 50": "Whatever is going to happen is already happening" (47). For Whitehead, the process of becoming an individual, of acquiring an individual essence, is bound up in continual processes of change. Whitehead argues that reality should be conceived as a series of overlapping and contrasting events that are constantly being shaped by external forces, not a linear progression of singular events (34). He further argues that individuals are composed of "occasions of experience" that in turn overlap to constitute the act of becoming (34). Marx's dialectic process functions in the same way, albeit it is conflicting events that shape the course of history; the individual's role in altering history is minimal. For Marx, history is continually in a process of change driven by the tension between events. Berrigan's sonnets are structured accordingly and they seek the vitality of overlapping "occasions of experience" to produce dialectic movement. His processes of change reflect and modify the ever-present tension between sociopolitical structures in the Marxian tradition.

The Sonnets in "The Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Berrigan's reliance on dialectic processes further influenced the structure of his readings, as they often exemplified practices of call-and-response that relied on the reciprocity between poet and audience, between current and past work. According to Kane, Berrigan viewed the poetry reading "not simply [as] an incidental opportunity to socialize and advance as an established writer but an inherently valuable form for receiving and creating poetry" (108). The internal and external communication between texts in Berrigan's poetry should not be understated. Reflecting the dialectic tradition of Second Generation readings, *The Sonnets* encodes on a structural and subject level a sociability of poetics, both externally through the interaction between various poets and painters and internally through the dialogue between sonnets themselves. By choosing to print many of his sonnets in propaganda-like, small literary magazines, Berrigan highlights poetry's role in forming an easily transmutable and largely aural class-identity:

> *The Sonnets* as a book is to be heard rather than simply to be read off the page – should be being heard at the same time – for I am speaking all the lines, it is my voice and where it's coming from is – is – I am literally standing up in front of an audience and reading the sonnet sequence . . . there was a performance element in it then (Kane 108).

Through emphasizing this "performance element," Berrigan consciously embeds the oracular beginnings of poetry into the text. Consequently, his readings center on the intimacy of oral storytelling and he relies on both the audience's aural and oral participation to increase the sociability of meaning.

While one could certainly argue that Berrigan was not the first poet to construct his readings dialectically, his insistence on making vocal exchange a priority during poetry readings resituates poetry's performative sociability in a twentieth-century context. Principles of performative sociability, specifically appropriative discourse, are in turn codified in the first couple of sonnets in the collection. Published in the first issue of *C*, "Sonnet 2" exemplifies the poetics of appropriation that drive the dialectic in the work. The line, "It's 8:30 p.m in New York and I've been running around all day . . . / Yes, it is now," (2) and the poem's subsequent preoccupation with temporality, mirror O'Hara's earlier poem, "The Day Lady Died":

> It is 12:20 in New York a Friday
> three days after Bastille day, yes
> it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine
> because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton
> at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner
> and I don't know the people who will feed me (O'Hara).

Here, both poets concern themselves with spatial and temporal detail. The material world of the "everyman" is stressed by the "Yes, it is now" syntax in Berrigan and the "yes / it is 1959" in O'Hara. Instead of directing our attention to an unobtainable past or an undecided future, both poets assert the primacy of the material present at the expense of the transcendental world of elitist ideas and concepts. In doing so, O'Hara and Berrigan advance a poetics that seeks not to express the seriousness of the writing process itself, as so many Modernists were wont to do, but engage with the joyful (and dare I say 'fun') side of writing predicated on childlike exploration.

Furthermore, "Sonnet 18" echoes the temporal playfulness of "Sonnet 2:" "Dear Marge, hello. It is 5:15 a.m" (17). Homage is given to O'Hara's playful doctrine of

"Personism"[1] insofar as the sonnets are explicitly addressed to "Marge." Berrigan thus constructs a relationship centered upon the external dialogue between poets and an internal dialogue between sonnets from the beginning of the work. His opening informs us that any sonnet may be cut-up and repositioned, any author may be appropriated and juxtaposed, and collaboration is a mainstay of Second Generation poetics. Furthermore, his utilization of a poetics of appropriation, "of minimizing authorial presence" (Kane 117) positions the work firmly within a proletarian conscious of mass collectivity, "a quasi-Marxist utopia where the cultural workers are in control of the forms of production" (Kane 346). The recycling of lines (of Berrigan and others), meanwhile, fits well within the tradition of Marxian "mechanical reproduction" as outlined by Walter Benjamin.

In "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin maintains that the reproduction of art[1] thrusts art into the hands of the proletariat by virtue of a loss of the "aura" of the "authenticity surrounding it" (5). For Benjamin, whereas art was once grounded in ritual, mechanical reproduction places art within the realm of the political, giving the masses access to works that were once conceived for the bourgeoisie: "But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics" (Benjamin 5). Acts of recycling and appropriation constitute the political act of democratizing aesthetics.[2] The author of works of art loses her authorial voice and authorship is redistributed among a multiplicity of voices.

[1] And by "art" I mean all artistic creation: literature, painting, sculpture, etc.

Like Benjamin, Berrigan recognizes the potentialities of mechanical reproduction in the formation of a postmodern aesthetic centered on community. Just as the small mimeograph presses founded by Second Generation New York school poets printed to a mass audience, so too do Berrigan's sonnets attempt to reach a class conscious via the reproduction of his work and the work of others. In a move typical of Berrigan's subversive and iconoclastic poetics, the poet seems to poke fun at the idea of the "aura" surrounding "vaulted" works of art through the internal recycling of lines that fall short of the intellectual elitism or Shakespearian elegance mandated by past bourgeoisie poets. Lines from the heavily fragmented "Sonnet 15" are reproduced in "correct order" in "Sonnet 59." The line, "The black heart beside the fifteen pieces / Monroe died, so I went to a matinee B-movie" (14) in "Sonnet 15" is reproduced in "Sonnet 59" as, "Today I am truly horribly upset because Marilyn Monroe died, so I went to a matinee B-movie / and ate King Korn popcorn" (54). The disjointed syntax of "Sonnet 15" is reconfigured to make the later sonnet more accessible for mass consumption.

That Berrigan not only reproduces his own lines in his own sonnets, but also reproduces (and modifies) the sonnet form established first by Petrarch then Shakespeare and Keats, signifies a deconstruction of the aura surrounding the Western poetic tradition. Unlike the traditional English sonnet written in 14-line iambic pentameter, Berrigan's sonnets manipulate meter and line count. Line 6 in "Sonnet 15," for instance, is written in iambic tetrameter after the uniform meter of iambic pentameter of the preceding 5 lines; "Sonnet 30" has 15 lines instead of the usual 14. And at no point in the work does Berrigan adhere to the traditional sonnet's *a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g* rhyme scheme.

Furthermore, Berrigan distances himself from the Petrarchan sonnet form through his rejection of the interplay between the octave and sestet. The final six lines of his sonnets do not resolve the problem of fragmentation posed in the first eight; rather they continue to jumble meaning.

Such a distancing from tradition democratizes Berrigan's sonnets. Whereas past sonneteers operated within the metrical parameters outlined by traditional poetic procedure, the creation of Berrigan's sonnets requires little knowledge of sixteenth-century poetic structures. Other than the occasional observance of the traditional sonnet's 14-line "box-like" structure, Berrigan isn't as concerned with legitimizing tradition as he is with toying with it. In wresting control of the sonnet form from traditionalists, Berrigan gives greater autonomy to the presumably less erudite "amateur poet." This is not to say that Berrigan forgets his lineage, as Keats is centered especially well in "Sonnet 78": "Dear Ron: Keats was a baiter of bears[2] who died / of lust! / Today I think about all those radio waves . . ." (70). But in placing Keats in the middle of his new proceduralism, Berrigan forces a confrontation between the traditional sonnet form and his mutations. Berrigan's work is in a dialogue with the masters of the sonnet and it is precisely this sociability that places his sonnets within the Marxian tradition of dialectic exchange.

[2] Here Berrigan seems to be distancing himself from bourgeoisie sonneteers of the past or at least poking fun at Keats' aristocratic tendencies.

CHAPTER TWO

BERRIGAN'S PROCEDURALISM AND THE DEPARTURE FROM TRADITION

Owing to Berrigan's emphasis on a poetics of sociability, *The Sonnets* reads, at times, like homage to literary Dadaist, collagist, proceduralist, and serialist heavyweights; speckled throughout the work are references to Pound and Eliot, to Apollinaire and Ashbery. Berrigan's interweaving of high-cultural work into his countercultural (and what would be considered low-brow aesthetic) accomplishes at least two objectives: it places *The Sonnets* within the tradition of collagist poetry, while paradoxically facilitating the work's departure from it. Whereas Pound and Eliot intersperse references from antiquity and the classics throughout their work, Berrigan relies more so on a middle-class, pop-cultural ethos. Furthermore, Berrigan deviates from Pound and Eliot's predilection for immense socio-historical and cultural inclusivity as mandated by the epic form, and from Ashbery's intellectualism in a political distancing that opens the door for a leftist collagist aesthetic focused on process rather than completed cultural artifact. I would first like to direct our attention towards Pound's *Cantos.*

The enormity of Pound's *Cantos* (802 pages in the complete edition) underscores the modernist epic's drive towards building a coherent synthesis and an overarching historical narrative. In *Unending Design: The Forms of Postmodern Poetry*, Joseph Conte notes, "The modernist epic can be distinguished from postmodern long forms by its characteristic for totality. Pound's *Cantos* demand - even if they do not achieve - a

coherent synthesis" (37). Pound's cultural totality is thus predicated on an expansive recording of history, a narrative that, at least for Pound, necessitates a definitive linear progression. We enter "Canto 1" *in media res*, for instance, and the "And then went down to the ship" (3) opening signifies an entrance into the historical narrative at *"Book XI" of the Odyssey*. Having spent the first cantos in antiquity, Pound then takes us on a journey throughout history, devoting cantos to the rise of usury and banking, Jefferson's America, and Mussolini's Italy, to name but a few historical checkpoints.

Whereas Pound presents a somewhat linear view of history, Berrigan constructs history rhizomatically. Rather than pointing to antiquity as the source of culture and then expanding outward, Berrigan views cultural history as lacking a definitive source. We do not enter *The Sonnets* in the middle of the historical narrative because there isn't a "beginning, middle, and end," but a non-linear continuity of experience. Like Pound, Berrigan furthers a political agenda through the juxtaposition of modernity and pre-modernity, of high and low-cultural artifacts. Unlike Pound, Berrigan's collagist aesthetic does not seek to provide an overarching historical narrative, but a polysemous, atemporal collage in which the past is constantly being folded into the present.

I emphasize the distinction between Berrigan and Pound because both poets rely on paratactic linguistic relationships to further different political aims. Berrigan's parataxis is meant to demonstrate process and his wordplay deals with themes of a more frivolous nature; Pound seeks to synthesize artifacts into a total web of culture, resulting in a poetic project that is much more ambitious. Whereas Berrigan's "Sonnet 59" reflects the immediacy of cinematic experience – "I am truly horribly upset, so I went to a

matinee B-movie and ate King Korn popcorn" (54), thus spotlighting quotidian activity and processes of movement reflective of O'Harian "I do this I do that," Pound is much more concerned with philosophic and trans-historical ideals. In "Canto 81," for instance, Pound includes a range of historical and cultural artifacts: Zeus and Mt. Taishan are juxtaposed, John Adams speaks to Thomas Jefferson, and humanity is explored in terms of imagism. Pound writes, "The ant's a centaur in his dragon world. /Pull down thy vanity, it is not man / Made courage, or made order, or made grace / Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down" (541). Here Pound forces us to grapple with very weighty ideas of human essence. Rather than detailing an unremarkable excursion to the movies, Pound wants us to intellectualize deeply rooted humanistic traditions. He is much more concerned with compiling a "serious" cultural program than having a "fun" time as Berrigan is inclined to do.

Quite frequently, Pound relies on his "ideogramic method" to convey abstract concepts. "The ideogramic method," writes Pound in *Guide to Kulchur*, "consists of presenting one facet and then another until at some point one gets off the dead and desensitized surface of the reader's mind, onto a part that will register" (51). Like Berrigan, Pound juxtaposes lingusitic objects to achieve a continuous stream of meaning. Pound's juxtaposition, however, performs a much more intellectual role: that of concretizing the abstract. Take for instance Pound's classic Imagist poem, "In a Station of the Metro," and the juxtaposition of "these faces in the crowd," with "petals on a wet black bough," (*Lustra,* 53) a collision of concrete images that bespeaks the abstract concepts of human mortality and transience. Berrigan's imagistic collisions, do not

function to concretize the abstract nor emphasize transcendental concepts. Rather, collisions such as, "Davy Crockett was nothing like Jesse James / A farmer drove up on a tractor" in "Sonnet 32" (29), produce nothing especially profound from a philosophic standpoint. In Berrigan, images collide less seriously and are not meant to consolidate abstract meaning.

This distinction between Berrigan's poetics of "enjoyment and fun" and Pound's more serious poetic enterprise is one worth noting. "He [Pound] came to define the epic as 'a poem including history," writes Hugh Henner in *Ezra Pound*, "and thought that there was no other worthy subject" (32). For Berrigan, history is only one of an infinite number of subjects poetry can touch, and it certainly isn't the most enjoyable. Rather than focusing on synthesizing the Past (capitalization mine), Berrigan chooses to reinforce the processes of present production. According to Huntsperger, *The Sonnets* functions as a proceduralist text that seeks to reflect the modes of production and the labor conditions of the postindustrial American working class (58). For Joseph Conte, proceduralism "rejects the concept of a form superimposed on preexistent content; instead, it presupposes a system of arbitrary constraints which functions as a generative device" (40). Berrigan's proceduralism is evident in "Sonnet 59" as the sonnet rearranges lines from "Sonnet 15" using a method in which line 1 from "Sonnet 15" is placed above line 14, line 2 above 13, line 3 above 12, and so on until the full poem is generated. Cohesiveness is not a strict objective of proceduralism; rather, the *teleos* of procedural form is simply an awareness of the process. Pound's *Cantos*, however, adheres to what Conte deems "the modernist epic" form and does seek as its *teleos* "a coherent synthesis" (Conte 37).

Two very different political modes are thus created between Berrigan and Pound. Berrigan's proceduralism reinforces the Marxian idea of controlled production and outcome, and, more important, reifies the conditions of production (the base) that give rise to certain ideologies, cultures, and politics (the superstructure). He is not concerned with bounding his sonnets into thematic paradigms, as he understands the totality of culture cannot be archived. For Berrigan, culture is an ever-fluid confrontation between often-disparate societal artifacts and thus the search for comprehensiveness is futile. Pound's serial epic, however, *is* concerned with compiling a comprehensive history, and his collagist techniques emphasize a longing for completeness.

In "Sonnet 48," Berrigan weaves lines from earlier sonnets into the later sonnet, specifically the oft-repeated line "meaning strides through these poems" (45). Like previous sonnets, "Sonnet 48" relies on form-generated content to give a vignette of a farmer working a "dust-fissured" plot of land upon which stood "his family farm" (45). Berrigan highlights the farmer's exhaustion through words such as "traipse" in line 10 and "wan" in line 11. Further adjectives such as "tooth-clenched" in line 13 signify the strenuous labor conditions the farmer must endure in order to replicate the means of his own existence. Even though the farm lays fallow, the farmer must continually work and suffer to support the postindustrial consumer culture mediated by capitalism. These strenuous labor conditions are concretized through Berrigan's proceduralism. In a reflection of the ways in which the sonnet's form acknowledges the role labor plays in generating content, the content of the sonnet acknowledges the modes of production that mediate a postindustrial class-consciousness. Additionally, the content of "Sonnet 48"

directly resists these very modes of production through the anachronistic inclusion of Francis Marion, the infamous leader of guerrilla insurgency against the British in the Revolutionary War.

Marion's entrance in the poem simultaneous to the "farmer riding a tractor" (45) highlights the trans-historical nature of class-conflict. More important, the ahistorical inclusion of Marion is a dialectic in itself insofar as Marion's historical past is linked to modern modes of labor production. In juxtaposing Marion and the material machinery that work the land in a 20th century context, Berrigan reconstitutes the dialectic that presupposes the synthesis of opposites in the formation of labor conditions.

Whereas Berrigan's proceduralism seeks to extol the virtues of the working class through a description of quotidian, materialist activity, Pound's serial epic seeks, in part, to archive history. Like Berrigan, he introduces a plurality of voices that reflects an ethos of international connectivity. Yet Pound is much more overtly historical, and his poetics stray from the quotidian. "Canto 73," for example, reads as homage to a young girl that performed her duty to the Italian nation by leading a troop of Canadians into a minefield because "the glory / Of dying for one's land / in the Romagna" (Pound) trumps all individual aspirations. Here Pound attempts to valorize the actions of an individual he deems culturally significant. Her sacrificial actions couldn't be farther removed from the relatively innocuous movements of cinemagoers in Berrigan's parataxis.

If a concern with historical cohesiveness at the expense of frivolity separates Pound and Berrigan, then overt intellectualism is what drives the wedge between Berrigan and Eliot, another modernist poet whose paratactic design might be seen to

resemble Berrigan's. As he does with Pound, Berrigan cites Eliot as a major influence in the creation of *The Sonnets* (Notley xi). Yet Berrigan and Eliot's collage forms spawn two very different aesthetics. Like Pound, Eliot's most accomplished work is written under the auspices of the modernist epic rather than in proceduralist fashion, and relies too much on high-cultural rhetoric and referents to be readily consumed by the traditionally less erudite labor class. Indeed, there are pop-cultural elements in *The Waste Land*, but these seem to be written with a much more serious intent.

Concerned with attaining cohesiveness, Eliot's Cubist collage in *The Waste Land* is reflective of the modernist epic's tendency towards compiling a totality of culture. Whereas Berrigan's paratactic linguistic relationships place the readership within an easily accessible *moment* of history, as in the opening lines of "Sonnet 48,"-"Francis Marion nudges himself gently into the big blue sky / The farm was his family farm," (45) - Eliot's parataxis forces readers to grapple with the weight of an entire trans-cultural, and linguistically transcendent, history: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins / Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe. / Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata" (lines 430- 432). Eliot's penchant for erudite language and obscure literary/mythic allusions reflects his belief that "the duty of the poet, as poet, is only indirectly to the people: his direct duty is to his language, first to preserve, and second to extend and improve" (Eliot). Eliot's poetic intentions thus contradict Berrigan's emphasis on poetry's social function. Berrigan's reliance on procedural form and his use of quotidian language and pop-cultural references forces his work to engage the social conditions that mediated his text.

Eliot's erudite allusions do not exactly wrest language away from its alienation vis-à-vis capitalism. They do not exclude the low-cultural referents that function as cultural signifiers just as much as quotes from antiquity. But they do signify a belief in the role of transcendental ideas and tradition over the "here-and-now" in the reclaiming of language and the poem as reified cultural object. Berrigan's "linguistic revolution," however, *is* concerned with the material world of the "here-and-now" and he re-centers language by making it available to the masses. "His [Berrigan's] work-his intervention in language-is always apparent," writes Huntsperger. "As a result, Berrigan's poems resist reduction to discrete, reified linguistic objects" (46).

Berrigan's resistance of high-cultural rhetoric as a tool to reclaim language also distances *The Sonnets* from the work of John Ashbery. This deviation is odd given the emphasis scholars have traditionally placed on Ashbery in the formation of *The Sonnets* and "Sonnet 74's" opening line allusion to Ashbery's "Last Month": "The academy of the future is opening its doors" (66). According to Huntsperger, "He [Berrigan] made a place for himself within the New York scene by constantly citing influences like John Ashbery . . ." (43). Yet Ashbery's juxtaposition of low-culture with high-culture suggests a refusal to fully abandon the poetics of "the academy" in favor of less elitist poetic structures. In "Daffy Duck In Hollywood," Asbhery manages to weave pop-cultural, quotidian references, such as Daffy Duck and Elmer Fudd, into a text made difficult by erudite and obtuse language. By doing so, Joseph Conte argues "Ashbery successfully absorbs popular culture without catering to it" (11). Berrigan, however, does "cater" to popular culture by limiting both arcane rhetoric and erudite allusions. Both poets

structure their forms around a poetics of sociability, but Berrigan's proceduralism forces us to be more aware of the class-conscious mediated text.

CHAPTER THREE

"THE RED BLOCK DREAM OF HANS HOFMANN: EISENSTEIN AND HOFMANN IN *THE SONNETS*

If the idea for *The Sonnets* was conceived through a political unconscious constructed around sociability, Berrigan composed the work using techniques that made the sociable possible in the Marxian tradition. Even though he took only two months to craft the work, *The Sonnets* is not a haphazard poetic amalgamation, but a carefully calculated book of assemblage and process. Berrigan's poetics of appropriation, of cutting-up lines and juxtaposing them to achieve contrapuntal meaning, can be partially traced to the work of famed Soviet montage director, Sergei Eisenstein.

Berrigan's sonnets operate with respect to the Eisensteinian tradition of focusing on the act of assemblage, rather than on the content being assembled. For Eisenstein, meaning arises out of metaphor; the continued splicing, cutting, and rearrangement of seemingly random cinematic shots gives birth to a new, wholly organic narrative (Kadelac 313). Berrigan instantiates Soviet montage by continually cutting up sonnets and rearranging them to create new poems, thereby functioning as an editor of sorts to produce contrapuntal meaning from separate, disjointed "shots." Berrigan's poetics resemble montage more than collage, a genealogy overlooked by Rifkin and other scholars who are too quick to strictly analyze Berrigan in terms of Dadaism. Attempts to place Berrigan solely within the tradition framed by Tristan Tzara are far too reductive. Whereas Dadaist poets were primarily focused on producing works of collagist

palimpsest, Berrigan sought the "third meaning" constructed through dialectic arrangements. His contrapuntally derived meaning in *The Sonnets* and the fluidity of movement of lines between individual sonnets allows us to conceptualize the sonnets not only as self-contained and transmuted images, but also as *motion* pictures. Berrigan produces on the page what Eisenstein captures on the screen: meaning from fragmentation.

Such transparency across artistic mediums indicates Berrigan's willingness to conjoin artistic cinema and poetry into a multimodal poetic statement. Indeed, his belief in film-as-poetry is evident in *The Sonnets*, as the work is replete with cinematic references. In "Sonnet 15," the speaker goes to a "matinee B-movie" the day Marilyn Monroe died (14) and cinematic culture is interspersed throughout the work, most notably in the context of the "histrionic" (48). Berrigan seems to have a special affinity for classic Westerns; the line "Okinawa was a John Wayne movie to me" appears in multiple sonnets, as do references to Rory Calhoun, a 1950's black-and-white Western movie star. Perhaps most telling is Berrigan's use of film language. The odd love scene unfolding in lines 5-6 of "Sonnet 41," "you never tell me your name / and I'm forced to write 'belly' when I mean 'love'," abruptly concludes in line 7 with the interjection "Au revoir[3], scene!'" (38), a line that bears resemblance to dramatic Shakesperian stage direction. Furthermore, the final couplet in "Sonnet 40" is preceded by " . . .Icy girls / finger thighs bellies apples in my dream the big gunfire / *sequence* [italics mine]. Here Berrigan blurs the line between dream reality and cinematic narrative. The disjointed,

[3] "Au revoir"- French for "good-bye."

atemporal dream world is associated with the fragmentation of cinematic *jump cut* transitioning and montage editing. Berrigan connects avant-garde poetics with the greater tradition of socialist artistic discourse by placing cinematic language and references within the sonnet structure.

Recent scholarship has closed the gap between Soviet aesthetics and early modern/postmodern American poetry. According to David Kadelac in "Early Soviet Cinema and American Poetry,"

> Art critics have begun to take more seriously the effects of constructivism and Russian futurism upon avant-garde movements in Western Europe and in America; and literary scholars have begun to notice the imprint in the 1930s of Soviet genres . . . (299).

Kadelac argues that poets such as Louis Zukofsky - a poet that Berrigan initially berates, yet admits to resembling in poetics[4] – and William Carlos Williams were directly influenced by Soviet cinematic aesthetics, and that their long poems contain large traces of Soviet influence, specifically Eisenstein's conception of processes of assemblage, "newsreel realism," and contrapuntal ideology (300). Moreover, Kadelac traces elements of both poets' work to specific Eisensteinian films such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1926).

By following in the footsteps of Zukofsky and Williams, Berrigan incorporates Soviet cinematic technique, especially "newsreel realism" and processes of assemblage, into *The Sonnets*. And through techniques of newsreel construction, techniques advanced

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[4] In *Talking in Tranquility: Interviews with Ted Berrigan*, Berrigan expresses his disdain for Zukofsky, stating first, "at the time we had a great contempt for Zukofsky. It was impersonal. We had Frank O'Hara and a tradition on back through Apollinaire, and we thought that Zukofsky and all the people that were talking about Zukofsky were rock-heads," before admitting, "Maybe I'm too close to Zukofsky in one way" (Oppen, *Talking in Tranquility: Interviews with Ted Berrigan*.)

by Eisenstein, Berrigan crafts his poetics of mass consciousness. Like the small literary presses of Second Generation New York School poets, *The Sonnets* seeks the "vitality of the newsreel" (Kadelac 302) because the newsreel is the catalyst for sociability in the community. Eisenstein's influence is felt dramatically in "Sonnet 15" and "Sonnet 59."

Perhaps the best-known sonnet, "Sonnet 15" exemplifies Eisenstein's theory of "montage of attraction." "A new method emerges," writes Eisenstein in the somewhat mocking "Montage of Attractions: 'For Enough Stupidity in Every Wiseman,'" "-free montage of arbitrarily selected independent (also outside of the given composition and the plot links of the characters) effects (attractions) but with a view to establishing a certain final thematic effect-montage of attraction" (79). In "Sonnet 15," these effects are juxtaposed to create a collision of "shots," resulting in contrapuntally derived meaning. The poem's opening line reads fairly straightforward: "In Joe Brainard's collage its white arrow" (14). Yet the second line, "He is not in it, the hungry dead doctor" (14), does not modify nor tell us anything about where the collage's "white arrow" is pointing. Rather, we are presented with two disjointed lines describing action without cause, two "attractions" that create effect. If the image of the "white arrow" and the "hungry dead doctor" were images successively flashed in a newsreel, we might infer that the "white arrow" is pointing to the "hungry dead doctor," who could stand in for Joe Brainard in his collage (see figure 1). But we cannot be certain. The "white arrow" opening symbolizes the difficulty this poem presents: a loss of signifieds.

The sonnet continues in the same manner of disjointed shots. Lines 10 through 12 present the reader with a glimpse of homoeroticism, again in separate images intended to

produce a totality of effect: "The black heart beside the fifteen pieces / Monroe died, so I went to a matinee B-movie / washed by Joe's throbbing hands" (14). We can infer from earlier lines that the "Monroe" in question is Marilyn Monroe and it is Joe Brainard's "hands that throb," but we must form connections between the "fifteen black pieces," the "matinee B-movie," and "Joe's throbbing hands," three "attractions" that collide to create meaning. Perhaps the "fifteen black pieces" are cutouts of Marilyn Monroe that didn't make it into "Joe Brainard's collage," and the "matinee B-movie" is the site of a homoerotic act between the speaker and Joe Brainard.

Our inability to decipher meaning stems partially from Berrigan's process of metric montage, a form of editing in which a specific number of frames (or, in the case of poetry, feet) dictate the transition of shots, rather than a completed image or thought. 12 of 14 lines in "Sonnet 15" are written in iambic pentameter (lines 6 and 8 are written in trochaic tetrameter) and every line contains a fragmented image or action that stands alone. Furthermore, each line's enjambment is not meant to carry meaning over to the next line, as Eliot does in the opening of *The Wasteland*, but terminate meaning before it can be contextualized. Berrigan is more concerned with cutting lines at precisely the right meter than with correct syntactical arrangement. The resulting sonnet thus contradicts line eight's proclamation that "the sonnet is not dead" as it bears little resemblance to the Petrarchan form of sestet-octave and the Shakesperian practice of enjambing lines to carry meaning. Berrigan's parataxis of images and actions signifies a belief in the ability of montage to produce contrapuntal meaning for the reader. Each image-segment[5] forms

[5] What Eisenstein calls "representational segments" ("Montage of Attractions, 79).

a plot line that can stand independently of the rest and perform a special function of effect. The resulting contrapuntal meaning reflects a mass consciousness of sociability and is consequently politically charged.

Like the collagist/collaborative techniques employed by Lower East Side poets in the production of literary magazines and public readings, the lines of "Sonnet 15" are interchangeable and appropriative. As Berrigan demonstrates in "Sonnet 59," line 1 can be placed next to line 14, spawning a couplet that reads, "In Joe Brainard's collage its white arrow / does not point to William Carlos Williams" (54). Here we have juxtaposition of the intellectualism of Williams and the pop-cultural significance of Joe Brainard, of high and low art. Berrigan effectually increases the sociability between socio-political classes and weakens the aura surrounding previously conceived bourgeoisie art by allowing such movement.

Whereas meaning is derived from "Sonnet 15's" disjointed "attractions," Berrigan drives the meaning in "Sonnet 59." "Sonnet 15" functions as montage; Berrigan, in "Sonnet 59," repositions lines from "Sonnet 15" to structure an accessible, sequential narrative. Thus, "In Joe Brainard's collage its white arrow / He is not in it, the hungry dead doctor," (14) becomes "In Joe Brainard's collage its white arrow/does not point to William Carlos Williams" (54) and "He is not in it, the hungry dead doctor. / What is in it is sixteen ripped pictures" (54). The homoeroticism derived contrapuntally in "Sonnet 15" is mitigated as the line is transformed into, "Of Marilyn Monroe, her white teeth white -/ washed by Joe's throbbing hands" (54). The poem still functions as a "montage of attraction" where images collide to produce meaning, but the "image-segments" do not

stand independently, nor do they follow a process of metric editing. Through cutting up and arranging image fragments, Berrigan appropriates the Soviet-style realism of the newsreel to create a poetics of sociability in which the news of the Lower East Side - of Joe Brainard's collage and other happenings - is broadcasted as if it were a new William Carlos Williams publication . In doing so, Berrigan once again highlights poetry's social function as a catalyst for social change. The "news" his sonnets' transmit is the communal aesthetic. To place it in the context of William's "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," this sense of communality is the surplus that poetry holds: "It is difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there" (13).

Yet if Berrigan's processes of assemblage can be partially traced to the work of Eisenstein, what accounts for the myriad use of color in his sonnets? Furthermore, if it is possible to reduce the sonnets to frames of images in a cinematic sense, what causes the sonnets to *function* as moving images, to assume the qualities of *motion* pictures? The answer, as Berrigan indicates, stems from the interplay of color in his work. Berrigan's fascination with colorful representation in *The Sonnets* should come as no surprise to any critic as his Lower East Side collective included the likes of abstract expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. Many sonnets reference the work of prominent abstractionists and Berrigan's technique is no doubt informed by process of drip and nonrepresentational painting. Particularly important is the work of German-American expressionist painter, Hans Hofmann. Hofmann is referenced more than any other painter in *The Sonnets*, yet contemporary scholarship has largely neglected

to recognize the painter's contributions to Berrigan's masterpiece. In doing so, scholarship fails to bridge the gap between Berrigan's poetics and currents of mid-20th century abstract expressionist painting.

Born in Germany in 1880 and rising to prominence in the early 1950's, Hofmann was best known for his ideas of push/pull in relation to color theory. According to Hofmann in *The Search for the Real and Other Essays*, "Depth in a pictorial, plastic sense, is not created by the arrangement of objects one after another toward a vanishing point . . . but . . . by the creation of forces in the sense of *push and pull*" (43). Like Eisenstein, Hofmann believed it was possible to create contrapuntal meaning through the collision of "attractions," or, in the context of painting, through the collision of color. For Hofmann, paintings could literally expand and contract, "pulsate" and "breath," if color was arranged so that darker colors "pushed and pulled" on lighter hues in the work[6]. Moreover, Hofmann maintained that this plasticity could be emulated on the page as "a sensation of movement and countermovement is simultaneously created through the position of two lines . . . [that] move in relation to each other. . . creating tension on the page" (Hofmann 42). And it is through this tension on the page, like the collision of shots in an Eisensteinian context, that meaning is produced.

Berrigan's familiarity with Hofmann's work is evident. In "Sonnet 82," Berrigan mentions Hofmann directly, writing, "The red block dream of Hans Hofmann keeps going away / and coming back to me" (73). Berrigan continually appropriates Hofmann's

[6] In *The Search for the Real and Other Essays*, Hofmann elaborates on this point, writing, "Color is a plastic means of creating intervals. Intervals are color harmonics produced by special relationships, or tensions" (45).

idea of color as blocks or planes that move internally and externally in the poem and throughout the collection. These "blocks of color" in turn lay the foundation for the "block structure" of the sonnet: each sonnet is roughly the same shape and dimension and each line adheres to nearly the same metrical length. The result is a series of text-blocks that interact through an exchange of color.

In "Sonnet 48," Berrigan writes, "A farmer rides a tractor. It is a block / To swallow" (45), effectually transforming the image of the farmer-tractor into a picture plane and the line of text into a movable block. Berrigan's emphasis on the "swallowing" of the tractor-block is of particular importance. One one hand, the act of "consuming" literary texts is a reflection of readership grounded in post-industrial consumerism. Yet the line also specifically elevates us, as readers, into an economic system in which our ability to consume is predicated upon the farmer's means of production; the farmer's labor output is vital to our continued existence. These blocks are then carried over into "Sonnet 32," but are disassembled and rearranged: "A farmer drove up on a tractor / In the square, on the farm, in my white block hair" (29).

Berrigan's reliance on the color "white" to produce movement is of particular interest. As the blending of all colors, "white" is distinctly neutral in relation to the "violence" of "red" and the "passivity" of "blue" both of which are used heavily throughout *The Sonnets*. In certain sonnets, "white" attains a central position. In "Sonnet 15," for instance, it is the "*white* arrow" that "does not point to William Carlos Williams" and Marilyn Monroe's "*white* teeth" are being *"white* washed by Joe's throbbing hands" (54). Oftentimes, "whiteness" functions as an important character modifier; "Sonnet 21"

specifies that, “On the green a *white* boy goes” and one should “Bring the green boy *white* ways” (19). The emphasis on white seems to indicate a subtle (or not so subtle) undertone of race difference. But as with the ironic opening statement of politics in “Tambourine Life,” Berrigan’s excessive use of “whiteness” must be understood not as illustrative of his politics, but as a condemnation of the imperial nature of “whiteness” in subjugating the “green boy” and other marginalized groups. Furthermore, the *white* arrow *does not* point towards cultural signifiers, such as William Carlos Williams, any longer. Rather, as an amalgamation of color, “white” should be understood as a metaphor for the idealized multicultural community.

Berrigan achieves movement both literally through the movement of color planes and figuratively through the juxtaposition of narrative blocks: the farmer is able to “drive his tractor” between sonnets transformed into cinematic frames of color. Furthermore, the opening lines of both sonnets reflect a poetics of sociability made possible by the tension existing between moveable blocks of line. Lines 1 through 3 of “Sonnet 32,” “The blue day In the air winds dance / Now our own children are strangled down in the bubbling quadrangle,” (29) move in relation to each other, providing both a literal and metaphorical space for the “winds” to “dance.” And, as if the sonnet was an actual Hofmann painting replete with moveable blocks of color, the movement of the “winds” and “children” is manifested as a pushing and pulling “quadrangle” (29).

Whereas the “blue day” of “Sonnet 32” is juxtaposed into an abstract montage of “dancing winds” and “a farmer” driving a tractor, the “big blue sky” of “Sonnet 48” frames the setting as “Francis Marion nudges himself gently” into it (45). Marion’s

movement is twofold; on one hand, Marion is literally moving into the environment of the sonnet. On the other, he is undergoing a process of change vis-à-vis the "gentle" push and pull of the big "blue" color block. Meaning is derived from the abstract, independent blue block in "Sonnet 32" as a metaphorical act of movement for disjointed "winds" and "children," and concretized in "Sonnet 48" as an image-segment that modifies successive lines in the sonnet. Moreover, the independent image of the "farmer" in "Sonnet 32," is imbued with meaning as a result of the tension between lines 12-14 in "Sonnet 48": "Francis Marion / Muscles down in tooth-clenched strides toward / The effort regulator: His piercing pince-nez" (45). Movement is implied by the variance in line length and through the "striding" Francis Marion towards an anachronistic mechanism contained in the "effort regulator." Movement is also prefaced earlier though the change in meter from iambic pentameter in lines 5-8 to hendesyllabic in line 9, "Meaning strides through these poems just as it strides," back to pentameter in line 10, "Through me! When I traipse on my spunk, I get" (45). The abstract final lines in "Sonnet 32," "The air beginning to thicken / In the square, on the farm, in my white block hair" (29), symbolize a movement in tense as Francis Marion loses his voice as observer of his own hair and is discussed through the vision of an omnipresent narrator.

Just as Berrigan crafts a mass conscious of sociability through a "montage of attractions" using Eisensteinian juxtaposition, so too does he develop socio-political meaning through the movement of "blocks of color." In an instance of internal reflection, Berrigan writes in line 10 of "Sonnet 32," "He said he was puzzled by the exact meaning of "block" (29). Here, Berrigan questions the usefulness of poetic form, as he comes to

understand form as a plastic block that can be cut-up and fragmented. Blocks of color can lose their "aura", to use Benjamin's terminology, because they can be reproduced in other works of art. Berrigan's sonnets are themselves "blocks of color" that rely on the push and pull of spatiality, the tension between lines, to effect movement both internally and externally. Through reproduction, even the great Revolutionary-era leader Francis Marion, is posited as a moveable "block" to be cut-up and repackaged to the pop-culturally induced masses as a "farmer driving a tractor" in the postmodern tradition.

I therefore urge readers of *The Sonnets* to unpack these culturally reproduced artifacts as their very reproduction epitomized Berrigan's belief in the communality of discourse. Through a careful process of fragmentation, juxtaposition, and appropriation, Berrigan created in *The Sonnets* a collection that reflects an urge towards sociability. And it is precisely this sociopolitical dimension of the work that is particularly important to scholars studying poetry's social function during the tumultuous 1950's and 60's. Rather than focusing on Ted Berrigan as a man addicted to speed and fame (to use Rifkin's argument), future scholarship might study the role dialectic process philosophy plays in the construction of a uniquely Marxian voice. To this extent, perhaps the real value of Berrigan's life and work are the lessons to be learned about community building. Through Lower East Side communal practices, Berrigan and company illustrated the capability of written and aural poetry to form a nucleus of radical, yet peaceful, dissent.

What I am arguing then is that *The Sonnets* functions as a medium through which the political economy of the 1960's can be accessed. By reconstituting Marxian aesthetic practices in a work defined in terms of appropriation, Berrigan bridges the overt political

resistance of Soviet-era artistic discourses with the subtler poetics of sociability already ingrained in Second Generation New York School work. And while such gaps were already being closed in the years preceding *The Sonnets*, Berrigan's singular tour de force most emphatically reemphasized the need for collectives of poets to reclaim ownership over the modes of poetic production. Through a poetics of sociability, *The Sonnets* states an important political axiom: the voice of resistance is always amplified when your friends join in on the fun.

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