

ON MARJORIE PERLOFF

written by Fred Moten | December 28, 2015



Featured Image Credit: Mumbo Jumbo, 2011 India ink and Wite Out correction fluid on acid free recycled paper, 8.5 x 11

Image courtesy of [Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle](#) and [Jenkins Johnson Gallery](#)

I got off Facebook way before Kenneth “Solid” Goldsmith decided it was time to find something to re-say about the deadly way we’ve always been living now. If only someone had whispered in his ear: if you can’t find something good to re-say then don’t re-say anything at all. In any case, the last thing I would have asked him, on Facebook or anywhere else, is “What the fuck are you doing?” I know what the fuck he is doing. Unfortunately, as a matter of life and death, I have to know that kinda shit. It’s part of what you have to do to survive the ancient and continuously present attempt to erase our ancient and continuing presence. But because *he* doesn’t have to know what the fuck he is doing, I was wondering if he did, or if he cared. Over the course of time the answer has become clear. Meanwhile, we seek after a commonness in how we breathe that would correspond to a commonness in that we breathe. This under-respirational aspiration is Juliana Spahr’s portfolio. It’s an essential object of desire and criticism.

I breathe some air that Marjorie Perloff breathes. I like some poetry that Marjorie Perloff likes. At the same time, we don’t like one another, even though we don’t know one another; at the same time, even though I don’t know her, I know a lot about her. As a matter of fact, I know a lot more about her than she knows about either me or herself. That’s a function of our education. I had to learn about her and many of the things that have gone and continue to go into the making of her. She has never been so obligated, a condition that induces not only ignorance but also cold-heartedness. And now she wants to leave the poetry world because she thinks we’ve entered it, bringing all that loud talk, nastiness and indecorum—cars on blocks in the front yard; the unsavory smell of low-class savories wafting over the universal manicure and its intubated concepts. But this is her world; she can’t leave it. She thought it up so she can have it. She gotta have it. She couldn’t withdraw—or, to be more precise, shut the fuck up for a minute and feel—if her life depended on it. Actually, her life—to which brutal and immaterial abstraction she assumes an absolute right in refusing to assume the same for big, black, scary Michael Brown—depends upon her continuing to speak, even if it’s just to her tight-ass circle, even if all she and they can speak about is her and their right to speak. Deeper still, sadly, pitifully, Marjorie Perloff claims her Jewishness in order freely to speak whiteness, exercising her right to say whatever horrid anti-semitic shit she wants in order to exercise her right to say whatever horrid anti-black shit she wants. There’s something painfully and shamefully typical about this violence and hatred directed towards the victim, which is announced as some kind of clear-eyed anti-romanticism rather than the surreptitious

romanticization of the victimizer, a (ser)vile fealty that takes the form of a loose, unthinking theology of strength. Perhaps this is what it is to love the (poetry) world as it is: a possessive rejectionism, an anti-intellectually callous insistence on valuation in separation, an imperial refusal to feel that constitute a tragic and all but absolute reduction of what we are and what we're supposed to be.

To speak, however obliquely, of the making of Marjorie Perloff is to speak also of her unmaking. It may well be that there's no longer any such person as Marjorie Perloff. Perhaps now Marjorie Perloff is just a concept. Further investigation is required. For the time being, let's just say, with as much accuracy as is possible, that there's a venal susceptibility to such unrequitable love of the (poetry) world to which finally we are enjoined to assign the name Marjorie Perloff. It's not Marjorie Perloff that must leave the poetry world; we must leave it, a condition that ought to fill us with pride and joy. Marjorie Perloff rightly intimates the distinction between the violation and the rejection of taste. Marjorie Perloff has bad taste. Marjorie Perloff is in bad taste. On the other hand—the hand that's steady flying all the way off the handle, careening out of body and out of this world—we sing the earth with flavor: dust in our mouths, water in our lungs, blood in our eyes, hands in our hands. Marjorie Perloff, we been studying you so long that we ain't studying you; we been thinking about you so hard that we ain't thinking about you. Stay right where you are.

Also read Jen Hofer's piece ["If You Hear Something Say Something, Or If You're Not At The Table You're On The Menu"](#)