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ACLA 2024 René Wellek Prize, Monograph: Honorable Mention

Committee:

Chair, Kamran Rastegar (Tufts University)
Simona Bertacco (University of Louisville)
Jeremy Glick (Hunter College): 2023-2026

Eduardo Cadava and Sara Nadal-Melsió, *Politically Red*

The parenthetically named (“race”) for Fredric Jameson (and arguably for W.E.B. Du Bois) is the *answer* supplementing and expanding upon Werner Sombart’s 1906 *question: Why is There No Socialism in the United States?* Eduardo Cadava and Sara Nadal-Melsió’s *Politically Red* in step with their key interlocutors (Walter Benjamin, Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Amiri Baraka, Raya Dunayevskaya, Du Bois, Julia Ng, and, of course, Jameson) open up this parenthetical, decanting it to mine its insights and access all its *readerly* and Communist force. The text in its arrangement, curation of illustrations, and binding is also—beautiful.

Politically Red brilliantly actualizes Brecht and Gorki’s *The Mother’s* insurgent pedagogic maxim: “Reading is class struggle.” **Reading** here is a set of anti-capitalist protocols, an attendant insistence on literary and aesthetic form (often read down to the level of the sentence), the spiral or swerve of the pen, a process of *massification*, citation as revolutionary method—in other words: a Read/Red Black Radical Communist improvisational procedure. As a study it refashions a book-review (Jameson’s 2020 *The Benjamin Files*) as an episodic flurry and firing of political problems and questions. This is via its “process of opening, unfolding, and expanding”—returning back to Benjamin his revolutionary commitments, putting them in dialogue with Black Radical and Communist praxis. Their reading amplifies and adds onto Jameson’s internationalist project and Cultural Revolutionary palimpsest of mediations. **Reading** itself is restored here to its insurgent labor and patient discipline. Reflections on Benjamin’s anti-fascism, his theory of mechanical reproduction, destruction as “Benjaminian *gestus*,” his delineation of law-positing and law-preserving [police] violence, his insistence on thinking through various mediations all help us to see and to read what was always already there: a Communist pedagogy propelling Benjamin’s praxis-*oeuvre*, the converging of Black Radical critique *as*, not supplementary to Communist struggle and theoretical rigor.

This outstanding project honors its subjects by holding steadfast to its authors stated marching orders: “to catch up to our own improvisations” by way of “reading more.” Stated differently by George Jackson-- who Cadava engages in an earlier essay working through an exhilarating juxtaposition of Ralph Waldo Emerson and George Jackson on the “guano of history”: “People’s War is improvisation and more improvisation”.

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Politically Red's archive of readings are as urgent as they are brilliant: the book reads Amiri Baraka's aphoristic formulation that "the red what reading did re adding reproducing revolution", Du Bois and Luxemburg's studied insistence that "all revolutions are mediated forms," Marx/Engels unfolding their critiques by way of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, attention to a hand-written page of the "Feuerbach" section of *The German Ideology* in which the right-column of the page is populated by frantic, errant, ever-proliferating doodling of faces read as a "mass-like mass," and W.E.B Du Bois's framing by, expansion of, and dialogue with the centrality of Black radical movement and labor insurgency in the American Civil War period in Marx's writings on Abolitionist and Black Radical struggle—what Marx refers to in 1860 as the most "momentous thing happening in the world today."

Politically Red follows Marx's priorities and Du Bois's diagnosis to struggle against what the latter calls "the upward moving of white labour...betrayed into wars for profit based on color caste."

Pertaining to the matter of Redemption ["Whereas Du Bois and Benjamin know"], *Politically Red* in one of its many dense and rich footnotes reminds us that Redemption "implies the death of any certitude but also any claim to temporal order and cohesion. They also know that this last death may be the most violent and difficult of all." This is *montage-as-conflict* at its very best. *Politically Red's* juxtapositions are greater than the sum of its parts. The authors create something new by carefully reading the archives in all its richness. In the brilliance of its readings, its attunement to matters of literary and aesthetic form, its studied historicization of the motion of history, and its unwavering emancipatory commitments—*Politically Red* returns reading to its proper insurgent labor, charting bright-red paths against a myriad of inter-connected "increasing disorders".