

61-“To make a city into a season”: Three Poetic Interventions into Climate Catastrophe

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Abstract

For the last twenty years, climate change—or what may be more properly described as “climate catastrophe”—has been at the forefront of much social and scientific thinking. Given the science, nowadays we accept it as a fact of life on earth, or perhaps an existential force of doom, and are slowly growing used to the fact that we must drastically change the way we live. This paper argues that artistic expression had been addressing such environmental issues years before they had reached the general public’s awareness. Poets always seem to be ahead of their time, and such is the case with three writers associated with the Language School, Barrett Watten, Kit Robinson, and Harryette Mullen, whose work analyzed herein offers interventions—of different ways of approaching—the burgeoning climate catastrophe. Poets associated with the Language School, as the umbrella term suggests, made it their mission to interrogate language (and traditional poetic language) to produce dynamic and experimental writing. They began doing so in the 1970s against the backdrop of 1960s poststructuralist literary theory, especially the work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Here it is argued that they were not only avant-garde practitioners of language, but also avant-garde thinkers when it came to the issue of the environment. The poems analyzed here provide readers unique perspectives on an issue that interests so many people today.

Keywords: Language poetry, climate change, politics, poetics

“Bir şehri bir mevsime dönüştürmek”: İklim Felaketine Üç Şiirsel Müdahale

Öz

Son yirmi yıldır, iklim değişikliği—ya da daha doğrusu “iklim felaketi” olarak tanımlanması gereken problem—çoğu sosyal ve bilimsel çalışmanın öncelik konuları arasında yer almaktadır. Bilimsel veriler çerçevesinde bu durumu dünyadaki yaşamın bir gerçekliği belki de varoluşsal bir son olarak kabul ediyoruz ve yavaş yavaş yaşam biçimimizi büyük ölçüde değiştirmemiz gerektiği gerçeğine alışmış bulunuyoruz. Sanatçıların ve özellikle şairlerin zamanlarının ilerisini görüp buna dair üretimde buldukları ifade edilir ve bu durum gerçekten de böyledir. Dil Okulu şairlerinden ve bu çalışmada bazı çalışmaları analiz edilen Barrett Watten, Kit Robinson ve Harryette Mullen deneysel ve dinamik yaklaşımlarıyla büyüyen iklim felaketine şiirleriyle müdahalede bulunmuş ve aynı zamanda geleneksel şiirsel dili sorgulamayı da misyon edinmişlerdir. Bu çalışma, burada örneklenen şairlerin şiir dilini, sadece avangard uygulayıcılar olarak değil, aynı zamanda çevre konusunda avangard düşünürler olarak kullandıklarını ortaya koyacak ve çevresel sorunları konu alan ve

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kamuoyunun dikkatine sunan sanatsal çalışmaları ile, bu sorunları felakete dönüşmeden çok önce ele aldıklarını örneklerle tartışacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Dil şiiri, iklim değişikliği, siyaset, şiir sanatı

Introduction: Earth and world

One need only read the news to conclude that, as for now, in 2021, the earth is doomed. We have begun to witness and live through the real effects of climate change, which would be better termed "climate catastrophe." In the last few years, we've witnessed wildfires ravaging California, more intense and larger hurricanes on average than ever before, and suffocating, unprecedented heat waves. As of this writing, the American Northwest and southwestern Canada are experiencing high temperatures not felt in a thousand years. One way to conceive of and frame climate catastrophe is to consider an earth-world split, of sorts (and its resulting clash zone where capitalist development encroaches upon nature) and review certain points made by Martin Heidegger in his theoretical work. Doing so will lead us toward the notion that, whereas the overuse of fossil fuels certainly represents the scientific side of today's crisis, our reliance on technology and worshiping of capital has exacerbated the crisis at the level of the social, i.e., in the ways we live our lives. Perhaps Marx's well-known base-superstructure differentiation offers insight into this dichotomy, with "base" being represented by hard-core scientific factors (fossil fuels, pollution etc.) and "superstructure" the realm in which effects of those factors are felt. The poets I examine here, of course, face the superstructure; their words describe *the world* affected by climate change.

Heidegger's "earth"/"world" dichotomy (from "The Origin of the Work of Art") is a useful starting-point for analyzing poems that address or are suggestive of today's ecological concerns. His distinction, however, must be problematized; "earth" does not correspond exactly to what we in the twenty-first century nostalgically call "nature," and "world" does not necessarily correspond to what I call the technocracy, that seemingly inescapable web of technology that increasingly controls our lives through the veil of notions like "ease" and "advancement." Nonetheless, his distinction is worth examining and "postmodernizing." Fredric Jameson's "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"—with its brief but crucial reference to Heidegger—goes a long way in postmodernizing Heidegger's writing in "The Origin of the Work of Art." In complicating Heidegger, however, I am also forced to complicate Jameson, whose implicit notions about technology in "Cultural Logic" need to be reexamined. His arguments, while groundbreaking and enlightening are dated now; much has changed in the way that capitalist ideologues use and disperse technology. With the explosion of digital technology since about 1984 (when "Cultural Logic" was first published and the Macintosh corporation was launched), the world has gone from computer-aided to computer-centered to computer-reliant. Nor could Jameson have foreseen the impossibly rapid spread of digital computer technology—in the form of mobile phones—to even the most modest of consumers.

Today, as digital technology has largely overtaken manufacturing and heavy industry as a job source, relations among individuals, "nature," and technology have become increasingly complex. Relations between technology and capitalism are also complex. To argue that digital technology *harms nature* or people is to set up a false relation, though certainly an attractive one for eco-fundamentalists. To say that digital technology, people, and nature exist together is true; to say that they exist together in "harmony" (itself a loaded, stupid word) would be misleading. The poems that I examine here shed light on this disharmony: Barrett Watten's "Plasma," Kit Robinson's "In the American Tree," and "Wino

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Rhino,” a poem from Harryette Mullen’s *Sleeping with the Dictionary*. I choose these particular poems owing to a pair of complementary factors: (1) as products of Language Poetry—that avant-garde trend in American poetry that emerged in the 1970s led by such writers and theorists as Ron Silliman and Bruce Andrews—their formal qualities challenge the mainstream poetry of the era (“workshop” poetry or what Silliman later termed the “School of Quietude”); and (2) their concern with (and framing of) the burgeoning eco-crisis in terms of the social were avant-garde in their own right. In other words, they moved toward addressing the changing planet when it was not yet trendy in the mainstream to do so, and focus on how people live through, respond, and emerge from it.

Quiet country living

Barrett Watten’s “Plasma” (1979), one of Silliman’s selections for *In the American Tree* (an anthology of experimental poetry originally published in 1986 at the dawn of climate change awareness, at least for most lay-people) approaches the earth-world split from a different perspective and with a different set of goals than straightforward didactical or descriptive poetry. Watten doesn’t merely wish to describe how capitalist ideology scars the earth, leaving stains and remnants, although he accomplishes that quite vividly. There are numerous images of such scars in “Plasma.” Consider sentences like these [my commentary appears in brackets]:

All rainbows end in the street. [Rainbows don’t merely “end in the street”; the street devours their beauty, painting their prisms in shades of gray. The street is responsible for their death.]

A rock argues with the door. [As to which is a better boundary.]

The roadbed tilts upward, devouring detail. [The roadbed is “devouring” the details of the land: wildflowers, geological formations, minerals, soils, grasses, trees etc.]

A telephone pole is an edited tree. [Perhaps there is no better observation of environmental abuse.] (26-30)

The poem, however, goes beyond description and lamentation. It is more accurately understood as a powerful, direct indictment of human agency, of humans’ ironic desire to *re-transform* urbanized landscapes into original, ideal states of nature. The poem explores humans’ desire to propagate a “false nature” back upon a world already urbanized. This is not to say that Robinson and Silliman don’t perceive human agency and desire behind their images; Watten just makes his perception more explicit. The fourth sentence of the poem reads, “He never forgets his dreams.” I am suggesting that the “dreams” Watten refers to are best understood as human desires to manipulate and transform the world back to some supposedly more authentic, healthier state; such desires are driven by a Romantic idealization of nature.

The form of “Plasma” resembles much of Silliman’s seminal work in that it is comprised of new sentences, some of which stand alone as discrete paragraphs and some of which combine to form longer paragraphs. No paragraph, however, is longer than four sentences. Paragraph length generally increases as the poem proceeds, but there are exceptions. For example, there are several one-sentence paragraphs on the poem’s sixth and final page. Watten uses form very carefully here to reveal something about the poem’s content. The form of the poem (with paragraphs that build in length) actually reflects humans’ increasing desire to restore nature. With time and an increased hunger to extend the material bases of capitalism, these desires increase. Why even mention capitalism here? Because nature sells. The notion of the “pristine” or “untainted” sells. People are attracted to what they perceive has not (yet) been contaminated by the technocracy. While such places do exist in the world, Watten’s poem is interesting because explores the desire to “re-nature” what’s already been touched by capitalism. Nature has become

a hot commodity, not only in real estate, vacation resorts, and health foods, but in a wide range of products. Companies and advertising executives have appropriated the terms "country," "natural," and "100% pure"—and it's paying off in profits. Consider these three sentences from the first page of the poem:

To make a city into a season is to wear sunglasses inside a volcano.

The effect of the lack of effect.

The road turns into a beautiful country drive. (26)

The first sentence notes the inevitable futility and impossibility of trying to impose nature or that which occurs naturally (like seasons) upon a place (the city) wholly formed and inhabited by humans. It leads to destruction; one might deflect some of the volcano's light with sunglasses, but the intense heat is what kills. Nature, too, is vaster than humans are able surmise: there is much more than light that comes with a volcanic eruption, although light might be the first or most obvious phenomenon to be dealt with. "The effect of the lack of effect" refers to humans' attempt to make a landscape appear untouched and guarded from human interference.

Paradoxically, "Lack of effect" is the very effect that retailers and consumers have come to desire. Consider the food industry and its current diet and nutrition crazes: low fat or no fat, low carbohydrate or no carbohydrate, low cholesterol, or no cholesterol. Retailers and consumers, in their desire to rid their food of this stuff and rid its effects from their bodies, also sacrifice whatever good effects such products contain. Beer is another good example—and one of Slavoj Žižek's favorite points of analysis in his work: many consumers today want beer without alcohol; they want the experience of beer without its effects. They want "lack of effect." Perhaps the best example of the phenomenon is camping. People today go "camping" in hundred thousand dollar Winnebagos with thousands of dollars of equipment—all designed and marketed to enhance the experience. What's being marketed, however, is lack of effect. People want camping *without camping*, without the (dis)comforts of natural elements: weather, mosquitoes, and other dangers of the wilderness. The "effect" sentence, along with the next, sound like TV commercials for pristine country resorts—the vacation "resort" is often little more than a patch of wilderness manipulated by humans to be made comfortable, realistic, and original. The effect, however, is the same: vacationers can never really "get out" of the city if they choose to go to an advertised resort area. Both environments are equally manipulated. In both environments, whatever the original state *was* has been transformed.

The last line of the poem reads, "Such is night in the mountains" (31). That's the speaker's good-bye, as though all of these sentences form a one-night commentary, the speaker having meditated upon nature and considered its collision with the world of humans. More than once, he mentions "the rock," calling it at one point—and harking back to Heidegger's stone—"the ideal in the world of objects" (29). The speaker is aware that humans are constantly attempting to (re)create that ideal. Much postmodern human development springs from the desire I've mentioned: somehow we've grown tired or desperate with our concrete buildings or the steel that transports us from shopping mall to shopping mall, and in that desperation have sought to "return," at least aesthetically, to more natural or undeveloped environs. "Plasma," however, shows us that our desire to return to nature will ultimately not be realized, for we are the ones who have *created* these "undeveloped" places. Nature can never be restored to its original state, and any attempt to do so posits a false, anthropomorphic layer upon what is already there. Perhaps Watten, in calling the poem "Plasma," is suggesting that we look inward, to our bodies, to our very blood and the cells that comprise it, if we really wish to encounter nature undisturbed in its original, unified

state. Sadly, however, it is not in the nature of humans to look inward, for that would entail engaging with the real source of nature’s destruction: our own unending and intensifying pursuit of capital.

A “Plastic” Earth

Kit Robinson’s “In the American Tree,” which begins on the first page of Silliman’s 1986 anthology of the same name, combines its critique of ideology with other concerns. First, it is a powerful indictment of the stuffy academic poetry held up by the New Critics and their followers as *the* standard. At the same time, it is an indictment of the subjugation of the environment. It begins, “A bitter wind taxes the will / causing dry syllables / to rise from the throat.” The “bitter wind” can be understood as the monologic form of discourse engaged in by critics of that poetry or writers of that poetry (a theme Kenneth Koch took up with “Fresh Air” forty years ago), but the *natural* image is a striking one: the wind is bitter; it is polluted. How can one sing or speak against such a wind? “Flipping out wd be one alternative,” Robinson writes, because

[...] having fired all the guns you find you are left with a ton of butter,

Which, if it isn’t eaten by some lurking rat
hiding out under the gate, may well be picked
up by the wind and spread all over

The face you’re by now too chicken to admit is yours.
Wheat grows between bare toes
of a cripple barely able to hold his or her breath

And at the crack of dawn
we howl for more
beer. (xiii)

A better alternative to “flipping out” is recognizing and writing about the ecological crisis, a crisis that can be partly understood as the clashing of nature and machines. In these stanzas, we see that nature (first in the form of the rat) has been forced into “hiding out under” human machinery. The rat is hiding “under the gate.” This image recalls the most famous gate in English poetry: Thomas Hardy’s “coppice gate” from “The Darkling Thrush,” arguably one of the first modernist poems in English. While Robinson and Hardy share little textual resemblance, their speakers’ sensibilities about ecological erosion—and the disintegration of social ties that accompanies it—are similar. The gate is an important symbol in that poem, as it represents at least two symbolic gateways: the gateway between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the emotional gateway Hardy’s speaker has to face. The entire poem is permeated with images of gray desolation (in the landscape) and emotional isolation (in the speaker’s spirits). Everything’s bleak. Why? Is the brutally bleak winter landscape to blame for the speaker’s sadness? Does *it* cause him to feel this way, or is the speaker, suffering from some emotional trauma brought about by the passage of time, by things changing, by a new century, simply projecting his inner turmoil *onto* that landscape? While both explanations work, I think the origins of hopelessness lie with the speaker. His hopelessness is a result of his feeling left out of a rapidly changing society. The year 1900, like the year 2021, was a time of intense mechanization and industrialization. Modernism means many things, but

one of the primary features of the period was huge technological advance. This speaker feels nostalgia for the "country"; he describes it bleakly because he senses its gradual disappearance. The modern period is marked by a loss of faith in central systems of authority—the church, the state, one's "gut instinct," or the land itself—and Hardy's speaker is lost. Perhaps the very last thing in which he has faith, the land, is being swallowed up. It would, in two decades, become the terrain of the first mechanized war.

The postmodern period is marked by an even more intense recognition of the loss of the land, and Robinson's poem chronicles that loss. We have "fired the guns" and fought noble (and selfish) wars, but still we're left with nothing. What little remains is bound to be scavenged by rats, creatures that Robinson depicts with more pity than revulsion. The rat waiting "under the gate" is not so much a menace but rather one that's been rejected by the dominant culture. Like a homeless person whose presence we'd like to ignore, the thought of whom we often repress, the rat is merely hungry. Robinson's landscape does not seem totally bleak, however: wheat is beginning to sprout, but not freely and easily. It doesn't have the benefit of full sun and has to grow through the cracks of toes, those of a "cripple barely able to hold his or her breath." The cripple must be breathing the "bitter," polluted wind that the speaker mentions in the first stanza. "[W]e howl for more / beer" brings Allen Ginsberg's famous poem to mind, in which marginalized individuals howl for any number of socio-political reasons, especially with the intrusion of the "Golgotha"-like cityscape and the horrific impact of urbanization and industrialization on people's psyches. Consider this excerpt from *Howl*:

Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless
jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are
judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war! Moloch the stunned
governments!
Moloch *whose mind is pure machinery!* Moloch whose blood is running
money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch
whose ear is a smoking tomb!
Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose
skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovas! Moloch whose factories dream and croak
in the fog! Moloch whose smokestacks and antennae crown the cities!
Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is
electricity and banks! Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud
of sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind! (*Collected Poems* 131, my emphasis)

Ginsberg imbues machines with evil personalities. These beasts are taking over our cities. Again, the same thing is happening today, more intensely, but in a much more subtle way. Unlike the skyscrapers and factories Ginsberg describes, the machines we've become dependent on today (like mobile phones) don't conquer via their monstrous size or sheer power. They conquer precisely because the dominant ideology (through media and advertising) makes it appear as though we can't live without them, can't work without them, communicate without them, or take pleasure without them.

Indeed, secret pleasure and sleek design have become the favored weapons of the technocracy, not overwhelming strength and power. The digital gadgets seen on America's streets today possess their users with a kind of genius that Ginsberg's Moloch—or any devil—could hardly imagine. These gadgets entrance their users sexually and emotionally. I've witnessed the cell phone become a substitute for sexual pleasure: watch students on campus, city commuters, and people waiting in airports manipulate

and hold these machines as if they were genitals. Certainly the pleasure that users derive from them goes beyond communication and information retrieval: it appears sensual and intoxicating. The cell phone also appears to have become a crutch for the lonely. When an individual speaks on the phone on a busy corner, she is announcing to those around her: “Look, I have friends, I am very popular. I am not the lonely person I appear to be.” The cell phone builds her self-esteem. Like a devil, it soothes her where she is most vulnerable. On a textual level, this excerpt from *Howl* points to Ginsberg as a precedent to the new sentence writers. While they are not complete sentences, his individual units, each beginning with “Moloch,” observe on a consistent, overarching theme. The breadth of Ginsberg’s observations, at least in this excerpt, is not as wide as Robinson’s or Silliman’s, but in other places we see him working horizontally, covering territory. He approaches the city as Silliman does, observing, recording, and commenting. The power of this particular excerpt is its verticality; he pounds a certain theme repeatedly: the military-industrial complex’s merger with downtown America.

Robinson continues, noting the clash between the natural and the technological:

[...]

The freeway is empty now, moonlight
reflecting brightly off the belly of a blimp,

And as you wipe the red from your eyes
and suck on the lemon someone has given you,
you notice a curious warp in the sequence

Of events suggesting a time loop
in which bitter details repeat
themselves like the hands of a clock

Repeat their circular travels in a dream-
like medium you find impossible to pierce:
it simply spreads out before you, a field. (xiii-xiv)

Two themes emerge in the preceding stanzas. First, we are witness to the slamming together of the natural and mechanic: the moonlight reflecting off the blimp. We have here the natural and the technological coming together. Moreover, today’s blimps are no longer novelties—they function more as floating billboards for this company’s tire or that company’s film. Just as Ginsberg personified the machinery of war and industry, Robinson personifies the blimp, giving it a belly. The blimps of today are gentler machines than Moloch’s towers, but are just as pervasive as symbols of ideology. Robinson also introduces the theme of repetition in these stanzas, and this is where the poem turns into a kind of Romantic lament. “Details repeat” steadily and without mercy; these may be read as the details of technological domination: “the hands of a clock,” the blinking of a cursor, or the beep-beep of cell phones in the street. We cannot escape from these constant ticks. Like the wind, these “details” are “bitter.” They have worked their way into our conscious *and* our unconscious, to which Robinson alludes by noting the “dream- / like medium you find impossible to pierce.” He is right; this onslaught of technology can’t be pierced. “Space,” he reminds us at the end, “assumes the form of a bubble / whose limits are entirely plastic.” One can never completely pierce plastic because its nature is to transform, turning that

attempted puncture into a new kind of skin, a skin without "limits," and that is precisely how ideology functions. The Language (and postmodern) poet's task is to pierce that plastic. Poets have already achieved this with regard to the slowly-fading transparency of the New Critical school, but they must continue, because the ecological crisis will eventually affect everyone, even though

[...] it is Spring.
[And] The goddess herself
is really
Feeling great. (xiv)

Different city, familiar streets

Robinson, perched somewhere within the American tree, extends his cultural critique in two directions. Down below he sees the roots of American poetic tradition; above the branches he imagines the floating slogans of capitalism on "the belly of a blimp." In the tradition of Ginsberg, Harryette Mullen's best work notes the social decay of urban America. She is a poet dedicated to combating racism, classism, and sexism with irony, wit, and creative—and at times surreal—wordplay. From *Sleeping with the Dictionary* (2002), "Wino Rhino" transposes images from the African wilderness and the American ghetto.

For no specific reason I have become one of the city's unicorns. No rare species, but one in range of danger. No mythical animal, but a common creature of urban legend. No potent stallion woven into poetry and song. Just the tough horny beast you may observe, roaming at large in our habitat. I'm known to adventurers whose drive-by safari is this circumscribed wilderness. Denatured photographers like to shoot me tipping the bottle, capture me snorting dust, mount on the wall my horn of empties that spilled the grape's blood. My flesh crawls with itchy insects. My heart quivers as arrows on street maps target me for urban removal. You can see that my hair's stiffened and my skin's thick, but the bravest camera can't document what my armor hides. How I know you so well. Why I know my own strength. Why, when I charge you with my rags, I won't overturn your sporty jeep. (79)

The poem's central figure is certainly a victim of economic change, but the crucial point is that he resists his ideological interpellation. Caught in the cycles of poverty, oppression, drink, and drugs common to ghetto life, he (the wino) also assumes an alternate identity, imagining himself as "the tough horny beast" (the rhino) more commonly associated with Africa. In the mainstream reading of this poem, the figure assumes the rhino's identity as a political statement, claiming perhaps, "I am tough and I am a survivor. You who drive your Jeeps and snap your thousand-dollar Nikon cameras, you who attempt to isolate and stereotype me by objectifying me as a journalist would objectify a wild animal, you who repress me and try to ignore my presence on 'your' city streets, you have no idea of the power I possess within. I could destroy you if I chose to do so." There is truth in that mainstream reading; in fact, the figure bears metaphorical resemblance to Langston Hughes's speaker in "I, Too, Sing America," who, forced to eat his supper in the kitchen, promises a future where he will be strong and equal. Nevertheless, the mainstream reading falls short, for this figure refuses the romanticization that goes along with his stereotyping. He refuses the (ironically) *privileged* position in society that goes along with being the system's romantic victim, portrayed on TV news specials and documentaries on urban decay (and renewal). He refuses romantic victimization, which is itself a thoroughly ideological act. By making the victim a hero, a tough survivor, ideology is in fact implying that if this guy can survive in the ghetto (and dream and imagine!) then anybody can survive. The ideological move changes the entire social scenario. Instead of pinning blame on the real source of urban disintegration, capitalism itself, instead of shining

the spotlight on it, ideology places the victim at the center, making him the *story*, and turns the whole scenario into a human-interest story.

The wino/rhino, however, refuses his victimization/romantic idealization and, in his refusal, he makes it impossible for the system to perform its ideological moves on him—and therefore refuses his heroism as a human-interest story survivor. He executes this refusal in two ways. First, he portrays himself as merely one of a crowd, common in this part of the world: “a common creature of urban legend.” There are many here like him. He is neither “rare” nor “mythical.” For its ideological moves to be successful, the system would have to portray him as rare, mythical, and extraordinary; he understands that, so he flatly denies those qualities. To present oneself as rare and mythical would be like offering oneself to the devil. He will allow no poetry to sing his praises; he will allow no documentary to categorize his plight. Second, he unabashedly displays his clothes and actions, announcing to the world, “I drink and snort and come to you in these rags.” He emphasizes his “otherness,” and knows that doing so will make it all the more difficult for the masters of ideology to perform their moves on him, for the masters require some trace of resemblance, some trace of “well, after all, he is just like us.” Without that trace, he is less likely to become their hero, and therefore a double-victim, for even though he refuses to be romanticized, he *is* a victim. America’s inner cities, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, rotted. The jobs fell away to suburbia or to other countries, and with the jobs, social and cultural opportunities disappeared, as well: arts, the parks, and shopping and entertainment. The story is well known, but can anything be blamed for the urban upheaval? It’s convenient to pin it on job loss, but it’s probably truer to say the changing nature of jobs themselves, America’s changing economic base, caused the upheaval. The technology sector has overtaken manufacturing and heavy industry; those jobs that the urban community had relied on gradually disappeared. The wino/rhino might be a victim of that change.

Technology is not the enemy of the inner cities—or of the working classes, for that matter. Perhaps in the future it will open up job opportunities everywhere. Perhaps in the future radical political and social thinkers will discover ways to use technology as a unifying force. As it stands today, however, technology still divides. The class gap in America isn’t narrowing. When Senator John Edwards claimed years ago that there are “two Americas,” he was right. Inequality in access to technology is partly to blame for the class gap. Nevertheless, technology, in itself, is fine. Like the poets I have presented here, we should reserve our most powerful critique for the technocracy, the vast system that is the result of capitalism’s appropriation of technology and encroachment upon the natural world.

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