Editor's Column

An Invitation to the Archives

One of the advantages of the decision in 2021 to publish the journal through an agreement with Cambridge University Press on behalf of the MLA is that the full run of *PMLA* since its founding in 1884 is now accessible to all MLA members through *Cambridge Core*. The dedicated website for *PMLA* (www.cambridge.org/core/journals/pmla) can serve not only as a passive repository of back issues but also as an interface that allows a renewed and revisionary engagement with the history of the journal, which of course is also in no small sense a record of the history of the Modern Language Association itself. To this end, moving forward the website will feature short posts highlighting elements from the journal's past. The first few have been commissioned by the *PMLA* Editorial Board and will appear on the site this spring.

I think of this modest new initiative as responding to and building on calls in the field of archival studies to "activate" records: to proliferate avenues of access, to invite participation and "recontextualization" (Ketelaar 137), to foster novel and even sometimes contrarian, irreverent, and transgressive uses. In 2001 the influential Canadian archivist Terry Cook argued that there had been a "paradigm shift" that had transformed the archival profession: "a shift away from viewing records as static physical objects, and towards understanding them as dynamic virtual concepts; a shift away from looking at records as the passive products of human or administrative activity and towards considering records as active agents themselves in the formation of human and organizational memory" (4). The same year, the Dutch archive theorist Eric Ketelaar argued in a similar vein that "every interaction, intervention, interrogation, and interpretation by creator, user, and archivist is an activation of the record." The archive is not a vault for a precious artifact with a fixed signification, he insisted, but instead the site of an "infinite activation of the record" (137). Over the subsequent two decades, there has been an ongoing conversation among processing archivists working with materials in fields as various as photography, film, and community activism about strategies to activate the archive, especially through digital curation and access.[1]

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In a quiet way, this new mechanism for reading into the archive of *PMLA* is an attempt to adopt this sort of interventionist approach to the long history of the journal. Without imposing strictures on scope or approach in advance, I imagine that posts could take any number of approaches: revisiting key articles, especially ones that proved influential in catalyzing future scholarship; drawing connections, parallels, or juxtapositions among various individual pieces over the years in order to trace shifts or discrepancies in the discipline; unearthing neglected or underappreciated gems, articles that may not have been given their due; spotlighting blind spots and absences, topics and approaches that seemed unthinkable at a given conjuncture but have since become prominent or commonplace; following the emergence over a period of time of a particular subfield or area of concern; and reading the mundane facets of the journal's form (its changing subsections, for example) as a reflection of the glacial norms of the discipline overall, a transcription of the largely unremarked sedimentation of a professional ethos. I hope that the resulting inquiries will be provocations and charged reconsiderations rather than reiterations of the usual platitudes—or perfunctory rehashings of the usual complaints. To adopt a suggestion my predecessor advanced years ago in these pages about a "long view of history" in literary reading, I hope that these little excursions into the periodical archive of *PMLA* might be exercises in diachronic historicism, tracking the "traveling frequencies" that have reverberated in literary scholarship across the past century, "frequencies received and amplified across time, moving farther and farther from their points of origin, causing unexpected vibrations in unexpected places" (Dimock 1061).

This column offers an opportunity not only to announce the new rubric but also to take a dip into some back issues myself, and a few months ago I decided to take a look back at an article that had been published a little more than fifty years earlier: Louis Kampf's Presidential Address, "'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)': Literature and Language in the Academy," which appeared in the May 1972 issue. Kampf's piece could be said to mark the end of what was arguably the most significant transitional period in the history of the association, a period that commenced—or, better, erupted—with the controversial events of the December 1968 MLA convention in New York City.

For those of us who entered the profession decades later, to take the time to read oneself patiently—I perused issue after issue in original sequence from volume 82 in 1967 up to volume 87 in 1972—into the "density of accumulation" (Foucault 125) of an academic discourse unfolding with its own bounded field of reference, its own unspoken assumptions, and its own shifting common sense, is to confront a funhouse realm in which what at first appear to be the same institutions, the same titles, the same offices, the same protocols, are suddenly revealed to be the trappings of an entirely unfamiliar world—not one we have inherited, but one we have if anything departed or been separated from, often forcibly. Having myself attended the MLA convention in New York half a century later during the frigid "bomb cyclone" of 2018, I found it engrossing if disorienting to visit the same midtown hotels (the Hilton and the Americana, the latter since renamed the Sheraton) through the 1968 conference program and various articles in *PMLA*, and to reconstruct my own piecemeal version of the tumultuous events that led to Kampf's presidency.[2]

In the fall of 1968, faculty members and graduate students on campuses across the country came together to found an organization called the New University Conference, which, until its collapse in 1972, came to play a crucial role in pushing academic institutions and scholarly associations in the United States to respond to the exigencies of the political landscape in the Vietnam era.[3] A group of professors associated with the New University Conference—including Kampf, Richard M. Ohmann, Florence Howe, Paul Lauter, Frederick Crews, and Noam Chomsky—decided to take the opportunity of the 1968 convention to "stir things up," as they put it in a letter to the editor in *The New York Review of Books*, to discuss curricula, to "formulate and introduce a series of resolutions

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dealing with educational, professional, and political matters," and to "give a forum to graduate students and young faculty. They are the most exploited and least listened to amongst us; they experience the MLA meeting as a corral and auction block; their grievances should be heard" (Chomsky et al.). They called for an open planning meeting the evening of Thursday, 26 December, in an auditorium uptown at Columbia University before the convention kicked off the next morning, as well as meetings and caucuses at the convention itself on Friday and Saturday. Kampf recalled later that they were "flabbergasted" by the turnout: "apparently, we all underestimated the resentment boiling here against the system" (qtd. in Schrecker 345). More than four hundred people showed up for the planning meeting and nearly eight hundred attended an MLA session called "Student Dissent" at the Americana on Friday morning.

In the wake of the convention, the incoming 1969 MLA president Henry Nash Smith accused the reformers from the New University Conference of engaging in a "pattern of confrontation" at the convention ("Statement"). John Hurt Fisher, the MLA executive secretary and editor of *PMLA*, claimed that the activists had deliberately sowed "panic" in the hallways and ballrooms of the Americana, creating a "threat of violence" that overhung the scholarly interchange and administrative business of the conference ("Statement" 345, 346). But there is no evidence that the activists advocated or engaged in violence of any sort. Both Smith and Fisher were well aware of the mounting unrest among the membership, and in fact they attempted to make space for the discussion of the place of politics in the affairs of the association.

The previous spring, Fisher had already opened the debate himself by convening a plenary session at the March 1968 meeting of the MLA Standing Committees to which he invited Ohmann, among others (see Schorske; Hardison; Ohmann, "MLA"). The papers presented there were published in the September *PMLA* and seem to have received a good deal of attention. They stake out a striking variety of opinion. Whereas the Shakespeare scholar O. B. Hardison contributed a paper titled "The MLA and Social Activism" in which he "emphatically" denied "that social and political issues are the proper business of the Modern Language Association" (985), the historian Carl E. Schorske presented a paper titled "Professional Ethos and Public Crisis," in which he made an impassioned case that the professionalization of scholarship had led to "both moral and civic irresponsibility" and that, in the face of the crises roiling American society, the academy could no longer claim "immunity and neutrality" (980). The "point of entry for professional associations into the public sphere," Schorske contended, was for them to recognize their "responsibility" for their work "for society and mankind" (982). For his part, Ohmann declared (as he summarized his paper later) "that there was no point in discussing whether the MLA should exercise political rights, for it was in politics already, as is every organization, whether or not it takes a political stand" (*English* 43).

At the MLA convention in December, the philosopher Sidney Hook was invited to respond to the plenary position papers from March.[4] And Fisher accommodated the reformers by granting them sessions including the panel on student dissent that opened the conference (at which student leaders from various campuses were scheduled to speak); a panel titled "The American Scholar and the Crisis of Our Culture" chaired by Smith; a teach-in on the Vietnam war led by Chomsky; and a seminar titled "Student Rebellions and the Profession of Literature" moderated by Ohmann on Saturday (see "Eighty-Third Annual Meeting" 1582, 1584, and 1603). Members of the MLA staff also assigned the reformers space in the hotels to gather and to pass out leaflets and organizational information.

The infamous confrontation that ensued may have at least in part been due to the fact that the activists were assigned to an out-of-the-way corridor (Howe and Cantarow 484). As a result, on Friday morning as the conference opened, they decided to put up posters in the lobby of the Americana to direct conference attendees to their tables. Leslie Fiedler had started to deliver his paper in the student dissent panel underway in the Imperial Ballroom.

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Kampf, then a thirty-nine-year-old modernist who was the chair of literature at MIT, was taping posters emblazoned with a slogan from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* ("The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction") to the wall and handing out leaflets with a few graduate students when a member of the hotel security staff approached them aggressively and started tearing down the posters. When the reformers objected, the hotel management called the police, who summarily confiscated the posters and arrested Kampf and two students for "defacing private property" (Schrecker 344).

Word of the incident soon spilled into the conference proceedings. By the time Kampf and the students were being led out of the hotel in handcuffs, the student dissent panel had concluded and "The American Scholar and the Crisis of Our Culture" had commenced. When he heard what had happened, Smith allowed one of the reformers, the pioneering feminist scholar Florence Howe (who would become president of the MLA in 1973), to take the podium to explain the situation and to raise money for bail. Over the course of the remainder of the panel, thirty or forty protestors stood in a silent protest in a line across the front of the ballroom. The next morning there was a sit-in protest in the hotel lobby by conference attendees demanding that the charges be dropped.

As the historian Ellen Schrecker notes, "the contretemps galvanized the convention" (344). A large constituency of attendees, even beyond those who had been involved in the meetings organized by the New University Conference, seemed to share Ohmann's visceral reaction that the arrest "violated some immemorial decorum" (*English* 28). In contrast to the formality of the official conference proceedings, the caucuses put on by the reformers on Friday and Saturday were "unstructured, consisting of spontaneous debate," and they attracted large crowds who discussed a variety of issues, with meetings "on teaching assistants, on the position of women in the profession, on teaching literature to non-white students, on curriculum and grades, and on high school experiments in teaching literature" (Howe and Cantarow 485).

The Business Meeting of the MLA was famous for being dull and perfunctory, sparsely attended and quickly concluded. Schrecker observes pointedly that scholarly professional organizations at the time tended to rely on

> an informal consensus that promoted men (and at that time, they were almost always white men) with similar credentials and values. Elections were usually uncontested. Though formally major policy issues had to be decided at business meetings during the annual convention, in reality a small group of elected officers and staff members actually ran the associations. After all, what normal academic would forgo a convention's boozy networking to sit through an hour and a half of reports about the book review editor's budget? At times, in fact, it was hard to round up a quorum. (347)

But the Business Meeting held on Saturday, 29 December, in the Trianon Ballroom of the New York Hilton Hotel was an entirely different sort of affair, transformed into the main arena of contestation and reform. It started at 11:30 a.m. and ran without interruption until 5:20 p.m., and it attracted an audience of approximately eight hundred participants.

Months earlier, the activists of the New University Conference realized that there was a parliamentary procedure to propose resolutions to be considered for adoption by the membership. Normally the work of the Resolutions Committee was straightforward: the chairman "drafted resolutions thanking the host institution, the MLA staff on arrangements, and (more or less hypocritically) the hotels in which meetings were held" (Bostetter 1208). In the wake of the debates that commenced with the plenary in March, the members of the 1968 Resolutions Committee realized that they were going to receive many proposals for the MLA to make public statements that might well become controversial. Flustered and concerned, they published a comical notice in *PMLA*, soliciting suggestions from the membership on how to handle the situation.[5]

In the fall, the New University Conference reformers prepared a handful of resolutions and

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submitted them to the committee. Although the submission was in order, the Resolutions Committee initially decided not to present them at the 1968 Business Meeting. When pressed to explain their reasoning, a member of the Resolutions Committee said that "the Committee tried to avoid resolutions which are controversial. When asked why, he courageously said that he guessed the MLA had not learned how to move into the twentieth century" (Kampf, "Statement" 348).

The minutes of the Business Meeting, published in the September 1969 issue of *PMLA*, are a hilariously dry recounting of what must have been a contentious session, even if it was supervised by a professional parliamentarian brought in from the New York City Council (see "Actions" 1231). After the presentation of the reports of the trustees and treasurer and elections of honorary members and fellows, the 1968 Nominating Committee presented its chosen slate of officers, including Smith as the 1969 president. Incredibly, a motion was advanced from the floor to replace the choice of the Nominating Committee for second vice president (who would in turn assume the presidency of the MLA two years thereafter) with a new candidate: none other than the poster rebel from the Americana lobby, Louis Kampf. Following parliamentary procedure, the motion carried by a standing vote of 292 to 187 among those in attendance (1231).

Even more astonishingly, the meeting voted to consider the proposals that the Resolutions Committee had tried to withhold from consideration, and passed four resolutions by standing vote: a statement opposing the federal government's practice of punishing college and university student protestors by withholding financial aid and fellowships; a statement demanding the end of the military draft and calling "upon our respective institutions to refuse cooperation with the Selective Service System"; a statement of support for writers (including Eldridge Cleaver, Andrey Siniavsky, Yuri Daniel, Le Roi Jones, Octavio Paz, and Carlos Fuentes) facing politically motivated persecution and harassment; and a strongly worded denunciation of the Vietnam war:

> The United States is waging an immoral, illegal, and imperial war in Vietnam, and is guilty of aggression. Any individual or organization concerned with human ends must condemn the United States' presence in Vietnam. Therefore the MLA urges the immediate withdrawal of all US and other foreign military forces from Vietnam. (1233)

Although formal resolutions had not been submitted in time, the assembly passed a couple of other motions reflecting the "sense of the meeting." First, they urged the MLA Executive Council to move the 1969 convention from Chicago in protest of the violent police repression of antiwar demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. (In the end, the 1969 meeting took place in Denver.) And, second, they called for the establishment of "a committee to investigate the situation of women within the profession with the aim of assuring equitable standards" (1233).

Unsurprisingly, the arrest of Kampf and the students dominated media coverage of the convention. *The New York Times* published an editorial castigating what it described as "the irresponsible behavior of a noisy fringe group of academics" ("Breeder of Anti-Intellectualism"). The reformers realized that the arrest became the "symbolic event" of the convention (Ohmann, *English* 28), even if they knew—as Ohmann wrote in a letter to the editor of the *Times*—that "what actually went on at MLA was more important than lobby scuffles." Looking back at the episode later, they made light of their so-called revolt, calling it "The Little Bourgeois Cultural Revolution of MLA 1968" (Kampf and Lauter 34; Lauter 23). "What matters," wrote Florence Howe and Ellen Cantarow the following year, "is not the arrests, which were an unfortunate and regrettable distraction from the main work of the caucus, nor even the Chicago ballot, provocative as that proved to be as an organizing issue, but the new sense of freedom and interest on the part of so many members, to change, to reform, to improve their profession" (487). The MLA membership, they concluded, "or at least a significant portion of it, recognizes that the profession can no longer pretend to be apolitical" (486).

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Their successes led the reformers to recognize that, as Paul Lauter wrote thirty years later, the "institutions within which we worked were resistant but, at least in some measure, permeable." They could be transformed, Lauter saw, "even as we continued to be a part of, not apart from, them" (23). The advances were nonetheless concrete. In her introduction to the special millennium issue of *PMLA*, Linda Hutcheon noted that "the legendary 1968 convention led to the creation of the current governance structure of the MLA" (1724), with the business meeting replaced in 1971 by the Delegate Assembly, and the election of the president and other officers by the democratic vote of the entire membership. It also led to the creation of the MLA Job Information Service and, crucially, to the Commission on the Status and Education of Women in the Profession, which released a series of reports documenting systemic bias against women in modern language and literature departments (see Howe et al.; Morlock et al.).

Kampf's "'It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)': Literature and Language in the Academy" may be the only MLA Presidential Address that culminates with a call for faculty unionization. "Many academics choke on that particular horse pill," Kampf admits. But

> it comes much too close to unveiling the nature of our activities, and undercutting most humanist pretenses. We sell our labor. We are workers under industrial capitalism. If we understand that, we can understand our alienation, our sense of powerlessness. For teaching we collect wages: that is our basic connection to educational institutions, not the claims of humanist rhetoric. We are, in short, an intellectual proletariat. (383)

As exceptional as it is in some respects, in other ways the address is surprising above all in how apropos it seems to the current conjuncture, half a century later. "In the light of the shrinking job market and the overproduction of Ph.D.'s," Kampf argues, US universities have become "bastions of normalcy" and "enclaves of the comfortable" (377). He makes a case that after the turmoil of the 1960s, rather than double down on the exclusivity of American higher education, the task facing the profession is to redefine the commitment at its core, "by asking ourselves why the profession attracted us in the first place" (377). For Kampf himself, that commitment was rooted in a belief that "a life devoted to civilized refection" as a critic, teacher, and scholar would "improve my own life, that of my students, and humanity in general." Such a "faith," he suggests, "has served to justify nearly all teaching and research in the humanities. At some level anyone who comes into our profession believes in the redemptive power of literature, its capacity to ennoble a fallen world" (378).

The problem with this "dogma of redemption"—which Kampf locates in the work of a number of its major exponents, including I. A. Richards and Matthew Arnold (quoting the latter: the critical enterprise is the search for "perfection" defined as "an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances" [378])—is that it situates the powers of literature as a matter of its "therapeutic power for the individual," pursued and achieved only "in the private world of our feelings." The pursuit of such an "inward realm of perfection" has come to serve as a rationale for disengagement, for the "construction of an emotive and intellectual world which exists apart from the everyday, utilitarian one." For a professionalized faculty, Kampf warns, the impulse to "define intellectual activity as superior, as that toward which all activity should strive, and to characterize its highest functions by disinterest" ends up being a "self-serving ideology for people like ourselves" (378).

But this unquestioned ideology offers "no substantive argument illustrating how the powers of literature (and criticism) lead people to perfection without the mediation of institutions." And if literature has a redemptive function, it can take shape only through the institutional spaces where it is read and discussed: "We teach language and literature, whatever our intentions, not in some abstract realm, not in and for themselves, but within institutions." Public or private, at whatever level, with whatever resources, it is an inescapable fact that

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educational institutions operate within the confines of political economy (379). This is true not only of our schools, he continues, but also for our professional organizations, including the MLA. On every scale, he concludes, there is a contradiction between our "humanistic ideology"—that belief in the redemptive power of literature —and our "practice as professionals" (380).

"I doubt that we can even begin to rectify this condition," Kampf writes, "unless we make our professional activity part of the wider cultural struggle to unite the realm of esthetics with that of practical activity." Interestingly, he contends that the "forces of insurgency within our society" can in fact serve as models for "a literary and critical practice which goes beyond professional requirements." The writings of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, and George Jackson, for example, are not simply great works of art but also "an intimate part of the movement for black liberation" (381). Similarly,

> feminist literary criticism has profoundly challenged the notion of literature as a self-enclosed field with a set of autonomous rules. . . . The feminist critique challenges us to change the canon of literature, to radically shift our valuations of that canon, and to remember that in the classroom we are men and women affecting the thoughts and feelings of other men and women. In short, feminists do not regard literary study as an activity apart from the general concerns of feminism. (382)

This debate about the core commitments of the profession of literary scholarship is a central thread running through the cluster of articles on "politics" and "social activism" in the era of the 1968 convention. Even as he rejects the prospect of involving the MLA in what he takes to be extramural social and political concerns, Hardison writes that "the major task confronting the MLA" is to "explain the end of humanistic study—that is, the value of the humanities—to a society increasingly committed to novelty for its own sake, to short-term social engineering, and to instant utility" (986). In his own Presidential Address in December 1969, Smith remarked that "we need a fresh statement of the aims and methods of scholarship" ("Something" 419). The "dissidents" from the 1968 convention "are challenging assumptions that have gone too long without being reexamined. Provocation is good for us if it obliges us to explain—to ourselves as much as to others—why we consider our scholarship and our teaching to be worthwhile" (422). The concern is ubiquitous, in other words. The problem, though, as Kampf notes trenchantly, is that

> hardly anyone ever attempts to specify how literature performs its magic act. How, in fact, will its study make for a better world? The politics of this transformation are invariably left out. Indeed, faith in literature's dogma of redemption depends on one's willingness—perhaps desire—to skirt the realm of society, politics, and institutions altogether. ("'It's Alright'" 378)

This is precisely the problem taken up in the remarkable Theories and Methodologies section in this issue. Literary study, Nicholas Gaskill and Kate Stanley remind us in their introduction, begins in the social settings of educational institutions—it begins in the classroom, "with the work of learning to activate, analyze, and ultimately do something with the styles of thinking and feeling that literature makes available." Like Kampf, they observe that "the big-banner claims made for the moral and political effects of studying literature—of the sort that characterize contemporary defenses of the humanities no less than the Schillerian tradition—assume the practical tasks of teaching. They just don't explain them." It is an unexpected echo across a half century on another frequency—or perhaps a reminder that we are still wrestling with the same deep questions, fighting "the same wars over and over" (Hutcheon 1726).

Take another look at that letter to the editor in *The New York Review of Books*. The reformers announce their aim "to give a forum to graduate students and young faculty. They are the most exploited and least listened to amongst us; they experience the MLA meeting as a corral and auction block; their grievances should be heard" (Chomsky et al.). Read it again—read it from here and now. "The

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ceaseless passage of time touches language on many registers," but what is most striking are the shifts in the "semantic webs" around individual words, "broadening, contracting, acquiring new overtones and inflections," in a manner that "bear[s] witness to the advent and retreat of social norms" (Dimock 1060).

As a corral and auction block. It was not until I read Ohmann's 1976 book *English in America* as I was working on this column that I realized that it was common in the guild vernacular of the MLA at least through the mid-1970s to jokingly describe the faculty recruitment and job interviews that were such a major part of the convention as a "slave market."[6]

The metaphor is at once shocking and utterly predictable. Of course people would have joked that interviewing for a faculty position was like being on the auction block. And of course I myself would have never heard the phrase. The year 1968 was incidentally also the year when another future MLA president, Houston A. Baker, Jr., attended his first convention; he missed the fracas in the lobby of the Americana but, as a young African American aspiring Victorianist, Baker was well aware of "what the profession at large looked like": it was "very, very white; very, very male; and distinctly middlebrow in its ceremonial forms" (401). In his 1992 Presidential Address, Baker recounts an unsettling encounter in 1968 with a "ruddy-faced" faculty member who accosted him by the elevator and asked if Baker knew where he could find some "good Negro boys" to teach at his school (401). But these sorts of casual microaggressions became less common over time. Once the profession stumbled toward a semblance of integration in the years after 1968, the rhetoric of auction blocks would have been squelched, muffled out of a middlebrow sense of decorum, so as not to offend the trickle of minority colleagues one passed more often in the hallway. Eventually it may have fallen out of common use and, perhaps, as the generations turned, even been forgotten. But there it is, lingering in the archive of this journal, smoldering still.

What disturbs me about the metaphor is not the incommensurability between the cases. (After all, incommensurability is the condition of metaphor, and the source of its power.) It is instead the easy inclination to metaphorize Blackness—easy precisely because the assumption is that Blackness is elsewhere, available for figuration because it is not in the ballroom.[7] In this sense it is of a piece with Schorske's recommendation at the March 1968 plenary that one way for literary scholars to demonstrate their responsibility to society would be for them to learn Black vernacular. "We all know that the Negro is resisting learning 'pure' English in the schools," Schorske counsels.

> What do we know about his language? Why don't we learn it? The MLA of the 1880's plied a two-way street between academic and folk culture. As a European historian, I know that every democratic movement in the nineteenth century—in Greece, Serbia, Bohemia, and the like—had as a decisive stage the convergence of philologist and folk, to bridge the cultural gulf that divided elite and people. Are your scholars and students learning about the language gap between the ghetto culture and ours, or between Puerto Ricans and Negroes? (983)

Well-intentioned as it may appear, the formulation relegates "the Negro" to the object of study, the "folk culture" out there. Any Houston Baker in the room is rhetorically made to vanish from the presumed "we" being addressed.

Even beyond the letter in *The New York Review of Books*, this impulse to metaphorize Blackness is not absent from the rhetoric of the 1968 reformers. In Kampf's address, the great writers of the Black Power movement stand outside "the peaceful atmosphere of our classrooms." ("Our teaching," he laments, "seems to have produced no George Jackson's, no Malcolm X's, no Eldridge Cleaver's—all of whom learned their craft in prison" ["'It's Alright'" 377].) Yet from a distance they can suggest "possibilities for our own transformation" (382), offering "us" lessons of what it means as an intellectual to seek "the social sources of one's own humanity" (377). It is perhaps worth adding that, along with their buttons reinterpreting the organization's acronym as the "Mother Language Association"—in a provocation invoking "four or five types of

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ambiguity"[8] (Kampf and Lauter 35)—the reformers also plastered the walls of the Americana with a poster of Eldridge Cleaver featuring a ventriloquized inscription: "I got my job through the MLA."

Again, this problematic resonates in provocative ways in the essays in the section on aesthetic education in this issue. They aim neither to condemn nor to absolve. But in Kristen Case's article, to take only the most pertinent instance, with its poignant reflection on the vicissitudes of teaching *The Golden Bowl* in Maine to college students struggling with poverty and debt who are for the most part "disallowed the kind of empty time and mental space, the kind of decadence of receptivity, that the sentences in James's late novels require," there is something like a revisitation of Kampf's concern with discovering ways to teach and write that reveal the social sources of one's humanity. The answer is not to emulate or to metaphorize the "clamor outside the gates" (Kampf, "'It's Alright'" 377). Instead the strategy is modest and practical, in a manner that may not have seemed possible in the heady days of 1968: to bring the question of aesthetic education back to the classroom.

Brent Hayes Edwards

Notes

1. For a few examples of recent scholarship in these various fields, see Kim and Wernimont; Wernimont (discussing work with an archive of "ethnic" photography); Carter; Paalman et al. (in film studies); Buchanan and Bastian; Flinn et al.; Mills et al. (in the history of community activism). These ongoing conversations concerning strategies to open the use and interpretation of established archives should be understood as complements to initiatives to draw a wide range of stakeholders into the *making* of archives; on the "participatory archives" movement, see especially Benoit and Eveleigh.

2. Aside from the statements and responses in *PMLA* itself cited below, the most useful accounts of the events at the 1968 MLA convention include Schrecker 343–45; Howe and Cantarow; Kampf and Lauter.

3. On the history of the New University Conference, see especially Schrecker 353–58.

4. Indeed, the debate around the political role of the MLA that commenced with the March 1968 session was subsequently revisited in a number of *PMLA* articles published over the next few years (including Hook; Crews; Reck; Schwarz).

5. Apparently unsure how to handle these unforeseen circumstances, the members of the committee placed their report in the fondly recalled and delightfully quixotic section of *PMLA* called "For Members Only" (introduced by the former MLA executive secretary William Riley Parker in 1952), which gathered sundry announcements, profiles, and notices (see Fisher, "Remembrance" 405). Written by the chairman Edward E. Bostetter, the report almost sputters with anxiety:

> After discussion of the issues raised by Messrs. Schorske, Hardison, and Ohmann at the Plenary meeting of MLA Committees last March, the Resolutions Committee held a meeting which resulted in this report. . . . This, so far as I know, has been an unprecedented meeting of the Resolutions Committee (indeed it may never have met before, but conducted its business by correspondence). Furthermore, it has found itself considering problems of unprecedented difficulty in the light of Thursday's meeting. (1208)

It occurred to Bostetter that members might not even know what the Resolutions Committee was: "Perhaps a brief description of duties of the Resolutions Committee may be useful, for some of you probably know as little as I did until last year about it" (1208). Although the three members discussed the possibility of drafting resolutions on subjects including the military draft and civil rights, Bostetter concluded his report with a plea for help: "the Committee is keenly aware that in turning to the formulation of specific resolutions on such problems, it is moving beyond the traditional scope of the Resolutions Committee, and it feels desperately in need of further instruction and direction from the membership at large" (1210).

6. Without pausing to reflect on the metaphor, Ohmann writes, "I should say that though the 'slave market' (as recruitment at MLA meetings is called) is a frenzied and, lately, a cruel spectacle, I have never resented its existence" (41). The first reference I have found in *PMLA* dates to a footnote in William Riley Parker's 1953 encyclopedic overview of the history of the association, in which he notes that "the MLA annual meetings, despite all pretensions to the contrary, become more and more (in the phrase of the unhappy younger participants) a 'slave market'" (34n29). The phrase "more and more" implies that the phrase predates Parker's piece. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the phrase pops up now and then, even almost to the point of becoming a minor running joke in presidential addresses, from "The Legacy of Sisyphus" by George Winchester Stone, Jr., at the 1967 gathering (10) to Northrop Frye's unironic line in 1976 that the MLA was "a place that people go to partly to give and get jobs: there are enough jokes about the slave market, and enough demonology about the department chairman who sits in his hotel room over a bottle and breaks down the morale of one applicant after another. But there is something in the MLA's continued concern for employment that is both realistic and humane" (388).

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7. Intriguingly enough, the 1968 convention did include sessions covering African diasporic literature (with papers and seminars on Chinua Achebe, Aimé Césaire, and Samuel Delany), and a few African American participants aside from Baker, including Charles T. Davis, the first Black tenured faculty member at Penn State and later the director of the influential Afro-American studies program at Yale (on his career, see Gates). Davis was a participant (along with Leo Marx and Richard Poirier) on the panel "The American Scholar and the Crisis of Our Culture," chaired by Smith on Friday, where Davis gave a presentation titled "The Scholar and the Black Arts." Despite his grudging acknowledgment of the "emotional energy" channeled by the Black Arts Movement, Davis criticized the way it had come to be associated with the radical politics of Black Power (41). For him this was a misstep rooted in "the confusion of artistic disciplines and political and economic strength" (29). I have not come across any discussion of Davis's paper in the published reflections on the events of MLA 1968. One can only wonder how it was received in the volatile atmosphere of the convention.

8. As Lauter explained one of the phrase's implications later, "however furious many of us were with the academy, however much we decried its rule, we remained in significant measure its children. We expected the Mother Language Association, as some 1968 buttons characterized the MLA, to care for us; we presumed, often rather casually, that we would gain and retain jobs, and in due course secure tenure" (23).

The button also seems designed to serve as an ambiguous allusion to the concept of the "mother tongue," a particularly volatile point of reference during a period when the MLA Executive Council had recently (in 1967) founded the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages to advance the teaching of all foreign languages at all levels of instruction in American education. There was some controversy around this initiative, which some educators suspected was motivated by (or at least aligned with) the interests of US intelligence and foreign policy in Cold War era. In his Presidential Address a year later, Smith defended its importance:

> The possibility, even the certainty, that the Foreign Language Program may contribute in some measure to a foreign policy we disapprove of does not seem to me to mean that the MLA should abandon it. . . . [B]y giving rein to an inherently morbid imagination I can conceive that the preparation of an Albanian or a Vietnamese grammar might be a contribution to the training of CIA operatives for underground work in the Balkans or Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, I believe that the goal of fostering the study of languages in an intensely ethnocentric society warrants the risk. ("Something" 421)

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