

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

ADRIENNE CAREY HURLEY. *Revolutionary Suicide and Other Desperate Measures: Narratives of Youth and Violence from Japan and the United States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. (2011). 259 pp. \$24.92 (Paperback). (ISBN 978-0822349617).

In *Revolutionary Suicide and Other Desperate Measures*, Adrienne Hurley renders hyper-visible the often disavowed “culture of child abuse” in Japan and the United States. Through analysis of autobiographical fiction, tabloid journalism, film, clinical case studies and her personal experiences serving as a court-appointed special advocate for abused children, Hurley exposes how child abuse and youth violence are popularly understood as aberrant, manufactured for commercial profit, and represented as a mass mediated “freak” spectacle. In these late-capitalist societies where parental rights have eclipsed children’s rights, and where teenagers are disproportionately incarcerated, it has become common sense to blame youth for their own vulnerability. Hurley effectively shifts the terms of the debate to argue that adults and the institutions that purport to “protect” children (child protective services and juvenile “correctional” facilities) are complicit in creating the conditions that engender violence. Instead of alluding to youth violence as “inexplicable,” she urges readers to provide youth with opportunities to identify why they are angry, disaffected, and suicidal, and to create strategies to challenge the conditions that fuel their hopelessness.

Bridging the gap between academia and action, Hurley undertakes close readings as a form of advocacy. She speaks to those readers, critical educators and scholar-activists who can position themselves as “ally-advocates” (p. 45) in the service of children’s and youth’s liberation. She calls on them to disrupt both the “adult optic” (p. 11) and “unilateral adult caretaker-child relationship” (p. 33) that maintain differential power relations that structure acts of violence. Successful strategies offered from Hurley’s own experiences as a youth empowerment program coordinator for criminalized youth validate her call.

Hurley (de)naturalizes violence as it is experienced by youth. She successfully counters many of the racial and class biases that blame “identity instead of

institutions” and challenges “the prevailing myths that obscure the violent conditions many youth face and offer alternative models for reading and interpreting young people’s rage” (p. 4). Violence against children is, according to Hurley a daily occurrence that cuts across class and racial lines often times with impunity for the perpetrator. To prove her point, Hurley overwhelms her readers with statistics of widespread child abuse and abduction crimes throughout the United States and Japan; figures which are inaccurate due to underreporting (see p. 42; 118-119). She also documents the growing body of professional literature and comparative research about violence against children and underscores the profound cultural shift in the “abuse and recovery industries” (p. 174) marked by a popular proliferation of disclosures of trauma (such as those by adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse). Hurley underscores that “the very material and real power of storytelling to save lives is written into fiction by young women who themselves survived repeated and violent sexual assault by writing” (p. 38). The importance of storytelling for survival is demonstrated by Hurley in her extensive analysis of two autobiographical works of fiction written from the vantage point of the abused girls themselves: *Fazaa Fakkaa/Father Fucker* (1993) by Uchida Shungiku and Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard out of Carolina* (1993). From the perspective of these two novelists, “fiction” can communicate that which has been suppressed and continues to be buried in nonfiction, formal discourse, and everyday conversation.

After underscoring just how endemic child abuse is and how stories of prolonged childhood sexual abuse are rendered invisible within mainstream society, Hurley argues that violent acts committed by youth cannot be attributed solely to those who are poor, non-White, or simply “crazy”; such a formulaic notion forestalls understanding. Hurley discusses Seung-Hui Cho, the student who killed 32 people and then himself at Virginia Tech in 2007 (p. 31). Sensationalized as simply “demented” by the tabloid press, Cho’s experiences of physical and sexual child abuse, racism and class oppression were virtually ignored. Instead, mainstream media cited Cho’s legal resident alien status as if his “foreignness” could explain his actions.

For Hurley, youth from all backgrounds are only mimicking the fear and outrage, the revanchist impulses that comprise the “dominant national feeling states” (p. 117) of the Global North in the post-9/11 era. Youth-driven responses to conditions of oppression include violence, both representational and real. In various popular cultural texts produced by young anarchists, Hurley examines how the turn to representational and political violence in these works is used to “expose the ways in which violent state policies elicit interpersonal brutality” (p. 179). Hurley examines the work of Sherman Austin, a young Black anarchist and rap artist who was arrested for “inflammatory” content on his website which provided a platform for discussion for anti-police brutality activists, and provided suggestions on how to practice for possible armed combat with police; Sherman was subsequently censored and convicted under United

States domestic terrorist laws (pp. 115-117). Like Austin, award-winning novelist Tomoyuki Hoshino is also preoccupied with how youth can and do resist state repression. Hoshino's science fiction novel *Lonely Hearts Killer* (2009) explores how marginalized youth violently challenge a new authoritarian political leadership on the ruins of the Japanese emperor state (pp. 177-214). In both of these productions, the state is identified as the greatest purveyor of violence against its people; in particular, against those radically "disaffected youth" who actively envision the death of the state and the creation of a new anti-authoritarian society.

Hurley appeals to those committed to building intergenerational movements for radical social change and transformative justice. Her interdisciplinary analysis will benefit the work of a wide range of actors, from youth advocates, teachers, and social workers to scholars in the newly emerging field of girlhood studies as well as those specializing in the sociology of youth culture. *Revolutionary Suicide* – the classic autobiography authored by Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton (1973) which shares its title with Hurley's book, as well as its parallel analyses of the necessity for revolutionary change – should also be read by youth activists who are at the forefront of organizing against both interpersonal and state violence. Ultimately, it is our responsibility to engage with youth so that they too can taste a power not driven by desperate measures such as suicidal despair or violent rage, but by revolutionary hope.

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