

Gilbert Adair

**“Child-Emporerer (vacncy)”:  
Apprehending U.S. Empire through Robert Fitterman’s *Metropolis***

1. ‘The New Unoriginal’[1]

paragraph 1

In the months following the terrorist attacks on the U.S. mainland of September 11, 2001, more than one New Yorker who asserted that this date had ‘changed everything’ was unable to articulate exactly what — with the city’s daily life apparently resumed as normal — had changed. It’s at least conceivable that the 30th section of Robert Fitterman’s ongoing long poem *Metropolis* is an attempt to provide, among other things, a surprising and nuanced answer to this vexed question, an answer whose rubric might nonetheless derive from the maxim attributed to President Coolidge, ‘The business of America is business.’[1a]

2

What changes, again among many other things, is the mix of ways of doing business. Fitterman’s *Metropolis XXX: The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the first of the three volumes to date to be wholly composed after September 11, is made up of a range of ‘appropriated’ internet materials (corporate brochures, search engine Q&A exchanges, an EXPO guide, religio-apocalyptic enthusiasms, consumer reports official and unofficial, legal transcripts, etc.), yielding two, 15-part halves, one titled “The Decline” and the other “The Fall.” This is a pronounced departure from the near-maniacal inventiveness of *Metropolis 1–15* (2000, but composed through much of the 90s) and *Metropolis 16–29* (2002) — although these volumes also make increasing use of what Hugh Kenner called a “poetic of quotation” (ix). Kenner’s immediate reference was to Louis Zukofsky, but the term would embrace Zukofsky’s immediate precursors Eliot and Pound, the latter of whom had enlisted a ‘poetic of quotation’ to the epic task of “including history” (ABC 46), as opposed to simply being ‘about’ history.

3

Fitterman told Michael Kelleher in 2005, “I don’t see myself as the epic type, and sometimes I feel like the three books are complete enough” (qtd. in par. 13);[2] in the same piece he proposes for *Metropolis* the model of an “art gallery ... where a reader can walk into a section and have a particular experience and then move on. There isn’t meant to be much connection from one section to the next” (qtd. in par. 4). Space here is paramount, the gallery’s simultaneous layout, and time the chance specifics of our wandering through it (entirely possible to read section 8, say, which is quite eye-catching, before 3).

4

It’s worth noting, however, that 15, an historical survey which plays up the Dutch origins of New York, mentions “Old Eolus bags / of wind adrift, pell-mell // to gambol about this windy *Metropolis*” (133). Eolus was the god ordered by Juno to unleash a tempest on the Trojan fleet in Book I of the *Aeneid*, the work that durably in the West celebrated the yoking of epic to empire; by the time Neptune arises to calm the waves, the ships have been driven onto the coast of Carthage — a mere hiccup, nonetheless, in the unfolding of imperial destiny, as Jupiter assures Venus. *Metropolis 29*, made up of “the final sentences or phrases from a variety of books around the house” (“Notes and Acknowledgements”), ends, “His spirit fled into the gloom below” (124), a translation of the *Aeneid*’s final line.[3]

5

Given that this section immediately precedes *Metropolis XXX* with its oddly strident subtitle, and pace Fitterman's reservation above, it may therefore indeed be useful to consider the poem as an ongoing exploration of American empire, with Eolus's 'pell-mell' winds as more constitutive of than diversionary from it. But we should also focus on 'ongoing.' Had XXX been unlinked by title to the first two volumes, it could easily be seen as a 'new departure' in the poet's career, able to subsist, if needed, unencumbered by the anticipations and false starts of its predecessors.

6

This, however, is clearly and deliberately not the case; more pertinent, perhaps, is Ron Silliman's characterization of the shift from Pound's *Pisan Cantos* (1948), its often beautiful lyricism informed by "the immediate present of the traitor's cage in the mud," to the *Drafts and Fragments of Cantos XV–CXVII* (1968) where Pound confronts his epic's defeat by a Disneyfied culture, as "a change in tense" in the temporal progression of *The Cantos* as a whole (par. 30). A change in tense, in mood, in voice ... with this in mind I want to look first at *Metropolis* from the 90s, the decade which witnessed a growing readiness in American ruling circles to speak of an "imperial" policy (Haass), long considered taboo.

## 2. Books / Booths

7

My program is simple: to surrender to the city and survive its inundation.  
— Stephen Rodefer, *Four Lectures* (1982)

8

*Metropolis 7*, given as a "Selected Reference" (59) for section 9, ends with a line (xv.xciii) from Byron's *Don Juan*, "Because my business is to dress society ..." (62). The original continues, "And stuff with sage that very verdant goose"; society is to be exhibited seasoned for consumption as something at once young, silly, old, female, and in need of wisdom. The citation signals an intention to social critique, not necessarily an innocent one; Fitterman mounts his own version of Byron's racy exuberance not least in the dictionary conventions, real and absurdly invented, that pepper 7, and in some inspired riffs: "Avon – a.sp. and pppl. + I. Obs. foci. cf. Obs. invst. strtg. I. defining landscape catchphrase: have you got a match? he's got a bad memory. 2. these aren't my order {voice}. see: dye-free. [n. used merger] lp. sis. see:voice" (59). 'Avon' (a kind of spelling [?] and present / past participle plural[?!]) evokes both the Bard and the line of inexpensive beauty products, and the quirky particulars of the rest sustain the mutual infecting of poetry and pavlovian ('landscape catchphrase') sales methods: 'obsolete aesthetic concerns are much like obsolete investment strategy.'

9

Palpable here and throughout 1–29 is a gratitude to the city (unequivocally, in the first volume, New York) for its rich source of potential sign-combinations, or more accurately, perhaps, signifier-combinations, or perhaps not even that. In effect, the critique risks becoming at the same time a celebration of its target, if the target operates as a destruction of normative signification — or, as a re-normativizing of what signification entails. We can begin to open this up by considering the relation of 7 with the text it offers to gloss, quickly noting that the first word of 7, "Ambient" (59), turns up not before stanza 3 of section 9 as, however, "ambiance" (80), and that in general, words or phrases selected for attention in 7 — "Arabesque," "Benison Of Heaven," "Dapper,"

“Magpie,” and “Verdant,” among others (59–62) — engage in a plausibly glancing commentary on various unobvious aspects of the later poem, rather than in an explication of what about it might beg to be explicated.

10

A mischievous commentary askew from its ‘original’ goes back to William Carlos Williams’s *Kora in Hell* (1920); Fitterman ups the mischief by having the glossary precede its text.[4] Section 9 itself seems to be a take on 90s globalization as a ‘north-south’ divide: “Getting back to germs / mazeful hed, realm, isle / less this Southern man / o weep! downside envy with / hevi herte, acid-tongued, / assembled, brimming o’er / grieveth me ful sore rare — ” (79). The voice here is quizzical, cynical, vicious, down-the-ages urbane; ‘rare,’ implying both ‘mightily’ and ‘decidedly seldom,’ is the critical addition to a completed rhyme (‘o’er / sore’). In fact, perusal of these lines turns up a sparkle of complicating interpretive possibilities: ‘hed’ might be a typo at once for ‘head’ (seat of government, corporate boardroom) and ‘he’d,’ a declaration of patriarchal persistence that troubles anything innocent or single to the ‘Southern man.’ Intersecting these unfurlings and détournements of the signifier, the poem prompts at once a mixing of eras / cultures (evident in the lines quoted) and a recurrent nostalgic voice of ‘the fathers’ — “rigor idola of years” (82) — a dialectic operative in the U.S. since the Puritan jeremiads.

11

We should hesitate, however, to accord its metonymic status a conceptual command, “stems / to restore emblematic dove- / tails” (86); rather, all voices are within the empire. But how do the concept and the intransigent material swarmings (including of significations) interact? We need to take a theoretical pit-stop.

12

Metropolis 9 ‘dovetails’ nicely with Jean Baudrillard’s insistence that ascendancy of signifier over signified was an early 20th-century requirement of burgeoning consumer capitalism. But planes of formal consistency also need to be considered. New York poet Bruce Andrews offered in 1986 the useful model of “levels... exist[ing] in a series of concentric circles” (34), applying it to how both language and society are organized:

13

With society, you can talk about [the] surface level ... as a kind of decentered constellation of different practices ... pluralism, a micropolitics of fragments. Second, beyond that, you can talk about those ... being organized into a dominant hegemony and a variety of counter-hegemonies ... And then third ... you can talk about the outer limits of something like a totality, an overall horizon of restriction and constitution, a limit, a set of organizing principles within the social order. (34)

14

The corresponding levels in language are given as “a set of differences, the production of meaning (as signification)”; the organizing of these “into a polyphony — of different voices, different literary traditions”; and again, “this outer horizon, this set of limits” (34–35). Crucially, these ‘concentric circles’ inter-radiate: ‘language’ and ‘society’ are not hypostatized in a relation of mutual exteriority; writing, therefore, cannot be determined in any “point-by-point” (42) or mechanical way, whether by what it refers to (its ‘signified’) or by “a socioeconomic system, for instance” (46). Particulars are evitable, rather than inevitable. This opens up enormous and sometimes hair-raising possibilities for poetry.

15

Metropolis 2, for example, is made up of short-lined, roughly centered stanzas with words often split line-to-line, unsignaled by hyphens:

16

palm bra  
ss do  
or arm  
ory wat  
ery no  
on rat

es all  
owable ... (21)

17

A unitary reading, silent or aloud, is clearly impossible here. Let me, however, commit the near-heresy of ‘regularizing’ some of the lines: “this branch’s glass bank’s punch clock a mock up pier workers on-the-go lacquered sentimental apple cart ... ” (22–23). Here the sense that in New York almost any combination of elements is possible finds a stabilizing referential support in the pockets of lower Manhattan, complete with its corporate art, anyone might wander in.[5] The poem is a game of recognitions, as is section 6, composed of words with missing, superabundant, or run-together letters, which provided the present article’s title phrase (54). In 18 and 23 Fitterman plays variants on the split-word strategy of section 2, but presenting greater challenges to recognition, firstly because the lines, instead of being single-spaced, are in both sections crammed together in half-spacing in the pages’ lower left half:

18

(c) hoo  
ps o  
f ste  
el shou  
lders woo  
ster lov  
e beads  
not you  
r mom’s  
pod  
ium

19

But secondly — ‘hoops of steel shoulders wooster love beads not your mom’s podium’ (26) — recognition is impeded because here there is no established referential template, so no possibility of anticipating the next word’s ballpark, even; although in retrospect the words appear not to be random (the above stanza plays fragmentary fashion statements from different eras against the maleness / conformity or lack thereof they’re presumed to signal). Recognition, then, is eventually satisfied, while being alloyed by the further recognition that what holds this together is far more the formal consistency, page to page, of sections 18 and 23 — conforming, perhaps, to Andrews’s intermediary and inter-radiating levels of ‘a dominant hegemony and a variety of counter-

hegemonies' and 'a polyphony — of different voices, different literary traditions.' 18 ends (again in heretical transcription), '[run]ning a dry catholic blended hornet own macdougal impersonal all this stuffs a prince's pocket' (30), arriving after curious stalls and specificities at a satisfaction that must register in itself the will to recognition, to dispense with perceptual accidents, of the 'outer horizon' of totality, this last having mid-80s, Andrews said, to be extended beyond the national to the global, "this integrated capitalist world system" (41).

20

In effect, liberty of the signifier has been exploited by a range of late-20th-century American poets to restore political primacy (palpably if not directly) to the support, which rather than being confined to the signified, emerges as the fraying coherence with its density of levels. This in turn grants (if retrospectively) to moments of cultural analysis, plausibility as prophecy indebted, however, to its local form. 'Child-Emporerer (vacncy)' may have been sparked by Clinton's boyish charm, even as by mid-90s, incomes for most Americans had "stagnated or declined for fifteen years along with working conditions and job security, continuing through economic recovery, an unprecedented phenomenon" (Chomsky 28).[6]

21

As likely, 'Emporerer' was a child's overheard struggle to pronounce the word. Either way, or both or other ways, it now appears dreadfully prescient of present reality, and 1–15 presents other such examples.[7] We should also return here to section 8 (see n.6), where the building names that on first appearance are given in full — "WORLD TRADE CENTER" (65), "AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL BUILDING/ a.k.a. CITIES SERVICE BUILDING" (67) — are then shortened to a single word, and which therefore ends, so far at least as the subtitles are concerned: 'RCA: AMERICAN: FLATIRON: WORLD: FLATIRON: EMPIRE: WORLD: CHRYSLER' (73–75).

22

More directly here than we have yet registered, the city presents raw materials for textualization; there is a distance, moreover, between the poem's opening lines, "As I live and breathe / I left my briefcase in Queens, / on the Q, no a cab" (9) — attentive, in-down-there-in-medias-res, to a string of sound-transformations and -complications — and the one-word subtitles of section 8, crafted from the monumental authority of the city's high massings. The poem's second volume offers in section 16 another 'text-of-the-city' but on a lower level, with 10 stanzas of mostly one-word lines, those words naming the chain-stores whose outlets we encounter everywhere: "McDonald's / Wal+Mart / Sunglass Hut / Kmart / Wendy's / Starbucks" (8), and repeating, with each stanza having fewer lines, until the closing reductio, "K Mart / KFC / K Mart" (12).[8]

23

This volume also has increasing recourse to intercutting apparently incompatible printed texts. Section 19, "Dream Cuisine," combines menu selections from the Union Square Café with snippets from The Journals of Lewis & Clark to bring forward the imperial histories informing our culinary innocences: "a fine morning bejeweled / pulsing with Mexican seasoning // lime-miso vinaigrette // cilantro soy // crouded with Islands; / Colorado lamb ... " (33). As deftly telling in its particulars is 27's intercutting of a 1963 compendium of riddles and the anonymous 1995 An Interviewer's Handbook. Still, the question arises of sustainable aesthetic effectiveness: the technique of intercutting, by being inexhaustibly but samely productive, will yield diminishing returns. It's consciously apparent in section 16, in its trajectory from a 14- to a 3-line stanza: the more that's fired at us the less we remember and the more we compartmentalize along the lines given while we also fill up with multi-sourced data we can't take anywhere. Fitterman wanted,

perhaps, to go on using citations but also to find other ways of doing it; if so, XXX was the first result.

24

### 3. A Change in Metonymy

25

Shampoo bottle ego-image, Cracker Jack prize one-shot amusement [...] meat packages disguise of slaughter, dry-cleaning bags infant strangulation, garden hoses feeding endlessly the desert ... but [...] to find the meanest sharp sliver of truth in so much replication, so much waste... .

— Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)

26

On August 12, 1819, in respect of the first two cantos of *Don Juan* (and what might follow), Byron wrote his publisher, “I have no plan — I had no plan; But I had or have materials” (qtd. in McGann 1). This could be applied to many American long poems from *Leaves of Grass* on, but with *Metropolis* there is, to date, a special resonance. Byron’s epic is episodic (picaresque) until around the middle of Canto X, when the hero’s arrival in England launches a continuous narrative broken off by the abrupt end of XVII; the discrete sections of *Metropolis* 1–29 give way in XXX to a 30-part section around a third their combined page-length. In both cases (though speeded-up in Fitterman’s), it would seem that guerrilla dartings are replaced by a more sustained strategy to seize the culture, as if the imperial ambition of the epic models the poems had looked on variously askance had belatedly seized them.[9] But in *Metropolis* XXX (which concerns us here), complications fairly quickly set in.

27

‘Rome’ was a pervasive post-Independence model, evident in Joel Barlow’s revising of his 1787 epic *The Vision of Columbus* as *The Columbiad* (1807) and in the neoclassical architecture of Philadelphia’s Bank of the United States and Jefferson’s Monticello, among other edifices; although Horace Greenough’s 1830s statue of Washington garbed in a toga aroused controversy, since by then historical models were being displaced by felt speed of movement into the expansionary future of ‘manifest destiny,’ about to be so named. Fitterman’s evocation of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*, then, in a text that seeks to take on the internet, can be seen as both unAmerican and originally American. It “is constructed as 15 ‘aspects’ of the Roman Empire updated and then the same 15 aspects mirrored in reverse that emphasize how much it costs” (qtd. in Kelleher par. 8). ‘Mirrored in reverse’ means that part XV, “Senate,” chimes with XVI, also called “Senate,”[10] and so on down the lines until I, “Guide A–Z” (9) (the complete Roman alphabet), calls to XXX, “Guide 1–99” (71), whose implicit unit of only 100 opens up to an infinity of numbers.

28

This, ironically enough, encapsulates the problem for metonymy in a world American poets have been living with, again, since Whitman, one where sheer quantity marks a substantive difference from the part that gestures at it. This is clear in, for example, parts VII and XXIV, “Convention Center (EXPOguide)” and “Convention Center,” each a listing of alphabetically named booths in numbered groups. XXIV (booths 100–112, 123–139, and 200–210) goes from “American Academy of Art Therapy National Convention” to “American College of Rheumatology [sic] Meeting” (59); in 111 booths, with even those named evoking considerable occupational divergence

(bovine practitioners [?!], school administrators, etc.), all beginning ‘American,’ we have reached A–C, with an effectively infinite way to go. Metonymy might then give way to fractals, the search for a constancy of irregularity over different scales, figured — although again, surely, ironically — in the slim volume’s elegant, self-replicating structure.[11]

29

A similar problem is buried in the notion of ‘updating,’ which often masks historical differences by being saddled with arbitrary points of departure and framing. Fitterman’s touch is delicate here, letting Gibbon’s text play over his own (‘including history’) without taking hold of it. He thus includes several sites with Christian themes: part XX has for bonus the world’s most mawkish piece of ‘free verse’ (51); XXI lists products for a Catholic church’s every occasion (“Veils Holy Bears Deacon Stoles ... Processional Candles Wedding Caketoppers ... Spanish Titles Bells & Chimes” [53]), worthy of any medieval fair. Still, were we to seek a present recycling of, say, the following lines from Gibbon —

30

If Alaric himself had been introduced into the council of Ravenna, he would probably have advised the same measures which were actually pursued by the ministers of Honorius... . [who] excluded all persons who were adverse to the catholic church from holding any office in the state, obstinately rejected the service of all those who dissented from his religion, and rashly disqualified many of his bravest and most skilful officers who adhered to the pagan worship or who had imbibed the opinions of Arianism (585–86) —

31

we would have to inform our sense of Metropolis XXX by proposing objects of controversy (even, or especially, history needs interpretation) drawn from ‘today’s news.’ Gibbon’s recurring ‘beginning of the end,’ the reduction of the senate to endorser of imperial tyranny, receives in XXX never a hint. Some of the parts of sub-section 2, “The Fall,” ‘emphasize,’ as the author said, ‘how much it costs’ — XIV, “Rubber Ducks,” is succeeded by XVII, listing 36 ducks (“Ball Player Duck ... Surfer Duck ... James Brown Duck,” etc. [46]) whose prices range from \$3.95 to \$6.95 — but the format (at least in this literal aspect) is not discernible in all the ‘reverse mirror’ pairings. More pertinent at this point, no doubt, is to wonder what a passage such as this from XXVI, “Airbrush: Order the Video,” has to offer a reader of poetry:

32

Yesterday when I got home from an airbrush class, my airbrush video I had ordered from Nails in the Real World had arrived... . popped it in and oh my goodness. I felt so angry. WHY? Because if I had received it BEFORE the airbrush class I took I could have saved \$300.00!!! Suddenly I felt renewed. I learned far more in the video than in the whole three days of the airbrush class... (63; ellipses in text)

33

For while Pound (“Disney against the metaphysicals” [Cantos 796]) may have lamented the culture’s saturation by an orientation inimical to his harried notion of epic, we should not suppose that the largely normative syntax of Metropolis XXX will gain it any more readers than 1–29. XXX could be sold only as poetry, framed in its publication by a radical poetry press — which is to say that its parts are reframed from their internet appearances for a different kind of attention. With this laid down, what does a ‘close reading’ of the text yield?

First off, the sobering knowledge that if we're paying attention to language, we had better look to the registers of it that do invest us. We may raise to a level of consciousness, then, what was perhaps subliminal. So, 'my airbrush video I had ordered,' not 'the airbrush video'; in the internet's 're-normativizing' of signification, possession sets in at the moment of staking one's online claim. XVIII, "Stadium Seating (moneystory)," consists of consumer guides to four cinema complexes, and we find ourselves comparing (seats are cheaper here but snacks dearer, etc.), something we 'spend' a fair amount of routine time doing; basic concerns have been translated to and nitpicked over on the internet, making whole swathes of our lives, again, visibly if not necessarily flatteringly available. XXIII, "The Goths (Fall Sale)" is a list of chokers, complete with spelling-renditions of the desiring consumer: "Silver-plated rose charm on one end. Preeetty" (57); its counterpart offers for persona the 'Bad Kitty': "We are works of art, we know how to be sensuous at any size or shape or color of coat, and we play up with style. Bad Kitties are NEVER trashy. // Being a Bad Kitty means having groups of other Bad Kitties for social grooming and fun, but never taking on the group mind" (24). Its charm includes your young narcissist's beaming ignorance of history. IX, "The Hermes Effect," seems to be a set of maxims for a male student likewise anxious to preserve some detachment: "look at yourself in the most critical fountain // don't decide any price in advance // don't try to impress the Eastern Bloc toilet attendant with your German" (26) — 'Eastern Bloc'?! how old is this?[12]

But does any meaning lodge in the brief bafflement? The "mountain mastiff" (9) in the opening shuffle of travel-guide sentences seems to have purchase into no more than a briefly amusing error, just as the disorienting effect of 'Suddenly I felt renewed' in "Airbrush: Order the Video" derives from clumsy writing rather than purposeful parataxis. In "Ship Décor (Odyssey Special," the appropriated text is divided into couplets that hardly dress it to advantage: "Public areas are decorated with warm wood / paneling accented with blue and green and white // marble floor (this can be slippery in the spa/fitness area)" (69). Lineation, again amusingly, 'poeticizes' this then stares disowningly.

David Alworth argues compellingly that the "rebarbative" (par. 12) quality of Metropolis XXX derives above all from its refusal to allow its readers the comfort of "an ironic, critical stance" toward "the language of mass-mediated consumer culture" (par. 7). 'Language,' note: If we google some of the sites Fitterman draws on — a 'demystifying' he has surely set up — we see how much is 'missing' (the visuals, the links). Nevertheless, bearing in mind that internet sites are ever-changing, we must assume that he has, for the most part, quoted verbatim. XXX enacts a bleaker sense of the vulnerability to interference of public discourse than the preceding volumes, which appear by contrast almost naïve in their combinatory liberties; as if there, the poet were the 'child-emporerer.' Allowably, a target of XXX's 'irony' are the expectations aroused by its subtitle, which may be floating only the mirage of a grand (epic) narrative at work. But the critique, I think, is larger than that.

Fitterman wrote Kelleher that he "appropriated" internet materials "with the intention of including everything because we have access to everything" (qtd. in par. 8). I'm reminded of Jed Rasula's response to a sentence by Stephen Rodefer,[13] "I am an archaeologist in the archive of everything now": "[O]ne is caught between calling him on the sham, and asserting that this too might be another apparition of the [techno-cultural] voiceover" (88). As noted, the city for Metropolis 1–15 (and, mostly, 16–29) is New York; XXX tinkers with its travel-guide materials to suggest a world



city, referring to the “provincial capital of this city” and the “manufacturing town of this city” (71).

38

Search engine inquiries suggest that in late 2000, some 300 million people worldwide had home internet access; by the end of 2001, almost half a billion. That’s not 10% of a population of 6 billion and climbing. Bill Maher remarked on MSNBC’s *Hardball*, Sept. 13, 2006 (I quote from memory): “Look, if we have to be told over and over we’re fighting a war? — we’re not. The troops are fighting a war; we’re shopping.” It echoes Fitterman’s intelligent doggedness in making his ‘post-9/11’ volume a continuation by other means of the critique of capitalist empire begun in 1–15, now withholding from us the alienations with which, perhaps, we’re most comfortable, but Mahr flat means it: ‘we’ really are shopping. *Metropolis XXX*, in including ‘everything,’ is po-faced and sealed on its most significant exclusions, not least of the burgeoning slum hyper-cities of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Breaking self-mirroring’s techno-narcosis, and in that, imaginatively (as opposed to cerebrally) registering the frightening provincialism of the ‘sole superpower,’ left to the reader, becomes the remarkable experience afforded by this text.

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Notes

[1] Filched from the blurb of *Metropolis*'s second volume.

[1a] 'Attributed,' yes. I thank John Tranter for pointing out Coolidge's actual words, January 17, 1925, in response to the question of whether or not a newspaper's making a profit was in conflict with its function to disseminate information. No, said Coolidge, since "After all, the chief business of the American people is business," just as "the chief ideal of the American people is idealism." The more familiar but distorted version of this, according to Robert Sobel, was the work of Wilsonian historians eager to present Coolidge as a philistine; see King (1998). American 'idealism' is also, of course, a currently pertinent topic, but beyond the scope of the present article.

[2] In fact, compilation of materials for a projected fourth volume have now (summer '06) begun.

[3] "[V]itaeque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras": "And his reluctant soul fled with a groan beneath the shadows."

[4] Versions of this would be, for example, science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem's two volumes of reviews of imaginary books, *A Perfect Vacuum* (tr. 1979) and *Imaginary Magnitude* (tr. 1984). Fitterman's own section 10 opens with a "Contents" page to *The State of Things Called Recent* (91), an imaginary text with three sections — "Transformism," "The Word," and "Fathers" — of four chapters each. Overall, the first chapter is "The Attempted Return to Antiquity" [fictitious p. 15] and the last "Room at the Top" [115], the title of a 1959 British novel whose working-class protagonist marries lovelessly into company money, and an ironic reference now, perhaps, to the 'investors capitalism' of the 80s and 90s. Within this framing, neither historical references nor page-numbers follow a linear sequence, precipitating disorienting effects of the temporal leveling, combined with fake memories and arbitrary periodizations, of a retro / repro economy — "Feel that breeze," offers section 5, "/ coming down from repro, / that's your party, man!" (47)

[5] The 'eye-catching' section 8 mentioned earlier is a sequence of short lyrics as if depending from the capitalized names of famous New York buildings: EMPIRE STATE BUILDING, RCA BUILDING/ ROCKEFELLER CENTER, and others. The visual evocation is of the city's very upper reaches where humans seldom or never go, which in interaction with the tiny lyrics themselves, sets up tremendous tensions of scale.

[6] Disgust with this 'phenomenon' bursts out in *Metropolis* 13: "Look, these passer-bys / they've been beaten, abused, / what do you expect them to look like! / Turnstiles of the filthy / rich, walk-up heard anew / sworn in, slow / learner to burn in a public place / a towel fee" (114–15).

[7] Section 4, for example, ends: "a carousel / programmed / for fear ," adding, "// friends / came / here // and told / me / otherwise" (42); while toward the end of 5, certainly composed before the 1999 Columbine shootings, we read: "gift amnesia of fictitious / relatives renting above the carcass / bags, that bohemian gasp, a spiraling / meat packing of watery swan / lake junior-high gun / recital smites the mesmerized" (48) — perhaps in reference to another such incident.

[8] 'Kmart' becomes 'K Mart' — which of these defaces the original?

[9] Byron's on-again, off-again affair with epic is traced in McGann's opening chapters (1–67).

[10] Both parts are composed wholly of questions from legal transcripts (the case seems to involve a bus accident suffered by an immigrant) that underscore the tawdry surreality of routine court procedures: "Do you have any feelings about commercial bus drivers? About the Greyhound bus company? Do you teach acting?" (45), etc.

[11] For an intriguingly different, although also complementary, take on the question of number in *Metropolis XXX*, see Alworth (6–7).

[12] Unease at lack of contextualization may become acute in part X, "Popes (crossing the threshold of Hope)," the apocalyptic text, which notes that "The great nation in the ocean that is inhabited by people of different tribes and descent will be devastated by earthquake, storm, and tidal wave" (29): when and by whom was this written?

[13] Rasula gives no reference for this, while implying it occurs in *Four Lectures*; if so, I haven't found it there. [Editorial Note: an email to Jacket from Michael Sokolowski identifies the quote: "It is on page 60 of *Four Lectures* (*The Figures*, 1982), seven lines from the bottom of the text block." Thanks, Michael. — Ed.]