

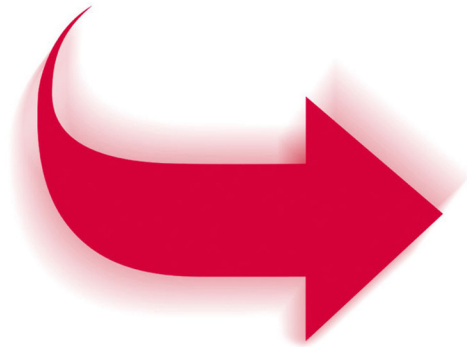
A Poetical Economy Social Credit in William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*



An Idea Kit

Rebecca Steffy

This is an essay. But it's not this essay.



To Use:

1. Look, read, touch.
2. The blank notepads and pencils are here in case you want to write something down. You can take them with you.
3. If you want to, you can leave a comment or question about this kit here: <http://rebeccasteffy.info/blog/remediating-poetical-economy>
4. Remember that this kit is not a SUM.

What does poetry use?

To what use is poetry put?

This kit shows some of the materials William Carlos Williams used to write *Paterson*, a long poem published in five books between 1946 and 1958, with notes for a sixth book in process when he died.

It suggests that the poem enacts a textual economy not unlike the fiscal economy envisioned by the American Social Credit Movement, of which Williams was a part; it privileged subjects as consumers and wanted to make vast credit available to individuals and the nation-state. Debt notwithstanding, it was a fantastic plan for development.

Given Williams' status as an American poetry patriarch and the imperial record of America in the 20th century, this essay wants to put the ideals of *Paterson* in tension with history in progress.

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English 823
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11 December 2009

A Poetical Economy: Social Credit in William Carlos Williams' *Paterson*

As the author of *In the American Grain* and theoretician of "the American idiom," it should come as no surprise that William Carlos Williams sought to work out his democratic political ideals in all his writing, which include not just the short Imagistic poems by which many students recognize his work, but also prose poems, novels, short stories, essays in history, autobiography, and the book-length poem *Paterson*. Those political ideals entailed economic commitments; Williams was not satisfied with a mathematical economics that ignored how exchange was socially organized and to whom it was geared to maximally benefit. My title, then, which substitutes "poetical economy" for "political economy," revises politics as a poetics, a creative and imaginative endeavor that organizes and works out aesthetic and social ideals. It also articulates a surplus – in the syllabic excess of "poetical" – in order to assert the notion that a poetical economy inserts an imagined credit, a beautiful surplus in the form of aesthetic production, into the pipeline of utilitarian trade. Williams argued as much himself, in his explicit alignment with the American Social Credit Movement (ASCM), and in his compositional practice, which borrowed freely from other sources in order to imaginatively and materially assemble a poem that encompassed a democratic body politic.¹ This paper will read Williams' *Paterson*, tracing material and imagined credits through its anti-Hamilton rhetoric, its tropes that link debt with a damaging cultural economy, and its practice of textual borrowing without citations, or "interest due," in order to delineate Williams' poetical economy.

The American Social Credit Movement, as Mike Weaver details, officially debuted on October 5, 1938 in New York, with Gorham B. Munson serving as General Secretary (103). Williams joined and paid dues almost immediately (105). The circle attracted champions of reform who wanted to shift the

Contents

29 pages
2 notepads
3 pencils
35 cotton balls
1 silk scrap
3 stainless steel carabiners
1 plastic carrying case



In print in 1925, Williams called Paterson
“the vilest swillhole in Christendom.”

Sunday in the Park

“Witnessing the Falls Hamilton was impressed by this show of what in those times was overwhelming power...planned a stone aqueduct following a proposed boulevard, as the crow flies, to Newark with outlets every mile or two along the river for groups of factories: The Society for Useful Manufactures: SUM they called it.”

Williams, *Paterson* (73)

Colonial capitalists like Hamilton saw in Paterson and the Passaic's Falls the opportunity to transform colonies that produced raw goods into a nation with its own domestic economy, a vision smacking of an Enlightenment-era utilitarian utopia.

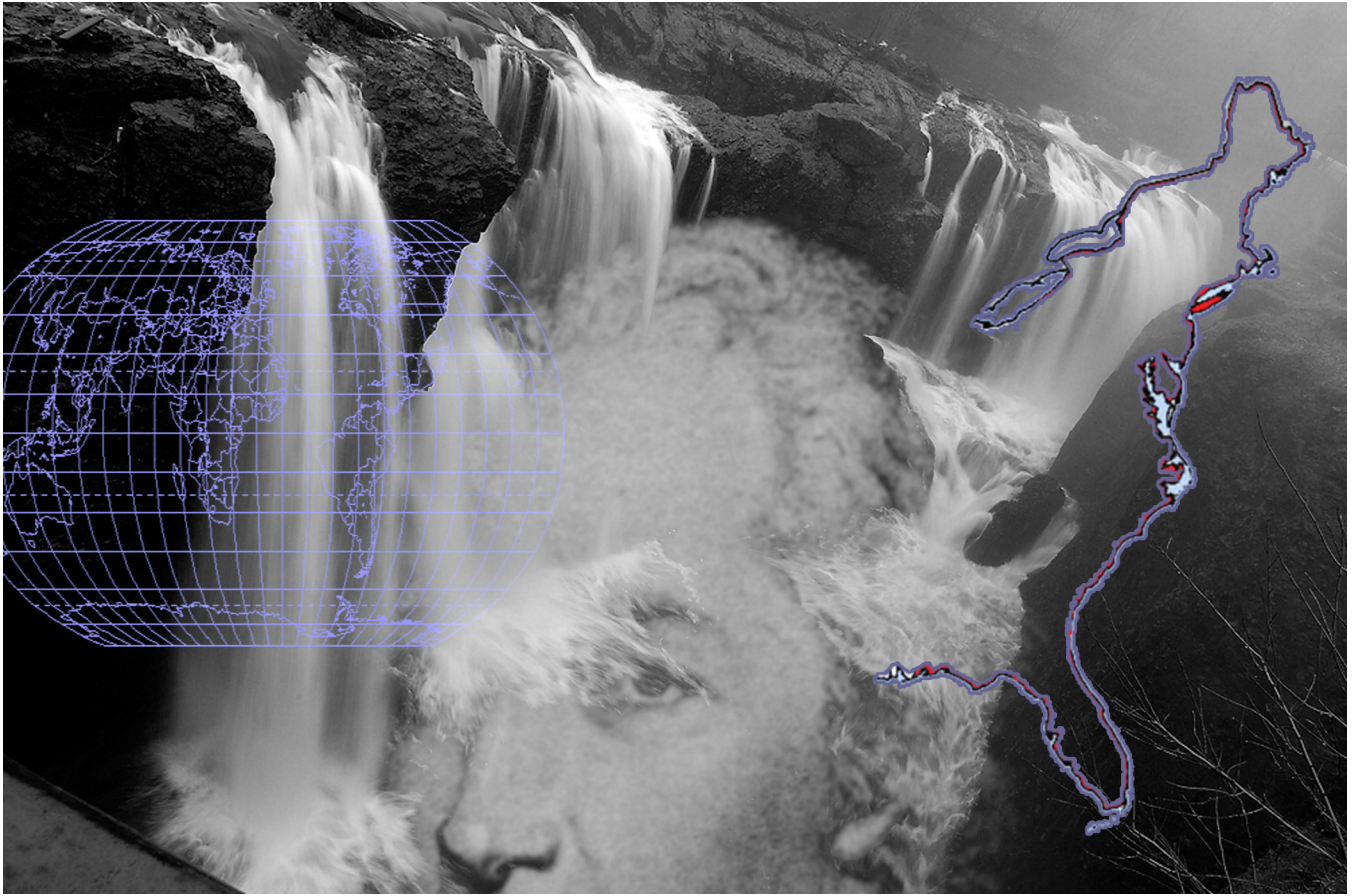
The passage goes on to describe how, despite enthusiasm for domestic production of a wide range of goods, the city planners of Paterson consolidated its manufacturing potential into one industry, cotton, which becomes a symbol for the United States's incipient nationhood:

Washington at his first inaugural
 wore
 a coat of Crow-black homespun woven
 in Paterson (74)

The ellipsis marks where Williams slimmed his historical source.

Also elided: sections of historical narration upon which the content of the text depends - the agricultural production of cotton (not just its manufacture), Southern plantations and the transatlantic slave trade.

Paterson's industrial history is dominated by the manufacturing of cotton, silk and steel.



impressed by the show of overwhelming power





Lawyer

Judge





Signer of the Constitution



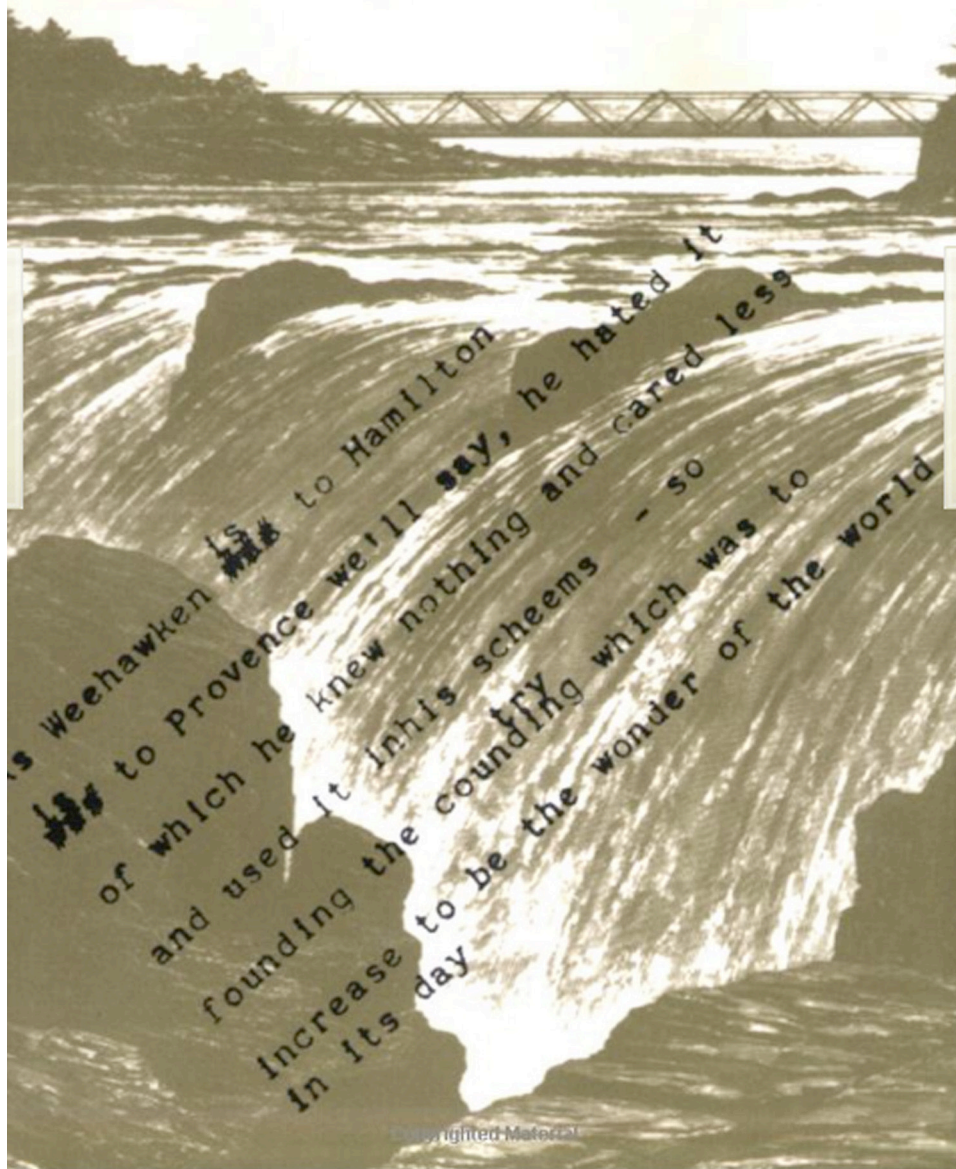


The American Social Credit Movement officially debuted on October 5, 1938 in New York, with Gorham B. Munson serving as General Secretary. Williams joined and paid dues almost immediately. The circle attracted champions of reform who wanted to shift the economic debate away from Marxism's focus on gaining proletarian control of the means of production and toward reforming the distribution of capital's benefits in the interest of consumers. They took up Major C. H. Douglas' theorem that wages paid to workers, translated as the purchasing power of consumers, was always less than the total cost of production.

PATERSON

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

Revised Edition Prepared by Christopher MacGowan



A false language. A true. A false language pouring a
language (misunderstood) pouring (misinterpreted) without
dignity, without minister, crashing upon a stone ear.

*Say it! No ideas but in things. Mr.
Paterson has gone away
to rest and write. Inside the bus one sees
his thoughts sitting and standing. His
thoughts alight and scatter -*

Who are these people (how complex
the mathematic) among whom I see myself
in the regularly ordered plateglass of
his thoughts, glimmering before shoes and bicycles?
They walk incommunicado, the
equation is beyond solution, yet
its sense is clear - that they may live
his thought is listed in the Telephone
Directory -

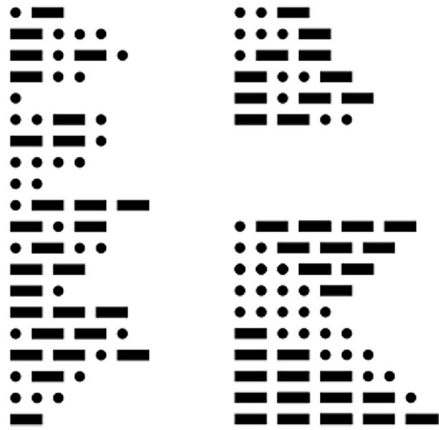


At its nub, the idea of fiscal reform based on social credit sought to increase the circulation of credit, thereby also increasing access to and circulation of goods and services. In this view, “[b]anks take the place of the capitalist as the source of social injustice,” because they “control...the distribution of credit” (Marsh 73). Credit, rather than accruing within the clutches of a bank or as a commodity itself for speculation and monetary profit, should be, according to Douglas, considered a broadly social right, a “cultural inheritance” to be distributed among an entire living community, thereby boosting a community’s productive potential—manufacturing and otherwise—and their purchasing power (85).



The circulation of credit in this system would redistribute corporate dividends among a community as individuals’ rightful share, not because they have invested in a particular business but because they are part of society. As Benjamin Sankey summarizes, “‘Credit’ is the productive power latent within money—now concealed or imprisoned there” (190).

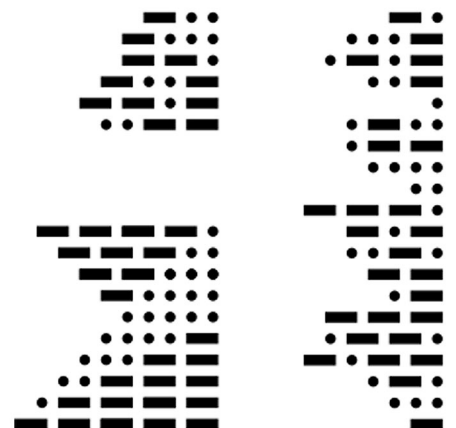
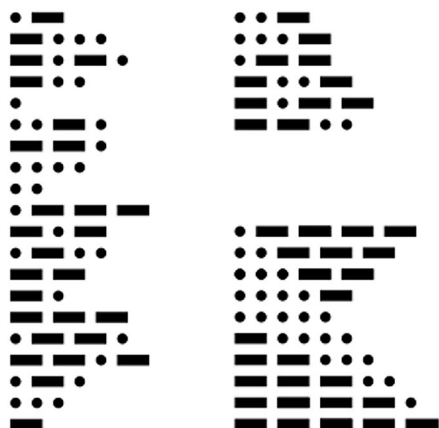
Social credit, then, as it would “register what was possible” (Marsh 94), imagined a system through which to affirm the productive potential, through economic and cultural inheritance, of communities.



Paterson tests the idea that we trade similarly in language, with social benefits - if not progress and development - following from widely available access and use.

Williams credits to readers

- overheard speech
- vernacular idiom
- excerpts from letters from Allen Ginsberg, Ezra Pound, and Marcia Nardi
- newspaper reportage
- narratives from Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey (1844) by John Barber and Henry Howe
- vignettes from Stories of New Jersey, a 1938 state guidebook compiled for public school use by workers in the WPA-funded Federal Writers Project
- sermonizing
- language motifs from David Lyle, a former military radio operator, who retired in New Jersey to scan public language for patterns
- flyering from Social Creditors and money issue fanatics



Or...it is equivalent to saying that there is some fast running, flowing continuous imagism mood...equivalent (as growth points) to Goethe's, 'fruitful moment (um)', Emerson's 'ecstatic moment', Lord Dunsany's MOOD...or for a short interval...it is the equivalent to attaining Jeffers' express aim...to achieve the continuity Boehme meant by 'Life above sense'. LIFE above sense is what a dancer means by saying that in dancing, you've got to keep your mind above (your body matter) feet...feet are taken in as instantaneously comprehensible picture setup of the 'SWAGGERING SHUFFLE' of Jap soldiers..and transferred from one picture setup to another..all known, all instantaneously comprehensible, and for convenience, sown in and out of the concrete pictures at hand. In this week's LIFE...ie, an example of the language Harold Rugg asked for in the Stieglitz essay. As continuous imagism...you can test it for yourself..The Secret behind it.....and/or all of any human acts whatsoever..concerning anything..or any length of TIME whatsoever...ie, the secret behind Maya or appearances...or quoting H.Ellis again..When all disguises have been stripped away, it is ALWAYS and EVERY-WHERE (Where is your re-al substance?) the same simple process, a SPIRITUAL FUNCTION which is almost a PHYSIOLOGICAL function, and art which NATURE makes..that is ALL, and of imagism..Ellis says..quoting Gaudier..FACULTY of drawing joy from IMAGES of things, apart from the POSSESSION of them, is based on physiologic conditions, which growing knowledge of the NERVOUS SYSTEM may some day make clearer. That is here NOW...and involves the objective translation of that which is of the utmost permanence behind any and all possessions or appearances and creations...a substantial sameness for each and all...thru all history idea ideal, iso, oid, story, wisdom, righteousness. HT 25...a GREAT FACE..65 feet high..is pictured..the WORD and Name beneath..George Washn...It will tower above Constitution Hall. p8..Living 'GREAT FACE'. (Pope Pius 12th)..will give radio address...p9... Rabbi Goldstein asked great face Pope Pius 12th...to speak few words necessary to start the summons for world peace parley. HT..22..Many Nashville Tenn convicts get liberty thru falsified symbolic areas..the records. HT21..NYCity.. Working in full sight of 7 man, 5 woman jury, a govt agent swaps a disputed symbol area NAMED a Check entry in 1934 ledger...there is revealed a singular, simultaneous and all history, all men, all mankind, allness law...which is overwhelmingly simply and plain to see..once you know, HOW TO see the terms of the answer to the 'WHO and WHAT are the People?'..which eliminates all MULTIPLICITY...and answers the real substance question..and allows everyone, everyone...an exceptionless generality..everyone..to 'BREAK thru Humanity', together...as Dr. Canby has said Am literary men engaged in one mighty mapping of efforts to make a 'language adequate to DESCRIBE society', ie, a topological language, equivalent to Rebecca West's..Literature set out to make a map of the SEA. Describing society..involves first answering the Lynd question WHO and What are the People?' The word science roots with the Gr schizo..to

From one of David Lyle's many letters to Williams,
in search of "fresh coorelations"

DO YOU FAVOR LENIN OR UNCLE SAM?

The Constitution says: To borrow money on the credit of the United States. It does not say: To borrow money from Private bankers.

To explain the fallacies and illusions upon which our present method of financing the national budget is based would take too much space and time. To win the cold war we must reform our finance system. The Russians understand only force. We must be stronger than they and build more airplanes.



FINANCE THE BUILDING OF AIRPLANES AS FOLLOWS:

1. Pay the manufacturer with a NATIONAL CREDIT CERTIFICATE.
2. Manufacturer deposits the Certificate with his bank the same as a check.
3. Banker returns National Credit Certificate to Treasury Dept., which opens UNITED STATES NATIONAL CREDIT for banker.
4. Banker in turn now opens BANKER'S CREDIT for depositor. Manufacturer draws checks against his credit as usual.
5. Manufacturer pays his workers with checks upon his bank.
6. Treasury Dept. pays banker a service charge of 1% for handling the Treasury transaction. If the airplanes cost 1 million dollars the banker's profit would be \$10,000.

WHAT DO WE ACCOMPLISH BY USING THIS SYSTEM?

1. Manufacturer is paid in full.
2. Workers are paid in full.
3. Bankers make a \$10,000 profit every time he handles a 1 million dollar National Credit Certificate.
4. We do not add to the National Debt.
5. We do not need to increase federal taxation.
6. The only cost of the 1 million dollar airplane is only \$10,000, the cost of the banker's service charges.
7. We can build 100 airplanes for the price of one.

I would like to have some smart economist or banker stick out his neck and contradict one single claim I present herewith to the nation.

ENFORCE THE CONSTITUTION ON MONEY

August Walters, Newark, NJ

If there is subtlety, you are subtle.

Dear Citizen:

The Federal Reserve System is a private enterprise...a private monopoly...(with power)... given to it by a spineless Congress...to issue and regulate all our money.

* * *

In other words, the Federal Reserve Banks constitute a Legalized National Usury System, whose No. 1 is our Government, the richest country in the world.

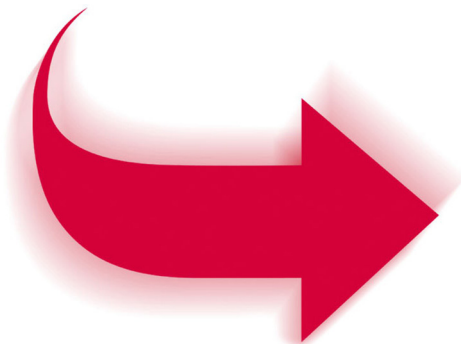
Alfred & Clara Studer

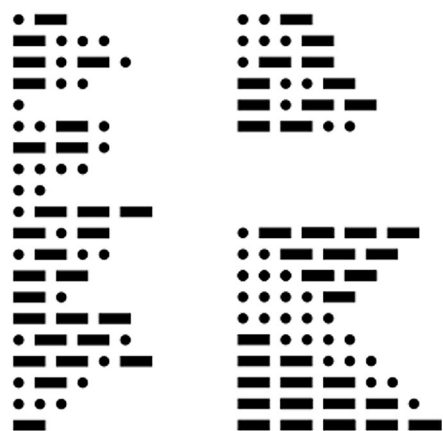
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American Social Credit Movement supporters assumed a public voice by starting the magazine, *New Democracy*.

The magazine, in turn, led to the establishment of **New Directions** press in 1936, headed by James Laughlin in New York. New Directions published the individual books of Paterson in 1946, 1948, 1949, 1951, and 1958, respectively, with a complete Paterson, including fragments of a sixth book, put out in 1963.

New Directions credits to readers the authors that follow:





Abish, Walter
Ackland, Valetine
Adigal, Prince Ilango
Aira, Cesar
Ali, Ahmed
Allman, John
Almeida, Germano
Alvaro, Corrado
Andersch, Alfred
Anderson, Sherwood
Andrade, Eugenio de
Andrews, Wayne
Apollinaire, Guillaume
Aridjis, Homero
Auster, Paul
Aygi, Gennady
Baca, Jimmy Santiago
Balzac, Honore de
Bangs, Carol Jane
Barnes, Djuna
Barnstone, Willis
Bartlett, Lee
Barzun, Jacques
Bataille, Christophe
Bates, H. E.
Baudelaire, Charles
Bei Dao
Benn, Gottfried
Berberova, Nina
Bioy Casares, Adolfo
Bioy Casares, Adolfo
Bird, Carmel
Blackmur, R. P.
Bobrowski, Johannes
Bolano, Roberto
Borchert, Wolfgang
Borges, Jorge Luis
Bosquet, Alain
Boyle, Kay
Brathwaite, Kamau

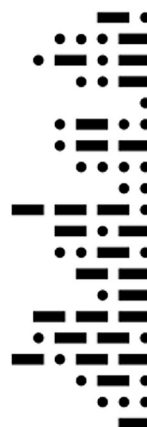
Brock, Edwin
Bronk, William
Brooke-Rose, Christine
Buddha
Bulgakov, Mikhail
Bunting, Basil
Busch, Frederick
Can Xue
Canetti, Elias
Canetti, Veza
Carruth, Hayden
Carson, Anne
Carswell, John
Cartarescu, Mircea
Cary, Joyce
Cela, Camilo Jose
Celine, Louis-Ferdinand
Char, Rene
Christensen, Inger
Clark, Tom
Cleverdon, Douglas
Clissold, Stephen
Cocteau, Jean
Cohen, Marvin
Collis, Maurice
Corman, Cid
Corso, Gregory
Cortazar, Julio
Creeley, Robert
Dahlberg, Edward
Danielou, Alain
Davenport, Guy
Dawe, Margaret
Dazai, Osamu
Dery, Tibor
Di Blasi, Debra
Doolittle (HD), Hilda
Dujardin, Edouard
Duncan, Robert
Eberhart, Richard
Eca de Queiros
Empson, William
Endo, Shusaku
Epler, Barbara
Erpenbeck, Jenny
Evans, Caradoc
Ewart, Gavin
Faverey, Hans
Ferlinghetti, Lawrence
Field, Thalia
Firbank, Ronald
Fitzgerald (FS), F. Scott
Fitzgerald (R), Robert
Flaubert, Gustave
Gahagan, Judy

Gander, Forrest
Gardner, John
Gary, Romain
Genazino, Wilhelm
Gerhardie, William Goethe
Green, Henry
Grossman, Allen
Grzimek, Martin
Gu Cheng
Guigonnat, Henri
Guillevic, Eugene
Gustafsson, Lars
Haley, Russell
Hamill, Sam
Hamsun, Knut
Handke, Peter
Hawkes, John
Hazo, Samuel
Helbling, Robert E.
Herling, Gustaw
Hernandez, Felisberto
Herrick, William
Hesse, Hermann
Hinton, David
Hoffmann, Yoel
Hofmann, Gert
Hoover, Paul
Howe, Susan
Hsieh Ling-Yun
Huidobro, Vicente
Hyder, Qurratulain
Isherwood, Christopher
Ivo, Ledo
Jaccottet, Philippe
Jaeggy, Fleur
James, Henry
Janouch, Gustav
Jarry, Alfred
Jeffers, Robinson
Johnson, B. S.
Josipovici, Gabriel
Joyce (J), James
Kafka, Franz
Karasu, Bilge
Karr, Mary
Kaufman, Robert
Keene, John
Kenyon Critics
Kis, Danilo
Kleist, Heninrich Von
Kluge, Alexander
Kono Taeko
Kosztolanyi, Deszo
Kraf, Elaine
Krasznahorkai, Laszlo

Kremer, Rudiger
Krlcza, Miroslav
Kusano, Shimpei
Lafayette, Madame De
Lajolo, Davide
Lake, Carlton
Lal, P.
Landolfi, Tommaso
Larsen, Deborah
Laughlin, James
Lautreamont, Comte de
Lawrence, D. H.
Layton, Irving
Lehner, Christine
Leibowitz, Herbert
Lentfoehr, Sister Therese
Lenz, Siegfried
Levertov, Denise
Levin, Harry
Li Ching-Chao
Li Po
Lihn, Enrique
Lispector, Clarice
Lleshanaku, Luljeta
Lorca (Fr), Francisco Garcia
Lorca, Federico Garcia
MacAulay, Donald
MacDiarmid, Hugh
Mackey, Nathaniel
Maistre, Xavier de
Mallarme, Stephane
Mandel, Oscar
Mann, Abby
Marias, Javier
Maso, Carole
Mayer, Bernadette
McClure, Michael
McCullers, Carson
Merton, Thomas
Michaux, Henri
Mikhail, Dunya
Miller, Henry
Mishima, Yukio
Mistral, Frederic
Miyamoto, Teru
Montale, Eugenio
Morand, Paul
Munves, James
Nabokov, Vladimir
Neruda, Pablo
Nichols, Robert
Nims, John F.
Nothomb, Amelie
Oates, Joyce Carol
Olson (C), Charles

Olson (T), Toby
Oppen, George
Owen, Wilfred
Pacheco, Jose Emilio
Parra, Nicanor
Pasternak, Boris
Patchen, Kenneth
Paz, Octavio
Pelevin, Victor
Perloff, Marjorie
Perse, Saint John
Philoctete, Rene
Po Chu-I
Porter, Joe Ashby
Pound, Ezra
Prichard, Caradog
Qian, Zhongshu
Queneau, Raymond
Rabassa, Geogory
Rachewiltz, Maryde
Rao, Raja
Read, Herbert
Reece, Erik Anderson
Rexroth, Kenneth
Rey Rosa, Rodrigo
Rilke, Rainer Maria
Rimbaud, Arthur
Roditi, Edouard
Rodman, Selden
Rothenberg, Jerome
Rothmann, Ralf
Sahgal, Nayantara
Saikaku, Ihara
Saroyan, William
Sartre, Jean-Paul
Schloegl, Irmgard
Schwartz, Delmore
Scott (J), John
Scott (PD),
Peter Dale
Sebald, W. G.
Shabtai, Aharon
Shah, Hasan
Shattan, Merchant-Prince
Shiraishi, Kazuko
Sinclair, Andrew
Sisson, C. H.
Smith (DH), D. Howard
Smith (S), Stevie
Snyder, Gary
Sobin, Gustaf
Sorrentio, Gilbert
Spark, Muriel
Starkie, Enid
Steiner, Robert

Stendhal
Supervielle, Jules
Swartz, Richard
Tabucchi, Antonio
Tarn, Nathaniel
Tawada, Yoko
Tennant, Emma
Thomas (D), Dylan
Thomas (M), Merlin
Tian Wen
Timm, Uwe
Tomlinson, Charles
Tozzi, Federigo
Transtromer, Tomas
Trilling, Lionel
Tsushima, Yukio
Tsyppkin, Leonid
Tu Fu
Tucci, Niccolo
Turnell, Martin
Tuten, Frederic
Ugresic, Dubravka
Valery, Paul
Van Ostaijen, Paul
Verissimo, Luis Fernando
Vila-Matas, Enrique
Vittorini, Elio
Waldrop, Rosmarie
Wang Wei
Warren, Robert Penn
Watkins, Vernon
Weinberger, Eliot
West (N), Nathanael
West (P), Paul
Wheelwright, John
Williams (T), Tennessee
Williams (WC), William Carlos
Zinik, Zinovy



What is credit? The Parthenon
What is money? The gold entrusted to Phideas for the
statue of Pallas Athena, that he “put aside”
for private purposes

the gold, in short, that Phideas stole
You can't steal credit : the Parthenon

Money : small time
reciprocal action relic
precedent to stream-lined
turbine : credit

Uranium : basic thought leadward
Fractured : radium : credit

Curie : woman (of no importance) genius : radium

THE GIST

credit : the gist



Greer
Garson in
“Madame
Curie”
MGM
1943

I see they - the Senate, is trying to block Lilienthal and deliver “the bomb” over to a few industrialists. I don’t think they will succeed but ... that is what I mean when I refuse to get excited over the cry, Communist! they use to blind us. It’s terrifying to think how easily we can be destroyed, a few votes. Even though Communism is a threat, are Communists any *worse* than the guilty bastards trying in that way to undermine us?

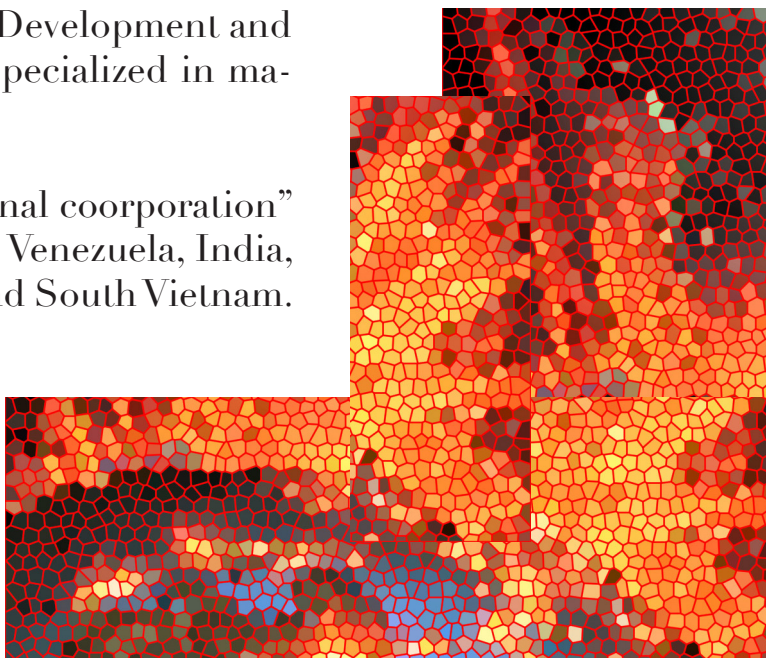


The TVA’s Wilson Dam.

David Lilienthal served as head of the Tennessee Valley Authority and, later, as chair of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission.

He started a business called the Development and Resources Corporation, which specialized in major energy projects.

He coined the term “multi-national corporation” and did work in Iran, Colombia, Venezuela, India, Italy, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria and South Vietnam.



The Library

Williams does not pay his debts, so to speak, in *Paterson*. He freely borrows from what he wants to develop his work.

Alec Marsh provides a term from Jeffersonian political economy, a tradition against federalism, that I think will be helpful as a final frame in which to think through the investment in social credit that Williams makes in *Paterson*. Jefferson, according to Marsh, records the influence of French Physiocrats (Francois Quesney and Marquis de Mirabeau) in using the term “usufruct” to indicate the legal right “of enjoying all of the advantages of a thing that belongs to another as far as is compatible with the substance of the thing not being destroyed or injured” (37). This sense of usufructory — use for the enjoyment of fruits — can be seen in Williams’ well-known short poem “This Is Just to Say,” in which he eats, and enjoys, the plums in the icebox even though they “belonged” to someone else. Interestingly, that poem is framed as an apology, with traces of entitlement and anxiety over indebtedness.

Poetry is not financial credit in real terms.

Calling it a social credit, however, suggests that language, art and culture are publicly available no matter to whom they might have previously “belonged” and that using them releases latent potential. How comfortable does that feel?

The follow images are from the contemporary art anthology *Fresh Cream* (2000):

The Century with Mushroom Clouds: Event at Nevada Nuclear Test Site, 1996 (Cai Guo-Qiang)
Warm Benches, 1997 (Ayse Erkmen)
Untitled, 1994 (Fernanda Gomes)
Inseparable. 1999 (Kaisu Koivisto)
She Is No Longer Looking for Beauty or Love (1998) Jason Dodge
Carnivores, 1999 (Kaisu Koivisto)
Rooms, 1994 (Montien Boonma)
Dear Robert I'll See You at the Crossroads - Man Trap (1994) Renee Stout
Arokhayasala, 1996 (Montien Boonma)
From the Silkworm Series, 1994-1995 (Xu Bing)

Following the left-facing image, the objects are made using either cotton, silk or steel.





