

Strange Vacation Days: ❖ James Schuyler's Materialist Writing of Space-Time

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ABSTRACT

This article responds to what the critic Daniel Kane has called “the scandalous paucity of attention” suffered by the twentieth-century poet, novelist, diarist, letter-writer and art critic James Schuyler as compared to the treatment of his fellow “New York School” writers, John Ashbery, Frank O’Hara, and Kenneth Koch. More specifically, it challenges a widespread view that Schuyler was not a seriously political or social poet. My argument is that poetry by Schuyler which seems on the surface to consist of straightforwardly descriptive or lyrical evocations of American pastoral life or erotic passion is in fact highly expressive of tensions arising from the historically developing nature of labor, consumption, property and other forms of capital.

In my analysis of some of Schuyler’s love poetry, this work is read as the indirect confession of his own disquieting vulnerability toward aspects of capitalism that he shows to be embodied in his lover’s accelerated mode of being. Drawing on a conception of space-time from Marxist cultural geography, the article reveals the extent to which Schuyler anticipates this theoretical and empirical perspective through his erotic figuring of capitalism’s proleptic tendency to use up people and resources and to sprawl out in new untenable spatial forms to do so if necessary. This article is intended to supplement Christopher Nealon’s recent demonstration that “the workings of capitalism are a central subject matter of twentieth-century American poetry in English.” James Schuyler, I want to demonstrate, is a very significant—and an instructively troubled—writer of the experience of American capitalism.

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In 2011, Daniel Kane lamented “the scandalous paucity of attention” that James Schuyler has received compared to the treatment of his fellow “New York School” poets (328). The present article is an attempt to address this critical deficit by complicating and challenging the views of Schuyler’s poetry that have been expressed by the small group of critics who have written about him. The general view that this article will oppose is that Schuyler was not a seriously political or social poet and that his work does not significantly express the full force of the economic and other material tensions of the eras he lived through. The analysis that follows is intended to supplement Christopher Nealon’s recent volume of poetry criticism on what he calls “the American century” (30), where he provides ample evidence for his opening claim that “the workings of capitalism are a central subject matter of twentieth-century American poetry in English” (1). James Schuyler, I want to demonstrate, is a very significant—and an instructively troubled—writer of the space-time of American capitalism.

The common under-estimation of Schuyler as a historically-engaged materialist poet is apparent in Helen Vendler’s essay on his writing and is made explicit in David Kaufmann’s recent article for the highly-respected online magazine *Jacket*. Schuyler is said by Kaufmann to exhibit a lack of critical interest in “mediation,” being, as the critic puts it, unconcerned with “what Marxists mean by ‘relations of production.’”¹ The argument of the present article is that poetry by Schuyler which seems on the surface to consist of straightforwardly descriptive or lyrical evocations of American pastoral life or erotic passion is in fact highly expressive of tensions arising from the historically developing nature of labor, consumption, property and other forms of capital. The apparent inexorability of these tensions is emphasized in this article. This contrasts with the more hopefully dialectical picture of Schuyler that emerges in the criticism of those (notably Watkin, Katz, Silverberg, and Wilkinson) who have attended to some of the historically materialist strata in his writing.

The phrase “space-time” relates to a body of Marxist theory through which some of Schuyler’s poetry from the 1970s will later on be examined. But the phrase also suggests the manner in which Schuyler’s poetry makes us

¹ Kaufmann’s view of Schuyler as an essentially uncritical and apolitical writer can be compared to the impression left by other critics that the intention of this poet’s writing was typically “to assert an easy interchange with things” (Herd 195) or “to see the city in the best light” (Gray 109).

as readers more than usually conscious of the axes of space and time as mutually co-dependent realities in our lives.² At several moments, he allows us to consider the apparent mutability of space and time, showing us the sad deformations but also the fragile enhancement of history and geography under capitalism as they emerge through his scrutiny of his own perceptual and erotic life. This is another way of saying that the context for his historical materialist poetry is always partly biographical: to read him is to become intimate with a specific set of personal vicissitudes and dependencies which point in turn to a more general condition of socio-economic unevenness. The close-read analyses that follow are intended to demonstrate that it is by attending intensely to Schuyler as a poet of love, friendship, and the American landscape that we realize his significance as an observer of life under capitalism.

I. The Time of the Island

Schuyler's perceptual life was necessarily a matter of urgent concern to him and others for much of his adulthood until his death at the age of sixty-seven in 1991.³ By the time his first poetry volume, *Freely Espousing*, was published in 1969 he had endured several of his "spells," as he and his friend the poet Ron Padgett called Schuyler's periods of serial institutional

² In the attention the present article gives to the thematics of time in relation to space it picks up on Daniel Katz's suggestion that the treatment of time is one requiring "extended critical attention" (Katz 159). For another view of temporality in Schuyler's work, see Ward 10-35. Ward points to a significant area of continuity in this oeuvre when, adopting some terms of Harold Rosenberg's, he suggests that Schuyler's work be seen as the poetic expression of a "layered-space world-view" (17) set in opposition to "an art of deep space," where in the latter would belong "all questions and certainties of religion, metaphysics, or the extremes of subjectivism" as well as "[a]ny hierarchical ordering of perceptual data" (10). The temporal implications of the layered-space view are apparently manifested in a poetry that, by way of response to a condition in which "metaphysics and origins and eschatology are put in question," locates existence "only in the present moment" (17). Ward goes on to suggest that a de Manian deconstructive mode might be applied to Schuyler's (and O'Hara's) poetry, where the reader may find a doomed attempt to escape death through the "recorded observation and the exaltation of New York [that] make of that city a totality very close to the Romantic picturing of Nature, one massively networked Symbol" (25). But, after perusing a few poems whose "relative satisfaction with temporality" (28) may be exposed as the tell-tale reliance on an ideology "privileg[ing] the ego over the perceived" (26), Ward decides that "none of these readings will really do": in the face of poetic language such as Schuyler's, which is involved in "the generation of multiple and contradictory meanings from the outset" and which "constantly draws attention to its own artifice," "Deconstruction may shed a certain light of the poetry, but it does not in the end disclose anything that the poetry did not know about itself" (28).

³ Unless stated otherwise, the biographical material in this article derives from Nathan Kernan's apparatuses in *The Diary of James Schuyler*, which is referred to hereafter as "*Diary*."

confinement in one mental hospital or another in east coast America (*Just the Thing: Selected Letters of James Schuyler 1951-1991* 372). Schuyler's first hospitalization due to mental breakdown was in late October 1952, just a few weeks after he got to know the other important "New York School" poets O'Hara and Ashbery. After a three-month stay in the Grace New Haven Community Hospital in 1961 he was invited by his friend the painter Fairfield Porter to live with him and his family. Porter, who was sixteen years Schuyler's senior and could easily afford to support the poet materially as a result of multi-generational wealth derived mainly from real estate, took on a loco-parental role in relation to the younger man, even providing him with an allowance.⁴ Schuyler adopted the Porter family's seasonal habits of spending summers on their privately-owned Great Spruce Head Island in Penobscot Bay, Maine, and the rest of the year in their Southampton townhouse in affluent upstate New York.

This spatiotemporal cycle is written into the structure of Schuyler's second poetry collection, *The Crystal Lithium* (1972). The volume begins with a poem called "Empathy and New Year" in a section entitled "Southampton and New York" and continues with "The Island." The latter is followed by a "Fall and Winter" section that includes poetic fragments from a diary Schuyler kept during a brief sojourn in Vermont under the roof of another wealthy friend, the poet and librettist Kenward Elmslie. All of these three sections—there is a fourth entitled "Loving You"—attest to the opportunities for quiet meditative watching of human and especially non-human daily life in this non-institutional phase of Schuyler's recuperation. This phase came to an end in the summer of 1971 when the poet was treated for schizophrenia in a state mental hospital.

In William Corbett's chronology, this particular hospitalization follows the understandable decision of the Porters, who for three years had been trying to persuade Schuyler to live independently, not to allow him to accompany them to Maine for the summer. The poet was instead invited to stay in their Southampton house with Ron Padgett and that writer's family, amongst whom "[Schuyler's] behavior quickly deteriorated and he threw his money in the trash because, he said, 'Money is shit'" (*Just* 350). Schuyler's definitive move from the Porters—from Southampton to 250 East 35th Street, New York City—did not come until September 1973. This was the year of his

⁴ For detailed information about Fairfield Porter's family history, see Spring 1-23.

first spell in the Payne Whitney psychiatric hospital, after which a New York psychiatrist diagnosed him with depression rather than schizophrenia, and two years before Porter's premature death.

The special significance that Porter's Great Spruce Head Island held for Schuyler, amongst all his places of residence, emerges from a letter to Elmslie dated June 19, 1970:

As Lizzie [Porter's youngest daughter] said on the Kittiwake [ferry], "Going to the island makes me feel schizophrenic." Because it really seems as though no time had passed—there's a person who only lived here, and there's somebody else who lives in the inferior places. Scary and beautiful. . . . No, I guess one does forget each winter the utter sameness of here as a place. It's not enough to be here and see it, I want to be it. (*Just* 296)

Our knowledge that since 1968 the Porters had been trying to persuade Schuyler to move into a place of his own provides a poignant context for this letter. We can practically hear the protest and hurt in the phrase "the inferior places," and the poet's wish to "be" the island can certainly be read as the desire to attain at some permanent ontological level what he feared he would be losing in practical experiential terms. A wider personal context for Schuyler's desire to *become* Great Spruce Head Island is supplied by the letter's gesture toward a seasonally fractured, or "schizophrenic," experience of space and time for which the island, in its radically differentiated "utter sameness," appears to be both a contributory factor and a potential cure.

From as early on as his first visit as a temporary guest to the island Schuyler had emphasized both the psychologically healing and the time-altering qualities of the place. In a letter of July 26, 1955, to O'Hara, he wrote: "A week here is like a month anywhere else in its breadth, depth and general spaciousness, and I feel if not like a new man then rather like an old one, who wasn't really such a bad egg now was he?" (*The Letters of James Schuyler to Frank O'Hara* 40). By the late 1960s, the sense of timelessness and "general spaciousness" on the island was at once a more intimately familiar and a more agonizingly precarious matter for the poet in residence.

Some of this intimacy and precariousness arises in the lyric "Closed Gentian Distances," which, befitting its textual location at the end of the "Island" section of *The Crystal Lithium*, bids farewell to summer and Maine

for another year. The poem is more notable, however, for the revealing manner in which a conception of the island's power to suspend regular clock-time or change is linked to a wider history of social privilege and capital. Here is the poem in its entirety:

A nothing day full of
 wild beauty and the
 timer pings. Roll up
 the silver off the bay
 take down the clouds
 sort the spruce and
 send to the laundry marked,
 more starch. Goodbye
 golden- and silver-
 rod, asters, bayberry
 crisp in elegance.
 Little fish stream
 by, a river in water. (Schuyler, *Collected Poems* 102)

The poem begins at the exact point at which a paradoxically timeless unit of time (“A nothing day / full of wild beauty”)—at once a plenitude and a vacancy—is overtaken by the reality of clock-time (“and the timer pings”). The pinging of time in turn activates a series of commands announcing the need for the island to be figuratively stripped of its summer appearance in preparation for fall and, in the poetry volume’s biographical terms, for the Porter family’s absence from the place. But the volume structure and the biography also tell us that this is an absence which, in a cyclical fashion, promises the family’s eventual return the following summer (with or without Schuyler). The final lines’ imagery of a streaming “river” of fish enclosed within another version of itself (a more literal “water”) provides an emblem of this cyclical life, offering as it does a picture of duplication even in change, a picture of “utter sameness” which is tenuously supported by the temporal “flowing” that constitutes it. Even without the biographical context, the poem achieves a stylized form of post-romantic beauty through its sparsely plotted restoration of a certain sort of paradise—the paradise of suspended or “nothing” time—as well as through the implicit sense that its closing

equilibrium could so easily be unbalanced by the advance of ping-pong clock-time.

It is only when we look more closely at how “Closed Gentry Distances” moves toward its final image of eternity-in-flux that we see what this disarmingly simple lyric has to tell us about the social reality of the clock-time it would suspend. We see that this seemingly effortless poem is dominated by images of work. The demand that the bay’s silver be *rolled up*, that clouds be *taken down*, and that trees be *sorted*—overlaid, as these directions are with an imagery of chemicals and factory dispatches (“send to the laundry marked, / more starch”)—presents the island’s natural beauty and “general spaciousness” as fundamentally mediated by spatially constrained and industrialized work. This realization prompts another: the chain of imperatives beginning “Roll up . . .” shows us that if the island is to be cyclically restored to the Porters (and perhaps Schuyler) as a place of recuperative esthetic being (“A nothing day full of / wild beauty”), then this is possible only because somebody at some point will have done something they were told to do—carried out day-labor, that is, to enable the seemingly timeless potentiality of time on the island. Behind what Michael Hofmann, in his reading of the poem, calls “the controlling hand” (56) by which Schuyler movingly concludes the lyric with his version of the Horatian “*simplex munditiis*” (i.e. “elegance in simplicity”) (56) are other hands, then. These are the human yet mechanized hands of people working in factories to realize the capital and expansive space-time of landowners such as the Porters; and, behind *them*, is the yet more unseen hand of the market itself.

One of the poem’s elegantly uttered commands, “send to the laundry marked, / more starch,” recalls a phrase from earlier in “The Island”: “The sun is high enough to have its plain daily look of someone who takes in wash” (CP 98). The earlier line helps us to hear the way in which Schuyler, in “Closed Gentry Spaces,” points to the Porters’ and his own dependence on inherited property in terms evoking an era of domestic service that prefigures as well as overlaps with modern capitalism. “[T]he laundry” sounds like it belongs as much in the “general spaciousness” of an aristocratic or *haute bourgeois* European house as it does in a modern factory; it could be in the form of grand drapes that the clouds are to be taken down. In this historically extended domestic context, the lyric’s goodbye (or is it farewell?) to “golden- and silver- / rod, asters, bayberry / crisp in elegance” may be thought to turn

the outdoor scene into a decorously maintained yet vivid interior of the sort Fairfield Porter liked to paint and which linked his work with European painters of an earlier phase of bourgeois culture. As a professional art critic, Schuyler praised Porter's painting of "a bowl of light violet rhododendrons with a few—three—daisies" (*Selected Art Writings* 3) in a 1958 review for *ARTnews*, where he also compared Porter's picture of "Jane Wilson *elegant* [my emphasis] in pearls" (3) to the great French artist Édouard Vuillard's portrait of the aristocratic Comtesse de Polignac. The faint echoes of Schuyler's appreciation of his patron's art in "Closed Gentian Distances" emphasize what is personally as well as more generally at stake in the lyric. When its softly elegiac floral language is taken together with his somewhat camp adoption of the master's or mistress's imperative voice ("send to the laundry," etc.), we may decide we are being offered a performative self-portrait of a poet who partially conceals and so reveals his anxiety that next summer the gentian distances will be closed to him, meaning he will have been permanently returned to "the inferior places" on the side of the historically dispossessed.

To read "Closed Gentian Distances" in the way we have been reading it is to complicate our understanding of what Mark Silverberg calls Schuyler's "Poetics of Indolence" (75). Silverberg writes of how this poet's "attempts to put the self aside and 'leave the world alone'" (76) represent "the opposite of historical avant-garde ambitions to change *everything*" (76) but are no less political for it since they challenge the "modern hegemonies" of self-assertive confessional bourgeois selfhood (202). Schuyler's anachronistic adoption of the haughty aristocrat's (or *haute bourgeois*) directive language might be thought to put aside some of the finer detail of the American life, even the landed New England life, that he knew in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But, as we have seen, this lyric poem beginning on "a nothing day" is very much concerned with the world as a social and political complex, even as it is also highly concerned with Schuyler's own precarious sense of selfhood and his at least partly affirmatory relationship with bourgeois privilege. Schuyler's *indolence*—which is to say, his reflection on his own immobile dependence as well as an anxious prizing of stasis—is a considerably more fraught dialectical matter than Silverberg's account would suggest.

And in fact there is another, no less intimate, way in which "Closed Gentian Distances" may be thought to relate in an ambiguous fashion to some

of the forces of capitalism. The implied self-portrait of a poet immersed in the wild yet decorative beauty of the island invites the reader to make a comparison as well as a contrast between Schuyler's passive consumption of the humanized environment and the behavior of the "colorful load of pleasure-seeking shoppers" who are observed being taken by lobster boat to mainland Camden at the very beginning of "The Island" (*CP* 92). A diary entry dated August 22, 1969, written at a point when Schuyler's poetic practice was aligned with an interest in photography, underlines the connection between what, according to Silverberg's argument, ought to be the incompatible impulses of indolent day-long watching (prized by Silverberg) and the more obviously self-assertive (i.e. "bad") cycles of bourgeois consumption:

Yesterday impatiently used up the one roll of color film and today—flawless rock crystal—is when I want it. And wasted my time impatiently waiting for the light to be right so I could take the things I'd mentally reserved for color film. Not completely wasted (to know that waits on development and contacts) but better as in most things to swing with the scene and take what you see right now and avoid the stultifying effect of pre-cooked bon mots. It left me with an aesthetic hangover—as though I were a mill to which all must be grist—no aimless unseeing walks, no lounging among rocks and juniper . . . [ellipses in original] a habit of looking is OK, and so is one of—not forgetting—vegetating? not exactly—more like Bruno [the Porters' dog], who puts his muzzle on the low windowsill with a sigh and sits for a long time. (*Diary* 63-64)

The moral of Schuyler's characteristically rambling tale seems to be the double one that to get the right sort of pictures, mental or photographic, one should "take what you see right now" and yet also sit, lounge or walk "for a long time" with an aimless or canine sort of resignation. The second half of this advice echoes many occasions in Schuyler's oeuvre—for instance, "Time brings us into bloom and we wait" in the title-poem of *Hymn to Life* (1974) (*CP* 215)—when he identifies his lyric art with the slow temporality of organic growth, or a gradual *becoming*, to press on the figure's German

romantic connotations.⁵ The first half of the advice seems more obviously acquisitive in spirit and therefore invites the reader to see a phenomenon underlying the diary entry's approved of and disapproved of approaches to photography alike—namely, a conspicuous using up or, in the active sense, *wasting* of time and resources. As shall be seen, both the temporal ambiguity and the ambivalent emphasis on consumption and wasting in this passage indicate a powerful tension at the heart of some of Schuyler's most memorable and passionate poetry.

II. Loving Capitalism

We have seen how a seemingly pastoral short lyric of Schuyler's opens out into a compelling picture of social difference based on labor under (and just before) modern capitalism. We can now move on to examine how some of the tensions of capitalist existence affect the texture of another type of poetry characteristic of Schuyler's oeuvre but whose historical and materialist thematics have generally been overlooked by the critics—namely, his love poetry. Like most of Schuyler's love poetry, the poems under consideration in this section—"You're," from *The Hymn to Life* (1974), and the title-poem of the volume that preceded it, *The Crystal Lithium*—concern "Bob." Robert ("Bob") Jordan, the dedicatee of both aforementioned volumes, was the married man whom Schuyler met on April 3, 1971, at New York City's famously homoerotic Everard Baths (see *Diary* 114 n.167) and who apparently endured as the object of Schuyler's desire and often disappointed love "until the relationship ended in about 1973" (*Diary* 307).

Jordan, who is the "You" addressed directly in the closing sections of *The Crystal Lithium* and *Hymn to Life*—both of which are called "Loving You"—worked as a well-paid salesman at Brooks Brothers and, after that, Abercrombie and Fitch (*Diary* 307). The poetry Schuyler wrote to him and about him can be read as the poet's indirect confession of his own disquieting vulnerability toward aspects of capitalism that he shows to be embodied in his lover's strenuously productive and consuming way of being. This love poetry can be read as an implicit confession, too, of a certain contentment on

⁵ For extended discussion of the related tropes of slowness, waiting, blooming, self-realization, and becoming in Emerson, Nietzsche, and Rilke, see Hutchinson 10-32.

Schuyler's part in being unable to modify his lover's bourgeois self-assertion which amounts to a troubled form of identification with it.

The material possibilities, and perhaps excesses, integral to Bob Jordan's corporate position are signaled at the beginning of "You're," which appears in the "Loving You" section of *Hymn to Life* (its title provides the first word of its opening sentence). Tellingly, Bob's well-enumerated labor is instantly associated here both with floral organic growth and the recuperative time out of which so many of Schuyler's poems arise:

You're

on vacation. Well
earned, twice and
more over, like a
double rose. I'll
miss you. I'm glad
you're there: you
need and want it. (*CP* 184)

The acquisitive impression left by the opening's doubling of earning (i.e. deserving) and desire ("need and want") is increased when Schuyler, rather like Cleopatra imagining Antony on his horse (Shakespeare 2640), imagines Bob, Triton-like, "dive into / a glassy wave / and come up / spouting" (*CP* 184); and when he declares, with a syncopated rhyming sense of rightness:

I'll
bet you like
pissing in the
sea. People who
don't seem odd
to me. (184)

After this, Schuyler's contracted paratactic lines allow his lover an instant transition from one form of self-gratification to another:

Dry off.
Supper time. What-

ever's on the grill
smells good: steak,
or chops. Wild horses
run there on the dunes. (184-85)

This imagery of carnivorous *use*, made to seem strangely preemptive and unstable by the foreshortened lineation, helps to explain the growing awareness in the remainder of the poem that there may be troubling consequences in time when one partner is moving at a faster rate than the other. "You're" ends like this:

The moon
will rise. The foot-
steps on it from
here don't show. In
moon terms, you're
not so far away. We
see the same sky
and night. The nights
there are your
own. I'll have mine
later. In the fall,
toward which doggily
I point. Be tan,
stretch out, forget
your job, and that
which troubled you
last week. Strange
vacation days, speed-
ing by for you, so
slow for me. Time
is not our own, and
yet it is. Use it
up freely and grow
with it, relaxed.
You like to work.
You won't mind

coming back. Time,
 pass more quickly
 for me, more slowly,
 slower, for him. (CP 185)

On the surface, Schuyler's prayer-like wish that Bob's vacation days pass "slowly, / slower for him" is to be interpreted as a magnanimous loving desire for his partner to enjoy himself in his absence. But this request that personified time grant the men a bifurcated temporal experience—the waiting one's faster, the enjoying one's slower—also exposes a latent anxiety about the spatiotemporal gap that already exists between them. The prescription to Bob that he "Be tan, / stretch out, forget / your job" is, like the mechanism by which his return is supposed to be assured—"You like to work. / You won't mind / coming back"—a queasy reminder of the materially dependent nature of Schuyler's own permanently "Strange / vacation days." In other words, time isn't just "speed- / ing for you, so / slow for me" when Bob is on holiday: the condition is metonymic, general.⁶

The tension between the two men's way of being in the world can already be felt when, having insisted on the lovers' coincidence *in space* ("We / see the same sky / and night"), Schuyler somewhat contradictorily states that, in *temporal* terms, "The nights / there are your own. I'll have mine later." If "Time is not our own, and / yet it is," as the poem slightly gnomically puts it, then it would appear that, compared to Bob's, Schuyler's possession of time is the less secure, being the more dependent on what the other man might do with *his* time. These multiple non-alignments within the axes of space and time underline a fundamental disjunction between the two lovers. By expressing his hope that time will slow down for Bob so that he can "Use it / up freely," Schuyler is in effect asking that their two temporally-differentiated forms of consumption and waste—the one dynamically self-assertive, the other more ("doggily") perceptual and recuperative—be brought into alignment in order that they might "grow" *together*. The projection of a time-

⁶ There is an intriguing similarity in the way Schuyler wrote about Jordan and Frank O'Hara in terms of their tempo and attitude to time. In July 1955 Schuyler, who was then sharing an apartment with O'Hara and Joe LeSueur, wrote the poet Barbara Guest: "I can't type on Frank's typewriter. My touch is too pastoral: it's like trying to go for a canter on Pegasus" (*Just* 23). O'Hara and Jordan are linked explicitly when Schuyler writes the artist and poet (and Elmslie's partner) Joe Brainard in June 1971: "Bob, by the way, is Irish in a number of Frank-like ways: such as regarding sleep as some sort of nuisance and waste of time" (*Just* 348).

lag by which one man comes into possession of his “nights” before the other is unsettling. It is hard to escape the feeling—not least because of the poem’s own strenuous denials (“Nor am I jealous / that you’re not alone” [184])—that the rupture in time stands metonymically for a relationship characterized by unevenness and dislocation as well as longing. Indeed, it is possible to hear the poem as Schuyler’s faint confession of an amorous kind of fear that he will be used up and wasted by the accelerated temporality of his corporate lover.

The psychological stakes of this relationship are apparent in a letter Schuyler wrote his friend Robert Dash thanking him for calling after his hospitalization in July 1971. Schuyler comes close to presenting his meeting with Jordan as a contributory cause of his psychosis: “I was more, much more tired than I knew. As you said I’ve been incandescent since April 3rd (night Bob & I connected—& now, have to—not face myself—but, relax, unwind, get back to normal tempo (whatever that is!)” (*Just* 352). That Schuyler was conscious, moreover, of the way his relationship with Bob Jordan reproduced aspects of the temporality that is peculiar to capitalism becomes very clear from a letter dated March 8, 1972, to the poet Harry Matthews: “I always feel very up and free right after I’ve seen Bob Jordan, but then the days pass and I sink slowly into a slump, like a stock market or fever chart” (*Just* 379). But in its materialist expression of longing for the salesman who enacts a “speed- / ing” cycle of labor and consumption even when he is *supposed to be* at rest, “You’re” evokes not so much the stock exchange as what Marxist theorist Moishe Postone calls the “dialectic of the two dimensions of the commodity form” (Harootunian and Postone 11). Postone has recently explained this dialectic thus:

On the one hand, there is pressure for ongoing changes in production, organization, knowledge, and, ultimately, for social life. On the other hand, the recalibration of the abstract temporal unit—for example, the hour—means that it is redetermined, pushed forward, as it were, while at the same time it is reconstituted as an hour. . . . On the surface, then, the Newtonian axis remains unchanged; an hour is an hour. Beneath the surface, however, the entire axis of abstract time has been moved. This motion of time is what I term “historical time.” (11)

In his *magnum opus*, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (1993) Postone provides a memorably specific example of what he also calls the “*treadmill effect*,” whereby “[i]ncreased productivity increases the amount of value produced per unit of time—until this productivity becomes generalized,” at which point “the magnitude of value yielded in that time period, because of its abstract and general temporal determination, falls back to its previous level” (289). His example relates to the moment in industrial history when the power loom was introduced. Because the standard of value “socially necessary labor time” (289) was still set by hand weaving, the norm remained at 20 yards of cloth per hour, which is what a hand-loom weaver produced, and the 40 yards of cloth that one could produce in one hour on a power loom had the value $2x$. But once the new, mechanized form of weaving became generalized, “the normative labor time for the production of 40 yards of cloth was reduced to an hour” (288) and the workers still laboring away on the hand-looms to produce their 20 yards of cloth per hour now received only $1/2x$.

The example points to how producers are compelled not only to “produce in accordance with an abstract temporal norm” but to do so “in a historically adequate fashion: they are compelled to ‘keep up with the times’” (301). Schuyler’s light-seeming lyric, with its (auto)biographical imagery of multi-tempo, non-coincidental days and nights and its queasy suggestions of dependency, gestures elliptically toward capitalism’s “recalibration of the abstract temporal unit,” as Postone puts it. It can be read as a tentatively analytical tale of disjunction and attraction between the producer-consumer capitalist who earns his vacation by keeping up with an ever-quickening abstract temporal norm and the person who, in more than one sense, risks being left behind. To put it another way, from its odd little contracted title onwards, “You’re” is an anxious love letter to what Noel Castree, paraphrasing the Marxist geographer David Harvey, calls “capitalism’s insatiable compulsion to run ahead of itself” (Castree 41).

Postone and, especially, Harvey feature as authoritative guides in Castree’s 2009 article, “The Spatio-Temporality of Capitalism”—a lucid piece of writing that helps to explain how the erotic entanglement with accelerated capitalist time found in “You’re” becomes a more fully embodied and spatialized matter elsewhere in Schuyler’s writing. As Castree explains, the logic of Harvey’s re-enunciated Marxism is one according to which

“capitalist time makes capitalist space, and capitalist space makes capitalist time” (Castree 53). This happens, for instance, in the way geography “comes to matter greatly” in a system structured around maximizing the profitability not only of production periods but also circulation time. The result is that temporal imperatives lead to spatial reorganizations aimed at overcoming the inconvenience of space, as seen in the urge to build or expand airports (49-50).

The convergence of space and time is also apparent, Castree suggests, in the doomed nature of the attempt by capitalists endlessly to defer the pain of capital devaluation by the expansionist “spatial fix” of dispersing surpluses over newly created and unequal “geographies of production,” as in international property developments such as factories (51). In other words, the temporality of capitalism is paradoxically one of speeding-up and attempted slowing-down. But in geographical Marxism’s vividly pessimistic spatiotemporal terms, “great splurges of fixed capital investment come back to haunt capitalism 25-35 years later” (52), once “the mass of built environments that sustain capital accumulation during one period [have] become both physical and economic barriers to future economic growth” (51). More gravely still, the desire of regions to “deflect the costs of devaluation from their doorstep” leads to trade wars and sometimes even military actions, so that “seen over the medium to long term, capitalist space is itself just as fluid as the time it both reflects and alters”(52).

As shall become clear, crucial aspects of Castree’s summary are relevant to the 105-line title-poem of *Crystal Lithium*. For the most part, this is not a love poem in an obvious sort of way; rather, its expansive and accumulative responses to the industrial American landscape are expressive of Schuyler’s erotic infatuation with Bob Jordan. Ultimately, the reverse will also be apparent: Schuyler’s infatuation is expressive of his response to the landscape of accumulation. But it is not until the poem’s final five and a half lines—in which Jordan, though unnamed,⁷ first makes his appearance in Schuyler’s published poetic oeuvre—that we encounter anything explicitly amatory:

. . . room in this or that cheap dump
Where the ceiling light burns night and day and we stare at or

⁷ “I know the ending is abrupt: well, meeting Bob Jordan was pretty abrupt,” Schuyler wrote Kenneth Koch (*Just* 334). For further confirmation that the volume’s dedicatee is referred to in these lines, see *Diary* 114 n167.

into each
 Other's eyes in hope the other reads there what he reads: snow,
 wind
 Lifted; black water, slashed with white; and that which is, which
 is beyond
 Happiness or love mixed with them or more than they or less,
 unchanging change,
 "Look," the ocean said (it was tumbled, like our sheets), "look in
 my eyes" [punctuation in the original] (*CP* 119)

This condenses Schuyler's early trysts with Bob after they first met in the Everard Baths in April 1971. That these lines depict each man looking into the other for an oceanic restlessness ("unchanging change") mirroring his own provides a fitting conclusion to a poem that has brought us to this intimate point in personal space and time by recreating, within a single unbroken sentence, Schuyler's travel through an industrial pastoral of late-twentieth-century America. As suggested by the volatile marine imagery of its final lines and that ominous word "slashed," "The Crystal Lithium" explores the tension touched upon in "You're" between the temporal slowness (or "utter sameness") of Schuyler's pastoral writing of the island and the dynamic alterity introduced by the "You" of the "Loving You" section (that section follows straight after "The Crystal Lithium"). In its panoramic representation of the world's richest country at leisure, the poem can also be read as a distillation both of his year-round quasi-vacation with the Porters and of his potentially perilous removal in 1971 from that recuperative but sexually confining set-up. This element of psychological peril perhaps explains the reference in the poem's title to the treatment of manic depression.

But what most needs to be appreciated about this almost excessively long-lined ("Whitman-ish" [Hofmann 53]) poem is its allegorical and erotic evocation of "capitalism's insatiable compulsion to run ahead of itself" (Castree 41). Even when "The Crystal Lithium" does not explicitly refer to capitalist production or consumption—though it often does—it asks to be read as the poet's inevitable historical encounter with a man who manifests the inexorable transformative power of capital through prolepsis. An aspect of the speeding Jordan's being (and Schuyler's loving him), we will realize retrospectively, has been present in the poem's highly sensory, accumulative and proleptic language long before we reach the ecstatic awe of the "cheap

dump” ending. In a slightly uncanny way, the three and a half pages leading from its first words, “The smell of snow, stinging in nostrils as the wind lifts it from a beach” (*CP* 116), up to its rushed intimate close—where the incipient lovers *hope* to see the answering image of “snow, wind / Lifted”—enact, almost as a past memory,⁸ the anticipated encounter with Jordan and the acquisitive force he embodies. The effect of this is to make Schuyler and the unnamed other seem fated to be together at the end of the poem, even as it weds them to the peculiar and potentially dislocating space-time of capitalism.

In fact the future rupture of time-with-Jordan is expansively present and past in the way that time, in the extraordinarily long single sentence of this poem, seems to jump toward the April encounter and sometimes also back from it as if relishing the opportunity to start racing forward again. After its beginning in winter with a static noun phrase (“The smell of snow”), the poem passes through various heightened multi-sensory perceptions of a season in which “the taste of the—to your eyes—invisible crystals irradiates the world” (116). There is no time to discover to whom this “your” might refer, since the poem has suddenly set its clock momentarily back. Or is it forward? Now it is “late on a broiling day in late September” and we are being told of the *remembered* “promise” offered by a marble counter “of the cold kiss / Of marble sheets to one who goes quickly in the snow and early / Only so far as the ash can” (116). In this propulsive context, perhaps we can say the erotically-charged winter is experienced almost simultaneously as the present and as an intensely realized anticipation in a past hurtling toward the present which it “sees” as the future.

After that, the reader is propelled this way and that through a kaleidoscopic and emphatically industrial and wasted eclogue in which the images of a beach’s washed-up “Christmas tree naked of needles” (116) and someone, perhaps Schuyler, about to rub “Time’s latest acquisition” into commercially reified “Chapped Lips” are suddenly wiped out in “[t]he thunder of a summer’s day” (*CP* 117). We later find “January,” as if in an allegorical calendar painting, “disgorging / February, shaped like a flounder” and “September / Diving into blue October” (117). This last image anticipates the rapacious vision of Jordan vacationing in “You’re.”

⁸ My language here signals a long-standing general debt to Mark Currie’s engrossing analysis of prolepsis in modern fiction, *About Time* (2006).

The strange sense in which there has *already been* a translation of Schuyler's perceptual and bodily life into the specific temporality—and in fact spatiality—of capitalism is more directly expressed by the manner in which the poem's wide-screen images of ending or repose shift into figures of pulsing expansion, consumption, desire, and waste. We are, for instance, in a moment of brief repose along the simultaneously mental and documentary journey, shown the place “Where kids in kapok ice-skate and play at Secret City as the sun / Sets before dinner,” only to find this sunset overwritten by a more disquieting and industrial one: “under the hatched ice / The water slides darkly and over it a never before seen liquefaction of the sun / In a chemical yellow greener than sulphur a flash of petroleum by-product” (*CP* 118). Another of the poem's changing skies “Flows with impersonal passion,” but is then bathetically revealed as one under which a dog will “bury a future dinner” (118). It is also one under which leisured amateur sailors “furl their sails and all pile into cars and go off to the supermarket,” where the parking lot will be “vast as the kiss to which is made the most complete surrender” (119).

The poet and critic David Lehman writes of Schuyler's diaries that, “The notation of the weather turns into a sublime activity” (254). To this observation can be added the thought that Schuyler's poetic notation of the American landscape on holiday under capitalism is no less sublime. The almost relentlessly furling and unfurling imageries of this poem certainly convey something of the vastness of capitalist space in its (“chemical”) domination of nature. But in a more specific way they also enact what the Marxist geographers suggest is its radically “fluid” yet fixing capacity—capitalist *space* as a “never before seen liquefaction,” we might say—to reflect and affect the already fluid *time* of capitalism.

Schuyler's erotic presentation of this spatiotemporal interdependence is arguably at its most elaborated with the already-quoted comparison of the “vast” magnitude of a parking lot to that of the “kiss to which is made the most complete surrender.” For in its context, the constellation of images here points not only (proleptically) to the intimate yielding at the poem's breathless close (“‘Look,’ the ocean said [it was tumbled, like our sheets], ‘look in my eyes’”) but also to a more general phenomenological condition of ever-increasing movement and consumption which is allied with the images of “petroleum” and “supermarket” (or “dog”) food. The eroticization of the

parking lot gestures toward the simultaneously self-liberating and capitulated responses of individuals participating in the enormous opening up of motorized space in America (and elsewhere) after World War Two. To look at it in a slightly different way, it is as though the promise of spatial fixed capital that is exemplified by the industrial-scale car park—and figured as an open kissing mouth—is simply too potent to be resisted; the consuming mouth and eyes of the speaker of this appropriately “vast” poem yield to such imageries, and so too does the reader carried along by the poem’s accumulative and geographically ranging sentence.⁹

The spatially expansionist as well as historical character of capitalism has been highlighted earlier in “The Crystal Lithium,” at a point where once again we have reached winter along the way of the poem’s speeding allegorical pictorial calendar. The season is personified at first as a poker-faced gambler capable of producing by rare chance a day of fragile and fractured (“hairline”) lunar beauty. In line with the poem’s repeatedly fluid character, this gambling figure then shape-shifts into the anonymous profile of high-stakes trans-national finance. This happens in a way that suddenly invites the reader to see the birth of the modern American city as a self-organizing cash-game where the very skyscrapers are the ongoing tally of accumulated capital or, in this case, “poker chips” (*CP* 118):

. . . and deadly dull December which now
 And then with a surprised blank look produces from its hand the
 ace of trumps
 Or sets within the ice white hairline of a new moon the gibbous
 rest:
 Global, blue, Columbian, a blue dull definite and thin as the first
 day
 Of February when, in the steamed and feeling capital cash built
 Without a plan to be its own best monument its skyline set in
 stacks
 Like poker chips (signed “Autodidact”), at the crux of a view
 there crosses
 A flatcar-trailer piled with five of the cheaper yachts, tarpaulined,

⁹ And perhaps literary criticism risks becoming excessive in the attempt to analyze and do justice to Schuyler’s most expansive productions.

Plus one youth in purple pants, a maid in her uniform and an
 “It’s not real
 Anything” Cossack hat and coat, a bus one-quarter full of
 strangers and
 The other familiar fixings of lengthening short days. . . . (CP 117-
 18)

There is something very striking about the way Schuyler in this passage splices together the artful marine beauty and privilege of his intermittently “familiar” Great Spruce Head existence and a representation of the “global” “capital” (capital as financial center and process) upon which the Porter family’s generous patronage was founded. That this powerfully conflated imagery issues from a “surprised blank look” may underline his somewhat chance-driven (i.e. gambling) poem’s acceptance of the *laissez-faire* economic horizon erected before him (“Without a plan”). The seemingly uncritical (“blank”) relation between Schuyler’s sprawling form and the skyscrapers as “splurges of fixed capital investment” could be confirmed by the humorous thought of this architecture bearing an anonymous (that is, “blank”) artist’s signature. For “Autodidact” is almost certainly a reference not only to the unplanned city but also to Schuyler himself, the writer who was often conscious of not having studied at Harvard alongside his fellow “New York School” poets Ashbery, O’Hara, and Koch.

On the other hand, his notation, in the just-quoted passage, of a maid in her conspicuous proximity to the imperial “purple” of fashionable affluence indicates a less complacent and even an uneasy responsiveness on his part to the socio-economic *difference* (i.e. inequality) created by any market-led expansion. By the time we reach the approach to this long poem’s denouement in and around the Everard Baths, the specter of social unevenness is more clearly visible in a series of images which brings us close to a sense of abjection. The admittedly brief glimpse of immobility, waste, and confinement we find in this section—given greater significance by the return of the spatiotemporally fluid sky motif—carries a haunting reminder, in Castree’s terms, of the manic and doomed attempt to “overcome the inconvenience of space” manifested up to that point in the expansive poem:¹⁰

¹⁰ For an analysis of the theme of waste in Schuyler’s work that emphasizes the more positive meaning of waste, see Schmidt 91-122.

The sky empties itself to a color, there, where yesterday's puddle
 Offers its hospitality to people-trash and nature-trash in tans and
 silvers
 And black grit like that in corners of a room in this or that cheap
 dump
 Where a ceiling light burns night and day and we stare at or into
 each
 Other's eyes (CP 119)

Through the presence of the word “hospitality”—such a fraught and expansive concept in Schuyler’s poetics of dependency—it is all too easy to feel that what we are witnessing here is somehow not only the waste produced by humans but also humans who have been wasted by production and remaindered as inconvenient and spurned obstacles in the midst of the “steamed and feeling” metropolis. Whatever the precise meaning of this abstractedly evoked “people-trash,” Schuyler and the unnamed Bob Jordan are linked to it through their occupation of a “cheap dump,” through the “black grit” in its corners, and through the tableau of almost sepulchral stasis out of which their future-oriented passion comes into vivid, acquisitive life. “The Crystal Lithium,” even more than “You’re,” anticipates the empirical and theoretical materialist geography of Harvey and Castree by showing how, in capitalist space-time, the slump and the “dump” are, ultimately, always intimately connected to the rapid growth of what we value most highly.

III. Poetry in the Age of Downsizing

Reading Schuyler’s love poetry through the prism of recent Marxist writings about space-time allows us to see the way in which that poetry relates to general tendencies within twentieth-century and in fact also twenty-first-century capitalism. For a suggestion of how Schuyler might here be exploring the more specific materialist mentalities and practices of the era in which these poems were composed, we can turn to some of the criticism written about his close friend John Ashbery. In his chapter on Ashbery in *The Matter of Capital*, Christopher Nealon relays David Harvey’s and others’ accounts of how in early-mid 1970s New York City “investment bankers and corporate leaders seized the opportunity of the recession of the day to unhitch the city from federal support and make it dependent on private financing” (75). A

clear spatial outcome of this process of de-unionization and deregulation was apparently “the concentration and spectacularization of capital exemplified in the two towers of Minoru Yamasaki’s World Trade Center” (76).

“The Crystal Lithium” might reasonably be said to anticipate the unveiling of these towers in 1973 in its imagery of “the steamed and freezing capital cash built / Without a plan to be its own best monument” (*CP* 118). And Schuyler arguably also anticipates, in his long poem’s climax around the feverishly cloistered Queer space of the Everard Baths, what Nealon suggests was Ashbery’s response to the “scenes of spectacle, pageantry, and even apocalypse” in the new urban landscape of the 1970s—namely, a “posture of minority” through which the reader is asked to recognize that the poet “is in danger, like any of us, of being downsized” (78).

But if Nealon is implicitly accusing the independently wealthy Ashbery of a certain degree of escapism and disingenuousness in his bohemianism, it is necessary to emphasize how revealingly and even self-critically dialectical Schuyler can be in his materialist writing of space-time. Time at the end of “The Crystal Lithium” is presented as an individuating and transgressive wasting of those hours that are given over to production and abstract accounting (“beyond / Happiness or love mixed with them or more than they or less”), even as it hints at a sexually transactional logic which is more clearly indicated in the previously-quoted letter of July 29, 1971 to Robert Dash:

I had to wait until I was 47 to find Bob, & in a filthy wonderful dump—The Everard—at that. So—! Come into New York more—there are nice people there—and Bob & I will always like to see you. Perhaps take you to a clean ill-lighted bath, put you in a room, & send in something nice. Or perhaps those are things you would rather do on your own? Truthfully, I have never been any good at all at fixing people up—but—in NYC there *are* more opportunities in the winter than in Sagaponack—that I know. (*Just* 352-53)

Of no less relevance to Schuyler’s poetry than Nealon’s chapter on Ashbery is a 1995 essay, “Periodizing Ashbery and His Influence,” by Stephen Paul Miller. Having stated it is not his intention “to pin poems too neatly to a decade” (“[o]f course, decades do overlap” [153]), Miller proposes

a general American cultural trajectory that he finds mirrored and explained in Ashbery's poetry. Drawing on Fredric Jameson's Marxist analysis for his description of what he concedes may well be a collective mythological "relationship to 'reality'" rather than technically "correct" (155), Miller characterizes the 1970s as a period of "limitation" (159), "consolidation and codification" (158), and "ambivalence toward reality" (155), which came as a response to the escalation of consumerism and "an imperialist war" (in Vietnam) (157) associated with the "wild expansion" (158) and the "romantic imperative" (150) of the 1960s. In this context, the central trope of the mirror in Ashbery's most famous poem, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," which was first published in August 1974—"the same month Richard Nixon resigned his office" (146)—is said by Miller to thematize the sorts of surveillance mechanisms used by Nixon and others in the 1970s "to account for what [in the 1960s] is previously unexplained" (159). But while Ashbery's long poem, in its use of the convex mirror, "initially argues that the human condition is a closed one of self-imprisonment" (159), the mirror trope is, Miller tells us, eventually displaced in a way that provides the ground for an affirmation of the unforeseen processes of the imagination, or what the poem itself calls "dreams and inspirations on an unassigned / Frequency" (qtd. in Miller 159).

As poems written just before and during the unfolding of the Watergate affair respectively, "The Crystal Lithium" (like Ashbery's long poem, optically-named) and "You're" can certainly be seen to negotiate between a generalized 1960s expansiveness and a 1970s emphasis on limit and foreclosure. As will be seen, a number of critics writing about Schuyler's poetry from the mid-1970s onwards have written about it in terms that are reminiscent of Ashbery's displacement of the view of life as imprisonment. But in what remains of this article I hope to show how Schuyler's work from this period and afterwards can be more fraught and less positively dialectical in the attention it gives to material limitation than has previously been emphasized in the critical literature.

The first example comes from the cluster of weirdly anti-lyrical lyrics that appear in Schuyler's Pulitzer Prize-winning volume, *The Morning of the Poem* (1980) under the heading "The Payne Whitney Poems" (CP 252-58). These were written between January and February 1975 during Schuyler's second spell in the psychiatric hospital of that name. In one of these poems,

Schuyler describes himself as being “claustrated” (*CP* 252), using an expression which, in its verbally playful and bleak context, conveys not only the ostensible meaning of being cloistered as a monk but also, through a precarious portmanteau of *castrated*, *frustrated* and *claustrophobia*, the sense of a general shutting down of erotic and other affective forces. In a very thoughtful essay on Schuyler the poet and critic John Wilkinson quotes Robert Kaufman asking, in the Marxian manner of Theodor Adorno or Walter Benjamin, how “a solid, convincing artistic structure” (qtd. in Wilkinson 79) might be made from the evanescent form of “subjective song” that is also required somehow to “delineate or objectivate the impressively fluid contents of capitalist modernity” (79). Wilkinson suggests that, “these questions might be explored” (79) by a close reading of the following Payne Whitney poem, entitled “Linen”:

Is this the moment?
No, not yet.
When is the moment?
Perhaps there is none.
Need I persist?

This morning I
changed bedding.
At lunch I watched
someone shake out
the cloth, fold and
stow it in a side-
board. Then, the
cigarette moment
flows out of me
down the pen and
writes.

I’m glad I have
fresh linen. (*CP* 253-54)

Wilkinson’s argument is that while avoiding the sentimentality of “some kind of redemption,” “Linen” negates the suspended time of the psychiatric

hospital through the poet's discovery that the "mechanical" act of folding linen allows "the possibility of speaking to a self now folded into the world" (83); or, as Wilkinson also puts it: "When watching gives him the time to watch, which is the trick of distraction, he stops worrying about the moment, and the moment then happens by itself" (82). Crucially, though, we should realize, "the moment" of this poem is one of consumption, and what Schuyler is given to watch, thereby precipitating his act of writing and the poem's final secular benediction, is another person's work *for him*—this manipulation of fresh linen which in its context is made to sound so much more meticulously complete than Schuyler's own changing of the bedding. In other words, we are being shown another version of the faceless labor time depicted in the imperative, "send to laundry marked, / more starch," in "Closed Gentian Distances." The enclosed space of the psychiatric clinic actually unfolds to a whole system of under-appreciated toil. Clausturation appears to be a general condition.

Wilkinson points out that the Payne Whitney poems are "consistent with the poems of an endless Maine vacation" as a result of their "simultaneously desultory and precise attention, their recurrent epanorthosis [i.e. their use of the rhetorical trope of self-correction] and their both studied and medication-induced indolence" (83). But the Maine island feels present in the sequence more as a rebuke to the present than as a dreamy memory. Schuyler's position of cordoned-off passivity exposes him to an expansive multi-temporality or multi-tempo of weather with tantalizingly, even cruelly, brief suggestions of a marine world: "Out the window no / sun. Cloud / turbulence and / the wind whistles" (*CP* 252-53); "So what else is new? The sky / slowly / swiftly [hyphen in original] went blue to gray" (253); "Blown side- / ways in the wind, / coming in my window / wetting stacked books" (255). In "Linen," the words "stow" and "board" relate no less directly to the memory of the Porters' productively leisured island existence, and, like the other marine images in the sequence, they do so in a way that brings to the fore the pathos of Schuyler's current and recurrent confinement. But this is not simply a case of memorably notated self-pity: "Linen" and the other Payne Whitney poems can be read as a highly concretized allegory of dispossession and immobility in an era of extending uneven development.

The utterly real and personally mythologized space-time of Great Spruce Head Island is, likewise, not forgotten in Schuyler's work from the 1980s.

The autobiographical speaker of the title-poem of *A Few Days* (1985), remembering his much younger self's travels in Italy, says: "since I was there / I fell in love with an island in Maine, now out of bounds. I'd like to find a new place, somewhere where there are friends and not too many / houses" (CP 362). Both Schuyler's biography and, more subtly, some of his poetry from this period reveal how much materially specific desire is contained in these last quoted lines. Schuyler spent most of the mid-to-late 1970s either in cheap single room occupancies in New York City or at his mother's house in East Aurora, when he wasn't in psychiatric and other medical facilities.

When *A Few Days* was published he had been living for six years in the famous but hardly luxurious Chelsea Hotel in New York City, which in fact is where he stayed for the rest of his life, supported by a number of grants, beginning with the money from the Frank O'Hara Foundation that had been redirected from its original purpose of sponsoring young poets' publications. These grants made it possible for Schuyler to afford the expensive medical operations he underwent in the 1980s and they also paid for a series of assistants to help him with his medication and other aspects of daily living.

Elements of this recent material history of dependence billow up to the surface of "A Belated Birthday Poem for Robert Dash," a poem from *A Few Days* which offers a powerfully plangent image of Schuyler's material disadvantage in relation to an addressee, in this case his friend, the already-mentioned painter-gardener Robert Dash. From its opening, the poem evokes the artist's garden in eastern Long Island in terms suggestive of both the self-sufficiently achieved organic artwork and a place of bourgeois privilege:

You are walking in the grounds
 on the second day of summer
 taking snapshots, the seeds
 of future paintings, under
 a June already hot
 on this Sunday morning.

...

You got up at seven and went
 right to work: how I envy
 you your creative energy!
 Painting, painting: landscapes
 of Sagaponack.

You make houses out of
 sheds. You cook, you
 garden: how you garden!
 One of the best I've ever seen.
 "It's a sort of English cottage garden." (CP 328)

There is something strikingly sad here about the way Schuyler's exclamation of apparent friendly admiration for Dash, which he rather cordially calls "envy," is immediately overcome by a more seriously envious awareness of his friend's freedom to build on, so as to transcend, material constraints in the creation of an inhabitable pastoral. After such emotional unconcealing, it becomes easier to see the way that, in the poem's *temporally*-specified opening images, Schuyler's *spatial* language enforces a link between what, in standard Marxist terms, would be Dash's superstructural activity and its material base. By the sly means of Schuyler's horticulturist mode of materialism, the "seeds" of Dash's "future paintings" are the very "grounds" that he walks upon and that Schuyler seems to convert into his own (and the reader's) precarious possession through the medium of poetry.

This conversion, which is never far from tilting back into a form of dispossession or envious desire, takes place above all through a depiction of Schuyler's own embodied looking at the garden in seasonal transition: "The big / thrill these past few days / is the opening of the evening primroses / — *Oenothera missourensis*, perhaps?"; "I sit at the dining table / staring out at a dark pink weigela" (CP 329). But for Dash and anyone else familiar with the vicissitudes of Schuyler's life up to the mid-1980s, which included almost dying in a fire in his rooming house in 1977 and living in total squalor when he wasn't in hospital in 1978 and early 1979, such images of perceptual poise surely carry with them a haunting reminder of more agitated time and space.

The poet-guest's tone of presumptuous largesse and inquisitive connoisseurship briefly takes on a solid sort of confidence in his expectation that, though "pretty shrimpy," his birthday gift to Dash of "five / of the rose Cornelia" (CP 329) "will / grow to great shrubs, the canes / bending, studded with / many petalled-blooms" (330). The important point about this promise of organic *becoming* is how it is seemingly opposed to talk of money occurring before and after it in the poem. Before it (separated only by Schuyler's depiction of himself at the dining table) is some discussion of where the "moola [i.e. money]" will come from to repair what, grandly

evoking the dramatic fissures in the landscape of luxurious European ski resorts, Schuyler calls “The roof / of your grand *couloirs*”: “Don’t worry, it always comes, to you / at least (somehow, we get / through)” (329). A few lines after the promise of shrubs, he allows himself to blurt out: “how / I wish I had the dough / to shower you with shrub / roses! But I haven’t” (330).

As the critic John Kerrigan reminds us, Marx saw money both as “a bond that separates” and “itself a form of property, one which invites endless accumulation” (Kerrigan 17). It is possible at this moment in the poem to imagine that the Cornelia’s imagined steady development, standing metonymically for Schuyler’s friendly poetic art, overwrites the rival claims of the lexically accumulating money. The words “moola” and “dough” here add themselves to the “shit” Schuyler spoke of during his 1971 breakdown. This positive notional reading would be reminiscent of the separate but complementary readings offered by William Watkin and Daniel Katz of “Stone Knife,” a poem placed just after the end of the “Vermont Diary” sequence in *The Crystal Lithium*, in which the poet thanks his friend and host Kenward Elmslie for the gift of a knife. Watkin emphasizes that earlier poem’s utopian imagining of an “economy of pleasure” beyond consumption (Watkin 114), while Katz makes a great deal of the poem’s way of presenting the given knife not simply as a paper knife to open mail as Elmslie presumably intended it but as a message to which “an answering letter is the proper response . . . rather than the gift of an ‘object’ in exchange” (Katz 150).

But in “A Belated Birthday Poem *for Robert Dash*,” it is the social separation rather than the shared bloom of inter-subjectivity that is felt most keenly by the time we come to the self-portrait of vicariousness at the poem’s at once courteous and quietly self-lacerating close:

I sit and stare at a blue sky
lightly dashed with morning
clouds and think about
these paintings, this house,
this garden, all as beautiful
as your solitary inner life.
Your moon last night was gibbous. (*CP* 330)

For the sake of a happily anti-capitalist ending, a reader might very well *wish* to experience this as a moment when, in Katz’s terms, the poem becomes an

“extension of [Schuyler] himself and his affect” within an epistolary mode of relating to the other that replaces the conventional fetishization of the gift object (Katz 155). And yet the movement here from the reiterated deixis of “this” and “these” to the imagery of Dash’s internalized *possessions*—“your inner life,” “Your moon”—shows how the recreated materials of this friend’s aesthetic living space are as much a barrier to interpersonal relation as the condition of its possibility: “your[s],” here, strongly suggests “*not mine*.”

Moreover, Schuyler’s punning on his addressee’s name is no doubt meant affectionately, but there is surely a strong suggestion that to be “dashed” by the light of his friend’s artfully conceived property is to realize how often his own prospects have been “dashed” by one thing or another including the radical material unevenness of the world as a whole. The fact that the moon above that world is “gibbous”—that is, between half and full—certainly creates an intriguing ambiguity in the final line, returning us perhaps to the promised *becoming* of the Cornelia. But, at this point in his personal *and* political oeuvre, it is pointedly not Schuyler’s moon—the moon of the dispossessed—that might be about to come into full possession of itself.

IV. Conclusion

Schuyler never regained the specific “breadth, depth and general spaciousness” of Great Spruce Head Island. The poetry he wrote away from that privileged space-time may be felt as expressive of its loss. But at its best that writing also represents a bid for transcendence from recurrent psycho-physiological and material unevenness and harm, though almost always as part of an approach to life and art that does not turn away from its own erotic and imaginative investment in the radical unevenness promoted by capitalism. Putting the matter like that is to suggest that the attempt at transcendence in Schuyler’s materialist writing is one that fails and needs to fail for the sake of truth—the truth of the culture in which his own consumerist inclinations arise. The analysis in the present article has revealed how his poetry reproduces an environment in which the expansive space-time of mental, aesthetic, and capital accumulation is inextricably bound together with the time and space of unappreciated labor, waste, and isolating immobility.

The overview offered in these pages also shows the allegorical manner in which Schuyler explores general economic unevenness through the space-time of personal relationships. For if Robert Dash and his garden in

Schuyler's birthday poem stand, like Fairfield Porter's island, for an achievement of "transcendence" through bourgeois artistry that is denied most people, the more disquieting figure of Bob Jordan in Schuyler's poetry represents both the ever-increasing and often destructive production times and cycles of consumption in modern capitalism. "The Crystal Lithium" is a remarkable monument to Schuyler's dawning love for Jordan as well as for a whole culture's precarious attachment to "capitalism's insatiable compulsion to run ahead of itself" (Castree 41). The poem is a powerful example of how Schuyler's poetry can produce a critical evaluation of capitalist space-time against the grain of its own exuberant investment in expansion. In a similar fashion, we have seen, in "Closed Gentry Distances" and "A Belated Birthday Poem for Robert Dash," how Schuyler reveals himself to be most vulnerable to the dislocating character of capital when on the face of it he appears most at home in its visible structures.

In all these ways, and whatever his conscious intentions, Schuyler's work is both highly political and skeptical, and he is certainly a "social poet" in many more senses than that his poems are, as David Lehman puts it, "populated with memorable characters" (277). All the same, future research into Schuyler's writing would do well to probe deeper than this article has into how the idiosyncratic depiction of successful and affluent friends, including Ashbery and other writers, forms an aspect of Schuyler's revealing encounter with global material forces. There is also the need to take properly into account his marvelous novels. We are only beginning to understand the at times exuberant, but rarely consoling, entwining of life under capitalism and the work of one of twentieth-century America's subtlest poets.

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