

Susanne Lang and Darius James

# Magic Hat – Property of the People

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e-flux journal #14 — march 2010 Susanne Lang and Darius James  
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## What is a Political Education?

*“Radical moments” such as the ones found here, fraught with social and historical contradictions stemming from opposing deeply held beliefs, reveal common conceptual bases previously invisible within the staging of their enmity or opposition. It is in this space that whole generations can rediscover the possibilities of Utopia and radical critique. What follows is an exploration of how different radical moments speak to one another across time, continents, and generations; and, as these moments bridge temporal gaps, of what meanings can be derived from their interaction.*

*It seems almost impossible to import any of the truths of these moments to a different reality. They lie too much in their own time, context, and specific situation. Yet it is crucial to grasp these moments and their political dimensions. Sometimes it is necessary to “unframe” them from their complex social histories and stare at the raw pieces that remain.*

*What story can this palimpsest tell us?*

*In the text that follows, we try to strip learning from the structures of education. It is impossible, of course, to do so completely, but the effort is all the same necessary if we are to explore the underlying processes by which we make something our own, wresting it back from its formal “framing” and allowing actual “learning” to take place. As the microcosm of the society it represents and reproduces, school is the first proposal for and the first hindrance to both understanding the world we live in and shaping the idea of the world we want to live in. In starting from this point, we found a chance to rewrite our political education.*

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## Newhall Street School / September 1963

Dear Suzanne:

My teacher said we had to find a pen pal who live somewhere different and I picked your name from a hat. Suzanne. That’s a pretty name. You live in East Germany. I hope you know American talk because I only know three words in German: “donka shern,” “dumb cough” and “heil hitler.” I am supposed to ask you a lot of questions about how it is to live where you live. I have to ask what food you eat. What clothes you wear. What your family look like. What they smell like and what jobs they got. What shows play on your television set. What kind of government you got. I’m supposed to ask all kinds of questions that’s really not nobody’s business. I hate it when strangers want to know all your business. So if you don’t answer I understand. But once I get all the answers I am supposed to write a report



about what I learn and read it in front of the whole class.

When I told my teacher what country you from she say you live in one of them communism countries behind the iron curtain and I didn't even know you could make curtains out of iron. American curtains made out of cloth. She say *How communism get in my hat? Communism don't belong in my hat! Somebody in this school is a communism and put communism in my hat! They trying to poison me with that communism and I won't stand for it! I'm going to report them to the Red Squad and The House of UnAmerican Activities! Gunner Joe take care of them communism quick!*

She say communism really bad but she going to fix those sneaky communism. She point at me and say I was going to be patriotic American and fight communism telling you how good it is to live in democracy where everybody free and don't stand in line and call everybody comrag and wear car tires for shoes like you people do over there in that communism country. My teacher say my letters going make you free. I'll have you drinking Cocoa Cola and eating Wheaties in no time she say!

But before I save you from your communism ways and make you believe my right way of Christian American Democracy thinking it her duty to teach me about the evils of communism. So she make me watch movies call *Invasion*, *U.S.A.* and *Red Nightmare* and read *Captain American Capitalism* comic books and teach me why communism bad for American way of life.

Donka Shern,  
Darius

**Schwedt/Oder, 15. Oktober 1985**

Hello Darius,

Thank you very much for your letter. My teacher asked me to join PenPal-Club but I am surprised somebody from USA writes to me. I hoped somebody from a brother country writes to me. But this is also interesting. My teacher told me that the government and the newspaper in USA always lies about our country. So I tell you the truth.

In PenPal-club we translate letters we get from our penpals. Our teacher helps translate. I learn english very new, but my teacher helps me.

My name is Susanne. I live in Schwedt/Oder with my parents and my little sister. Schwedt/Oder is situated on the river Oder, directly on the border to Poland. We live in an apartment in a new building. My grandfather build it. My father is a construction engineer. My mother is a construction engineer, too. My sister is five years old. She goes to Kindergarten. I bring her every morning, before I go to school. We don't

have a dog. My grandmother has a dog and on the weekends I visit and play with the dog. In my free time, I like running and I also like to watch television and drink cola.

You should tell your teacher that in GDR we are not living in communism yet. We are living in socialism. But if we try very hard we will live in communism in the future. Your teacher sounds very mean and stupid. We have nice curtains made from dederon, not iron!

I am very happy in GDR. Everybody knows that only in socialism there is peace. We have peace and we are very happy about it. Not all children in the world can live in peace. My teacher told me afro-american children in USA are not happy. She told me the police hits them on the head and makes them cry, just because they are coming from Africa. Is that true? Please answer soon,

Susanne



ps: I don't know what you mean with the car tires shoes. I have very nice sandals. They are called "Jesus Slippers." My mom was standing in line a long time to get them for me. Do you also have such kind of shoes? Or do you have to wear car tires shoes? I send you a picture. Please send me pictures back.

Hamden, Connecticut / October 1963

Dear Comrag Suzanne:

Thank you for your letter. I like it very much. I thought when you say my government do not tell the truth about your country was interesting. Color people do get beat in the head with police sticks in my country when they are marching for their rights but little kids do not get beat up unless they are praying in church then they get blown up by the Klu Klux Klan! But you do not see little kids marching and singing because it is not safe. The police not only use sticks. They use dogs! And water hoses, too!

Your teacher told the truth. Down south white people do not believe color people are Americans like white people. It segregated down south. They like race prejudice down there. Color people can't use the same bathrooms or water fountains or restaurants or theaters as white people. There is one for white people. And one for color people. Big sign say FOR COLOR ONLY. But I live up north in Connecticut. It not segregated here. I go to school with white children. Everybody pee together. That don't fool me though. They still act funny around color people.

I told my teacher what you say that you not living in Communism but Socialism. I had to look that up first. It mean everybody share everything right? Everybody own everything together?



Boy! She got mad when I say that! Her face turn orange and she hollering you telling me communism lies and I was UnAmerican and Communism Dupe! I say I wasn't duping no communism nothing! How can I be duping communism when I see them scrunchy-face white folks beating up color people on tv every night?

She get real mad then and kicked me out and made me go to the principal office. The principal this other old scrunchy face white lady.

She say I couldn't write no more letters because you communism. She don't want no color communism children in her school. Then she call my mother and told her I couldn't come back to school until I wrote a "satisfactory" essay explaining "Why I Love America."

When I got home, my mother beat my behind! She chase me all over the house! She say *Don't you know you can't tell white people the truth?!!* She say I can be all the communism I want but don't say nothing to no white folks about it because they just shoot me with a water hose or blow me up in church!!

After she finish beating my behind, she made me lie and write that essay and pretend I don't know white folks treat color people bad. Then she say forget that stupid old principal. I could still write you and be your friend if I want. Friendship got nothing to do with communism. So I going to call you Comrag like they do in communism country. I feel better after that because my mother took me out and bought me some of those Jesus shoes you wear instead of car tires. Now I look like a beatnik.

Your American friend,  
Darius

Schwedt/Oder, 20. Dezember 1985

Hello Darius,

I am sorry for my tardy answer. Your teacher sounds really scary. I am very happy your mother allowed you to write more letters. If life is too dangerous for you in USA you can come and live here. We have peace and nobody has to be afraid here anymore.

You ask about socialism. In socialism we don't share everything. I don't share my dolls - I want to play with them myself. But all the tables in school and the chairs and all the things that are for the people are property of the people. They all have a sticker "property of the people" so everybody knows it belongs to the people and you can't take it home or destroy it.

Some information from your letter I didn't understand. Please explain:

Why do you say "color" people. What color do you mean? Do you mean they are black?

Why doesn't your government forbid Klu Klux Klan? And why they attack children?

My teacher and me were wondering. You write "I go to school with white children." Does that mean that white children are not color? And does that mean that you are color? And what color do you have?

Why in USA people still go to church? Do they not know that God does not exist? Here in GDR church is only to look at, like a museum. Everybody knows that people are responsible for people and not God can help them because he

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doesn't exist. Above the sky there is space and Juri Gagarin was flying there and checked if there is anybody living there. And he said that there was nobody, no God and nobody else. Didn't anybody tell you this?

Please write me back soon.

Your friend

Susanne

PS: What is a communism dupe? The dictionary don't know the word.

**Hamden, Connecticut / January 1964**

Dear Comrag Susanne:

Why I say color people? Color people come in different color that why!

My mother color egg nog freckle with nutmeg. My daddy Bosco color. Bosco a drink. It come in a bear. Bosco Bear. You squeeze Bosco Bear and chocolate come out. My daddy color Bosco Bear chocolate. My sister ginger bread color. I'm new penny color.

Some color people get mad you call them black. Make them think they back in the jungle with Tarzan. You got Tarzan over there? Tarzan white and swing through trees like a monkey. He beat on his chest like a gorilla too! And they say color people monkeys! *Hah!* Is white people

color? Yeah. Sure. Why not? One color. *White.*

I got in trouble for drawing white people orange. The teacher say something wrong with my head so she send me to this special nurse. This special nurse call something I can't spell but she talk to people who got problems in the head. She ask why I draw white people orange. I say because you can't see white crayon on white paper so I use orange. What wrong with that? She look at me blink a couple times then send me back to class.

I ask my mother why the government don't just put the Klu Klux Klan in jail. She say they got Constitutional Rights. Government can't stop them because they got Constitutional Rights and Free Speech. I say of course speech free I never pay a nickel for a word of it in my life words cheaper than bubble gum but that still don't explain how come the government give the Klu Klux Klan Constitutional Rights and color people got no Constitutional Rights. She say color people do got Constitutional Rights because they American. Then I say why we marching and singing and asking for our Constitutional Rights all the time if we already got Constitutional Rights? Make no sense. She say not everybody want to do what the Constitution say. Oh is all I say.

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Sie hat  
Keine Schuhe

My teacher say you trying to fool me into communism. That what dupe mean. Dupe is fool. Communism dupe is fool for communism. But I explain to my teacher you not communism. You still waiting for communism to come like people in my church waiting for Jesus. When Jesus come everything going to be peach pie. Everybody have wings. Same with communism. But that make no different to her. Communism. Socialism. It all the same. It don't help to say you got "Property of the People" stickers. She just get more mad and start taking about "private property" and "free market system" and turn orange. I know she lying. I got to pay every time I go to the market. Hostess Twinkies and Drake's Devil Dogs take a big bite out my weekly allowance.

What you mean Juri Gagarin flying in space and say ain't nobody up there? He blind? He look hard enough he see John Glenn. John Glenn first man in space. John Glenn flying around up there too! They can wave at each other from they rocket ships.



So how you know there no God? Who told you that? God everywhere. Even in Communism. God not made up like Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy. I see God. I feel God. It happen every time I pray. Try it sometime.

Your American Friend,  
Darius

PS-- I am very very very sad our president got shot and kill. How could this happen? This America! Somebody shot and kill President Kennedy! He was sitting in a car waving and smiling then BLAM!!! They took off all the cartoons on TV and talk about how President Kennedy got shot and kill all day and all night long. It was sad but real boring too. Worse I saw the man they say kill President Kennedy get shot on TV ! How he get kill with all those policeman around? I thought policeman supposed to protect

you. That not supposed to happen. This America! It keep going on like this with no more cartoons and people get shot with policemen I'm going to move over there and live in "Property of the People" peace. Stay at your house. Eat all your sausage.

**Schwedt/Oder, 3. February 1986**

Hello Darius,

thank you very much for your letter. I understand now you are African American and I feel solidarity with your struggle for justice. We are comrades, like in the song we sing in school: "Black and White will change the world." In the song it says if you want to win you can't pray, because it doesn't help and will only confuse you so you don't know who is your enemy. We don't pray because we want to win.

Thank you for explaining the color-people. We say African American people, because you all came from Africa until the white people came and steal you and make you slaves. We learned that in school. But they didn't steal ALL people in Africa. There is still some living there. They are our comrades, too. Nelson Mandela is our friend. He is in prison all the time, because he is the leader of the color people in Africa. He is fighting for justice. The police in Africa is white people and hits pupils on the head and shoots them. We make demonstration and collect money to help the pupils in Africa and we send food because they are hungry. The white people in Africa are bad. I think the white people in Africa should go home. I like color people very much. I have a Negro-doll. It's my favorite doll and it was really hard to get.

I don't understand what you write about your government and the Constitutional Rights. What is that? Evil people that hurt other people should go to jail! We send bad people to jail, so the good people can live together in Peace. In Germany after the war there was many evil people. They were Hitlers friends. We send them all away.

One thing I didn't understand in your letter. Nobody shoot your President Ronald Reagan. My teacher told me that Kennedy is an old president from old times and he was shoot a long long time ago. Why are you writing about it now?

Please write back soon,  
Susanne

**Hamden, Connecticut / February 1964**

Dear Comrag Suzanne:

Now I know your government lies. They tell BIG ones, too! My government lie about your government. Your government lie about my government. What that tell you? Governments lie. Communism. Democracy. It all the same. They LIE.

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What kind of crazy people tell you President Kennedy an old time president from old times? *They* from old times! HE JUST DIE FOUR MONTHS AGO!!! Four months ago is no olden times. That CURRENT EVENTS!!! That mean your government don't even want you to know the right time.

You ask if it time for lunch. They tell you it time for Buck Rogers. The Twenty-fifth century. They probably got you thinking you live in a time not even happened yet. Or way done past happening. They can make up anything. Switch the newspapers around. Build statues of people who never was. Make movies and tv shows about things that never happened. They could have you living on a Hollywood movie set and you don't even know it. That what happened in those crazy communism take over America movies my teacher made me watch. In this one movie, communism built this small American town in communism country look like it belong on a Look magazine cover. This Look magazine cover town was used to train communism spies to act like Americans. They dress American. They walk American. They talk American. They was just like that movie with them string bean people, only communism. It was spooky.

These communism spies flew over to America in these crop duster planes, spraying

sleeping powder over the whole country like it was a Poppy field in the Land of Oz, and the next thing you know, Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion, and everybody else in America speaking Russian and clomping around in car tires. *Clop. Clop. Clop.*

Where your teachers think I live? *The Twilight Zone?* With Rod Serling's head spinning around?

And where you get that President Ronald Reagan stuff? He an actor who be selling Twenty Mule Team on TV. *Jimmy Cricket!* Lyndon Johnson president. He a nice white man from down south who like color people. He make sure color people vote. And that everybody in the country – color and white – can pee together at the lunch counter of their choice eating meatloaf sandwiches if they want to. He used to be vice president, not Ronald Reagan. Even though he like color people, white people still mad at him because of Vietnam.

Ronald Reagan president? That's the craziest thing I ever hear! Why anybody vote for somebody act like a monkey daddy? That all he good for. Selling soap and acting like a monkey daddy. *Bedtime for Bozo.* Americans not that stupid.

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Now who all these white Africans you talking about? I never hear of no white Africans. They live in grass houses, too? And they act like those cracker fools we got down south? That a shame. White Folks really just don't know how to act when they get around color people, even if they living in grass houses. Seems like all they know how to do is beat up color people and put them in jail. My daddy say all white folks need to do is smoke some reefer and relax. They be ok. My mother tell him shut up and not talk that way in front of the kids. Your parents smoke reefer in East Germany? My daddy probably like communism reefer. Anyway, I'm sure glad those African color people got some communism friends in East Germany help them out. I think white people should go away too. That Nelson Mandela fellow sound like a nice guy.

Your American Friend,

Darius

PS – You sure use a lot of big words in communism. I ask you what “solidarity” mean in my next letter. This Ronald Reagan Twilight Zone talk got me dizzy!

#### **Schwedt/Oder, 10. Juni 1986**

Hello Darius,

I had a long talk with my teacher and we discussed your case in class and in pioneers club. We agree that you have very strong counter-revolutionary tendencies. We understand that you are probably brainwashed by your government but we cannot accept that you keep lying and twisting the truth into bourgeois unpolitical things.

We know you have a very unfair position in your society and you come from an oppressed class. So we are with solidarity with you. But in order to break the chains under which you live, you need to become conscious first and face the fact your government is lying and mine is not. If you don't believe me, that means you are believing the counter-revolutionary propaganda.

I am sorry but in our Pioneers meeting we came to the conclusion that we should not write anymore, unless you first position yourself. That means you should say my government is right and yours is lying. Then we know you are a comrade and not a counter-revolutionary.

In solidarity,

Susanne

#### **Hamden, Connecticut / July 1964**

Dear X Comrag Susanne:

You bet your stinky communisms underwear I'm “counter revolutionary”! You communisms didn't give me no constitutional rights! I didn't get no try by jury of my pee! Constitutional Rights

says I have to be try by my pee! I was railroaded by you communisms pioneer club kangaroo court! I want color people have the right to eat at a lunch COUNTER too! I'm a lunch counter revolutionary! You go try and eat a Woolworth lunch counter down south with your color Negro doll and see how fast them white folks chase you out with a water hose! You be a “counter revolutionary” real quick!

And I don't know all them big communism words you keep writing! What “bourgeois unpolitical things” mean? Those aren't kids words! Those are big people words! You one who brainwashed! You believe what big people say! You a big people dupe! I bet your teacher who is a big people told you I was “pressed glass”! I ain't no “pressed glass”! I'm made out of people just like you! I ain't your comrag no more but God loves you and I will still pray for you!

A Lunch Counter Revolutionary

Who Believe In God American!

Darius

#### **Schwedt/Oder 10. Oktober 1989**

Hello Darius,

I don't know if you remember me, I don't know if your address is still the same. I don't know if this letter will reach you and if you even want to talk to me again.

We were penpals in 4th grade, accidentally picked from your mad teacher. You told me that Kennedy was shot and I was all confused why you say such old stories. I told you that your president is Reagan and you got all angry at me. Now I realized that you wrote from a different time – you even had a different date on your letters. You were writing from the 60's and I am writing from the 80's. I still don't understand how this could happen, as if our letters were teleported through time, like in Star Trek. But so many strange things happen these days that I stopped wondering about how the impossible can happen, just because it does.

After you wrote your last letters we had many discussions with the teacher and the class and we discussed so much, that I didn't really know how I can be your friend and be a pioneer at the same time. I didn't know good enough english to tell you myself. And I didn't want to go to PenPals club anymore. Reading and translating other peoples letters all the time got really boring. I am in 8th grade now and my english is better. But I still need very much dictionary and many things are hard to say.

I was sad and angry because we fight about our governments and because you said my government was lying. But now something happens here that really make me wonder. And I don't know what to believe anymore.

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It started in the summer. There was this protests in China, in Peking on the Tiananmen Square. I was watching television – both news channels: our channel and the western channel. And they were showing the same images of young people protesting. One channel says it is a revolution of the students for free speech and the other says it is a counter-revolutionary insurgence that must be defeated. And both channels speak in big words and I don't understand what is going on there. It just doesn't make any sense! One image was especially strange: There was one man, in front of a tank. And it seems like he wanted to dance with the tank – where ever the tank would go, he also goes, as if he wants to stop the tank, not let him pass. But obviously you cannot stop a tank as a single man. What is he doing there? Is he trying to overthrow the government? Is he fighting for free speech? So I thought: Well it's just like I'm used to: you take half of our news and half of the west news and then you just take the middle and know what was going on. But what is the middle between a fight for freedom of speech and a counter-revolutionary insurgence?

So I remembered you wrote that both our governments lie and they were only using big words that nobody understands. And I remembered I called you a counter-revolutionary and now I wonder what that means . . . So I started to think about you and wondered what happened to you. And may be you were right and may be our governments are lying to us. But if they do: What is the truth then?

That was only the beginning: the more the summer went on, the crazier it got. Our people even started running away to the West, sit in embassy's, sit in lagers, sit on the streets. It's many people every day. And I don't understand why they leave us? Of course there is problems, in every country there is problems. But you can't fix them if you run away and leave all your people behind?

Then I thought after the summer, when everybody is back to school, things will get normal again. But it seems it just gets crazier every day . . .

I will stop here my letter. I could continue with thousands of questions, but I don't even know if this letter reaches you and I have to run to track and field now.

I will be very happy to hear from you again,  
Susanne

### Hamden, Connecticut / 1968

Dear Comrade Susanne:

HOLY SHIT!!! I do remember you! We met in that crazy Mrs. Rattree's hat back in the fourth grade! You were my Socialist pen pal from behind

the Iron Curtain! You live like twenty years in the future, something crazy like that, or so you claim! Anyway, like, *far out!* You called me a counter-revolutionary and said you couldn't be my friend until I was correct with my unjust social positions as a member of an oppressed class of people and prove I wasn't a spy! This pot must be really good! I can't believe I remembered everything all at once!

Your letter really hurt my feelings. When I read it, I felt just like the time Timmy told me I couldn't come over to his house and play any more because his mother said I was a nigger. She said niggers were dirty and he might get lice. Or worse. Except this time it wasn't because I was black. It was because your teacher said I was a counter-revolutionary and you couldn't write me no more. I thought our friendship had nothing to do with communism or democracy. I thought we liked each other. To me, it was like what my parents taught me about having a friend who was of a different race or religion. If you like them, they are your friend and you respect them for who they are. It don't matter what race or religion or creed or what other people say.

But I'm still a Christian and believe in God so I forgive you.

I don't pledge allegiance to the flag anymore, though. I stopped in the sixth grade. America says its one thing but acts another. Its two-faced. That's not the America I grew up to believe in. This all happened around the same time my father moved out and left my mother. My mother drank a lot after that, too.

There were a lot of riots then. Black people rioting because they was just plain fed up with how bad white folks was treating them. There was riots in Watts. There was riots in Detroit. There were riots in Newark. We was shouting Black Power all across the country! Suddenly, I wasn't colored no more. I was BLACK! And proud of it! James Brown even made us dance to it! We don't take no junk off white people no more. We get up in they face. Tell them to take that junk back where they found it. White kids are scared of us more now than ever. They know if they talk smack we'll jack them up!

This is what happened . . .

There were Black people running around the country burning and looting and throwing Molotov cocktails like I said so my teacher thought it would be a good idea if the class had a debate about America's problem with the Negroes (or was that "Negro Problem"?). We split up into two teams. One side was the marching peaceful blacks and whites holding hands together and singing "We Shall Overcome" for civil rights types.

And then there was my side. We were all for burning and looting and throwing Molotov

cocktails! The way we saw it marching and singing only got your butt beat by the cops. But if you burned, looted and threw Molotov cocktails for civil rights, you might get a brand new color TV out the deal!

We did a lot of preparation. We read newspapers. We checked out library books. Our teacher showed us a movie called "Our Negro Friends. And What To Do About Them." She even took the class on a field trip to the United Nations to see how other countries solve their problems with each other!

So, while I was studying up on civil rights, I found something even better than the "The Bill of Rights." It was called "The Declaration of Independence."

The Declaration of Independence says you have the right to overthrow the government if its not serving the needs of the people. And that was the last thing I needed to know. All the burning, looting and Molotov cocktail throwing black people was doing was just a response to "a long train of abuses."

I had all I needed for the debate. But then my mother told me something I didn't know. Do you remember I said my father left my mother around this time? And that she was drinking a lot? Well, I asked her about all the rioting and if we really did have the right to overthrow the government. It was a Friday night. The debate was on Monday. I had the whole weekend to get ready. My mother was real unhappy and drinking a lot. Something was really bothering her. I knew part of it was my father but I could see something else was bothering her, too. We were talking about the riots. And I asked her about overthrowing the government. She gave me this angry look and handed me a little book one of her patients gave her. I forgot to tell you my mother is a nurse and she works in a hospital for crazy people. The book was called "Concentration Camp, U.S.A." It was put out by the communist party. I still have it.

My mother told me what the government did to all the Japanese people living in the United States during World War II. She said the government put them in concentration camps. These were American citizens just like us she told me. And the government put them in concentration camps.

I got really scared. I could only think about how the Nazis sent all those people to concentration camps and put them in ovens. Did America do the same thing like the Nazis? Put people in concentration camps? I told my mother I didn't believe it. Well, believe it she said because it happened. And there was nothing to stop the government from doing the same thing to black people if we keep up all this rioting.

My mother pointed to pictures of the

concentration camps in the book. That's when she told me about "The McCarren Act." She said it gave the government the power to declare martial law and imprison anyone who is a threat to the security of the United States. My mother was drunk walking around the kitchen. She asked me a lot of hard questions. They were about America and what it stood for. And white people. Can you really trust them she kept asking me. I didn't know the answer to her questions. And I was really scared. Would the United States government really put all the black people in a concentration camp and stick us in a oven?

I had nightmares all weekend. The American government kept climbing through my window and crawling from under my bed to take my family to a concentration camp where they were going to burn us up like the witch in Hansel and Gretel.

Monday morning finally came. It was the day of the debate but the teacher did something we didn't expect. She invited the school principal to be the judge. That kind of messed everything up because we were only allowed to call each other "Negroids" and "Caucasoids." We were like What the heck is that?!! Lizard people from outer space?!! But I didn't let her lizard words get in the way. I had all my books and notes. I was ready. I said what I had to say.

The principal's face turned orange like it always did and asked Who told you that?!! I said I read it in a book. And pulled out "Concentration Camp, U.S.A." and let her look at it. She said that book was nothing but communist propaganda. And I said *Is it true or not? Did the government put Japanese people in concentration camps during World War II?*

She just turned a brighter color orange. Yes, *but that doesn't give you people the right to riot in the streets . . .*

*Yes it do!* I said. That's when I opened up one of the other books I had and read:

But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government" Declaration of Independence, July 4th 1776

All the kids on my team clapped even though they didn't really understand what I just said. They clapped because I trapped that old orange face principal. But we still didn't win. The principal said the Negroid people had to learn to respect private property and stop wasting the tax payers' money taking welfare before we would be respected as Americans. I felt like she just slapped me in the face. I stopped standing for

the pledge of allegiance after that. You don't see me as an American. I don't see your flag. Now I'm down with the Black Panthers but I'll tell you about that next time.

Your American Comrade,  
Darius



#### **Schwedt/Oder, Dezember 1989**

Hello Darius,

thank you very much for your letter.

What you say sounds right, except I'm not sure anymore if this still applies today. I thought that black people will never be free in the capitalist society, because the system itself is based on exploitation of the workers. In order to exploit the workers you need to break their unity. So you use their differences to make them fight each other. You treat one better and one worse so they will not unite. It's the same with woman and man. Woman gets less money, so the man think that they are better and stronger and won't help the woman. That's why you need to change the whole system to something else. (Except I don't know what would be an alternative. And I don't know if that is really true, too.)

I don't know much about the history of USA, but I think your angry orange teacher wins, since your president today is George Bush. And he is really serious conservative.

Darius, here everything is really really crazy. It gets crazier every day. In the beginning I was really shocked: there were all the demonstrations, there were all these refugees and then suddenly they opened the wall. That was already crazy, but then I saw the pictures on

television how so many of our people (we are now called "Ossi," because we are now the East Germans and not GDR people anymore), were jamming up at those border crossings and were all going to the west, crying and celebrating and I didn't understand what they celebrated? They were saying how they are free now and I was really embarrassed by these people. One image was especially disturbed: Some truck pulled up and was throwing out bananas to those crazy screaming Ossi people. And they would actually stand there and scream and would ask for more bananas to throw at them. Like feeding monkeys. Like these people forgot dignity when crossing the border. I will never eat bananas again in my life! I can't understand how these people are part of our country.

All the demonstrations keep going on, everybody is demonstrating for or against something. Also in Schwedt the demonstrations have started. I went there to find out what's going on. Many people had candles, I guess because it's more romantic. They had a microphone where you could say what you want. I heard two speeches: One was complaining how the Germans in Schwedt have to wait to rent a new apartment while the Polish and Yugoslav Guest-Workers get apartments as soon as they arrive. The woman talking must have had never visited the home of a polish guest-worker, otherwise she wouldn't talk such nonsense. My classmate is from Poland and they live with three people in a very small 2-room flat. They are working for our country, they need a place to stay. And we don't offer them much. So this is why she wants to overthrow the government? The second person was complaining about the environment. He said the government is not taking any means to protect the environment. Factories produce too much bad waste and it pollutes the air. He is right. The air sometimes really stinks. But why to overthrow the government?

I was frustrated and went home. My mother was watching television and crying again. This sometimes happens, since the wall came down. She gets all scared and says our life will now be really tough and we will all be unemployed. And I keep telling her to stay calm and wait. But then she gives me this look, this "you don't know what you are talking about" look and I can see she is not believing me. She says we need to start saving money, for the times ahead. So we don't go out to eat anymore and save money. But that's okay, if only she stops crying.

Also in school everything is crazy. Today our teacher from "Social Studies" came into our class. She was all serious, I think she was crying before. So many people cry these days. She told us she would not be our teacher anymore. She



told us, what we've learned until now is not valid anymore. She can't tell us what is true today, but what she told us, doesn't apply anymore. Then our former sport-teacher took over. He is very young, I really like him a lot. He sits on benches and comes in with a sport suit and discusses the news with us all the time in class. How can she just say it's not valid anymore? Is it ALL not valid? Or only parts? But which parts are right and which parts are wrong?

Nobody knows what is going on anymore. Every Day there is a different news: Government resigned, new government, two days later: resigns again. Next day: old government is being imprisoned. It goes on and on and on. Then I realized how I even got used to it. I was watching the news, a new government is up again? Whatever, tell me something interesting. . . . I started to stop watching the news, you can't keep up with it anyway. I rather watch "Happy Days" instead. They show it on one of the private channels from the west. I really like that show – you probably don't know it yet, but I really like Fonzie – he is sooo cool, he makes me laugh!

I wish so much I could travel with this letter to where you are and may be we could both join this Black Panthers that you are mentioning and may be we could make an actual change happening.

Please write back,  
Susanne

x

Drawings in this article are by Destiny McKeever, an illustrator, sculptor, package designer, and special-effects artist based in Las Vegas, Nevada. Recently, she completed work supervised by movie effects-wizard Rick Baker on the Universal release "The Wolfman."

Darius James is an author and spoken-word artist. He has four published books ("Negrophobia"; "That's Blaxploitation!!!"; "Voodoo Stew"; and "Froggie Chocolate's Christmas Eve") and is currently developing with filmmaker Oliver Hardt a documentary titled "The United States of Hoodoo."

Susanne Lang is one of the organizers of the "Summit – non-aligned initiatives in education cultures." She works as an editor for a consumers rights web-portal, freelances in art and cultural productions. In these, she is trying to develop and advocate for open source online media, as for instance in the video-syndication network v2v.

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e-flux journal #14 — march 2010 Susanne Lang and Darius James  
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