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Academic Year 2023-24 No. 4

psc-cuny.org/retirees

THE FUTURE OF TURNING THE PAGE

After a survey on the issue and much discussion and contemplation, the editors and Executive Committee have decided to try making a transition to a digital newsletter. This retirees newsletter *Turning The Page* will be “digital only” for at least the first two issues in Fall 2024. We will then do another survey and reassess.



The benefits of digital publication are many:

Cost Savings: The Chapter spends roughly \$2,000 per issue for printing and mailing.

Time and Labor Savings: The printing process through the central office is often uncertain and lengthy, taking up to one month after submission preventing time-sensitive articles and announcements.

Environmental Savings: Digital publication has no carbon footprint.

Space and Information Expansion: Digital publications can be longer with more extensive articles, graphics, and useful links.

Accommodating to those with special needs: Text and visuals can be adjusted at will.

Finally, anyone who prefers a print version can merely print out the issue at any time (with any size fonts) and read it at their leisure.

Feedback is encouraged. Please email the Retirees Chapter at retirees@psc-cuny.org with subject heading of TTP.

MEDICARE UPDATE

WHAT'S REALLY WRONG WITH MEDICARE ADVANTAGE PROGRAMS: AN EXPERT TESTIFIES

Donald Berwick is a physician and health policy expert, who served as national Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (“CMS”) under President Obama. He has submitted a remarkable medical and technical Amicus brief in the case now before the NY State Court of Appeals in support of Judge Frank’s Medicare Advantage (MA) decision, with financial assistance from the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees (NYCOPSR). The PSC and five other unions have also filed *Amicus* briefs in support of Judge Frank’s decision. Below is a short excerpt (pages 3-5) from Dr. Berwick’s brief:

"Introduction and Summary of the Argument"

"The core claim made by proponents of the MA healthcare model is that prioritized MA healthcare plans are more efficient than traditional Medicare plans that rely on a 'fee for service' payment structure ('the Medicare FFS model'). In essence the claim is that the MA model provides equal or greater benefits to patients at reduced cost to defendants. Appellants make this affect them and their communities. Appellants make this claim in the present appeal See Br. At 14. But this claim is belied by the data.

"Broken down to its component parts, this claim is founded on three inaccurate premises. **First**, MA proponents claim that, relative to the Medicare FFS model, MA programs are associated with improved quality of care for individual patients. This claim is not supported by the data.

"**Second**, they claim that, relative to the Medicare FFS model, MA programs align the cost of delivering care--paid for by the federal government--to the healthcare burden of both the individual patients and the aggregate overall populations served. This claim is actually refuted by the data, which indicates that, as compared to the FFS program, MA programs result in overpayments to insurers. This is true even though the populations served by the MA programs tend to suffer from similar or even lower health burdens as FFS populations. As explained below, these overpayments stem from MA's perverse business model, which incentivizes the overuse of diagnosis codes to make it appear as though beneficiaries are in poorer health than similarly situated FFS beneficiaries, and thus require higher payments from the federal government to cover the cost of delivering care.

"**Third**, proponents claim that the revenue for insurers that is generated by MA models--i.e., the revenue derived from these excessive overpayments--

allows MA programs to improve healthcare infrastructure, and thus the quality and efficiency of care for patients enrolled in MA plans. However, the data suggests that most of the revenue generated from these overpayments are simply treated as increased profits for providers and plan sponsors, and do not result in better benefits, improved infrastructure, or higher quality care for MA patients."

-- Summarized and excerpted by
David Kotelchuck

RETIREE CHAPTER MEETING REPORTS

THE YIN/YANG OF OUR PHYSICAL URBAN ENVIRONMENT: ARCHITECTURE/CITY PLANNING — JANUARY 8, 2024 BY MARCIA NEWFIELD

Why does our city look the way it does?
What accounts for so many high rises?
How come there is a lack of affordable
housing? Can unions help create
buildings? How are innovations
incorporated into the landscape?

Tom Angotti, Prof. Emeritus, Urban Policy & Planning, Hunter College and CUNY Grad Center and **Alan Feigenberg**, Prof. Emeritus, Spitzer School of Architecture, CCNY, two distinguished retirees from our chapter attempted to answer some of these questions. Tom Angotti, who as he says has been inside and outside the official planning community as activist, researcher, and appointed planner, affirms that the bottom line is the influence the real-estate industry continues to assert over policies or the absences thereof. They have used zoning ordinances to keep changing the New York landscape so as to increase profits i.e., keep immigrant businesses outside the high-rent areas, raise the height of buildings on the Lower East Side so as to

build high income residences. *Zoned Out!: Race, Displacement, and City Planning in NYC* (Revised, 2023) is one of the many books Angotti has written to detail that situation. New York does not have a comprehensive city plan and never did. Since 2016, when the present zoning ordinance was put in place, community planning has largely been ignored.

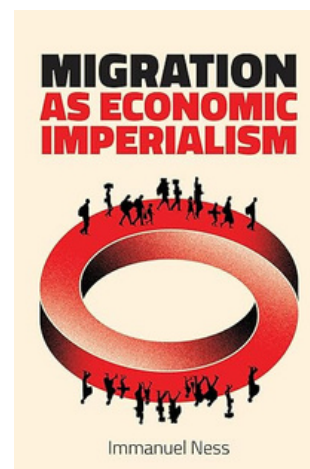
Another persistent problem is racial discrimination—the Mitchell-Lama legislation in 1955 allowed unions to build projects, but as that sunsetted, the money dried up and the only permits come from developers who again used the myriad zone-code lawyers. Then came redlining, the federal rules that prohibited banks from making loans to districts of more than 5% persons of color. Angotti says the history of Blacks is one of serial displacement. Combined with the dangers of coastal flooding, a withering sewer system, endless traffic jams, and an inadequate public transportation system, our endangered 100-year-old infrastructure is in trouble.

Alan Feigenberg, who is also a photographer, presented a slide show showing the great variation of CUNY buildings, as well as our architecturally mixed neighborhoods. Our buildings and their arrangements reflect class, history, and shifting engineering advances. We have gone from fire escapes to elevators to air conditioning and solar, from bricks to concrete to glass. He showed a newly-constructed building near City College that had all the new innovations but wasn't yet salable because the working-class neighborhood was not appealing to those who could afford the prices. He showed how the tendency towards slanted and recessed buildings was intended to increase access to sunlight but doesn't always work. Feigenberg says the conversion of unused office buildings to residential use is not hard, although additional plumbing lines would be necessary. Again, solving the affordability problem would require public subsidies,

higher worker wages, and a revised political agenda.

To see the session for yourself, go to <https://youtu.be/la7ATTRWOeA> on *PSCCUNYCommunication's* YouTube page.

**MIGRATION AS ECONOMIC
IMPERIALISM — FEBRUARY 5, 2024
A TALK BY MANNY NESS
BY DAVID KOTELCHUCK**



On Feb.5, CUNY scholar and PSC member Immanuel (Manny) Ness talked to over 130 PSC retirees on "Migration and Economic Imperialism," also the title of his most recent book, published by Wiley in 2023. Manny is Professor of Political Science at Brooklyn College, and currently Visiting Professor of Sociology at University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

We, in the United States, have been vexed for some years on how to respond to U.S. immigration from countries around the world. As Manny noted, migration is a world-wide phenomenon. Many supporters of the current system believe it has "beneficial" effects, since by sending money back to their families, migrants contribute to stability and economic development in these countries. Manny's thesis, based on research in over 10 countries, largely in the Global South (Asia, Africa and Latin America), is that these remittances deepen economic exploitation, unravel societal stability, and significantly

increase economic inequality between richer and poorer societies.

Negative Social Impacts

In his slides he gave many examples of negative social impacts of migration on origin countries. For example, of 9,000 nurses educated and trained in and by Ghana, two-thirds (6,000) work in Great Britain, draining the economy of Ghana and decreasing its educated workforce, while bringing significant benefits to the British economy. There is a similar situation, he noted, with Philippine nurses working in the U.S. In another example, Manny showed slides of women in an Arab country demonstrating for the right to go home to their families due to exploitive working conditions, but their passports had been taken and held by their employers under the slave-like Kefala (sponsorship) system. He noted throughout his talk that women migrant workers suffer far more from exploitation in destination countries than do men.

Also disruptive of the origin societies which the migrants had left are the dangerous and deadly working conditions in destination countries. For example, Manny noted, in the construction of buildings for the recent World Cup in Qatar, 6,500 construction workers, most of them from five South-Asian countries, died between 2010 and 2020. This was a disaster for them and the families they left behind. What's more, as Manny noted later in his talk, most migrants who are able to make a living long-term in a destination country—for example, Salvadorian migrants in the U.S.—eventually lose touch with their origin families and stop sending money home. The U.S. economy gains all the benefits from their low-paid labor.

Based on international data, Manny said that in 2022 there were about 281 million migrants in the world, about 3.6 percent of the world population. While this might seem a small percentage, the remittances sent back from the migrants can and do represent a large percentage

of the GDP for small countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Nepal, Gambia, El Salvador and Honduras. With the loss of significant portions of its workforce, these small countries cannot narrow the economic gap between themselves and the advanced industrial countries. Thus, as Manny asserts in the subtitle of his new book, “International Labour Mobility Undermines Development in Poor Countries.”

Medicare and Vaccines

Finally, before and after Manny's talk, respectively, PSC Executive Director Dean Hubbard reported on the Medical Advantage court case now before the NYS Court of Appeals, and Welfare-Fund Director of Communications Michael Foley explained how retirees could access various needed vaccines via the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund (communications@pscunyw.org).

RETIREES AND THE 2024 CONTRACT

JOIN THE FIGHT TO PROTECT OUR COLLEAGUES, OUR UNION, OUR STUDENTS AND OUR CITY!

BY NANCY ROMER

As a retiree, you might be thinking, “Aren't we done with the contract? We are no longer CUNY employees.” Yes and no. Of course, the main purpose of contract negotiations is to advance the in-service members' interests, wages and working conditions (and learning conditions of CUNY students), but there are still important ways that the union takes responsibility for advancing *our* interests as retirees in and beyond the contract. So, the union contract serves our “self-interest” and, of course, those of our in-service colleagues, CUNY students and the health of the institution to which we have devoted our professional lives.

The PSC contract expired on February 29, 2023; the PSC leadership and membership have been organizing for a good contract before that date and very intensely thereafter. They've organized spirited and huge demonstrations, lobbying efforts at City Hall and Albany for a good budget that supports the contract, and so much more.

Contract demands

The three contract demands that relate specifically to retirees are as follows:

- The PSC is demanding that CUNY provides information to the PSC on all new retirees. We rely on CUNY management to keep us posted on new retirees so we can invite them to join the union as retirees and keep them active and informed. Because we have a truly mighty and well-organized Retirees Chapter, we were, for example, able to mobilize union support on the Medicare Advantage revolt. We need to keep inviting new retirees to join us, so we can advance our work together.
- The PSC bargaining team has demanded a Labor-Management Committee to resolve issues related to the tracking and implementation of retirement benefits, including (but not limited to) timely enrollment in and correct contributions for both TRS and TIAA. This would mandate that the committee meet twice a semester and that the committee be required to issue an initial report of their findings and recommendations within one year following contract ratification. This would ensure that all retirees have accurate and up-to-date information and contributions to their retirement benefits. CUNY, TRS and TIAA have all been negligent in maintaining up-to-date and accurate records, causing delays and incorrect pension payments to the financial detriment of many of our members in all titles. The union's oversight role is crucial for protecting our members.

- The PSC is demanding retiree health insurance for adjuncts and is still working on the specifics of that proposal. This has been a demand advanced by adjuncts for a long time and the union is bringing this forward to CUNY management during this bargaining cycle.

CUNY management has also proposed limiting CUNY email access for retirees to one year and the PSC is fighting that give-back. This new limit would go against past decisions made by the CUNY Board of Trustees! This is just another example of how CUNY management nibbles away at our dignity and past practices. The administration is so distant from the academic world, they have no idea that maintaining CUNY email access advances the interest, prestige and academic participation of members of our university. They are pinching us over something that doesn't cost them anything, but helps to keep us participating in academic scholarship. Our union is fighting to keep our email privileges and more.

Taking part in miracles

The main reason I participate in the contract campaign is that I want to protect the faculty, staff and students of CUNY—the place I poured my heart and soul into for 42 years! Like most of you, I loved my job, my colleagues and students (okay, not ALL of them and not so much management). I know that a good contract and a good budget will advance their interests. We know the miracles that a great CUNY education can deliver to students. Each of us has witnessed these miracles of personal transformation throughout our working lives. We want to see those great opportunities continue for working-class New Yorkers. We want to play a part in this huge drama, protecting the great value of our work and the people we care about.

The power of the union advances goals way beyond the University's campuses. The stronger our union contract, the stronger the labor movement will be and the power of workers will be advanced.

The US labor movement is waking up, organizing new workers, getting better contracts and protecting workers across our nation. I am always looking for ways to participate in this fraught political time; how to protect democracy, the planet, the people who make this world work, and how to advance greater equality and justice. The PSC contract cannot right all these wrongs, but it provides an important platform to deliver what is possible. The union and the leadership need our support, participation and hearts. We can march on picket lines, lobby our City and State representatives, speak at hearings, make phone calls and send out emails. Elected officials know that elders and union members vote and spread the word. We have more power than we realize. So, let's get out there in any way we can to keep up the good fight. We are fortunate to have a great union to be part of and a fabulous Retirees Chapter to lead the fight!

PS: If you want to check out the latest ways to participate in the contract campaign, go to PSC-CUNY.org. They are not shy about spreading the word!!

[Nancy Romer, Ph.D., is Professor Emerita of Psychology, Brooklyn College. She is now serving on the PSC Executive Council as one of the two representatives from the Retirees Chapter, co-leading the Environmental Justice Working Group, and has been an active union member since she was hired in 1973.]

THE PASSING OF A UNIONIST

THE ONE AND ONLY BEN CHITTY

BY DIANE MENNA

What to say about Ben Chitty. His given name was Arthur, which he very much disliked. He preferred Ben, his middle name. He was in the US Navy and served in Vietnam. Becoming disillusioned like many, after he returned he became an

anti-war activist. He joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War and counseled young men about getting out of the draft. In college, he studied Medieval Literature at Swarthmore, but chose labor instead. He became the president of an AFSCME local, and with his wife Priscilla Murolo co-authored a seminal book on labor history, called *From the People who Brought You the Weekend*. He became an Assistant Professor at Queens College in 1984 and then a Higher Education Officer. At Queens, he served on the Advisory Council, the Executive Committee, co-founded the Queens College Joint Committee of Unions and spearheaded the Health and Safety Committee locally and across CUNY. He did not do things halfway.



Photo by Dave Sanders

We at Queens knew Ben as the one in the Library to call when it was 90 degrees in your office or classroom and no one was doing anything about it. He was the one to call when there was a military recruiter on campus and the administration did not notify the union. He was the one to call when a HEO or CLT was being called into HR for possible disciplinary action. He was the one to call when a laborer found asbestos when knocking down a wall. If someone needed help filing a grievance, writing a HEO reclassification, or had a problem with Public Safety or Building & Grounds, he was the one.

Ben was not only at every Labor/Management and Executive Committee meeting, he wrote the agenda and the minutes. He did not do things halfway. He was not loud or talkative or showy, so you did not notice at first. But you noticed fast enough when he was not there.

What to say about Ben Chitty. He was steady, unshakable, indomitable. He was competent, dependable, supportive. He was self-possessed, soft-spoken, a southern gentleman. For many years, if you needed the union at Queens College, he was the one.

What to say about Ben Chitty. If I had to pick one person who meant the union to me, Ben Chitty is the one.

BOOK FORUM

RUSSIA: A PETRO-NUCLEAR PLUTOCRACY: A BOOK REVIEW BY PETER RANIS

In his latest book, *Russia Against Modernity* (Polity Press, 2023), Alexander Etkind, a prolific Russian historian, indicts the country as a center of extraction, polluting the environment while corrupting the plutarchy it enriches. Etkind's thesis is that Russia represents a *paleomodernity*, living in the past, based almost entirely on natural resource extraction and nuclear weaponry. This he juxtaposes with the West's *gaiaomodernity*, based on climate awareness, energy transition and a productive labor force within complex and heterogeneous economies and societies. In stark terms, Etkind depicts Russia as dependent upon "resource colonization, settler imperialism and war capitalism." The Russian invasion of Ukraine is simply a manifestation of this paleomodernity.



Fossil fuels make up two-thirds of Russia's exports and fund half of its federal budget. The data for Russia, resulting from its predominantly extractive economy, are dramatic. For example, global median incomes rank

Russia 46th, lower than Lebanon and Bulgaria. In health care spending per capita, Russia placed 104th, on par with Nigeria and Uzbekistan. Russia spent less per capita on education than Turkey, Mexico and Latvia.

Conversely, Russia led the world in oil extraction and is the biggest exporter of natural gas worldwide. As Etkind writes, Russia was the most carbonized among the major countries of the world. As a petrostate, extraction requires little labor, enriches the state and deforms the economy and its people while enriching a powerful plutocracy. Etkind calls Russia a "double monopoly" combining a monopoly of violence with a monopoly of energy. Millions of Russian workers, farmers and professionals remain secondary in this mono-cultural export economy. What Etkind posits is that the more Russia relies on natural resource extraction, the less it invests in human capital, and the more parasitic the state becomes.

Parasitic Corruption

In the chapter on "Parasitic Governance," Etkind evaluates the overwhelming centralization of wealth. He cites the whistleblowers who have laid bare this corruption: Alexander Litvinenko, Anna Politkovskaya, Sergey Magnitsky, all of whom have been assassinated, and Alexei Navalny who recently died in a penal colony.

Etkind gives significant details of the wealth of Russian plutocrats depicted by their lavish West European properties. This has led to obvious consequences. Using taxation data, French economist Thomas Piketty calculated the Russian Gini index at 0.545, placing Russia among the world's most unequal nations. According to Credit Suisse, in Russia in 2021, 58 percent of national wealth belonged to the top 1 percent, well above Brazil (49%), the US (35%) and the UK (21%). Poverty is overwhelming. In 2022, more than one-fifth of Russia's citizens lived on less than ten dollars a day and twenty-one million

on less than two dollars. Salaries in mining and extraction industries equaled 184 percent of the average wage; in finance 220 percent. By contrast, in the education and public health sectors, wages were only 71 and 80 percent of the average wage.

Negative effects on demography

Etkind also spends considerable time analyzing Russian public policy that impacts negatively on demography. For example, the average life expectancy is one of the lowest in the world, on a level with Kyrgyzstan and North Korea. The gender gap was also immense. There were 86 men for every 100 women in 2021. One can only imagine that gap after two years of the war in Ukraine. Interestingly, he references economist Albert O. Hirschman's concept of "voice or exit," in which people who are unhappy or disloyal to their leaders have these two alternatives. With civil rights largely silenced, those fleeing Russia have increased under Putin's approach to modernity. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, those fleeing, conscripted soldiers and other dissenters, have greatly multiplied the number of Russians exiting their country. Lastly, Etkind writes of the generational impact of the premodern mentality and the Ukraine war, of grandmothers and mothers substituting for missing and disappeared fathers. Yet the maternal-dominated Russian society is headed by a male gerontocracy. Among the 31 members of the Russian cabinet in 2022, only six were younger than 50, while among the 23 members of the Ukrainian cabinet in 2022, only four were older than 50.

Culture War

In his penultimate chapter, Etkind weighs in on *"Putin's War."* He sees the invasion as an imperialist war with intentional destruction of cultural objects, monuments, museums, theaters, educational facilities and even history textbooks. The two nations were not that dissimilar, but Russia "fetishized" minor differences in artificially constructed

dialects, accents, and even costumes and fashions that often meant life or death. Putin argued that Russia had to stop the humiliation, Nazification and genocide of millions of Russians living in the Donbas region of Ukraine. More persuasive is that with the accession of Putin, Chechen autonomy was repressed with bloody violence (1999–2009), Georgia was invaded (2008), Crimea was annexed (2014) and now there is the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As the Soviet Union post-WWII was an occupying colonial power in Eastern Europe, so Putin saw its demise as a "geopolitical catastrophe." He has since sought to return Russia to being an internal colonizer of its own by the exploitation of Chechnya and Tatarstan, as well as other Eurasian republics in the Russian Federation.

Etkind views Russia as a political economy that has deepened class differences that already existed in the Soviet Union. It is sliding into a German post-Weimar scenario, barreling toward a neo-Fascist authoritarianism under Putin. With his retro-machismo rants, he continues to rail against the West's decline of nuclear family values, all the while exemplifying both homophobia and misogyny.

As Etkind writes, a country once led by a utopian left has turned into a far-right Putinist Russia. It is as if Russia were returning to Vladimir Lenin's historic slogan of "Communism is Soviet power plus electrification." Now it's a petrol state with an ideology that lacks the earliest Soviet aspirations for creating a new society.

CULTURE CORNER

A TIME OF RENEWAL

BY MARCIA NEWFIELD

Spring is a time of renewal—and the museums are in synch with the season.

**Metropolitan Museum
The Harlem Renaissance and
Transatlantic Modernism—until July 28**

Through some 160 works of painting, sculpture, photography, film, and ephemera, this exhibit, the first on this subject since 1987, will explore the comprehensive and far-reaching ways in which Black artists portrayed everyday modern life in the new Black cities that took shape in the 1920s–40s in New York City's Harlem and nationwide in the early decades of the Great Migration, when millions of African Americans began to move away from the segregated rural South. The exhibition will establish the Harlem Renaissance and its radically new development of the modern Black subject as central to the development of international modern art.

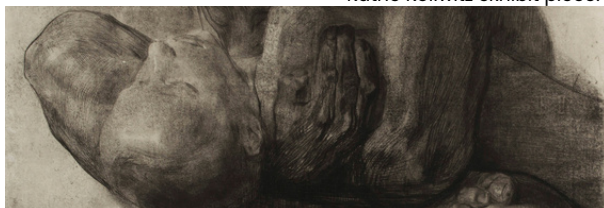
**The Harlem
Renaissance and
Transatlantic
Modernism**



**Museum of Modern Art
Käthe Kollwitz —until July 20**

Kollwitz worked in paint, sculpture, and print from the 1890s to the 1930s to produce a body of social criticism during a period of turmoil in German history. This first exhibition in more than 30 years features 120 examples of her work. In lithographs, etchings, and woodcuts, Kollwitz portrayed scenes of poverty and class warfare, devoid of color, using only line and shadow. As a propagandist and educator, she worked with socialist organizations to criticize inequality and oppression under the German Empire, Weimar Republic, and Third Reich.

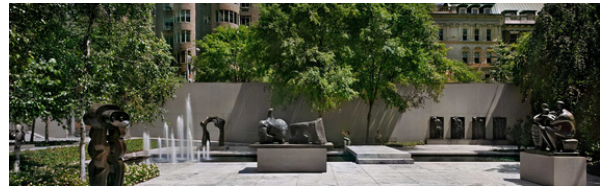
Käthe Kollwitz exhibit piece.



The Sculpture Garden—until May 19

The Sculpture Garden adds work of the last twenty years to the perennial favorites of Matisse, Picasso, and Maillot so as to engender a dialogue between the old and the new. What do they have in common? How do they help us understand our world?

The Sculpture Garden exhibit piece.



Morgan Library—until June 9

Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature

The children's author (and illustrator of characters and stories that have lasted beyond her time, 1866–1943), based her tales on the lands of Scotland and the English Lake District. Peter Rabbit, Mr. Jeremy Fisher, and Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle were animated by the author's love of the life sciences and rural life. Her own collection of picture letters is enhanced by artwork and artifacts from several institutions in the United Kingdom.



Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature
exhibition piece on the left; Walton
Ford: Birds and Beasts of the Studio
exhibition piece on the right.

**Walton Ford: Birds and Beasts of the
Studio—until October 13**

This exhibit includes watercolor and graphic paintings of wild animals inspired by true or legendary stories of dramatic encounters between humankind and nature. Ford was fascinated by the perception of wilderness in the collective imagination and by the consequences of human behavior—from colonialism to climate change—for the future of wildlife species.

WHITNEY BIENNIAL MAR 2024

Whitney Museum—until Fall 2024 Biennial 2024: Even Better Than the Real Thing

Seventy-one artists and collectives were chosen to reflect on ideas of “the real” in this 81st installment of the survey of American art. The curators’ stated premise is that society is at an inflection point around this notion, in part brought on by artificial intelligence challenging what we consider to be real, as well as critical discussions about identity. Many of the works explore the fluidity of identity and form, historical and current land stewardship, and concepts of embodiment, among other urgent through-lines.

POETRY CORNER

AGE

BY RENATE BRIDENTHAL

is not sage

it is rage

to live the last act

of a long beloved drama.

Ecstasy, tragedy,

Wins and losses,

Love and solitude

Contentment at last.

I see the curtain

That will fall.

That is all.

November 24, 2023

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Upcoming Monthly Retiree Meetings 2024

April 1 – 1PM

May 6 – 1PM

June 3 – 1PM

WRITE FOR TURNING THE PAGE

We always invite members to write about issues of union concern in the places where they live, as well as national and or streaming events that others would like to go to. Please write us at retirees@psccmail.org with “**Newsletter**” in the subject line.

The ***Turning the Page*** editorial

committee this month is made up of

Diane Menna, Marianne Pita, Joan

Greenbaum and Dave Kotelchuck.

Graphic design is by Amanda Magalhaes.

TURNING THE PAGE is a publication of the Retirees chapter of PSC-CUNY, Local 2334 of NYSUT and the AFT.