Documentary Poetics:
*The Book of the Dead* and *One Big Self*

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Primary Texts

Muriel Rukeyser’s
The Book of the Dead
Tim Dayton

One Big Self
C.D. Wright
Hawk’s Nest Tunnel

While digging Hawk’s Nest Tunnel in early 1930s, hundreds of the mostly black migrant workforce contracted acute silicosis from silica dust and later died. Many were buried in secret, unmarked graves to the north. In 1971, the bodies were reburied nearby. The tragic event is one of the worst disasters in American history.
Simple Silicosis

normal chest x-ray

simple silicosis

Silicosis
Prisoners
Argument

C.D. Wright expanded Rukeyser’s docupoetry which extends the document of the socio-political issue to have more poetic languages and consciousness about the issues, encouraging social changes to pursue justice.
“docupoetry” designates poetry that
(1) contains quotations from or reproductions of documents or statements not produced by the poet and
(2) relates historical narratives, whether macro or micro, human or natural.
Muriel Rukeyser

“Poetry can extend the document”
I first discovered what was killing these men. I had three sons who worked with their father in the tunnel: Cecil, aged 23, Owen, aged 21, Shirley, aged 17. They used to work in a coal mind, not steady work for the mines were not going much of the time.
Documentary VS Lyric
Objectivity VS Subjectivity

Rukeyser = Multiple voices = Objective
BUT
Wright = Objectivity & Subjectivity
Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women
St. Gabriel, Louisiana

Antoinette Ford

DOC # 412541
DOB 7.31.79
PDB Oakland, CA
SENTENCE 5 years 4 months
WORK Incarcerated

Photography & Photographic Language
Photography – Portraits
Identity, Presence
Prison = Re-educate prisoners
In some prisons, you can’t have a last cigarette, but Valium is permitted.

The popular perception is that art is apart. I insist it is a part of. Some thing not in dispute is that people in prison are apart from. If you can accept—whatever level of discipline and punishment you adhere to momentarily aside—that the ultimate goal should be to reunite the separated with the larger human enterprise, it might behoove us to see prisoners, among others, as they elect to be seen, in their larger selves. If we go there, if not with our bodies then at least our minds, we are more likely to register the implications.
Difficult to look at the woman
much less photograph and not ask
about a scar that runs from one ear
to the opposing breast

whose babied died of smoke inhalation
I want to go home, Patricia whispered.

I won’t say I like being in prison, but I have learned a lot, and I like experiences. The terriblest part is being away from your families. – Juanita

I miss my screenporch.

I know every word to every song on *Purple Rain*. – Willie
Conclusion
THANK YOU
THANK YOU VERY MUCH