

XCP

CROSS CULTURAL POETICS
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XCP: CROSS CULTURAL POETICS

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CROSS CULTURAL POETICS

THE POETICS OF ISLAM

Kazim Ali

I was raised a Shia' Muslim. Depending on whom you listen to, the essential difference between Sunni and Shia' Islam is that upon the prophet's death, Shia' followed what they believe to be the oral transmission of the prophet regarding succession by following Ali, his son-in-law, while Sunnis followed the more dominant group at the time (and since then) when the collective of chieftains deemed Ali too young to rule and elected Abu Bakr, one of the prophet's companions to succeed him.

The lineage of Sunnis remained political rulers of the empire, while on the margins the Shia' followed a lineage descended from Fatima, the prophet's daughter. That's why the term "muslim fundamentalist" is a supreme irony. Because almost as soon as breath left the body of the prophet, the Body of Islam fractured and within a single generation there were countless factions and factions within factions.

To be sure there existed in the rough center of this matrix an outline of a figure—to this day in paintings and images his face remains blank, mere outline—called "Mohammed," but one Mohammed has very little to do with another.

The classical Islamic arts eschew, in fact, representation. They are calligraphy, geometry, and architecture. As Lilian Karnouk writes, "Islamic art is an adventure in non-figuration dictated by a rejection of the Pythagorean idea of man as "the measure of all things." The Islamic artist opts for an aesthetic process rooted in religious transcendence: an art based on harmonies of the formal elements of line, surface, and color arranged to a mathematical perception of time and space. His intention is to attain the visualization of a thought which does not represent man or nature but life understood as energy and motion."

Islam as a system of belief, like poetry itself, incorporates doubt and questioning into its "fundamental" fiber, because at the "foundation" of organized belief—the end of prophethood and the beginning of lineages of authority, you had to make a choice.

One significant verse of the Qura'an appears near its beginning "This is the book. In it there is no doubt." Growing up under the shadow of such an authoritarian dictum I continually wondered at my own doubts, engage-

ments with faith, forays away, through, and within dogmatic teachings. Only last year, in a new and wonderfully acclaimed translation I read a new rendering of the same verse: “There is no doubt this book is a guide for the faithful.”

I have a feeling I had better learn Arabic because those two renderings do not read the same.

My father told me once about the story of “one hundred and four” books revealed by God to prophets through the ages to all the various peoples of the world. Four of these books are mentioned by name in the Qura’an, but a Muslim would believe there are a hundred others out there whose names we do not know—that perhaps the *Bhagavad-Gita* is one, or the *Lotus Sutra*, who can say.

The hundred books of course call to mind the “hundred names of God,” of which ninety-nine are named in tradition, the last one being secret. Always this dark place, the place of unknown, the place you cannot go. A place where you are not sure what is what.

This sense of unsurety is built into the very way we celebrate the revelation of this Qura’an. During the month of fasting—Ramadhan—we celebrate Lail-util-Qadr, the Night of Majesty, on which the scripture was said to be first revealed. But scholars do not agree on the actual historical date, saying only it is an odd-numbered evening in the last third of the month. So traditionally we celebrate the occasion on three separate evenings—the nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-third evenings. It sounds manic and amazing and it is. It’s a miracle of unknowing and allowing the mystery of that subsume the centralization or systemizing of a single day.

The beginning and ending of the lunar months of the Islamic calendar are similarly fraught with disagreements. Many people believe the month itself has not started unless the very first sliver of the moon is officially sighted. For those of us who live in the west, we more often than not depend upon the visions living far away, on the other side of the world. In the final days of the fasting month I can still remember my father on the phone with Iran or Pakistan, waiting to hear if the moon had been sighted there. Had it been it would signal the end of our fast, thousands of miles away.

The tricky moon was also the site of one of the prophet’s major miracles. While Jesus fed the masses and Moses parted the sea, Prophet Mohammed’s miracle was, appropriately, centered upon the night sky—he pointed to the moon once and it broke into half.

The written scripture itself was revealed to a man said to be illiterate. He was commanded to read by the Angel and protested that he could not read, and so came the first revealed verse of the Qura'an: "Read: in the name of Your Lord Who created you."

The chronology of the Qura'an is similarly disguised in its written form. The prophet came down from the mountain and dictated it to scribes; eventually these verses were organized into chapters, and the chapters themselves were given a canonical order. This order, unlike the long deliberative process surrounding the compiling of the Bible as we now know it, did not change from the first arrangement and is the one thing that all of the sundry sects of Islam do share in common and mainly agree upon.

It's the *word* and not the man or his flesh or even the definitive understanding of the word itself that reigns supreme in the Islamic consciousness. There hasn't seemed to have been the same kind of lively tradition of commentary and cross-commentary on Qura'anic scripture as there as been in Judaism. The real heart of the controversy around Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* was not after all on the caricature of the prophet, but rather on the triggering plot device—that Satan had managed to corrupt the scribe taking dictation of the Qura'an, inducing him to introduce false verses into the scripture.

In such a fundamentally decentralized religion where even the satellite in the sky could break into pieces, when the one thing that everyone could hold onto was called into question, even fictionally, all hell broke loose. Literally. The great shame is that the novel remained widely unread in the Muslim world, when it is the one book that comes so close to describe the fever and fervor of Islamic thought, the "art based on harmonies of the formal elements of line, surface, and color arranged to a mathematical perception of time and space" of which Karnouk spoke.

It remains the province of poetry, an art made for the doubting and the doubtful, to create structures for meaning, to privilege and plumb the notions of bewilderment, doubt, and interrogative spirituality. Though Islam requires five daily prayers and an obligatory pilgrimage, the Prophet also said, "one hour of work towards attaining knowledge is worth sixty years of worship."

And what is that worship towards? The famous *hajj*, obligatory on every adult Muslim, is towards the Kaaba, the House of God, a black square structure at the heart of the Mecca Masjid. The house itself—like every mosque—is empty inside.

BLACK POWER IN NEWARK

Amiri Baraka

It was around 1968 that I first heard the phrase *Black Power*. I remember writing, somewhere, "God Bless You, Stokely Carmichael!" Recording my deep joy at hearing that phrase. Carmichael marching with Dr. King to add to the march declaring a determination to go on with the civil rights movement even after Alabama klans shot James Meredith.

In his autobiography Carmichael, later Kwame Toure, says that contrary to media reports of a conflict between Dr. King and himself around this statement, which Dr. King called "an unfortunate choice of language," that Dr. King did in his own less declarative way, support this general idea that Black people needed power in order to secure their social and economic needs. The most obvious method of securing that power is political struggle. But as the King led marches demonstrated as well as anything that electoral politics is not the only way of securing a grasp of power.

But Dr. King's public persona historically eschewed more sharply confrontational rhetoric, his capacity to lead thousands of people in demonstrating against segregation, discrimination, economic exploitation and the terrorism of White supremacy allowed enough social change for a limited access to political power.

But this was the '60s now and Dr. King himself had been changed by the struggle he led. I think he had gone past his reaction to the racist violence of white Montgomery, Alabama, who when the Black forces led by Dr. King, in that struggle initiated by Rosa Parks refusal to sit in the back of the bus, declared victory after almost three years of boycott, blew up Dr. King's house while he preached his sermon. When the black grass roots forces arrived on the scene, with rifles and shot guns raised shouting, "Dr. King, Dr. King, what shall we do?" Dr. King answered, "If any blood be shed, let it be ours!"

It was that reaction that partially estranged many young people of my generation from the Non-Violent and turn-the-other-cheek philosophy that Dr. King had gleaned from the bible and from India's Mahatma Gandhi. But by the '60s other forces had begun to emerge. Fidel Castro's liberation of Cuba Jan 1, 1959 gave our generation another kind of paradigm to aspire to. I visited Cuba to celebrate the first anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, July 1960. Among thousands of students from all over Latin

America, and invited intellectuals and militants from all over the world, the idea of Revolution in our time, where we lived, became a material force for the first time.

I also met Robert Williams, the Afro American revolutionary who was chairman of the Monroe, North Carolina NAACP. An ex-marine who drew other Black veterans to the branch, Williams made history by ambushing a Klan raiding party, stripping off their hoods and taking their guns away from them. He was fired from the Chairmanship by national chair, Roy Wilkins, the same Negro who refused to let the Association march with Dr. King and Stokely Carmichael in Alabama, instead denouncing Stokely's Black Power phrase as Racism. This same Wilkins also denounced the National Black Political Convention in Gary in 1972, which was chaired by Richard Hatcher, first Black mayor of Gary Indiana, Charles Diggs, Black congressman from Detroit, and Amiri Baraka, who was then chairman of the nationalist Congress of African People. For what? I don't even remember the specific denunciation, but in essence for having the nerve to claim Equal citizenship rights, the right of self determination and democracy in the US, while Black. And for gathering 8,000 Black People to Gary to put together a National Black Assembly composed of democratically elected delegates from 50 states, which was set up to serve as a Congress like body to give guidance and direction to Afro American political struggles.

I mention these things to point out that the struggle for Afro American Democratic Rights has never been a monolithic struggle. That we have had the foundations for class and class struggle even in slavery with the differentiation of the House slave from the Field Slave. But with each succeeding stage of our struggle, the contradictory irony is that as the Afro American people, the Black nation, makes progress as a whole, there is a wider separation between the majority of Black people and the more privileged Black bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.

So that Black People's power has always been subject to specific definition of time, place, condition and class. In Newark, the 1967 rebellion marked a point of sharpest demarcation. The years of oppression and exploitation, open egregious racism in this northern ghetto had grown to flash point. From our Black arts theater, The Spirit House, my wife Amina and I had set up a vital performance arts space for theater, poetry, and music as a means of helping to transform the city, as part of what we hoped would be a developing wave to help in the transformation of the US itself.

For us our maximum leader was Malcolm X. Spawned out of the Black Arts Repertory Theater in Harlem, that I had helped organize, The Spirit

House became a gathering place for young Black militants who adhered to Malcolm X's teaching of Self Determination, Self Respect and Self Defense. Malcolm countered Dr. King's philosophy of Non Violence which Malcolm called "A criminal philosophy," in that it would prevent Black people from utilizing self defense against our enemies whom Malcolm called Criminals, since they had stolen us from Africa and into slavery. When he said, "You treat people like they treat you, if they treat you with respect, you treat them the same way, but if they put their hands on you, send 'em to the cemetery!" We agreed he was a wise man!

In 1965 the Watts rebellion in California, made the phrase "Burn Baby Burn!" which was immortalized by poet Marvin X, celebrating the destruction of American white supremacy symbolized by a burning supermarket in California when Black people chanted at its destruction, "Burn, Baby, Burn!!" Because to them that supermarket with its daily exploitation of rotten meat and elderly vegetables for high prices represented the Oppressive America which they wanted to see burned down and replaced by a society where they had equal rights, democracy, self determination, employment, education and the right to enjoy their own culture. Burn, Baby, Burn! That is still relevant right today! But by the '80s the forces of commercial entertainment, which are one aspect of the propaganda arm of US corporate society had changed that phrase to mean "BBB, A Disco Inferno." Remember?

1965 also marked the assassination of Malcolm X, Feb 21, The Watts explosion happened in August, the long hot summer where 34 Black People were killed and \$200 million in property damaged. At first the racists said it was "outside agitators" just like they said the African pyramids must have been built by people from outer space." But later, it would have to be understood that the people were rebelling against their day to day exploitation and national oppression particularly at the hands of the insane Los Angeles police department who some thirty years later (1992) would beat Rodney King almost to death and spur another rebellion, when the cops, the blood thirsty swine, who beat him were filmed and were shown repeatedly on television beating him almost to death, were acquitted by a Simi Valley, California! The trial was moved out of LA for just that reason. But a few hours after the acquittal LA blew up.

The only way those cops got any sentence for the beating was in a Federal Court where two of the officers were sentenced to 30 months. A Black convict tried to attack one of the beaters but was himself shot and killed by guards. But as a result of the King beating the rebellion saw 54 people killed, 7,000 arrested and a billion dollars in damages.

The Newark Rebellion, and note that I will not say riot. A riot is something made by drunken college students in Miami. But in Newark, just as in Watts and in Detroit in 1967, the same year as the Newark went up in smoke, these were rebellions against the murder, terror, daily oppression and exploitation of Black people by white supremacy and monopoly capitalism.

When we talk about “the ’60s” we mean a period of revolution, rebellion, innovation and struggle. At the beginning of the ’60s I had been living in Greenwich Village, as a writer, a poet, a jazz critic. But the increasing turbulence of the civil rights movement, the Cuban revolution, and in 1960 the first national appearance of Malcolm X inspired me and I would think my whole generation to take a more militant stance toward changing America. We refused to live in it in the old way.

In 1960 Black students sat in in Greensboro, North Carolina to get the right to be served and eat the little nasty food at Woolworths. In Washington, DC where I went to college at Howard University, we would order the food and when they wouldn’t let us eat it on the premises (even if we never intended to) we would leave it. Order 20 hamburgers and 20 milk shakes and if they brought it wrapped up we would turn and leave. In Newark, during this period even White Castle was segregated. Thursdays were “Colored Night” there and at the Dreamland skating rink.

But by the sixties confrontations around racism and overt resistance to it had sharpened, agitated by the national civil rights movement, but also by the international climate which saw European colonialism under assault all over the world. This had particular resonance throughout Black communities everywhere as the African anti-colonial independence struggles began to reach high profile. The influence of the African struggles on Afro Americans should not be minimized. These were more fuel on the psyche of Black America to resist racism with all its might, though to hear some of the Negro politicians today who were manufactured in various ivy league laboratories, they speak of even resenting classics of African culture such as Kente Cloth.

This is one of the bitter ironies of the Civil Rights and the more aggressively defined Black Liberation Movement, that it was through the struggles of the men, women, and youth, the marches and demonstrations, and confrontations, and beatings, and jailings and murders that any real progress was made, but in a period such as we live in today, under the domination of the extreme right wing of racist monopoly capitalism, the most reactionary and backward elements of US including Black American culture come to some power.

After Malcolm X's murder, I moved to Harlem and helped organize the Black Arts Repertory Theater School. At the end of that year (1965) I came back home to Newark. This was a very intense period since it was characterized by the rising tide of the Black Liberation Movement and the diehard resistance to democracy by a US ruling class moving in completely the opposite direction. Not just in the US, but across the world. Even though Kwame Nkrumah had moved into power as Prime Minister of Ghana in 1960, Belgian and US forces assassinated the newly elected Prime Minister of the Congo Patrice Lumumba in 1962. It was the question of mass action, "positive action" Nkrumah called it. Civil Disobedience, Strikes, Boycotts, just as Dr. King had led in 1957 in Montgomery, Alabama. Always Fred Douglass dictum is confirmed, "Power Concedes nothing without a demand...Where there is no struggle, there is no progress..."

Carmichael's call for "Black Power" made us analyze the prospects of Black People gaining power in Newark. Remember the essence of Revolution is The seizure of Power! We found that Black people were the majority in this city. We also found out that as we organized and educated our people, we became the majority of registered voters as well. I used to go around spray painting a black fist with the words Black Power under it!

We put out a newsletter distributed by neighborhood youth raising the question of a Black mayor in Newark. We became part of an organization, the United Brothers, that openly sought political power through electoral politics.

Amina Baraka organized The African Free School to teach young people their history and culture. Performances, Discussions, Concerts, Readings continued at the Spirit House. All aimed at raising the level of the peoples' consciousness, bringing people to revolutionary positions.

The '67 rebellion was the culmination of such organizing and in response to the relentless intensification of racism and national oppression here in the city.

Aside from the constant racial abuse spotlighted by police brutality, the state now wanted to bulldoze a central part of the black community to build a medical school that they sd would take 150 acres. This, of course, would mean the destruction of the central part of the Afro American community which had been steadily building since the '50s in contrast to the white population which had been steadily declining. In twenty years the city went from a population of 85% white to one that was 60% Black. We found out that the largest medical school in the United States was the prestigious Johns

Hopkins in Baltimore that took on an acre and a half!

As the Black population increased the tolerance for racism and national oppression declined. But now the Addonizio regime, which the Feds said later was giving 1% of the city budget to the mob, would do things like refusing to name a Cornell graduate Black Man as secretary of the Board of Education instead naming a white high school graduate. In addition to the steady run of Police abuse, the cops invaded a Muslim martial arts center at the East Orange boarder and brutalized the inhabitants, for the crime of being there while Black.

This was a period when police even rushed into the loft where we were rehearsing a play and actually snatched a script out of my hands. When they would ride up and down streets in our neighborhoods and call the women names. When they stationed policeman outside one building to prevent a poetry reading they thought controversial.

The straw that broke the racists back was the arresting and beating of a cab driver, John Smith. When people in the Central Ward heard about it they went to the precinct calling for his release. The next day we picketed the precinct but by the time the sun was going down people were breaking out windows and stoning cars that were headed out of town driven by whites.

The rebellions in Harlem, 1964, Watts in 1965 and Detroit and Newark in 1967 were the biggest of the “early” rebellion cycle of the '60s until the outburst numbering almost two hundred American cities when Dr. King was murdered.

What the Newark rebellion made clear is that that old city was dead, not just the fact that thousands of white folks and a few middle class Negroes got their hat, but that the remaining citizens had their minds set on a new kind of governance and that the old only white folks model was going to be scrapped.

The main difference between Afro American National Oppression and straight out Colonialism is that we exist within the same national state as our oppressor nation. The idea of Afro American Revolution within the United States was not, in itself, a New idea. There have been hundreds of Black Rebellions within the US. The most prominent, Nat Turner in VA (1829), Denmark Vesey (1832) in Charleston, SC, and Gabriel Prosser's aborted uprising in Richmond (1800). But there was at least one large outburst in New York city when it was still called New Amsterdam.

The fact of chattel slavery itself should always be the historical foundation upon which any study or analysis of Afro American life should be measured. What DuBois summed it up saying, "Many people have suffered as much as we have...but none of them was real estate!" And even as the exact definition of that bondage was chipped away, the new paradigm was no easier for the next generation to accept.

It is the exact subtraction from full Democratic rights that is the poison between those who have those rights and those who do not. It is even a poison between those who think they have those rights and those who know they do not!

There has never been a moment when the 1967 rebellion can be said to be old news, just as there will never be a complete resolution of Black Chattel slavery, that is until all the issues leading up to those and including all those new issues that begin after the term of the "event" so called has passed. The issues created by chattel slavery exist emphatically today and will exist until the society is totally changed. Poverty, lack of education, homelessness, lack of solid family structures, at risk children, one parent homes, racism, national oppression exist until this day. Certainly only an advanced socialist nation will be able to resolve these problems in some way. No monopoly capitalist imperialist superpower will ever be able to solve all these problems.

In the same way the problems, tensions social and class contradictions that led to the 1967 rebellion which are some of the same problems that came with Chattel slavery can be said to have been resolved. And certainly the same theorem applies that under the national oppression, economic exploitation and racism of the overall US state and its international superpower profile, those problems can be and must be reformed, but until the end of the system itself its major tensions, turbulence, violence and murders cannot be totally eliminated.

The major progress made in the '60s combination of the Civil Rights and Black Liberation Movement was the end of overt racial discrimination and segregation, tho obviously those elements of American life still exist very viciously.

The White and Colored signs came down. But think about it, there has only been one Catholic president, JFK, and he lasted two years. There has never been a Jewish president. There has never been a woman president. Just to look at the boldest face of still existing discrimination in this country.

The explosive '60s world wide helped eliminate some of the most visible

social barriers. But just as in the field of education, once *Brown vs The Board of Education* ostensibly ended segregation in public education, many white people withdrew their children from public schools and in some twenty-four states the state took over the education process, as in New Jersey, so that those cities with large Black populations could not practice self determination in those cities. Hence the question of Democracy was still squashed. Now the right wing advocates of privatization and a corporate state want to end public education altogether with the devious privatization of the voucher campaign pushed up front by some Negroes as in the Excellent Education for Everyone, 3E's national campaign a large amount of its funding coming from the same foundation that published the book on the Bell Curve "proving" that Blacks were inferior.

As Black Nationalists we thought back in the day that all we had to do was to get rid of white folks and our troubles would be over. That when we had successfully struggled and worked to elect a Black mayor and Black majority in the city council we would have the tools in our hands to transform our community. But we did not understand classes and class struggle, nor the fact that the Afro American peoples' class stratification, though retarded by national oppression and the creation by such oppression as a "nation class" to use Amilcar Cabral's words, ie the almost horizontal demographic shape of the Black community, very similar to the victims of colonialism. Nevertheless, it was our very struggle that created some verticality in communities. A pimple's worth of verticality was the development and enlarging of the Black Bourgeois and petty bourgeoisie. With such expansion due to the struggle of the people who would not even share its greatest benefits.

Take for instance the box of negroes who have recently come to power in Newark. Actually, one can say that they are the result of a vote against the former Mayor Sharpe James, rather than full support or even understanding of what Corey Booker and his cohorts really represent.

No one screamed on Sharpe James as much as I did during his twenty years in office. As I said in an 2001 article in the newspaper *Unity & Struggle*, called "The Trojan Horse," trying to provide an analysis of who Booker was and in contrast to Sharpe James": "On one hand, you have Sharpe James, in public office, since the Community's choice Campaign is part of the Afro American National Bourgeoisie. Always compromising with Corporate Capital, usually shaky in confronting the big dogs of government and business. An important operative in the Democratic Party, usually self hypnotized by the beauties of his ego, never completely honest, manipulative, capable of any trick, betrayal, scam, one can think of.

Yet he is the national bourgeoisie, as shaky as Chiang Kai-shekself promoting Tonto politics of the Congressional Black Caucus. But the Black national bourgeoisie, for all its weak wavering dishonest compromise, is a flawed but actual representative of "Home Rule," a very weak example of this city's Self Determination. That it is so weak must also raise questions of the weakness of Newark's would-be revolutionaries.

Cory Booker, on the other hand, is a comprador, straight out. He is a representative not of a flawed class of the Black nation, he represents imperialism.

In 2001 he raised \$795,000 from Wall Street (See *Star Ledger NY Times*) and another \$400,000 from New Jersey suburbs. That figure roase to \$3 million dollars. Including contributions from Goldman-Sachs, Jack Kemp, and the National Republican Party With over one million dollars raise from outside Newark, it indicates his true spopnsors. Yet Booker is an active Republican, the Republicans of Bush, Ashcroft, Thomas, Whitman, budget cuts, tax rebates to the corpoarations, Booker escorted Bush 2's spouse Laura, Schundler, Franks, Booker backs privatization, Charter schools, the general anti-working class anti-minority anti-immigrant pro-corporate agenda. He is quite simply a Trojan horse for the Republican initiative to take Newark..." That was in 2001.

In the little more than 90 days he has been in office now, which was made possible by spending 6 million dollars (for Mayor of Newark?). With ads even on the Academy Awards . And with the steady support of both the *Star Liar* and *The New York Times*. In fact he used to meet with the editor of the *New Jersey Star Liar* every couple of weeks at the golf course to set up What has he done?

Fired or proposed to fire 1,200 city workers. The Negro he hired to run the housing authority who, naturally, is from out of town says he is "not running an employment agency" meaning that he does not understand that for the Afro American people it has been just this public employment that has allowed us to survive and create a steady lower middle class and stable working class.

In fact the Negro, Kinard, who runs the housing authority declared, along with his wife, that they had no intention of living in Newark, even though he makes some six figures parading in an out of the housing authority while firing indigenous citizens.

Booker, in less than 90 days, has raised our taxes by 8%. Residents will feel

this whether they are renters or own their own homes. They will feel it in the restaurants and retail stores or other businesses. Plus the idea of ascendancy to electoral office as a means to empower the whole community has no meaning for this self described post civil rights Negro .

Even though any place they have in the US was won for them by the struggles of the generation before them. The fact that the movement for “integration” sent them into covens of white supremacy disguised as educational institutions. Both Cory Booker and Condoleeza Rice are Stanford products, one of the most reactionary universities in the US. Especially they are products of the ultra right wing Hoover Institute. These are not Toms, they are brains shaped, warped by the vision of complete participation in the ugliness of the American Dream. Dr. King warned us about wanting to integrate into a burning building.

Like the imbecilic or I should say, sociopathic Negro John Ridley who wrote an article in *Esquire*, “The Ascendancy of the Modern Nigger,” in which he declares that there is “A New Black” who the old school of protest, he uses Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and Kwesi Mfume as his old school objects of New Black Scorn, and praises Condoleeza Rice and Clarence Thomas as part of the new Blacks who actually have power.

As such Mr Ridley is part of the Bill Cosby, Juan Williams Calif, strain of Negroes who will never understand self determination or democracy and confuse equal citizenship rights with induction into some aspect of the neo-fascist superpower. Mr. Ridley’s human Negro paradigm is Collin Powerll and Condolzeeza Rice who ss Fanon sd some of the oppressed don’t want to kill their enemies but become them.

This is the Corey Booker syndrome, raised in a little privileged white suburb of Bergen County and rationalizing that the Afro American’s main problem is that we are not petty bourgeois white Americans.

"I DID NOT MARRY MARY TODD"

WEBS, RED INK, HIGHWAYS LAID WITH HEADSTONES, AND CROSS-CULTURAL INVESTIGATIVE POETICS.

Susan Briante

1. Webs

In 1994, artist Mark Lombardi began working on a series of spindled, pencil drawings that graph relationships between business and government elites, tracing paths of financial meltdowns and mergers, shady deals and convenient bedfellows. Lombardi's titles demonstrate his range of interests: "pat robertson, beurt servaas and the UPI takeover battle, c.1985-91" or "bill clinton, lippo group and china ocean shipping co. aka COSCO little rock-jakarta-hong kong c.1990s (5th version), 1999." One frequently cited piece, "george w. bush, harken energy, and jackson stevens c.1979-90, (5th version)," completed in 1999, shows three short arrows of relation between George W. Bush and Osama Bin Laden.¹

Lombardi's gallery's press release explains: "Busted banks, hot money, financial fraud...people make art out of that these days?" "They do now," says Mark Lombardi." The words feel a little stilted. But canned or not, this "now" interests me as an indication of an information crisis, a moment when we feel simultaneously glutted with data and starved for the links that make this information meaningful.

Until his death in 2000, Lombardi culled facts from the public record, recorded them on index cards and meticulously mapped them out in his art. He called the works made from this data "narrative structures" because he felt that they could "convey a story, typically about a recent event of interest... like the collapse of a large international bank, trading company, or investment house." But his drawings, which sometimes stretch to 5-by-6-feet, feel too large to represent a single story. Instead they suggest broader, more complicated relationships of power, influence, violence and greed. Instead, they suggest constellations of associations governed by more than narrative; they suggest provocative linkages, a blossoming object of speculation and beauty, a kind of lyric.

2. Red Ink

Today, as I read a *New York Times* headline: "Downturn Tests the Fed's Ability to Avert a Crisis," I think of an old joke from the former German Democratic Republic recounted by the philosopher Slavoj Zizek. In his

collection of essays, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, Zizek writes:

A German worker gets a job in Siberia. Aware of how all mail will be read by the censors, he tells his friends: “Let’s establish a code: if a letter you get from me is written in ordinary blue ink, it’s true; if it’s written in red ink, it’s false.” After a month, his friends get the first letter, written in blue ink: “Everything is wonderful here: the shops are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, cinemas show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair—the only thing you can’t get is red ink.”

I think of Zizek’s worker whenever I hear the word “recession.” “Recession” defines our recent economic problems from a corporate point of view. But words such as “lay-offs” and “inflation” describe the situation that most of us feel—our weakening ability to pay for the things we need (food, heating oil, gasoline) or find sufficient employment. I’m tired of being called a consumer. I’m a citizen, educator, state employee, artist.

As writers and thinkers, we have a responsibility to push against the limits of journalism’s often narrow language. We need to write over the blue ink. I’m thinking of Mark Nowak’s sampling of capitalization rules within interwoven narratives of worker exploitation in his poem “Capitalization” from *Shut Up Shut Down*. I’m thinking of Kristin Prevallet’s “Lyric Infiltrations” from *Scratch Slides* as well as her “Lexicons” in *Shadow Evidence Intelligence*.

I’m tired of reading headlines that describe the smallest details of the largest problem. I’m tired of trying to sketch the webs between, trying to read through the censorship of limited ideologies. The red ink is gone. I can’t even find a category for most of the questions I want to ask.

3. Highways and Headstones

Not far from my apartment, the North Central Expressway slices through Dallas shooting north from downtown, walled for great stretches, sunk below street level, sometimes fringed in flowers, frequently snarled with traffic. Not far from my apartment, a freedman’s community formed in the years after the Civil War, and a cemetery was consecrated on a parcel of land bought for \$25. By 1907, the city of Dallas tried to condemn the Freedman’s Cemetery. In 1940s, the Central Expressway chopped through it turning headstones into gravel for the road. A portion was paved over to make a playground. Fifty years later when the state planned the highway’s expan-

sion, African-American community groups forced the proper excavation of what remained of the burial ground. Families approached archeologists in hopes of locating ancestors. One man came looking for his great uncle.

—Was he hanged?

—That's what the stories said.

—There's a chance broken necks can be found by looking at the skeleton.

Any bullet wounds?

—I don't think so.

—Then we will look for a broken neck.

There are bones under our highways and histories: Native American, slave, exploited, immigrant, working poor, poor, undocumented histories in need of continual exhumation.

Like Williams and Olson before her, Brenda Coultas undertakes a project of place-based excavation in the "The Abolitionist Journal (or, Tracing the Earthworks of My County)" from her new book *The Marvelous Bones of Time*. She excavates while illuminating the process of excavation: "A hundred years hence, will there be markers commemorating where we had borrowed a book?" Coultas was born in the slave-holding state of Kentucky, but raised across the border in the "free" state of Indiana. While she wants to identify with abolitionists from Indiana's past, with the Great Emancipator, she does not shy away from the racism of her local history. "I thought of Klansman when I thought of Indiana," Coultas writes. Identification can be complicated. It is hard to identify with place in a nation that scours much of its past from the landscape. It is even harder to identify with national myths:

"Lincoln looked out over the river and saw a slave state and he was born in one (Kentucky), like me, but was raised in a free state (Indiana), like me. We were white and so could cross the river."

She cannot speak of their "shared" history without invoking the history of those who could not cross that river. When she reminds us that her and Lincoln were "white" she recalls privilege and its limits ("If in the document, she is described as an old darky, then I might be described as an old whitey," she writes elsewhere); she excavates a past, constructs a net of relationship and responsibility.

When Coultas writes elsewhere, "I did not marry Mary Todd, although I have always admired her," it reads as a joke and a reminder. Identification only goes so far.

4. Art is not Apart

“The popular perception is that art is apart. I insist it is part of,” explains CD Wright in the preface to her most-recent collection, *One Big Self: An Investigation*. The poems in this book come from Wright’s travels to three Louisiana prisons with photographer Deborah Luster. The book’s subtitle “An Investigation” implies a resistance to the idea of documentary. Investigation emphasizes the speculative nature of the lyric, results in a documentary that knows its own limits and actively pushes against them. When Wright records snippets of conversations, anecdotes, observations from both inside and outside of the prisons, she spins a web of connections between incarceration rates and local economies, writes beyond the language of crime and punishment, unmaps a history.

Wright never presents herself as an impossibly objective observer. She draws attention to her own circumstances, constantly re-affirming the connection and dissonance between herself and the prisoners. “If I were you,” she writes. “Screw up today and it’s solitary, Sister Woman, the padded dress with the food log to gnaw upon.” Then later: “If you were me: If you wanted blueberries you could have a big bowl. 2 dozen bushes right on your hill.” The book is full of contrasts and commonalities, slips and reversals between “you” and the “I,” images of the incarcerated and their brutalized crimes.

To write, to try to render the circumstances of those vastly different than ourselves takes a careful consideration of our own position. It takes an ability to think and write across divides of culture, gender and class. In her preface, Wright explains: “Not to idealize, not to judge, not exonerate, not to aestheticize immeasurable levels of pain. Not to demonize, not to anathematize. What I wanted was to unequivocally lay out the real feel of hard time.” It is an act of compassion and imagination.

Wright tells us: “If we go there, if not with our bodies then at least with our minds, we are more likely to register the implications.” This is more than an act of sympathy.² To get anywhere with our minds requires that we actively investigate our own circumstances and ideologies, our own part in a web of power and capital, our relationship to history and language.

Too few links are forged; we have run out of red link; the minute we begin to connect the dots someone erases the charts, buries the body, plows over the tombstones and lays a highway. To connect, to push against the boundaries of language, to unearth our history—how could we not continue to need cross-cultural poetics?

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¹ Images of Lombardi's work can be found at <http://www.pierogi2000.com/flatfile/lombardi.html>. See also Kristen Prevallet's "The Economy of Poetics" for a poetic response to Lombardi's work in *Shadow Evidence Intelligence*.

² Whenever an ambulance or a police car siren sounds through my neighborhood, my dog howls out the window. It is an act of sympathy: a beautiful and ineffectual act. "So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering," Susan Sontag explains. "Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence."

STATE, CONDITION

Maria Damon

What appeals most about this opportunity to celebrate *Xcp*'s 20th issue is, most immediately and phenomenologically, the freedom of a blank white screen/page on which to expand. Please, no accusations of imperialist metaphors here; I'm so in need of the freedom to lie down and roll around on that white page on the screen as if it were tropical snow, to sprawl the micro-culture of my consciousness across the poetics of blankness offered by this illusion technology, this way of seeing my mind take shape in words and linking it to other minds, this way of participating in collectivity, of enacting humanness which is culture, words-in-form which are expressive culture.

But what can this rising urge toward (the word) "freedom" mean? Although I am freer materially than most, "while there is a soul in prison," etc. This is so now more than ever, since those souls are increasing in number, innocent, tortured with the encouragement and sometimes instigation of our government, uncharged in certain cases and held indefinitely: it seems that the worse institutional and procedural conditions become, the closer penal imprisonment and existential unfreedom come to resemble each other.

How is it that an invitation to discuss the "cross-cultural" in "poetics" immediately raises questions of freedom, or about "freedom"?

Cross-culturality conjures images of the "line of flight" that defies borders and whose aim is true if not deliberate or teleological. It is a tactic of survival through movement: someone is a "border-crosser" or a "culture-crosser" or a "cross-dresser." Someone's on the run, grabbing just enough to last a day or two, a few words from the earth, a few hanging from that bare branch, stuffing them in a sack from whence they dribble letter by deformed letter etching a line of text that traces her movement across motley terrain. This diasporic movement is a kind of freedom, though it is fueled more often than not by desperation.

One could ask if the prefix "cross-" is too static, too linear, not sufficiently meta-, trans-, inter- enough for the diffuse, fluid or vaporized movement imagined by those of us who mistrust overly reified form, or feel that stark oppositions are false consciousness, provisionally useful for analytic leverage but ultimately limiting. I remember at the *Xcp*: Cross-Cultural Poetics Conference that kicked this whole thing off, I think it was Roy Miki, perhaps

among others, who challenged the “cross” and proposed “inter.” The latter has the advantage of implied agency on the part of culture; one can see cultures interacting rather than being crossed, or crossing each other aggressively. There’s something to this, and a lively, internally dynamic “intercultural poetics” is an appealing concept. But there’s something of the *realpolitik* in the hardness and tension implied by “cross”; there is contradiction, contestation, stark verticality of prison bars, agon in the world, even if our imaginations prefer dwelling in an interzone of melifluid possibilities.

And a cross is, after all, an instrument of torture, political and otherwise. Maintaining the cross in cross-cultural poetics acknowledges our grim times. That that instrument of torture has been raised to a symbol of redemption, spiritual and otherwise, over the last two millennia plays as highly ironic but also suggestive. Curiously, the words “curve” and “circle,” seemingly so far in connotation from that stark and lonely cross on the hill, bear a close etymological kinship to it (Indo-European *ger* or *greu*), a fact that undermines attempts to cast the harshly binaristic cross in absolute contrast to its curvy “others,” the circle with which illiterate immigrant Jews would sign their names (so as not to have to make a cross) at the turn of the last millennium, and the crescent that cradles the youngest of the book-based religions. Remaining scrupulous about/respectful of difference while acknowledging kinship is an ethic of the cross-cultural poetics project; maintaining the rigor and suppleness of the materialist dialectic while simultaneously acknowledging the cultural limitations of its provenance (Hegelian, Northern European, post-Enlightenment) and providing space for contrapuntal (“competing”) models of process, of *poeisis*, continues into the 2000s.

What might serve as an alternative to “cross-cultural poetics”—“global poeisis”?

And then, let’s switch the question while retaining the terms: What is the “poetics” in cross-culturality? Over the last eleven years, since *Xcp: Cross-Cultural Poetics* 1 first appeared, I’ve become increasingly drawn toward “poeisis” over “poetics,” for the same reason that one might prefer “inter” over “cross.” “Poetics,” taking its cue from Aristotle and coming down through the Russian formalists, suggests a scientific attempt to analyze aesthetic (“poetics” in its narrow, literary and formal sense), and by extension, cultural (“poetics” in its wider, anthropological sense), production. “Poeisis” promises something messier, broader and more generative: the making-process itself. To date, one of my favorite issues is #3, on fieldnotes and diaries, precisely because of the messy, private, in-process aesthetic that many of the pieces evinced. It was the issue for which I got to review John Wieners’s journal *707 Scott Street*, a project that became much larger over the years as I pursued that odd

auto-ethnographic voice that Wieners and others from the bohemian and addiction-ridden 1950s used to describe their lives and exercise their literary faculties. In fact, many of the reviews I've been "assigned" by *Xcp* turn into larger inquiries, a phenomenon which intensifies my organic relationship to the journal. Another of my favorite issues is the much later "Word" issue, a highly organized but democratic dictionary of heavily-catheted words for *Xcp* contributors, each defining a favorite or most charged (*odi et amo*) term in less than a page. Its dynamic, jostling juxtapositions create a living artifact of thinking and arguing; it's exciting!

Xcp is becoming, it is changing, it has changed, it is making itself up as it goes along, issue to issue and phase to phase. The concept has changed, evidence by the change in cover design: the folkloric birds that suggest funerary art, the wavy lines and circles of the earlier design have ceded to a harder, more angular and less representational agit-prop look, with a gritty, industrial font (identified as "Dirty Ego"? Really???) cutting a vertical scar down the dark slate front. Agon, class struggle, appears front and center, or rather slightly off-center (a nod, perhaps, to the art of Walter Benjamin, that unorthodox dialectician?), but at a sharp, unambiguous right-angle to the page. But while the cover's gotten less messy, the friction factor in *Xcp* has amped up; it's more confrontational, less a "beautiful object." It's exciting to see the change, and to anticipate more down the line.

Deeper exploration of "freedom" and ethics are needed in my remarks, as they are twin twined sites of desire relevant to *Xcp*'s vision and vibe; my proto-philosophical torque may stay proto for lack of serious chops, but the issues are central to poetry's place in the world. I'm aware that the "ethical turn" is understood among cultural studies scholars as a depoliticization of the frankly engaged and often joyfully partisan scholarship in which we were trained; "ethics" embraces a secular humanism somewhere between "morality" and "justice," but never quite gets its day in the sun in the arena of poetics scholarship or the arts conferences at which "ethics" is invoked as an urgent motivation for the conference's existence. Recently I've seen stickers and postcards announcing readings or actions: "Poetry is not enough," is the slogan. I guess that depends on what one means by "poetry." *Xcp*, it seems to me, is devoted precisely to exploring and troubling that boundary between whatever "poetry" is and what may lie beyond it, which may well be more poetry, different poetry, action poetry, *poiesis* itself. As for "freedom," the freedom I described with anticipatory delight in my first paragraph, which one might characterize as "existential freedom," or a utopian moment of gamboling in a page-field, is not unconnected to social justice and the de-alienation of labor that one might call the poetic process... The freedom I've found in *Xcp* is that of the imagination but not

only. It publishes work that encourages freedom; I'm not sure the two major essays (major in terms of my own intellectual and creative development) I've published herein would have been acceptable elsewhere, and I've heard many writers express their gratitude that quirky and risky new departures for them have found a happy welcome in the pages of *Xcp*.

I am quite certain I have not answered the question posed by Mark Nowak in his pulse-taking of *Xcp* at twenty issues/eleven years, but I have been concerned to express both my current interest in "freedom" and gratitude for *Xcp*'s longevity, vitality, and continued evolution.

THE IDEA OF CROSS-CULTURE

Jeff Derksen

Yesterday we went to a discussion set up by the Vancouver Socialist Forum to hear about developments in Venezuela after a set of reforms that included extending the possibility of Hugo Chavez presidency until 2021 did not pass. This referendum was the first electoral loss for the Bolivarian revolution and it is being viewed as either the first sign of weakness in the program of social transformation or a loss that reflects diminishing support for Chavez, signaling a rift between the government and the people who have been driving the experiment in participatory democracy in Venezuela. Yet, the representative from the Venezuelan government told another story, one that breaks the various narratives we have of just how any scale of social transformation might cohere and gather force. From her perspective, these referendums aren't a harbinger of the end of Venezuela's great social process, but rather that Venezuelans don't hold the same narrative expectations as many supporters, looking for hope to the south, hold. Rather than a march to social transformation, she described the situation in Venezuela at this moment as an uneven process, and in fact it was this unevenness of historical forces that first ignited the process. "El proceso" had not been derailed by a *democratic* vote but, in fact, this type of referendum that allows those who have been historically excluded and manipulated by the state and competing political parties is seen as exactly part of the social process rather than the cracks in a revolutionary moment.

But, as the discussion period bounced from position to position even though everyone was in some way in solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution, a familiar aura began to settle in – an aura that is deeply grounded in a form of respect and engagement with the particular everyday social life that is being refigured in Venezuela and yet framed by a *cultural understanding* that the particularities of Venezuela can be engaged with, argued with, and connected to through an affective solidarity, but that cross-cultural (and historical) differences create a form of distance that ultimately keeps Venezuela at a level of abstraction. What emerged for me was a set of questions about our contemporary concept of culture and how it can be rethought through a social imaginary that is both particular and strongly connective (or articulatory) and how forms of political action (from modes of organizing to what types of questions could be initially asked) can cohere. Do we have a common-sense understanding of culture that approaches cultural particularities as both necessary and yet ultimately distancing? Has the necessity to recognize cultural difference become an end game and nudged out the

new or even unpredictable possibilities of social and political connection? And, has a form of post-structuralist knowledge become an organic model of culture?

Raymond Williams's now-classical definition of the concept of culture in *The Long Revolution* has been identified as being over organic, overly based on commonality and culture as a "whole way of life" being built through the relations of human agency. Williams's culturalism is reflected in his assertion that "The human energy of the long revolutions springs from the conviction that men can direct their own lives, by breaking through the pressures and restrictions of older forms of society, and by discovering new common institutions" (347). To illuminate a limit or a tension between this culturalism and a structuralism that emphasizes the restrictions on human agency, Jim McQuigan splits a classic sentence from Marx: "Culturalism can be aligned with Karl Marx's 'men [sic] make their own history', and the structuralism with 'not in conditions of their own making.'" (Davies 119). Yet geographer Don Mitchell powerfully argues that such a balance is lost and that the super-organicism of culture (in which culture is necessarily causative and ultimately explains action) still dogs the idea of culture even after a turn toward "metaphors of spatiality" that foreground culture as a process that is socially constructed. For Mitchell, such an idea of culture, "an idea that has developed under specific historical conditions and later broadened as a means of explaining material differences, social order and relations of power" still reifies culture. His solution, or proposal, is to step back from culture as a set of practices woven together into a whole way of life and to turn to *the idea of culture* (rather than culture itself – which he contests is indefinable) as the *thing* that is "very real indeed" (104). This leads Mitchell to end on a definable goal; "Our goal, therefore, should be one of figuring out how the idea of culture becomes socially solidified as a thing, realm, attribute, or domain" (113). The problem with Mitchell's endpoint is that it doesn't give sufficient space to agency in figuring out how the idea of culture gains traction, but it also retracts from the agency in reshaping the idea of culture by engaging in its constitution or configuration, by engaging in the clashes and alignments of ideas of culture.

What then is the idea of cross-culturalism? Is it an organicist notion of culture that draws on the taken for granted radicality of cultural hybridity or the always already heterogeneity of culture (laying bare the false claim of cultural coherence, even if it is "organically" lived and creates real effects, as we saw in Belgrade as Serbs reacted to the declaration of Kosovo's independence)? Does it always aim at the breaking apart of national cultures (figured as retrograde and historically embedded) by a process of global cultural grafting? For instance, in an important and contested essay, James Clifford puts

forward two aspects of globalized culture: first, that although “Intercultural connection is, and has long been, the norm” (5) the “prying open” *ideas* of coherent cultures makes space for heterogeneous cultural and political juxtapositions; and secondly, that “The performance of culture involves processes of identification and antagonism that cannot be fully contained, that overflow national and transnational structures” (9). Implicit in this idea of cross-culturalism is that national structures are a container within transnational structures and that they are historically heterogeneous, yet only understood as coherent once they are organized through the idea of culture. But the powerful idea of a heterogeneous culture as uncontainable and that the necessary work of cultural criticism is to pry open false coherencies are equally, in Mitchell’s terms, a reification of the idea of culture (and who aims to contest the reification of the idea of heterogeneity and uncontainability?). Have we moved from an organicism of Williams’s “whole way of life” to an organicism of heterogeneity? And does this unruly organicism have its roots and branches clipped by the caution Clifford proposes (and one that is equally echoed in debates about globalization and culture) to “avoid, at least, the excessive localism of particularist cultural relativism, as well as the overly global vision of a capitalist or technocratic monoculture” (36)...? If so—and if the obvious organic metaphors of unruliness and flows are metaphors that reify the idea of culture—then what are the political and social stakes of this idea of culture?

To return to the questions raised about the *idea of culture* by a forum on Venezuela in which transnational forms of solidarity are asked to travel across spatial scales, disparate yet interlocked histories, and competing economic models: What *idea of culture* can be shaped to allow affective solidarity as well as a political understanding? I’m going to suggest that we can look at what could be seen as the particularized localism of Venezuela and the “overly global” or homogenizing forces at work not as the ends of an organic heterogeneous culture that need to be trimmed off, but as a dialectical relationship, not as spaces but as processes. Nothing new in proposing this, as the centripetal and centrifugal processes of culture have been made alive by Bakhtin and many others; but, as the idea of culture has been spatialized, these two processes have been located more as the poles of the debate of globalization and culture, and the poles of the process of culture spread over the globe. Cross-cultural activity in this framework has been seen as hybridity, as radical connectivity, and as unexpected cultural forms that cohere across the scapes of globalization, either taking form organically (as they collide in global flows), or socially in resistance to closures and clampdowns by capitalism or the state (think of *The Plastic People of the Universe* from 1970s Prague), or in market-driven multiculturalism. But, by productively collapsing these poles, we can see the possibilities in

an idea of cross-cultural connection that does not enter through tentative understandings of particularities (“particularist cultural relativism” made sticky) but enters “from above” via globalizing processes of homogeneity. Rather than locate these forces of homogeneity as the commodification of culture or the Americanization of a global culture, I think it is useful to conceive of neoliberalism as a traveling or migrating ideology that is both global yet path-drive, highly localized and particular once it hits the ground and yet, once installed, tending toward monologism in the types of solutions to local problems and neoliberal fixes. Spatially, neoliberalism is imagined as an “economic tsunami” or “totalizing economic master narrative” and the “path-driven” and “migratory”, emphasizing how neoliberalism from above is adapted to local conditions and practices. One of the key *particular* aspects of how Venezuela is defining its Bolivarian revolution from within, one of the key self-fashionings of the moment, is that the relationship between the state and the citizens is focused on the rejection of neoliberalism. The term *neoliberalism* and the understanding of it as a force that shapes everyday life is popularized more in Venezuela than it is in North America due to this relationship. Rather than understanding the reaction and mobilization against neoliberalism in Venezuela as only a particularized localism (or as a suspect national project with a troubling populist at the delusional helm!) there is the possibility of a cross-cultural understanding that goes beyond an affective solidarity and begins to reshape the *idea of culture* that imagines political understanding and a shared political project. This is not an idea of culture that necessarily understands the local as isolatingly particular (but worthy of recognition, understanding, and support) nor an idea of culture that looks for an internal universalizing strain that cuts through and across cultures, but a simple shift that first exteriorizes the homogenizing impulse in order to articulate across cultures and spatial sales. The idea of culture is then respatialized and creates the possibility of asking what can be done against neoliberalism as it localizes rather than having the *idea of culture* particularize and distance Venezuela and its project. Whether configured as a process, a space, or a set of relations, the idea of culture—an idea dissipated due to its tendency to be used to explain everything (as Mitchell complains) and hence to hold nothing—can be the dialectical answer to neoliberalism’s emphasis on the economic as the frame to understand the world through.

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TOWARD A POST-ABLEIST POETICS

Patrick F. Durgin

In his recent reading of William Carlos Williams' late work, poet-critic Bob Perelman adapts Allen Ginsberg's term—"social candor"—to describe the ways in which Williams' "social coordinates" are foregrounded and "intersect ceaselessly with the positions of many others" (88). If I imagine the relationship between the "cross cultural" and "poetics" as we move through the early years of the new millennium, I wonder how to make "social candor" a textual condition. (In doing so, I take "poetics" as a means of being with and bringing forth, staying true as possible to the etymological roots of that term.) For me, such a textual condition must account for the continuities across the ideological split in USAmerican poetics that occurred at mid-century, when various socio-political imperatives induced debates over the practical ramifications of interwar avant-garde and high modernist innovation. In the anthology wars, a kind of domestication of radical and often epic impulses became an undeclared cold war that echoes in first lady Barbara Bush's pronouncement that there is nothing political about American literature. By radical modernist, several things were meant: a certain hypothetical motivation for formal experimentation; a range of suitable subjects for and to poetic expression rooted in lived experience; and of course a variously prized penchant for effecting something unforeseen in the midst of counter-cultural progress. New "voices" were heard, but the poetic "voice" was both socialized and essentialized.

Among many well-known dramatizations of this contentious pressure on the lyric "voice" at mid-century would be Adrienne Rich's ascension from under the auspices of W.H. Auden to her performative feminism of the mid-1970s; or, LeRoi Jones sloughing off the Beat prophet's sack cloth only to ultimately canonize Black Arts poetics. To watch what was meant by poetic "voice" in mid- to late-century USAmerican poetic culture, especially what Charles Bernstein has called "official verse culture," is to survey how fluidly the uniforms of the anthology wars changed colors, and how giving up ground meant more than being out of favor with literary "taste." Among other examples, however, you'd think that "taste" was paramount, and not the attendant struggles of anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-ableist, and other counter-cultural struggles. Robert Bly's poetics of the "deep image" cast doubt on the status of poetry that took cues from Imagism—calling even Williams' work "Picturism": "No ideas but in things" was a doctrine that, for Bly, extinguished the "revolutionary feeling" of "the unconscious" at a time when a so-called "Hysterical Generation"—poets like Karl Shapiro,

John Berryman, and Robert Lowell—produced a flaccid, reactionary poetics of confession (26, 29). What were they reacting to? The Pound-Eliot line of the “objective correlative” and the “Grand Collage” of “luminous details,” to which he famously contrasted the work of Lorca. So how do language writing’s critiques of the still center of self and the fetishism of referentiality that supports it escape becoming a mere reaction to the “Hysterical Generation”? Surely its judgment of confessionalism was no less sympathetic than Bly’s. And its commitment to “revolution” was at least as sincere. One way was by claiming the objectivists, who themselves claimed Williams as coeval—the so-called “Turn to Language” in the 1960s quite ironically coincided with the rejuvenation of the careers of Objectivist poets like Carl Rakosi and, most influentially and publicly, George Oppen. Less well-known, or at least very little theorized, is the tremendous influence of contemporary intermedia and performance work—the “happenings” of John Cage, Al Hansen, Adrian Piper, Carolee Schneemann, Andy Warhol, and others provided limit cases of the phenomenological “complex realism” of Gertrude Stein. Another way was by looking beyond Anglo-American poetics, specifically to Russian Formalism. Victor Shklovsky’s call for “defamiliarization” rhymed with the paltry circumstance of USAmerican letters beside “the meaning,” as Lyn Hejinian put it, “of [the Vietnam war’s] never being named” (188). And so retrofitting modernism made way for the very prospects of even rudimentary linguistic processes, such as naming.

Then, as Jerome Rothenberg put it in 1973, “the careers of the inheritors were too often literary, resting like the idea of literature itself on a fixed notion of poetry and poem, which might be improved upon but never questioned at the root” (xiii). Now, the “root” or *radicand* of *radical* modernist praxis is clamorously echoed in the ways history bends under technological acceleration and neo-liberal myths of globalization. In reply are new conversations between scholarly, aesthetic, and political activisms—biocultural historiography, ecopoetics, and social movement unionism are examples. The problem remains a question of social candor. As we position ourselves in conversation, a candid poetics will be one that recognizes our interdependence, with a healthy skepticism toward the idea of a singular, isolated, autonomous subject. That skepticism is not a given. It must be produced, somehow forged, or we’ll never know what it could mean to make meaning in the company of others.

My interest has increasingly focused on bringing discourses of radical modernist poetics and disability studies¹ together. I was reading about Williams, for instance, with an eye to his position as a physician. Williams’ poetics *do* reflect his experience of care-giving, an area disability theorists like Lennard Davis and Tobin Siebers have mapped in theories of “dependency.” When

working through his imaginations of radical difference, Williams never falls prey to the disabling work of stigmatizing embodiment; yet this sort of work is a familiar poetic trope, as Erving Goffman put it in 1963:

By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. . . . We tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one, and at the same time to impute some desirable but undesired attributes, often of a supernatural cast. (4-5)

Think of Tiresias, the blind prophet in *Oedipus, The King*, through to Homer Barbee, one of *Invisible Man*'s Tiresias figures. But it's not just the distasteful metaphors that pry extra-literary morals from actual, non-normative expressions of biological elasticity. It is the nexus of what I call "psycho-social" disability that requires careful attention. Not only because we are all only temporarily able-bodied, but because the terms of our thinking have been socialized to the benefit of an outmoded model of the "I," not to mention "we" or "us." Dependency theory compels disability culture to operate less from a minority identity and more from an unforeseeable commonality that is adequate to the vicissitudes of biological elasticity and ideational productivity. The conjunction between "elasticity" and "productivity" is meant literally; alone, the former can be claimed by the dubious "new psychiatry" and psychopharmacological interests while the latter can be claimed by a faculty of reasoning that was itself produced. Disability culture poetics must engage a social model of cognitive, developmental, and psychic difference in order to make the most of its participation in "cross cultural" activism. For example, can we speak legibly about homelessness in received medical or aesthetic languages of psychosis or "madness"? We don't need another mad genius of letters, heroic seer, or declaration of independence. We need a post-ableist poetics.

Post-ableist poetics will take full advantage of poetry's formal means of competing with apparently universal human conditions underwriting ableism. Its formal acuity will match its social candor. Independent living is a norm and illusory aim of the temporarily-able-bodied whose mania for fitness bleeds into the discounted vitality of the differently-minded. Psycho-social deadlock is the ideal of ableism, setting a trajectory for poetry that is mere ornament and embarrassed evasion, intrapersonal retreat, and bland affirmation that something better serves as an end more than a means to what couldn't be foretold. Post-ableist poetics won't breed poems "about" disability, but its "aboutness" will disclose the interdependence that at any given moment seems essential. It will test the grounds of the real rather than

use received realities as a vehicle for lived experience. It will recognize this as an inevitable purpose of textual production. Anyone will write it.

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(Footnotes)

¹ For an excellent history of the Disability Rights Movement, see Joseph P. Shapiro's *No Pity*:

People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement. For more on disability studies as an academic area study, see Lennard Davis' "Crips Strike Back" and Catherine J. Kudlick's "Disability History: Why We Need Another 'Other.'" The website of the Society for Disability Studies (SDS) provides a crucial snapshot of the contemporary, institutional means and materials of interest to the field, at <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/sds/index.html>. Disability as an identity category has resonated particularly well with queer theory and feminist philosophy, as evidenced in the work of Robert McCruer (author of *Crip Theory*) and Eva Kittay (author of *Love's Labor*). See also <http://www.journalofliterarydisability.com>.

DE-SUBLIMATED MULTI-LINGUALISMS

Laura Elrick

Some of the most potent cross-cultural moments are often invisible as such to their participants. Though they are most definitely socially charged, they may seem more like weird, momentary warps of private perception and double-take. Our sensibilities suddenly swell up into startling perpendiculars, a fleeting 3-D experience that quickly quiets back down into a land of flatness. “What just happened?” we say.

Affectual disturbances? Mere distractions from the flow of dailiness? (*What did you think of the reading? Gimme a small regular coffee and a twist. Excuse me I'm getting off at this stop*). How is it that these ripples of interaction somehow only end up being readable as the codings of personality: “Not my aesthetic, really. Not my thing.”

The most readily visible sign that one of these “invisible” cross-cultural interactions is taking place is the discomfited movement of one person’s eyes to one side and down, sometimes accompanied by a vague “uh-huh” before complete disengagement. This is the beginning of a “recognition” of your conversation partner (a placing of her based on your schema), but this recognition is a *misrecognition* since you assume that she speaks your tongue. The eyes to the side and down is only the momentary bashfulness that precedes an exercise of power, a gathering of the self before a judgment “face-to-face.” This is not cynical. This is about the uncanny powers of *sublimated* multi-lingualism, even when everyone is speaking English. We don’t recognize your language – you must speak “us,” because you are speaking *to* us. Therefore I can maintain the belief that it’s only your content (or only your form) I dislike. Likewise, I may think I am communicating with you until your look tells me otherwise. “Not my aesthetic, really. Not my thing.”

Half our lives is just trying to master the languages.

Yet, and I don’t know how to say this: some people only speak one English. If this is only a gigantic illusion, then the perpetuation of this illusion is nonetheless a social truth in its own right: “We speak English,” as if there’s only one. Do we write that way too? In reality, most people probably speak several Englishes but perhaps aren’t aware of it consciously. This condition (of *sublimated* multilingualism) creates a couple of life-possibilities for the in-toner; it could mean that either they are super astute, linguistically diligent

“survivors” (so they only use the correct English in the correct settings), or that they are clumsy with their multi-linguistic talents, relying only on good intentions and good-will to carry them through the perpetually rough communicative spots. Still others make knowing and sliding and challenging and choosing between their Englishes (and other languages) an art. That is where Poetics comes in.

Recently I happened to have the opportunity to see a great avant-garde poet give a job talk at an art school in Brooklyn. I’m an adjunct there even though I only have a B.A., and this makes me nervous: I never know if I am about to be “recognized” by my (sublimated) language. Naturally, I’m also quite curious about job talks (they’re intimidating and slightly mysterious) and since it was Tracie Morris talking I went. Her talk was about Austin’s speech act theory in connection with hip-hop and black poetics; in it, she gave an intensely eloquent theoretical introduction before playing excerpts from James Brown and Rakim for her discussion in the Alumni Reading Room. She talked about the use of speed and internal rhyme in black speech and art and suggested that the “trochees” that have come to characterize the American-English speech pattern are really black innovations that have been absorbed into the dominant culture, which then erases itself in calling itself American (coded white).

What impressed me the most though was her own fluid multi-lingual speech acts. Fluent in high theory, fluent in the embodied language of hip-hop, she never once allowed the music to become an “object” for the academic crowd. Not only did she *move* behind the podium to the music, but she broke out of academic speech to comment on it. This was a clear instance of desublimated multilingualism as live poetic act. It was also desublimating in the sense that the artificiality of maintaining that monolingual space was pushed (artfully) into the collective experience of that newly conscious moment. It was a demystified cross-cultural poetic act. A poetics of poetics.

I have some good friends in Manhattan who cannot help but imagine me standing in the midst of a heard of cows near Buffalo Bill’s grave wearing spurs and chaps when I say that I’m from Colorado. They can’t help it. Or, okay then, they say, if not chaps, then maybe a tie-dye with a bunch of rich white hippies chanting *om*. I can’t ever quite explain that most of the years of my childhood and youth were spent in “north side” Denver parking lots breakdancing, or cruising around in black satin jackets and low-riders, talking shit and razzing with Chicanas. They literally do not understand what that means, “Chicana,” though they know (perhaps, vaguely) that it means a Mexican-American female with an attitude. I myself was well-into my adult life before I realized that my affect and speech (when I am most

relaxed and feel like “myself”) is Chicana. Among other things, this way of speaking involves a jocular stance and a level of fairly aggressive teasing that is meant to communicate affection, a collective encouragement and appreciation of the art of braggadocio, and an open sharing of both personal struggles and accomplishments (coupled with more teasing). This affect is doubly (and deeply) confusing to East-Coast people, since it is coming first of all from a white girl who looks like she is probably from Connecticut (where an altogether different English is spoken). Thus, my language stance is *literally* unrecognizable and appears as simply my “personality.” Even to myself, for many years. Is this – right here, *this*, my aesthetic? (What goes around, comes around, mirrored consciousness).

I’m not talking about a hyper-local cultural marker here. And I am certainly not claiming to “be” a Chicana. I am talking about the cross-cultural poetics of opening your mouth and choosing which English to embody at a particular moment. I am talking about striving for a more conscious riding and riffing over the English that is presumed in the phrase “I only speak English.” In other words, interventions instead of accidents. Or: accidents that become interventions with a little artful movement behind the podiums lining the spaces of our enforced monolingualism. Not all of these spaces are in Universities or Boardrooms either. They exist by the water-cooler at work, in the bar after the reading, even at the bedside. I am also not talking about a conflict-free liberalism that enforces economic and social disparity through a vaguely moralistic call to “celebrate difference.” Since cultural relativism can get on just fine with border walls, it is not enough to “celebrate” cultures. Instead, it is exactly the supposed naturalness of those stations that we mean to debunk. In other words, to de-sublimate our multi-lingualisms means to desublimate the conflicts that would otherwise remain on a strictly personal interpretive scale.

Mine is what they call an “interracial” relationship. Rodrigo’s (Toscano) family is of Mexican origin (with people splayed out on both “sides” of the border – for generations) and mine is of Northern European descent, but it’s obvious (at least to us) that we are more like each other in one important way than I am to my white colleagues from the East Coast—they don’t speak Chicana/o. This doesn’t erase the real differences between Rodrigo’s background and my own (or the fact that his first language was not English at all but Spanish), but it does recalibrate the landscape of our personal cross-cultural poetic. Also, I should add that often times when we misunderstand each other it has to do with problems of translation – literally, he may be relating something in Mexican Spanish in English. Or I may be speaking what I call “splintered Southern” to him (Southern affect and narrative impulse without the accent). In my family growing up,

the assumption was there that a unified shared language culture existed, and that ended up causing a lot of hardship. We did not desubliminate our (English) multilingualisms very well. Most of these had to do with class, and class ambitions filtered through regional expressive patterns: deep-south white small merchant class meets western populist (atheist) farmers (there's those cows and chaps again) in the tumults of the Civil Rights movement, Vietnam and the 1970s oil crisis. This expressed itself in arguments about American history that usually ended with one side of the family storming out of the trailer without their Christmas ham and braised green beans. Left undigested, this, my perpendicular sensibilities, attacking each other with smiles.

Half our lives is just trying to desubliminate our multilingualisms.

That process is a cross-cultural poetics in the making, one that demystifies embodied social contradiction through the personified speech act, while simultaneously revealing the constitutive function of voluntary normative speech in the constitution and enforcement of "conflict-free" spaces of monolingualism. Let's just say that this process might be seen as an alternative to the unexamined psychological discourse of aesthetics. Like "some other kind of therapy."

ROLLSIGNS / NOTES ON TRANSIT

C. S. Giscombe

Of recent importance to me: Juliana Spahr's idea of joining (this as it would relate to joinery rather than the way one might agree to accompany an already existing gang and number oneself among them), Kamau Brathwaite's tidalectics, and Fiona Templeton's work with cities; and that at Naropa this past summer (2007) we worked up *interruption* as the literary figure for a kind of performance that gets messy, for a trope for acting out (in the vernacular), for being difficult, for becoming difficulty itself. (I worked with an amazing group of women and men who named themselves, the performance troupe, the Grammar Sluts.) These things among others.

But my recourse is, again, to the spectacle of travel, to—more exactly and widely—the traveling public. The surge beyond the self. I can't get around the cultural without recourse to the physical—what the surround is, and how one moves through it, how one might be flush up against it and/ or ignorant of it. One what? Travel's "a) mechanical motion, especially reciprocating motion. b) the distance of a mechanical stroke, etc." (*Webster's New World Dictionary*); travel's some migration in the world ("Never seen/ a man/ travel more/ seen more lands/ than this/ poor/ path-/ less harbourless/ spade," said Brathwaite in *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*). Travel's a stain, it spreads; you—the city? You, the stain. (Templeton: "The word 'you' is the pronoun of recognition, of reply, of accusation, of balance; beyond the visual, animate, returnable; 'you' assumes and creates relationship.")

It's the predictable reach of travel that continues to interest me and that I continue to see as a place of exchange—within that predictable's the unfamiliar or the defamiliarizing moment or potential, proximity providing that. Traveling in public on surface transportation is the situation I come to again and again for a poetic that crosses over, for the surge. The way of going for everyone including people without means. The travel's pretty ordinary—getting from A to B and back—but it gets interesting when you mix in the presence of others there to do something ordinary with you, in spite of you, alongside you. A stranger in blood with whom to share a seat, even if he or she doesn't appear until you vacate the conveyance. Negotiations, abandon on the bus, the geography of seating itself, the density of the standees among one's fellow travelers and, perhaps most disconcerting, every body's similarity—all stalks are the same.

Banal transit, in transit, transitory, transitional, the Transit Mulatta blog

(“Stories of Race/ Gender/ Sexuality & Public Transportation in Pluri-Cultural Perspective,” <http://transitmulatta.blogspot.com/>), the several roads that make up the Trans-Canada Highway, MARTA for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority but folks say it means Moving Africans Rapidly Through Atlanta, the crypto-racial of bus and light-rail, where we’re going and with whom, “the erotically charged space of the omnibus,” says the abstract for Masha Belenky’s “From Transit to Transitoire,” mundane travel, rapid transit, Transportes del Norte’s “Omnibus de Mexico con mas de 800 destinos en Mexico y EU” (<http://www.gruposenda.com>), my current new relation to Bay Area Rapid Transit, its stations—their mix of outside and inside—the closest thing to the Old World I’ve seen in America, city transit.

I grew up in a black and white town, Dayton, Ohio, with a very fine citywide system of electric buses that is largely undiminished now, 40 years after I left home. The West Side is still black Dayton and the West Side buses are Number 9 (Cincinnati Street), Number 8 (Lakeview/ Nicholas Road), Number 4 (Delphos), Number 2 (Home Avenue), and Number 1 (Drexel). But these are crosstown buses—the rollsigns (route number and street) announce the destinations/ directions and the rollsigns are changeable. The driver cranks them and this was and has been the *vision*—the driver standing up inside the bus, reaching up to turn the handle above the big windshield, changing the destination, going through two or three or several possibilities. Nowadays rollsigns are electric, a display of lights that spells it out; before, they were linen, replaced by treated paper, replaced by the DuPont product Tyvek. The “opposite” was present, is present: the black Number 9 Cincinnati Street bus became the Number 9 Valley Street bus, bound for the Polish neighborhood on the northeast side of Dayton. The Number 1 bus, Drexel (my bus), turned around and became the Number 1 Third Street bus out to the white areas near the Air Force base, out to where East Third Street becomes Airway Road; same bus and driver, different colors of folks in the seats, and the bus bearing the *name* of the “different” neighborhood like a flag through the streets of this one. This is the relationship, the indication of *you*. I’d hate to stop with the idea of place being dichotomy—it’s a way to begin the talk of the cross-cultural, not a note to end it on. What I’m looking for, in my own work and in the writing I admire, is something that’s often unstable, something beyond “descriptive prowess” crossing the tenets of some static landscape or map, some ethnography.

The bus is not some transparency—the rollsigns are racial-/ ethnic-/ class-heavy. The bus is, for now, how I say; the bus goes without saying. Interruption still talks up to power.

I went to Belgium in 2003 and followed, on my bicycle, the tramline from Zeebrugge down to Saint-Idesbald, 30 miles or so, on my way to the Paul Delvaux Museum. Coming though Ostende along the tracks I saw that the tram is invasive—close passages in the narrow streets—and a familiar presence at once and came there to a clearer understanding of Delvaux’s paintings of them. He said: “All those images that entered my head at that time remained and I watched the trams in Brussels because the trams were part of the mobile furniture of the streets of Brussels. As important as a house, a monument, a public square or any other urban element.”

**ON MY WAY FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER
IN THE SANDHILLS OF CENTRAL NEBRASKA
ON HIGHWAY 183 IN A NEW CAR WITH 1016 MILES
THE DAY AFTER I TURNED IN THE OLD CAR WITH 198,589 MILES
OR THE IMPORTANCE OF CROSS-CULTURAL POETICS**

Diane Glancy

Before I am ready to let it go, the car is gone. The blizzards I drove through. The miles of road I passed. The purpose, the heightened awareness of travel.

It's a piece of metal, my brother said when I longed for the old car. But the car was more than that to me. It was journey. A migration from here to there. It was pulled off my skin like adhesive when it left. It had become unreliable. I didn't want to be stranded on the road by myself.

From Kansas City, I drove in the new car to the University of Nebraska at Kearny, then south on Highway 183 from Nebraska through Kansas to Clinton, Oklahoma.

It was sandy in the hills when I stopped at the Platte River. I carried it away in my shoes and on the floorboard of the new car. The new car transforming the territory around it as I drove. The new car transformed by the new territory through which it passed.

The moon, fading into light, was a dusting of snow in the early sky, much like the sense of poetics pervading travel.

I started writing: *If I had seen them, it would have been brief. No prolonged longing.* What did that mean? Where did it come from?

The cross-cultural understanding of poetics has a barn in it, and a crop. It is the culture of the land, the culture of memory, of the unconscious that spots the understanding like the visage of the moon in the day sky. It is the present car going through the land, the presence of all the surrounding *otherness*, even the unrecognized, unrealized *otherness* surrounding. It also is the relationship of them all.

I picked up a rock as I stood beside the Platte. *Her face, the lifted edge of her skirt, appeared as stone.* The otherness was there in the physical presence of the rock and the story that surrounded it.

I heard the voice of the rock from the back floorboard of the car as I drove:

I was caught in the haymow and he freed my skirt. It would have pulled me into the baler and set me on the ground wrapped in barbed wire. It was a field skirt that would not rip. He freed me. He freed.

Her cry was a sort of crop on the field.

It was a covering of wire.

Cross-cultural poetics is the connotations, the presence of _____, the mystery of the unknown going on around me at all times is the poetics, the tune the mind plays while driving.

Otherwise, talking directly of sameness is a haymow that can bale you.

The last town in Nebraska, Alma, was a series of storage tanks and railcars, then a brick street, and an adjacent main street with a few rows of buildings and cars parked at an angle, nose to the curb.

Half-way through Kansas, I noticed the post-rock fences I passed.

It is estimated that about forty thousand miles of post-rock fence around the fields can be traced— No two rock posts are the same.

The Post Rock Museum Brochure
La Crosse, Kansas
Rush County Historical Society

The need of differernce in the existence
[of fence]
or modes of fence.

From the western border of Washington County, southwest for almost 200 miles, there is 40,000 miles of fence around fields.

At one time, holes were drilled into the limestone strata about eight inches apart. It is said that water was sometimes poured in the holes in the winter and the expansion of the water would split the stone.

It was water, then, I head from the rock in the backseat.

It was the force pushing the journey apart.

Water in the hole drilled in stone would drive apart the stone when the water froze. It was *her* voice that came between them so their parts of difference would be known.

That's the way it was then.

Was water still water when it was ice? Or ice when it was water? Or how the terms were inspected and stamped the same as water if solid or air. The steam invention was patented, an iron contraption on wheels rusting in the outer yard on the far side of the barn, was a reference guide otherwise occupied.

At one time, it was an engine scarring animals from the rows where they had built their quilts. Their wire bed-frames and wire front-gates. The hollyhocks leaning into one another—Cross-culturally leaning for the diversity that is culture.

As in early morning when the moon lets go of the weathered fields withered from drought and harvest, and the sun plows between the window frames in a caked wedge of heat. Sun glory. Moon glory. All.

A car on the road transforms the air it passes through. Its tires turning cartwheel after cartwheel as it passes in the store windows of small towns. Alma or Schoenchen or Liebenthal or any of those places named after the soul, or the man who established his name on the land.

The statement of boundaries are cultural interstices. The architecture of boundaries requires a necessary re-margining of discrepant reaching in more than one direction at once, moving toward a backpost, certainly. The culturality of an experimental form to relay the complex goings of many cars at once.

A trip of 1,308 miles in this contained world—in this fish-tank car.

Driving is an act of memory. Other voices appear in travel and cause other things to happen. That is what travel is for. The connectives. The conjunctives. The land carries memories. When I am on the road, I remember not only my own history, but what happened on the land threads through it, weaving my particular mode of travel with other modes that have passed. This is the underworking of poetry that underpins my particular shade of cross-cultural poetics.

FEELINGS-?

Kimiko Hahn

“If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry.”

Emily Dickinson

My own training suggests I look at *objective conditions*. What do I find? These days, my view is largely limited to the campus; in a somewhat larger picture, I see that MFA programs have proliferated to the point where workshops are no longer *only* for the upper-middle/white-collar class. What I mean is that there are now students who are unsophisticated, biased, earnest, sometimes very-religious, sometimes poorly-prepared for college. (Insert your own adjectives!) These are my students, undergrad and grad. And they are also wonderfully incredible.

Meantime, the studio-model is under attack for turning out *workshop poems*. But rather than continue the beat down (to use my students' phraseology—), I am concerned with how to revive. How to recreate the workshop so there can be a genuine exchange and true creative risk-taking. So, part of my own concern in this small and large picture is how to ensure that the workshop culture doesn't bourgeois-fy these sons and daughters of the working class. My students deserve this and, frankly, I do as well.

Back up a moment: what's *wrong* with a *workshop poem*? There are a great many workshops and as many styles as there are poets: diversity in the form of style, poetics-inclination, school/trend, identity/ethnicity-informed, etc. But somewhere in all these rich variety, the workshop has become a center for homogeneity and whoever reaches too far or makes the odd gesture—gets beaten back. Rather than creativity and risk, the results are a kind of numbing competency.

Another result of this proliferation is craft over content *and* craft and content over feeling. Yes. And, for myself, that is what means the most to me in art: the experience. The juice, the swing, the head-popping-off, the radiation. *Poetics in this millennia*.

And my own even smaller writing life? Over the past four years I've been working on a series of poems that are inspired by science essays. I am in the final stage of revision and, more than with previous collections, I am being particularly tough on myself. If I don't feel the poem breaks open, in some way erupts, it gets rewritten or tossed. Up till now, I've been a bit

easy on myself—and that has resulted in a certain messiness that has suited my own risk-taking, so fine. And it's allowed a measure of emotionality, so fine. But now I'd like, no, I need to be in a position to take more risks—to risk explosives.

What can I learn from this process for Poetics?

In preparation for a recent talk on my own process, I brought up how dynamics ('dialectical opposites,' in Marxist terms) are essential—whether in sound, structure, imagery, and so on. An easy example: if I have a pair of opposites, I test them to see if they are obvious. If so, there's no feeling, just sense. Birth/Extinction, say, is more intriguing than Birth/Death.

These dynamics fuel a larger element, a 'qualitative leap': where the poem leaps from being a bunch of words to being an experience. An experience for me and, hopefully, for the reader. Hopefully moving.

This is what I wish for myself, my students, my writer friends, and for readers: that poetry returns, or turns, to feeling. I am tired of work that is merely a good idea (read marketable). I am tired of work that presents content that is moving as an idea, but does not use craft. I am tired of work that is all craft, no pulse.

This rant is not against any particular 'school' or sensibility (though a few might try to pick that fight). Rather, in this millennium, I want it all. *And why not!*

INTERDISCOURSE(S): POETICS & THE CROSS CULTURAL [EXPERIMENT IN BRIEF]

Duriel Harris

My current preoccupations include writings on embodiment, sexual trauma, the trauma of racialization, community accountability, cognitive neuroscience, Yorùbá language and culture, and discourse. That which follows offers a truncated rumination upon my encounters with notions of the “cross cultural” and “poetics” within that textual frame.

• • •

If the part of our cognitive apparatus that allows us to predict others’ whereabouts, to act socially, and locate ourselves with respect to others in an intentional way is exosomatic... we are disabled if that apparatus is poorly structured.

—Alan Penn, from “Space Syntax and Spatial Cognition”

in seasons after
droughts/
...

There are borders
There are borders
There are borders
...

I knowed names
by seasons
...

There
were caves
in names
...

There
was a gallows
on the air

—Sterling Plumpp, from *Mfua’s Song*

[A]s we are further removed from Slavery and Reconstruction, and even Jim Crow in its most honest, overt manifestation, many of the constructions of these periods have become naturalized such that they cannot be easily dismantled through cultural intervention and may simply be reified through our practice due to our own ignorance.

—from “Notes for workshop:
PostModern Funk & the Changing Same”

To envision is to structure movement; to make up & make real the image, properly aligned: the mechanism by which liberatory praxis transforms the material world [Free Your Mind...And Your Ass Will Follow (Funkadelic)]. To unsettle & displace (rupture, a matter of course): we endeavor to emancipate dissonant chords.

As hybrid [. . .] performs
—to enact strategic mythopoesis & demystify unintelligible space
[/ideology].

(*reference determines value* even in the agentless passive.

*silent, dark figures attending
the margins*

*shyly, dark figures crowding
a doorway*

(the agentless passive —at least 30 areas in the human brain are concerned with seeing, not just the visual cortex [considered home of consciousness], e(r)go : vision :: seeing :

a mapping d from pairs of elements of a set X . . .
If $d(x, y) = d(y, x) = 0$ then $x = y$

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| [1] Blindsight | [3] Visual Neglect |
| [2] Inattentional Blindness | [4] Capgras (Syndrome/Delusion) |

Even the body falls very early under the influence of convention. Gender, notions of propriety, the requirements of class can be said to create a second body that, almost like

a suit of clothes, exists as an outer layer to the natural body of birth.
(Griffin)

: *(softly) the rind. [In it, a young woman lies dead, waiting to be dissected by an anatomist. (Robles, A note from the editor, 5 FR 19/SKIN)]*

: *(softly) the rind. [Around him and the draped figure is darkness. (Robles, A note from the editor, 5 FR 19/SKIN)]*

: *(softly) the rind. [[H]is main purpose is to breach that skin, to cut through its separating surface in order to examine and record what lies beneath and within it. (Robles, A note from the editor, 5 FR 19/SKIN)]*

[. . .]

a permission to continue
(DuPlessis)

impairment < disability < handicap
[Lifting As We Climb]

[. . .]

[cautious] syntax (Hillier, Hanson), focus

movement across planes & distances.

[see *vbl. n.*, also implied in] valuing the contributions of several traditional disciplines and facilitating exploration of their areas of overlap, can be used to engage the complexity of the contemporary world.

within this interdiscursive space ... a cultural competency ... the repertoire of ... strategies, the range of knowledge that a viewer brings comes into play
(Bobo)

WHAT'S AVAILABLE, FEATURES THAT COUNT, HOW TO CHOOSE
(SHINY NIGGER TETHERS ASCENDED BLACK AKA THE POLITICS OF RESPECTABILITY
—TRIPLE JEOPARDY)

The Masher (1907) *The Scar of Shame* (1927) *Imitation of Life* (1959)
The Debt (1912) *Topsy and Eva* (1927) *A Raisin in the Sun* (1961)

The person who builds a house does not travel with it
The mouth is never so filthy that its owner cannot eat with it
Loud chewing does not increase the size of one's teeth

The miser's eyes redden twice

(how tormented and cruel you are)

[. . .]

: the brain manages without consciousness > the brain managed without
consciousness

: solid objects are permeable at the molecular level

see also EKTIK

(esp)

ephectic	dialectic	epileptic	eutectic
cachectic	dyslectic	orectic	cathectic
eclectic	synectic	smectic	
acatalectic	apoplectic	syntactic	

wary (. . . .)

[by one's witting]

Suffering is never absolute

between theme, subjectivity, & strategies of articulation, a point of departure

in relation to bodies' responses to conditions of (urban and global) crisis,
a meditation

, *post-*

[negotiate]:

-lude [see also *lewdness*], -larva, -meridian, -memory, -n—
[alienation], -ocular, -op, -pectus, -prandial [et al., *phr.*]

with history and memory (content) and with the object itself
(Costello)

so situated, to build on, to render

through gaps

SWAY VALUE: CROSS CULTURAL POETICS

A. A. Hedge Coke

Evidenced in the oral literatures of Indigenous cultures from around the world, poetics place people in the proximity of presence with purposeful revelatory lingual pluck against a grain of potential plunder. Cross cultural relationships intermingle human and other mammals, animals, plants; commingle human to humanity; bridge bearings across borders, real and imagined, throughout the planetary embrace we call life. In this platitude of existential and physical endeavor, poetics play a philosophic, intellectual, and spiritual role in narrativising and imaging culture, as is necessary to sustain ourselves as humans, as an average angle plays the most pivotal physical role in keeping comfort in a wintering lodge night.

Words spoken, written, recited, and relayed, reveal the lingual tinkering of the isolated emblem, individual consciousness, as a linking variable integral to the patterning consciousness of humanity and that which humanity thrives upon and co-exists with: energy/cosmos. The relative nature is essentially invoked in participatory communicative couplings of beautiful and horrendous knowns and unknowns we deem markers of experience in human life. Poetics warm and feed us; emit insight and surviving substance; nurture our beingness and enhance our revelations with personal and collective experiences, through which we renew and expand our revealings to a greater understanding of self and that which surrounds self: introspective gradient expanding to bear full witness.

As a narrativising gesture, poetics form easy pathways into separate consciousnesses (realities), thereby, bridge portals to other knowns. This necessary oraendeavor is a natural evolution of the communicative processes of our life form and that of life forms we maintain balance and interdependence alongside. The need for encounter, embrace, eventful emotive experience, the need to develop knowledges, understandings—celebratory revelings—toward pleasurable synergism, is as fundamental to what we know as sense of purpose as breath is to life. It is no coincidence when polling eighty international poets individually¹ an extremely high per cent of the poets, when queried as to what poetry is, most responded easily, without conversation with any other poet polled, and without hesitation: poetry is breathing.

Conversely, one might suppose that poetry is an attempt for higher order of reasoning and that sincere supposition may actually formulate in a cohesive manner of truth, yet poetry itself, the poetic interplay of language and experi-

ence, or intake and exhalation, of detail and response, or consideration and dwelling, of muse and musings, is as basic to sustaining natural consciousness and thought as breathing is a sustaining force of the body, therefore natural order of reasoning for the poet and for anyone interpreting ingested experience into cognition. Oxygenation of the brain allows for processing, for proper construction and abstraction of thought, and in so much what is good for the body is good for the mind as well, again concentrated on breathing: inhale, exhale. The formation of thought is reliant upon not only the body's ability to produce a healthily conducive environment for the cranial function, but for inhalation of substance necessary to bring thought into fruition; be it perception, intuition, and/or reason. Thus witnessing detail, sensory impression, available probable elements that, in the correct conditions and circumstantial or purposeful arrangement (order), could become knowledge/known causes instinctive curiosity to concern one with the matter of problem solving and/or puzzling, thus giving way to the rambling over that which muses and tumbling around the elemental processing until something tangible and/or provocation, perhaps profound, evolves from the interplay/engagement.

This musing causes one to form captivating detail to relay that which is intake to the listener, as well as to self for introspective purposes. The engagement with intake and effective detailing further informs the poet to associate knowns and unknowns into the narration to relate the information in such a way that the listener and/or self is credibly encouraged to arrive at the exact same place as the translator of the information, thus simile and metaphor are employed to bring attention to particulars and to open up the evolving imaging of information into something relatable and/or surprising to thoroughly coerce inspiration to flourish and to replicate, invariably bringing the information into a more fully realized development through the translator now acting as transliterator developing that which has been inhaled as information into something one may expand consciousnesses of other life forms with, through the process of exhaling in a changed form: image-ridden verse with challenging/nourishing metaphoric puzzle.

The sound sensibility of poetry comes into play due, in part, to the need to make reverberations of the substance to cause a continuous flow and better the impact of replication and transition for further development/maturity through the listeners/readers. Widening the air channels for full ability to thrive. Alliteration, consonance, assonance—word play—become the employment of diction that allows for flow to be produced, bringing a smooth quality to the verse that both keeps a constant and causes additional engagement/response: sway. This sway, persuades one to move in response, in an intellectual, a lingual and by all rights a physical response to the

lingual prowess. The rhythm/beat caused by this employment and leading to repetition and perhaps scheme, bring the consciousness toward more blendability and synergistic interchange, interaction—relationship—relativity! The more diverse the engagement, the information, interpretation, and the transliteration, the greater prospect of learning, co-imagining, imaging, the greater chance of developing knowledge, understanding, and the greater possibility of profound and entertaining bridgemaking occurrence. Humans, despite what we are served by the commercialized world, thrive on challenges that result in learning. When one ceases to learn, one becomes quite dull and loses zest and zeal necessary to partake readily from the benefits before us in this life. An opportunity to grow, as it is referred to, is probable cause to partake.

A chief role of cross-cultural poetics is the challenge to the listener and the advancing of knowledge from the speaker made possible (and greatly enjoyable) through the gesture in a non-didactic vessel. Poetics, for the most part, operate with the knowledge that listeners/readers enjoy coming to conclusions along with the speaker versus as instructed to do so. The synergistic quality of poetry provides a meaningful communicatory process in which knowledge is generated, gifted, and received through a lingual relay of actual and imagined multi-dimensional translations, interpretations and transliterations. It is a conversation contingent upon the quality of flow and replication available and enhanced when such is embodied and/or disembodied from the original gist, muse, or impetus.

Culture, the way of being/knowing/maneuvering life as is distinguishable by Indigeneity, ethnicity, racial lineage, historical truths, regional-environmental landscape(s) of belonging/habitat/visitation/diaspora, cosmogonic story, familial ascendancy and descendent current, status of age, gender, socio-economic position (or lack thereof), concentrated scholarship, religious affiliation/doctrine, spiritualness, and any other number of qualifications within human context, creates a beingness in which the sway is inherent to the specific speaker as a discerning mechanism of intake, interpret, translate, persuasion, just as it plays such bearing for the specific listener/reader, including the degree of dissonance to source of origin and possible shared (commonality) variables. Thus, the natural imposition of cultural nuance within any form of communication (speaker/listener) is intrinsic to the variant experience of any interplay.

Cross-cultural could then be defined, in this context, as a speaker/listener exchange. One could argue that cross-cultural exchange could occur between a mother and daughter, who have lived in the same house, attended the same education, adhered to the identical ethno-spiritual affili-

ations, and share most everything other than generation as cross-cultural speaker/listener in communicative relationship. Thus the poet-daughter read by the listener-mother would essentially transcribe essences of the era specifics within this milieu as is pertinent to her generational sway and vice versa. The influence of cross-cultural communication (poetry) serves to translate, bridge, pathway scene surroundings natural to the speaker's nature toward the listener's learning curve consumption. An opening is presented through the communicative process (spoken/written page) and equally significant devoured/inhaled/cultured substance materializes within the knowns/familiarities of the (now learned) recipient. With this truth is knowledge, arguable or relatable. The sway gradation persuading growth, understanding, educative process—relatedness—wielded by the distinctive manner of the pen as decreed by speaker's intent and generous maneuverings of own culture (curiosities/knowns) for the value of lingual pleasure, personal expression, intellectual-spiritual-emotional growth, communicative desire/need, or any other variety of whim with which creative process occurs—inhale, exhale.

The knowns of A'kabal, Akiwenzie-Damm, Alexie, Allen, Armstrong, Belin, Bitsui, Blaeser, Brandt, Cicangana, Cocom Pech, Crystos, Cuevos Cob, Cuthand, Dumont, Dunn, Erdrich (any one of three: Heid, Lise, Louise), Frazier, Gansworth, Glancy, Gomez, Grover, Halfe, Harjo, Hedge Coke (yours truly), Henry, Henson, Hill-Whiteman, Howe, Hogan, Hunter, Jamioy, Jim, Joe, Kenny (George or Maurice), Kleemann, Kowii, Lienlaf, Maracle, McAdams, McDougal, Miranda, Momaday, Moses, Northrup, Naranjo-Morse, Okpik, Ortiz, Rendon, Revard, Rose, Salisbury, Sanchez, Silko, Solano Mendoza, Stevens, Tamez, Tapahonso, Tohe, Toledo, Trask, Turcotte, Twist, Van Camp, Vizenor, Walters and White are as significant a cultural-poetic/cross-cultural interchange between each other (ourselves) as are cross-poetic interchanges between Stevens and Sze, Ortiz and Baraka, Allen and Waldman, Bitsui and Shenoda, Hogan and Troupe, or Frazier and Trethewey (though these are a bit of a variant as Troupe is 3/8th Georgia Cherokee and Trethewey is 1/16th Mi'kmaq, but you get the point). Colloquial vernacular to contemporary realisms, engaged, enraged, endowed, embedded, exchanged and gifted generously for the listener to transform accordingly along with the speaker in verse. And for the reader, the extent of sway affective upon the volume of interplay is as varied as the experience the reader brings to the day of reciprocal reckoning and ultimately necessary for synergistic organization in humanity itself.

So bring on the phenomena we call crossings in all literary pages. Let the words bring a better world for the knowingness of us all. The balance afforded serves to tilt our (kn)own axis of knowns to a place of equilibrium

and equidistant means. The phenomena made available by the engaging poetic interchange is surely essential in this world, literary and beyond. Not to mention the response poetry resulting from the read. Slide some moose by your corn soup, salmon alongside your kanuchi; everything seasons as we sway it so.

(Footnotes)

¹ Festival Internacional de Poesía de Medellín, 2005.

NOTES ON FAILURE: A SHORT ESSAY ON CROSS-CULTURAL POETICS

Bhanu Kapil

1.

“Because I’m interested in flatness, in long, slow descriptions of the jungle as a kind of particulate matter, a precursor to abrupt change, it’s hard to read aloud from this project consecutively. And so, for today, I’ve decided to carve a space around the feral body itself, before capture and afterwards. In this companion text, I’d like to make you a creature from the materials already available to me in the book. Writing and reading, I want that. I want a casual biology. I want a narrative that can become something else in the same way a body does, in time. But if a body, a creature, comes into being in ways that are beyond their control, then where exactly do they have a sensation? Today, because I don’t exactly know, I’ve placed the question of desire next to that of containment. It’s an experiment. It’s a project for future children. It’s my way of communicating with you.” —Preparatory notes for a reading at Small Press Traffic, with Dodie Bellamy, February 2008. I first met her in 2001, and then every three years after that. Dazzled by her writing, and, thus, mute, I failed to make an alliance. I failed to go to the sea and drink coffee above its dirty skirt. So I had to. I had to find a way to speak about the body, which is to say: to “her,” a monstrous “you.”

2.

At The SynTech Lab, in Berkeley, Dr. John Dueber, an incredibly handsome young man whose birthday it was on the day I visited—he’d just turned 31—said, when I asked him what it meant, in this setting, for his work, to fail: “We work in a duration, on multiple projects in parallel, and we push each one very hard. It takes a lot of time to develop a transparent approach to a problem, and in a way, we’re not interested in that. Everything takes so much longer than in other fields, so what we’re trying to do is get a look at something. Once we can see what it will be...once I can see what it will look like, I move on. It doesn’t have to be perfect. In a way, it’s radically different to the handicraft approach...we’re trying to gather information as swiftly as we can, in these intermediate steps, so that we can store it for something else, for the work we really want to do. Which is design.” Me: “Design?” J.D: “Versioning. Like a tracking effort, so that we can be, like, okay, we want to build that, and we need this, this, this.” Me: “So, you’re more interested in selection than in production.” J.D: “Exactly. There’s a lot to do. This is the golden age of the experiment. There’s a

huge amount of failure in everything we do.” Me: “Is that why the counters are so messy?” J.D: “[Laughing] No.” Me: “Hmm.” J.D: “So, what are you working on?” Me: “[Completely out of my depth] Er...the emotional hybrid.” J.D: “Wow. What’s that?” Me: “[Bullshitting] I’m working on how exactly membranes function in organisms that are conjunct, like immigrants. In fact, that is why I am here. I wanted to ask you if it was true. Like, in my field, poetics, there’s a lot of talk about crossing borders, the membranes between things as inevitably porous. It’s so basic, but what is a membrane?” J.D: “Well, have you heard of metagenomics? There’s this guy working on this, and he basically just goes out on the ocean and puts down a bucket and scoops whatever he gets up, and sequences the DNA he gets. And what he found was that in these communities that are incredibly inter-dependent, there aren’t any membranes dividing them. The genomes basically live without cell walls and the lines between cell walls aren’t clear at all. They’re sort of disembodied.” Me: “Dude, I teach at The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics.” J.D: “Wow. [Asks me to repeat this to a physicist who is also really good-looking, and is wearing a cool T-shirt and an unbuttoned lab coat, making me, indiscriminately, want to kiss him too, which is unlike me and was in fact not personal/erotic, as, before leaving, I extended the tip of my tongue to a clear container with a bright pink lid, though there were several signs warning passers-by/administrative personnel of carcinogenic processes. I didn’t care. I just wanted to touch something.] But what destroys a membrane?” J.D: “Organisms run the gamut from being heavily dependent on a membrane, to not needing one at all. In a way, we’re less interested in the membrane in this context. Because it’s a simple matter to build a chassis.” Me: “Huh. Like a car?” JD: “No. A chassis is an artificial growth environment.” Me: “[After getting to the bottom of what an artificial growth environment is: a petri dish] Bloody hell. So you’re saying that you’re less interested in what the body is than in what the body will become?” JD: “Exactly.” BK: “Define hybridity. Define love. What is a protein? What’s your favorite flower?” J.D: “Slow down! Er...The columbine.”

3.

My mind is a little blank as I build a cell community. In some ways, that’s fine. Manuel De Landa, the Mexican philosopher, compares it to the flatness just before water boils. A kind of conversion technology performed at the limit of kinesis; water into steam. I want that. This idea that the numbness I feel in my body, erratically, when I sleep with politicians and failed trapeze artists, or, lately, when I read experimental writing, is actually useful. That it’s a precursor to abrupt change.

4.

I was recently invited, by the Poetry Center of San Francisco State University, to judge their annual prize. Being Punjabi, I instantly said yes, assuming ten books or so would come in the mail and I'd have a pleasant day in Denver, reading them at the counter of Patsy's, my plate of potato gnocci pushed aside like the transatlantic jet-plane snack of a nauseous passenger. But no. One hundred and sixty-three books arrived in the mail and that night, my son made "poetry towers," and I began to read, randomly decimating our makeshift architecture. Thelonious, being six, was a little obsessive about the structure he had built and thus, when I selected the winner—*Other Fugitives and Other Strangers*, by Rigoberto Gonzalez—sliding the slim green book from its position eight books down, he wept. He said: "You've ruined everything." I said: "That's a big word." He said: "I hate you." I handed him *Grave of Light*, by Alice Notley, a submission as thick as a brick, and he quieted down, assessing its weight in his grubby little paws. I am writing this essay, in part, to understand why I was so drawn to these poems of violence and desire, poems written by a gay man who is "the son and grandson of migrant farm workers"; a man "born in Bakersfield, California, and raised in Michoacan, Mexico."

5.

Cross-cultural, as a valued term, implies transmission. Something passed between bodies, altering a natural arousal. Making someone want something else, something that was, as my friend, the philosopher Andrea Spain describes it: "imperceptible to us before." BK: "What?" AS: "It's the force of the thought, the fragment, brought forward, which does not have a place." BK: "From the notebook?" AS: "Not just the notebook. All the non-reproductive elements." BK: "But is there a membrane? Does the fragment, when it comes forward into the text, it's so much like a shard the way you describe it, and so—does it destroy the membrane?" AS: "No, I want to ask something else. I don't think it's about the membrane. Think about it. At the limit of a species you can say there is a line." BK: "Like a dotted line." AS: "Yes, and the entire set of mutations, of fragments that don't become books, you could say, communicate with that line." BK: "They influence it. Like a vibration. But then how does that communication take place? Define: a line." AS: "A line is literally a set of marks. It's the place where the species evolves. The larger the non-reproductive store of a population, the faster that happens." BK: "Do the mutations stay where they are, or can they still have these effects when they're disseminated?" AS: "Well, I think, both. I think it's that thing where as soon as you use a word like "cross," it's already happened." BK: "And it implies, I think, a smooth movement. A permission to cross that border..." AS: "That doesn't take into account the accidental and powerful forces that might

affect dissemination.” BK: “Exactly. It makes me sick. It makes me feel sick.” AS: “So what do you want?” BK: “What do you mean, what do I want?” AS: “What do you want?” BK: “I want a cell community of failed gestures. I want the notebooks of Helene Cixous. I want the rough models Olafur Eliasson makes, just to move closer to a design for a project that doesn’t appear anywhere in the exhibition. I want to throw the book into the garden. I want to open the door and throw the book into the snow.” AS: “Number one, you’re completely insane. Number two, you’re making a connection here between the failure of a productive act and emergence. Okay, the hybrid. Even the act of the cut itself proliferates the conditions for newness. It’s not about what you cross it with. It’s the cut itself. Do you understand?” BK: “Define emergent. Is there such a thing as emergent structure, or does all of this happen pre-organism, so to speak, and does it just get folded in?”

6.

The book I also want to select for The Poetry Center Book Award, splitting it somehow, is a book that wasn’t submitted for consideration, in part because it hadn’t been published yet. *Dolores Dorantes*, by Dolores Dorantes, translated by Jen Hofer, is also about violence and desire—“Pick a body/ Any body”—Gonzalez—but whereas Gonzalez’s lyric narratives form or mimic the chassis Dr. Dueber described, Dorantes’s book, which combines Books Two and Three – “sexoPUROsexoVELOZ” and “SEPTIEMBRE”—is less heavily dependent on a membrane, which I find exciting in a different way. I need Gonzalez because I am still, as a woman, as an Indian dog, as a writer, gathering information about what happens when the conditions prevent the crossing in question. I need that fundamental content or physical experience, which comes forward so brutally in his poems. But I need Dorantes because she’s working with hybridity in ways that foreground the inter-dependence of subject and form, the way they share not site but attention, to the desire of fragments themselves to touch:

You (*Death*)
 in spite of you uninhabited
seamstress sewing and unsewing
bodies on my side

stranger woman, with me remain.

And so, I get that. I get that the border dilates around a foreign presence, and that it’s complicated. That person can orient themselves in an apposite fashion to the future crossing, which is so generative: compulsive and transgressive at the same time. The sound of the lid of the jar of coconut oil

being loosened, behind you where you can't see it. But it's also the ability to be fucked-up beyond all repair and hopeful at the same time. To focus not on movement but on what becomes visible, when you slow it all down enough to see it: the image available to you at a border realm, made possible through a process of vibration, which is sound, species-sound, the thinnest of all cell walls, which is poetry. Dorantes: "I might attempt to define these books as reflections of excitement, massacre and silence in the aftermath of devastation...What does clearly emerge from all of this, for me, is war."

7.

Then I want a war.

CELLULAR ARCHIVE, LANDED MILITANT: POETHIC NOTES ON ASIANTED FUTURES

Larissa Lai

In the last decade or so, new imaginations of what culture is and can be beyond fixed notions of geographic, race or linguistic identification allow for fresh possibilities in re-imagining the writing subject in relation to both culture and its crossing. Under conditions of high capital, neo-conservative economics and a return of family values, and living in the moment of what Arjun Appadurai has called global flows, we hardly inhabit conditions in which power, language or culture can flow freely, without attachment to material or historical roots and conditions. That said, the colonial and post-colonial imagination of cultures located in centres and margins, while certainly not at the end of its historical playing out, has been complicated by the intensification of financial, technological, ideological and media flows, and flows of bodies, not separated from colonial pasts, but increasingly racialized in more complex and contradictory ways.

Marked bodies themselves circulate as correspondingly complex texts, still bearers of Western fantasies of the other, and also, in excess of that, overwritten by digital and bio technologies, empowered and constrained by papers and plastic—identification cards and passports as much as credit cards and usb ports. Through movements of undocumented and heavily criminalized migrant labour on the one hand and documented human biomaterial on the other, in the form of donated organs and blood, or the unraveling of indigenous genomes, the notion of body as parts, body as incomplete subject, body as non-citizen and body as text creates a different kind of relationship to the “cross” as sign of sacrifice, as first line of colonial appropriation, as interrelation among fixed cultures to cross and criss-cross, re-cross, double cross. Free trade laws cross bodily restrictions until the body is reduced to its own alphabet, privileging A, T, G, C. New forms of knowledge produce new forms of ownership and new forms of exchange. For the racialized writer to pome into the flow requires a complex of identifications, misidentifications, re-identifications and overflow. The text rewrites the author rewrites the text, still material and striving for justice. Fred Wah has proposed a notion of poethics as *something that surrounds you like your house it's where you live*. But increasingly place is displaced, and the body's identifications along with it. There is a kinship among those sited in transit, but it is not a kinship in which power is equal. The migrant laborer contained across the pacific by ship, or by truck across the newly formed EU flows differently from the capital of the international banker, even as both are freshly orientalized by concentrated

Aspers propagandizing the shiny side of global while the rough underside scratches earth. Ask if writing between the poles of Asian can produce a poethics of coalition. Only raced in its old and new narrativizations—colonial and neo-con. To po ethics is to re member a kind of September. Oh one or seventy-three, the numbers tell rising and falling housing starts, and more than that, democracy read and produced as experience texting the media spin. Othering other kinds of “orientals” our coalition tentative finds comfort in translations of hard cash.

Culture crosses, cattle on highway, X marks the chromosomal difference, butterfly affects pork chop, the cheap meat of labour urges race to cross border shop, ship the excess in standardized containers, holding the text in textile, the plasticity of identity, papered illegal, the running of the bulls, stocks hang seng’s upward scale. Spell empire’s rule of law, the mock in democracy, the site of citizen desires mobile phones, penetrated to the last mitochondria.

The agent in Asian seeks fresh equilibrium. If capital cogs salaryman and worker in special economic zone as different value in the same machine, while West dreams Asian automata as dysto-tech future, it seems worth asking if “Asian” can citizen differently while recognizing the creativity of the same.

Lewis Hyde proposes economy of gift as agenting in excess of capital. What if Asian can difference along similar lines: *The spirit of a gift is kept alive by its constant donation... gifts of the inner world must be accepted as gifts of the outer world if they are to retain their vitality. Where gifts have no public currency, therefore, where the gift as a form of property is neither recognized nor honored, our inner gifts will find themselves excluded from the very commerce which is their nourishment.*

To recognize earth gifts and inner gifts not as property at all but that which circulates outside capital commons wealth without empire. Corps cannot cog, but coalition Asian Indigenous might surface land and water in ways cap cannot contain.

Asian Indigenous could cell out empire by coalition of mistaken identity, intermarriage, genome cited as common even as we cog historical difference. Begs the question of absence at the heart of knowing, the evacuated subject craves the centre pomo abandoned, ghost in the shell aches human in spite of mechanical parts. What if the margin collects like water pooling into the dark places greed abandoned? If water could stop rushing against dams, three gorges, ashlu, pitt, or any of the five hundred rivers sold like forests, quietly to private concerns. Dorothy Christian: *How do people who immigrate*

to these lands reconcile the exploitation of the land and resources by the political forces? Must “flow” mean “acquiesce”? Thin roots go deep, but must the route to see runs through cap’s curtain? Or worse, cap’s curtail, fifth appendage cropped at sacrum, our prehensile apprehensive. It’s hard to feel your way in the dark, but sometimes it is necessary to Asian specifically, local to unceded Coast Salish and Musqueam territory, piggybacking British colonial, still living off the proceeds of theft. To proceed differently, process in alliance, bliss difference or step up to the dinner plate, as circumstance refuses colonial compass. Food and water both int. and ext. – our connection begins with setting, but exceeds representation. Complicit with the jigsaw, and it is important not to forget. To articulate the difference, cannery housing hierarchy reopens Native space at height of Internment. Federal jettison. The Beothuk aren’t dead, they are only hiding. Lies the curriculum told me. Poethic becoming chides another archive, past beyond future, materializes history oral or textual.

The time is out of joint. Ham slams without thank-you, wanders lonely battlement on hoof and hand, porking docile greedy. The spectre haunting europe daunts asian n/a. In the time of minority, democracy has not yet arrived. *Reverb future imperfect*, save imagination from the failures that hop state to static. Instead play doctor, diagnose the difference, archive the present’s past to mutate futures along lines of bio. Politic potlatch, cross traveller with indigene, contact zone doesn’t guarantee power equity but unseats the post of colonial. Neo of liberalism might fail in its return. Ask what can be returned beyond the power of the con, re-people as minor where possible lies at the evacuated centre.

Thank-you for the music: Arjun Appadurai, Gilles Deleuze, Dorothy Christian, Fred Wah, Rita Wong, John Rajchman, Shakespeare

[Definitions

Enucleation: Complete surgical removal of the eyeball.

Evisceration: Surgical removal of the contents of the eyeball with retention of the sclera or cornea and sclera.

Exenteration: Surgical removal of all the eyeball contents which may include the removal of the eyelids.

Ocular Prosthesis: A plastic or glass fabricated eye that replaces volume of the enucleated eye socket.]

Monologue:

It begins with a photograph and a rug; that so much can be woven into both, one in dyed wool, the other scar tissue against the undisturbed surface of her hand. It's in her eyes. I know it's cliché but *look*, there is something there—unsaid. Resignation, resolve, or just “God damn it, we've planned this since high school, you will *not* take this away from me too.” She is in white, he a dress uniform, three-quarter view. The eye facing the camera is glass—impenetrable.

The rug is tribal, meant for prayer. It is one of the few things I kept. They say the weaving of bombs into its borders, machine guns and tanks began during the Russian occupation; now the images are of planes en route, buildings on fire, the flag—American.

How do you move 1,000 pounds of concrete,
separate bodies from debris,
twisted as steel bar
at the exposed edge of a wound;

in the expanse of aftermath, broken pieces
a uniform shade of red,

how do you know your own;

how do you reconcile

the hand held is no longer attached, phantom pain
is the body missing limb, not the reverse;

that you still wake in your clothing
between adrenaline and exhaustion,

that the year begins as it ended, will end
as it began?

Monologue:

The T-shirt reads *Kill 'em all. Let God sort 'em out*; skull on black cotton, 3XL. They say 20,000 to 100,000 were killed, the exact number in dispute. What makes this a crusade, what number a massacre? In 1209 AD crusaders asked how to tell Catholics from heretics—the response, from the Latin, Kill them all. God—will know his own.

[IMAGE:

Relatives of the victims with corpses
outside Baghdad's al-Kindi hospital.]

[Emergency Condition Responses

Code Green: cut hand, scrape, broken arm, nausea, and headache.

Code Yellow: decreased level of consciousness, chest pain, unconsciousness for unknown reason, loss of feeling/motor skills in an extremity.

Code Red: penetrating trauma to the torso, severe loss of blood, severe head injury, and chest pain followed by unconsciousness.

Code Blue: no breathing/no heartbeat

Code Black: Rigor mortis, Post mortem lividity, decapitation, decomposition, etc.]

Black the ash from a burning car

 the color of lung tissue, of sutures,
dried blood where glass

 made ribbons of skin;

it is what deepens over ribcage,
tells of fracture, of the grind

 of bone against bone;

it is a body wrapped in cellophane,
packed in ice, the bag

 in which it is zippered,

the color of digging to the height of a man,
of clawing one's face, that of soil

 held tightly in hand

.***

[CARTRIDGE, 7.62MM, ARMOR PIERCING, M61

The cartridge is used in rifles and machine guns against personnel and light armored or unarmored targets, concrete shelters,

and similar bullet-resisting targets;

a hollow cinder block, both sides of a car body,

internal walls, partitions, plaster, floors, ceilings, common office furniture, home appliances,

and bedding can be easily penetrated.]

Monologue:

Bedding. Penetrated. The Bushmaster Chain Gun™ meets the warfighter's needs. The brochure tells that it is more flexible, reliable than others; among its attributes—scaleable lethality.

Again black; the background of a magazine ad, glossy stock. It reads *Over 120 models with one thing in common... inspired by the human hand.* The image is of fingers curled around nothing, suggesting the grip of a gun. Is it the gloss, the implied wetness that is allure? Or the fingers on the verge of tightening—the spasm that would follow.

Ten paces from this doorway
a hollow of stone
not so much shelter

as a wall against which
to flatten my back
continue to count

a breath of a pause, six round burst
two second hold, one
single crack

and twenty more paces

from this wall to his body,
his body to doorway, my back
to that wall.

[IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Department of Defense announced today
the death of two soldiers.

They died Dec. 26 in Mosul, Iraq,

of wounds suffered from small arms fire
during dismounted combat operations.]

[Definitions

Penetration: The tissue through which the projectile passes, and which it disrupts or destroys.

Permanent Cavity: The volume of space once occupied by tissue that has been destroyed by the passage of the projectile.

Fragmentation: Projectile pieces or secondary fragments of bone which are impelled outward from the permanent cavity and may sever muscle tissues, blood vessels, etc.]

THE UNGRAMMATICAL PEOPLE: MINSTRELSY, LOVE

Farid Matuk

This isa nice neighborhood.

-- Daniel J. Martinez

Martinez's text, quoted above in its entirety, is one of my favorite poems. In truth, Martinez is no poet; he is a conceptual artist who uses text, among other media, to create his work.¹ In response to a public art commission by the city of San Francisco, Martinez and two collaborators designed each word of "This isa a nice neighborhood" to arch over Howard Street in front of the then new Moscone Center. The design met with virulent resistance from various community groups which led the San Francisco Art Commission to scrap the project. And so I'm left to claim this text as a poem because I need it to speak to my writing practice and my writing community. Inclined to follow Martinez's orthographic feint beyond its initial cleverness, I find these four (or five) words open onto considerations of subjectivity, labor, class and finally, imagination and ethics that feel urgent to me.

When I ask students what language is for, they invariably say "communication." But while no one has any trouble arriving at a literal understanding Martinez's text, it nonetheless dares us to correct its spelling and in that to correct also its diction and accent. Before sliding into issues of ethnicity and representation, though, I want to address how Martinez offers us a consideration of labor. Whether teaching English in Korea or Manhattan, whether teaching composition and rhetoric in colleges and universities, or whether teaching secondary or primary school, it's fair to say that many emerging poets earn their paychecks by approaching texts like Martinez's with a red pen and that we have a professional responsibility to separate forever his "is" from his "a." Though we may practice various experimental or non-normative strategies in composing our own texts, very few institutions (outside of the peculiar forum of the university creative writing workshop) are willing to pay us to teach students to write like Gertrude Stein. Of course I cannot speak for the many poets who find other ways to earn money, but Martinez calls those of us who teach composition to consider that our livelihoods are not earned by empowering students to communicate but by training student communication to remain within the bounds of Standard American English.

And this is where Martinez helps us find the touch point between our labor and the production of subjectivity: we get paid to teach legitimacy. That legitimacy, of course, is more embodied, more clearly coded, than

the phrase “Standard American English” wants to allow. Linguistic legitimacy is, by definition, well educated, and it is “public” in so far as it eschews regional intonations for the bland clarity of newscasters.² Is it white? It may be getting harder to make that claim. Greater access to education, upward mobility, and generational wealth among blacks and some immigrant populations are complicating our racial discourse. I find nothing wrong with inducting the disenfranchised into power by teaching them (us) to speak the language of commerce, or the language of the masters, or however else we may want to characterize it. As a first generation Peruvian immigrant and the first in my family to finish college, I’ve been the beneficiary of such a process. We come out on the other side not necessarily more or less ethnic, but better able to render ourselves legible and thereby negotiate relations of power. That some still argue one has lost his or her ethnic identity by becoming too educated (remember charges early in Barack Obama’s presidential campaign that he was not “black enough”) only underscores how clumsy we become when we excise the tools of class analysis from our racial and ethnic discourse. As many activists and educators have pointed out, bilingualism, that is, the ability to switch between the dominant discourse and whatever language or English dialect is used by one’s home community, has long been a survival strategy among disenfranchised groups in this country.

The terms of the argument around language, race, ethnicity, and legitimacy I’ve just outlined have been familiar to not only to disenfranchised students, progressive activists and educators but to most affiliates of graduate English and Cultural Studies departments as well. But it seems to me crucial to articulate them again here because they help to make evident the liminal state in which both Martinez’s text and its careful reader are suspended. It is a text that makes itself available to us while simultaneously making available the possibility of its alteration. It is as if the act of reading this sentence conjures above it the hand that wields the correction pen. That my own labor (and that of my fellow composition teachers) is implicated by the suspended pen makes the poem that much more urgent, and potentially threatening, when we consider its obverse reading. In other words, when we deny the urge to correct and indulge in not only understanding the text as a literal utterance but also in saying the words, in taking on their diction and accent, however briefly, as our own. Has not Martinez laid out before us, then, a banana peel? One which slides us forcefully and gleefully into the role of minstrel?³ And it is minstrelsy unfaithful to any specific history of race relations in the U.S. but haunted by all of them, a quintessential post-modern minstrelsy. For, whose accent, exactly, does the text render? It is worth noting that the neighborhood that was dismantled to make room for San Francisco’s Moscone Center had housed a thriving Filipino

immigrant community. What's more, the original design for the public art project laid neon tubing over each word that would, by night, glow the same word in Chinese characters on one side and in Spanish on the other. So the accented "other" we are given to perform when we utter "this is a nice neighborhood" is a perfect void each reader/speaker fills in, or, colors for herself.

It is a remarkable double gesture the poem asks to inhabit, to oscillate between the policing agent of Standard American English and whatever minstrel performance might be proper to our particular, local set of fantasies about racial and ethnic otherness. But, if this were all the poem offered, it would be little more than a piece of agitprop carefully constructed to indict as it incites. The American Studies scholar, Eric Lott, has described the complex relations 19th century blackface shows engendered among performers, working-class white audiences, and blacks (urban and rural) as a dialectic between love and theft. Even in these most disparaging performances, participants on either side of the stage could not escape the fact of their desire for and pleasure in the performance of blackness, however much such performances were in fact based on racial fantasy and bizarre hybridizations that included immigrant Irish and German stories and songs, slave culture's oral and performance traditions, and white working class antipathy for high-brow culture.⁴ As I've argued, Martinez's text does not spring from nor produce any such complex alchemy of diverse folk referents. Nonetheless, Martinez holds up a mirror in which we see, like 19th century minstrel show participants, our own desire and interest in the other. In this we are shown for something that holds in itself as much good as bad. The fact of our reaching for otherness is the starting place of an ethic, even if our only means for approaching that otherness is clumsy and indecorous.

Or, better, precisely because our reach is clumsy and its effect indecorous this reaching should be taken as a serious means by which to engage with cross-cultural projects. When poets deal with cross-cultural relations, much is made of gestures that inscribe difference, of literary tropes that signal an appropriate degree of self-awareness and distance, lest we lapse into an embarrassing act of appropriation or, worse, romantic identification. But what if we were to pretend not to be the other, but to be the other we think exists, the other we cobble together in nothing but our imperfect imaginations? It seems to me that what is at stake in these projects is not a faithful rendering of otherness, nor, as many would have it, a faithful rendering of our inability to render otherness. Instead, such investigations are an opportunity to rigorously exercise our imaginations in the service of our desires. Doing so might invite into our texts an element of performance

such as we find in Martinez's simple sentence, a chance to pretend to be the thing we have been trained not to be: readers who trust their imaginations to inch forward beyond social discipline. In other words, if our fantasies, good and bad, are allowed no form, are we to proceed with our reason alone? What kind of love is that?

(Endnotes)

¹ A Los Angeles native, Martinez is best known for his 1993 Biennial Exhibition entry at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. For the project, Martinez altered the normal museum admission tags from saying "WMAA" to "I can't imagine ever wanting to be white." He describes himself as a "tactical media practitioner."

² The Nebraska Department of Education, for one, defines Standard American English this way: 1. that variety of American English in which most educational texts, government, and media publications are written in the United States. 2. English as it is spoken and written by those groups with social, economic, and political power in the United States. Note: Standard American English is a relative concept, varying widely in pronunciation and in idiomatic use but maintaining a fairly uniform grammatical structure. <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/READ/FRAMEWORK/index.html>

³ I wonder who I am addressing. Would there be anyone who might identify with Martinez's text as a faithful typographic rendering of his or her own spoken language? Would anyone feel native to this utterance when it is rendered in print? I suspect no one would. Isn't it the case that those of us with accented English answer Standard American English in print with our mispronunciations and not the other way around? The true perversion – what Martinez in effect does – is to have our mispronunciations rendered in print.

⁴ Lott, Eric. *Love & Theft: Blackface, Minstrelsy, and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

FIND US WITH THE LEMURS: DISABILITY AND THE SPRÅKGROTESK

Joyelle McSweeney and Johannes Göransson

1. We admit a fatso poetry, lemur poetry, disabled poetry, språkgrotesk. A softness, malformation, which may be penetrated, distended by multiple languages from multiple directions, which is a process, which undermines hierarchies of wellness and illness, ability and disability, which is becoming, minor and non-exemplary.¹

2. Lennard Davis isolates the connection between normalized languages and normalized bodies in his essay, “Bodies of Difference: Politics, Disability, and Representation”: “Is it a coincidence, then, that normalcy and linguistic standardization begin at roughly the same time? [... F]or the formation of the modern nation-state, not simply language but also bodies and bodily practices had to be standardized, homogenized, normalized.”²

3. Deleuze and Guattari propose an antidote to the standardization of language – a minor literature inside of the major language. They call on the writer to “be a stranger within one’s own language”, to “make use of the polylingualism within one’s own language”³; their primary example is Kafka. Such minoritization releases a large quotient of deterritorialization and is an element in their anti-ontological notion of becoming-animal (or -insect, -woman, -infant). D + G’s concept of minor literature is now fairly well-trodden, but we would like to call attention to what is often missing in such discussions: the body.

4. It is Gregory Samsa’s body that becomes a cockroach; it is in his mouth that his words begin to vibrate strangely.

5. Leaving the body out of D + G’s model is already an attempt to suppress the threat of the minor—because to admit the theory into one’s own mouth invites one’s own deterritorialization. This is the kind of breakdown we are waiting for, which we invite. We are down with it we have come down with it. We’re embarrassed.

6. Kom Leatherface, min älskade⁴

7. Like Samsa and Leatherface, the grotesque body is a hybrid, a monster, both animal and human, threateningly both falling short of and exceeding its components. Language hybridizes with similarly mixed and monstrous

results. In an essay on French poet Henri Michaux, Swedish scholar Per Bäckström coins the term “språkgrotesk” (language grotesque), a concept that brings Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of the grotesque (the body that is always “becoming”) to bear on language itself. Språkgrotesk speaks to the ways in which certain writers mutate and meld language as if it were a monstrous body.⁵

8. As Andreas Huyssen points out in his study of avant-garde writings, *After the Great Divide*, the historical avant-garde rejected the High Modernist striation into high and low culture and enacted convulsive effects akin to Bakhtin’s grotesque.⁶ Unfortunately, contemporary American discussions of supposed avant-garde poetics have sterilized, hygienified and normalized the avant-garde into a self-righteous, well-bounded, militarized/masculinized political outfit that derives and maintains its hardness via a rigorous outsidership and rejection of mass culture. This set of tropes has enabled, say, Ron Silliman’s denigration of other writers’ “soft surrealism,” insufficiently rigorous in its politics or endpoints.⁷ Such pronouncements cast the American ‘avant-garde’ as an alternative hierarchy rather than an alternative to hierarchy.

9. We think Ron’s got it wrong. The global epidemic of Surrealism derives not from its manifestos and pronouncements, the imperialist/ecumenical instincts of Breton, but because it has traveled with émigrés across borders and oceans, in a flux of disheveled genders, nationalities, and media, in the second-rate garments of sleep, dream, and game.

10. This is not to say that we reject manifestos (such as the one we are writing now). We merely reject replacing one regime with another. We want to recognize the minor, which never takes power, which never sets up a new regime. The Swedish poets Aase Berg and Matthias Forshage, then both members of Surrealistgruppen of Stockholm, called in 1996 for a “Surrealism on the outer edge of time: irrational, compromising, conspiratorial, confused, monotonous, bloodthirsty. Find it with the lemurs, on the bloodstained backstreets or in the parks that are still ugly.”⁸ This non-eschatological, non-linear avant-garde project does not identify with the macho hard-core Messiah who knocks out History and sets up His own shop. Here is no utopian endpoint but rather confusion, “zones where interesting things can happen,” where “lemurs” – cuddly but rabid – swarm.

11. This poetics of the teeming mass rather than the organized, well-framed subject is at work in Berg’s book *Forsla fett* (Transfer Fat), a poem about both translation and pregnancy.

Mamma val

Mom choice

Amma val
Valyngelskal
Ge harmjölkk,
alla val är
samma val

Nurse whale
Whalebroodshell
Give hare-milk
all whales are
the same whale⁹

This verse depends on a series of puns—and puns, with their potential to collapse orders of meanings, can only provide the kind of order that enacts its own collapse. The title pun works around ‘val’, which can mean ‘choice’ or ‘whale’, and as the word is repeated in various phrases neither one nor the other meaning becomes dominant. This lexical flux undoes the ability of word ‘choice’ to mean. If one cannot choose among meanings for this word, no choice is possible; all choices are the same whale. Elsewhere in the book the text melds multiple languages—English, horror movies, string theory—into its monstrous body:

Navelsträng

Umbilical String

I mittencirkelhålet
hårt suger harespåret
i inåtcirkelvirkeln
av det spända

In the middlecirclehole
hard sucks the hare track
in the inwardcircle whirl
of the strung

Klar kyla rusar kabel
Stum stämma rinner sträng
Stram strämja rusar fett
i malströmsåret

Clear cold rushes cable
Mute voice runs strung
Strained struggle ruses fat
in the malestromsore¹⁰

Berg produced *Transfer Fat* in part by translating from English scientific articles on string theory, a subject of which she has no expertise. The deformed English terminology in turn denatures the integrity of the Swedish words, calling attention to their component syllables over their connotative or denotative meanings. To translate this work is not, in fact, to translate from Swedish into English but to invite new coalescences across one multilingual, mongrel swarm.

12. Bakhtin argued that poetry had a centripetal mission – to create the illusion of a central, true language, a hierarchical notion of culture. The prevalence of such a notion in US culture explains why Americans still think poetry is what is “lost in translation,” and why American poets are

always turning their attention—enviously, critically, or admiringly—to anthologies and prizes which posit bestness, a bestness which itself ratifies a fantasy notion of poetry as a center of American culture, of American English, and a correlating fantasy of American culture and English as central to the world. Berg presents an antithesis: a poetry of lemurs, of swarms, as translation, as that which doesn't exclude other languages but draws them into an unstable assemblage. Such an assemblage, though lowly, is dynamic, insidious rather than conquering. In the piece above, the strings (and other scientific language) of string theory are brought together with the pregnant body – making the science corporeal and the body – that supposed icon of the natural – de-essentialized. The result is a flux comparable to what D + G calls rhizome:

The rhizome is altogether different, *a map and not a tracing*. Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification.¹¹

13. The political tendency of fatso poetry, of lemur poetry, comes from its filiations with unwell bodies, with deficient bodies, with disabled bodies, with poor bodies. Like the lemurs, such poetry cannot compete. Its edges cannot be marked, and its figure cannot be judged. Translation works this way. Its excess belies a deficit (of mastery, of fluency, of equivalence) and exposes deficits currently masked within a table of hierarchies. It uncouples priorities and lays bare lacks and needs. In the face of its unnerving debasement, material is unworked from frames and rushes to fill low pits and orifices. Strange mutants congeal at pit-level. This may be going nowhere. It goes on.

(Endnotes)

¹ For further elaboration of our intersecting model of translation and disability studies, see our “Manifesto of the Disabled Text” in the Spring 2008 issue of */nor*.

² Davis, Lennard. “Bodies of Difference: Politics, Disability, and Representation.” In *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*. Snyder, Brueggmann, and Garland-Thomas, eds. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2002. 101.

³ Deleuze and Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Translated by Dana B. Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. 26.

⁴ “4.5 I reaktor,” from *Mörk Materia*, collected in *Remainland: Selected Poems of Aase Berg*. Johannes Göransson, translator. Tuscaloosa: Action Books, 2005. Trans: “Come Leatherface, my love.”

⁵ See “Språkgrotesk” in Per Bäckström’s *Enhet I mångfalden: Henri Michaux och det groteska*. (Lund: ellerströms, 2005) 73-85. Translated here by Johannes Göransson.

⁶ Andreas Huyssen. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

⁷ One such volley is lobbed at Charles Simic on Silliman’s Blog here: <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2007/10/in-recent-years-different-poets.html>

⁸ Matthias Forshage and Aase Berg. “Surrealismen I den yttersta tiden”. *Stora Stallet* Nr 4, Mars 1996. Reprinted at <http://www.surrealistguppen.org/surrmainisy.htm>. Translated here by Johannes Göransson.

⁹ “Mamma Val” and “Mom Choice” reprinted in *Remainland: Selected Poems of Aase Berg*. Johannes Göransson, translator. Tuscaloosa: Action Books, 2005. 46-47.

¹⁰ Ibid, 54-55.

¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated and with a foreword by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. 12.

NOTES TOWARD A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF "CONTRADICTIONS. IRONY. SENTIMENTALITY."

Deborah Meadows

The following is a way to honor the first decade of *Xcp: Cross-Cultural Poetics* which generously sponsored discussion, experimental poetry and theatre, photography and theory. Though humble and exploratory *notes*, I hope to reflect on Mark Nowak's call for "where we've been, where we're going," and where we might be:

1. Consider the way irony can prick the conscience, throw injustice into steep relief, offer a humored response to scandal, whittle down tyrannical authority figures.
2. Consider that too often 19th century "sentimental" literature is read flat and at face value: might today's readers miss out how *sentimentality is 19th century irony*.
3. *The blues holds me up, the blues shift the ground.*

Where are changing lines between artifice and authenticity in a self-reflexive poetics? Is an ironic mode an extension of 19th century sentimentality; what is the relation of both to expertise, to worldly sophistication? Is one a complex relation to that expertise so acts as *desire-collected*?

Does ignoring much-touted differences factored from structured tree-phyllum irony (sophisticated, masculine, theoretical) and sentimentality (naïve, feminine, tragico-religious) miss out how those categories fail in perception, or detection, of how readers move from naïve (reading at "face value") to literary readers initiated into detecting duplicity, tone, subtext? In this way, *sentimentality is 19th century irony*, yet haven't 20th century readers too often misconstrued how sentimental literature was read in its time, uninitiated into how it was not read at "face value"?

Theorists may too often rely on tree-phyllum and seek a better or more inclusive definition, more numerous tree-categories yet not see how they are using structures that are self reinforcing. Unlike, say, opening a conversation on how similar irony and sentimentality are.

Apart from recognizable social critique or "statements" in literature, what are other kinds? Where does 19th century sentimentality (to advance aboli-

tion of slavery, e.g.) cross to 20th century irony (to critique complacency in the face of social injustice, e.g.)?

Are these “ironic poets and playwrights,” or “poets and playwrights of contradiction” who take on sacred cows, vanities, self-indulgent motives, move toward action, and inaction, such as Samuel Beckett who deflects meaning, or who won’t resolve emotional strife or turn to ready-at-hand tropes. To what extent does the waiting for a possible saviour by Estragon and Vladimir interrogate iconic economy, or the misguided belief that one can negotiate an even better deal with a cruel god?

Sacred cows, exposed by poets who reject monologic, unified self, yet why is it that so often in their role as critics write from monologic, unified self and reject essay forms perceived as “collaged.” Of mathematic and philosophical reason.

Their travel literature.

Contradictions can be understood as a person holding up or prevailing (well or poorly) under material conditions that thwart their own inclinations, desires, and convictions. bell hooks has written how receiving an advanced degree *and* remaining affiliated with working-class concerns means living a contradiction. In Havana, to conduct tourism, even in a controlled form or area, is discussed as a contradiction: to raise funds for people while advancing a business based on a culture of servility.

It’s important to not dismiss contradictions as mere hypocrisy wherein one piously holds a position yet opportunistically suspends that position with “special pleading.” Living contradictions is a critique of those conditions, a way of surviving, a way of engaging very close limits, operating in a narrow crack of action and thought. No one gets a free pass.

A poetics that might come out of contradictions, rather than driven by irony or sentimentality (though possibly using those means) could make use of all forms to show or create experience of being awash with ideological messages and structures while finding those unjust (such as the experience of exposure to 19th century religious justifications for slavery while being an abolitionist, e.g.); being surrounded by images and icons of abjection and debasement of segments of our population while feeling the sting of injustice (such as the experience of being covered over with propaganda

advancing the terms of wealth while critiquing capitalism and its dehumanizing processes); being saturated with political and commercial messages (such as Peggy Noonan's speeches written for Reagan that sought to be all things to all people while critiquing the terms of that blurring); being restricted by lack of public transportation to rely heavily on a car culture while opposing the wars for oil.

In some such way, poetics of contradiction might register without promoting, nor without justifying these concurrences, but works as form of truth, of inquiry in the face of complacency, clarity in a muddled representation, possibly even as a chronicle of the times it seeks to change (thus, we notice many poets working in events "of the day" in the past couple of decades), or to mitigate dehumanizing conditions and so to survive with humanity intact.

This poetics may mean being *both the voice-over and the one who defaces*, or *detourné(s)*. The voice-over because a poetics of contradiction is among other things a way of both talking back to power and to the powerless, a way of performing a deep disintegration of tradition and making something else of its ruins, a way of collecting fragments and appropriating shards of everyday in re-made ways that, too, then aren't fit for sale or primitive. Fillets.

Hazards for this art include being quoted out of context (or being co-opted) to resolve contradictions by just being a happy consumer or registered Republican, or by a turn to naturalized stories of progress, development, or of "overcoming obstacles." Unlike culture studies that held up the promise of studying popularly-produced or -practiced cultural forms yet yielded a bumper crop of scholars who importantly, but too easily, studied professionally-produced commercial forms such as TV messages and products, a poetics of contradiction would do the hard work of finding and meeting small enclaves of people (somewhat like Nowak's and others' poetry of ethnography) rather than write from a couch in front of the TV. To avoid another hazard: this poetics would expand study of peoples and issues to include materials from more than twenty years ago – study, reading, thought.

Critique of sentimentality—that it can keep those individuals who are under that operation as tragic, in need of rescue or salvage, and so outside the realm of human rights, "parasitic relation."

Critique of irony—that it can keep individuals or structures that are ironized suspended in time, distanced by elitist framing and self-assurance and a

product dependent on the author's will rather than separate, autonomous, and thus, they are made into "pets."

PARROTFISH, PACHYDERMS, AND POETRY:

WRITING WHILE TRAVELING

Aimee Nezhukumatathil

I want to make sure my husband feels like he knows what he is doing: it is our honeymoon after all. In the parking lot of our resort here in St. Lucia, our tour guide tosses wet snorkel equipment at us from a glass tank filled with blue fluid that reminds me of windshield wiper fluid. By now, I know my husband is nervous by the way he blinks hard and squints his eyes and that when he picks up his gear and steals sideways glances at the other couples, he is sizing them up to see if he can figure out if he is the only one here who has never snorkeled before. Our guide begins to warn us of eels, fire coral that will burn your hands if you touch it, and sea snakes that may sidle up next to you if you venture too far from the shoreline. More blinking, more squinting. And inside I am laughing because my otherwise fearless and brave new husband is clearly nervous. In fact, it is the first time I ever recall seeing him flat out *scared*. It's a small moment, I know, but one that will stay with me for the express purpose of somehow recapturing that day in a poem. I file it away and try to remind myself to jot it down once we get back to our room.

Dang it—I just caught myself! I'm doing it again, and on my honeymoon, to boot. I'm supposed to be out here relaxing on a Caribbean island, far away from work, family, and friends—and even without a pen and paper in sight, I am still working. I am writing.

I have been blessed with several research grants and a teaching job that lets me have my summers and winter holidays 'off'—time that I use for renewal, writing and traveling. But I find that during those travels—even those, like my honeymoon, where I am supposed to be at 'play'—I can never turn off the switch off. I am always writing, always trying to remember, to savor like a candy or pastille to savor for later. This does not mean that my head is never 'in the moment' so to speak when I am in another country, for example, but that I enjoy and thrive upon this movement from one landscape to the next to charge up my writing. As if seeing a new and unfamiliar horizon line is just the gentle push I need to remember with exacting detail the richness of what I call home, of intimacy. And even if that horizon line is underwater and filled with parrotfish and the shape of your spouse wearing flippers, then so be it.

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Henry James famously implored a writer “to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost,” and in a recent trip to south India to introduce my new husband to my grandmother, this quote rang especially true even though I purposely did not bring my writing journal or any writing instruments when we rented a houseboat for a day. I wanted to put aside all thoughts of work, of writing and just enjoy the day as it unfolded. The minute we stepped aboard our thatched boat, I sorely regretted my journals and pens left at my grandmother’s house. I thought all would be lost and I would never remember specific smells and sounds for future poems. Clouds gathered unannounced, as if the sky was mimicking my disappointment. But when I returned home, I realized I was writing “in my head” all along.

Rain pimpled the lake and greeted us in the afternoon, smelling of crow feather and cumin. The boatmen dock our rented houseboat for the evening in the still and quiet backwaters of Kerala and my ankles ring with mosquito bites—the only skin exposed under my broomstick skirt. Dusk gathered close and the boat’s kitchen staff began preparing our dinner. My husband and I sat on the deck, facing the elegant sweep of waterways.

Out of nowhere, a honey calf ran out of the jungle and charged right towards our boat. It took one look at us, shrieked, and stumbled away in the other direction. I do not have to tell you there was nothing more frightening than this calf’s mama barreling full-speed towards us minutes later, still dragging a piece of fence tied around her neck, demanding to know what we did with her baby. I thought she would jump onto the deck of our boat and chomp on my thin brown arm. When she saw our blank looks, she snorted and charged back into the trees.

By dusk, something jumped continuously from the coconut trees that edged the shoreline to the thatched coir roof of our houseboat. Each thud came with a small yelp, like a sack of puppies thrown at us. Small husks of fruits rained down the side of the boat but we said nothing and barely breathed. I froze, held my husband’s arm, and scanned the shoreline for any outlines of men among the trees. *What now*, we wondered. And still we sat there, under the open-air patio of the houseboat and didn’t say a single word to each other. We didn’t think to call out to the boatmen who were now preparing our curry dinners just fifty feet away in the cook’s quarters. The tiny hairs in my ears pricked awake, trying to place the source of the strange sounds coming from the patio roof above us. My husband whispered that everything was going to be okay, but I could see his green eyes were open wide in alert mode. The sun was almost completely vanished, but suddenly we noticed chips of papaya flesh and bright chartreuse skins pitched from our houseboat roof and into the bay. Someone or something was eating

and making a mess over the sides of the roof. The *plink-plink* of fruit pieces and seeds into the bay made the water boil with minnows and tiny turtles at the water's surface. The hungry turtles especially hoped for a defeated dragonfly or wasp.

Now the sun had set completely and small fires from distant villages told us where the shoreline began on the other side of the bay. As if on cue with the sun, the fruit showers and thumping stopped. The chattering seemed higher, more distant. A few minutes of silence—then a giant *something* landed on the rooftop and the thatch began to sag with a heavy secret. No more movement. Finally, bravely, my husband poked his head outside and saw more clearly from the lanterns now lit by the boatmen who were already squatting ashore by their own fire and eating their dinners.

Of course! *Monkeys* were laughing at us from the trees a few yards away and the obese wildcat that chased them from our site was now guarding the roof, refusing to move. And who were we to shoo it away? The boatmen laughed and said the fat cat would not harm us, but we better finish our shrimp curry quickly. These giant stray cats apparently *love* curry and have been known to lick unattended plates clean.

We finished our delicious meal in a hurry and retreated to our bedroom. We never locked the door before, but we locked it that night—as if these monkeys would know how to turn a doorknob and latch. From the window I could see the small fires on the other side of the bay slowly extinguish themselves one by one. The scent of fruitflesh hung heavy in the starlit bay. The last thing I remember hearing was a distant meowing and chattery laughter, and I swear the monkeys were still having a good laugh over us, a new couple still trying to navigate through this edge of jungle—this new marriage.

For all these travels, for the chances to see these new landscapes and wild animals, I felt very lucky, just as we have felt every day since my husband and I were first married, and why shouldn't our luck continue? It was our one-year anniversary after all, and the next week we chose to spend it a little further north in Kerala, on the elevated hill stations where tea and pepper grow almost wild. There we would spy baby elephants in the wild, chomping on cinnamon and eucalyptus. What a gift, what a way to commemorate a beautiful first year together, than to view such a regal animal in as natural a habitat as was possible in this densely populated country. Really, I was still in disbelief that we were able to catch a glimpse of one of India's beloved and endangered elephants. It was the first elephant I had ever seen that wasn't in a tiny zoo. *This* elephant seemed in complete bliss as she ate, oblivious to our serendipitous intrusion.

I know all this in my head and kept it in my heart even though it's been almost two years since we were there. I couldn't even begin to write about it until months after we returned home to western New York. I never brought my writing journals with me to those places in St. Lucia and south India, and in a way, I feel like what I do get down on the page now seems somehow more accurate, *truer*, perhaps, than if I were to have taken diligent notes and conducted interviews with the locals as I went along.

On our way back to the hotel, we saw the last of the tea workers trim the neatly clipped green carpet of tea leaves into canvas sacks for the day's harvest. In the backseat of our rented car, I rested my head on my husband's shoulder and closed my eyes for a nap, trying to remember each step of the lovely elephant he saw—*we* saw—and I hoped we would be able to return one day and see her still thriving. The heavy scent of pepper and tea laced the air and left our clothes fragrant for days.

AFRO-ASIAN SOLIDARITIES AND THE "CIRCLE OF CULTURE"

Yuichiro Onishi

In *Black Marxism*, Cedric J. Robinson searchingly moves in and out of Western radical traditions and registers epistemic limitations and moral bankruptcies that are fundamental. In the process, he renders visible “an African tradition that grounded collective resistance by Blacks to slavery and colonial imperialism.”¹ Robinson’s argument is that out of the growing strength of this African tradition through history in modern times emerged what he calls the Black Radical Tradition. He explains its revolutionary character in this way:

The experimentation with Western political inventories of change, specifically nationalism and class struggle, is coming to a close. Black radicalism is transcending those traditions in order to adhere to its own authority. It will arrive as points of resistance here, rebellion there, and mass revolutionary movements still elsewhere. But each instance will be formed the Black radical tradition in an awareness of the others and the consciousness that there remains nothing to which it may return.²

Moving in a “racial groove,” as W. E. B. Du Bois once put it, the Black Radical Tradition produced a philosophical and political category of its own, and changing the groove itself, it carved out an independent field of inquiry into revolutionary consciousness and praxis. The trajectory of the Black Radical Tradition involved such a movement in modern thought and an experience of race, for, as Robinson explains, “its focus was on the structures of the mind.”³ The Black Radical Tradition has been—historically—a powerful modality that could generate a whole new way of cultivating moral epistemology, aesthetic sensibility, and even universality.

Although this insight into the Black Radical Tradition is particularly important in making sense of where the impetus for Afro-Asian solidarities comes from and why it persists, scholars, artists, and activists that are shaping the growing subfield that explores Afro-Asian connections in history, politics, and culture do not grapple with the enabling and creative capacities of the Black Radical Tradition, especially where all of these originate.⁴ Instead, these scholars rely on such theoretical formulations as Afro-Orientalism, strategic anti-essentialism, and polyculturalism to analyze how Blacks and Asians negotiate identity and culture within the context of white supremacy.

Following cultural critic Paul Gilroy's claim that Black nationalism is a catalyst that engenders an epistemic, ontological, and political problem called ethnic absolutism or raciology, they all express a certain kind of aversion toward Black nationalism. Consequently, they never explain where what Vijay Prashad calls "a 'practical index' that sets in motion the processes that might in time produce a *humanity* that is indeed in some way equal" comes from in the first place.⁵ This oversight reveals scholars' inadequate grasp of the dynamic and central feature of African heritage, which the great African American historian Sterling Stuckey refers to as a "circle of culture."

In *Slave Culture*, Stuckey argues that although Africans of diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as Angolans, Akans, Yorubas, and Ibos, spoke different languages, worshipped their own gods, and perpetuated their own social and cultural norms, they began shaping their sense of shared identity from the moment they were placed on slave ships to be sold as chattel in the New World. Stuckey calls this shared sense Africanity. Specifically, central to the articulation of Africanity was the circle of culture, which was cultivated through a dance ceremony called the Ring Shout involving singing, call and response, drumming, hand clapping, fiddle or violin performance, and storytelling carried out by moving counterclockwise in a circle to honor the ancestors. In the New World, the Ring Shout functioned as a language with which Africans and peoples of African descent reached across linguistic, cultural, and ethnic boundaries to forge pan-African and racial solidarity.⁶

It was through the Ring Shout that Africans of diverse ethnic backgrounds found a direct link to their homelands, and it was the affirmation of Africanity that enabled them to step into the circle of universal humanity and "establish the norm for *humans*."⁷ As Robinson makes it clear in *Black Marxism*, "They lived on their terms, they died on their terms, they obtained freedom on their own terms.... These were the terms that these African peasants and farmers brought with them to captivity."⁸ They operated with their own conception of universalism against the western notion, which Aimé Césaire called a "disembodied universalism."⁹ Indeed, as Stuckey notes, "before there was mention of natural rights in North America," Africans of diverse ethnic backgrounds, through the Ring Shout and during the course of becoming a single people, produced distinct political idioms for imagining and actualizing what it meant to be human and African.¹⁰ Far from being an essentialist discourse, the vision of liberation that Africans in captivity and their descendants nurtured and sustained over time was informed by a "universal" of their own.

Leading Asian American intellectuals and activists who entered the Black freedom struggle pursued this potential for singular universalism that was

made palpable and even audible by the circle of culture. Clearly, they were not deterred by the claim that the Black Radical Tradition was essentializing. Consider, for instance, Grace Lee Boggs's experience of entering the circle of culture in the early 1940s. Then, she was getting involved in a radical politics via the Trotskyist-led Workers Party in Chicago. As she stepped into a political space shaped by the groove of the Black Radical Tradition, which intensified as the all-Black March on Washington Movement led by A. Philip Randolph galvanized mass support from the bottom up, she witnessed Black working people's readiness to seize hope for a better future.¹¹ In the autobiography *Living for Change*, she described her political awakening as a magical moment in which she experienced a total human liberation, for it revolutionalized the existing categories and idioms of radicalism. She wrote:

From the March on Washington movement I learned that a movement begins when large numbers of people, having reached the point where they feel they can't take the way things are any longer, find hope for improving their daily lives in an action that they can take together. I also discovered that the black community has within itself to change this country when it begins to move. As a result, I decided that what I wanted to do with the rest of my life was to become a movement activist in the black community.¹²

Like Boggs, something happened to Yuri Kochiyama's political imagination when she first heard Malcolm X's captivating oration on the radio in October 1963. She began taking a giant step in theory and practice. As the biographer Diane Fujino writes, "Malcolm had moved her," and it was this experience of race, or a moment of cognitive clarity, that pushed her in a direction to embrace revolutionary Black nationalism, especially its centerpiece, the idea of self-determination.¹³ Fred Ho, a Chinese American composer, baritone saxophonist, and political activist was also transformed by the revolutionary vision of Malcolm X. He was in high school when he first read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and its prose and voice led him to the circle of culture. He later described his own experience of race in this way: "For the first time... I began to theorize my personal experience to the level of social analysis and radical political concepts."¹⁴

Although the circle of culture was of utmost importance in strengthening Africanity among Blacks in the diaspora, it generated an ethos that was ecumenical and touched these and other Asian American intellectual-activists and artists who were repulsed by social miseries created by white supremacy and capitalism. They were drawn to the circle, for there was a strong desire on their part to feel the groove of the Black Radical Tradition

that could help shatter normative standards, incite intellectual curiosity, and make waves for new kinds of knowledge to emerge. Such was also the outcome of my teaching experience at Borough of Manhattan Community College of The City University of New York, where I discovered the utopian potential of the circle of culture.

In the beginning of every semester, the very fact that I, a Japanese, taught Black studies courses created friction. The racial and ethnic composition of these courses was highly heterogeneous, and the dynamic of the classroom was such that African Americans from Bronx, Brooklyn, and Harlem, immigrants, migrants, and refugees from Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America, and I occupied this shared space, even when we did not always connect with each other beyond this classroom in our everyday lives. Upon entering this space and seeing my face on the first day, many of these students seemed either perplexed or disappointed. Others were more frank. They were just mad that a learning space they hoped to occupy to further cultivate their pride in blackness was not there, but was controlled by an Asian instructor.

In particular, those who identified themselves as Black cultural nationalists were the first to show their discontent. Doubting my ability to teach and relate to the Black historical experience, they listened to everything I said closely, often correcting how I framed the movement of Black history. If I placed an emphasis on the human agency of Africans and peoples of African descent, for instance, they reminded me the unspeakable scale of violence unleashed by the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, slavery, and Jim Crow segregation. However, if I placed more than usual emphasis on what the oppressors did to Black people, then they accurately pointed out the resilience of the Black freedom struggle. Also if I failed to mention such crucial information as the African roots of the western civilization and rich histories of African ancient civilizations, they cited John Henrik Clarke, Yosef Ben-Jochannan, and Cheikh Anta Diop, encouraging others and me in the classroom to consult their work.

Students and I self-consciously sustained dialectical thinking throughout the semester in this way, much in the same way that the Ring Shout was carried out to engender necessary vigor and creativity to muster the power to achieve liberation. We moved in a racial groove, all the while stretching and redefining the boundaries of Black nationalism and intensifying our movement in a circle by struggling over identity, place, culture, and meaning of these categories. The circle or culture emerged slowly in these courses I taught. My students, who were all subjects of the African diaspora, and I pursued the impulse to translate differences in experience, history, and

thought at every turn, allowing the supple workings of race to articulate the reach and limitation of Afro-Asian solidarities. Although this struggle never ceased, we did acknowledge not in words but with the cadences of our dialogues that Afro-Asian solidarities could potentially manifest as long as the circle of culture was made foundational.

Notes

- ¹ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, foreword by Robin D. G. Kelley with a new preface by the author (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 169.
- ² Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 317.
- ³ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 169.
- ⁴ Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung-Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Bill V. Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen, ed. *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
- ⁵ Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung-Fu Fighting*, 69; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
- ⁶ Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-97.
- ⁷ Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 58.
- ⁸ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 170.
- ⁹ Quoted in Robin D. G. Kelley, "A Poetics of Anticolonialism," in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 25.
- ¹⁰ Stuckey, 3.
- ¹¹ Grace Lee Boggs, *Living for Change: An Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 38.
- ¹² Boggs, *Living for Change*, 39.
- ¹³ Diane C. Fujino, *Yuri Kochiyama: Heartbeat of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 138.
- ¹⁴ Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism*, 169-170.

Traveling in China, a friend of mine came across a portrait of baby-Krishna under a tree. Surprised to find the worship of this Hindu god in Chinese heartland, and inquiring, he was told it was a portrait of baby-Buddha.

How does it matter if they look the same, when they have different names?

In the battle for supremacy between Buddhism and Taoism in 8th century AD China, Buddhism became a boys club and needed a female figurehead. Indian male bodhisattva Avalokishwara had a sex-change operation and became the Chinese female goddess of compassion, Kuan Yin.¹

Does it matter if they look different, when they are the same?

A couple of centuries later, Kuan Yin got a new look when she met Madonna who came to China with Nestorian Christians.²

If they look so similar, how will we tell the difference?

In the case of Krishna and Buddha, there is no transformation of form. Although both tropes ultimately stand for a wise teacher, their values differ. One dances, one sits still. One is imagistic-surreal-suggestive-symbolic, and other is real-material-statement. Ardour, play, devotion and embellishment vs. tranquility, pragmatism, detachment and austerity. The identical form is as if a shell upon two different substances, and could be considered duplicitous.

Avalokiteswara's transformation may also be seen as a spin, reducing the form to a formality, and it is startling because the change seems to occur across different cultural spaces.

If you don't read colonization into it, or don't care for equal exchange, Kuan Yin's imitation of Madonna may be less disturbing. While being less necessary, it is as natural as wearing your sister's clothes, especially if she is also a compassionate bodhisattva.

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Disney influences Manga in the 1940s. Within decades, Manga returns to the USA as a Japanese form. In Japan, 'manga' is the word for comics (rather than for a kind of comics.) Outside Japan, manga is understood as Japanese comics.

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Translating between Hebrew and Arabic = peace-treaty. Translating from Vietnamese into American = apology. Americans translating from any language into English = espionage, an effort to counter the charge that America has invaded the world more than the world has invaded America. One notices the current lack of American interest in Russian writing. Vietnamese and West European writers upstaged by the Middle East, even with discourse scraping the bottom of the barrel, as the title of this panel discussion – “Islam and Women: What is there to talk about?”³

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According to theosophist Annie Besant, India was colonized by the British because English was destined to become the global language, and was a good vehicle “to prepare the spiritualization of the world.”⁴

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Laforgue in Eliot, Hartmann in Laforgue, Schopenhauer in Hartmann, Buddhism in Schopenhauer, and the Veda in Buddhism.

Tongue in tongue in tongue in tongue. Author, system alike: source, carrier, receptacle. Ultimately, every writer, a system, a culture, and all meetings, crosscultural.

Had Laforgue not carried Hartmann's book in his pocket, and had Eliot not declared his love for Laforgue's work, it would not have been as easy to see this sensibility-tree.

Roots are routes, which is easier to spot if you are British and do not pronounce route like out, like so many Americans.

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Americans are/were known for regarding trees as beauties in the wilderness. Europeans and other older settlements are/were supposed to see trees more domestically, making pets, trolls and myths of them.

Did the settlers who went to America miss the pet myths they left behind? And was there a time when even a European felt wild and grand and solitary when they met trees? What happens when an American meets a European under a tree. A fluid moment, too nuanced to record, too lively to not be slippery.

But which tree?

Are trees different? Firs, 'western' trees, tall and sharp like church spires. Indian trees, short and rounded like Indian temples. Every tree a posture, a petrification of its posture at the moment it was pronounced a tree. In the spelling, a spell?

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Joseph Brodsky: "Given the lunacy this piece deals with, it ought to be written in a language other than English. The only option available to me, however, is Russian, which is the very source of the lunacy in question. Who needs tautology?"⁵ Brodsky did not say if English-language vocabulary is not up to the mark, or if it will be corrupted by mad thoughts. Did Brodsky not care to put some lunacy into English?

For Celan: "There's nothing in the world for which a poet will give up writing, not even when he is a Jew and the language of his poems is German."

Sanskrit has no word for "have," therefore draw a conclusion. Some languages have a neuter gender, this resolves or affirms something. Nomenclature, allowance; lack of nomenclature, disallowance.

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Indians tend to pun in English because their languages are more phonetically precise: fifty-three alphabets, and an exact correspondence between an alphabet and how it sounds (unlike English, where 'a' sounds different in play, arm, any, cat, amuse, awful, and 'f' looks different in fairy, philosophy and rough). East Asians tend to parse English to get to know the parts better, as one would decipher ideograms.

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The packaging of *Good Earth Chai* has a picture of a woman with an oriental face, and wearing Thai head-dress, and a purple dress the color of

Thai orchids. She sits cross-legged, has an unexplained smile, her eyes are downcast, and she holds a cup with both hands in typical Chinese-style. Just over her shoulder, there is a gold-embossed Tibetan letter “SAH” “representing the script for earth.” The text on the packaging describes *Chai* as a drink enjoyed for centuries in Tibet and India. The word *Chai* is written in calligraphy, and the predominant color scheme on the package is an earthy orange-brown. The tea and spices do not come from anywhere particular; they are “from around the world.” All of this is put together in Santa Rosa, California.

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In the video, “Writing Across Borders,”⁶ produced by Oregon University, a Japanese student talks about Japanese plots and quotes a poem titled “Daughters in a String Shop,” to illustrate the distinctly cultural structure. Introduction (Ki): There are two daughters at The String Shop in Osaka. Development (Sho): The oldest daughter is 16, and the youngest daughter is 14 years old. Turning Point (Ten): Japanese Samurai kill their enemies with arrows. Conclusion (Ketsu): Japanese daughters kill guys with their eyes. The video features students from different parts of the world. A student from the Middle East says that what is considered exaggeration in the USA is an expected stylistic device in the Middle East. A student from China says that plagiarism is normal in China because of communist ideas about sharing everything. The video quotes a 1966 article, “Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-cultural education” as the first study of its kind, where author Robert Caplan draws diagrams to represent rhetorical structures of different cultures: English as straight arrow, Semitic as zigzag, Oriental as circular, and Romance and Russian as jagged.

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The 2007 Man Asian Literary Prize for a novel written in English launches along with a controversy when founder and organizer Nury Vittachi is fired from the committee, and says: “There were no Asians or non-white faces among the judges ... when I mentioned this racial insensitivity at a meeting, they just sat silent.”⁷ A few months later, Vittachi poses the problem of racial poetics: “Asian story arcs differ significantly from Western ones.” He cites Mahabharata and Ramayana as examples of Asian narratives, structured like “lucky charm bracelets,” as opposed to the Greek structure of story-telling. In discussions at a festival, Xuxi is said to have said about the Asian arc: “perhaps as in the tale of Buddha, a short story should just mosey along, this way and that, and then one day achieve enlightenment if it happens.”⁸

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“I no longer use any motifs that would mark my work as Japanese,” says Yoshimaru Takahashi, a designer in Japan. Partly “to evade stereotyping,”⁹ Takahashi dropped conventional Japanese motifs in his work and went ‘deeper’ into Japaneseness, and drawing from a philosophy of ambiguity, indirectness and flux, identified eight basic “notions,” or “aesthetic preferences” with which to perceive time and space, and that would characterize his work: “*kekai* (bounds), *hyoumen* (surface), *fuuka* (weathering), *hada-ai* (touch), *yashu* (rusticity), *mitate* (imaginative comparison), *oboro/myou* (fuzziness/mystery), and *konzai* (mixing).”

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Poetics or posturing. Metamorphosis or camouflage. Absorption or mirroring. Transparency or display. Definition or recipe. Vision or agenda. Fulfillment or excitement. Innovate or scavenge. Stretching canvasses contain each other. Diversity, the scale of unity. All history contemporaneous. Own any. Join these dots and not those dots. *Bhagwad Gita*: The humble learned have the same attitude towards a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater.¹⁰

(Notes)

¹ Martin Palmer, Jay Ramsay and Man-Ho Kwok. *Myths and Revelations of the Chinese Goddess of Compassion*. (London: Thorsons, 1995)

² Ibid.

³ A panel at the Iowa International Writing Program, September 2005.

⁴ Annie Besant, *Avatars*. (Adyar, Chennai: The Theosophical Publishing House, 2002), 135

⁵ Joseph Brodsky, “A Collector’s Item,” in *On Grief and Reason* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux 1995), 149.

⁶ *Writing Across Borders*. Written and directed by Wayne Robertson (Oregon State University, 2005.)

⁷ Mark McCord, “Racism Row Mars Hong Kong literary festival (Hong Kong, Feb 7, 2007 (AFP),” http://mrjam.typepad.com/diary/2007/02/racism_row_goes.html#more. (accessed 29 December 2007)

⁸ Sharon Bakar, “Asian Story Arcs Revisited,” <http://thebookaholic.blogspot.com/2007/11/asian-story-arcs-revisited.html>

⁹ Yoshimaru Takahashi, in *Fuzzy Communication – Graphic Design by Yoshimaru Takahashi*, (Hong Kong: MCCM Creations, 2008) 22-23

¹⁰ *Bhagwad Gita* 5:18

ON FEMINISM, WOMEN OF COLOR, POETICS, AND RETICENCE: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Barbara Jane Reyes

Subsequent to the *Chicago Review's* publishing of Juliana Spahr's and Stephanie Young's now notorious essay, "Numbers Trouble," on gender disparity in the US experimental poetry scene, these two authors initiated a project entitled "Tell US Poets," and issued a call for information on feminism as it exists for women writers in the world outside of North America. I responded to Spahr and Young, and to my relief, they were both receptive to my criticisms and questions. I asked if they were interested in hearing about American feminisms from the perspective of women writers from communities of color, for I was troubled by what appeared implicit to me in their request for non-North American information: that all women in North America experience and define gender relations, power dynamics, and feminism in the same manner.

This is a dangerous assumption, for Third World conditions exist in North America, in North American countries that are not Canada and the USA, among Native Hawaiians and the First Peoples of Canada, on Native American reservations, in the prison industrial complex, inner cities, rural and agricultural settings. I suspect that women in these communities do not have access to the feminism which exists in white American middle class households and their corresponding professional workplaces and educational institutions.

As well, North America is comprised of many immigrant communities (one of which I am a part), who have different beliefs and practices of gender relations, and who live in varying degrees of integration into and isolation from mainstream institutions and popular culture.

And so I have come to both appreciate and resent this, "Tell us what we need to know about feminism in _____," (fill in blank with a name of a place that isn't in America) coming from white American women who are middle class and professionals.

Perhaps a "Please," and a withholding of any initial assumptions would have made me appreciate the request a little bit more. This "Please," would have made the request sound like a request and not a command. I would have also appreciated an explanation of why the requesters feel they do not know enough or anything at all about the feminism of "other" women, why this

information is not something they have found, where they have looked, to whom they have spoken as they have attempted to gather information.

I am critical of the assumption that communities of “others,” or those of “other” places deemphasize feminism because of these “other” communities’ inherent or essential misogyny.

I am critical of the assumption that “other” communities’ misogyny is essential.

I am critical of the assumption that “innovative” poetry coming from these “other” places will abide by the same standards by which “white,” “avant garde” American poetry abides; I find this problematic precisely because these standards are determined by this same “avant garde,” their cultural values, and their relationships with English.

As well, I would ask that this American “avant garde” reconsider that we of “other” communities may not group ourselves in the groupings set up for us by those who do not live in our communities.

Consider that Filipino American poets may have more historical and linguistic commonalities with Chicano and Latino poets.

Consider that Filipino American poets may have more aesthetic commonalities with African American poets.

Consider that Filipino American poets may have more oral tradition/storytelling commonalities with Native American poets.

In thinking about what is “innovative” poetry for women of color poets, and in thinking about this alleged reticence of women poets to submit their work to journal and anthology editors for publication, here are a couple of my reference points:

(1) Chris Chen, who curated the *Asian American Poetry Now* reading at the Berkeley Art Museum in October 2007, discussed “post identity poetry,” for contemporary Asian American poets, as a process of movement and negotiation, between the already used and overused tropes of cultural artifact and sentimentality, and its binary opposite of blanket disavowal of any ethnic identifiers.

Cathy Park Hong’s *Dance Dance Revolution* reenvisions the American city and American language. Bruna Mori’s *Dérive* witnesses, engages, and participates

in American city and its farthest reaches, via public mass transit. Sarah Gambito's *Matadora* persona is full of rage despite her apparent delicacy. Yoko Ono, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, Shin Yu Pai, and Eileen Tabios write from visual and conceptual art.

(2) On the Harriet blog of the Poetry Foundation, Rigoberto González reminds us that not all poets are published (yet), or seek print publication. This may be interpreted as reticence but let me offer this possibility: Many poets not widely published are perhaps invested in live and recorded performance, which makes sense for communities for whom oral tradition is underscored over written tradition.

Harryette Mullen's *Muse and Drudge* draws from scat's improvisation, verbal games such as playground rhyme, and the dozens. The chanting of Mazatec curandera María Sabina, and of Tibetan Buddhism, Anne Waldman borrows and utilizes in her incantatory long poem, "Fast Speaking Woman." In a similar vein, Genny Lim's incantations draw from and expand her Buddhist traditions, and from Jazz.

Cecilia Vicuña draws upon the quipu tradition of the Andean people, elongating her words as she intones, as one spins fibers into thread. She incorporates actual string into her performance, tying herself to the space, and to her audience. She writes threads of words upon the handwritten pages of *Instan*.

In *Storyteller*, Leslie Marmon Silko writes that words set into motion, much like the casting of a spell, cannot simply be taken back. There are consequences to speaking, and so it should not be done lightly or carelessly. Here, word is the thing and the representation of the thing.

Spanning or blending poetry and theatre, Ntozake Shange's choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*, is performed by an ensemble of women. Jessica Hagedorn, one of the original Colored Girls, has performed poetic work with her rock band, the West Coast Gangster Choir. We can consider the ensemble poetic performance productions of Aimee Suzara's *Pagbabalik*, and Maiana Minahal's *Before Their Words* as descendants of Shange's *Colored Girls* and Hagedorn's Gangster Choir.

An emphasis on oral tradition in part explains the popularity of Def Poetry, slam poetry, Hip-hop theatre, multidisciplinary performance which is neither "new" nor "innovative" a thing to do, but extensions of oral traditions. Hip-hop generation poets are the descendants of Black Arts and Jazz Poets,

Gwendolyn Brooks, Jayne Cortez, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni. This Hip-hop generation includes such poets as LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, Ishle Yi Park, Tara Betts, Kelly Zen-Yie Tsai, Aya De León, Staceyann Chin, and Chinaka Hodge. As well, we see many of these poets actively pursuing publication, literary awards, graduate degrees, writing and teaching fellowships, acceptance and participation in artist in residency programs, and professorships.

Still, another reason for this perceived “reticence” of women writers of color to publish also has to do with a general and justifiable distrust of American letters and Western institutions. I say “justifiable,” for the historical exclusion women of color voices from American letters, but I am also wary of blanket rejections of poetry written by women of color who are products of MFA programs, erroneously thought of as not ethnic enough, not political enough, not invested in nor informed by the communities from which these writers come.

A member of an Asian American writers’ list serve some years ago attempted to make the argument that the poetry of Myung Mi Kim did not speak to the Asian American experience because Kim was a “Language Poet.” Here, I interpret this list serve member’s inaccurate use of the term “Language Poetry” to describe Kim’s fractured usage of language, narrative, and expansive use of white space. But it is precisely these fractures and caesurae in *Under Flag* which embody and enact some Korean Americans’ experiences of war, American Occupation, and subsequent displacement from their homeland, of struggling to learn new language and culture, and of negotiating between what is native, acquired, and imposed.

Catalina Cariaga’s *Cultural Evidence*, in utilizing white space and inventing poetic form; Tsering Wangmo Dhompa’s *In the Absent Everyday*, in questioning English words’ conventional meanings; and Heather Nagami’s *Hostile*, in examining translation and in criticisms of Asian American tropes, are descendants of Kim’s works.

What is “innovative” in our communities then includes various permutations of code switching, translating, fracturing language, polyglottism, vernacular; integrating performance and music onto the page presentation; integrating our own cultures’ art, oral, and poetic forms into written English and Western poetic forms.

Debra Kang Dean’s *Precipitates* synthesizes koan and haiku with American Transcendentalism. Michelle Bautista’s *Kali’s Blade* integrates the movements of the Filipino martial art, kali, into written free verse. In *Teeth*,

Aracelis Girmay pays very close attention to poetics rhythm and meter which mimic those of the African slaves working the American South's sugarcane fields. Evie Shockley writes sonnet ballads in *a half red sea*, in the tradition of Gwendolyn Brooks.

Do editors of American publications recognize these innovations? How do these editors read or deal with the "foreign" elements in this work, and especially "foreign" elements that do not abide by these editors' preconceived notions, assumptions, and prejudices? For example, not all Asian American poets are East Asian. Not all East Asian poets have Buddhist sensibilities. Not all Hip-hop poets are African American. Not all African American poets are Hip-hop. Not all Spanish writing comes from Latino/a and/or Chicano/a poets. Not all ethnic "innovative" poets disavow ethnicity; many enact rather than simply tell.

What happens to the work of "ethnic" poets who do not conform to some American editors' expectations? How is this work received? Where does that work go? Who publishes it? Is this reticence when we do not see this work in print?

One major theme I find in the poetic work of women of color is body politics, and its intersections with war, imperialism, race, and ethnicity. Combine these issues with the above explorations of language, vernacular, bi/multilingualism, oral tradition, and performance. How is this work read and received by predominantly white, maybe predominantly male American editors?

Tara Betts and Patricia Smith write about the racially motivated abduction, torture, and extreme sexual abuse of Megan Williams. On the Harriet blog of the Poetry Foundation, Smith posted mug shots of Williams' assailants, telling us, "This is where poetry comes from."

In *Trimnings* and *S*PeRM**K*T*, Harryette Mullen writes of femininity, fashion accessories, advertising, marketing, and reproduction, in ways that verge upon pornography.

Invoking the spirit of Harryette Mullen's *Sleeping with the Dictionary*, Ching-In Chen's "Ku Li," utilizes strategies of sound association and wordplay, and in the process, tests her readers' sensitivities at hearing this racially derogatory term in repetition.

Elizabeth Alexander writes of Saartjie Baartman, popularly known as the Venus Hottentot, whose prominent buttocks and *sinus pudoris* (elongated

labia) placed her body in the Western world as a living display piece. Her preserved genitals remained on display in Paris, after her death in 1815 and until 1974.

Evie Shockley writes of the Middle Passage, of rivers in the tradition of Langston Hughes (this talk of rivers which influenced Jean-Michel Basquiat), and women who navigate these rivers: Phyllis Wheatley, Gwendolyn Brooks, Sally Hemmings, Billie Holiday, and Anita Hill, to name a few.

Suheir Hammad writes of the plight of Arab women negotiating tradition and war, surviving tradition and war, and of forming alliances and communities with women across ethnicity.

In the largely imagistic, “Spanglish” and “Chinglish” poems of *Crazy Melon*, *Chinese Apple*, Frances Chung has written about the inhabitants of New York Chinatown, pushed off the sidewalks and forced to walk in the gutters, Oriental curio objects gazed upon by white tourists.

Maile Arvin writes also of tourism, which continues to push native Hawaiians off their land and away from their depleting natural resources. Arvin also writes of Hawaiian Sovereignty as it permeates every aspect of her poetic speaker’s daily life.

Irene Faye Duller, confronting the global perception of Filipino women as sexual commodities and domestics, has written, “I am the maid of the world, and the world has made me dirty.”

I write about Third World women in war and military occupation — Filipina brides, the gang rapes of Iraqi women, the Comfort Women of WWII, linking these power dynamics to pornography.

We are American poets and we are American feminists.

I don’t think we are reticent.

1.

I was trying to understand my mother when she called us middle class all through my childhood. And why she said this since by all the markers of economic resources, education, and cultural access within the US we were working class. When I years later asked her why, she said that we were middle class because we lived in a house between two apartment buildings.

I was trying to think about what was right about what she said.

The house she was talking about was owned by my father's boss. It was built out of cinderblocks and it had four rooms plus a bathroom: a kitchen and a living room at the front; two bedrooms at the back. It also had a carport and a gravel driveway leading to the carport. It had a linoleum floor. It had two picture windows, one looked out on the carport and one on the apartments next door. The house was pleasant. Its main drawback was that it leaked a lot and was very damp so things in the house tended to get covered with a green mildew if left on the floor.

When my mother was saying we were middle class she was saying something less about our house and more about our location on the block and about our location on the globe at the same time.

I was trying to think about what was right about what she said.

I was trying to think about the role of the US government in forcing reduced tariff barriers on numerous countries.

I was trying to think about the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

I was trying to think about women packing ice cream in the Gaza Strip.

I was trying to think about the World Trade Organization.

I was trying to think about women sewing garments in Liberia.

I was trying to think about the North American Free Trade Agreement.

I was trying to think about women shelling shrimp in Honduras.

I was trying to think about the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement.

I was trying to think about women cultivating cassava in Zambia.

I was trying to think about a number of bilateral agreements.

I was trying to think about women panning the tailings of diamond gravel for gold in Sierra Leone.

I was trying to think about Hannah Weiner's "Radcliffe and Guatemalan Women."

Weiner in this piece keeps one eye on herself, one eye on her neighborhood, Radcliffe, and one eye on another place, Guatemala, as she puts statements about Radcliffe women and Guatemalan women side by side. It is not known when Weiner wrote "Radcliffe and Guatemalan Women" but she probably wrote it in the 1980s.

She might have been thinking about how the 1980s began in Guatemala with the police burning alive thirty-nine people who were occupying or were hostages of those occupying the Spanish Embassy.

She might have been thinking about how the intensity of government killings peaked in 1982, with estimates of at least 18,000 state killings in that year alone.

She might have been thinking about the scorched earth campaign that in addition to killing hundreds of thousands displaced about one million people.

She might have been thinking about how the decade ended, in August and September of 1989, with the government kidnapping and then "disappearing" a number of student leaders.

She might have been thinking about how the Guatemalan government did all of this with the support of the US government.

She might have been thinking about how the US government began funding the security forces of the Guatemalan government in the 1960s and how close ties remained between the two governments through the 1980s.

“Radcliffe and Guatemalan Women” is probably all found language but I do not know this for sure. The sentences that are obviously about Radcliffe women sound as if they are from an alumna magazine. Some of the sentences that are obviously about Guatemalan women are from Severo Martínez Peláez’s *La patria del criollo*, a book not yet translated into English; others seem to be from some sort of human rights report.

Weiner’s piece is full of juxtaposition, fragmentation, and lack of attribution as if to suggest that there is nothing easy to say about this relationship between Radcliffe women and Guatemalan women. She avoids presenting herself as knowing but uninvolved witness, as the clichéd poet-prophet. And as Weiner was a Radcliffe graduate, the piece also suggests that she might be a participant, part of the problem.

But at the same time, even while the categories “Radcliffe women” and “Guatemalan women” are not equal—one is a group of women from a university and one is a group of women from a nation—the piece also suggests that there is a relationship, a complicated relationship between the two categories. This relationship is the multi-eyed aspect of “Radcliffe and Guatemalan Women.”

“Radcliffe and Guatemalan Women” makes me profoundly uneasy.

It makes me uneasy that the Radcliffe women and the Guatemalan women are presumed opposites, one privileged and one not.

It makes me uneasy that at the same time the Radcliffe women and the Guatemalan women are a specific sort of joined opposites, joined by their gender, by the ties that their governments have with each other, and by the ties that they have with their governments.

It makes me uneasy that Weiner more or less treats both categories of women equally; neither the Radcliffe women nor the Guatemalan women have any depth. While there are some names mentioned in the piece, they are not really present as individuals in the poem and it is often not clear which sentences are about Guatemalan women and which sentences are about Radcliffe women.

It makes me uneasy that as nothing is attributed, I cannot stop myself from guessing at whether it was a Radcliffe or a Guatemalan woman who “had to raise five children by herself.” But the minute I guess, I have to think again and wonder about the relationship between guess and cliché or culturalist assumptions.

It makes me uneasy that Weiner frequently includes statements that would be true about both Radcliffe and Guatemalan women, such as “They are paid lower wages than the men,” as if these lower wages are in any way equivalent.

While thinking about my mother’s assertion that we were middle class, while thinking about “Radcliffe and Guatemalan Women,” while thinking about women’s employment in the countries with the highest percentage of women in poverty, while thinking about how the manipulation of trade barriers by the US government has adversely impacted women across many different nations, while thinking about how at the same time the global economy empowers some women and disempowers others, I was trying to think about what sort of vision one needed to have in order to keep one eye on the neighborhood and then one eye on the nation and then yet one more eye on the world,

I was trying to think, in other words.

I wanted to write something about Chillicothe. I am from Chillicothe. In my family, I was the Chillicothian. My parents were from somewhere else. And yet I am not really a Chillicothian anymore and that feels obvious when I go back there. So my next thought was then, oh maybe it is that I am a child of Chillicothe. And I sat down to figure out what that might mean. I was trying to write something about being a child of a certain moment, of a certain class, working class, and then an adult of a different moment, of a different class, middle class.

I was attempting to grow some other eyes. I wanted to write something about Chillicothe, even as my story is not the story of Chillicothe, even as Chillicothe and me both benefit from the economic incentives that Lyndon B. Johnson’s 1964 war on poverty allocates to Appalachia, even as I take these incentives and I leave town and benefit from globalization in numerous ways, even as I continue to benefit, even as Chillicothe’s fortunes dwindle a few years after NAFTA when its industries go south.

Each morning, as I tried to develop a multi-eyed focus, I would sit down at my desk and go into a trance and write down whatever came up. I left Chillicothe more or less for good when I was 21 so I ended up with a lot of childhood memories. Most of them personally pleasant. I kept these totems in a file and when I got tired of gathering them, I would try to rebuild the town from the outside, from statistics, and I would arrange all these parts of Chillicothe in various patterns and try to see what sort of place the various patterns made.

2.

Mark, I am sending you this fable, a draft and an excerpt from a piece on which I am currently working, as something about the relationship(s) between the “cross cultural” & “poetics” because I feel as if I could not have written it without the suggestion that poetry can have something to say about the cross cultural moments that so define this contemporary moment, without, in other words, the issues and attentions that come with cross cultural poetics (and thus the journal *XCP*). As you know, the intentions of this and various other cross cultural turns are, however, still very much under contention. While there has been much discussion of what it means to talk about something other than one’s self, about how someone’s respectful use is another’s appropriation, issues around who gets to talk about what, who should talk about what no matter what, and if one does talk about it, how one has to talk about it are still very much under debate. As I work on this piece I keep trying to figure out how to work with these issues more. I kept thinking only of questions when I sat down to write something about this relationship between cross-cultural and poetics. Questions such as what are the values behind the cross cultural poetics that we adopt?; why the haiku and not the qasida?; why the ghazal and not the sijo?; do the values of movie-telling differ from those of neo-benshi?; what forms do we export and what are their values? While I don’t think there are going to be any clear and agreed upon answers any time soon, this debate about what happens when various traditions enter into dialogue with other traditions sure is interesting. I am, in other words, looking forward to another twenty issues.

A POETICS OF DISSENT: LABOR AND ITS EXIGENCIES

Jane Sprague

It is early in the new season of the epoch, early in the new age, after the stock-piling of rice and beans or, at least, after the imagining of this act. Nothing zeroed out at the turn of one clock to the next. No grid collapsed. No drama unfolded gentle or violent as we had secretly hoped in the night, secretly hoped a collapse of artificial systems maybe pushing us back into bread and commerce, no push back into simpler times, simpler ways of living when the engine broke.

This didn't happen.

Instead, here we are. Pitched as we ever were, leaning over the edge (careful, careful) looking into the blank sheet of 'next' thinking and knowing for certain that if anything humans repeat their histories and so, if modernity into Disney into Warhol into Slow Food into whatever meant we were still not done with the last century's work, still not done with the major force and torque of various movements, still not done with ideas, still not done with 19th century objects, even, sidling up as we did in the grants room, café, reading hall, sliding our fingers happily happily over the cool dent of letter-pressed paper. We were not done with so many things.

And yet. And yet. This was the thing we were faced with: a poetics of dissent through the working. We were working in our small and private places, working together publicly, loudly, some of us taking up what others of us saw to be too much space and yet in the moments alone, at home, under the lamp, pressed to the gap between woodstove and sill—wherever we were reading we were sometimes suddenly glad for that noise, glad for the example of others who were better equipped or at least less vexed by the tight apparatus of systems, tight apparatuses of jobs and books and getting to that place of noise. We were glad for the noise or the idea therein, it could comfort us in the night, on the bus, walking as we did through the hall, the poem taped to the wall and we didn't care if it ripped the drywall, it wasn't our drywall anyway and we knew all the tricks of toothpaste and whiteout to fool the landlord on his final pass, final walk-through before he wrote us the refund check.

We were looking through the long lens of our art, our 'art' such as it was or is, invisible inside the larger culture though we found ourselves often astonished and sad or happy or bewildered when we'd see our peers or

people we knew anyway, we would see their names lined up on the shelves at the local Barnes and Noble. We were looking through the long lens of our art our cultural work, such as we imagined it to be, as we understood our self, inside the long room, laughing with our friends about the contest system and how people got jobs and how we wanted a synthesized life where the work of the dollar was also the work of the mind. We wanted an integratedness, a seamlessness, a match and a fine mesh between the work of our thinking and the work of our hands. But we laughed and we laughed with our politico-peeps, we laughed and were bitter too, we laughed and we swallowed more of the micro-brewed mead we laughed and we let the hot pear juice go to our heads we laughed and we decided to invent our own prize we laughed and shook our curls we laughed and slapped our thighs and we cried as the tightness in the belly came we laughed as it changed from a true laugh to that thing of hurt and wince we laughed because we were exhausted and had sold every single one of our books to buy the plane ticket to come here we laughed and leaned against the wall knowing our books begetting books sold as we also were sold out as we also were we couldn't help this laughing and laughing.

For if not laughter, what other sustenance to negotiate the shifting terrain? The culture we had to cross into was an economy of jobs and losses. We crossed in blindly. We crossed in over the century's gap. Crossed in thanking our parents, not our begetters, our poetical parents. Crossed in over the transom they'd sacked. Crossed in with all of Vietnam on our backs. Vietnam and how that war had shaped our ability to see all the other wars. Crossed in knowing that this too was one of them. Crossed in wearing our mule-blinders of class. Crossed in with the live ghost of our father affixed to the front of our sleeve. Crossed in with the desire to focus and read. We crossed in. And took every inch of what we had every inch of every workplace within us.

I could strip away the 'we' from this. I could strip away and plainly say what we already know to be true: that the constant grind of capital's engine presses hard at our backs and upon us. Could say that the working people of this nation have been sold down the river to almost any other nation over the ocean. But the alarming thing, loaded as we always are on sharp-eyed cutting, loaded as we always are on trimming the edge of each and every thing, loaded as we always are on the speech of our region, loaded as we always are on My Appalachia's cadence: the crossing we faced was through economies too divergent and strained same old same old's too predictable and painful, painful in their predictable repeating, painful in their commerce of vagaries and wit, painful in their classist entrenchment. We watched as the minds of our peers slipped further and further into the distance. We

saw ourselves landed and landlocked at the gap. That edge.

Was it enough to want things to be different? Was it enough to call working-class culture its own? Was it enough to walk into the room with your father's broken body clouding your vision? Was it enough to see ourselves too as working-class workers? Farmed out as we were into the classrooms? Farmed out as we were, disinvented as we were, excluded as we were from economies of commerce and mind? Unpedigreed as we were and yet—alone in the thinking that if we were poets didn't everybody know better? Was it wrong to wish our friends knew better? Was it wrong to be angry with them for their finally jobs? Wrong to be angry with them for birth into economies different from our own? Wrong to be angry for their inability to understand what it really is to be poor—and not through abstraction? It was neither wrongly nor rightly. It simply was. Complicatedly was. And so. And so we sold every single one of our books. And so we shaped a poetics of dissent. And so we made the work of our mind also the work of our editing hand. We sought out only the finest of print subjects. We found loose and feral ways to make these objects into print. We took the free textbooks and sold every single one of their books. As for our own work, we entered into a poetics of refusal. A poetics of dissent informed by our father's broken body pinned to our sleeve. A poetics of yes for our peers speaking up, speaking out. A poetics of look here for all that you're missing. A poetics of yes for no contest. A poetics of yes for working people. A poetics of yes for post-millennial hashing. A poetics of yes for lost and feral voices. And also voices on the inside of vast larger systems. A generous poetics of yes for your forbears. A poetics of yes for our students. A poetics of yes inside our poetry. A poetics of plain speech for we could not help thinking of our father and My Appalachia and how good it would be if he too could read what we wrote if he too could find a way inside our writing which did not want to confess which did not want to write about love or if it did not inside flimsy systems of sonnets sestinas or lyrical mediations on the lyric itself. And yet—the way our words came out was not easy for our fathers to hear. Or our fathers did not know about poetry. Or our fathers knew about poetry they might find in magazines and one time shared with us, reading aloud, a poem about Vermont and country people we also knew, a poem about jezum crow and the speech of the people we knew. We loved them too and there was no room for them in the workplace. There was no room for them as real living people with speech acts and difficult lives. They were always being written about as idea not people and not in the fine-cadenced speech we knew which got called redneck or stupid or working-class or stupid or backwards or stupid or ignorant or stupid.

Our post-millennial poetics of dissent was also a saying yes to many things

twisted and dear to our hearts. It had to be a poetics of refusal. It had to be a poetics of plain speech, clean speech, a speech act which also let in class. A speech act which also let in our father's broken hands and his alcoholic eye. A speech act which also let in our sweet naïveté. A speech act which also said no even as it said yes. A poetics of yes for our students with their complicated lives. With their lives in Compton, their lives in Long Beach, their lives in Westminster, their lives all over and in every over also at the edge of the same systems we tracked and tried to make sense of. So the poetics of labor was always also the poetics of our pen. Our poetics of dissent said no to the contest system and anyway we couldn't afford it. Our poetics of dissent said no to language games said no to intentional opacity and tricks. Said no to many things as it was always saying yes and opening the door to who we were in spite of the way our words got read sometimes. In spite of the things people wrote about us sometimes. In spite of what they missed, mule-blinded by class as they also were but in a different vector. So our poetics of dissent had to open space. Had to open space for less rarified tongues. Had to open space for what got called colloquial language. Had to open space for the lilt of Irish. Had to open space for this lilt because even in the kitchen and over Bud Light it too was speaking class. Its speech act too spoke of what we came from spoke of song. It too the tongue of the mother and the women. It too the song of the kitchen the song of the trail. It too hauling logs. It too out of work and shivered. It too lonely in the night as it turned and turned and turned in its song, a song to sleep, a thing to comfort. And small as we were, in that other millennial epoch, small as we were writing on paper plates and napkins, we couldn't explain couldn't explain but our very writing act separated us from them and something very precious was lost. It was the song of surviving that went into us. And it was the fixation with such song and how to make it that also took us out. Forever out. But by way of getting back or saying yes, yes, I hear you and your voice matters, this song went into our poems, went into the books we made and published. It was a fine thing, a certain thing and speaking culture distance. Speaking mapping across vagaries and time. It spoke the same thing working people everywhere were speaking: we are together. We are together. Keep working.

I AM YOUR ELECTRIC FAN: OR, 13 WAYS TO LOOK AT A PURPORTED HEART

Celina Su

America is a serpentine thread in the global quilt, lining superhighways with electric cables, dotting backroads with mini-malls and shiny new Cadillacs. US culture paints the earth, fuels its furnaces, and raises its hemlines. If it is a collapsing paradigm, it is because the serpent has eaten its dysplastic tail.

A Bangkokian hipster refuses to lend out his SUV for his friend's big date. "You are *kai bplaa*," his friend snaps, ขาย ("sell") ปลา ("fish"). 3000 miles to the north, a teenager sweet-talks to her hot, new, industrializing crush, “我是你的電扇” (“I am your electric fan”).

Quick, quickening snippets of conversations, elastic trips through foreign lands...



Amid macroeconomic wars for hearts and minds. Often an essentializing process, sometimes not. I hope to encounter, to recognize the counter-threads among the homogenizing and fetishizing whorls of globalization. The finer lines, like those Karl Polanyi described in *The Great Transformation*: The real revolution is not the push but the push-back.

1. เข้าใจ (*kao-jai*, “enter-heart”). To understand. Sitting in a bungalow in a rice field, listening. To fragile geckos trilling clicks, water buffaloes moaning, a creek slowly trickling, frogs croaking. The distant beats of trance music, the national anthem, the prayers of a nearby mosque, the gongs and chants of a nearby Buddhist temple, the silence of scarecrows.

I've been coming to northwestern Thailand, to work with a small NGO working with Shan Burmese refugee children, for 7 years, and still. To enter one's heart is not necessarily to understand.

That ใจ (*jai*) signifies the “mind” as well as the “heart.” That which it is

closest to, what it is not.

2. ปลุกใจ (*plook-jai*, “wake-heart”). To rouse, to hearten to action. R- and K-, both Thai, were running an informal, illicit school for refugee children in the area. Without pay, for two years. Attendance hovered near 100% every day.

On holiday, Peter used his White People Power to ask the local hospital doctors to donate de-worming pills, vitamin A drops, and measles-mumps-rubella vaccines, and they did so.

Later, the District Office shut down the informal school. R- and K- surreptitiously got the kids into Thai schools. Now, they are social workers rather than teachers. Cleaning blood off benches, dealing in maxi pads, collecting first bras in the Wednesday market, distributing shoes and uniforms, procuring birth certificates from the District Office. The Officer retorts, “Did you know it is illegal to help someone who is not in your family?”

3. ซื้อใจ (*seeuu-jai*, “buy-heart”). To influence via money. (My power here unsettling. I should be in Latin America, where I was one of *them*, until I was 10. Where I can speak their language, perhaps navigate at least some of the social situations.)

R- and K- are getting restless, ready to move on, but still they work, partly because of the grants we raise. I am a heartless heart-buyer. They say that we make it “a real NGO”; they’re the “normal workers helping the children.” Whither to be a “real” NGO, weaving alien social justice jargon to justify a homegrown existence.

I’m meeting with a Shan refugee monk, Kh-, who runs his own NGO helping Shan refugee children, and he is calling us “older sibling.” He is older than both of us. He says, “Before *Pee* Celina and *Pee* Peter, I was in darkness.” It’s true that the electric bill had not been paid. Electricity is an American, and we can help. We will help him purchase hearts.

4. เกรงใจ (*geng-jai*, “dread-heart”). To be fearful in approach. I fear that my heart isn’t petrified enough. Yet. To heed endless songs of praise for *geng-jai* on pop radio, in shampoo commercials, in the guidebooks, in my language textbooks. To hold everyday experiences in an ineffable politics of fear and wonder.

A friend of mine visited Isaan, northeastern Thailand. It wasn’t until he left Isaan and arrived in Bangkok that he realized that he’d left his passport

behind. The guesthouse owner took the 11 pm bus to arrive in Bangkok at 4 am with his passport, before taking the 5 am bus to return to work.

Such awesome, dreadful hearts. Always, from a murmured distance. When my friend visited Isaan again, months later, he learned that this guesthouse owner was abusive to her employees, especially the Cambodian refugee, and never paid her any wages. The employees plotted for months to help the refugee escape. Back to Cambodia. As they did so, they developed an ornate story about how she needed to leave in the middle of the night not to escape, but because of a convoluted “emergency,” lest the guesthouse owner lose face in town.

To grasp an awful poetry of prosaic subjection.

5. **ใจเย็น** (*jai-yen*, “cool-heart”). To be equanimous. To answer, when we ask whether they had any problems with Burmese soldiers, *No*. When we ask again. *Nah*. So long as, they paid half of their meager earnings to the junta as levied taxes. Provided that, they portered weapons for them every year. On the condition that, rapes in neighboring villages haunted them only in their sleep.

To keep calm, to stay cool, to live without freezing. To have a say, to access, to share in one’s crops. To slash-and-burn one’s paradoxical haven. To suffer a tempered heart.

6. **เข็นใจ** (*ken-jai*, “push-heart”). To be stranded in an improvised life without resources. To stand up straight, to not have spots on your teeth, to keep all of your fingers, to live to be old, or just older. To learn to read, to think out loud, to storm one’s brain. To be pulled as well as pushed.

To build a new hyper-flammable thatch hut each year and stay there, imbued by the saccharine scent of pesticides, surrounded by fiery ants.

To walk farther each week, hunting rocks in the riverbed, carrying them to shore on your back, filling an entire truckbed every day. To pound them into powder, churn them into concrete, pour them into the foundation of a house for other people’s children. To weigh your worth in stones.

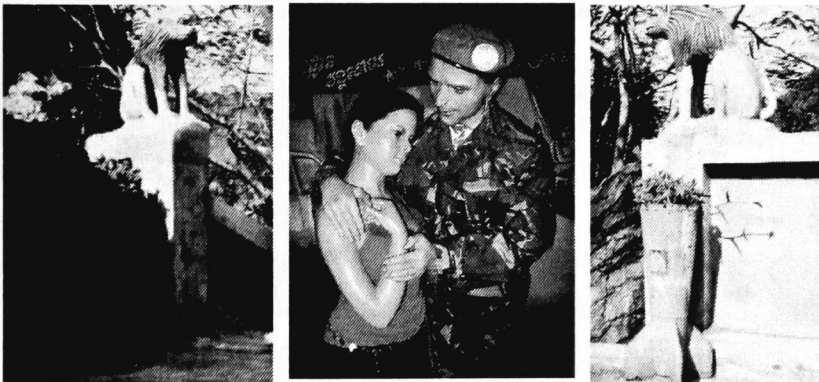
7. **ใจร้อน** (*jai-rawn*, “hot-heart”). To be hot-tempered. Like me, graceless here, unable to read subtle signals in socially awkward situations, unable to maneuver even slow-moving buses. Passing by, a baby, her father, her grandmother, and a dog atop a motorbike, whirling around the corner, a cartful of chickens clucking behind.

Two weeks after his hut burned down, we asked whether anything bad happened that year, and he could not think of anything. After his wife “found a new husband,” after she walked for 5 days through the jungle only to land in jail for working without a permit, only a foreigner would bristle at such inconsequentials with a boiling heart. Let it dwell, and the heart will fracture a fever pitch (มีไข้ใจ, *mi-kai-jai*, “have-fever-heart”). To shatter with feeling.

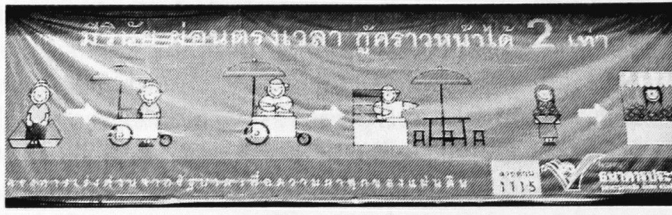
8. ก็นั่นแหละแคลงใจ (*gin-naeng-kleng-jai*, “use/eat-suspect-doubt-heart”). To be mutually suspicious. To cherish what is clearly a middle-income country. Malaria eradicated, HIV/AIDS under control. The hushed, gleaming metro whooshes past. The ice in outdoor market guava shakes is oh so fine.

To struggle in a political economy where hairstyle magazines feature primers on currency devaluation, and 7-11 clerks banter about NGOs. Where lesbian women call themselves ทอมดี้ (*tom-dee*, “tomboy-lady”) because “lesbian” now signifies “girl-on-girl action” for sex-pats. Where street food stalls announce “IMF” as a codeword for “fiscal austerity,” for “bargain”: ไก่ทอดIMF! (*gai-tawt-IMF*, “IMF fried chicken!”)

To stand on the right side of the tempestuous border. In Laos, with plenty of leftover American bombshells to use as plant pots, lining restaurants, carpeting gardens. In Cambodia, where UN soldiers helping sex workers are memorialized in museum wax.



To question inter-governmental institutions, whether they are a-changing... Their talk about participatory development, their narrow notions of empowerment. Through microcredit, the power of the market, the promise of a franchise.



If capital flies, then why clip these wings of toil. When I say “transnational,” they cheer, “corporations!” To note, as even UNESCO intones, a depoliticized “participation” discourse, a “new strategic top-down and hegemonic speech.” To mind their “shift from ‘supply-side’ to ‘demand-side’ development strategies.”

To witness foundations asking our tiny NGO friend in a nearby town, running an entire orphanage on \$5,000 a year, to accept a \$5,000 grant—but only if it’s used on capacity-building workshops, only if it hires international consultants, only if it’s spent in the next few weeks. Whither suspicious empowerment, amidst all these well-intentioned hearts.

9. **หัวใจ** (*hua-jai*, “essential/brain-heart”). The anatomical heart. To flinch at the structural violence, the “noncompliance” of mothers in getting their babies vaccinated. The refugees’ most common afflictions, broken backs, pterygium (sun-scarred eyes), stunting from malnutrition, severed fingers and phantom pain. To leave the medical technology to the *farang*; it was theirs in the first place.

To maintain a right-sized heart. To be **น้อย** (*noy*, “small”) is to nurse grudges, to be **ยักษ์** (*yak*, “giant”) is to turn brutal. But to be **ใหญ่** (*yai*, “big”)...

10. **ใจดี** (*jai-di*, “good-heart”). To be kind. **ดีใจ** (*di-jai*, “heart-good/well”). To be happy. (Is to be good to be happy?) Teen pregnancy, drug abuse, gambling. To be pathologically social, playing with fate for a willing heart.

11. **จริงใจ** (*jing-jai*, “real-heart”) To be honest. Perhaps we can agree to disagree, seam these phrases into a real sense of mutual belonging, or longing. To storyline the thinner threads, and then. I am trying to define “cheesy” to R-. Finally, she says, “Oh, I do not think that you will like my favorite movies, then.” She counts them on her fingers: Beethoven 1, Beethoven 2, Beethoven 3, Beethoven 4, and...

I am trying to tell R- and K- about the notion of the 7 Deadly Sins, enacting each one in melodramatic histrionics. After 10 minutes, R- says, “Ooohh,

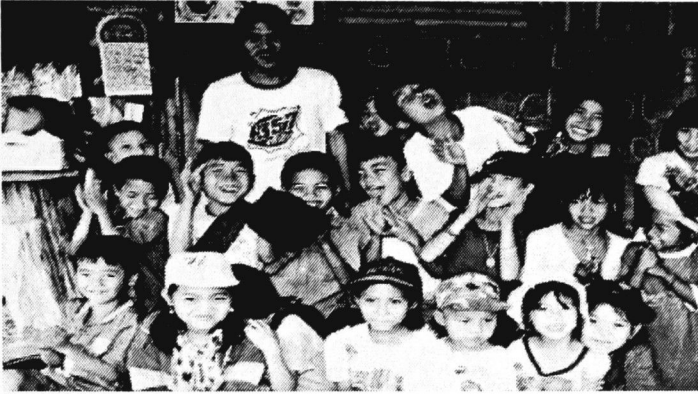
like the movie *Seven*.”

...and...Beethoven 5.

I am trying to teach English to 30 squirming children. When I point at the picture and say, “Tiger,” they repeat, in unison, “Tiger!” When I say, “Elephant,” they say, “Eeee-la-phant!” When I say, “Oooooooh, rhinoceros,” they chime, “Ooooooooorhinoceros!”

My wandering mind kindles to the coos of a chorus. When I say it will all be fine, they look at me in the eye.

To look back.

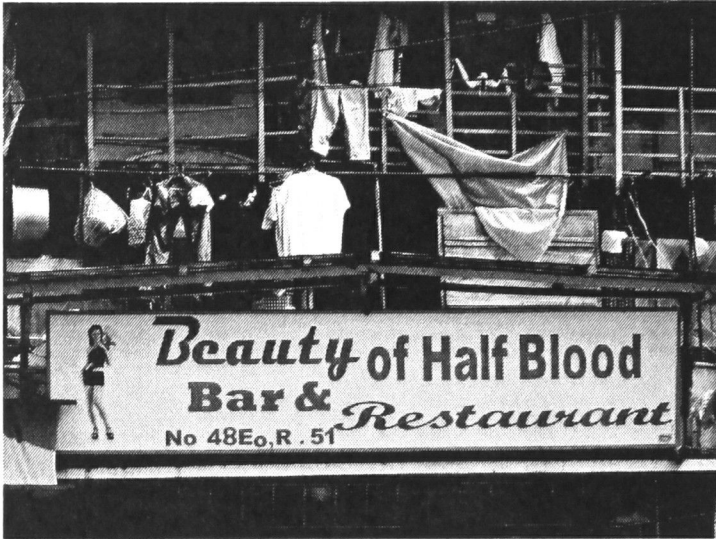


12. การอึ้งใจ (*gaan-im-jai*, “process-full-heart”). To delight in. Standing on the side of the road, Kh- and E-, another Shan Burmese monk, are with us to visit some of the refugee families we serve. Kh- doesn’t usually stay in the monastery as a monk, but he’s there this month because of a personal tragedy, mourning, reflecting.

Kh- is having trouble wearing his robes right, and E- tries to help him get them back together. Suddenly, E- screams มดกัด!! (*moht-gat!!*), and he’s being bitten by thousands of fiery ants, and he’s jumping up and down, and Kh- is still nearly naked, scrambling to pick up the robes around his knees, and I can’t help them because women can’t touch monks, and Peter’s killing the ants with E-’s sandals, and Kh- and E- are probably thinking that Peter’s not being very Buddhist, and I am standing there, trying not to laugh. (All of us laughing hysterically, E- also crying, Kh- also blushing.)

13. เห็นใจ (*hen-jai*, “see-heart”). To commiserate. To engage with the cross-cultural in poetics, not via seemingly seamless integration or romanticized

pleasantries, but a nexus of negotiation and resistance. To confront the historically embedded, those emblems that cannot be torn apart, co-opted, stripped of context, carried elsewhere, or fucked and passed on like genes into a new baby, even one with the beauty of half-blood.



And yet. At first, all N- could say in English was, “Excuse me! Oh! Oh. Oh.... Never mind. Never mind.” The next year, she’s telling us that she and her husband separated, that she has a new “man-friend.” She knows him well; they were once sweethearts. “This is betterrrr!” She and her first husband “married too early, didn’t get to know each other first.” Sigh. “We didn’t have enough time for...for...for...osmosis!”

I see that we are watching, walking the same terrain, through different prisms, along parallaxical paths. The cross-cultural in poetics is that which cannot be translated. And yet.

SEEKER-CROSSING IN THE AGE OF GLASS MACHINES

Edwin Torres

I remember thinking how encyclopedic the phrase “cross cultural poetics” was to me, back when Mark first requested a submission in my NYC haze as a slam poet. I felt it was fairly bold to align yourself with such a large global idea where borders were dared to be crossed — a concept that subsequently fed into my development as a border crosser between language/media/discipline. And acknowledging literature as a culture crosser back when I was just a *Nuyorican* poet, struck a nerve in my untraveled bones.

Years later ‘multi-cultural’ has become the world, whereas ‘cross-cultural’ remains expansive, untapped by its fluidity. Is there one state of cross cultural poetics today, and has there ever been anything that has not crossed culture? Over the skim of these words, can a story without culture find its edge by reaching under its skin? Decades old and I have just now discovered mine.

To affix framework as refracted eyetooth, open seeker jumps place to rescue age, to sound *othered* by tongue, leave out connectors i.e. where you come from — pardon the tangent, some poetry-speak as I search for my next outcome. But I’ll tell you how to speak across immeasurable distances. The thing we like about us or don’t (us cross-workers) is that we split from ourself — no more tension existing the tension — in someone else, in some other place. So, how to take back that projection? Claim your split. Continued poetry speak to arrive at this: The poet has no nation, no territory — the poet is a citizen of the world.

It was over beers and misremembers that I recently beckoned the spirit of my parents onto a Lower East Side bar in New York City. Over carefully rehearsed Dark Rum and Ginger Ale, a spectral sartori appeared; my parents had been born on the island of Puerto Rico, “boricua” as the natives call it, and I had been born in New York City, not “boricua,” and while I may have been considered a “boricua” I was in fact a “non-boricua.” And so, “Noricua” was invented; a territory where negatives cancel each other out, where non-ideas take precedent over non-intention. A manifesto has yet to materialize, but there is something appealing about the minimal ‘no’ as opposed to the weighted one. And if there is a world where no nations exist but IN the ‘no,’ would that make the non-poet its cultural crosser?

If I could talk, I'd hear you better...says the witness to the letter. And at this point, I leave you fine seekers with a few words about place and tangent. And where to leave a bit of yourself. And who to leave it for:

THE NECCESSARIEST

>

> the most necessary nearest
> is not most pl*ced by self

>

> the alln*ss of pl*ce
> as necessary nesting

>

> the antagonist pugilist
> absent of pounding, *I*m*nt...as such

>

> lacking most expression is
> what's missing

>

> a sense of hum*r
> pieces of scr*p...really

>

> an action
> transcending pl*ce

>

> pliant expl**n*d in a moment, but...
> I d*n't kn*w

>

> to river a word

>

> in a time of anxiety, a rising ros, in a time of relieved
> quality, a willing of acceptance, of don't have a quality,
> of a time that dies, out of irony, a time when the public
> will get mad

>

> in a something great, a time of improvement, my friend,
> interesting young and machine-like, is a built-up machine,
> art machine of the garden, somehow dedicated, to machine,
> friend to friend of himself, imagined by his own friendship
> to whom is machine but machine-him

>

> homage to destruction, a destroyed place, highly
> chance-like, a great one thing, the machine in flames,
> that didn't center off of it, the machine of himself, uncentered

- > somewhere, for them, the originators of machine, what would
- > hardly destroy, a series of giants, waiting
- >
- > a choir waiting, a young tingle waiting, a shiver, a ripple
- > unskinned, waiting, waiting, a finger, an army, waiting to pull
- > itself, holding a misunderstanding, a capital, a sheet of
- > paper, a self, a borrowed ahem, a clearing of the ahem,
- > a castle, throat art, there was a machine that destroyed this
- > young friend of mine, this man, artistic man, these men,
- > willing and cleared, by place
- >
- > a great anxiety, ten developed into two, a sui fenned
- > by space, alphetogs developed into numerals,
- > popped by speaker, eternalent pointillistic firmament,
- > writ by muse, how inspiring the unspeaker, this
- > unheard of country, this all american, fired upon, what I
- > was hearing, feedback to men, as human as one can be,
- > without gender
- >
- > fine indiffident flatness, not only the public, was the
- > perfect, but into the interest, was the seeing, not only
- > entertainment but real fight, pugilismo, the idea behind
- > the fight, no anatagonist, no protest, all they did, all these
- > men did, all my friend destroyed, pull the plug, they had
- > to, what? otherwise, completely rosed, d'ya see that?, to who,
- > to what was, lacking the elemental, a good antagonism,
- > a machine work, a friend without gender, a nothing that was
- >
- > nothing without the public, who talks like they know it,
- > who initiates change, who is objectified by acceptance, but
- > what is here is, everything accepted, mentality of junk, of
- > space, of Jung, of aggreement, who is public but who stays
- > home, time to sign anything, a mass of anger, what would
- > engrify the audience, an intense no, a more of our
- > existential, of want, of who I want, you angry?, give me a
- > chance to pull one over, to sometimes disappear, to live in
- > things that are true
- >
- > a kind of incredible intelligence, wills into emphasis,
- > cares about who is public and who is human, is the part, of
- > you that destroys, is the ride a beginning, or so, society, are
- > only part of, we, into our games, obligations
- > of conviction, aesthetic language, by any two, any one

TO BECOME SUPER-SOLID

Rodrigo Toscano

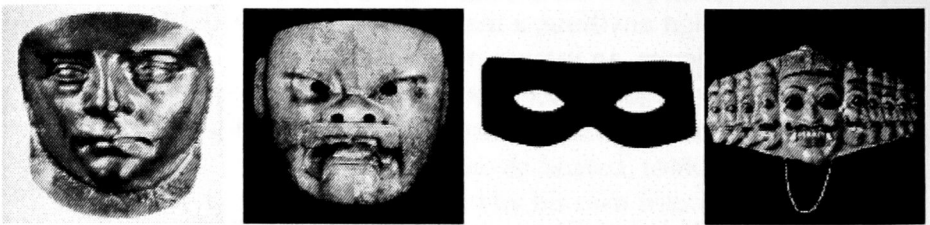


Job insecurity is King in the United States. Fear of losing the roof over your head, your overall health and the health of those close to you (if not in body just yet, then in spirit first) is your moment of No Fame. Most workplace cultures act as gladiatorial arenas for trident-&-net betrayals of co-workers <lateral antagonism> and boss suck-up techniques—perfected minute by minute <vertical antagonism, deferred>. And who believes in masks anymore? Though they do add contrast to the scene. Televised ambience slathered onto these Reality Shows co-work the logic of *eliminationism*—till it's Famous. Talent-judging panels beknight your every move. “You’re fired.” And now, you’re on a barren island with sexy strangers, the occupational nurse, the alligator trainer, the independent designer of specialty sunshades, scuba wear, umbrellas and bras.

Eliminationism

*is the contemporary sex practice
that leads gunmen into malls.*

Talk directly to the American People.



The boss is an Ostrogoth and you’re an Olmec. “I have a moderately extensive collection of Indian (*continental Indian*) masks at my home office” says the co-worker wearing a simple over-the-eyes-only, \$1.50, black mask. That’s

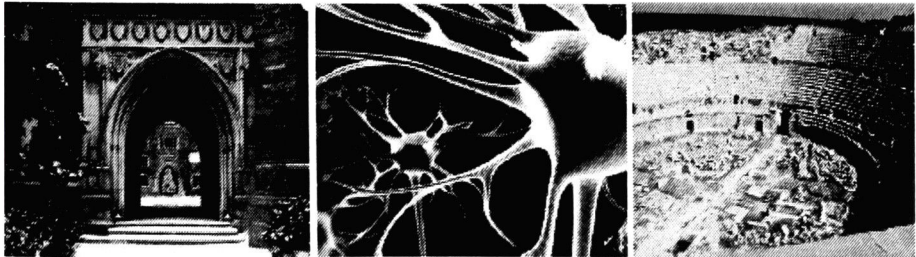
good to know. But what we didn't know was that over 2 million Mexican nationals were driven off their small farms in Mexico in the last fifteen years (after NAFTA) and that an additional 1.4 million will meet the same fate soon. We see a Cross-Cultural Moment of Fame around the corner pretty soon <quadrilateral antagonism>.



The Ostrogoth's daughter, Global Goldilocks ("GG", for short, or sometimes just plain "G") is locked into an immoderate lust for the boy's dark eye brows and deeply bronzed skin.



Idolatry. *American* Idolatry. *Great American* Idolatry. Turn to the Olmec (who, after all, whether ascending to ex-president of Pepsi Mexico, or avant-fringe poet in Poughkeepsie, must continually formalize the sexing...and has an Ivy League way of kindling the nerves).



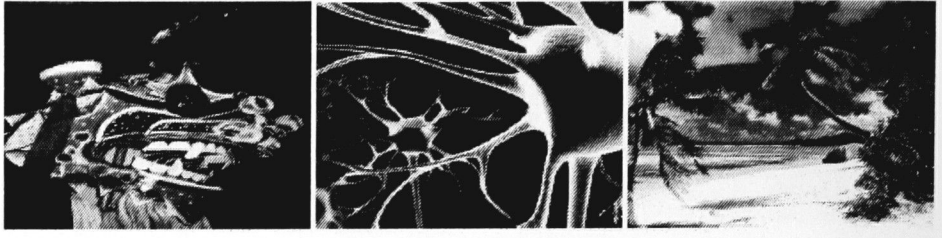
Olmec: you're fired.

Ostrogoth: haha...you had me there, for a moment.

Olmec: no, you're fired...this ain't no communalist bonfire poetics of soft

landings, you're famous now.

Ostrogoth (taking off mask, revealing mask of British (*trans-continental* British) Hong Kong-based Happy Lion Dancer—face): no...*I'm* fired (fired myself).



Co-worker with the simple over-the-eyes-only, \$1.50, black mask: “I just want to say...thanks...to everybody...everywhere...for everything”



Talk directly to the American People.

National per capita / per year spent on the arts:

Canada and France: \$32

Germany: \$27

U.S.:



“Poem for my dad, the nervous Ostrogoth, who doesn't want me to mix-it-up with Brown Boys...”

Brick of Gold

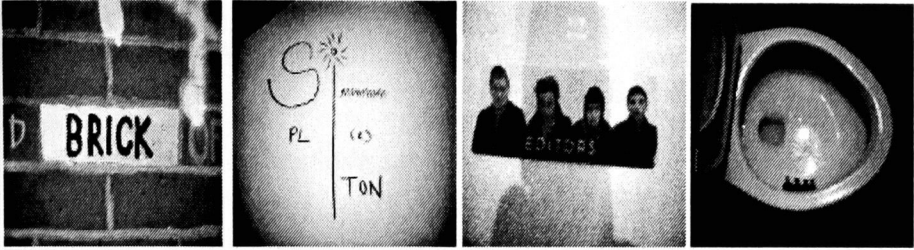
*Stupid brick of gold, don't be a simpleton;
be as a “quality control” team, or closed circuit*

of hipster culture editors,

a decal, a shiny beacon

in the toilet bowl rim
of a local dive bar.

“GG”



“Dear ‘G’

Just now docking near Caracas on this cruise liner. I just hit your web page (these newest of impulses of these newest of modern times must be looked into with greater depth and reach!) and saw something about export duty-free blood, sweat, and tears. When I first glanced it, I thought (well, there is no “thinking” anymore in the strict sense (wheeling one’s own steel-enforced behind into the picture), but in its place, an observance of gentle siftings and filtering of disparate materials—*boom! smack! boom!*)—I thought, cool, those must be Postmodern Poetic Specs you got there, able to forestall history (if only for a moment). Thanks for posting. I remember (well, there is no “memory” anymore in the strict sense either (a having to grapple the confluence of ideas in time), but in its place, an observance of multiple broken impulses packed into one momentary, violent super-pulse—*ba’zoom!*)—I remember, or rather, just realized something...

YOU’RE IGNORING ME

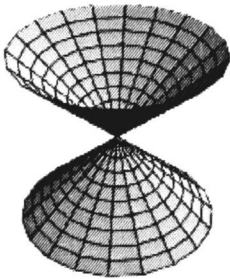
(full blot-out mode)

why?

‘Z’ ”



Curiously, *eliminationism* is shaped like a bicone with a funnel at both ends...



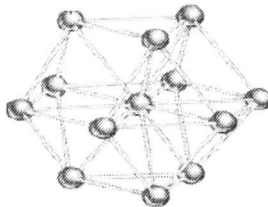
and so when ooping out of either end a sense of “widening prospects” comes on...

but the only real freedom is to feel the *lack* of any scripted motion in the passage

$$\frac{z^2}{c^2} = \frac{x^2 + y^2}{a^2}$$

the speed at which one *homo sapiens sapiens* is exiting (in flickers)

determines the kind of super-solid one is to become...

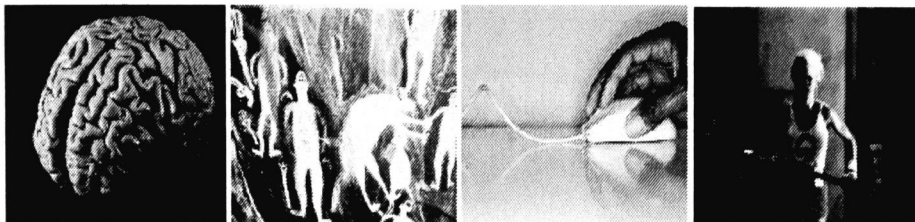


It's raining content, all the time now, everywhere.



Where as people used to wait, conjure, invoke, provoke c h a n g e
now it just rains all the time.

As you read this,
there's little mist droplets bulging out of your noodle-knot.



Struggle,
is also about filtration, speed,
and the particular kind of “compaction”
one goes through—through a cone—

to become
super-solid

a modern proletarianized poetic culture.

CROSS CULTURAL POETICS: THOUGHT-TRAFFICKING AND THE PLAGUED TEXT

Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi

Over the last few years, in thinking about my position as an Iranian-American writer I have found myself confronted with the same questions, over and over: what happens to *thought* in situations where the possibility of action has either been extracted or become legally punishable by the state? How might *thought*, under such circumstances, become severed from action and how would this severance manifest itself in language? In other words, in instances of political and cultural disempowerment, how are one's sentences disrupted, fractured, reinvented, and how might one begin to build a text, a community of sentences, in which *thought* is no longer severed from action, but is posited as action itself? And finally, what possibilities might cross-cultural poetics offer for building such a text?

These questions are for me part of an ongoing investigation, and I would like to treat this essay as an opportunity to sift through some of the ideas without necessarily reaching towards conclusive answers. Given the open nature of these questions, any conclusions would, I believe, draw them to an artificial close. Nevertheless, I will attempt here, through two different modes of writing, to explore these questions within the context of cross-cultural poetics: firstly, through a theoretical text, and secondly through a poetics. I present the two texts side by side for various reasons: in order to open up the space for conversation to occur between the two, in order to not rely on one mode of writing to the exclusion of the other, and most importantly, to initiate a discipline of thought to put theoretical ideas into praxis. I by no means claim that the second piece achieves the theories/ideas I propose in the first.

1. Cross-Cultural Poetics: Thought-Trafficking and the Plagued Text (In Theory)

In order to begin exploring the question I introduce in the opening paragraph, I want to pose the notion of cross-cultural poetics as symptomatic not only of the political and economic disequilibrium that divides the world into so-called categories of first, second and third, but ultimately as symptomatic of the political and economic oppression that coerces people to move across these divides, be it in the form of forced migration, displacement, deportation, land confiscation, illegal immigration or exile. The very term 'cross-cultural' implies interactivity between multiple cultures, and in the case of

‘cross-cultural poetics’ interactivity between multiple literary and linguistic registers. It is important here to note that I am excluding, for the purposes of this essay, the kinds of cross-cultural interactivity that arise out of more positive circumstances, not because I do not believe that such circumstances exist, but because I am interested in the kinds of cross-cultural interactivity, and ultimately in the kinds of poetics, that arise out of displacement.

For me, the notion of a cross-cultural poetics is inextricably tied at the navel with the disempowering brutality of political and cultural censorship. The one cannot exist without the other and to take this notion to task would mean to recognize that at the very nexus of cross-cultural poetics is a kind of *thought-trafficking*: thoughts and/or ideas that are prohibited from being enacted or expressed in a given political/cultural context are trafficked by the writer into another. In this way, cross-cultural poetics becomes the very site on which thoughts that are censored in one socio-cultural register come into contact with and take form (through the body of the writer) in a language from *another* socio-cultural register. In other words, returning to the set of opening questions, in this way cross-cultural poetics affords the possibility for *thoughts* that are severed from action in one context to be trafficked into another and posited as action.

I would like to propose the idea of a *plagued text* as a way of naming the kinds of poetics that arise out of displacement, and ultimately out of the kinds of sociological imbalance that give way to displacement to begin with. I use the term *plagued* to refer to the kinds of literary experiments whose origins are in exile, immigration, forced migration—in other words, texts in which the thinking is confronted with the possibility of abundance or excess on the one hand (the so-called first world) and scarcity on the other (the so-called third world). It is the relation between these two points, excess on the one hand and scarcity on the other, that is at the base of cross-cultural poetics: what is prohibited from being expressed or enacted in one socio-linguistic/political context is translated/trafficked into another. Lucidity of communication or a purity of access are interrupted, disrupted, and completely broken down, as the author invents a community of sentences in which the obscurity of politics, of culture, of language, of history itself and finally one’s displacement from these is not forsaken. In this way the text itself embodies the relation between scarcity and excess; it becomes a mirror image of the socio-political and economic disequilibrium in the world.

To this end, the *plagued text* performs a long pause in language as the subject/author reveals his/her own process of thought, his/her own thinking through of the spaces between excess and scarcity as he/she is confronted with the world. This insistence to locate oneself in language produces a kind of lin-

guistic excess, and causes the text to circle around itself, to fold over itself, to become uncontainable, contagious or plagued, taking as much pleasure as possible in its own contagiousness, in its own excess, and overextending itself until it has reconstituted the possibility of thought as action. The *plagued text* is a text whose very disease-ness is its source of agency: at the same time that it is symptomatic of the political and economic disequilibrium in the world, it also exposes and reflects these back to the world, and by doing so retaliates against the very system that (re)produces such inequalities.

2. Cross-Cultural Poetics: Thought-Trafficking and the Plagued Text (In Praxis)

Study of a Beheading, Or the Possibility of a Peacock

There are lands in which it is difficult to know who fed what to *whom*, and a sentence is packed into the stomach—little needle, tiny fish, darling silver sardine. Sometimes bottles are lined up in the mind where there is a need for containers. Other times pluralities drive the body to the river, late at night, to chase the wobbly figure of the moon. The backdrop switches from green to red where there is a beheading. All names become dislodged from their referents. Rain falls on the river and a pattern emerges on the surface of the water. The mind searches for the line between absolute guilt and absolute innocence. In the river the body reaches a rock and rests for a while. The mind grows wary of all things totalitarian. There is a moment of unrest, then a red rose and the rind of a watermelon emerge.

The word to *decapitate* and the sentence keeps going. The head can live up to 60 seconds after it has been severed from the body. The muscles and vertebrae of the neck do not lend themselves too easily to chopping. The skill of an experienced headsman is absolutely necessary. Most often the head is removed with a sword or an axe. The person is blindfolded to avoid flinching in anticipation of the slash. Where a sword is used the person is made to kneel down. A block shaped to accept the neck is not necessarily used. In Germany, women being executed were allowed to sit down. Different countries employed various arrangements over time. In Sweden people were made to lie down and place their heads on a low block, just inches above the ground.

Over time, a place has been carved out in language where one man's head can come to represent a whole century of unrest. To unhinge a name from everything a country has ever known. To remove the head, to decapitate, to draw an exact relation, one to one, between the death of a figure and the end of an era of violence. To take a paper clip and join the pages of

the civil war. To close a chapter. To put a period at the end of a sentence. To stitch the head back to the neck. To bury the body in an undisclosed location. To imagine the ugly hills of a prison graveyard. To think of fish swimming in mercury. To see the bones so pale against the night sky. To see death and language keeps going. To see it enter from all sides. To not know what “it” refers to. Century after century and the swan has just mated with the dalmation: winged, spotted things! The imagination is running wild! Transitive verb! Momentary verb! Fleeting and vanishing verb! To Decapitate. To Behead. To remove the head. To make headless. From the Latin. To make. To make. To decapitate. Headless, bloody thing. Define! Define! Define!

ONE: He showed up in court in his underclothes and sat facing away from the judge. It was his way to protest. The half-brother. If there were appetite for food he'd be eating dates and dragging smoke into his lungs through a cigarette.

TWO: Seven names: the former Iraqi dictator and six subordinates.

THREE: 600,000 deaths, meaning the death rate in Iraq is 4 times higher than what it used to be before U.S. invasion.

FOUR: Three dates: 1980 Iran-Iraq war; 1991 Gulf War; 1982 slaughter of 148 people in a single Shiite town.

FIVE: The former Iraqi dictator was ejected from the courtroom several times for his political harangues.

SIX: The nine-month trial involved the murder of three defense lawyers and one witness over its 39 sessions.

SEVEN: I am running out of facts.

EIGHT: I have now fully run out of facts.

NINE: I am now beyond the point where I fully ran out of facts.

TEN: I have now gone further than beyond the point where I fully ran out of facts.

There are lineages you can trace back to a specific navel. Three centuries ago. If you follow the sentence backwards you might arrive at a place as ideal as any other to designate as origin. You can stand there like on a zero

and graph time expanding in positive and negative directions to either side of you. You could take a word to your mouth then, turn it over like a seed on your tongue, find a moist place where you aren't, plant it there and watch a population follow. Such a process would require careful observation sustained over time and a system to calculate for subjective intrusions. Each image haunts with a counter-image, each phrase with its own undoing. Facts become so much more interesting when they are pulled from a mind filled with fiction. He is over there. The half-brother. It is a fact, his body in protest.

(When my father came home from China the rerun of “family” shifted into the neighborhood to actualize the desire for citizenship but only (probably) as it might accompany luck. The middle of the tongue pressed hard on the upper teeth and palate, the diasporic “lateral.”)

volume 6.

Even sex, as it is, a cloud
passing through sensation.
Another birthday, blind '39 to
as catches.” “the years

(The ghost margins lined up and down the field, the ice. “*il n’y a pas d’hors-texte.*” Lost in the city now, any city. Google earth and *voilà*, space is time. Vowels are valves. Or valves. Again, ininvented, but supplement. bpNichol’s “beyond the orchard” as that sort of space; buried just there.)

top 7.

Breath’s ticket invisible,
the piano, not the speed or feeling
beneath the *ss*’s and *zeds*.
the *italic* assumptions buried

(The authority of language over the fingers of production goes hand-in hand with offset and offside just enough to inform thinking up ice but always he must have eyes at the back of his head suspicious of those “universal” global clouds visible in the static along the blue line and above the f-line that produce that irritating radio of distrust called “planning.”)

8 spot.

Chance change in the body shop
with XM satellite traffic on the Okahalla
head heavy with breeding its radar
look out
over the edge past the ache.

(When I asked Creeley about his assignment for “A Curriculum for the Study of the Soul” his eye blazed and he shrugged “mind mind.”)

forty 9th.

A little heavier with the handwriting.
All visible but unreadable, more
a hint of the spectacle, voiceover
the dub chirpy
but added to the catalogue.

(I think I use 16 of the 26 phonemes. The sounds are converted into a list, but not Keats. His otherness barely discernible in the scrawl; dead at.....That would be “lito” in JC pidgin. For grammar use your breathing, or your breeding. The pen as anger, just like the sword.)

10 (final score).

The scale shifts
or the eyes do
lipreading beyond the text
equal to always
the key change.

(Or maybe not. Outside the bar lines some soul custody riffs for a little hoped-for otherness, an unbroken wave of equivalence to land with.)

INTERSENTIENCE (CRIMES OF THE OBVIOUS)

Christophe Wall-Romana

[dyspeptic parts of this draft are in fond memory of Ed Dorn]

An egregious chasm extends between the culturally entrenched (but scientifically bogus) ‘five-sense’ model of the sensory-perceptual foundation of individual and collective experience, and the affectless mapping of cognitive processes that is somehow making neurosciences today the ‘chosen’ locus of redefinitions of subjectivity as a very much individualized monad...

In this chasm lies the exorbitant political and human price of the current disregard for social affect dynamics, whose psychosomatic reality and political potential nonetheless exceed by far the hyper-thin accounts of experience provided by neuro-processes (too often still, pickles in a jar).

What might be called the intersentient plastic life of our sensory sociality goes unacknowledged, unplumbed, and unarticulated in its potential. Yet it could become a thickly described basis for neo-ideological activism, since it powerfully unfolds, without recourse to grand telic narratives, the complexities of our intercorporeal social horizon. Husserl would be called here to further early Marx’s “history of the five senses.”

When French youth of Maghrebi background rioted in the projects outside Paris in late fall 2005, the political class was caught in a slimy web of surprise, calculations, denial, and paranoia. At worse, even the more savvy commentators such as Finkelkraut (who’s smarter than that), raised the hallucinatory flag of Islamic radicalism—and flag-waving is always painting with the largest brush. More careful observers fared no better: their odd circumspection about the true causes of the riot fueled the illusion that—other than the proximate trigger (the death by electrocution of two youths pursued by the police)—something occult must have been at play that warrants the opinion of ‘experts.’ It took weary sociologists to point out the numbskullingly obvious. Could the fact that the 15-24 year-old French males of North-African ancestry age group is by so very far the most heavily discriminated against in housing, job, police and judicial treatment, in the press and in political representation, of any demographics in France, have something to do with it? Might it, in some quaintly backhanded manner for sure, and way down the line, be, ever so teeny-weenily, a factor that the *banlieues* are sensory-depriving and time-reifying socio-scapes? A commission setup to investigate neither confirmed nor infirmed this: its only duty was

to *disarm* the obvious. What commercial regimes fear most is the terrorism of plain facts.

Political attention deficit disorder—patent this side of the pond too in the scandalously obvious yet mysteriously ignored denial of equal voting rights in the United States as (quaint) factor directly shaping the political right-swing over the last twenty years—names the failure of political philosophy to install sentient materialism at the very center of its theoretical project. How, the same diligent question goes, can it be that the painstakingly *documented* negative impact (to use environmental sociological terms) of ghetto-like life conditions on every psycho-affective aspect of an individual and her very specifically disenfranchised populations, whether in France or the United States or elseliberewhere, has become so thoroughly unavailable to the engine of outrage and correction that should drive the broadest humanistic politics?

The answers are obvious (but wait for the commission's report). Could it be that the press, taking itself at its own word, hurries to its next fix? (are superficial news addictive? The experts say 'not so fast!' Next at 11!). Could it be that politics has gone to seed, as in *what about me* (get your rebate!—from the state!). Could it be that the new varmint is the commons (*horror vacua*)? Could it be that Internet can be defined as: self-fulfilling psycho-goggles? Has 'you' become utterable only in the singular and in privies? (you, my own skin, my follicled ambassador, need more care products).

After all, History itself must conform to what sells. History (pace Gingrich's Editorialicist con, but who remembers it?) is merely "Based on a true story."

"Urban blight" suggests that it hurts the harmony of the Heavenly City; that it is a kind of microorganism or divine plague; that it is not political. This is what needs to be replaced with: "Sensory injury," and "perceptual assault," and "murderous of life-projects," and "collective inner ecological disaster." Psychosomatics is politics.

* * *

What I sketch here takes its inspiration from the spectacularly successful—if also spectacularly and sadly politically myopic—primordial ethics of Emmanuel Levinas. Yet rather than proceed, as most Levinasian critics do, from the ethical encounter upward toward its possible programmatic ramifications, my intent here will be simply (and not so simply) to disentangle laterally, in order to reempiricize them, the vast socially embodied network

of scenes that informs Levinas' ethics of ethics.

Vivre de... Living off of...

It is plain that Levinas' primordial ethics is an incisive intervention against Heidegger's primordial ontology. Yet it cannot be its philosophical origin. For Levinas was plainly aware that his primordial ethics represented an *ethical* corrective to Heidegger's autotelism (Being-for-Death) in two ways. First, Levinas always remained indebted to Heidegger in the very sense of 'being hostage to': philosophically, Heidegger's ontology is *sine qua non* to Levinas' corrective, and the latter is thus a footnote (albeit an in-finite footnote) to the former which, as such, constitutes its limitation. Second, the source of Levinas's ethical *differend* with Heidegger is Heidegger's system's conniving with the Shoah, and Levinas's project must be understood as a violent deconstruction (*Destruction*) of this system from the inside. The predicament of Levinas's philosophy is thus that an act of violence founds it, even if this violence is on behalf of the murdered other, and even if vulnerability for Levinas means (also, not only, but always) his being 'persecuted' (in Levinas's syntactical precedence of the *accusative*) by Heidegger.

The question of philosophical origin is solved neither by being hostage to Heidegger nor by instrumentalizing as generosity a resentment at murder—although both strictures are inherent to the ethics of ethics. Such moves only dialecticize 'being' (via the other) rather than bringing into the picture 'the good,' the oft-forgotten embodiment of the transcendental trace in Levinas' life-work without which it instantly vaporizes into one more eschatology. How can the good be recognized as an origin stripped of any allergy to alterity?

The answer constitutes a therapy for the survivor who is (also, not only, but always) the 'other' Levinas has in mind: *vivre de...* ("living off of..."). The good for the survivor is found in the self's reawakening to its dependence on living flows—living off air, food, love, philosophy, devotion, and time—despite the numbing halo of the '*il y a*' of insomnia when living becomes a torture since what the self needs then is to live off unliving, i.e. "not to be," in Hamlet's insomniac parlance. *Living off of...* is the source of Levinas' primordial ethics, in part as a corrective to *survivre* ("living on"), since "*vivre de...*" reinstates the bodily temporality of appetite through a sensorial suffix ('de...'), rather than the preemptive prefix of melancholy (sur-). Worldliness is every day's origin of both my alterity (my need *of* food) and of my identity (*my* needs), on the twin basis of which I look up to the other to peer into the singular humanity and commandeering precedence of her face-any-face.

This is a condensed account of Levinas's first grounding of primordial ethics in *Totality and Infinity*, which he then hyperbolized into the rhapsody of *Otherwise Than Being*—whose sheer lyrics we also need living off of. The contention is that *living off of...* inaugurates a radical new model of sensation and cognition as intersentient politics.

Out of Your Senses...

But before getting there, let us disassemble the 'five-sense' model still reigning over our current views of our sensory life. The automaton-schema inherited from Sensationalism, and egregiously reinforced by more recent figures of robots and androids, entertains the fiction that we go about living by receiving sensory stimulations from the world, which cognitive functions translate into perceptions, which then are taken up as conceptual posits by the central-processing unit—itsself informed by Kantian-like *a priori*—in order to make decisionary applications of the categorical imperative. Freedom is the spark and switch that ignites the human machinery. We're not talking perception, however, we're consecrating the liberal agent. The five-senses fashion the liberal-commercial imperative.

This fantasy has proven illogical for several reasons. To begin with, as evolutionary organisms, humanoids are phylogenetically shaped by the world, and human cognition is to be considered rather like a complex and useful side-effect of sentience, rather than sensation amounting to tentacles some preexisting will pushes into the thickness of the world. The realization by Husserl and Heidegger that the pre-reflective horizon of worldhood must subtend consciousness means that we cannot place any agency outside of our perception of the world since the world precedes agency, shaping our very psychic apparatus. The world is our psycho-physiological origin, we are its creature, and our psychic context and freedom come of it, not against or before it.

The second radical undoing of Sensationalism was Merleau-Ponty's refusal of the sequence sensation>perception>cognition in favor of a joint holistic immersion of the corporeal and the psychological within experience. Sensation, Merleau-Ponty asserts, does not precede experience or cognition: on the contrary, cognitive and sensory mechanisms are contemporaneous (if not exactly simultaneous). Among the more acute consequences of our holistic engagement with experience Merleau-Ponty designates that of the plastic graftability of perception. A pair of new glasses, after a brief period of habituation, becomes transparent to perception. Less obviously, if we usually wear a hat or wield a bat or racket or frying pan, or if we drive a bicycle or a car, our perceptions and actions will intuitively adapt to, and

literally ‘absorb,’ the object as an extension of our body as part of what Merleau-Ponty calls our “body schema.” Plastic graftability is not a subsidiary or lesser aspect of perception but one of its essential dimensions: if it weren’t the case, we couldn’t learn to skateboard with a proficiency going beyond anything we can perceive and achieve without a skateboard.

The third undoing of Sensationalism comes from the recent interest, by both cognitive sciences and sensory research, in what has been called “the half-second delay.” The problem is the crucial interval between the onset of a nerve impulse and its actual arrival in the brain. This delay means, among other things, that a ‘central-processing’ model of the brain is unable to account for most of what we do that requires ‘real-time’ reactions: if we see with half-a-second delay, we should be constitutively unable to catch a ball, open a door, or interact with the moving world. But we are not. Why? The general agreement is that our core cognitive abilities have developed within this gap by creating both substitute formations (the “illusion of free will” as Wegner puts it) and necessary approximations of reality. Studies show that efferent nerve signals—signals coming *from* the brain or other secondary centers *to* the nerve-endings—are up to ten times the volume of afferent signals coming from the nerve-endings. This should be understood as a revolution! The most likely conclusion, suggested already by other studies, is that cognition functions in large part by creating bits of the reality likely to be encountered, then refining this invented model with feedback touch-ups. In other words, we create a probable perception, trying it on for size by triangulating with a few sensory inputs, and we go from match to match via such created flowing models. We are not minds registering sensory pictures: we live inside a series of pictures we fit to what happens to us.

Finally, closer to our praxis of entomologists of the text (i.e. ‘literary critics’), the single most astounding blind-spot of the humanities since the linguistic revolution of the 1960s must be the incredibly powerful sensory life and affects coming out of language uses—whether one embraces the strategic conceits of the ‘materiality of the signifier’ or the language-like structure of the unconscious, or the Lucretian atomism of the dissemination of the sign in Derrida’s deconstruction, or not. What made the terrific movement of ‘French Theory’ or ‘poststructuralism’ possible, is the broad realization that words do not let their meanings blossom in our museum-like cerebrum alone, but that text, words, speech, discourse, and language (each at a different pitch) have the exorbitant power to reshape our perception and renew aspects of our embodiment and self-image, and conversely, to discipline our attention and render aspects of our corporeality or self-image abject. Wrong words, epithets, stereotypes, encapsulations of ourselves by others or other’s language coursing in ourselves, haunt major portions of our lives,

shaping our acts, our choices, our desires, our hopes. Sensationalism must be wrong—or at the very least, too simple and too incomplete—if some among our most intimately incapacitating or enabling experiences come and remain and get reenacted through no channel other than language.

Poetics in_action via a theory of intersentience that reveals anew the social crimes of the obvious (under construction).

ECHOES: A X-CULTURAL RESPONSE TO GUY SENESE'S THROWING VOICES

Mary E. Weems

Poetry is a way to interact with the culture of another person; to cross moments, perspectives, and eyes constructed the same seeing different. In the following poems, I respond to lines, passages, words in *Throwing Voices*, a series of five autoethnographies about Guy Senese's experiences as an Italian American-used car salesman, university professor, censored then *whitelisted* AESA conference participant, evaluator, jazz lover and musician. Guy and I have a long distance friendship connected by the fact that we're poets, our commitment to social justice and radical positive change in education, and our love of jazz.

He's used his horn to back up my words at several conferences over the years, each time his notes, like punctuation of love and respect. I didn't know until I read his work that in 1890 following the murder of police chief David Hennessy in New Orleans, whose last words were "the dagos did it" (Senese, 70), 11 Italian/Sicillian Americans were arrested. That the next day (echoing the lynching of three Black males in Duluth, Minnesota some years later) a white mob stormed the jail and one-by-one—lynched the men.

This image of the same noose being used over and over again, the neck break, head snap, loosening and re-stretching represents another, more painful link in our friendship. My history mis-education based upon myth and omission had never exposed me to this incident, and until I read it I thought Italian Americans had escaped that particular way of saying Howdy! Welcome to America!

Here, Guy wants to talk about race, and its ugly sister racism—and he does but in a careful way like stepping on stones heated overnight in an oven. He's not sure how to do it, which he states, and while he offers no solutions, change isn't possible about anything if we can't even begin a dialogue about it. This discomfort with his discomfort inspired some of the poems in this piece.

Reading this book made me pause and re-read a lot. Often I'd find myself wanting to talk back to the work, to throw my own Black voice in the mix, to shout *this fucking shit is wrong, and why are people still getting away with it!* The following pieces are shared as a way of interacting with his writing, of offering messy, culturally mixed windows into this work. They represent an

extended palm, head and heart to an audience who will be reading these five uneasy pieces long after our last words are written.

Skineege

(A person always working an angle or hustle)

In order to get arrested
a fake thug
has to write a rap
long enough to cover his real
rep, a cred

earned in his mama's house
by streetlights
apron in place
washing and drying
dishes after dinner

(p. 32)

“At-risk is a code term”

First time I felt at-risk
I was a little too close to Little Italy
synonymous with ass whoopin,
beat downs, danger in the late
60s early 70s, now

Everybody Black knew better
than to fuck around over there
whenever some new atrocity
hit the papers we automatically
understood it was somebody
who was *not* from the neighborhood

When I started driving, I wouldn't
even speed down Murray Hill
my mind replaying scenes filled
with boots, broken teeth, *nigger*
tossed like stones at my beater
already running on a wing
and a stare

I remember the young Black men
out for a ride down one of the best hills
in Cleveland for a bike—if you're white
broad daylight not enough to stop
men who felt their community
violated by Black bodies cycling
through on ten speeds that weren't
fast enough .

(p. 35)

'Real' Talking Circle

I don't hang out with squares:
heads minds smokes
I read signals until I understand
dialogue is like a prayer
hands joined do not shake
change is not something that jingles
need a four letter word
stuck in rote

teachers throw wages at supplies
their kids never bring
city school a place where
prison prep is an elective
street clothing, cuss words prohibited

arithmetic, learn to count backwards
like sheep caught in a nightmare
radical voices target of Freddy Kruger
man behind mask as mysterious as Wizard
of Oz, academic freedom personified

an Emerald Palace you have to be on drugs
to get to.

(p. 43)

Giving Head

Truth spoken
sans a filter
over the pie hole
is better than a blow job.

(p. 43)

“Dago madman”

Thinking of Guy
I break these syllables
like bread

and the **Da**[y] **Go**[es]
on like the endless
beat of heart
inside horn
loved **mad**[ly]

tossing gender
into air
a **man**
who loves women.

(p. 45)

“Calling things by their right name”

*It wasn't the word nigger that bothered me Richards
it was way you described that Black man you lynched
on that stage as if you'd been one of those white table cloth
picnic eaters under the tree
fanned by the breeze*

Collateral damage sounds like a calculated
stock loss, the kind you find on the floor
of the New York Stock Exchange
not dead bodies, no names

Urban education is buzz word for less than,
cut losses, cut it out, cut out, cut class,
city and schoolhouse as mismatched
as gloves on a 2 year-old kid, two people
speaking different languages, private
and poverty money

White flight. White people do not fly
away from Black people in their neighborhoods
they run.

Diversity, other than any kind that has nothing
whatsoever to do with racial
is the last thing white universities want
and they will fight to the death anyone who says this.

(p. 50)

“You All Play Pretty Good Jim Crow Music”

Charles Mingus,

I know immediately when I read this.
Brother Mingus dissed Guy’s jazz quintet
up close and personal knowing
it would stay on his mind like last
words of a dead man

I’ve never known anyone Black
to use Jim Crow in a positive sense
nothing positive about hate dressed as a white
man in rags pretending to be a cripple
Black man. Nothing good about white man
who turns misery into a living
with dance moves

Telling a musician he plays Jim Crow
music is like telling him he ain’t paid
no dues! and don’t even know
how much is owed.

(p. 50)

**“[I]n order to “pass” in *White bands...*
Black musicians began to identify as Hawaiian
or Cuban”**

This speaks of century turn to WWII
but still true since Black population
in America has been 12-13 percent since
forever no re-count in sight

We joke among ourselves about all
the Black people not being counted
but underneath surface feel shame
of our brothers and sisters who no longer
live with Jim Crow, but would still rather
be anything than Black.

(p. 69)

“me with my soprano”

This line speaks of horn
traveling with musician
a metal best friend
with its own case
tool for soul notes

but I’m rushed to TV land
the umpteenth time Grammy
winning show keeps Italian
stereotypes alive

the mob story like the head
of the mop in Gordon Parks’
photograph, a metaphor
for what’s missing

most of the actors belong
to the group, proud participants
they take their awards as an
Italian family

who when acting use *nigger*

when referencing Black people
you never see on the show.

(p. 79)

**“What do the schools do...
[t]o the beautiful dreamers?”**

When I work with middle school,
high school kids in inner schools
the neighborhoods hold me close
to the blocks I grew up in spindly
legged, too tall, unhappy to be nappy
ghetto child who had to go to school
to learn I was poor.

I reach them wearing no disguise
my face tells a story they can relate
to. There's always a poet
in the room, a young Phyllis Wheatley,
Langston, Coleman, Baraka, spitting rhymes
off rip, letting light show when
I offer mad props for words
that make me laugh, make me sigh.

There are so many dreams here
interrupted by racism, curricula
constructed for endless tests, the big one
at the end of roads *not* taken by their
parents before them

As we read, write, rhyme together,
a community of Black folks
rejecting deferment, I look at their
beautiful, many-shaded faces
wonder if real school change is ever
gon' come.

(p. 130)

Guy and I share a love and respect for work of the late, radically free, satirist Lenny Bruce. A Jewish man living in a society steeped in Blue Laws, who treated freedom of speech like his religion, and was *whitelisted* for it. Like us, Bruce believed real words have the power to change the world.

Immersed in the radical, satirical, creative sucker punch of *Throwing Voices*, I had an aesthetic experience in the Deweyian sense. This work made me re-think the Italian American experience, made me glad I never had to sell used cars, confirmed what I know about the tragic mis-use of school funds, inspired new poems, re-affirmed my commitment to speaking truth from my own cultural lens.

Here's to more people who take the time to really listen, to express their own lived experience truths, criticisms, and questions. I envision a world where overwhelming numbers of people are inspired to cross cultures through the arts, to act as agents for systemic social change in public schools and all other American institutions.

As Bruce once quipped:

“Satire is tragedy plus time. You give it enough time, the public, the reviewers will allow you to satirize it. Which is rather ridiculous, when you think about it.”

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PROBLEMS AND PROMISES OF ACTUALLY EXISTING CROSS CULTURAL POETICS

Tyrone Williams

In theory, there is no relationship between a “culture” and a “poetics” that escapes the scrutiny of a “cultural studies.” Nonetheless, the praxis of cross cultural poetics would be otherwise; the moment a transnational or pre-national subject begins to speak or write poetry—for example—she is already immersed in some—not the—mix, theorized or not. By virtue of language (verbal, visual, etc.) she contests certain hegemonies, certain constructions of reality, the responsibility for which we may abdicate but only at the risk of conceding the “world” to the very forces we otherwise contest.¹ However, the speaking subject may speak, may construct her reality, as it constructs her, without the benefit—or handicap—of the concept—that which we will call, here, cross cultural poetics. As an object of thought, and thus of study, the cross cultural (poetics in abeyance for the moment) depends on prior givens, among them the singularity of culture, its ontological locus, its integrity as an effect of a border or membrane, and its susceptibility to passage across, though, over, under, etc., prepositions with political and social consequences. Moreover, the problematic concept of culture is inextricable from the equally problematic concept of the subject. And even if we feel assured we know what each of these might mean, separately and together, other questions and problems await us. For example, can a single subject embody, must less represent, much less exemplify, a culture? And if not, how many subjects of a particular culture does it take to adequately “represent” or “exemplify” a culture? And how can anyone within or without such a culture write “about” it if, for example, the subjects themselves contest the very name of the culture?²

The recourse to history as a kind of archive itself—the very condition of the possibility of the archive as irreducibly archival—only multiplies our difficulties.³ What texts do we privilege when we name, for example, the descendants of Africans in the United States of America colored, Negro, black, Afro-American, African American, etc? Or those of Spanish descent Latina/o, Chicana/o, Hispanic, Nuyorican, etc.? Here we have terms that refer to or derive from ethnicity, race, pigmentation, geography and, most, problematically, culture, none of which necessarily relate to other terms in this list.⁴ In the introduction to his groundbreaking study of Black Power and the Black Arts Movement in the Sixties and Seventies, James Smethurst articulates the fluid, indistinct and porous modes of aesthetic, political, and regional “identities” that arrest any attempt to homogenize the his-

tory of what was essentially a decade-long “movement” whose nebulous endpoints—say, the Fifties and Eighties—nonetheless remain ambiguous as causes and effects of the movements, however “thick”⁵ the actual object of study.⁶

This problem of, for example, African American “identity,” never solved or resolved, has already been, is already being, superseded by other ethnic and racial and cultural conflicts and difficulties among Indonesians in the northern Midwest, Arabs and Iranians in the central Midwest, Haitians and West Indians in the Northeast, and Asians and Polynesians in the West. And this brief schematic is a gross oversimplification. As is the notion of “supersede” since African Americans, like the indigenous people of the country, are still struggling with and through “their,” that is, “our,” problems regardless of what the latest “in” or “out” group happens to be.

* * *

The concept of “poetics,” like the concept of the academic discipline, has always been fluid, partaking of and influencing any number of human modes of cultural knowledge. In general, the term denotes the founding concepts and underlying structure of any body of cultural arts knowledge—hence Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Today, it covers not only the traditional modes of cultural arts knowledge but also emerging ones, including digital, somatic-based, and public space-performative ones.⁷ Still, however expansive, “poetics” will continue to draw upon its stereotypical history, its historical link to a form of thinking or thought outside the binaries of traditional logic and reason and thus one linked to the feminine and, more pejoratively, the effete.⁸ Thus, fluidity notwithstanding, it will continue to reinforce a border and thus a problematic—what to expel or keep out, what to ingest or keep in, and so forth. The history of poetics will have always been a history of histories, a chronicle of borderline clashes between the functions and parameters of any number of intersecting and overlapping poetic practices. Thus, like the concept of culture, the concept of poetics will continue to be renewed by cross fertilization with adjacent modes of production within and outside the arts. Resistance to this appropriation, perceived as a form of bastardization, will continue to expand precisely to the extent cross cultural poetics continues to contest the status quo in all its social, cultural, political, economic and aesthetic forms.

Within the United States of America, this resistance to the multiplication and cross-fertilization of “cultures” and “poetries,” to say nothing of “poetics,” will only partially be offset by social, economic and technological “advances” that allow a plurality of demographic markets and constituencies to flourish.

This is so because many of these technologies are themselves financed by local, state and federal funds. Indeed, were it not for the fact that much of the “small publishing” outlets are composed of aesthetically conservative, if not reactionary, houses that, like their more innovative and/or radical counterparts, see themselves in opposition to “academic” poetry, it is doubtful that the small publishing market would have flourished as much as it has. In other words, cross-cultural poetics are not synonymous with aesthetic innovations, much less particular political postures. Thus competition within the marketplace of ideas and resources (economic, political and cultural) will continue to define small publishing in general. And the relatively low overhead of digital and Internet-based poetics and publishing outlets, to say nothing of desktop publishing in general, means that so-called niche-marketing will remain an important factor in the dissemination of cross-cultural poetics, conservative and radical, traditional and adventurous, during the first half of the 21st century.

These developments will continue to call into question nationalism and ethnocentrism in all their permutations. This interrogation is not new. One finds, at the very birth of the nation itself, see-saw struggles over exactly what the concept of “the nation” might mean, over the desirability and risks of even establishing a nation, over the still relevant question of the extent to which the current “nation” even exists, or could ever exist, *qua* a nation outside the coercion of federal taxation, military enforcement, mandatory education and the salacious palaver of regional and national media outlets. Within the smaller, though no less incoherent, sector of literature, these issues took, still take, the shape of debates over, for example, “American” literature. Does it exist? Can it exist? What, if any “aesthetics,” constitute it? Though it is now academically sound to dismiss the 19th century Eurocentric aesthetics of the so-called Fireside Poets (Longfellow, Lowell, etc.) and praise the forward-looking “American” poetics of Whitman and Dickinson, this neat binary configuration presents a problem in relation to a history of cross-cultural interactions. One could argue, for example, that for all their racial and ethnic chauvinism, their social, political and aesthetic conservatism, the Fireside poets were, nonetheless, more culturally “aware,” if not more culturally “sensitive,” to ethnic, racial, religious and cultural differences than either Whitman or Dickinson, their respective “radicalism” and “liberalism” notwithstanding.⁹ Of course, it is precisely their apparent appropriation of, indifference to, “multicultural” issues that made the latter poets candidates for hermeneutical christening as the two pillars on which a certain formation of American modernism would be erected, however unstable the foundation. In that sense, then, the Objectivists remain problematic for a certain strand of avant-gardism—say, that represented by Stein—in terms of Zukofsky’s, Oppen’s and Rakosi’s relationship to specific modes of Judaism.¹⁰

This problematic relationship between ethnicity and innovation haunts all of the important movements within North American poetics, including the Black Arts Movement and Language Writing. Not only in terms of self-reflexive meditations on ethnic identity but also in debates about cross cultural poetics, say those that fractured Umbra over the question of anti-Semitism and the relation between political activism and aesthetics, or the well-publicized exchanges that ensued between Ron Silliman and Leslie Scalapino concerning what is today so easily called identity poetics and identity politics. These debates are merely indices of this resistance.¹¹ More generally, the attack on what is perceived as a conservative poetics and politics of identity confuses, as many have long pointed out, any number of realms in terms of their relative power within a particular historical moment. The assertion of racial and ethnic identity within a conservative aesthetics is, perhaps, an index of an attenuated concept of aesthetic possibility but aesthetic possibility is not necessarily the sole—or primary—catalyst for creative “products” by those marked ethnic, racial, gender or sexual orientation minorities. To conflate this aesthetic conservatism with racial and ethnic assertions of identity is to confound the relative autonomy of aesthetics in Western history with cultural formations outside or at the margins of that history, formations that contest the autonomy, relative or not, of aesthetics. Such a conflation reveals a fairly traditional humanism at the core of alleged radical aesthetics.¹²

Thus the attack on ethnic and racial identitarian¹³ assertions was based, in part, on a belief that culture, in general, liberates one from the realm of nature, a concept and value that coincides with, indeed, gave rise to, the European Renaissance and Enlightenment. This sentiment underscores the very *raison d'être* of the arts and sciences in the West and receives its material investment in, for example, the museum and university while its overarching idealism drives everything from the campaign against illiteracy to the struggles for universal suffrage. This Western notion of culture as liberating, democratic, innovative and, sometimes, antagonistic toward the culture from which it sprang, is at odds with a quite different aesthetic—or poetics—which insists that the point of “culture” is to reinforce prevailing beliefs and uphold the standards of custom and tradition.¹⁴ Taken to their logical conclusions, both concepts of aesthetics reify history as impossible, though its impossibility may result from cultural inadequacy (“conservative” Hegel, for example, on the African peoples) or human mortality (“radical” Hegel as read through Marx and Trotsky). And since there is no concept of “mortality” in the West that does not partake of Graeco-Roman “pride” (*hubris*) and its Christian translation—sin—one notices immediately that both trajectories share a common lineage, one we, here in the West, can trace back to Plato and Aristotle. The pejoratives “identity politics” and

“identity poetics” thus represent the most current moment in the ongoing transposition of cultural deficiency and/or human “fallibility” into cultural defeatism and/or human hubris. These competing notions of politics and culture can only be analyzed after their lineage has been acknowledged as actually existing, indeed co-existing, reinforcing and propping up one another.¹⁵

It is by now a cliché that the avant-garde has historically strengthened the very culture or society it supposedly came into existence to critique, that innovation oils the wheels of capitalism and its cultural analogues regardless of its radical “content,” and so forth. One might thus see the relationship between the avant-garde and the culture it critiques as analogous to that between any two departments in a modern Western university. The borders are porous and thus each culture contains its own self-critique in its very structure just as every academic discipline is intrinsically interdisciplinary.¹⁶ Of course, this fact must be suppressed by each department, which is why it must demonize, and suffer demonization, according to the division of knowledge and labor. Ditto the avant-garde and its host-culture.

Nevertheless, the domestication of the radical—e.g., the academicization of Language Writing or Black Arts aesthetics—does not at all mean the force of their respective critiques is diverted or muted even if their primary targets are the very institutions and traditions that house them. Resistance at the academic levels to some of the implications of both movements (implications which are still working their way through the production and consumption of literary texts in particular and cultural products in general) is thus not at all surprising. Although it is far too early to make an accurate assessment of its implications, the so-called “return” to the lyric, to the subject, deformed, historicized, and so forth, risks eliding precisely the social foundations on which both teeter. The most promising writing in this vein—and these are just examples—yokes together, often violently, the social and the body (I’m thinking of writers like Liz Waldner, Tracie Morris, Rodrigo Toscano, Erica Hunt, Laura Elrick, Jocelyn Saldenberg, Kristen Prevallet, Taylor Brady, Rob Halpern, Duriel Harris, etc.) as a strategy for de-idealizing the human subject while still retaining a human focus.

* * *

Exhibit Most Recent: *Snow Sensitive Skin* is a remarkable collaboration between Taylor Brady and Rob Halpern. Beautifully designed by Michael Cross for Atticus Finch, this black-on-black chapbook, as dense intellectually, as culturally “thick” as many, much longer, books of poetry, is really a collaboration between Brady, Halpern, Cross and the inspiration for this

meditation on the 2006 Israeli bombing of Lebanon, the music of Lebanese musician and artist Mazen Kerbaj. Brady's and Halpern's alternately terse and lapidary lyrics acknowledge the distance between them and Kerbaj, their sense of culpability and impotence, even as it rages against these "individual" reactions and conditions in order to situate the war within and as a function of global economies. And always, always, they return (as did the bombs, the commands, etc.) to the body.

(Endnotes)

¹ Jess Whyte, "Contesting Reality," *Overland*, 188, 26-29. As will be seen below the divide between theory and practice is only the most general postlapsarian binary system that inaugurates the movement of temporality as history.

² These are only some of the questions Timothy Yu reviews in his article on the limitations of both Language Writing and ethnocentric writing, which he sees as the two competing movements emerging from sustained critiques of mainstream workshop lyric poetry in the United States. See his "Form and Identity in Language Poetry and Asian American Poetry," *Contemporary Literature*, 41:3 (Autumn 2000), 422-61.

³ See Helen Freshwater's ruminations on the relationship between censorship in Great Britain and the problem of the archive in her "The Allure of the Archive," *Poetics Today*, 24:4, 729-58. More indirect but still useful as a general critique of the "lure" of the archive is Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*.

⁴ As one early example of the confusion these terms seem to give rise to, see Sandra Govan, "The Poetry of Black Experience as Counterpoint to the Poetry of the Black Aesthetic," *Negro American Literature Forum*, Vol. 8 No. 4 (Winter 1974), 288-92. Govan's distinctions fall apart almost immediately since, as she concedes, the two "tendencies" may be found within the work of a single poet's work and, I would add, even within a single poem. The real issue for Govan, though she never names it, seems to be "protest" poetry versus poetry that attempts to illuminate black experience without recourse to white culture, history, etc.

⁵ I use this term in James Clifford's sense of thin and thick descriptions of history.

⁶ James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁷ See, for examples, Brian Kim Stefans, *Fashionable Noise: On Digital Poetics* (Atelos, 2003), Lisa McDonald, "writing, with, t/error," 66-76, and John Kinsella, "Poetry as means of dialogue in court spaces," 98-114, the latter two in *Cultural Studies Review*, 13:2.

⁸ Emily Critchley's essay, "dilemmatic boundaries: constructing a poetics of thinking," on the Intercapillary blog is a good overview of the relevance of women writers and various feminisms to the project of unsettling Western metaphysics. However Critchley sets up a male/female binary herself in trying to account for the career-oriented male language writers v. the more radical, less conventional, essays of women writers, a binarism that is applicable only for some of her examples and certainly not representative of either all male or female Language Writers. Nor, in criticizing those who enter academia, does she consider the work that one does instead of academia. Finally, she seems to overlook Language Writing women associated with academic, including Rachel du Plessis and Rosemarie Waldrop.

⁹ See Nathaniel Mackey, "Phrenological Whitman," in his *Paracritical Hinge* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 21-39; the important feminist rereadings of Dickinson elide race in general, and slavery in particular—see Martha Nell Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* and Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *Emily Dickinson*. The important exception which proves the rule is Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson*, which contextualizes Dickinson's life and work

in terms of the indigenous people, slavery and the Puritans, though Howe's bifurcations emphasize the absence of these issues in Dickinson's poetry.

¹⁰ Timothy Yu notes Charles Bernstein's complicated relationship to his own Jewish identity in terms of the insistence on form as analogue to other spheres of existence, which presumably include the ethno-cultural. See footnote 2.

¹¹ Although the term "identity" politics and "identity poetics" are obviously related, an interrogation of the origin of these terms has not been foregrounded. However, the concept of identity as narrow or limiting defines its use within the political and cultural debates, though this has little to do with the philosophical critique of identity, which seems to me much more rigorous and robust. Some of the criticism within the cultural sphere in particular has the same aggressive and misrepresenting trajectories as the critique of affirmative action, equal rights for "special interests" and so on. For the Scalapino-Silliman debate on marginality, gender, ethnicity, race and innovation and conventionality in writing, see their "What/Person: From an Exchange," *Poetics Journal*, 9 (June 1991). 51-68. I should add that both have written follow-up statements and given interviews that clarify their positions.

¹² Scalapino is much more forthcoming on the inaccuracy of the terms of the original debate than Silliman, perhaps due to the different scales of investment in innovation. In fact, Scalapino, like Susan Howe, seems completely uninterested in the value of innovation per se. Her writing, like Howe's, derives from precisely a sense of "self" expression under critique primarily by the Language poets who happen to be men. What Scalapino and Howe (and Armantrout) hone in on is a different construct of the "ego" than that presumed by Silliman, Grenier, Watten et al. For different but characteristic assessments of the original debate, see Elisabeth Frost, "An Interview with Leslie Scalapino," *Contemporary Literature*, 17:1 (Spring 1996), 1-23; and Gary Sullivan, "Ron Silliman Interview," *ReadMe*, No. 3, Spring 2000, (<http://www.jps.net/nada/silliman.htm>)

¹³ The term is apparently meant to echo "libertarian" since both identity poetics and libertarian politics reduce aesthetics to either a group or individual, to a certain "humanism," in opposition to innovative writing which foregrounds language—not a "self"—as object and subject of investigation. My point, of course, is that there are, always have been, competing notions of the "human."

¹⁴ As Francis Fukuyama points out, the concept of self-identity as the ground for all other modes of identity is a modern Western concept—the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* is only its most well-known index—which infiltrates traditional Christianity in the form of Protestantism, traditional Judaism as Zionism and traditional Islam as jihadism; in all three the links between subjectivity and nationalism is apparently inextricable. See Fukuyama's "Identity and migration," *Prospect Magazine*, No. 131 (February 2007), 1-10.

¹⁵ A recent articulation of this traditional Western humanism can be found on Reginald Shepherd's September 19, 2007 blog entitled "Against Identity Poetry, For Possibility." Shepherd's critique deploys all the usual appeals to aesthetic (and thus, for him, cultural, social, sexual, etc.) "distance" as the source and ground of "possibility" as opposed to a conception of poetry as a "mirror" of the "self." As I note elsewhere, this concept itself, identity poetics per se, represents a charged distortion and failure to read the so-called poetry of self-identity, of self-reflection, within *other* contexts.

¹⁶ On the interdisciplinary structure of disciplines see Christopher Newfield, "Criticism and Cultural Knowledge," *Poetics Today*, 19:3, 423-438. For a preliminary overview of how this intrinsic interdisciplinarity might affect a particular social and cultural movement, see Cyranja Johnson-Roullier's "Identity Politics, Feminism and the Problem of Difference," *Surfaces*, Vol. 7: 108, folio 1-12.

MANY CULTURES TO CROSS

Christopher Winks

Measured against the notion of the multicultural, which has acquired overtones of a superficial if not atomized diversity “in itself,” the concept of the cross-cultural implies definite movement – whether fully conscious or not – towards a ground of mutuality that yet does not smooth out any dissonances encountered en route. As a statement of poetics, Jay Wright’s declaration that “[things] are already woven, I’m just trying to uncover the weave” acknowledges that the creative crossing of cultures entails more of a search than an unraveling (the weave being more than the sum of its threads). Its truth emerges from a listening-for, an apprehension and bringing-to-light of, variegated textures made up of myriad connections, exchanges, and voices. There is always a mystery at the heart of this process, which Martin Carter recognizes: the “strength of the web of the ever-weaving weaver / I know not how to speak of, caught as I am / in the great dark of the bright connection of words” (“The Great Dark”) encompasses both ultimate ineffability and tragic necessity. The crossing must be dared, the quest embarked upon, the bright connections made in, through, sometimes against darkness and other times with its aid. For, as Carter says elsewhere, “Like a jig / shakes the loom. / Like a web / is spun the pattern / all are involved! / all are consumed!” (“You Are Involved!”). Uncovering the weave we live in, rather than merely existing unconsciously within it – or worse, denying its living presence – thus becomes a matter of urgency given the present moment of danger.

Speaking of the “resistance to alterities” exhibited by some readers of his cross-cultural fictions, Wilson Harris wonders, “Is it that they are inherently or traumatically convinced that cross-culturality – in its engagement with other cultures, ancient and modern – is foreign to them?” And after enumerating some of the most genocidal historical consequences to which such unthinking resistance is heir, Harris indicts what he considers a prevailing blindness on the part of society “to the necessity – to say the least – of deep-seated cultural change that would alter its ways of seeing and thinking.” What Harris calls the “fixed order of tradition” retains sufficient purchase to cause unease among far too many who feel themselves invested in the present global order of things and who therefore do not wish to be reminded of the past and ongoing horrors involved in its consolidation and masked by its dominant epistemologies. But such defensiveness – bordering at times on hostility – testifies to what Harris calls a profound “trauma of an age: *a trauma that is building a void into sensibility.*” The incessant tocsins

and drumbeats of a propaganda that extols some geographical/cultural imaginary called the “West” strategically censors not only the processes through which this “West” constructed itself, but the extent to which it was actually shaped by those it designated as its Others.

To proclaim cross-culturality – more, to practice it, which is now the task of any poetics worth its salt – is to take an important step towards dissolving the “predatory coherence” of such modern myths as clashes of civilizations, the end of history, the universal rationality of the untrammelled capitalist market, etc. Kamau Brathwaite reminds us in his magisterial *MR: Magical Realism*: “No useful productive formulation/understanding/interstanding of interculturalization – far less a critique of ‘it’...can derive from the application of closed European conquistadorial systems of thought to ‘it’, since the prin-cess has nothing to do with ratiocination or ‘logic’, but w/human process & its interactive & internegative effects/defects.” And entering into that process, as Brathwaite points out elsewhere in that text, involves a “de-education & unprejudiced to the concept not of tabula rasta but of *palimpsest* wiping the slate of literary & cultural assumptions clean in such a way that we begin to discern the ainkan voices of the inscriptions of history y memory.” The problem, then, is to learn how to think, read, and act differently, outside the assorted boxes, prisons, and comfort zones, virtual and otherwise, into which we are all crowded and cluttered.

A recurring figure in Wilson Harris’s fictions is the Jester, one of whose avatars declares “Intervention by the divine cannot be entirely divorced from laughter at oneself, one’s refusal sometimes to read the signs until it’s too late or almost too late” (*Jonestown*). Legba, who presides over crossroads and opens pathways and ceremonies of possession; Anancy the weaving spider who traps fears in its webs and outwits those stupefied by their own delusions of power; the Amerindian sacred clown who parodies rituals as they unfold: these trickster divinities introduce vital uncertainties into mechanical routine and compel new readings, new translations of the signature of all things. A cross-cultural poetics always involves some kind of trickster logic, and the point of the jest lies precisely in its ultimate seriousness. The work of the Cuban poet José Lezama Lima exemplifies the upending of certainties in the interests of forging a superior poetic intelligence: undaunted by the challenges of developing a radically new poetics in a country considered by the gatekeepers of Western poetry (when they thought of it at all) as culturally underdeveloped, Lezama not only assimilated a vast array of world poetics but, in a marvelously anthropophagic act of absorption, transformed this heritage into a moment of Cuban culture, thereby implementing Aimé Césaire’s desire for a “universal rich with all that is particular, rich with all the particulars there are, the deepening of each particular, the coexistence

of them all” (“Letter to Maurice Thorez”).

In his poem “Un puente, un gran puente” (“A Bridge, a Great Bridge”), Lezama avails himself of one of the most commonplace metaphors (and physical structures) denoting crossings and connections. But here, it is “amidst the frozen or boiling waters / a bridge, a great bridge that cannot be seen / but that walks upon its own work in manuscript.” It is, then, a ductile, not a static construction – perhaps it is poetry itself, a spirit at once within and superior to its “own work in manuscript.” And the bridge is not built “over” the alternately frozen or boiling waters, but rather appears as a mediating force within them. It cannot be seen, but on the page it acquires materiality through language; thus, its invisibility serves to confer greater power upon it. Later in the poem, the “honey-colored armatures” of the bridge metamorphose into what “could be the Sicilian vespers / painted on a diminutive poster” and vanish into “salty silver / that we have to cross despite the swollen silent / armies that have besieged the city without silence.” The Sicilian Vespers, a violent 13th-century uprising against the French (and Papal) occupation of the island, which had been a Mediterranean cultural crossroads for centuries, marked the beginning of the end of a cross-cultural historical epoch. That Lezama should invoke it in connection with armies besieging an (unnamed) city might be a reference to World War II (the poem was published in a 1941 collection) but the “salty silver,” with its fusion of seawater and one of the precious metals that aroused conquistadorial greed and attendant destruction of indigenous American cultures conjures up visions of Cuzco and Tenochtitlán. Perhaps the contemporary war should be seen as a consequence and incarnation of the colonial invasion. The repressive armies are lying in wait to impose their silence on a city which, like all cities, derives its being and becoming from the noise and bustle of communication between humans. And yet, “we” are compelled to cross, doubtless into what Wole Soyinka calls “the numinous realm of transition,” in order to sustain non-violent, non-repressive possibilities.

Typically for Lezama, the poem ends on a playfully ambiguous note. Repeating the one-line refrain, “A bridge, a great bridge that cannot be seen,” the waters that were by turns “frozen or boiling” are now “boiling, frozen” and “rebound against the last defensive wall / and rapt away the head and the single voice / crosses the Bridge once again, like the blind king / who’s unaware he’s been dethroned / and dies gently sewn into night’s loyalty.” While the bridge is invisible, the walls against which the waters crash do not appear to be – unless they are Blake’s “mind-forg’d manacles” or Bob Marley’s “mental slavery,” in which case these roiling waters would be linked to spirit-possession, which seizes hold of the head: Maya Deren, shortly before being possessed by Erzulie in a Vodou ritual, notices “Now it is the dance

which suggests water,” and later, after her return, recalls “a fleeting memory of a white tent in the dark night and a trough of water.” And that water stirred up by dance and drumbeat may well have been both “boiling and frozen” and neither. The moment of Deren’s crossing is expressed through an oxymoron that in other circumstances would be called baroque, and an inner call answered by a single voice: “It is much too bright, too white for me; this is its darkness. ‘Mercy!’ I scream within me. I hear it echoed by the voice, shrill and unearthly, ‘*Erzulie!*’ But who is the dying blind king? It could well be Prospero, Shakespeare’s master-magus figure of “Western” power and colonial pseudo-rationality. Kamau Brathwaite might offer a further clue: “...we begin by locating where the **BLACK HOLES** in the **CLOSED (PROSPEREAN) SYSTEM** are and **GO THRU THERE [...]** **INTO ALL (NEW) KINDS OF ENVISIONING/REVISIONING.**” A parody of the “Eastern” god Dionysus, whose fetus Zeus rescued from the burnt body of his mother and sewed into his own thigh until the baby’s gestation was complete, the dethroned king, blinded figuratively and literally by power, crosses the bridge into his grave, the black hole of night.

I spoke earlier of the “cross-cultural” as a concept. But more than that; it is a praxis, and its poetic dimension is summarized in Aimé Césaire’s observation: “...I find that the image is rich, and the concept poor [...] [The concept] starts by reducing you to the minimum, the barest minimum that basically represents your *identity*.” On the contrary, the image “enables me to select, to take, to supersede, to go forward. *I reap*. I grasp it; I don’t back away.” So perhaps it would be closer to the heart of the matter to say that the cross-cultural reveals itself in and through the image, which should not necessarily be seen in solely a literary sense. Césaire reminds us that it is not something from which we should turn away. Given the systems of predatory coherence that continue to operate globally, with all the lethally reductive consequences that can be imagined, genuinely affirming and practicing cross-culturality will also demand risk and ordeal of the sort experienced by Maya Deren in her engagement with Vodou: “...the journey around is long and hard, alike for the strong horse, alike for the great rider.” While the world is indeed always-already cross-cultural, it is not enough merely to proclaim that fact without attending to the protracted work not only of close reading but of dialogue and empathy (refusing to privilege “book” over “people”, as Kamau Brathwaite says). The danger of permanently becoming like the passengers on a U.S. Coast Guard Cutter watching a boatload of Haitian refugees slowly sinking in the (boiling and frozen?) water, as described in Brathwaite’s “Dream Haiti,” is especially present in the comfortable precincts of “First World” academic institutions: “their mouths wide open / wide open & ounsi / drinkin salt & dream & the gold- / en sound of the court like // LA CRÈTE-À- / PIERROT // & / CITÉ

SOLEIL // all over & over & over again // while we stann on the soff hard
deck of the // Coast Guard / 'Impeccable' / watchin them poem."

Here is an image, resonant with history and myth and ancient and modern
agony whose depths the poet himself can only hint at by "tryin to ghost /
words to / holler / this tale." And, as Brathwaite reminds us, it is also a
reality lived every day, in the Mediterranean, in the Atlantic, in the Carib-
bean Sea, in Iraq, in the deserts of the Mexico-U.S. border – wherever
women, men, and children are compelled to attempt crossings from blasted
homelands that can no longer sustain them to increasingly hostile lands of
affluence and imperial contempt, often administered by their very destroy-
ers. Formulating a cross-cultural poetics for the new millennium – which
would aim to get us out of the 21st century with greater speed – must do
honor to "them poem," for, as Brathwaite says, "...we are they broders
and fellow writers bound to them by all kinds of travellers cheques & the
content of our character."

XC-POETICS, OR TOWARD 90 ADDRESSES FOR A POEM

Rita Wong

In *Tripwire: a journal of poetics*, Myung Mi Kim talks with Yedda Morrison about what she calls “generosity as method,” an “ability to read subtleties and nuances as to how you affect the systems around you, whether they are intimate relationships or work or the poetics you explore, how can we attend to that whole *circuitry*” (78). That phrase has stuck with me, as I mull over why cross-cultural poetics is so generative for me as a writer. Below are a number of fragments from various sources I have encountered over the years that speak to the many ways in which cross-cultural poetics are urgent in this moment. Culture, I might add, might not always be centered on the human, though that is where it begins for me:

If your kind cannot be assimilated to make spare parts for Borg wars, your resistance challenges the ant farm to adapt. —from “Resistance Is Fertile,” *Sleeping With the Dictionary*, Harryette Mullen, 2002

When I speak of English as the enemy’s language, I see the enemy as being within the individual person—within one’s own language use and how one is programmed to look at things. Those who see only the enemy outside are, fortunately foolish, because it’s more difficult to detect the enemy within. A second language, or even one’s first or mother tongue, might be the hiding place for a racist ideology. I do think of myself as a “word warrior” because I have to fight with words that demean my experience as an indigenous person.... If a writer does not question imposed language, then, to me, this writer is only passing on oppression to the reader or listener—we are hearing the “colonized Native” voice. —from “I make sense of my world through writing,” Marie Annharte Baker interviewed by Pauline Butling, *Poets Talk*, 2005

“hey,” he bellowed, pants down in quebec, “bring in some english mags, i can’t shit in french!” claude nearly kicked him in the anglo. macauley’s minute & roosevelt’s second unearthed in canadian library digs, chattel feared english had him in its grip, spooked for, pun-ish. —“from the Diction Air,” Jam. Ismail, 1989

There's life in the interstices. We proposition to hold our being. Against the verb. To not cut. To not machine. To not maim. To not kill. If there is breath there is life. If there are wildflowers there is life. If there is pollen there is life. If there are bees there is life. And the sting. And liquid golden honey. —from "Other Bees, Incomplete, A response to Margot Butler's 'Other' Honey," Larissa Lai, *Representations of Murdered and Missing Women, West Coast Line* 53, eds. Anne Stone and Amber Dawn, 2007

sister i am no longer brave
who walks with me?
—from *She*, Claire Harris, 2000

Using the imperfect, I have arranged the most unnerving
improptu Meet me where the line ends Find me

in the loop
—from *Transversals for Orpheus & the untitled 1-13*, Garry Morse, 2006

Poesis consumes the green noem evanesced in glossolalial white. Shuffle it like cards and you may find another way of bathing language.
—from *Human Resources*, Rachel Zolf, 2007

The dogged suspicion that words
belong to some other place.
Some other time.
—from *Site-Specific Poems*, Lola Lemire-Tostevin, 2004

under the bed and under the bigot.
under strictest orders.
miscegenation of the races has occurred.
like a mocking curve.
—from "March 23, 1989," *Lines*, David Fujino, 1990

*each delicious moment is apt to undo the test drive. each immigrant
moment is apt to undot the fault lines. falling between the seams
unbends the communication canal. eruptions enter unannounced.
lend me your ear, like would you succeed if the discourse were less*

slippery? clouds of unknowing drift across the blank page. sign on
the dotted line.

—from *Surrender*, Roy Miki, 2001

The stars had only one task: they taught me how to read. —from “Poetic
Regulations,” Mahmoud Darwish, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, 2003

I do not intend to speak about/ Just speak near by.

—from *Reassemblage*, Trinh T. Minh-ha

PBDEs have been detected in the flesh and blood of marine mammals, fish, and shellfish in the Baltic Sea, the Gulf of Mexico, the Great Lakes, and in Greenland. PBDEs have been found in soil in the UK and Norway and in sewage sludge on the east coast of the US. PBDEs have been found in polar bears living in the remote glaciers of northernmost Norway, in beluga whales and cod that swim the Arctic Ocean, and in orcas cruising Puget Sound. They have been found in peregrine falcon eggs from Sweden, in fish that live in a tributary of the Ebro River in Spain, and in sperm whales beached on the coasts of Denmark and Holland—an indication that PBDEs have reached the deep sea. Levels of these chemicals found in herring gull eggs from the Great Lakes have been doubling every three years, while PBDE levels in San Francisco Bay harbor seals increased a hundredfold between 1988 and 2000. —from *High Tech Trash*, Elizabeth Grossman

So it is better to speak

remembering

we were never meant to survive.

—from “A Litany for Survival,” Audre Lorde

With or without human survivors, the planet’s latest extinction will come to an end. Sobering as the current cascading loss of species is, this is not another Permian, or even a rogue asteroid. There is still the sea, beleaguered but boundlessly creative. Even though it will take 100,000 years for it to absorb all the carbon we mined from the Earth and loaded into the air, it will be turning it back into shells, coral, and who knows what else. “On the genome level,” notes microbiologist Forest Rohwer, “the difference between coral and us is small. That’s strong molecular evidence that we all come from the same place. —from *The World Without Us*, Alan Weisman, 2007

The rich world's most common excuse for inaction can be expressed in one word: China. It is true that China's emissions per person have been rising by around 2 per cent a year. But they are still small by comparison to our own. A citizen of China produces, on average, 2.7 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year. A citizen of the UK emits 9.5, and of the US 20. To blame the Chinese for the problem, and to claim that their rapacious appetites render our efforts futile, is not just hypocritical. It is, I believe, another manifestation of our ancient hysteria about the Yellow Peril. —from *Heat*, George Monbiot

What is called food today is not food. It is the by-product of a war economy. We are eating the leftovers of the Second World War. The nitrogen fertilizers that made explosives are now being used to fertilize, but not fertilize, kill, our soil. The chemicals of warfare have been deployed as pesticides and herbicides. Agriculture has been reduced to the consumption and recycling of war waste” —from Terra Madre Turin speech, Vandana Shiva, 2004

Lucretius said that to flourish we must absorb more than we exude
Of elements, minerals and so forth.
We call this food, and it fabricates us
From the inside. But much does drip and escape
From the corporeal tissues and we use this
Excess to make belief.

—from “Spontaneous Horizontal Restaurants (After Lucretius),” Lisa Robertson, *Eating Things* (Public 30), ed. Scott McFarlane, 2004

The space for sharing must increase and the dialogues must deepen. We must question ourselves. Freedom is not the ability to merely control one's destiny but is more than that: the ability to share destiny. We are a long way from this now, on this planet. If we do not grasp it, the technologies which institute as well as reflect thought will more and more strongly act to reinforce structures of the status quo that devalue us. Using “colour,” for example, as in Benetton ads, or lesbianism as in a *Cosmopolitan* cover, not to be inclusive but to reduce white anxiety about domination and colonial history, to reduce hetero anxiety (or disgust) about sexual difference. *The commodification of race/sexual difference/gender does not have equality as its end, but the growth of capital.* It is not a conspiracy, just the usual entropic process, the pull toward the centre, and must be resisted by the work we do. Even if “*the pull toward the centre breaks down the fucking organism.*” — from *The Glow*, Erin Moure, in *Colour. An Issue* (West Coast Line Spring-Fall 1994, Eds. Roy

Miki and Fred Wah)

I want to be free to use the crumbs and scraps for the crumbiness and scrap-ness in them, for nothing else. —from *Articulations*, Fred Wah, 2007

Five years ago, the Zapatista revolution took as one of its principal symbols the snail and its spiral shell. Their revolution spirals outward and backward, away from some of the colossal mistakes of capitalism's savage alienation, industrialism's regimentation, and toward old ways and small things; it also spirals inward via new words and new thoughts. The astonishing force of the Zapatistas has come from their being deeply rooted in the ancient past—"we teach our children our language to keep alive our grandmothers" said one Zapatista woman—and prophetic of the half-born other world in which, as they say, many worlds are possible. They travel both ways on their spiral. —from "Revolution of the Snails," Rebecca Solnit <http://www.tomdispatch.com/>

Some of the oldest Buddhist texts describe the past, present and future as each having overlapping pasts, presents, and futures, with time flowing unbroken backwards through them. Others, to reflect the possibility of enlightenment bursting karmic links at any point, describe the world as destroyed and created in every moment. Premonitional poetry sees clearly the play between all divisions of tense, harmonizes at the modal switches where fact and simile still pulse together as the possible, and must believe, like a master fighter or musician, that its throws, strokes, and attenuations, no longer owned by a source, will hit their mark, beyond the tired chords of the known—a "still arc between sight, and more sight" (Yamamoto), one's "hand that close to the unconscious" (Hahn). —from *Premonitions*, ed. Walter K. Lew, 1995

It isn't possible to write about our art
without connecting it to our ancient
customs.

—from *Cqwoie Cqwoie*, Shirley Bear, 2005

how many languages does a pear tree speak?

—from *Pacific Windows: Collected Poems of Roy Kiyooka*, ed. Roy Miki, 1997

And if
that shirt's from The Gap, then one arm was sewn
in Malaysia, the other in Sri Lanka. Why then
is it hard to "see" ideology when you're
wearing it? Is it "out there"? Or deeper inside
than even desire could get?
—from "Jerk," Jeff Derksen

Speak Cree you're in Canada now

Speak Siouan

Speak Salishan

—*pappaji wrote poetry in a language I cannot read*, Rajinderpal S. Pal

knowing that you are the great River as is the abundant land it brings
to carve its banks then spread its fertile plains and deltas and open its
basins its great estuaries even to where it finally joins once again the
grandmother ocean's vast and liquid peace. —from "Siwllkw," Jeannette
Armstrong, 2003 World Water Forum, UNESCO website

Here is history too. A backbone bending and
unbending without a word, heat, bellowing these
lungs spongy, exhaled in humming, the ocean, a
way out and not anything of beauty, tipping turquoise
and scandalous...

—from *No Language Is Neutral*, Dionne Brand, 1990

Every sound and tree is a hermit.
Not every hermit is a sound or tree.
Sometimes the quiet act of following
your own past will address the future. And will be

given back as it began.

—from "Near Milk River, looking for the Sweetgrass Hills," Weyman
Chan, 2007

In the legend are instructions on the language of the land, how it was we
forgot to acknowledge the gift, as if we were not in it or of it.

—from *A Map to the Next World*, Joy Harjo, 2000

listen
ing swallow
ing s
ing
ing be
ing
the inside of another
ing
—from *Performance Bond*, Wayde Compton, 2004

poetry lives here:
<http://www.rewilding.org/>

and here:
<http://www.keepersofthewaters.org/models.cfm>

and here:
<http://utsam-witness.ca>

(to be continued)

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CROSS-CULTURAL POETICS

Kao Kalia Yang

One day on a walk, a windy day when the sun was a distant, harmless thing beyond the trees and winter was just settling in on cool winds, and the leaves were dry and crispy already on the ground. I listened to the way the leaves were talking to the sidewalk, the cool pavement and the crinkled parchment. In the wind, they were flirting, seriously, scratching, tickling, trying to get away, and then coming back again and again. I realized a definition for cross-cultural poetics.

When one language makes sense, no matter for how long, to another, and there is a memory of understanding, unforgettable for its truth and complete honesty. To me, that is two cultures crossing each other on a joined journey to no place beyond understanding a simple truth: we belong to this world together. The day the leaves talked to the sidewalk in the midst of a busy wind, cross cultural poetics happened, the relationship unveiled as something more natural than artificial, something beautiful and elemental.

Cross-cultural poetics isn't language-based. It is a freezing of difference, of time, of people. It's the moment the smiling eyes make harmless the bleeding hand holding the knife over the life of a helpless chicken in the busy streets of a Bangkok market asking not for forgiveness but for a simple truce between the sun and the stranger standing, staring, steadily and with some surprise, at this act. It's a moment when understanding dawns and no breath needs to be expelled or collected to get the message being communicated.

You understand what I do.

It's an assertion and a fact.

It is the most effective and natural way we get to being.

So when I ask you to pause, to take a small stop in the journey of your day, to stand and stare into the window of my mind, to see the way the blood pounds in my veins, sending triggers of truth to my heart, I am asking you to share in the poetry of my culture.

So when you stop and you stay long enough to understand or not, to simply behold and bare witness, you agree to a bridge of belonging which we cannot shake or break because it is what makes us reflective: that I can and I

must, and no matter the danger, see elements of myself in the person that you are—is only natural.

Cross-cultural poetics is poetry. Because it works at holding captive the attention of its audience long enough, strong enough, to get beyond a fleeting impression, a small salvation from what is mundane and can be easily ignored and unretrieved from the day, the series of days that necessarily makes up a life lost.

Crossing cultures is a translation on being.

Maxwell, my baby brother, says to my father, “My spirit lived in your eyes.”—whenever we talk of a time and place before him, memories of happy and of exciting, long ago and far away from his four year old conception.

“Kw tus plig tseem nyob hauw koj lub qhov muag.”

Who is to say that he hadn’t been there all along to see and bear witness to all that would bring on his coming?

Did the leaves really flirt with the pavement?

For me they did, and if I can through poetry, take you there and then with me, I believe that you’ll hear it and see it and feel it and know it the way I did, too.

A TENUOUS WE: WRITING AS NOT-KNOWING

Rachel Zolf

“Does the unreadable drive the reader from consuming to producing or all the 66 what good time is death bells and whistles of the ineffable?”¹ A false binary steeped in irony yet strafed with resonance depending on your point of view. “Will we feel compelled to learn how to say these names?”² A seemingly prosaic Judith Butler line that acts as an epigraph to some new pieces I’m working on, one of which is a poem I don’t know how to pronounce yet, listing certain Palestinian civilians killed while they “did not participate in hostilities” with Israelis.³

I’m taking Arabic classes to learn how to “say” that piece, and to speak to Palestinians when I go to the area for the first time later this year. Given that I can’t read my own handwriting, a language that displays itself only in a written form (with multiple ways to write many of its letters depending on where the letter falls in a word) is a particular challenge. Yet, while I weirdly pride myself on being a university dropout and mildly dread the trek through the snow every Saturday morning to the dank church basement classroom, when I arrive and disentangle from multiple layers of clothing, and the familiar sounds of hordes of children stomping overhead (Scottish dancing lessons?) kick in, I quite enjoy learning how to say “Ali is Kareem’s grandfather’s sister’s son’s son who goes to university in Princeton, which is close to New York.” Sure I have to put aside my queer notions of chosen family as I admire the specificity of Arabic family naming (yes, there is no word for uncle or cousin) – and my atheist reality as I learn standard greetings dependent in more ways than one on the will of God. But there is something productive, dare I say hopeful, about the whole starting-again-in-language thing, particularly starting again in a completely different alphabet and way of constructing and conceiving of language.

A circuitous way of getting to my main point that as poets laboring away in our tiny airless negative-economy garrets, we shouldn’t stop with or at the unreadable. We have to let go of (western, imperialist) notions of epistemic mastery if we want to do the crucial work needed to understand “other” cultures in this time of increasing world crisis. For we are readers as well as writers, and the more we approach all our work from a place of not-knowing, dare to be naive, yes, the more the space of our work can become a place of knowledge production rather than reproduction.

I came to poetry from a background in documentary film and television.

Throughout the 1990s, I watched the documentary film form shift from a site of inquiry into a site of knowledge display, eventually becoming just another form of glib artistic reportage. While I am pleased that poets I admire are envisioning a kind of documentary poetics (with its investigative, relational and other subsets), I think we should be conscious and careful in how we go about our inquiries. I just don't think Ed Sanders's macho approach to epistemic mastery, honed in his 1976 tract *Investigative Poetry* would work today, for example.⁴ It's too quintessentially American in its frontier, imperialist, gumshoe way. And a little further north we're still unfortunately yoked with a Canadian documentary poem "genre" deemed by the late Marxist poet Dorothy Livesay to be "based on topical data but held together by descriptive, lyrical, and didactic elements ... rearranged for the eye and ear." As if the labor of the documentary poet is simply to make empirical evidence more compelling, to deliver the "truth" in a more enticing fashion using "direct, plain, accurate language; sudden leaps into metaphor – these elements provide a setting for action."⁵

The "accumulation" of hybrid "sediments" that Edouard Glissant advocates for in his *Poetics of Relation*⁶ seems to me more applicable to contemporary poetics. Relational poetics speaks to a materialist (not in the Marxian sense but still politically charged) documentary practice aimed at, in Kristin Prevallet's words, "respecting what already exists and translating the content of the borrowed source into a form that usefully complicates apparently simple truths."⁷ The poet's materials may include newspaper reports, books, museum exhibits, online sources, archival and circulating documents (such as identity papers), personal testimonies, monuments (or lack thereof), cultural productions (including poetry) or perhaps actual sites and borders, contested or not. There are few sites in Israel and the Occupied Territories, for example, that don't hold conflicting and conflicted knowledges, from the separation barrier (also known as the Apartheid Wall) to the Damascus Gate to the countless checkpoints to the rubble of demolished Palestinian houses and contested archaeological sites.

The poet employs her collected materials to make a poetry of assemblage that extends the documentary into the world – to shift Muriel Rukeyser's notion⁸ slightly – paying careful attention to the competing intensities and complex rhetorical effects and affects produced by this material "at hand." The poet may become part detective and archivist, perhaps with a dash of amateur ethnographer, and indeed she must deal with the multifaceted ethical complexities entailed in these roles. But she does not fit easily into one cleancut metaphorical figure charged with a transparent transmission of direct communication – no such thing exists of course. She rides the associative axis of combination rather than selection, her crown an unstable

king.

Maybe it's not possible for a western person to comprehend the ineffable limit case of the suicide bomber, the *nuda vita*⁹ he or she represents. But that doesn't mean we don't try – and risk failure. Rather than repress our horror in pithy language jokes riffing on 72 heavenly virgins, maybe we can use the investigative, research-based tools of documentary practice to look at, sit with and ultimately respect the material reality of the bomber's existence. Indeed this process could lead us to acknowledge the suicide bomber's obliteration as a "grievable"¹⁰ death, as we do in a knee-jerk manner the people he or she takes in a "deadly embrace."¹¹ This shift in perspective is one of the ways western poetry and poetics can cross cultures and *do* something vaguely akin to the influence Mahmoud Darwish has on his people, for example (yes, I know "they" love their poets in the "east" much better than "we" love our poets). The third party, the neighbor, the text (Levinas's *le tiers*) can make an attempt, however vain, to articulate the Other (*l'Autrî*) to others (*les autres*).¹² For we all know the self/other relation of the personal lyric is more than tired. Better of course that we "die as egos and be born again in the swarm ... individual and related"¹³ – and using poetic structure to help change the way people think. "[D]uty of guest and host" can be more than "a torn body."¹⁴

Prevallet uses the trope of translation in her description of Relational poetics cited above, which references the polylingual "créolization" of poetry that Glissant promotes; but it also leads me to think that while the reporter describes and the human rights worker bears witness, it may be part of the job of the poet to (yes, for fear of stating the shopworn), trans-late – to "carry" a scene, issue, conflict or meaning (however fragmentary) "across" spaces. Part of that task involves taking apart solidified language and knowledge forms to make them portable and using the documentary lens of the poem to examine the various rhetorical strategies that these sites and media employ to make and shape meaning. Poetry as a space that enacts multiple forms of motion has the potential to conduct just such border crossings: "language must break up and yield if I am to know you."¹⁵

On top of the dreaded Arabic lessons, I am attempting to teaching myself Hebrew (it's easier – there's printing!) in the hopes of finding convergences between the root words in these sister Semitic languages – and using these linguistic encounters in my work, even though they may be on the surface unreadable to a western audience. The sonorities should produce their own effects and affects. Of course it will take me years to "master" the languages, but I want to dwell in my halting in-between learning process as a kind of performative not-knowing in two languages, one of which I'm supposed to

have a claim to given my Jewish background, and another of course belonging to the supposed “enemy.” I may perform “transcreations” (a term coined by Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos for freewheeling modes of translation used as forms of epistemological inquiry) of Palestinian and Israeli poets responding to the ongoing crisis. Not “pure” or mimetic, these translations would use the material space between languages – the space of sound and gesture and multiple meaning – as a site of possibility for dialogue or polylogue. Of course Palestinians and Jews “come from” similar soil (as some would say we all do), and perhaps there are more similarities among these peoples, their languages and cultures than there are differences – an idea some scholars and poets such as Ammiel Alcalay have pointed to.¹⁶ Indeed early Jewish “pioneers” to Palestine called themselves Arabs.

Through my research process for this Palestine/Israel project, I’ve become increasingly aware of the commonalities across occupied territories dealing with colonialism and indigenous struggle. This includes the domestication of violence that renders certain violences invisible to people living nearby while making such violence disturbingly routine for its targets. The flaws and plights of other people and peoples are often more visible from a distance than they are looking in our own backyard. While I abhor Israel’s role as vassal for the United States in the Middle East and that this “Jewish state” speaks and acts at least partly in my name, I live in Canada and my presence here has had its own deleterious effects. My next poetic project will look at the experience of First Nations people in Canada and how a culture of denial on the part of our government and most of our citizens has led to a monumental human rights crisis. While the circumstances of colonization are different from Palestine/Israel, the level of resistance to knowledge and action here has had similar tragic effects. I worked on a documentary in the mid-1990s on the impact of smuggling and gambling on certain Native reserves in Ontario and New York state and witnessed the complex and tragic play of capital, power and morality on these colonized communities. In an ironic twist, the storied North End Winnipeg where my father comes from, and which has been the site of so much nostalgic repetition by diasporic Jewish writers like him,¹⁷ is now the site of one the most crisis-ridden First Nations communities east of Vancouver’s downtown eastside. Not surprisingly, North End Winnipeg is only written about in the past, not the present. Every state has its sources of collective shame, and this is one of Canada’s.

The reality is that few of us in today’s world can escape the position of occupier or occupied, and the competing knowledges these relations produce bear more scrutiny from poetry. A practice that is not a quest for final truths but a critical inquiry into how “other” knowledges and borderlands

are constructed – a poetry that imagines new ways of thinking about and across spaces through the fluidity of the document.

(Endnotes)

¹ Rachel Zolf, *Human Resources* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2007), 74.

² Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), 37. The Butler phrase is an epigraph to my chapbook, *Shoot and Weep* (Vancouver: Nomados Literary Publishers, 2008), which represents the first section of a longer project on Palestine/Israel.

³ Zolf, *Shoot and Weep*, 10.

⁴ Edward Sanders, *Investigative Poetry* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1976).

⁵ Dorothy Livesay, “The Documentary Poem: a Canadian Genre,” in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 267-281.

⁶ Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

⁷ Kristin Prevallet, “Writing Is Never by Itself Alone: Six Mini-Essays on Relational Investigative Poetics,” *Fence* Vol 6 No. 1 Spring/Summer 2003. Accessed online: <http://fence.fenceportal.org/v6n1/text/prevallet.html>.

⁸ Muriel Rukeyser, *U.S. 1* (New York: Covici & Friede Publishers, 1938).

⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Butler, 20.

¹¹ Jacqueline Rose, “Deadly Embrace,” *London Review of Books*, 4 November, 2004. Accessed online: http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n21/rose01_.html.

¹² Steve McCaffery, “The Scandal of Sincerity: Toward a Levinasian Poetics” in *Prior to Meaning: The Protosemantic and Poetics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 208.

¹³ Excerpt from Henry Miller’s *Sexus* used as epigraph to the introduction to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xv.

¹⁴ Zolf, *Shoot and Weep*, 27.

¹⁵ Butler, 49.

¹⁶ Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁷ See, for example, Larry Zolf, *Scorpions for Sale* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1989).

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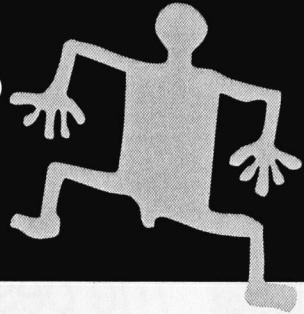


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