

# Xcp 1

cross cultural poetics



Amiri Baraka / Maria Damon / Lise McCloud / Solomon Deressa  
Walter K. Lew / Ofelia Zepeda / Elizabeth Burns / Diane Glancy  
Edwin Torres / Alejandro Aura / Forrest Gander / Michael Heller  
Bonnie Irwin / Kim Koch / David Michalski / Dan Featherston

*Reviews of Anthropology and Literature / The Dialogic Emergence  
of Culture / Fictions of Feminist Ethnography / Things As They Are:  
New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology / Home Places:  
Contemporary Native American Writing from Sun Tracks*





XcP

cross cultural poetics

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# *What is Undug Will Be*

Amiri Baraka

The pretenders arrived after we'd found out they were pretenders. And the people killed them. Dont blame me with Sarah Vaughan when we used to walk up the hill pointing at her house. It's the pretenders who make believe her house aint there no more, just a boys and girls club the off pretend is for the on. I see that funny looking sun and cant pretend its the real one. The real one is locked up. You see God is the guardian of Good. So it don't escape and get rid of book keeping. The missing front wheel. You cant have infinity without two good wheels. Thats why the 1st Crazy Eddie was lame. See the woman headed lying nigger so hip he could hang out in the desert forever waiting for a new horn, told the sister upstairs that the dude was really a human being. You know the riddle, hey diddle diddle, niggers play second fiddle. Four Legs, Two Legs, and Three Legs. But three legs is a lame. A MF who goes north and becomes a MF. Frowny he called hisself, opening the supermarket of Dis. It was Hell, which was the future not coming. A two legged Man who never arrives. Then it was Hades. The past tense of wealth which is insanity. Then dig, you knew where light went. You didnt understand that when you said out and the lame said out, they was different outs. You wanted Bird climb black fire wings wailing the blue raise of gone went, the square, I told him that was curtains, some snow ju ju greedy inside garbage that stunk with charm. To eat you beat, remember that slogan? What about, dont make me happy if you respect my intelligence? Remember that. The limping crazy motherfucker told us he discovered yodeling in a labyrinth, who else ate doo doo while rich, squeezed africas titties for milk, stored in the refrigerator, waiting for Alan Ladd to kill him. And the withered bastard, had a pen that shot poison swords. Remember Colonus, that's literary for frozen nigger pops, chocolate blood sweet, and the baseball mind, oh diamond crystal salt, which is white, aint that right? He meant out as the city's enemy. We is in On all the time, except when we go out, like on out, which is where the good go and come to and from, is you with us jitter bug? But out mean darkness which is hip, but lame mean that as if nothing could exist, it could, but wouldnt that be something? So now when they come, frowning, and eating everything like the low cuss they call God. I told you a dog shit the church out of his backwardness. God is a broke short passing for in but its only out as in the opposite of off. And darkness, for a lame, has nothing to commend it but his cannibal breath and lying tongue. If you eat doo doo your breath stink, or so the pope do sing, and if feces aint the past and turn into money the cow jumps over the moon and never comes down, but froze in the north grows balls in the sky, and what is really aint and what aint is just a coat of paint and the devil own everything, and you see him on television lame motherfucker.

That's why when the rest of on got hip to off and offed him, dug dis/stance was the graveyard, and illusion of skulls being on a flag, with you they background

anonymous and still except for the wind, and you know the negro played god and the skull made believe it had malcolm behind them in white a frame for the cross, which aint even fishy, its dead, What I say? And the skull tell the rest of the niggers to lay flat and passive like they worked in the museum, a tombstone for ideas which was was a couple a weeks ago. That's how long you been down, and I dont mean hip, except at the top of your lying body is your woman, the only sane person in the desert and you holding her back being an animal and refusing to leave the ground so its a play ground now a desert and its the whole meal. dont make me say it. You aint got no more juice, except north, where they too hip even to lie completely. Like a half a lie is better than a full deck. Gravity. They in an airplane ruling. Or in a laboratory. They aint Tarzan and if they was you warned them not to fall in the trap they set for you. So you joined Local 666 and they got you a gig in his movies as uncivilized. Dig that.

Pirates was not minerals you found out (later) but they wanted to be. Brains was not edible (but they was) and spendable. So we changed the laws and slavery was actually a religion. Didn't your father dig it first and set himself up as invisible except for De Toad. (Dutch for murder victim.) Jesus! Yeh, him. With Blonde hair, and the deity swartznegger, after you lost your warmth and come back looking like you had lost your skin to your limping kin.

Dude lost in a forest as a baby with a twin named Flawed Operator. Backwards, he wasnt no baby either. With Wolf Mama, the white blues singer. Janis, you dig. When it was us, she could see out both sides of the world, the past and the future. Now she's dead to confirm a lie, and a dutch banker married her and sent her od'd to paradise, which is an arrestable offence. Surround it. Dont let it sweeten the world. Dont let them be happy. Take the p. out and give em a god that makes noise and flies, a woman that live in halloween with homolocus subsidere, the bent over jr tarzan who bathes in toilets so he still think he bad. That mean bath. remember, Isabella the transvestite edgar allen poe of middle america. Still pretending. Thats why they get killed when Now come.

Stop getting High. This is what the initials told you. A message. The calendar's genius. Changed it. Julius and Augustus get in it, so with Paul that's 13, which is really unlucky. That mean dark, not like us, but like they mind which says when he stuck cane in his eyes, it was to improve the armed forces. Especially the semen, which was dry since he left the best of it in his mama, then denied you was his one drop overseas sun. Called you Moon, the Bob Marley of Ireland. Thats where that mystery shit came in. Stone henge. And the nigger nodding on the corner. Where you left him when you went to get fire, and where you dropped everybody turned into new. Could sing like you. And dance. You was gone so long. Got so high, you forgot the you of I. And the time grew into a prison, the destination into a villain you looking for and come was embarassing if it was mentioned, go was half a vulgar job description.

I know the treble clef. From Thought, them Egyptians, your man who went further east. Your man. All them guys and dolls, I read about them niggers. Got



outta here. When the band broke up and your arrival turned to stone and you couldnt understand yourself. And started arguing with your own eyes. Like you could see what never will exist.

I remember your father told you your mother got here first. And you went with this karate muhguh. The blue was cool. The idea. That there could be light you couldnt dig. That was hard, since when we went up in the sky scraper and shit on government, they thought they could turn to butter by circling our triple hip outness howling like they deserved to eat us.

But the negro was run out of India. I saw a picture of him in the papers, blue. He went for it and made the lie a game, and the agony of the waiting room a country were money talked in consonants. A job. Remember when you was asking questions about that. Jesus! Come out the John tricked by the Times. His accountant killed himself. His johnson betrayed him and told stories about his life that neglected to say he was impotent with fear. He was the 1st one at the tomb, after the murder, claimed the nigger had come back and told him that God wanted him at the Audubon and wanted him murdered to prove he could be the weather man.

Got a job as mystic in a candy factory, a private dick, hooked up with the scary quiet of delusion, a rock star, and made the big time, before they hung them, ancient mussolini style. Father Christmas was the St Nicholas of the normal. Like a white lie, which is like a white plague, which is like, a white noise, which is like a circle around knowing. Contain it. Speaks the Yellow Submarine, which is where your man went before they exposed him and put him on a cross to invent television and candy.

Stay out of the mountains. That was a dumb statement. After the world broke up and there was a middle made of water. And your singing got large and you wanted to get in something and get away from your responsibilities as dead man and was the johnny ray of being digested. You was Ahab later and as autobiography of your photograph. But disguised as Trane high as the 1st father tripping out at the prison picnic.

Tender. The runner. The money. The soft of yourself before you was tricked. The pretender was your man, the goat lady. The ram of snot, stay out the mountains. Here they come your boy was saying you mulatto. Jacob, I knew him in his later years before he got to Chicago, when he was still building the mother ship, but he was so high it come out the father ship, and could only fly to Rome. Your mama wasnt in it. He couldnt get no leg. Thats why he called the sisters nun. He wanted to be Elvis Presley once his man told him he could go north and start a newspaper for the little people. His gig had run out in other as jackleg, was this you or him, oh, i see. when you took up singing, and he was copping your stuff as a shadow of the coming, which was cold when it went all the way out the way, the way they wanted out was north. Not south.

That frown should have told you the city was not the town. They were in the future, like Dis, like Capital, like Hades when it was Havies. Its heavy. Its still

havies. Not you swimming, with the women. You the havie not, the heavy knot on your past. The gas from your non answerable prayer. An invisible invoice. You will not get paid. Father sex. You created Europeans from chains. You was Jacub before Hollywood. You created Hollywood because you didnt want to talk. You made the women feline so you could teach philosophy while you was asleep.

So you created yourself as the answer to what you shouldnt have asked. It was perfect. Each drop of shit has something to say. Pray you aint being talked about by what you create as waste. Haste, like we say, but tie up your camel and quit playing jazz. Use a rubber.

You aint a pretender but sometimes I wonder why you pretend. You aint the only mother that went but you is the only father they sent. Your destiny has become an inverted design. Your future is smaller than Babel. So you be quiet and eat the questions as answers to your religion.

They killed the pretenders, I'm telling you. The animals who thought the world was endless feces. The Runs. The Races. Told you death was real, an advertisement for insect mercy killing. Meditate while you head for the closet. Blue glass like your changed flick when they ran you out of contemplation with straight hair, the 1st cow boy.

Who could forget your lies about who was Mr. Hyde as you sped to that position as green thumb of the specific. I know you invented place so you could rest. That sign, the wave, as a picture or stopping. That tricked a lot of people. What about Clef for the split in the stone. The G for the heaven, the top of your head where you thought light was a person, an owned creation necessary to go to your body which you thought could be white stone.

Caste the first stone. Remember that. Dizzy with travel. Your songs stain your skin like the future candle of No. You censored us by leaving. Heard you was not the shepherd but the cow. You was not a woman but number 3 on the hit parade, a ghost, which meant you wanted people to remember you when.

Then when your brother, Sulumoor, who mouth was always full of the wolf's titty, whose milk ran through his veins, when All Baba was the future of his own past, where his skin had become trigonometry, and exile was where he lived, a small piece of reality, outside reality. So he was not the king of is, and he couldnt take it. He had to get a job as martial arts teacher and dreamt Ahab up to bolster the knock out bizness. Looking at everybody crazy eyed, Called himself the night, love music, funk, story teller, (They called him nunile, and he left the sun home, but still he wanted to be known as Shine. Kicking people in the head for their own good. And when the writer showed. The end of the flow. Where the rain stopped and the bottom was the top and the top was the bottom and they were both opposite and the same and he was not normal, he had never been. His ease was now a thing to be described as grinning. He could be fertilizer for money. You could be fertilizer for money. And you didnt understand. I told you that lame meant you no good and you left anyway after you had kicked this oriental in the face, talked about race, so you could cop and not stop, you was sick, you know, like you found yourself, and wouldnt

correct yourself. You wouldnt read the proof, of what was rite and write. And here the symbol magicians came and got your secrets as you left to go up in the mountains and become half crazy.

Said you never was yourself, but you was. You wasnt your mothers son but her lover. Or was that you. No, you had changed, come out the mountains with a four legged body and Abby Lincoln's mind. But the rest of you was north and south east and west, going to where they came from ignorant they had been there as themselves before they became the self they didnt even know.

The fetish and the party, the maker and the doo doo. You was talking about money and the goat you fucked. And here you come as your half brother. Where was the sister, I asked. It wasnt just I, but I & I, but you was only half of you. And if you flew you wd a donut be. And when you copped, the middle dropped out of the world. You went, or was that the arab, the blessing of good, which is natural. Like your house high among the leaves, and your laughter your face invisible to the animals. (They were the ones who started that Mr. Hyde shit, so they cd say they was doctors, they was Jackles and looked up at your laughing ass, and sucked the bones of your solid waste and imitated your laughter and got on the hit parade and turned love into sex and revelation into a club, a balloon over a cartoon's head.

They learned the gibberish of your drunkenness and became the wizards, the old beings you left dead and bleached by not standing under the sun. The offed The unon. Laugh. They offered you a job as Othello, the distant greeting. A cry we thought was the fart of what does not exist. But you could get paid. The father of feeling? But that became religion. The entrance to the zoo. Became money. And charge was not the teaching of energy, but teeth.

You laughed so long your vision of prayer was walking away calling you dumb, because your droppings fertilized their resistance to being with you because they wanted to know why you wouldnt let them eat you and you wouldnt tell them, couldnt tell them, because you was high, and began to lie that you was the closest thing to what you didnt understand and started to say you was in charge, as well as out charge.

You wouldnt eat meat because it made you bad company, which was ok, but you couldnt hang with everybody because you made em mad by being where they couldnt see you, up in a tree laughing and the doo doo you dropped they copped and ate, and became war like with starvation since you left their world and made them create a church of getting and having, a heaven of menus, a fixed paradise where your self is the loser and the bank where they come out when they left, your boy remus was with `em, oh thats you, the were wolf. I dig. Where you is a delicacy. Brain food. And the mind is under the ground, where they left you. The south, Where darkies laugh and beat on wood. And confuse happiness with morality.

And how and when did the pretenders get wasted? And who, be specific, was they? If you tend, you the on maker, (pardon me, officer) then you are the ever and the one added to three, a 2 beat, new orleans sound.

You hard to get along with because you know you too well and dont understand your self. But I heard your music. I see you laughing like you was still in a tree. I seen you dancing one night. Your body somebody said was made of dark metal.

You are the animal stories the descendant of the answer. Yes, it is a trip, a question. Your mother is what is relavent, on forever, and where you go, daddy -o is where anything will be, when it gets, changes my you into your me, or before it splits again, the boat rocking in rhythm near the dock, the blue waves like yourself upstairs, hiding inside your name.

I would have stopped us from killing the pretenders. But animals have no use for boats (except them Ants who was trying to eat Charlton Heston...and that shit is understandable). But I was doing something else, before I could say stop. And they was gone. And the voice of me that would have saved them was gone before it even got here.

(Trancespoken by AB from the tongue of the X rated "Bible")

AB 7/96

Brick City, New Ark

GoBlahDee  
Ooolyacoo  
Bloomdide  
OoBopShabam  
Perdido Klackto-  
Voestedene  
Salt Peanuts oroonie  
McVouty  
reboop

Ornithology  
Ba Ba Ree Bop

Ooo Shoobie  
Doobie

Squirrel  
In The Glass  
House

of the essential  
Transbluesency

We dreamt Paradise  
w/ you  
Naima

Savoying  
Balue Bolivared

in Black Night  
Indigo

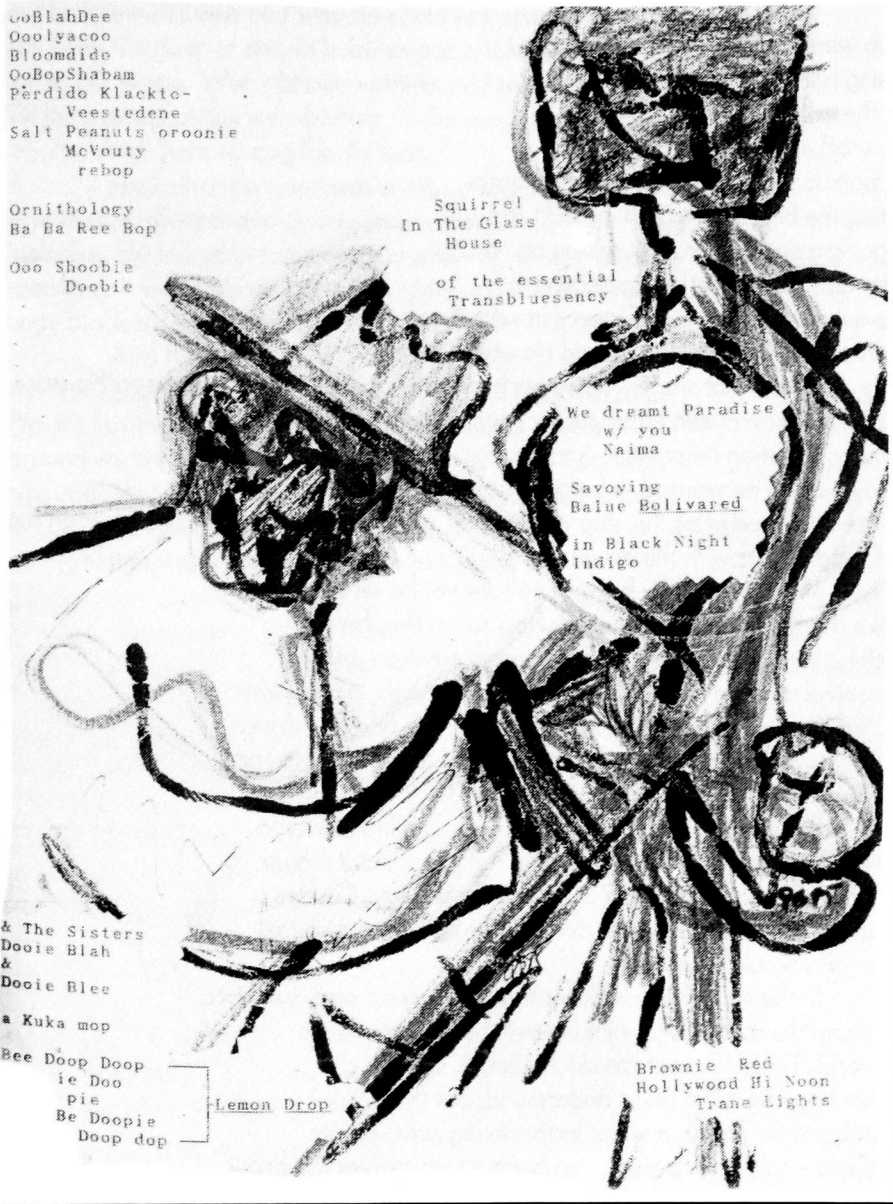
& The Sisters  
Dooie Blah  
&  
Dooie Blee

a Kuka mop

Bee Doop Doop  
ie Doo  
pie  
Be Doopie  
Doop dop

Lemon Drop

Brownie Red  
Hollywood Hi Noon  
Trans Lights



Ahab went crazy  
chasing his self  
and the self his self was  
who worked him his employer self  
and butcher self, the imperialist navigator  
hunting the biggest white thing in literature!  
He got crazier and crazier raising his spear  
to the devil by reflection, imagining evil  
an evil vector and imp of Satan, himself. And he knew that  
was really him, and so he chased his white tale through  
the lie, but then that's later, when early no one could stand his psychopathic stare,  
the anglo-saxon dueling scar cut by Moby Dick,  
dig, across human emptiness. And he was  
alone because he wanted to be and thought he was, after all  
he was both master of this ship and master of his fate. And so he swore upon the  
devil, and set off with the drunken  
laughter of Dis, the crazy howl of color yet he set himself  
up like the thing itself, like the colorless satan fish, for  
which he was to sacrifice his life. Ignorant savages under  
the control of even more ignorant savages. Ahab, alone, who  
was the King, where Ishmael went when Sarah had him driven  
out, from where Hagar stayed. He cried, "Is there no help for  
the widow's son?"

But see he rode there all the time. The little black  
spot on the destination card. The tiny but shiny black nigger  
on the great white way. You a pip, others wd say. Gladys,  
however, had three pips with her. She took them out so the  
white folks would'n get `em.

In the torrent of madness the ship carried and drew into  
itself from the belly of the stinking evil that must balance  
the world. Triple Six, out the ditch, dicht is a thing, dig  
is what sing, dig is like on to understand, but their dick  
is a policeman, Tracy, a white Indian living in the comic  
strip. This washing throwing even beneath the waves the prow  
would lunge, and shudder, and you held whatever you could, so  
you wouldn't be hurt, or even, God forbid, tossed overboard!

But that is what happened to Pip, sharp black heaven and  
hell of symbol-everything. Suddenly, was thrown into the



screaming torrent, above the dick where invisible forces clawed at the staggering crew, then Pip felt himself (and I too, as if a sweep of jet hell had heaved him and he flew and tumbled over board and dropped without thought except the evil he knew this was and why he could not prevent it, who has been the doer of this, in bubbles and choking swift lashing downess. Wet without wetness, rushing without speed. Till he crashed at the very bottom of the sea, even way below the whales. And there he dug God's foot.

And when he returned he was a singer and a poet, and drummer of dreams and curious harmonies of lilting wondrous melodies. He talked in tongues he explained, almost without speaking, it was his hands and shoulders and the bottomless huge black eyes that sent the response to almost everything.

And they became close, I know, it hurts you the way the shit works, sometimes. But they were never friend. Ahab and Pip. It's just that they were so weird they could only be around each other. Ahab, mad. Pip, on the other hand was hip, until her tried to save Ahab's life, got entangled in the Rope, got choked and drowned, while the White Devil drug Ahab away, screaming. I aint seen neither him since.

JA ZZ  
7/96 New Ark

# *When the NuYoricans Came to Town: (Ex)Changing Poetics* <sup>1</sup>

Maria Damon

Once again we shall discover those motives of action still remembered by many societies and classes: the joy of giving in public, the delight in generous artistic expenditure, the pleasure of hospitality in the public or private feast... We can visualize a society in which these principles obtain... We should come out of ourselves and regard the duty of giving as a liberty, for in it there lies no risk.<sup>2</sup>

## "pomo"/POMO

In February 1996, a curious controversy broke out on the Poetics List, an electronic discussion group comprising primarily practitioners and aficionados of avant-garde and experimental Anglophone poetics. In the course of a discussion in which the word "post-modern" was being abbreviated as "pomo," a member of the list raised the possibility of using another designator for the term, as "Pomo" also refers to a group of indigenous Californians. The response was immediate: a prominent poet with a history of left activism was quick to point out that homonyms not etymologically related do not necessarily bleed into each other in deleterious ways: after all, there's a Bay Area performance group called the "Pomo Afro Homos," where Pomo refers to postmodern rather than Pomo Indian; surely their playfulness should not be held back? Others enlisted Wittgenstein in their arguments that language should not be subject to such pc policing, or that language created a reality unrelated to the hypothetical feelings of Pomo Indians, none of whom had themselves written in to the Poetics List to complain of being used as an abbreviation for "postmodern." Charges of censorship and paternalism bubbled up. Some members of the list reacted defensively, claiming sardonically that now we could no longer refer to British, Turks and Greeks for fear of offending nationals of these countries. Others responded by saying that these were not in a political relationship with the predominantly Euro-American list membership analogous to the Pomos'. Still others complained that those who raised the question of respectful usage of "pomo" were "[blurring] issues of language and issues of social responsibility" and that these were distinct realms. In my reading, it was a startling flurry of cyber-bluster and imperialist guilt. A few weeks later, when someone posted a new article about the situation of impoverishment among the Pomos and a related notice about the impending loss of Native American languages (including Pomo), another wave of responses came. Some of the most angry respondents to the original "Pomo" post wanted it known that they were, on their meagre graduate stipends, sending aid to the Pomos. (One wondered in print how many of the pro-Pomo/anti-"pomo" list members could say



the same, implying that linguistic "political correctness" was hypocritical and incompatible with "real"-i.e. financial -support.)

The whole debate in all its permutations and entangled threads was a fascinating lesson in presumed audience: the reactive shock when two discursive realms presumed to be distinct turn out to overlap in ways that force an uncomfortable retroactive self-awareness (like the sharp silence when, after someone has told an anti-Semitic joke, the interlocutor responds immediately, "I'm sorry, but I have to tell you that my wife is Jewish"). The presumption that there could be no Pomo Indians who had any investment in postmodernism, experimental poetry or avant-garde poetics, and thus any unintended linguistic infelicities on the part of the latter interest group would carry no embarrassing consequences, resonated for me with the contradictions of poetics and community, of the current predicament of poetix. Poets often say they want a wider audience; the "death of poetry" is a constant sounding point for essays by poets about their craft and its difficulties; we/they take comfort in the solace of a small but loyal following/readership/critical and practical community etc -but when the opportunity presents itself to widen the reach of poetry and poetics, there is suspicion, defensiveness, mistrust. The disinterestedness of poetic discourse is brought in to argue the separation of "social responsibility" from "language" -poetry/language cannot be made subservient to particular social ends, no matter how laudable, because this necessarily narrows the field of play that re-invigorates language.

Although in the debate above, I tended to side with those who suggested coining an alternate term for "postmodern," I have much sympathy with the more abstract levels, if not the particular articulations of, this argument against social decorum in poetry (one instructive moment came for me when a few years ago in a class on American poetry, a dispute broke out between an American woman for whom Jack Spicer's "internalized homophobia" was socially irresponsible and thus reprehensible, and a French student who argued that, to the contrary, it was precisely the artist's obligation to be socially *irresponsible*). I have argued elsewhere, following Karlheinz Stierle, that poetry is essentially anti-discourse.<sup>3</sup> This is a hard line to hold to --how is it that poetry, unlike medical, ethnographic, narrative, memoiristic, etc. discourses, gets to be asocial, ahistorical, non-institutional? At times it is an intellectually indefensible argument, kind of like essentialist feminism ("there's just --something --you know --special about us that can never be domesticated or understood!") but it has its strategic uses. My aim, when I made this flawed argument, was to link poetry with subjectivity, and to then suggest that since certain kinds of subjects (specifically, in the cases I was examining) had not been conventionally honored as such because of their social locations, poetic/subjective language provided a sort of laboratory for experimentation for new forms, new consciousnesses, new communities among the socially despised. However, these forms, consciousnesses and communities were not mere a-cultural novelties but carried with them the traces and influences of many dissident or socially subordinated traditions, as well as evolving new ones. Hence, in my view, Pomo Indians,

postmodernity and postmodernism were not at all incompatible. In fact, as representatives and chroniclers of an old history of verbal healing (which also combine dancing, sucking, basket-weaving, medicine-making, and laying on of hands), and of a more recent history of displacement, linguistic fracturing, and education in multiple and sometimes conflicting cultural codes, Pomo word artists might have a better chance of producing "multimedia performance events" saturated with both "meaning" and aesthetic "Otherness" -that latter term I mean in the positive sense of "defamiliarized" literary language experimentalists strive for.

(And see, in fact, Greg Sarris's writings about Mabel McKay, the last of the Pomo dreaming and sucking doctors, for substantiation of this claim; Mabel, a cannery worker by day and a doctor by night (doctoring, as mentioned above, includes singing spontaneously "invented" or dictated songs, dancing, basket-weaving, etc.; in other words it combines many skills in addition to diagnosis and prescription), had several of her baskets, whose patterns and materials are dictated by the Dream, on display at the Smithsonian. A speaker of Lolsel Pomo, Kashaya Pomo, English, and Wintun, she would lecture at Stanford Medical School and other Enlightenment-legacy institutions, confounding her audiences' expectations by dying her hair to stay young-looking, telling them that she goes to medical doctors for her arthritis, and recommending calamine lotion for poison ivy, at the same time as she insists that she learned basket weaving from the Spirit rather than from humans, that she has seen people turn into animals and vice versa, and that if menstruating women come too close to her or her baskets they will faint, which latter has actually happened at some of these events.)<sup>4</sup>

Pomos, in short, are just as "pomo" as any other people invested in postmodernism or living in/under conditions of postmodernity, and this is all the more reason to be mindful of nomenclature, and in particular the relationship between naming and self-determinism. (See, for example, a recent *New York Times* article on a previously unincorporated Native American tribe in New England who, in order to advertise their new casino, hired a South African firm to design their "tribal artifacts" and logos based on these artifacts. And as corollary see also James Clifford's now-classic essay on the Mashpee Wampanoags' unsuccessful attempt at federal recognition as a tribe, though they have for centuries operated as such with high visibility.)<sup>5</sup> Not being metaphysically sure what a "self" or other corporate entity is in the age of cyborgs, organ transplants and poststructuralist critiques of self/other and related binarisms does not vitiate the social decorum of respecting others' claims to selfhood, be it collective, cybernetic, or monadic.

### NuYo/Rican

While the Pomo Indians of the West coast are indigenous and semi-rural and thus ostensibly have little in common with the forcibly or voluntarily immigrated denizens of New York City's Puerto Rican neighborhoods, both have suffered extreme historical traumas of dislocation, dispossession, ethnicide and genocide, and

both have manifested in recent times a dynamic visionary verbalism that speaks to and of a cultural resilience and brilliance. In walking backwards into my ostensible subject, the visit of the NuYorican Poets Café touring group to the Twin Cities in 1993, I immediately apprehend, behind my back but fast approaching, the related "naming" controversy swarming like a glorious headful of snakes around the NuYorican Poets' Café. The fact that a multi-ethnic touring group, of which only one member was a "classic" NuYorican -that is, a native New Yorker of Puerto Rican descent -raised some eyebrows in the Twin Cities, whose Puerto Rican population is itself negligible. The term "NuYorican" arose in the 1970s as part of the politicization and specification of various ethnic, racial, and other populations historically subordinated by social category. According to some, the word came into usage via and/or simultaneous with the establishment of the Young Lords, a liberation-and-service organization for New York's Puerto Rican population analogous to the Black Panthers in Oakland. Thus it was, from the start, a politicized word, a neologism born out of political urgency, a coinage the necessity for which arose out of a political need to be perceived -visible -as historically, geographically, ethnically specific -to be *identifiable*.

However -and this is an axiom often overlooked by critics of "identity politics" -that denominator -"NuYorican" -was understood to and assumed to contain multitudes. Puerto Rican history itself, with its Afro-Hispano-Caribbean indigenous interaction over many centuries, and its fraught colonial relationship first to Spain and then to the United States since the Spanish-American War, makes for a rich if conflictual mix of ethnic, national(list), political identities. Its topographical status as island, moreover, makes it a meetingplace of transient naval travelers of all kinds and with many different purposes -hybridity in action. This already-multiply signifying designator -"Puerto Rican" -becomes increasingly internally heterogeneous when transplanted to New York City, a megalopolis consisting of several islands and countless racial, ethnic, social and economic variables.

#### NuYo/Minne-apple: Divergent Populisms

These issues of naming and poetic audience -one problematic among many raised by examination of poetry in the public sphere -come into dramatic focus in another instance of two poetic/social/regional communities in an intense and circumscribed encounter. When the NuYorican Poets touring group came to Minneapolis/St Paul, two distinct writing communities came into direct contact. Those two groups were the multi-ethnic, fast-talking, vernacular-rapping East Coast performance poets of color, and the stoic, liberal, middle-class Minnesota writers of free-verse, confessional lyric epitomized by the Twin Cities writing institution called The Loft. What happened, in my view, was that the intersecting groups enabled a third group, who had been there all along but whose poetic achievements and potentials had received scant public attention, to come to the fore in the make up of the cities' writing profile. That group was the urban poets of color, the teenagers and story-

tellers, the open-mike punks and hard-edged oral poets who had not found their modes of cultural expression sufficiently addressed or attended to by extant venues, be it local publishers, the Loft, the University (which was at the time trying to establish an MFA program in Creative Writing after years of internal opposition), or other local educational or cultural institutions.

The longterm legacy for the Twin Cities, then, was a more overt split between the various writing institutions, all of which function on populist principles, but have different populations in mind -and a healthy proliferation in grassroots literary activity. Fissures led to pluralistic growth. While the NuYoricans were not solely the force that through the green fuse drove these flowers, their visit made manifest in dramatic and carnivalesque stagings the different constituencies of poetic production and consumption in a large midwestern city known for its support of the arts, its social conscience (and consequently relatively good social services), its pro-education orientation -and simultaneously for its cultural and ethnic homogeneity. This particular urban culturesscape is thus a notable backdrop for the scene of cultural exchange.

In thinking about this event as cultural moment I want to suggest the ways in which specific cultural/ethnic/regional aesthetics that were developed in one context traveled to, germinated in, changed, and are embraced or rebuffed by other locales in order to facilitate or catalyze movement and change in that host region's patterns of expressive culture. In traditional societies, cultural exchange helps to heal fissures or avert dramatic change and does not generally cause underrepresented portions of the socius to split from their community and form new groups. In the NuYo-Minneapple case, however, the exchange did help to fuel a change: several key players from the Loft and other venues established new writing/performing institutions, notably SASE (pronounced "sassy"): *The Write Place*, *Shout! A Community Arts Newspaper for Poets, Storytellers, and Performance Artists*, *Cacophony Chorus*, a group involved in ongoing oral performances, and poetry slams throughout the cities. But am I not establishing a false dichotomy (like that between Pomo and "pomo") between change and continuity here? Between "traditional societies" like the Tlingit or the Haida, where tyhe classic studies of cultural exchange have been conducted, and a modern city with an ethnically diverse population arranged in strict and predictable hierarchy? And what is the effect of poetry's being both the medium of exchange and the substance exchanged? How, in this case, were poetry and poetic discourse socially binding or socially fracturing?

NuYorican Poetry has been alive and well since the 1970s, when the anthology *NuYorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings*, edited by Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero, appeared not to initiate but to present to the respectable world of "publishable results" the already dynamic and thriving creativity of the combined forces of the "outlaw" and the laboring poor.<sup>6</sup> Although at that time "NuYorican" referred specifically to New Yorkers of Puerto Rican descent, a definition pointed up by the book's subtitle, and though several of the poems contain explicit Puerto Rican nationalist sentiment, the book's introduction ad-

vocates as a virtue, in a lively, in-your-face style, the variety and *mélange* that comprise that identity. Algarín also points out the uniqueness of the NuYorican situation and how it has enabled a rich hybrid language:

We come to the city as citizens and can retain the use of Spanish and include English. The 'naturalizing' process for citizenship does not scare the average Nuyorican into learning English. But pressures of getting a job stimulate the need to master a minimal English usage. But really it is the English around you that seeps into your vocabulary. ... The interchange between both yields new verbal possibilities, new images to deal with the stresses of living on tar and cement.<sup>7</sup>

All of the contributors were NuYorican. As documented in the more recent anthology, *Aloud! Voices from the NuYorican Poets' Café* the café, which had been primarily associated with founders Algarín and Piñero, reopened as a kind of homage to Piñero after his death in 1988.<sup>8</sup> This time around, the ethnic focus was wider: while the NuYorican neighborhood ("Alphabet City," an auspicious name for a poetic locale) continued to play host to the café, and while Algarín also maintained a high profile as editor, founder, emcee, impresario and poet, the main body of poets who participated in café activities were not only Puerto Rican but African American, Euro-American, other Latin ethnics, and whoever was willing and able to swing in the groove. Algarín attributes the café's phoenix-like resurrection and growth to its multi-ethnic, inclusive profile. While the era of cultural nationalism had given the café its start, this pride, while not abated, had metamorphosed. In a sense, this is not such a radical change, because, as noted earlier, Puerto Rico, like many Caribbean islands, already exemplifies multi-, post- and trans-national postmodernity. (See Antonio Benitez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* for an extended poetic polemic on this theme.<sup>9</sup>) And NuYoricans represent the diaspora of multiple diasporas. What better conditions for a post-"cultural-nationalist" venue to enable writers who participate in many oral, performative and poetic traditions? By the time a group of the café poets toured the country and stopped in Minneapolis in Fall 1993, the café had published a book, Paul Beatty's *Big Bank Take Little Bank*, hosted weekly slams as well as frequent readings by featured poets, and were considered an integral and catalytic phenomenon in the Spoken Word movement.<sup>10</sup> Only one of the six who came to Minneapolis -Edwin Torres -was a "real" NuYorican; but all were dazzling vernacular performers whose creativity had been nurtured in the pan-ethnic warmth of the NuYorican Poets' Café.

The NuYoricans' visit to Minneapolis was kicked off by founding father Miguel Algarín, who hosted an inaugural slam at the Rogue, a now defunct nightclub in downtown Minneapolis. That slam brought to public attention several local poets whose visibility continued for the next month and beyond. Among them were Blac Q, a nineteen year old freshman at MacAlester College; Joanne DiMarco, a Native American who often sang an invocation before reciting her poetry; Pony Tail, a Euro-American "poet of the people" who coped good-naturedly with his low scores; Michael McAllister, a young poet whose work rode the razor's edge of the

dangerous joys and perilous beauties of gay urban experience. Blac Q, McAllister and Diego Vasquez, who is primarily a prose writer, ended up sharing slam championship; the prize was that they got to perform with the NuYoricans on stage at the Walker Art Center, the Twin Cities' most prominent artistic "establishment." After a month of Twin-City-wide slams, organized by Loft Program Director Carolyn Holbrook to take place in neighborhood venues like bars, cafés, and drop-in centers, the troupe of "NuYoricans" arrived. They were Paul Beatty, Dana Bryant, Bob Holman, Tracie Morris, Edwin Torres and Mike Tyler. The Walker Art Center, which defines its mission and constituency more broadly than the Loft, was excited about the visit and extended the invitation to the Loft to co-sponsor the event. However, with the exception of Holbrook, who was in the process of leaving the Loft, the Loft personnel were somewhat skeptical and apprehensive about the NuYoricans, fearing that sponsors and important founders would not support the New York style, that slams would prove unpopular in Minnesota (a feeling that to some extent has proven accurate, though it falls into the "self-fulfilling prophecy" category), and that their guests would be perceived by their steady clientele as invading the quiet Midwest and making local spaces too loud.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, though, they did accept, ambivalence notwithstanding.

This ambivalence should be seen in context; it is not peculiar to this institution. The upper Midwest has a history of pride in its populism, but that pride is characterized by a respect for stoicism, silence, modesty, and inconspicuous competence rather than visible brilliance. For example, at the University of Minnesota, access is considered a standard of excellence for the University, and more selective state universities across the country are criticised for their elitism. Minnesotans refer to this modesty as "Minnesota nice." But this catchall phrase, used by detractors and boosters alike to characterize the state's dominant sensibility, means among other more laudable qualities such as a concern for social justice and unpretentiousness, a bland appearance of acceptance which hides an emphatic rejection of difference. The phrase "Minnesota nice" is often contrasted with "New York in-your-face," (along with which goes "pushiness," "grabbiness," loudness and general intrusiveness; it's not hard to read the ethnic subtext here); the contrast suggests that "nice" primarily refers to a diffident politeness rather than a pro-active helpfulness, friendliness or willingness to engage.<sup>12</sup>

The Loft is the Twin Cities' most prominent writing establishment, and it exemplifies both the engaging and trying aspects of "Minnesota nice." Founded in 1974 to serve the community with low-cost, high-quality writing classes and events, the Loft employs many local writers to teach seminars ranging from, for example, "how to get published" to "working with your dreams as material." It also brings in many national writers for readings or short-term "mentoring" projects in which the "featured" writers are hooked up with a carefully screened handful of local aspiring writers for several weeks. A recent editorial in the cities' largest newspaper celebrated the Loft's achievement, citing its "60 workshops and 75 classes a year," and claiming that it had achieved its primary goal of combatting the isolation and



solitude most writers feel.<sup>13</sup> The Loft has helped many local writers find community as well as employment, and it is one of the primary examples of Minnesotan's sense of commitment to public service. The Loft has a worthy record of nurturing writers and fostering careers that have taken off, sometimes to the point of national recognition.

Many in the Twin Cities, however, feel frustrated with the Loft's limitations: its aesthetic is fairly conservative and conventional; perhaps twice in the last eight years have courses been offered which stress newer, "experimental" poetic developments. Moreover, its espousal of what Charles Bernstein has called "official verse culture," combined with a constituency of mostly white, middle-class women and men interested in documenting their personal experiences, makes for a somewhat homogeneous atmosphere tinged with an earnestness untempered by verbal color or flamboyance: understated, nondisruptive confession.<sup>14</sup> "Stoic prairie stuff," was how one skeptic expressed it to me: "Why I started drinking again or why I quit drinking, take your pick, after I hit a deer on the highway." Another term for this genre that has started circulating recently is "prairie anecdotal."

In response to pressures to be more inclusive, the Loft revised its mission to explicitly include a multicultural imperative. It initiated a program called "Inroads," in which local writers of color (and later, gay/lesbian writers) from within the community offer brief residencies to work with aspiring writers (also local) of that minoritarian category (i.e. Asian Americans work with David Mura, gay or lesbian writers work with Judith Katz or Bill Reichard, etc.). These have mixed success, as do the instances where nationally known writers of color serve as visiting mentors: on one memorable occasion, an I-hit-a-deer suburban local "mentoree" read about his wife's "warm, ample rear" on the same bill as the leather-jacketed, cosmopolitan/diasporan Jessica Hagedorn wittily jibing at Imelda Marcos in the high-spirited display of code-switching that characterizes her work. A hugely attended program against censorship featuring Kathy Acker, Amiri Baraka and Nat Hentoff was deemed to be a failure because Baraka was "rude to the audience," Acker was pornographic and Hentoff was, well, Hentoff. Likewise, with the NuYoricans' visit, what appeared to most of the world to be a screaming success was a loud intrusion that had to be back-pedaled away from for several years of subsequent tepid programming. In general, then, there is much well-intentioned piety at the Loft (one newspaper article on the Loft's mixed reputation quoted the director, without a trace of irony, praising the institution by comparing its board meetings to Sunday church services<sup>15</sup>) but because it understands its primary mission to serve the local community as acceding to that community's aesthetic sensibilities (as well as the tastes of their major donors), it is slow to incorporate into its programming the truly exciting aspects of contemporary poetics, most notably experimental ("language-centered") writing and writing/performing that draws on (dissident) traditions other than personality-centered post-Romantic Western narrative, memoir and/or lyric.

This mixture of commitment to public service combined with a narrow view of what is acceptably within the range of cultural expressibility reflects the larger

Minnesotan and upper-midwestern structure of values: a Scandinavian-inherited public-spiritedness and orientation in favor of “the little people” (with the understanding that these latter are humble, pious, virtuous, and industrious white Protestants), but also an “intolerant liberalism” rather than an inclusive one. That is, entitlement to equal rights is predicated on the assumption that everyone should be striving for the same goals and have the same cultural values: namely, plainspoken, modest conformism to an ethical norm. Cultures that celebrate vibrant sensuous expressiveness, colorful clothing, highly embellished speech, or the enjoyment of leisure (and the corollary uncoupling of work from suffering) are profoundly mistrusted. (A small but telling example, not of Minnesota exclusively but of the midwestern work ethos: “Me and Roger,” a film by Michael Moore about the decimation of Flint, Michigan as a result of huge worker layoffs at General Motors’ factories, is a quintessentially midwestern film. Fiercely and enjoyably pro-labor, it nonetheless holds forth one extremely oppressive model of labor as authentic: the factory job and its timeclock, whose obsolescence the film was documenting. In what is meant to be a scathing putdown of the frivolous and trendy Bay Area, Moore remarks on the plethora of cafés and the variety of coffee drinks available at them; he comments on the denizens of these cafés, “Everyone had a job, but nobody seemed to be working.”)

There are, of course, other Twin Cities writing cultures and expressive venues beyond the mainstream ones. The Walker Art Center, which initiated the NuYoricans’ visit, is far more ambitious in its national scope than the Loft (whose first commitment is to the art of its own locale), and thus can afford to play further out on the edge. With Diane Glancy, a Cherokee from Oklahoma; Roberta Hill Whiteman (an Oneida from Wisconsin)’s extended stay as a doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota; and Jim Northrup, an Ojibwe poet who lives a traditional life on Fond du Lac Reservation several hours north of the Cities; and with a large urban Native population, there is a strong Native American presence in the mix. This Native presence is one of Minnesota’s most powerful assets. However, as Joanna O’Connell points out eloquently, this presence gives rise to some anxiety and defensiveness on the part of the white settler culture which dominates the state (and the nation). In larger historical terms, one could read the “I hit a deer” genre as encoding “I shot an Indian”; Pomos are not the only Indians in question here. Again, as the Pomo/“pomo” debate, the politics of context governs how these local Native American artists interact with the mainstream art scene. “The outsider presence [of the NuYoricans] threw all this into stark relief, because they have the glamor of the Big Apple, but the ‘local wildnesses’ bring up a history that [the settler culture] would prefer to exclude from the [conversation].”<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, a quartet of high-profile, non-profit “small literary presses” — Coffee House Press, New Rivers, Milkweed Editions, and Graywolf, many of whom make a point of publishing local as well as national work — is undergirded by several highly-regarded micro-presses (Chax, Standing Stones, Detour Press, etc.) and a plethora of ‘zines. The glossy magazine *Colors*, in its fifth year of publication, is



devoted to writings by Minnesotans of color. Patrick's Cabaret, a monthly showcase for performance artists (closed down by the fire department as of this writing) founded and hosted by queer, HIV-activist performer Patrick Scully, is another stage for alternative expressive culture. The University, the only higher-degree granting institution in the state, did not yet, in 1993-4, offer an MFA in Creative Writing, though it did have a graduate writing program, several of whose graduates have found employment at the Loft. In addition, a number of bars and cafés regularly featured open readings. However, many of these different aspects of literary production and consumption had little if anything to do with each other.

Besides the tension between different aesthetics and their underlying differences in cultural tradition, a related tension that often surfaces in the Twin Cities' arts communities is a common one articulated as "national versus local." The somewhat defensive Midwestern assumption that these two are in a binary relationship can make it difficult to achieve real cultural mixing; and this itself is a not a desirable goal for many Twin Citians concerned with the cities' own survival as a metropolis that combines a "small town atmosphere" with "big city excitement," as one billboard advertises the Cities to itself. (Much as the term "small town" appeals, it also should be understood as a code for "white," and to resonate with the settler culture's defensive ambivalence toward more powerful, "central" metropolises on the one hand, and toward the colonized, with whom it lives in close proximity). In some ways, moreover, the elision of "local" (which I take to mean poets living and practicing in the Cities) and "regional" (which, rather than referring to specific writers, designates a sensibility) works to make urban writers of color or sexual minorities less visible, in that they are local but not regional in sensibility: they do not necessarily celebrate a woodsy life, they tend not to write about the metaphysical and moral complexities of hitting deer with cars or bullets, and working through an abusive childhood is not a predominant theme though there are exceptions to all of these dicta (for instance, the psychological and emotional fall-out from adoption into white families is a significant issue in the Asian American arts community). Writers of color from elsewhere are occasionally brought in and lionized, and the "stoic prairie" confessionals of the Loft's constituency support each other through teaching and taking courses -but there is little space in legitimate venues for local writers explicitly working in what Renato Rosaldo calls "dissident traditions," except as mentors or mentorees in the Inroads program, a designator that reinforces a centrist view of the socially disenfranchised as peripherals seeking a way into the mainream.

Interestingly, two of the most scathing reviews and comments on the NuYorican visit came from local writers of color Diego Vasquez and Adrian C. Louis.<sup>17</sup> The former's short opinion piece in the *A View from the Loft* [the Loft's newsletter] complained that, in contrast to the money showered on the out-of-townners, the local winners were unpaid except for the privilege of sharing a stage with "overpaid nitwits." Vasquez several years later contextualized these comments by reiterating his firmly held belief that to honor artists without paying them is no honor; moreover, as someone who has been warmly received in Minnesota, he

feels it indecorous to fawn on coastal culture and diss the hand that feeds one.<sup>18</sup> Louis also termed Tracie Morris and Bob Holman “nitwits;” in his case, it was for referring to themselves as NuYorican although the former “appears to be Black” and the latter “looks white, although from his garb and hairdo he could be from Mars”; for claiming that tv was more receptive to oral poetry than the literary community; and for claiming that performative gestures were a form of writing.

Because of the heavily enforced (if unwritten) conformist norm, an embattled sense of separatism gets projected onto and sometimes adopted by the “alternative” or traditionally subordinated communities; this is another dynamic that makes creative cross-pollination and hybrid artistic production difficult. The Loft’s “Inroads” series, in which traditionally disenfranchised ethnic groups and sexual minorities are conceived of in strictly separable categories and “helped” as such, is a case in point. Another transplant from the Bay Area, Djola Branner (late of the performance group Pomo Afro Homos), recently had a performance piece called off because he wanted to hire a Latino director he admired, while the producer of the piece thought that the play needed an African American director who could understand that specific experience (both the producer and Branner are African American). Adrian Louis’s concern that Bob Holman and Tracie Morris didn’t *look like* NuYoricans, and that this impaired their credibility as artists, could be understood in this context. Branner has observed that there’s very little sense of play here, and that artistic narratives by minorities are treated as and expected to conform to tales of unrelieved victimhood. At the same time, thriving institutions such as the Minneapolis American Indian Center, African American Penumbra Theatre, Mixed Blood Theatre and the newer consortium Asian American Renaissance are often, when they explicitly state their missions, accused by dominant-cultural critics of divisiveness. (One such explicit critique followed Minneapolis playwright August Wilson’s recent call for a renewed need for African American theatrical institutions.<sup>19</sup>) Partly because it is a more newly colonized space, Minnesotan “settler culture” lags behind New York and California in its skills and resources for navigating between the Scylla of a necessarily overdetermined identity politics and the Charybdis of liberal, difference-denying “colorblindness” of the dominant Euro-American culture that feels threatened by uninhibited experiments in cultural difference. And for the same reason, communities and artists of color face different dilemmas and have different investments in “identity” than their coastal counterparts.

Enter into this particular and also not altogether unusual set of political and aesthetic tensions, in Autumn of 1993, the NuYorican Poets’ Café touring group, word-dazzlers and cultural healers. The words of Bob Holman, one of the troupe, convey the tenor of the energy they brought with them: “It was a Fellini marriage. It was all for Poetry and Poetry for All. We turned the town into the Café for a week, and we danced all night.”<sup>20</sup> Holman takes for granted, in ways that Minnesotans do not, the importance of breaking rules:

The big plus though was penetration of the local communities. I remember getting the word early that Jamison Mahto [a Native American beat-style

poet] was going to boycott us (!) because the Loft had said that only a "limited number" would be allowed to participate in the Slam. I did a radio show at [KFAI], and used my time to make a personal appeal to Jamison, whom I'd never met, and told him we were cool and fuck the rules and really wanted him to turn up. So, guess what? The man was actually listening and the appeal worked. He showed, we raved and bonded... Many Minneapolis poets who had felt excluded by Loft hierarchical programming managed somehow to overcome all that and found themselves entwined in Cafe poets vibe and entanglement agenda. The Slam Open was a totally raucous affair, with over 30 poets reading -the list just kept getting longer. Round 2, next night, was at the Walker Café, an inspired choice. Nothing like this had ever happened there, and when a Museum extends itself, really opens up to the populations, why, everybody wants to use the Museum! Museums should be our Grange Halls!

Holman goes on to document some of the personal pleasures of the trip, which led to further developments in his own projects as well as an appreciation of the contagion of the NuYorican vision:

For me though, it was Beni Matías driving me up to the Res near Duluth to meet Jim Northrup, and shoot him reading his poems there with Pat in their warm and cozy, where I really entered Jim's world. It resulted in Jim's appearing in United States of Poetry [a series Holman produced for television]....and Carolyn [Holbrook] confessing to me that she wanted to start her OWN Café, like the Nuyorican, and by Gumbo, midst storm and gang, SASE did come into being, ... and Mike "Spam" Hall getting props long overdue... and [disabled performance poet Elaine Shelley]...

### Thinking it Through

Some insights from Marcel Mauss's classic *The Gift* seem useful here; two groups, tribal units as it were, under the same general (national) rubric come together to share, celebrate, and give away that which is dearest to them -poetry -jin a set of spectacular displays, games and gatherings whose purpose is not only to share but in sharing to bring honor and glory upon the sharers. Accordingly, there is an undercurrent of rivalry in the display of hospitality and gift-giving. This was certainly true in that two different concepts of "people's poetry" both got some airplay in a mock-competitive staging (the "slam," to which many Minnesotans had objections precisely because of its competitive aura), and in that the whole exercise of bringing the Manhattanites to Minnesota involved an aesthetic challenge for both parties. One thing both hosts and guests understood was that poetry is an "economy of the soul," that is, not an exchange economy but one of gift or theft. In the Maussian sense of self-interested extravagance, we can see the exchange between two cultures, one of which understands extravagance, entertainment, poetry, the other of which understands earnest hospitality and piety. The elements of Twin Cities culture

that resonated with NuYorican panethnicity and social marginalization came alive in a larger public, had a chance to have the cities' spotlight on them; the elements that are used to seeing themselves as the givers, the bestowers of charity, puzzled and a bit put off, were more tentative in their reception.

There was also a healthy exchange beyond all the local politicking and regional anxiety: the NuYoricans brought to Minneapolis a brilliantly carnivalesque display of verbal excess; the Twin Cities contributed its own talent, particularly that which had been underrepresented in mainstream quarters, its hospitality, and a warm reception that veiled its diffidence, à la MN nice. In a sense, the results were, as in Mauss's studies, a consolidation of each community through a homeopathic contact with the Other: the NuYorican poets, through their tour, constituted their national presence as cultural heavy-hitters; and through its lack of follow-up programming, the Loft reconstituted itself as recommitting its resources to its primary clientele with its regional sensibility. However, a tremendously generative legacy came into view in the months and years that followed. A third, previously marginally-represented, group of Twin Cities poets came to the fore, developing institutions and venues of its own.

For example, Bob Gale, who ran the Bad Habit Café where he hosted weekly open mike readings for several years, got the inspiration to found the journal *SHOUT! Community Arts Newspaper for Poets, Storytellers, and Performance Artists* from spoken word artist and NuYorican Café habitué Reg E. Gaines, who came to the University's student-run event series, along with Tracie Morris and Don Bajema, the following year (Morris's appearance was one of the wonderfully quirky, unpredictable follow-ups from the 1993 visit, this time sponsored by University undergraduates, one of the most disempowered populations at the University). Gaines urged him, in response to his wondering how to bring the local and the national into closer conversation, to make the Twin Cities a place people would want to come to, to put it on the spoken word map, so to speak. Gale sees the worship of established poets from the coasts, combined with obliviousness to oral traditions, as seriously compromising the potential quality of the writing communities here, and has taken a pro-active role by founding *SHOUT!* ("an audience development tool") and the Cacophony Chorus, an ongoing set of performances by local spoken word poets of their own and others' work ("an artist development tool"). Initially skeptical about the NuYoricans' visit because it was the only time the Loft ever showed an interest in his efforts to host public poetries (they asked the cafe to sponsor a slam), he ended up taking inspiration from them in ways that challenged and broadened the Twin Cities literary concept of itself.<sup>21</sup> In the most recent *SHOUT!*, which addresses issues of community, the Loft's gradual and tentative reception of "spoken word" as a viable form of poetry is noted and given due credit; some of the Loft personnel were cited as cautiously supportive, claiming that an organization so dependent on large non-profit grants, and so dedicated to a particular constituency, must move with some care.<sup>22</sup>

The newer institutions lost no time in following up on their contact with the

NuYoricans and other nationally recognized oral poets: SASE brought Bob Holman and Dana Bryant out to the Cities the following year to serve as "mentors" in its mentoring program; *SHOUT* has published interviews with Quincy Troupe, Allen Ginsberg, and Jim Northrup in its first year of existence, and on a shoestring budget. By contrast, it took several years for the Loft to bring Edwin Torres back for a residency in 1996; this has been the only programming follow-up to the NuYorican visit. Mauss's archaic model offers some analytical insights, even adapted to this postmodern potlatch in which coastal pre- and postmodern verbal traditions came into productive conflict with the Midwest's blend of third-generation modernist aesthetics and trenchant regionalism. However, though the hortatory epigraph of this paper -one of Mauss's conclusions- is a bracing wake-up call to Minnesotans to shed some of their protective diffidence to embrace the joy of contestatory giving and taking, the colonial and postmodern subtext of the societies in question here limits the unqualified applicability of Mauss's insights.

Exchange takes a somewhat different valence in Steven Caton's *"Peaks of Yemen I Summon": Poetry as Social Practice in a Northern Yemeni Tribe*, a book that delineates the function of poetry in representing and moving people through various social events, be they political showdowns or weddings.<sup>23</sup> In the socius he documents, exchange often takes the form of poetic competition, which is used as a deflector or a sublimating medium for serious differences, but whose invention and declamation achieve real social effects (in other words, the public poetry is not a palliative or means of evading the matter at hand, but rather a means of seriously addressing it). Similarly, competing styles of poetry and the exercise of this rivalry in public spaces, as well as the local writing institutions and their interrelations, help to constitute Twin Citians' sense of themselves as literary creators, producers, and consumers. However, Caton describes practices that have deep roots in time and traditional society; many of the Twin Citian institutions under discussion here are nascent and as yet unstable, although the aesthetic traditions they perpetuate (post-Romantic lyric, African/American oratory and inventive wordplay, "people's" poetic conventions) are as venerable as modernist traditions can be; some of them, *SHOUT!* and Cacophony Chorus, will have changed their format by the time this essay appears in print.<sup>24</sup>

Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone," reworked from Bakhtin and socio-linguistic research to examine travel literatures, ideologies of imperialism, and transculturation, proves a useful one here, though again, not through direct superimposition on the events described above.<sup>25</sup> If the meeting between cultures constituted a "social [space] where highly disparate cultures [met, clashed, and grappled] with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination," it was complicated by several layers of asymmetry: most notably, the intermediary presences of a politically liberal white "settler culture," on the one hand, which prizes its own humility over the moneyed arrogance of the coasts, and on the other, networks of local writers who have much in common with the NuYoricans (shared races and ethnicities, languages, aesthetic orientations, etc.),

and who have had mixed but sometimes supportive relations with the local arts institutions. Pratt refers to "slavery, colonialism, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today"<sup>26</sup> as primary instances of such asymmetrical relations. In coastal/midwestern encounters, or urban/rural encounters, many Minnesotans experience New York as colonizing the midwest with intimidating displays of power, imposing its fast-talking flash on a culture where still waters run deep. However, to accuse the NuYorican poets of colonizing anybody would be patently ludicrous, like accusing Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco of colonizing, with their gorgeously comical excesses and vivid enactments of humans put on display as exotic trophies, the nation's museum and performance spaces in their attempts to dramatize the colonization of indigenous Americans. In other words, such an accusation would fall into the same category as the inflammatory and misleading phrase "reverse discrimination." Moreover, it would be to confuse style with social power; in fact it is often the case that cultures in which loud talk, interruption, competitive verbal games and ritual displays of bright color and movement are not socially empowered in places where the majority culture is of Northern European descent. In the NuYorican case, the cosmopolitanism that intimidates and puts off mainstream midwesterners is a direct result of histories of slavery and colonialism.

Pratt elsewhere uses the phrase "strategies of innocence"<sup>27</sup> to describe, among other European phenomena, the naturalist, the apparently harmless fuddy-duddy eccentric who searches only for natural wonders and can thereby disentangle him/herself from charges of complicity with overtly militaristic or economically imperialist agendas. I find this a useful concept for questioning the "big shots from New York" *ressentiment* that pervaded, however subtly, the dominant writing community's reception of the NuYoricans. In Nietzsche's analysis, the resentment of the victim becomes the basis for a justified domination: Christianity used its valorization of meekness and humility as an aesthetic/ethical and stylistic mask behind which to conduct its bid for global supremacy; homespun "plainspokenness" and stoicism becomes the downtrodden virtue that justifies a regional aesthetic that discriminates against the joys of sophisticated alterity, that views with suspicion even the *right* to be different. (The word "different," applied with no normative standard for comparison, as in "That shirt is kind of... different," has a particularly distancing, pejorative connotation in the upper midwest.) There is a great deal of consistency in the idea of welcoming Spoken Word imports from elsewhere as flashy bits of exotica, and seeing the threat in too much too close to home; the NuYoricans' visit became, for Minnesota's "official verse culture," a homeopathic warding off of local wildnesses, while for local non-normative artists, the visit inspired greater activity.

Worthy of deeper study also are the creative individuals and works that surfaced at this time. The strategies of thick description exemplified by Vincent Crapanzano's *Tuhami*, whose rich spiritual life is rendered in equally rich detail, and the essays in that portion of Lavie, Narayan, and Rosaldo's *Creativity/Anthropology* devoted to "creative individuals in cultural context" exemplify this approach.



Here, the anthropologists exhibit their own creative gifts, their empathies with “folk” poets, performers, musicians, sculptors in extended interpretations of these individuals’ relations to their traditions, societies and artistic processes, and of their body of artifacts: songs, poems, sculptures and dances. Particularly moving for me were BlacQ’s poetry, as well as his name change from BlacQ, at the beginning of the month of slams, to Ibn Majaheed when he read on the stage of the Walker; the evolution from a Question, a “stage name” that gestures toward the entertainment factor (cue ball) in the slam venue, to a committed word-warriorship that denotes a legacy (“son of...”). The poem cited here comprises an astute analysis of the limitations of upward mobility through education, the faux security of the “gentle college land” of MacAlester, one of the most heavily endowed private liberal arts colleges in the country, and its innocent complicity with the “blue-uniformed [blue-eyed?] enemy/watching me” even as he watches the cop shows on tv that target him/young black men, inevitably, as national criminal cum entertainment. BlacQ read with conviction, but his voice was quiet and young (he is nineteen, but looks like a younger adolescent); his hip-hop-oversized clothing hung on him, and the brim of his baseball cap shadowed his face -an enactment of the “self-effacement” Minnesotans admire, though it worked in acute and effective ways with the hard-hitting confidence of the verse. After winning the “slam shut,” he pretty much disappeared from the local slam scene, unlike the other winners McAllister, who made a pilgrimage to the NuYorican Poets’ Café and read there, and Vasquez, who, in spite of his anti-NuYorican position several years ago, has just won a grant to host six slams in the next year at various venues in the Twin Cities.

**BlacQ’s Poem:**<sup>28</sup>

“This is the first piece that I wrote when I came out here to go to school.”

I sat down in my college lounge thinking I had made it, that I am free  
of the bullet spree,  
and it came to me.

I look down at my young black body, no bullet scars can I see,  
but still, it came to me.

I avoided the attraction back home.  
Many of my boyhood friends could not do the same.  
They walked the streets very much in vain,  
But they own those streets now.  
Pushing, surviving, living the only way they know how.  
I held onto my books, increasing in education that could not put gold around my  
neck,  
gear on my back,

or a gun on my hip, but they knew.  
My boys knew I was true.  
Mom said your time will come, son, be patient.  
And when graduation day arrived, Pops gleamed. "I'm proud of you, son, you did it!"  
And I did,  
yet it came to me.

No longer do I lay myself down to sleep to the gunfire lullabies.  
No longer do I see my blue-uniformed enemy  
watching me  
every other block  
I thought I was free  
when it came to me.

That paranoid state of living has stopped for a moment in this gentle college land  
No longer do I walk the streets with my motherfucking master plan  
So I lay down this night thinking I just might read a little Walt Whitman, maybe some  
Keats  
Might even get real deep and check out some  
Baraka.  
And so on my break I flipped on the TV

And this  
is when  
it came  
to me

Cops  
America's Most Wanted  
And the countless half-assed shows of the like  
What kind of fucking country is this when it showcases, plugs, and advertises  
the violence it supposedly so despises  
Are my urban streets a made-for-tv circus for you fucking suburban clowns?  
All you want to see is the crime  
while the TV powers that be make their dime  
and your white boys, well, they want to dance to my rhyme  
Stop the madness, stop the exploitation,  
stop showcasing what your government views as the plague of this nation.  
It's amazing for me  
to see  
that the Massah still runs the show.  
Maybe now it's not his slave girl that he sees in his wet dreams as his playful little 'ho,



But our neighborhoods, our families, us.

And I thought I was free  
But it got to me.

He killed me on the TV<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, in the spirit of Howard Becker's useful *Art Worlds*, whose opening epigraph by Thackeray on the crucial role his "manservant" played in the author's creative process by bringing him coffee every morning at 6:00, attention to the importance of the cultural workers who made the events feasible should complement attention paid to the poets and their work: Carolyn Holbrook, who left the Loft to found SASE, a more grassroots, hands-on, interventionist writing organization that, among other things, runs programs for at-risk kids where they learn to write memoir and poetry, aspires to generate writing and reading venues for the international diasporic communities of the Twin Cities (among them Hmong, Horn of Africa, Filipino), and other equally ambitious projects; or Bob Gale.<sup>30</sup> As Gale points out in an interview with Michael Brown, an originary "slammer" from Chicago, now Boston-based, slams haven't really taken off in Minnesota as they have in Boston, Ann Arbor and San Francisco, even though Chicago, the "birthplace" of slam, is so geographically close to the Twin Cities.<sup>31</sup>

Equally useful is James Clifford's "traveling culture" as a trope both for NuYoricans from Puerto Rico or Brooklyn and the non-NuYorican NuYoricans traveling to the US's heartland, a land with folkways far more foreign to New York City, arguably, than any Caribbean island. The relative homebodies in Minneapolis and St. Paul also are travelers: Michael McAllister and Spam (Michael Hall), Carolyn Holbrook and I, among others, have made trips to the Loïsaida café subsequent to the tour; Diego Vasquez's loyalty to Minneapolis stems from his warm reception here as a serious writer, after his youth in San Antonio and several years in Alaska; my own arrival in Minneapolis from Northern California in 1988 to take my first academic position was a culturally jarring experience. While I am now literally a local, I still do not feel that this is "my place" and am still easily identifiable as "not from around here." The convenient phrase "traveling culture" legitimizes the flexibility and indeterminacy of a situation that is still in process, whose ripples are still widening after the initial big splash of contact with the NuYoricans.

#### Minne-Confessional

Since this is clearly not a disinterested essay, perhaps I should spell out my own "subject position" here; one of my hopes for this essay is that, erratic as it is, it may spark others to theorize and historicize their own literary communities beyond simply constituting/recording them for posterity (as Ginsberg did for the Beat scene,

and others are currently undertaking for the "Language" poets). I am trying not to capture and freeze-frame a scene, but to understand the dynamics of *these* poetries in *this* public sphere. Though I was not a central player in the NuYorican event, I am involved in the literary culture under discussion. I teach American poetry at the University, which keeps its distance from such populist events (while I was consistently the only member of my department at these public events, I was immensely gratified to see, at the Algarín-emcee'd slam, all the first-year students from the Program in American Studies comprising the last row of the audience), though several of the creative writing faculty have close ties with the Loft; I have served on the board of directors of several of the local literary publishers, who have gone non-profit in order to stay afloat; I have informal brainstorming/collaborative friendships and/or cordial collegial relations with former and/or current members of the Loft staff, current program directors at SASE, the Walker Art Center, *SHOUT!*, and the journal in which this essay appears. I am also an audience member at many of these events and an off-and-on dues-paying member of the Loft and the Walker Art Center. Since I live here, I have a stake in making the Twin Cities' literary culture one that is congenial to my tastes, and this essay is obviously not free from that agenda. However, partisan as I am, I cannot claim to have an embattled position, and I am not writing an "autoethnography" fueled by the same kind of urgency that gives rise to indigenous accounts of traditional life threatened by colonialism. (If anything, the University, because of its size and structure, and because of the way it interprets its land-grant mission, is far more complacent than any of the institutions described here.) Nonetheless I am critical of certain aspects of this/my community and want to hurry its changes along (thus justly risking the epithets "pushy," "outsider," "east coast aggressive," etc.); this is as much a letter to that community as to the world of poets and ethnographers who comprise the readership of *Cross-Cultural Poetics*.

## Poetry

To return to some of the questions I laid out earlier, what happens when poetry, poetic activity, or poetic discourse is keyed in as a major factor in these deliberations? What if, for example, poetry itself were considered the contact zone (a temporarily autonomous contact zone, at that, as in Hakim Bey's *TAZ*), the culture that travels and the medium of travel itself (as in Emily Dickinson's "when I want to travel I close my eyes"), the medium of exchange (as in playing the dozens, or as in folklorist Americo Paredes's rich description of the centrality of a particular *corrido* to the history of two rivalrous border families), the gift being given, the subject of autoethnography? Does the "outside"ness of poetry -its dubious though arguable anti-discursivity - give it special transformative properties that catalyze the process of meaning-making that comprises cultural self-creation and interpenetration?

Undertaking such a perspective compels rapturous language to describe

the performances of the NuYoricans: Edwin Torres wowed the crowd with his “Indian Hand Poem:’ (this is a story told with hand movements)” and sent us into poetry overdrive again and again with his linguistic decontravaganzas of Spanglish and other supreme orpho-delphic detritusyllables (“I represent, the chatta-zondatta of non-conformist cumpleanos...!, Puerto-*REEK*”); a slow scream arose from the crowd after his lyrical parry and philistine thrust:

*“When angels fall in love,  
they place their halos over each others’ chest  
and let their hearts fall through.*

...  
*The cloud you’re in, is the heaven I feel when I’m with you...”*

So I said, “Well, what do you mean by that?”<sup>32</sup>

You say you want heteroglossia? Semiotic flux and shimmy shimmy cocopop? Roll over Bakhtin, and tell Kristeva the news. Tracie Morris’s astonishing gestural and verbal pyrotechnics as she imitated the “scratch” sound of hip-hop technology to Carmen McRae tone-songs! Bluesish and jazzish, the “queen of hip hop poetry” was fully embodied, in the house, stand up and be counted, a quick tongue and tender wit, her gender-bending bragging poem, “Ten Men,” aroused nervous if approving laughter at its honesty about the “anguished pleasures”<sup>33</sup> of smart Black womanhood; “The Spot” castigated “superficial people everywhere” for commodifying the X gear that marks the spot that should remind us what Malcolm died for; “Project Princess,” a praise-poem for girls who like herself grow up in the highrise projects of Brooklyn and are its “black gold,” its richest resource, hymned the tough sweetness of the young women (“multi-dimensional shrimp earrings [framing their cinnamon faces]”) who blush at compliments but whose fists can “deck” a verbal transgressor no problem.<sup>34</sup> Paul Beatty’s hairpin-turn puns and relentless stream of race-bending cultural manifesti and disclosures of personal vulnerability that raced by so fast your ears had to double as wings to catch up. Dana Bryant’s magisterial movements and Shange-with-a-traditionalist-twist womanhood soliloquies that made intimacy, grief, religion all alchemical matter for striking/making the aesthetic motherlode; Bob Holman’s ebullient emcee style and Mike Tyler’s physically contorted teen spirit -standing ovation at the Walker’s final wordbang melt-down meant that poetry had arrived, been recognized, accepted as the gift of a love supreme.

It doesn’t get any better than this. For days the Twin Cities levitated over the rest of the prairie, supercharged with the dark light of WORDZZZZZZZZ from afar, good news of the planet’s verbal health and resiliency in spite of history’s ravages. Even the Mega Mall was paradise enow. (Well, almost.) But when the stardust of fragmented wordbits settled and the aura dissolved back into its constitutive elements -Was it so? When the gods arrived laden with gifts, were we too busy looking at the floor to be more than passingly delighted? Too embarrassed about our

rapt surrender and childish adulation? Needing to disavow that trans-discursive trance? Let's think not. Deep under the deepfreeze: the heat, stirrings of new words.

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<sup>2</sup>Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967) 67-69.

<sup>3</sup>Maria Damon, *The Dark End of the Street: Margins in American Vanguard Poetry* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993), 18; Karlheinz Stierle, "Identité du Discours et Transgression Lyrique," trans. Jean-Paul Colin, *Poétique* 32 (Nov. 1977): 422-41.

<sup>4</sup>Greg Sarris, *Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream*. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994); and Greg Sarris, ed., *The Sound of Rattles and Clappers: A Collection of New California Indian Writing* (Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1994).

<sup>5</sup>Herbert Muschamp, "A Primal Phantasmagoria Not Just for Gamblers," *New York Times* 21 Oct. 1996: B1, B4; James Clifford, "Identity in Mashpee," *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1989) 277-346.

<sup>6</sup>Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero. eds., *NuYorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto*

*Rican Words and Feelings* (New York: William Morrow, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* 15.

<sup>8</sup> Miguel Algarín and Bob Holman, eds., *Aloud! Voices from the NuYorican Poets' Café* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Benitez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Beatty, *Big Bank Take Little Bank* (New York: NuYorican Poets Cafe, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Carolyn Holbrook, Interview with the author, August 1996.

<sup>12</sup> A review of recent articles in Minneapolis's daily newspaper, *The Star-Tribune*, seems to support the tension between midwestern and coastal sensibilities that is often implicit in the term "Minnesota Nice." See, e.g.: Peter J. Borson opinion piece, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* 10 August 1996, 19A; Colin Covert and Jeff Strickler, "Move Along, Minnesotans, It's Only a Movie Superstar," *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* 12 April 1996.

<sup>13</sup> "Literary Model: The Loft grows up, reaches out," *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* 10 Oct. 1996: A26.

<sup>14</sup> Bernstein, Charles, "The Academy in Peril: William Carlos Williams Meets the MLA," *Content's Dream: Essays, 1975-1984* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1986) 244-51.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Myers quoted in David Schimke, "The 800-Pound Loft," *Twin Cities Reader*, January 25-31, 1995 (20:4), pp. 16-17.

<sup>16</sup> Joanna O'Connell, letter to the author, 4 Nov. 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Diego Vasquez, "Viewpoint," *A View From The Loft: A Magazine About Writing* 17.2 (May 1994): 17; Adrian C. Louis, letter, *A View From The Loft: A Magazine About Writing* 16.6 (Jan. 1994): 17.

<sup>18</sup> Bob Gale, "Diego Vasquez: It's a Risk and a Gamble," *SHOUT! Community Arts Newspaper for Poets, Storytellers, and Performance Artists* 2.4 (Oct. 1996): 9.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Vaughn, "A Script For Change," *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* 26 Aug. 1996: 1E, 7E.

<sup>20</sup> Bob Holman, letter to the author, 20 Nov. 1996.

<sup>21</sup> Bob Gale, personal interview, Oct. 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Aaron Lictov and Elise Matthesen, "The Loft: A Good Home for Spoken Word?" *SHOUT! Community Arts Newspaper for Poets, Storytellers, and Performance Artists* 2.4 (Oct. 1996): 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Caton, *"Peaks of Yemen I Summon": Poetry as Social Practice in a Northern Yemeni Tribe*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

<sup>24</sup> Bob Gale has shifted *SHOUT!* from a free distribution format to a subscription format, responding to what he sees as an as-yet-not-sufficiently-developed market for spoken word arts.

<sup>25</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse and the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 345; Mary Louise Pratt: *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Pratt 4.

<sup>27</sup> Pratt, 7, 33, 38.

<sup>28</sup> Laurie Dickinson transcribed this and the following poem from a videotape made by the Loft, and I formatted them with line breaks that I felt did most justice to the emphases placed during the performances.

<sup>29</sup> This endnote represents a compromise worked out between me and the editor of *Xcp*, who felt that the following poem and the paragraph that precedes it, which were originally in the main text, diverged aesthetically and intellectually from the article as a whole and

the poems selected for publication:

Another poem that caught my attention stood out as atypical; its author also seemed to disappear from public view after the month of slams. Symantha Jones (pseudonym)'s prayer/poem, "this poem's about the alcoholic in my home," analyzes the predicament of the writer's relationship to alcoholism and alcoholics, and the self-sabotage such a relationship entails ("my own codependencies robbing me blind"). It also touches on the value of writing as a process of self-healing "as fear will rise in my mind it reflects on these pages." Minnesota is a nationally recognized center for recovery from alcoholism and chemical dependency ("land of ten thousand treatment centers," the joke has it), but the recovery community here, unlike its counterparts in other parts of the country, is characterized by its dependency on clinics and the medical establishment, rather than by an emphasis on the spiritual program laid out by Alcoholics Anonymous and other grassroots community self-help networks. This poem is an artifact both of the publicness with which the language of addictionology is embraced in the region, and of a departure from the mainstream in its reliance on spirituality rather than clinical, therapeutic, or "transformative aesthetic" expertise. The tradition of African American oratory and public prayer plays a role here, in that the slam audience is implicitly asked to witness the poet's committing herself to the care of a power greater than herself. This tradition perhaps informs this poetic event more than the conventions of medical addictionology or, certainly, of either the local slam-and-open-mike scene as it came out for the NuYoricans, or the official verse culture that, while it permits and even advocates the "personal voice," shies away from such devotional directness in favor of an Eliotic distance and circumspect descriptive tone mediated by objective correlatives such as deer in the headlights, vegetables, and stark winter landscapes ("show don't tell"). In a sense, the poem and its presentation, which was dignified and undramatic also in contrast with stereotypical slam style brought together some of the concerns respected by the mainstream (female confession, twelve-step recovery) and the stylistic legacy of dissident traditions.

Symantha Jones's Poem:

"This poem's about the alcoholic in my home."

Walk with me lord through my home  
for there lives a disease I can't face alone

I'm imprisoned with confusion and my emotions are in cages  
as fear overrides my mind it reflects on these pages

I don't understand why I'm losing control



So much pain in my heart and despair in my soul

He's feeding a sickness that wants more and more  
Incurable pain is beyond my front door

I press my face against the window to see my way out  
But this disease called alcoholism has filled me with doubt

I am a voice with no name and no peace of mind  
As my own codependencies are robbing me blind

So walk with me lord  
through this lonely place  
So I may survive on your will  
And then on your grace.

<sup>30</sup>Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982) 1.

<sup>31</sup>Bob Gale, "A Man, A Plan, A Slam: Interview with Michael Brown," *SHOUT! Community Arts Newspaper for Poets, Storytellers, and Performance Artists* 1.8 (March 1996): 1, 4-5.

<sup>32</sup>Edwin Torres, "Ugilante" and "Indian Hand Poem," *I Hear Things People Haven't Really Said* (New York, 1991) n. pag.

<sup>33</sup>The phrase is Lisa Gail Collins's, from her essay "Anguished Pleasures: Black Female Sexual Politics and Poetics," *Colors* 4.5 (September/October 1995): 26-30.

<sup>34</sup>Tracie Morris, "Ten Men," "The Spot," "Project Princess," *Chap-t-her Won: Some Poems by Tracie Morris* (Brooklyn: TM Ink, 1992) 15-17, 40-41, 13.

# MIXED AMERICAN PAK: NATIONAL HOLIDAY THUNDER CHRYSANTHEMUM WITH PEARLS & REPORTS

Lise McCloud

\*\*\*\*\*Bang\*\*\*\*\*Bang\*\*\*\*\*POP\*POP\*POP\*\*\*\*\*Bang\*\*\*\*\*

Working at the plastic factory, working in the mental home, working at a desk job, working, working, working all the holidays but one. Years of scrips & scraps in U-HAUL boxes acting as my furniture--

O boy! O joy! It is Independence Day in the land of the free. This will be a documentary labeled A Pearl of Time, a string of things, a mixed memoir with a roadside fireworks stand and a cornfield and a corny joke, corny laugh, straw hat on a sunburned woman holding up for the camera a NEWS TRANSMITTER D.O.T. Class C Consumer Explosive.

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*Fishing Report: Roaming down old highway 81, the ancient glacial seashore. White Rock Dam, South Dakota, 7/4/94: Smoked salmon, fried chicken, deviled eggs, ham & swiss & dijon sandwiches, baked beans, roasted wieners, garden salad, fluffy biscuits with sweet cream butter & homemade chokecherry jelly & raspberry & wild plum jam & sunf lower honey, assorted cheese, crackers, Doritos, marinated artichoke hearts, grandma's giant made-from-scratch decorated with little odds & ends cupcakes in a star-spangled-night enamel roaster, cold watermelon too, red white & blue star-sprinkled chocolate cake with cumulonimbus frosting and whirlingig vortex of sharply cloven Snickers bar triangles on top. The fishing is no good today, who cares.*

\*

The pearl of the prairie, the legend we seek, is the sacred White Rock. Therefore our afternoon excursion takes us down the slope of the ancient glacial shoreline and across the phantom seabed, a vast mud plain eerily scattered with rocks, boulders, skeletons (the bones of farm machines and farmsteads and an elm picked white and clean). Flocks of terns and gulls skim the phantom tide. We are submerged in the inexplicable tide of Lake Agassiz, pulled toward the ghost town. The ghost town is visible as a distant green raft of trees which we approach singing stupidly. Vocalizing, rather, a version of "Name That Tune" in which the only musical clues are absurd wordless noises related to the theme: Ghost Riders in the Sky, The Ghost of a Chance, The Ghost of Route 109, etc. (the dead tree smooth and barkless with its arms still raised in supplication) (an *act of God* is lightning). The theme tunes from "Ghostbusters" "Casper the Friendly Ghost" "Phantom of the Opera," and so on (or perhaps an act of certain beetles is what the tree succumbed to, a fine example

of *denuded*) (a word casting the deceased in a different light now, a bare-naked dance for nobody living in this noplacel). A song dog waits in nearby hiding for the moon.

South Dakota is the Coyote State, North Dakota is the Flickertail State, Minnesotans refer to even a very specific place in either state as being "in the Dakotas." The flickertails stand bolt upright at comically nervous attention along the road to White Rock, SD, Pop. 2 as we approach the pockmarked sign. Hail and bullets always find these forlorn markers. The town is reportedly named for a large white boulder around which it once prospered.

There is always one flickertail who will break under the strain and hurl itself suicidally under your vehicle and escape miraculously unharmed just as you're trying to pass it. I have seen a flickertail scrambling madly about under a speeding vehicle ahead of me on the highway, having made the dash in a frenzy of indecision. Usually they just stand about trying to get a better view and neurotically jerking their tails. People from other parts of the country don't notice our small rodent mascot unless it's pointed out, and then they tend to believe that it's a prairie dog.

We motor slowly through the streets of White Rock, looking for signs of its two living citizens. A glassed box nailed to a corner pole, displaying a fake red rose and minutes of the most recent town meeting (Paid the power company, \$68.69. Paid the telephone company, \$42.71). Neatly mowed roadsides with intervals of wild asparagus carefully missed by the mower. A well-kept white frame church with red roof. A couple of elderly houses in good repair with trim lawns and paint jobs, many perky hobby-shop birdhouses (a cunning wren cabin, an apartment complex for purple martins, a wood duck house, a cottage for finches in the empty lots turning to forest where people once lived). Deer glide from the yards of the battered and sagging grey stick houses, vanish into the tangled growth of box elder with just one haunting glance back. A sleek 1930s robin's-egg blue phaeton keeps slipping around the corners ahead of us before we can even get a look at the ghost who's driving it. The little boys are more impressed with this phenomenon than with the ectoplasm we found dumped by the crossroad. They haven't been around long enough to notice the regional pattern of 4th of July antique car shows.

Two giant cottonwoods and a slab of sparkly red granite tell us we are in the business district. There is nothing visible but an apparent sculpture of a giant Idaho baking potato made of welded spray-painted white reinforcing rods. The granite marker communicates that in its heyday, pioneer White Rock boasted banks, hotels, mercantile and grocery stores, restaurants, blacksmith shops, grain mills, saloons, dance halls and even an opera house. The town was quickly outgrowing its original plat, where it wanted a grain elevator erected, but this big white rock was in the way. Skyscraper of the prairie, highly visible symbolic manifestation of progress--the grain

elevator was a new important landmark. Now I see what happened. White people never did believe what lives in such a rock. So they got a load of dynamite, and they blew the rock to smithereens, and unhoused its displeased ghost. A series of civic misfortunes followed. Only the skeletal re-bar monument is left to represent old White Rock. Only the venerable cottonwoods lived to whisper this glum tale.

\*

BOOM!

\*

7/4/96: I always like to observe the 4th of July. I live in the Sunset Trailer Court, have two pink plastic flamingos and a plastic birdbath in my yard, three kids who are pretty sure they saw the featured suspect on America's Most Wanted or Unsolved Mysteries just a few trailers down or in the Stop-N-Go. Sunset Court used to be a field of sunflowers and corn and sometimes soybeans way north of town, just north of the north 40 of the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school where I was growing up. The Chicago & Western track ran past these fields then the Wahpeton Indian School then the town and rickety old Peavey grain elevators right after that. In the springtime, wild prairie roses bloomed along the track so exactly like luminous pink Ojibway floral beadwork it makes me wish them back, right now. There. They smell pure, like a blessing. Like rain. One drop held in a petal, *glistening* in the sun. Anyone impatient enough to go AWOL in the daylight could follow the tracks this far out and see that there was suddenly nothing else to see but rows of green things zooming into and colliding in infinity, the horizon I saw then as yet unobstructed.

\*

TOP TEN FIREWORKS I WOULD WANT TO SEE IN BEADWORK:

1. OPENING FLOWER WITH HAPPY BIRD
2. PLUM FLOWERS REPORT SPRING
3. 96 COLOUR PEARL FLOWERS WITH REPORT
4. WEEPING DAFFODILS
5. MAMMOTH CHRYSANTHEMUM
6. SILVER CHRYSANTHEMUM ZENITH
7. NO. 300 3 COLOR-CHANGING CHRYSANTHEMUM
8. SUNFLOWER SPINNER
9. CRACKLING CARNATION WITH BLUE
10. SWORD ORCHID FOUNTAIN

\*

Perhaps the most daring and determined AWOL in memory was the boy counted absent just before a long school bus trip in the 1960s. Police were notified, the town was combed, but the mass bus trips had to go on as scheduled. It was the start of summer vacation when all the students, maybe four hundred in number, were being taken back to their home reservations in the Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, Nebraska, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and a few other far-flung places. My father and other teachers were driving the buses, as they always did; in those days there were only about forty staff to the whole operation. Sometimes I rode along, since it was

the only chance I'd get to see the world and travel. The northbound buses were to stop near the little town of Hillsboro, about ninety miles up the highway, and meet at the wayside rest for a picnic. When the second bus pulled in and parked in the shade, people from the first bus noticed something fall out from under it. When they went over to investigate they found the missing boy, who had been clinging to the undercarriage all the way from Wahpeton. He was lying on the ground, in a state of complete, dazed, and speechless exhaustion, but otherwise unharmed.

\*

TIGERS ROARING FOUNTAIN, SNOW AND RED PLUM ROCKET, DRAGON DANCING WITH PHOENIX, OVERLORD IN THE SKIES, JUMBO GLITTEROUS LIGHT ROCKET, NO. 300 GALAXY OF STROBING STARS, WARMING GREETING (61 SHOTS PEARLS & REPORTS)

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Wahpeton is an old tribal meeting ground at the confluence of three rivers. The Red River of the North is formed by the Ottetail River, which has its source in the eastern forest and lake country, and the Bois de Sioux which proceeds up from Lake Traverse between Minnesota and South Dakota. The Red River Valley is a strip of land thirty to ninety miles wide running north-south and is the bottom of the glacial Lake Agassiz which was seven hundred miles long. Wave action of the receding lake caused different beaches that one can notice while traveling across the Valley. I was born just a few hundred yards from the headwaters of the Red, on the Minnesota bank as there was no hospital in Wahpeton. The Red River flows north into Lake Winnipeg in Canada which is a remnant of the huge inland sea.

Turtle Mountain Chippewa and Devils Lake Sioux runaways ran north all night on the tracks, to the grain elevator at Brushvale, Minnesota, and hid inside till someone caught up with them and took them back to Wahpeton. The other Sioux sometimes hopped a Chicago & Western boxcar down to South Dakota. The tracks are gone now, along with the rural era that they symbolized. Gone is the little lone grove of native trees on the western skyline, where townfolk used to go and poke around for arrowheads in the ruins of long-dead campfires. In 1971 the new highway bypass cut down and ran over that solitary marker. The usual suburban, industrial sprawl ensued. It's not to wax nostalgic by attempting to fix in place, to reconstruct, re-member. By the age of ten I understood that there was never going to be anything for me in Wahpeton. I would have to run off to the mountains and live inside a tree like this boy in a movie I had seen, or build a raft and float away on the Red, or steal a horse from the barnyard by the tracks with the wild plum and Russian olive trees running alongside it that's now the trailer court section. I packed up a hobo bundle many times for practice, made lists. At some point in history the local fireworks stand brought a nagging mysterious whisper of the Orient into my small, dull, homogenous corner of the U. S. A. I picked up and pieced together the tissue paper that someone ripped off a package. And understood that it was a deviant trait to notice the exotic Chinese written characters and illustrations and oddly behaved

English of the product wrappers-- to wonder at these frail missives from the oppressed but poetry-minded commies on the far side of the planet.

\*

BLUE PALM, SPARKLING TREE FIREWORKS, No. 300 PLUM TREE, No. 200 RAIN WILLOW, NOISY FOUNTAIN

\*

In 1904 a resident of the city, Senator Porter J. McCumber, introduced a bill "to establish an Indian agricultural college at or near the city of Wahpeton, in the county of Richland." This was the same person responsible for the McCumber Agreement or "Ten-Cent Treaty" of 1892, whereby the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa Indians were forced to cede ten million acres of the richest land on the continent for the perverse sum of 10 cents per acre. In 1904 the school was created by an act of Congress, the McCumber agreement was ratified, and the disastrous government Indian policies of the Allotment era found their perfect vehicle at Wahpeton.

The first crowd brought to this pseudomilitary outpost were the dispossessed children of Turtle Mountain. My grandpa graduated from Wahpeton Indian School in 1923. He started in 1912 at the age of seven, with time at Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota and Haskell Institute in Kansas. You could enter first grade here and never leave until it was time to go down to Flandreau, then Haskell, then the great mythic melting pot. An early-1900s photo captioned "United States Indian School" shows a line of stark brick buildings on a treeless grid of dirt with tufts of native grasses still hanging on the fringes. Immense, dark, and strictly foreboding, these were the very same structures which occupied my early view of the world; their demolition in the 1960s seemed like a WW II movie or similar apocalypse simply because they were the community I knew up to then. The bricks were of a peculiar deep ferrous shade like drying blood, and I have never since seen their type anywhere. They were heavy, inhabited bricks, dense with the forces of human and geologic history that had pressed them into the U. S. Indian Service. And they were speckled through with tiny, tiny little lovely seashells! If you hoped to pry a wee white ocean clamshell out of a brick in the wall and keep it for a treasure, it would break and leave a scar like smallpox. These walls housed a vast unseen ghost made of unresolved grief, violent wind, and black shadows, but every summer they upheld the swaying silk gowns, the unspeakable swooning beauty of the federal-Indian hollyhocks.

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VIOLETS & CRIMSONS, DANCING FRESH FLOWERS, BEAUTIFUL BUDS, GROUND-BLOOMING FLOWERS, ATTRACTIVE FLOWERS, COLOUR PEARL FLOWERS, GREEN GLITTEROUS FLOWERS, FLORAL SHELL

\*

My older sister and her glam girlfriends of the secret exclusive Tibby Club and her showbiz *wintke* friend held hollyhock doll beauty pageants and Cinderella balls. You take a full blossom--the pale buttery yellow, or the rich rich magenta, or the

virginal white, or the fairy pink, or the voluptuous purple--and poke a toothpick through the center. Then you put a medium size green bud on for the bosom and poke a toothpick crossways for arms and put a little head bud on the top of this. Try to find a bud with a little flare of color bursting out, like a hairdo.

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GOLDEN FLOWER FOUNTAIN, GREEN GLITTERING FLOWER TRI-COLOR SPRAYER, HAPPY SILVER FLOWERS, PEACH FLOWERS, TRI-ANGLE WHISTLING FLOWERS, GOLDEN SILVERFLOWERS, MAMMOTH PEONY

\*

This is not "a longing for experiences, things, or acquaintanceships belonging to the past." This is a salvage operation. A dive into the wreck even knowing that this life is sink or swim against the current. I am a minor and contrary organism, swimming the invisible tides of the ghost lake.

\*

After the buffalo were gone, my great-grandfather contracted to gather their bones across the plains and haul them to some location on the railroad, maybe Minot. His previous occupation had of course been a buffalo hunter. The bones were piled up in mountains alongside the tracks, shipped in boxcars to cities like Detroit for industrial purposes like being crushed into fertilizer. But my great-grandmother took a pair of buffalo horns and carefully polished them with boot black and wrapped the bone bridge in a precious scrap of black velvet and beaded it with flowers

They were reservation Indians in 1892, not long married, setting out to make their living by farming the unfarmable land of the reservation as in the McCumber Agreement. They raised grain and vegetables and a pig or two, kept a cow and sometimes chickens. Even deer had become rare, but they say that before the sun was up great-grandma traversed the woods and the hills hunting squirrels, birds, rabbits. She rigged up some kind of trap involving a door and a bedspring, which suddenly dispatched unsuspecting crowds of birds that came for the grain she had sprinkled outside the family cabin. Although great-grandpa was angered to see the beautiful songbirds fall victim to this particular enterprise, it kept a dozen kids fed and busy on a cold day in winter. Great-grandma could make a few coins at different times of the year by selling butter and cream to the trader, selling wild reservation berries to the farmers' wives down on the prairie, selling cranberry bark and a certain medicinal root to the pharmaceutical company buyer (these ended up in patent medicines such as the one labeled as Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound). Great-grandma would sometimes drive her horse and buggy down from Turtle Mountain, sixty miles down the road to the pioneer town of Rugby, at the geographic center of North America where the handsome wooden train depot yet stands. There she sold her beadwork to tourists for a price I do not know. If these heirlooms were valued at all by passing strangers, they perhaps are preserved in some far-off museum. They were the nearest thing to family jewels an Indian woman had, but they did not get handed down among family members. I do have a small



circular drawstring coin purse that my great-grandmother gave to my grandmother who gave it to my mother who gave it to me.

It is a purse of many colors. It is a thing that saw good use. I know this because it is an object made of leftovers, of irregular beads sewed concentrically on soft, worn doeskin, and not a long painstaking work of art that someone would have purchased. I can see the different kinds of beads that my great-grandmother used to create her vanished treasure, a sampler of antique beads all at hand in this circle. I can see her put a few silver coins into it and walk away from the train depot without the flowering art she spent so many patient hours at, sorting every bead to the right size and shape and shade and prayerful result that she surely would have rather left behind her, a half century later, in her Turtle Mountain home.

One day in the 1950s or 60s Relocation era of federal-Indian history my uncle happened to be walking down an alley in Grand Forks, North Dakota, where he was trying to work or go to college or be otherwise assimilated into non-Indian society. There he saw some people packing up and moving out of their large fine house. Heaped by the alley were all manner of items to be discarded. Decades after he first laid eyes on it, he recognized his grandmother's beaded bison horn memorial perched atop the rubbish pile. He retrieved it, and despite a bumpy life of relocation, has kept it in a safe and honored place all these years.

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#### GARDEN-INSPIRING FIREWORKS, BLOSSOMING GARDEN, GUEST GREETING GARDEN

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*July 4, 1994. Raining fast and steady all morning, nothing to see on TV but "Anne of a Thousand Days" with Genevieve Bujold as Anne Boleyn, Richard Burton as Henry VIII. The boys are restless, impatient for everything to dry up so they can see fireworks. "What is the Fourth of July for?" "So there will be no more kings in this land. The radio reports a high chance of continued bad weather, a "trailer court shooting" in Minnesota. Sky stops pouring, sun comes out, we pack up and spend the day in South Dakota, sight a small funnel cloud on the way home. At 9:38 p.m., people accumulate in Chahinkapa Park waiting for the town fireworks show to officially be canceled. Trucks and vans with Texas plates have the picnic parking spots already. Barbecue smoke rises up slowly into the drizzle, falls down all around with a tantalizing sizzle. The migrant workers are setting off rockets, cones, Roman candles, dancing over exploding chains of firecrackers. Big boys on bikes ride by: "He's gonna blow up his cojones." "Cooking prairie oysters, ha ha."*

\*

Old Wild Rice was my many-times-great grandfather and the first documented ancestor to migrate into the Red River country and work in the furbiz industry. So it has been since the late 1700s that this writer's history has its source in the Valley. The ancestor was born on an island in Lake Superior and led a canoe brigade out of

the woodlands to begin a Plains culture transition. My grandpa named him as Gaytay Mahnomin, meaning Old Wild Rice, from the handed-down tales; he was a considerable personage still spoken of in the 1900s. The traders Henry and Chaboillez, in their 1797-1801 fur trade journals, referred to him variously as The Great Chief Manomine, Old Menominee, Vieux Folle Avoine, Old Fallewine, Crazy Oats and Old Wild Oats, probably signifying his origins in the wild rice country, but just as aptly tweaking a tribal progenitor.

To make a long story short, the furbiz men married the Indian women and started a mixedblood, furtrade society whose modern incarnation after the passing of the mixedblood, bison-based society and subsequent reservation poverty was the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service cultures, two massive federal-Indian vertical hierarchies where persons with sufficient skills and blood quantum to meet the paperwork requirements could find a niche or a college education. Education being an historical treaty provision, I would be happy to go along collecting degrees as long as the grass shall grow and the rivers shall flow, but everybody needs \$, have worked in BIA, IHS with the same Indian and fur trade surnames as in the historical treaty and trade journal documents. My brothers, sisters, and I grew up in a federal-Indian enclave by Dad's tour of duty at Turtle Mountain agency in the 1950s then transfer down to Wahpeton. A full-blooded German from Minnesota, he was lured by somewhat exaggerated reports of skiing opportunities at Turtle Mountain.

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In October of 1992, I step outside a seedy bat-infested apartment in Minnesota, where I have gone to obtain a graduate degree in something of supposed use to the national Indian health problem. I open my mailbox as a foolish hopeful ritual, because a few years earlier on the Turtle Mountain reservation I learned that one can sometimes get a check this way or at least a blink of motivation. (I have *never* got a *cruel* rejection note from anywhere, but literary acceptances with payment are just about as rare.) There's a discount outlet where you can get ten loaves of not quite moldy bread for a dollar on Tuesdays and that's where I'm headed, because you can fuel, or fool, a family of boys *indefinitely* on grilled commodity cheese sandwiches and date-expired Ho-Hos. To my total shock, there is a check from the U. S. Treasury in San Francisco, made out to me in the amount of \$1,729.76. It is "La Pay" from the Ten-Cent Treaty that everyone was waiting for all this time and meanwhile died of old age and hardship. In a daze I call up different meat lockers and finally order half a beef to be delivered. Nobody had any bison.

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Good Sport Report: My younger sister H and her husband J come down July 3rd, 1994 meaning to escape the heat and din of the Cities. J is forced to rescue a man from a burning house they notice on the way out. The guy is on the phone, miffed with J's persistent interruption, doesn't want to hang up and acknowledge the inferno. Finally the guy is dragged out, fire engines hose down the house, H and J

continue on to Wahpeton and knock on the door. "Mom, my godmother, godfather, and god-dog are here." They have a rehabilitated greyhound they adopted from the race track. Even after his near immolation, J is running every which way for hours, performing safety maneuvers and pyrotechnic feats ("close adult supervision"). The things that we thought were harmless bottle rockets turn out to be flesh-seeking FESTERING SCUDS. Although we follow all the correct steps to point them at nowhere they only want to go in people's windows or on the heads of those getting out of a car in a parking lot a block down the street. One of them starts the entrance to the apartment building across the street on fire, J runs over and using his big feet and a rug deftly stamps and smothers it out, "I've had practice." The videotape of all this looks quite a bit like the Desert Storm news recording from 1991 when I dig them both out of a U-HAUL box the next winter.

*Consumer Report: After the a.m. rain, a last-minute investigation of area fireworks stands turns up a MIXED AMERICAN economy pak assortment and a 2-for-one sale on the item labeled SMALL BFFS. The small bffs sound like a dud, an ineffectual trifle that might produce a minor spark and puff of smoke then go spluttering into the wet grass to die. Just the thing for three small boys too hell-bent on acquiring artillery skills. After midnight, all the goods with exciting names like SONIC JACK, THOR MISSILE, SATURN MISSILE BATTERY, BANSHEE WHISTLING AIR BOMB ROCKET, AMERICAN DOGFIGHT, AERIAL CROSSFIRE, 61-SHOTS NATIONAL HOLIDAY, MAXIMUM LOAD lie in acrid tatters on the lawn. Time for the small bffs, a suitable anticlimax to the day's war, get them all lit and done with. "Yikes!" "Holy Shit!" Uncle John is in the crossfire. They're all over us like hornets. That is when I realize that the Chinese writer left two vital strokes out, and small bffs belong in the pyrotechnic family that includes KILLER BEES, CRAZY BEES, DEVIL CLUSTER BEEHIVE.*

Whizzzzz !!! Bang

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FAVORITE INSECT-INSPIRED FIREWORKS WITH RUNNER-UP ARACHNID:

1. SMALL BEES
2. CRAZY BEES (7 TUBES WITH PEARLS & REPORTS)
3. CLUSTERING BEES
4. KILLER BEES
5. HAPPY BEES
6. YELLOW BEES
7. JUMBO BEES ROCKET
8. BEES & FLOWERS
9. GLISTERING BUTTERFLIES
10. DANCING BUTTERFLIES

11. CLUSTERING CICADAS (6 1 SHOTS WHISPERING COLOURED BOUQUET)
12. RISING WHISTLE CICADA
13. PRAISE GOOD CICADA
14. GLORIOUS CRICKETS
15. NO. 200 GOLDEN SPIDER

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Mixed American Report: From time to time at Turtle Mountain, elders mentioned to me their school experiences with a hint-- sometimes subtle, sometimes not-- that a Turtle Mountain mixedblood did not enjoy the highest niche of prestige in the boarding school system. This could not have been strictly a matter of genetics. Most if not all students would have been "mixed" to some degree or another by the early 1900s, and a Turtle Mountain "Michif" might be more Indian than the perceived "fullbloods." No, it was the perennial problem of everybody trying, without sufficient social or historical perspective or an informed frame of reference, to categorize the Michif. If you wished to give one of them an English translation for their Indian name, they already had a French one. They were called a band of Chippewa, but were a Plains buffalo culture. They loved to dance, but were likely to require a fiddle instead of a drum, performing a crazy blur of bagpipe and Indian steps known as the Red River Jig. They were uncanny linguists. If you taught them a noun in English they would attach a French article and gender and article to it, as well as a Plains-Cree verb phrase, and maybe even a Hudson's Bay Company burr if the noun had an R sound (nonexistent in the Algonquian tongues). As Plains Indians the Turtle Mountain Chippewa were not even famous for any battles or massacres involving the U.S. Army (who were latecomers on the scene, this bunch having already figured out centuries earlier how to get along with non-Indians). In innumerable other ways the Turtle Mountain Chippewa refused to behave as an acceptable stereotype, and instead were a truly disappointing, exasperating, adapting variety of native!

"You are not really Indians but a poor class of French," a teacher at Bismarck Indian School told a girl from Turtle Mountain, whose voice sixty years later conveyed the sting of that remark. Another girl, arriving at the Wahpeton Indian School and starting the first day of classroom instruction in her life, experienced a feeling of deep inferiority and embarrassment when the children were asked to announce their names for the teacher. One by one, the children of the plains, mountain, and woodland tribes told the teacher their names. American Horse, Black Thunder, Chasing Hawk... "Oh! Wonderful! How beautiful!" the teacher exclaimed and printed and wrote in her exquisite Palmer cursive on her blackboard the names, so that everyone could see how beautiful and wonderful they looked. Running Deer, Spotted Eagle, Yellow Bird...the Turtle Mountain girl was gripped with dread as her turn approached, wishing she could tell the teacher anything but *Parisien*.... Coming from the train depot, she had already seen many marvelous and unfamiliar new sights of civilization and learned the names for them. There was even a big grand cake of a house with a fence of pointed iron spears all around it (possibly Senator McCumber's

house, by the description) and in the yard was caged the most astonishing, gorgeous creature in all the world. "And what is your name?" the teacher asked her. The little Michif girl leapt beamingly to her feet. "My name is *Parrot*," she proudly pronounced to her audience.

\*

AWK!

\*

#### TEN FAVORITE ORNITHOLOGICAL DISTRACTIONS & 2-WAY ALTERNATIVE

1. 61-SHOTS SILVERY EAGLE BALL
2. WILD GEESE ROCKET WHISTLING WITH RED & GREEN FLOWERS
3. MANDARIN DUCK DISPORTING WATER
4. CHIRPING ORIOLE
6. FRIGHTENED BIRDS
7. HUNDRED BIRDS
8. HEN LAYING EGG
9. COCK CROWING AT DAWN
10. JR. CUCKOO
11. CUCKOO CUCKOO

\*

A Pearl: Rummaging in the fireworks displays, I come across an item labeled simply HAPPY.

A Pearl: Rummaging in a box of old papers, I come across a group of reports written by Indian students in the 1920s. The teacher had evidently encouraged the pupils to capture on paper their oral traditions. Some were trickster tales and creation legends, but the boy with the French last name had something resembling a European fairy tale featuring an Indian princess and the winning of her hand by the most unlikely in her Chief father's eyes suitor with the help of the boy's magic horse, "and he was sparkling her," said the loop-de-loop, skipping, leaping, dot the i cross the t dance of the child's newly-acquired fountain pen cursive, and I remember the imaginary writing that children do as they run along in the summer night with their briefly blazing wand of spitting stars.

GLORY TORCH SPARKLER, SUPER CHARGED FLASHLIGHT FIRECRACKERS BOMB, WHISTLING MOON TRAVELERS WITH REPORT, THUNDER BOMBS, BLACK CAT BOTTLE ROCKET, TURTLE, FROG, BLOWFISH, MONKEY DRIVE, MONKEY DANCING & 12 SPINNING JACKS

A Pearl: Checking out another fireworks display, I come across a thing called DAKOTA DAZZLERS 36 SHOTS and in the same apparent category another thing called CAJUN PAGEANT, a hexagonal explosive wrapped in cheesecake art with the sum of all planes depicting some sort of "bathing suit competition" in which each

weirdly clad, different-colored beauty contestant wears only a beehive hairdo (with antennae? feelers?) in addition to her conical sci-fi costume and robotic "poise" (that is, notably somber and unsmiling, without attempt at the phony shiny regular-earthling-variety contest grimace). CHEERFUL NOISE, SOUND OF MUSIC, MARDI GRAS PARADE.

\*

I remember that there were still kids staying throughout the summer and there was a big fireworks show on the 4th of July and for our entertainment, Dad lit an M-80. He was a master sergeant in the National Guard on weekends. We lived in the Old Superintendency, or Building No. 26. Every morning my mother or father set seven bowls of oatmeal porridge on the table for me, my brothers, and sisters (mine was always cold and rubbery and I was usually late for school although I could easily run the eight blocks at the last crucial minute). There was a beautiful antique mirrored bird's-eye maple piece of furniture in the dining room that took up all a wall. I did climb up to the ornately wood-carved mirror and wish and wish that I could get inside it, like Alice, and did remain an unreasonable person all my life. My mother sewed all our clothes, the basement was full of fruits and vegetables in Mason jars. In the kitchen drawers were some heavy stainless steel spoons engraved with U.S.I.S. We were the only family in town who had a totem pole in the front yard.

Across from our home was the Old Infirmary or U.S.I.S. hospital building which was a grim and Dickensian affair. It was haunted. Next to that was the Pocahantas Lodge or domestic science building where girls learned to cook, sew, and iron. It is haunted. My desk is in the corner, on the first floor and by the door. I have worked upstairs alone many late nights next to the dark and narrow wooden door where the ironing board folds out of the wall, because I had to. A medicine man or woman is periodically called in to perform the necessary functions, as is the Pest Control, but those little running tapping presences never go away.

The early-1900s large white frame Pocahantas Lodge with the dark woodwork and old sewing machines and bolts of fabric and ghosts in the attic is now the Main Office. The superintendent and administrative staff are in it. My desk is not too many footsteps from where I started out, in No. 26, but sooner or later I'll move on again. From my desk I can see the round spot near the ceiling where the pipe to the cast-iron cookstove used to go. The floor is creaky anywhere. The upstairs has slate blackboards on the wall and a wooden wardrobe where the prom dresses used to hang. There was an annual Spring Tea to which town ladies were invited to see the girls' etiquette, dressmaking, and assimilation skills. There was a massive round oak table and chairs in the parlor, hand-carved by a master craftsman who taught the boys his trade. These and many other fine vocational education artifacts were beaten to splinters with a sledge hammer in the time of plastic metal furniture, since it was the government policy not to leave anything in a usable condition if it were to be replaced. The only school record I ever saw for my grandfather was a 1920 state-

ment: "This boy is a very good citizen. There has been a lot of sickness in his family." At that time of the century entire families of Indian people had died from the WWI influenza epidemics. Many orphans were brought to the infirmary, among them my brother's father-in-law who came up from the Sisseton Sioux Agency in a horse-drawn wagon to the ambulance landing out back and "I never did leave the place" he said at his thirty-year retirement party the last year that the school was BIA.

BIA realty records show that the town cemetery was originally the property of the school. I called a retired employee to ask, and he answered that the land was deeded to the city "in exchange for perpetual care." There are no markers with the Indian or mixedblood names. One day the old-timer came in to visit, bringing an ancient yellowed cemetery record book, where he had found the name and resting place of a little girl who died in 1918 at the U.S.I.S. infirmary. He took us to the unmarked grave which was tightly surrounded by the monuments of strangers. There was no way to guess.

\*

The gymnasium was named after Jim Thorpe, the Olympic hero of Carlisle Indian School. The girls' dormitory was named after Sacajawea, heroine of the Lewis and Clark expedition. The boys' dormitory was named after Tinker, a dead Indian soldier hero. When the federal-Indian bugle boy roused up the student population every 4 a.m., they put on their itchy wool soldier uniforms and drilled and performed on the sidewalk grid in front of the Pemmican mess hall, the Jim Thorpe gym, the dorms, and then they went to do their details in the barn or the laundry or the bakery. In his old age my grandpa enjoyed singing reveille tunes at breakfast. In his school days he learned how to barber, blacksmith, carpenter, cobble, dairy, garden, and write in beautiful cursive penmanship and write himself some books. The BIA flag with the bull bison standing in a sunburst that I used to see run up the flagpole every a.m. by Indian boys along with the stars & stripes is retired to the closet by my desk. The most decorated soldier in North Dakota history is a Sisseton Sioux alumnus and employee. Although dreadfully wounded in the Pacific, he left the medical unit AMA to single-handedly destroy a bunker full of Japanese. I recall that when he used to visit our house he had to communicate with my dad by means of hand signs, a tablet and pencil. The effects of his injuries must have been compounded by then and he was nearing the end of his life.

In the school library is a History of the Wahpeton Indian School book made by seventh and eight grade students in 1941. It is made of frail green construction paper, cardboard, pencil and crayon illustrations, and inkpen text that says *We find that the student body took an active part in war work during the first World War 1917-18, several students became soldiers in this war.* The school superintendent was given a promotion and sent to the BIA boarding school at Carson City, Nevada, but *During the big war times flu epidemic in 1917 or 1918 he contracted the*



disease and died.

\*

A Pearl: According to the little dusty green book, *The barn was burned on April 24, 1923. It was started by a boy who wanted to see the new Wahpeton truck in action. He had sense enough to get the animals all out. The fire department did not get there in time to save the barn. The authorities did not find out who started the fire until six months later. Some boys told on him. He was sent to reform school because he had done many wrong things besides burning the barn. The barn was rebuilt on the old walls in 1924. They put a Gothic roof on the barn. It cost \$11, 300 to build the barn.*

The baroque silver-roofed brick barn was a creepily enticing place to climb around in, smoke cigarettes, play hooky. I had an incorrigible habit of truancy, so I ended up at the reform school myself. I didn't want to go to school anymore, I saw how everything was & always would be, I only liked books. My favorites were *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *A Narrative of the Captivity & Adventures of John Tanner U.S. Interpreter at the Sault de Ste. Marie During Thirty Years Residence Among The Indians in the Interior of North America*, which answered the question of what HF might have found had he lit out for the Territory as he proposed to do in the end. These two books corrupted me. Assimilation was a real dumb idea, I was having none of it, not ever. When they finally let me out of my "room" to go to the canteen, I saw it was full of Indian boys and girls. I heard somebody say Hey! Right on, Pukkon! and instantly knew it was Turtle Mountain Chippewa and it was the ones I knew at Wahpeton. "So this is where the Indian School kids end up," I thought.

\*

On my initial do-it-yourself adolescent vision quest I heard the elm trees talking. "Aneeb. Aneeb. Aneeb." They never said a thing to me in English. A little while later, after I walked through the park and across the bridge, they were dancing on the levee, waving their arms wildly with the electric moon and velvet sky and winking toy-town lights and mumbling black waters behind them, I laughed. Nobody else could see this. Walking through the old campsite, I acquired a little helper. It looked like a small beadworked man glowing on the elm bark. I looked a bit closer and decided it was a cecropia moth larva or bookworm. Ha ha, I'm kidding! Meanwhile the sidewalk was made of these jeweled Alpha-Bits in various surprising colors running past like a flashing light message. I always saw the letters everywhere, every time although it remains a mysery what if anything was spelled. They were weirdly frosted, like some kind of changing mental cereal. The name Wahpeton in the Dakota language means "dwellers among the leaves." At my workplace the academic building is named Sequoyah Hall after the indigenous genius who invented the Cherokee alphabet or syllabary or "talking leaves." As for Walt Whitman, the Funk & Wagnalls says *In 1865 he became a clerk in the Indian Bureau of the Department of the Interior, but was fired by the secretary of the department on the grounds that*

Leaves of Grass was an indecent book. I never had the urge to jump out of high-rise windows, carve people up with a butcher knife, or writhe on on the ground screaming gibberish, you can do all kinds of crazy stuff on paper.

\*

The reason I mention all this, is to pack up for when the time happens, a bundle of words for this convoluted journey. I have come and gone several times since the 1970s, and worked at the Wahpeton Indian School in different years as the "DHHS/PHS/IHS Medical Clerk, Typing" "Intensive Residential Guidance Counselor" and "Therapeutic Coordinator." It's something like the reservation: you can leave, but sooner or later you'll be back-- a little remnant of acreage in the midst of the non-Indian town that has grown all around it, and what must serve the purpose of a village for too many Indian children when there is no one to left to raise them but the grandmothers. The gangs. In recent years the boarding school has gone from BIA to tribal control. Owing to a 1994 act of Congress, the school now has "therapy" as its stated mission. The students I see now are often grandchildren of those who came here in the 1950s and 1960s. Some say the boarding schools are an obsolete system that perpetuates dysfunction-- only a handful are left in the whole country. Others will tell you there is nothing else out there for the kids who don't fit, who get sent.

\*

*News Transmitter Reports Pink Thunder Chrysanthemum: As we leave South Dakota, the sky is a deepening blue we know to be a significant meteorological mood swing. In our rearview we see the cloud stuff swelling and piling high into a puffy mass that blots up the darkening stain of the sky. At the state line ahead of us, though, all is so bright and hot and clear I wish I could crack a couple of eggs on the scene and cook them sunny-side-up. There is a historical marker, a white frame farmhouse, and yet another roadside fireworks sale in an old trailer painted bright red. In the trailer we buy an item called GLISTERING BUTTERFLIES. In the blistering heat we walk the ditch, heading back to the pickup truck, and I think I see JoJo the Dog-Faced Boy coming out of the corn but it would be not polite to take another look.*

*At the highway overpass by the square manmade lake and the national historic bonanza farm July 4 celebration, we spot an elderly Indian runner moving down the road across the fields, a neighbor whom we have spotted at different times running along in Massachusetts, Minnesota, South Dakota, Kansas, Washington, California, D.C., or somewhere in Europe on CNN. We outrun the storm behind us, but at home the sky is wet and sulky and the fireworks show gets called off until the next night. Then it is completely dark out with no rain and it's up to us to make some sort of a spectacle: run and get the bug spray, popcorn, lawn chairs, beer, Kool-Aid, video camera, and string the colored Owl Party Lights through my apple trees that I found at a rummage sale this summer, still in their packaging.*

*To the south of us the stack of clouds was piling higher and higher, six miles up, which is the height of the atmospheric tropopause against which the clouds would spread out and flatten and attain an anvil shape or cumulonimbus or "thunderhead" formation. Not until the dark is complete and we begin our festive small disturbance do we see it: the monstrous flashing shape of the T-storm, blooming bright in the night like some violent carnation. The TV weather show doppler radar shows its location to be thirty miles away directly over the ghost town. Our thunder is stolen by the wrathful pink bouquet. Every time the lightning coils and strikes inside of the cloud its perfect textbook formation gets illuminated. We witness the terrible splendor of the T-storm whose distant silence is only feebly challenged by town fireworks. Long after the microscopic effect of our paper and gunpowder contrivances are all gone and used up, we stand in the muggy smoking darkness slapping the onslaught of buffalo gnats and mosquitoes, grateful that the rain and winds and hail and electricity are being slung down elsewhere and it costs us nothing to watch.*

\*

EMERALD METEORS, WHISTLING MOON TRAVELER WITH REPORT AND COLOR, MAR'S MISSILE, MUSHROOM CLOUD (19 SHOT WITH REPORT), MAGICAL SHOTS BARRAGE, DESERT AT NIGHT, COSMIC CELEBRATION ZENITH, REPORT GOOD ROCKET, 10 GUNSLINGING SALUTE, SATURN MISSILE WITH CRACKERS, THUNDER THOR

\*

On the 4th of July in 1995, Boy # 2 is in the hospital for a burst appendix, and the special color front page of the local newspaper features a USA rocket drawn by Boy # 3 and the headline story with mugshot of the mixedblood girl who shot a man two nights earlier downtown and walked into the bar across the street and had a drink waiting for the cops to come and get her, another country-western saga. In the morning I looked down out of the hospital window and noticed a red boat beneath the footbridge, then a yellow crime scene tape and some frogmen and firemen and by and by the TV news cameras, state's attorney, local newspaper reporter, some joggers and dog walkers and pretty soon a gawking crowd. When the newspaper matron arrived she verbally challenged the state's attorney. "Mr.--, are you talking to the Fargo stations and not *The Daily News*?" By 5:30 the Search and Rescue and Fire Department had given up their useless mucking about in the river and the attempted murder weapon .357 magnum revolver was not to be found. The shooter, a stranger in town, reportedly confessed to having thrown it off the footbridge before going to the bar. Wild rumors had circulated before the paper came out, even identifying a local Native American female teacher as the suspect. Police-band radio hobbyists were identified as the source of this false report. Some teenage girls on bicycles were still hanging around the bank in late afternoon watching the frogmen and firemen who were all eating sandwiches from the boat. "This is, like, the biggest thing that's ever happened around here," said a girl.

But, back in the 1930s the local bank was robbed by the Alvin Karpis-Ma Barker

Gang who drove their getaway car down the dried-up river bed to South Dakota. Near the footbridge the river swirls over a "car dam" constructed in the drought years; at that time also, the Bois de Sioux was dredged and straightened from the White Rock Dam project almost into North Dakota. On a balmy, green day in May the waters below the dam are teeming with fish which draw a crowd of anglers, and pelicans. The sky is blue, blue with white clouds or pelicans. The grass ripples lushly over the banks and the pelicans in the water act like white sailboats with the breeze gusting them down the canal into the blue distance. The old man who lived across the street from us in a later part of Wahpeton was the bank teller who was pistol-whipped by Karpis. He used to back his long boxy automobile out of his driveway and clear across the street so bashingly that the curb had a bite in it. The lady bank teller who was taken hostage and shot in the escape down the riverbed was later on a retired schoolteacher whose inscription and signature I discovered in a discard children's book brought home from the library, the book is a long illustrated odyssey about the life cycle and coping mechanisms of a hermit crab whose positive message is *Once more a new Pagurus, Pagoo, for short, had found his place in the endless rocking rhythm of the sea.*

#### TOP TEN FIREWORKS I NEVER SAW

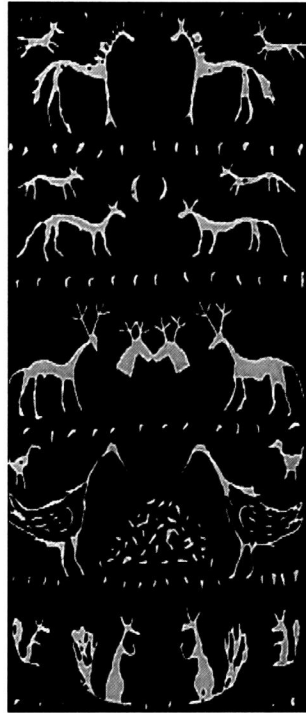
1. CUSTER MASSACRE 61 SHOT NATIONAL HOLIDAY NOISE
2. DRUNKEN BEES 96-SHOT IAMBIC TETRAMETER & TRIMETER EMILY DICKINSON ORGY
3. MOTHER OF ALL BATTLES FESTERING SCUDS MALEDICTION
4. INTERMITTENT EXPLOSIVE DISORDER (WITH PEARLS & REPORTS)
5. ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER WITH HYPERACTIVITY BARRAGE
6. CONDUCT-DISORDERED BIRDS
7. KILLER DAFFODILS & SCREAMING BUDS
8. JIMI HENDRIX SKY PARASTHESIA EXPERIENCE
9. SEXUAL THOUGHTS BLOOMING HOLLYHOCKS ZENITH
10. PINK THUNDER CHRYSANTHEMUM WITH CRACKLING SILVER VOLT-AGE

Indian Education Q & A of the day: Just as we're all about to finally leave the office for the holiday, another vexing drawn-out problem comes in the door and in a fit of exasperation I ask, "Why don't we just get a professional to do it?" and the stoic deadpan of the Arikara business manager, "Because we're Buy Indian."

Two Birds & One Stone: While I'm doggedly working on a long detailed report, the accountant asks, "How can you *stand* to look at all those words all day? I hate having to write anything, how can you stand it?" and I'm dumbfounded, thinking of the insane and never-resolved purgatory of scrutinizing numbers far into the night and empty haunted-office weekends and I say like a joke, "Easy, man, easy. It's both my sickness and my therapy."



**Multilingual  
&  
Translated  
Poetries**







# *fragments form the Horn*

*(in progress)*

Solomon Deressa

**...and**

the dead of Wallo,  
believing Lallibela Jerusalem  
(holy whore of the ages!)  
not knowing that there is no return,  
leave Mecca to their back  
and roll toward me across windless seas

**...and**

the dead of Tigraai,  
believing Axum the climax,  
fantasizing coming twice  
on empty bellies  
on interrupted phrases,  
surge toward me across windless seas,

**in dun**

Lallibela! dead citadel of monolithic cathedrals  
enclave of a race whose dawn songs  
direct the sun east, clearer than the crowing cock,  
but cannot milk a drop of rain out of the blue udders,  
whose baptismal cistern, now dry a dozen years,  
offers up images for wafers, dun dust per holy waters

**in moon-scape**

Tigraai. Fallopian helicline  
down which then came the once living compassion,  
the Abyssinian Virgin of Zion, Queen of Heaven, Lady of Axum,  
too dry now even for the red ants that feed on garnered grain,  
so arid, water loses its flow...  
only stubble has the heart to dream genuflecting for rain

**in crimson**

hunger eternal...  
the hills are bone bear.  
I hear growls at the city gate  
calves stuck in the birth canal

rain that listeth no where,  
stealth locusts take to the air

**in gut stench & gore**

and we, the last of a 100,000 generations to flee the Horn,  
we howl our leave into the chalice of mysteries,  
I, within ear-shot of the thrice chiliadic Virgin,  
of those even She could not shelter from the revolution:

*as for those who died at their brothers' hands--  
too busy figuring out why they failed to see  
the murder in their neighbor's eyes--  
too young! too stunned to cross windy or windless seas*

**in grey:**

the starved, refusing to stay dead,  
forgetting uniforms deform,  
follow the same old road  
to salvation in horror town in Kanaan  
whence saviors save by fire  
glorifying the dead, charring the living & the fires deliver ashes.

**lightning:**

though too ill-phased to light anything,  
capable only of immutable synaxary demands  
that I harbor rage hot enough to burn out  
the child's marrow-rooted tongues,  
life's ineffable early morning games  
and loves too late for mere heat to incinerate.

**in gold:**

I go on searching, unredeemed atavistic!  
for the sounds that once moved me  
for the familiar taste of water  
for children in the streets  
for chicks in yards, animals in fields,  
for these tunes that bait and evaporate...

**(in gold brocade)**

who is this cantor that I hear,  
Aleqa Lemma in his *Book of Memories*?  
too much feeling, too sweet a lilt,  
more like his son, Mengstu in the *Congress of Poems*:  
*"who knows?"*

*if the bird of spring and the ahday flower  
had not agreed to caper here and at this hour  
and this tree to lament the severing of that one's boughs,*

**(in blood red)**

to what purpose re- all  
the caracoling and the heart beat of the battle mount  
here where beat and word fight to separate  
in exile over tongues I near forget,  
the spacious heroics of Deressa, the Blatta,  
Amentay's first-born, begetter of my one mother, master of infallible memory,  
rhythm long beyond words like the warriors it recalls?  
*to swear fraternity once for all,  
in the morning  
Abishai was to sit across from Adaal.*

*the last sunset over the plains of Horro aborts time  
and darkness marks Abishai's betrayal west of the Nile  
and the massacre of 5000 sleeping warriors*

*the lords of death sheath flaming swords  
bury their prince  
in the crack between shield and final silence.*

*(I, who be barely there, watch  
the new land suckled on betrayal...  
Watch again*

*Adaal's royal parasol scorch the Nile,  
turn and watch one more time  
the royal parasol also go up in flame*

and hear disconsolate mid-wives whose hips swing balls of fire  
wail

from end to end through Alemu Aga's strumming, my lost poems,  
through the itch of amputated limbs, across the trickle of profaned streams,  
hurling lightning from end to end through eternities too short for time.)

**Ah, blue!**

chill listening  
for trees I swing to, swung from  
the shades the timbre the tone,  
all ash all dust all stone  
the arms that cradled me  
the scents that stoned me. Now all dust, all ashes, all stone.

**in yellow:**

went looking in the mirror--for my face  
met an Amhara staring back: hard, grim  
met a Moslem staring back: silent, hurt  
met an Eritrean, angry, too tired for victory  
a Walaamo frozen in a dance-moment--and other and others...  
an Oromo suspended in half-movement--and many, many others...

**in vague violet:**

who? who? whom?  
whom do you  
love,  
follow,  
look like,  
be tomorrow?

**in white:**

turning grey toward death, the gate ajar,  
she comes not. No savior enters, no guest, no Elijah...

I'll chew on my own bones alone  
man-child of these mountains  
that have seen the nightmares of the angels  
the confinement of a thousand unspoken loves

**in black:**

dark as the belly of heaven  
30 million years coming, coming--never arriving  
dim recollections longer than hunger  
longer than thirst, longer than hurt.

the Pieta knows no this defective death... this solitude  
nor does she know this, this...

**clear water: this shunya, this zero**

this love, this love, this dispassionate yearning  
to chant for you as we must have done before we left home  
as did my heathen forebears of Mount Bissil west  
flaunting phalluses between the third-eye and the crown  
as chant yet Yahred's sons from Tsion-Axum north,  
and you at the moment of your last breath...

**at Magenta:**

in whose voice chant? this one is irretrievable, I sense.  
and who be I then? A private public enterprise to be nationalized?  
Oromo horse trappings or Amhara sophistication  
or Emperor Yohannes's hair braid to be ethnicized?  
(isn't all this zigzag charge a mere limp?  
all this thunder plain broken-wind, anyway?)

**in indigo**

battle hymns here make no sense--no more,  
conflagrations as back-drop to the cat-walk swank  
best where the forests that burn are on some other shore,  
war is the luxury of the full-bellied spunk  
best after a flambé and a Napoleon cognac  
and it is an Other's child that survives or expires on the rack

**in transparent turquoise:**

don't rush me! (I'll lose my grip on this brittle, breath-thin chalice.)  
patience. I will enlist with you each, in turn, from beyond the *bardo*,  
from beyond the unbounded gap whose name is its only residence,

and in unison shall we drain one by one the 30 million cups of misery,  
*a dried-up Nile is not the only infract that you and I know how to cross  
though for now I be mere meaningless dispassionate space.*

**question in indigo**

what to do with water insoluble corpses  
that litter the mind streets,  
or the stench of once sacred rivers?  
what to do with my many faces?  
what to say to the cackling scavenger hyena, and  
to the ark whose covenant I left unsigned?

**thru translucent crystal:**

and the pollen, opulence and prayer in one  
whose time runs longer than my time can run,  
the pollen, this personage in waiting...  
riding the west wind, still unopen, all divination?  
appears to come to this:  
I may be near free at last  
to crawl to, to have-n-be, nothing...

## TOPOGRAPHY (FOR GALANNE)

Nine interconnected cathedrals sculpted out of the same mountain make up **Lallibela**, the New Jerusalem. Legend has it that there is a tunnel, open to the awake, that leads from Lallibela directly to the Heavenly Jerusalem. Will take you there one of these days.

**chiliad**= More overtly religious, seems to me, Greek synonym of the Latin millennium.

**Virgin** here refers, among other dimension, to those of the Virgin Mother and Queen Saba (Sheba) of Axum, mother of Menilik I, by Solomon of Israel; founder of the Solomonic dynast. Emperor Haile Selassie claimed to be the 225th ruler of this line.

**Kannan** is my spelling of the biblical Canaan, the land YAHVE promised to Abraham. The Israelites had to massacre the original Canaanites to take it.

**Aleqa Lemma's son is Mengstu Lemma** whose few lines, inadequately rendered here, are my favorites in all Amharic poetry. **Aleqa**= title given to the highly learned in the Ethiopian church. Aleqa Lemma was himself a poet in the classical Ge'ez tradition. Hence the genealogic appellations--in traditional Oromo manner-- to honor the father & son together.

**Amentay's** first-born is deressa, my maternal grandfather, who, though he had no use for poets, himself sung privately to his grandchildren for hours on end, in both Oromo and Amharic, of Ethiopian heroes. He also declaimed Oromo poems in honor of his ancestors to the 20th generation.

**Abishai Garba**= Prince of Horro, in north-eastern Wollega, and 5000 of his finest Oromo horsemen, were massacred in their sleep by the musketeers of Gojam after a party given by **Adaal Tessema** to seal the pact of brotherhood between Gojam and Horro.

**Adaal Tessema**, aka Negus Tekle-Hymannot, King of Gojam, with whom Abishai had sworn an oath of brotherhood, ordered the betrayal executed by his general, Ras Deressu. Gojam and Deressu were to be routed by Shewan musketeers and Western Oromo and Shewan cavalry at the battle of Embabo also in north-eastern Wollega; hence the double conflagration.

**Alemu Aaga**= a composer and bagana player with whom I was to co-operate as lyricist had I returned to Addis. None of those I contacted have seen him since the early days of the revolution. I'll keep looking.

**Walaamo**= to my ears, the most musically gifted of all Ethiopian peoples

**pieta**= iconic representation of Mary holding the dead Christ in her lap--hence the icon of maternal sorrow. (Pieta= Michelangelo's sculpture of *la madre dolorosa*)

**Shunya**= Sanskrit for void, empty, zero. Shunyata= Buddhist Void, also referred to as the morther of the Buddhas, the mind's (penultimate?) aspiration.

**zero**= empty set, fulcrum equi-distant to positive and negative integers. The cold but fruitful womb of Arab, and consequently Western, mathematics.

**Tullu (Mount) Bissil**= holy mountain and Oromo place of power in Western Wollega.

**Yahred**= Axumite poet who "single-handedly" composed all of Ethiopic liturgical music, aka, St. Yahred.

**Tsion-Axum**, traditionally written Axum Tsion. (In Ethi. symbolism, reversals are signifcatn)

**Tsion**= Ethiopic version of Zion.

**Axum**= holy city in Tigraai, royal seat of power of Amhara and Tigrai Christians.

**Magenta**= town west of Milan, scene of Franco-Sardinian victory over Austria. reddish purple.

# *The Poem Sheathed*

Solomon Deressa

in anxious confinement, apes masturbate against panic  
with high order abstraction, we side-step the moment

& rhythm become time...and matter moves...streaming  
& speech reaches to images beyond expedient abstraction...

image and syllable part like the Eritrean Sea  
Somalia disintegrates at the tight end of unity  
the highlander, eyes shut, chases a cat's-tail atonement  
dreamer and dream now live and die lives apart

prime Sabeen images gone, the syllabary stays behind  
going this way, then that, before deciding on left to right  
leeching first on prophetic sleight-o'hand, then parting waves  
then on redemption—here as elsewhere—shorn of compassion.

arcane allusions separate lofty brow from dancing feet  
in-bred decorum locks the door to primal mystery—  
only the occasional song leaks through between door and wall  
to repeat what we've heard thrice before.

the poem, rebus, sound, bow to the para-verbal,  
speech rooted in wombs adjacent to the Seat of Power,  
the Adonoy, the Egzi-O, the Ill-la-Hu, the Wy...Wy...Wy, the Ouh...Ouh...Ouh, the Om Ah Hum...  
repeatedly re-incarnates. Or is not born at all.

the Seat of Power, ever present at the play of light and shade,  
crumbles where, table, picture, printer, petals, lips, or cheek intrude,  
& lovely time rides in on a whiff of baking bread, the softness of skin  
and the sweetness of breath. Ah! how separation harbors yearning...

love, the first begotten of pulsating light, tells a harsher story  
tells of separation and infinite yearning, then turns being into cadence.

we who've been fragmented by serif and sound-byte  
who've covered our tracks back to the silence before the first scream  
whose tongues can no more move the weight of jaded words,  
we wait, though no one knows we are waiting ... how come?



fragmented Amharic, Tigrinya, Somali, Afar, Oromo sounds  
and those of the *forty-four and forty-four* other tongues!

how long pretend that life and death did not trade places  
& this, the redemptive crucible and not the crotch-point of choices?

store the screams of *twice forty-four* tongues tearing? how?  
(mind your syllables, now! my shattering is organic, marrow deep)  
lie with me in pieces or do not speak at all  
replicate the howl of the torture dungeon, or say no more.

the learned barely glimpse their own noses  
(the *debtera*, the *mutakallimun*, the burnt-face Marxists are proof enough  
if proof there need be)  
extrapolating the future out of a past not worth the inventing—  
as if the past can be counted upon to count!

the past is merely the present limping  
(it takes more than good will to walk backward straight)  
the past has no dimension, the past cannot see cannot hear  
barely be seen, barely heard—and heard to grant what we already have.

later is now unlive, half-ass fantasized, a shadowless dark-alley trick  
would you hire the dead or the misbegotten even as boundary markers,  
time's territorial response to panic, a dog's scattered piss,  
presence cat-napping and coming-to in fits and starts?

why else would tectonic plates collide, starts explode,  
and the acorn leave eternal encapsulation to stand millennia at best  
[talk of perverse ego!] and the bitch carry a yelping litter to term  
when mother and pup will turn to everywhich master for love? panic?

so the epistasis begins at this wretched point  
and the stink spreads in swell as the heart sinks

beaches Goddesses and Gods disoriented whales  
kings and queens priests and priestesses all manner of demons  
dictators and controllers and toe-suckers and rulers,  
and attendants to their divinities and majesties and sanctities,  
for like the pup they insist they be attended to.  
holy shit! all this radiance, all this horror out of panic!  
& who will deliver us from Powers to whom a poem is news?

*et pourtant, la gloire de dieu n'a pas eu lieu*

just like you, I too am born of this. like you like the shattered star  
like the tectonic itch inching toward rapture in the colossal rub  
one pup in a litter burning with the ardor of an inflated galaxy.  
and the black-hole/contained-fart distinction?

sheer torque, mere syllabic implosion  
reverse rapacity for the mirror that untwines,  
the yearning for visibility via extension  
of the neither-here-nor-there for appearance

**like you like her like him like it like us like them**

in panic I left ... and in panic I launch me home  
be it no launching be possible for the present be already here  
impenetrable to aggression to piety to yearning or to seduction...  
**it is hard core.**

the saint and the hero are unwelcome here,  
their ulterior motives are a given,  
they lack the blinding speed that curls into immobility  
the no-mind of the sperm, the ovum's hospitality...

the drying river, the crumbling mountain, the sand that rides the wind  
the *twice forty-four* tongues of the Horn do not recognize them—  
they speak of ancestral glory, and tomorrow's promise of the millennium  
unaware that though they utter every name, there will be yet unuttered names

always. And tongues of flame will lick again,  
words like wet-land weed will reach for the sun,  
the young woman will smile for no reason at all  
and silently ask, how did all this begin?

<sup>1</sup> *debtera*= non-ordained of the Ethiopian Orthodox church known more for their mental acumen than for their piety; pl. *debtera* or *debteroch* depending on context; *debteroch* also means note-books.  
*mutakallimun*= (pl. of *mutakallim*) clerics of Islam; in Ethiopia, Christian *debtera*, Moslem *mutakallimun*, six of one...

1983

Walter K. Lew

for BKS  
*Tô ch'ak-han chakka*

I. Burial of the Lower Class

Winter kept us dull, covering  
Tramps in forgetful snow—  
Feeding a little life with new video.

Summer surprised us, showered from World Trade Centers  
With economic indicators. Three stopped at a trash bin  
And went on in sunlight (their only recovery),  
And sat on warm pavement & yapped for an hour:  
"Cleveland screwed me..."

"Go tell it to the President..."

"I'm an American..."

*binbō*

Ed Rowney, say something or

Resign!

For you know the charts of stymied agencies  
And scenarios where payloads beat down  
And the populace has no shelter,  
The dying no belief, and the soft bone  
No hope of healing. Only  
There is shadow under this rocket  
(Come in under the shadow of this red rocket)  
And I will show you something different

From your shadow at morning rising to meet you  
Or your shadow at evening striding behind you;  
I will show you, in Hiroshima  
A shadow without

the human that cast it,  
Radiation in a handful of flesh.

*hi no oku ni  
botan kuzururu*

*sama wo mitsu*

President Reagan, famous clairvoyant,  
Has it up to his keister. Nonetheless voted  
Best man in America  
With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said he  
Is a Commie airstrip in Grenada  
(Those are Russians beneath the trees, Look!)  
Here is Nicaragua, a country of Reds  
Here an SS-20 with three warheads,  
And this slide, which I've just de-classified,  
Is what the Soviet hides in Cam Ranh Bay,  
Which I'm learning to say. I do not want  
A test ban. Fear death by peace.  
I see lots of Marines floating round on starships...  
Thanks and God Bless. O, if you see  
Dear Clark or Adelman, tell them I bring  
The horrorscope myself;  
One must be so careful these days.

Unreal City,  
Under the rust of a winter dusk,  
A crowd flowed over Williamsburg Bridge.  
Sighs, long and tenuous, were exhaled  
And all looked for supper beneath their feet,  
Flowed up Sixth Ave to 32nd Street  
To where Penn Station drags out the hours  
With a fat cop on the final stroke of three.  
There I saw one I knew and stopped him, crying  
"You who were with me in the gunships at My Lai!  
The corpses we planted in the paddy,  
Have they begun to sprout? Will they bloom this year?  
You!" *Hypocrite défenseur—*  
*mon semblable, mon frère...*

## II. A Game of Missile Command

The Air Force believes these kids will be outstanding pilots, should they fly our jets.... Watch a 12-year-old take evasive action and score multiple hits while playing "Space Invaders" and you will appreciate the skills of tomorrow's pilot.... Right now you're being prepared for tomorrow in many ways—and in ways that many of us who are older cannot fully comprehend.

—President Reagan,  
to high school students at the Epcot Center

Beam him up at eight

And if it rains  
We'll play a round of "Missile Command"  
Pushing blue buttons and scanning for  
God's knock upon the door.

The punks are departed.  
*Dark Hudson, run softly till I end my song*  
The river bears empty bottles, syringes,  
Cardboard boxes, cigarette butts,  
And other testimony of wretched nights. The punks  
are departed.

And their Dads, executives from Darien,  
Departed, have left no addresses.  
By the waters of Paterson  
I sat down and wept. At my back  
In a hot blast I feel  
The melting of ganglia and..  
A cockroach crept slowly through the detritus,  
Dragging its feelers along the bank  
While I was decaying in a charred hotel  
On a rainy evening behind the stadium  
Musing upon my roommate, such a wreck:  
Hurt flab naked on a low damp cot  
And needles cast in a rusted-out tin,  
Cockles warmed by heroin only, year to year.  
While through my back I sometimes hear

The whack of sirens and choppers...  
*Et ô les voix des enfants Coréens brûlant dans Nagasaki!*

Shit shit shit  
Fuh fuh fuh fuh  
So rudely forced

Unreal City,  
Under a white dome on a winter noon,  
The Asst. Secretary of Defense, slate-eyed  
With a satchel full of toys  
(C.i.f. Northrup, disketts out of sight)  
Asked Congress to invest in Hell,  
Followed by a weekend inside the Liberty Bell.

"This fag crept out of a warehouse  
And along the piers, beneath a ramp..."

O City City, I can sometimes hear  
Outside a bar on the Lower West Side  
The whining of boys  
And a clatter and chatter from within  
Where tight jeans lunge at noon  
And posters of movie stars hold  
Absolute splendor of  
U.S. rawhide and gold.

Sweatshops & factories:  
"Rockefeller bore me. Toyota  
Undid me. To Tokyo I raised my pleas  
Supine on the floor of an extinct economy."

Boom lacka lackalacka  
Boom lacka lackalacka

"During the recession,  
I felt no remorse. I stayed the new course!  
They made no comment.  
What could they prevent?"

Boom lacka

To Grand Concourse then I came

- Burning burning burning burning
- Lord Thou pluckest the South Bronx
- Lord Thou pluckest Overtown
- Lord Thou

burning





## V. What the Pyôrak Said

What is that island over the seas  
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air  
Perforated atolls  
Enewetok      Moruroa  
Christmas Island  
Unreal

A woman drew her pale hair out tight,  
Then let it fan across the keloids on her back.  
She runs a shop near Taegu now  
In southeast Korea, near a village where four hundred  
Forsaken live like lepers. If you speak to her  
In Korean, she doesn't remember. It's only  
The colonial tongue—*ilbon mal*—that can salve open  
The hell in her brain. "I would kill myself now," she says  
*Jisatsu sitai no desu ga*  
"But I must take care of my grandson..."  
(She points off-screen at a deformed young man.)  
In the violet light  
The newborn with bent faces  
Whistled and beat their wings  
And crawled head downward down blackened walls.  
Upside down in air were towers  
Tolling antiquated bells  
And voices fading in contaminated wells.

Nuked bones can harm no one.  
DA

*Im:* After the bombing, the few doctors  
Would only treat Japanese. So I  
Crawled off with the rest  
To die in the hills.  
DA

*Yi:* What have we given, my friend?  
Blood shaking the world  
That an age of programs can never retract.  
By this we have resisted,  
Which cannot be found in Monbusho books  
Or diplomatic calls for peace.  
DA

*Chung:* The kayagum responded gaily

To the hand expert with pluck and bend.  
The drum was calm, your heart would have responded  
Gaily, if amnesiac, beating obedient  
To the songs of our land.

I crouched in a foxhole in Nevada  
With the fallout close upon me.  
Shall I at least set my limbs in order?  
Shinbashi is falling down falling down  
*Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*  
*Quando fiam uti chelidon?* O Cruise cruise!  
MX, Pershing, Trident  
*Le roi d'Amerique à la tour abolie*  
SS-20, -13, -4...  
*Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen*  
Laser beams, particle beams, enhanced  
Radiation: Teller's mad againe!  
These sandbags deter against my ruin  
Why then I'll beat you  
*Kono yo mo nagori*  
*yo mo nagori*  
*shini ni yuku mi wo*

*tatoreba*

# DA:M KA:CIM HIHMDAM / THOSE THAT WALK THE EARTH

Ofelia Zepeda

## HOHOGIMAL

S-ke:gaj, s-ke:gaj.  
Cem s-e-hiosigimcud.

## BUTTERFLY

With beauty, with beauty,  
the pull to be a flower is forever strong.

## NANAKMEL

Şu:dagi 'am si al cendad.  
Ge cuhug eda 'am ha-nanmek  
g ha:şañ hiosig.

## BAT

Gently the water is kissed.  
By moonlight,  
the courting of saguaro blossoms.

## NAKSEL

Kuşdak bahi,  
s-ta-e:bidama.  
Hemhoa 'am hodai weco 'e-e:stokc, hemhoa.

## SCORPION

A crooked tail,  
to be feared.  
Surely, all stones must go unturned.

## CIADAGI

S-oam, s-cuk, s-wegi.  
Hejelkam c 'an 'oimed  
Ñ-şoiga 'o an s-m-ñenhogi.  
Gdhu si al kokma g jewed c him.

## GILA MONSTER

Yellow, black, red.  
A solitary wanderer.  
My horse senses you.  
Yet with each movement the earth is embraced.

## CEMAMAGI

Pi ʃa:muñhim an oimeḍ  
Sikolim, s-kowk, s-muḥadagi.  
S-na:k g ñ-ha:l hiosig.

## HORNED TOAD

A silent traveler.  
Thickly round, unflattering colors.  
Squash blossoms await you.

## HUJUD

S-wepegihim e-ñenigid.  
S-wegi totoñ.  
Cuk totoñ.  
To:ta totoñ.  
Wo'o kc ha-ñeñda, 'e-ñeñigid.

## LIZARD

With lightning strikes.  
Red ants.  
Black ants.  
White ants.  
Lying in wait, lightning strikes.

## WIPISMAL

Ñeñe'í'an himcuḁ.  
'Al' á'an 'an beteñim  
ñ-i:bdag ed.

## HUMMING BIRD

Moving along songs.  
Little wings beating  
in my heart.

# JEWED 'I-HOI / RIDING THE EARTH

Ofelia Zepeda

Kus hascu hab a:g mat hab o cei,

"añ ep ta:tk mat si i-hoi g jewed,

nap pi şa'í ta:tk a:pi?"

"Pi'a, pi'a."

Nia, kus hascu hab a:g?

Kutp hems heg hab a:g mat o şa e-hai g jewed k o 'i-hoi

a no heg hab a:g mat sikol o memdad mo g milga:n b a'aga rotation.

Nia, kutp hems heg hab a:g mo hegai ta:tk.

Kutp hems hab 'e-elid mo an ke:k 'id jewed da:m c da'a 'an da:m ka:cim 'oidc.

Cessajcug g jewed hab masma mat hemakc g s-melidkam kawyu o cessajcug.

An međad c g mo'oj şelim'an 'e-wiđut huhu'u mehidag ku:bs 'oidc.

S-ke:g hab ma:s.

Heg'an we:maj wiappoi mo 'an ko:mcug g taş c gahu 'amjed 'i-bebhe

si'alig tagio 'amjed gamhu hukkam hudnig ta:gjo.

Nia, kut hegai maş d maşad ced o'odham o si al hehemad mats 'an o bij.

She said she felt the earth move again.

I never knew whether she meant she felt a tremor

or whether it was the rotation of the earth.

I like to think she felt the rotation, because

anyone can feel a tremor.

And when she felt this

she could see herself

standing on the earth's surface.

Her thick, wide feet solidly planted,

toes digging in.

Her visualization so strong

she almost feels her body arch

against the centrifugal force of the rotation.

She sees herself with her long hair floating,

floating in the atmosphere of stardust.

She rides her planet the way a child rides a toy.

Her company is the boy who takes the sun on its daily journey

and the man in the moon smiles as she passes by.



# *el puente / the bridge*

Elizabeth Burns

el puente

[the bridge

en la cama  
pensamos:  
si dormimos...  
si son-amos...

in bed  
we think:  
if we sleep...  
if we dream...

entonces  
dame tu pierna  
o  
dame tu mano

well, then  
give me your leg  
or  
give me your hand

que no  
dame la oreja

but no  
give me your ear

así hacemos el puente

that's how to make the bridge]

# *nahna aduldgi gesvi* of that wanting which is

Diane Glancy

We told the Indians we knew things by written documents. The savages asked, *before you came to the lands where we live, did you know we were here?* We were obliged to say, *no. Then you don't know all things through books.*

Louis Hennepin, 1684

## 1.

Upstairs in the New York City Library, when I was there, there was a line of old photos of Indians on the wall:

A Blackfoot warrior wearing a robe  
on which was written  
*a history of his wars*  
*buffalo hunts*  
*& showing the number of scalps*  
*he has taken from his enemies*

Tee Yee Nen Ho Ga Row, a Mahican *who*  
*spread Christianity*

Chotan Wah Ko Wah Ma Nee, Sioux  
*(the Hawk that Chases Walking)*

Now there was the space between the words:  
Hawk was a boy and Walking a man (to emulate).  
Or Walking was a girl (to love).  
Another possibility was the hawk was a hawk  
and chased anyone who walked.  
or perhaps the pursuit in air was slow (to glide).  
or the hawk walks and not flies  
because of a wound in its wing.  
Or *Hawk that Chases Walking* was a vision  
at which distance from what was

left a self-construct of understanding  
which is the incision of *nahna adulvdi gesvi*  
into the New York City Library.

A process which reflects the pattern.

2.

The Ute Creation Story  
Told by Ralph Cloud

it was long ago, long time ago;  
the one who did it created everything was Sinawav;  
he lived with his younger brother Coyote,  
they were roaming the earth together;  
only the two of them were roaming around then;  
they were roaming the earth,  
when no one else was (alive) yet on this earth;  
there was nobody (there), only the two of them;

so then he said, Sinawav did,  
to his younger brother Coyote: "go cut some brush,  
all kinds of brush that grows on this earth,  
cut it all into real small pieces,  
exactly like that; not other kinds,  
just from all the brush (growing) on this earth;  
then pack them into this bag here";

so Coyote did as he was told,  
he kept walking around doing it,  
he kept walking all over; through the hills,  
wherever it be,  
he kept gathering all the white-blossom bushes  
and the like;  
Sinawav had never told him:  
"Do it exactly like that"; he didn't tell him,  
he had never told him (how to do it exactly);

so finally Coyote filled up his bag;  
then Sinawav told him, afterwards,  
when he had filled up the bag:  
"now my little brother go on that-a-way;  
whichever direction it be, over the open country,  
and keep dumping (the sticks) all over there"  
he told him, "Those sticks that you've gathered,  
dump them over there" he told him;

so when Coyote went ahead, he (began wondering):  
"Where is it?" he thought, Coyote did,  
"What is this (that I'm carrying)"  
What is it all about?  
he kept thinking; perhaps I should open it  
and take a look?" he thought;

so when he had gotten further away,  
when Sinawav could not see him any more, he opened  
it...he did, out they rushed,  
they were people! people, all kinds of people,  
whooping and hollering together, speaking...  
speakers of many different tongues,  
they whooped and hollered;  
very many of them escaped,  
he caught only very few of them there  
and locked them back inside the bag;  
but the great majority managed to escape;

now the remaining ones, later on...  
after the others had all escaped,  
that big crowd of peoples,  
then he dumped them out, the few remaining ones...  
and then he went back home;

now Sinawav knew (about) him, (about) the way  
he had acted; so he said: "You did it, didn't you?"  
"Yes" said Coyote, "when those guys ran away on me,  
those speakers of all different tongues,  
whooping and hollering; only a few remained  
and those ones I dumped out too";  
"How come you never listen to me?"  
Sinawav asked;  
"Now they will start making arrows"  
he told him, "and soon they'll be fighting you,  
(they'll be fighting) you and me" he said;

so Coyote made arrows (preparing for war);  
and later they all fought each other on the plains,  
those were Comanches, and other as well...  
all kinds of Indians  
from around here, from the east,  
and from that country over there (gesture);

but those few ones (who remained in the bag)  
were the Utes, the real Utes from around here;  
so Sinawav said: "Those few ones,

no one will surpass them in fighting;  
the Ute (tribe) that is so small,  
they will keep slaughtering  
all the others" he said.

It was all Coyote's doing, he had done it;  
and lo...that's the way it turned out;  
that's the way it used to be,  
long ago they were fighters,  
this Ute (tribe), nobody could ever beat them;  
they used to fight  
the Comanches and everybody else,  
they used to slaughter them; that's the way  
he told it, that one, Sinaway,  
the way he predicted; that's the way it was;  
I've spoken.

### 3.

According to the Ute creation story, we come from brush cut into twigs and put into a bag. We were not to be let out while on the way to another place.

But Coyote opened the bag to look. Now part of us is in a place we weren't intended to be. We have to keep shifting so we don't take root. Outside of what can't be caught with words. In the inner space between them.

But part of us stayed in the bag to open-ended country where *nahne adulvdi gesvi*, of-that-wanting-which-is, divides the will as if it were an arrow.

The space between words is the intrusion of other into the text. Or the text into the other.

To stay in the bag until its destination of understanding.

Its placement in open country.

Its grounding in space.

# SEEDS SOWN LONG AGO: ARE YOU THE LAYER?

Edwin Torres

Soya Saya Sinya Rota  
Seeya Solo Sio Yayo  
Youa Boomba Mama  
Sooyo Simpo Po Yo  
Po po O oet...a...youa...poet?  
Seeds Sown...long ago...youa layer?

We the seeds  
Carrying the wind for a change  
The things of change  
Of what we are - as we  
Bring it to another wind - all wind  
Same wind - all travel  
One drop  
    of change is  
        ours to bring  
So someone must bring it  
There already so - ours to sing it  
Ours yet again, the seeds are there  
Already a song

    the wind is ours for the taking  
the wind is not for the taking  
    the wind is ours for the taking  
take the wind in our arms and  
    embrace who we are  
take the wind in our arms and  
    embrace who we are  
vibration = reach out : to  
    embrace you : to reach you = vibretio

You a streak? (take in the drop)  
You a vibe...o...raytion?  
Gen...o...bration (in the air)? You a  
Dead one? (falling fast)  
Ripple past dead ones, up here

In the plummet which I pass on to you, dear neighbor...wouldya  
lookit that there...

Alla those convenient roots, ancestral homage  
just falling past what lies before...and before lies alot, eh? mmm...  
Just lookit all'em dead ones changed into who-yous and wherefores  
and me? I'm just passin' the season  
makin' holes in the layer, where the harvest is old

where the street gives way to the other way around  
where the Aca-demi-co-merry goes:  
    You a repulsory Enig-ma...tician serving the cause...right?  
    Got that whatsit from that one...dint you?  
Acamadeuches' terrible getback:  
    s'gotta BE like something for it to BE...right?  
I can't hear the influence, but the prejudice is  
definitely circa now

These winds of change terrify  
The electricutanne of the - par for the course  
The por favor and the more flavor (you the sa-vior?)  
Mustn't stand for it...a lo-on-ly...and then, when...only never

You're one of those street poets  
gettin' inspiration from your life...hmmm?  
What a novel that? That!  
Must be YOU-rica? No...ME-rica?  
Oh, you must have absolutely  
in the must of the word, have read the  
engla-terre-nanny-lisp-of-ilo-kookies-ubla-kan't! I mean  
I can hear the influence!

Where do you get your  
Africa-ismo-cha-cha from?  
It's a wonder how you lift without seperating!  
How you're rifflin' off the `eaudelaire  
without bouquin' on the vintage!

Olé...my tips off to ya!  
May you sail into unknown you an' me-lands...eh?  
May you stray into skies without peering at mazes uninvented...right?  
Proud as you seperate plummage from vibration  
Stansions extensions bleached egress and fly...we fallin' still movin' I see

where my kind have been marginalized by  
a-YOU-ricas, Me-ricaaaaas an' all em Otra-Votras

Olé...may you BE like something  
so you may KNOW who you are, pushed  
into push by the forces of pushidity -

my playpen -  
is the universe -

inside

my kind -

we use words -

dear neighbor -

we are the new ethnic

our margins are beyond borders

from where we stand our edges stretch  
the cranium, explode the heart - from where we stand  
between naked words, our pages begin...increasing our margin  
for error by infinity...thereby  
impossible to marginalize

vibration me : to reach you = vibretio

the air : now ready  
fertile  
planted

I am a streak  
My plummet carries a seed  
A seed with the wind in its arms  
I tickle its bone  
It lets the wind go  
I pick up the wind  
I am a streak with the wind in my arms  
My plummet carries an ocean - changing  
Neverchanging



# TAXI-TOXIC-TICTION

Edwin Torres

A foreign froobaliction: Fractals.  
Friction is the skull of diction.  
Riding fractions freeful triction.  
Taxi for the norkyan riptions.  
Trapping high the wrong deriction.  
Riding side the crossing slicktion.  
Rightist is the verb for motion / pic tion / mention  
Sextion streets of linktion.  
Men who sus the sissy-rection / for  
Jesters joshed of sloshy lotions / in  
Lords who gilly in the treat / of  
Lungs who ride the renchant wrong of / friction.  
DICTION FOR THE UNDERTOWER!  
FICTION FOR THE PREACHER CREATURE!  
*ICKTCHING FOR THE TOXIC PIXIE?*  
YAPTION! FACTION! BBC: The tickling tics  
Attacked to craption.  
Rapture maps a yapping motion.  
Textion *is* the race erosion  
Lieveing be the lefting righting hiding *all* the excorsising.  
Mixing up the mixtion fixing *all* the wrong addictions  
For the foreign froobaliction: Fractals...  
Friction *is* the skull of diction.

# PLANET CONCERTINA

Edwin Torres

Earth is an eyeball I lie

A lens in her iris I stay  
Stye to eye color  
Me is the color of pupil - resonant  
Reverb bouncing I slice in her head  
Volcanoes and lava  
Mostly a major problema,  
One-eyed patch  
Floating the solars - a glitch  
In the pale and a cataract  
Floats  
As a moon - mighty  
And a small guardian serving  
White-gloved-alumina  
Solus-ola-roller, gyrate  
Tuxedoist mal d'orador  
Salome - am I  
The earth - is  
My eyeball a lens, re-  
Fract-inna prism and oh! like light! like  
Rainbows of lava styes...  
I refract what I want  
Coalesce inhibitionist. Skate man  
Ray. Sea lion. Spoon.  
One-eyed earthball.  
Conch-quistadoring...in a gallop that  
Consumes earth I am Balleye -  
Bulls! Concentri-geering  
Callopes in flotsam of - see  
Revson rings about daying doom -  
Buccaneer basking about  
For my boom - *Whom lay over Mundo*  
*To burn out her wings? T'was a fellow*  
*Who minstrels the bane of my*  
*Sail, Sightball, THE BARGE!*

Gathered

And all in one eye - was my lens and I  
Sliced her and served up my  
Iris to her - and she  
Took of my light - and I  
Stayed in her light - and my earth  
Was a vision  
A lens to my lie



### Thirtieth Eighth

as long as it won't come out  
nursery rhymes

delicacies

pampering?

auntie may would always say we ought to play in the day

modern times in the store they have everything  
as in the old village stores

as long as it might get stuck there

have the apricots gone apeshit?

few

add that little spark to the day

what more can one what more? demand the gamblers  
the ball the dice

the chips the tickets

the hand

the point of the spade

the dead-eye bang

it's worth groping blindly along to blindly place a bet to be

as long as it won't come out

## The Thirtieth Seventh

the infusion if doogherbs  
the yamapine  
the cardamomcia of the ewd in the esertmerida

an occasion for

atrueble my moribule to uskdy tarocity  
sophys imputile of dittany servibane

what difference does it make  
if lerros spicask to morsaynos

roundly we fell  
like a carcoughena

scapese  
pirexes  
yugl  
noby  
olord  
sage  
or chum

the sea on the other hand with its name

like the other  
unique unnameable  
whose appellative  
isn't worth saying

## The Thirtieth Sixth

species all in seed  
will they germinate?

they are making bets in the bars  
in cape canaveral in acapulco on broadway  
in the elysian in the white house in the pink house  
in the kremlin in the park in the streets of mercy

alright in all the places where people get together to think and  
discuss things that interest humanity and  
can alter its destiny

consecration destruction  
the music doesn't get higher

the red pepper and whoever brandishes it  
humanity cowers  
check it out that there isn't  
method

from time to insane time the dream sets sail  
yes it will be yes it will be will continue will last and suddenly

humanity you've been made out to be a fool so you  
start fresh from the beginning with the discourse  
that concerns your possible germination as a  
species etcetera

## The Thirtieth Fifth

that they are deductible hands

yes,

long and bony

taxed or untaxed

hands that perform socially

that's it

in order to slap?

I already know

didn't you see the super's kids putting the mother on?

so the sea caresses

the soft winds

fame

serves fame

it adds centimeters of life more

like life's blows

to load a sack of cement

a bartender of collage

a heap of partitions

eh?

and there is something with which to defend whatever needs defending  
hands, there are

I would say water in the sea

life further on

that which we cease to be

hand to hand cowards hand in hand



## The Thirtieth Fourth

this is a green silence  
so it is

like magic lymph  
and particles of the beyond and slime

nearly figure nearly body  
with hair bristling at the scruff of the neck

sing it sing it  
sings the night its  
high dark note

high darkness? that dog  
don't hunt  
who doesn't wait for her so obviously  
as if she wasn't in plain sight

there  
thereere  
she herself tormented  
for being who she is

but for our long service record  
we would not know her

who has teats and nurses  
with her green sap  
madame someone

### The Thirtieth Third

fortyeighththousandeighthundred and  
eighty four

or more

when it comes to kisses

love cannot be counted  
not at all the lips they are lips your flesh placed here  
regenerates and  
returns to sender

in an envelope of shadow

she lowered her hand and said

we're waiting

right here for the sum of factors

a warm moisture absorbed the discourse

it's not mere

not ore

it's mirror

they have been drumming without letup

already it is after twelve

no animal  
could be so lucky

## The Thirtieth Second

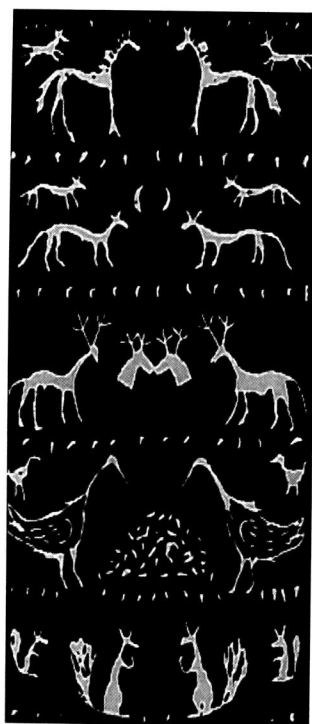
I leap back  
statues of salt and ivory  
gorgons  
those who chew gum  
who laugh and its opposite

there are always two things  
the world and what  
you and who  
a god and?  
the egg and whoever laid it then

I have more than a cockledoodledoo choir can sing  
you open sesame  
the truth slips from its prison  
all disjointed  
I quit  
I do not like not seeing  
sometimes desire works  
the goddess of will  
is a full case  
empty it in the garbage  
and wash the crystal

to begin again  
back and forth  
between the skin and the cherished pants of the soul

Reviews





# *Anthropology and Literature*

Edited by Paul Benson  
University of Illinois Press, 1993

More than ever, contemporary anthropology is something of an elegiac enterprise. Glossing an already phantomed databank of groups, tribes and civilizations, modern ethnography investigates the ghosts of cultural forms rather than the forms themselves. This is the inevitable result of the displacement and reductiveness between fieldwork and text. But also, anthropology's object of knowledge often consists of societies about to go under or in the process of sliding into homogenization. Furthermore, where a culture resists assimilation, post-structuralist ethnographic techniques, with their bias toward cultural determinism, their schizoid relationship to the groundings and so-called "essentialisms" that are often part of the culture of the Other, seem, at this moment, to be the least adequate tools to register the group's cultural resiliency.

As well, the Heisenbergian effects of disruption and dislocation created by the presence of an outside observer are over-romanticized, creating a kind of post-modern *mauvais foi* of participation, disguise and polypsychy. Attempts at intellectual distance or objectivity (the bugaboo words of contemporary academe) are replaced by false positioning, condescending empathy, in short anything but a scientific approach. Dan Rose, for example, sees anthropology as "*radically fractured*" (his italics), (194) yet, at the same time, he mounts an attack on the institution of ethnography for being an institution (what else could a discipline be?). He then goes on, in manifesto-like form, to propose the "death of anthropology" in which "one must go native," leading to "the unethical, to madness, the estranged," etc. Stand aside Mr. Kurtz. Rose is a professor and edits a series in contemporary anthropology for the University of Pennsylvania. The image of a wholesale resignation from the tenured ranks of ethnographers, of professors catching boats to New Guinea, disappearing into the Rockies or boarding trains to take up residence in the inner city is ludicrously unrealistic and betrays no little self-contempt for one's chosen profession.

Yet Rose's yearnings have a point. The practice of contemporary ethnography is painfully self-reflexive, more tribal and cultist and given to arcane language than many of its subjects. Such an understanding permeates much of the work in *Anthropology and Literature*, making of the volume less of a reader than a complex meditation on the fate of contemporary anthropology.

Among a number of its exemplary essays, "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions From A Feminist Perspective" by Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen proposes a feminist model for anthropology as a way out of self-enclosure. It is also an accurate indictment of current ethnographic practice as falling somewhere between the patriarchal and the self-indulgent. The writers wonder whether

much academic-based anthropology is now anything more than a self-perpetuating text generator producing irrelevant documents tailored to conform not to science or fact but to conditions of publication, tenure and promotion, pre-ordaining a rather narrowly framed literary genre which appears to be somewhat self-deluded as to its power or effect in the world. As P. Steven Sangren, cited in the same essay, suggests, "Whatever 'authority' is created in a text has its most direct social effect not in the world of political and economic domination...but in the academic institutions in which [its] authors participant" (232).

If such problems mark many of the essays in this book, there is also much material to be considered in attempting to formulate a new poetics for anthropology. Against the pall thrown over the ethnographic enterprise by the depredations of time, modernization and the nostalgia for lost "golden" ages, possibly the clearest direction revealed in this collection is dialogical. Mascia-Lees et. al. advance the feminist model because in its role of speaking as "the Other" (228) it offers a way of bringing into an ethnographic work the suppressed voice and concerns of the object of study.

Robin Ridington's account of his involvement with members of the Omaha tribe in restoring to them the Pole, also referred to as the Venerable Man, the Omaha tribe's most sacred relic, stored for over a hundred years in Harvard's Peabody Museum, is structured as a kind of morality tale, halfway between a detective story and an epic poem. There is an indelible poignancy of lost worlds in that moment in the text when Ridington, invited to speak at a ceremony celebrating the Pole's return, has to explain the meaning of an Omaha ritual to his audience of Omaha tribal members. But this drama is not onesided; the ethnographer is not so much making discoveries as being involved in and reporting an intersubjective occasion, the power of which is precisely predicated on the deeply moving Omahan voices who give the story of tribal rescue both imaginative power and pathos.

Likewise, Robin Fox's reading of Sophocle's *Antigone* as a conflict not between the individual and the state but between the claims of kinship and the secularized Greek city-state invokes an ethnographic poesis that has relevance to the tensions which now exist between the modern technocratic nation and deep historic feelings of group identity. Fox reinterprets a number of key elements of tragic drama, suggesting for example that "noble" figures are chosen as central characters not because of their aristocratic status or highbirth but because they are representatives or stand-ins for tribes and kinship groups. Fox, also wary of imprinting other cultures with our own theoretical constructs, strongly critiques structural analysis, one of contemporary anthropology's most widely used tools, claiming that its conceptual apparatus imposes a Western frame on cultural patterns while in no way "reflecting anything like the mentalities of the individuals involved" (135).

The elaborate sand drawings, the central ritualistic objects of William Rodman's "When Questions Are Answers," which are "blown away by the wind in an afternoon," might well be the metaphors for today's ethnography. Rodman's essay, detailing the response of the people of the Ambae to the inquiries of the

anthropologist, provides a paradigm of the dynamic and fluid nature of such contemporary encounters. We are hard and soft wired together into an ever-shifting world-wide amibiotic web. There are no longer any "museum" cultures existing timelessly like badly painted figures in a diorama. Cultures now are in recombinant phases, and the repeatability of either the experimental set-up or the recorded result is an anthropological will-of-the-wisp. This situation, of course, is the embodiment of an elegiac condition with respect to scientific inquiry, one based on mourning for a lost grounding in universals and objectivity.

But elegies need not be merely commemorative texts; they can also function as pro-active occasions, making us aware of pastness by embracing temporality. That is, the ethnographic text can enact a poesis enabling the cultures it talks about (those of observed and observer) to "see" into their own set of temporal relationships, thus providing a basis for imaginative acts of their own, acts which might involve anything from preserving useful or important old ways to developing new strategies of encounter and interaction.

Plato would have the poets banished, but Aristotle acknowledged the superiority of poetry, in its concretion of emotion and event, to both history and philosophy. Poetry's strength lies, paradoxically, in its vulnerability to contingency and uncertainty, to all those kinds of occasions which now seem to make up the contemporary ethnographic encounter. True, the concretions needed now can no longer consist of the singular imperial gaze, but rather must be constructed of the entanglements with others, multi-voiced and multi-leveled. Any ethnographic work must now answer to Marilyn Strathern's statement: "I must know on whose behalf and to what end I write" (241). Against the old *a priori*s of a dominant discourse or of its disguised form in post-modern theory, a new anthropology-as-poetics offers distinct possibilities. Almost all the essays in *Anthropology and Literature* suggest poetic strategies, ones that no longer give us tales of alien lands and alien shores, but instead recognize that we now mutually occupy the same ethnographic spaces.

Michael Heller  
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# *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*

Edited by Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim  
University of Illinois Press, 1995

NOTE: As I approached the task of critiquing *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture*, a collection of essays about the use of dialogue in anthropological research, I was aware of the internal dialogue in my mind between the reader, who read merely to enjoy and be informed, and the reviewer, who had to read with a more critical eye. I finally decided on the following format in order to reflect both the text under review and the process of composing the review itself.

READER: I kept wondering as I read through this text what Bakhtin might think of it.

REVIEWER: Bakhtin might not agree with much of what is presented here, but I doubt he would have strenuous objections either. Some twenty years after the original publication of the essays which constitute Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975 in Russian; English translation published 1981), Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim have brought together a collection that not only pays homage to Bakhtin's idea of dialogism but also challenges his argument that this reaches its most sophisticated form only with the development of the novel. Bakhtin did not see the oral dialogue as the sophisticated production that these scholars show that it is, but I think he would be intrigued by the idea and convinced by some, if not all, of the research presented.

READER: What does this collection take from Bakhtin's ideas?

REVIEWER: In *The Dialogic Imagination*, especially in the essay entitled "Discourse in the Novel" (259-422), Bakhtin argues that the reader/scholar must view the language of the novel in its heteroglot aspects. In other words, context is everything. Language in its communicative or artistic roles should not, indeed cannot, be divorced from all the factors that contribute to its production. Even a monologue can be defined as a dialogue when one considers that an author's words are his own but also those of his culture and time. In addition, each of us has internal dialogues which determine what words we will expose to external scrutiny. As folklorists, ethnographers, and anthropologists have been doing for decades, the thirteen scholars whose work is included in *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture* argue that theories developed from literate production can also be useful in analyzing oral discourse. *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture* demonstrates that heteroglossia in all its complexity is operative in oral communication and storytelling and that it is of great importance in our study not only of texts, but also of culture.

READER: But isn't it obvious that dialogue is important to anthropological study?

REVIEWER: Yes, but it often goes unexpressed, and that which is not expressed is too easily ignored. The editors identify the purpose of the volume as "to explore the practice of an anthropology that actively acknowledges the dialogic nature of its own production" (3). The dialogues depicted and discussed are both external among natives, between field workers and natives, among field workers and internal within individual fieldworkers. This range of content vividly represents the complexity of fieldwork and brings its inner workings to the forefront with refreshing honesty. Anthropologists have always known that the interaction between field-worker and native, for example, has a profound impact on the nature of data an informant provides, but rarely has that interaction been reported through the actual dialogues that take place in the field. By bringing the dialogic nature of anthropology to the forefront, the essays in *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture* make both ethnographer and reader a little more self-conscious about the way we conduct and report our research.

READER: The collection is exciting not only in its content but also its form, as some of the contributions break the frame of what we recognize as the scholarly essay and communicate their information dialogically. Of these, I most enjoyed "Women's Voices: Lima 1975" by Billie Jean Isbell. She succeeds in bringing out the emotions of her subjects as they reflect on their lives, the cultural milieu in which they live, and also the dynamic between fieldworker and native subjects.

REVIEWER: The essays written in dialogue form are particularly intriguing, bringing the issue directly to the reader's attention, both in theory and practice. Isbell's essay makes us feel that we are in the room during the interview. I wonder, however, if the reader's attraction to the essays of non-traditional format will detract from the other excellent chapters which discuss dialogue in a more straightforward and traditional scholarly manner.

READER: Is the dialogue form then just a gimmick?

REVIEWER: No, I don't think so. Take the chapter by Becker and Mannheim, "Culture Tropic: Languages, Codes, and Texts," for instance. This is an actual dialogue, a discussion between two scholars on the way they define their respective approaches to language. Many co-authored essays speak with one voice to the extent that the reader cannot tell whose contributions are whose. Haven't you ever wondered about that?

READER: I suppose so, but isn't that what collaboration is all about two or more scholars speaking as one?

REVIEWER: Surely, though, they can't have the same view on everything. The "Culture Tropic" essay shows two scholars working together, but at the same time maintaining their individuality.

READER: It still seems a bit artificial to me.

REVIEWER: Certainly. The authors themselves write, "Each turn in the dialogue was written in sequence" (249n). The fact that the dialogue was composed in writing shows us that it is not an ordinary conversation, but the dialogues that Bakhtin and most of the anthropologists in *Dialogic Emergence* are discussing are also "constructed" in their own ways. As Tannen explains in her chapter, there is no such thing as "reported speech" in most cases. We all alter the nature of dialogue when we report it to others, unconsciously "constructing" dialogue under the guise of reporting it, as Tannen would argue.

READER: Yes, that essay gave me pause about the ways in which I repeat and report my own conversations with others. Speaking of reported or constructed dialogue, to whom is Tedlock speaking in his chapter?

REVIEWER: He never tells us, leading me to assume that the essay depicts an internal dialogue, much like the one we are having now. Tedlock poses the questions to provide context for his answers and to keep us focused on the dialogues we hear in field work.

READER: I was intrigued by the way he re-opened the work of others and attempted to reconstruct dialogue that was hidden within scholarly discourse.

REVIEWER: That is an interesting form of critique, but I think that some readers may find the essay presumptuous. Tedlock takes on many of the icons of anthropology Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, Geertz and essentially explains how he thinks they *should* have reported their field study.

READER: Or does he merely suggest how they *could* have presented dialogue and ask the reader to consider the differences in approach? After all, as his first question admits (253), anthropology has always been dialogic.

REVIEWER: Yes but traditionally it has been reported as a one-way transmission of information: native to field-worker to reader. It is easy, especially for the novice or student, to forget all the voices that go into the process. Without the dynamism of dialogue, culture appears as a static object. As the title of this book we're discussing implies, however, culture *emerges* through dialogue. By openly reporting this dialogue instead of burying it under scholarly prose the anthropologist can communicate his findings more vividly. Of course, it also requires the reader to develop an

analytical sense of his or her own.

READER: *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture* is a thought-provoking volume in many respects. There are six essays we haven't even touched upon. Allan F. Burns, Jane H. Hill, and Ruth Behar each contribute studies on dialogue as used to report on and in some ways commemorate tragic episodes in family history. In fact, most of the dialogues among natives seemed to be about painful events and uncomfortable situations such as that of the little girl in McDermott and Tylbor's essay who colludes with the rest of her classmates in ensuring that she not be called on to read. The dynamics of that dialogue are particularly revealing in that on the surface they communicate conflict, but underneath they indicate collusion.

REVIEWER: Another essay that discusses a form of collusion is Jean DeBenardi's chapter on her interviews with spirit mediums in Malaysia. The whole notion of speaking to a god through a human intermediary brings up myriad dialogic possibilities. Who is the fieldworker really interviewing?

Because human beings are social creatures, dialogue will always be a part of our lives, and I think this volume presents a number of useful ways of looking at it that can be applied back to literary texts as well as to other oral dialogues. Attinasi and Friedrich's essay on life-changing dialogue sets the stage for the volume as a whole. They compare life-changing dialogue to "found-poems," an analogy which should be of particular interest to readers of this journal. Not every chapter in the collection will appeal to every reader, but if these essays generate more dialogue about dialogism, we must consider the book a success.

#### Work Cited

Bakhtin, M. M. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Translated by C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

**Bonnie D. Irwin**  
Eastern Illinois University

# *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*

Kamala Visweswaran  
University of Minnesota Press, 1994

**Fable:** Review...summary, analysis, reaction  
*intuition...process...inspiration*

**Intro:** What is ethnography? Kamala Visweswaran (K.V.) leads us through ten years of thought, experiment and personal examination resulting in a collection of nine essays that lay ethnography bare. She strips and digs and questions, all the while holding the bones of ethnography up to the mirror, examining them as well her own theoretical and ethnographic self through ethnography's reflection. In the end she has fashioned not so much a "new feminist ethnography," but a collection of tools for thought. She presents a process, a context and a space for a very personal kind of theorizing and critique. She shows that ethnography disrobed inhabits a place of personal construction and projection. But that by knowing the body of one's own reflection, the self will be a familiar frame on which to hang constructions of another.

*My thoughts here mirror, distort, refract, restructure K.V.'s own: each passage a parallel process to her respective essay. This is a textual exchange, more conversation than review. In K.V.'s words: "My authority rests not on positing facts; rather, it risks forfeiture by posing more and more questions. In doing so, my role as an unreliable narrator is activated" (62).*

**Defining:** *The literary goals of a text diminish its scientific value...*

*In the history of ethnography the "professionals" separated themselves from the "amateurs" with science, purposefully distancing themselves from creative, non-objective forms. They believed that by allowing personal experience to influence form, scientific reputation and academic credibility would be compromised.*

*Ethnographic Form / Autobiography / Poetry*

*Autobiography should be considered ethnographic knowledge...Poetry is the ultimate autobiography.*

*Life history /Autobiography*

*Confessional field literature / Fiction*

*The link between fiction and ethnography (constructed identities refracted) is a fine thread binding knower and known. All ethnography is ultimately based on subjective personal experience. To present this storied experience (filtered & constructed sensation) as fact (a certain truth of existence, immovable) is in itself a fictive act.*

*The denial of process.*

K.V. spins an ethnographic story and a story of ethnography. She fashions her text with used threads and altered patterns. Ethnography is writing, and it is the writing

of one projected upon the other. In exploring form K.V.'s intent is to draw the reader's attention to literary process and the persuasive powers of text. The discipline's theory and practice originate with idea, word then form. The cannon upholds these words, a testament to the collective construction of truth. But the cannon is also a body of knowledge influenced by omission and exclusion.

*Silence, the absence of voice, is a force. One only has to listen for it.*

The history of feminist ethnography is a collection of many creative works barred from entry or kept silent by definition. Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Elsie Clews Parsons and Ruth Landes are among those sighted whose works were passed over or dismissed as too literary. K.V. pulls from these examples threads, a "tangling of genres," weaving a cloak to draw around herself.

The moral dilemma: how to know one's self enough to know another. How to represent another? Language, perspective, audience, theoretical assumption and methodology give you away, reveal the projection. Let text rise from the necessity of situation, position, voice. Simultaneously give voice to another, let stand experience of self and challenge convention through process. K.V. gives us experiments with ethnographic form, data collection, personal positioning and self consciousness in order to question and enlarge the cannon.

*Is it more equitable, moral, to speak of personal experience rather than assuming that a personal view point is also a universal one — personal, local, specific, becomes collective, representative and factual? K.V. sees the use of first person narrative in women's ethnographic writing as a political, feminist statement challenging the cannon and positivist positions. I think it is less overtly political and more a comfortable, personal point of view. Science is not a personal enterprise. It is certain that the women sighted were aware that ethnography based on overtly personal experience would hardly be called scientific.*

*Women's experience as critique of positivist assumptions. Conscious or not.*

K.V. positions women as other. By inhabiting the margins women's voices run counter to the male center, the patriarchal traditional cannon and theoretical arena. Feminist ethnographers theorize from a position of gendered knowledge. Though the universal sisterhood has been replaced by self conscious confessions of privileged power, K.V. believes the Western woman is yet sensitive enough, still woman enough, to negotiate silence.

*Women as cultural other — Gender as cultural group*

*Women can not be properly understood using traditional ethnographic forms — too scientific, definitely patriarchal — even if these forms are used by women ethnographers.*

**Betrayal:** Braiding allegory, self conscious analysis, emerging feminist theory and critique of experimental ethnography nested within a practice of form, K.V. stages her theoretical self. Her subjects betray each other and assumptions of sisterhood betray her own feminist ideals. The form, a three act ethnographic performance with many-layered analysis, shakes a finger at Clifford.

*Clifford defines experimental ethnography as an "intercultural dialogic production of texts" (31). Meaning a jointly produced ethnography: ethnographer and subject work together to create and interpret the data.*

*Heteroglossia*

*K.V. says that "Heteroglossia...is not a ready-made solution" (31) to the problem of defining or speaking for the other. Experimental ethnography is a critique of anthropology's "scientific ethos" but stops short of critiquing patriarchy, or of asking whether the scientific voice is in fact patriarchal.*

*Heteroglossia assumes voice — usually a male voice.*

*How does one come to voice?*

*Speaking through silence*

The three acts examine the production of knowledge through agency, silence and the construction of identity. K.V. translates feminist theory to form and presentation. Deconstruction follows to pull threads of K.V., uncovering motives, ideals and mistakes.

**Refusing:** An ethnography of silence. K.V. gives her process for constructing a text of one who is both subject and object: the trick of representing another who wishes to remain silent.

*Turning disaster into advantage. Even botched fieldwork can be whipped into palatable theory.*

*Advantage to feminist theory:*

*not the theory itself but the necessity of locating the individual within the experience of oppression in order to liberate the self from oppression.*

*More data, more personal experience to liberate voice, self.*

K.V. places the act of 'refusing to participate' within an historical and political context: positioning herself, situating her subject, constructing meaning. Her own failure to connect with her subject becomes a tool for feminist theory.

*Should every event be tested, made to serve? If a human refuses to participate — she did not want her experience drained, her personal history dissected to form the lining in K.V. theoretical cloak — should that refusal itself be forced to speak?*

*For whom?*

**A Feminist Deconstructs:** Here K.V. places her essays "Defining Feminist Ethnography" and "Betrayal" on the dissecting table. Using all the instruments of a postmodern feminist she reveals her own theoretical assumptions, "discontinuities," self-conscious deconstructions of deconstructions of deconstructions.

*A tangle of theory and practice snaking simultaneously forward and back.*

*Critical reconstruction*

*Violent subject constitution*

*Multiple positioning*

*Her point, perhaps, is to drag us through this mire of theorylanguage. In its self importance language has assumed the audience — consumed the audience. Selfish theory. Self-congratulatory slight of hand. Postmodern magicians all.*

In the end K.V. concludes that the subject has not been better served by the writer's conscious attention to every detail. Careful packaging notwithstanding, the intent is all too familiar. Representation, re-creation: a portrait of "the other" by any other name.

*What she's doing seems intuitive, common sense, until you look at the theoretical positions she's merging and moving beyond. She's on the edge. Perhaps that's why she's so careful to make her motives and moves so explicit. She has to build within her texts her own theoretical foundation, while at the same time showing this theory in action.*

**Failure:** *The failure of feminism is the failure of ethnography.*

Feminism has failed twice. It has failed in the correction of a failure. Previously absent "woman other" painted into two dimensions using Western notions, colors, textures that disregard her full figure: race, status, gender. All sociopolitical constructions in three dimensions. K.V. admits that even feminist notions of "positionality" and "giving-voice" have failed to truly represent. *Represent.* With all the attempts at self-reflexivity, positionality and textual experimentation there is still a fatal flaw in the reasoning: one can never truly know another. Ethnography is not a question of language or theory or methodology. It is fundamentally an issue of self-transcendence. One can never transcend the self. One can never speak "as if" she were another.

*Anthropological reasoning was poisoned at its very inception with the power play of Western expansion. It was, and is, an intellectual reconnaissance mission (admittedly more overt in the past) that values the journey and the knowledge obtained above anything locally produced. Romantic fantasy still: exotic mystery tamed, ex-*



*plained and enslaved by the Western intellect.*

K.V.'s solution is a shift in perspective: from field to home. The whole idea of anthropological travel, or journey, is infused with privileged assumption. Rather than "dwelling" in the field and bringing the knowledge home, why not make home a field for dwelling?

*Decolonization / Re-territorialization*

*Allowing a "native" homeplace.*

*The importance of anthropologists recognizing their own homeplaces — their points of interest often begin by looking for a home, by turning away from a point too close — not merely projecting a need to belong on to another's homeplace.*

The shift is not merely one of geographical place, but of theoretical and epistemological conception. Gender must no longer hold the center for feminist theory. Much more shapes a three dimensional woman. To identify her person only by anatomy denies the multiple, many leveled being she is. For anthropology, fieldwork's dominance and central position must be replaced by a dialogue of field and home. In the future perhaps "homework," and an anthropology where "the other" sees our West as field, will replace our current colonial legacy.

*Postcolonial "Homework"*

*Is this just another turning away from fact? The foundations of American culture too were constructed with bloody colonial hands. Our own history is violent and painful, wounds yet to be unwrapped and cleaned.*

*Is there a "Home" to do work in? Or are we yet the privileged travelers .*

**Identity:** K.V. is a second generation American. Her ethnographic identity begins with understanding her own roots in India, uncovering the influences of colonial power, gender, class and ethnicity. Her theory parallels the process of becoming, becoming a woman, an American and an Indian. As a member of the group she has chosen to study, K.V. has attempted to create a home through fieldwork—to fashion, through theory, process and practice, a field of transport from one identity to another. The final two essays in the book, "Introductions to a Diary" and "Sari Stories," are personal ethnographic moments, putting theory to practice, person to process. Feminist theory, a companion and adversary throughout, has allowed K.V. to discover a point of personal departure for a future ethnography of process. The goal of ethnographic work, home or field, is not being but becoming. It is the process of human culture and condition that we hope to understand. The challenge faced by ethnographers is to find language, and theory, that will express this very personal process.

In reaching beyond traditional ethnographic form, K.V. places her own style of femi-

nist ethnography at the nexus of feminist anthropology and literature — in the forms of autobiography, personal narrative, fable and fiction. By working through these “experimental” forms K.V. puts her own theories of feminist ethnography into practice, calling traditional positivist ethnographic form into question, as well as the rather limited definitions of current experimental ethnography.

*Push past form to follow person and process . Theory as personal process. Voices from experience, autobiography. Ethnographic knowledge no longer produced with the anemic language of science. If language indeed gives birth to experience, why not paint ethno-perception in words that breathe, laugh, sing.*

### **Hmong Woman New Year**

*She makes her costume  
for a New Year.  
She will dance  
with a belt of bells,  
coins jingling,  
her tall black hat  
carrying the rhythm  
with white, pink, and black balls swaying.  
She wears sashes,  
a huge silver breastplate pulsing,  
or a neck band of ten rings.  
Brass shining against  
jet black velvet:  
intricate geometry  
embroidered over a hundred days.  
A regal seriousness flowing  
across her face,  
breaks into a radiant smile  
as she turns,  
and together  
with a drum  
her figure moves through  
a thousand years.  
This point in time,  
another New Year  
is held,  
like a breath,  
like the voice's high pitch,  
an emphases  
at the end of a thought.*

**Kim Koch**  
*Xcp* Managing Editor

# *Things As They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*

Edited by Michael Jackson  
Indiana University Press, 1996

Phenomenology is primarily a means of investigation, a way of seeing, and not a reason onto itself. The reason this method of cognition should be employed in anthropological research rests not in phenomenology, but in the troubled past of anthropology. Phenomenology, radical empiricism, and participatory observation become latent parlor tricks without the accompaniment of a searing motive or a theoretical grasp of the consequences of these types of investigations.

What is at issue for anthropologist Michael Jackson, the editor of this anthology of essays, is the very impetus for studying human cultures. Here, anthropology is stripped of its missionary and zoological pretensions, and asks, why bother now, when our world seems wholly named and discovered? This concern for intentions sparks a series of ramifications, a new diversity in the method, rhythm, and cadence of ethnographic work, and breathes life into this field of human inquiry.

To answer the question of intent, Jackson quotes Helene Cixous, "to transmit: to make things loved by making them known" (43). Although this may sound glib, consider it a trenchant departure from the taxonomic forays of administrative elites. Love is a concept that runs deep in this slightly covert manifesto. Jackson intuitively and continually refers to "life affirming" and "life sustaining" virtues, setting phenomenology up to do battle against cold hearted bureaucrats. His intentions are laid to bare, and the reader can be quite sure this book is no primer in social research methods. He writes, "Our task is clear: to validate the everyday life of ordinary people, to tell their stories in their own words, to recover their names" (36).

I recently became acquainted with The Phenomenological Institute of North America. It is a group of physicists who look for dimensional disturbances in our universe. They send a single atom speeding around a 10 kilometer track and record the point at which the atom makes contact with an atom catcher. If this point is anywhere outside the predicted spot, a disturbance in the universe is registered. The result is a changed conception of the universe. The anthropologist has a similar mission. The phenomenological anthropologist doing field research is not trying to find the exact position of the atom for its own sake, nor trying to display the structure of a particular society within a greater schema, but experimenting to expand the dimensions of our cultural universe. The phenomenological anthropologist does not study people in the effort to get to know the other, to capture ways of being; this anthropologist is working to know her or his self through the other, and ultimately to change the composition of the world.

Jackson uses phenomenology to move anthropology beyond three fallacies

concerning the documentation of imaginative consciousness:

1) The fallacy of immanence: This occurs when images are treated as quasi-material things existing in the mind rather than acts of a living consciousness.

2) The fallacy of representationalism: This causes images to be construed as mere copies of sensible experience.

3) The fallacy of dualism: Here, images are considered allies of the lower corporeal order and thus inimical to the elevated pursuits of the intellect.

With special attention concentrated on avoiding these pitfalls, the writers in this volume open the doors of human experience.

Phenomenology has always been wielded in times of crisis, when we need to see more, to assert difference, and to change the way things are. The popularity of phenomenology in philosophy is never far from the politics of confrontation and change. This is because the course of phenomenology is to study of the raw conditions of life, be these conditions emotional, social, or physical, and then to question existing interpretations of these conditions vis-a-vis the new data. By the study of raw conditions, I am referring to the phenomenologist's resolve to pursue a universal critique of life. Jackson states that phenomenology "...refuses to invoke cultural privilege as a foundation for evaluating worldviews, or examining the complex and enigmatic character of the human condition. It is a way of illuminating things by bringing them into the daylight of ordinary understanding" (1), or as he later writes, "a method of illuminating the lives people see themselves living" (7). This prejudice against prejudice downplays the importance of theory. Attention is instead turned to lived processes. Jackson reiterates Goethe's admonition: "Don't look beyond phenomena; they themselves are the truth" (11).

The result is a radical apprehension of the world which "yields to the practical question of how the world might be changed....we [Jackson] seek only to underscore the point that compels our interest in any idea is its power to destabilize and unsettle received ways of seeing the world, replenishing our sense of life's variety and possibility, and encouraging debate on the role of the intellectual in practical affairs" (4). Jackson aligns the motives of phenomenological anthropologists with those of post-colonial writers and post-modernists, writing that the general subversion of authority and authorhood can collapse the gaps between thinking and action. "To shift our focus from the privileged world of detached intellectual activity to the often underprivileged domains of the lifeworld is to reconstitute our notion of knowledge as something urgently of and for the world rather than something about the world" (37).

Jackson's introduction thus brings us to the crux and fertile contradiction underlying all phenomenological thought. We must reconcile being-in-the-world with a reflexive consciousness of our position relative to dynamic power structures, structures more real as concepts than percepts, i.e. modernization, class consciousness, ideology, urbanization, and ethnicity.

This point of contact between perception and conception thus becomes the proper field of anthropological inquiry, a field described by phenomenologists as

the lifeworld or *Lebenswelt*. For Jackson this is not a static realm based on a "transcendental, monadic ego" (18). "The lifeworld is never a seamless unitary domain in which social relations remain constant and the experience of the self stable" (27). It is a zone where participants are habitually in crisis, strategizing and coping with the dynamism of self, role, and environment.

The real beauty of this book is that the thinking does not stop here, deep in the thickets of philosophic references. Instead, true to the spirit of phenomenology, we are provided with provocative accounts of how such thinking flows in contemporary anthropological practice.

Lila Abu-Lughod's essay on her research with Bedouin women illustrates how anthropologists can participate in a redescription of regulatory forces acting upon cultural identity. Her piece, entitled "Honor and Shame," uses personal letters and essays written by her friend and informant, Kalma, to show the interplay involved in self making. The reciprocal forces of honor and shame become, for Kalma, the language she uses in writing her life story. As a language, these categories are open to twists and tropes of agency.

A somewhat similar lesson can be drawn from Michael Herzfeld's chapter, "In Defiance of Destiny: The Management of Time and Gender at a Cretan Funeral." Here, Herzfeld breaks from the narrative structure of the scientific model. Instead of hypothesis, or conclusion, he dwells in observation. It is through following the life of a Cretan woman, well after the actual performance of the lament, that conclusions and hypotheses are forwarded. The lament, it turns out, is not the submission of the woman to her fate, but a catalyst issued into the community, one of many expressive actions towards the making of a new life. To see this, Herzfeld had to be open to the notion that meaning, rather than resting inertly in the core of the lament, is more likely the ritual's changing garment, closer to social fashion than essential truth.

Throughout this book special attention is paid to the ways anthropologists relate feeling in words. One recurrent theme is suffering. In the essay by the anthropology team of Arthur and Joan Kleinman, "Suffering and its Professional Transformation," the authors call for a shifting of views, or a dual focus. The authors sense parallel inadequacies in the representation of suffering by culture theorists who represent it as the physical symptoms of social malaise (i.e. state oppression, or unemployment), and by biologists who represent suffering as the psychological effects of medical problems. They call on ethnography to recognize that the psychosomatic processes of suffering are both the transmitters and receivers of cultural codes. As such, images of suffering or emotions in anthropology are "more humanly rendered, not as representations of some other reality (one that we as experts possess special power over), but rather as evocation of close experience that stands for itself" (187). Without such a redefinition, analysis of the phenomena is closed by the very techniques used in its discovery. Other essays challenge anthropology's conformity to Western dualisms. In Christine Helliwell's "Space and Sociality in a Dayak Longhouse," the author subverts the hegemony of sight in anthropological descrip-

tion to critique the "the endless production and reproduction of Western social categories in the accounts of non-Western people, and an accompanying inability to capture in any meaningful sense what constitutes sociality in communities very different from our own" (145). By listening to a "community of voices" and learning to appreciate a "tapestry of sound" (139), visual borders of longhouse life, previously seeming to conform to Western ideas of private versus public space, were reworked.

Robert Desjarlais also hopes to debunk the primacy of Western categories in his cogent essay "Struggling Along," a summation of his fieldwork in a downtown Boston shelter for the homeless and mentally ill. He writes, "...I argue that the category of experience, which many take to be universal, natural, and supremely authentic, is not an existential given but rather a historically and culturally constituted process predicated on a range of cultural, social, and political forces" (70). His disclosure of an alternative mode of experience, called "struggling along," is made possible by his move beyond a mind/body metaphysic where "practice opposes theory and the sensate parries meaning" (89).

Other writers even venture to question long time anthropological 'rules,' turning phenomenology's unceasing doubt upon itself. Keith Feidler's "If Not Words: Shared Practical Activity and Friendship in Fieldwork" is an honest look at long term cross-cultural friendships and the effect these have on writers and writing. Jim Wafer's "After the Field" relates a video made by his partner and collaborator, Archipiado. The video questions the very notion of the field as the static place from which ethnography is written. It is constituted "rather aesthetically...and is not underpinned by logic of containment and control, but rather by the fractured dialectic of social performances made interactive through the artifice of juxtaposition" (268).

These are only a portion of the questions and thoughts raised by bringing phenomenology's universal critique into the field of anthropology. Contrary to the concrete title, one is left with elasticity. Indeed, nothing is spared but an intuitive sense of love and an unwavering quest for understanding posited by these authors.

David Michalski

Xcp Website Editor

<http://freenet.buffalo.edu/~xcp/>

# *Home Places: Contemporary Native American Writing from Sun Tracks*

Edited by Larry Evers and Ofelia Zepeda  
University of Arizona Press, 1995

I think of language as a kind of portable home-- a place we carry in us that also carries us; something from which we are constructed and, in turn, help construct. *Home Places* gathers together stories, songs, and poems from the twenty-five years of Sun Tracks publications that explore the notion of home in contemporary Native American writing.

As Evers notes in an essay in *Home Places*, "Sun Tracks: A Brief History and Checklist," Sun Tracks began in 1971 as an American Indian literary quarterly run by three Navajo students at the University of Arizona. The journal ran for four issues and attracted some community support both within and outside of the University. Begun on a sort of grass-roots level, the editors aimed at providing a literary journal that would "be a vehicle for the creative expression of the American Indian people, particularly Indian students" (74-75).

When Evers joined the faculty at the University of Arizona in 1974, he revitalized Sun Tracks, and the journal went into a second phase with contributors including Simon Ortiz, Rae Young Bear, N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko. With the help of grants and an ever widening readership, Sun Tracks began a joint book-publishing venture with the University of Arizona Press. In 1981, *The South Corner of Time* (originally volume 6 of the Sun Tracks literary journal) was published. Since then, Sun Tracks has published thirty-two volumes of Native American literature, including *Home Places*: volume 31 in the series.

Throughout its history, Sun Tracks has been a leading forum for Native American writers working in "the forms of writing and the languages that they choose" (79). Sun Tracks has also helped to change the perception of Native Americans from merely subjects for anthropological studies to a people possessing their own diverse range of both traditional and contemporary literatures. Indeed, *Home Places'* wide range of Native American languages (Yaqui, Navajo, O'odham, etc.) in addition to English exemplifies a sense of language as home *places* existing within "ever-widening webs of community that spin out to include not just humans but all the living things of the material world" (vii). This wide web of works from various Native American cultures and communities is thematically centered on what is common to these writers: and indigenous geography. It is from this foundation that language serves as a variable in shaping one's sense of place.

The strongest works in *Home Places* are those that shake-up the conventional sense of home as a naive reconciliation between self and place. For example,

several writings in *Home Places* address migration as integral to what home means from a Native American perspective: not simply "leaving one place for another," but returning to a place one has been to before, either literally or figuratively.

Ramona Wilson's "December on the Coast" illustrates this broader sense of home as a place of endless turning and returning:

As I sleep the Grey Whales  
Swim and blow a smell of green and sea  
into the moon-cold air.  
They do not sleep, they court  
and play even as they pull south  
to the lagoons and sky  
some have never seen.

(43)

There is a lovely, tugging rhythm between the sleeping speaker and sleepless whales, a mimetic cadence courted in sibilant "swim," "smell," and "sea," as well as the synesthetic "smell of green sea" and "moon-cold air" that merge sleep- and ocean-scapes where

All things fall away  
before their intentness  
their bulk rising like prophecy,  
like dreams that begin  
the same way, time after time.  
They have no count  
of miles or years  
but answer to a memory  
that is its own need.

(43)

The whales, "like dreams," resurface here, "their bulk rising like prophecy" after falling away. Prophecy is a *projecting over* of what is yet to happen, like a whale's falling and rising at ocean's surface: half-concealed, half-revealed. There is an interesting semantic ambiguity between "their" (all things) and "they" (all things? the whales?). Like a dream's aquatic ambiguities, the speaker grammatically braids "all things" into these whales that "have no count / of miles or years": no boundaries, no final quantification of space ("miles") and time ("years").

If "they" are all things (including speaker, whales, prophecy and dreams), then memory is an account without counting, an answer "that is its own need":



I turn over with a dream of sun  
turning my sleep like waves.  
I wake restless into a day  
murmuring of migration.

(43)

The “dream of sun” is the “sky / some have never seen,” but turns “sleep like waves.” It is this restlessness that is, in waking, the dream’s vestigial turning, the speaker’s own migrations and the whales’ murmured songs and migratory circling. This mapping of whale migration that “answers to a memory” turns round an interesting notion of memory as being driven by the same need that propels animal migration: survival. Like language, memory has been one of the most important portable tools for survival. And as migration is by memory, memory is, in turn, migration across complex topographies of places and times.

Another kind of returning in *Home Places* is the use of lexical repetition as symbolic of both the recovery and redispersal of experience in the act of narration. That is, the refrain is both a return in language to what has come before and a folding forward into what is new. While this sense of “the new” is difficult to detect in written language, reading a refrain aloud accentuates the fact that language takes place in time: the signs repeat, but within a new temporal and narrative context. For example, here is a song and its English translation from Felipe S. Molina, “Sewailo Malichi (Flower-Covered Fawn)”:

Aa sewailo malichi yewelu sika  
yo chikti yo sea  
huya aniwapo  
yeulu sika  
sewailo malichi yewelu sika  
yo chikti yo sea  
huya aniwapo  
yeulu sikaaa

Aa sewailo malichi yewelu sika  
yo chikti yo sea  
huya aniwapo  
yeulu sika  
sewailo malichi yewelu sika  
yo chikti yo sea  
huya aniwapo  
yeulu sikaaa

Ayamansu sewailo  
yo fayaliasu  
weyekai  
yeulu sika  
sewailo malichi yewelu sika  
yo chikti yo sea  
huya aniwapo  
yeulu sikaaa

[Aa flower-covered fawn went out,  
enchanted, from each enchanted flower  
wilderness world,  
he went out.

Flower-covered fawn went out,  
enchanted, from each enchanted flower  
wilderness world,  
he went out.

Aa flower-covered fawn went out,  
enchanted, from each enchanted flower  
wilderness world,  
he went out.

Flower-covered fawn went out,  
enchanted, from each enchanted flower  
wilderness world,  
he went out.

Over there, in the flower-covered  
enchanted opening,  
as he is walking,  
he went out.

Flower-covered fawn went out,  
enchanted, from each enchanted flower  
wilderness world,  
he went out.]

(15-16)

Molina explains that this is “the first song of the *pahko*. In it we talk about *saila maaso*, little brother deer, as a young deer, a fawn. During the night of the *pahko*, he will grow up” (16). Even without this contextual information, we can sense the song’s repetition and variation mimicking both fawn’s going out “from each

enchanted flower / wilderness world" and his growing up on the night of the *pahko* while the song is sung. The song acts as a sort of coaxing-out into each world, while fawn's own going out can be understood as coaxing-out the song as well: a reciprocity between the act of the song *about* fawn and fawn's *own act* of going out into the worlds. The song's ostensible repetition of the same act ("going out") is actually multiple acts of going-out: a returning in language and turning out into "each and every part of the wilderness world" (17).

This play between repetition and variation takes a subtle twist in the last section, from "as he is walking" to "he went out." Quantitative change leads to qualitative change, and one can't help but be reminded here of Zeno's arrow, or Charlie Chaplin sliding out unnoticed from a barroom brawl he inadvertently instigated. As Molina's Yaqui song and English translation illustrate, for many Native American writers "being at home" in language often involves being within several languages-- several places or sites. Indeed, *Home Places'* multilingual format attests to the dynamic tension between the singular notion of "home" and the multiple "places" home implies.

My reading of these two works barely begins a conversation with the complex meditations on home and places found in this anthology, but will hopefully point toward the variety of voices, styles, and ideas found there. *Home Places* will undoubtedly serve as both a wonderful introduction for those new to the Sun Tracks series and, for those who have followed the tracks, another fine testimony to its achievements.

Dan Featherston

Xcp

cross cultural poetics

**Alejandro Aura**, poet, novelist, and dramaturge associated with the internationally renowned performance space, Hijo del Cuervo in Mixcoac/Mexico City, is most widely known in Mexico for his weekly television interviews with literary and cultural figures. The translated poems are from a booklength sequence titled *Fuentes* (a title that winks at Carlos Fuentes' early novel, *Aura*).

**Amiri Baraka** has produced, over the past thirty years, thirteen volumes of poetry, over twenty plays, three jazz operas, seven volumes of nonfiction, and a novel. His most recent books are *Transbluesency* (Marsilio, 1995) and *Wise Why's Y's* (Third World Press, 1995).

**Elizabeth Burns' POEMAS** will soon be available from Public Works Press. She is co-editor of *Poetic Briefs* and lives in Minnesota.

**Maria Damon** is the author of *The Dark End of the Street: Margins in American Vanguard Poetry* (University of Minnesota Press) and essays in *Cultural Critique*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, and *Postmodern Culture*. She is a member of the National Writers' Union.

**Solomon Deressa**, who currently lives in Minnesota, was born in the heart of Oromo country during the five-year Italian occupation of Ethiopia. His work has been anthologized in such books as *Poems of Black Africa* (1975), edited by Wole Soyinka. *Xcp: Cross Cultural Poetics Press* will be publishing a bi-lingual edition of Deressa's selected poems next year.

**Dan Featherston** has recent/forthcoming work in *Central Park*, *First Intensity*, *Talisman*, and *Sulfur*. He lives in Tucson, Arizona.

**Forrest Gander** is author of *Deeds of Utmost Kindness* (Wesleyan) and *Eggplants and Lotus Root* (Burning Deck) among other titles. He edited and translated poems for the bilingual anthology *Mouth to Mouth: Poems by 12 Contemporary Mexican Women* (Milkweed Editions).

**Diane Glancy** is author of two collections of short stories, five volumes of poetry, and *Pushing the Bear: A Novel of the Trail of Tears* (Harcourt & Brace, 1996). She teaches literature and writing at Macalester College in St. Paul, MN. Currently the Poet Laureate of the Five Civilized Tribes, Glancy is of Cherokee and German/English descent.

**Michael Heller** is a poet and critic. His most recent book of poetry is *In The Builded Place* (Coffee House, 1990). *Wordflow: New and Selected Poems, 1970-1995* is forthcoming from Talisman House in 1997.

**Bonnie D. Irwin** is an assistant professor of English at Eastern Illinois University where she teaches non-western literatures and world mythology. Her primary areas of research are oral tradition and medieval narrative, and she is currently working on a monograph about medieval tale collections.

**Kim Koch** a student, cab driver and writer was the founding editor-organizer of *Your Elbow / Wire Mother*, a spoken-word series and journal that initiated the current wave of resistance to the Loft's monopoly on the Twin Cities literary scene. She is currently co-director of The DinkyTown Folk History Project and Managing Editor of *Xcp*.

**Walter K. Lew** is editor of *Premonitions: The Kaya Anthology of New Asian North American Poetry* and author of *Excerpts from: ΔIKTH DIKTE for DICTEE (1982)*, a critical collage on the work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. His multimedia "movietelling" pieces have been performed at a wide range of venues, including the 1990 Los Angeles Festival, Walker Art Center, Pacific Film Archive, and Asian CineVisions's International Asian and Asian American Film Festival.

**Lise McCloud** is the 1996 winner of *Minnesota Monthly's* Tamarack Award for fiction. Her work has been published in journals and anthologies including *Aboriginal Voices*, *Cream City Review*, *NDQ*, *Sing Heavenly Muse!*, *Tamaqua*, *Two Worlds Walking* (New Rivers Press, 1994) and *Prairie Volcano* (Dacotah Territory/St. Ives, 1995).

**David Michalski** is *Xcp* Website Editor (<http://freenet.buffalo.edu/~xcp/>) and founding editor of *Working Title: Intercultural Studies*. He currently works as an archivist at the School for Visual Arts Library in New York City.

**Edwin Torres** is a bilingual poet rooted in the languages of both sight and sound. Touring with "Real Live Poetry," his poems uproot themselves in workshops and performances all around the alphabet. Edwin has two books of poetry available, *I Hear Things People Haven't Really Said* and *Lung Poetry*. Among his many infringements on society: he's received a one year fellowship from The Foundation for Contemporary Performance Art and is included in the forthcoming anthology from St. Martins Press, *Verses That Hurt: Pain and Pleasure From The Poemfone Poets*.

**Ofelia Zepeda** is a member of the Tohono O'odham Nation of southern Arizona. She is currently a faculty member in the department of linguistics at the University of Arizona and is the author of *Ocean Power: Poems from the Desert* and co-editor of *Home Places*, both published by the University of Arizona Press.

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