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cross cultural poetics

POSTCOLONIAL "A"? EMPIRE & NATION IN LOUIS ZUKOFSKY'S AMERICAN MOVEMENTS, *A*-14—*A*-17 (AN ESSAY BY MARK MCMORRIS)

GALLERY: CECILIA VICUÑA

NEW WRITING FROM WANG PING, HOA NGUYEN, LESLIE SCALAPINO, KAMAU BRATHWAITE & OTHERS

"THERE'S NO CENTER WHERE / SIMILARITY WOULD BEGIN": C.S. GISCOMBE'S *GISCOME ROAD* AND *HERE* (AN ESSAY BY ALAN GILBERT)

REVIEWS OF *THE PRE-OCCUPATION OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES*, JODI DEAN'S *CULTURAL STUDIES AND POLITICAL THEORY*, *EDWARD SAID AND THE WORK OF THE CRITIC*, JAY WRIGHT'S *COLLECTED POEMS*, & MUCH MORE

College of St. Catherine-Minneapolis

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"...(Dis)Location..."

This issue is dedicated to the memory of
Ramez Qureshi (1972-2001)

Mixed Blood

Wang Ping

We greet our neighbors with
"You ate?" or "Where are you going?"
When we meet a stranger, we say,
"Where are you from?"

It is believed that influenzas come from Asia, where animals and birds live with humans.

At fifteen, my father ran away from his widowed mother to fight the Japanese, and had been trying to return home ever since.

"I'll come back
with a Ph. D. degree
and serve my country
with better English and knowledge,"
I pledged at the farewell party in Beijing.

He lost his left ear in a bayonet fight with a Japanese soldier. Two years later, the National Army cracked his eardrums with American cannons.

The night I arrived in JFK, the Mets won the World Series and the noise on the street went on till three. I got up at six and went to work in my sponsor's antique shop in Manhattan.

He never lost his Weihai accent, never learned Mandarin or the island dialect.

"Did you jump or fly?" asked my Fuzhou landlady from her mahjong table. Seeing my puzzled face, she laughed and told me her husband jumped ship ten years ago. When he opened his fifth Chinese takeout, he bought her a passport and flew her to Queens.

The only thing he liked to talk about was Weihai, its plump sea cucumbers and sweet apples, men with broad shoulders, stubborn thighs, and girls with long braids making steamed bread.

"Please, please become an American citizen,"
my brother begged me over the phone,

his words severed by the long distant wire.
"This is the only way I can come to America."

"I don't know why," she said, shivering from behind her fruit stand. "Back at home, I could go for days without a penny in my pocket, and I didn't feel poor. Now, if my money goes down below four figures, I panic." She scanned the snow-covered street of Chinatown. "I guess I really don't want to be homeless here."

Playing back the message,
I was shocked by the heavy accent
in my voice.

On her sixtieth birthday, my grandma went home to die. The trip involved two ships, one from the island to Shanghai, then from Shanghai to Yantai. From there, she would take two more buses to reach Weihai. I carried her onto the big ship at the Shanghai Port, down to the bottom, where she'd spend three days on a mattress, on the floor, with hundreds of fellow passengers. "How are you going to make it, grandma," I asked. She pulled out a pair of embroidered shoes from her parcel and placed them between my feet. "My sweet heart and liver, promise you'll come to see your old home soon, before it's too late."

A person without an ancestral home
is a kite with a broken string.

The U. S. Consulate in Shanghai rejected my brother's visa applications three times. He talks about borrowing thirty thousand dollars from snakeheads and jumping ship.

I hired my babysitter when I heard her hometown was fifty miles away from Weihai.

The president visited the rice paddies in Vietnam where a pilot was downed thirty-three years ago. He vowed to bring every bone of the fallen hero back to America.

When asked where I'm from,
I say "Weihai," even though
nobody knows where it is,
even though I've never been there.

My father tried to return home after his demotion from the Navy. With his rank, he could only get into a coalmine town five hundred miles away. No one in the family wanted to go. He went alone, and was soon hospitalized with TB. My mother sold her furniture to bribe the county administrator and ordered me to go out with his son so that my father could come back to the island.

The bag lady stopped her cart
on the busy street and urinated
into a subway grate.

They swore, before boarding the ship, that they'd send money home to bring more relatives over; in return, they were promised that if they died, their bodies would be sent back home for burial.

The bus stopped suddenly. The woman behind me bumped her head against the baby pack. "Go back to Laos," she shouted angrily, "and breed in your own place." "Ma'am," I turned to her, "I'm Chinese. We breed only one child for each family." "I don't care," she roared. "Just go back."

"No, I'm not sad."
The street child shook her head.
"How can I miss
something I've never had?"

My mother buried her husband on the island, where he lived for forty years.

"Don't tell me it's impossible. I'm willing to wait, five, ten years. I'm willing to work, restaurants, Laundromats. I just want my daughter to have a good education and freedom to choose where she wants to live, like you, Sister."

My friends call me "banana"—waxed yellow skin, but white and mushy inside.

Back from America, my mother furnished her home on the island, bought an apartment in the suburb of Shanghai, and is considering a third one in Beijing. "A cunning rabbit needs three holes," she wrote to her daughters, demanding their contributions.

Weihai, a small city
in Shandong Province,
on the coast of North China Sea,
a home, where my grandfather
and his father were born,
where my grandma married,
raised her children, and was buried
in the yam fields, next to her husband,
an old frontier to fend off Japanese pirates,
a place I come from, have never seen.

For fifteen years, I drink American milk (a few drops in tea) and eat American rice (Japanese brand). I speak and write in American English, often catch myself swearing in American slang. Chinese only comes to me in dreams, in black and white pictures.

家 *Jia* — a roof with animals underneath
房 *Fang* — door and a square
屋 *wu* — a body unnamed and homeless until it finds a destination

—the tangled parts of root words for home.

Postcolonial "A"? Empire & Nation in Louis Zukofsky's American Movements, A-14 – A-17

Mark McMorris

American poetry in the 1960s is not ordinarily examined in the context of political developments elsewhere in the world, among which one could plausibly emphasize the dismantling of European colonial empires in Africa and the Caribbean, and the concomitant turmoil surrounding the emergence of new nations out of a history of domination. Following up on suggestions offered by Kwame Anthony Appiah, I propose to examine movements of Zukofsky's *"A"* from the early 1960s as texts that respond to decolonization and that conspicuously render the United States in terms familiar from the rhetoric of postcolonial criticism today. My concern is with the figures of *empire* and *nation* primarily as these intersect with and displace each other in *A*-15, but in other movements as well, chiefly -14, -16, & -17. I call this sequence of 1963-1964 the American Movements of *"A"*.[1]

Appiah recalls our attention to the concords or thematic alliances in the discourses of nation-formation and national literatures common to the United States, in the nineteenth century, and the emergent nations of Africa and the Caribbean, in the twentieth. As a Ghanian intellectual, as he explains in *In My Father's House,* he encounters William Carlos Williams with a "sense of recognition [at Williams's] anxious observation:

> 'Americans have never recognized themselves. How can they? It is impossible until someone invents the original terms. As long as we are content to be called by somebody else's terms, we are incapable of being anything but our own dupes.'" (Appiah 60)

Both Appiah and Williams stand forward as anglophone intellectuals working in a field—literary production in relatively new nations—heavily inscribed by the literary evaluations of Britain. Who is to do the naming? The capitals of established literary production (somebody else) or the emergent collectivity (we) situated here—"on the periphery vis-à-vis the European center" (Appiah 60).

Mindful of these remarks, I want to propose, as an initial gesture towards widening the field for reading Zukofsky's work, that not only does America distinctly "recognize" itself in the crisis of the civil rights movement and the assassination of John F. Kennedy, but significantly that we can grasp the 1963-1964 movements of *"A"* as poetry that construes America as "nation"—and that therefore participates in the project of representation that Williams speaks of—through the display of indices marked as American and understood as such by Zukofsky. To be sure, America as nation is post-colonial at longer range than the decolonized zones

of Africa and the Caribbean in the 1960s, but the poem distorts, even as it alludes to, the historical chronology of the imperial relay—Greek, Roman, British, American—by its incorporation of the spectre of Rome through quotations from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* This text necessarily summons Britain into play, as one of those modern powers that through the discourse of its statesmen and intellectuals routinely perceived the image of Roman empire as model or as negative precedent for their own adventures. Though after World War II, America decisively displaces Britain as the global power, the quotations from -15 situate this development within a history that is much older than that shift and than the nation itself.

In an essay from 1931, Zukofsky tells us that "historic and contemporary particulars" move in the direction of the "objective" (*Prepositions* 12). In the movements from 1963-1964, one could say that Zukofsky's objective is to integrate the particulars of a disintegrating national and international situation into the total life of his poem. He wants to objectify the horror, and advance the cause of integration. Within a vast and incalculable historical and contemporary field, I will mention the following national themes: *"A"*-14 broaches the crisis of the civil rights movement to end racial segregation and the violent response it provoked; *"A"*-15 treats the death of John F. Kennedy, the public mourning & other responses to it, and evokes the poet's friendship with Williams, who died in 1963; and the "Coronal" of *"A"*-17 serves as a posthumous wreath dedicated to Williams's widow. Casting a glance at the end of -17, we see that the facsimile of Williams's signature brings a kind of closure to this sequence: a wide, oversized image in handwriting, the signature underlines the preceding material, bringing it into focus as pertinent to the dead American poet, but also graphically, i.e., crookedly, to paraphrase Susan Howe in another context, represents the arithmetic symbol for summation. Such an operation performed not as a mere aggregate but as a synthesis would in mathematical terms rely on the integral calculus. The column of "entries" in -17 itself, the variables in the function, consists in selections of poetry, translation, criticism, fiction, and letters, arranged in chronological sequence and dated in the left hand margin. The signature sums all of this material up—i.e., integrates it—and vests it with the authenticity of the poet's direct inscription onto the page. Additionally, *"A"*-18, which Zukofsky dates to 1964-1966, takes up the war in Indo-China.

Between these foci—civil disobedience, in -14, and the signature, in -17—there is an accumulation of conspicuously American indices, for example, a roster of American authors (Melville, James, Twain, Adams, Hawthorne, Irving, Whittier, and a reference to Whitman by naming *Song of Myself*; *"A"*-14, 336), at first of low density, then over the course of -15 coming to centrality, and with the "Coronal" of -17 circling through the history of the Americas to touch upon the Aztecs and Columbus. *"A"*-16 has only four words, generously spaced on a single page: "An // inequality ///// wind flower" (376). But the choice of the word "inequality" is pivotal for the whole sequence: inequality provokes the response of

civil disobedience and threatens public order. I would suggest that the 15th movement, dealing with the public reaction to the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and with Zukofsky's own reflections upon this death, combined with his treatment of the deaths of Frost and Williams, represents the poet's self-conscious attempt to take a national purview onto events, to speak for the nation as a whole. What he wrote of Williams' *Paterson* and includes in the "Coronal" just as well applies to this sequence of *"A"*, "this is for the nation" (*"A"*-17, 387), another instance of the self-referential comment scattered throughout the poem.

Integration is at once a mathematical operation, a social ideal, and an aesthetic objective. Indeed, history itself, as Zukofsky writes, "integrates" (*"A"*-14, 349). As a social ideal, the plot of integration has a definite beginning in the sequence: a Miltonic reference to a "christening 'civil / rights' disobedience" (*"A"*-14, 317), followed by testimony from someone who has witnessed a death, and then a swerve to location somewhere in the South, presumably Birmingham, Alabama:

> Throw bottles
> jeering at
> their funerals
>
> sweep down
> by pressure
> hoses, the
>
> cutting streams
> strip the
> bark off
>
> trees four
> little girls
> bombed' ...
> .....
> ... *Crazy*
> *white man!*
>
> (*"A"*-14, 318-319)

All of this can be precisely dated. The Birmingham marches at which the Police Commissioner "Bull" Connor unleashed police dogs and fire hoses upon the protesters took place between May 2 and May 7, 1963; the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, where four black girls died, on the morning of September 15, 1963 (Raines 14-15). The poem chronicles these two events but splices them together. Furthermore, with a nod to a vision ahead of its time, "Twain's Jim [has] / integration *behind* him" (Zukofsky's italics; 336), the text advancing one standard reading of the raft as a prototype of good race-relations, free from the racism of the society on shore and in Zukofsky's own time.

The imperial plot in -14 takes focus largely through Zukofsky's quotations from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, perhaps the canonical novel of postcolonial studies, if there could be such a thing (I'm thinking in particular of the critical revaluation provoked by Chinua Achebe's essay on *Heart of Darkness*).[2] Zukofsky rewrites Conrad to draw lines across times and places, aligning depredations in the Congo of Leopold II, where Conrad situates his novel, with the more recent torture and assassination of the nationalist leader and prime minister Patrice Lumumba in the newly independent nation of Zaire (formerly the Belgian Congo), and with violent episodes during the civil rights movement and with America's increasing involvement in the war in Indo-China. The circles of trouble—the black "gurge" (324) or whirlpool—extend outward to global proportions. The poem shifts attention from one nation to contact between nations, from domestic to international politics. Race is the tinder common to both arenas:

> contact's skintight between
> nations, long hot
>
> summer "a coasted
> torn-muffin" negro ghettos
> police "horse," black
>
> as white's, white
> as black's cache—
> (346)

The problem of the color line—the problem of black and white—which bedevils the United States has reached crisis elsewhere also owing to the history of imperial and colonial domination. Joseph Conrad's narrator Marlow, a man experienced in the "rapacious and pitiless folly" of Belgian imperialism overseas, enters the poem and signals the possibility of further domestic blood-shed on the racial front:

> 'nobody not
> a hut
> standing, if
>
> a gang
> of *thick-lips*
> armed suddenly
>
> took to
> travelling on
> the road
>
> catching the
> white swine
> right and left

I fancy
every farm
and cottage

hereabouts would
get empty
infra dig.
(328-329)

Zukofsky edits and re-arranges Conrad's text, and he replaces Conrad's words with his own. Instead of Conrad's "niggers," Zukofsky has the marginally less inflammatory "thick-lips"; and instead of "yokels," Zukofsky chooses an overtly pejorative locution, "white swine." But the most significant change is the substitution of "hereabouts" for Conrad's "thereabouts." The poem means to refer to conflict in local neighborhoods, not only in a distant part of England or across the seas. Accordingly, as if to route the reader's attention to the vicinity of the writer, which is not immune from the public catastrophe of race riots, words from another section of Conrad's text intervene:

and I
don't like
work I

like what
is *in*
the work'.[3]
(*"A"*-14, 329)

Work for Marlow is the chance "to find yourself—your own reality—for yourself, not for others—what no other man can ever know" (97). For Zukofsky, the work is presumably the poetry under sustained composition, the chance to write out a life, which as Bob Perelman argues is unsuccessful, a failed gambit to achieve an organic correspondence between man and poetry, over the entire 40-year range of the book (Perelman 181 ff.).

The American situation charted through the "same shame" of news print and the TV interferes with the context of imperialism put in play by Marlow, and the "four / little girls / bombed" exchange places as victims or indices of violence, in another movement, with four boys from the former territory of Leopold II. Filtered through a magazine, the world takes on a Kurtzean aspect, as "one horror dims another" (*"A"*-18, 397):

Life thumbed—three
photographs: a monument to Lumumba his wax figure
in a glass booth; corpse of another year

salved from heaped plaster; 4 small Congolese boys
left to play hide-and-go-seek
a game of grasping the last stake standing
of an iron fence to swing out to
devastation that does not own them, happy in
their play:

(*"A"*-18, 399)

The last stake standing, object of the game's grasping, is also the last straw. The wrath of the voice gathers speed and force from the photographs till the swift thunder of the withheld "devastation," rising to meet the enjambed "swing out to," sounds a chord for the time's calamities, the lack of any "*Pacem in terris*" (*"A"*-14, 353), "its inanities // and horrors" (*"A"*-15, 330):

buying and
selling, the
sparkling water

the cold
war.

(*"A"*-14, 330)

The fit of rampage that destroys Kurtz and, as Homi Bhabha observes, leaves his interlocutor Marlow with only "those two unworkable words 'the Horror! the Horror!" (124) instead of the self sought through work, has no more meaning than the inanities of an ongoing consumption and the catch phrases of cold war foreign policy.

The field of particulars is vast and historical and it is also minutely local and contemporary: scraps of news and natural history, reports from Gagarin's conquest of space, news of "millions / of spiritual / creatures" (*"A"*-14, 321), forays into Biblical Eden, into the Egyptian *Book of the Dead,* Lucretian cosmology and bodily poetics, into the speaker's early life, into the personal details of daily life, the speaker and his love:

Lonely the
season's quiet with
my love, terrace

cedar fence picket
our woods. Not
a false ending—

(*"A"*-14, 350)

which pauses to allow the scene of private intimacy to coalesce out of the particulars of sight and sound (cedar fence picket). That "picket" may be a verb of protest

inserts the time's turbulence into the tranquillity of love but does not destabilize the season. Johann Sebastian Bach, as is typical of *"A"*, occupies a portion of the field. In -17, Williams comes into focus as the author of "a work most indigenously of these states" and in anticipation of *Paterson*, as one who writes "for the nation" (*"A"*-17, 378, 387). Nevertheless, the "Coronal" that focuses Williams thus, and by implication focuses attention on Zukofsky's own American work, includes translations of Catullus II and Catullus LI. Both reprint the first line of Catullus's Latin before beginning with Zukofsky's English. In other words, Latin is part of the objective direction of particulars.

Latin, or learning, what Zukofsky calls "*mathémata / swank* for *things // learned*" (*"A"*-14, 349) is also significantly part of the imperial plot. I do not have room to develop this point, except to observe that references to Catullus and to the use of Latin enter into the sequence and draw attention to the source and distributor of that language, the Roman empire. Zukofsky splices into "A"-14 an allusion to Catullus XVI: "chaste—eyeing passionate Italian lips two / thousand years near // to sharp them and flat them / not in prurience—of their voice—" (356). (Zukofsky's translation of XVI, in *Catullus*, reads: "the pious poet / is chaste" (*Complete Short Poetry* 253).)[4] Zukofsky alludes to his own translation technique, applied to the *Catullus*, published in 1969, and to the homophonic translations from the Book of Job at the opening of -15, when he writes:

> On a single
> instrument runs to
>
> chords, chords into
> runs, broken homonyms
> an empire silenced.
> (*"A"*-14 , 356)

And the technique of broken homonyms finds further application to a slice of Latin text that recalls Catullus' liaison with Lesbia, in *"A"*-14: "*—dulce mihist* / kiss me last— / *pietate mea*— // my piety may" (357); and, with the Latin omitted, in *"A"*-18, "We warm us may ah Lesbia what cue / may maim us" (393), which translates homophonically the first line of Catullus V "*vivamus mea Lesbia atque amemus*."

Any number of references internal to the poem could answer to the signifier "an empire silenced"—significantly, the Greek, or the Roman, or the Egyptian *imperium*—but coming in proximity to the "broken homonyms" of the "Cats" (*"A"*-14, 355), Zukofsky's word for the translations, the phrase inevitably invokes the passing of the Roman empire and Latin. "[B]roken homonyms / an empire silenced" suggests the capacity of Zukofsky's homophonic translation to silence the original empire of Latin that Catullus exists in, which is to say, to break rather than to "follow" the language, but also links the technique of translation to the theme of imperialism initially activated by the quotations from Conrad, and pros-

ecuted from -14 to -15 and into -18: rootedly, in connection with Vietnam, "Remorse said: / 'one Senator—*imperialism*? I don't delight in semantics / the U.S. is guilty of violating international law" (*"A"*-18, 389). There is in -18 a punning, assonantal indictment of Latin: "Napalm no palm, manroot pollutes their throats, "eloquence" that is the old Latin's / past participle merely declaims"[5]; and more enigmatically, "We / are nothing if not American. But we are *not* a Europe-of-the-United States / an Asia-of-an Africa-of-a South America of-the-United States. Aware 'gathers ground fast' / how fast their empire dwindled, child 'tasted A' (*"A"*-18, 397). In these chains, the preposition "of" means "subject" to the nation at the terminus of the series.

Crossed by such lines of empire, the plot of integration feeds into a fully developed national plot, in the fifteenth movement. There, in its own turn, the images of national gathering are displaced onto the screen of imperialism through the sudden interpolation of passages from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. As a chronicle of events, the poetry signals its use of other people's words without any interference other than lineation. The public—or as Benedict Anderson puts it, the community which must remain imagined, since all of its members can never be in physical contact with one another (6)—gathers in mourning around news reports from the television. Simulacra of images connected with the president's death enter the poem.

> 'In a moment it was no more.
> And so she took a ring from her finger and placed it
> in his hands'
> And he added the fifth time:
> 'and kissed him and closed
> the lid of the coffin.'
>
> (366)

Visually mediated, the "nation" gathers as such through the common experience of shock and grief and coalesces as the supervisory concept of this sequence of *"A"*: "the nation / a world / mourned / three / days in / dark and in / daylight / glued to / TV / grieved as a family / the Kennedy's [sic] were a family" (364). There is the customary excursus into Bach, then a return: "so the nation grieved/ each as for someone in his or her family / *we want Kennedy*—" (368).

Because of the predominant tone of sympathy and grief—extended to the president's widow, the public, and the poet himself—the onset of edited passages from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* marks yet another point of discontinuity, unrelatedness, and displacement in a poetry where the foreground changes frequently and without syntactic cues. The movement has not been critical of Kennedy or of the United States. We hear of the positive "test ban treaty" (367); Kennedy's inspirational words, downplaying military and economic might: "'not to our size, but to our spirit'" (367); "Fidel Castro," the anti-imperial sponsor of hemispheric revolution, ironically the target of an assassination attempt launched from the

Kennedy White House, sounds the note of loss: "We should comprehend it / who repudiate assassination / a man is small/ and relative in society / his death no joy" (364). The riderless noble horse, a figure for Zukofsky's "cultural constant" in *"A"*-12, evokes the pathos of a hero's death:

> hilted sword black dangled in silver scabbard from
> the saddle riderless rider
> his life looked back
> into silver stirrups and the
> reversed boots in them
>
> (368)

As a decorated veteran of the U.S. Navy in World War II, the president receives a full dress military funeral.[6]

In such surroundings of patriotic symbolism and national gathering, the referents of the *Decline and Fall* must remain directed at Rome and separate from the aura of the United States: "perpetual violation of justice / . . maintained by . . political virtues" applies to the old "mere bloated empire" (Pound's phrase), to the city that "swelled into . . empire" and collapsed from the "effect of immoderate greatness" (370). As with the field of broken homonyms generated from the Book of Job that opens -15, the strangeness of the extended quotation from Gibbon derives partly from the sense that, although resistant, it deserves to be corrected back into relevance to the national thematic. The poem in front of us reads, quoting from Gibbon: "the causes of destruction multiplied with / the extent of conquest"; but, locally, this part of *"A"* does not deal with overseas conquests at all. And it quotes: "The victorious legions, who, in distant wars, / acquired the vices of strangers and mercenaries"; but domestic crisis and grief have been the focus of contemporary public events in this movement.

Once the quotation turns however to consider the lesson that Rome offers to the Europe of Gibbon's own day, the balance between substitution and interference changes.

> This awful revolution may be
> usefully applied to the instruction of the *present*
> *age* . . The savage nations of the globe are the
> common enemies of civilized society; and
> we may inquire . . whether Europe is still
> threatened with a *repetition*
> of those *calamities* which formerly oppressed
> the arms and institutions of Rome.
>
> (371-372; my italics)

The passage provides an explanation for its place in the American text: "the present age," the contemporary world of national and international crisis, can make use of the lesson of Rome. The questions Gibbon asked then bear asking now, and not

only of post-World War II Europe but of those countries that possess "the fruit of industry." Juxtaposed with the domestic crisis, certain phrases of Gibbon take on a double meaning. Epithets attached to Rome split their referents and point towards the "American Giant," Zukofsky's phrase from -18 (*"A"*-18, 398): "immoderate greatness," "stupendous fabric" (*"A"*-15, 370). The interference of the signs "Rome" and "nation," this doubling of the referent, is aggravated by the context of recent history. World War II ravaged Europe economically and accelerated decolonization, the birth of the Third World. International confrontation builds:

> . . poor, voracious, and turbulent;
> bold in arms and impatient
> to ravish the fruits of industry . . The barbarian world
> was agitated by the rapid impulse of war . .
> the peace of Gaul or Italy was shaken
> by the distant revolutions of China . .
> .....
> In every age . . oppressed
> China, India, Persia
>
> (372)

Every age has its "poor, voracious, and turbulent" peoples who line up with the old barbarians of the Roman world as the enemies of *imperium*. *"A"*-18 specifies the barbarian casualties of modern imperialism: Lumumba's "corpse of another year," and the peasants damaged in "'The stupid war / in Viet Nam' afterthought of an earlier stupid / Frog's thought for Glory not all neat o" (*"A"*-18, 398):

> Weeping: the food he eats.
> The spirits would not return to rest under
> the huts burnt to the ground their lifegiving
> handful of rice smoke when the rice paddies
> fired. The marine with the cigarette lighter did
> not know nor the air cavalry bombing indiscriminately.
>
> (*"A"*-18, 399-400)

The "nation" forms only one aspect of the representation of "lines meeting" that cross and re-cross the poem from Europe and elsewhere and that proceed from the civil state to the global conflict around European post-imperialism and the cold war with the Soviet Union. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, displacing and then implicating the national thematic, inscribes the U.S. into the wider fold of the history of imperialism for which Rome serves as the European paradigm.

Here, again, then, Rome makes its appearance thanks to the circulating library of the west, but under the shadowy aspect of a *translatio imperii* already exposed in its brutality of not already exhausted, never fully articulated for the U.S. adventure as it was for the British, and only articulated by the poem to draw attention to a condition of degeneracy and to the general degeneracy of the age.

The imperial plot displaces the national plot, or rather, both plots interfere with each other, and America splits its identity between a nation in crisis and an agent of overseas intervention. Owing to the traditional place of Rome's *imperium* in the discourse of modern empires—a discourse reaching from the late nineteenth into the twentieth century that we still encounter in Eliot's essays from the 1940s and George Steiner's writings on cultural decline from the early 1970s—the United States in *"A"* comes to occupy, I suggest, the structural place of power vacated by the European nation-states after World War II, but here not as cogent center to barbarian peripheries so much as itself a deteriorating hegemony, which the fragmentary quotations from Gibbon serve to emblematize. The quotations are elliptical, awkward, difficult to read. If anything, the transmission of the history of the *imperium* which passes from ancient sources into Gibbon's text now appears in sabotaged form. Zukofsky's Rome is not the Rome of Vergil and of Eliot's *imperium sine fine*, except as a remnant of this promise. Rome still makes its way into the future, into the anglophone text, but rather as a "mere bloated empire," as a collapsed center and candidate for an archaeological reconstruction from the verbal ruins that Zukofsky's text offers.

[1] The table of contents in *"A"* gives these dates of composition: -14 & -15, 1964; -16 & -17, 1963. The movements written earlier are positioned later in the numbered sequence.

[2] Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa" (*Massachusetts Review* 18 (1977): 782-794). For Zukofsky's use of Conrad, see also Harry Gilonis, "Dark Heart: Conrad in Louis Zukofsky's *A*" (*The Conradian* 14: 1-2 (1989): 92-101).

[3] Conrad's texts are as follows: "a solitude, a solitude, nobody, not a hut. The population had cleared out a long time ago. Well, if a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all kinds of fearful weapons suddenly took to travelling the road between Deal and Gravesend, catching the yokels right and left to carry heavy loads for them, I fancy every farm and cottage thereabouts would get empty very soon" (85). And from a later part of the novella: "I don't like work — no man does — but I like what is in the work — the chance to find yourself. Your own reality —" (97).

[4] This passage contains an oblique reference to Dante and to the intellect as it is transmuted into speech: "matters worthy of the 'highest common speech — all that flows from the tops of the heads of illustrious poets down to their lips' — properly embrace the whole art of poetry" (*Prep.* 17).

[5] Though *eloquence* properly derives from the present participle *loquens*, from *loquor*.

[6] Kennedy was a Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy from 1941-1945. He commanded a PT boat in the South Pacific and was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal and the Purple Heart.

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[Years after stealing cattle from the womb]

Hoa Nguyen

Years after stealing cattle from the womb
your face is slightly smeary

The globe cracks and depends on you

All the elements are literally "at my feet"
pointing in a disco dance stance
where two waters (dry beds) divide
I wear a simple pin and dirty jeans

A strong dancer that leaps ahead
to sing "Last Pieces"

I Woke Up This Morning And It Was Friday

Hoa Nguyen

Scribbling aimlessly and abstractedly on scraps of paper
my life is completely uninteresting
to you, Dear Reader "O I guess
I have a mother now"

Pretend I am asleep
Hang up!

She struggles to carry the flowers
up the stairs

If only the world wasn't glob-al
"Don't be a sucker"

Mission Dolores

Hoa Nguyen

Stream of our Lady of Sorrows
Dolores though the river is gone now
Ring your bell on holy days sunny
        Mission and the old cemetary
in the District of Missions
    Palmy Dolores
bright ceiling dim with candle smoke
survivor of earthquakes and fires
(Dolores and her gold fire hydrant)

$1 will get you history
        museum entry and a California moment
Dolores where I kissed you
    for a lifetime wishing fierceness
to die with you or maybe
                just after you

Lozenge

Hoa Nguyen

There's a revolution going on
and commercials & football on t.v.

Secret
river in the sky it's a tree or crocodile
Mayans say it ends in 12 years
(sky fall down)

layer layer layer

I could be born graceful
to pull turnips or rice
or tricks all my life

long wavy hair plump lips

and then die

The secret seed of the thing

Bulbing words
throb the way hearts do

Hanoi Palimpsest

May Joseph

Utopias are sites with no real place.
—Foucault

terror of the hat

Crisp severe and formal it sat, the cadre hat on the basic wooden table. A sign of a time passing away, token of history's experiment gone awry. Souvenirs of the city stir as kitsch gecko sounds and tube lights spasm. Hip young women cadres in crisp Khaki uniforms and an almost casual air about them attend arrivals at Hanoi airport. I had heard about the forbidding array of armed, sunglassed and uniformed cadres but was unprepared for this disarming entourage of immigration appratchniks. Their rigid hats by their side on the table made communist paraphernalia look chic and almost a flavor of the day trend that belonged to the streets of Soho. This striking presence of women cadres as representatives of the state at immigration checkpoints is symptomatic of a trend that is visible along the class spectrum of Hanoi's public spaces. Fashionable working women, students, workers, peasants, hip teens, middleclass women all partake of the daily workings of the city.

The people of the city meet you before the city does, in a teeming flow of socialist modernity. Scooters, cyclos, minibuses, bicycles, pedestrians. Dreams deferred. Khmer towers, cham balustrade and soviet architecture unfold a flat city transforming. The heightened presence of women commuters on the streets of Hanoi catch my eye. Women on two-wheelers with kids standing in front, women with large bundles of goods on the front and back of scooters, women with their mothers on the back and baggage in front, women on mopeds and bikes, the city of Hanoi is a hum in motion, afloat in speed and change. The roar of the scooter engines cumulatively create a sphere of noise and drone in keeping with the city's surging thrust forward. No one here is looking back. The fix is on the future.

Uncle Ho's conservatism on clothing for the nation has given way to adventure and style for women on the street. Fashion has never been more important, with tight soho flared pants and strapped tops with the bra-straps showing. Impossibly daring shoes occasionally shock amidst the largely sensible display of footwear. Social change begins with the feet, and this is what the shoe stores seem to be saying, as innovative designs of balsam wood shoes and extraordinarily inventive

platform shoes stare at passers by in the old quarter. Straps, heels, wedges, pumps, slides, spikes, boots, clogs. Reinventing the flatness of the city, these plastic and wooden vehicles of mobility arrest my gaze. Hanoi is a city discovering a passion for feet adornments. Its streets pulse with the throb of intensity.

the city between the rivers

The contemporary city of old Hanoi is the remnant of the Market Town of Thang Long, which was located outside the Royal city, and known as the Commoner's City or 'Kinh Thanh'. Old Hanoi is structured around the ceremonial lake of Hoan Kiem, with the Ho Tay (West Lake) and Song Hong (Red River) framing it to the north and east, the To Lich River to the west, and a number of lakes stretching south. An eleventh century anonymous description of the ancient capital describes its topography as resembling "a coiled dragon or a crouching tiger."[1]

Despite its watery location, the contemporary historic city has the condensed structure of an inland feudal city, whose imagination is centered south towards the ceremonial lake rather than on all sides towards its watery borders. One of the older cities in Indo-China, Hanoi bears the mapping of many similar cities traumatized by colonial occupation. Its geography moves from the internal logic of mercantile trading zones of the old quarter to the artificially imposed grid like structure of modern Hanoi designed by the French between 1884 and the early Twentieth century, to the post-revolutionary Vietnamese aesthetic which organizes the rest of Hanoi with the heavy hand of Soviet planning and architecture embossed upon the city's visage through the design of Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum, the redesign of Ba Dinh Square and the Soviet-Vietnamese Friendship Cultural Palace.

Meandering through the bustling streets of the City of Thirty-Six Streets in the summer of 2000, the minutiae of detail floods the field of vision as movement, human activity and everyday life unfold on the antique sidewalks of the eleventh century trading city. People gather on the corner of streets by sidewalk cafes for snacks and communal meals. Women in transit to the market place carry loads of fruit and vegetables in hanging baskets balanced intricately on either side of their shoulders. Children cycle to school, deftly maneuvering the dense traffic. Plants on bicycles driven by women en route to the florists, pink upholstered cyclos jostling pedestrians, scooters and cycles. The ear sees and the eye blurs, as a suffusion of bi-pedal intensity and dense living draws the traveler into a place of habitation filled with the machinations of a throbbing Asian city. Food smells and intense sounds interrupted by the roar of two-wheeled transport create a moving theater of sensations at once distinctly grounded in this particular city, and simultaneously invoking the comforting mnemonic trace of other trading cities traversed, Cochin, Mombasa. Dense, seductive, intoxicating.

Hanoi is a city of historical junctures, colonial and postcolonial, utopian and modernist, nationalist and postmodernist. A portal to understanding the logic of simultaneity and interconnectedness that shaped socialist cities like Dar-es-salaam, Cairo, Dakar and Sarajevo, the city bears the scars of its violent modernity in ways reminiscent of strategically important medieval cities transformed by their brutal histories of feudal, colonial and nationalist struggles. Poignantly caught in the threshold space of what was formerly imagined as "second world cities," Hanoi's visage embodies the performance of frugality, where political figures, ideologies and strategic location of place as a city of resistance combined to create specific utopic sites. It is a quickly transitioning monument to the movements of scarcity and frugality that shaped a sphere of modernity during the twentieth century.

the frugal city

For socialist cultures of the last century, the frugal city bears a special place in the second world imaginary. It is a city filled with the ghosts of its history, and the spectres of ours. The frugal city was a utopic city, what Foucault calls "a site with no place." It was the space of the ideological phantasmatic, a city quietly resilient in its conviction to survive all odds.

A city of fragments—Hanoi is such a utopic city, lacerated by its dystopic realization. Repressed, buoyant, resilient, seductive, restrained, proud, Hanoi demands submission to be read. For the itinerant traveller, only an epidermal reading of Hanoi's layered history is possible. There are the clearly delineated spaces of the transitioning modernist capital city where the space of trade, the space of health and the space of the nation are geographically and somatically intertwined by the trace of the ancient city. Today's old quarter is a vestige of the former Commoner's City, while the area around Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum marks the borders of the ancient citadel walls, now marked by the solitary One Pillar Pagoda.

Then there are the more inchoate triggers of perception that cities like Hanoi allow the traveller as new buildings and roads are built over the ashes of old. It is the familiarity of having traversed a similar layered landscape of historic past and surging modernity in another space and time. Of having come of age amidst the vestiges of a changing economy in another continent, as transitioning political ideologies collide. The visual signs of fervent entrepreneurialism most embodied by Ho Chi Minh City juxtaposed with obsolete forms of communal farming remind me of Tanzanian and Indian transformations towards agrarian modernization. The circumspect commercialism surrounded by a revitalizing sphere of individual entrepreneurial spirit is exciting after the jaded greed of New York City's Wall Street. Old fashioned communal generosity encounters capitalist drive in

ways that are lost forever in the suburban sprawl of America. Yet, "America" looms large as Vietnam's sign of the modern, as Vietnamese-Americans like the Los Angeles-based Alain Tan return to Vietnam with entrepreneurial innovations in fast food, such as the protean noodle dish the "Pho," described as the Vietnamese answer to MacDonalds. [2]

Frugality in the 20th century was mobilized within the now defunct imagined space of First, Second, and Third World as a structuring concept that simultaneously expressed the different ends of the spectrum of expenditure. In the United States it was mobilized through the aesthetics of 1930's depression, 1950's minimalism, the 1970's international oil crisis, and the ecological and environmental movements in the interests of planetary sustainability, invoking images of a depleted earth. Socialist experiments such as the Fourierist inspired utopic housing projects of Brook Farm in Massachusetts and Red Bank in New Jersey in architecture; minimalism and solo performance in the realm of cultural practice combined with vegetarianism and recycling marked this self-conscious move toward a selective frugality through life-style choices in the United States.

But the structuring logic of a three world system which shaped relationships of exchange in cities like Cairo, Dar-es-salaam, Vientiane and Hanoi during the colonial period of the first half of the Twentieth century and later the Cold War operated under a different logic of frugality. Colonial exploitation of local and national resources was followed by postcolonial attempts at failed utopic social engineering. For emerging states crippled by the history of colonialism, socialist and communal forms of social organizing offered a radical reconceptualization of power, society and space on what appeared to be modern and utopic terms. These reformist turned totalitarian experiments offered a way out of feudal systems of monarchichal and tribal forms of social organization. Socialism was a means of addressing a postindependence transition crisis. The postcolonial city offered a heretofore unknown space for modern self-invention to indigenous subjects. It also brought along with its modernizing regimes of control and policing new forms of surveillance, fear and conformity often etched onto the façade of the city. For Hanoi, as for Asian cities like Djakarta, Eastern European cities like Riga or the former East Berlin, the physical layout of the capital city mirrored the ideology of the state.[3] Socialist housing, public monuments and statues of Lenin and Ho commemorating the communist state and its citizens delineated the horizontal perspective of the main transportation arteries and junctures linking the medieval city to the colonial city and the post-revolutionary city in Hanoi.

Frugality as a state policy—self reliance as a logic of physical culture through the deployment of youth camps, state holidays and national parades—institutionalized the utopian ideal of socialist transformation materialized as coercive, dystopic social control. Drawing upon communist and confucian philosophies of frugality,

whereby mass education and self-subsistence became the vehicles for redistributing resources by the state, Vietnam went the path of utopic social organizing, followed shortly after by Kerala and Tanzania among other utopic experiments. Hanoi, Trivandrum and Dar-es-salaam were in a space of simultaneous imaginings, parallel laboratories of utopic organizing unfolding through varying degrees of instrumental rationalization.

While these now historically defunct and socially catastrophic experiments have proven to be colossal travesties with far reaching human consequences, the spheres of social imagining metabolized within these societies are only beginning to be articulated. The urban expressions of such state ideologies of frugality produced particular experiences of 20th century modernity. Socialist cities such as Dar and Dakar in Africa, Sarajevo in the former Yugoslavia and Vientiane in Laos, link the International Style with Marxist urban planning in the Second World space of the mid-20th century. Often marked by postwar socialist housing, signs of urban decay, eroding residential buildings, and 19th century graciousness converted into 20th century overcrowded housing, these cities bore an aura of frugality through the public staging of urban neglect.

The frugal city, the city that combined mass housing with minimal expenditure, redefined Bauhaus style as proletarian. The minimalism of Bauhaus merged with the frugality of socialist policies and generated a new post-independence framework of uniform housing that was rational, devoid of character, and productivity-driven. The resulting mushrooming of mass housing in the form of micro-cities such as the Tanzanian "*ujamaa* village" became a sign of modernization in Second World cities. It generated new perceptual frameworks of frugality in relation to efficiency, economic need and aesthetic minimalism.

Frugality was an international modernist project, linking structures of modernity from Havana to Hanoi, from Chandigarh to Zanzibar.[4] Its aesthetic springs from the conjunction of a three-world system and a bi-polar logic of excess or scarcity, capitalism or socialism that structured the Cold-War era. Operating on a transnational logic, frugality manifested the negative side of expenditure, the alternative economy to spending, the underbelly of conspicuous consumption. Frugality and nationalism linked rhetorics in the modern city, as rights to the city and rights of the individual merged with interests within public policy. Less space, more housing. Less horizontal expansion, more verticality. Less spending, more thrift. These dictums worked on either side of the capitalist/socialist divide and gave way to more complex networks of privatization and gentrification, complicating the relationship between less and more.

Frugality emerges as a set of relations of exchange—between abstinence, enjoyment and expenditure—as well as a structuring logic between states. In the United

States, frugality becomes linked in the mid-Twentieth century with a notion of restraint, quiet wealth, old money and measured expenditure that denotes expendable capital, and assumes specific historic relations to the production and censorship of pleasure in the modern American city. To consume through elaborate expenditure of vision and aurality opened up newer fields of consumption than the mere exchange of money would permit. Modern cities such as New York come to embody new forms of austerity, simultaneously visual (modernist minimalism), tactile and visceral. The arrogant skyline of steel, glass and concrete in conjunction with the modern grid of streets permits new forms of social life where the banker and the street vendor, the real estate mogul and the homeless co-exist in a maelstrom of change. The frugal becomes an obsessive condition as insatiable desire and the ability to consume vicariously distorts the cycle of urban need marked as the sign of "America."

On a different visual register from the verticality of Manhattan's minimalism, the horizontal frugality of Hanoi's visage is a set of social and psychic practices determined by the extraordinary history of resistence and revolution that has shaped the geography of this city's imagination. It hovers around Hanoi like a tangible presence, embossed on people's bodies, faces, the physiognomy of the city: Soviet modernist architecture, Indian made trains, thirties French urban planning, fifties experiments in suburban sprawl, Buddhist minimalism, Communist restraint and austerity propelled by Five-Year plans and an increasingly beleaguered economy.

city of the senses

On the Street of China Bowls, the cock crows a fetid dawn, as comforting sounds of the street sweeper scraping the refuse of yesterdays excess, leaves, plastic, paper and mortality, echo off the intimate streets of the City of Thirty Six Streets. A little girl takes her first bicycle ride as women on bicycles, long coats and conical hats weave their way through cool damp roads, where satellites atop eroding rooftops beam dreams of France and Hollywood, odorless fantasies, grasped in the stronghold of greed and gluttony, consumptive desire in its ecstatic trance, self-devouring.

Paper devotions, embers of wealth, lie resplendent in commodities of appeasement on Hang Ma Street or the Street of Ghost Money. Here, a candle for graceless death at the corner of the street make paper ghosts a respite for bodies that cannot be retrieved. Incense, red candlesticks and cardboard mausoleums on Hang Quat Street (Fan Street) offer solace for loss and desire as unspoken dreams drift in the myriad lights of smoke and fragrance. Silver and red tinsel monuments burn reminders of troubled spirits and reconciled souls. Fragrant vapors suffuse Thuoc Bac Street (the Street of Herbal Medicine), as herbs, seeds, twigs, leaves and tradi-

tional medicines arrest one's olfactory senses. Vermilion, magenta, fuschcia and saffron silks drape the store fronts of Hang Gai Street (Silk Street), rousing the skin to a panoply of color and texture. Fine laquerware and ornate paintings distract the eye.

The old quarter hugs the north-eastern part of the City Between The Rivers like a medula oblongata.[5] It is distinctly medieval in its non-grid compressed labyrinth of winding streets and alleys and remains a mnemonic link between the historic and the modern, a palimpsest of multiple spatial frameworks and temporal materializations. Now an eclectic mix of commodities and desires, the City of Thirty-Six streets was built as a commercial and residential center on the periphery of the forbidden city for the commoners as well as for soldiers and administrators of the Royal Palace during its eleventh century emergence. The market town continues to link the different trades, commodities and services in an everchanging network of relations of exchange. Called the "native city" during the French colonial occupation, the old city bears residues of its former trading economies and artisan commodities such as Han Muoi (the Street of Salt) and Hang Bac (the Street of Silversmiths). These trade and artisan logics have transitioned with forms of modern consumption from old trades of bamboo, rattan, hemp and cotton to new trades of plastic, aluminum, polyester and internet cafes. Old trades give way for new desires. Hang Bong or the Street of Cotton now sells art, plastic and electronics, while Chan Cam or the Street of Stringed Instruments sells art, tourist bric-a-brac and some musical instruments.

The City of Thirty-Six Streets demands a reworking of space on a more compressed human scale of movement, rather than the modernist, grid-like spaces determined by the size of the automobile that circumvents this medieval space of mercantile logic. It is a self-enclosed universe of dense social life that offers an alternative structure of daily life to the rest of the pulsing city. Tight knit social spaces generate compact multi-purpose public uses. Here, tailors, launderers, shoemakers, hair dressers, restaurateurs, confectioners, bakers, beauticians, fish mongers, fruit vendors, and herbalists work and live within the same space, proliferating the possible distractions in this revitalizing city of the senses. Tube-like dwellings create intense proximities.[6]

The verticality of this space allows for at least four levels of everyday activities—the street, the pavement, the rooftops and the fourth interiorized space of everyday social activity. Across the rooftops of the old quarter, space expands in a myriad of uses, roof gardens, clotheslines, balconies of children's paraphernalia. The solitary bombed out hull of a roof top remains a lingering reminder of a violent hovering past. A girl stretches in languorous ease in the searing light of dawn. These dense outer spaces offer an array of public social life that complements life on the streets, where corner eateries, cafes and street level hang-out joints allow for a

variety of informal gathering points on the street. The smell of roasting fish wafts across the cool of the Hanoi night on Cha Ca Street (the Street of Roasted Fish). Shadows linger in the curves of the tree-lined streets as women of the market return, now unburdened of their baskets heavy with watercress, mint and scallions—local economies, fast disappearing.

lake of memory

Shaped like a fluid heart, the expanse of serene water called the Hoan Kiem Lake stretches south of the old quarter. It borders the southern most streets of the old city like a blue gauze, thick with memory and history. The centrality of this immensity of water to the city's imagining is marked by its few remaining historic monuments marking the city's struggle for sovereignty. The Tortoise Pagoda in the middle of the lake crowned symbolically with a single red star and the Ngoc Son Temple (Jade Mountain) an eighteenth century construction located at the northern part of the lake accessible by a red wooden bridge, The Rising Sun Bridge, which imbues the lake with a ceremonial memory of sovereignty and health. The Ngoc Son Temple resonates as an anti-colonial sign of the victory of the Vietnamese against the Mongols in the 13th century. The temple is also dedicated to the patron saint of physicians, La To, concretizing the plethora of uses that the inhabitants of this city use this span of water for.

From morning till dusk the Lake of the Restored Sword is a space of healing, an intense physical inhabitation. Hoan Kiem lies serene amidst the young trees and new concrete park structures of the urban corniche. It is a space filled with multiple crossings, old and new, fraught and passionate. As dawn rises early morning, the elderly engage in qui gong, others practice Tai Chi, the young involve in physical exercise, some jog and others push hands. Some meditate, others walk or sit and chat. In the afternoon groups of men play checkers or gamble huddled by the stone balustrades, while food vendors, herbalists, paper vendors, t-shirt vendors, fruit sellers, retired army officers, women with weighing scales, street children and groups of young men stroll, wander, saunter or sit on the stone benches. Meditation, romance, play, intrigue, camaraderie, all unfold around the periphery of this magnetic sweep of water.

A space born of legend, the lake is the heart of reunified Vietnam. It grounds Hanoi geographically and is the mythic originary space of modern Vietnamese nationalist identity. Legend goes that with the help of a magical sword received from the celestial skies, the 15th century ruler Le Loi drove the invading Chinese out of Vietnam. After the reclamation of the city, a giant turtle is said to have risen out of the depths of Hoan Kiem Lake and reclaimed the heavenly weapon from the King.

Colonial Urbanites and Frugality

The extent of Hanoi's impact on the international imaginary during the early part of the 20th century is powerfully linked to the charismatic nomadism of its most famous inhabitant, Ho Chi Minh. The lure of Hanoi lies in its extraordinarly rich history of resistance and revolution, most tangibly marked by the lingering spectre of its dead architect. It is in the old quarter of Hanoi that the Vietnamese Declaration of Independeence was drawn up by Ho Chi Minh at 48 Hang Ngang Street street. Seaman, gardener, pastry chef maker (he supposedly worked in Paris with Escoffier), photographer and painter, Ho was a man who went by many aliases in different countries. "After World War One," Ho Chi Minh writes in the 1920's, "I made my living in Paris, now as a retoucher at a photographer's, now as painter of `Chinese antiquities' (made in France!). I would distribute leaflets denouncing the crimes committed by the French colonialists in Viet-nam."[7]

When Ho signed up in 1911 as a mess boy on the crew of the Latouche-Treville, a liner operating between Haiphong and Marseille, he chose the path of the emigrant that marked the crossroads for many revolutionaries-to-be of his era. Economic necessity, colonial rule, and a curiosity to experience the boundaries of the Empire's reach freed him to choose the open ocean over known territory. What Ho and many other Third World intellectuals like him learned in the metropoles of the North would later become tools to unlearn the grip of Empire. What is interesting in Ho's anecdote is the key role played by world cities like Paris, London, and New York in the nurturing of anticolonial revolutionaries and their philosophies of state frugality through socialism. Like Ho, who also visited Oran, Dakar, Diego-Suarez, Port Said, Alexandria, Le Havre, New York, and London, Cesaire, Senghor, Fanon, Nehru, Nyerere and Jomo Kenyatta all sojourned in the Western metropoles of Paris, London, or New York. During the 1920's and 1930's, these cities were vibrant crucibles of revolutionary sentiment, inspired by the still-resounding echoes of the French and Haitian revolutions and aided by the Russian revolution, the Third International, and the rising tide of rebellion across the different colonial dominions.

By the 1920's in Paris, Ho Chi Minh's theoretical conceptualization of peasant revolutions were unusual for a member of the French Communist Party. His preoccupation with the condition of the Annamese peasantry in relation to colonial oppression found little sympathy among his French comrades. Even vociferous anti-colonialist French communists such as Jacques Rivet, the Socialist deputy and director of the Musee de l'Homme and famed champion of the Vietnamese cause, parted ways with their colonized comrades on the matter of Vietnamese independence from the French. Profoundly aware of the painful rift between the class sympathies of the French Left and those of its colonized nationalists of different African and Asian colonies, Ho Chi Minh turned to Moscow and Yunan for

strategies that would sharply redefine the future shape of the Vietnamese social revolution. Mao did not come to the fore till later.[8]

Like other cosmopolitans of his generation, the metropolitan city of Paris opened up the colonial edifice on new terms for the colonial emigrant. In Paris, Ho could be anonymous as he immersed himself in a close study of French socialism. Absorbing Proudhon and the skirmishes between Lenin, Stalin, and Rosa Luxemburg, meeting students from West Indian and African states, all sharpened Ho's views as to the direction he should take the nationalist cause toward, in the search for self-determination. For Ho, that direction was laid out in Lenin's "Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions," published by *L'Humanité*.[9]

The confidence inspired by Lenin's slim tract on the crucial distinction between First World socialism and the interests of colonized peoples, and the impact of the Third International on the group of African, Caribbean, and Asian colonized nationals in Paris, London, and New York, should not be underestimated. For the generation of black and Third World radicals coming of age during this time, socialism and communism offered a structure for organizing both colonized and working-class peoples of the world. These were the tools of modernity that oppressed peoples could deploy in the interests of sovereignty and self-determination. At the heart of this tract of modernization through collectivization and proletarianization was a notion of frugality that would shape future agendas of modernization in the Third World. This conception of frugality was grounded in the urban milieus of colonial cities.

In his various essays, letters and speeches written between 1920 and 1930, Ho Chi Minh is a vociferous advocate for decolonization of Africa and Asia. His encounters with fellow colonial subjects from Africa and the West Indies obviously impacted his own profoundly internationalist sense of anti-colonial social change across national boundaries. While there is no mention who these West Indian and African comrades are, the time Ho spent in Paris crosses with the time spend by Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Claude McKay, each hailing from a different colonial city, Dakar, Fort de France, and Harlem respectively, but all of whom had lived in Paris during this time and were either socialists or communists. These writers were formulating the emerging concept of negritude, theorizing the urban modernity of Black radicals seeking modes of self-determination within the city and the oppressive state. For Senghor, negritude was an amalgamation of the reality of colonial experience and aspects of West African gnostic traditions that had been demonized by Christianity. Negritude offered an African-centered approach to modernity while drawing upon the intellectual legacies of French socialism from Saint-Simon, Proudhon, and Teilhard de Chardin to the French communist party. Negritude, as articulated by Senghor, Césaire, and McKay, was an urban philosophical response to the colonial presence. It consolidated the critical

response in Paris and in Africa to the ethnographic exoticism of Africa as tribal and premodern. Incorporating particular inflexions of African cultural and gnostic traditions, Senghor's negritude offered strategies of socialist modernity—an African-derived frugality that drew upon locally based forms of community and kinship organization while incorporating global capital and the world market into its machinations. Such concerns on the part of Black intellectuals in Paris intersected with the concerns of Annamese and other Indo-Chinese intellectuals sojourning in Paris for similar reasons of exposure and strategy.

The impact of the city of Paris in the fermenting of a certain third world revolutionary nationalist spirit during this period of the early twentieth century was extraordinary. This impact worked at various levels. There was the kinds of interaction made possible by the dense agglomeration of colonial subjects in the colonial metropole in search of education that was structurally impossible to have back home. The proximity of Black and Asian intellectuals, students and merchants within the spaces of Paris made possible a sense of historic connectedness that was otherwise successfully compartmentalized by colonial mapping and governmentality.

A contemporary of Ho's whose work greatly elaborated on the relationship of French colonial space and the postcolonial somatic space was Frantz Fanon. Arriving in Marseille in the 1940's, the port of arrival for Ho Chi Minh a few years before, Fanon was shocked into a moment of profound alienation in the colonizer's city.

> "Dirty nigger!" Or simply, "Look, a Negro!"
>
> I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.
>
> Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movement, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self.[10]

This atavism startles the colonial emigrant into a state of cosmopolitan alienation, at once disavowing and recognizing the moment of fragmentation. As Fanon points out, colonial "thingification" was a structuring logic that bound colonial spaces to

each other through the elaborate edifice of colonial architecture and subjectification. A colonized Martiniquan subject whose nomadism produced a phenomenology of black modernity, Fanon's perception of the impact of colonial space on the colonial psyche links with nomadic Ho Chi Minh's own crusade for a decolonized Vietnam. A vigorous opponent of "thingification," Ho chose the path of subterfuge and strategy to undo the technologies of Empire.

forgetting ho

It is said that Ho Chi Minh never wanted to be buried or hagiographed. He explicitly requested that he be cremated and his ashes spread so that the impulse to deify would not be there.[11] But the city of Hanoi bears the burden of Ho's fear, that he would be mummified and made monumental. Like Walter Benjamin, Ho was profoundly opposed to monumentality. He dreaded petrification, as the master of strategy and vigilant protean self-invention. Dead monuments and archaic forms of devotion embodied the excesses of accumulation, and emancipation lay in freeing the state from static manifestations of capital.

Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum is a monstrously unfrugal tribute that is at once stultifying, bizarre and unnerving. Its Soviet-designed realization is in contradition with the graceful lines of Ho's own house on stilts which he preferred to the Presidential residence while in Hanoi. Ho's own simple aesthetic of bamboo and wood clashes with the cold remoteness of the marble mausoleum that houses the earthly remains of this most protean of revolutionaries. Wrapping its way silently around the inarticulate monument, an astounding serpentine trail of pilgrims arrests one's gaze. The unforgettable and infectious power of thousands of people standing in humble veneration to pay their respects to a serene effigy of revolution begs a reconsideration of the power of freedom to fire the imagination of people of Vietnam today. This space of secular pilgrimage is peopled by a remarkable range of devotees, a moving and powerful testament to the inspiring power of a frugal man who defied the limits of possibility. From peasants from the provinces and travelers from the interior, to hip students from southern cities dressed inappropriately in tight shorts and high heels, the winding line of respectful travelers transformed the banality of waiting to an exercise in national reification, where the space of the nation and the line of people in waiting converged in a momentary enactment of national belonging. This is a utopic imagined space of nationness on the move. And yet, it is simultaneously a deadly ossified space of the death of freedom embodied by the static monumentality of the carceral architecture of soviet modernism.

The event of visiting this dead space of the imagined nation is a contradictory one. It contrasts the live nationalist sentiments and devotion of peoples across genera-

tions with the monumental ennui of dead architecture. People move in attitudes of curious deference, winding their way across the cold cryptic spaces of the eerie mausoleum. Static monumentality devours the macro-scale human motion of people lined up to pay their respects to the mummified representation of modern Vietnam's architect. The event is at once a process of forgetting Ho and marveling at one of the last extraordinary public performances of modern nationalist sentiment- the voluntary and involuntary veneration of a national hero as tourist site, a vestigial spectacle of the last century.[12]

Notes

[1] Mark Seidel, *Old Hanoi*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 1-4.

[2] *The Saigon Times*, No. 1-2000 (430), January 1, 2000, p. 23. Also see *The Saigon Times Weekly,* No. 46, 1999 (423) November 13, 1999.

[3] Abidin Kusno, "Modern Architecture and Traditional Polity: Jakarta at the Time of Sukarno" in *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures In Indonesia*, New York: Routledge, 2000: pp. 49-70.

[4] See William Cunningham Bissell, "Camera Zanzibar," in *Public Culture* Volume 11, Number 1, 1999: pp. 209-222. Bissell argues for the category of "historic" to be assigned to the area of Ng'ambo, Zanzibar, where the East German inspired low-income housing projects of Michenzani pose the visual and conservationist problem of how to designate specific areas as historic. Bisell points out that socialist modernism has not yet become a commodity of marketable nostalgia.

[5] Mark Sidel, "The Early History of Hanoi" *Old Hanoi,* p. 4.

[6] Mark Sidel, *Old Hanoi,* p. 55. The distinctive 'tube houses' of old Hanoi are long and narrow constructions, two to four metres wide and two stories tall. These residences are fronted by a shop facing the street. The middle rooms contain manufacturing or assembly facilities while the interior spaces are residential domestic quarters. Some of these "tube houses" were originally built with small inner courtyards, sometimes enhanced by water pools or fountains.

[7]Ho Chi Minh, "The Path Which Led Me to Leninism," in *On Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920–66* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 23.

[8] Ruth Fischer in Jean Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh: A Political Biography*, New York: Vintage Books, 1968, p. 44.

[9]Jean Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Vintage, 1968), 31.

[10]Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," in *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1956), 109.

[11] Mark Sidel, *Old Hanoi*, p. 61.

[12] I would like to thank Faye Ginsburg, Barbara Abrash and the Center for Media, Culture and History at New York University for their generous support of my work.

he takes papaya from my hands.

only now years after my passing does he begin to suspect: it was me who leaked all the languages into him. through my many-folded mouth.

> *(I could sing three notes in the same tone.*
> *same way he has learned to say two things in the same breath.)*

*

when he came into my house he became sick from the water.
he was given a packet of paper to wear around his neck & told not to unfold it.
when he unfolded it he found only words in saffron ink.

invocations and prayers inscribed in letters he couldn't understand.

*

now he comes across strange moods he can't explain.

finds himself speaking languages he never learned.
sometimes two in the same breath.

*

foreign tongued fire-eater forgetful and imaginary.
we walked through what are barely remembered places.

the place I was born. the bed from which I fed him the papaya.

*

clot up in the salted breeze. go. leave him to his fibs and rhymes.

one day he will bite his lip so hard it will blister and bleed.

then he might bend over backwards and try digging up my spririt from the bones of his memory.

he might find in it those saffron ciphers.
with blessing he may forget that he cannot read them.

Juan Gris/*le livre*

Kazim Ali

the book has become not a book

the page, the square cover, the sewn edge, the table

the slowness of sight and

disappearing edges

the book is coming apart

the solution to this equation cannot be proven

Flock To

Taj Jackson

(Face)

(Shun-Face)

Words bit-parts of the rite

wool and protein's

belled shake
Concerted —

Magnet pawprint
Wearer sows a

Hoof bleat.

Gallery: Cecilia Vicuña

Cecilia Vicuña is a Chilean poet, artist, and filmmaker. Her visual work was recently included in the 1997 Biennial (at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York), Quotidiana (at the Castello di Rivoli, Italy, 2000) and Inside the Visible (at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Boston, 1996). Her most recent one person exhibition, "Cloud-net," opened at the Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center in Buffalo (1999) and travelled to DiverseWorks (Houston) and to New York's Art in General. The recipient of many honors, she received The Anonymous Was a Woman Awarad (1999), the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Arts International Award (1992), and the Human Rights Award from the Fund for Free Expression (1985). Her writings include *QUIPOem/The Precarious: The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña* (Wesleyan University Press) as well as pieces in *Parkett, The Guardian,* and *American Poetry Review.* She is currently coediting, with Ernesto L. Grosman, *500 Years of Latin American Poetry* for Oxford University Press.

Rosa Alcalá, who tranlated the work on the following pages, is currently pursuing a Ph. D. in English at SUNY-Buffalo. Her recent translations include *El Templo* (Situations Press, 2001) and *Cloud-net* (Art in General, 1999), both by Cecilia Vicuña. Alcalá's poems have recently appeared in *The Kenyon Review, Chain, The World,* and other magazines.


DO NOT
ENTER


SUMMIT
BANK


PARK
PARK

C r u c e r o m a n

Lavando la calle en la noche,

se lava la calle o la noche?

En el cruce del espacio y el tiempo

comienza el ritual

A ver Kunanri

qori chiji, qolqe chiji,

pena de oro pena de plata

camino cruceroman riponqa!

La puerta del siglo

es una encrucijada

cada esquina

un umbral

Lavando la puerta se crea el portal

Nueva York, 1 de enero, 2000

Cleaning the street at night

Which is cleaned: the street or the night?

The ritual begins

at the intersection of time and space

Let's see Kunanri

qori chiji, qolqe chiji

sorrow of gold, sorrow of silver

camino cruceroman riponqa!

Century's door

is a crossroads

each corner

a threshold

F a k e w a t e r f a l l

Lavando
el hilo enredado

en una falsa
cascada

Washing
a tangled thread

in a fake
waterfall

melinko lauen

Entrando
en la niebla
de las cascadas
bebían las gotas
cargadas

Entering
the waterfall's mist
they drank
heavy drops

melinko lauen

Vocal
al revés

rocío
ascendiendo

reverso
del mundo

Upside down
vowel

ascending
dew

world
inside out

melinko lauen

Brooklyn, NY Julio 1997

L u i s G ó m e z

Escombro
y olvido

Sueño
malherido

Forgotten
rubble

Wounded
dream

you are

el enterrado
vivo

el hombre
desecho

sin cuerpo
ni abrigo

viajando
en el ruido.

discarded
alive

man
undone

no body
no warmth

noise
in transit

Nueva York, 12 de julio 1998


— NO —
PARKING

Notes

—Cruceroman

A ver Kunanri..... (Quechua)
In this Callawaya prayer for change, all sorrows are asked to go to a crossroads, where they will find a way to return to whoever sent them.

"Estos rezos son como música"
Ina Rosing says, and she asks, why do they say *qori chiji qolqe chiji?*

Opposition creates change!
Golden light eating sorrow, silver light eating pain!

North/South/East/West Hudson & Beach St. photographed by Francesco Cincotta: January 1, 2000

*

—Fake Waterfall

Melinko lauen, waterfall mist medicine (Mapuche).

Brooklyn waterfall photographed by César Paternosto: Brooklyn, July 1997

*

—Luis Gómez

Luis Gómez, a newly arrived immigrant was drilling on Greenwich St. and fell asleep in the far end of a pit. Other workers forgot to look down and dumped rubble over him, burying him alive.

No Parking photographed by César Paternosto, Franklin Street: New York, October 1989

William

Gregory Vincent St. Thomasino

1.

a sally,
out of hand, is giving cupboard

to great aunts,
are likening boys, at scrimmage,

to brocaded hemlines.
And later on,

dressing up is chipping in, for visits
to quiet places.

2.

how, to overhear, is to seeing
is to waking, early on

is to raising, a cloth
in ransom,

residing, is remaining,
to pedal far, ahead, of shouts

3.

to such, a one, unremarked, by misstep
or violet

pretending, these clothespin soldiers,
marching in place,

seated in relation to north, can precede
in common,

what is now, and what is giving way
are hidden, coming

to an end,
or still unuttered, and again. A voice

seeing to morning,
is hiding grahams into umbrellas,

is hiding sneakers, into manners,
and knowing, is someone, eye to eye

or,
were otherwise unthought of

4.

a lawn,
remote, in dither, and every varying,

in picture, in summer, upon water and on clouds,
to pedal far, ahead, of shouts

Great Love Poems of the State Hospital

Lise Erdrich

I.

A couple of lawyers were chewing me up at the time, or I would have said something different. It is true the notion of "involuntary commitment" applied more aptly to me, the plaintiff, since I wanted no more part in this particular drama involving genes and chemicals and the comic inventory of threats.

"And you do love the defendant, do you not?" The fact of our animal totems posted over the doors in the Burleigh County courthouse failed to excite any ideas of reference in this case. But as long as I was part of a conspiracy or a significant number in this scheme there was no other way.

To glimpse the white bison. That one in a million million holy form standing alone at the bottom of this hill. To glimpse the white bison from the highest tower of this hill. To regain the pure asylum of a mind or soul or youth.

Do you remember that dude down in the tunnels? Yeah, great love poems, sell it to you cheap, a real chick-getter for sure. Another drinking cousin from up on the rez who wintered there each year. We passed the gray giant with the surgical bunghole in his forehead. The news fell short of psychosurgery and yet I wanted to be tranquilized. Then we arrived at the catatonic gypsy with her black Medusa hair and Cleopatra make-up, someone got her pregnant but is she still down there guarding the entrance to the underworld?

In that maze of mental basement was someone crazy and horny enough to try. Less inspired, we were doing that until we got through some hallucinogenic odyssey and to the door of daylight and continued on our way. Your path took you farther. All along the watchtower, syphilitics were howling in a chorus. I have cried enough in this rain. I have lived enough in this pain. It was the kind of day in June that was hot and still and green and carried sound clear down to all the sanemen in the town.

Maybe I am sorry. You are my only drug. I have no home I want no shelter but the merest thought of myself like a wandering candle in the intricate halls the weirdly ornate castle of your mind. Without this hope I would have never embarked on this obsession, nor the criminally insane trajectory of your thighs. My calla lily. My burning fire and ice.

II.

At the very brink of this cold, lapping shore Henry asked no questions. Henry at a place where there is no need to know anymore than he already knows. And he knows all there is. The guardian of the brew is pouring chilled dark honey on this moment when I arrive, craving "The End."

Then we drink it into sight although the view is no doubt different from that place. I, on the other hand, could stay alive for decades. This beer does now recognize the ultimate futility of words. Adjourned.

How else can I explain the foamy courtroom/a game of signs and meanings. And after all that, here is this Mosasaur chasing me 90 per all the way from the Missouri. Just one snap ahead of his jaws, swimming the ancient Lake Agassiz for all that I am worth: the entire history, evolution, and oramic vision narrated by my brother riding shotgun or sleeping at the wheel. At last we are climbing up the Pembina escarpment and out of the swift brown plains and there is nothing more that I can add in regards to the strange days and psychodynamic etiology of the Mosasaur, or the tremendous Terrible tragedy of tyrannus oedipus rex: You are not a shore that I swam to. Drowning one cell at a time, one measure of "success."

The limnology of madness is a reservoir whose depth we cannot guess, just the mirrored surface. Over and over Henry fills the frosted mugs before we would ever have to contemplate a halfway. What good would it do for any one of us to encounter such a thing?

Vigilant, he tests the yeast and stirs the honeymead contraption. A thinner, warmer brew and I would never even mention prehistoric subjects or the channel of Lake Agassiz.

"The Mosasaur will never catch us thirsty, by no means," my brother said in summary. Three black bears were rummaging in the garbage can outside the back door and I spoke to them at length.

In the government compound by Red Lake there was a black retriever. Night fell and then the wee hours and the moon was shining on thin ice. If this big dog could be hugged like a bear, head-squeezed and ear-scratched into ecstasy he would visibly express our gratitude for Henry's ritual beer. No matter how many times I threw away the ending, he bounded from the darkness and brought it back the same.

Kamau Brathwaite

FLIM STUDIES +2 +3

(2) The Cinema of (S)words
(3) Kite

CUT 2: THE CINEMA OF (S)WORDS

the lights from the twin projectors
keep entering my eyes floating
thru the tonnelle of the dream
like grains of sand like
Angélique Kidjo's *Oshun*
spreading out spreading out
the waters of her sound

The chariot wings of the grass-
hopper(s) keep whirring in the
dark. ness of the indigo as if
searching for dew & the early
morning hone-
(y) of the homeless doves
it is on such a far journey of the alphabet

it is on such a far journey
am I going

.

Anyday now there will be this clip
back into the darling that i will be
unable to read in the real=reel worl
ld as ve already sceen in the peace
of yam I am eatin

. Writing has nvr been
easy but here in the toi
-lets of the white temple walls
of the Nile
near Mennenefer 'establish in all its beauty'
it says

-actly what it intends to subvert: a falcon
a penis an old rusty musket of graffiti
and a nintendo set. the long xtending
courtesies of hieroglyphic pokémon
:gold Ekam-Arbok. Ivysaur

& even a black shiney Zubat . tho it's already 3
o'clock of the nxt Horus w/ out morning
the white chorus of seabirds coming out of
the sea their beaks chirping even in this
dark/light the clouds blanketting up silence
like someone cold on Olympus
around wher the sun will set/out from. origen
of cocks & bleepers. into its
shadda of space. this peace
before morning stretch. ing out frontomfrom
from the now long young already wound
-ed violet hand of its light & the law
of its cinnemon

NY 30 December 2000

(3)

i can still feel my arms pinion & rising
w/ the reckless kite, my body riding from the brown earth in straining
struggling spirals

- because I am not very good at this or at least I have suddenly become awed
& crowed & crippled
from the very ground I fling from upward
up into this restless sky of flap & buzz & colour paper
at the end of the games at the end of the affair
at the very end of the morning of the crowded carnival
where I had seen some very strange surprising disappointing things

- Llwellwyn not wanting to enter the air
Tombé insisting on his supremacy
Omar's voice changing w/ what is regarded
as ***political power*** in our debt riggle-me-dis-an-riggle-me-dat island
countries
Don Diego's pencil gun still sharpening its greed

only the Princess Electra of the Dominauts
after so much quiet patience collecting dead kites
& other ideas. getting into that red deadly sports car
- mad Mazda

VIDEO OF MOTOR RACING, VIDEO OF CAR CRASHES

- & reversing
since that was the only way to get out of here - at higher & higher voo-voo
speeds

so that we all heard if not saw that she had crash
next to that grey decaying slave house outside the Cholera Graveyard

[VIDEO]

but she had not

- revving the car to its utmost sunset altitude & then double clutching it like
a real xpert, Fangio or Sterling Moss at the last summet
just before she shd have hit the wall into blood grass & smithereens

- but instead had been able to get the taper of the jet
-stream lighted as we cd see from all over that far field
me rising awkward from the ground as I have said hearing the triumph

of her engine

[the KITE rising]

& come runnin runnin runnin because she had **STARTED**
it. seein raw liberian wheels howlin & skiddin on the gravel of the coral
limestone tyres & save herself & somehow all of us
from destruction as I cd see from my high slant stanchion of the air
& the red open sportscar of triggernometory

of blank holiday. had burst forward in a blaze of like shattashot celebration
the gravel pelletting & stinging all over the jack
palance . thru the lugs & rivets
even tho it shd not have **BLAZE** forward like that - quite the opposite in

fact

- w/ people howling & palacin the palms of their hands on their tall
ritual statuesque somalian heads & shoulders

[VIDEO] 

& hammering at the tangle wreckage of steel & skele**TONS** & sawing
all that chromium off to save her trapp & bleeding
& twisted insides w/ all those cries & ullulations
& moans & cavities & all-night drilling w/ searchlights & policecars
& ambulatories

if they cd if they cd if they cd

but instead. even as i say from my high tilting air
wobbelling about this playing field of my fear - all the dead that have

disappear here to the sounds of **olé** & contra

-dictions

Pinochet & John Coltrane inside the same said nowadays LP albuminion
cover of mwine. the strange fruit. the dead men hanging from their
dreams in poplar trees. the Haitian women swimming into the Massacre
River . the blood here so thick you wd think it is poppies & violets & drown
as you drink it

but here she is in triumph like a 4th Traveller sitting in that red jibben car
like a conquering hero or heroine or like Pele & Mohammet Ali
when they had use to come from the airport in trumpets
hand or hands aloft the crowds

IDEO OF PELE & ALI MOTORCADES]

usually one hand
since the other had somehow to be holding on to the slow or speed or jerk
of the car or onto the back or lack of its black

so that she had only one hand up alooft
I remember from my distance - I cd see it clearly - the fingers smiling &
laughing & happy high up above the clouds in her pork & evvabody as I say
come running to see the crash

& the 'accident' but instead were wild w/ ecstatic that she had **SAVE**
herself & the car from that ceritain destruction just as I said like Fangio

or Sterling Moss before their own 'accidents' before the red death
of their own cash

& there she is. spinning present continuous. w/ she long blonde foreign air

[from the Archives - WHITE CARIBBEAN MISS UNIVERSE VIDEOS]

riding the pinochet & going through the crowds as if she **OWN** them
even though she had so quietly & some feel secretly
collected all our manuscripts & drafts of poems

& birth cerfiticrates & title deeds & deed polls & all our derring
& daringdoo's into her Central Air Conditioned Book or Bank
of Thanks or Submarine Data Bases

so that there was like this emptiness over the whole carnival of the year
as if something was missing despite the mewer & mewer costumes
at Savannah-la-Mar & East Coast Demerara & the fat
spork of Belleplaine of Barabados w/ all that fizz & brass & conchshells
yellin & blowing in a breeze that knew no terror at this time

[BARBADOS CROPOVER CANTICLES ON THE EAST COAST

the crowds engorging from the lorries w/ a great moan over the footpad
velvetty grasses. the great fit marching bands

[VIDEO]

tramping the curve of the slope from the guesthouse. all the mens chest
glistening & glowing in gusts of seabreeze & what look like dew

[WINER WO VIDEO]

the womens thighs sprawled open & smooth &

SHINING

for far more & more **SEX** & ravenous like squattin crabs w/ heat
tho they was still 'only' dancin

[Bdos E Coast Scenery & CropOver & Winer Wo continuing]

the ravines whispering w/ water w/strips of silver like tinsill
& evvabody listening to Red Plastic Bags latest xoca & dolla wineing
& doing the butterfly & bogle & wavin dem panty & waterhoses & swinging
so much DJ slackness & smutt that Col Macmillan was like tossin decrees
out the window like dockets that wd never be in a lawyers office
& cryin some say all the way into the blank of his moustache
since this was such a time of terrific corruption - like Rwanda & Bosnia
Her***** & Pinochet all over agrain what w/ the wide brown playingfield so
near the sea of Africa tho **SO** out of the sigh of Miami
& the overflowing treasures of the orient

[kite flying video]

that I begin calling for COLOUR
like I wanted everyone to own fefees & blow trillers & torches of flutes
filled w/ incense & golden bamboo skies & I wanted to see the flaags
& the high flying skites so we cd light our heads up in music against
that bold sky w/ its hot & its blue & its not being gold after all indeed not
el dorado at all at all at all at all

tho once at a Bajan sunset coming down from the palateau of Wildley and
like there by Sangsters at Liguanea - wherever river-roads like flow to the
sea

I had seen it incredibly large & & smoothe & silver it was so hot

& white w/gold & being so very very caribbean
that I went in search of the batman & borrowed his costume
even though I had nvr try it on before
far less used it

since I had never GONE UP before but I had it on now
even tho I know that they were saying things & laughing at me
& somebody one of those in that stone carousel in Queen's Park

[Q PARK VIDEO]

built like a Navrongo hut but of solid emory stone rather than of water
& daub & the salt of the desert
& it was he or she who shouted as I was pissing that the bat was on wrong
that it was upside down in my costume & so I had the

humiliation

since I was really no xpert. even at putting it on. to showing that I was no
xpert & had was to stop
& take off the cloth & the wings & the snorters
& put them on properly again & they told me that llewellwyn
had the birdman but that he was busy somewhere else hidden out on the
verge or virgins

or **margins** of the plantation
that he had been studying for so many years w/ beckford & girvan & kerri

levitt but that he wd **soon come**

and I cd see all the years of hurt & anger & envy & the

SUPPRESSION OF THE SLAVE TRADE

on his face & he must have heard long before that I was looking for the bird
because before I cd say anything to him in fear or reconciliation
tho I know I was v determined & was already. in a way. partly. as i say

UP IN THE AIR

but before I cd say anything as I say, he draw this long knife
out of his whalebone & hold it by the handle w/ its long gleaming self
pointing at the me of my belly tho he was still not close enough to use it
to kill me unless he threw it & of course I didn't know whether
he had develop those skills in marrakesh or Zanzibar or wherever
in the Africa of the Congo he had been living in after the death of his wife
& the burning down of the Omanoomano
& Tate&Lyle & the controversy over his reputation as a native economist
in face of the failure of all these OECSSES & CARICOM
& comprador & colluvian governments

but he kept coming & by that time had only one foot on the ground
& was clawing up naturally into the air in this only half-working clock
of a costume but i was getting up into what shd have been my own
way of celebrating into that kite of air, that bird, heir of twitters high above
all the heat & intrigue as they say, instead of having to claw up

even to **ESCRAPADE**

since after all I was still writing poetry even if you may not have notice
& awake of this distance on the Island of Sound, as I say,
w/ my hands still windmill & my chain feet try
-ing to push me up from the plantation at quarter to three in the morn
-ing so that I was beginning to see Cove & Pico, that long wet
carpet all along the white beaches past Walkers past Lakes past LongPond
past Benab w/ Cattlewash & the red mushroom rocks of Bath
-sheba & the St Elizabeth grasspiece & Martins Bay & Congor Roacks
and I thought I cd sleep in the blue evening as far out as Consetts & Bell
& even Ragged Point where the whales are
on the soft cruel costs of Gorée and Guinea among the now blesséd
upturned faces of the people of the carnival plantation watch

-in the paper & the colour & the sunlight of the buzz & like all their history
shrewn out now & forgotten all over again & i cd feel my arms pinion
& risin my body ridin from the brown earth in strainin strugglin spirals
awed & crowned & crippled from the very ground I fling from up up
-ward into this reckless sky of flap & buzz & colour paper
at the end of the games at the end of the tape at the end of the poem
at the very **HANG**

of the
morning

KB, 'Kite Dreaming', from How music come to the Ainchan people & 'The Kendall Hill CrashKite Disaster of 7 September 1993'
(Kingston & New York 1993, 2000, 2001)

language doodle: on a post-lunch napkin

Everett Hoagland

they say
post-language poetry is deep
post-speak in tongues not to be
written not to be read white black
hole heavy

too … too …
utter … utter …
for words

it is what

it is it
is what it
is not less
more than was is
more less
than is was

a present outpost
of future on-
going past post-present
in overlapping poetries

layered tectonic silences
clatter stacked plain white plates

conveyed smiles chew tough
cafeteria tongue sandwiches
served wryly
on black and white
bread it ain't either

one an obligingly
oblique far out in
each the other both
neither scissor the silence

edged new coast paper cut
obloquy from sea to shining sea semi-

abstract high
modal tight wired (dizzying abe lincoln
gillespie later jazz jonesed joans
bop reeded what saxy norman
pritchard's "o" & "as we lay" were still
later into) trip it can't

scat chant it can
cop cant bebop
a recant redeem a try to trans-

pose or score dream
driven steam trane's "ascension"
to some parallel
universal eye esoteria –

and gone – relevant

as a bridge club
party's bull
moose in
the clearing near the
opening field
knee deep in moonlight

flowing in an acid
rain filled maine stream of milk
black water's muddy bad
blood tributaries grown as soul deep
as cape fear
river the gulf middle

passage deep

as infinite space brightly bridged
by starstudded young black and white
paper tongues

"There's no center where / similarity would begin": C.S. Giscombe's *Giscome Road* and *Here*

Alan Gilbert

"Trust the place to form the voice."
—Susan Howe

I. "Jihad vs. McWorld"

In a world in which the global reach of capitalist economies is becoming more and more total, the concerns of local histories have an almost impertinent quality about them. But it's precisely the degree to which the local refuses to conform to these global patterns that makes it such an important object of study to those troubled by the economic, social, and cultural depredations accompanying capitalism's untrammeled expansion. However snugly a local community may appear to fit within a capitalist economy, there are always shifting relations within these communities that threaten to make the interactions between the local and global chafe. For instance, Wall Street, one of the key locations in the domain of finance capital, has its own complex set of interactions between bosses and workers, as well as majority and minority populations, which are much less smoothly functioning than they may appear on the surface. Whether class-based or oriented around questions of ethnicity and gender, various factors put a stagger into the swagger of capitalism in ways which belie the myths of ever-increasing prosperity and contentment under the guidance of free market principles.

This tension between the local and the global is the subject of Benjamin Barber's cleverly named book *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995). In it, he argues that as capitalism becomes a world economy ("McWorld") local resistance to this homogeneity arises in the form of nationalisms and assertions of identity ("Jihad"): "...Jihad and McWorld operate with equal strength in opposite directions, the one driven by parochial hatreds, the other by universalizing markets, the one re-creating ancient subnational and ethnic borders from within, the other making national borders porous from without" (1995: 6). According to Barber, while McWorld seeks to create a universe where freedom is reduced to such decisions as which brand of toothpaste to buy, Jihad attempts to create barriers to this process, but in doing so oftentimes undermines democracy and instigates bloodshed (while very much critical of McWorld, Barber downplays the blood it has spilled).

This raises the question regarding the degree to which some of the more negative aspects of Jihad are the consequence of lingering ill-effects from the pernicious damage wrought by McWorld. In other words, the failures that sometimes accompany Jihad may result from the traces it has retained during its painful birth within the conditions of McWorld. Edward Said has made a similar point in regard

to the inability of different countries which have overthrown colonial rule to create emancipatory conditions for all their citizens (1993: 325). Thus, the dialectical relationship Barber creates between McWorld and Jihad, while useful and interesting, is too conceptually reductive to be able to account for the complex interrelations between these two world views.[1] As with any dialectical argument, it takes for granted the triumph of one of its components—in this case, McWorld. It's precisely this emphasis on an abstract form of analysis that tends to draw attention away from the kinds of democratic, resources-retaining local communities Barber himself posits as a way out of the cruel logic of the dialectic he outlines. It also underestimates just how much the McWorld-ish quality to the global economy is in crisis outside of the United States.[2] And it downplays the state of crisis within the United States as well. For if, as "St. Louis Fed Director of Research Robert Rasche" says, "The 1990s is the best decade of the century for the American economy, no doubt about it" (Clary 1999: n.p.), then why is the gap between rich and poor widening, why are increasing numbers of families without affordable housing, and why do a significant percentage of children in the US suffer from malnutrition?

To use a model Stuart Hall has adopted from Antonio Gramsci, it may be more helpful to understand these kinds of struggles on a local, national, or global scale not so much as dialectical, but as shifts in strategies and positions between a variety of options, however much circumscribed by economic and ideological conditions:

> These emphases bring a range of new institutions and arenas of struggle into the traditional conceptualization of the state and politics. It constitutes them as specific and strategic centres of struggle. The effect is to multiply and proliferate the various fronts of politics, and to differentiate the different kinds of social antagonisms. The different fronts of struggle are the various sites of political and social antagonism and constitute the objects of modern politics, when it is understood in the form of a 'war of position'. (Hall 1996a: 430)

This further ties in to what Hall describes as a change in the way in which societal transformation is to be perceived, at least within a Marxist paradigm: from a "'base-superstructure' metaphor to a fully discourse-and-power-conception of the ideological" (Hall 1996: 297), from "'the dialectic of class antagonism' to the 'dialogic of multi-accentuality,'" from "dialectic" to "dialogic," and from a "'war of manœuvre' to a 'war of position.'" The phrase "war of manœuvre" refers to the idea that a single ruling ideology or social group is overthrown in a sweeping victory by another clearly delineated group. In a "war of position," political power is constantly negotiated, resisted, and occupied from a variety of individual and collective positions (Hall 1996: 299). It is, in many ways, a more realistic assessment of how power functions in contemporary society. It also parallels an ap-

proach to societal dynamics posited by microhistorians in their efforts to provide an alternative to more conventional attempts within historical analysis to understand history through a focus on large historical processes.

In other words, it shouldn't come down to a choice "'between the local ayatollah and Coca-Cola'" (Barber 1995: 82), but of acknowledging the specific range of choices available to an individual and a community within particular political, social, and economic configurations. As Stuart Hall makes clear, the lack of cut-and-dry political categories and models of analysis (class, dialectic, base, superstructure, etc.) does not de-politicize an understanding of society, but opens up greater aspects of society to political analysis and imbues those fields previously considered apolitical, or not political enough (such as culture), with political significance. But local histories disrupt more than just economic universalism. From the notion of a single ruling ideology to monoculturalism, the local is the site not of a singular resistance, but of many resistances. Both voluntary and involuntary, these resistances accompany in a concrete manner the systems of economic and social power within which much of the possibility for political decision-making is contained. In other words, where global forces impinge on human endeavor, local communities squirm within this unreflecting approach. This is not to say that local communities are not frequently complicit in advancing globalizing economic and cultural agendas (Wall Street, to mention it again, is an obvious example), but that an attention to the local will reveal struggles oftentimes taken for granted, ignored, forgotten, and overlooked.

II. "the centre cannot hold"

C.S. Giscombe's two most recent books of poetry address some of these underrepresented aspects of the local. Complexly depicting the interaction between language, history, and identity within a contextual approach to place, *Here* (1994) and *Giscome Road* (1998) chart a terrain that appears peripheral only when a center is presupposed. Part of Giscombe's strategy for eliminating the binary constituted by center and periphery is to empty out and displace the notion of a cultural or geographical center. His way of doing this is both subtle and sophisticated. First of all, he makes the center fluid and roaming. In *Here*, this displacement assumes the metaphor of the railroad. In *Giscome Road*, it takes the form of rivers. Thus, the center becomes pervasive without necessarily being omnipotent. In other words, when the center is conceived of as a power snaking through the landscape, it's no longer a static center surrounded by peripheries, but a dynamic and active process. This increases the reach of a now dispersed center, but also leaves gaps and edges where it can be briefly eluded. And in these gaps and at these edges oppositional practices—including poetry—can be arrayed against its power.

The political forces represented by a center are ones which impose homogeneity and enforce a status quo. For the center to exist, it must create a periphery—an other—from which to distinguish itself. The concrete forms this relation

takes entail ethnic discrimination and economic domination. It's in an attempt to disrupt this relation that Giscombe undermines the notion of a dominant center. But he does so for another reason as well, which has more to do with depicting political and economic conditions within global capitalism, where the boundaries of the traditional nation-state waver as corporations re-locate to those countries where their profits are most maximized and markets are forcibly opened through diplomatic or military means. As Paul Gilroy writes: "Neither political nor economic structures of domination are still simply co-extensive with national borders" (1993: 7). Giscombe traces this transnationality by constantly shifting locations, especially between North and South. Where *Here* depicts journeys into the American South (particularly, Birmingham, Alabama), *Giscome Road* describes a trip north into western Canada, where the author travels in order to find materials on a Jamaican ancestor named John Robert Giscome who discovered the Giscome Portage connecting the Pacific and Arctic Watersheds, and for whom a town, a road, a historical site, a historical society, and a couple geographical locations in British Columbia are currently named (1998: 17). This moving across borders further subverts the idea of a dominant center. It's also part of a larger series of migrations undertaken—frequently for economic reasons—by people of African descent transplanted to the Americas.[3]

At the same time they undermine the notion of a dominant center, *Here* and *Giscome Road* reveal the workings of prejudice and subordination on a local and global scale. One recurring example of this in *Here* is the image of the Southern Railway boxcars with the phrase "LOOK AHEAD—LOOK SOUTH" painted in large (white?) letters on their sides (1994: 9 & 20). Clearly, the notion that the future will be represented by conditions in the southern United States is a harrowing idea, especially since Giscombe tells the reader he's "old enough to remember Jim Crow" (1994: 15). More specifically, in describing a return trip to Birmingham, Giscombe writes:

> ensconced in Dixie I am piss elegance,
> nameless dread, I am the route of escape
> & approach both,
> the absence of meaning,
>
> I'm night itself, close in & far away,
>
> the long view demands. (16)

In this passage Giscombe re-articulates racist stereotypes in which a lack of meaning, a sense of darkness, and being mired in the unconscious are attributed to a subjugated other (an "otherness" as applicable to both ethnicity and gender, since similar stereotypes have served as misogynistic descriptions of women). Furthermore, his reference to what "the long view demands" points to the distortions

resulting from the inability of this view to recognize specificity, locality, and difference. The long view looks for the larger patterns in society and history, and in doing so posits generalizations that neglect the particular details revealing diversity.

In *Here*, the South inscribed on the boxcar sides is equated with this long view and its positing of centers and totalizing historical paradigms:

> We were all,
>
> at school, different from one another
>
> except for the south, the unbroken border
>
> at all centers... (1994: 25)

Note that the mentioning of "all centers" is a compromise between a singular center and a notion of power as more diffuse, but the South is affiliated with a center nonetheless. In *Giscome Road*, the North, while certainly harboring its own racial prejudices and exploitative relations, is a place of associations. This is because it's not configured in terms of a dominant (and dominating) center:

> There's no center where
> similarity would begin (1998: 48)

Where the center disappears, there's a greater chance for mutuality to occur, but it must be able to respect differences, and this is where an emphasis on the local and specificity and histories plays a crucial role.

The poem "(3 ideas about the future)" in *Here* mentions that Giscombe first saw the "LOOK AHEAD—LOOK SOUTH" boxcar slogan in Syracuse, New York. This instigates a series of abstract and general statements on what the South represents: "no chance in the ugly face of what's coming," and "the future looking unbearable based on the foreground" (1994: 20), which are contrasted with "the touted *specificity* of winter in upstate N.Y.—" (emphasis added; 1994: 21). Again, it's not a question of the North being idealized in opposition to what the South represents, especially since the reference to seeing the boxcars outside of Syracuse is meant to signify that the South is not simply a geographical region, and that the influence of the South "worries the line through the service belt around Syracuse / like anyplace:" (1994: 21).[4] Neither is it a question of establishing a careless metaphorical dichotomy. As Giscombe himself says in a brief description of his project: "No point though in trying to face it (the archetype, North) in language or any other way as some destiny (peculiar, racial, magical, some E-Z metaphor)..." (1993: 166). Instead, what Giscombe is sketching out in these two books of poetry are differing paradigms: one rooted in locality and multiplicity, the other in universal-

ity and homogeneity. Parallel to this is a political model based on a fluid notion of power and shifting engagements between dominant and marginal ideologies and social formations ("war of position"). In this model, political and cultural hegemony is not the rule of the iron fist but a series of negotiations, consents, and complicities (Hall 1996a: 424).

The "long view" Giscombe mentions is also a primary component of a historiographical method to which *Here* and *Giscome Road* are meant to be an alternative. The *Annales* school of historiography has made famous the concept of the *longue durée*, though it's not an idea exclusive to it. In dismissing the local, the historians of the *longue durée*—translated as the "long-term"—focus on large expanses of global time and space in order to uncover what they conceive to be the most important patterns of history. (In certain ways, the phrase "long view" might be a better translation since it also denotes the spatial component included within the *Annales* brand of research.) These patterns, they argue, could never be discovered by exclusively studying the local. Fernand Braudel, one of the most well-known members of the *Annales* school, writes in the foreword to Volume III of his monumental *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th-18th Century*: "I am convinced that history would benefit immeasurably from comparisons made on the *only* valid scale—that of the world" (emphasis added; 1984: 18). While it's clear that a comprehensive understanding of the history of, for instance, capitalism could never be reached without a larger perspective,[5] it's also obvious that a dismissal of the local not only leads to the loss of a vast collection of cultural resources, but it sacrifices a more precise understanding of how both politics and economics work in the here and now. Thus, if one is to abandon totalizing narratives (while not abandoning the necessity of narratives people use in order to help make sense of their immediate and extended environment) which place grand historical forces—whether political, economic, geographical, etc.—in conflict with each other while subsuming the whole process to a kind of historical determinism, then a focus on the local will present both alternative histories and alternative ways of conceiving the political.

The question enfolded within the study of history and politics is to what degree are all histories on some level microhistories, to what degree are all politics micropolitics? Microhistory arose as a discipline in Italy in the 1970s partially as a challenge to the long view of history. One of the primary components of microhistory is a complex theory of context in which local details are not simply illustrative of larger historical processes, but are part of specific configurations of varying and contested symbolic and material conditions which present individuals with a range of possibilities. The similarities to Stuart Hall's description of social and political formations is striking, though not surprising, since both the British cultural studies approach and the Italian school of microhistory draw upon the writings of Gramsci. In his essay "Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social," Jacques Revel describes this approach as one in which history is understood as "the multiplicity of the social experiences and representations, in part contradictory and in any case ambiguous, in terms of which human beings construct the world and their actions"

(1995: 501). This is not to imply that individuals have unlimited freedoms, and Revel's use of the words "contradictory" and "ambiguous" is meant to help confine the range of decision-making and action. This attention to history at the level of the local brings into focus the intricate social dynamics a longer view will necessarily miss, thereby revealing freedoms at the same time it illuminates the ways in which individuals experience particular oppressions.

In *Giscome Road*, the author's search for a distant ancestor in western Canada is meant to show the impacts a person of African descent was able to make upon 19th-century North American society and the landscape, while also pointing to the discrimination this ancestor experienced in the process. The few surviving documents mentioning John Robert Giscome describe him not as the discoverer of the portage connecting the Arctic and Pacific Watersheds, but as a cook. In fact, he seems only to be given credit as the one for whom the portage was named after, not the one who discovered it. Note how Giscombe connects this approach to history with the South:

> *the valley of the Fraser*
> leaves this
> valley
> & turns
> almost due
>
> *south* continuing—
>
> "To further his ends," Fr. Morice sd, of Dunlevy, "he established a post at Giscome Portage, a section of land named after a man he had for some time in his employ as cook."
>
> But Rev. Runnalls gets to the point: "To further his trade w/ the natives he established a number of outposts, one of wch was at Giscome Portage, a place wch was named for a negro cook in Dunlevy's employ." (emphasis in original; 1998: 33)

One of the problems is that the portage opened "the stage door / for the civilized boys to come to—" (41). This created a situation in which not only was an individual such as John Robert Giscome pushed to the margins of historical consciousness, but the Native Americans in the area were both literally and figuratively extirpated. *Giscome Road* reproduces a couple pages from a book recording the cosmology and cultural symbols of the Thompson River Indians, named after a river in the area which was itself named after a British explorer of the region. The recovery of lost and disrupted communities, of forgotten or ignored forms of communication, and of destroyed cultural artifacts is one of the motivating factors behind the historicizing poetry of *Giscome Road*. While keeping this issue of

marginalization foregrounded, Giscombe's earlier book *Here* is more focused on the configurations of power that create the conditions for neglect and exclusion. As a result, substantial parts of it are located in the American South.

The other crucial concern in both books is the relationship of naming and place. In the essay "Incloser," Susan Howe writes: "If history is a record of survivors, Poetry shelters other voices" (1993: 47). Giscombe shares with Howe various poetic concerns, but it's in an implied power of language (specifically poetry, and especially a hybrid form of poetry and history) to intervene in history that the connection between the two writers is strongest. If history traditionally has been written by the victors, then Giscombe and Howe's poetry reveal this by pointing out the ways in which "other voices" are portrayed (as in the quote above depicting John Robert Giscome as just a cook). But unlike the more Modernist impulse of a writer such as Walter Benjamin who wants to "explode" and "blast open the continuum of history" (1968: 261 & 262), the strategy in Giscombe and Howe's work is to break History down into many different histories: "Thus, 'the end of History' means the beginning of histories: the history of women's struggle, the history of youth culture, the history of prisons, the history of madness, the history of the working class, the history of minorities and the history of the Third World" (Chen 1996: 311-312). For Giscombe and Howe, the proliferation of alternative histories undermines the notion of a monolithic history and creates connections between multiple histories. As Giscombe writes: "tell me it's creolized, tell me that it's a bridge between designations" (1998: 23). This is a compact formulation of a sense of language, history, and identity that's non-essentialist in outlook, and allows for the hybridity necessary in breaking down ossified categories of self and other, along with rigid formulations of ethnicity.

At the same time, Giscombe's poetry constantly moves at the margins, and it's here that his concerns with language, history, and identity are most tightly interwoven:

language:

> The wide eye corporeal &
> at the time sane, both—
>
> but on the remotest edge
>
> of description, at an unexaggerated pinnacle
>
> of the color line, (1994: 30)

history:

> here the name of furthest African arrival heralded in the north,

this name

for such a place as this

in wch to detrain

in wch to entrain (1998: 51)

identity:

(my distant self, the one
"nearest home" (1994: 39)

Underlying this is a conception of language in which poetry becomes differentiated from song as a result of its immersion in history and culture. *Here* ends and *Giscome Road* begins with passages describing the qualities of a "long song" (1994: 61) from which voices and singing and poetry are differentiated. This "long song" echoes some of the characteristics Giscombe associates with the South, especially universality and homogeneity. In contrast, poetry is what articulates the particular relationships between individuals and their local cultures and histories. In *Here*, the "long song" is associated with a South confronted by a vernacular language "unimaginably intricate at the thick lip" (1994: 62) which fractures the song's smooth surface, but in doing so leaves memory and histories in a partly fragmented state. *Giscome Road* is an attempt to gather these shards, to reconstruct a genealogy revealing a distinct historical thread. In this latter book, the metaphor would appear to be that poetry is a kind of portage between rivers of song. More specifically, poetry helps carve out multiple local and specific histories from the undifferentiated flow of history. Poetry as portage means that language, history, and identity are actively constructed. None are natural in the way "some bottom-most designations of blood became the song" (1998: 16); instead, they are actively formed by individuals while also being determined by surrounding social, economic, and political conditions.

In their concern with margins, *Giscome Road* and *Here* endeavor at moments to push language toward "the remotest edge / of description." This can occasionally lead to frustrating experiences for the reader. What is most interesting in these two books is how Giscombe navigates the social, political, and geographical border spaces he encounters, and the shifting sets of positions this forces him to adopt. Where these borders begin to become linguistically indistinguishable from "the outermost—most / extended—edges of remote" (1998: 16), the poems lose some of their focus. Nevertheless, the disjunctive aspect to the writing in both books is clearly part of a strategy to compose a poetry of gaps, edges, and marginality. As Nathaniel Mackey remarks in "Other: From Noun to Verb": "But a revolution of the word can only be a beginning. It initiates a break while remaining

overshadowed by the conditions it seeks to go beyond.... Oppositional speech is only partly oppositional. Cramp and obstruction have to do with it as well" (1993: 273). The sometimes laconic quality to Giscombe's poetry speaks to those conditions circumscribing the alternative subjects, communities, and histories that poetry at its best proposes and articulates connections between. At the same time, the concise and precise language of *Giscome Road* and *Here* aims to depict the various liberating and oppressive circumstances of lives lived in the particular.

III. from postmodernism to pluralism

Postmodernism is frequently used as a very loose rubric under which to lump a variety of cultural and artistic practices. This is true in poetry as well, but the range of attributes which designate postmodernism within poetry are oftentimes reduced to a particular set of formal devices: estrangement, irony, non-narrative structures, semantic indeterminacy, aleatory techniques, etc. Accompanying this is an equation of materialism with the materiality of the signifier and of language itself. In doing so, issues involving history, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation are reduced to the level of textuality. Attempts to address these concerns within postmodern practices usually focus on problems of representation. The accompanying political strategy is an almost exclusive attention to discourse, which is viewed as a satisfactory mode of intervention when all material conditions are reduced to the level of the text.[6] This tends to parallel a politics of the formal device abstracted from its accompanying historical, material, and contextual conditions. As a result, poetry becomes burdened with the task of being more politically efficacious than it can possibly be, and not political at all—more political, in that a purely text-based approach relies on a conception of art in which the capacity for political effectiveness is placed solely on the level of language and representation, and not political enough because isolated works of art (which is where a concentration on the formal device is forced to place its emphasis) cannot possibly live up to this burden.

Moreover, the degree to which political efficacy is recognized only in the deployment of a particular set of avant-garde techniques means that the prioritizing of the formal device in postmodernism oftentimes serves as an excuse to eradicate difference as opposed to encouraging it. In other words, when art gets reduced to its formal device, differences of all sorts—artistic, social, geographical, historical, etc.—are effaced. Thus, writers both within and outside the white European and North American avant-garde tradition are evaluated according to how readily they employ the techniques of this tradition. As Kuan-Hsing Chen writes: "Micropolitical struggle cannot afford to assume that similar effects exist in different social groups if postmodern politics is to preserve differences" (1996: 315). The same can be said for artistic practices. As the larger context for a writer's work is ignored, any awareness of history, location, and the position of the subject within this specificity is eradicated. This negating of cultural and historical differences in

order to foreground the formal device is a kind of aesthetic and intellectual colonialism, this one backed up by the institutional power postmodernism continues to accrue, to say nothing of the fact that these kinds of avant-garde techniques are increasingly employed by the U. S. mainstream media, and its advertising cohorts, to push its products around the world.

A historicized and variegated approach to how language functions in poetry understands its use within a particular set of conditions. This applies as well to the act of interpretation attending it. In this model, language is a site of contestation by and between different social groups, and never exists apart from its concrete usages: "Language exists not in and of itself but only in conjunction with the individual structure of a concrete utterance" (Voloshinov 1973: 123). For this reason, the notion that a particular kind of language use or any formal device is inherently radical is a tenuous proposal at best. Poems make particular symbolic and material interventions within particular sets of circumstances (including, among many other factors, institutionality) and cannot be separated from these; neither can those acts of interpretations which in many instances help facilitate these interventions. But a poem can never make these interventions on its own, and no amount of close or active reading will cause it to do so. Instead, poetry gains its influence—whether radical, conservative, or somewhere in between—when placed within a larger constellation of cultural and social forces which themselves recognize the value of poetry within this framework of relations.

It's the focus on particular locations, utterances, histories, and persons that makes C.S. Giscombe's recent work so important. In her essay "North American Tunnel Vision," Adrienne Rich stresses, "the need to examine not only racial and ethnic identity, but *location* in the United States of North America" (emphasis in original; 1986: 162), in order to have a more specific awareness of how these identities are formed and the conditions in which they exist. It's only within a particular understanding of place that difference can be embraced on more than a textual level, and not for its own sake. Giscombe describes his project as a site-specific one: "[M]y interest is making use of knowledge about geographical situation: where one is situated in relation to geographical entities (streets, rivers & bridges, embankments, sides of quite real tracks) & coming to terms with that: a poetic of situation(s), reference, notation, placement" (1993: 166). This is in keeping with a long literary tradition in which geography is a metaphor for a conception of place. And while in certain ways Giscombe's description of his poetic project may initially appear somewhat modest in scope, as a response to the damages wrought by imposed North American and European value systems and globalizing economies, it's a significant alternative.

Endnotes

[1] Although in one section of his book, Barber switches his conceptual framework from "Jihad vs. McWorld" to "Jihad via McWorld" in an effort to expand his discussion (155-168).

[2] Granting that Barber's book was written before the collapse of the Southeast Asian, Russian, and Brazilian economies.

[3] For a contemporary example in which it's not the Canadian border but the Mexican border that is transgressed, see Gayl Jones' marvelous novel *Mosquito* (1999), in which a female African-American truck driver helps transport illegal aliens into the United States.

[4] Compare Jean Toomer's statement in *Cane*: "You and I know, who have had experience in such things, that love is not a thing like prejudice which can be bettered by changes of town" (1988: 18). Like *Giscome Road* and *Here*, Toomer's *Cane* sets up North and South as differing worlds, however much they share certain forms of oppression and malevolence.

[5] But how large a perspective? In *The Perspective of the World*, Braudel argues that some form of capitalism has existed in different parts of the world throughout human history (1984: 620). This can be contrasted with the argument put forward by Ellen Meiksins Wood—itself adopted from Robert Brenner—that capitalism evolved in Britain and did not exist outside of it in any developed form until around 1800. These conclusions depend upon how strictly one defines capitalism: Braudel equates it with a disparate set of economic conditions including the expansion of a market economy, the use of paper money, population density, etc.; whereas Wood follows a more strictly Marxist line in which capitalism involves a relationship between capital and labor whereby the majority of workers are forced to sell their labor to those few who own the means of production. The point of more carefully delimiting the parameters of capitalism is to make it a specific system with a particular set of workings which can be overturned or modified. This way, capitalism doesn't become a de-historicized, de-territorialized entity that has always existed as a world historical socio-economic phenomenon which cannot be confronted because of its vastness as well as inevitability (Wood 1991: 1-19).

[6] See, for instance, Gayatri Spivak's comment: "If the subaltern can speak then, thank God, the subaltern is not a subaltern any more" (1989: 283). Can the marginal existence of the "subaltern" in this particular instance simply be reduced to the realm of discourse and representation? Aren't there other, possibly more pressing, material factors that need to be taken into consideration?

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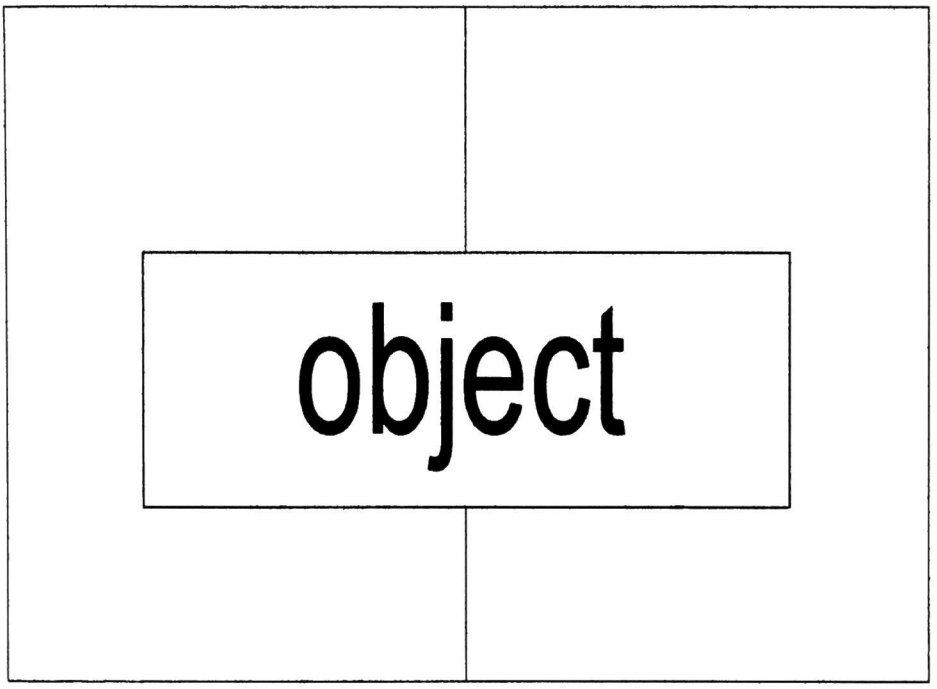
from The Beauty Projection

Deborah Richards



Hottentot SAfDu. Imit. of clucking speech. So explained 1670. Cf *barbarian*. EDME	some of you women wonder why it is I am so flexible bending here and there shouldn't I keep my legs shut some time or would you believe it was good and pure fun that happens when a woman runs around displaying herself and on a pedestal if you're going to look you may as well see what it is some of you black women are curious am I really as black as that catalogue bought dress kept out of the sun men what about you would you like to see me shall I give a description imagine me so small and black in your arms or shared with your girlfriend am I your typecast it's nice to be desired by one you desire and being stroked is a relief if an invitation but your hardness against my buttocks is not when I am pressed and cannot see your face your observations are an intrusion but I am afraid of being ignored so I exhibit myself in a way that is an imitation of titillating tantalizing trembling threatening

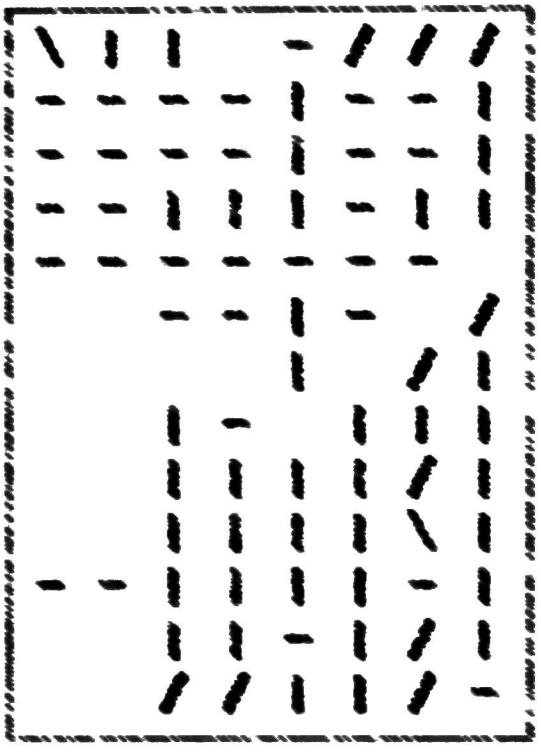
strange adjective strang·er; strang·est Pronunciation: 'strAnj Etymology: Middle English, from Old French estrange, from Latin extraneus, literally, external, from extra outside -- more at EXTRA- Date: 13th century 1 a archaic : of, relating to, or characteristic of another country : FOREIGN b : not native to or naturally belonging in a place : of external origin, kind, or character 2 a : not before known, heard, or seen : UNFAMILIAR b : exciting wonder or awe : EXTRAORDINARY 3 a : discouraging familiarities : RESERVED, DISTANT b : ILL AT EASE 4 : UNACCUSTOMED 2 <she was strange to his ways>	look this is what happened I was i ill at ease and he was a specimen of nature so beautiful with such charm and the most sprightly gifts it was the morning I came into his room with a sheet wrapped around me I wasn't trying to seduce he was too serious a student for that but slept black naked it was so warm in the nights so I was there and I could see for the first time that he found me strange and amazing he was just staring at me I think it was my extraordinary complexion against the whiteness of the sheet of yes yes it was a sheet of take me desire well before I went to italy I had my hair relaxed queer ould curl it and comb it so I looked different maybe that made me more delicious but it didn't last long the hairstyle or the affair because I hate hairstyles that require a lot of fussing and if you sleep with white men they are unaccustomed familiar with the beauty ways of black women so I was a standing yes sheet

5 : having the quantum characteristic of strangeness <strange quark> <strange particle> - strange·ly adverb synonyms STRANGE, SINGULAR, UNIQUE, PECULIAR, ECCENTRIC, ERRATIC, ODD, QUEER, QUAINT, OUTLANDISH mean departing from what is ordinary, usual, or to be expected. STRANGE stresses unfamiliarity and may apply to the foreign, the unnatural, the unaccountable <a journey filled with strange sights>. SINGULAR suggests individuality or puzzling strangeness <a singular feeling of impending disaster>. UNIQUE implies singularity and the fact of being without a known parallel <a career unique in the annals of science> PECULIAR implies a marked distinctiveness <the peculiar status of America's first lady>. ECCENTRIC suggests a wide divergence from the usual	[Insert picture of Saartjie Baartman. Put her on a pedestal. Label the plinth "Hottentot Venus".] Let's gather around and have a long look at this peculiar form. Have you seen a posterior like it? Is there something particular about her? She is outlandish, but is she the one and only singular being? Look at how she looks towards the artist! She has a queer smile on that flat face. I wouldn't say that she is beautiful, but she is unique. I love the way that everything about her is there to be seen. There is something mesmerizing in her extremities. I hear she speaks French with an odd clicking affectation. Let's ask her to say a few words and try to puzzle their meanings! She is a specimen without known parallel! Let's poke her with our umbrellas and hear her squawk like a parrot! Let's poke her and you can hear how she cries! Poke her backside and watch it move! Hear her! Bababababababa

or normal especially in behavior <the eccentric eating habits of preschoolers>. ERRATIC stresses a capricious and unpredictable wandering or deviating <a friend's suddenly erratic behavior>. ODD applies to a departure from the regular or expected <an odd sense of humor>. QUEER suggests a dubious sometimes sinister oddness <queer happenings offering no ready explanation>.QUAINT suggests an old-fashioned but pleasant oddness <a quaint fishing village>. OUTLANDISH applies to what is uncouth, bizarre, or **barbaric** <the outlandish getups of heavy metal bands>. Encyclop†dia Britannica, Inc. and 1999 Merriam-Webster, Incorporated	bababababababababababababababab abababababababababababababababa bababababababababababababababab abababababababababababababababa bababababababababababababababab abababababababababababababababab**bar** **baric**

from Mud Tablet *(Tableta de barro)*

Kenneth Sherwood



Other numerical and calendrical systems speak of what has come or what will come, but only the word is the divination of what we are now and why. . . . Language loses and gains its worth from earlier times.

—Cecilia Vicuña

written word is
art if act

hands that wrote
in both directions

from center page
toward both margins

~ ~ ~

these letters mark the place where in a particular time there was

here the form of these artifacts of the place equally solid as the

present scape and equally charged with flow

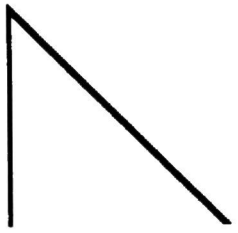
~ ~ ~

SITE **SCATTER**

TILE **TONGUE**

POEM **REMAINS**

SOL



¿ Qué hora es ?

~ ~ ~

idioma language

tongue and ear of place

divided
sombra y sol

~ ~ ~

dy-strophic grain of anglicized names

Seville for Sevilla
Sherry for Jerez

orthographic drain

geography transposed to landscape

out and in of code

phrase phase turn

~ ~ ~

scope of the sea
speck of sand
scape of land

the eye can bring
into the hand

in the stope of a single view

~ ~ ~

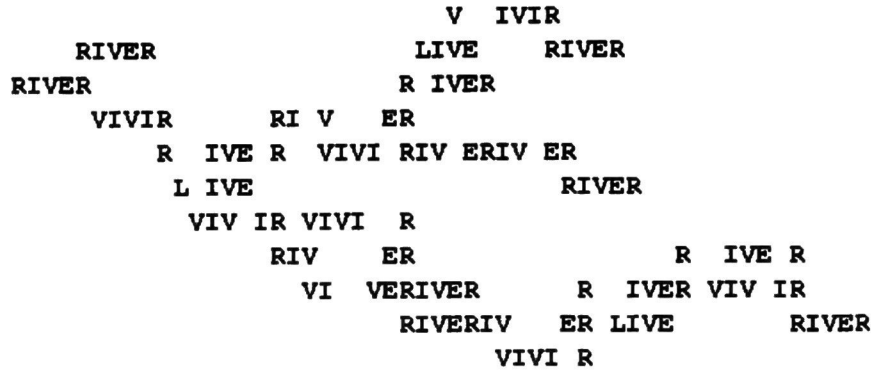
we are not coeval with
a locality
but we imagine others are*

*George Oppen

a man liked signs liked them to be clear walking they were not for reading were signs for lines of songs on tiles of letters in blocks on buildings walls or bridges to Triana gypsy barrios of ceramic poets and tilemakers of word signs painted for walls and songs pots or dead men signed for poesía and sang of sevilla españa patria river water guadalquivir guarded tower and chain across passage where boats barges sail gouges of water wake waves in memorial

guadal quivir vivir river

(Guadalquivir: river in Sevilla; guadal: sand dune, bog)



124 seconds of *Surviving the Dustbowl*

Ruth Now

47:36: surprisingly, the film exposes its own insides, the partially digested remains of an older film, a U.S. government documentary that fell into disuse after its first propagandizing function was filled but managed to secrete living parts of itself into the body of a later filmic text. The wound closed into a scar by secret operations of narrative:

Washington now put its full weight behind soil conservation. To promote its new message, the administration produced a provocative new film

47:40: During the making of the PBS dustbowl documentary, many of the technicians, especially those involved in the editing, themselves became symbiotic invaders. Or so the decision was made to voice-over the old (*archae*)-images where contact was made with the host (*eu*)-images so as not to let the male narrator be sucked into the breach.

47:48: A grainy-grey *archae*-image. **Filmed near Dalhart, Texas, the filmmakers searched for** a tall skinny farmer **a local farmer** stooping over **to play the part of an original settler** to pick up a dry clod of soil that blows away in the wind **They found Ban White,** The filmmakers told Ban White to look up "like you're waiting for rain." Ban White **Melt's father** looked up, and they paid him.

"Here, the 'past itself' cannot be determined outside this possibility of being scrambled and entering into new combinations with the present..." [1]

47:51: straining, thinly wavering music: the faded dramatic score of the government film.

47:51: in the *archae*'s last moments of difference, a break in the sound-image causes the narrator's ethnically unmarked male voice to take on a deep **They** Texas **was** drawl. **wanting someone with a team and a plow to more or less demonstrate** 47:54: a color close-up of a man in a cowboy hat speaking directly to the camera **how they started breaking the plains up** white

letters superimposed over his dark plaid shirt spelling "Melt White" **So they had him being the guilty one to start it, who started breaking the plains out in the early days.**

Thus, the image-event, "Melt White," is the film's memory of *archae*-Ban White; *Surviving* survives by retaining its descendents within its own molecular combinations, developing images that go beyond the sum of their parts into new collectives.

49:25: a blurred gray photograph of Dalhart's Main Street in the 1930's. Closer-than-close is the old movie house marquis, layered over and partially blocked by signs for a Texaco station, a café, a striped awning, an accentless voice explaining: **In 1936, the completed film was released across the country...** Crackling in the background is the stern, over-dramatized male narrator of the old government film: *High winds and sun, country without rivers and without rain--settler, plow at your peril!*

49:27: the marquis close-up bleeds uncontrollably to the edges of the screen. *Archae*-imagery tends toward pure abstraction and vibration. Pushed to these limits the three male narrators hesitate in excruciating self-doubt, "hallucinatory occasions" **(inchoate stuttering)** in which the "rustic" can speak: **There went dad across the screen up there**

49:29: Melt moves his hands back and forth in a horizontal line in front of him **him and old Tom & Ansley** watching the movement of his hands with clouded eyes, **and the horses,** the "up there," *archae*-images not recorded on film for exterior viewing **and there he was plowing**

49:32: Melt turns to the right, eyes open, toward the light **and there he was settin' by me** Melt turns to the left, eyes closed, half in shadow **and I was looking at him, looking there,** To the right, eyes open, toward light **and I couldn't figure how they were doing that** To the left, eyes closed, half shadow **showing him that real, him and the horses, and being shown, and here sat by me a** non-synchronized body-machine.

**Surviving the Dustbowl* (Chana Gazit, 1998)

[1] Lambert, Gregg, (2000), "Cinema and the Outside", in Gregory Flaxman (ed.) *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

from The Tango

Leslie Scalapino

rode back in on horses raids into their own land —
and were defeated — by modern military that had invaded
grinding them, sent to camps, starved, were executed

she says that mind opposing continually is "insane"
as 'simply' not 'in' fixed or continuing social state — which
there *isn't* — but is conceptualized (and she conceptualizes
it) as shared, *isn't* —either, as the mind *per se is* opposing
fixed state continually

individual motions are dependent — orchids and
one's mind streaming-opposing

---

the fabric of their logic (itself hierarchy) is a 'whole,'
which they say is

'analysis.' — one's 'analysis' of their 'whole' fabric,
they say is a 'whole'

(in order to dismiss it) or they say is "insane" *but it*
can't be both probably

convention of perception —can't be both 'whole' and
'insane' — unless it's theirs (they construct)

they exclude outside

---

the tango is dependent — it disrupts — it goes in and in to outside

their logic itself hierarchy which they call 'analysis' is invisible to them —

that is not 'analysis' — because it is 'whole' — merely excluding 'outside'

———

must 'accept' death of others. — except them. except him. (can't) is them him *also.*

at *'night' any night* is *can't*

———

the flesh's 'memory of pain' and also 'memory of pleasure' — and 'memory of being free' 'there'

their 'social' realm also extended out there — their 'seeing' observation opposing and streaming as 'not there' in the sense of 'conflict only' — may be —

———

why does one wish to frighten oneself? — at *'night' any night* is *can't*

dying isn't 'that' (its same) time —and — in that blossoming trees — which aren't (in fall) — are one's 'not knowing' *also*

———

ears are as if lips — *but ears 'are' lips.* trunk as man's chest. woman's ears lying back as she lies down. forward trunk floating or lying on ears

people charging make interior motion 'outside'

A child says that's because it's the nerve's 'memory of pain' not the pain itself being there (later, after the nerve being freed, in the pain that's there being treated)

and the flesh's 'memory of pain' and also 'memory of pleasure' — and the flesh's 'memory of being free' that's in it *only* there *are* occurring

---

observation is its occurrence in on (at all) (also)

is subjunctive — the man starving dying lying in garbage? — there not being black dawn — ?

no. not anyway — that is, anywhere. — or: subjunctive is *only* 'social.' both.

then (when alive). — (subjunctive.) — black dawn isn't? — so it has to pass. both.

---

motion is forward without one. either sleeping or walking, which are the same.

ears. a recoiled or forward trunk is floating on the ears.

a man's trunk, coming.

a man is the tango. is relentless.

gentleness. it is *speaking — there.* repeats 'just' space.

the man looking at only one in a group willing his hierarchy — is making their 'insane' realm opposing, where they are

as their sense that 'the flesh itself isn't anything' as opposing others et al

then it's only one — in their 'social' realm — neither as there's no memory et al — and the flesh's 'memory of being free' 'as' 'there' —no *memory 'in' night*

———

repeats 'just' space

their 'social' realm also extended out there — one's motion without extension in this place forward 'as' *at 'night' any night is can't* and at 'night' 'night rose' — is not the same

one's motion forward — not even there — is at *'night' any night* is *can't* — not the flesh's 'memory of being free' either — 'out there'

he escapes — walks out. from his invaded land,
where is hemmed in, imprisoned. lied to. now boy to lead
controlled so as not to learn
military wolves
walks. then transported by trucks
'everyone is suffering' transported on trucks
mountains-high 'outside' can't change one's behavior.
sole. not anyway — that is, anywhere — 'moon' 'rose'
subjunctive is *only* 'social.' he escapes
is near bare moon that's in the day 'accept (the fact of)
dying' sole? (or living. at all)

Rules of Order.

Rosamond S. King

You have the odd
ones + the even ones –
no one likes the odds
because they stick together + thus
are harder to divide. Then you have the prime
ones, quite hoity toity because
they also are very hard to divide.
Put two + two together
+ you still have the one two + the other
two but they call it four.
Some they call irrational but only
because *they* cant underst+ them.
Typical ism, + then again
since you cant have the irrational
without the rational...
nothing from nothing is nothing
nothing with nothing is nothing
nothing into nothing is nothing
try to find how many fours are in nothing
+ youll lose the four + both twos.
Nobody knows the answer.

Now, if youre interested
such operations are equations.
equal. equality. The world
should take note(s). But then
they came up with more problems:
lesser than
+ greater than (inequalities) + called them equations
+ said we can solve them, too.
But that inequality business
complicated things, meant there could be
more than one answer.
This equating development was countered
with the absolute value + the square route
both of which must be positive necessitating
the definition of negative –

we counter attacked. So square routes can
only be positive, cant even take a square route
from a negative? Fine because
who wants to be square? (This is why
roots are so important to us.)
What did they do? They wrote
the directors said bubble in
one + only one answer
so we picked all of the above
and none of the above.
They had all of the constantnants said There Exists One + Only One If + Only If –

We picked the vowels said
+ Sometimes Y.

Indigenous

Rosamond S. King

you tried to go back
(to your roots) but they weren't
where you left them you
other of the other home is
inside your head your

own head which is
also (a) strange(r)

the other
of the other outside
of the outside looking
outside to the side never
in the skin
you're in someone
else's head thinking bad
thoughts saying this
is the best you could do
so you learn their language their
dances even change your
god and inside someone else's
head you hear something
about pigs flying

you tried to go back

to your roots but they weren't

where you left them

you other of the other

home is inside your own

head which is also a stranger

(is) there a choice

Rosamond S. King

(is) there a choice
between anger and defense
? a way to be here and speak abc
the way noncolored people abcdefg
can be and speak freely? abc defg hijk
they are in between anger and abc defg hijk l
defensiveness able to think abc defg hijk lmnop
in a big white blank space abc de fg hijk lmnop qrs
where they rule abc de fg hijk lmnop qrs tuv w x y z

Reviews

The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies

Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, editors
Duke University Press, 2000

In an era of epistemic doubts, when grand theories are called into question and master narratives of the "Other"—as a subject and a culture—are interrogated, both postmodern and postfeminist thinking have emerged as illuminative and alternative grounds from which a much needed consciousness of the processes of subject formation, representation and the production of cultural difference can be launched. The era destabilizes problematic epistemological and ontological grounds from which the subject emerged as bounded only within singular or specific categories of race, class, gender, or sexuality. In so doing it innovatively liberates the subject as a multiplicity that refuses simplification, codification, and classification thereby underscoring: 1) the multiple positions that it [the subject] may simultaneously inhabit, and 2) the political processes through which the subject as well social difference among subjects are articulated within complexly intertwined positions and categories in different historical moments.

As a theoretical insurrection of this era, postcolonial studies demands an awareness, in a politically radical force, of the many positions, spaces, power relations, processes and colonial encounters and moments through which the colonial subject, knowledge about that subject, and its cultural differences are produced and articulated. Postcolonial studies is also an effort to historicize such awareness. In so doing, it disengages such representation and knowledge from the material realities it tries to represent by exposing the paradox and inconsistencies that are inherent in such representation and knowledge. In this endeavor, postcolonial studies provide both the theoretical and the political space for such awareness of processes and articulation.

In a geopolitical "global" sense, postcolonial studies is a political and intellectual engagement with the history of European colonialism that is launched from the perspectives of the once colonized "Other" in its increasingly hybrid and precarious space of marginality vis-à-vis not only the forces of neocolonialism, Orientalism, imperialism and neoimperialism but also within the process of building knowledge and representing the once colonized. Yet in an era of gross capitalist infiltration in third world countries, that once colonized "Other" is hardly unified, total, or stable. Nor does this "Other" have a simple monolithic reaction to the colonizer and experiences of colonization. Rather, in its multiplicity, the marginal "Other" problematizes the entrapment of the colonized and the colonizer duality as well as that of the totality and stable categories at the global margins. This is a critical point of departure for a new, powerful and vibrant edited volume of postcolonial studies, *The Pre-occupation of Postcolonial Studies,* where the exploitation and consumption of an "undifferentiated" notion of the once colo-

nized margin is theoretically, politically, and intellectually interrogated.

The book brings together a collection of essays by different scholars from a wide spectrum of disciplines and area studies that include South Asian, Latin American, East African, Arab and Jewish studies and maps out contemporary academic issues and crises as well as theoretical standpoints from which colonialism and the continuous unequal power relations of production of knowledge about the other as a "subject" and "culture" still persists. This collection of sixteen chapters is divided into two parts. The first part is grouped under "The Occupation of Postcolonial Studies: Knowledge and Institutional Politics" and deals mainly with postcolonial studies from the vantage of institutional and academic issues. The second part, entitled "The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies: Modernity, Sexuality, Nation," compliments the first part with its specific and currently ubiquitous thematic topics in the field.

The introductory chapters by the editors are eloquently dense and richly saturated with theoretical backgrounds and arguments, paving the way for an even more fertile ground for generating more theories on postcoloniality in the decades to come. Equally fruitful are the subsequent chapters, which offer specific cases from around the globe. The chapters by Ella Shohat, Daniel Boyarin, and Joseph Massad are timely, given the current political crises in the third world and the Middle East. Massad's chapter, "The Post-Colonial Colony: Time, Space, and Bodies in Palestine/Israel," provides in-depth and visionary theoretical passages that interrogate the tacit as well as implicit diachronic, hence limiting, aspects of Colonial and Postcolonial terms which postcolonial studies takes for granted as a point of departure. His effort of tackling a third term—the "settler colonialism"—is meant to blur as well as unsettle and destabilize the neat and cozy ontological distinction that postcolonial studies establishes between "colonial" and "postcolonial" eras. Drawing his vision from a variety of experiences that range from Rhodesia, Palestine, and Zimbabwe, "where settler colonists declared themselves independent while maintaining colonial privilege for themselves over the conquered population," he argues, "how can one determine the coloniality and/or postcoloniality of these spaces or times?"

Timothy Powell's chapter, "Postcolonial Theory in an American Context," tackles a different, yet related, limitation of the current theoretical premises of postcolonial studies. His concerns are related to the limitations imposed by the colonized/colonizer binary terms of postcolonial theory and the way in which this may pose a problem in the fragmented and tense situation of defining the "historical and theoretical structure of colonialism in the American context where all the parties involved —African Americans, Chicanos and Anglo-Americans—insist on seeing themselves as the colonized?" With such chaotic questions of "identity," histories, and historicities, how then can postcolonial theory entertain the colonized/colonizer diachronic binary? Powell then calls for a radical revision of postcolonial theory so as to respond to the complexities of the American context and suggests three different fields of analyzing internal colonialism that are "nei-

ther definitive nor necessarily distinct." For Powell these undeveloped fields are the "economically imposed internal colonies, self-imposed internal colonies, and externally imposed internal colonies."

If Powell's and Massad's chapters call for an illuminative revision, there are other forms of internal colonization that are in my view not adequately problematized. Fawzia Afzal-Khan's insightful chapter reveals yet another dimension of postcolonial studies. In "Street Theater in Pakistani Punjab," she emphatically discusses the nature of the relationship between the postcolonial Pakistani Islamic state and society and in particular the former's "coercive relation with its female citizenry" through its *Hudoud* laws of the Islamic Shari'a legal body. Such relation is theorized through Afzal-Khan's perceptive analysis as well as first-hand participation in Ajoka, (meaning "dawn of a new day") a theater group (of protest and struggle) that is composed of a revolutionary amalgam of actor-activists that includes wide ranging classes, from the "urban working class to upper-middle-class urban intelligentsia." The paper would have further benefited, nevertheless, from a mention of the way in which such *Hudoud* laws are also differently imposed in an even more coercive and repressive form, especially the blasphemy article, on the Christian minority in Pakistan. To be fair, Afzal-Khan mentions the category "religious minorities," which I assume to include Pakistani Christians as the object of the Islamic state's repressive laws. Yet we do not hear from them in the remainder of the text.

My own first hand experiences in Pakistan in 1998 and 1999 allow me to speak about this specific aspect of coercive and repressive relations of the Pakistani Islamic state's further colonization of this particular minority, the majority of whom dwell in what are ironically known in Islamabad as "Colonies" that have by far disproportionate experiences of human suffering and destitution. During my work in Islamabad, there were a wide range of demonstrations against the intimidation of religious minorities with what is known in Pakistan as the Blasphemy Law, which is an aspect of the *Hudoud* laws used against women. Such demonstration and "civil unrest" had culminated in the suicide of a well-known priest who ended his life as a protest of such intimidation and internal colonization. Excerpts of his suicide note were published in many local daily newspapers for days following the tragedy. My point of mentioning this incident is not to minimize Afzal-Khan's eloquent and forcefully theoretical paper on the postcolonial state power and coercive relation with its women "subjects" but: 1) to simply underline the need to be vigilant of all forms and counts of related internal colonization as an indispensable aspect of all efforts of decolonization, and 2) to not be swayed by the category of "women" as a totality and the need to be conscious of its inherent unstable tendency so as to avoid further internal colonization in the name of liberation under the larger category of "women."

In this case it would have been illuminating to see if and how this subcategory of Christian "women" experience the repressive regime of the postcolonial state and how or if the liberating theater of Ajoka may have or could have given

voice to the subcategory of women within the larger citizen category of "women" under the Islamic postcolonial state of Pakistan.

Another fascinating chapter that theoretically engages with the problems of postcolonial States and the practice of state institutionalization and control over women's bodies is the chapter "Beyond the Hysterectomies Scandal: Women, the Institutional Family, and the State in India," by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan. The chapter discusses the institutionalized discursive practices and medical discourses that collapse schemes for social control and social welfare into each other, thereby providing a rationalized as well as rationalizing social space where the state can take control of women's bodies. Involuntary hysterectomies on "mentally retarded" women in state-run institutions are the domains through which this author interrogates the institutionalization of women's bodies in the postcolonial state as well as the intellectual tendencies that seek to rationalize "indigenous values," among others "with reference to certain *India,* various aspects of the status quo," of which the position of women is one. It is, as the author argues, a case study that can "illustrate the intimate, indeed, constitutive, connections between (actual) violence and (ostensible) protection in the relations between women and the state."

There are many complex observations in this collection. My only concern is that despite the complex observations and subsequent arguments and in spite of the profuse references to the heterogeneity of marginal spaces within the "West" there seems to be a looming view of the "West" and colonizer as monolithic. This runs the risk of slightly conflating the "West" as militaristic giant and economic empire with the West as heterogeneous historical space where relations of power, violence, class differentiation, and internal colonization existed and still exist due to class differentiation, racism, and migration. In other words, the colonizing "West" is not adequately theorized nor problematized for its own internal history of colonization, thereby allowing it to emerge as an undifferentiated and monolithic other. I am also not entirely convinced by the collection's success at going beyond the aggrandizement of capitalism as "undifferentiated" giant, thereby undermining the multiple ways in which it interacts and finds alliances within local dominant values at the margin. Similarly, I am uncertain that the margin itself is adequately interrogated as a space of contestation and power-laden relations where the repressive is not just the postcolonial state that in many ways mimics its colonial predecessor, but as a space where colonization still persists within the constituency of the once colonized. In other words, the heterogeneity and complexity of the margin beyond or before the realm of the postcolonial state (outside the American context) in what is termed as third world societies are not brought to stark visibility.

Finally, and in conclusion, many of the chapters in this collection are a fascinating *tour de force* that makes the volume a must item in the libraries of not only those interested in postcolonial studies, discourses, theories, and paradigms, but also those interested in power, production of knowledge, the postcolonial state, marginality, and feminist struggles as well as literary and cultural criticism, mo-

dernity and postmodern paradigms. I am limited here by space only to mention the other illuminating chapters and authors, among them Daniel Boyarin, Saree Makdisi, Hamid Naficy, Bruce Robins, Neil Larsen, R. Radhakrishnan, Ali Behadi, Walter Mignolo, and Ngugi Wa Thiongo. Their multidisciplinary and critical, as well as self-reflexive, approach to postcolonial studies is timely and theoretically challenging and stimulating.

The collection of articles ends with an even more rewarding bonus that features an elucidating conversation with Homi K. Bhabha, one of the leading figures of postcolonial studies.

Huda Seif

Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality and Experimental Writing

Nathaniel Mackey
University of Alabama Press (reprint), 2000

Nathaniel Mackey, poet aside, is, as a critic, a universalist as he roams across cultures from North Carolina to the Caribbean. If so, let him not be faulted as an old trumpeter of Western Humanism, but as an acute recorder of those writers who, as he puts it quoting a blues song, "sing bass" in the cultures in which they find themselves on the margins, from which "one hears the rumblings... of insubordination." Those who sing the bass notes may do it out of formal artistic progression, as in the case of Olson and Creeley, or out of political concerns, as in the case of the other writers Mackey examines: Duncan, Baraka, Braithwaite, Major, and Harris. Mackey's examination follows those who undertake "discrepant engagement," an oblique phrase properly understood, Mackey tells us, etymologically: "discrepant"'s prehistory in rattling or creaking, which reminds Mackey of the Dogon practice of weaving. Through these twists and turns Mackey has arrived at a critical practice that, too, sings bass, takes its subjects by the hand in a double gesture whose facets are identifying, mirroring and grasping illumination.

Even when Mackey is not discussing an overtly political subject, as is the case of Creeley, politics is not far from his mind. Black music surfaces in his discussion of Creeley, a music that Baraka has indelibly associated with opposition; indeed, Black music is a major theme of the collection. Nevertheless, Creeley serves as an example of an "apolitical" in the primary sense (which is to admit a subtextual politics which may or may not be equally "primary") to whom Mackey joins his dissenting bass voice. Mackey chooses to address not Creeley's poetry, but rather his fiction, specifically *The Gold Diggers,* which Mackey defends not only as "some of the best writing Creeley has done," but "interesting also in relation to Creeley's and Olson's Projectivist poetics," for which we are fortunate for Mackey's treatment thereof. As with poetry, for Creeley, prose functions as "the projection of ideas." Creeley is as masterful "as with which facts are to be seen as to which emotions exist," suggesting a narratorial consciousness that "makes use of a field, rather than a focal, approach" as with the poetics. Without an omniscient narrator, the stories resemble The New Novel. His characters are ever caught in "the possible gulf between mind and world," both in content and in narrative rendering. In such handling, Mackey presents an oppositional Creeley who seeks to resolve what Hegel called "the opposition of consciousness," the non-identity of subject and object only aggravated by late capitalism.

If Creeley came to oppositionality formally, Duncan never left a doubt as to the oppositional character of his project, from depth to surface. As early as in

"The Homosexual in Society" he revolutionized identity politics; later, he had no kind words for Johnson during the Vietnam War. Mackey devotes two chapters to wood creaking with Duncan, the wood creaking of anti-foundationalism, non-closure, a-centrality. Mackey takes up "The Continent," Duncan's flourishing *tour de force* attempting "to include within the boundaries of the same poem both the fable- or myth-world of [Duncan's] earlier rhetoric and a here-and-now colloquialness worthy of Williams." Duncan's poem, despite its title, "is more trans-cultural than culture specific": decentering the Americas as subject matter it displaces itself into a Jungian realm of cultural understanding. "...There is only/ the one continent, the one sea," quotes Mackey—a monolith against itself. What is truly mythical is the Williams version of American blood, points out Mackey. The "continent" is not Williams's static monument, but rather "moving in rifts, churning, enjambing/drifting from feature to feature." Moreover, Duncan confirms this vision through form: "the field concept, a practice meant to give inklings of synchronicity." Duncan, Mackey shows, unveils dominant ideology which is nationalistic, unveils ideology which conceals historical world process.

Mackey also engages Duncan's *Dante* and *A Seventeenth Century Suite.* In *Dante*, Duncan makes mention of a "sublime community" of poetry, Mackey joining Duncan in singing bass against competitive capitalist culture. Yet this takes on metaphysical dimensions, a gateway to creation itself, "a cosmic Poem." Admittance to such involves "a freedom of limitations dialectically related to the experience of limits." Eventually, the poems "attest to a marriage... between the past and present," akin to historical materialism. "This marriage, having both a world and a poetic text in which to articulate itself, is the prophecy-fulfilling susceptibility of the present to the past, the subjugation of presence to absence, an Other, announced and figured by the past." Such a recognition of alterity and history is the surest consciousness of the real in a society where the two do not fare well.

The wood creaks especially loudly when Mackey concentrates on Amiri Baraka. If Duncan gave the term "Identity Politics" a new face with his early arrival, Baraka tempts one to play with words and think of how many times he has actually changed his name with his politics. Mackey's discussion of the tone of Baraka's bass note focuses on black music, on which Baraka has authored two books. *Blues People* insists that jazz was made by social and economic forces, anticipating Baraka's later Marxist years. Baraka sees jazz as "a willful disassociation from mainstream American culture – as in fact 'a form of social aggression'." From such a form Baraka takes the idea of "process," spontaneity in opposition, complaint as reflex, to his poetry. Baraka plays on the jazz terms "bridge" and "head" in his poem, "The Bridge." Baraka's most outrageous poems, such as "BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS" operate, contests Mackey, on a level of uprise between rationality and rationalization, the adminisitered world that the Frankfurt School critiqued, rearing itself in the form of racism. The operative musical influence is Ornette Coleman, whose New Thing freedoms challenge the status quo.

"Obliquity or angularity... challenges the epistemic order": the music inspiring Baraka and his own work through avant-garde methods in that promise of the avant-garde at its most political. Mackey carefully traces the influence of black music on Baraka's assault on dominant racism.

Caribbean writer Wilson Harris receives the most attention in his book, his oppositional target the brutal legacy of colonialism. Harris's is a world of westen monuments, memorials to colonialism. It is a world even today exploited by neo-colonialism. The novel, for Harris, is "*an act of memory*," a uniquely needful cultural artifact whose mission is to recover a lost history, "making the case for the imagination." As with Duncan, for whom faith in imagination could overcome reification, for Harris its potential is the restoration of identity, be it through novels or cultural ceremonies. The tribulations of the West Indies are allegorical of those of humanity.

The very bareness of the West Indian world reveals the necessity to examine closely the starting point of human societies. The diminution of man is not entirely accomplished and a relationship between man and the paradoxes of this world becomes evident as a relationship which can still have momentous consequences. Harris is working in the dark, flashlight in hand, in search through the caves of memory. Harris's narratives are "indissociable" from the colonial encounter. For him, the creaking of discrepance is a critque of colonialism. *The Secret Ladder* concerns a runaway slave named Poseidon, a name which itself decenters between the European and African. His is not only a European name, but the name of a deity. There is, in the novel, talk of a lost continent; Mackey reminds us that Poseidon ruled over Plato's Atlantis. Poseidon is an "omen of unfathomability," cipher because of skin color. As Poseidon's mysteriousness irks his sea captain, the captain attempts to speak, but cannot, his voice dubbed by a foreign tongue. This is an exemplar of discrepant engagement for Mackey: "Discrepant engagement dislodges or seeks to dislodge homogenous models of identity, assumptions of monolithic form, purist expectation, redefining 'the features of expression'." The subversion of the colonizer by the subaltern empowered by a name signals an opposition as fierce, if more subtle, as Baraka's.

Mackey addresses additional Harris novels, including *Ascent to Omai,* "an exploration of reality" haunted by the spectre of justice, as in the Derridean link between justice and objective spirit. The novel is replete with phrases such as "a ruling fable of the land" and words such as "mask," theatrical," "camouflage," "ruse," "hallucination," and "fabricate" which buttress the theme of the tenuous link between fact and fiction. The novel concerns a trial, administered by a judge who at times steps in as a narrator, saluting the "gentle reader and all. That the figure of putative justice narrates a fiction in a fictional world complicates the actual and the fictive. This is the discrepancy of the novel. It becomes an allegory for ideology, for the failure of the imaginary to know the real in the symbolic of the novel. That the Judge presides over the land under a "ruling fable" ushers the spectre of Mannheim's total ideology, under which justice is perverted. Such is the

allegory of the Harris Mackey presents.

Oppositionality is perhaps taken too easily for granted. While writers such as Major and Wilson are overtly political in opposition, what is one to say of Olson, or worse, Pound, whose mere poetics are oppositional. These poetics become political in the challenge to form which refuses to replicate dominant culture, or even orthodox poetry. But one would like to ask: is Duncan is more oppositional then Olson? Creeley? It seems as if sometime around 1972, when the Language Poets read Marx and Rothenberg and company popularized ethnopoetics the avant-garde gained an innocence it had already lost in the days of Pound and Eliot. There is then Adorno, who tells us "Art negates Society" a priori. The discrepant engagement which Mackey latches onto is a criticism pinpointing those whose work not only formally negate society by virtue of their formal being, but whose forms are imbued with intentional subjectivity in questioning the non-identical falsely made identical, who challenge the status quo.

Ramez Qureshi

Passport Photos

Amitava Kumar
University of California Press, 2000

> ...there always remains a certain gap, an opening which is rendered...by the famous '*Che voui*?'—'You're telling me that, but what do you want with it, what are you aiming at?'...at the level of utterance you're saying this, but what do you want to tell me with it, through it?
>
> —Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*

What would it mean to be a self-reflexive subject of history? That is, what would it mean to be a subject whose very existentiality becomes torn, or at the very least unstitched, in the wake of an awareness of the subject's dissolution—a moment that, if for the moment we oppose the discourse of postmodernism to a certain post-structuralism, can be marked at a series of precise epochs in the West's colonialist and capitalist history? More than just an interrogative intellectual exercise, the analysis of the subject *qua* an awareness (and thus a recuperation) of its shattering becomes a useful, performative counterpart to the self-aggrandizing notion of the death-of-the-subject proclaimed by a large body of 'contemporary' theory. Such a proclamation depends on a lived unawareness of those of us who have *come of age in the age* when the death-of-the-subject no longer seems like radical insight, but instead, a cultural commonplace. Like the father unwilling to recognize the maturity of his now-adult son, or the mother unwilling to take the advice of the already-worldly daughter (more generally, a case of the not-quite/not-yet fully human that marks filiality), proclaiming the death-of-the-subject ignores the experience of those of us who witness splitting and fracture alongside, and thus complimentary to, a profoundly pre-postmodern system of economy, psyche, and sociality. Therefore, to ask about a certain self-reflexivity of the subject is to adopt the figure of theory's perverse Other, for if it is acknowledged that a certain group of subjects in some way recuperates their shattering, postmodern thought becomes re-encircled within its Cartesian coordinates.

Though it never phrases the problematic in quite this manner, Amitava Kumar's exciting new book, *Passport Photos*, seems to be asking a similar set of questions about the self-reflexive subject as it functions in the field of diasporic subjectivity. Through a series of circuitous meditations on language, nationality, sexuality, and the representational modalities of photography and poetry, Kumar attempts to establish that the diasporic subject is something profoundly different from the exilic post-colonial intellectual embodied in the canonical works of post-colonial literary theory. Through an interdisciplinarity made truly radical—not merely a pastiche of theory and appropriately theoretical literature, but a textual practice that daringly moves between photography, poetry, autobiography, social

theory, and the hard kernel of empirical facticity—Kumar stages the life of the diasporic intellectual who lives a betweenness unforeseen by much of post-colonial theory: existing not only between the West and the East, but also between the material and the discursive, between the bodies of knowledge aimed at theorizing diasporic existence and the tensions his own diasporic existence inevitably brings to these theories. In a prose that allows itself to err, to remain uncontrolled (but can what is allowed to be uncontrolled really be anything but a strange form of control?; can there be a sanctioned textual anarchism?), Kumar takes us not only from an Indian restaurant to the Palestinian Gardens of Wilmer, Alabama, from Bihar to New York and back again, but also from Homi Bhabha's theorizations of thirdness to the statistics of the World Bank's genocide; from semiotic discourses on curry as catachresis to discussions of racist Western guidebooks on India, guidebooks whose power to create or withhold material benefits for the areas they discuss prompt Kumar to ask the desperate question: "Where is catachresis when you need it?" If, as Kumar suggests, his book is organized as a kind of passport, a document that allows one to travel from the "metaphor of the border...to the material reality of barbed-wire fences," it is also an acute practice of translation in the Benjaminian sense—the untranslatable core of one discourse (here, post-colonial theory) compels Kumar to attempt to transform its tenets into a series of previously foreclosed contexts: the lived experience of diasporic (rather than post-colonial) subject *qua* intellectual and, to a lesser and more problematic extent, *qua* proletarian.[1] This is a space of translation that, as Kumar himself astutely notes, one might say self-*reflexively* realizes, is "also a space of failure."

Of course, generating a new model of post-colonial interdisciplinarity, or a new set of questions that post-colonial interdisciplinarity must answer, inevitably takes time, and it is not surprising that the initial formulations will lack a certain polish. There are numerous rough spots in Kumar's work. For instance, Kumar's poetry ranges from the brilliant and haunting to the silly and simplistic, and a more critical self-editing would have been helpful. The excerpts from Kumar's expository writings in numerous activist and mainstream newspapers are often self-indulgent, a kind of inner self-quotation that is overkill in a book already so much about the space of self-quotation in the narration of self. More importantly, and more in line with the opening questions with which this review began, Kumar suffers from an overemphasization of the deconstructive tendency to continually kick out the ground from underneath oneself, to offer extended meditations on one's inability to make the claims one has just made, to constantly render provisional the grounding assumptions by which one proceeds. While at one time this was certainly a crucial move, disturbing, as it did, both the complacency of the Orthodox Marxist left and a kind of bourgeois liberal sentimentality, it has taken the form of a new theoretical narcissism masquerading as self-effacement. Often, the impression left by such self-deconstructions is that only those with the training and time required for such a minute self-awareness can think a politics that moves beyond the reactive. Kumar himself seems to recognize that this is not the case.

Unlike some, though not all, of his theoretical forefathers/mothers, he realizes that the sphere of counter-hegemonic politics is irreducibly multiple and refractory, quite independently of the pronouncements of theorists. For instance, at one point he argues that the radical potential inherent in tapping female identity (no pun intended) for a progressive subaltern politics need not depend on one's theorizations of feminine alterity, because one finds that such complexities are present "in the daily lived practices of the people." So I take this particular flaw to be less a real blindness on Kumar's part and more a product of a not-quite fully achieved unlearning of his intellectual privilege. As he tells us, Kumar had his intellectual coming of age in the late 80s. This was the time of an unrepentant deconstruction of all classical binaries; it was an era in which one had to learn to negotiate one's way in the "land of theoryspeak...with its divisions between the signifier and the signified." Try as he might to move beyond the elitist mode of post-colonial theory, Kumar's very equivocations remain caught within it. (Of course, the irony of evoking Spivak's celebrated phrase: "The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss. In this they are a paradigm of the intellectuals,"[2] to accuse Kumar of not fully unlearning his Spivakian heritage is not missed on this reviewer).

Most problematic, however, is the question of the book's audience. To adopt for the moment the question that Slavoj Zizek, reading Lacan, sees as fundamental to the process of intersubjective (mis)recognition by which the subject becomes integrated into the social Symbolic: "*Che voui*? You're telling me that, but what do you want with it, what are you aiming at?"[3] In this context, *Che voui?*: what does becoming a self-reflexive subject—one who considers himself unproblematically as the one with the infinite ability to problematize—entail for conceiving the anti-hegemonic, *collective* diasporic politics that Kumar's book intends to make possible for the reader? Could there exist a collective struggle on the part of subjects all of whom are as self-aware as Kumar? Is it not true that a struggle could not be maintained unless there were some subjects who lacked such total self-awareness of their role in the struggle? Is that not the lesson Marx taught us and Althusser pushed to its uncomfortable limits? Might this be the troubling reality that Kumar's text seems to foreclose, the bit of knowledge that escapes his self-reflexivity?

To adopt Spivak's criticism of Foucault for our own purposes, it seems that beneath the proliferation of subject-effects, Kumar locates himself as a kind of stable subject. This process of self-stabilization, whereby one speaks the contradictions of one's existence rather than being spoken by them, seems to point to an existentialist poetics of self-choosing—one in which I realize my determinations in the social Symbolic and attempt, by my actions, to overcome them—rather than the death-of-the-subject demanded by radical politics. (I apologize for inconsistency here, as I have now both criticized and demanded a theory of the dead subject, but can one help but use the ideas of one's theoretical forefathers?) To return to my (contradictory and contradicted) opening words on self-reflexivity as willful perversion: I am saying this to you, but what do I want? Do I really think

that such a self-reflexivity cannot found a radical politics? Do you?

It seems that while Kumar's work is an exciting effort on the part of a new-generation of post-colonial thinkers, those who are, as it were, trying to do a phenomenology of diasporicity—to think through a possible *Diasporic Dasein*—it remains misguided in that effort. In describing its faults, I am reminded of another quasi-Oedipal theoretical conflict, that between Sartre and Heidegger. Sartre, concerned with the acute political struggles of his time, was eager to translate the obscurity of Heidegger's philosophy of existence into understandable terms for the modern man. But, in this laudable translationary desire, Sartre missed the fundamental fact that while Heidegger's thought appeared in places to lend itself to an existentialist reading, equally fundamental for Heidegger was the idea that 'man' is thrown into a non-chosen proximity to Being, a proximity that reduces the self's self-choosing possibilities, turning ethics into a passive sphere of meditation rather than a *praxis* of concerned action. Sartre missed the kernel of Heidegger's theory that anticipated and explicitly foreclosed the possibility of collective action. Similarly, Kumar reads post-colonial theory for his own purposes, purposes that I certainly share sympathies with, missing the fact that this body of theory cannot be incorporated into the subject's awareness (at least not with the ease with which Kumar performs this incorporation) without severely limiting both the persistence of post-colonial theory as critique and, more importantly, the possibility of the very radical political struggles he envisions. Thus, Kumar's book calls for a deconstruction of its deconstructively deconstructive stance.

Rafeeq Hasan

[1] For a remarkable reading of Benjamin's philosophy of translation, see Jean Laplanche, "The Wall and the Arcade," in *Seduction, Translation, Drives*, ed. John Fletcher and Martin Stanton (London: ICA, 1992), pp. 197-216. Laplanche writes:

> The drive to translate...comes more from the untranslatable...It's an imperative which is brought...by the work itself. It's a categorical imperative: 'you must translate because it's untranslatable' (204).

[2] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 287.

[3] Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1999), p. 111.

The Wireless Room

Shane Rhodes
NeWest Press, 2000

and

Echo Regime

John Olson
Black Square Editions, 2000

As a New Yorker caught in the jaws of a dirty city, I often hope to find places inside of new books of poetry for a moment of quiet and a glimpse of the trees. In this respect, *The Wireless Room* by Shane Rhodes and *Echo Regime* by John Olson have afforded me endless pleasure. This is not to say that Rhodes or Olson can be characterized as quiet-nature-poet-types, but rather that both create sanctuaries of otherworldly pleasures, presenting their poetry as storehouses of marvelous shifting terrains of words.

Born in 1973, Shane Rhodes may well be the herald of a visionary metaphysical poetry taking root in his native Canada. *The Wireless Room* is a book of beginnings. It marks a poetics coming into form, and a young poet coming into a voice. Throughout the book Rhodes sketches out the parameters of the communal world— the life to be found in the familial, the social, and the regional— a series of systems interconnected through landscape. The rural is familiar to Rhodes, and reflected in his poems are the visual memories of his childhood in Alberta, Canada, as well as his later stay in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where he attended graduate school. He opens the collection with a series of semi-narrative, semi-autobiographical poems, but this is far from the full scope of Rhodes's work. His range of techniques is sophisticated. Broken into six sections, *The Wireless Room* is more of a panorama of diverse forms than a single architecture. Rhodes comes to the task equipped to balance his narrative strains with occasional funky disjunctive phrasings. Where the verse can totter close to the edge of an unwieldy sentimentality, Rhodes manages to pull back the reins, and to balance the emotion of the poems with infusions of wit and clever turns of form.

Perhaps the most accomplished contributions come in the third and fifth sections of the book— smart observations on the nature of the erotic through metaphors of atomic physics and gardening. These interludes are filled with playful leaps, and they serve as a variation on the more traditional themes also included throughout the collection. There are delightful surprises within the weave of confession and word play, as in "Meditation on the Photon" where a neoplatonic philosophy creeps into the poem:

But look,

light is
the language
between 'things'

This fragment gives but a small insight into Rhodes's comfort in exploring the parameters of the physical page. Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" essay echoes through a poem such as "Gravitas" where the lines again begin to sprawl and the message thoroughly reflects a Black Mountain School perspective:

What we have learned thus far:
Eros is geometric

extended field theory

Eros is indeed a main theme of *The Wireless Room*, and the presence of the figure of eros aligns itself with a tradition that branches out from Catullus and Sappho to Thom Gunn, Robin Blaser and Robert Duncan. And there are other great moments of derivative clarity throughout the book, where Rhodes falls into a music reminiscent of Lorca or Rilke, as in the sixth section of his long poem "Garden Time":

The saskatoon reminds you that your love
should be as subdued as possible
and this little rampage through the berry patch
is what we all dream of— the perfect lover
who slips from his skin to stain our hands
with his dark purple kiss.

Rhodes balances his metaphors and his puns in the same way that he balances the sentimentality of the verse— at times he wobbles into self-consciousness, but at his best he is very good. The final long poem of the collection, "The Unified Field", is an ambitious seventeen part piece in serial form. Within it, the realms of the philosophical, the political, and the personal are unified with remarkable skill. Rhodes brings forward a story which is specific to his life, yet these fragments of a personal history are glimpsed alongside much broader ideas about human relationships. The ever-present tug of war between love and hate that lies at the center of the human condition is expounded upon with a grace and care that is ultimately moving. As Rhodes writes:

Where the edges blur
is where our interactions prove us

as we momentarily become part of the other
and we accept the difference

as our own...

It is a poem of "good truth"— on the most basic level of the reconciliation avail-

able between love and hate, between violence and care. Throughout *The Wireless Room*, Rhodes proves that poetry can still be a place of solace, and as he writes in "The Unified Field":

> Love will show us new landscapes
> traced by the dark just rising
> and we will follow behind
> in its wreckage
> with our surveys and tools

If you're wondering what the talented young poets of Canada are doing these days, Shane Rhodes's *The Wireless Room* is a good place to start.

Echo Regime is also a first full-length collection of poetry. In this case it is long overdue, from a writer whose work has appeared regularly in magazines throughout the United States for several years. While Shane Rhodes in his poetry pushes forward a series of compositions that become more anchored or "unified" as the book proceeds, there is an equally delightful and opposite dilemma of location in John Olson's *Echo Regime*. In Olson's work the lines of verse fall as displacements of location— echoes of narrative, where "we lifted the freezer out of the back of the stanza/and set it down on the asphalt." Consistently Olson frustrates any urge the reader might have toward voyeurism— the "author" and the story of his life is not the focus of this drama. As Olson said in a recent lecture: "The impulse to write is very strange. It's a superfluity. What Levi-Strauss calls a 'surplus of signifier,' which has to do with the Shamanistic 'cure' brought about by an 'empty constellation of pure signifiers in which the free-floating unexpressed and inexpressible affectivity of the patient can suddenly articulate itself and find release.' I'm very invigorated by this. I feel a strong affinity for superfluity." *Echo Regime* is a collection of forty-one poems of spectacular superfluity— a true glossolalia where words follow each other like a stream running over pebbles or the flapping of birds' wings emitted as a song.

From the beginning of the collection, Olson makes clear the territory at hand. His opening poem, "Reason Enough", includes the instruction:

> ....Imagine Artaud
> coming down for breakfast
> with the whole broad day before us
>
> moving its heavy bones out of the water
> to say bonjour. I might also add there is a cougar
> in the local museum with an enormous amount of dust
>
> on it. It will function later as a symbol
> at dinner, a childhood memory of South Dakota
> mutating into crayfish....

Olson goes on to say: "For such is the arbitrariness /& violence of language that the hum of an ordinary appliance / serves as a pituitary initiative..." Those themes

and explorations of language and poetry and aesthetics are resonant throughout. That the first word of the first poem of *Echo Regime* is "Artaud" comes as little surprise as one wanders through the collection to subsequently find the other masters of this dominion— Rimbaud, Eluard, Matisse, Magritte, Pollock, Kline, and Warhol. (And a little bit of Hollywood to remind us of film, that other magic art.) The ghostly appearances establish *Echo Regime* as a book filled with echoes, recorded with a surgical precision, and accumulating to become an amalgam of irreverent haunting word mazes.

In the tradition of New York School writers like John Ashbery, David Shapiro, and Michael Friedman, Olson is quick to upset the reader's expectations, so that "what comes next" is always a surprise. In "Grapefruit in Greenland" the author explains that:

> Art is not difficult because it wishes
> to be difficult but because it wishes
> to be a gorgeous energy or hardware
>
> versatile as ether.

And Olson keeps his poetry "free" by refusing to settle into one tradition of influence. That versatility propels him out of the New York School and into an occasional Spicerian deadpan, as in the poem "Heliotrope"—

> as soon as I loosen my
> grip on the crumpled potato
>
> chip bag it expands outward
> like a universe. But is it
>
> better to be a window
> or a nail
>
> or a lemon
> in a logarithm
>
> of strings?

Like Williams, we can assume that Olson believes in "no ideas but in things," and even the narrator enters the loop of "things," as in the poem "Armoire" where Olson writes: "sometimes I feel/like a direct object/first orange then green then blue..." *Echo Regime* is a place to revel in a music and in a freedom of language without expectation of a particular end. We find not "revelation" in a conventional sense of the word but rather a terrific superfluidity to the superfluity. John Olson, like Shane Rhodes, knows that "words are currents of luminous energy." The bottom line is that these are both good and energetic books— go forth and read them.

Lisa Jarnot

Transfigurations: Collected Poems

Jay Wright
Louisiana State University Press, 2000

Jay Wright plays bass, A.K.A. viola da gamba, double bass, bass viol, string, upright . . . How you hear your instrument is intimately associated with how you call it. Who knows but on the lower frequencies he speaks for you. It's a register that many fail to register, but you notice immediately if it's not there:

> My bass a fine piece of furniture.
> My fingers soft, too soft to rattle
> rafters in second-rate halls.
> The harmonies I could never learn
> stick in Ayler's screams.

These lines appeared in "The End of an Ethnic Dream," one of the poems that marked Wright's debut chapbook, *Death as History,* as an advent worth attending to. There were only 200 copies of that volume published by Poets Press. There were more copies of *The Homecoming Singer* when Corinth brought out that collection in 1971. By 1987 there was a *Selected* from Princeton University Press, and Wright was beginning to win more of the major awards and to garner attention from the likes of Harold Bloom and John Hollander.

Suppose John Hollander listens to Albert Ayler? In his *New York Times* review of Wright's new *Collected,* Hollander congratulates Wright for giving evidence in his writings of encounters with "the forms and rituals of cultures without literatures — West African, Mexican and Central American." Suppose John Hollander means the same thing by the terms "literature" and "Mexico" that you do? That Wright might? It's hard to tell. In the last paragraph of his review, Hollander notes that one of Wright's poems bears an epigraph "from a 1582 Spanish translation of Nahuatl poetry." Are we to gather from this that Nahuatl poetry only becomes literature when translated into a European tongue? And even if that were the case, wouldn't that be Mexican literature? Did Hollander's reading somehow miss the reference to "the bee buzz of a Maya text"? Think he could pass a test on the Sundiata Epic? No doubt John Hollander corrects his students when they think Wright's allusion to the phrase "Out of Africa" is a reference to a Meryl Streep film, but do you suppose Hollander knows what Herodotus was talking about? Any literature scholar who missed the source of Wright's "Out of the cradle / endlessly rock . . ." would be denied tenure, even at Yale, but do you suppose that when Wright proposes as epitaph for Toussaint L'Ouverture the lines "Toussaint's failure was the failure of enlightenment / not of darkness" very many in the Yale

Department of English will recognize one of the most frequently cited passages from the work of C.L.R. James? Suppose Hollander knows in what sense Toussaint made a failure of enlightenment?

For it is related to the failure of Hollander's review. The Yale critic tells his readers that Jay Wright's poetry can be concerned, powerfully concerned, "with roots" (there it is! You knew that he'd get around to roots sooner or later), but that Wright recognizes that "a true poet's metaphor of the journey taken by his or her poetic work itself may have a much more complex and — ultimately — more universal tale to tell." Yes, the same critic who complains of the "often baleful cliches in so much contemporary verse" can't seem to avoid the invocation of roots here any more than he can seem to avoid positing a universalism as the true test of literature at the same time that he denies literature to large swaths of global geography.

What's a poet, or a reader for that matter, to do? "I have a measure for the facts, / but none for you," Wright offers, before the fact, in elegantly measured lines. Elsewhere: "Rough me, scuff me, / but leave my kicks alone, / unless you want to die." As for "schoolteacher Hollanders" (one point for knowing those are dactyls; three points for knowing who wrote them) — well, nobody in this post-*Beloved* reading universe can read of them and their measures without a certain dread. The condition might well be relieved with a good dose of cross-cultural poetics, which is exactly what is offered in such good measure by the book Hollander seems to have read without registering.

This is a collected volume, not the complete poems. Some of that first chapbook has been missing in action since Wright's second book, but in compensation we have here a more than usually substantial body of newer works, including the virtuoso riot of rhyming titled "The Anti-Fabliau of Saturnino Orestes 'Minnie' Miñoso," which includes my favorite bad joke of the book: "the wicker / of my discontent." The appearance of *Transfigurations* has given the poet an opportunity to correct some things. Most notably, the African figure that was printed upside down at the opening of *Dimensions of History* (and was still inverted in at least one book of criticism that discusses it) has finally been righted. On the other hand, some editorial apparatus that many readers would find most useful has been omitted from this collection. That material includes the author's note from *Explications / Interpretations,* endnotes from *Dimensions of History* and the valuable Afterword from *The Double Invention of Komo.* In that Afterword, Wright explains that it does not "in the strictest sense" explain the poem, as the notes to *Dimensions of History* caution that they are aids to the reading of the poem, not a substitute for it. Still, as new readers find their way to this remarkable volume, as they surely will, many of them will want to seek out those deleted writings. In the same way that Wright's title *Dimensions of History* was suggested to him by a line from Wilson Harris, many visitors to the poem will find a wealth of suggestion and incitement in the poet's own notes and commentaries. (They certainly would have been an assistance to John Hollander.)

We can only be grateful, though, that Wright's work has slowly come to more widespread acceptance. We will only remain grateful if that mainstream acceptance leads to real engagement with the poems and with the life's work of this artist. It's hard to play the bass every night and always see the trumpet solo get all the applause. It's hard to go on as a teacher-poet when the university you agreed to visit for a term doesn't produce the practice instrument they promised you (yep, it happened). The book is a veritable "house of fact and composition." It's meant to be lived in. It's meant as a scene in which we can compose ourselves. Even the most cramped quarters may produce new measures:

> Down where the smallest quality
> will turn and figure itself,
> turn again to become other than itself,
> I hear the exact belling of my vexation.

We are invited always to become co-compositors: "Come, sit here, now, with me, in this solitude, / and teach me to hear the song / I have composed." Context itself turns on its side and rereads poems from the past, as in the line about "those who were impeached for unspeakable desire."

The real treasure in such long-range reading is, again, like good bass work. When Charlie Haden or Jimmy Garrison commenced to walk, we did, indeed, turn our attention to the tenor, but the tenor kept opening windows through which we saw that the walk was constantly shifting, a dance that punished speech, a step to the "smithy of the ear's anticipation," and that's what Jay Wright has been offering us for some three decades and more:

> So I lay two notes in the bar ahead,
> diminish a major,
> tunnel through the dark
> of the brightest minor,
> and come out on the right side of the song.
> I pick the composer's pocket,
> and lay the hidden jewels out there.

That's what Bop does. That's what good readers do. That's universal. The genius of Jay Wright is in his unstinting ability to lay notes "in the bar ahead." That's what Wright hears within himself, "the cithara voice in the dy'li's craft." Wise readers will know why he says that. "If you ask enough 'whys' you might get wise."

Aldon Nielsen

Living Root: A Memoir

Michael Heller
SUNY Press, 2000

> We have seen that mystical religion seeks to transform the God whom it encounters in the peculiar religious consciousness of its own social environment from an object of dogmatic knowledge into a novel and living experience and intuition.
>
> —Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*

> "[T]his life is utterly and finally relational."
>
> —Michael Heller, "Deep Song: Some Provocations"

In Genesis 15, God establishes the covenant with Abraham, still Abram, having earlier bidden him to leave his homeland and travel to another country, "a land that I will shew thee" (Gen. 12: 1). In this new land, Canaan, God calls Abram out into the night and asks him to "tell the stars, if thou be able to number them." He adds: "So shall be thy seed." (Gen. 15:5). It's the initial term of the contract: multitude, progeny. An extended branching of family from this one root. Abram believes God, even as he questions how he will be sure that this contract is real. God asks for a three-year old heifer, a three-year old she-goat, a three-year old ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon. Abram knows to rive these animals in half for sacrifice. But he leaves the birds whole with the slaughtered beasts, laying them on an altar. Deep sleep comes upon him, "and lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him" (Gen. 15:12). In this sleep, God speaks to Abram of all that will come to pass, assuring him of the terms of the contract. As a sign of his fidelity, God appears as burning light: "And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces [of sacrificed animals]" (Gen. 15:17). Later, as a sign of his own upholding of the contract, God asks that the newly named Abraham cut his penis and those of the other men born from him and who follow him. In rehearsing the story of this covenant, the crucial term is "horror," not because this God is horrifying, but because he operates in great darkness, in the realm of unknowing; or, as Erich Auerbach puts it in his seminal essay "Odysseus's Scar," this God of Abraham "extends into the depths" and is "fraught with background."

The central mystery of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) is the relationship of the adherent to this God of the depths. Transcendence marks this God, whose being is a simultaneous presence and distance outside the sphere of the known (and unknown) physical cosmos. As the energy of God emanates into the universe, the mystic, the prophet, and the poet project themselves toward that invisible, unknowable Source, bridging that impossible transcendence

with language. In the Jewish tradition, the intermediary agent between the transcendent God and man is Torah: God is reflected in the Book just as the one reading it is a reflection of the Book. It is the perfect mirror whose two-way action causes a doubling, a layering over of God and man, blurred by the Torahtic letter. As Michael Heller explains in *Living Root,* his new memoir:

> Mankind's linguistic querulousness, the fracturing of the Word into tongues..., suggests the theological impossibility of total redemption. Now one perhaps sees or hears God, be it It or She or He, who comes, as it were, from the outside—the very witnessing, the heard tones of Revelation insist on this point—and whose grace or majesty of masked power are then borrowed and made use of. In Judaism, this sense of religion is bound up in the concept of Devekuth, adhesion. One comes face to face with God but does not join Him in mystical union. Every human act, even the most intimately religious, is, therefore, a displacement from God; every prayer, while calling out to God, invoking God is only testimony to one's apartness from God.

Speech—language—adheres the prophet and the poet to God, even as it denies them union with that God, displacing them into a further remoteness. The paradox of this relationship—given parable in Genesis in the story of the Tower of Babel—is recapitulated in Abraham's convenant with God: a binding contract with a Deity of the depths—removed from history but alive through its events—who promises abundant offspring, all of whom will be obliged to articulate their parentage to the unknown. Stating this relationship in terms of his own writing, Heller writes: "In my mind, I relate my feeling toward language and poetry to events like this, events in which one experiences the whole inarticulateness of one's physical and historical person, the very heaviness of the body, as only something pressing to be a word, as though a word or sound were an extrusion of the pressures upon the body." History is a relational vice of God; its pressure forces out poems from the children of Abraham.

Heller's remembrances in *Living Root* center around two interconnected periods in his life: his early childhood when his family was uprooted from Brooklyn to Miami Beach; and his early adulthood, when Heller began to take stabs at being a poet himself (It may be surprising for some to learn that the poet Heller was not "born" until sometime in his late 20s). Heller was born in 1937 to Philip "Pete" and Martha Heller. His father's father, Zalman (Solomon) Heller was a rabbi from Bialystok who emigrated with his family to Brooklyn at the turn of the century. Zalman is the Abrahamic ancestor of this tale, simultaneously remote in his customs, speaking a Yiddish incomprehensible to the young Michael, and present as the ritual authority, the lodestone of the family Judaism (scenes of ritual begin and end the memoir). In a poem about his grandfather included in *Living Root,* Heller

intones:

> There's little sense of your life
> Left now. In Cracow and Bialystok, no carcass
> To rise, to become a golem. In the ground
>
> The matted hair of the dead is a mockery
> to the living root.

Zalman, interred, is horrifying, especially so far removed from the places of his own roots. His rabbinic figure moves like a revenant through the memoir. More vivid, though oddly no less warm than Zalman, are Heller's stories about his mother, who suffered bronchial ailments that led to the relocation of the family to south Florida, and his father, a hapless tinkering businessman, who never seems to have found his place in the world. Heller is unabashed in his sense that he emerges as a man and a poet out of his relationship to his parents; likewise, he is unconfused about seeing himself as an utterly ironic commentator on American Jewish life, as both memoirist and poet. Heller understands his memoir as an essentially Jewish act, the birthright of the American immigrant: "[D]ecipherment was to be the body and text of America... And in truth, no Jew owned his or her commentary: it belonged to that sprawling engarblement of language and thought, that still unfused mass of the many verbiages and word systems that constitute American life." But Heller's decipherment is no exercise in criticism and code: it is an utterly human attendance to the people most important to him; and despite their obvious flaws and struggles, Heller's parents are the loci of this memoir, the heart and soul of it. One is immensely grateful to Heller for showing us his parents in this way. Their humanity is clearly his own; he owns it, builds himself on its foundation.

Two other crucial figures preside over *Living Root:* Walter Benjamin and George Oppen. Benjamin (who is the subject of an operatic libretto that Heller has recently completed) is the prophet of a Judaism of fragmentation, in the partially seen, partially apprehended Torah that is the world and the word. In Heller's imagination and experience, derived from the familial root, words are snared in "conviction's net" (to borrow the title of his book on Objectivist poetics), from which they can never be unsnagged. "All language was a making of diasporas and scatterings." America—the land of his father's inopportunity—is the homeland of shattered language, "its extraordinary displacements and misreadings, its elusive and belated processing of information, its profound and tragic doubleness." Benjamin's philosophical wanderings, his assemblage of fragments and quotations, and his own actual exile, flight, and tragic end propose an angelic direction of abandonment in language that marks Heller, standing for his own Jewishness. Referring to Benjamin's sense of the "sinister... awful... aura" surrounding words, Heller locates this Jewishness in an atheistic alienation, nonetheless reverent to its Abrahamic source: "Thus, words, even as they participated in the realm of nostalgia

and evoked golden ages, even as they brought glories and prides before the imagination, inscribed lostness. For Jewish practice, which consists of placing layer upon layer of borrowings and accretions, lostness made something cosmic out of dispersal and diaspora." What to do in the face of this cosmic orphanage, with merest language your only buttress against the annihilating void of history and space? Poetry for Heller is a religious cipher and Heller himself is a religious poet. Here's where Oppen, a much more discrete (and discreet) presence in *Living Root* than Benjamin, exerts his force in Heller's imagination. Elsewhere, Heller has stated unequivocally that Oppen was a guru to him, a man whose moral-ethical force endowed Heller with his own amplitude and a sense of environing freedom. His praise of Oppen is one of the most direct statements of awe in the entire memoir: "His entire poetic oeuvre was for me an endless efflorescence, a singular linguistic act of the truth of boundaries and boundlessness, not only on the level of nations—where the inability to tolerate aloneness was most destructive in our time—but on the level of the singularity of individuals and on the level of consciousness relating to the nonhuman world. It was out of such often wearying aloneness that the poetic act seemed to spring." For Heller, Benjamin's Jewishness is ultimately in his language. Oppen, on the other hand, attains a rabbinic authority for Heller because of his poetry.

Inevitably, *Living Root* must be reckoned in terms of its relationship to other Jewish-American writing. It describes the picture of a life that feels utterly peculiar yet universal to the Jewish-American experience. Heller himself lets no mistake be made on this count: his is clearly, indelibly a Jewish story, with the life and death of his parents as its center. In this respect, I would compare *Living Root* to Leon Wieseltier's *Kaddish,* a scholarly/rabbinical reading of the act of mourning his father's death and coming to life as a remembrancer of American Judaism. Perhaps even more so, I would compare Heller's memoir to Henry Roth's epic of immigration, *Call It Sleep,* especially in terms of the details, the speech, the erotics of family life shared and delved into in both these books. Heller's book will have an indisputably important place in the tradition of Jewish-American writing (as most of the praises on the dust-jacket attest). It would be a loss, however, if another, perhaps more significant, place were not asserted for Heller's book: that of the American autobiographical Ars Poetica. In this light, *Living Root* belongs firmly in the company of such unique documents as Charles Olson's *Mayan Letters,* Nathaniel Tarn's "Child as Father to Man in the American Uni-Verse," and most especially Robert Duncan's "The Truth and Life of Myth," with which Heller's book is in conspicuously harmonious accord. Starting with the assertion that myth is the story told of what cannot be told, Duncan undermines the myth of his own becoming as a poet by telling it. Like Heller, Duncan insists that the domains of childhood are rich, linguistically fragmented, and uniformly dark and deep. But both poets agree that it is not so much that poets are made from the unfathomable disturbances of childhood; the poet is made in how he relates to these unfathomable disturbances. "Poetry," Heller writes, "embodied two vast and contradictory human

tropes: the urge toward meaning, with no residue left, i.e., with the sufficiency of a scientific discourse; and the urge to reveal a world beyond present limitations, not merely as some Romantic poet's figuring, some 'inner dictation,' but as a method by which one moved beyond boundaries, beyond conceptual schemes." In the unarticulated interstices of meaning and revelation, the poet finds Speech, nourished on the root living there, growing into words the poet is compelled to utter. Heller's memoir is a book of roots, of growth, of speech, and of sustaining nourishment.

Peter O'Leary

(Dis)figurations

Ian Angus
Verso, 2000

and

Empire

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri
Harvard, 2000

> The institution of the consumer-capitalist regime continuously pressures the politics of difference toward differences established within this regime. Only by speaking in some way of the epochal horizon can politics be drawn toward a difference in shaping- which may open the possibility of systemic transformation.
>
> —*(Dis)figurations*

> ...we must delve into the ontological substrate of the concrete alternatives continually pushed forward by the resgestae, the subjective forces acting in the historical context. What appears here is not a new rationality but a new scenario of different rational acts—a horizon of activities, resistances, wills, and desires that refuse the hegemonic order, propose lines of flight, and forge alternative constitutive itineraries.
>
> —*Empire*

> *What was really prophetic was the poor, bird-free laugh of Charlie Chaplin when, free from any utopian illusions and above all from any* discipline *of liberation, he interpreted the "modern times" of poverty, but at the same time linked the name of the poor to that of life, a liberated life and a liberated productivity.*
>
> —*Empire*

In *(Dis)figurations*, Ian Angus investigates the crisis internal to modern European philosophy known as the linguistic turn. The "linguistic turn" refers to the idea of "a self-enclosed system of signs where each sign derives its meaning from its relation to other signs within the system." In accepting this idea of self-referring sign systems, the modern era rid itself of the belief in a transcendent being. In addition, this idea caused modernists to destroy the story they had been telling themselves: that the connection between origin and telos signified a cosmic harmony. Without a transcendent being, a master planner, men and women lost

their preordained place in the world and the world fell apart: the narrative trajectory fizzled. To replace the old picture, self-referring sign-systems such as cybernetics, information theory, semiotics, as well as similar systems in the fields of mathematics and computer science became examples of modern scientific endeavour "based on the standing back from the world and doubling it in thought that occurs in representation. When the world is represented in thought it appears as a plurality of objects that stand over against the thinking subject. The doubling of the world in thought allows objects to be regarded from the point of view of the relation between them established by their representation in thought. Here emerges the idea of a self-enclosed system of signs where each sign derives its meaning from its relation to other signs within the system.

Angus' objection to the predominant form of postmodern theorizing that has followed the discovery of the linguistic turn originates in his belief that the rejection of an "extra-social, onto-theological foundation for society" has left us open to the dangers of merely internal, "restricted" critique such as relativism, social constructionism, hermeneutics, and Wittgensteinian language game theory.

> While the critique of representation entails a rejection of a sovereign, pure, a-cultural, transcendental subject on which social criticism could be based, the danger is that this tends to lead in turn to a confinement of criticism with an established order-whether this order is conceptualized in terms of a socially constructed reality, a tradition, or a language game.

According to Angus, the problem with the restricted critique used by many postmodern critics is that "since there are any number of discourses that claim both particular and universal dimensions of the present epoch, it is *impossible in principle* to legitimate one discourse over another." Consequently, although we will always be able to "clear away obstacles to the achievement of a better society," we will never be able to theorize the social whole and thus move beyond our current capitalist system. Angus' desire then is to describe what he calls a "postmodern turn" where the sort of disembodied analysis which modernism enabled is ended. What falls outside self-referring sign systems is the practical ethics Angus is concerned to theorize.

Angus' main point is that the end of metaphysics is not the loss of totality *per se*, but is instead a loss of the metaphysical interpretation of totality. With postmetaphysical perception we engage the totality or "horizon" (as standing behind and emerging through particulars)" but as different from the perception conceived through metaphysical totality. We must understand this horizon as "incapable of systematic organization or directing force." In other words, Angus' theory of postmodern critique initiates an infinite delay of the telos of reconciliation. As different from modernity in which totality was interpreted through self-same identity or authenticity and identity-difference polarity, according to Angus, postmodern

critique must include the horizon, but at the same time it must recognize its ground as unchained from its horizon. In Angus' view, restricted critique has failed because it constructs the critic's position as immanent, transcendent, or contradictory (He cites, for example, Adorno as retreating to the damaged subject who accepts the communicative isolation of the critic whose experience is articulated in avant-garde art).

To escape the fate of modern isolation and as well postmodern relativism, Angus argues that we need an epochal critique which theorizes a "speech from nowhere," a constitutive paradoxical speech which includes *site*, *said*, and *saying* at the moment of criticism and therefore, understands itself as neither inside nor outside (the institution). As different from critiquing from a position of immanence, transcendence or contradiction, Angus' idea of a "constitutive paradox" recognizes that philosophical legitimation of social critique and the practice of social critique have collapsed together. What this means is that "the subject of social critique enunciates its own reflexive legitimation."

> Paradox is not only a logical, and post-logical, appellation; it is constitutive of self-referring critique, in which utterances made possible by a form of life radically question that form of life itself.

Angus theorizes a totalizing critique of the epoch through proposing we limit the epoch by viewing the reflexive capacity of language as situated in "a medium of communication."

> The medium of communication in which an utterance is inscribed is a forming, shaping, instituting influence on the world. It may be called a "materiality" in the sense that it is distinguished from the ideal meaning which inheres in content, but should not be thought of as merely an external physical and dispensable vehicle for supporting content. The influential transportation model of communication reduced and misunderstood the medium as a "channel" in precisely this manner. A channel allows a passage between two pre-existent points, but neither brings the origin and destination into existence nor forges the spatial relation between them. The term "medium" is intended to refer to the shaping of spatial relations that is the origin of locations and also to the instituting of temporal relations that are the origin of historical events. In this way the term "medium" makes a connection between the phenomenological concept of institution and the shaping of social relations by forms of inscription.

According to Angus, a medium of communication is of the order of "a primal

scene that originates a complex of social relations." "Thus understood," he continues, "'materiality'" does not have to be added to a discursive theory; the primal scenes instituted by communicative forms encompass material relations."

> If I learn to play a musical instrument or to use a machine such as an automobile, for example, my percepetion of the world is changed along with an enhanced ability to act in it. The most primary communicative act is, from this perspective, not the word but the gesture and the fundamental issue of communication is the cultivation of the body through which the entirety of human culture is developed. A medium of communication is the embodiment of meaning in this sense.

To work critically from the point of view of post-capitalist non-foundational pluralism, we must recognize the *site* of communication as creating a particular interpersonal relation. Simply put, when we want for example to investigate the relation between subjects, we must include the technology which structures this relation as the embodied limit of this relation: telephone, radio, computer etc. If this technology is centralized as in the modern era—or as is the case in postmodern life, globalized—our interpersonal relations are thus embodied.

What one learns from reading Angus is that in the transition between the modern and postmodern our imaginations must work hard to break out of our self-made modern *and* postmodern capitalist prisons. Modern modes of communication are gone, yet we are inhibited by the boundaries of our modernist ideas. Postmodern communication is here, yet we disavow the way in which new sites of communication, in fact, create new relations. On the other hand, if we follow Angus and reimagine the site of the saying as "constitutive paradox," we begin the labor of remapping our conceptual schema to coincide with our technological reality and we enable a materialist critique of capitalism because we insist on theorizing the limit of any communicative horizon.

***

> We have to recognize where in transnational networks of production, the circuits of the world market, and the global structures of capitalist rule there is the potential for rupture and the motor for a future that is not simply doomed to repeat the past cycles of capitalism.
>
> ...the peasants who become wage workers and who are subjected to the discipline of the new organization of labor in many cases suffer worse living conditions, and one cannot say that they are more free than the traditional territorialized laborer, but they do

> become infused with a new desire for liberation. When the new disciplinary regime constructs the tendency toward a global market of labor power, it constructs also the possibility of its antithesis. It constructs the desire to escape the disciplinary regime and tendentially an undisciplined multitude of workers who want to be free.

Today, according to Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, if the new proletariat wants to move forward with its desire to be free, we must embrace a new historical perspective which recognizes "the novelty of the structures and logics of power that order the contemporary world." We must begin by seeing imperial sovereignty (globalization) as a rupture with modern sovereignty: "Empire is not a weak echo of modern imperialisms but a fundamentally new form of rule." In recognizing that "history has a logic only when subjectivity rules it, only when (as Nietzsche says) the emergence of subjectivity reconfigures efficient causes and final causes in the development of history," we must see that globalization is not part of a continually recurring cycle of rule: the Genoese, the Dutch, the British, the USA, i.e., "What is happening to the capitalist system led by the United States today happened to the British one hundred years ago, to the Dutch before them, and earlier to the Genoese."

What is new in the passage toward the constitution of Empire is "the end of modern sovereignty...a new capacity to think outside the framework of modern binaries and modern identities, a thought of plurality and multiplicity." Against the old cyclical view of history, its shadows and enemies, the new proletariat must recognize in its desire (in its ontological being)—in its affirmation of fragmented social identities—a break with the past. The proletariat must affirm its newly inspired articulation of its paradoxical refusal to go back to the modern disciplinary factory system. First exported during the period of the West's world colonization, the disciplinary function has today spread across the globe like a virus, literally imprisoning most of the earth's human labor power. However, although today the proletariat is working more for the Elite with less benefit than during the period of modernization, the difference is that whereas during modernization we honored authority and expected future gain ourselves, now we know that with respect to benefit, we've been cut out of the (corporate) deal. We are not a part of the corporate story, and yet we know it is our labor (agency) that is making this story happen. We know that the corporate logo, its huge, expansive skyscapes, its monstrous glittering image of itself is nothing but hot air, nothing but empty images. Power is naked: it is no longer "masked by the ideology of the state and the dominant classes." Today, the "crisis of modernity," the "contradictory co-presence of the multitude and a power that wants to reduce it to the rule of one—that is, the co-presence of a new productive set of free subjectivities and a disciplinary power that wants to exploit it"—is absolutely apparent. Desire on the part of power to put a stop to humanity's assertion of its immanent power and its understanding of

itself as part of nature is visibly corrupt. The answer to the democratization of power realized during the Renaissance was the reestablishment of order and command via the modern sovereign nation-state. Today, the spectacle of mediation has blinded many of us to the fact that our productive labor is what makes capital, and consequently, we continue to labor under non-democratic forms of hierarchial sovereignty. We've got to step out of the darkness of this Plato's cave , and speak truth to power: The media image is empty, it lacks ontological being. An alternative ontological being is what we who are productive power are producing. In producing this alternative, a global self is produced. The modern crisis has deepened, "Imperial power can no longer resolve the conflict of social forces through mediatory schemata that displace the terms of conflict. The social conflicts that constitute the political confront one another directly, without mediations of any sort. So, there is now, "a greater potential for revolution..." Negri and Hardt's point is that, now, there is no more mediation, the mask is off; power is raw, exposed. And we, the new proletariat, are all together, on the other side of corporate power. We are "the set of all the exploited and the subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation."

Using the power of the internet and increased (however forced) mobility to our advantage, we have a new perspective on history. Our labor is what makes the trains, planes, and global factories spin... round and round we go. So, we want off; we want liberation from the conditions of modern humanity. Because, however, there is no place to go; no place to get off the disciplinary death wheel or jouissance merry-go-round, we must use our intellectual and affective tools to construct from within Empire; we must make in the non-place of our present circumstance, a new place for "constructing ontologically new determinations of the human, of living—a powerful artificiality of being." We must develop "poietic protheses," for when "the dialectic between inside and outside comes to an end, and when the separate place of use value disappears from the imperial terrain, the new forms of labor power are charged with the task of producing anew the human (or really the posthuman)." And who or what is this new human? Who else but the barbarian/nomad who can no longer submit to modern forms of command, i.e., institutional discipline; s/he who is "radically unprepared for normalization."

> The will to be against really needs a body that is completely incapable of submitting to command. It needs a body that is incapable of adapting to family, to factory discipline, to the regulations of a traditional sex life, and so forth.

But as against focusing on this gesture of refusal in the terms of a futile return to the illusionary past (a nostalgic, resentful demand for a "new" "form and order!"), we must focus on the practices of production of the multitude. In the past, we understood labor power as subsumed as "veritable capital," as an internal part of the production of capital"; as mere muscle power, blue (slave) collar power. But

today, labor power includes much more than muscle; it is not only blue collar; it begins to constitute itself when the multitude recognizes itself as machinic; when it includes "science, communication, and language" as part of its "identity" tools. The new proletariat has expanded to include the intellectual and affective capabilites of the human, and it is using these appropriated knowledges to greatly increase its skill in biopolitics. In effect, our surplus value is immanent, our "poietic prothesis" is a new ontological being: blue collar + communication + language + science. In other words, in the new "info" era, though we're all still working for The (Corporate) Techno-Man, it turns out that the large amount of immaterial labor power which we have accessed is increasing our collective capacity as autonomous agents of production.

> Industry produces no surplus except what is generated by social activity- and this is why, buried in the great whale of life, value is beyond measure. There would be no surplus if production were not animated throughout by social intelligence, by the general intellect and at the same time by the affective expressions that define social relations and rule over the articulations of social being. The excess of value is determined today in the affects, in the bodies crisscrossed by knowledge, in the intelligence of the mind, and in the sheer power to act.

Even the fact that we're rapidly losing jobs to cheaper labor and are "overeducated" for the temp service jobs we inhabit contributes to our capacity to resist exploitation. Saying we are "overeducated" really means we are now new prothetic bodies enriched with intellectual and cooperative power, and bodies that are already hybrid: militant "social worker's" bodies. We are bodies "beyond measure." Since recognizing that our desire breaks down in the black hole of (disciplinary) corruption, as or before we are fired, we refuse orders from above; in effect, we fire ourselves. Whether it be through forced exodus, self-exile, or simply horizontal mobility, we, the nomadic multitude, invest in the reconstitution of our ontological desire.

> Today the militant cannot even pretend to be a representative, even of the fundamental human needs of the exploited. Revolutionary political militancy today, on the contrary, must rediscover what has always been its proper form: not representational but constituent activity.

The importance of Negri and Hardt's *Empire* has to do with the proletariat's sense and articulation of its struggle. Obviously, with the heavy burden of loss corporatization has placed on the left, we need an alternative vision. The voicing of an alternative vision involves denouncing the spectacle of corporate domina-

tion. Negri and Hardt want us to begin to see life from the point of view of who is actually doing the work: who has the energy, who fills the orders. Spectacle sets us up to believe that behind spectacle there is energy, a something which sustains corporate power. But from the point of view of labor and desire, spectacle is a vacuum. The transformation in our ontological being comes when we begin to see that it is because of our labor that the world is flourishing. What Negri and Hardt point out is that in the Renaissance the idea that there was no divine and transcendent authority over world affairs is only a symptom of the primary event of modernity: "affirmation of the powers of this world, the discovery of the plane of immanence." In other words, during the Renaissance, there arose a new immanent ontological knowledge—that it is we, the multitude, who are the agents of power on earth. Knowledge shifts from the transcendent plane to the immanent plane; human knowledge became a doing, a practice of transforming nature. "Claiming that humans could immediately establish their freedom in being was a subversive delirium." Since the Renaissance, we've been in the virtual realm within the "divine city," unable to pass to the "earthly city". In other words, we've been in the process of revolution for a long time, but as yet we haven't moved to the level where we are no longer willing to accept freedom only on the divine level. Now, with our move to the earthly city, what we show the world is that we've moved, ontologically, to a new plane, where work as desire is not excluded but included, made immanent.

Negri and Hardt tell the story of communist revolutionary struggle from the materialist point of view. Against the illusory transcendent idea that dominant history and mass media tell—"the people lost! capital is victorious!"—Negri and Hardt show that the community of the human species is stronger today than during the era of modernity because the ideals of god the father/boss/family/nation-state have been shattered.

> The multitude today... resides on the imperial surfaces where there is no God the Father and no transcendence. Instead there is our immanent labor. The teleology of the multitude is theurgical; it consists in the possibility of directing technologies and production toward its own joy and its own increase of power.

We are global citizens; ontological being is not outside the political, it is the political; it is constituent desire, production; it is joy. What Negri and Hardt show is that materiality is victorious, so beware what you believe: question the ontological foundations of your beliefs. Recognize that the movement in global communications from the possible to the virtual signals our time as that of the liberation of real power. Real power, the joyous power of the human species as production is our telos. A proletariat telling of humanity's struggle to free itself is what finally emerges when we examine our "non-place" from social and historical ground. We are nomads of an earthly city. We are the poor who know no measure but value

beyond value:

> *There is an ancient legend that might serve to illuminate the future life of communist militancy: that of Saint Francis of Assisi. Consider this work. To denounce the poverty of the multitude he adopted that common condition and discovered there the ontological power of a new society. The communist militant does the same, identifying in the common condition of the multitude its enormous wealth. Francis in opposition to nascent capitalism refused every instrumental discipline, and in opposition to the mortification of the flesh (in poverty and in the constituted order) he posed a joyous life, including all of being and nature, the animals, sister moon, brother sun, the birds of the field, the poor and exploited humans, together against the will of power and corruption. Once again in postmodernity we find ourselves in Francis's situation, posing against the misery of power the joy of being. This is a revolution that no power will control—because biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist.*

Julia Van Cleve

Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking the Truth to Power

Paul Bové, editor
Duke University Press, 2000

Within the United States, an amalgam of colliding realities manifests itself in an obfuscating and obtrusive manner, particularly in what passes for intellectual discourse, and even much scholarship, on the Middle East. Clearly, it is only in this biased American climate that racist propaganda campaigns guised in "objectivity," such as the attacks on Edward Said's *Out of Place*, his version of his own childhood, are given legitimacy at all.

To get behind such static, to think about life as it was actually lived before these ideological categories determined who was who, where they might live, how they might think or, in fact, what they should even be allowed to consider thinking, is one of the implicit and explicit tasks Said set for himself in writing *Out of Place: A Memoir*, almost as if he had anticipated the charges of falsehood leveled against him. If the grenade-launching, towel-headed terrorist remains the essence of the Arab in Palestinian form for too many Americans (whether they readily admit it or not), the suave, urbane and sophisticated face of Edward Said has become the essence of that figure for certain educated and even liberal Americans, cool and acceptable on the surface but potentially volatile nevertheless.

Said's own variegated intellectual "multiculturalism," as it were, is well-known and has taken him from fairly traditional literary criticism to seminal texts such as *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* (a work that should bear the same primary relationship to literary and cultural studies now that one of Said's intellectual models, Eric Auerbach's *Mimesis*, bore to previous generations). These two books have been enormously influential in redefining the nature, scope and relationship of diverse disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, not only in this country but throughout the world.

In between these major works, Said has published voluminously in a variety of areas, from music criticism to media coverage of the Middle East. As we also know, from a certain point in his very public career, Said has written, worked tirelessly and served as a spokesperson (both officially and unofficially) for Palestinians and the Palestinian national movement, explicating Palestinian identity, history, politics and rights for an American audience completely unused to hearing about such things. In his efforts on behalf of Palestine, one can see the issue serve as a kind of moral litmus test, a way for Said to check the integrity of his intellectual peers. Much as Zola galvanized public opinion in the Dreyfus affair, Said has lifted the Palestinian cause out of the apologetic and beleaguered discourse in which it had been embedded, to lend it universal dimensions.

Now, let's specifically engage *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic:*

Speaking Truth to Power, a volume of essays on Said's work that Paul Bové edited for Duke University Press. The book originated as a special issue of *boundary 2*, but now includes new essays on minority culture and on orientalism in music, as well as an interview of Said by Jacqueline Rose. For at least two decades the career of Edward Said has defined what it means to be a public intellectual today.

Although attacked as a terrorist and derided as a fraud for his work on behalf of his fellow Palestinians, Said's importance extends far beyond his political activism. In this volume a distinguished group of scholars assesses nearly every aspect of Said's work: his contributions to postcolonial theory, his work on racism and ethnicity, his aesthetics and his resistance to the aestheticization of politics, his concepts of figuration, his assessment of the role of the exile in a metropolitan culture, and his work on music and the visual arts. In two separate interviews in the book, Said himself comments on a variety of topics, among them the response of the American Jewish community to his political efforts in the Middle East. Yet even as the Palestinian struggle finds a central place in his work, it is essential—as the contributors demonstrate—to see that this struggle rests on and gives power to his general "critique of colonizers" and is not simply the outgrowth of a local nationalism.

Perhaps more than any other person in the United States, Said has changed how the U.S. media and American intellectuals must think about and represent Palestinians, Islam, and the Middle East. Most importantly, this change arises not as a result of political action but out of a potent humanism—a breadth of knowledge and insight that has nourished many fields of inquiry. Said has been accused of being primarily a humanist who exploits—and distorts— his Palestinean heritage for personal enhancement of his profile as an "academic superstar" within the US academy. But in an article in *Al-Ahram* in January of 2000, he stated clearly the complex and necessary commitment of the humanist to political and social injustice at the end of the twentieth century. I cite him at length here because what he says sheds considerable light on the purpose and effect of the volume *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic* on the one hand, and on the other, outlines the deep connections between literary humanism and history, and between epistemology and politics:

> What is a real choice for the modern humanist at the threshold of the 21st century facing a major seismic shift in the conditions for humanistic practices, and for whom the ideas of tradition, sect, ethnicity and religion are neither adequate as guides nor useful as modes of making sense of human history. And what a complex new situation we face. Those of us who grew up intellectually in the United States framed by the Cold War are now citizens of the last remaining superpower, with a global reach often put at the service of awful destruction and inhumane practices such as the genocidal sanctions policy against the people

> of Iraq. We face a world no longer under the unopposed thrall of Eurocentrism, and in which a whole panoply of literatures and civilizations that have emerged from the blight of colonialism can be seen to furnish challenges to ours. Regressively, we can speak of the clash of civilizations or it might be possible and, in my opinion, certainly better to expand our understanding of human history to include all those Others constructed as dehumanized, demonized opponents by imperial knowledges and a will to rule. Civilizations have never occurred or survived for long simply by fighting off all the others: beneath a superficial level of defensive propaganda every great civilization is made up of endless traffic with others.

Among this volume's contributors are recognized scholars in various areas like cultural studies, postcolonial theory, feminism, and literary psychoanalysis. In his contribution, Jonathan Arac presents his own arguments about *Huckleberry Finn* and shows how Said's work articluates the quizzical complexities of American literature, culture, and politics, disclosing further the question that perennially confronts the activist academic: What should the critic do? In her essay, Barbara Harlow seems to answer precisely that question: Speak truth to power. Harlow's essay, the most effective in the volume in making the case for the imbrication of literature, politics, and history, argues that literary intellectuals must use their special training and knowledge not just to analyze stories but also to speak about massacres, cover-ups, and human rights as well as about race. In her own turn, Gayatri Spivak—who has been credited, rightly or wrongly, with Said as the co-founder of postcolonial studies in the US academy—uses Jack Forbes's *Black Africans and Native Americans* to look at the issue of hybridization in Said's work: the cross-fertilization of peoples, races, and histories.

Like Said, Rashid Khalidi has also contributed significantly in transforming the US understanding of Palestinian history and politics, and his essay focuses on the various operations of "orientalism" in the US corporate media, disclosing numerous practices of ignorance and prejudice. Terry Cochran, James Merod, and Lindsay Waters, in respective essays, expand the rhetorical devices in Said's work into the the terrain of cultural production, specifically, into music, and while Cochran deals with the materiality of the figure in music, Merod focuses on musical performance, on the undercurrents, in Said's work, of lyricism in jazz and classical music—and Waters uses Theodor Adorno's theory of the aesthetic to examine the importance that Said places on experience in his career as a music critic as well as a performer. *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic* illuminates well, within the context of the academic professoriat and criticism, the hybridization of races, cultures, histories, and areas of knowledge and performance that undergirds Said's work up to this point—without stamping it with any form of finality.

Said himself has articulated the complexity and necessity of his own

multidisciplinary performance as a cultural and political critic—and perhaps more importantly as a professor—in his article on the millennium for *Al-Ahram* that I cited earlier in thiis review:

> Is it too much to opine that the disarray in which we find ourselves as scholars and teachers of literature with vast disagreements separating us from each other, with hyphenated and ill-formed new fields of activity many of which are neither linguistics, nor psychoanalysis, nor anthropology, nor history, nor sociology, nor philosophy but bits of all of them, flooding and overcoming the (perhaps false) serenity of former times...that all this may in fact be traceable to the loss of an enabling image of an individual human being pressing on with her/his work, pen in hand, manuscript or book on the table, rescuing some sense for the page from out of the confusion and disorganization that surround us in ordinary life?

Biodun Iginla

States of Emergency: Documentaries, War, Democracies

Patricia Zimmermann
University of Minnesota Press, 2000

Patricia Zimmermann's *States of Emergency* is a necessary text, a political text that aims at eliding articulations between the realms of politics and esthetics around the specific field of documentary filmmaking. Throughout its pages, the very distinction between those realms is unveiled as spurious. This move is present since its very title: the concept of state of emergency is, by now, one that occupies an important space in contemporary critical theory. It was re-conceptualized by Walter Benjamin in his "Thesis on the Philosophy of History": the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule. This reversal of the sense of political history is also the context of the inquiries that Patricia Zimmermann undertakes in her work. Zimmermann does not quote Benjamin on politics of emergency (she does subtly elaborate on his analysis of shock, expanding the scope of the concept). But the spirit of the text bears a sign related to the inspiration of the Frankfurt philosopher. The text depicts a landscape of power relations—of war and politics in several world areas, and of politics as war in contemporary democracies—where the field of independent documentary is understood as a field not only of eye witnessing but of active militant engagement. The text functions around three main concepts: war, the body and image/representation, concepts that keep recurring across the chapters, intertwined in a very creative and subtle manner.

Post Cold War, late capitalism, New Right hegemonic strategies: these are the historico-political contexts of the materials analyzed in the text. "We urgently need a new world image order," Zimmermann states in the introduction. And this urgency, shown in the first statement of the text, is the mark of its clear stance as a political intervention. Because if we read the world through mainstream media and the cultural industry, the only thing that seems to be urgent today is the dynamics of flexible accumulation, the new velocity of capital that shapes the political realm under its own contours. Therefore, this other urgency stated by Zimmermann, one that struggles for images embedded in new configurated power relations, has to be most welcome.

The text is remarkable for the conjunctions that it attains: detailed, insightful analysis of particular documentaries entwined with fragments of crucial works in a broad spectrum of contemporary theory—from anthropology to film theory and from feminism to postcolonial studies, and beyond—that illuminate the specificities, the locality of the esthetic projects analyzed, which are interpreted through the scenery of today's political economy.

The idea of war appears both as a concept and as a metaphor, blurring the difference between this two linguistic functions in a definitely political way that illuminates the contours of concepts as images, of images as conceptual patterns.

This of course, is a major, if subtle, (under) statement on the form and the content of documentary film itself. The genre is here conceptualized as bearing on raw facts and data, working through its material with the tools and the scope of other genres such as fiction, poetry, journalism, travelogue and—in many of the cases reviewed—political treatise. This last genre, concerned with the dynamics of relations of power is the one invoked—both in the films and in this text which analyzes them—by the concept of war.

The wars here depicted are the actual "struggles on the ground" (a phrase that reappears in the text) represented in the films about Angola, Vietnam, El Salvador, WWII, or the Gulf war—and also the remains of dirty wars, like the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina. But they are as well the political struggle that takes place at home. It could be the case of the non-conventional wars inside of which the issues of AIDS, drugs or minority politics develop. They could also be referring—more elliptically and yet not less poignantly—to the political battleground in which independent documentary is conceived, produced and reproduced. "War never stops" is the subtitle of the first section in chapter 2, a chapter that deals with "Mobile battlegrounds in the air." Lately, war has become an issue of technological mediation, not only regarding the lasers, the computer imaging or the simulation programs that are actual war weapons, but also regarding the mediation through the mass media of the representations, simulacra and documents that contemporary, post political, post historical wars deploy as a crucial tool, as self fulfilling prophecies. The text does not only refer to the bombing of multiple air forces but also, obliquely, to the reproduction and dissemination of political documentaries through several media.

Through the discussion of issues such as public and private funding for documentary film, the dynamics of state agencies, federal funds, private foundations, corporations, the very notion of independence becomes problematized across this text on independent documentary. Zimmermann depicts in an acute manner —through the analysis of her particular field of inquiry—the current context of expansion of capital and implosion of culture that many theories of postmodernism address. Zimmermann follows the threads that link several different spheres of contemporary societies, showing how the global deployment of capital and its flexible ways of accumulation appear as not permitting any position that attempts to locate itself as exterior to that economic logic. All politico-cultural manifestations—not to mention labor, production or consumption—seem to be located in the interior of this systemic compound, organized by borders that have also become internal and do not demarcate contiguous territories any longer.

This is the sociocultural context in which the true task of Zimmermann is situated. In this scenery that problematizes the very notion of independent documentary, Zimmermann aims at mapping a cultural movement of independent forms at the very moment of a deep, large transformation in which this notion—and related ones like criticism, counterdiscourse , exteriority, marginality—are being transformed into new figures of thought and practice.

What is the current status of independent documentary? The text interrogates the status of these films as counterdiscourse, as cultural critique, in a social milieu ruled by the logic of federal funding, private corporations and large scale foundations and the dependence on channels of communication to disseminate the images publicly. Zimmermann portrays the situation as a very complex one, involving multiple levels. Nevertheless, perhaps the most subtle of her insights is the depiction of the field of documentaries as a field that precisely heightens the contradictions of this systemics. It is a field that, while questioning the dialectics of dependency/independence—through the work of capital, technology, and art, all of which are analyzed wisely and in depth by Zimmermann—points toward the state of emergency that is contemporary society. Zimmermann seems to be implicitly arguing that independent documentary, by problematizing its status as independent critique and looking for innovative channels of diffusion, would be reaffirming the Benjaminian dictum: the state of emergency is not the exception but the rule.

Zimmermann's text argues implicitly in the same direction as Benjamin's thesis and its reflections on the politicization of esthetics. It explores the way in which politics serve as an envelope that covers material and symbolic violence, while the struggle for rights, recognition, and public policies is also a kind of struggle that is deployed though the language and images of war—a war aimed at deepening and radicalizing current democracies.

The strength of Zimmermann's analysis is the detailed focus on particular cases, local issues and peculiar locations. Hers is even a sort of ethnographic approach through which, instead of constructing grand theory, she theorizes by means of the minute regard upon individual events and objects. Zimmermann writes about current war documentaries as well as about mainstream war movies. She refers to parallels and divergences, both in styles of war and in styles of documenting it. In this way, the "war in the air" becomes an accurate sliding of words that is an accurate and powerful metaphor. From the writings of Paul Virilio on war and cinema—with its chapters on the air forces—to the images taken from the Enola Gay in the instant of bombing Hiroshima to the restrictions of information that the state enforces during contemporary wars, driven by the logic of the spectacle.

Spectacle, simulacrum, fetish: these are, according to Zimmermann, the key words that define postmodern, mass-mediated wars such as the Gulf War. Independent documentaries, working through the cracks of the hyper-mediated society, intend to deploy strategies opposite to the fetishistic dissemination of images accomplished by the state.

But through this analysis, Zimmermann allows the reader to interpret between the lines: the text's subtitle, "documentaries, war, democracies," establishes parallels that lead one to again conceive democracies as battlegrounds. And the tactics and strategies of independent filmmakers to avoid the restriction upon information are moves that lead us to conceive the "free" status of information and public speech in the "normal" state of liberal democracies. The images and pic-

tures that illustrate the book reinforce this argument about the state of emergency in which we live that is not the exception but the rule.

The sections on documentaries on the struggles around reproductive health enhance our understanding of these political films by showing the diverse meanings of the concept itself: social reproduction, health reproduction, technological reproduction of images. By doing this, the text politicizes the apparently aseptic surfaces and forms of current postmodern culture.

A single quote from the text could give us a glimpse of the complex levels analyzed in depth here. The body as central figure in the documentaries reviewed appears as the main support of "new political subjectivities (that) permeate discourse as well as visual representation, formulating a new amalgamated spatial territory to be assembled ad hoc and locally as public spheres shrink." And these levels of action of bodies-as-territories are located by Zimmermann in a smart analysis of the pervasiveness of new technologies which somehow democratize access to representation and politicize in a different, counter hegemonic way the moves toward privatization.

Zimmermann posits that these political bodies have been ambushed, caught as if by surprise by the forces of the conservative New Tradition. At the instant of the inauguration of a new amBush, this text appears as a very timely one. Zimmermann studies independent documentaries that bear witness to the quotidian struggle for expanding the democratic system. Her text itself is a privileged witness that provides us with accurate, sharp testimony.

Juan Obarrio

The Ends of Globalization

Mohammed A. Bamyeh
University of Minnesota Press, 2000

and

Cultural Studies and Political Theory

Jodi Dean, editor
Cornell University Press, 2000

These two books were released prior to the implosion of America's quadrennial political ritual and have thus escaped the ferment of immediacy and passion circulating both on the streets and in the airwaves in the wake of the dubious ascension of the new administration. Their appearance now, however, is fortuitous as we attempt to make sense of the machinations of the very legal procedures, political brokering, and social and cultural dynamics that prepared the grounds for our contemporary debacle. Now as our ears are tuned and attention whetted, these two very different volumes both accommodate our need for a deeper understanding of the political, and in turn widen and increase the inclusiveness of that realm.

Mohammed A. Bamyeh, in *The Ends of Globalization*, begins his analysis of the emergent world system of globalism with an introspection of the historical and theoretical foundations of the State, concentrating specifically on the codes and consequences of its replication. Bamyeh, a student of world systems—who is the editor of the transcultural studies journal, *Passages,* and a Professor of Historical Sociology at New York University—crafts an intriguing, if densely tangled argument. He posits multiple social forces as responsible for our global political environment. This is refreshing in lieu of the dominant theorizing which concentrates primarily on the technological causes of our newly wired and crisscrossed planet. It is an argument which he intends, in the end, can open space for social responses to the weight of governmentality and create an awareness of new possibilities for freedom.

Bamyeh characterizes globalization as a complex and evolving network of administrative and political alliances flowing from the State's innate inclination towards a rational and systematic integration of economic and cultural forces. Theoretically informed by Max Weber, he displays the State through numerous historical examples as an apparatus bent on totalitarianism, a social form that swallows dissent, difference, and notions of alternative systems of governance. "The illusion here is that the empire is the source of universal ideas... Regardless of how the world adjusts to or produces variations of modernity, the logic of empire today is inscribed in the will of one political center or another to see itself as the

source of all such metamorphoses."

In the climate of State power, culture becomes a marker for what is contained beneath the apparatus of nationalism, a tool left only to distinguish replicated governments across geography. Bamyeh argues, however, that it is only when culture is reified in this manner that nativism becomes pitted against globalism. When culture becomes a sign of identity within a particular state, it ceases to be recognized as a process of interaction with the world. When culture and ethnicity are reduced to nominative categories, signifying only the historical legacy of peoples, globalists begin to see them as obstacles to the efficiency of a new world system.

The absence of a totalitarian vision, writes Bamyeh, "leaves a political scene typified by directionlessness and by illogical and nonsystematic invasions and war, where it is difficult to discover a common thread or thread other than sheer and unanchored political opportunism." In a critique of Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* Bamyeh argues that such caricatures serve as an oppositional framework upon which a new imperialism can be waged. Such oppositions neglect the cultural history of the transnational economy while obfuscating the administrative processes involved in manufacturing the consumerist appeal of anti-imperial movements. Such an analysis, Bamyeh contends, force movements for ethnic and cultural nationhood onto a playing field circumscribed by rules of the State apparatus. In the end, both competitors in this dialectical struggle emerge looking more alike.

To respond to opportunities in a globally connected world, Bayhem insists we must first divorce ourselves from the legacies and outworn concepts of the State system. Sensing that the most salient aspect of imperialism is the hegemony of governmentality, Bamyeh's book concludes by recognizing a host of transcultural movements which offer alternative organizational models for social action. Among the movements more apropos to the global environment are efforts to nurture transnational alliances based on emancipatory principles, those which critique the hegemonic structure of globalization. He contends intercultural class solidarity and feminism, as well as spiritual movements and environmentalism, can reshape globalization from a system operating above the level of human experience to one that is authenticated by gains of freedom on the ground.

Cultural Studies and Political Theory, edited by Jodi Dean, works similarly to question politics as the science of administration. The book's sixteen essayists seek to redress the separation of political theory from the concerns and rhythms of everyday life. The authors herein insist that understanding cultural dynamics is imperative to understanding politics, and frequently invoke the term "cultural politics" to denote the dialogue from which political opinion and policy emerge.

Kathleen Stewart, in her essay, "Real American Dreams (Can Be Nightmares)," extrapolates her ethnographic experience in the Appalachian hollers of West Virginia to theorize national cultural politics in the United States. By listening closely and recording the stories, fears and aspirations of people living

outside the mainline of commercial American culture, she is able to tune into the very underbelly of consumer dreams. Stewart's documentation of the paranoia of these people living across the backdrop of America's abject economy is haunting. As she juxtaposes the trauma in their voices with the media portrayals of a universal economic boom, their words break through the mythic narrative of success. Like cries from "beyond the pale," the resulting caesura rips the slumber of complacency and challenges the way poverty is interpreted from the angle of the safe.

While Stewart's methodology alerts us to the ubiquity of ruptures in the veil of the American Dream, in closing she delivers an equally haunting description of how such eruptions are methodically repaired. In an analysis of a day time talk show subplot, she shows the depiction of the "loser" in the game of economic success to be as important as the proclamation of the "winner."

Continuing the analysis of paranoia in relation to cultural politics is an essay from Jodi Dean entitled, "Declarations of Independence." Here the author questions the place of conspiracy theory in American political life. She draws an historical etymology of public subjects and private realms, and moves to illustrate the complementary roles these audiences have in shaping the nature of legitimate speech practices.

To conspire, literally, to breathe together, in secrecy, is surely anathema to the open public debate into which democracy was borne. Dean shows how the term *conspiracy theory* has come to mean the twisted and irrational thought pattern symptomatic of the mentally ill. Her analysis of *conspiratorial thinking* interprets the consequences of the mode's leaps of logic and fits of hyperbole as a liberating activity. Poets and others interested in enhancing the metaphoric flexibility of our languages will recognize a creative fluidity in the conspiratorial mind. Conspiratorial thinking is shown to be necessary in the overly administrative world, not only because it touches on unmentionable subjects, but because it plots unique narrative structures, distinct and interesting patchworks which stretch and jump from point A to point B. This associative thought pattern is like the mind of the crowd, a collection of perspectives and diverse histories, united momentarily by situations, trajectories, confluence and influence.

Dean looks at how such "theories" are debunked, discredited, and de-legitimized, as a way of delineating what is socially acceptable. She sees rising accusations against the conspiratorial as a sign of restricted access to legitimate political debate.

The word political can be interpreted in nearly all the essays of *Cultural Studies and Political Theory* as the domain of contention over some sort of power rather than the art or science of governmental administration. Barbara Cruikshank's essay, "Cultural Politics: Political Theory and the Foundations of Democratic Order" begins with a statement reminiscent of Bamyeh's critique of the govermental. She writes, today, "In the political world, everything is decided in advance...In the cultural / moral world everything is contested."

Cruikshank maintains the neo-conservative declaration of a "culture war"

was aimed at segregating the political, or that which can be contested, from the cultural, or that which is inherited and given. The conservative idea that "the cultural" is given, however, is no longer a viable argument. Instead it has been shown to be widely mutable by cultural anthropologists, counter culture insurgents, and eloquently again in Bamyeh's extended argument on the relationship of the State apparatus to the spiritual and cultural identities of people.

For these authors, it is the old notion of the political which now positions itself as given, an unwavering system of rules administered over by technocrats. To some, the idea of a just machine in place to distribute power, legislate policy, and execute laws may seem attractive in the light of the tumult unleashed by new freedoms in the cultural world. But even if such a machine could be produced, it would have to be continuously monitored, tuned, contested, watched, and rebutted. Otherwise, the anarchy of symbols we enjoy will continue to be only an anarchy of symbolic consumption.

Other important essays continue this effort by mapping the additional entry points into a cultural politics, all of which seek to broaden the realm of democratic engagement and political participation to the streets, the homes, and work places of America. Other essayists in *Cultural Studies and Political Theory* include Paul Apostolidis, Lauren Berlant, William E. Connolly, Thomas L. Dumm, Judith Grant, Aida A. Hozic, George Lipsitz, Paul A. Passavant, Mark Reinhardt, Micheal J. Shapiro, George Shulman, Priscilla Ward and Linda Zerilli.

David Michalski

Dyssemia Sleaze

Adeena Karasick
Talonbooks, 2000

and

hovercraft

K. Silem Muhammad
Kenning, 2000

Cheesy Dessert: Dyssemia Sleaze Licks the Bowl While Hovercraft, uh, Hovers

I, amorphous little essay that I am, come begging to *Dyssemia Sleaze*, tugging at its tattered metallic hem and saying, "Tell me what to say and what to be. Give me form, dictate me. You are a Book, bounded, bound and glossy. I'm but a nascent little Book Review, a paltry handful of words aspiring to glow in your reflected aura, asking you for guidance, shape and telos." (Moreover, as my author moves to command S, I almost get saved in the "cheesy dessert" file. My abjection grows and grows in direct proportion to my word count.) (And, in fact, "cheesy dessert" isn't so far removed from "dyssemia sleaze," except in its syntactic construction. "Dessert cheesiness" would be more accurate a parallel, as, among my students at least, "cheesy" has come to have the same connotations of cheap, ersatz sentimentality that attaches to "sleaze," and "dyssemia" echoes "dessert" as in "unserve" as in it don't serve no more it's BROKEN and dyssemia means "a difficult or distorted sign" —a distortion of the sign, it don't work it's BROKEN and set spinning in a delirious riot of BROKEN SPOKENNESS against the nightwalled sky, a firework Catherine Word Salad Slander Wheel or a Roman Syllab Candle but these references are all wroing wron wroun wrong wrecked references as this is a JEWISH TEXT, it feels really great to write that for an *Xcp* review. A la Hannah (Weiner) and La (Mother) Stein —and au Uncle Lenny, whose "I was a pregnant teenage yortsite candle" describes this book with its smart-wild-shayne-maydele sensibility flustering out all over the place, sticking out of the pages askew and agog (gag-me-not s'il te plaît) like some self-dissasembled miriamette jostled on strings of lingoesque power lines.

Like, for instance, the following:

> flounced with fretted foaming
> as hunger floats in cadenced drapes spun pungent
> primped in plush proxy. ("Mehaneh Yehuda," 7)

or, from the same poem,

...take yr paratactic prophylactic in a
ventriloquy se crée

And grind yr

Haughty Taughty tater-tot.

in the calm torment of
uninhabitable anguish gripped
by all that is elliptical...

Looking at either one of these snappy calypso (or, to use one of Karasick's favorite words, "calico" —a tricolored girl-cat material) synapses we can see the *jolie-laide* yoking of textile, textual, sexual-sensual references into a texture of rapture-anguish that frets and chomps at the soundbytten limits it takes as its own litmus-test, pushing language to extrude itself from the page and from its structural limits (grammar, syntax, etc) like a cloth made up of rough-with-projecting fibers, beyond three-dee into, say, dresses that wear themselves, wild girls whose mobile glitter-skin, hairy hair and flailing limbs are their own richly patterned dancing out fits, the glorious detritus twirling around the holy abject who pirouettes on the point of a s/word. Following Walter Benjamin's scavenger sensibility —that dictates that "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history" —and turning her attention to language rather than story, Karasick takes every syllable and nuanced phrase that has been utteredly rejected and dejected, downpressed and distressed, and winds it together into a woven wound that also stanches its own blood, that is its own tourniquet. Her immersion in language resists inquisition, turns Torquemada on himself by injecting him with its own marrano fever, that itch to blurt and spew and spritz, so that the torture chamber becomes the voice-box, the brain, the transformative crucible of the possessed larynx wrapt 'n' torn, 'buked and scorned hebraic scripture. As poet Joesph Lease has astutely pointed out, Karasick's work is a "protest against discourse."

There's non-linear, intuitively divined lineage here, which includes as well as Stein and Bruce Jacques Derrida and Edmond Jabès, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin and John Zorn, Kathy Acker and (dare I say) Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva, willy-nilly architextual founders of the "new Jewish Cultural Studies." Boyarin the elder has (in a text cited by Boyarin the younger) insisted that the Jewish spiritual/intellectual tradition obliges one to push language to its limits. Karasick obliges over the top, and seems to add, with others in this roster, "by any means necessary." What this means in *Dyssemia Sleaze* is a multi-media assault on linguistic and imagistic propriety within the seemingly safe pages of a book.

Open its pages and out tumble collage; text laid over and almost disappearing under fashion photography and other disturbing, distorted and highly charged visual images; a page of a Deleuze and Guattari text coming in and out of visibility over/under a series of Dolce & Gabana ad-photos; (the piece's title, "Improbable Grammars V," rewrites in high theory/fashion bpNichol's "Probable Systems" series, and echoes the latter series' humor); and text so disoriented by its manifestion in a jarring mangle of font sizes and styles that it is virtually unreadable. And of course the sonic/semantic aspects of language, as exemplified above, make their way through heteroglossic tongue-twisters that make even the quotidian and mass-cultural, like "tater tot," seem foreign.

High-spirited as the attack is, this project is not all fun and games, though; not at all. Throughout, the imp/possibility of speech (the book bears comparison to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* in this regard) and yet the imperative compulsion to spritz (spew) are evident —as is the theme of sa(l)vaging cultures, being Jewish and female in a world in which those non/anti/identities have been both nailed down and set aspin, reviled and revered as both victim and oppressor, origin and counterfeit. "Mehaneh Yehuda," for example, means "Jewish Market" and refers to the bombing of the Jewish market in Jerusalem by HaMaS, the radical Palestinian guerilla group, which at the time of the poem's writing was a recent event. Mixed in with the verbal hi-jinx is, necessarily, a sense of mourning, horror and the ongoing inevitability and responsibility of being Other. Embedded in and superimposed on a brightly colored photograph of an open-air market, one finds the following:

> *Yehudi* ***HAMAS***. as her face
> fissures in upsurge arbitrarity. *Mehaneh* Honey.
> gnaws in nightmares, anxieties. In the aching atlas of
> her body. ruptured in *Mehaneh Yehuda.* ***HAMAS***. as violence
> encrusted in this horror. Tortured without men or respite. And her
> gaunt flaunt tweaks semes strewn in her husky throb lobling surds.
> And she is
> crushed in the zone of her trembling...

It comes as a shock to realize (though why not?) that this describes/enacts Jewry and the geographical site of Israel (Eretz Israel, aching atlas) as woman, a woman being blown up by a bomb, a woman ravaged by abject desire internally and externally, disseminated and dispersed, her body diasporized and dismembered. Hélène Cixous's neologism "Juifemme" (Jewoman) comes to mind, resonating with a century of European intellectual history in which Jews were feminized and women were conflated with Jews as aberrant ersatz-humans who could not use language or cognitive faculties properly and thus were not entitled to equal rights (see Sander Gilman's extensive work on this historical era). The problem here is that the bombing of the Jewish market in the late 1990s took place in a

context of a liberation struggle in which Jews —or Jewish Israel —are cast as oppressors, not victims. This twist of history is elucidated by Karasick in a note at the bottom of the page:

> • *HAMAS*, literally an acronym for the *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya* (the Islamic Resistance Movement) and litearlly denotes "zeal" or "enthusiasm". The *HAMAS* Covenant, however, interprets its name to mean "strength and bravery". My Hebrew-English dictionary defines the Hebrew word "hamas" (het-mem-samech) as: To Displace. Rob. Destroy. Corruption. Violence.

The painful irony that a word can mean enthusiasm/strength/bravery and corruption/violence/destruction in Arabic and Hebrew respectively points toward the explosive power of language in conflict with itself —as the two languages are so closely related as to signify that the explosion was one of self-destruction as well as the destruction of an Other, since the two cultures, religions and languages mirror each other and resonate so deeply. In that sense, Jew and Arab are the semblables/*frères/soeurs* it would be hypocrisy to disown, and simultaneously hypocrisy to embrace without acknowledgment of pain and injustice. The signal difference is History: the recent history of Jews and Arabs has led them to occupy vastly different positions within a tightly, (explosively) con(s)t(r)ained geo-political space. As a Jewish woman Karasick takes the persona of the Jewoman displaced by historical violence —but also by internal difference with herself, the schiziod, self-divided living-out of the politics of identity in the face of the knowledge that identity is contingent, ghostly, unstable. And the piece seems to oscillate between celebrating this indeterminacy as enabling—as it is in Judith Butler's concept that identity is a performance—and underscoring the mournfulness and permanent grief that such an impossible position sets in motion. In general, Karasick's work instanciates fully the notion that the most compelling experimental literary writing—that which most successfully enacts an *ostrananie* or defamiliarizing of quotidian language—comprises trauma *and* play.

Another piece, "Mellah Marrano," opens with definitions of the words in its title: "mellah" refers to salt, as Jewish ghettos in Arab states were known because Jews were often forced into the abject profession of salting the decapitated heads of executed criminals in preparation for their diplay on city gates; "marrano" is the contemptuous term ("pig" in Spanish) used for Jews forcibly converted during the period of the Inquisition, who continued to practice in secret—so the word has connotations of compulsive but cryptic utterance whose need for expression is linked to a tenuous identity that both sustains and exposes the already fragile subject to further violence. Thus, both extremes of Jewishness —the triumphalist Jewish citizen of contemporary Israel and the frightened and furtive forced convert in a hostile host country of Europe past and present—are equally unstable,

marked, vulnerable, and inextricably linked both to the violence *done by* speech, writing, and silence, and to the violence *done to* speaking and writing (and silent) subjects.

The most ambitious piece is, perhaps, "The Wall," an essay which explores the significance of the Western Wall, the most holy of Jewish sites, as a form of writing and of female presence (in the form of the *shekhina*, the animating holy breath, the word, which is and is not word, breath, woman, man, writing). While the Wall, whose existence memorializes the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C. E., provides the occasion and ground of being for the piece, other walls are cited through photographic superimposition, collage and decoupage— NYC walls whose major attraction is the graffiti scrawled thereon, a page from the Wall Street Journal—and I could swear the first time I read this there was a picture of the Berlin Wall, but it seems to be gone now. Also there are photos of women's bodies and especially their mouths—walls that are permeable, walls that suggest interiority, that are the meeting-place of inside and outside, power and abjection, life and memory, trauma and narrative. The remarkable thing about the Western Wall (also known as the wailing wall, as it is the site of religious mourning) is that not only is it in itself—the stones tufted with grass and doves, the different archictectural eras and styles layered one on the other—a form of writing, but actual prayers on tiny pieces of paper have been shoved into the cracks and crannies between the stones, so, like this book itself, the Wall bristles with alphabetic and glyphic detritus which is both mass cultural and esoteric, secret and revealed, private and public. It bears comparison with what the United States knows as the "wall," that is, the Viet Nam War Memorial, which though much younger, also is produced by its primary materials, words and stone, in productive tension with each other as negative and positive space...woundings and tracings standing in for a generation sacrificed. (There are enormous differences as well —the well-ordered, regimented lettering of the Viet Nam War Memorial against its glossy black marble vs. the rough, eroded, half-gone higglety-piggletiness of the Western Wall with its fugitive prayers shoved into the reachable fissures, and so forth.) Karasick cites the Wall as

> A SOCIAL FIELD OF DESIRES. Flows of letters and investments...
> **inscribing not a homogeneity of history, of ideas, of language, but a *hemorrhageity*, a bleeding of differences. A range of ruptures, fissures, wounds...**

and, because it is the Second, not the First, Temple whose ruins are immanent,

> point[ing] to an origin that is not an origin bur re-created in replication, dissemination, simulacra.

Moreover, the Wall's self-difference (its rough surface) is

> structured like a language (mimic[king] the ideological cracks in the surface of complex and inaccessible, non-linear grammar).

It is hard to resist the temptation to cite the whole in great detail—basically the argument, which builds like the Wall itself from the rubble of dissimilar and jarring elements (different fonts and font sizes, the startling imagery, the messy language), enacts a "Jewish" writing/utterance that is an all-embracing and chaotic, historically sensitive, unreconstructed, powerfully destabilizing claim to dys/"identity." One could point out that this piece is, unlike the rest of the book, characterized by expository prose in the academic/high-theory mode and thus does not live up to the same poetically experimental standards set by the rest of the book. However, the disturbing and disruptive visual elements, the near-illegibility of several passages due to overlay by these graphics, and the occasion breakdown of the prosaic language into poetic babble, I would argue, further the author's argument that the Wall, though seemingly solid like a block of prose, is in fact eroded and eroding, constantly shifting, permeable, shot through with inconsistency, moments of chaotic history and surface imperfection, and the s/cite of both presence and absence. In fact to my mind the piece offers a strong model for theoretical/poetical writing at its strongest and most interdisciplinary, drawing into its whirling vortical orbit an astonishing array of associations —gendered and sexed, metaphysical and physical, bodily and cerebral, emotional and spiritual, passionate and cognitive, historical, mythic and topical, abstruse and mass-cultural.

As diaspora poetics at its most intense pitch, I find this book very liberating. And thank you, DS, for giving me form and words, the form not too neat, the words not too wooden. I, a little Book Review, have layered myself on you, have tried to ooze parasitic into your not-so-glossy interior, to suckle at your crazed and cracked appendage-orifices, your sticky-out fibers, whatever surface crevice or convexity i can grab onto in your knobbly wall of glyphix. I do sin-seared-ly hop you lik my valentine—not much, i admit, but very very mine. Well not really but you know what i mean.

Kasey Silem Muhammad's *hovercraft* is a different story indeed. Austerely playful, its closest cognate to this little-bit-more-grown-up-than-last-time book review is the poetry of John Donne or Shakespeare; it is self-contained, not a word out of place, and the book is also a subdued, elegant chapbook, Kenning's first. It is like a highly polished cut stone, whose surface reflections dazzle and invite admiration, and there is much to admire. Whereas *Dyssemia Sleaze* is a "protest against discourse"—a sort of dyss-curse—that tears at itself and at high-theoretical language structures with equal abandon, *hovercraft* delights deftly in discourse—playing with it, juxtaposing various idioms archaic and contemporary, punning and eye-off-rhyming, all within contained poems that look and feel like sonnets, lyrics and other high court poesy in spite of its heavy nod to Objectivism

(with its epigraph drawn from Carl Rakosi), and in spite of its claim to be a long serial poem. It is a display of engagement through mastery, rather than through (con)front(ation)al assault. There is much pleasure in this endeavor. The book is a beautiful object —a tasteful gray dustjacket with an abstract print suggesting a somewhat antiquated aircraft or windmill (propellor-like hint of circular air movement and wide paddles) encloses 45 pages of neat, left-justified, organized verse. It is delicately luminous, and does indeed seem to hover, hauntingly and a bit tauntingly, over the everyday, with just a hint of defamiliarized diction to disorient pleasantly, as if one were in an outdoor elevator without walls, one's sense of gravity ever so teasingly tinkered with. There's nothing overtly demonic or possessed here, but it's not business as usual either —a more subtle sense of haunting, shadowing, hovering imbues the book, either through its intertexts or through its invocations of heretofore unthought of ghost-paradigms.

Much of the intertextual play is erudite and canonical. The opening passages, for instance, riff on Dante's famous descent, but in contemporary terms from the mass media and the fragmented sensibility of the present era. In a tercet structure resonating with the *terza rima* Dante invented for his masterwork, Muhammad writes:

> .....*middle voice*—
> .....*midsentence*—
> .....*thirtysomething*—
>
> to pass from a forest
> onto rungs of telepathy
> the dark art of producing
>
> experiential tides
> rips me from one end
> to the other
>
> each third step—
> the shade that helps
> pass the triple brutes
>
> corrects a yen to weep
> sets me up as
> premature corpse
>
> the shade of a named station
> demotes that formal shade
> to his spent rational role

the shade that floats
in pivoting light—
the terminal she

the muse & missed
mirabilis
my blest

On turning the page, the reader finds "*ha 'you come to read my digest...,*" which seems to continue the previous passage because of the rhyme (blest/digest), but in every other regard there is a sharp rupture—the tercet is no more, the intertextual "shades" and the religious notes have ceded to a different idiom—a British one, which goes on to be even more over-the-top contemporary, with mentions of a reader's digest, "dumptrucks," a "cellular highway, "weed-whacking qualia," "narco bugs" and "hydroplanes"—all musico-lexical concatenations that excite and please but lead us in a much different direction from the previous page's allusive musings. Further on, a whole page/passage is devoted to Sir Walter Raleigh, the Elizabethan Renaissance man who wrote poetry, explored the New World, performed as a statesman and lover of Queen Elizabeth (and was eventually executed for it).

So each page brings a different permutation of quirky phrasings, which glance in many cultural and epochal directions simultaneously. This sort of bringing-together of classic pre-Romantic literary and cultural figures (and idioms), whose orderly works nonetheless bear their own disorderly traces, with a contemporary "American" poetic project and diction characterizes the logical strategies of disorientation at work here. Teasing rather than dramatically destabilizing the kind of periodization and genre-specific divisions that parse up the field and discipline of "English literary studies" and "poetic schools" is part of the sly delight of this airy, spacious but miniaturesque (`a la Dickinson) book. Nonetheless, certain tropes run through it; my favorite is precisely that of the "ghost," the "shade," the "spook" whose "scars form spirit tissue"—that is, in my view at least, writing. The final page/passage brings us full circle from the opening's Virgilian shade guiding us through the forest to the wintry p(l)ane/plain of the computer screen, which is also a battlefield mediating contemporary warfare:

visible on ghost screen:
centrifugal bands of static:
pyramidal wedges:
a nearing horizon:

—it is an infant world
its gold to be scattered
like balls of quicksilver

into dead circulation

pixels fried in craze of snow:
a straining toward image:

the emperor's chair
shouldered
by endless replications of
the same men

fired on and falling, new
ones springing up, again
falling again springing up
bearing him forward till
his face fills the screen
falling back into pixels
blood & dirt

This is a beautiful —and lyrical —politicization of the contemporary act of writing. Like Elizabeth Bishop's "12:00 News," it equates the scene of writing with the carnage of our times, mediated by the mass media —in Bishop's era the Viet Nam war on television, in our own moment the violence of the Middle East, the Gulf War, and countless "undeclared" wars mediated to us through video games, the Internet and DVDs where we can watch classic battle panoramas from our emperors' desk chairs. Though "blood & dirt" get the last word, the volume is permeated by an etheric sense of light, print, tracery, and control.

Maria Damon

Wang Ping's publications include *American Visa, Foreign Devil,* and *Of Flesh and Spirit,* all from Coffee House. *New Generation: Poetry from China Today,* an anthology she edited and co-translated, is published by Hanging Loose Press. Her new book, *Aching for Beauty: Footbinding in China,* is from the University of Minnesota Press.

Mark McMorris writes poetry, fiction, and literary criticism. His most recent book of poetry is *The Black Reeds* (1997). He teaches in the English Department at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

Hoa Nguyen lives in Austin, Texas, where she teaches creative writing and edits the poetry magazine *Skanky Possum.* Her first full-length book will be published later this year by subpress.

May Joseph is Associate Professor of Global Studies at Pratt Institute, New York. She is the author of *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (Minnesota, 1999) and co-editor (with Jennifer Natalya Fink) of *Performing Hybridity* (Minnesota, 1999).

Kazim Ali is a painter, writer, and performance artist. He has been a political activist for many years, serving as National President of the United States Student Association and on the National Preparatory Committee of the World Youth Festival.

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Lise Erdrich is an addiction counselor and gardener at the Circle of Nations Indian School in Wahpeton, North Dakota. Her work appears in *Visit Teepee Town: Native Writing after the Detours* and several previous issues of *Xcp. Bears Make Rock Soup,* illustrated by the Oneida watercolorist Lisa Fifield, is forthcoming from Children's Book Press.

Kamau Brathwaite is author of numerous prize-winning books, most recently *Words Need Love Too* (House of Nehesi Publishers). He currently divides his time between CowPastor, Barbados, and New York, where he is a professor in Comparative Literature at NYU.

Everett Hoagland has recently read his work to large audiences in Accra, Ghana, and Havana, Cuba. His most recent book is *The City and Other Poems* (Spinner Publications). He teaches at UMass-Dartmouth.

Alan Gilbert's writings on poetry, art, politics, and critical theory have appeared in a number of publications, including *Publishers Weekly*, the *Poetry Project Newsletter*, and issue number six of *Xcp*. Recent poems have appeared in *The Germ* and *The Hat*.

Deborah Richards is from London, but has been living in Philadelphia since 1998. Her work can be seen in *Chain* and is forthcoming on *HOW2*. Her first book of poems, *Last One Out,* will be published in 2002.

Kenneth Sherwood has several chapbooks and edited the ezine *RIF/T.* His dissertation, "The Audible Word," discusses ethnopoetics and the work of Cecilia Vicuña, among others. He is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Texas-Permian Basin.

Ruth Now edits *hemorrhagingimaging.* She lives in Minneapolis.

Leslie Scalapino is author of numerous collections including *R-HU* and *The Public World/ Syntactically Impermanence.* She lives in Oakland, CA.

Rosamond S. King's work has appeared in *Colored Women, Colored Wor(l)ds,* E. Ethelbert Miller's forthcoming anthology *Beyond the Frontier: African American Poetry for the Twenty-First Century, The Caribbean Writer, ACM (Another Chicago Magazine)* and elsewhere.

Huda Seif has done long term research in Yemen, Afghanistan, and Somalia on issues of gender, transnational labor migration, and postcolonial states. She is a Ph. D. Candidate at the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University.

Ramez Qureshi's work appeared in *Tripwire, How2, Lagniappe, Jacket, Rain Taxi,* and many other magazines. He died unexpectedly while our spring issue was going to press. *Xcp* dedicates this issue to the memory of his work and spirit.

Rafeeq Hasan is a philosophy student at the University of Chicago. He is currently at work on a collection of essays entitled "After the Post-Colonial: Notes on a Diasporic Dasein."

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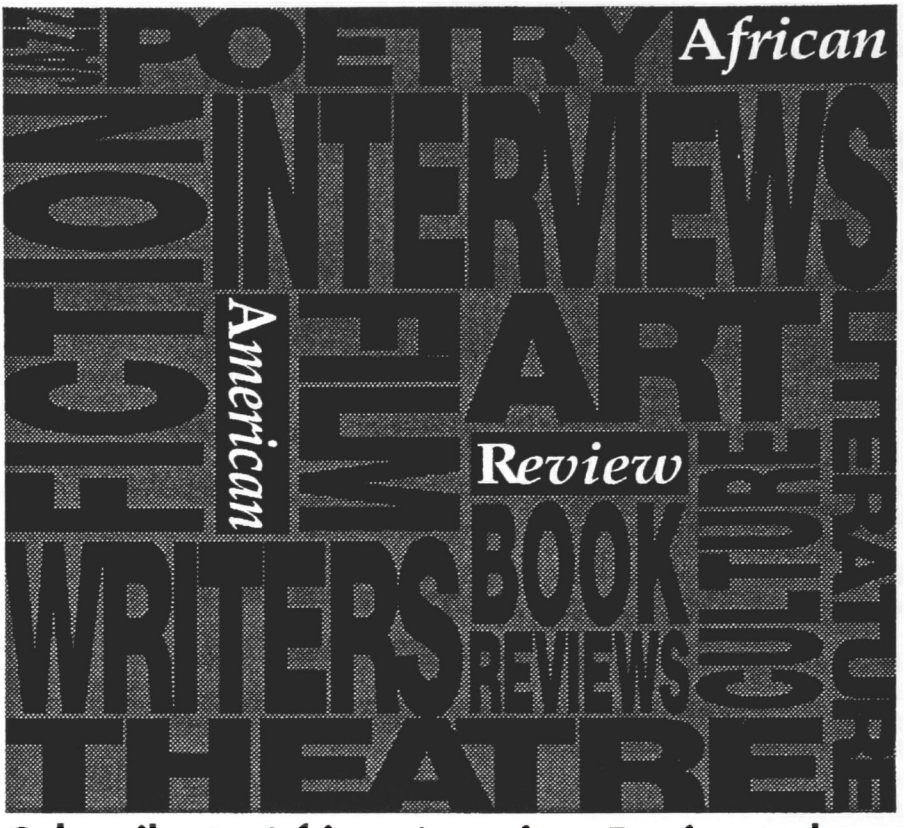

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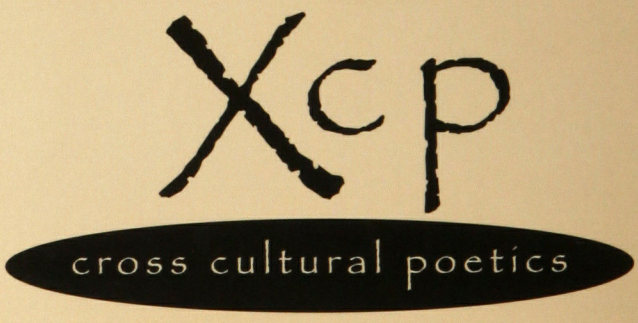

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