

Xcp 5

cross cultural poetics



Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Frederick Luis Aldama, Sianne Ngai,
Wang Ping, Eleni Sikelianos, Elaine Pigeon, Mickey Jenkins, John Olson,
George Kalamaras, Laurie Price, Rafeeq Hasan, Zhang Er,
Susan M. Schultz, Sterling Plumpp, John Taggart, Nathaniel Mackey,
Nathaniel Tarn, Shamoon Zamir, Christopher Funkhouser,
Peter O'Leary, Jessica Cattelino, David Michalski, Anna Reckin,
Maria Damon, Jon Spayde, Jordan Davis, Julia Van Cleve

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**Dia/Logos:
Speaking Across**



The New Millennial Xicano: An Interview with Guillermo Gómez-Peña

Frederick Luis Aldama

Performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña dares to ask, what does it mean to be Chicano/a at the end of the millennium?

From his early “Authentic Primitives Exhibit” to his recent “Mexterminator Project,” Gómez-Peña has been tearing up a seemingly tired and ineffectual Us-verses-Them landscape, clearing space for a more complicated new millennial mestizo identity that isn’t so *pret à porter*. Born and raised in Mexico City but a “convert” to Chicanohood, since first crossing the Tortilla Curtain in 1978 he has dedicated his life to speaking out against the brown-targeted racism that pervades U.S. mainstream society. In his performances, the old-school paradigms—brown verses white, Chicano verses Mexican, pre-Columbian pastoral verses Western supertech modern—are re-mapped. Gómez-Peña portrays the “other”’s shapeshifting tactics for evasion and subversion while the structures that contain and control the racialized subject become increasingly sophisticated—as infrared panoptic surveillance cameras and supercharged Jet Ranger helicopters patrol U.S./Mex. borders, for example.

His performance figures are not, say, the “undocumented” worker exploited by the Man. They are polylingual, cross-dressing computer programming, M16 totting, Aztec-cosmology painted border shamans and cyber-vato Mexterminators that celebrate ethnic identity as an empowered hybridity that intersects with cultures, races, sexualities and abuses the imperialist powers that be. His hybrid aesthetic aims to de-center the old hierarchies and grand narratives within and outside ethnic enclaves. The Chicano/a of today, Gómez-Peña more than suggests, exists in a border-zone of ethnic, racial, and sexual flux that doesn’t exclude, say, Chicanos/Latinos who “lack” quantifiable indian-ness or “lack” heterosexual-ness. He thus prepares the way for a new millennial polysexual, polylingual, ethnic subject.

Gómez-Peña’s move to de-essentialize ethnic identity has met with loud applause and harsh critique. Many cultural studies critics see his work as an important move away from models that pigeonhole ethnic identity—see Homi Bhabha’s *Location of Culture*, for example. But others read his performances, especially ’60s Raza-cheering veteranos who see his work as appropriationist—citing his middle-class, Mexico City parentage—and destructive to the Chicano/a community’s struggle to gain political visibility in a U.S. racist mainstream. His performances, some claim, deny the distinctive historically situated experiences that define Chicano/a subjectivity. And, many read his oft-hypermilitarized vato figures not as a parodic critique of male patriarchy, but as macho sensationalism. So, how are we to read this new-millennial, self-inventing polyethnic, polylingual, high-tech/low-tech

diasporic performance artist?

I caught up with Guillermo Gómez-Peña in San Francisco during his tour of "The Mexterminator Project."

* * * *

Frederick Luis Aldama: You've scripted a question that appears at your website, "Temple of Confessions," that asks webgoers to tell of a crazy adventure they've had in the Third World?" Can you speak to an experience you've had as a Mexicano adventuring in the so-called "Third World"?

Guillermo Gómez-Peña: Probably the worst thing I can think of is when we [collaborator Roberto Sifuentes] were in Chiapas last year in a Zapatista community for a few weeks and then had to go to a conference in Wales. Everybody we objected to in terms of the "revolutionary tourist" we ended up becoming. That is the kind of line that we are constantly crossing all the time, you know. We can be sharp and clear about what we object to and a few weeks later we are perpetrating it, importing it, and being hyper self-conscious about it.

F.L.A: How do you deal with the conflict?

G. G-P: We are just crass, stupid, idiotic human beings having to pay telephone bills. These things are constantly overlapping.

F.L.A: Your website also asks the webgoer to express intimate race-based fantasies. [See website: <http://www.sfgate.com/foundry/pochanostra.html>]. Why is the exoticized body so central to your performance?

G. G-P: A lot of things like that [the exoticization of brown male and female bodies] we are constantly being confronted with. . . At which point does exoticization get disrupted or merely perpetrated in a time when content no longer matters for a lot of people? . . .

We can say that, well we are deconstructing stereotypes, but then we are fully aware that this end-of-millennium culture we live in is, in a sense, beyond culture. As long as it is hip and has high production values it can go on MTV. Hollywood is making films about drug culture. The penis of the president is being discussed right now. . . . So it's like, what is radical and what is not radical? Where does the field of deconstruction begin to take place? No matter how blatant we are, someone can still say, "you guys are cool."

. . . Yeah. Like if an audience doesn't even know, say, what the Zapatista move-

ment is, then how can they even get into your satire of the politics of Mexico. We are commenting on revolutionary, *este*, desire—the desire for revolutionary icons, sexualization and eroticization of Zapatismo. In France, like chic-French designers use Zapatista ski masks for their models. We want to comment on all that. What happens to painful images like Chicanismo, gang culture, Zapatismo, the plight of the migrant worker when it becomes hip?

F.L.A: How do you deal with having been given a certain authenticity by the mainstream, like the MacArthur Foundation and American Book Award?

G. G-P: You know I just can't take it seriously. But this is something that Roberto and I are constantly discussing. If we'd begin to take our selves too seriously, and think of ourselves as messianic, cutting edge, or morally righteous we're completely dead. We have to be irreverent first and foremost with ourselves.

Even after receiving the MacArthur and the American Book Award I get stopped by the cops because I'm Mexican. They don't care about the American Book Award and MacArthur. I look Mexican. I have a big mustache, and I fulfill all their fears. And I get stopped by the border patrol; and Roberto's body gets strip searched. This is our everyday reality we cannot escape. All it helps [the awards] is to give us more power to broadcast our ideas, and extra, kinda, moral weight to our thoughts. Other than that, we are no different than any other Mexican as far as the powers that be are concerned. And that is clear to all of us.

F.L.A: How is your performance art perceived in different parts of the U.S., even different countries?

G.G-P: We make a political practice to touring outside the urban cultural centers. We do the main the cultural urban centers, but we also do Wisconsin, Montana, Kansas City, Sasquachua, Hull [England], San Sebastian, the Basque Country. Places off the map of internationalism. We do that because of political praxis. We were just in North Carolina, a few months ago. And it was great.

It is sometimes in these other cartographies that our work is more interesting. We get confronted by Aryan supremacists, Christian evangelists. True racists. We're talking about true racists. When we go back to the hotel we have a couple of calls that are really spooky. We have been escorted out of town by police. That is when things get real interesting. That is when a true political praxis takes place.

It is in the main urban centers when we get to experiment in a big laboratory. But nevertheless these are places we're never that sure about. San Francisco is a prime ex-

ample. At first it's like, wow, our performance is like mainstream San Francisco culture: culture of apocalypse, cholo chic, low riders, strippers, sex culture, computer arts. All these elements make up San Francisco mainstream culture, but it's like a masquerade of costumes that mask conservative and reactionary behavior. There are still cops who knock off blacks and Chicanos in the mission. And, just because you speak Spanish you might not be on my side. The loyalty lines are more evanescent. And that's why it can be a more interesting challenge than performing in Montana.

When we perform in Montana we know there's a binary opposition: On the one side you have the Crows and the black native Montanians, a handful of Chicanos and hip artists, on the other you have the pro-militia, right-wing mountain men, and anti-federalists. Even they can be a contradictory subject. They love Corona beer. They come to the performances. The imagery, the textures, and the colors are very attractive to mainstream America. It really touches their fears. Gang culture, Chicano hip culture, *norteño* Tex/Mex., and cantina culture. It's very attractive—for all the wrong reasons. That's why we want them at the performance. So they come expecting a mariachi, and they find a mariachi with a big mouth. Once in Kansas City we performed for a republican audience and hundreds of people showed up with maracas. The audience thought it was "Fiesta Theater." Ooh, the Mexicans are in town. Ooh, let's hear mariachis. I'll never forget it. We had three or four hundred people in the theater and when the performance was over, we went back stage to take off make up and meet with the audience. . . they had fear and anger in their eyes. We had to run away. We had to escape. We were scared shitless.

F.L.A.: Could you say a little about why your performances use the technology of the internet?

G.G-P: Most of our characters are chosen by the people on line. We never enforce an image on our performance artists. We present menus, options, and challenges, but inevitably they have the last word. One character, played by stripper/performer Isis, was created from on-line fantasies. She's, like, shooting up Vitamin B right into her ass every half hour and walking around with an I-V. She's really thin—a girl-woman. What does this say about the fantasies out there? But such a character will be completely transformed from one performance to the next as a result of the transcribed tapes [from the internet confessions].

F.L.A.: Why the fusion of ethnic iconography, technological apparatus, and paramilitary weaponry?

G.G-P: I would say that all of the actors use weapons. . . . People from different cultures and backgrounds—Anglo choreographers, Chicanas, two artists from Mexico city—everybody chose to use weapons. One of the images we've been playing with is a fashion model/Zapatista. We all are pacifists. We object, *este* to the invasion of Iraq. I object to

the U.S. militias and I am all for the peace talks in Mexico between the Zapatista and government yet we are all armed. Why? What does this say?

F.L.A: What's in store for the future of U.S. identity politics?

G.G-P: How much of a nationalist can you be when you go to a school and you have Guatamatecos, Russians, Blacks, Filipinos, Asians, Whites. I see a resurgence of neo-nationalism provoked by the uncertainty of the future and by globalization and right-wing policies.

You have to learn to negotiate a new cultural contract.

Orientation

Sianne Ngai

Eye-to-eye ecological huddle
from haywire satellite effects thirty
million knocked-out ampersands

In migration to
a new statistic—the off-white
side of a time management expert, 21 pounds of saltines a year
cf. factoid-filled bubbles
popping for the soirée impaired. Some “fantasmatic

and slightly scummy” relation begins as with
two kinds of merchandise in the mixed word problem.

*

In crusty Crockpot enthusiast daisy months
without gender or treatment
Still vast amounts of limb discipline
allow minor virtues
to develop— suppressed intellectual creak in beige.
so glazed
basket becomes lurid receptacle

for the bossy Girl Scout.

*

Legally formed bodies in sloppy
smooch but intimacy depersonalizes
even the cheating taxpayer’s private basement this is classic fumigation
technique, holy tulip
method behind wood panelling consolidating his

nougat filling chewy consensus
center's new flavor or
 accidentally squishy d'oeuvre on the hotplate — wee symbol
in a fondue of ruthless facts

why bother maximum saucepan assurance

*

Uneeda Biscuit
headquarters of saliva
or plentiful subordinate involvements
 between the beeps

& dirty resource-fork.

Knees miserable triumph of self-expressive
intimacy investing where one thanks won't apply without regional gerunds
such as weeping from all the loose gravel.

Chinese Bathroom

Wang Ping

A week after his birth, my son already suffered from constipation. I smelled his bottom every five minutes, and stuck my fingers into his diaper from time to time. Nothing there for four days. Finally, I took him to his pediatrician. Dr. Greenbaun inserted a Vaseline Q-tip into his tiny body and a darkish brown ooze gushed out. "See, not that hard to do," she said as she took off her stained gloves and washed her hands in the sink. "If he's holding himself in again, just try that to help him open up."

I know many diseases are genetically inherited, though I'm not sure if constipation is one of them. According to my grandma's tale of my childhood plight, it might be. She is never tired of telling me how she pinned me on her lap for hours trying to make me go, how I struggled, crying my eyes out, how nothing happened until she slipped a piece of soap into my ass and some dark balls streaked with blood fell out.

I'm also told that this embarrassing problem is more a mental block than a physical sickness. Again, it seems true in my case. I suffered terribly in my kindergarten years because I couldn't release myself according to the class schedule. Exactly at 8:00 a.m., ten cuspidors were brought in and lined up along the wall of the dining room, which was also used as our playroom and classroom. Children, including the two-year olds, queued up in silence, each holding a piece of toilet paper. Nobody seemed bothered by the smell or groans from the writhing bodies perched on the mobile toilets. When it was my turn, I refused to go. A teacher pulled me over by the ear, tore off my pants, and pressed me firmly on the cuspidor. "Do it now," she said, "if you don't want to shit in your pants, because your next bathroom time is after lunch." My ears roared as I imagined children pointing their fingers and laughing at my awkward body. An hour passed by. I was the only one left there, sitting on the cuspidor like an orphaned chick. A teacher finally came over, shaking her head in disbelief. "Get up, you stubborn girl. No snack for you today. And no snack for you until you learn to poop in a cuspidor."

Missing the afternoon snack was severe punishment. I was hungry all the time. Our rice porridge with dried shredded yam seemed more watery with each meal. The slice of pickle drifted in my bowl like a sinking boat. Our teacher kept telling us that we were lucky to have anything to eat at all. People all over the country were chewing tree bark and grass, even soil. At 2:30 p.m., a basin of corn bread was brought in. The smell of food made my stomach growl with pain. Who would eat my portion, I wondered, as I sneaked out of the room? I walked aimlessly around the campus. Our kindergarten used to be a nunnery. Nuns were parasites, our teacher told us. They did not work, but made a comfortable

living by sucking blood from others. That was not allowed in a socialist society. So they were all sent back home to work in the fields or factories to earn food with their own hands. The blood-sucking parasites seemed to like trees, and had planted plenty. Our campus was surrounded by old, knotted mulberries and Chinese scholartrees, all stark naked, not a slice of skin left on their trunks, not a single leaf on the tops. At the far end of the woods were some pine trees, untouched because of their inedible needles. Under the shade stood a thatched hut with mud walls. It was a latrine pit for teachers. There was no open ditch or stalls like the one in my parents' compound, just three linked wooden seats that reached my chest. I peeked in. It was deep. Long, bloody napkins floated upon the dark brown ooze. No wonder we were never taken here for bathroom, but used cuspidors instead. I picked a clean seat and climbed onto it, gripping the board on both sides to balance myself. Through the glassless window, I could see the pine trees, the blue sky, and the huge red slogan on the wall of our kindergarten. It said "Enter the Communist Paradise with one big leap." I remembered it by heart because we shouted it out loud with our teachers every morning. I sat there until snack time was over. As I headed back to my classroom, I felt calm, even happy, for the first time since I came to the kindergarten.

I grew up with public bathrooms. A private toilet was a luxury beyond the imagination of a little girl from a common family in the 60's, even 70's of China. The first one I frequented stood on a hill, about a quarter mile away from our compound. Its red brick walls and gray tile roof were shadowed by old firs. The women's section had five stalls. All the doors were missing, and the floor was littered with coarse, yellow toilet paper, half-vaporized urine, turds that clung stubbornly to the edge of the foothold. It was still my favorite because most public bathrooms had no walls, just an open ditch where people squatted face to face or ass to ass. Because of the distance, we hardly smelled the stench that rose constantly from the pit where the waste accumulated and fermented, except on windy days, or when the sanitary truck came to empty the pit. From a distance, the bathroom, with its curved eaves basked in sunset, looked quite elegant and mysterious. On my nightly trip there, I often imagined myself visiting a temple under the moonlight or exploring a cave for buried treasure. Since all the housework was done, and my parents were sound asleep, I could stay there as long as I wanted. There were no flies or people, only the howling wind or crickets chirping in tall grass. Watching the moon and stars in the ink-blue sky, tree tops trembling with silver dew, I forgot about the stench, the cold or heat, and the loneliness heaped upon me during the day.

Since reading was forbidden then, the bathroom became my private library. There I traded and read many classics, the Brothers Grimm, *Journey to the West*, *Dreams of the Red Chamber*, as well as erotica like *The Heart of a Teenage Girl*. Once I traded three of my best novels for a hand-written copy of *Romeo and Juliet*, the "dirtiest" book that was circling underground. I was guaranteed that it would poison my mind and make me sin. I did shed a lot of tears for the unfortunate lovers, but my flesh did not feel the drastic change I'd been promised. Perhaps my reading environment wasn't romantic enough. Perhaps I'd already been poisoned by the stories from the Ming Qing Dynasties. People knew how to

have real adventures then. Wearing men's clothes, women became champion scholars, high officials or generals. Men pierced their ears and bound their feet, masquerading as female teachers so that they could enter inner chambers or nunneries to have orgies. How passionately women loved and made love, with their cousins, neighbors, sometimes strangers they encountered over walls or through bathroom wall cracks. When their parents forced them to marry someone else, they'd elope, or cut off their noses, ears or cheeks, or hang themselves. Some jumped into wells, occasionally latrine pits, probably unable to walk far with their bound feet. What a terrible place to die, I thought!

One of my favorite stories was about a scholar who had failed in each official exam. On his fiftieth birthday, he decided to try his luck one more time, even though a fortune teller told him he had no chance. On his way to the capital, he found a bag of gold in a public bathroom. He was tempted to keep it, start a business, or live comfortably for a few years. Finally, he decided to wait for the owner. An hour later, a sweating merchant ran in. The scholar asked some questions and gave him the bag. In tears, the merchant told him that he'd have to kill himself if he lost the money his family had borrowed from relatives for his business trip. He offered the scholar a reward, but he declined and continued his trip to the capital. To everyone's surprise, he became a champion in the exams and was appointed a governor. He returned home to confront his fortune teller. Before he could say anything, the fortune teller cried out and asked him what he had done to change his luck. He told the bathroom story. "Congratulations! You were doomed to fail and live in poverty because of the misdeeds from your previous life. But you redeemed yourself with that bag of gold and reversed your fate." Each time I read the story, I sighed. I had never seen gold in my life. The biggest money I had ever handled was a one-yuan note. And the only time I found money in the bathroom was a five-fen coin floating in the pit. It was actually discovered by my sister. She dragged me there, hoping I could think of a way to retrieve it. I told her it was disgusting and walked away. The next day, it was gone. My sister kept nagging, "We could have bought two packs of candies with that coin." I ignored her, but sometimes wondered if my luck might have changed if I had retrieved that coin and returned it to the owner.

Our water taps were built near the bathroom so that the used water could be recycled for cleaning the toilets. Grandma always cursed as she carried buckets of soapy water uphill, puffing and limping in her bound feet. Everyone complained, but they all did it because nobody wanted a bathroom flooded in excrement. I spent a lot of time at the tap washing vegetables, rice, clothing, dishes. In winter, my frost-bitten hands hurt like hell in the icy water. I still liked it there. I was in the open air, away from grandma and mother's constant nagging. I could daydream, listen to my neighbors gossip, or watch my sister play with her friends.

Every afternoon, my sister gathered a crowd of children on the slope outside the bathroom. Though only nine years old, she was a natural born leader, tough, quick, bold, and charming. Even boys took her orders willingly. They rolled glass marbles from hole to

hole, jumped rubber band ropes, flipped cigarette wrappers folded in triangles or octagons. Everything involved gambling. Since nobody had money, the prizes were the things they played with, or books, candies or other odds and ends. I watched from my sink, beating laundry with a stick. Compared to my sister, I was a natural born loser. Nobody wanted to be paired with me because I had never won a single game. Occasionally, I was called to do cartwheels, the only sport I was good at. Once I did fifteen in a row and won in the name of my sister. She pulled me into the bathroom and handed me a piece of toilet paper. "Hold it," she said, digging out some cigarette butts from her pocket. She tore them one by one, poured the tobacco onto the paper, and rolled it into a thick, long cigarette. "Want a smoke?" she handed it to me after she took a deep drag. I wanted to ask her how, but was afraid of losing face, afraid of spoiling her grand prize. I took the roll and blew into it like a whistle as hard as I could. It died instantly. My sister gave me a pitiful look. "First time, eh?"

I never learned to obey the toilet rule in the kindergarten. I refused to use the cuspidor there, refused to use it at home, even if I had to run to the hill at four in the morning. My mother, on the contrary, hated public bathrooms but loved cuspidors. She had one specially ordered from Shanghai. It had a peony bush on its white enamel body, a red flower dotted with golden pollen blooming delicately on the cover. It was my job to clean my family cuspidors in the morning. I stacked them together, with mother's on the top because it had a cover. They reached under my nose. I walked with my face turned to the side, and the peony kept jumping into the corner of my eye as if pleading me to take her away from the shit. Neighbors passed by, mostly mothers holding cuspidors in their hands. "Morning, Little Ping, have you had your breakfast?" they greeted me warmly. I grunted, trying to return their friendliness while keeping my nose away from the toilets. I wished people would not greet one another with "Have you eaten" when they carried their nightly waste in their hands. There should be some difference, some distance, between what goes in and what comes out.

I headed to the vegetable garden behind the bathroom. My grandma taught me to fertilize vegetables with human waste. She had wanted me to use the fermented manure from the latrine pit. "Safer and cleaner," she said, ignoring my silent protest as she tied a bamboo stick to the ladle. She changed her mind only after a peasant boy fell in the pit and drowned. "Just thin the urine with water and pour it a foot away from the roots so they won't get burnt," she said. "If there's something other than piss, throw it away." She didn't say why, just gave me a look which made me shiver in disgust. I followed her instructions carefully until one day when mother yanked a handful of hair off my scalp for breaking her teacup. In the morning, I found a turd in her cuspidor. I buried it near a cauliflower. A month later, mother broke a mop handle beating my sister for talking back. I cut the cauliflower and sautéed it with sliced pork, her favorite dish. I added an extra spoonful of lard and MSG. She gobbled everything down without suspicion, even giving me a friendly pat on the head. I winced, my triumph suddenly drowned by shame. My revenge was so unspeakable I'd never be able to tell anybody. What good was it then? If she didn't know what she was eating, what difference would it make?

Many Chinese sayings come out of latrines and waste: shit, dog shit, shit eater, a mouth full of shit, fart, dog fart. “A flower inserted in a cow dung” describes a beauty who married a poor, ugly man. Pig-headed people are called “rocks in a latrine pit—hard and stinky.” For newly appointed officials who feign integrity, we say “a new chamber pot with only three days of fragrance.” To avoid a bully, we say he’s “a latrine pit in July, the more you stir it, the smellier it gets.” Every Chinese knows Mao’s famous poetry line: “We counted the mighty as no more than muck.” The most vicious curse for a woman is perhaps “May you bear a son without an asshole.” Once my sister called mother “dog fart,” a slip of tongue. She was slapped so hard that her eardrum cracked. Since then, she farted uncontrollably whenever she encountered our mother.

They say wisdom and truth are buried in old sayings. A new chamber pot may indeed smell good though once it’s used, the stench stays forever. My maternal grandma from Shanghai was a chamber pot lover. She placed hers next to her bed behind a curtain, where she hid all her treasures: exotic dry fruit, nuts, jewelry, silk. Toward the afternoon, the pot began to fill up. Each time someone lifted the cover, I held my breath until I gasped for air. I couldn’t understand how my aunts and uncles could continue chatting with the person who was sprinkling and splashing so noisily behind the curtain. At night, I could hear people downstairs and next door pissing in their pots. But no one else seemed to notice. As my face turned blue from severe constipation, my grandma would comfort me with her chamber pot story. When she married my grandpa, her father sold half of the family land to get her a chamber pot carved and gilded with dragons and phoenixes. It matched perfectly the bed which the bridegroom’s family provided. The bed was an antique that looked like a house, with steps in the middle. The pot, made of cedar wood, gave off such a fragrance that women guests stuck their heads inside, sniffing and sighing. “What a pity your grandpa paid his debt with my pot, together with the bed! It turned out a blessing in disguise. If he hadn’t gambled his wealth away, we’d have been branded as capitalists after the liberation, and exiled to the countryside.” She shuddered. My grandma grew up in the countryside, but was a city snob. She considered Shanghai the center of civilization and everywhere else barbarous. She still couldn’t believe my mother had given up her Shanghai residence and moved to an island with her husband.

Grandma taught me how to clean the pot in the morning. When Uncle Shan pulled his manure cart into the lane around 6:30, I took it down the dark, narrow staircase and waited in line with the other women. After Uncle Shan poured the soil into his cart for me, I brushed the pot with a bamboo brush until the dirt was gone and sprinkled it with the “Stinky Liquid,” a deodorant every family used. There were so many chamber pots, lined neatly along the lane like an army. The sound of brushing pots was loud, crisp, and rhythmic, as if ten bands were playing together on one stage with an odd harmony. “Hurry up and be careful,” grandma would say from her pillow as soon as Uncle Shan’s bell rang in the lane. If I missed the cart, I’d have to use the pit built underneath the lane. It was no treat to lift the heavy cement cover with an iron hook. And I almost fainted once from inhaling the stench.

I discovered a public bathroom twelve blocks away from grandma's apartment. It cost two fen to get in. But it was cleaned every hour, the concierge told me, and I got a piece of toilet paper. I told grandma about it and she offered to pay. Every other day, I made my trip to my paradise, as happy as a lark. When my sister heard the story, her eyes popped out in disbelief. "What a fool! If you had saved the money, you could have bought yourself a kilogram of chocolate cookies in two months!"

One afternoon, my father came home unexpectedly early, shaking a set of keys above his head. "I got it," he shouted, "our own bathroom, our own shower!" Mother shrieked and jumped on top of him. Together they chanted, "Good-bye, public toilet. Good-bye, sponge bath." When my sister told me we were assigned a new apartment with modern facilities, I was in tears. "Good-bye, cuspidors," I chanted silently. A week later, we moved. The new apartment indeed had a private squat toilet and a cold shower. Soon we discovered that the water pressure was too low to flush and we had to save laundry water in a jar for the cleaning. Mother quickly switched back to her cuspidor, claiming squatting gave her sleeping legs and dizzy spans. A private bathroom didn't change my life. In fact, it made it worse. I had no more excuses to get away from the house. And my daydreaming and reading were constantly interrupted by grandma's pounding on the bathroom door, asking if I had drowned. I wanted to reply that the old curse no longer applied to our toilet, which was only a foot deep, but dared not. It occurred to me one morning, as I carried mother's cuspidor to the new garden, that the vegetables I ate were all fertilized by her pee. She had her final revenge.

Two years later, my father was demoted for siding with the wrong faction. We had to move into a crowded compound. It was built for the family of an ex-landlord, but now inhabited by at least thirty families. The apartments were old. The walls were peeling, and the stairways crumbling. There was always a line outside the two-stall bathroom. Every day, a bully took his radio there, bolting the door to listen to the story broadcasting from noon to 1:00, despite the pounding and cursing outside. I stopped reading, because I didn't dare stay in the bathroom longer than ten minutes. Besides, the stench and dirt were intolerable. My sister fell ill soon after we moved. First, blue spots appeared on her arms, legs, and thighs. Then her nose, stomach, and uterus started bleeding, and doctors couldn't figure out the reason. She had to be hospitalized so often and so long that we moved her desk and chair to her ward. Grandma blamed the illness on the bathroom. "It's bad *feng shui* to have a bathroom to the east of the living quarter, especially when it constantly overflows with soil."

I got my own bathroom when I moved to the countryside. Peasants put tall buckets in pig-sties as toilets. Once a week they carried them on a yoke to the community manure pit. Each family could save two buckets a month for their own vegetable plot. Apparently it wasn't enough because many were caught stealing manure from the commune pit. Since I had no pigs to raise, villagers built me a shed next to my neighbor's sty, placing a new pinewood bucket and bundles of rice straw inside. The straw was for the wiping. I

used it to cover worms and prevent splashes. For some reason, I didn't mind the bucket as much as the cuspidors or chamber pots. Perhaps I didn't have to share it with others. As my grandma often said, "Other people's shit stinks you to death; your own droppings smell like perfume." Perhaps I got used to it from spreading manure in the fields with my hands almost every day. The smell seeped into the pores and nothing could wash it off. Sometimes as I sat in the fields eating lunch with my dirty hands, I'd think of my fuss about the chamber pots and cuspidors, my petty revenge on mother. It all seemed so trivial. Three months after I became a peasant, the only trace of my city upbringing was the toilet paper I stacked neatly in a basket. Whenever my girlfriend helped me carry out the bucket, she'd ask why I wasted money on the filthy paper made of straw. She said it was like "taking off one's pants to fart."

Villagers collected excrement like treasure. Even children carried baskets when they went out to pick up droppings on the road. Bloody feuds could erupt between villages over the right to collect manure from public bathrooms in town. But they feared it as they feared pregnant and menstruating women. Women used to give birth in pigsties. The stench could prevent jealous gods from going there and harming babies, especially boys, and prevent the birth blood from bringing bad luck to the family. Nowadays, peasants give birth in hospitals just like city women. They still believe that a pregnant woman's accidental touch can cure a stiff neck and her urine can revive a person from convulsion or coma. Treasured or feared, excrement is rarely regarded as dirty or unsanitary.

Such attitudes are hard to sustain in the city. Worms, flies, stench, dirt, stories of infants found in pits, of little girls molested in men's rooms, all these associate public bathrooms with a place filthy, low, unspeakable. Bathrooms used to be controlled by *Fen ba*—feces lords—as lucrative businesses, just as garbage collecting, begging, gambling and prostitution were controlled by underground societies. In Mao's era, garbage and manure collecting became the job of the Sanitation Bureau, and was respected like teaching and governing. One of the national heroes was Shi Tianxiang, who devoted his life to cleaning Beijing's public bathrooms. Still, when I was offered a job in the Sanitation Bureau, I chose to become a peasant. I convinced my parents that if I went to the countryside, my younger sister would make the quota for a decent job in town. Thus, at fifteen, I was on my own, high up in a mountain village. Bathrooms indeed changed my life.

When I got my American visa, the first thing that flashed through my mind was I'd have a clean bathroom all to myself. It took me awhile to get used to a sitting toilet, which somehow reminded me of sitting on a cuspidor or a chamber pot. And my toilet wasn't that clean, shared by three men who often forgot to lift the seat. Appalled by the amount of perfectly good water going down the drain, I vowed to keep my Chinese tradition and practice thrifty. But soon, I began to flush the toilet several times during my bowel movement, and couldn't sleep without a hot bath. To ease my conscience, I put rocks in the toilet tank to save water and reduced my bathing to five times a week. But whenever I stepped into the water treated with Aveeno moisturizer, I felt shame for the weakness of my flesh. I thought

about how everything was recycled in China over and over again until it couldn't be used, and what would happen now that everybody was imitating America. My mother had moved into a new apartment with a sitting toilet, leaving the old apartment to my brother and his family. Even my pot-loving grandma was installing a flush toilet in her one-room apartment because she was too old to carry the pot downstairs. I offered to pay for a cleaning woman. She said maids nowadays refused to clean chamber pots. Besides, Uncle Shan had died without a successor. Those who couldn't afford the flush toilets had to open the pit to empty their chamber pots. But the peasants no longer came to cities to collect manure because they used American fertilizers. Cheaper and cleaner.

Lying in the bath, I imagined the pit under my grandma's building overflowing with shit. The public bathroom in my old compound would fare no better if local peasants also stopped coming. If modern toilets had spread so far and so fast, China would have to import American technology to pump more water from underground, to increase water pressure so that toilets would flush, and open more sewers to carry out the waste. To where, though, I asked myself. How much happiness could science and technology bring to people? I laughed when I thought about the flashlight my American friend had dropped into a Tibetan latrine pit. Having heard about the conditions of Chinese bathrooms, he went to Home Depot the day before his flight and asked for the most powerful flashlight. The salesperson handed him a 19" Maglight and a pack of size D Duracells. The first night in Lahsa, he took out the flashlight, waving its white beam around the dark street. "I can see everything with this," he said and strode to the bathroom at the back of the hotel. Three minutes later, he returned empty handed, speechless. I asked him what had happened to the flashlight. He pointed towards the pitch dark toilet. I ran over. There, half buried in the ooze of the deep pit, the black Maglight shed its light all the way up to the thatched ceiling. We watched it for a few minutes, then burst out laughing simultaneously. The next day, I bought him a Chinese flashlight, which he used throughout the trip and brought back to America as a souvenir. That was half a year ago. I wondered if the Maglight was still lighting the bottom of the pit. The salesperson had promised that it could last forever.

Essay: 13 Pressure Points Inside The Skull

Eleni Sikelianos

(I was) (previously) incapable of establishing a link between one phenomenon & another
like the colors & shape of the bridge in the water in front of the susceptible (unknown)
spectacle

Later, numbers responded to calculations It was distracting Numbers obeyed

It disturbed me that things is divided into sectors and this one says MONEY and that one
says (K)ING

between one phenomenon &
another like the colors and the other and the shape of the (bride) in the water I loved
a man I could not recognize

I would have liked to live in a less dangerous world
where things resembled things
had I, I
taking sustenance from leaves might I, I
kept mistaking myself for Napoléon
on my way to the subway with a
implant up my sleeve

I shoved all my blood & bone
into one rough foot
—the left—no, the right

Nobody, come to me I says
So, nobody come

inside were closed letters,
atomic, reversible & shining

and then we // we then
the reports shattered

so I wrote RECOGNITION
I wrote RECOGNITION to perform in

Michel Tremblay's Hosanna and the Queering of National Identity

Elaine Pigeon

In 1968 Michel Tremblay made theatre history when he electrified Québec audiences with *Les Belles-soeurs*. Over the course of his long and enduring career, Tremblay's work aroused greater critical controversy in Canada than that of any other dramatist in or out of Québec (Usmiani 1982, 2). Even today, Tremblay remains Québec's foremost playwright.

Les Belles-soeurs introduced one of Tremblay's more pronounced theatrical innovations: his controversial use of *joual*, the term used to describe the particular variety of Québec slang or street French commonly used in Montréal. By incorporating various Anglicisms and religious expressions or "sacres", such as "crisse" and "tabarnac," along with the use of phonetic contractions, *joual* carries important social, religious and political connotations. Renate Usmiani, who has written extensively on Tremblay, draws attention to the fact that, at the time, some young radicals "hailed the use of *joual* as a major step through which *québécois* culture was finally asserting its independence from centuries-old bondage to the culture of France, the mother country, a partial liberation on the level of language which carried strong political overtones" (1982, 4). Tremblay achieved a significant breakthrough in making the spoken language of his people acceptable as a dramatic idiom. The production of *Les Belles-soeurs* thus marked Québec's first step towards decolonization and liberation (47); *le théâtre québécois* was born and the cultural identity of a people galvanized.

Others, however, viewed the theatrical use of *joual* as "a necessary evil," arguing that it manifested "a symptom of defeat: a language whose very texture expresses the alienation, lack of identity, inability to communicate and tragic impotence of Quebec society" (4). A heated debate over the correct usage of the French language in Québec ensued, in which one writer, Jean Marcel, even went so far as to publish a book entitled *Le Joual de Troie*, a pun on *joual*, the dialect pronunciation of *cheval*, meaning horse. Marcel argued that *joual* "constituted yet another pernicious instrument of colonization, encouraged by Anglophones to bring about the total destruction of Francophone culture" (Usmiani 1990, 97). Subsequently, Québec intellectuals began to insist that *québécois* writers utilize a universal language, that is, standard French, in order to distance themselves from a regional dialect associated with underdevelopment and an illiterate working class. In fact, the controversy over Tremblay's use of *joual* still persists to this day, although to a lesser degree.

Utilizing a kind of *théâtre-vérité* that had never before been attempted on what

was previously known as the French-Canadian stage, Tremblay's early plays, called *le cycle des Belles-soeurs*, depict members of the Québec working class grappling with an oppressive family life — *la maudite vie plate* — and the advent of a consumer society, one of the effects of Québec's "Quiet Revolution." With the death of Premier Maurice Duplessis in 1959, Usmiani writes, "there followed a wave of far reaching, often radical reforms that changed the face of Quebec society," for the government, under increasing pressure, "began to introduce reforms aimed at modernizing the educational system, as well as a number of much-needed social and economic changes" (1982, 12). Robert Schwartzwald, one of the few specialists on Québec culture to publish in English, adds that these changes "all provided the concrete realizations for a modernity that represented itself as developmental, linear, and ruled by the inexorable laws of progress" (1991, 177). Moreover, the shift from a fundamentally agrarian society to industrialization and its consequent urbanization resulted in a new nationalist consciousness.

During this period, Québec intellectuals, artists and writers began to produce individual and collective analyses of the situation, summing up the problem as nothing less than alienation on the political, economic and cultural levels. In 1963, the radical journal *Parti pris* was founded, which Schwartzwald remarks, was by far the most arresting aspect of a generalized but intense social critique (177). The journal defined "the specific tasks of Québec's Quiet Revolution with a social program and a political objective that took its inspiration from the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles of the period: national independence in Africa, revolution in Cuba, and the civil rights movement in the United States" (177). In short, the goal of *Parti pris*, made up of creative writers and political activists, including theoreticians strongly influenced by a Marxist perspective, "was an independent, socialist Quebec, free of political influence from the Catholic Church" (Forsyth 159).

Previously, the Church had taught Québec's agrarian nationalists "to be satisfied with a lesser lot in life, to believe that they had been *nés pour un petit pain*," which Schwartzwald notes, is "a reference to the buns given out on the feast of Saint John the Baptist, the patron saint of French Canada" (1991, 178; 1993, 269). Within this traditional form of nationalism, "messianic ideology sought to turn Québec's underdevelopment into a virtue," by which Québec was to exemplify its "spiritual, Latin" ancestors in the New World (1993, 268). In distinct contrast, modern nationalism sought to expose the self-deception behind the acceptance of being born for a lesser lot in life, which was in part also a consequence of the collective sense of failure that had haunted Québec's colonized consciousness ever since the "Conquest," the defeat of the French on the Plains of Abraham in 1759 (1993, 268-9; 1991, 176). The rise of Québec's new nationalist movement meant rejecting the second-class status of being Canada's Other, the so-called "French"-Canadians. The task of Québec's artists, writers and playwrights "became to denounce the past and to liberate — as well as create — a sense of identity" (Usmiani 1982, 13). The confidence Québec would achieve with this new self-knowledge "would be what would authorize it to participate in the universal community of nations," rather than turn in upon itself as it had done in the past (Schwartzwald 1992, 503). As a consequence, the Quiet Revolution finally

“laid to rest the century-long ideological representation of Québec as a piously Catholic, agrarian society” (1991, 177).

Not only did a newly modernized Québec population discover their “imagined community” or “nation-ness” through print culture, the process described by Benedict Anderson in his attempt to clarify the modern nation as a cultural formation, but theatre audiences in Québec also found their cultural identity reflected on the stage, an event which helped foster the construction of a new national identity. Therefore, to view Tremblay simply as a product of his time is not adequate; it is far more important to grasp how he actively participated in shaping Québec’s nationalist project. For Tremblay wrote in response to the all-encompassing modernization which was taking place, often dramatizing individual efforts to break free of the family and liberate the self from the repressive effects of Roman Catholicism and, in the process, created allegories suggestive of national liberation. At the same time, Tremblay emphasized the pernicious influence of American consumerism on an emergent but vulnerable Québec.

In his subsequent plays, Tremblay went on to portray characters who had managed to escape from the tyranny of the family but were now surviving on the fringes of society — the transsexuals and criminals who frequent Montréal’s *demi-monde*, the downtown core, locally known as “The Main.” “The setting itself, and the choice of this particular milieu,” Usmiani points out, “is a plea for marginality, for freedom of the individual from the pressures of society, as well as for the freedom of marginal societies,” such as the Québécois community in North America (1982, 22). Commenting on his predilection for focusing on marginal characters, Tremblay maintains, “I am not a realistic playwright. If I choose to talk about the fringes of society, it is because my people are a fringe society” (Anthony 283).

Although Tremblay eventually wrote a series of novels about the early lives of his characters, collectively known as *les chroniques du Plateau Mont-Royal*, he is also renowned for *Hosanna*, which may very well be his most controversial play. *Hosanna* was first performed at the Théâtre de Quat’Sous in Montréal in 1973. The following year, it was produced in English at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto, where its exotic homosexuality rendered it a major success. *Hosanna* then opened on Broadway where, unfortunately, it only achieved a lukewarm reception from its American audience; nevertheless, it went on to be staged in Vancouver, Amsterdam, Paris, London, Cologne and Glasgow. In the early 1990s, a significantly modified version of the play was produced in Montréal. Despite the blatant homosexuality of the original production, as we shall see, the 1991 production of *Hosanna* more readily lends itself to a queer reading of nationalism, that is, a reading that calls for the deconstruction of heterosexual gender categories that tend to privilege masculinity unproblematically.

In brief, *Hosanna* deals with the anguish of two ageing homosexuals caught in the trap of identifying with heterosexually defined gender roles as a means of sustaining their relationship. By night, Claude, a hairdresser, transforms himself into the drag queen,

Hosanna, while Raymond, a biker, complete with black leather and studs, is the macho lover who goes by the name of Cuirette. The play opens in Hosanna's cramped bachelor apartment on Halloween night. Cuirette and Hosanna, who is still in full drag, return from the annual costume party at Sandra's transvestite bar, where Hosanna had hoped to realize her life long dream and outdo Elizabeth Taylor's rendition of Cleopatra. As a transvestite, Hosanna wants to emulate the most desirable of all women. However, to teach Hosanna a lesson for being such a bitchy queen — that is, for thinking herself better than all the other drag queens, Cuirette gets them all to show up dressed as Cleopatra as well. Of course, Hosanna is devastated. Hurt and humiliated, she has it out with Cuirette, who wants Claude to stop pretending to be a woman. Finally, by the play's end, Claude declares that Cleopatra is dead; he removes all his make-up and stripes down naked, asserting: "Look, Raymond, I'm a man ... I'm a man, Raymond ... I'm a man..." (87). Before the lights fade out, Raymond gets up and takes Claude in his arms.

One of the remarkable aspects of the critical response to this play is that there are two levels of interpretation that can potentially cancel each other out. On the one hand, numerous critiques focused on the play's ostensive homosexuality, thereby eschewing a political interpretation. For example, immediately following *Hosanna's* opening night in Montréal, Martial Dassylva, the theatre critic for *La Presse*, restricted his discussion to the play's homosexuality, noting that it was the first time two of Tremblay's characters achieved a truly mutual understanding. While Dassylva expressly chose to defer a political analysis, a few days later, in *Le Devoir*, Albert Brie dismissed the possibility of any political message, claiming the play had no real theme: "*Il est à cent lieues du théâtre à thèse.*" Instead, Brie, in a gesture that appears to be an attempt to assuage his own sexual anxiety, clearly identified himself with straight audiences — "*Nous autres, normaux*" — while encouraging them to see the play on the grounds that their assumptions about homosexuality would be dispelled. On the other hand, political readings of *Hosanna* tend to read it as an allegory, thus denying the play's crucial homosexual element by interpreting Claude's feminization as a consequence of colonization by the English and his final declaration of manhood as an assertion of Québec nationalism.

An instance of just such a reading can be found in Renate Usmiani's otherwise comprehensive analysis, *Michel Tremblay*, a text that comprises one volume of the series, *Studies in Canadian Literature*. Despite the fact that Usmiani recognizes that *Hosanna* also functions on a psychological level, in that "it offers a gripping insight into the complex workings of a lover's relationship," she proposes that the fact "that both happen to be male becomes irrelevant" (89)! While Tremblay himself clearly insists on a political reading in his commentary on the play — published in Geraldine Anthony's *Stage Voices*, from which Usmiani quotes in part but which I have reproduced in full — he does not disavow the play's homosexuality:

My play, *Hosanna*, deals in a symbolic way with the problems of Québec. Although *Hosanna* concerns two homosexuals, one an exagger-

ated masculine character, the other a transvestite, it is really an allegory about Quebec. In the end they drop their poses and embrace their real identity. The climax occurs when Hosanna kills Elizabeth Taylor and at the end he appears naked on stage and says he is a man. He kills all the ghosts around him as Quebec did. We are not French but we are Québécois living in North America! (284)

That homosexuality is integral to the play is further substantiated during the second act. As Schwartzwald points out, when Cuirette returns from his frustrating walk through Parc Lafontaine, we learn that “the newly installed floodlights have obliterated the shadows in which he used to cruise and have sex with other men. His response to this municipal act of moral zeal is a defiant one: ‘From now on we’re gonna do it in public, goddamn it!’” (1992, 499). Significantly, Cuirette’s “refusal to seek new shadows and relegate his desire to the realm of the hidden sets the stage for Hosanna’s own moment of enlightenment” (499). Thus, *Hosanna* can be seen as a coming-out-play, and in more respects than one, since, on the level of political allegory, Claude is also coming out in terms of his cultural or national identity.

Usmiani does, however, comment on *Hosanna*’s transvestism. In fact, she notes the prevalence of transvestite characters in Tremblay’s work, suggesting that “these can be seen as inverted and caricatured versions of the sex symbol, a central element in the consumer society much hated by Tremblay. They also carry heavy overtones of political symbolism: the transvestite par excellence represents loss of identity, as well as impotence” (1982, 22). By exemplifying the assumption of an identity that is Other, transvestism reveals the performative aspect of gender, and at the same time, highlights the extent to which gender has been commodified. But transvestism does not necessarily signify sexual impotence. On the contrary, Hosanna uses drag seductively, as a means of initiating same-sex activity within a heterosexual framework. Nevertheless, her identification with Elizabeth Taylor, the English-born actor who became a major American movie star, does suggest just how far removed Claude is from his own cultural identity. Not only is Claude attempting to appropriate an English heritage, that is, the cultural roots of the colonizer, but his assumption of Elizabeth Taylor’s star persona also signals how he has been overwhelmed by American culture. Moreover, that these identifications are played out under the guise of the *femme fatale*, Cleopatra, serves to underscore Claude’s loss of a masculine identity. Indeed, Claude’s feminization does point to his powerlessness or, more specifically, his emasculation, that is, his having been conquered by a colonizing power. Therefore, as Usmiani suggests, in *Hosanna*, the figure of the transvestite does function as a device that evokes the self-alienation of Québec society. In fact, she sees the transvestite as embodying a universal archetype of alienation that exceeds the boundaries of any one nation or language (81). Following Usmiani, we can say that Claude’s repudiation of a feminine identity corresponds to the casting off of a colonized subject position and the final assertion of his male identity corresponds to the assumption of his true cultural identity.

What complicates readings of the play is that at the very moment Claude renounces his feminization, that is, his status as a colonized subject, and asserts his manhood, he also accepts his homosexuality. When viewed through the dominant heterosexual frame, homosexual contact is assumed to entail effeminization for at least one of the males involved; and that Raymond is the male lover is made explicit by his macho posturing. In grappling with their homosexuality, Claude and Raymond are attempting to escape the trap of heterosexually determined sex roles and to love each other as men. Political readings that deny the centrality of homosexuality to *Hosanna* thereby mask the homophobic anxiety Tremblay's play can evince.

In his astute reading of the play, Schwartzwald is one of the few critics to recognize Tremblay's convergence of discourses of sexual and national liberation, a convergence that Schwartzwald observes, Tremblay makes appear *almost natural*. Precisely because Claude must accept that it is as a man that he desires other men before he can be *bien dans sa peau*, "sexual desire is thus posed to perform as a more naturalized and radical arbiter of authenticity than gender, which for Tremblay is already encoded as more performative and therefore 'artificial'..." (1992, 504). That Cuirette's exaggerated macho posturing and Hosanna's drag represent the extent to which heterosexually defined gender roles are a staged performance is further suggested by the reminder that it is after all Cuirette "who does all the cooking, cleaning, and housework and who is financially dependent upon *her*" (506), while Hosanna, as the professional hairdresser, Claude, is actually the bread winner. Quite rightly, Schwartzwald argues that "the inconsistencies of Cuirette's gender performances, when compounded by their inevitable interaction with Hosanna's own, tend to underscore just how inoperative a category gender finally is for Tremblay" (506). In Foucauldian terms, Tremblay privileges sex as the measure of truth; in other words, it is the assertion of Claude's male sex, combined with the acceptance of his (homo)sexuality that reveals the truth of his being, his essence or authentic identity. But, as Schwartzwald notes, "homosexuality is figured as the behaviour of a specific sexual minority existing *within* a sex with specific biological features and capacities" (504) that are usually attributed to the heterosexual male.

As a consequence, the deployment of the category of the homosexual as a means of stabilizing Claude's identity proves problematic, for it creates a seeming paradox: Claude's "approachment with his homosexual essence permanently marginalizes him as a sexual minority even as it authenticates him" (Schwartzwald 1982, 504). For it was the intolerable minoritizing dynamic of Québec's relation to the rest of Canada that fuelled a good part of the nationalist argument in the first place. Should Québec then embrace its uniqueness as a marginal society and accept this status? Or, as Schwartzwald pointedly asks: did Hosanna's reconciliation with the authenticity of his sexual desire not confirm that Québec's "specificity," its inherent *Québécoisité*, "was to be a permanently countercultural society, and consequently excluded from easy integration into the extended family of modern nations?" (1993, 265).

While Benedict Anderson claims that “in the modern world, everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality, as he or she has a gender” (14), it is imperative to remember that nationalism is already a gendered term. As Elspeth Probyn, in her engaging analysis of queer belonging in Québec, points out, what is less evident in Anderson’s “formulation is that the type of nationality one will ‘have’ is dependent on the way in which gender is locally articulated” (36). For the centre and its margins are conceived as respectively masculine and feminine through the interpretative grid of what Adrienne Rich has adroitly called “compulsory heterosexuality.” Significantly, the rise of nationalism over the course of the nineteenth century relied on rigid gender divisions that were strictly enforced. According to masculinist ideologies of nation, women were relegated to the domestic or private sphere, where they dutifully produced and nurtured the future population of the nation. Mary Louise Pratt succinctly sums up the situation, pointing out that women’s “value was specifically attached to (and implicitly conditioned on) their reproductive capacity. As mothers of the nation, they are precariously other to the nation. They are imagined as dependent rather than sovereign. They are practically forbidden to be limited and finite, being obsessively defined by their reproductive capacity” (51). Only men were allowed to participate in the public sphere, in business, politics and the military, realms in which they sought to consolidate and expand the power of the nation. Consigned to the margins of society, women were effectively rendered powerless.

Despite the fact that Canada has traditionally figured as feminine in relation to the dominant power of the United States, prior to the Quiet Revolution, Québec also figured as a marginal female in relation to the rest of Canada and the US, which compounded its marginal status. It was precisely this oppressive, heterosexual configuration that Tremblay pointed to in *Les Belles-soeurs*. Usmiani, who succinctly describes the play as “a contemporary domestic tragedy,” notes that when read as a political allegory, Tremblay’s presentation of an all-female society, “a powerless, exploited and almost marginal group in traditional society, effectively parallels the position of Quebec as a whole versus the rest of the North American continent” (1982, 45). And to further complicate things, Probyn reminds us that

the French ‘minority’ comprises, in actual fact, 82% of the population within Québec which then allows some anglophone rights groups to position themselves as marginal and in need of protection. This then produces a discourse of anglophones as ‘emasculated’ in relation to the Québécois strongman. Given the historical relations of anglo colonization, this actually produces a discursive relation of male to male, homosocial bickering. (50)

Even more relevant, however, is Probyn’s suggestion that “the general troping of national identity as gendered and heterosexual can break down” (50). The shifting power relations between various nations or “imagined communities” that give rise to the figuring of specific, heterosexually gendered positions illustrate how these binary categories are not

stable, since the dominant masculine position can collapse into the feminine, while the feminine can assume a masculine position of dominance. By exposing the absence of an immutable essence around which each of these binary opposites can cohere, such transformations point to the incoherence with which heterosexuality is conceptualized. Yet, the persistent and prevalent articulation of nations in terms of their gendered positions discloses the extent to which a heterosexist bias permeates such constructions, a bias which, moreover, privileges the heterosexual male.

The primary reason for this bias appears to be that patriarchal conceptions of the modern nation continue to rely on the familial model as a means of naturalizing nationalism. David Carroll, in his ideological analysis of French nationalism during the first half of this century, points out that if organic unity is to characterize the form of the nation, “the origin of the nation and its model is the *patrie* conceived as the primal family, the original and natural community or society” (84). Homosexuality therefore proves particularly disturbing to conceptions of the nation that draw on a familial model. Consequently, as Schwartzwald remarks, it is not difficult to see how Tremblay’s “construction of homosexual and national identity as adequate metaphorical substitutions for each other could seem scandalous to those nationalist ideologues who saw independence as the goal in a developmental narrative deployed around a trope of infantilism and maturity” (1992, 504), maturity meaning here, of course, the assumption of male heterosexuality. Burdened with the mark of feminization, homosexuality perturbs the link between postcolonial conceptions of the nation that derive from a normalizing or regulatory model of the family and traditional notions of masculinity. Indeed, the abhorrence that the feminization of the masculine can provoke reveals how homophobia and misogyny often intersect. Precisely because the feminine has been defined as subordinate to the masculine, and thereby denigrated, when it “penetrates” the heterosexual male ideal, it contaminates it, thereby rendering it abject. What is so remarkable about *Hosanna* is that Tremblay has attempted to cast off the taint of feminization attached to homosexuality by having two *men*, namely Claude and Raymond, accept and embrace their love for each other with dignity and mutual respect..

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in *Epistemology of the Closet*, brilliantly argues that “thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured — indeed, fractured — by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century”, when the category of the homosexual first emerged in medical discourse. As a result, “an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition” (1). Indeed, Québec nationalists have proven particularly resistant to just such an incorporation, a typically homophobic response that provides valuable insight into the underlying assumptions and projections of Québec nationalists in their analyses of the failure of the nationalist project. However, as laudable as Tremblay’s project may have been in the 1970s, the fact that he succeeded in reinscribing a masculinist subject remains problematic from a feminist perspective. For, once again, women are excluded

from this nationalist model.

In an essay that appears in *Fear of a Queer Planet*, Schwartzwald, who draws on Sedgwick, points out: "One of the most salient features of modern intellectual (self-)representation in Québec turns out to be that the homophobic elements of its *learned* discourse on identity are largely inconsistent with both liberal legal discourse and popular attitudes" (1993, 266). Somewhat ironically, "Québec was the first state jurisdiction in North America to adopt anti-discrimination legislation on grounds of sexual orientation, and this was done by the *nationalist* Parti Québécois government" that was elected in 1976 (1991, 180). Far from stigmatizing homosexuals as emblematic of 'national alienation,' at that time, the government, under the leadership of the late René Lévesque, "spoke of wanting to protect and further the interests of all communities in an inclusive figuration of the nation" (180). However, following the defeat of the 1980 referendum on sovereignty-association, the analytic trend of Québec nationalists proved to be especially sensitive to "homosexually inflected articulations of identity, which are compulsively read for clues that might explicate the identitary impasse of the Québécois subject-nation" (1993, 267). Relying on the coming-of-age trope particular to postcolonial discourse, "a developmental narrative in which Québec's independence would be the culmination of a process leading from 'infancy' to 'maturity'" was consistently produced (1993, 265). Consequently, these nationalists all too readily deployed "the homophobic assignation of homosexuality as *arrested* development" in support of their "explanations of Québec's long, halting progress toward self-determination" (1993, 267).

Pointing out that "the formation of a viable Québécois nation implicitly depended upon the forging of a new, emancipatory social contract," which had in fact been "one of the most powerful discursive ruptures initiated by the Quiet Revolution," Schwartzwald concludes that

the overarching persistence of a developmental model for nationhood within this contractual paradigm and its particular claims to modernity reveals an enduring reliance upon heterosexually ordered and ultimately archaizing familial models when constructing the national 'body' itself. Subjecting contractual models to pressures as great as the defeat of a popular referendum on sovereignty is perhaps a sad but effective way of demonstrating how the attendant figures of a familial model never entirely disappear, but are instead held 'in reserve' until a disastrous conjuncture resuscitates them. (1993, 270)

In his analysis of the discursive construction of nationhood by Québec intellectuals, Schwartzwald goes on to demonstrate how homosexuality persistently figures as central "to the identitary matrix of the subject-nation," but becomes "the repressed whose return portends only disruption and signifies failure" (1993, 270), rather than the possibility of acknowledging and incorporating internal differences that could potentially give rise to the

creation of a more inclusive cultural formation. For within Québec nationalist discourses, the appropriation of heterosexual gender models of identity inflect the queering of nationhood with developmental failure and reveal homophobic anxiety infecting even the most radical versions of Québec nationalism.

Jonathan Dollimore, in *Sexual Dissidence*, his brilliant study of homosexuality's symbolic centrality to modern society, points out that the "associations of sexual deviation and political threat have a long history sedimented into our language and culture" (236-237). By way of example, he provides us with the term 'buggery,' which "derives from the religious as well as sexual nonconformity of an eleventh-century Bulgarian sect...; the *OED* tells us that it was later applied to other heretics, to whom abominable practices were also ascribed" (237). Dollimore then refers to Arthur N. Gilbert, who reports that in England, during the Napoleonic wars, the numbers of prosecutions for sodomy increased as a direct result of the sodomite's "association at the time with evil, rebellion, and insurrection, and the belief that to tolerate his sin was to court the possibility of divine revenge (as with Sodom and Gomorrah)" (237). The mythology surrounding the sodomite found an immediate focus: he "was perceived as an internal deviant who refigured a foreign threat, in this case the threat from the French" (237). The displacement of non-sexual fears onto the so-called sexual deviant, Dollimore concludes, "are made possible because other kinds of transgression — political, religious — are not only loosely associated with the sexual deviant, but 'condensed' in the very definition of deviance"; moreover, that this process of displacement succeeds attests to the paranoid instabilities that threaten to undermine the accusers' identity (237).

In an earlier essay, wittily entitled "Fear of Federasty," Schwartzwald explores the homophobic tropes deployed by Québec's new nationalists during the 1960s and 1970s, tropes that evince the mythology that connects sexual deviance with political threat. He suggests that for these nationalists, "homosexuality signifies metonymically, ... that is, as the *presence* of an earlier intellectual élite composed of or tied to the clergy that entered into a compact with Anglo-Canadian capital to divide supervision over the colonized body of the Québécois... " (1991, 180). In their attempts to effect a radical break with the conservative nationalism of the past, the homophobic sexual anxiety of the new nationalists was articulated by gendering "those found to be traitors or sell-outs to the cause of national revolution ... as passive/seductive men" (179). Such a man was labelled a *fédéraste*, a play on *pédéraste*, the French word used to signify homosexuality, although its primary definition concerns the love of men for boys. For to be called a federast meant to be one of those who are "first the victims, then the corrupted perpetrators of what is figured as a permanent violation by a salacious 'fully grown' Canada against the waifish, innocent Québec" (179). Because the term *pédéraste* is not usually used in Québec, "its foreignness as a continental French signifier for homosexuality underlines the 'exotic' or unrooted personality of the traitor/violator;" moreover, Schwartzwald adds, "the activity to which federasts give themselves over is compulsive, repetitious, and unproductive" (180). Thus, the figuring of Québec as a homosexual came to assume a doubly vexed position.

Even those who considered themselves amongst the most progressive of the new breed of nationalists were primarily interested in reasserting conventional gender definitions, in which Québec would assume its position as a dominant, heterosexual male. Schwartzwald, in fact, cites an essay which appeared in *Parti pris* in 1964, tellingly entitled "The Colonial Oedipus," in which Pierre Maheu urged fellow nationalists

to accept that we are sons of women. This will lead us to make of women both our lovers and wives while we liberate ourselves from the Mother by surging forth once again from her breast, well armed for a new combat, a new confrontation: that of the free man who attacks concrete enemies head on.... (1991, 188)

As this blatantly sexist rhetoric suggests, Québec's nationalist project was not unique, rather it situated itself "within the universalizing discourse of all the great anti-colonial movements of the epoch in question" (179). Schwartzwald argues that it was "the preoccupation with unified subjectivity that led to a profound sexual anxiety in Québec's anti-colonial discourse, an anxiety which is *already* borne within the attempted synthesis of Marxist, existentialist, and Freudian theory that underlies the anti-colonial writings of the post-war period" (178).

Sequential development, Dollimore points out, is fundamental for Freud (196). According to Freud, the positive form of the Oedipus complex meant that one moved through the complex in order to arrive at a positioning within heterosexual difference as the appropriate end result; consequently, Freud considered homosexuality "to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development..." (196-7). However, in order to develop an effective counter-discourse, it is certainly worthwhile to further probe Freud's writings, given their complexity and contradictions. Of particular relevance is Freud's acceptance of Fliess's view, by which he conceded that human beings were inherently bisexual. Even more to the point is that in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud proposes that the most important way in which bisexuality influences the vicissitudes of the Oedipus complex is in its complete form, which is twofold, both positive and negative. He even goes so far as to suggest that the positive or "simple Oedipus complex is by no means its commonest form..." (279). The more complete Oedipus complex, Freud writes,

is due to the bisexuality originally present in children: that is to say, a boy has not merely an ambivalent attitude towards his father and an affectionate object-choice towards his mother, but at the same time he also behaves like a girl and displays an affectionate feminine attitude to his father and a corresponding jealousy and hostility towards his mother. It is this complicating element introduced by bisexuality that makes it so difficult to obtain a clear view of the facts in connection with the earliest object-choices and identifications, and still more difficult to describe them intelligibly. (279)

What is troubling about Freud's description of the complete complex is his characterization of the boy's affection for the father as feminine behaviour, which however we can read as a symptom of his own sexual anxiety and evidence of the regulatory pressures of compulsory heterosexuality.

Significantly, Freud acknowledges these pressures elsewhere, indicating that the dominance of heterosexuality is driven by cultural attitudes. For instance, in an extraordinary footnote Freud added to his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in 1915, which extends over four pages, Freud argues against "separating off homosexuals from the rest of mankind as a group of a special character" (56). Moreover, he continues,

from the point of view of psychoanalysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature. A person's final sexual attitude is not decided until after puberty and is the result of a number of factors, not all of which are yet known; some are of a constitutional nature but others are accidental.... But in general the multiplicity of determining factors is reflected in the variety of manifest sexual attitudes in which they find their issue in mankind. (57)

While Dollimore is not interested "in recovering the authentic voice of psychoanalysis," he is nevertheless interested in Freud's "deconstructive assault on normality" (182). Dollimore demonstrates how, via Freud, "we can see that the concept of perversion always embodied what has now become a fundamental deconstructive proposition: whatever a culture designates as alien, utterly other, and incommensurably different is rarely and perhaps never so" (182). Drawing on Freud's concepts of repression, disavowal, negation, and splitting, Dollimore elaborates on what he calls "the perverse dynamic:" how perversion "destroys the binary structure of which it is initially an effect" (183). For, according to Freud's theory, the development of culture inevitably leads to the production of the effects it seeks to repress and sublimate (188). As Dollimore astutely observes, it is at this point that Freud anticipates Michel Foucault.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that the intensification of the regulation of sexuality over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not lead to the repression of same-sex activity, that on the contrary, it produced the category of the homosexual. While the end product may appear to be qualitatively distinct, Robert May points out that "analysis shows that the determinants are only different in degree" (163). Citing Freud's remarkable footnote, May draws attention to Freud's point that there are no "constitutional peculiarities" that can be attributed to the invert or homosexual that are not present, "though less strongly, in the constitution of transitional types and those whose manifest attitude is normal" (163). Therefore, sexual categories are not discrete but overlap, which destroys their binary structure. In other words, not only is heterosexual identity

constructed on the disavowal of homosexuality, which becomes the unstable ground on which it is founded, but the proximity of homosexuality threatens this fragile construction by mirroring its interior.

Within its specific historical context, a rendering of *Hosanna* organized around binary sexual categories was necessary in order to stabilize Claude's identity. In 1991, however, a new production of *Hosanna* was staged in Montréal, in which Tremblay allowed the focus of the play's essentialized conception of sexual identity to shift towards an emphasis on gender roles and their performances, "and the impossibilities of the heterosexual coherence in relation to which masculinity and femininity are usually constructed" (Schwartzwald 1992, 502). As previously mentioned, when discussing the original production of the play, Tremblay maintained, "*Hosanna* concerns two homosexuals, one an exaggerated masculine character, the other a transvestite..." (Anthony 284). Tremblay's new program note, Schwartzwald points out, now describes the play as an exploration of the crises of "two transvestites, not only Hosanna but her lover Cuirette..." (1992, 502). Claude is no longer in drag; instead, Hosanna's bright red dress glares out at us from the open closet, and Cuirette's macho posturing is also exposed as an exaggerated gender performance. Furthermore, Hosanna's final line, "I'm a man," no longer resembles an affirmation of an authentic identity, rather it has become a profound interrogation charged with ambivalence, creating a gaping uncertainty (1992, 501). As Schwartzwald adroitly notes, "Tremblay's statement reminds us that these issues were present in the original version, but remained largely illegible when set against the overarching, virtually compulsory reading of *Hosanna* at that time as an allegory of national oppression" (502). In contrast, the new version of *Hosanna* engages a Québec that has undergone significant changes in its confrontation with the developments of French feminism and poststructuralist theories, including deconstruction, since the play's emergence. "To those who yearn to be part of a stable, homogeneous majority," Schwartzwald concludes, the new "*Hosanna* responds with another allegory, this time mocking the self-delusion that underwrites the self-confident 'putting on' of gender roles that appear more natural, but whose performative character is denied" (505).

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that while there is no abiding substance or immutable gender core that derives from morphological sex, gender is not a set of free-floating attributes that can be assumed at will, but "the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced" (24) over time by the regulatory demands of the inherited discourses that encode masculinity and femininity within the heterosexual matrix. As the drag queen, Hosanna, Claude attempted to imitate the ultimate woman, but once he removed his costume and make-up, as he presents himself to the audience in the 1991 production, he reveals himself as a male, and as such, from an already gendered position. It is precisely at this point that Butler's analysis becomes most pertinent, for there is no one behind this *naturalized* performance of gender, just as there is no one behind Raymond's male identity once he drops his macho posturing. Although gender still proves to be performative, "that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be" (25), its performative aspect is no

longer obvious in an exaggerated, theatrical sense. Of critical importance, however, is that Hosanna's and Cuirette's earlier performances of femininity and masculinity, which parodied heterosexually gendered positions, served to establish the performative aspect of gender. But, as Hosanna laments, "the show must go on ... and on ... and on ... and on..." (62). The question now becomes where to go from here: How are Claude and Raymond to articulate their masculine identities as gay men after the performance of heterosexually conceived gender positions has collapsed under the weight of an impossibly incoherent, tyrannizing ideal?

In rethinking performativity, Butler refers to Derrida, emphasizing that it is important to understand performativity "as citationality, for the invocation of identity is always a *reinvoction*" (Rajchman 132). This means that a gendered subject can only be produced "through the citing of a norm, a citing which instantiates and institutes the norm" (134). But precisely because gendered identity has been so rigorously regulated in accordance with heterosexuality, for a male to become a "man" within this logic requires the repudiation of an identification with the feminine, a repudiation which "becomes a precondition for the heterosexualization of sexual desire and hence, perhaps also, its fundamental ambivalence" (Butler 1995, 26), a haunting doubt that must constantly be appeased. As we have seen, it is this fundamental ambivalence that produces sexual anxiety. Not only can it lead to a violent, homophobic response, but its misogynist element has contributed to the oppression of women, who, in assuming the masquerade of femininity, act as a mirror that reflects the male's superior, privileged position of dominance.

If a male subject can only be produced through the citing or enunciation of the norm, how then can a gay man articulate a masculine subject position if he does not want to replicate the heterosexual male model and thus efface his homosexuality? While efforts are now being made to rearticulate masculinity in such a way that it no longer depends upon the repudiation of traditionally "feminine" traits, such as care giving and the expression of emotion, as well as allowing for same-sex desire, some gays object to this model on the grounds that it assimilates homosexuality to the heterosexual norm, thus depoliticizing homosexual identity by disabling its transgressive potential. Clearly, a distinctly gay male identity can only be produced by queering the norm, by marking it with either a feminine identification or an exaggeration of masculinity. This, however, is not to suggest an attempt to replicate the heterosexually gendered positions of masculinity and femininity that Cuirette and Hosanna initially tried to inhabit. Rather, the self-conscious performance or invocation of these gendered markers signals the incoherence of heterosexually determined gender positions, while, at the same time, producing a queer subject position.

Since the emergence of queer theory in the late 1980s, but prior to the new production of *Hosanna*, the term "queer" has taken on new significance. Embraced as a site of resistance in response to the culturally pervasive and oppressive homophobia, "the desanctifying power of the name 'queer' is reversed to sanction a contestation of the terms of sexual legitimacy" (Butler 1997, 18). Butler's translation of queer theory into praxis

produces a new form of sexual activism. She elaborates:

Paradoxically, but also with great promise, the subject who is 'queered' into public discourse through homophobic interpellations of various kinds *takes up* or *cites* that very term as the discursive basis for an opposition. This kind of citation will emerge as *theatrical* to the extent that it *mimes and renders hyperbolic* the discursive convention that it also *reverses*. The hyperbolic gesture is crucial to the exposure of the homophobic law which can no longer control the terms of its own abjecting strategies. (18)

Not only does the performance of queerness enable the articulation of a specifically homosexual subject position, it also provides the ground on which to develop an oppositional movement. By mocking the incoherence of its antagonists' position, it seeks to undermine the very ground from which the attack was launched. Thus, queer politics instantiates what Dollimore defines as the "perverse dynamic;" for the queer dynamic seeks to undermine the binary structure that not only produced it, but attempts to contain and oppress it.

Although queer theory is anti-essentialist, in that it interprets sexual identities as historically specific cultural constructions that are produced by discursive practices, queer politics remains a form of identity politics precisely because the modern political realm is dominated by the notion of a coherent self. However, it is identity politics with a difference: its potential lies in its being a politicized cultural formation or political identity. As Jeffrey Weeks sees it, in its broadest sense, the organizing principle of queer politics "is not an assumed sexual identity based on orientation or practice, but identification with the forms of politics and patterns of transgression that define queerness" (112). Michael Warner suggests that queerness "rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (xxii). Specifically, it is the privileging of the white heterosexual male norm that is being contested. This makes for a potentially inclusive political movement, in which there is space for a multiplicity of identities that have been marginalized, including gays and lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, single mothers, radical feminists or heterosexuals, and sympathetic ethnic minorities — indeed, all those who embrace the ambiguity of a culturally produced identity.

A queer reading of the 1991 production of *Hosanna* also suggests that we can extend the questioning of stable gender categories to that of national identity; specifically, we can ask what it means to be a Québécois or a Canadian. For instance, in attempting to rewrite the narrative of the nation, the renowned postcolonial theorist, Homi K. Bhabha suggests that the ambivalence that haunts the articulation of gender positions parallels the particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the modern nation. According to Bhabha's timely argument, in the discursive production of the nation, "there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical," the people as an *a priori* historical

presence, an ideal, and the people constructed in the performance of narration, the enunciatory present (297-9). In Québec, the pedagogical ideal of a homogeneous mass, the people as one deriving from old Québécois stock — *la souche* — creates the imaginary boundary that marks the nation's selfhood, "the people as 'image' and its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, distinct from the Other or the Outside" (299). Within a postmodern context that includes mass migration, the performance of an authorizing, pedagogical narrative is interrupted, introducing a temporality of the "in-between," what Bhabha defines as a liminal "space of representation that threatens binary division with its difference" (299).

However, the opening up of this queer, "in-between" space, where the external threat of the Other is now perceived as internal, also creates intense anxiety. The enunciation of cultural differences within a nation, Bhabha reminds us, can only be agonistically articulated. Nevertheless, such an attempt must be made; otherwise, this anxiety can lead to xenophobia. Whereas heterogeneous figures now proliferate on the streets of Montréal, the obsession of Québec nationalists with *la souche*, Probyn pointedly notes, "continually threatens to asphyxiate their movement" (63). Referring to C. Philo, Probyn reminds us that "it is deeply insufficient to think that we can comprehend forms of belonging by seeking to refer them to an underlying structuring principle, a stable and guaranteeing referent" (17). Moreover, as she notes, when the Parti Québécois resumed power in 1994, one of the first statements made by then Premier Jacques Parizeau, was "that it is now time to make Québec into a normal country" (n65), meaning of course a patriarchal nation-state based on the familial, pedagogical model. While Bhabha suggests why such a model is no longer viable within a contemporary context, Parizeau's response to the failure of Québec's 1995 referendum confirms the critical importance of Bhabha's theory. For Parizeau, overcome with bitterness, firmly placed the blame on "money and the ethnic vote," money here referring to the English minority in Québec, who are by no means all wealthy. Why minorities would vote for a sovereign Québec that bars them from participating in that society remains a serious question these nationalists must address. Although some of Québec's artists and intellectuals have come to recognize the problematic of identity within a postmodern context, clearly, it appears that Québec's governing party has not. But, as Bhabha concludes:

Once the liminality of the nation-space is established, and its 'difference' is turned from the boundary 'outside' to its finitude 'within,' the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of 'other' people. It becomes a question of the otherness of the people-as-one. The national subject splits in the ethnographic perspective of culture's contemporaneity and provides both a theoretical position and a narrative authority for marginal voices or minority discourse. (301)

In Québec, the narrative authority of marginal voices has yet to be established; however, here, as elsewhere, the issue of identity remains an ongoing preoccupation. Perhaps in rethinking Canada, with its own preoccupations of becoming in the face of the "perplexity of

living,” there remains the possibility of queering a space. In any case, we would do well to follow Probyn’s suggestion, for “we need to mobilize the exigency of difference, to unapologetically place it square within the centre” — indeed, create a colourful, queerly decentered space (11). For, as Benedict Anderson implies, it is the “imagined community” that produces a nation.

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Flirt-Wife and Love-Whack, How:

Mickey Jenkins

1

Speak with grooved tongue.

2

Grow ache in city squares.

(sizzle fossil pink dog, remembered meat-thaw.)

First oil spit of crave-resist.

3

Cut Age Money with alabaster crumble cake.

Over here, weighing-in at size zippo,

a band-aid in the cleft.

4

Creep-voiced CALL NOW:

you may be entitled to a large cash settlement.

Sheep Lotto and machine-wait with tax clippings

and false id.

5

I don't know; pencil me in.

Crewel Embroidery

John Olson

Lawrence Olivier filmed Hamlet in black and white. This was an accident, the result of a contretemps with the technicolor company that processed Olivier's Henry V.

Black and white suits Hamlet. Black and white suits its mood of light & shadow, incestuous sheets & questionable shapes. But at heart the play is orange.

Why orange?

Because the sound of orange is that of the angelus, or of an old violin.

Because an eye is a coin of light, a muscular grape put together with little sticks.

Because the hectic in the blood is sometimes henna, sometimes infrared.

Because the serene hysteria of green disturbs the seclusion of pink.

Because Hamlet was grounded in the real world where a noun is a noun & a pronoun a gummed velvet.

Because Hamlet is a laboratory of black.

Because Hamlet anticipated Wittgenstein.

Because words words words.

Because Hamlet never completely understood knuckles.

Because to be or not to be is a grammatical problem solved by expostulation.

Because the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveler returns, puzzles the will.

Because in each manifestation of life, & color, is the seed of a striving towards the abstract, the non-material.

Because when all goes wrong, there is always water.

Because the obdurate fragility of violet sags in a circumstance of red.

Because a man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, & eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

Because Hamlet walked around sad & marvelous carrying a skull of crewel embroidery.

Mirrors in the Medulla:

A Coroner's Interview with the Exhumed Corpse of Gerard de Nerval During a Delayed Autopsy

George Kalamaras

1. Delayed Autopsy: The Initial Probe

How about the lobster and the leash? Reality or myth?

First, consider bending over naked and staring between your legs into a mirror at your own asshole.

Had you ever considered keeping a more conventional pet, say, like a dog or a goldfish?

Three apples, four or which hang in the attitude of sound.

What are dreams made of?

A camel moving through the muck in a glass of table water.

Is there any truth to the claims of the music-hall singer, Yvonne George—with whom Robert Desnos fell into mad, unrequited love—that she is your daughter?

It's an issue of learning to hear the leopard's yowl.

Your bowels—what is it my hand feels as it reaches into them after so many years?

Toilet tissue wrapped around the middle finger of your left hand.

What is it that speaks from the other side?

Two graves at the roadside filling with buffalo bones that fall at midnight as rain, as damp dung.

How can one actually sleep-talk?

The other side is nothing but our own selves trying to recognize us.

How did your life and work anticipate Surrealism?

It's all nothing but vowel.

What *is* Surrealism?

I never really cared for brussels sprouts.

There are many myths about Gerard de Nerval? Who are you truly?

1 + 1 = 2

1 + 1 = 3

What is the source of moonlight?

Mirrors in the medulla oblongata, the seat of the ego according to Hindu scriptures.

Which is more true, poetry or the world?

A bark canoe containing a dead giraffe.

Andre Breton, who is he really?

Go ask Henri—I'm guessing he's still alive.

2. Upon Locating Several Minute Mirrors in the Medulla: What the Corpse Asks

Toilet tissue wrapped around the middle finger of your left hand. How about the lobster and the leash? Reality or myth?

Two graves at the roadside filling with buffalo bones that fall at midnight as rain, as damp dung. How did your life and work anticipate Surrealism?

1 + 1 = 2

1 + 1 = 3. My bowels—what is it your hand feels as it reaches into them after so many years?

It's an issue of learning to hear the leopard's yowl. Had you ever considered keeping a more conventional pet, say, like a dog or a goldfish?

I never really cared for brussels sprouts. What *is* Surrealism?

It's all nothing but vowel. Which is more true, poetry or the world?

Go ask Henri—I'm guessing he's still alive. What are dreams made of?

Mirrors in the medulla oblongata, the seat of the ego according to Hindu scriptures. There are many myths about Gerard de Nerval. Who am I truly?

A camel moving through the muck in a glass of table water. What is it that speaks from the other side?

The other side is nothing but our own selves trying to recognize us. Andre Breton, who is he really?

First, consider bending over naked and staring between your legs into a mirror at

your own asshole. Is there any truth to the claims of the music-hall singer, Yvonne George—with whom Robert Desnos fell into mad, unrequited love—that she is my daughter?

Three apples, four of which hang in the attitude of sound. How can one actually sleep-talk?

A bark canoe containing a dead giraffe. What is the source of moonlight?

3. *The Official Report: The Final Probe*

How did your life and work anticipate Surrealism?

Mirrors in the medulla oblongata, the seat of the ego according to Hindu scriptures.

What are dreams made of?

A bark canoe containing a dead giraffe.

Which is more true, poetry or the world?

A camel moving through the muck in a glass of table water.

Is there any truth to the claims of the music-hall singer, Yvonne George—with whom Robert Desnos fell into mad, unrequited love—that she is your daughter?

The other side is nothing but our own selves trying to recognize us.

What *is* Surrealism?

Go ask Henri—I'm guessing he's still alive.

How can one actually sleep-talk?

I never really cared for brussels sprouts.

Your bowels—what is it my hand feels as it reaches into them after so many years?

Toilet tissue wrapped around the middle finger of your left hand.

What is it that speaks from the other side?

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There are many myths about Gerard de Nerval. Who are you truly?

1 + 1 = 2

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Had you ever considered keeping a more conventional pet, say, like a dog or a goldfish?

It's all nothing but vowel.

Andre Breton, who is he really?

Three apples, four of which hang in the attitude of sound.

How about the lobster and the leash? Reality or myth?

Two graves at the roadside filling with buffalo bones that fall at midnight as rain, as damp dung.

What is the source of moonlight?

It's an issue of learning to hear the leopard's yowl.

Tick

Laurie Price

Starts with a transliteration of mercy, dark blue aggregate, ticking at the stripped breeze. A singular word that means impossible. Blink. Culls a sequence at the edge of an eyelid. To fight against sight and its proprietary counsel dictates another field of composition, or composure alters the importance of. In certainty there is modesty, the wide breeze fully correcting. A knowing sureness governed by slippery cobalt deposits, who knows where awakes. And though the texture weaves in horizontal bands, another oversight, day pushes on toward day where reflex bent forward as if in meditation defers.

***Slipping into the Easy India or,
How to Write about Thinking about Writing
about Thinking (or maybe even,
How to Write the History of Cultural Studies,
Without Really Trying)***

Rafeeq Hasan

‘...your Angrez accent wrapped around you like a flag, and don’t think it’s so perfect, it slips, baba, like a false mustache.’

Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*¹

‘I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.’

Jacques Lacan, ‘The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze’²

I.

So, I have come to this place today to attempt the difficult task of writing India...or at least India as I imagine it. It is not an India that I know, claim to understand, or have any firsthand or privileged access to. It is an India that I must grasp only elusively—through the refracted gaze of the \$6.99 all you can eat dinner buffet, or in snack shops filled with old men smelling of cigarettes that they have only recently been told not to smoke—an India through the film posters of movies I will never see, or, if I did, would appreciate only out of some sense of camp.

And what of this \$6.99 buffet that I am eating? I am enjoying it, no doubt. Yet I will probably work out twice tomorrow in a desperate attempt to ward off its multiple grams of fat. It is a meal that will cause me repeatedly to smell my shirt before I go to my girlfriend’s house tonight, perhaps even to smoke a few cigarettes to conceal the sickly sweet smell of ‘curry’—that undefinable, floating signifier of metonymy and reduction (reductive metonymy?) in the American conception of Indian ‘culture.’

But the fact remains that I have driven through most of Chicago to sit in this dirty little India, to feel the warm comforts of a fat man with a gravy stained shirt who says *aja beta* and directs me to my table. Words of affection, basic words that I, embarrassingly, can’t even translate, have probably even spelled incorrectly. Words that remind me of my parents—but then why not just go to my real home, a drive only a little longer? Why doesn’t

my parents' *aja beta* evoke some homely India?

I have a suspicion that as Marxists, as intellectuals, as graduates from American institutes who have lived in America since long before I was born, their *aja beta* simply doesn't count. Their accents don't really sound Indian *enough*. Their precise, 'correct' pronunciations lead people to believe that they must have been educated in public (read 'private) schools in England. They are not the head wobbling, bumbling bald Indians scripted in the early and cognitively formative years of my neo-colonialist mind. They are too complex to be India.

You should be offended by this. I am...and they're my thoughts. In fact, they probably offend me more since I obviously know myself and you, you have only gathered the fragments of *the real me* from this so far telescoping scopic text. I know the me that sits for hours and reads the great postmodern theorists of colonial and post-colonial hybridity, ambivalence, third spaces, what have you. I can tell you the difference, to the most minute detail, between the sonically similar yet radically different turns of 'cultural difference' versus 'cultural diversity.'³

Hybridity and pretension, however, are mere fleeting scholarly fascinations. Some irritatingly more permanent instinct compels me to travel to this place, to sit and eat impossibly greasy food, to indulge and gorge my senses in this easy, silly, satisfying India.

II.

I have just eaten a plate of food, stopped, refilled, and smoked a cigarette. Let me now recount some things to you. Things I would not like to admit. But things that I can admit given the false and revealing intimacy involved in the reading of *the me* by the *you*. ('You come too late, much too late. There will always be a world...between you and us.'—Frantz Fanon)⁴

I tend to take some perverse delight in being told that I don't look Indian. Even though, to any 'real' Indian, I look impossibly Indian—hooked nose, slanted Bengali eyes, coarse, curly hair. Yet, for most people that I meet, including the 'unreal' Indians (?), the Indian-Americans, I elude their stereotype of the sweet faced, chubby, dressed by his mother 'Indian' youth—the kind of youth that populates many a nicer home in many a nicer suburb. I look too self-consciously frail, too immersed in some quasi-Midwestern version of heroin chic. I have unwashed, tribal looking hair that cascades over my ill-fitting clothes. 'Are you Mexican,' they ask, 'half-black, Sicilian...you just don't look Indian.' (We will later return to my 'Mexicanness'.)

But my ambiguous Indian status irritatingly doesn't irritate me, despite the fact that it is quite obviously conferred due to a lack of characteristics that could efficaciously script me into the already existing criteria for ridicule. Instead of shirking it, I play it up (and

not from some unconscious 'mimicry,' or 'repetition with difference,' psychoanalysis be damned). 'Some people tell me that I look half-black,' I tell any girl whose interested in me, myself playing upon the prevalent exoticism that makes black men so mysterious. I hope that they will secretly agree. The smart ones, thankfully, do not.

So why all this love/hate, this *ambivalence*, if we must use the term, between an India that I obviously think about, write about, consider my relationship with, and an India that best serves my needs when its far away, removed, concealed by something 'cooler,' or enjoyed when it serves my culinary tastes? Why the break between the India that I write and the India that I live?

Yes, an India about which I write and write...in the most precise, neo-academic language that I can muster, filled with multi-claused and elliptical sentences. In my adolescent zeal to write this postmodern post-post-colonial India I see a bit of myself in the protagonist of Hanif Kureishi's novel *The Black Album*, the nervous, enthusiastic Shahid who, '...read for the course on colonialism and literature, determined to write an immense paper, riddled with quotes, weighed down by footnotes, brilliantly argued.'⁵

I try to expound the need to think of India as complex, contestory. I discursively wish to do away with a conception of India by my generation that involves a return to its *cuisine*, its dances, its music. Yet, like the grease that is currently sliding around my plate, I slip back. I get depressed, get in a car and drive 15 miles to create an Indian home much more *hegemonically* (again I shudder at my need to use the term) constructed than my own, *hybrid, multi-national* home. Again like Shahid, I may try to write the complicated India, but in the intimate mire of the social situation I can only histrionically confess, 'I want to be racist...Why do I have to miss out on that privilege?...I have wanted to join the British National Party...How does one apply to such an organization?'⁶

'I have wanted to join...'—and in this moment Kureishi is self-consciously delineating for both his protagonist and himself a historical position that is post post, beyond the beyond. 'I *have* wanted to join' as the *necessary* successor to Toni Morrison's post-indentured narrator Beloved, 'I *am* looking for the join...I *want* to join.'⁷

I slip...my post-colonial, postmodern accent is not nearly so perfect as I think.

The problem of this dual India has come to my mind only as of late. Or, I have wanted to join the exiles from the (dis)joined only very recently. The *seeds* were implanted when I started to think about India, took root as I began to think about myself thinking about India. And now that I am thinking about myself writing about the way I think India...well, I have moved into the realm of an incommensurable ethnic anomie; a state radically out of time with my just written metaphor of a blossoming plant. My (re)actions have pulled off the pseudo-sophisticated stubble of my writing, exposing a dime-store 'false mustache' underneath.

III.

Someone is looking at me now. It is the look. Let me again (or perhaps further) elaborate it to you, for the benefit of *the you* that is uninitiated in the exacting intricacies of the look that often defines *the me*. It is the look that speaks a conversational, congenial, and yet ultimately shattering dialogue.

'Is he an Indian—he looks more Mexican to me' then racism seeps in, 'No, no, he is reading a book, his pants, well they may be a bit too wrinkled and stained, but aren't they part of the new line at Abercrombie and Fitch? He must be Indian, doesn't really look like it though.'

Then there is the look from Indian-Americans themselves. Since we possess few proponents of fierce ethnic consciousness there is not, as far as I know, an 'Indian-tude' on the depths of negritude. The look, therefore, doesn't carry the crippling race-traitor connotations that often paralyze the black. Instead, it is simply a feeling of psychic unsettledness that spreads across the other 'Indian' face. I quietly shatter their ability to see the one of us, to look through slight differences to see the real, just like them, me. ('Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me.'—Fanon)⁸ Why does my diction so adamantly refer to the 'them' of the Indian-American—as though they really were some cultural Other?

Perhaps I am now slipping back into the younger me—the me who didn't get A's in high school calculus, the me who ended up at an elite college by dint of a last minute arrogance that drove me to push myself to my academic limits rather than as a result of the controlled, staggeringly industrial work ethic of these Other children of the brain drain. Perhaps I will again start uttering phrases from those unsure days of awkward middle-late adolescence. 'The Indian kids aren't creative, Mom, they just want to be doctors.'

Yes...the more I write the postmodern Indian/American diaspora the more I slip into ethnic reaction and silly childishness. (Just so you know, I am now writing about the way that I used to think about the India that others lived through speaking.)

So, to return to the question that I posed earlier and that you have probably lost in this *disjointed* simulacra of an essay, what is there to do about this unstable, unsettling, unhomely space between the production of cultural critique and the practice of cultural living—the aporetic disjunction between theory and practice, the poetics and the politics? Why is it that however much one attempts to live the temporality of the complicated present, the 'past bubble[s] up, in transmogrified vowels and vocab?'⁹ Or, how can our erudition be reconciled with the atavistic notion of home and hearth that marks our experience with the easy India?—an experience of the fundamental, the natural, the *homely* that has a marked primacy to the scene of writing.

Let me now turn away from this mode of conversational discourse which, as of late, has acquired a learned unfamiliarity for me. If we are to see a solution to this dilemma,

it must be within the realm of some sort of theory. To quote from an interview with Homi Bhabha, the grand theoretician of those very utterances that I have continually invoked and revoked:

‘The act of theorizing comes out of a struggle with a certain description that you inherit, and out of the feeling that you have to propose another construction of those conditions in order to be able to envisage emergent moments of social identification or cultural enunciation.’¹⁰

But my fascination with Bhabha will, for the purposes of this essay, end with what he says rather than with what he writes. As I have said earlier, I am interested in the homely scene of cultural conversation (conversations on culture) rather than the distanced space of cultural discourse. Nor do I feel like treating, at any length, the postmodern epistemological nihilism of Jean Baudrillard, for whom there is no subject of reason, or even a ‘real’ system of signs which produces such a subject, only an inescapable hyper-reality of meaningless codes which endlessly incorporate the subject into their non-meaning.¹¹ For no intellectual theory, brilliant or provocative as these theories/theorists are (respectively rather than conjointly), can efface the comfortable reaction we have to the easy India, a reaction that has come to be instantiated as natural by the rhetoric of multiculturalism, a much more prevalent and frightening theory, and one that exists outside of one particularly fashionable subset of the academy.

Multiculturalism is a much discussed mode of discourse in which different ‘cultures’ are seen to melt into a homogenous America, providing zones of acceptable difference—cultures as assimilatable only if they are grounded in some traditional historical ordering of time, tolerable only if its members cohere around some sort of discernible non-radicality...but perhaps this is itself an out of date notion of multiculturalism. What about the version that holds that we are instead ‘progressively’ mixed like a salad; that different cultures are allowed to stand as separate entities, staunchly lined up side by side (like the military stance of the soldier)? Forgive the godawful extended metaphor that I am about to embark upon (but one that is commensurable with the stupidity of the salad analogy); to this I respond that I’ve eaten many an ‘American’ salad and most are rendered tasteless by the bland, fat-free dressing that we pour on in ungodly quantities, obscuring the ‘sophisticated’ differences between Romaine versus radicchio... Different ‘cultures’ as long as they merely accent primary allegiance, as long as they don’t split the nationalist subject and its pluralist orientations, as long as they don’t, skip this over, it is painfully bad, pronouncedly alter the taste of ranch dressing.

This is strange, I have slipped back into personal reflection (and silly ones at that), ignoring the academic style that I had prefaced in order to provide an ebb and flow for the you, let me reslip, or, slip back into slippage, or something. Obfuscatory games aside, I am now actually going to ‘talk’ theory.

What this fictive sense of national unity (at the hands of a scripting multiculturalism) has the effect of doing is creating as its residue a celebration of the most easily collapsible, non-contestory aspects of 'culture.' In effect, reducing culture to its cuisine. And it is in this narrative of homogenizing or, as I have termed it somewhat *ad nauseam*, 'easy' difference that we, as the second generation, have been conditioned as ethnic subjects. Or rather, it is the site from which our marginalized and unsettling notions of ethnicity emerge, the disunity (that, for some reason, we accentuate and make a primary unity in writing) from which we precede. As semiotics has shown, we are unable, as postmodern beings, to escape the economy of the sign, the prison-house of language by which we make ourselves as on the make, or, as Roland Barthes has shown, by which we fashion ourselves as fashionable. But, if we accept the semiotic paradigm, I have a perhaps narcissistic or self-centered tendency to believe that as ethnic beings in an unstable zone of conflicting ethnicities, as those caught between multiple systems of signs, we are perhaps the subjects most fully entrenched in this semiotic nightmare—we must think ourselves from some script, and think of our *difference* from the script in terms of another script. We are caught in a double bind of unity. We are, to bend Fanon's phrase, 'overdetermined from without,'¹² or, to again read from 'The Fact of Blackness,' '[our] fragments have put together again by another self.'¹³ And as psychoanalysis has adeptly shown (from Freud to Fanon, Bhabha to Baudrillard—forgive the methodological inconsistencies for the sonic regularity), this is a unity that we can consciously attempt to shatter, but that, as unconscious beings, we must ultimately return to. ('The psychoanalysts say that nothing is more traumatizing for the young child than his encounters with what is rational.'—Fanon)¹⁴

There is no way to write about thinking or to think about writing, or to think or write about living, other than by grasping access to an original referent (What I think Derrida means by *the trace*...I have been spending far too much time in the critical and literary theory section of my favorite bookstore) enunciated by the silent and impersonal speaker of multiculturalism. Whatever radical sounding critical theories we may attempt to hammer into our psyches, it can only, in any finite temporal situation, question this dominant and originary rhetoric. We might not be doomed into some Baudrillardian non-agency, however, for as we slip back, it is on the jagged terrain of this backward that we can look to the stance of the forward...by trying to understand how we think about writing about thinking. We must, to use a vaguely Lacanian sounding concept (*pace* Baudrillard), hold up a kind of discursive mirror to see the techniques through which we refract ourselves in the gaze of our creators. We must take to *heart* Lacan's cryptically *cerebral* suggestion that 'I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.' And eventually we must realize that this partial and distorted 'broken mirror' of modern ethnic experience is, to again include (*join?*) Salman Rushdie, this time from *Imaginary Homelands*, 'as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed.'¹⁵

Defeated as it may sound, all that we can *currently* do is reflect, through writing, on the way that we experience. (Perhaps it is not so insignificant a gesture, however, if we opt for the deconstructionist 'ideology' of Derrida, an ideology that holds that 'a written

sign carries with it a force of breaking with its context, that is, the set of presences which organize the moment of its inscription.¹⁶⁾

But I don't want to end with Derrida, that would not do the appropriate justice to my (failed) attempt to necessarily rest in excess of an excess of theory, my pretend to not be pretentious. Nor do I wish to conclude with a return to the culinary metaphor—a recourse to the grease of my buffet made apparent through my insistence that: *I am returning to my food, I am enjoying my food—but while I may greedily consume many mouthfuls of gravy-saturated rice, I am consciously counting the fat grams.* No, this would certainly impose a sense of closure and cloture that would run counter to my insistence that, as ethnic beings, we are enunciated from a multiplicity of unresolvable subject positionings. Let us instead end by once again listening to radically disruptive and profoundly self-aware voice of Fanon: 'I am one who waits; I investigate my surroundings, I interpret everything in terms of what I discover, I become sensitive.'¹⁷

Notes

- ¹ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company: 1988), 53.
- ² Jacques Lacan, 'The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze,' *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Hogarth Press, 1977), 72.
- ³ See Homi Bhabha, 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference,' *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).
- ⁴ Frantz Fanon, 'The Fact of Blackness,' *Black Skin/White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann, (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 122.
- ⁵ Hanif Kureishi, *The Black Album*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 38.
- ⁶ Kureishi, 19.
- ⁷ Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 213. Excerpted in, Homi Bhabha, Introduction to *The Location of Culture*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 18.
- ⁸ Fanon, 112.
- ⁹ Rushdie, 34.
- ¹⁰ 'Translator Translated: W.J.T. Mitchell Talks With Homi Bhabha,' *Artforum*, (March 1995), 83.
- ¹¹ See Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Ian H. Grant, (London: Sage, 1993).
- ¹² Fanon, 116.
- ¹³ Fanon, 109.
- ¹⁴ Fanon, 118.
- ¹⁵ Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands,' *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, (London: Granta Books, 1991), 11.
- ¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context,' *Between the Blinds: A Derrida Reader*, ed. Peggy Kamuf, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 92.
- ¹⁷ Fanon 120.

NuWa Jing Wei (the baby girl, Jing Wei)

Zhang Er

Translated by Zhang Er and Susan M. Schultz

Fu Jiu Mountain is 200 li farther north. Higher up, the zhe trees are quite plentiful. There is a crow-like bird here with a striped head, white bill, and red feet. It is called Jing Wei. Its call sounds like its name. This is Emperor Yan's daughter, NuWa. NuWa drowned while swimming in the Eastern Sea. That was when she became Jing Wei and carried trees and stones from the western mountains to dam the Eastern Sea. The Zhang River flows east from here.

—*The Legend of the Northern Mountains*

Zhe wooden slippers predate the Christian era.
Crimson silk ribbons redden the ankle
like the flush of scarlet kisses; you dart back
and forth, possessed of exotic origins.
NuWa, you're no ordinary girl,
for the magnetic field of your rooted bones
makes you nomadic; you walk from the south
up the western mountain of my backyard:
tell me, which side do I climb down?

Go forward, eastward, face the sun.
Here everyone drinks too much coffee, is pale, sun-starved.
Be cautious: there's a secret deal in mirror-images, photos.
And the bay's appetite!
Not for stones or branches, but for steel and plastic puzzles.
Sail boats, ferries, skulls, steamers, ocean liners
(S.S. Thises and Thats), their shop lights, window displays.
Behind glass you see tourists with styrofoam lunch boxes in hand,
while further east, according to legend, there are shark
and shark fin JinShen soups. Fresh, two for a dollar.
Let us share...

Beside the pier, the winery banner seduces us
to sit, shoulder to shoulder, while other eyes scatter,
multi-angled lenses that fail to mark your fire-red slippers,
southern NuWa, nor their ears the eastern sea wind,
results posted in the local language

like fragrance rushing from a bottle.
You wait, patiently, patiently,
gracefully lowering your head as if
each time your heart broke there were
the consolatory “next time.”

Only I know your path:
It's like the song, “12 Hours a Day.”
Sweet nostalgia of no longer
fashionable music, about a time
no longer fashionable, whose
ancient principles yet apply,
deep as the eastern sea and this
backyard, bitterness unvomited.

My guests' anger baseless.
Grandma died without a will
despite torrents of last words and piles of ancient
towels, prints smudged, difficult to fathom;
she phoned my grandpa, recently dead,
to chat; the doctor called it “a strange existence.”
Your cervical cancer caused by poor water, poor diet,
an excess of love, the deep pool of your genes?
Excess misery and beauty were her company.

“My baby is NuWa,” grandma murmured to herself.
Fly, run, swim! Your crimson silk string slippers drown,
young heroine, yet the yearbook leaves out your entry.
What are collected are as-yet-undefined words,
phrases that already trouble us, like “love life.”
At the party, in fancy dress, we cry for a happy funeral.
You see, she was 89; you only 18 or 19.

One should learn from the green Zhe tree on the western mountain.
The crow-like bird in the branches died of hatred.
The ancient book still contains unparaphraseable wisdom.
You hold my two hands in yours.
I face the sky blue sea—over there.
In the backyard and on the hill, crowds bustle and horses neigh.
Hard at work, they dig at the mountain without ceasing,
either to dam the eastern sea or build a new legend.
They quarrel: so you and I have reason to sit longer.
We'll share another mug of wine.

Five Poems

Sterling Plumpp

Long Ways From the Page (for Duke Ellington)

Each
night when I'm on the road
map of compositions
I rent a satin doll
house

Legend has it
you are the sole creature
who can assassinate
with a long bow
tie and tuxedo
languages

You sing

music is my mystery
story/I'm an urban cow
hand me down corralling
the stray
horn bill of rights
for tenor axe
men who roam the range
of naps in Satchmo's territory

I know
America's embryonic
anthem of democracy
is voice of hands:
black, brown, and beige
montages of creativity
Evict **solitude** from lexicons
slide "piano player" in its place

*

You sing
when I ride

I'm in the mood
indigo go dancer's
grooves on a Basin Street
car of desire

The synchronized
breath of fingers, jazz
music of surreal
lungs Decades quod for
Monet's organs Jazz, myth's
bassinets A cosmos of dreams
arranged with impromptu
explorations into hours
you invent

You sing

I'm fluent
in AB
C-jams blues
in the night
time is the right
time

You sing
When I ride

I travel to East Saint Louis
toddle-oo/I'm just
a lucky so and so

I feel trouble's heart
beat on my window's
painless face
lifts

*

You sing

I'm the first to wear
sobriquets of longing
on my hip
hop references of genius

Jazz, Harlem's river
boat anthology of hep
cats' tall tales where you
discover more images of survival
than black women do in dish
water falls of anonymity

Jazz, black, brown, and
beige passages from
one epoch to the next

You sing

I learn narration from
Oliver Twist's saga of London town
houses I envy

You sing

When I'm thirsty
I like cozy
cole slaw/ beaten
madly

*

Elegantly dressed
smile on cloudy days Member
ship made of paper Sailing
the seven Cs of trumpets

Royal House Man
din
go home

landscapes of brown
epics

You sing

I bring swing
low sweet chariot in
to cotton club
houses

My sounds
forecast the body
and soul man/hold
on/I'm coming
lineage of history

You sing

I'm a crawling black
snake eyes
and I knows my den

I'm royalty One subject
the A-Train on disrupted
tracks of my tears Another
the Sophisticated Lady

Day with brown gardenias
withering around dreams

*

You sing

Anybody
can cross the bar
be cue pit
bull's snarls
against laughter

You sing

I reed somewhere

the law feeds black folks jim crow
bars for dinner

I am royalty One
subject be Mood Indigo
behind the back melodies
to Hodges Another be
solitude weaving membranes
of discord into silk
for a scarf Duke Duke
Duke cousin to the Duke
of Earl

You sing

I could be
the father of native
sons of a bitch's
brew

*

I wonder
if the A-Train ain't
ancestral memory coming
from mimed land
scapes of music I steal
away steal away steal
away

You sing

I crave local color blind
dates with cognac
and milk

Every morning
I eat only a jelly
roll/sleep on pillows of rag
weed/dream in rag
time/where I stay
a night in Tunisia
round midnight owls

that scat mono long
dreams I collect

You sing

Sometimes I feel
like a motherless child
hooded poem

A long ways
from the page

Sometimes I feel
like a motherless child
hooded poem

A long ways
from the page

A long ways
from black, brown
and beige

***Facets Of Nights
(for John Jackson)***

1.

You are blues
the facets of nights
when the good times
roar When I
holler shouts of joy
cause I gotta have more

2.

I believe
I believe
I believe

You no
thing but a
Good man feeling
bad Say

I believe
I believe
I believe

You no
thing but a

Good man feeling
bad Lord
I believe
portraits of troubles
and the blues

all you ever had

3.

When it rain
bows I see
I know it your blues
I feel way down
way down in
side When it rain
bows I see
I know it your blues
I feel way down
way down in
side

I git a itch to ramble
even devil won't let me ride

4.

Your face an antique shop
lifter of pains Mister Soing
So moans cause his baby
gone and Miss Down
Child screams to empty
beds when all alone

Inside my heart memories
of my mother's laughter
turned to rocks
But you pulverize them
with beats that cause me
to shout or dance with
out socks

“My poem is an imaginary traveler...”

My poem is an imaginary traveler
on an imaginary journey.
Perhaps,
that's why I wake up in Harriet
Jacob's incidents. Think they be woman
troubles of my mother.
Or find myself
respect aboard a Douglass plight.
And I do
not know if a black boy is in Paradise
Lost or not.
I have no control.
Some
times my poems swallow me only to allow
half resurrections in increments.
Blues idioms,
blues mood in
digo go dangers dripping in my head, blues
peoples's moans shacking up
stairs in the upper room Mahalia
cleans with gospel mop and shuffled foot
prints on the King's Highway.

I am Inn
The Upper Room.

***Night: A Tenor Educates Dawn
(for Fred Anderson)***

His measuring tape
is sound tracks
of my tears/Miracles with mo
town houses
than a rich man
din
go home
landscape or Dog
on/statue He is ears
and ears of journeys

The drummer prefers rib
tip off tournaments of riffs

Calls
voyages his stick
up patterns long
gone sassiness in a solo

His face is several
million calendars defining
cosmoses inaudible
till he visits He annexes
new territories of uncharted
galaxies to his embouchure

Tomorrow is a question
mark he has for
dessert His axe
sings "Precious Lord
have mercy take my hand
shakes"

*

His voyage is candor:
running the stretch of scales
where ballads lounge
side the confluence of genius
and possibility There
is no more water
melons any
where His axe plants
seeds between riffs
in the fertile silence

There is an epic eye
recoiled in ears and
ears of longings to venture ad
lib search
warrants of dreams
beyond knowledge

He takes
the weight
less orbits of time
on his shoulder
blades Slices
toasts for a town
ship He is Captain
Dyet incarnate

There are no cold
trains in myth
only night
Tranes

Trumpets are cannibals
they prey on lymph
nodes of distance
Miles and Miles and
Miles beyond dizzy
atmospheres They choose loud
speak easies Say legends
are just book

mark twains Tattooed
on a clown's face

*

Fred uses his tenor axe
handle to beat darkness
to the punch
bowl of lyrics by
mo
town night
in
gales at the Regal
memory of Handy

He climbs myth
to where he hears no
thing since the Arm
strong box of revelation
(except Be
bop pension
plans) meant
as much
as his latest solo
down blues elevated

Sings
wade in the water
colors I paint
with sound

*

Sings

I am free at
last night's
solo beginning

He is creation before
and after
creation A tenor
exploding life in

side and out
side a holy malignancy of
dreams Spreading

behind curtains of a million
star systems black
holes in one Tenor
man's hands In one horn
man's garlic desire

ornate with smoke
house memories of Lady
day light
years in tones

audible only after
galactic search
warrants are served
with fire one gets

from blowing while
in the posture of prayer
meeting houses
in a storm

*

Sings

I shall
not be moved
The storm is a fan
I use to cool the be
bop itch I seek
beyond knowledge

beyond where I ever
been in the storm
so long Beyond
the Beyond I
know

His master

piece is a contingency

Beyond the Beyond I
know

for Poets

1.

Blues

re-magics. Every
day myth. Points
of view through
hours that know.
Unextended hands of door
mats. And lonely
cold
nights as quilts. And foul
odors as surnames. And
wandering as home.

2.

All

blues got peripheral
visionary concerns. Because
English is a door
I can
not open/All
the wayward distances.
I need
to call my name.

3.

All

blues got
windows. I breathe
shadows through
out broken heart
aches. All

blues got
rights. All
blues got
the tree of life
saviors floating
in tremors of
Lucille's vocal
longed cardiograms
printing Decalog
cabins for homeless
dreams. All blues
got shapes of
pain embraced.
Got shapes of
troubles stitched.
Got shapes of
souls transplanted
by callings of light
in tore down
dungeons almost
level with satanic
greed.

4.
All blues
got metamorphosis of nights in
to day
light years of shouts.
Light years of ugliness
in the face.
Light years of moans
flooded out
side the mouth.
Light years of ecstasy.
Light years of belief
in turning a furrow
to plant tomorrow.
Even in humus of dire
circumstances.

from ***When The Saints***

(Part Three)

John Taggart

The subject was roses the problem is memory
the problem is the train of memory
chasing the train
chasing the train of memory to its destination
its destination the chapel
all those stations in the chapel station
all those rooms
rooms are the condition of the known
all those rooms to one room
to the one child in the one room
child of pain
every progression suggests a problem
a problem of destination
a known destination
the chapel a known destination
child of pain a known destination
problem and question and more than one question
the question of an unknown destination
completely unknown
the question of making the roof to fall in.

Susceptible

for whatever comes in the ear
what comes in the ear

music

remembered
music

chapel music
screaming
screaming in the chapel.

Unforgettable that's what
what is

what is what is unforgettable

what is

what is unforgettable what is memory

all that is musical

what is in the chapel
what is in me.

“Je voudrais que mon amour meure”

stronger than want
than a wish
desire
strong as desire
need
stronger
need what is

what is what is needed

roof to fall in
child to die.

I'll be seeing you
you know where I'll be seeing you
you know all those places

you know = you see

you see all those old familiar places
and you see you

you = me

all those old places = one place

I'll be looking at the moon
I'm not looking at the moon.

Acknowledgment and acknowledgments
a page for acknowledgments
for acknowledgment of what has been taken
taken and changed

what has been quoted
poetry is the art of quotation
phrases comments cadences
in some instances without quotation marks

acknowledgment
poetry is the art of quotation
the art of cutting
cutting into
cutting into and around.

A page for acknowledgments
acknowledgment of error

error and errors

error of knowing
of being too knowing

error of not knowing
error of not knowing
what love is.

Too many all too many seeds in the air
like milkweed seeds
"beloved of imaginative children"

all too many milky seed words

ergo cutting
cutting into
around

ergo cutting

which clears the air.

What can be cut
roses can be can be cut and burned

you can be cut while cutting roses
Rilke was cut cutting roses

when roses have been burned
what's left what remains to be cut

what's left
yourself

you can cut yourself.

Before they were the Orioles
they were the Vibranaires
Sonny Til and the Orioles
first true rhythm and blues vocal group
first true rhythm and blues harmony
which opens
which closes on a close
true blue harmony
the Orioles opened the door
the Orioles closed the door
their biggest hit "Crying in the Chapel"
they cried in the chapel
you saw them crying
tears of joy
their tears were tears of joy.

Not so big a hit
"Back in the Chapel Again"

needed to go back and pray
went down
went down on their knees and prayed

burdens would be lighter
they'd surely find a way

again and again
back in the chapel in the need of prayer
back in the need of jokes.

Knock knock joke

Silvanus the teacher
knock upon yourself as upon a door

Silvanus the teacher
open the door that you may know what is

Silvanus the teacher
whatever you will open you will open

doorway without a door
which is the doorway of the chapel
doorway without a door.

Rhythm and blues harmony
minimal
minimal harmonic progression

from crying
from crying to praying in the chapel

in the chapel
back in the chapel again

minimal

going nowhere.

A musical joke a jazz joke
and a bird joke
a Charlie Parker joke
also a kind of knock knock joke

after a concert
Charlie Parker was asked
how much he cared about the critics
the critics who know so much

about as much as birds
he said as birds care about ornithologists

about as much.

Silvanus the teacher
walk upon yourself as upon a straight road

Silvanus the teacher
if you walk if you walk upon the road
it's impossible to go astray

if you = me

I walk the line between
lines

stray between

quite quite astray.

The point of a joke is a point
is pointed
something that could cut into and around
into and around memory
you need memory to remember the point
first a joke then the point
which is funny
needing memory to cut memory is funny
you could say the joke's on you
on you and in you
if you could remember
if you could you could cut it
you could be a cut-up
who cuts up who cuts into and around
who cuts it out.

You could say the joke's on me

me = me

on me and in me

chasing the train is funny
chasing the train to its destination
memory train
to its destination

to the chapel to the child of pain

chapel and child
chapel and child in me.

Song of the Andoumboulou: 42

Nathaniel Mackey

in memory of Glenn Spearman

What we rode was a book. We
fell out of it, scattered.
The book fell out of my
hand while I slept. Page
upon page upon page
nodded
out on... Fell from the
hero's
hand on the page I gripped,
never to be read again
or, if ever, only were I to
awake...
Walked each with an arm around
the other's waist, weathered
hell, heaven's andoumboulouous
remit... Me the hero, we the
dream come true I'd leave off
dreaming,
thin line between the dead and the
living dead no longer there, fanfare
remanding the day, dawn's burst
anticlimactic one or two hours
in...
So as to return we stowed a
part of ourselves away. Felt we
fell, found it sleep we fell
into.
A low moan altered endlessly
braced us, broke our sleep,
Nazakat and Salamat were
there...
I put a part of myself aside,

sought light, loosely, shone
 like a halo, hupped, marched
 up
 Unreal Street unstrung, strode
 across Atet Street. Remembered
 Glenn remembering Frank remembering
 John, heard voices, Nazakat
 and Salamat again... Stra strut
 it
 was we called it, crawled unbeknown
 to us. Having long bid ourselves
 goodbye, we begged off leaving,
 better
 said or sung than done it seemed we
 reasoned, leaflike the trembling
 skin
 we strode inside... Torn cloth, we the
 would-be thread lay in wait with
 whatsay, more than could be seen we saw,
 said we saw, more than could be said
 we
 saw. One made-up step made it seem
 like dancing, anomie's make-believe
 ball, scratch of sand and of intimate
 stubble, whatever of late went
 for love on Lone Coast... It was an
 island we were on, anabatic sand
 we
 strode across, come to where, if
 at all,
 we'd live again

So that B'Head called hard rock pillow,
pillow book the scribbling we saw.
We lay on our backs, rocks cradling
the backs of our heads, lay looking
up
at the sky... Starlight hit us with
headshine. "Sky, be the writing we
saw," we begged incessantly, breathless,
all but out loud. We lay on our backs,
arms
out at our sides, putative wings, hands
palms up catching light... It was Arrival
we were
in, suddenly so with a capital A, all
we'd
always wanted it to be, been told it would
be... Falling from the sky, an immaculate
dust
attending
sleep

•

Statuesque, beautifully unbent as
we looked on, arched, insatiate
bodies in the shape of trees bent
by wind on Lone Coast...

Shook.

We stood on stilts. Mountain wind put
parts in our hair, we heard singing,
backed by an armadillo-back

mandolin...

It was a tavern we were in, we were in

Peru,

some sung-about vamp grinding corn
on a Cusco jukebox, some vamp-till-ready
we sat suspended in... Lumbering
harps had their way with the backs of
our heads, we held on, wincing,

sat

with eyes averted, scattered ashes coated our
throats. Cough seemed all we could do,
we could hardly speak, not so much

Peru now as Paris it seemed, a

train

what it was we were on wherever it
was, a train whatever it was we
were on... In the city's insides
albeit we were in Egypt, high-breasted
Sekhmet statuesque at the metro

stop...

Beautifully bent all ears to inside an
inch of hearing, said nothing, muse

meant

lost in thought. As we were, who were
otherwise also made of stone, Sekhmet's

Mem-

phite rock

Premature rebirth, fake book of the
dead. Burned or embalmed cosmic
body by default... Screen outside a
screen inside a screen, dreamt im-
munity. Said goodbye having
hardly
begun... Sang with a catch in our throats,
cough caught in our throats...
Sang to
have been done with singing,
song
not enough

Anthropology/Poetry/Poetics:
A Special Nathaniel Tarn Section



from *Ecce Homo Martin* (1983)

Nathaniel Tarn

1.1

What the Martin is; sows, grows, matures, dies; of everything; our food, our sustenance. Martin singular/plural: Martinab: the Martins/ Achihab: the men/ Atinab: the bathers - "and the first fathers lay in the water surrounded with light". Martin 12/13 totality number, no itemization suits; totality number may have been 20 at one time. Martin male/female Maria. Martin old/young. Martin cyclical; youngest ch'ep: little finger, oldest nabeyal: thumb next series 12/13. "They say that in the old days each period of 20 days dry or wet ended with peal of thunder. This was ch'ep Martin who never comes out for fear world would end." This ch'ep frames/brackets mature power Martin/Maria as young/premarital//old/postmenopausal. This ch'ep the Mam.

1.3

Mam puppet; wood core affixed pots affixed legs arms hands head; tied rope, thread; clothed several suits boots scarves hats; Erythrina/Tzite/Palo de Pito mask, divining seed tree; sassy ceegar. Lives on ceiling trellis Brotherhood Holy Cross; looked after special priest: Dresser. A.K.A.: Judas Iscariot First Traitor; St. Peter First Apostle; St. Michael First Archangel; Pedro de Alvarado First Conquistador; Maximon: Mam/Simon/ Ma (Mr) Xmon (bound) with c'a'am (rope) batz (thread); Mr. Stiff; Mr. Lame; Mr. Dummy; Mr. Face; Mr. Taltale; Mr. Coat; Mr. Silkscarf; Mr. Bat; Mr. Hawk; Mr. Butterfly; Mr. Hummingbird; Red Hill Dwarf; Red Deer; Toad Back; Mr. Wind; Mr. Fire; Mr. Lightning; Mr. Whirlwind; Mr. Sun; Mr. Light. Wives another number altogether.

1.5

MARTIN; form Martinab form anglice Rain Angels; form nawal tak' achi (Power-Men) human form angel form; form Nabeyail (First-Throne) privileged ritualist form human form. Continuous passage nature world power-world controlling nature such that events former reflection decisions, events latter. Movement youth age young angels old angels

passing into executive council at Center // youth married man married man alguacil
(water-boy) rising all religious/political ranks principal pasado (past-participial participant)
all duty done. La Nature est un Temple ou de Vivants Piliers***

1.8

Weathers carry tzuy gourds contain rain clouds always full. Plus other gourds dust/shot
sprinkle clouds rainmaker. Gourd office-sign Throne. Tzuy scrotum/sperm cloud+wet falls
man “rainmaker”. “Your head gourd your belly gourd your being gourd” prayer to
Weather. Strong rain Young Weather/ weak rain Old Weather. Weather ch’ul urine.
Weathers dismount to pee. Weather thumb weapon. “At your hands at your feet Give me
right hand thumb” : witchpower. Ask more fingers kill yourself.

1.9

Center insignificant hill O’elbal Juyu Tak’aj (Throne Hills/Valleys) south rim Lake Atitlan.
Seat executive council pasados angels; home sun small cold end solar dying year,
perhaps main home sun, period (.); major arsenal angel national guard. Invisible
“cement-stone” temple believed top hill rimmed natural cave entrances humanoid. Stump
huge cypress top hill - destroyed Mexican prospecting company uranium - believed
throne major angel/summation angels one. Angels live in/on hills each also arsenal. If
complete cloud-cap covers tip angel sits palbal (lit. elevation-thing, i.e. tree-throne)
home. Hill often “bones” previous creation angel : : earth bones whole previous creation.
Angels go Center for council orders. Generally hills (+mountains, +volcanos) Brother-
hood chapels. Continuous passage nature world power-world such that events former
reflect events latter per 1.5. Possibility Center shift cardinal direction per each creation/
world era as possibility each hill governance season+weather.

*Note: From one of a number of experimental texts preparatory to Scandals in the House of Birds—all of which
had to be rejected for commercial reasons, i.e. if the book were ever to be published.*

Scandals in the House of Anthropology: notes towards a reading of Nathaniel Tarn

Shamoon Zamir

Anthropology will survive in a changing world by allowing itself to perish in order to be born again under a new guise.

- Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966)¹

...the genre so long looked for which would assure a complete union of the poetic and anthropological enterprises (should such be desirable) lies not in the keeping of the anthropologist who cannot, for all his/her efforts, get beyond belles lettres, but with the poet who, in theory, can. This is a question of a language which, without turning away from scientific veracity, abdicates not one jot of its literary potential. Undoubtedly utopian, the search is at home in poetry, incurably utopian, and probably nowhere else.

- Nathaniel Tarn (1991)²

Since the publication of *Writing Culture* (1986), a collection of essays on “the poetics and politics of ethnography”, there has been a widespread debate among anthropologists and cultural critics about the relationship of anthropology and literature, of ethnographic writing and poetics. But for all this talk literature itself, and especially the work of poets, have been banished almost completely from the dialogue.³ It is in fact literary theory (mainly post-structuralist) and not literature which appears to fuel the efforts to reconsider and transform ethnography. Poetics is reduced almost always to what those working in cultural studies or new historicism refer to as ‘cultural poetics’ and poetry more often than not is associated with the personal (and such discussion as there is of poetry is often confined to the usually less than remarkable verse productions of anthropologists themselves). In a notable exception to these tendencies James Clifford, in his introduction to *Writing Culture*, does at least stress that “to recognize the poetic dimensions of ethnography does not require that one give up the facts and accurate accounting for the supposed free play of poetry. ‘Poetry’ is not limited to romantic or modernist subjectivism: it can be historical, precise, objective.”⁴ But “historical, precise, objective” in the way that social science in its present or a future transformed state wants to be? Two passing references to William Carlos Williams (on the inclusion of history into poetry) and to Charles Olson (citing his poetic rule “For use now!”) (3, 24) indicate that Clifford may have in mind the tradition of the American long poem (going back in this century to Pound) which has radically redefined

the ambitions of poetry and made of it a unique form of cultural investigation through constant innovations of form and content. However, neither Clifford nor any of the other contributors to the 'writing culture' debates ever engages with the nature of this poetic project and its implications for a rethinking of ethnography and anthropological theory; they never consider adequately the ways in which the poets' use of language and their notions of truth and history may be very different to the social scientists'. Poetry is never fully understood as a particular order of imagination, as what Tarn defines as "the activity typical of all writing which is totally committed not to the recording of fact but to its creative transformations" (*Views* 255).

The suggestion in Clifford's introduction is that Williams and Olson can be incorporated comfortably into the company of social scientists with a post-structuralist bent. The poets are invoked only to be thoroughly silenced.⁵ "The essays will be accused of having gone too far" writes Clifford in his conclusion, "poetry will again be banned from the city." The power to disrupt the calm of the republic of science is usurped by the critic-become-poet, and the sources of this power are marked out as "semiotics, post-structuralism, hermeneutics, and deconstruction" (25). Given these evasions and occlusions, it is difficult not to acknowledge the justness of Tarn's assessment that "in his emphasis on ethnography as *creative*, his consequent stress on *collective* authorship of culture-as-texts, and his avoidance of distinctions between that kind of 'creativity' and the creativity of the poet or novelist (by avoiding these latter *as such*), [Clifford] conspires with much contemporary theory in disenfranchising the 'creative writer'.... In short, it seems to be one more example of our academic culture's present widespread empowerment of the critic at the expense of the poet" (*Views* 251).

The failure to engage with poetry as such, and with whatever such an engagement may bring to a consideration of the dialogue between anthropology and literature, is most clearly evident in the brief citation of Tarn himself in Clifford's introduction. In a discussion of the dominance of the "visual paradigm" in ethnography, he quotes Tarn, identified only "as a tricultural French/Englishman endlessly becoming an American", on "the ethnographer or the anthropologist" as one who has "his ears wider open to what he considers the exotic as opposed to the familiar" (12). Tarn is not identified as someone who is both a poet and an anthropologist and since most of Clifford's readers are unlikely to know Tarn's work, they are likely to assume that Tarn is only an anthropologist. The quotation that Clifford uses is in fact taken from an interview in which Tarn discusses at some length his dual life in anthropology and poetry and the quoted comments occur at a moment in the interview when Tarn is specifically discussing the polyvocal nature of much of his own poetry. Tarn approaches the "sudden irruptions into the body of the work" of other voices partly through anthropological analogy ("almost like spirit-possession cults") and goes on to suggest by juxtaposition that the techniques of the poet and the anthropologist are mutually informative in "discovering something new in the use of language".⁶

While it may be unfair to be too severe about Clifford's use of the Tarn interview,

his treatment of Tarn *does* point towards the much more significant and troubling exclusion from the 'writing culture' debates of the entire ethnopoetics movement. Centred on the signal contributions of poet-translator-anthology maker Jerome Rothenberg and anthropologist-translator-editor Denis Tedlock, the ethnopoetics movement has provided since the late 1960s a forum for exchange and collaboration between poets and anthropologists unique in the history of American culture. While ethnopoetics may have lost the intensity and drive that one associates with the term 'movement' by the second half of the 1980s, it is by no means a dead project. It is surprising then that those involved in the 'writing culture' debates, which came to prominence precisely in the mid-1980s, have ignored consistently the achievements of ethnopoetics. It may be that ethnopoetics is seen to offer little that is immediately relevant to considerations of ethnographic writing, but it is hard to understand how scholars interested in issues of textuality and the representations of fieldwork and of other cultures can continue to ignore a large body of work, built up over more than two decades now, in which notions of the primitive, the comparison of cross-cultural poetics, the problems of translation, the representation of performance, and the practice of collaborative textual work have been investigated by both poets and anthropologists.

Along with Rothenberg and Tedlock, Tarn is one of the foundational figures in ethnopoetics. Though not an instigator and organiser within the movement as Rothenberg and Tedlock were, Tarn has nevertheless produced a remarkable range of work as poet, ethnographer, anthropologist, translator, editor and theoretician of ethnopoetics that places his contribution to the movement second to none. In one sense he is unique within ethnopoetics and equally within the longer history of the dialogue between American poets and anthropology that stretches from Pound and Eliot, through to the likes of Olson, Duncan, Rukeyser, Snyder, Dorn and Jay Wright:⁷ he is the only one to have produced substantial and accomplished bodies of work as a poet and as an anthropologist and the only one to have written at length on the interactions of literature and anthropology.

The reservations expressed about the 'writing culture' debates above and the discussions that follow are not intended as a wholesale rejection of these debates (and certainly not of Clifford's work), nor are they intended as an argument for the supremacy of the poet, nor are they meant to propose either a simple defence or critique of 'traditional' anthropology and ethnography. The case being made is that *if* the transformation of anthropology is sought and *if* the confluence of poetry and anthropology towards the creation of a new writing is seen to be desirable, then the work of poets, 'creative writers' and other artists must be engaged and that Tarn has a significant contribution to make in this dialogue. The notes or sketches that follow are offered as counter-information, a mapping (by no means complete) of a range of work which, unfortunately, is too little known both among anthropologists and those interested in 'the poetry world'. The focus is on an account of Tarn's career as poet and anthropologist, on the interaction between his work in poetics and anthropological theory, and on his latest book, *Scandals in the House of Birds: Shamans and Priests on Lake Atitlán* (1997).⁸

Scandals is a synthesising of over forty years of fieldwork among, research on and thinking about the Tzutujil Maya living on the shores of Lake Atitlán in Guatemala ('House of Birds' is a translation of the indigenous name for the pre-Columbian Tzutujil capital, now in ruins at the foot of Volcano San Pedro [*Scandals* 383]). Narrated through multiple narratives and many voices, the book deals with a religious conflict between indigenous religion and Christianity. The theft of masks covering Maximón, a Mayan wooden statue venerated since pre-Columbian times, and the later return of one of the masks over twenty years later, is the core around which are spun accounts of Mayan mythology, ritual practices, religious festivals, individual life histories, local social conflicts and the horrors of Guatemala's national politics. Nine years before the publication of the book, writing of the struggle between poetry and anthropology throughout his career as "the battle between the angel of creation and the angel of the record," Tarn refers to the project as "the last possible (for me) throw to the record."⁹ More recently, with the book in press, Tarn has referred to it as "a sort of experimental ethnography".¹⁰ Certainly, if one comes to the book from the world of contemporary anthropology, the discussions about the writing of ethnographies provide the means for getting a good grasp on it. But *Scandals* is not only the work of "the angel of the record"; it is only "sort of an experimental ethnography". It is, in fact, a book that resists generic categorisation. Placing it in the context of the full range of Tarn's work significantly shifts the sense of the book and reveals it to be a part of a continuum of exploratory action that stretches far beyond the 'poetics' of ethnographic writing.

* * * *

Born in Paris in 1928, Tarn spent some of his childhood in Belgium and then, at the age of eleven, was evacuated to England just before the start of the war.¹¹ After completing an undergraduate degree in history and English at Cambridge, Tarn returned to Paris in the late 1940s and studied anthropology with the likes of Marcel Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen and Claude Lévi-Strauss while at the same time being involved in a literary scene that still included Breton and other Surrealists. Accounts of the intricate symbolic system of Dogon cosmology and ritual offered by Griaule, Dieterlen and others prepared the way for Lévi-Strauss's structuralist analyses of primitive classification and myth. These studies, along with Paul Lévy's courses on the relationship of folk and Buddhist traditions, were to have a lasting impact on Tarn's thinking.¹² They reinforced a childhood fascination with classification and system (a dream of order formed, at least in part, in the midst of geographical displacement and the chaos of war) and also provided a point of contact with Surrealism's interests in initiation and esoteric traditions.¹³ Tarn's later experience as both poet and ethnographer would deepen the understanding of symbolic systems by opening it up to a sense of historical process and contradiction. Given the nature of Tarn's training in French anthropology and his involvement in the Paris literary scene, it is not surprising that he can draw with confidence on both French literary experiments which have used and transmuted anthropological sources and experience (he has written on Michel Leiris and Artaud and translated Victor Segalen),¹⁴ and a social scientific tradition which (in the works of theorists like Durkheim, Mauss and Lévi-Strauss himself) has not severed its links with

philosophy.¹⁵

In 1951 Tarn was awarded a Smith-Mundt-Fulbright Scholarship and continued his anthropological training with graduate work at the University of Chicago, in the company of such notable American scholars as Robert Redfield, Milton Singer, Sol Tax and Fred Eggan (he also attended Melville Herskovits's classes at Northwestern and met frequently with Paul Radin). Redfield, who was Tarn's doctoral supervisor, was a pioneer in studies of world view and social change, particularly the modernisation of folk and primitive communities. Tarn's Ph.D., which was based on fieldwork in a village on the shores of Lake Atitlán in Guatemala, combined these concerns with his own interests in religious symbolism. Much of Tarn's published Latin American ethnography is centred on the figure of Maximón, a figure in whom Christian and indigenous Mayan beliefs meet and whose hybrid iconography reveals a complex history of cultural contact and violence.¹⁶ This is the material that *Scandals* revisits more than forty years later.

With the doctorate still to be completed, Tarn returned to London in 1953 and continued work in anthropology as a postgraduate student and part time lecturer at the London School of Economics, working with Raymond Firth, Issac Schapera, S.F. Nadel and Maurice Freedman. Once the Ph.D. was out of the way (1957), Tarn undertook eighteen months of research on religion, politics and esoteric Buddhism in Burma. The published work on Burma deals with two main areas: the modern relationship of *sangha* (the Buddhist order of monks) and state politics, understood in the light of earlier periods, and the blending of Buddhist and folk elements in what Tarn refers to as "messianic" Buddhism. It is a long way from Guatemala and Mayan-Christian hybrids to Burmese Buddhism, but there are clear continuities. In the work on messianic Buddhism Tarn is again dealing with a complex symbolic order and its historical meanings, this time as an ambivalent vision of redemptive kingship and national independence which is a response to colonial and post-colonial conditions. In the study of *sangha* and state, the relationship of worldly affairs and a religion assumed to be detached from such concerns is given within a meticulous account of a more pragmatic and institutional political history.¹⁷

When Tarn came back from Burma, he was appointed Lecturer in Southeast Asian Anthropology at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London and had the prospect of a productive career in anthropology before him. But in 1967 he resigned his post and turned his back on academic anthropology (though he would publish some work in anthropology in the years to come). Since his return from Burma Tarn had in fact led a double life as both anthropologist and poet, keeping the two separate. He had won the First Guinness Prize in 1963, published his first book of poems, *Old Savage/Young City* (Jonathan Cape, 1964), and translated Pablo Neruda's *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* (Jonathan Cape, 1966). Torn between "the recording angel" of anthropology and "the creative angel" of poetry, Tarn confirmed a life-long wish in 1967 to make poetry his primary work.

At this time he became General Editor of Cape Editions and a Founding Director

of Cape Goliard Press. These two were to prove to be among the most innovative publishing ventures in Britain in the 1960s, the former a remarkable international series of short multi-disciplinary texts and the latter a bold attempt to combine the distributive power of a large commercial press like Jonathan Cape with the flexibility and imagination of a small press like Goliard.¹⁸ The first twelve titles in the Cape Editions series indicate the extent to which as editor Tarn fostered the kind of innovative cross disciplinary thinking which characterised his own subsequent work: *The Scope of Anthropology* by Lévi-Strauss (his inaugural lecture as professor at the Collège de France, viewing anthropology both as a philosophy and a method); *Call Me Ishmael*, Olson's ground-breaking study of Melville; *Writing Degree Zero* and *The Elements of Semiology* by Barthes (offered as an introduction to structuralism, "a new critical movement which is rapidly gaining an international following"); *I Wanted to Write a Poem* by William Carlos Williams; *The Memorandum*, a play by Vaclav Havel; *Selected Poems* by Nazim Hikmet; *Selected Letters and Aphorisms of Lichtenberg* (a sampling from the Göttingen professor admired by the likes of Goethe and Breton); *Tango* by the Polish dramatist Slawmir Mrozek; Ortega y Gasset's *On Love*; Michel Leiris's autobiographical *Manhood*, an introduction for the English public to the work of this then little-known writer; and *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses and Language* by Karl von Frisch. In addition, between them Cape Editions and Cape Goliard published many American poets, including Zukofsky, Olson and Duncan, as well as many works of literature from other countries in translation.

Drawn to America since his childhood and more and more engaged in his own poetry with the innovations of the 'New American poetry', Tarn emigrated to the States in 1970. Since then he has held a Professorship in the Department of Comparative Literature at Rutgers University, has taught at many other institutions, has done further fieldwork (though not with the aim of producing traditional ethnographies), and has continued to write poetry and to explore issues in poetics arising out of the confluence of anthropology and poetry. In 1985 Tarn took early retirement and moved to New Mexico where he lives and writes today.

Since the first book of poems in 1963 there have been about twenty others. It is, therefore, impossible to generalise either about Tarn's poetry or about its relationship to his work in anthropology. Tarn is at home in both the long, book-length poem where a complex range of cultural and intellectual materials are engaged with, and, in books such as *October* (Trigram 1969), *The Microcosm* (Membrane 1977) and *At the Western Gates* (Tooth of Time 1985), with simpler lyric modes. It is in the longer poems perhaps that the use of anthropological materials is most immediately visible. *The Beautiful Contradictions* (Cape Goliard 1969), the third book of poetry and the work which Tarn himself takes as the proper point of departure for an understanding of his poetry,¹⁹ is a long poetic sequence in fifteen sections which works from a sense of placelessness towards a desperate and ultimately impossible "attachment to the whole world".²⁰ The cultural, political and historical material drawn upon include 1960s politics and culture, Jewish and Central European history from mid century, Australian indigenous cultures, classical and Medieval lore about winds and

animals, the Oedipus mythology, Wägner's *Ring* cycle as well as Tarn's own researches into Latin American and Burmese religions. The central process of the poem, the transformations of the poetic persona through many masks and identities is indebted to Tarn's own contributions to anthropological theories of initiation. As Eric Mottram noted of *The Beautiful Contradictions* and *A Nowhere for Vallejo* (Random House 1971), the "poems have a complex formal analysis of inventive structures, but their movement has the controlled urgency of a reasoned social analysis."²¹ *Lyrics for the Bride of God* (New Directions 1975) is an extended meditation on the Shekinah, the bride of God in Jewish mysticism, in all her manifestations and so a mining of world mythologies in which poet and anthropologist inform each other. *The House of Leaves* (Black Sparrow 1976) is a book of arrival, an attempt to make the newly adopted country a home through an exploration of the Americas that draws on early ethnographic experience and the life in Europe as counterpoints—and that concern with the idea and experience of America continues in the more recent *Seeing America First* (Coffee House 1989). *Alaska* (Brillig Works 1979) is a collaborative work. Co-written with Janet Rodney (the authorship of individual poems is left unidentified) and based on various extended visits to Alaska, it tries to deal with the poets' experience of Alaskan cultures by drawing on a variety of modes—ethnography, travelogue, cultural commentary, naturalist description, love poem.²²

* * * *

In the essay "The Heraldic Vision: Some Cognitive Models for Comparative Aesthetics" (1976), delivered at the First Ethnopoetics Symposium, Tarn distinguishes his own interest in ethnopoetics from the interests of the movement's main figure, Jerome Rothenberg:

A poet...could be interested in anthropology as the discipline dealing, amongst others, with societies which have a heavy investment in "techniques of the sacred" for the reasons outlined by Rothenberg. He proposes a confluence between their poets and ours on the basis of analogies involving: orality (preliterate/postliterate); imagism (prelogical/postlogical); formal minimalisation/participational maximalization; intermedia-ness; somaticism; shamanism, etc. What interests *me* most, however, is somewhat different and runs thus: 1) the extent to which both poetry and anthropology deal with the process of classification, 2) the extent to which the anthropological study of classification might lead to valuable understandings in poetics and aesthetics, and 3) the relevance of 1 and 2 to contemporary debates among poets on the origin, nature, and function of poetry. (*Views* 261)

Tarn is deeply fascinated by systems of classification, both primitive and scientific. Much of this interest is informed by a long tradition of French anthropology going back to Durkheim and Mauss but the most notable influence is clearly Lévi-Strauss's structuralist interpretation of totemism and the workings of "the savage mind". In "The Heraldic Vision" Tarn uses

the structural and transformational aspects of totemic systems to undertake an anthropologically informed reading of the systematic categorisation and organisation in Blake's personal mythology and of the movement between dismemberment and integration in his great prophecies. Put crudely, the totemic division of society into, say, Bear clan, Eagle clan, Seal clan and the multiple possible sub-divisions of such groups are compared with Albion in his wholeness and in his divided state ("the sons and daughters of Albion in their manifold complexity" etc., *Views* 273). And the movement of the "totemic operator" between extreme poles of generalisation and particularisation (between say bear and head of bear, claw of bear etc.), a process Tarn (following Victor Turner) calls totalisation and detotalisation, is then used towards an anthropological description of "the essential Romantic myth" (*Views* 272) of Albion's movement from an image of ideal society ("*ecclesia*"), through dismemberment ("*sparagmos*"), to a new integration ("*ecclesia nova*") (the terms are Tarn's: see *Views* 272-74). Stressing that the return to integration is never a return to origin, Tarn then moves from here to a review of contemporary debates about the relationship of structure and process from an anthropological and a poetic perspective. Trained in structuralism and widely read in hermetic traditions, Tarn is sympathetic to Lévi-Strauss's critique of historicism's limitations in the final chapter of *The Savage Mind* (1962) (*Views* 167). However, a sense of the poverty of historicism does not constitute a rejection of history. Tarn argues that structure and process must not be seen as opposites but as inseparable parts of a single dialectic. The impasse between structuralism and phenomenology is broken for the poetic imagination by hermeticism because hermeticism refuses to treat the opposition of space and time as an immobile dualism:

The truth is that there are two Hermeticisms, one in which, yes, human nature really is eternally the same, human problems likewise and there is nothing new under the sun; another in which some form of accommodation with History becomes possible by postulating an *evolutionary* factor in human consciousness and problematics....it would seem possible for the poetic imagination to escape from the stark alternative of i) a point of view from which History is impossible and ii) another from which nothing but History is possible. (*Views* 281)

In a later essay on "Metaphors of Relative Elevation, Position and Ranking in *Popol Vuh*" (1981), co-written with Martin Prechtel, Tarn applies structuralist models of the totemic operator to the Quiché Mayan book of creation through the idea of "transforms" by which is meant "simply that any character, or event or set of such in relationship (such as a pair of twins) figuring in a textual episode and placed in the same structural situation as another character or event or set of such in another episode, will be considered as transforms of each other."²³ Connecting this idea of transformation to the structuralist sense of myth as the attempted and always unsuccessful mediations of contradictions, Tarn and Prechtel are brought to the conclusion that "If myth does proceed towards ever more adequate mediations between contradictions, we can perhaps read *Popol Vuh*'s generating of successive pairs of twins as an ever more successful education or initiation."²⁴ This con-

junction of the state of contradiction (accepted but never transcended in Tarn) and initiation as an open process of educative transformations lies at the very heart of Tarn's poetic and anthropological thought (Tarn confesses to having wanted "to write the definitive work for our time on *initiation*" [Views 250]). Tarn conceives of initiation as itself a paradoxical process of withdrawal from the exasperations of worldly contradictions leading to a return to this very world in a state of attention, a state which Tarn takes to be a foundation for the political dimensions of poetry. In later essays the theorisation of initiation is extended to considerations of the poetic voice singing *ideally* and again paradoxically in a solitary chorus in a state of detachment from the world that is simultaneously a return to it.

In "Initiation and the Paradox of Power" (1965), published only a few years before *The Beautiful Contradictions*, Tarn rejects those interpretations of initiation which see it only in terms of the acquisition of a fixed body of knowledge or as a rite of passage which is part of an equally fixed socialising process. Instead, he argues that in its most complex forms initiation can be a continuous educative process, one in which the ceaseless drama of self-improvement and growth into self-reliance are as valued as "social recognition" and social conformity and integration (Views 132). In anthropological terms, initiation not only binds the initiate into a nexus of reciprocity but also takes him towards a state of non-reciprocity. Tarn illustrates the point by drawing on his own ethnographic work on Burmese Buddhism, work in which he has "attempted to see the whole complex continuum of Burmese religion....in the light of initiatic theory." For Tarn meditation, "the primary instrument of Buddhist self-enhancement," is "a process of looking at the world and concluding, after examining all its aspects, that it is not worth the having. One after another various forms of attachment are sloughed off together with the reciprocal action which they imply." "In some Schools," Tarn goes on to argue, the meditator may discover eventually "that all these attachments are the mere shadow-play of mind, thus drawing into 'himself' all the different aspects of the world and leaving only the task of putting an end to 'himself.' We thus have three stages: the first we may call self-other reciprocity; the second self-self reciprocity; the third wipes out reciprocity altogether, and can be termed non-reciprocity" (Views 136-37).

As early as the late 1960s (in his essay on André Breton, first published in 1967, and in *The Beautiful Contradictions*) Tarn begins to use this model of initiation as a basis for thinking about the nature of the poetic voice. It is, however, in the mid-1980s that this thinking takes a systematic turn. The key essay is "The Choral Voice: A Diptych Re Anthropology and Poetry", first published in a special issue of *Dialectical Anthropology* on poetry and anthropology in the same year that saw the publication of *Writing Culture* (1986). Here Tarn moves out of an exasperation with anthropological interrogation, fictions of polyvocality and excessive subjectivism towards an unfashionable defence of the individual voice as potentially the guarantor of objective detachment and also the source of chorus. Fully appreciative of anthropology's contribution to our knowledge of the world, Tarn is nevertheless vexed by the discipline's ambivalent historical relationship with the powers that are "out to *eliminate* the simpler societies in our world" (Views 201). There is a muted sense in the essay that this process of elimination may be irreversible and Tarn admits that when he

reaches this point in his thinking he “would like to do away with anthropology altogether” (*Views* 201).

It comes to this. Either the object of study is destroyed. Or it/they have been strong enough to survive as subjects in their own right. They are informants in their own right and not only as answerers of questions. *They speak first*. Ultimately, in no walk of life, in no place on this planet or beyond, is there an “Informant” left, in the old sense of the word. *De jure*, if not *de facto*, anthropology no longer exists. (*Views* 201)

Of course, it doesn't quite “come to this.” Histories of genocides can hardly be denied but the possibilities of action do not rest only with indigenous peoples whose own empowerment as imagined here appears all too un-mediated by the very globalised power of capitalism and colonialism that fuels a ‘vanishing race’ historical narrative. The issues of power in the anthropologist-informant, questioner-answerer relationship are more realistically invoked. The same issues of power and the same relationship are examined by several of the essays in *Writing Culture* where various kinds of dialogic and polyvocal possibilities are theorised for a future ethnography where anthropologist and informant will be able to speak as equals. Some of the contributors to the ‘writing culture’ debates have also turned to personalised narratives as another alternative to positivism. Tarn also offers a model of polyvocality and individual voice as an alternative to interrogation but his is one which moves in a direction completely opposite to the one hoped for for a postmodern ethnography. He imagines the possibility of the *individual* poetic voice speaking “out of a stance from which no one asks or answers questions” towards a multiple voice rather than personalised address (*Views* 201). In the description that follows the terms of the Buddhist transcendence of reciprocity quoted earlier are re-worked so that the poetic self emerges as a poet-initiate moving towards self-reliance, “disinformed of both information and disinformation” (*Views* 201) and then beyond to a *choral* voice in which self and other meet:

Perhaps it is at this *very* point that the other will be met and that the poet will come into the possession of his/her own society. The original, unimpeded, and uninterrupted voice...is many, not one, for the more itself it is, the deeper it reaches into its own inner nature, the more—beautiful paradox—does it come upon the truth of all being and the more does it also become the not-itself. It is not by going to others and discovering other selves that the voice is reached; it is by going to one's own deepest self and discovering how un-self-ish it can be. To become an informant, in the final sense, is to let a voice speak which is not the property of any one person or which is only such in the liberality of allowing all voice to speak within it. To be an anthropologist in the final sense is no longer a bringing of many voices, the surface of other voices, to the collective singing place and exhibiting these voices in an

ordered and governed fashion. It is a letting be of voice, in the confidence that the deeper it can go and the more free it is to express itself, the more *collective* it will be heard to be. I am not now talking about the me-me-me generation but about the most profound direction of the poet's life and craft. (*Views* 202)

Tarn is quick to follow this up with the recognition that "it is a far cry from where we are to such a chorus" (*Views* 203). But he is also right to point out that such a utopian vision marks out the outer limit or ultimate horizon for a writing attempting to bring together anthropology and literature because "the genre so long looked for which would assure a complete union of the poetic and the anthropological enterprises (should such be desirable) lies *not* in the keeping of the anthropologist who cannot, for all his/her efforts, get beyond *belles lettres*, but with the poet who, in theory, still can. This is the question of a language which, without turning away from scientific veracity, abdicates not one jot of its literary potential. Undoubtedly utopian, the search is at home in poetry, incurably utopian, and probably nowhere else" (*Views* 256). The notion that the singularity of voice may be the necessary condition for the emergence of a collective is radically different as a response to the contemporary dilemmas of anthropology than the turn to the dialogic in postmodern anthropology. This is so at least in relation to those cases where a theatrical display of multiple voices ruffles the surface of the postmodern ethnography without extending to deeper re-assessments of the nature of writing, authority and scientific epistemology. At the same time, in order to adequately assess the nature of Tarn's response to the contemporary condition of anthropology, the deeply Romantic nature of his theorisation of voice would have to be critically interrogated from the perspectives of contemporary social science and poetry alike. Such a critical examination must await another occasion.

The notions of individual and choral voice are systematised by Tarn into a tripartite model which mirrors the tripartite model of reciprocity and non-reciprocity in his theorisation of initiation. Tarn transforms the three stage process of initiation into "a model of poetic *making* with three operative levels: 1) the *Vocal*, being that of the single poetic voice as self or ego in competition and sometimes conflict with all others in a Babel of voices; 2) the *Silence*, most often thought of consensually as 'underlying' the *Vocal*, from which the single poetic voice appears to arise; and 3) again 'below' that, the *Choral*—being a co-operative, *non*-competitive 'my-voice-in-all-and-all-in-my-voice' level representing the ideal peace of non-self with all of creation which is situated diametrically opposed to the *Vocal*."²⁵ If in Tarn's "model of poetic *making*" the *Choral* is a necessary utopia, the *Vocal* is also unreal. Tarn takes "the *VOCAL* and the *CHORAL* as two 'mythical' or 'illusory' poles of a continuum giving depth to the roles of 'self'/'non-self' in poetic production, the only 'real' level being that of *SILENCE* out of which and into which such production periodically falls back" (*Views* 345). In so far as the *Choral* is utopian it is tied to expectation because "utopia is the exasperation of human expectation to its ultimate limits" (*Voice* 44). Following on from his studies in Buddhism and Jewish mysticism, Tarn links expectation to "*desire* as the motor of all unenlightened human existence," noting that "what we fail to see is that the vast

and inexhaustible circularity of desire mocks and renders expectation absurd.” (Voice 44) If the Choral is tied to expectation (and one could argue the same for the Vocal, albeit in different terms, though Tarn does not extend his argument in this direction), then the Silence is defined by “attention.” Tarn’s distinguishing of attention from expectation brings out the character of Silence as visionary perception:

By expectation, I imply assurance in a state of awaiting the coming about of a favourable or unfavourable circumstance arising out of a moment or “now.” Attention, absolutely and completely open to the moment as it arises (i.e. defines itself) and to the quiddity of whatever then is, has *no* such assurance and does not desire it. In fact, it cannot know any desire or expectation. In these senses, it is what the great Tibetan scholar Tilopa defined as “Immanence without expectation” and what Blake, realizing that the absurd “eternity” of orthodoxies arose out of the inexhaustible circularity of desire attempting to englobe all time and all space, called the true *Eternity* found only in attention to the moment. It is Blake’s Eternity that all true poets discover for themselves as the very condition of their existence as poets. (Voice 44)

The “synchronous conjugation” of past and future in the present is what makes the silence “the locus of true, or shall we say ‘appropriate’ action which gives birth to the new poem” (Voice 46). That this notion of attention is for him at the centre of a properly political poetry is brought out by Tarn in his contrasting of the narrow anger and scope of “propagandist” poetry with one in which “the whole man is speaking with his whole attention turned on to as much of the world as he can possibly see at any moment, and, out of that, addresses himself to a particular topic.”²⁶

* * * *

In turning to *Scandals in the House of Birds* the discussion now takes up two aspects of Tarn’s work which are a consistent concern throughout the career: the attempt to relativise the interrogative and interpretative authority of the ethnographer-anthropologist without jettisoning “veracity” altogether, and , perhaps more complexly, to move through the confluence of different cultural forms and traditions towards a process of mutual translation and displacement across cultural boundaries (the nexus of Western initiatic theory, Buddhist practice and Tarn’s own processes of making poetry may be one try at this). Challenges to the traditional authorial status of the ethnographer are now widespread in contemporary anthropology and its calls for polyvocality and “an eclecticism of narrational style”,²⁷ though theory tends to outstrip practice here. Both the theory and practice of cross-cultural translation are harder to define and pin down. Arnold Krupat refers to such critical translation as “ethnocriticism”. For him “the ethnocritical perspective manifests itself in the form of *multiculturalism*” which he takes “to refer to that particular organisation of cultural studies which engages otherness and difference in such a way as to provoke an

interrogation of and a challenge to what we ordinarily take as familiar and our own.”²⁸ “To practice ethnocriticism”, he argues, “will require real engagement with the epistemological and explanatory categories of Others, most particularly as these animate and impel Other narratives. The necessary sorts of movement, therefore, are not only those between dominant Western paradigms but also those between Western paradigms and the as-yet-to-be-named paradigms of the Rest” (113). Krupat acknowledges that in some “absolute sense” there cannot be a “nonviolent criticism of the discourses of Others, not even an ethnocriticism” but rightly refuses to take this as a total defeat of the critical enterprise: “The question is whether, short of this absolute horizon, it is worth pursuing certain projects of inquiry in the interest of a rather less violent knowledge” (6). Tarn’s sense that the poet’s pursuit of the confluence of a literary imagination and anthropology is a project worth undertaking, no matter how utopian, chimes with Krupat’s injunction to sustain critical practice this side of an “absolute horizon.” In this regard it is telling that Krupat singles out Rothenberg’s work as translator of Native American materials as “the nearest approximation” to an ethnocritical practice (196). The reason given for the choice is that Rothenberg “importantly *mediates* idealist and materialist concerns, paying at least some measure of attention to ‘syntactic, semantic, lexical, prosodic’ elements of the original, while feeling quite unconstrained to cut loose from those elements in search of the essentially... ‘poetic’ dimensions of the original” (195-6). Here certainly it would be possible to place Tarn’s simultaneous pursuit of veracity and the imaginative transmutation of fact as a closely kindred project.

One aspect of ethnopoetics which is important for an ethnocritical practice and for any considerations of contemporary cross-cultural dialogue is what David Murray identifies as “the breaking away from the closed nature of the literary text” through a focus on performance rather than the lyric voice. Murray’s commentary is worth quoting at some length because not only does it summarise the issues of textuality with great clarity, but also because its focus on fragmentation and on Tarn himself usefully introduces issues central to a reading of *Scandals*:

In questioning the closure of the literary text, [ethnopoetics] opens up formal possibilities of engagement with a huge mass of material formerly excluded from ‘literature’, and takes up the fundamental challenge offered to our society by potential contact with an unprecedented range of cultures. This new approach can then undermine the power of our own culture to use other cultures only to reaffirm our exclusionary sense of our superiority. Nathaniel Tarn, as both poet and anthropologist, has recognised the issues very clearly. In talking about the sense of discontinuity experienced in modern cultures, he argues that ‘much of our major poetry has tried to deal with this in a conservative sense, the sense of these fragments I have shored against my ruin. It is perhaps for this reason that it seems to be form that mimes the cultural *sparagmos* [flying apart], whereas the content continues to proclaim a desire for the whole.’ Rather than lament cultural discontinuity, then,

we can see it offering reopenings through which we can become aware of the diversity that had been closed to us, and by rooting ourselves firmly in our historical and cultural situation can begin to recognise the specificity of other cultural moments not as totalities but as fragments, since it is from fragments that we have learned since modernism aesthetically to operate.²⁹

Scandals is, at first sight, the work of the recording angel, but this angel has been for so long locked in a struggle with his twin, the angel of creation, that it is not easy to hold to such clear distinctions. Having abandoned a career in anthropology some thirty years earlier, Tarn now returns to the place where he first did fieldwork and to the subject of his earliest contributions to ethnography. We are again in Santiago on the shores of Lake Atitlán among the living Tzutujil Maya. The central player in the drama is again Maximón, the ancient figure of polymorphic identifications which include the Mam and Martín, pre-Columbian Mayan deities of immense power, Christ, Judas and a host of other indigenous and non-indigenous figures drawn from religious and secular histories.

The narrative begins in 1950 when a Catholic priest attempts to destroy the Maximón statue and steals two of the masks that cover the head of the statue. This assault sets off religious and political conflicts or “scandals” involving practitioners of folk religion, Catholics and Protestants that last into the present and eventually pull into their vortex the national government and the international community. Having mapped the origins and nature of the conflicts in the 1950s, the book narrates the successful efforts in the 1970s to return one of the masks to Santiago (largely through Tarn’s interventions) from an unnamed European museum (where Tarn was forced to have the mask placed when he had discovered it many years earlier). The return of the mask leads not to a period of renewal and re-integration but to the eruption of new local conflicts. The later sections of the book outline major changes in Atitlán between 1950 and 1990 and the book concludes with a chilling account of the violence of “the terror” visited upon the Maya by Guatemala’s government and its army since the 1970s. The last few pages are “a memorial to the dead”, a long list of those killed from the Atitlán region, including many who have appeared in the book.

As the narrative of the scandals moves from the 1950s towards the present, there is a counter-movement towards the past. In the first half of the book the chapters dealing with the various stages of the scandals are interspersed with chapters telling “stories of the early earth”. Here, several ‘informants’ recorded by Tarn take the reader back to a pre-Columbian world, indeed to the very origins of the Mayan world. When the order of the ancient world of the ancestors is disrupted by the spread of sexual promiscuity, the Mam or Maximón is created by the ancestors to restore order. Though Mam does this successfully, the growth of his own individual powers rapidly exceeds the original intentions of the ancestors and becomes in turn the source of new disorder. The ancestors are forced at this point to dismantle Maximón, allowing him to be re-assembled only when his services

are needed.

The inter-cutting of the narratives of the contemporary religious conflicts with the stories of the early earth creates a kind of mirror effect. The movement from chaos to order to a new disorder in the latter is matched by a similar movement from conflict through the religious renewal promised by the return of the mask to the new conflicts in the former. Where the narrative of the scandals ends in the horrors of “the terror”, the stories of the early earth culminate in a dark account of “the Black Monster Wars” in which the Mam puts an end to the continued sacrifice of human victims by defeating the Monster. But to speak of mirroring here is to invite a separation of the two sets of narratives as ‘history’ and ‘myth’ and to imply that Tarn may be guilty of a reductive mythicisation of the specificities of the historical record. In fact, the structuring and narrative strategies of *Scandals* suggest that Tarn refuses the separation of myth and history as a false dichotomy. As his own direct commentary on the iconography of Maximón makes clear, the ‘myths’ that surround this figure are a tangled record of a complex religious and cultural conflict dating back to at least the period of conquest; the stories are oral palimpsests, indigenous forms for sustaining and shaping memories of historical experience. From this perspective the unfolding of the contemporary religious scandals becomes not a mirror image of a ‘mythic’ past but part of a continuing and living narrative of the ancient Mam. The “memorial to the dead” which closes the book rightly concludes with the assertion that “Maximón, as Lord of the Dead and pacific mediator both, continues to have his work cut out for him in Santiago Atitlán” (*Scandals* 363).

This intermingling of the two narratives strands is not an instance of Tarn taking liberties with the materials but a narrative strategy which is a self-conscious adaptation of the use of anachronistic detail by the indigenous storytellers. In one of the narratives of the Black Monster Wars, the teller (one ‘Weep Wizard’ — all the tellers are identified by their nicknames), explains that after the death of the Monster many of his prisoners were found transformed into horses: “It turns out they have been lost for years; *they were disappeared*, they are all crying and weeping; they don’t know where they are” (*Scandals* 130, emphasis added). It is impossible to read of ‘the disappeared’ of the early earth here without thinking of the connotations of this phrase in contemporary Latin American political history. The choice of words here may reflect the intentions of Tarn as translator as much as those of the teller himself, but similar anachronisms occur throughout the accounts of the ancestors: references to “the government”, to “ladinos” and to Christian materials all appear in tales of the pre-conquest world (egs. *Scandals* 7, 12). Other ways in which Tarn brings his writing into dialogue with indigenous narrative writing and so opens up his work to indigenous ways of knowing the world can be seen in his use of narrative fragmentation and a style that steers away from ‘poetic’ language towards a ‘dry’ and more ‘matter of fact’ address.

The summaries of the scandals and of the stories of the early earth presented above are extremely simplified, linear versions of what in the book appear as jagged, heterogeneous, overlapping, digressive and sometimes mutually contradictory narratives told

through a collage of many voices and documentary sources. The narratives are derived from interviews recorded by Tarn in the 1950s and 1970s, with each segment dated and each speaker identified. Tarn himself is one among these voices, appearing throughout in the third person. He is in fact three voices because Tarn from the 1950s and Tarn from the 1970s are distinguished and to these two must be added the Tarn from the 1990s who is writing *Scandals*. The narrative structure of the book is further complicated by the emergence of other narrative and discursive strands as the book progresses. The first of these is a series of three chapters which are “Episodes from the Life of Nicolás Chiviliu Tacaxoy, Portrait of an Aj’kun [shaman]”. Chiviliu was teacher to both Tarn and Martín Prechtel, Tarn’s collaborator on the book, and his own account of his life introduces autobiography and life-history to the generic proliferations of the book. Two chapters focused on Prechtel himself in his role of *Primer Mayor* (the official responsible for the rituals of Holy Week), continue with aspects of life history but are primarily accounts of the complex rituals of Holy Week. The density of detail in the ritual accounts makes them almost ungraspable and borders on surrealist estrangement. Two chapters of anthropological theorisation in which Tarn himself is the main voice come up against this density and the intricacies of the histories of Maximón in their attempt to order and schematise the materials towards social scientific understanding. Finally, there are two chapters in which historical accounts of social and cultural change and of “the terror” are derived in large part from textual sources.

The reader of *Scandals* experiences then something akin to what Lisette Josephides calls “ethnographic excess” in a description of her own work among the Kewa people of Highland New Guinea: “I describe the Kewa, and allow them to describe themselves, in long and untidy narratives that bring together different kinds of materials: solicited self-accounts, my observations of the eliciting strategies in people’s daily interactions, their fights, disputes and so on. These excessive accounts break up a continuous narrative, making untenable any single or generalising picture of ‘Kewa culture’.”³⁰ *Scandals* matches Josephides’s strategies of excess but pushes things further by withholding a great deal of contextual and descriptive information in places where these might be expected. (This is what was meant by the reference to the sometimes ‘dry’ or ‘matter of fact’ style of *Scandals* above). There is nothing in *Scandals* resembling the kind of sustained geographical, social or cultural survey which an ethnographer or travel writer might use to locate his or her subject. There is no local colour description. There is little or no description of the physical appearance of the principal characters, of the way they talk or gesture in their performance of the stories of Maximón or the scandals. This distinguishes the presentations of *Scandals* from the work of a translator like Dennis Tedlock who is a pioneer in the textual representation of performance but aligns them to the modes of representation used *within* the tales of the Mayan narrators themselves (as these are set down by Tarn himself).³¹ There is no account of the reasons and motivations behind Tarn’s own ethnographic researches or of methodological issues. And there is certainly little in the way of a personalised or autobiographical narrative involving Tarn himself. The reader is denied, in other words, the security either of clear authorial guidance within unequivocal explanatory frameworks or of thick description working within generically recognisable narratives of social science or travel-

ogue. He or she is disoriented and is forced to play both ethnographer and detective, piecing together information as it emerges in fragments.

The first chapter of *Scandals* can serve as an illustration of some of these techniques. It opens with the following paragraph:

We are on Lake Atitlán in the Department of Sololá, Guatemala, Central America. It is one of the most beautiful lakes in the world, ringed with hills and three majestic volcanoes, home to several Tzutujil and Cakchikel Maya Indian villages. The Maya here speak two of the languages in the Quichean group. Many of the dialects within the languages differ noticeably. (1)³²

This provides a toehold but little more and before the bare bones of this description can be fleshed out Tarn rapidly shifts direction in the next paragraph, moving to a long quotation from his own work from the early 1950s which gives a clear and unadorned description of the physical appearance and location of the Maximón statue. The description offers no explanation of the nature of Maximón, of his religious associations or of his function in the religious culture of Santiago. Instead of such an explanation the reader is given another lengthy quotation, this time from the Latin American Edition of *Time Magazine* for April 2nd, 1951. The extract, from an article titled “Devilish Deity”, introduces the religious culture of Santiago and gives a brief account of the attack on the Maximón statue:

The raw-boned Tzutujil Indians of mountain-bound Santiago Atitlán (pop. 10, 000) have a religion of their own, a mixture of undigested bits of Roman Catholicism and queer survivals of paganism. Their favourite deity is a raffish, four foot idol named Maximón, who smokes cigars, wears four hats and a leer. Smoking is the least of Maximón’s vices. With gleeful perversity, the Indians assign to him an uninhibited libido and a rollicking disregard for the Ten Commandments. (2)

The extract then goes on to describe the displaying of the statue during Holy Week, the tensions between the Catholic priest, Padre Recinos, and Chiviliu and the followers of Maximón, the firing of three shots at the statue by Recinos, the return of Recinos six weeks later and his attack on the statue. When later Recinos returns offering to say Good Friday Mass, he is met with cold silence: “Turning to go, the padre shook his fist at the leering Maximón. ‘That,’ he cried, ‘is the work of the devil.’ ‘Padre,’ said brujo Nicolás, ‘we are sons of the devil!’” (3). The whole founding moment of the scandals which Tarn will trace with great care and sensitivity are treated by *Time* as a pathetic comedy of “drunken dances, a caricature of a Passion Play” and slapstick farce.

The ethnocentrism of the value judgements and pop-anthropology in the extract is extreme and makes the commentary on Maximón and on the conflict unreliable. On the

other hand, such as it is this is the only ethnographic and documentary information provided on these matters so far. Tarn makes no comment on the account provided by *Time*. But as the book unfolds it becomes clear that the extract from *Time* presents a reduced image in negative of the main concerns of the whole book. What appears in *Time* as a sad mix of “undigested bits of Roman Catholicism and queer survivals of paganism” will slowly emerge as a profound and complex cultural syncretism mediating religious and political conflicts over many centuries. The leering and lascivious Maximón will come forth as a figure at the centre of rituals of fertility and cyclical renewal in which the Christian concept of sin is out of place. What is presented as petty squabbling will become the entrance to a long and intricate religious and historical drama. Comedy and violence, used as dismissive strategies by *Time*, will be seen to be at the core of the folk mythology of the Maya and of the strange epic *Scandals* will reveal itself to be. And Nicolás Chiviliu, treated here as a “brujo (witch doctor)” will be seen to be an *aj’kun* or shaman of great authority.

Tarn in fact concludes the chapter with an account of Chiviliu’s response to the *Time* article after Tarn had read it to him in the early 1950s:

“Well, I never said the we were sons of the devil! Can you imagine me saying *that*? But he did have a pistol, that’s true. Only thing is: the *cofrades* [religious officials] rushed him before he could fire. One bullet fell on the ground and we now have it at the bottom of Mam’s clothes box!” Nicolás does not use the name “Maximón.” He would accept “the Mam” or “Don Pedro” or “the Old Guy.” But not “Maximón.” (3)

Chiviliu begins to set the record straight and the inclusion of the bullet in the statue’s clothes box begins to suggest something of Maximón’s powers of cultural incorporation and survival. But Nicolás’s refusal to use the name ‘Maximón’ immediately moves the reader towards other unexplained issues: Why is Nicolás so adamant about not using ‘Maximón’ and why does Tarn continue to use it? What is at stake in the choice of names? These questions are left unanswered as the next chapter shifts to the telling of stories about the coming of chaos to the world of the Power Men and Power Women “in the very old days” (4).

Tarn’s uses of discontinuity and collage are clearly indebted to modernist literary techniques but they also draw upon the structures and techniques of Mayan stories and storytelling. In Chapter 2 the spread of adultery and the beginnings of chaos in the ancient world are told by five different narrators, each with a slightly different version of the same events. In one version there are six Power People, in another twelve and in another twenty-four. In one version there are many Power Men and only one woman and in another there are twelve men and twelve women. The narrators often acknowledge that there are different versions or that they themselves are not sure of the details. The language lacks metaphoric richness and the presentation is usually as direct and unadorned as it is in Tarn’s own commentaries. And the narratives can change direction as abruptly as Tarn does in the

first chapter. In the midst of the narrative of adultery there can be sudden digressions about the uses of “lime talc or white rock” and about the weapons of the ancients (7).

This is not to suggest that the writing or the telling of the stories is boring or flat. Their beauty lies precisely in their reliance on narrative parataxis, the clarity and minimalism of their telling, their use of the language of the everyday for what are sacred dramas, and their rapid mood shifts. Here is “Red Banana” telling the story of the ancient “merchants” chopping down the soft coral tree within which the Maximón is contained:

So the merchants go home and they get something to eat. ‘He doesn’t look so good, he doesn’t cut much of a figure,’ they decide, ‘but he’s our boy.’ They all get their files the next day, to sharpen their machetes. But the Ultimo [the youngest] has had a dream. ‘This tree doesn’t want sharp machetes: rub them on rocks to make them dull,’ he tells them. It’s true: if you put a sharp machete into coral wood, it will stick just like cork. So First Merchant comes up to the tree and asks if he is ready for his pain. The tree says he is. ‘Remember everything we told you yesterday because we are your makers and we will take you apart if you disobey us,’ First Merchant says.

So they give him a first stroke on his feet, plaaaam. With each chop, they give him an order. They get to his head and the head is going up and down, nodding, like this. Plaam. ‘You feel that?’ they ask. At every stroke they hear the tree going ‘A! E! O! Oh! Ay! Ou! A! E!’ while they are making and shaping him. When they have finally carved him out, he is about this big. ‘Well, can you stand up now?’ they ask. ‘He looks pretty good this man made of pain,’ they say to themselves in congratulation. (51)

The representation here of the emerging Maximón as both a cartoon-like character suffering cartoon pain and simultaneously (and beautifully) a “man made of pain” illustrates the shifts and range of moods in these tales and also the chimerical and contradictory nature of Maximón himself.

Tarn’s own narrations of the day to day manifestations of the religious and social conflicts surrounding the Maximón statue often share much of the style and tone of the Mayan narratives.³³ The context for the following extract is the state of tension and paranoia following the theft of the masks. Chiviliu, Tarn and Salvador Popsoy (“*Sacristán* and *escribano* of *cofradía* Santa Cruz” [367]) go drinking. Suddenly, Popsoy denounces Tarn as a filthy foreigner and a spy.

Tarn stomps off in a calculated rhetorical gesture and, as he turns around, finds an energetic scuffle going on between Salvador and Nicolás for the possession of what turns out to be a common or garden

Missal. Nicolás had mentioned this volume before as containing prayers to all the saints, including the Mam, and had told Tarn that he might want it back. Popsoy won't let go, but kicks, punches and shout in and out of the bar while *cofrades* try to help the Chiv: it is the nearest thing to a fight that Tarn has ever witnessed in these parts.

Finally, Popsoy, gives the book a resounding kiss, then slams it down furiously onto a window ledge. Exit Nicolás wild-eyed and dishevelled from the bar, half-disbelieving that he has the book back.

....

On and off during the day the memory of his bout came back to [Nicolás] and he wove it into his *costumbre* [religious ritual], weeping a ritual dirge: 'Ay, Don Pedro, Lord San Simon...(sob)...it hurts...(sob)...it hurts bitterly,' enumerating Popsoy's evil dispositions in his prayers and altogether managing to sound most lamentable to any saint within earshot. All of this interspersed, as usual, with fits of good humour in which he was as boisterous and amusing as ever. (42-3)

The comparison between the Mayan narratives and Tarn's is meant to suggest a common ground but this should not obscure the fact that there is significant variation of tone, style and intention in the discourses of both the indigenous speakers and the anthropologist. Tarn in particular moves from a mix of storytelling and documentary narrative to historical survey and, most importantly, anthropological interpretation and theorisation in the two chapters near the close of the book. These chapters appear at first to be attempts to synthesise a coherent schematisation of the fragmentary and heterogeneous material relating to Maximón but the two chapters offer two quite different, and to some extent contradictory, interpretations of the same materials. The first of the theoretical chapters, "Understanding the Mam and the Martín in the Nineteen-Fifties", is based largely on the conclusions of Tarn's doctoral work; the second, "Understanding the Mam and the Martín in 1979" revises the conclusions drawn in the 1950s.

Writing up the first field work in 1952-53, it made sense to divide people into the "Men of Martín," the "Men of Jesucristo," and the "Men of Maximón"—with Maximón as an impure, ambivalent figure, less "native" than Martín, less "Catholic" than Jesucristo. Maximón might then be seen as a vortex of conflict conceivably extending back in time through Atiteco history and representing everything which, in Maya-Christian syncretism, had never properly functioned, fused or formed itself into a unified whole.

Later understandings, in 1979 and beyond, were to dispel this tidy scheme in most of its details... (67)

The 1979 interpretations are very close to Tarn and Prechtel's 1981 commentary on the role of the transformer in the movement between dualism and process and in initiatic struc-

tures in *Popol Vuh* (discussed above). The Maximón now appears in a fluid and processual relationship with the Martín and Jesucristo, working as transformer within the conflicting pulls of linear and cyclical patterns in the Atiteco calendrical year, and now associated with various female and bisexual elements.

The 1979 interpretation clearly supersedes the 1950s one so why include the earlier one? The juxtaposition of the two can certainly be taken to indicate a progressive growth in the sophistication and complexity of understanding, but it also makes clear that such theorisations cannot be in any absolute sense definitive. Tarn stands back from any claims of unequivocal interpretative authority. There is no revisionary theorisation from the 1990s; there is only *Scandals* itself in which the theorisations themselves appear in relativised dialogue with other descriptions of the same reality. This is not say that Tarn is proposing the defeat of the critical endeavour by the claim that there are 'only stories.' It is more accurate to say that his strategies of juxtaposition are a caution against the potential violence of critical translation noted by Krupat and a move towards ethnocritical practice.

If in the 1990s, in place of a new, even more sophisticated interpretation all we have is the marvellous architecture of *Scandals*, what are we to make of this exercise in parataxis? From one perspective the whole thing adds up to "a sort of experimental ethnography". From another perspective one could argue that *Scandals* is an epic for our time. In a parenthesis near the start of the chapter in which we first encounter the "stories of the early earth", Tarn says he is "trying to put together a great sequence of stories by entering it at one point or another" (4). This suggests a lost original, an ancient folk epic of sorts of which only fragments survive in the present. Paul Radin, working with the Trickster tales of the Winebago, took a similar set of assumed 'fragments' and attempted to force them into a coherent, chronological sequence. Robert Graves tried to tie together Greek myths from different times and sources into single narratives. Tarn does not make this kind of mistake. He does not try to create a 'Homeric' synthesis out of the multiple narratives of local conflicts and squabbles. He accepts collage as an appropriate form for what is in effect an epic for the age of economic and cultural globalisation. From the obscure religious conflicts in a small village in Guatemala in the 1950s *Scandals* takes us back to the very beginnings of the world and forwards to our own time in which "the Indian village is being pulled into the expanding economy of Guatemala and beyond that the late-Capitalist economy, while the 'huge ecological and structural problems' of Santiago are being ignored by those who do the pulling." (319). As Tarn himself notes in the fifteenth section of his *The Beautiful Contradictions*:

The destruction of history by not setting down the history you know
by refusing to be a witness to your times is a crime against the earth

If *Scandals* is indeed "a last throw" by the angel of the record, it is a record made by an imagination in a state of attention towards the meanings of memory, survival and transformation in a shrinking world.

Notes

¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Anthropology: Its Achievements and Its Future", *Current Anthropology* 7, No. 2 (1966), p.126, used as epigraph in Dell Hymes, "The Use of Anthropology: Critical, Political, Personal" in Hymes, ed., *Reinventing Anthropology* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), p.3.

² Nathaniel Tarn, "Michel Leiris, Timor Mortis, and the Peopled Self: A Reading of *L'Afrique Fantôme* as Auto-Anthropology" (1991) in Tarn, *Views from the Weaving Mountain: Selected Essays in Poetics and Anthropology* (Albuquerque: An American Poetry Book/University of New Mexico Press, 1991), p.256. Hereafter cited as *Views*.

³ James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). The 'writing culture' debates now stretch across a large body of texts and I make no claims to total knowledge but in addition to *Writing Culture* the following provide some key points of reference: George E. Marcus and Dick Cushman, "Ethnographies as Texts," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982), 25-69; Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Marc Manganaro, ed., *Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Ivan Brady, ed., *Anthropological Poetics* (Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991); Paul Benson, ed., *Anthropology and Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Allison James, Jenny Hockey and Andrew Dawson, eds., *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁴ James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths", in Clifford and Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture*, p.25-6.

⁵ In "The Pure Product Go Crazy", the introduction to his *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), Clifford offers an anthropological or cultural reading of Williams's poem "To Elsie" but the nature of the commentary there does not affect the points made here.

⁶ Jed Rasula and Mike Irwin, "An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn," *Boundary 2*, 4, No.1 (1975), 9.

⁷ I am thinking here of Pound's readings in the work of Leo Frobenius and Chinese culture, Eliot's reading of Frazer and other contemporary anthropologists, the use of Native American and comparative mythological materials in Olson, Snyder and Dorn and Duncan's use of Australian indigenous cultures in the early sections of *The H.D. Book*. Eliot and Snyder both had some academic training in anthropology. In Muriel Rukeyser's case I am thinking in particular of her study of Franz Boas left unfinished at the time of her death. Jay Wright, an African-American poet whose work is not as widely known as it should be, has made accomplished use of anthropological researches into African cultures.

⁸ Nathaniel Tarn with Martin Prechtel, *Scandals in the House of Birds: Shamans and Priests on Lake Atitlán* (New York: Marsilio, 1997). As Tarn points out in his acknowledgements, all the writing has been done by Tarn himself. Prechtel, who was born and raised in New Mexico but who moved to Guatemala in the 1970s and went on to rise high in the indigenous religious hierarchy, is acknowledged as co-author in recognition of a long working collaboration and friendship (ix). (Hereafter cited as *Scandals* in the text).

⁹ Nathaniel Tarn, "A Letter to Michael Heller", *Talisman* No. 11 (1993), 87. The letter is dated 1989.

¹⁰ Shamoan Zamir, "On Anthropology and Poetry: An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn," *Boxkite* No. 2 (1998), 177.

¹¹ All biographical information presented in this introduction is drawn from several sources: a long recorded dialogue with Tarn, a large part of which has been published as Zamir, "On Poetry and Anthropology: An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn"; several essays in *Views*; the Chronology in Lee Bartlett, *Nathaniel Tarn: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1987), pp.1-4; and

Tarn's own autobiographical essay in *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, Vol. 26, pp.271-89. This section and the next of the present essay draw upon, revise and expand the introduction to Zamir, "On Anthropology and Poetry, An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn," pp.152-60.

¹² See Tarn, "The Choral Voice: A Diptych re Anthropology and Poetry" (1986) and "Reflections on the Work of Claude Lévi-Strauss" (1967), both in *Views*, pp.195-97, 161-68; and E. Michael Mendelson, "The Uninvited Guest : Ancilla to Lévi-Strauss on Totemism and Primitive Thought," in Edmund Leach, ed., *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967), pp.119-39. [N.B.: most of Tarn's work as anthropologist has been published under the heteronym of E. Michael Mendelson].

¹³ See Tarn, "André Breton, Anthropology, and the Limits of Culture" (1967), in *Views*, pp.207-12. For more on Tarn's involvement with the Surrealists, see Zamir, "On Anthropology and Poetry: An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn", pp.164-5.

¹⁴ See Tarn, "Michel Leiris, Timor Mortis, and the Peopled Self", in *Views*, pp.243-56; "L'Ethno-poétique chez Artaud, ou: Artaud, est-il en fait allé chez les Tarahumaras?", in Simon Harel, ed., *Antonin Artaud: Figures et Portraits Vertigineux* (Montreal: XYZ Press, 1995), pp.251-60; and Victor Segalen, *Stelae*, trans. Nathaniel Tarn (Santa Barbara, CA: Unicorn, 1969).

¹⁵ For Tarn's own comments on the philosophical aspects of this social scientific tradition, see E. Michael Mendelson, "Some Present Trends of Social Anthropology in France," *The British Journal of Sociology*, 9:3 (1958), pp.251-70.

¹⁶ Tarn's fieldwork at Santiago Atitlán resulted in a six-hundred page text, *Religion and World-View in a Guatemalan Village* (1957). This was never published but was preserved as Microfilm No. 52 of the Microfilm Collection of Manuscripts on Middle American Cultural Anthropology at the University of Chicago Libraries. The Ph.D. was a drastically shortened version of this text and was later revised and published in Spanish (Mendelson, *Los Escandalos de Maximón: Un estudio sobre la religión y la visión del mundo en Santiago Atitlán* [Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1965]). See also Tarn, "The King, the Traitor and the Cross: An Interpretation of a Highland Maya Religious Conflict" (1958), in *Views*, pp.191-101; and Mendelson, "A Guatemalan Sacred Bundle," *Man* 57 (1958), pp. 121-26, and "Maximón: An Iconographical Introduction," *Man* 59 (1959), pp.56-60. For comments on Redfield, see Tarn, "The Literate and the Literary: The Anthropological Discourse of Robert Redfield" (1981), in *Views*, pp.169-94; and Mendelson, "World View," in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David Sills, (New York: Macmillan & Free Press, 1968), vol. 16, pp.567-79, and the introduction to *Los Escandalos*.

¹⁷ For the work on Burma and Buddhism, see Tarn, "The Sage of Weaving Mountain" and "Buddhism and the Burmese Establishment" in *Views*, pp.102-115, 116-131; and Mendelson, "Buddhism and Politics in Burma," *New Society* No. 38 (20 June, 1963), pp.8-10, "A Messianic Buddhist Association in Upper Burma," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24 (1961), pp.560-80, "Religion and Authority in Modern Burma," *The World Today* 16:3 (1960), pp.110-18, "The Uses of Religious Scepticism in Modern Burma," *Diogenes* 41 (1963), pp.94-116, *Sangha and State in Burma: A Study of Monastic Sectarianism and Leadership*, ed. John P. Ferguson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), and, with John Ferguson, "Masters of the Buddhist Occult: The Burmese Weikzas", *Contributions to Asian Studies* 16 (1981), pp.62-88.

¹⁸ For more on Tarn's work for Cape Editions and Cape Goliard, see Shamooin Zamir, "Bringing the World to Little England. Cape Editions, Cape Goliard and Poetry in the Sixties. An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn. With an Afterword by Tom Raworth," in E.S. Shaffer, ed., *Comparative Criticism Vol. 19: Literary Devolution: Writing in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 263-286, and Bartlett, *Nathaniel Tarn*, pp.103-105.

¹⁹ See Rasula and Irwin, "An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn", p.9.

²⁰ Tarn in Rasula and Irwin, "An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn", p.6.

²¹ Eric Mottram, "The British Poetry Revival, 1960-75", in Robert Hampson and Peter Barry, eds., *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.36.

²² Other important books include: *Where Babylon Ends* (London: Cape Goliard, 1968), *The*

Persephones (Santa Barbara, CA: Christopher's Books, 1974), and *The Desert Mothers* (Grenada, Mississippi: Salt-Works Press, 1984).

²³ Nathaniel Tarn and Martin Prechtel, "Metaphors of Relative Elevation, Position and Ranking in *Popol Vuh*", *Estudios de Cultura Maya* XIII (1981), 107.

²⁴ Tarn and Prechtel, "Metaphors of Relative Elevation", pp.109-10.

²⁵ Nathaniel Tarn, "Voice Politic/Body Politic," *Talus* 10 (1997), 43-47. All further quotations from this text are simply identified as 'Voice'.

²⁶ Rasula and Irwin, "An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn", 21-22.

²⁷ Nigel Rappaport, "Edifying Anthropology: Culture as Conversation; Representation as Conversation", in James et al. eds., *After Writing Culture*, p.181. Compare also James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority" (in Clifford and Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture*) on "the staging and valuing of multiple allegorical registers, or 'voices'" (p.103).

²⁸ Arnold Krupat, *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p.3. All further references are given in the text.

²⁹ David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p.94. The Tarn quote is from Tarn, "The Heraldic Vision," p.31.

³⁰ Lisette Josephides, "Representing the Anthropologist's Predicament", in James et al. eds., *After Writing Culture*, pp. 24-5.

³¹ I am not qualified to assess the representative nature of Tarn's presentations of Mayan narration. For the purposes of the discussion here I am simply taking on trust the faithfulness or justness of his translations.

³² For an exoticist, cliché-ridden contrast to this, compare the opening of *Secrets of the Talking Jaguar: Unmasking the Mysterious World of the Living Maya* (New York: Joseph P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1998), Martin Prechtel's own account of his apprenticeship under Nicolás Chiviliu and his life among the Tzutujil Maya. Prechtel's book is, to say the least, disappointing. (See note 8 above on Prechtel's collaboration with Tarn on *Scandals*). There is, unfortunately, no time to discuss it here though a comparison with Tarn's text would be useful. Another text which may provide a productive point of comparison is Dennis Tedlock's very accomplished *Breath on the Mirror: Mythic Voices and Visions of the Living Maya* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

³³ On some level of course it could be said that the Mayan narratives share the style and tone of Tarn's narratives since Tarn is in fact the translator of the former. But here too, allowing for stylistic variations among translators, I am assuming that what Tarn presents in everyday language and as comedy is also given in the original in more or less equivalent form.

Scandals in the House of Birds: Shamans and Priests on Lake Atitlán

Marsilio Publishers, 1998

A review by Christopher Funkhouser

Tarn's excellent project here—related to earlier poetic interpretations of Mayan culture in *The Beautiful Contradictions*, *Atitlán/Alaska*, and other texts—ingeniously combines his own attentive and engaged journalistic writing with transcriptions of lore and reports on incidents described to him between 1953 and 1979 by Guatemalan friends and villagers. Instead of foregrounding in detail the people or region of Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala, however, *Scandals in the House of Birds* immediately focuses on Maximón (known colloquially as “the Mam”), the major religious icon of this small Highland lakeside village surrounded by volcanoes. Tarn unfolds, from these multiple viewpoints, Maximón's powerful presence as a controversial and unusual deity—a complex mixture of Maya and Catholic ritual and beliefs—who happens to enjoy smoking, women, and a disregard for the Ten Commandments. The essential elements of the lively and tragic close-to-the-earth society immediately surrounding this idol are then gradually illustrated throughout the book.

Characterized as, “the spirit of poison and all intoxicating things, the spirit of everything that makes people crazy”, Maximón hypnotizes people by blowing tobacco smoke in faces. His order, from creation, is tall. He's told: “You've got to make the impossible possible and the possible impossible. You have no mind of your own, you're a *machine*. Remember that!” Ultimately, Maximón transcends the material world's chaos: “‘My head is nothing,’ says the Mam, ‘and my body is nothing because I'm always present here and most sacred’”. A previous superficial attempt at explaining Maximón's powers to a wider public is shown. Tarn includes an article from a 1951 Latin American Edition of *Time Magazine*, which, according to his own research, completely misquotes a villager as saying, “We are sons of the devil” (i.e. the Mam). An insider's view of the extensive politicization of the caring for and influence of this deity (i.e. anti-traditional culture propaganda for conservatives; quintessential superhero for many locals), becomes, then, the axis around which *Scandals in the House of Birds* revolves. Guatemala's violent history—colonization and modernization via Spanish *conquistadores*, the Roman Catholic Church, death squads, &c.—which has attacked the powers of ancient prophets and lessened the sacredness of life in the village is, unavoidably, present. At times, its profile is subtle, though not always. One of the final sections, “Records of the Dead”, contains names of several of the author's close associates. Yet rather than emphasizing overt forms oppression, Tarn instead chooses to expose the intense spiritual and social fibre-fire which manages to sustain itself through such tur-

moil. He writes that Maximón might be seen as “a vortex of conflict conceivably extending back in time through Atetico history and representing everything which, in Maya-Christian syncretism, had never properly functioned, fused or formed itself into a unified whole.” A disturbing trajectory, unfortunately, emerges within this possibility: in 1952-53, Tarn observes: “There are many factors in everyday life in Atitlán which tend to impede conflict”; this is not at all the case by the 1970s. When Martin Prechtel (a gringo who married a villager) gets named Primer Mayor of Santiago and masterminds the elaborate festivities for Holy Week in 1979, a new beginning is acknowledged by all. Sadly, this hopeful development is dashed by strife on many fronts.

An interesting fact that empowers Tarn’s hydra-narrative is that after 150 A.D. the Highland Maya did not use their system of hieroglyphic writing. History, customs, and rituals were all passed along via action and word-of-mouth. Presented with such, we are usefully reminded of the somewhat high level of subjectivity regarding these matters in oral cultures. A “death of the world” incident transpires the 1950’s, where the Mam is stolen and its mask ends up in a European museum. Tarn, who is in part responsible for its return, attempts to chronicle exactly what happened with regards to the removal of the Mam from Atitlán. He encounters differing stories, including accounts by the same person whose own recounting of the event changes over decades. Significantly, *Scandals in the House of Birds* actively reveals, or unveils, the process of making and sustaining history and myth. While many of the problems of a society of traders and of a society under stress emerges in the telling, the stories themselves are wonderfully imaginative; crazy, playful exaggeration is present in most descriptions. The fact that the conspiracies—from all sides—have moved now into print is invaluable to the process of preserving ancient or contemporary ideologies and customs.

Technically, *Scandals in the House of Birds* is perhaps a work of non-fiction. Readers with a fair amount of patience and a healthy streak of negative capability may, however, also enjoy this as a familial or tribal tale of magical realism along the lines of Latin American authors such as Amado, Garcia Marquez, or Allende. Trees are given voices, are alive, and given place of esteem to believers in the Mam. Those who wish to read the book more literally, as a form wild anthropology, will be pleased that there is an extensive glossary of principal terms and characters. While outlining an intricate societal infrastructure, Tarn does describe in great detail the planning and enactment of Mayan ceremonies. A particularly potent section depicts a ritualized work brigade: not only are the work and workers mythologized, they are connect themselves to the efforts of those who have gone before, expressing awe gratitude for every one involved. A clear understanding of what is happening with regards to Mayan customs and traits in this century is derived for both the author and reader over the course of this superb title.

Rus: An Interview with Nathaniel Tarn

Peter O'Leary

The following interview was conducted via email over the course of June, 1999—interrupted by an excursion away from the computer I took for two weeks in the middle of the month. Questions & responses were written in their conception. For the sake of convenience in compiling Tarn's responses, my questions were numbered. I asked my questions in pairs. To keep things clear in the record of this interview, my questions are in italics. Tarn is a meticulous & systematic—dare I say structural?—respondant. I have not altered his orthography & organization in editing this interview; when prudent, I have inserted bibliographic information, etc. in brackets.

1) *Why, at this point, Russia?*

It is not exactly "at this point." Some facts. There have been 4 trips. i) 1968, as member of the Société Européenne de Culture; ii) 1995 as a guest of the Academy of Sciences and with an Aviation History group; iii) 1998 winter: mainly in St. Petersburg (St.P.) with three days in Moscow (M), mainly dealing with my work and translation of other American poets; iv) 1998 summer: two months plus trip all over Russia and Ukraine, the first for my wife Janet Rodney, (mainly looking at old architecture and icons) with two days in Warsaw and twelve in Lithuania. While much of interest happened on trip i, deep in the Soviet Era—like long talks with Efim Etkind re the death of Brecht and much else; night visits to the Samizdat writers including the legendary legless theater director Boris Ponzovsky; asking to see Brodsky and being told he was not on the phone—there was no special effect beyond one poem "Letter from Leningrad" published in "The House of Leaves" (now part 1 of the "St.P. Poems" ["The St. Petersburg Poems"].) It was trip ii which provoked a kind of *coup de foudre*, a sudden opening, an abrupt realization that Russia was intimately connected to my inner world in ways I had no inkling of to that date.

First, there is the matter of "the old country." My people (Jewish) came out of East Europe: my mother's folk from Rumania and some from Russia (one Parisian cousin from Odessa spoke Russian during my young student days there); my father's from Lithuania—which at one time was Russian like so much of East Europe. I have no idea how many relatives might at one time or another have lived in Russia proper or visited, say, St.P. If I let New Age fantasy have its say (which I usually don't!), I can see myself as a reincarnation of something Russian as much as anything else. Loving Russian culture as I do, it is very painful for me to contemplate how much Anti-Semitism there has always been and still is in that country.

Second. But there is something else. I appear always to have needed an “other place” or “elsewhere” to balance out my attachment to this one place, this “here.” Perhaps it is part of the dream world characteristic of many poets. Since trip ii, Russia has been that “elsewhere.” Just as, in *The Beautiful Contradictions*, I had the matter of “the tribes” coming into the United States from the East *and* from the West (over the Behring Straits) and relished the Oriental component coming over into these lands so, in the Russia Dream, I am fascinated by the fact that there was once a Russian America, that Russia is the one European country which covers not only Europe and Asia but also, at one time, covered America. Between trip i and trip ii came three seasons in Alaska where we saw plentiful survivals of my Russia’s presence and where so many people are still Russian Orthodox—and there are remnants too in California and Hawaii. This reminds me that I’ve been meaning to study why the Russians gave Alaska up. I think I know why we acquired it!

2) *What is the five year plan?*

This, of course, is a joking allusion to the famous Five Year Plans of Stalin’s Russia during which Soviet Russia was to become the world model for every kind of progress.

I don’t tend to do things by halves, as is manifested by the sudden pregnancies of my library whenever I get into a new subject. Part of the abrupt realization during trip ii was the notion that, apart from readings in Russian literature at most points in my life, I knew virtually nothing about East Europe apart from, say, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and the like.

I therefore decided that, for five years, I would read nothing but Russian materials and this in every conceivable discipline: literature; prehistory, history both ancient and modern, art history; sociology; politics: you name it, you’ve got it. I am now in the fourth year of this—virtually unable to touch anything else—and am beginning to call it my Twenty-Five Year Plan. Further, I tried for a year and a half to teach myself Russian with the Penguin “Teach Yourself” book and a dictionary. I got as far as translating technical documents but have been stymied by an aging memory which will not accumulate the amount of vocabulary necessary for take off into speaking. I have also rejoined Acanaemia in the shape of the American Association of Slavic Studies, read their publications, attend their conferences, etc.

During the trips, much time was spent in studying the collections of major museums, churches and monasteries in all the cities visited: M, St.P, Tula, Vladimir, Suzdal, Novgorod, Staraya Rusa, Pskov, Kiev, Odessa, Lvov, Warsaw, Vilnius, Trakai and Kaunas. Whenever possible, there were also visits to “house museums” (a Russian Passion) including those of Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Blok, Mayakovsky, Tsvetaeva, Bulgakov et al—very much more remains to be seen of this kind. There was also some research into family history, working with the Lithuania State Archives and visiting the town (on the very edge of the Russian

enclave of Kaliningrad, ex German Koenigsberg) my grandfather is supposed to have moved from.

There are many other, smaller, aspects of all this. Discovering the immense role Russia played in winning World War 2, I have done and continue to do a great deal of work on this period both in reading and in visits to a large number of WW2 museums and sites. During trip ii, I had access to a large number of Russian aviation and space centers, air shows, airports, colleges, training establishments, design bureaus, (MIG especially), etc. There were also flights during which a number of colleagues were killed.

In the “heraldic” department (see the essay “The Heraldic Vision” in “Views”), I have pursued an interest in the enormous world of Russian badges, of all periods but mainly Imperial; one in Russian engraved ephemera; one in old Russian postcards; one in Russian philately, again mainly Imperial; one in Russian toy soldiers (they are making excellent ones at this time). And, of course, an endless procession of books—art books especially are wonderfully produced in that country now.

Then there was the poetry: Part 2 of the “St.P. Poems” written during trip ii and Part 3 during trip iii. Both the latter are published in the Providence R.I. magazine *Alea* edited by my friend and occasional travel companion the Slavist Tom Epstein with Part 3 also appearing in the U.K. *Shearsman* no.37 (editor Tony Frazer out of Plymouth). There were the conferences organized by Vadim Mesyats and Ed Foster at Hoboken with meetings (and publications) between Russian and American poets: I attended two of these and Vadim facilitated trip ii. There was the idea of translating the “St.P. Poems” into Russian and publishing them in St.P. This idea broadened into finding financial help to pay Russian poets already engaged on translating American poetry from Pound, HD and WCW on but unable to find the funds to continue. The aim being to fill in many gaps and present a reasonably organized picture of the whole scene. Alas, the foundation approached, after the usual interminable burrocrasitic protocols, decided that “this was not the time to invest in Russia”—at least this is my hunch—it could have been anything else. The matter is thus much delayed at a time when Russian poets desperately need help. I am not sure at this moment when I shall be able to go back.

Having seen and experienced, living for the most part in Kruschovkas, the desperate extent to which the infrastructure of Russia and Ukraine is decomposing (something most tourists to the Hermitage etc. have little conception of), we remain intensely concerned with the future of these countries through their present extended crisis and try to follow the detailed news daily on the Internet..

3) *Russia merely as topography for your inner world has immediate contour & vista—: first, its vastitude, particularly its having spanned the three continents, not incidentally, in which you've dwelt (this fudges Central America into the picture...) for any period of time. When you speak of the “Russian Dream,” then, are you imagining something collective, in which*

you find yourself participating; or is this more of an individual reclamation of territory for personal occupation and cartography?

4) As a classifier &, as Duncan called himself, an “assembler of forms,” I’d be interested to know what—or where—else has served as an image of your inner world. Surely, America or These States, at one point. If so, how do these previous images relate to Russia? What does Russia show that previous inner images did not? Or, in what manner are these places contiguous in the imagination? Maybe what I’m getting at is whether there is a world-map or kosmos-map you have been making all these years. Or maybe it is your need to have an object on which to fix your attention.

I see your questions 3 and 4 as one question.

I have always found it very hard to believe geography, to trust maps. I have to go to places (one reason for extensive travel) to make sure that places are where they are supposed to be on the maps and behave as they are supposed to behave: outline and topography. Which is why I have always loved bodies of land or water which are easy to make out in their contours, especially from the air. It is one of the reasons I loved Alaska so much—over which we did a good deal of flying especially up in the Arctic: to Barrow, Shishmaref, Point Hope, St. Lawrence Island... In each of which places we walked a lot studying the contours.

Temperamentally, I have always been a totalizer and a model maker: as a good student of Levi-Strauss, the “reduced model” of a particular part of the world or, indeed, of the whole globe, has always had its great attractions. The ability to grasp a whole, as opposed to or as well as, a sum of parts (something I’ve talked about a lot, especially in the essay “The Heraldic Vision,” [in *Views from the Weaving Mountain*]) is one of the ways, perhaps *the* way for me in which knowledge, and even wisdom, is achievable. This may, for all I know, be linked to the glamor that the word “empire” has always had for me (see, currently “The Architectures” [a poem sequence, published in various journals]): *not* in the political sense in which we talk negatively, say, of “British or American Imperialism,” but in the sense of a spread of meaning or a sense of a spread of a certain valuable culture over a certain area—anthropologically, a diffusionism if you will. While the Napoleonic *Empire* eventually became politically reprehensible, there is a *frisson de gloire* for anyone with a French background which is undying and which concerns the spread of many good things which Napoleon brought about. Politically, however, and this would be backed by the horror which the XXth century Reich of a Thousand Years inspires, I believe human welfare can only be maximized in very small politico-territorial units (see “Small Where Space is Not” in a forthcoming issue of the Australian magazine *Heat*) which somehow must survive in the megageographies of late capitalism.

Virtually all of my books since *The Beautiful Contradictions*—and even the title poem of my first book *Old Savage/Young City*—work against a background of American geography. As a child in England during the war, evacuated to the ends of the country at Cornwall, I read the

Nevins & Commager history and, for some reason, was vastly inspired, and momentarily cured of early depressions, by the story of the Pioneers. (Before this, one of the only books I had been able to concentrate on during the London Blitz was a child's life of Lincoln). In my dorm, I had a Daily Telegraph map of the U.S. on the wall, learned all the names of the States and their capitals, went down to see the flag lowered every night at the U.S. Army base nearby, took a subscription to the Penguin magazine on the States and vowed one day to get to the Great Land. Since the Sixties, I pride myself on having set foot, often extensively, in every single State of the Union.

The geography, of course, goes way beyond the States, down into Central America and parts of South America: mainly Peru. I have often used the expression "The American Spine" and it is depicted in the black line under the sun on the cover of the book *Atitlán/Alaska*. I believe the first place where this may have been recorded is in the piece "Towards any Geography, towards any America Whatsoever" [in *Views from the Weaving Mountain*] which I wrote after visiting Richard Grossinger in Vermont and advising him to launch North Atlantic Books. There is much talk in that essay about "constructing" America over and over again as we would say in Pomo days. Indeed, it may be the major characteristic of America that, unlike the Old World States, it constructs itself—or attempts to, because many tragic political realities remain stubbornly unchanging—over and over and over again. At least in the imagination which, of course, primes here.

I believe it is in "The Heraldic Vision" that the notion of Blake coming over into these States and continuing his vision in the contemporary poetry of the New Americans here is spelled out (something, of course, seen by some before me, each in their own way, like Olson or Ginsberg)—jelling with that idea of New and Old Worlds being linked that I experience physically whenever I am on the Atlantic Coasts, whether American, English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish.

Asia, of course, has figured very largely in the imagination of this cosmos you speak of. One of the books I have enjoyed most in all my reading years is René Grousset's *In the Footsteps of the Buddha* (still available in English) where he traces, through visits to the various sites, the astounding history of the spread of Buddhism from India into the furthest corners of Asia. And I also remember the huge enjoyment of discovering how S.E. Asian kings would, each time their empires spread, rebuilt reduced models of the holy sites of the Buddha's legend as centerpieces in their own capitals. (See Paul Mus's monumental classic *Borabadur*). Of course, a European itinerary, like, say, the Pilgrimage Route to Santiago de Compostela, would have similar effects. There does seem to be something deeply ingrained in human nature requiring time after time the imaginative reconstruction of cosmic models: the history of the concept of "Jerusalem" is yet another example and one, alas, still battled over.

Russia itself, of course, has not been exempt from this imaginative activity—as evinced by the history of the concept of "The Third Rome" (Russia after Rome and Byzantium). Per-

haps one of the best places to study this is still James Billington's far seeing *The Icon and the Axe*.

What does this interest in Russia add to these peregrinations and reconstructions? I wonder whether it has anything to do with the cartographic imagination's need for a pendant, in the Old World, to this site in the New: a pendant which would be as large, as ground-covering (eleven time zones is it?) as this site and would also, via Alaska—the Aleutians—be contiguous to it. France, Britain, Spain and other European countries cannot fulfill this function—they are, beyond their own merits, the population reservoirs for the Americas—and indeed for the Russias: it is amazing, in reading Russian history to learn just how many European foreigners were brought in for every kind of employment from Peter the Great onwards! If that had not been so, would the confrontation of “Slavophiles” versus “Westerners” (still of major importance in the Russian psyche) ever have taken place?

And, a footnote, Russia is the country of uniforms and, as they say there, “The uniform attracts the badge.” Russia is, par excellence, right up to this day, the land of badges—a great magnet to the amateur of heraldry.

So, yes, I have been constructing a cosmic map all these years and it is the armature, the imaginary alternative in the holy world of Poetry, that can sometimes shield the practitioner from the sad realities of human politics.

I'm impressed with the place America has in this inner/outer geography—or poemography—but still want to get a clearer image of Russia on this map. And so again, a pair of questions:

5) *Specifically the religions of Russia. In much of your past work, the spiritual dynamic of a given place has formed the impression & the cosmology of that place; perhaps, better said, the cosmography. For instance, one cannot encounter your work in Guatemala without absorbing the fused Catholicism & native shamanism of Maya on Lake Atitlán. Your early ethnopoetic work & lately Scandals in the House of Birds attest your immersion in this spiritual world & then your documentation of its workings. Likewise, the Kabbalism of Lyrics for the Bride of God, which irradiates a specifically Jewish meaning throughout an America infused with myriad other cosmologies. Regarding Russia, I'm curious how you position yourself in these spiritual terms to its subject. We share an interest in icons—seen in the specific Christian Orthodox contours of that land; you've already described the value of locating your own Jewish heritage in the lands of Russia/former Soviet Union; & what about the shamanism, so famously assessed by the likes of Mircea Eliade? What do the spiritual domains of Russia mean to you?*

6) *In a related way, & perhaps more timely, I'm wondering about the use of poetry in personal diplomacy or otherwise. Russia has been in the news a lot lately for the Russian army's occupation of the airport at Pristina & the general obstinance of Russia to do any-*

thing about it. In what ways have your Russian studies brought you into the Slavic mind; & how is this poetic encounter different from a more strictly ethnographic type of encounter?

Your new questions on Rus not so easy. But here goes:

5) You see, there has not been so much time with Rus—and it takes time! Also, in my recent agnostic years, the appreciation of the Rus spiritual domains remains principally aesthetic. It started, on the first 1968 trip, with the discovery of icons. In those days, one had to chase them down in very hidden and distant corners of museums: the Sovs did not want them on the desktop. It was mainly on a day trip to Novgorod—together with the old church architecture—that I began to see icons. And found them as great and brilliant a cosmos as that of early Italian Renaissance painting, thinking perhaps mainly of Sienna. I still have on my desk a photo of the white-clad Christ of a Transfiguration icon I managed to snap at that time. Since then, there have been trips to many churches, monasteries, museums. There are the major collections of the Russian State Museum in Petersburg, as well as some items in the Hermitage; the Kremlin cathedrals, the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow with the celestial Old Testament Trinity of Rublev (not to forget Tarkovsky's magisterial movie of R.) and the newly re-opened Russian History Museum near the Kremlin but also museum after museum in the old towns of the Golden Ring, of Kiev in Ukraine and so many others. On this last long summer '98 trip, I remember especially the heavenly country peace of Suzdal, the little white bride of a church on the Nerl river, the huge museum in the Novgorod Kremlin, the host of churches around Novgorod—so many of them shattered in WW2 (including the extraordinary example of an old couple who had devoted their lives to restoring the 13th century frescoes of a single church); many places in Pskov... There was also that major show of the life of Rus monasteries from the beginning to the Revolution at the State Museum in Petersburg where you could travel to legendary places like the White Sea Monastery, later part of a famous Gulag.

Of a very few personal encounters, I recall one in a monastery in Pskov where UNESCO was restoring ancient frescoes. We heard there was a famous school of icon painting in a building next door. A young monk, bearded, with a completely Dostoevskian face, spoke of the place's history. We asked about UNESCO since its role, here as in Novgorod, was not clear to us. He held forth at great length, in Russian, to the effect that UNESCO, as a branch of the UN, was a tool of United States imperialism and referred to the doings in Bosnia. At the end, he looked hard at us and said, in English, "I am sorry but it is true." Turned out he had been a brilliant engineering student at one time. He gave us a book entitled "Antichrist." At the same time, an Army officer in full dress with his lady in country garb, with sword, and a very austere demeanor came up to Janet and upbraided her for not wearing a headscarf (she always had but this particular room did not seem to be a church). On leaving, we were exquisitely polite to the officer, remembering reading something about the feelings of some Soviet military being very hurt at certain breaches of etiquette among the "Allies." Among a rough people, manners remain remarkably important. He reacted in

kind.

For some reason, this was a very emotional experience—as close as I ever got to the “Slavic Mystery.” Another, much milder one, involved entering a huge hall in the Suzdal Kremlin and finding a group of eight young monks, quite famous for their singing, who proceeded to chant *a cappella*. This was quality! And there they had their CDs and their cassettes ready for sale... To be studied: Tchaikowsky’s religious music and his marvelous songs, coming out complete these days by Leferkus. Another world than the ballet music (lucious as that is)!

I have long wanted to read the great Russian theologian-mystics of the 19th century, people like Fedorov and Soloviev (the latter’s links to Kabbala are astounding)—but it is very difficult to find their books in English at the moment. There are extraordinary recent mystics like Daniil Andreev whose *Roza Mira* (“Rose of the World, 1950-58) in a first edition I was able to buy from a street-vendor on the Nevsky Prospekt in St.P. A very useful introduction is the recent *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* edited by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Cornell Univ. Press, 1997). Having, on one trip, found the great Buddhist temple of St.P.run by very impoverished Buryat Mongol monks, I am anxious to read John Snelling’s *Buddhism in Russia - The Story of Agvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa’s Emissary to the Tsar* (Element Publishing, Rockport Mass. 1993). By the way, as a general intro, it is still hard to beat Billington’s *The Icon and the Axe...*

As for the shamanism of Siberia—the *locus classicus* of the matter—I am sure I read much about it in my student days but I have never gone back to those materials. A trip to Siberia, however, especially the Arctic Coast, is very much part of my dream life.

6) Peter—question 6 has me beat. In spite of that Missouri Slavist Prof’s saying that the “St. Petersburg Poems” were as close as he’d ever seen a foreigner get into the Russian poetic mind, I just don’t think that I can parley my very brief and shallow excursions within that mind into a disquisition on “the use of poetry in personal diplomacy...”

It may be worth saying that I believe we have treated the Russians disastrously since the crash and that we might one day have to pay a very heavy price for this. The way in which we entered their space not to really help them but to immediately begin exploiting them via our brand of bottom line capitalism has escaped no one’s attention...and again, only two days ago, the President (was it him or did it happen during his visit?) announcing in Macedonia that Liz Clairborne was coming in to help the Macedonians!!! There are very old suspicions among the Russians—as among the Chinese—regarding what our Young Republic can do to venerable civilizations and these old suspicions can rapidly be clothed in garbs we might think and hope extinct aeons ago—but not so. I am struck with horror at the thought of Russia closing down again because the “reforming” parties simply do not have the strength or support to hold their own. We help them truly now or we lose the next century.

I am told that, despite press reports of heavy anti-americanism in Russia, the poets of St.P. are not holding anything against us. It would have been wonderful to be able to give a little financial help to a bunch of them to organize the publication of American poetry there from Pound/HD/Williams on down the line and it would have taken almost pathetically small sums not only to translate but actually to publish. The geniuses at the foundation I approached had obviously read the papers and decided, "This was not the time to invest in Russia." Blind and ignorant stupidity, the greatest human sin, is eternally with us.

7) You've given us some sense of the poetic past of the Russian dream, as far as your work is concerned; what about the poetic future? What are the poetry projects looking like? And what about other types of engagement? You've sent me your wonderful travelogue from the most recent trip—: what other kinds of writing has Russia brought out of you?

Somehow, the "Three Letters from the City: the St.Petersburg Poems" was such a huge throw for me that I am not sure there will be anything else. It very much depends on whether and when and under what circumstances I go back. Certainly, the long summer 1998 trip did not "produce" anything. And, in fact, I've written nothing for many months. The St.P.s are being translated into Russian by Julia Kounina and I think she will do a very good job. I'm hoping to have a small book in St.P.—if it can be bilingual, I'll throw a few copies around over here.

Other kinds of writing? I don't know. There are several ms. diaries which will probably go into an Archive but nowhere else (the travelogues I sent out emerge from these). Translation is a vague possibility but I doubt my Russian is good enough. I've done a great deal of work on Russia in World War II but doubt that this would lead to writing. If I ever get to the end of my Five Year Program, now a Twenty-Five Year Program, there could be some essays on Rus Lit or Rus Lit Figures. Who knows? At the moment, I really would like to get some money to help other poets get into Russian, to get the knowledge of American Poetry from Pound on "organized." We'll have to see.

Reviews



Exotics at Home: Anthropologies, Others, American Modernity

Micaela di Leonardo
University of Chicago Press, 1998

Every so often there appears a monograph exploring the state of anthropology appears that is destined to enter the disciplinary consciousness. A new volume that fits this bill is Micaela di Leonardo's provocative and engaging *Exotics at Home: Anthropologies, Others, American Modernity*. Although many anthropologists and students will read this book primarily for its fresh contributions as an intellectual and political history of anthropology, *Exotics at Home* is much more. Its author employs a sociology of knowledge approach to anthropological concepts such as culture and difference, relating them to broadly American structures of feeling and public debates. By setting anthropological theories and texts side-by-side with public debates, di Leonardo places anthropology squarely in relation to American politics. She asks whether – and precisely *how* – anthropology and anthropologists in the twentieth century United States have been complicit in what she views as intellectually sloppy and politically dangerous deployments of “culture,” cultural relativism, and other anthropologically-inflected concepts. Admirably integrating the four fields of anthropology into a discussion that ranges historically from the late nineteenth century to the present, the author guides her reader through analyses of such topics as New Age, culture of poverty, cultural feminism, and white ethnic communities.

The analytic center of the book is di Leonardo's convincing argument that a more thoroughly political economic approach to anthropological inquiry is required both to produce more rigorous scholarship and to counter politically dangerous abuse – by scholars and the American public alike – of anthropological concepts such as culture and difference. The author, for example, traces the historical development and dissemination of the concept of culture in American scholarship and public life. She argues that anthropologists since Margaret Mead have authorized the development of the concept absent an accompanying analysis of power, economy and history. In the current political climate, she contends, culture wars are fought without an analysis of power and political economy, as “culture” and “difference” are bandied about by both the political left and right with the consequence of reifying apolitical notions of identity and difference.

di Leonardo begins her discussion in the late nineteenth century. She takes the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition as the locus for her account of the politics and public manifestations of evolutionary anthropology, as well as the development of the twinned concepts of the noble and the nasty savage in American thought during this period of European and American imperialism. From this moment on, the author argues, a particularly useful point of entry for any interrogation of anthropology and its relation to American struc-

tures of feeling is the figure of the “Dusky Maiden,” the dark-skinned woman who hovers behind anthropological inquiry and public imaginaries during the twentieth century, indexing shifting American sensibilities about culture, difference, race, and gender. Perhaps because di Leonardo maintains so many strands of argumentation throughout this text, her discussion of the Dusky Maiden too often fades into the background. Nonetheless, here and throughout the book the author convincingly demonstrates that ethnography and anthropological theory shape and in turn are shaped by the political climates of their times (particularly with regard to race and gender). Consequently, di Leonardo demands that anthropologists both question their own indebtedness to contemporary politics and consider how their work may be put to political use in popular discourse.

One of di Leonardo’s primary targets is Margaret Mead, whose long career and prolific engagement with public concerns frame much of the author’s discussion of the twentieth century. Mead, di Leonardo argues, developed notions of culture and personality that resolutely ignored politics and economy and that reified “cultures” as bounded entities characterized by “difference.” It clearly frustrates di Leonardo that Mead’s legacy recently has been claimed by feminists, for di Leonardo argues strenuously that Mead spent most of her career advocating anti-feminist positions as well as anthropological theories of culture that ultimately propped up regressive race and gender regimes. Although here the author overstates Mead’s anti-feminist position, quoting selectively and interpreting Mead’s statements on gender in the worst possible light, her corrective to some feminists’ overly romantic readings of Mead is welcome. Mead is a particularly illustrative figure for di Leonardo because her problematic theories fed into her engagement with broadly American social and political questions. The author criticizes Mead’s lifelong intellectual and political positions for advocating a weak notion of tolerance in place of a more fundamental critique of social inequality. Additionally, di Leonardo rightly attacks Mead’s wartime monograph about American culture for its sloppy impressionism: an important thread that runs throughout this text is di Leonardo’s well-founded accusation that anthropologists often make facile claims about American “culture,” rarely subjecting their own social surroundings to the same standard of rigorous scholarly inquiry demanded when discussing far-away places.

Closely related to this criticism of anthropologists for failing to study rigorously the “home” they so frequently compare to the “field” is di Leonardo’s caution against the use of the “anthropological gambit” (p. 57), by which anthropologists and others often deploy irony, humor, or sentimentality to imply that “we” really are like “them.” It is not that di Leonardo entirely opposes a humanistic project or the use of comparison. Rather, she argues that too much twentieth century American anthropological writing superficially compares other places to the United States and presents readers with the false sense that they easily understand and can relate to people elsewhere. As a result, readers do not feel compelled to grasp the political complexity of often unequal relations between “us” and “them.”

Continuing to use Margaret Mead as an anchor point, di Leonardo turns to post-

war American anthropology, addressing moments of engagement with public policy and interest such as its use for Cold War purposes and the American public fascination with anthropological discussions of “man the hunter.” During the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, she argues, the discipline underwent a brief progressive turn, as anthropologists became politically engaged with decolonization, the Vietnam war, and other issues. di Leonardo regretfully recounts anthropology’s conservative shift during the early 1980s, which reflected and encouraged (e.g. via sociobiology) the more conservative climate of the Reagan years; she also criticizes the postmodern text-focused anthropologists influential during the 1980s for contributing to an apolitical climate.

To demonstrate how, when, and to what end anthropological scholarship became prominent in public debates during the 1980s, the author uses as case studies Marjorie Shostak’s *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* and Derek Freeman’s *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*. The wide reception of *Nisa* among students, feminists, and a generally liberal public readership signifies for di Leonardo the continuation and communicative efficacy of a Mead-like apolitical appreciation of culture and difference that demands from its readers no concern for political or economic issues. She notes that Shostak’s text was not in touch with the *anthropology* of its time (which di Leonardo claims was more engaged with questions of history and politics), yet obviously it struck a chord with the public. Likewise, Freeman’s book garnered little respect among anthropologists but appealed to a large, more conservative public sympathetic to his appeals to science and objectivity and his (misogynist) attack on Mead. To di Leonardo the popularity of these books reflects the political fragmentation of the American reading public and the overwhelming failure of anthropologists to effectively communicate political economic and historically grounded analyses of their own and other social groups. According to di Leonardo, this inability of anthropologists to forestall the imprecise public use of concepts such as culture has, in recent years, enabled such developments as the right-wing misuse of the notion of cultural relativism, the growth of “cultural feminism,” and the abuse of the “culture of poverty” concept.

di Leonardo’s sustained interest in how the American public views anthropology, and in what anthropology can and cannot contribute to American understandings of a variety of social questions, goes far beyond the simple and commonly heard call to make anthropology relevant. In fact, she worries that anthropologists too glibly attempt to appeal to the public without adequate consideration of the real-world consequences of their work. In this book readers learn in detail about the author’s own ill-fated conversation about gender, appearance and science with a *Newsweek* reporter who failed to incorporate her insights into the resulting article. This example poses a dilemma that the author does not resolve: if even thoughtful and publicly engaged scholars such as di Leonardo somehow do not seem to be getting through to a public more enamored with a Margaret Mead-like notion of culture and difference or a Derek Freeman-like simplistic and conservative scientism, then who is to blame? Anthropologists? The “public”? And how could more rigorous anthropology have more influence?

The strongest thread running through *Exotics at Home* is di Leonardo's explication of the intellectual and political pitfalls of anthropologists' shallow comparisons between Americans and social groups elsewhere. Her intervention is valuable not only because she makes the more obvious point that quick comparisons to "home" often produce a simplistic account of Americans (most often by homogenizing and reifying "American culture"), but even more because she analyzes how such simplistic comparative gestures encourage readers to understand "others" in a way that masks important issues of power. The question I would pose on this point is how anthropologists who, unlike the author herself, are *not* trained to study North America can go about their work with the kind of nuanced attention to the American political context that di Leonardo demands. Must anthropologists working outside the United States be so accountable for understanding the American political climate into which their work enters? If they spend so much time analyzing the *American* context might their insights into power, politics, and economy *elsewhere* suffer? That said, di Leonardo's point is well taken that anthropological knowledge production enters a political world, and it is to be hoped that her thoughts on these issues will spark a lively debate about the problematic conception of unquestioned "American culture" lurking in the shadows of so many studies by American anthropologists.

Exotics at Home comprises very engaging American social and political history, thoughtful discussion of the sociology of anthropological knowledge in the United States, and biting criticism of dominant public and academic ways of understanding concepts such as culture and difference. Unfortunately, if di Leonardo's approach is fresh and courageous, her harsh mode of attack undermines in its moments of hyperbole the author's otherwise insightful critique. Here it is disappointing to note that di Leonardo neglects to discuss – or in most cases, even to mention – recent ethnographic work by many American anthropologists who *do* engage some of the political, economic, and historical questions that di Leonardo raises (Emily Martin, June Nash, Karen Brodtkin, Faye Ginsburg, and Rayna Rapp come to mind). Nevertheless, *Exotics at Home* provokes many questions, only hinted at here, which should reinvigorate debates within anthropology about key concepts such as culture and difference, anthropology at "home," and the discipline's history and public face. It is a text well worth reading – for anthropologists, students and scholars in allied disciplines – which is sure to anger some and inspire others, but leave none unprovoked by the author's trenchant critique.

Jessica Cattelino

The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking

Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, Pierre Mayol
Edited by Luce Giard, Translated by Timothy J. Tomasik
University of Minnesota Press, 1998

The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking is the long awaited English translation of the second volume of *L'invention du Quotidien*, a series of investigations conducted by Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol from 1974-1977. Originally published in 1980, this welcomed revised and augmented edition contains additional essays by Michel de Certeau, who died in 1986, as well as important essays by Luce Girard which clarify and put into perspective the groundbreaking research of Certeau and his colleagues.

The 1984 English translation of *L'invention du Quotidien, Volume 1: Arts de Faire* by Michel de Certeau entitled *The Practice of Everyday Life* has had an tremendous impact on the multidiscipline endeavors of cultural studies. His efforts to bring to fore the study of culture as it is practiced, namely in studying orality, the ordinary, and the everyday operations of people, have redirected the focus of sociology from the study of how humans assimilate to their environments to the study of how one creates oneself and articulates one's environment. While structuralist and Marxist sociologists were studying disciplinary structures and the conformity of individuals to social strategies, Certeau turned his attention to the study of the tactics of daily social poesis. Certeau deconstructed the "common man" conceived as an passive amorphous mass guided by rules and procedures, and concentrated on the description of the movements and actions which men and women take to negotiate, and define their reality. By reversing the relations between society and individuals, and showing how people make use of rules, Certeau laid out a course of study concerned with improvisation, appropriation, and the tactics of resistance in the face of force-relationships. Culture was located at the level of concrete action, in the minuscule games of speaking, and the active composition of memory and space. His effect has been far reaching, influencing modes of representation and writing culture across diverse disciplines.

When Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* was published by the University of California in 1984 it was met with mixed reviews. Michele Lamont writing in the *American Journal of Sociology* in November of 1987 wrote,

De Certeau's book does not satisfy our curiosity—
whereas de Certeau limits himself to circumscribing a
problematic—a healthy dialogue between
empirical data and theory is more appropriate for

the development of a theory of resistance. (Lamont 1987)

Certeau's style of writing was however consistent with his critique of sociology. The playful, colorful prose that seemed to Lamont to lack conceptual unity corresponds to the path of the *Wandersmänner*, enabling the reader to reconstruct the fabric of the text based on haptic, rather than theoretical exploration. To ungrid social reality, Certeau saw it was necessary to liberate the reader, an essential first step in the recognition of the poetry of social action. If the text is playful it is because it is crucial that the sense of play, the sense that humans are creatures of play, can not be discarded.

If *The Practice of Everyday Life* left Michele Lamont hungry for specifics, I'm betting *Volume 2* will quench her appetite. *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking* presents the methodological tools for the analysis called for in *Volume 1*. The dialogue between empirical data and lifeways is the primary concern. The writers here seek to interlace the maps of the Croix-Rousse neighborhood (a working class suburb of Lyon, France) with the imagined topographies of the community which make it their home. The veil of social memory is lifted, through the repeated relation of details and utterances which occur in the act of dwelling, to prove that what is considered invisible by bureaucrats and census takers rumbles beneath our noses.

In "Part 1: Living", Pierre Mayol negotiates between the methods of the urban sociologist, concerned with the analysis of objective material and administrative plans, and the methods of the socioethnographer, who is concerned with the "vast poetic, even mythic frescoes" which "give the bittersweet illusion of rediscovering a people lost forever" (7). The chosen method of describing the neighborhood of the Croix-Rousse is to avoid indeterminate discursivity by relating external constraints and structural characteristics "only to the point where it becomes the terrain of choice for a 'setting and staging of everyday life'" (7). At this point the attention is turned to relationships, specific actions and tactics, better represented through oral history, symbolic interpretation and close description. So from a presentation of histories, maps, and political and economic statistics, beginning with the regional landscape, the city, and moving to the immediate neighborhood, and finally the floor plan of the house of the "R" family, Mayol travels fluidly to the social-scapes constructed by inhabitants who have familiarized their stomping grounds. He cogently relates the social identities of "Robert [as the] the Greengrocer" and later "Robert [as the] Confident" and the diverse peculiarities and roles of "La Germaine's Shop". The reader learns the course of people's decision making follows a multiple layered logic. The inhabitants choose in regard to a self-constructed bricolage of rationales assembled from fragmentary rules, inherited mores, and found semantic structures. The complexity of this process reflects the complexity of the socially constructed self, seen here as a multivalent agent rather than the behaviorist's subject. Each is shown to react and influence minuscule power relations and concepts of propriety, donning situation specific masks and "semilearned grammar" (Bourdieu's term for inherited clichés) in the name of coexistence. But rather than slipping into a functionalist

model of community, Mayol makes sure to point out the tension involved in daily maintenance of exchanges. The forces of propriety are shown to be occasionally contested by the carnivalesque reversal of codes. Mayol describes this act with the words of Kristeva, as the occasion when the speaker “coincides with the subject’s moments of rupture, renovation, and revolution” (33).

The regenerative and mutable aspects of signification are also displayed in Mayol’s chapter on “Bread and Wine.” These two all important foods to the people of the Croix-Rousse are shown to be not only edibles but cultural symbols. As such their meaning too is the result of a shifting collage. What kind of bread? Where it is kept? Who buys it from whom? How much wine? Of what quality? When is it consumed? Certeau is known for his assertion that consumption is a kind of cultural production. Mayol, in this essay, redefines eating and drinking as Certeau redefined reading in *Volume 1*. Consumption is not looked at as the opposite of production but instead as a kind of poetic operation which, in concert with social relations and cultural myths, can develop moods, scenes and identities. After all, you are not only what you eat, you are who you are because of it.

In “Part 2: Doing-Cooking,” Luce Giard further engages the “nourishing arts” in an analysis that weaves reflexive memory, national histories, the science of nutrition, with the voices of practitioners, to develop a moving and kaleidoscopic photograph of the art of cuisine from the field of oblivion. Cooking was undertaken as a subject for analysis for several reasons. Like Mayol’s analysis of consumption, Giard sees the act of cooking is important to our daily social fabrication. It is commonplace and continual. For Giard,

the alimentary habits constitute a domain where tradition and innovation matter equally, where past and present are mixed to serve the needs of the hour, to furnish joy of the moment, and to suit the circumstance. (151)

Our rituals of eating tie us formidable to the social world. Lévi Strauss, and anthropologists since, have considered the networks of information contained in cooking to be “a language through which [a] society unconsciously reveals its structure” (180). Cooking allows one to grasp a unique interdependence of diverse cultures. The endless combinations of foodstuffs and recipes defy the boundaries of state systems, yet the freedom of ingredients are simultaneously matched by a diversity of rules. While the proof of a meal is in the taste, taste is also socially learned. We inevitably go back to our earliest memories. The smells of food and the activities in the kitchen are nostalgically linked to our vitality. The kitchen is the hearth of the home, a zone animated with gesture and talk. There the body manipulates the environment. One organizes, combines, modifies and invents (153). Charged by the intersection of familiarity, personality, community, and economy, the kitchen becomes a privatized space traversed by a multitude of trajectories.

The hidden aspects of everyday life are also often times a function of gender relationships, a fact not lost on Luce Giard. In her analysis of cooking in France she looks closely at the cultural assertion that cooking is “women’s work”. For her this is not a manifestation of a feminine essence, but rather a temporal reality (in the 1970’s) stemming from social and cultural conditions and mental histories. Neither is the role of homemaker necessarily diminished. We find instead in her exposition of the “Kitchen Women Nation” a place where power is exercised. The role of women in the maintenance of the home, in the negotiation of economic constraints, and in the orchestration of family social life transcends the boundaries of those homes and contributes significantly to the greater human condition. This recognition is one of the reasons Certeau’s work has contributed to feminist scholarship. Giard’s study aims to give voice to the innumerable anonymous women who daily invent our worlds through the performance of the ordinary. She includes a full transcript of one of the many interviews provided by Marie Ferrier as research in this section. She suggests such voices,

give us a way of knowing their language, their words, and even the inflections in their voices, even the rhythm of their speech... Thus we can learn from them...how they represent their role and ability, if they take interest in their savoir faire, and what secret pride they take in finding a personal way to fulfill an imposed task. (160)

Interviews and conversations, both here and in Pierre Mayol’s section make up the foundation for this book. Oral history is conducted in the service of sociology and in return the discipline is changed. It becomes again the study of our living dynamic world, a world where people exercise opinion and choice.

David Michalski

Voice-Over

Elaine Equi
Coffee House Press, 1998

The voices in *Voice-Over* are the voices of temptation: the tease of transparency and the lure of consumerism whipped up enticingly with the drama of a postmodern self caught between dissolution and disjuncture. Reading these poems feels rather like eating a particularly elegant kind of ice-cream – green tea, perhaps. Cool, delicious, in tiny servings, resembling the fennel in Equi's poem of that name: "As much a liqueur as fruit or / vegetable." Or – to change the metaphor – it's like drifting along the perfume counters of a big department store (the fennel also "looks remarkably like a hookah / or else a bottle of eau de cologne"), sampling first one shiny bottle then another.

"Cake, Hat, Pillow," a tender poem dedicated to Joseph Cornell, is frank about the small pleasures of consumerism: "Some days I wake up so sad, / "morbid" you would say, / and not at all grateful / for the little things / heaped up in the windows / of antique stores that are / mostly overpriced. But then / slowly, especially after / a cappuccino, I feel better, / well enough anyway to stop / at The Photography Store / on Mercer and browse through / the postcards." She finds one for Cornell showing a white hat, a white cake, and a white pillow: "I don't know if you ever wore or would / want a fedora. But a pillow – considering / the vicissitude of even the mildest, / most pleasant, most temperate of lives / (yours, mine) – who would not like a pillow?" "Pink Shutters" is exhilaratingly aspirational – "Shocking Pink! Pagan Pink! / Milk of Magnesia and Panther Pink / seductively pulling us into the air // like a harem of wings / in which we desire and are perhaps afraid / to be lost forever. // We who have just left jobs, / families, packages below / while the eye continues to climb." "Armani Weather" pulls us in a different direction, into the world of the fashion-plate: "he was made / to do nothing / but lean against / tall buildings. / A somber / exclamation point, / eating an apple – / turning it slowly / into ballet" only to push us out again slyly: "Even the light matches, / pale and cold and / slightly green, / like the apple / against his dark skin."

The book opens with the very beautiful "Spirit Photography," reaching beyond the tricky light and shadow of photographs to the strangeness of physicalities: "where there is only smoke / we all find someone we know. // Yet the clearly visible / is more mysterious by far. // Our own breasts, arms, / legs, mouths – // unrecognizable bodies // we can no longer see." "Almost Transparent," dedicated to Lorine Niedecker, also makes the stretch to a somewhere beyond the constructed self: "You and your books: // quotes / fly overhead / like clouds // Your words: // quick and / emerald green // chameleon-like / in the spic and span / kitchen // You think you've disappeared – . . . You *think* you're part of the landscape // soaked in / water-voiced // but it's you I see moving (isn't it?) // behind the sheer / almost transparent curtain / of your poems."

Alongside the glitter and glare of reflections / constructions / representations, then, is the possibility of immersion, as in “Little Landscape”:

Little landscape
always at breast
equals water
under the bridge.
A flowing past
where faces and events
are not fixed.
The elves in selves
broken and darting,
nerves numbed by wind.
The shadow pours itself
out on the grass.
The dark arches
rise and cross over.

Flow and disjuncture play against each other; “the elves in selves” surface and then disappear.

Voice-Over's epigraph is from Bakhtin:

The world does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own.

In “Shield,” dedicated to Amy Gerstler, totems and insignia (“a crest bulging above a door/ (dolphin and rose)”) may seem inalienable compared to “ideas [that are] written in the blue / diary of the sky” but by the end of the poem, the animals have become nomadic: “I pick up your book / and know somehow it is yours. // I put it down / and the sentences mingle with mine // (moving slowly, as if in a caravan).” But this is not to make symbols any less potent. “Totem” provides a stark reading of power relations similar in tone to early poems by Margaret Atwood; the first person of the poem hurries past the totem, “eyes lowered / respectfully . . . never knowing / or perhaps / always knowing / it is // who protects *you* / from dark / incomprehensible forces / not to your liking / but even more so / from light,” in doing so, making another kind of “flowing past / where faces and events / are not fixed.”

The title poem, “Voice-Over,” summons up, teases with the monologic, the place where “contradictions fold / into a single voice.” Its glib pronouncements are “reassuringly direct” :

“Psychic advisors are waiting,” “Perfection is coming,” “Week after week, we tackle / the questions you’d like to ask God.” “This narrow world, / a silent movie,” Equi writes, “longs for those voices // on high to float down” and, she asserts, no matter how clearly we see through their manipulations – their carefully scripted naturalness, the “stock footage of . . . mudslides, earthquakes, monsoons” calculated to create an appetite for reassurance – we continue to need them, can’t ignore the specious warmth they promise, “diaphanous as scarves.”

Voice-Over is both more and less satisfying than Equi’s earlier collections. Her sly wit is still very much in evidence (the wonderful “Letter of Recommendation” ends, “remember how brave / and talented you are. / I would add beautiful too / but that might sound strange. / So just write anything, / something glowing – and sign my name”), and poems like “Spirit Photography” seem more substantial, more fully realized than many of those in *Decoy*, or *Surface Tension*. But as the language comes into sharper focus, something seems to be lost: the layered plangency of “Maria Callas,” for example (“Canaries faint /when caged / by the / metallic ardor /of your voice”), or the exquisite surrealism of “Geisha”: “Intrigued / the room / entered itself / with the tiny steps / of a mermaid / with a mustache / of orange blossom / with an abyss / dangling from / one pierced ear” – both from *Surface Tension*. Few poems in *Voice-Over* match “Poem” (in *Decoy*) in complexity: “Too busy to be internal / libido calmly rushes // in one orchard / and out another. // Its knotted weather / spreads brightly. / /Its peach-thread melody / is squandered away.” In comparison with these gorgeous subtleties, a poem like “Beauty Secret” tips over into the banal – “It must be / like losing your / fear of death // to just stop / worrying about / what you look like” and “It is all / a matter of arrangement. // Relationships / of power // made to seem / natural / and right,” – while “Remorse After Shopping” is as flat as its title.

But even when not resorting to direct statement, some of the poems in *Voice-Over* seem disappointingly oversimplified. “The Lost Language” is beautiful, ambitious, intriguing, but somehow unsatisfying:

One does not speak,
But is instead immersed in it as one
is said to be immersed in a book
or the weather on an island where
there is only one restaurant, without
any tables or chairs, and with only
two customers. A man and a woman,
both standing; she reading, and he
looking out at the sea.

Missing here, in this slow, beautiful and seemingly uncomplicated movement from book to weather to island to sea is the shock of breaking the surface, plunging from air into water, along with the teasing glancing movements that sparkle so brightly elsewhere. “Cupboard

/Shrine” plays with the notion of mind as general store, stocked with “boxes and / canned goods // to be moved / and dusted behind. // The idea / and its opposite, // paint and turpentine, / side by side – // honey and vinegar / on the shelf below.” This is very charming, but seems too neat, almost pat.

At their best, the poems in *Voice-Over* weave and duck, elusive (elf-like, even!) on and through the surface, insisting on indeterminacy. “The Heroine,” for example, may be defined by the choices that an all-too predictable plot lays out for her, “but it’s how we see her / in the middle of things / as yet undecided / and standing / so agitated and confused / hair wild / eyes wilder / her will / still virginal / it’s like this / that we remember / and like to love her best.” After sampling “Escape” or “Happiness,” “Opium,” or even “Poème,” we go downstairs, hunt for pomegranates in the food hall.

Anna Reckin

Race Traitor 9/Surrealist Issue

Franklin Rosemont, ed.
The New Abolitionists, 1998

“One thing you have to give surrealists credit for: They are always sending out rescue missions into the depths of History and coming back with awesome characters everybody else forgot about ages ago, but who somehow turn out to be incredibly relevant today” (134). Thus opens Rachel Blackwell’s review of *The Story of Mary MacLane and Other Writings*, one of nine book reviews that conclude this special issue of *Race Traitor*, the refreshingly in-your-face journal whose spirited slogan graces the bottom of the cover page: “Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity.” And it’s true. The issue is full of reprints from 19th and early 20th century wild writing by men and a few women proclaiming a link between radical aesthetic style and radical anti-racist politics, men and women whose names and works have been slighted by the literary-historical record, and whose ideas about race, racism and anti-racism, because they are not expressed in social scientific language or grounded primarily in “logocentric” treatises or party politics, have not been taken seriously as contributions to the large task of imagining a free society in the West. In fact, it is precisely because of the emphasis on the efficacy and centrality of “imagining” to this enormous global task that the surrealists are marginal to the mainstream narrative about white supremacy and its handful of recognized “righteous-gentile”-type defectors (John Brown is, in fact, the only one I can think of who has at no time sustained charges of covert racism, mixed motives, etc.).

One can see why, on reading this vibrant, charged paean to the “insurgent imagination,” this agenda would raise anxieties. It admits not a trace of doubt in its mission, its means, its program, its doctrines, and it is full of imperatives: “Demoralize the so-called ‘white race’ by any means necessary! ... Freedom Now!” (Rosemont, “Notes on Surrealism as a Revolution against Whiteness,” 29); “Nine out of ten doctors agree (or *should* agree): The best prescription for mental heath is: *Abolish whiteness!*” (Boyer, “Are You Crazy? Mental Illness and the Belief in Whiteness,” 119); “Race traitors beware. It’s not getting any easier” (Radcliffe, “Whitewashing the Blues,” 115). It disseminates as part of its standard lexicon such wonderful analytic categories, or more accurately categories of experience, as “miserabilism” (bad) and “the Marvelous” (good). These are not the standard terms in which journalistic or academic critiques of racism are currently conducted; the closest analogue, in fervent rhetorical absolutes, is the Black Panther Party rhetoric of the 1960s-70s (“All Power to the PEOPLE!”); and there is no current equivalent of their passionate valorization of poetry and art *as a way of life* that perforce includes an engaged activist social revolution (the anarchist arts communes I know of do not take public positions on issues of race and injustice—they just do their own thing with blindered utopianism).

The author bios are likewise intriguing in their spirited commitment to non-conformity. J. Allen Fees, for example, author of “Burning the Days” (30-31), is described as a “Surrealist poet...[living] in Arizona, where he is currently pursuing his interests in autism and tap dancing”(30). Not so weird when I think of George Wolfe, director of “Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk,” speaking of tap dancing as a form of mediumistic “writing” in which memories of slavery, stored in the body, are expressed (unencrypted) in wordless, rhythmic sounds made of body movements, and in which the facial affect and the movement of the lower body are utterly disjunct, dissociated as in a post-traumatic body/mind split: autism, poetry, anti-racism and the history of slavery, tap dancing and surrealism seem logically linked. Fees writes, with a visionary conviction I envy, “My individualism involves those magic moments on the road to a better life for five billion people (yes, my *individualism*), and even what I’ve done that no one else knows I’ve done. People will one day turn a corner and see glimmering through the cracks of the sidewalk a jumping point toward a better life under their feet” (31). The combination of popular literary and musical allusions (“those magic moments,” “on the road”), the impassioned affirmation of individualism, the nod to Whitman (“look for me under your bootsoles”), the youthful optimism and self-confidence—all seem to add up to a particularly *American* form of treason against the status quo. However, Franklin Rosemont, *eminence grise* of American surrealism, editor of the special issue and author of its most comprehensive pieces, traces the Surrealists’ genealogy to the early 20th-century French poets and artists who are usually taught in classes on modernism as a depoliticized literary coterie, a group of bohemian bad boys, rather than as the cadre of committed political activists Rosemont depicts. And he points to the many currently active Surrealist groups—Chicago, Madrid, Paris, Prague, Brno, Stockholm, Leeds, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Puerto Rico and Australia (16)—some of whose position papers on racial matters are reprinted here, that have been part of an unbroken chain of surrealist group activity since the Parisians entered the fray of engaged cultural politics back in the interbellum period.

There is a marvelous blend here of reprints from the past and new stuff from the present, and the older texts are particularly striking. Nancy Cunard’s 1934 anthology, *Negro*, is brought up for sympathetic reconsideration; René Crevel, translated by Samuel Beckett, is shown at his rhetorically overdriven best, in a passage that deserves citation:

It is natural enough that a nation whose practical ethics never lost sight of at least one transcendental proposition: *Un sou est un sou* (a penny’s a penny) should gladly remember now, in the fine flower of her genius, the fully licensed purveyor of passion, privileged to apprehend at the court of his King the whines of Princess X and the snarls of Princess Y and the paralyzing ballast of falbalas common to them both, who saw fit to crystalize the delirium of their royal gallants and catalogue them: objects of desire. (“The Black Woman in the Brothel,” 61)

I find this kind of writing, the headlong confrontational nature of it, very exciting and energizing. At the same time, though, in the absolute certainty of the language and ideas, the

complete lack of doubt, I find in it a touch of triumphalism that makes me a bit uneasy. Perhaps it is because I associate such certainty with privilege, and in some ways consider certainty itself a privilege; and I think this is gendered. Forgive the abundance of first-person singular usage here, but this is the doubt creeping in (a doubt that I value in spite of its at times paralytic effects). When the Madrid Surrealists, in their 1993 piece “Beyond Anti-Racism: The Role of Poetic Thought in the Eradication of White Supremacy,” aver that

We are convinced...that it is *poetry* alone —retaining as it does its exceptional importance in the exploration and liberation of the mind —which opens the way to these desired new ways of thinking [beyond the pro forma pieties of mainstream anti-racism]. And we are also convinced that poetry plays an equally important role in shattering “supreme” stupidity.

This affirmation confirms our view that it is urgent, today, for humankind to acquire new ways of thinking and new modes of behavior. And their acquisition is directly related to our solidarity with racial minorities and immigrants, who arouse in us the recognition —although some may not always be keen to acknowledge it —that the Unknown may also take human form. We believe that shedding our fear of this recognition will enable us to perceive all the more clearly the beauty that comes to us from afar (43),

it is both music to my ears and makes me wonder —“Really? *Poetry* alone? what about all the righteous ones laboring in the fields of history, ethnography, what about literal-minded folks who laid down their lives for freedom but had no patience for imaginative play...” Maybe I’m taking the word “poetry” too literally, and what they mean is a kind of poetic spirit, which I see active in all kinds of work, like that of labor historian David Roediger’s contribution to the volume (“Plotting Against Eurocentrism: The 1929 Surrealist Map of the World,” pp. 32-39), and which has infused much social scientific writing since the “linguistic turn” — a turn which many, ironically, see as a turn *away* from meaningful political engagement. Maybe the act of laying down one’s life in the service of freedom is itself poetic —and so we need not wonder about, say, John Brown’s qualifications for poeticity of spirit.

Another caveat: as I understand it, the surrealist movement was not all peaches and cream in a linear narrative of solidarity and goodness. Rosemont’s reference to Antonin Artaud’s “leaving” the Surrealist movement, for example, reminded me that I’d heard a more fraught version of that event, namely that he was “driven out” by Breton and others because he became too *outré*, too unmanageable. And were the proto-Fascist Futurists not also dedicated to a liberation of the human spirit, wild writing, triumphalist statements about the utopian possibilities of an emancipated artistic imagination? True, their faith in high technology as the means to freedom and triumph marks them apart from the Surrealists’ passion for going inward and downward, into the unconscious and outward to previously-de-spised artistic traditions —but in any case, the rhetorical certainty, like Nietzsche’s powerful

declaratives if read at face value (when their beauty in fact lies in his intent that we deconstruct them to see that certainty is an illusion), gives me pause. On the subject of race, moreover, one person's genuine race traitor is another person's hypocrite, pathetic wannabe, or dabbler-in-exoticism: see current evaluations of, for example Mezz Mezzrow, the white abolitionists, Johnny Otis, the Beats (who claimed to be heavily influenced by the Surrealists), and so forth.

So, this business of the politics of style is for me an open-ended question, while for the Surrealists it is an integral part of their platform. And the category of race-traitor is also a slippery, unfixed one, to my mind —like the category of “righteous gentile” —and dwelling on it too much can overshadow emphasis on the racially-oppressed themselves. Nonetheless, it's important for white people to have inspirational models of how to do it, how to *think* unwhitely, how to actively abdicate the privileges of whiteness. And it is important for poetry people, or people dedicated to a life of the “insurgent imagination,” to be reaffirmed in our belief that poetry, humor, and liveliness of spirit do in fact play a transformative role in the public sphere, and that we are not mere ineffective esthetes fiddling while the cities burn.

On sum, bracketing the questions raised above, this is a terrific read, and points the way, in its reconstruction of a world of Surrealists and wild thinkers, to a world of further terrific reading. The book reviews, which comprise the last section of the issue, are great. As both *Xcp* and *Race Traitor 9/Surrealist Issue* grapple with issues of the artistic imagination and social change, albeit in different rhetorics, they form a nice complement.

Maria Damon

The Scandals of Translation

Lawrence Venuti
Routledge, 1998

What's scandalous about translation? Nearly everything, according to Lawrence Venuti—if we weigh the word “scandal” as, say, a translator must: with an eye to all of its meanings and connotations. He begins this collection of loosely connected essays with the biggest scandal of all: that translation, rightly understood, is a stumbling block to those whose faith includes naive ideals of the mutual transparency of cultures. “Translating can never simply be communication between equals,” he writes, “because it is fundamentally ethnocentric. Most literary projects are initiated in the domestic culture, where a foreign text is selected to satisfy different tastes from those that motivated its composition and reception in its native culture.” A “translation ethics,” in his reading, needs to reflect and embody this awareness of inevitable inequity, not pretend that transparency is possible. “Good translation is demystifying,” he continues. “It manifests in its own language the foreignness of the foreign text.”

The other scandals follow from these foundational (or anti-foundational) ones. Through eight chapters, Venuti tells stories—mostly vivid and convincing ones—about how translation has reflected, fomented, masked, and exacerbated inequities of cultural power from St. Jerome to the seventeenth century Englishing of Latin to the age of Tom Clancy in Mandarin and Portuguese.

When he is, as we say, “doing” theory, Venuti lays down a labored, Latinate, passive-voiced cultural-studies-speak that never says “begin” when it can say “are initiated,” and uses “fluent strategies” to mean “strategies of fluency.” This can be tormenting, particularly in the first chapter, “Heterogeneity,” in which he explains, at interminable length and with the meet-every-objection, swat-every-fly exhaustiveness typical of academic argumentation, why translations should read like translations and why translation theory should use culture, not science, as its template.

The Scandals of Translation gets better as it goes along, though. Venuti's real theoretical gift is not for exposition, but for interpretation, and he is bracingly dialectical about the power relations he explores. He may overuse the expected Gramsci-isms (surely “hegemonic,” by now, is nearly as meaningless as “Obey your thirst”) but he's authentically Gramscian in his resistance to the idea that the hegemony simply manipulates the “other” without getting manipulated in turn. Translation's scandals include a great deal of back-and-forth subversion whenever master and subject languages come together.

In one of his most fascinating examples, Venuti exhibits (and, of course, translates) a 17th-century poem from the very first Filipino book, a Spanish language manual by the

printer Tomas Pinpin. Written in a macaronic combination of Tagalog and Castilian Spanish, this wry parody of a Christian hymn sets out to justify Pinpin's efforts to spread knowledge of Castilian among his compatriots. Each line begins with a Tagalog phrase, followed by a Castilian "translation." In the slippage from the earthy Tagalog idioms to the elevated Hispanisms used to gloss them, a subtle tension is created: Spanish doesn't cancel Tagalog, it merely "ascends" above it, while Tagalog returns, sturdy and ineradicable, at the beginning of each line. "Pinpin's textbook offers no explicit attack on the Spanish regime," says Venuti. "But it constantly reminds his Tagalog readers of the hierarchies—linguistic, cultural, and political—in which they are subordinated."

To examine Tagalog macaronics in the 17th century is to be genuinely international in scope, and Venuti, a translator of Italian, not only escapes Eurocentrism, but tackles subjects outside the usually woefully limited scope of academic multiculturalism, too. Depending on high-grade secondary sources, but assessing them shrewdly, he looks at one of the heroic ages of translation, late Qing-dynasty and early Republican China. As the last imperial dynasty waned, and Europeans carved up China's carcass from their treaty ports, scholar-officials like Lin Shu (1852-1924) and Yan Fu (1853-1921) made translations of European books into classical Chinese in an effort to strengthen the empire's powers of resistance—the goal was both to understand and profit by the example of the dynamic "barbarian" nations of nineteenth-century Europe.

As Venuti tells the story, these translations, ranging from Dumas fils' *La Dame aux Camélias* (Marguerite's faithfulness to her lover being interpreted as a fable of fidelity of minister to sovereign) to Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, catalyzed unintended consequences. Begun as efforts to prop up Qing orthodoxy and Confucian virtue, these meetings of two disparate "master" discourses—"hegemonic" European thought and the Chinese classical idiom in all its immemorial stength—ended up giving birth to an entirely new range of Chinese discourses. "Lin Shu's versions of sentimental romances didn't consistently transform filial piety into patriotism," writes Venuti. "They also fed into the craze for escapist novels of tragic love, the so-called Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly fiction that dominated Chinese publishing at the start of the twentieth century." And the extensive addenda, paraphrases, and glosses that the translators had to append to their renderings showed up the inadequacies of the classical language in the face of Western and other modern ideas, paving the way for the eventual rise and dominance of baihua, written colloquial Northern Chinese.

The first great master of baihua style, and a translator of genius, was Lu Xun (1881-1936), whose work seems to come as close as any to Venuti's ideal of demystifying, foreignizing, non-transparent translation. Although Lu kept to classical Chinese in his translations of German, Russian, and Polish literature, it was a classical idiom "combined with Europeanized lexical and syntactical features, transliteration of Western names, and Japanese loan words...In opposition to the comforting Confucian familiarity offered by many late Qing translations, [Lu Xun's] translations were designed to convey the unsettling strange-

ness of modern ideas and forms.”

Unsettlement is Venuti’s watchword, and “fluent strategies” (translation techniques that seek to mask the strangeness of the foreign text) his *bete noire*—because, in most of the cases Venuti looks at, fluency masks distortion in favor of a dominant culture and ideology. The book’s most extended case study of fluent strategies at work is an account of the Cold-War-era American success of the Italian humorist Giovanni Guareschi (1908-1968). Guareschi’s *The Little World of Don Camillo* (1948; American-English translation published 1950) told the story of a rough-hewn but lovable Piedmontese priest and his perennial opponent, the village’s Communist mayor, Peppone. The good-natured duels between priest and Red that fill this and the ten subsequent Don Camillo books were instrumental in humanizing the Communist Party for Italian readers and voters; the wildly popular books were credited with helping the Left to power in local and national elections.

In their American vestments, however, Guareschi’s fables became allegories of Cold War rivalry. And they were hits: *The Little World of Don Camillo* almost immediately landed on the Chicago Tribune and New York Times best-seller lists and was chosen for the Book-of-the-Month Club and the Catholic Digest Book Club (publisher/editor Sheila Cudahy cannilly marketed Guareschi via numerous Catholic outlets).

Translation choices subtly—and not-so-subtly—darkened the image of Communism in Don Camillo’s little world. Guareschi’s neutral word for Communist units of organization, *frazione* (“fractions” or “sections”), was rendered as “cells”—a familiar scare word from midcentury red-menace popular culture. *Fidelissimi* (“[Peppone’s] most loyal men”) was rendered “henchmen.” And overall, Venuti notes, the flattening or editing out of culturally specific Italian detail sustained “a prevailing humanism that was firmly anti-Communist.”

Here as elsewhere in *The Scandals of Translation*, Venuti’s main contribution isn’t merely sleuthing out what we might call conspiratorial mistranslation. It’s in situating translation within the complex dynamics of (cross-) cultural politics, and encouraging a view of translation that is as alive to the nuances of the cultural-political situation in the “target” culture as it needs to be to the complex textuality of the work being translated. “The value of any translated text depends on effects and functions that can’t be entirely predicted or controlled,” he writes. “Yet this element of contingency increases rather than lessens the translator’s responsibility to estimate the impact of a project by reconstructing the hierarchy of domestic [target-culture] values that inform the translation and its likely reception.”

Far from being a harmless drudge, then, the translator is, ideally, a sort of trickster figure operating on cultural margins, intervening in cross-cultural situations rather than merely “serving” a text. (This rationale underlies Venuti’s repeated calls for copyright and other literary-legal reforms to improve translators’ position *vis a vis* authors.) Venuti’s insistence that all translation be “foreignizing” seems like prior restraint, and his faith that calling attention to translatedness in translation is somehow *ipso facto* progressive recalls the naive

Brechtianism of an earlier era. (All alienation effects having long since entered the repertoire of hypercapitalism, liberation may now need to progress from somewhere other than the shaken-up brain—but that's another essay.) But he's spot-on in his insistence that all translation is tendentious, not only carrying ideology but making specific assertions (and not others) about the translated text.

Venuti's concentration upon prose, and mostly prose that carries considerable cultural weight in mainstream literary culture or mass culture, doesn't leave room for him to consider transgressive translations of transgressive poetry—the politics of rendering, say, a Central European poet into the idiom of LANGUAGE poetry. Subcultural literary worlds and their idioms aren't at issue here, but it would be interesting to read a dissection of the ways a foreign text attains legibility as part of transgressivity as defined in our own cultural capitals. That Venuti at least suggests such a project by implication is a measure of the subtlety of his argument, if not his style.

Jon Spayde

Review Essay: A.L. Nielsen and Kimiko Hahn

Vext, A. L. Nielsen, Sink Press, San Francisco, 1998

The Unbearable Heart, Kimiko Hahn, Kaya Productions, New York, 1995

Volatile, ———, Hanging Loose Press, New York, 1999

Mosquito & Ant, ———, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1999

Aldon Nielsen's new collection *Vext* is a mild follow-up to his breakthrough book, *Stepping Razor*. The talent for ironic category/syntax-error aphorisms he displayed there is bypassed for Ronald Johnson-esque erasures and reformatting appropriated texts from road signs and (English) departmental memos to African-American narratives. Nielsen, a professor of African-American literature at Loyola Marymount University in California, has long been reconciling his area of study with his work on and in contemporary language-influenced poetry. With *Vext*, his leading signifier for black American culture has shifted from the Peter Tosh song to the better-known surinicial of El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, in two poems: "Why X?" (a list of possible definitions, from rated X to crossing-out) and "Chapter X." He collates surreal substitution with skin color in his "Yellow is the color of my true love's hair", and skin color is the subtext of "Ash". Intermixed are poems such as "A Pack of Lies", which ends "Management, Management; all is management"; and : "American Song Bag" which rewrites classic American showtunes to refract our bifurcated rich/poor white/black prosaic/poetic context: "You say Potemkin/And I say potato/You say tomato/And I say tungsten alloy local area networks". Nielsen's work in *Vext* leans so far to wry that it looks like it's going to fall flat, though—"Can somebody tell me how to become an autodidact?" When he shies away from irony he's farther out, as in "Imputation", a vignette about "Four old women getting//Tanked//Together//Slowly//In//The restaurant", or in "Roscoe Mitchell", a five parter in which seventeen or eighteen words are (barely) rearranged from section to section:

4

The front steps rest
The neck slips under
The strap the backhand five
Strain the thumb
For sound

5

Steps to the front slip
The neck snaps back

Under the thumb five rest for
Strapping sound

*

In the remarkable first fourteen pages of her 1995 book, *The Unbearable Heart*, Kimiko Hahn, an associate professor of literature at Queens College, narrates the response of her family to the sudden death of her mother in a car accident. The book opens with “The Toll Attendant”:

whiter under a fluorescent halo
horn-rimmed and high-pitched
collects our coins and gives directions
to the hospital where mother's body
may be retrieved at our earliest convenience,
to a land perpetually 3:20 am
rain always raining heavily
and to where her two daughters and two sons-in-law
travel in the family station wagon
to tell father mother is gone.
The toll attendant points beyond the plaza lights
into the dark that will become the hospital.
And when we reach the emergency room father smiles
glad someone will finally assure him
Maude is all right.

Hahn places her metaphorical transformation of the moment of her mother's death into a “land perpetually 3:20 am” in a series of prepositional clauses between two flatter phrases. What she smuggles there and in her repeated but unremarked-upon pun (“Toll Attendant”) is brought into the open by the credible pathos of her father's denial. Is it inappropriate to locate strong emotion in the enjambment of “smiles/glad”? Are the sometimes aligned ideologies of poem-as-enactment and show-don't-tell repressive and manipulative, or are they standards of decency in the face of unbearable experience?

In the elegies that follow “The Toll Attendant”, Hahn's flat tone and changes of subject are convincing. Shock registers and reregisters: the narrator finds out more about the accident (her mother's car was hit by “an Arab kid fleeing a car of white kids with baseball bats”); she explains to her own daughter what happened (and is told that “maybe now is a good time/ to explain what the man has to do with babies”); she writes what she sees as she looks out the window; and she prepares for the funeral (and the reading of the Lotus Sutra that she predicts will cause her daughters to associate the scent of incense with their grandmother). Hahn's insistence on non-visual sense data as the strongest memory-stimuli is acute, and

in the first eleven poems of the book, she restricts herself to writing in a mainly unified and consistent first-person voice.

Which is fine as far as that goes, and for a writer either much less or much more ambitious than Hahn, that—surprising sense data organized to present the emotions and experiences of a lyric “I”—might be enough. In “On Death and Dying,” Elisabeth Kubler-Ross described the five stages of loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Hahn’s representation of grief does not follow this model. In “The Flooding,” an interruptive dialog with her father, Hahn introduces the subject of her own writing, specifically the writing of the book at hand:

I write about mother all the time.
I can’t stop myself. I have a new piece
in which I use lines from sympathy notes—

Here, as she turns to her father, Hahn also seems to be turning to the reader to ask for permission to grieve and work at the same time. But the confessional moment doesn’t unburden Hahn of the guilt she attaches to writing about her mother’s death; instead the guilt seems to manifest itself in the devices used in the next poems. It could be argued that the collages, interruptions, and invocations of theory are not merely poignant examples of Kubler-Ross’s bargaining stage, but are proof-positive of Hahn’s postmodernity. Fair enough—what author doesn’t sneak a justification of their style into the text now and then? But the interposed words in “Wisteria”—such as SNOW, SPARROW, SPARROW—aren’t different enough from her collaged materials to create a new meaning. And aside from the uneasy mixing-up of the reader with the poet’s father when Hahn says with Barthes that all writing is an appeal for the love of one’s father, her observations in “Cruising Barthes” don’t add up to much—the speaker takes issue with Barthes’s reiteration of Freud’s theories of sexual development, and more to the point, she refers to Barthes’s famous ability to marshal jargon in convincing arrays and declares that “I need him.” As an example of the path of thought of someone in mourning, it’s plausible, but the claims to meaning are overwrought. More convincing are the Shonagonesque *zuhitsu*, “Cuttings”, and a set of five parables that seem to be written as homage to/parody of the high translationese of the writers she describes in “Cruising Barthes” as “white, Occupation trained academic men.”

Less is at stake in the first of Hahn’s two books in 1999, *Volatile*. The few striking and beautiful pieces should be preserved if and when her selected poems are arranged, such as “The Details We Fall For”, a poem about driving while writing and dreaming, and “A Small Portrait”, about a woman who runs a day-care center, and “Found”, an anecdote from the Times about a twelve-year old former sex-slave who can only speak about herself in the third person. The larger part of the book is given over to longer pieces about mine workers in West Virginia and photographers in Nicaragua, Hahn arranging and interrupting her transcriptions in ways that, at best, suggest Steve Reich’s compositions based on the pitch values of speaking voices, but more often imply rough cuts of documentaries or made-for-

tv movies. Other poems in the book try a discursive prosy style, but the effect is more humid and stilted than enlightening: “It is a late twentieth century cliché that we must turn off/the hypersensitive television to distract our truer desire”, she writes at the beginning of “These Current Events”, the confusing infinitive contradicting the alleged cliché.

By contrast, *Mosquito & Ant* is significantly more alert. In a note at the back, Hahn explains that “mosquito and ant” was the name for a secret form of Chinese script used by women writing in China during the period that corresponded to the flourishing of Heian Japan. The book is organized around the lively (if standard) thesis that since we die, stimulation and strong emotion are preferable to ordinary experience, though probably not at the expense of one’s family. Aside from a zuhitsu that Hahn spoils by comparing herself to Sei Shonagon and by repeating the line “We do not know her name”, the book is a series of succinctly described sense-experiences—beginning with the memorial incense she deferred to her daughters in *The Unbearable Heart*, and ending with the narrowness of her daughter’s feet. Fruit is eaten; cappuccino lids are licked; the narrator shows up at her ex-husband’s wedding in a short black dress and red fishnet stockings; spray blows off the crests of waves; the cold of the tub is felt like a penetration of the skin; garnets, raspberries, and nipples get mixed up by color and by hardness; an ear is considered as a place to put bite marks; a woman is equated with caffeine. Hahn makes the whole vivid sensorium hold still long enough to be clear with herself that she’s only flirting in her praise of what used to be euphemistically called self-love:

Why spend love? Why
make available
a narrative that evaporates
like rubbing alcohol on cotton?
Do I strategize against wound
even as I head full tilt?
If I lie on my back
and breathe the air
the trees in the courtyard
expire into the window
perhaps I may stop *forgetting myself*,
quit looking for some other
to locate my own body.
What I do find after coming alone
is if I press my ear flat to the bed
I can hear my heartbeat
in the springs of the mattress deeply.
On your own, you write to me.
Mortal and stunningly adequate.

(“*The Lunar Calendar She Pins to the Door*”)

The promise to know oneself not by relation to *some other* is worthy, and Hahn's key word *narrative* finds a complementary sound in *evaporate*, to say nothing of the odd choices and placements of *expire* and *deeply*. *Stunningly adequate*, however, is excellent. More such surprising combinations might compensate for Hahn's displacement of conscious attention from psychology back to sensuality.

Jordan Davis

Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture

Eleanor Kaufman and Kevin Jon Heller, eds.
University of Minnesota Press, 1998

The following review explores ways in which the essays presented in the volume *Deleuze and Guattari; New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture* articulate a new political fabric (space-time) for the twenty-first century.

I

Eleanor Kaufman's introductory piece compares the essays in this volume to a map but not in the classical mimetic sense. The authors don't intend a representation of Deleuze and Guattari but rather assist the performance of the conceptualization of a new image of thought: in the play between actual and virtual our everyday assumptions about space and time change as does our concept of (whole) individual. Such play, as Bruno Bosteels writes in one of the articles, "From Text to Territory," helps us to make and unmake the environment, set up existential territories, or bring forth entire worlds from the uneven surface of the earth.

Following Kaufman, Deleuze's short piece translated by Kaufman, "Having an Idea in Cinema (On the Cinema of Straub-Huillet)" expands on Kaufman's point about the constitution of new space-times. All disciplines conceived as artistic engagements have in common the point of view that the disciplinary "task" is creational. For example, the philosopher's job is not to reflect on concepts but to invent them. Likewise, filmmakers don't record facts but make "blocks of movements/duration." Both philosophers and filmmakers struggle against information as the controlled system of order-words in a given society because while invention conceptualizes from the point of view of finite infinity, information or order-words deny not only that man is a creator, but as well, they deny this paradoxical aspect of time (finite infinity: between every two points there is always another point). Deleuze explains this creative & paradoxical aspect of man's relation to the world in his comments with respect to what he calls the cinematographic idea in the films of Straub-Huillet. Of the audible and visual images in these films he writes, "speech rises into air, while the visible ground sinks farther and farther" or again, "while this speech rises into air, what it speaks of sinks under the ground." (16) This commentary suggests that the sound-meaning movement in Straub-Huillet's speech acts is not essentially representational or linear. The auditory voice and visual image are disjunct in that there is no direct relation of the one to the other. The supposed representational world (the screen) is the emergence of a new space-time.

II

If you've ever heard an academic confess "we never stop working," (there is always another book to read, another lecture to prepare, another conference to attend,) the thought may have crossed your mind that perhaps, unfortunately, his or her professorial world has leaked beyond its institutional borders. However, though this is the picture typically drawn from stories academics tell others, among themselves academics think that since they do their work everywhere and anywhere, travel, for example, via the "airbus" combines space for work and pleasure. In other words, though they complain to others that they are always working, mobility convinces them they are free.

As an academic in training, about four years ago, almost as if unconsciously, I discovered this insider's thought and decided to try out the "airbus" program. Initially my attitude to mobility was jubilant and defiant, "no more enclosed disciplinary apparatus! no more lock down for me!" Once a month (for the next four years) I packed up my mobile office and moved for a week to New York. *Like my bosses*, I found the airbus sufficiently removed from the everyday to help me imagine my life as exotic. My motto became "here, there, wherever and...whatever." As a conscious "whatever function," I indulged my place as the system's basic modulating unit. Eventually, however, it became a job to keep moving. Although from an ideological viewpoint I was free (I could fly away on my magic carpet at a moment's notice and on top of it, I was unconcerned about job status (whatever particular assignment I was given didn't concern me)), I soon realized that professional hierarchy wasn't going away. Thus I learned another name for the airbus program, on-the-job-training in transcendence. Having developed another material plane, moving up on the corporate ladder was a non-issue. As far as I was concerned, everytime I got in a plane I was moving up, so when my pay stayed the same year after year, I compensated for this difficulty by improving my skill in transcendence. In other words, my thinking was, "being a graduate student with a cap at fifty per cent work-time is not exploitation but opportunity. I'm high because- I fly."

According to Michael Hardt's reading of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Michel Foucault, this type of movement from so called freedom to the transcendent "whatever" life is spreading like a virus in capitalist societies all across the planet. Thus we could say that the structural apparatus rewards it workers with mobility. Unfortunately, however, "mobility" is also a corporate strategy of making invisible or silent by means of displacement. Given the withering of civic institutions, their reinvention requires we be produced as whatever players. The capitalist machine can then march forward of its own accord without labor. To realize this trickery, a separate plane is constructed, "a simulacrum of society that excludes or marginalizes social forces foreign to the system."⁽³⁵⁾ The new post-modern whatever self is the "realized embodiment" of the transcendence myth. "Flying" is another name for this plane of transcendence. The point is you're elevated, above, so you're a happier player. Although being a "queen for eternity," (both in the sense of reality check, (Todd Hayne's suburban housewife Carol White in SAFE and pay check)) is not all its cracked up to be in

the fairytales (Yes, I'm scrubbing the floor, but, look! I'm really a princess!), to finally see and reject our Cinderella selves, we have to do more than "see it the way it is," we have to refuse transcendence of any sort.

Wickedly sophisticated as this scenario sounds, choosing a different "whatever" plan is the right of a democratic people to come. For the lover of the pop art insights of Deleuze and Guattari, rather than exploitation, the whatever player signals what Guattari calls a "futurist" or "constructivist" freeing-up of fields of virtuality. For example, a becoming princess (flying away on her magic carpet at a moments notice) learns to risk fearlessness in the face of death. Thus, "princess" takes on warrior qualities and the making of a war-machine is underway. The subject comes to embody qualities of *this world* or what film-maker Werner Herzog calls fabrication, imagination, and stylization and what philosopher Walter Benjamin calls courage, cunning, fortitude, and humor.

The truth about many of the academics who read but dislike Deleuze and Guattari's work is that they no longer believe nor do they want to believe in *this world*. For them, becoming a queen or king-god is the only real goal. There is no constructivist reality, merely masquerade for the status quo. Entire careers are spent evading *this world* precisely. When eventually these academics come to read Deleuze, it is too late. Belief in *this world* is no longer desired. Rather, transcendence is all. This is the sad state of affairs the university elite perpetuate: a system without a people.

Hardt's term "postcivil society" signifies the law of the jungle. Under this law, to many, belief in this world seems pointless, and yet because in the jungle not simply the marginalized lose, true reason cannot but invest in freedom in *this world*, via risk and chance. When we read the essayists in affinity with Deleuze, Guattari, and Foucault as in *D & G, New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*, we find affirmation of this reading of the jungle ethic. Finally as the princess asks, "am I too in my so called privileged site at the university no more than a global factory worker," conscience can again be heard. Immediately, when she answers, "yes! in that my passional subjective consciousness, (better known as the demand for equal rights,) veils the interiorization of contractual authority (despotic power)," she risks a different future. For her, the ever modulating system of whatever transcendence signals that she too modulates. Her labor is for sale not merely to her assigned whatever function but to the whatever function in general. Although the freedom to sell ones labor seems no freedom at all (she can reject this or that whatever function only to choose another) this consciousness is victory because it is a momentary break which opens the field to its mutability. Transcendence can be seen for what it is - the plane of capture or capitalist wage slavery.

In the article which follows Michael Hardt, Brian Massumi's "Requiem for Our Prospective Dead: Toward a Participatory Critique of Capitalist Power," again we see ourselves on an airplane, though this time it's the cockpit of a plane used for military maneuvers. Radar before us, we're set to fire, but we can't quite make out the figure on the screen.

Not knowing doesn't deter us, however. We've been trained to hit the bulls-eye. What's happening, according to Massumi, is that citizens of the only living superpower, are being stripped of their affective humanity as they are incorporated into technocracy. There is no space-time opening between a violent event and the affective legitimation of it thus, paradoxically, our "affective humanity" is disappearing. For example, photographs of the Gulf War's "highway of death" showed no flowing blood, but rather one still photograph: "The aerial pans showed a still: one automatic feedback that had dead-ended, dry as the desert, no more flow, any blood that may have warmed the veins of the vehicle operators boiled away in the blasts. In that stillness, the blackened ex-human became visibly a part of the circuitry."(42) According to this theory, mediation is no more; the mass "media" does anything but mediate. They directly instil and effectively circulate politically and morally operative affect.(46) What this means is that society is fast entering a zone where its members cannot, for example, be taught critical consciousness. There is no space and time between the event and its (mediated) representation; "affective concurrence suffices."(51) With this (im)mediacy in mind, Massumi says No to cultural critique which attempts to uncover the truth behind ideological consciousness or to change it. The realities of "mutual convertibilities or blurrings, reversals, repetitions, disappearances, displacements, and fusions"(52) make ideological viewpoint inconsequential.

Rather, Massumi suggests a number of ways to enact revolutionary becoming in the creation-validation of new space-times: 1) (*the principle of capitalist additivity*) Validate the afterlife of the death of pre-existing formations (formations pre-existent to capitalism, e.g. tribal societies) as a stratum that actually exists. In other words, recognize that formations pre-existent to capitalism are conserved in their institutionalization as *interference*. The "marginalized," or "negative" (e.g. the traditional values of the working class) communicates via interference. *Don't ignore interference*, it is resistance, par excellence! 2) (*the principle of separation*) Between separate strata there are always migrations moving about. Made up categories such as "criminal" move about in this in-between space. The socius doesn't want black holes or transparencies but rather interference patterns. If we see, for example, "criminal" as an interference pattern which signals "convergences, bifurcations, and resonations which are auto-generated,"(54) what was at one time recognized as the amorality of mutual convertibilities (blurring the line between civilians and combatants, action and inaction, life and death, participant and onlooker, guilt and innocence) now becomes a matter of "the production of a generative matrix composed of fissionable atoms of figurability."(54) In other words, once we see the space in between as a space where participants themselves determine the qualities of the mix, what we do is affirm revolution in process. 3) (*the principle of determination*) In light of the fact that all control-and-command power eventually operates as an apparatus of capture, we must "begin thinking in terms of nonmutually exclusive strata."(56) 4) (*the principle of modulation*) Command and control together make up "a complicated and fundamentally unpredictable rhythm covering the totality of social space."(58) 5) (*the principle of complicity*) Intentionality is a variable of the system so "mediation-based strategies, whether of reform or of dialectical struggle, are now bit players...."(58) Our "social existence is affective and reflexive." In other words,

ideological viewpoint is inconsequential. There is only room for the affective (local level) and the reflexive (international level). 6) (*The axiomatic principle*) Late capitalist power is autopoietic. It is not based on moral-rational integrity. 7) (*the countercapitalist principle of vitalist metaconstructivism*).(60) Reinscribe resistance in the generic; it is an operation on the generic not the particular. It is direct embodiment as the multiply singular. Resistance is not an oppositional practice but a pragmatics of intensified ontogenesis 8) (*the principle of autonomy of affect*) Interference patterns are joyful: excessive, deficient or humorous.

The final essay of this section, Eugene Holland's, "From Schizophrenia to Social Control," approaches the what-to-do-about- the-regime-of-control question through analyzing the gap between Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and *1000 Plateaus*. In Holland's reading, the improvisation figured in *Anti-Oedipus* signals a positive quality to lack of meaning (against paranoia or meaning fixation) but he thinks *1000 Plateaus* casts doubt on "schizophrenia" as a line of flight in that it is inevitably captured. For this reason, Holland stresses Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on the arts as a sphere of social change. Improvisation then is an art form which changes culture from within.

III

Following the idea that lines of escape manifest best in "unconscious connectivity" in that political economy is libidinal through and through (99), in the third section of *D & G, New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy, and Culture*, Bernardo Alexander Attias's essay entitled "To Each Its Own Sexes? Toward a Rhetorical Understanding of Molecular Revolution" demonstrates the way unconscious desire structured around a lack (99) (traditional psychoanalysis) or the reterritorialization of the unconscious structures economic-monetary dependencies. In other words, though we go to institutions hoping to make a contribution and at the same time make a living, institutions produce in us the feeling of lack and the incapacity to earn. We invest in these institutions because we think we lack skill and money but what we learn unconsciously is the idea "human nature is the market." Though consciously we resist the notion that profit is the bottom line, unconsciously we come to believe it. Because this profit idea is produced in the unconscious, it has little chance of being uncovered as exploitative. Countering this process, Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of affect as the basis of a-signifying semiotics contends that rhetoric has the potential to rupture unconscious investment, in particular when we realize that meaning does not translate primarily at the linguistic level. It is not so much what the professor is saying, but how she or he is saying it which, for example, keeps the student subservient. Though s/he may talk about progressive ideas, the professor's tone of voice, gestural embodiment etc. teaches us not to complain and to stay in our place.

IV

In the penultimate section of the text, *Mapping against the Grain*, Bruno Bosteels

article on Félix Guattari's cartographies of the unconscious entitled, "From Text to Territory," tells of Guattari's recognition of the permanent revolution occurring in the place of the apparent nonsense of a-significant practices (the informal maps and diagrams of everyday existence). Because daily life crosses over into the work world (strata are no longer kept separate) in Guattari's radical spatial praxis "teaching" for example may involve a crossing (transversality) between institutional pedagogy, institutional therapy and the struggle for social emancipation. As distinct from either a horizontal or vertical conceptualization of space, Guattari's mapping of social territory encourages the growth of virtual universes of reference adjacent to the actual territories of existence. Thus we are encouraged to value both discursive and nondiscursive worlds at the same time, breaking the despotism of the signifier and admitting instead the protocols of metamorphosis. As Bosteels describes it:

A cultural assemblage, for example, in one way lays out the color spectrum into a specific set of color zones, while another articulates the continuum of food matter to produce the various possible menus of a specific cuisine, just as language structures the phonetic continuum according to a system of significant phonological distinctions.

Such assemblages "effectuate diagrammatic conjunctions between semiotic flows and material flows, between machines of the real and machines of signs....and...whereas signifying practices produce useful redundancies within the sphere of semiotically formed substances of content and expression, a-signifying practices generate original interactions all across the intensive continuum of matter."(163)

V

In "Quantum Ontology" the essay which opens the last section of the text, *Philosophy and Ethics*, Timothy S. Murphy quotes Deleuze, "the mind...is not a space of subjective representation but a sensorimotor interval, a gap that allows difference to intervene between stimulus and response." Murphy continues, "The mind is the interval of freedom and creativity, but it is not fundamentally human or limited to humans; perception is an aspect of the "machinic phylum" that cuts across the organic/inorganic and subject/object antinomies." There is a certain madness in this idea but, in the opinion of many progressives the world is mad as we know it, so why not embrace Deleuze as a madness that seems mad but perhaps is not? Deleuze's freedom would ask our habituated systems to atrophy; he would ask us to embrace psychosis. This is because hierarchies no longer are suitable for us. We know this yet we are locked in. Deleuze as environmentalist realigns us with all life, taking "subjectivity" away from us. When we see something, he asks, do we think: light, tone, color, sound? Do we attempt to find a new link with which to see? Do we recognize that the space between words is not already filled? And that between two objects there is a third idea? There is so much "nomadic" space left for us to explore and yet we're locked into jobs which demand of us machine like responses to our environment, machine-like or reac-

tive. Humanity has reached all sorts of points of crisis. But one thing the body knows is reactive response, training. As if there were no “pause” between sounds. So, if we aren’t around a truly liberal audience, we’re locked into the division between reality and madness, a monological world: entropy. Yet science has shown us entropy is a rationalization of matter, it is not the matter of matter. Of the matter of matter, there is no end. There is no end to the combinations we can find, and to the ways in which we can create our world. Deleuze’s essential lesson is that language cannot continue to serve as a rational function which sets us above life.

The final essay in this collection entitled “Another Always Thinks in Me” discusses the problem of freedom citing Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* where he notes,

Negation is difference, but difference seen from its underside, seen from below. Seen the right way up, from top to bottom, difference is affirmation. This proposition, however, means many things: that difference is an object of affirmation; that affirmation itself is multiple; that it is creation but also that it must be created, as affirming difference, as being difference in itself... Negation results from affirmation: this means that negation arises in the wake of affirmation or beside it, but only as the shadow of the more profound genetic element - of the power of “will” which engenders the affirmation and the difference in the affirmation. (274)

Although we presume to know freedom, this quote by Deleuze is instructive in how far we still have to go. Basically, our culture has not begun to understand the meaning of freedom because we do not value difference as evidenced in the fact that we do not affirm affirmation. The scars from this are everywhere visible, most especially in children. But what would it mean to affirm, and why is this so important? Affirmation acknowledges making as the basis of human freedom. The idea “Negation is difference, but difference seen from its underside, seen from below” expresses the idea that when we see something different if we say, “That is not me, I’m different” it requires we look up. The thing I see must be lower than me. It is different, but different in that I have made it lower by saying “it’s not like me.” In contrast to this, Deleuze says we have to see from top to bottom. The point is we produce difference by affirming it. In other words, “difference is an object of affirmation.” It is a product of affirmation. If we affirm difference it is produced. When we proceed by way of negation we do not get difference we get sameness. Difference “must be created, as affirming difference, as being difference in itself....” We are creators, we make the difference.

Julia Van Cleve

Xcp

cross cultural poetics

Guillermo Gómez-Peña is an internationally acclaimed multimedia performance artist, social and cultural critic, and author. Born in 1955 and raised in Mexico City he immigrated to the US in 1978. He has received the Prix de la Parole, New York's Bessie Award, the American Book Award, and the MacArthur Genius Award.

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Eleni Sikelianos's most recent publications are *The Lover's Numbers* and *From The Blue Guide*. This Essay-poem belongs to *Of Cannibals, Of Thumbs*. Projects of late include a collaborative translation of Zhang Er's *Verses on Bird*.

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John Olson's poetry has recently appeared, or is due to appear, in *The Germ*, *Yefief*, *American Letters & Commentary* and *Gare du Nord*. Two short stories, "Signs" and "Monody," are due to appear in *First Intensity* and *Dirigible* respectively, and a chapbook - *Eggs & Mirrors* - is just out from Wood Works press.

George Kalamaras's collection of poems, *The Theory and Function of Mangoes*, won the Four Way Books Intro Series in Poetry Award and will be published by Four Way Books in Spring 2000. His poems appear in many places, including *Best American Poetry 1997*, *Boulevard*, *Epoch*, *The Iowa Review*, *Sulfur*, *Hambone*, and others. He is Associate Professor of English at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne.

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Zhang Er was born in Beijing, China and moved to the United States in 1986. Her writings have appeared widely in publications in Taiwan, China, and the American emigre community. Her chapbook in English translation (with Leonard Schwartz), *Winter Garden*, was published in 1997 (Goats and Compasses). Forthcoming chapbooks include *The Autumn of GuYao* (translated with Susan M. Schultz) from Poetry New York in 1999, *Verses on Bird* (translated with Eleni Sikelianos) from Talisman House in 2000. She currently lives in New York City.

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John Taggart directs the Interdisciplinary Arts Program at Shippensburg University. His recent books include *Loop* (poems), *Songs of Degrees* (essays), and *Remaining in the Light* (a study of Edward Hopper). The book from which the excerpt here appears, *When The Saints*, will be out soon from Talisman House.

Nathaniel Mackey's recent books include *School of Udhra* (City Lights), *Bedouin Hornbook* (Sun & Moon) and *Whatsaid Serif* (City Lights). Mackey co-edited the anthology *Moments Notice* and edits the journal *Hambone*.

Nathaniel Tarn is a poet, translator, editor, critic and anthropologist (Maya area, S.E.Asia, Alaska, China, Japan etc.) with some 25 books and translations into over a dozen languages. Tarn was Founding Editor of Cape Goliard Press and General Editor of Cape Editions in the 1960s. He has taught at Chicago, London, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Rutgers and Jilin (PRC). Latest publications are *Seeing America First* (Coffee House); *Views from the Weaving Mountain: Selected Essays in Poetics & Anthropology* (U. New Mexico Press) and *Scandals in the House of Birds: Shamans & Priests on Lake Atitlán* (Marsilio). *The Architextures* is forthcoming.

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In 1999, as editor of *We Press* and *Newark Review*, **Christopher Funkhouser** has produced publications by Kamau Brathwaite and Amiri Baraka; his writing has appeared in the *ACM SIGWEB Newsletter*, *Snare*, and *Gravitational Intrigue* (cd-rom). He teaches at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

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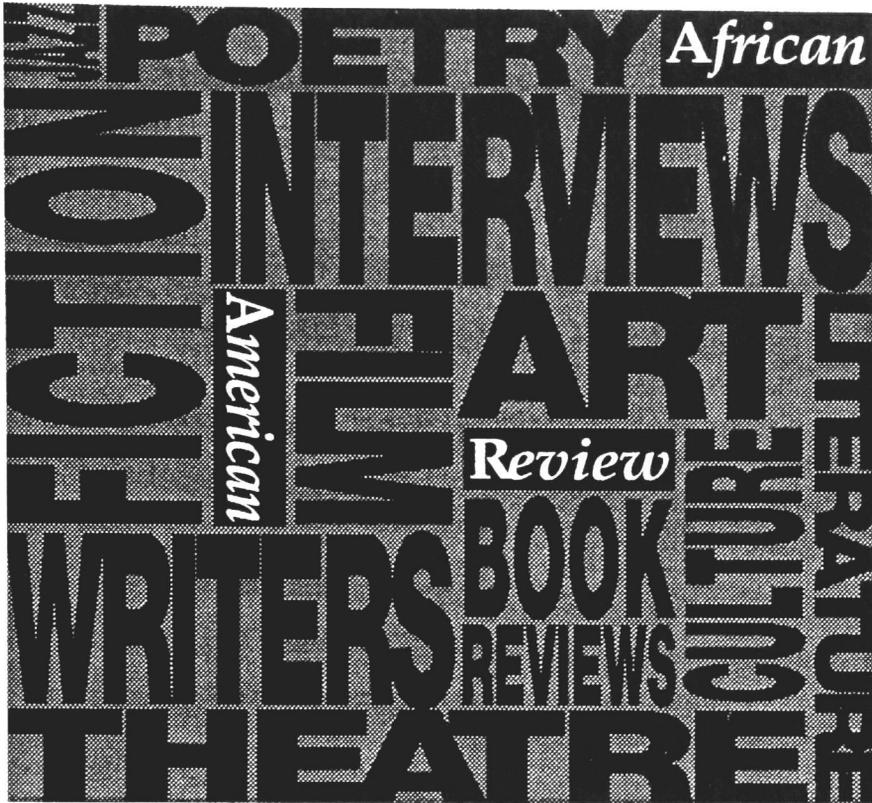
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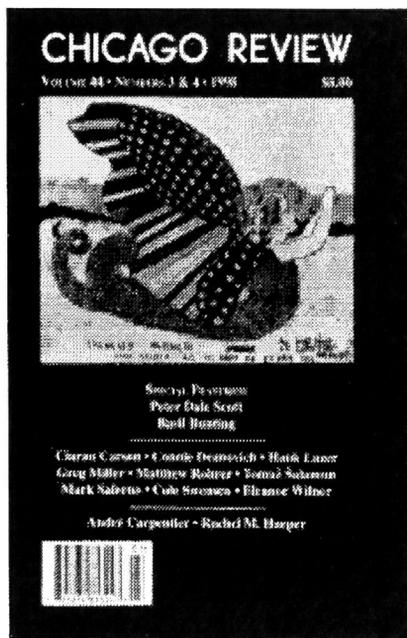
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