

# Cultural Transformations

Perspectives on Translocation in a Global Age

Edited by  
Chris Prentice,  
Vijay Devadas,  
and Henry Johnson

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# Cultural Transformations

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Chris Prentice, Vijay Devadas, and Henry Johnson



Amsterdam - New York, NY 2010



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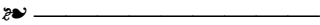
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# Introduction

## Cultural Transformations: Perspectives on Translocation in a Global Age



CHRIS PRENTICE, VIJAY DEVADAS,  
AND HENRY JOHNSON,

We need to situate the debate about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively 'settled' character of many populations and cultures, above all in relation to the processes of globalization [...] and the processes of forced and 'free' migration which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called 'postcolonial' world.<sup>1</sup>

**T**RANSLATION HAS EMERGED as a central problematic of our times. With its etymological root suggesting to 'carry across', 'translation' implies translocation. In the wake of Walter Benjamin's account of translation as a mode that is never static but performs, striving not to be as close as possible to the original but to renew it, translation further implies transformation. Translation applies to media, cultures, and peoples as much as to languages. Diasporic population flows and the additional culture flows brought about by technology and the globalization of the media are transforming our world, globally and locally. Many of the world's peoples are living 'in translation': inhabiting trans-

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall & Paul du Gay (London, Thousand Oaks CA & New Delhi: Sage, 1996): 4.



itional and transl(oc)ational realities as migrants, diasporas, the colonized. Thus translation, in all its inflections, is shaped by often unequal, asymmetrical relations of power, and by the politics of representation. Further, such ‘unsettlement’ and asymmetry has not defused questions of identity, but has given them new and complex articulations, while representation – with its dual connotations of portrait and proxy<sup>2</sup> – is itself only possible through the exercise of power. Representational acts of closure and naming are simultaneously enabling and exclusionary, as they enclose and define space at the cost of constituting an other/outside.

As Stuart Hall has noted,

Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation.<sup>3</sup>

While ‘becoming’ opens to the future and to transformation, and the very notion of identity has been subjected to a critique that emphasizes its instability and precariousness, Couze Venn poses the important question, “how is one to account for the fact that people by and large in everyday interaction [...] recognize themselves as particular selves who remain constant over time?”<sup>4</sup>

Venn suggests that “Self is not a fact or an event, it is not reducible to the facticity of things-in-themselves. The identity of a person, or a group of people, takes the form of stories told,”<sup>5</sup> thus “relying upon models and styles of emplotment already existing in a culture.”<sup>6</sup> He points to the ways identities (as) constituted through representation enact a dialectic of stability and mobility, location, and translation. Similarly, the essays in the

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<sup>2</sup> Gayatri Spivak, “Practical Politics of the Open End,” with Sarah Harasym, in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York & London: Routledge, 1990): 108–109.

<sup>3</sup> Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity,” 4.

<sup>4</sup> Venn, *The Postcolonial Challenge*, 107.

<sup>5</sup> *The Postcolonial Challenge*, 108.

<sup>6</sup> *The Postcolonial Challenge*, 109.

present volume illustrate that people construct, negotiate, and maintain their cultural identity and uniqueness through an array of cultural expressions, experiences, and artifacts, consistent with Hall's account of how

in modern forms of political movement [...] the signifier 'identity' [...] bears a] pivotal relationship to a politics of location – but also the manifest difficulties and instabilities which have characteristically affected all forms of 'identity politics'.<sup>7</sup>

Drawn from such fields as literary studies, music, media, visual and performance arts, the essays focus on contemporary forms of cultural translation and translocation, broadly at the intersection of postcolonial and global cultural dynamics.

Translation in postcolonial and diaspora theory has been taken up to insist upon the impossibility of maintaining a pure and pristine notion of culture, and upon the need to conceptualize culture as transitional and translational; culture is always in invention. Within the discourse of postcolonial theory and diaspora studies, translation affirms a politics of liminality and ambivalence. Thus we find the figures of the hyphenated subject (Hall), the migrant intellectual (Said), hybridized migrants (Bhabha), the diasporic subject (Rushdie) constantly mobilized as productive locations, as excessive and unconfined. Indeed, Stephen Pritchard affirms that "Translation and transposition [...] have a counter-colonial possibility," and he cites Judith Butler's observation that translation in this broad sense "'exposes the limits of what dominant language can handle'," while also effecting "'not only an integration of the minority into the dominant discourse, but also the possibility of the dominant into the minor, a counter-claim or appropriation. Indeed the very figure of the dominant term can alter as it is mimed and redeployed in that context of subordination'".<sup>8</sup> These essays similarly exemplify transl(oc)ation, both in the materials and practices they examine and in their own geo-cultural and

<sup>7</sup> Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity," 2.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Pritchard, "The Artifice of Culture: Contemporary Indigenous Art and the Work of Peter Robinson," *Third Text* 19.1 (2005): 72, citing Judith Butler, "Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, ed. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau & Slavoj Žižek (London & New York: Verso, 2000): 37.

(inter)disciplinary perspectives, their enactment of the mobile, uncontainable, and hybridized condition of contemporary culture.

The condition of globalization has generally been associated with the increased speed and density of ‘flows’ of peoples, finance, technologies, media, and ideas, images, and ideologies – the “scapes” identified by Appadurai<sup>9</sup> – and the notion of ‘flow’ has often been affirmed as superseding the limits and confinements of identity, essence, territory, and so on. While the term ‘flow’ itself connotes freedom and obscures any suggestion of inequality or violence, Appadurai insists on the disjunctive nature of ‘flows’, and the importance of the perspective from which they are viewed, provoking such questions as freedom for whom, from what, to what end? What ‘flows’ freely, and in which direction(s)? In the face of the freedom of cultures and their products to travel, what becomes of minority-culture property claims, the claims of (post)colonized indigenous peoples to cultural patrimony, bids to retain or for the return of materials that are appropriated or expropriated without consent? Thus the movements of peoples and cultures examined in this volume, whether in the context of migration or diaspora, tourism or the marketing of cultural commodities, or the networks of digital communications technologies, confront the problem that “If the fluidity of culture undermines the basis for cultural authority and property claims, the fixity of culture risks reducing culture to a static objectification that may well not represent those it purports to.”<sup>10</sup> At the same time, as Penny Van Toorn has pointed out in relation to ‘commodified’ Aboriginal histories, but – we would propose – with wider application to ‘cultural products’ more generally,

In the course of being transformed from one medium to another [...] they] have the potential to move out of the influence of one set of mechanisms into the jurisdiction of others. They can shift between different markets, and between the market and other regimes, depending

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<sup>9</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Pritchard, “The Artifice of Culture: Contemporary Indigenous Art and the Work of Peter Robinson,” 77.

on whether we view them at the moment of production, distribution, or consumption.<sup>11</sup>

Such questions are addressed in essays here on world music (Johnson), the musical heritage of small-island cultures (Bendrup, Hayward), and touristic performances of cultural identity (Prentice). As they negotiate the Scylla and Charybdis of essentialism versus appropriation or expropriation, cultures, products, and peoples on the move further encounter the dynamics of exoticism. In its persistence from early exploration and colonizing ventures, the contemporary exotic feeds globalization, and vice versa, as “an aestheticising process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar.”<sup>12</sup> Culture is subject to “commodifying processes by which generalised cultural differences are manufactured, discriminated and consumed,” a “fetishising process, which turns the [...] cultures of the ‘non-Western’ world into saleable exotic objects.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, just as Penny Van Toorn suggests that “at the same time as non-Western cultures are annexed into the empire of capital, they may in fact be availing themselves of new opportunities to perpetuate their cultural traditions, strengthen their social institutions, preserve and disseminate their historical knowledge, and further their political agendas,”<sup>14</sup> so Huggan qualifies his concern with the suggestion that in a post-colonial context, exoticism is effectively *re-politicized*, re-deployed “both to unsettle metropolitan expectations of cultural otherness and to effect a grounded critique of differential relations of power,”<sup>15</sup> and that “The choice here may be not so much whether to ‘succumb’ to market forces as how to use them judiciously to suit one’s own, and other people’s ends.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, as Simon During argues,

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<sup>11</sup> Penny Van Toorn, “Tactical History Business: The Ambivalent Politics of Commodifying the Stolen Generations Stories,” *Southerly* 59 (Spring–Summer 1999): 257.

<sup>12</sup> Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001): ix.

<sup>13</sup> Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Van Toorn, “Tactical History Business: The Ambivalent Politics of Commodifying the Stolen Generations Stories,” 253.

<sup>15</sup> Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, ix–x.

<sup>16</sup> *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 11.

The question is less, ‘are cultures converging under globalization?’, than ‘under what structures and pressures are cultural agents all around the world making choices what to communicate or export, what to import and graft, when to shift cross-border allegiances and target new markets/audiences, and when to reshuffle their own cultural repertoire to exploit, bolster, shrink or transform their traditions and heritage?’<sup>17</sup>

A number of essays in this volume examine instances of local agency in the production, marketing and consumption of their cultures; others discuss instances of resistance to cultural expropriation while seeking to escape imprisoning notions of authenticity and of insistence on participation in mobile networks of cultural exchange. They reveal the processes of local indigenization of different cultural forms that Appadurai emphasizes and Robertson has named ‘glocalization’.<sup>18</sup>

Just as debates about globalization have disagreed over whether it signifies homogeneity or fragmentation and singularities, decentredness or totalization, space/time distantiation or space/time compression, threats to local/national (cultural) sovereignty, or liberation from authoritarian or centrist cultural regimes, the term ‘translocation’ embeds not only a spatial but also a temporal dimension, one that challenges the normative (Enlightenment) conception of time as linear and progressive. In his celebrated essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin argues that it is necessary to reject an Enlightenment notion of time as a sequential march of progress in “empty, homogeneous time,”<sup>19</sup> because such a view of temporality, contingent upon a “causal connection between various moments in history,”<sup>20</sup> resists accommodating those instances that cannot legitimize the idea(l) of Progress and continuity. Benjamin proposes a temporality that is “based on a constructive principle [which] [...] in-

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<sup>17</sup> Simon During, “Postcolonialism and Globalization: Towards a Historicization of their Inter-Relation,” *Cultural Studies* 14 (2000): 388.

<sup>18</sup> Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time–Space and Homogeneity–Heterogeneity,” in *Global Modernities*, ed. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash & Roland Robertson (Thousand Oaks CA & London: Sage, 1995): 25–44.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940/1950), in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, tr. Harry Zohn, intro. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968): 252.

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 255.

volves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrests as well.”<sup>21</sup> A number of essays here emphasize this temporal challenge in such forms as repetition, interruption, uneven flows, instantaneity, simultaneity, haunting, and the ambivalent temporality of memory or commemoration. The nation-state, in particular, is subjected to the critical disruption of a ‘sequential march of progress’ in “empty, homogeneous time” in many of the following essays (Brydon, Devadas, Grant and Roy, McLaughlin, and Edmond). Benedict Anderson’s account of the “empty, homogenous” time of the nation is developed in Homi Bhabha’s postcolonial critique of a temporally unified modernity arrogated to the Western nation and its subject(s). He proposes that

postcolonial histories[,] actually provide us with an epistemological and, indeed, political and historical critique of Western modernity [...] not that we are simply interested in authenticating our different histories as [indentured, diasporic, migrant subjects] but on the basis that the cultural experience of those forms of displacement and exploitation might show us the other ‘colonial’ face of modernity that contests the ‘western’ appropriation and interpretation of the ideas of progress and transformation<sup>22</sup>

to ask, “what is the ‘we’ that defines the prerogative of the present?”<sup>23</sup> A universal, singular history gives way to dialogue and contestation, “to blast open the continuum of history.”<sup>24</sup> There are essays here that argue transience as the condition of the nation, whose borders are unable to contain the movement of cultural products and producers; that posit its always already contaminated cultural space against a fictive notion of unity; that point to the instability of the homeland as imagined or remembered from diasporic space; that affirm the lost, buried, and foreclosed narratives within the space and time of the nation; and that argue for the political possibilities inherent in alternative collectivities.

The very possibility of engaging culture as a productive terrain is conceivable only from a perspective of culture-in-translation. Drawing on a

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<sup>21</sup> “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 254.

<sup>22</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “The Postcolonial Critic: Homi Bhabha Interviewed by David Bennett and Terry Collits,” *Arena* 96 (1991): 49.

<sup>23</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): 247.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 254.



variety of contemporary theorists in fields of cultural studies and cultural analysis, the essays enact the performativity of translation as rendering impossible the notion of a fixed language or point of origin. Nevertheless, they remain scrupulously aware of their own locatedness in space and time. Despite diverse geo-cultural emphases, what they share are perspectives on culture shaped by the very notion of encounter – enacting cultural encounter in their own positions and approaches. Many of the essays concern Pacific, Asian, and Australasian contexts as themselves sites of (post) colonial encounter and exchange, in the often fraught processes of negotiating local values and global flows. They do not so much ‘use’ Euro-American theory, reading their materials from a vicarious intellectual and political high ground, as demonstrate how Europe, America, theory, and indeed globalization may be apprehended differently from antipodean perspectives, or perspectives on the margins of Euro-American power. From the margins/antipodes, Western Europe cannot be considered without recognition of its ‘Others’ – such as Turkish migrants – already within its borders (Grant and Roy). Digital communications media, articulating a virtual space in instantaneous time, are revalued from the point of view of the persistence of political, economic, and geographical locatedness of labour (Ryan) and embodiment of culture (Nicholls and Barratt). Globalization is revalued from a postcolonial Canadian perspective attentive to the politics of how we imagine and name our collectivity and interconnectedness (Brydon). Cultural locations are similarly examined from the liminal spaces of disciplinary boundaries (Voci), or through materials and practices produced from liminal sites contesting both nation-state hegemonies and global totalizing discourses. A Chinese poet in New Zealand interrupts the statutory biculturalism founded on a colonizer–colonized binary, and English-language cultural hegemony (Edmond); South Pacific students perform ‘their culture’ as cast through tourist eyes and expectations (Prentice); Australia is translated through Dante’s ‘Inferno’, and vice versa (McLaughlin); a Japanese popular music group negotiates its Okinawan roots with the global ‘world music’ industry (Johnson). In their shared concern with the processes of translation – from one language to another, one medium to another, one genre to another – culture itself is figured as “initiat[ing] new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society

itself.”<sup>25</sup> However, the essays also bear witness to Benjamin’s argument that “in all language and linguistic creations there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated,”<sup>26</sup> showing themselves just as attentive to moments of untranslatability. Devadas invokes Lyotard’s *différend*, or phrases/discourses in dispute which cannot be translated into one another’s terms, echoed in Nicholls’ and Barratt’s reading of the South Asian diasporic “Ummi” in *The Kumars at No. 42*; Bendrups shows how colonial history cannot simply be subsumed by fusion aesthetics into musical reconciliation of cultures, but can continue to signify oppression; Hayward argues that action research by outsiders into the musics of small-island cultures should still seek specific locally appropriate forms; and Voci maintains that images can signify in excess of their pedagogical intent, their visuality constituting an element of irreducibility.

The essays in the present volume pay close attention to the specificities of these movements within postcolonial and diasporic contexts, both past and present; the state politics of discrimination, persecution, and exile; the appetites of the global cultural and information economy, the ability of electronic media to recast our experiences of space and time; and the uneven distribution of wealth viewed alongside the unpredictable emergence of forms of agency. Whether emphasizing theoretical engagement or a case-study approach, each points to the functions of cultural translation in – and as – translocation, as processes of encounter, exchange, and transformation, disruption, and renewal, revision and the emergence of the totally new. Across the range of essays presented, culture – in the sense of cultural materials and practices – is the object, the medium, and the agent of translocation. The collection is in three parts: Part One contains essays that deal with textual translocations in literary and theoretical instances; the essays in Part Two deal with musical translocations; and Part Three presents analyses of translocations across visual forms, from performance to screen and other image media.



<sup>25</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” (1923), in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, tr. Harry Zohn, intro. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968): 80.

## Textual Translocations

Every language, every culture is impure, made up of several tongues relating to a class, gender, region, geography, and so on, so that every language and every culture are open to a double disruption of their claim to speak for a unified community or to force a consensus: on the one hand, it is open to the critique of the assumption of unitariness and homogeneity – of language, of culture, of the subject; on the other hand, the demonstration that the instability of the signifier arises from the effects of the plural forces that determine its mobility makes possible the disruption of the authority vested in the authenticity or originariness of the signifier/culture.<sup>27</sup>

The theme of translocation, conceptualized as a movement across borders and a challenge to specific notions of boundaries, whether this be national, cultural, textual, or disciplinary, is the general focus of the five essays in this section. The first two essays, by Diana Brydon and Vijay Devadas, offer theoretical interventions in the spatio-temporal questions opened up by the notion of transl(oc)ation. They share a commitment to the politics and aesthetics of contamination, presenting critical explorations of theoretical questions and approaches at the forefront of postcolonial studies. Drawing on arguments in diaspora studies and postcolonial theory, they both advocate a much more open, comparative way of conceptualizing theorizations on diaspora and postcolonial theory. Devadas argues that this is crucial so that a responsible and ethical politics of diaspora can be forged, while Brydon argues that it is through such a critical commitment to challenging disciplinary borders that postcolonial theory can offer a critical hand to globalization studies. The following three essays, by Alyth Grant and Kate Roy, Jacob Edmond, and Mary McLaughlin, turn to the domain of literature to explore the force of translocation in intervening in established regimes and modes of representation. Similarly drawing on the field of postcolonial studies, the essays engage with translocation as an interruptive act that challenges and re-codifies the way in which the nation is conceptualized, while simultaneously affirming the fluidity of culture and the precariousness of belonging. They each explore

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<sup>27</sup> Couze Venn, *The Postcolonial Challenge: Towards Alternative Worlds* (London, Thousand Oaks CA & New Delhi: Sage, 2006): 163.

movements between places and spaces that re-signify different possibilities of conceiving culture, nation, home, and belonging. In seeking to ‘contaminate’ spaces and places of purity that have definitive modalities of categorization, these essays affirm a politics of translocation as a way of locating the ambiguities and ambivalences that inform the social landscape. Across these five essays, there is a shared critical concern to develop dialogues across cultures, disciplines, texts, landscapes, memories, histories, and theoretical trajectories. This concern is informed and articulated by a willingness to maintain a sense of openness that challenges the desire for (disciplinary, cultural, and national) unity.

DIANA BRYDON, in her essay “Earth, World, Planet: Where Does the Postcolonial Critic Stand?” asks what connotations, trajectories, critical stances, and strategies are implied in terms such as ‘earth’, ‘world’, and ‘planet’ as terms for human and environmental, social, and political interconnectedness, in the context of the challenges posed by contemporary globalization. She asks a similar question about the location or stance of the literary critic in relation to a field like the postcolonial, which is not solely literary: what do literary critics have to offer, and what do they have to gain from other disciplines, especially in the social sciences? Brydon responds to these questions by way of an analysis of postcolonial theory and civil-society movements, and with a call to shift “the focus of analysis away from the nation-state toward space-based metaphors, such as earth, world, and planet,” on the grounds that there is an urgent need to disentangle ourselves from “our different disciplinary values [...] and] think outside them.” We need to produce a “kind of disciplinary work – [that is] undisciplined.” On the one hand, then, the essay calls for commitment to a sense of disciplinarity that is open and contingent; this is how postcolonial theory can gain from and give to other disciplines. On the other hand, the shift from temporal metaphors such as the nation-state to spatial metaphors (earth, planet, world), “stress[es] the ways in which space is produced by human communities in ways that always incorporate an imaginative geography, which in different societies has produced radically different conceptions of what space is and how it may be inhabited.” Such an intervention opens up the possibility of forging an alternative critical multitude that is not premised on the nation-state. At the same time, however, Brydon makes an important caveat against thinking of

such modalities of association as akin to the “‘global soul’ arguments advanced by Pico Iyer.” Such an uncritical position absorbs the Other (subject, culture, community, and text). This is against the spirit of entering into dialogue across cultures, texts, and disciplines, hence there is a need to be cautious “about rushing too quickly to conclusions based on unexamined assumptions [...] while] pay[ing] attention to other modes of knowledge production and priorities.”

VIJAY DEVADAS, in “Affirming Diasporas as National Antinomies,” reads the politics of translocation through a critical exploration of the notion of diaspora, tracing it across key debates within diaspora studies to suggest that diasporic consciousness – its conjuration of other times, histories, spaces, and memories – “can productively forge a cultural politics of critical diasporic difference” to critique the limits of the nation-state’s determination of identity. However, Devadas points to a paradox within such a politics: the affirmation of a diasporic aesthetic as a critique of the nation-state’s articulation of cultural difference through such formations as multiculturalism can fall prey to marking the diasporic aesthetic as *de rigueur*, and this is an irresponsible act. Against such a possibility, the question that Devadas explores is how to respond, to bear witness, and “enter into an ethical relationship with the trope of the diaspora, with the ‘lost’, ‘buried’, ‘foreclosed’ narratives within the space and time of the nation.” Drawing on Lyotard’s notions of the *différend* and bearing negative witness, and on Derrida’s notion of hauntology, the chapter suggests that an ethical and responsible relationship to the trope of the diaspora needs to be underscored by a politics of impossibility that keeps the relationship to the diasporic trope open and critical.

MARY McLAUGHLIN’S “Australian Infernos: Janette Turner Hospital’s Translation of Dante’s Hell into Contemporary Australia” examines Hospital’s ‘transl(oc)ation’ of Dante’s ‘Inferno’ into Australian space to argue that its textual translation “into post-bicentennial Australia makes clear the re-encounters and rememberings by which Australian settler identity is destabilized.” Working through the optic of postcolonial theory, McLaughlin seizes upon the liminal, ambivalent moments that emerge in this translation of contemporary Australian politics through Dantean imagery, and connects them to the larger question of the national imaginary. As they disrupt the dominant perspective on the nation, they open up

a space where the contemporary struggles of Indigenous Australians for land rights can be articulated. Ultimately, McLaughlin demonstrates that the act of translation reveals the “indeterminate, unmappable, and porous” nature of the Australian national imaginary to disrupt the singular, unified articulation of the nation. Against the normative construction of a unified Australia(ness), she proposes that Hospital’s translation blasts open such unities and champions a politics of plurality and ambivalence. In her critical reading of Hospital’s translocation of Dante into Australia, McLaughlin thus both unsettles the authorized version of the ‘Australian’ subject and calls for a reconsideration of the terms upon which nationhood is constructed.

ALYTH GRANT and KATE ROY, in “Between Mother Tongue, Grandfather Tongue and Foreign Tongue: A Turk in Translation,” analyze the writings of the diasporic Turkish author Sevgi Özdamar, and her connection to the larger socio-political condition of the diasporic Turkish community in Germany, to articulate the figure of “a Turk in translation.” They make the point that the figure of the diasporic (as translated subjectivity) disrupts and threatens the unproblematic, unified articulation of a German nation-state and a German national identity. In other words, a diasporic epistemology re-codes and re-signifies established modes of articulating identity within the nation-state. Grant and Roy further argue that narratives of diaspora must be conceived beyond foundational, originary moments, and must also account for differences – translations – between first- and third-generation diasporic members whose relationship to the imagined homeland, the country of residence, and the very status of being in diaspora are not necessarily the same. As such, even the mobilization of the translated subject of the diaspora must be open to translation, to changes and shifts within the diasporic epistemology.

The themes of nation and national identity are the central focus of JACOB EDMOND’S “A Poetics of Translocation: Yang Lian’s Auckland and Lyn Hejinian’s Leningrad,” which examines the works of the Chinese poet and the American poet through the notion of translation. The argument here is that, as translated selves, both poets produce work that draws from the personal experience of migration and movement, and connects this to an affirmation of transience as the very condition of the nation. Such a location of transience, of writing from a translated location, Ed-



mond argues, “challenge[s] the increasingly transient boundaries of national literatures [...] and exemplif[ies] the way national literatures are themselves increasingly caught up in a process of translocation.” He deploys the notion of translation to demonstrate the fictitiousness of the cultural unity of the nation (and national literature) as constructed in the image of a specific (dominant) community, and calls for a view of the nation (and national literature) as inherently ‘contaminated’, mixed, hybridized. In other words, cultural translation “desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy,”<sup>28</sup> and underscores the liminality of community formations premised upon fixed notion of culture.

### Musical Translocations

Over the last few decades, globalization has had a marked effect on music. The “world music”/“world beat” scene is one part of the global music industry that particularly highlights the increased accessibility, commodification, and consumption of some of the world’s musics, but the impact of globalization can influence local culture, where the nexus of local and global results in the negotiation of identity through music. While the immediate influences of global flows on local musical expression is especially visible and audible in musical styles that cross cultures in terms of shared musical traits, it is the localization of global influences that is particularly significant when attempting to understand the effects of globalization in local contexts. The musical flows from local to global and back to local (glocal) reveal traits that are often immediately recognizable in terms of their locality or global movement, but it is through translation in both the narrow and the broader sense – and translocation – that the contemporary production, distribution, and consumption of just about any type of music exhibit multiple layers of meaning that have been culturally transformed in one way or another. That is, music and place are intrinsically linked so that local modes of musical production,<sup>29</sup> whatever its influences, can generate intense affect in local insiders.

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<sup>28</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 228.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Stokes, “Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music,” in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

Just as people are on the move and the 'scapes' of (late) modernity influence many aspects of the lives of many of the planet's peoples, music, too, is on the move.<sup>30</sup> A number of the various 'scapes' of contemporary global flows that Appadurai defines are particularly visible in the 'world music' industry,<sup>31</sup> as well as in local forms that are increasingly influenced by global flows.<sup>32</sup> Harris Berger and Michael Thomas Carroll, in their discussion of global pop and local language, do much to emphasize the importance of looking at local meaning, emphasizing that it is the local that translates global music styles.<sup>33</sup>

Local forms of musical expression in a global age have intervention at their core, but intervention takes many forms and can raise many questions pertaining to cultural identity. Three essays in this volume focus on music, exploring locality in a global age and the effects of intervention in helping to construct local meaning. Each chapter looks at a different cultural context (Okinawa [Japan], Rapanui [Chile], and some of the small islands near Australia, and the research methodologies used vary among cultural studies, ethnography, and action research. What links these essays is the way each reveals an aspect of cultural intervention where a noticeably different music product is created that has transformation at its core. Intervention in this sense is mostly concerned with hybrid forms that blend local and global ideas, but the end-product is something that is mostly perceived as an expression of the local, something that helps in the building of local identity and cultural heritage. Henry Johnson looks at Okinawan music that is in between the local and the national, but also

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<sup>30</sup> See Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, and Krister Malm, "Music on the Move: Traditions and Mass Media," *Ethnomusicology* 37.3 (1993): 339–52.

<sup>31</sup> See Veit Erlmann, "The Politics and Aesthetics of Transnational Musics," *World of Music* 35.2 (1993): 3–15; Veit Erlmann, "The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s," *Public Culture* 8 (1996): 467–87; Martin Stokes, "Music and the Global Order," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 47–72; Timothy Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> *Global Pop, Local Language*, ed. Harris Berger & Michael Thomas Carroll (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2003); see also Jocelyne Guilbault, "On Redefining the 'Local' Through World Music," *World of Music* 35.2 (1993): 33–47.

between local/national and the global; Dan Bendrups examines a hybrid music style that exists between the local and the colonial; and Philip Hayward argues for explicit cultural facilitation as part of the research process, something that, in its approach, must involve intervention.

The negotiation of cultural identity is explored by DAN BENDRUPS in “Fusión Rapa Nui: Mito Manutomatoma and the Translocation of Easter Island Music in Chilean Popular Culture.” Having undertaken ethnographic field research on the island of Rapanui (part of Chile), Bendrups investigates the rise in popularity of the local songwriter Mito Manutomatoma and his group Fusión Rapanui in Chile. Manutomatoma’s music can be viewed as fusion music – mixing traditional and popular musical styles. Having returned to Rapanui in 2002 after a successful career in Chile, he draws both praise and criticism from the Rapanui audience for what he did with local music in Chile and how he represented his culture to outsiders. Essentially, the tensions originate in how and why Manutomatoma fused aspects of local music with Chilean popular music. On the positive side, the new sounds are seen as an attempt at cultural reconciliation; on the negative side, some see this new hybrid music as a continuation of Chilean colonial influences. Manutomatoma’s music, as a product of translation and translocation, occupies a space of tension in a place where colonial boundaries are increasingly obfuscated in the global age. Bendrups outlines the island’s precolonial and colonial history, noting the factors that have helped shaped contemporary music and current tensions on the island. The mass media are shown to be an important factor in creating these tensions, particularly after the exoticization of Rapanui in films and documentaries dating from the 1990s. Bendrups stresses the ways in which translation and location are negotiated through Rapanui music. Manutomatoma’s music is Chilean music, particularly because of his temporary re-location to the Chilean mainland, where he attempted to integrate his music as Chilean, rather than being viewed as some kind of exotic ‘Other’. Further, Manutomatoma’s return to Rapanui has been achieved because of the continuing colonial link between Chile and Rapanui. However, it was precisely Manutomatoma’s re-location to Chile that allowed him to revalue his island roots and to express his locality through music.

At the heart of PHILIP HAYWARD's essay "Interactive Environments and the Context of Heritage: Culturally Engaged Research and Facilitation in Small-Island Societies" is the idea of cultural facilitation, or action research. As a researcher, Hayward is also a research activist, someone who engages with the community being studied and who helps facilitate music production through interactive environments in a context of globalizing economies and media influences. Hayward's work over the last ten years or so has taken him to many small islands around and near Australia: the Whitsunday archipelago, Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island, East New Britain, Mioko, Ogasawara, and Pitcairn Island. Hayward calls his approach Culturally Engaged Research and Facilitation (CERF). In this approach, he identifies and advocates a research method and type of engagement suitable to the context where he is working. Hayward's work aims to identify the most socially appropriate way for outside researchers to engage with small-island cultures, and his chapter offers many considerations and suggestions reflecting his aim to achieve the best method in undertaking such study, including the return of materials to locals and ensuring their circulation. From publications to recordings, he argues, the research is morally bound to return items and to facilitate their future accessibility by islanders and non-islanders alike.

In "Constructing an 'Other' from your 'Own': Localizing, Nationalizing, and Globalizing Nēnēzu (Nenes)," HENRY JOHNSON discusses the Okinawan popular music group Nēnēzu, examining how it draws eclectically on strands of traditional and popular music from Okinawa, Japan, and the world to produce images of itself as an 'Other' that can exist within local, national, and global spheres. Nēnēzu, which was formed in 1990 by the composer, *sanshin* (three-string snake-skin lute) player, and producer China Sadao, has a history as a prefabricated band that is currently in its third totally different line-up. As an example of cultural intervention, especially in terms of their creation and subsequent re-inventions, Nēnēzu has a propensity to travel. The group's blend of Okinawan and world music allows them to be consumed in many cultures. From Okinawa, it is their cultural roots and diverse influences that are at the heart of their music. But it is also their place in Okinawa, Japan, and the world-music industry that shows them to be a useful case-study in the dialectic of difference, not only in the Japanese nation-state but also in the com-

mercial and global world-music industry. In recent years, Okinawan culture, including its traditional and popular music, has enjoyed increased popularity across Japan and beyond. Outside its local setting, it is seen in the nation-state as a locally produced ‘Other’ and in the broader world-music industry as a kind of Japanese roots music. Drawing on the idea of multicultural Japan,<sup>34</sup> Johnson looks at Nēnēzu as a band that has been able to exploit its local identity, particularly beyond Okinawa, as a result of the consumption of world music. In other words, identity is displayed, celebrated, and consumed within local, national, and international spheres, where difference is strengthened through the processes of localization and globalization.

### Visual Translocations

It has often been remarked that the visual is hegemonic in contemporary Western culture, and has become the principal mode in which identities are constructed, articulated, and transformed. However, this claim demands more precise nuancing if its complex significance is to be fully grasped. The image and the condition of visibility have long been associated with a politics of representation, from colonial discourse, described by Homi Bhabha as characterized by “the production of the visible as the knowable,”<sup>35</sup> and vice versa, to the postcolonial demand, in the face of racist representation, “for control of representation.”<sup>36</sup> As Marcia Langton, an Aboriginal Australian media-studies scholar suggests, however, “Rather than demanding an impossibility, it would be more useful to identify the points where it is possible to control the *means* of production and to make our own self-representations.”<sup>37</sup> Such a call is implicitly cognizant of Kelly Oliver’s point that “Vision, like all other types of perception and sensation, is just as much affected by social energy as it is by any other form of energy [...]. To see and be seen are not just the results of mech-

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<sup>34</sup> Yoshio Sugimoto, *An Introduction to Japanese Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 70–71.

<sup>36</sup> Marcia Langton, “Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television—”: *An essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of film-making by and about Aboriginal people and things* (Sydney: The Commission, 1993): 9.

<sup>37</sup> Langton, “Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television—”, 10.

anical and photic energies, but also of social energies.”<sup>38</sup> Visibility has been championed as the basis for a politics of liberation, as progressively transformative of social meanings, social space, social conditions, especially for those rendered invisible or misrepresented by hegemonic social discourses, by discrimination of various types. However, as Peggy Phelan notes, the relationship between visibility and power is not uni-directional, such that visibility confers power; rather, echoing Bhabha’s point, she suggests that power also confers and articulates visibility in such objectifying forms as voyeurism, fetishism, and surveillance.<sup>39</sup> Further, pressing as the concern for self-representation remains, the politics of the visible/visual must take account of transformations in the very processes of image-making and in the constitution, circulation, and consumption of images.

As the essays in this section demonstrate, images translate and are translated, are transformed and translocated. Yet the image, whether still or moving, aesthetic or pedagogical, documentary or fictive, live or screened, quotidian or spectacular, is inseparable from the conditions of its production and consumption. Such transformation is most immediately evident in the advent and implications of digital technology, such that the representational nature of the image is shadowed by its technically generated immediacy without necessary ‘scene’ or play of light and dark in the photographic negative, and its being subject not simply to endless reproduction but to indiscernible manipulation. But earlier visual media and forms, too, are now seen to have been similarly shaped by their own conditions of production, whether technological, institutional, or social. Jacques Derrida has written of televisual actuality as “not given but actively produced, sifted, invested, performatively interpreted by numerous apparatuses which are *factitious* or *artificial*, hierarchizing and selective, always in the service of forces and interests,” coming to us “by way of a fictional fashioning” that obliterates the ‘purity’ of the ‘live’ or ‘real-time’ aesthetic it proclaims. Thus,

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<sup>38</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis & London: U of Minnesota P, 2001): 14.

<sup>39</sup> Peggy Phelan, “Broken Symmetries: Memory, Sight, Love” (1993), in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London & New York: Routledge, 2003): 109–10.

[A] concept of *virtuality* (virtual image, virtual space, and so virtual event) [...] can doubtless no longer be opposed, in perfect philosophical serenity to actual [*actuelle*] reality [...]. This virtuality makes its mark even on the structure of the produced event. It affects both the time and the space of the image, of discourse, of ‘information’, in short, everything that refers us to this so-called actuality, to the implacable reality of its supposed present.<sup>40</sup>

Taking up the challenge of contextual interpretation of images, aware of the means of (re)production, including their reception and interpretation, the essays in this section focus on a variety of forms of visual representation or visual media. These include live performance, visual-text media such as posters, the screen images of film, television, and computer gaming. Although drawn from culturally and geographically diverse sites, and employing different theoretical bases and analytical approaches, each is concerned with the politics of the visual image, in particular with its production, circulation, and consumption. Covering a wide spread of geopolitical and cultural territory, from China, the Pacific, and the South-Asian diaspora in Britain to cyberspace, the essays insist on the social embeddedness of these processes, and each considers the political potential and political dangers that confront those who seek to articulate identities through visual representation.

Just as scholars working on images, from the traditional fine arts to posters, pictorials, scrolls, films, videos, performing arts, and Internet websites, have begun to break generic and cultural boundaries, PAOLA VOCI, in “Rejecting Words: Illiteracy, Silence and the Visual,” advocates and adopts a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary approach to the study of Chinese image-making to explore representations “crucial in the making, the perception, and the remembrance of the Cultural Revolution.” She focuses on the means by which rural China was defined by illiteracy and silence in comparison to urban China, and, through a reading of two films dealing with questions of literacy and illiteracy – one produced under Chinese communist government control, and the other a later re-thinking of Chinese language and culture – posits that “in a time where empty literacy dominated, illiteracy and silence were experienced and mythologized

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<sup>40</sup> Jacques Derrida & Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002): 3–6.

as a form of resistance.” Against the prevailing view that literacy empowers, Voci argues for illiteracy’s potential to represent an act of social resistance. She suggests that those who are literate are inevitably literate ‘in something’, their literacy formed and sustained in concrete contexts through ‘available’ texts, rendering them vulnerable to propaganda. In contrast, visual forms, such as posters or films, are “products of the official political discourse but they also belong to a visual culture that transcends the political discourse.” Thus, while it is not illiteracy itself that is powerful, it has the potential to enable resistance to the Cultural Revolution’s ideology. Reminding her reader that she is examining representations of the literacy/illiteracy question, rather than historical events or factual data concerning their relations and political effects among rural and urban Chinese, Voci goes on to look at further examples from Chinese political culture – musical as well as visual – that offer spaces of dissent from official doctrine.

In “Integral Culture: Agora-Phobia at the Polynesian Cultural Centre,” CHRIS PRENTICE reads the spatio-temporal rhetoric of this tourist theme-park in terms of Jean Baudrillard’s notion of “integral reality” to argue that the centre presents “integral culture.” Technologies of digitalization and virtualization figure forth a wider cultural logic of programming and immediate feedback – what Baudrillard refers to as a sort of “generalized Larsen effect” – that contribute to the collapse of three-dimensional representational space and its replacement by a fourth, “dimensionless” space–time of immersion. Drawing on her own visit to the Centre, on scholarship, and on print and on-line publicity about it, she argues that, just as tourists visiting the Centre are incited to ‘become Polynesian’, many of the performers have ‘learned their traditions’ in order to perform them at the Centre, further pointing to the notion of cultural simulation. Implicated from its inception in colonial incursions into the Pacific, the Polynesian Cultural Centre may have developed through multi-perspectival ‘frames’ on Polynesian cultures, including those of Church/mission, anthropology/education, and tourism/business, as analyzed in Andrew Ross’s ethnography, but it has increasingly privileged the latter, to the point where it is now explicit about its theme-park status. Differences are aestheticized and neutralized through an emphasis on availability, accessibility, participation, and absorption; recent advertising has humorously



employed familiar reality-TV formats suggesting ambivalence towards cultural difference. Prentice proposes that “The question, in relation to integral reality, is not simply where, but whether any frames can be drawn around theme-park and (reality) television to maintain them as distinctive cultural spaces, or whether we live in television reality, in theme-park culture.” Prentice poses this question from the perspective of a postcolonial concern with calls for the decolonization of culture, arguing that this will necessitate the re-creation and re-invigoration of a critical space of non-absorption.

In “*The Kumars at No. 42: The Dynamics of Hyphenation, or Did Sanjeev Take Parkie Down?*” BRETT NICHOLLS and ANDREW BARRATT analyze the British TV series as a sit-com/chat-show, arguing its status as “a hyphenated text [...] which actively traces the experience of postcolonial migrancy in Britain.” Focusing on the first episode of the series, which – significantly – featured as guests Michael Parkinson and Richard E. Grant, they ‘map’ the show’s basic format as offering a larger semiotic of hyphenation, from the physical spaces of the set to the series’ relation to broader cultural politics in contemporary postcolonial Britain. Careful to specify their analysis of the programme as it aired on New Zealand television, they nevertheless point to cultural transformations that have trans-national resonance. Thus the (South Asian) migrant experience in Britain is represented metaphorically in the intergenerational dynamic of the Kumar family, from the parents’ aspirations to assimilation into middle-class British gentility, to son Sanjeev’s full assimilation and mass-mediated aspirations to americanized-Bollywood celebrity, while encompassing ‘wild-card’ “Ummi’s” unassimilable unpredictability. Yet the show also functions crucially as meta-television, as a show about the business of television, commenting on the television industry and cultural politics in Britain, shaped by market logic and the cult of celebrity. As Nicholls and Barratt, argue, this forms the subtext of the encounter between the aspiring chat-show host Sanjeev and, in particular, his first-episode guest Michael Parkinson. Further, what distinguishes this series, which Nicholls and Barratt situate in relation to South Asian and other migrant British film and television, is its self-parody. They argue that “*The Kumars* powerfully enacts the shift to new market-driven modes of television production in the contemporary world,” but that it ironically

draws on “the ‘revenge of the migrant’ texts that have been central in the depictions of South Asian life in Britain” to re-vision migrant desire as emptied of politics. In the context of a post-Thatcherite hyphenation of xenophobic society and neoliberal promise of prosperity, the series confronts less the question of racist or non-racist representation than the process of social, cultural, and economic mainstreaming, as the real issue.

SIMON RYAN’s essay “Transl(oc)ating the Player: Are Some Computer- and Video-Game Players Also Unpaid Workers in the Information Economy?” specifically discusses the virtual worlds of digital gaming, arguing the inseparability of production, circulation, and consumption of cultural commodities in the global age. He draws on studies of the political economy and sociology of post-Fordist production to argue that computer- or video-gaming are examples of digital technology that are transforming historical tensions between play and labour, whether in terms of the relative freedom of the former and the coerciveness of the latter, or of the distinction between play as non-productive of economic value and labour as defined as precisely the production of such value. In short, computer-game players are being used as unpaid workers in the digital economy. Just as the play–labour distinction is dissolved through a range of strategies employed by the digital-games industry, so it both exacerbates and relies on such distinctions between the personal and the social, the interior and the exterior. Ryan points out that the computer-gaming community is made up largely of young and adolescent males, and suggests that, in harnessing such affects and social processes as competition, the desire for social currency, and peer-group affiliation, “computer games enable the translocation of important processes in the development, enhancement, and marketing of these digital commodities from the corporate headquarters and hi-tech production sites of the [...] industry’s dominant transnational manufacturers [...] to the bedrooms and living rooms of the ordinary suburban houses of their consumers, in effect enlisting many of the more dedicated players as industry outworkers.” Offering examples from the marketing and uses of digital on-line gaming products, he shows that “the entertainment content of computer games is manifestly orientated around a process of marketing affect. The desire of hardcore gamers to inhabit their worlds imaginatively and even socially [...] directly and indirectly assists the games industry in the development

and marketing of their products.” In this way, computer games reveal contemporary processes, adumbrated in their industrial form by Adorno, of the translation of play into labour, of relative freedom and even subversion into socialization and coercion.

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PART ONE  
TEXTUAL TRANSLOCATIONS

# Earth, World, Planet

## Where Does the Postcolonial Literary Critic Stand?<sup>1</sup>



DIANA BRYDON

Another world is possible<sup>2</sup>

Where does the subject of global inquiry or injury stand, or speak from?<sup>3</sup>

**T**HIS ESSAY BEGINS with two questions. What is the appropriate language for conveying what is at stake in globalization? What has postcolonial theory to offer to globalization studies? In addressing “cosmo-theory,” Timothy Brennan suggests that “a brief over-

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<sup>2</sup> This is the motto of the World Social Forum, set up by civil-society groups in 2000 as a network of networks, originally meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and designed to function as an alternative to the neoliberal globalization agenda of the World Economic Forum, which meets annually in Davos, Switzerland. For a fuller description, see *Another World is Possible: Popular Alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum*, ed. William Fisher & Thomas Ponniah, foreword by Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri (London & New York: Zed, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Unpacking My Library... Again,” in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers & Lidia Curti (New York: Routledge, 1996): 200.

view of a single decisive concept may be useful for illustrating a kind of inquiry that is seldom taken up in cultural studies: one that links intellectual producers to their own products in a localized matrix of intellectual work.”<sup>4</sup> In assessing three metaphors that emotively suggest how global contexts shape a space for action, I will question the matrix they afford for situating postcolonial intellectual work while briefly specifying my understanding of my own situatedness within these debates.<sup>5</sup>

This article remains a preliminary investigation, one in a series I have written over the last several years bringing together a range of issues related to identity and belonging that have been bubbling up in postcolonial and social-justice discussions across a variety of fields. I have focused on how to write and visualize ‘home’ under globalizing conditions, how notions of “cosmopolitanism, diaspora and autonomy” become newly relevant under such conditions, how the politics of postcoloniality are changing, how “the social life of stories”<sup>6</sup> functions in local and global contexts, and how citizenship is being reconceived within Canadian multicultural debates. This essay re-situates my fascination with these themes within the contexts of earth, world, and planet, each of which offers global options for thinking space in newly grounded ways. If John Berger is correct in linking the loss of political bearings to the loss of home as a “territory of experience,” then such a task is crucial to reclaiming globalization for poetry and the particular. Berger cites Édouard Glissant to argue:

The way to resist globalisation is not to deny globality, but to imagine what is the finite sum of all possible particularities and to get used to the idea that, as long as a single particularity is missing, globality will not be what it should be for us.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Brennan, “Cosmo-Theory,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 661–62.

<sup>5</sup> There are important institutional, national and disciplinary contexts shaping the localized matrix for my thinking to which I can only gesture here. I itemize these in more detail elsewhere: see Diana Brydon, “Canada and Postcolonialism: Questions, Inventories, and Futures,” in *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*, ed. Laura Moss (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2003): 49–77.

<sup>6</sup> Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory*, (Lincoln & London: U of Nebraska P, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> John Berger, “‘I’m getting into a train... I’ll call you later’: Ten dispatches about place,” <http://mondediplo.com/2005/08/14place> (accessed 11 August 2005): 2.

Although this sounds as if it could assume an additive model for understanding globality, I do not believe that is what is implied here. Rather, the insight that I find in this notion is the idea that each particularity alters the whole and so refracts understanding anew. For Berger, poetry, a mode of thinking seriously endangered in our contemporary moment, is where particularity most intensely names itself. With poetry, he claims, “We will take our bearings within another time-set.”<sup>8</sup> These beliefs, he concludes, are part of why he remains a marxist.<sup>9</sup>

The ways in which poetry and politics intertwine are central to the postcolonial project and the resistances it has posed to capitalism in its imperialist and late-imperialist neoliberal guises. Postcolonial mappings take on different configurations depending on the location from which they are charted and the dialogues that develop when they move into different kinds of social space. As a result, there is no single answer to my question: where does the postcolonial critic stand? It is the kind of question that we need to keep asking, and answering within the contingencies of the moment, but it is not the kind of question we can just raise, answer, and be done with.

I have put two epigraphs at the head of this essay, which function for me as points of orientation within a wide-ranging exploration; but I do not address them directly in what follows. They signal my attempt to bring together discourses too often kept apart: those of social activism and the literary imagination. This essay derives from several sources: my fascination with the different but overlapping resonances conjured up by the three terms of my title – earth, world, planet – and the different trajectories each suggests for how to make sense of the ways in which people are reconfiguring spaces of belonging under globalization, on the one hand, and, on the other, my wrestling with the various critiques of postcolonial theory that deplore its anti-foundationalism, its lack of grounding in particular forms of political struggle, or, as Peter Hallward puts it, its “refusal of any identifiable or precisely located centre, in favour of its own self-regulating transcendence of location.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Berger, “‘I’m getting into a train... I’ll call you later,’” 3.

<sup>9</sup> “‘I’m getting into a train... I’ll call you later,’” 4.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Hallward, *Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing Between the Singular and the Specific* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001): xv.



For the purpose of my argument, I want to bypass the controversial question of who legitimately can *be* a postcolonial critic by suggesting that, for me, the postcolonial critic is anyone who professes to be working with and through postcolonial theory today. This essay is meant to be descriptive and questioning rather than prescriptive. Each critic will find her own ground. What I describe here is part of my own continuing search. I seek postcolonial reading strategies that might prove appropriate to the contexts out of which I am working and I hope that you, my readers, wherever you may be located, will find some resonance for yourselves in my mapping of these questions.

Postcolonial theory, as I understand it, requires re-thinking the foundational categories on which the academic division of disciplines has traditionally been based, including examining the categories in which literary studies has operated. In forcing a re-thinking of the status and role of the nation-state, globalization has also compelled renewed attention to the category of national literatures and the supposed ability of Literature (with a capital L) both to reflect and to transcend the nation. Postcolonial criticism, whether it traces its roots to anticolonial liberation struggles, to Commonwealth literature, or, more recently, to notions of *francophonie* and the post-Soviet imaginary, began with a clear sense of its grounding in community and cause. Charges of groundlessness have come with the gaining of some theoretical purchase within the academy, which inaugurated a move away from geopolitical specificity toward a “world embracing”<sup>11</sup> level of generalization that linked postcolonial, postmodern, and poststructuralist critique in a common philosophical endeavour: to question the legacies of the Enlightenment and its modernity.

As a result, categories that have structured understanding of spatial, political, economic, temporal, and cultural organization are now all in question. The nation, the people, the local, the market, the human – these no longer function as they once did to anchor intellectual inquiry and emotive investment. They still function, but differently. They are no longer seen as stable ground but more often as shifting ground. What provides the grounding, then, for meaningful work today?

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<sup>11</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003): 4.

In *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Paul Gilroy laments “a failure of political imagination” in which “translocal affiliations” seem almost unthinkable outside “the limited codes of human-rights talk, medical emergency, and environmental catastrophe,” attributing this sorry situation to the fact that “the human sciences have become complacent.”<sup>12</sup> While it is far more usual to argue that the human sciences are under threat, and more anxious and defensive than complacent, Gilroy’s argument needs to be taken seriously.<sup>13</sup> As Gilroy sees it, Western society is in danger of forgetting the lessons of imperial history and of the Holocaust, and is on the way to repeating their abuses. But he also believes that we can reset “our moral and political compass [...] by acts of imagination and invention.”<sup>14</sup> This metaphor of re-setting the compass is in use across the political spectrum and already risks cliché, yet it expresses so compactly the spatial dynamic implicit in the threat and potential of the current moment that it is hard to resist.<sup>15</sup>

These questions of grounding and orientation motivate a range of inquiries across the disciplines and within the public sphere. According to some, postcolonial theory’s greatest strength resides in its insistence on asking these questions. To others, especially those who see “Western discursive rules, norms, and sensibilities as the proper context for global exchanges,” it is precisely that search for revised grounds that disqualifies the postcolonial from legitimacy.<sup>16</sup> In the broadest terms, postcolonial work shares the belief that motivates the World Social Forum: “another

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005): 5.

<sup>13</sup> I engage this question of the complacency of the human sciences at more length in my forthcoming article, “Do The Humanities Need a New Humanism?” in *The Culture of Research in Canadian Universities: Literary Scholars on the Retooling of the Humanities*, ed. Smaro Kamboureli & Daniel Coleman (Edmonton: U of Alberta P, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 52.

<sup>15</sup> In their “Foreword” to Fisher and Ponniah’s *Another World is Possible*, for example, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write that “The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre has already become a myth, one of those positive myths that define our political compass.” See Hardt & Negri, “Foreword,” in *Another World Is Possible*, ed. William Fisher & Thomas Ponniah (London & New York: Zed, 2003): vi.

<sup>16</sup> Siha N. Grovogui, “Postcolonial Criticism: International Reality and Modes of Inquiry,” in *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class*, ed. Geeta Chowdhry & Sheila Nair (London: Routledge, 2002): 38.

world is possible.” Such a belief, in being goal-oriented, sits uneasily with dominant models of disinterested research. At the same time, in its future-oriented temporal relation, it may seem complicit with Western norms. Those of us coming from a postcolonial training within the interdisciplinary collaborative research group studying “Globalization and Autonomy” find ourselves negotiating simultaneously on both these fronts. How many of the founding assumptions of disciplinary practice can we throw into question and still complete our work?<sup>17</sup> Can describing the world be separated from changing it, if we understand space itself as produced rather than merely given? Postcolonial work continually confronts the knowledge that space itself is metaphorical rather than a given and stable physical entity, because not all cultures conceive of space as colonizing Western cultures have.

In reading a first draft of this essay, my Brazilian colleague Lynn Mário de Souza Menezes drew my attention to this point through his work with indigenous Brazilian cultural logics and the challenges they pose to Western notions of space, agency, subjecthood, and especially writing as a privileged form of communication.<sup>18</sup> He explains that, for this community,

writing, from an indigenous ‘visionary’ perspective is just the spatializing of knowledge (knowledge becoming space and materializing; knowledge reduced to a single dimension, and accessible to a single body-sense, that of sight, rather than the multisensorial synaesthesia of the indigenous non-spatial ‘vision’.

Seen from this perspective, as he argues,

writing diminishes rather than enhances perception and the very notion of space itself [if thought of in the terms that writing establishes, will] in all its subsequent metaphorical realizations – earth, planet, globe – go[es] on colonizing our thought.

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<sup>17</sup> The first two books of this multi-volume series have now appeared: *Global Ordering*, ed. Louis W. Pauly & William D. Coleman, and *Renegotiating Community*, ed. Diana Brydon & William D. Coleman. As we prepare our concluding volume, we continue to wrestle with these questions.

<sup>18</sup> For published versions of his work, see the texts listed in my Works Cited.

"I see space," he writes, in this context of writing "as depending on the attendant concepts of sight and a seeing subject. When space becomes naturalized, the presupposed seeing subject becomes invisible and disembodied and escapes criticism."<sup>19</sup> Part of the task of postcolonial literary critics is to make that presupposed seeing subject visible but without privileging the sense of sight over other ways of understanding space and inhabiting, dwelling, and living in the world.

If cast within a frame that continues to privilege Western notions of space as something measurable and quantifiable, then Earth, world, and planet may all be employed as colonizing metaphors, as Menezes suggests. I want to argue, though, that they need not be subjected so rigorously to the domain of sight alone. Auditory space may also shape our understandings of these metaphors in different ways. Furthermore, what seems to be the relative interchangeability of Earth, world, and planet on the most general level can also obscure consideration of the significant ways in which they differ as employable images of how we configure our relation to space, and conceive of where we live and what it might become. Each name carries different associations, which may be stabilized in writing but which surely also convey different connotations within different contexts. As used within the World Social Forum, 'world' signals a socially based opposition to the supposedly impersonal economic forces of globalization. The 'globe', as a 'spherical representation of the earth', derives from a certain kind of scientific knowledge, a privileging of the visual and the panoptic, and need not include humanity as social agents within its visualization. 'Earth' has more varied meanings, some of which are more immediately tangible: it can signify the planet, the people who inhabit it, and the material that composes its surface. Similarly, 'world' can indicate the Planet Earth but also all people on the earth and, beyond that, the universe itself. Although environmental movements such as Earth First! advocate "a biocentric instead of a homocentric way of looking,"<sup>20</sup> the word 'earth' may be employed in the service of either vision. For me, 'earth' has a particularity that neither 'world' nor 'planet' can match. It has a touch,

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<sup>19</sup> All citations from Menezes, taken from his email communication to me (25 February 2004).

<sup>20</sup> John Barnie, *No Hiding Place: Essays on the New Nature and Poetry* (Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1996): 81.

taste, and smell, a graspable concreteness, which make it more intimately resonant of home.

I do not wish to make too much of these kinds of slipperiness in conceptual orderings of how ordinary usages image our relation to global place. I mention them because I think that they might help us to conceptualize the challenges currently posed by globalization. To me, some of the most alarming developments in the current world order seem to derive from the colonial experiment: the growing apparent tolerance for increasing inequities, for torture, and the growing numbers of people treated as “disposable” (Kevin Bales) or named as “illegal” (Catherine Dauvergne). In identifying the “illegality” of people as “a new discursive turn in contemporary migration talk,” Catherine Dauvergne sees a dangerous realignment of old ‘us’ versus ‘them’ divisions,<sup>21</sup> noting, further, that “human rights norms have done little to assist illegal migrants.”<sup>22</sup> Kevin Bales, in his analysis of “new slavery in the global economy,” and Paul Gilroy, in his consideration of the continuities and breaks between old racialisms and new, each identify the need for research into the history and current practices of race that are not based on forms of identity-politics but can instead address the changing forms of exploitation today.<sup>23</sup> These critics agree with Bryan Turner that “We do not possess the conceptual apparatus to express the idea of global membership”<sup>24</sup> or, we might add, of global accountability and global entitlement to the kinds of protections traditionally granted by citizenship within the nation-state and claimed more universally by human rights.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Catherine Dauvergne, *Making People Illegal: What Globalization Means for Migration and Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008): 16.

<sup>22</sup> Dauvergne, *Making People Illegal*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> The Special Topic October 2008 issue of *PMLA* 123.5, on “Comparative Racialization,” addresses this issue in more depth.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Sheila L. Croucher, *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004): 81.

<sup>25</sup> And as popular books such as James Hughes’s *Citizen Cyborg* suggest, the very idea of ‘human’ already seems too limited and inappropriate for what is rapidly becoming a posthuman society. Hughes suggests that the concept of the ‘person’ is more appropriate than what he sees as “human-racism, the idea that only humans can be citizens”; Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future* (Cambridge MA: Westview, 2004): xv). In his view, personhood and its attendant rights could be extended to “posthumans, intelligent

In addressing inequities on a global scale, attention to the metaphors that legitimate or disguise their practices should be helpful. This is not mere theory unconnected to practice. As David Harvey reminds us, there is more at stake than just “getting the metaphors right.”<sup>26</sup> But we do need to understand the metaphors we have, and how they are functioning, for, as he suggests, we seem to have come “to an intellectual impasse in our dominant representations.”<sup>27</sup> As a geographer, Harvey suggests that “we cannot deal with ‘the banality of evil’ [...] because, in turn, we cannot deal with geographical difference itself.”<sup>28</sup> I find this notion puzzling but think that he may be suggesting the kind of critique that Spivak and Menezes note: Western notions of mapping and measuring space obliterate the particular space–time relations that derive from other cultures in ways that question the very foundations of Western thought, and the resultant inequities that they legitimate.

Perhaps terms such as Earth, world, and planet, in their urge to stress interconnectedness, move beyond geographical difference too quickly. As Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan note,

Recent geographical work has recognized the significance of emotion at a range of spatial scales. As we move ‘out’ from the body, emotions are no less important but they are arguably less obvious, less centrally placed in studies of, for example, the home, the community, the city and so on.<sup>29</sup>

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animals and robots” (xv). But whatever we name a new rights-bearing global subject, the questions of how that subject might attain agency in making decisions to govern global actions and in reforming or devising new global institutions to manage change within the global sphere remain pressing. For a good introduction to some of these questions, see *A Possible World: Democratic Transformations of Global Institutions*, ed. Heikki Patomäki & Teivo Teivainen (London & New York: Zed, 2004). For a new research project, “Building Global Democracy,” see the website [www.buildingglobaldemocracy.org](http://www.buildingglobaldemocracy.org)

<sup>26</sup> David Harvey, “Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils,” in *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, ed. Jean Comaroff & John L. Comaroff (Durham NC & London: Duke UP, 2001): 284.

<sup>27</sup> Harvey, “Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils,” 290.

<sup>28</sup> “Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils,” 290.

<sup>29</sup> Joyce Davidson & Christine Milligan, “Editorial: Embodying Emotion Sensing Space: Introducing Emotional Geographies,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 5.4 (December 2004): 524.

Have we the emotional imagination to think space at this degree of abstraction? Or could the banality of evil derive, at least in part, from the same failures of the imagination that denigrate colonized cultures? Post-colonial work, along with the rest of contemporary inquiry, inherits the problem of how to address the 'banality of evil', Hannah Arendt's striking characterization of fascism. Her phrase provides a context for what David Dabydeen terms the "pornography of empire" and what Susan Sontag addresses as the unmet challenge involved in "regarding the pain of others." Harvey's assessment of why we cannot deal with the banality of evil leads him to question the ground, or knowledge-base, on which theorizing of global belonging might be based: "What kind of geographical knowledge is adequate to what kind of cosmopolitan ethic?"<sup>30</sup> In exploring this question, he notes that "postcolonial writings [...] have opened a vital door to a broad-based critical geographical sense in several disciplines"<sup>31</sup> and points to "the extraordinary proliferation of spatial, cartographic, and geographical metaphors as tools for understanding the fragmentations and fractures evident within a globalizing world."<sup>32</sup> "Cosmopolitanism," he concludes, "is empty without its cosmos."<sup>33</sup> A striking thought. The cosmos of cosmopolitanism, in its various current revivals, is clearly not understood by everyone in the same way, although it is often assumed as the given ground for a discussion of how people should live together. Daniele Archibugi's edited collection *Debating Cosmopolitics* provides an excellent introduction to the range of these debates, but does not consider whether or not there might be a postcolonial way of understanding the cosmos and pays almost no attention to the contributions of the humanities.

Harvey discerns an "embedded geopolitical allegory" in the concept of cosmopolitanism.<sup>34</sup> Are there also geopolitical allegories embedded in the three terms of my title: Earth, world, planet? If so, what are they and where might they lead us? My personal first orientation to earth comes as a gardener rather than a theorist. Gardening, in its practical and its literary

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<sup>30</sup> Harvey, "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils," 290.

<sup>31</sup> "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils," 298.

<sup>32</sup> "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils," 299.

<sup>33</sup> "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils," 298.

<sup>34</sup> "Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils," 302.

groundedness, brings the cosmos “back to earth,” as it were. From that base, I find myself wondering what kinds of communities are constellated around new organizational structures such as the Earth Summit, and what relationships those communities bear to the World Social Forum. Is the environmental movement split between such orientations or are there splits and overlaps that require much more detailed scrutiny? I suspect that these metaphors are being asked to carry sometimes widely divergent agendas. In a similar vein, the idea of civil society, whose groups so often employ these metaphors, is currently being made to carry too heavy a burden of hopes for progressive social change when much of the evidence suggests that civil-society groups may organize as often for discriminatory as for liberatory ends and may often find themselves advocating band-aid solutions and charity in place of what is really needed: radical reorganization in the cause of equity.

How are these metaphors affecting disciplinary practices? In English departments, postcolonial studies began with a comparative nation-based focus within a model of progress that linked the attainment of autonomy and territory with independence from imperial control. Much current postcolonial theory, although not the versions that I endorse, remains hostile to the nation-state, advocating cosmopolitical, transcultural or planetary consciousness as superior replacements. Yet the nation-state, at least in its liberal manifestations and despite its many shortcomings, remains the best provider of many public goods, such as universal public education and public medical care. In theory and often in practice, it provides citizens protection under the rule of law and institutional avenues for redress when this fails. Many problems remain, but they can be noted and addressed. I see no necessary contradiction between the survival of the nation-state and movements toward conceiving of the world as an interactively global space requiring new global institutional arrangements for managing the increasingly complex interactions that globalization promotes. People can operate on a number of complementary scales at once without having to make absolute choices among them.

As a Canadian who benefits from the current global order, while also feeling guilty about the many ways in which my benefits make me complicit with it, I still invest hope in the nation-state as a governing structure that can benefit all its citizens in a more equitable fashion and contribute



to a well-ordered, peaceable, and just world through modification of existing international and global structures. I do not, however, believe that allegiance to the place of my citizenship contradicts allegiance to the global community. A citizen of Canada can also be a citizen of the world, but those two forms of citizenship may be lived out in different ways and require different exercises of responsibility.

As a literary critic, even though I owe my first jobs to the national divisions that structure this discipline, having first been hired as a Canadianist and Commonwealth-literature specialist before the postcolonial existed as a category, I have always felt constrained by nation-based models that make it difficult to trace international patterns of interaction and the differences between local specificities in meaningful ways. The postcolonial can be construed as a transnational category, following the imperial languages of the West, most prominently English, wherever they went, and advocating attention to everything that they missed, or misconstrued, including alternative modes of charting complex connectivities. That is the model that I prefer for work in the classroom. But the postcolonial, in curricular practice, more often functions as a kind of grab-bag of national literatures, a supplementary afterthought added to the unchallenged base formed by the British and US experiences. In theory, of course, it must challenge that base, but in reality, it often serves to entrench it. Postcolonial criticism has brought new energy to established fields and enabled the addition of a category once termed 'English literature outside British and American' and, increasingly, simply 'postcolonial literatures' or 'world literature' but has not yet succeeded in changing the organization of English or other language departments nor of making many inroads into the analysis of globalization within globalization studies. Special issues of *PMLA* on "Globalizing Literary Studies" (2001) and "Literatures at Large" (2004) testify to changes afoot but have not yet been translated into major curricular change or degree requirements within many North American institutions.

Current postcolonial theory and civil-society movements are now forcing me to ask just what is at stake in shifting the focus of analysis away from the nation-state toward space-based metaphors, such as Earth, world, and planet? Do they really suggest different ways of imagining place and communal action within it? What do ecological, environmental, and in-

digenous concern about the fate of the earth, Edward Said's advocacy of a worldly criticism, and Gayatri Spivak's of planetarity, have in common? Each suggests modes of engagement beyond the nation for re-conceiving home, but to me such shifts need not deny the importance of the nation-state as a space of engagement. While the trend in much current cultural theorizing is to dismiss the nation-state and its institutions, from my Canadian-based perspective I want to resist this trend and question its politics.

In "Literature for the Planet," Wai Chee Dimock launches an attack on the nation that posits literature as an anarchic force, "impossible to regulate or police."<sup>35</sup> She sets up a straw man to argue that

we need to stop assuming a one-to-one correspondence between the geographic origins of a text and its evolving radius of literary action. We need to stop thinking of national literatures as the linguistic equivalents of territorial maps.

Growing up in Canada and then with postcolonial theory, I don't believe that I ever did think this way, but I am prepared to accept that this is the dominant mode in which English and comparative literatures have been and may still be largely conceived. Dimock suggests that global readership "brings into play a different set of temporal and spatial coordinates. It urges on us the entire planet as a unit of analysis."<sup>36</sup> In her view, "As a global process of extension, elaboration, and randomization, reading turns literature into the collective life of the planet."<sup>37</sup> But from what perspectives are we to understand that collective life? Given that reading is a highly specialized skill, not currently available to many, what does such a view of community really mean? Can there be such a collective life, really, when reading is an elite activity currently confined to the privileged, and when even those within this elite global community read in situated ways? It is this realm of conflicting readings that most interests me and that I worry that Dimock is implicitly denying by privileging what seems to me to be an unconsciously-based US-based reading. Like her, I hope there can be such a collective life, but I worry that the diversity she

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<sup>35</sup> Wai Chee Dimock, "Literature for the Planet," *PMLA* 116.1 (January 2001): 174.

<sup>36</sup> Dimock, "Literature for the Planet," 175.

<sup>37</sup> "Literature for the Planet," 178.

celebrates may be unhelpfully constrained by her invocation of a “practised reader” who can make sense of it all.

Dimock contends that “To a practised reader the hearable world is nothing less than the planet as a whole, thick with sounds human beings have made across the width of the globe and across the length of history.”<sup>38</sup> I love this image of the planet thick with sounds but I am somewhat chilled by the vision that the phrase “the practised reader” conjures for me in this context. Reading is a highly culture-specific skill of great complexity, yet it can be practised in a range of fashions, so that to rush to assume that one may always know how to identify which readings are practised and which naive, in our culturally diverse world, makes me nervous. Even though this practised reader is skilled in hearing and distinguishing diversity in the “thick sounds” that she imagines, it is this very assumption that there can be a culturally centred connoisseur of diversity, writing out of the pages of *PMLA*, that troubles me. As Menezes points out, while indigenous communities may adjust their writing to accommodate their non-spatial forms of knowledge, when “this writing is read ‘spatially’ in the west, it becomes lacking and rudimentary, even infantile.” Dimock substitutes a form of auditory mastery for a visual one and stresses the reader’s receptivity to what she “hears,” but this metaphorical “hearing” still occurs through print-based reading and relies on assumptions that we know what “mastery” is in ways that may too readily disguise a continuing ethnocentrism.

If Simon Gikandi is correct in suggesting that “postcolonial theory is the assertion of the centrality of the literary in the diagnosis and representation of the social terrain that we have been discussing under the sign of globalization,”<sup>39</sup> then what difference do these two signs – the postcolonial and the global – make? What does it mean to assert the centrality of the literary? And what difference does it make in analyzing a global social terrain? What have literary postcolonial studies to offer analyses of globalization and what are the implications of globalization for the future of literary studies? These are some of the questions we are asking within the Globalization and Autonomy research team discussed earlier in this essay.

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<sup>38</sup> Dimock, “Literature for the Planet,” 180.

<sup>39</sup> Simon Gikandi, “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (Summer 2001): 647.

Many of us in the team have come together out of frustration with the limits of our own disciplinary expertise and the frames they offer us, which seem inadequate for addressing the challenges of our times. What we are learning, however, is how entrenched our different disciplinary values may be and how hard it is to think outside them. Our ongoing on-line discussions and our conversations in person have revealed that the concept-metaphors we assume, and those we employ, can prove major stumbling blocks to true communication. We have breakthroughs and moments of illumination that make it all worthwhile, but it can be a profoundly destabilizing experience. We may use the same terms but we do not stand on the same conceptual ground. I conclude that there are many lessons that those of us in the humanities can learn from our colleagues in the social sciences, but at the same time I realize more clearly where the value may lie in the kind of disciplinary work – undisciplined as it may seem to outsiders – that we in literary and cultural studies in fact manage to do.

Charles Taylor suggests that “the language of traditional political theory – rights, citizenship, the demand for equal recognition, class, race, colonialism, etc. – is terribly inadequate” for enabling any “really fruitful conversation,”<sup>40</sup> the kind of conversation in which one can inhabit one’s own first position but also begin to enter the different position of one’s interlocutor. “Part of the problem with our contemporary philosophical language,” he continues, “is its surrender to an exclusive Kantianism. But this is only part of it. Much more crippling is its phenomenological poverty.”<sup>41</sup> Perhaps literary and literary-critical languages can address this phenomenological poverty. Pheng Cheah, in his essay “Of Being-Two,” in which he explicates and interrogates Luce Irigaray’s theories, argues that “Irigaray’s sexual ethics clearly entails not only a revisioning of the relations between and among the sexes but also a reconceptualization of what both thinking and politics are.”<sup>42</sup> In *Spectral Nationality*, Pheng Cheah addresses what Taylor had identified as the problem with an exclu-

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<sup>40</sup> Charles Taylor, “Response to Bhabha,” in *Globalizing Rights*, ed. Matthew J. Gibney (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003): 186.

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, “Response to Bhabha,” 186.

<sup>42</sup> Pheng Cheah, “Of Being-Two,” in *Futures of Critical Theory: Dreams of Difference*, ed. Michael Peters, Mark Olssen & Colin Lankshear (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003): 182.

sive Kantianism to move toward the question: "If political organicism is now being deformed in contemporary globalization, what is the most apposite metaphor for freedom today?"<sup>43</sup> Against Hardt and Negri's Deleuzian "nonorganic vitalism,"<sup>44</sup> Pheng Cheah argues that the "metaphor that has replaced the living organism as the most apposite figure for freedom today is that of the ghost."<sup>45</sup> Ghosts imply a different way of inhabiting space and time, a disembodied or differently embodied form of attachment to the earth, a place to which they no longer fully belong, at least in Western thought, yet cannot leave. Is there a link between hauntology as a theoretical and popular concern and the spatial crisis I am registering in this essay? Both James (Sakéj) Henderson, in his essay "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing," and Gayatri Spivak, in her lectures *Death of a Discipline*, imply that there may be such a link by turning to North American indigenous cultures to retrieve the metaphor of the ghost dance as a model for postcolonial practice.

The ghost dance is not the ghost and it is hard to write about without invoking inappropriate imagery derived from Western notions of time and space. The ghost dance is performed by embodied people in the hope of coaxing ghosts of the ancestors to return to the earth, but they may never have actually left. For Henderson, the ghost dances "were not part of a messianic movement," as eurocentric writers wrongly assumed, but

a sustained vision of how to resist colonization. It was a vision of how to release all the spirits contained in the old ceremonies and rites [...] back into the deep caves of mother Earth, where they would be immune from colonizers' strategies and techniques.<sup>46</sup>

In his view, the diagnosis of colonialism and the restorative processes required to reconcile conflicting knowledge systems, can be "organized under the term 'postcolonial ghost dancing'."<sup>47</sup> In opposition to the per-

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<sup>43</sup> Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom From Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003): 382.

<sup>44</sup> Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 382.

<sup>45</sup> *Spectral Nationality*, 383.

<sup>46</sup> James (Sakéj) Youngblood Henderson, "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing: Diagnosing European Colonialism," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 2000): 57–58.

<sup>47</sup> Henderson, "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing," 73.

ceived “abstraction of the world as a site of belonging,”<sup>48</sup> the earth as origin and context can seem much easier to embrace as a source of inspiration. But that ease may have its own pitfalls, as can be seen in the popularity of New-Age philosophies, which misunderstand the philosophical bases on which postcolonial ghost-dancing rests.

Henderson’s employment of the ghost dance locates a re-thought politics in a sphere of action in which freedom and responsibility may be re-joined. His postcolonial ghost dance is not backward-looking, as contemporary observers thought, but, rather, challenges their notions of time as linear. It combines materiality and spirituality, earth and world, in ways not readily amenable to Western philosophical constructions. Henderson’s postcolonial ghost-dancing provides a basis for beginning the kind of conversation across cultures envisioned by Charles Taylor – if non-indigenous critics can attend to its practices without yielding to the temptation of appropriating its vision for New-Age or other agendas. Henderson’s postcolonial ghost-dancing needs to be read alongside his powerful political essay “*Sui Generis* and Treaty Citizenship,” which bases its claims for layered indigenous citizenship, and for re-thinking the entire basis of Canadian citizenship, on the legal interactions of indigenous peoples and the British Crown. The layered nationality and planetarity he claims are based on his peoples’ relation to the earth, a relation maintained through the principles of the ghost dance.

Ultimately, the problem embedded in the metaphors of Earth, world, and planet is that of the “political status of space.”<sup>49</sup> (To address that politics, it may be necessary to resist the pull of Heideggerean mysticism and its elevation of art as possessing privileged access to truth.) According to Henri Lefebvre, when “points and systems of reference inherited from the past are in dissolution,” whether under colonization or, more recently, through globalization, elites lose their bearings, and new ideas “have difficulty generating their own space.”<sup>50</sup> Postcolonial ideas can find themselves trapped within older manichaeian structures (as analyzed by Gilroy) and psychologized, personalist modes of interpretation, even as

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<sup>48</sup> Croucher, *Globalization and Belonging*, 189, paraphrasing Benjamin Barber.

<sup>49</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (*La Production de l'espace*, 1974; Oxford: Blackwell, 1991): 416.

<sup>50</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 417.

they seek to generate alternative ways of conceiving and relating to space; but they can also turn their structures against themselves. I am thinking here of questions such as “Is Canada postcolonial?” and “Who is to blame?” – the question that, Susan Sontag argues, must be asked about the problems raised by regarding the pain of others. Laura Moss’s *Is Canada Postcolonial?* makes a major contribution to both Canadian and postcolonial studies, largely because the book’s contributors take issue with the terms and orientation of the title, seizing the occasion to problematize the space it set for them. Similarly, Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* problematizes the politics of blame by developing a complex argument about complicity.

Lefebvre’s conclusion to the section of *The Production of Space* quoted from above may help contextualize Spivakian notions of planetarity. He writes:

Formerly represented as Mother, the Earth appears today as the centre around which various (differentiated) spaces are arranged. Once stripped of its religious and naively sexual attributes, the world as planet – as planetary space – can retrieve its primordial place in practical thought and activity.<sup>51</sup>

Lefebvre concludes in full-fledged utopian vein:

The creation (or production) of a planet-wide space as the social foundation of a transformed everyday life open to myriad possibilities – such is the dawn now beginning to break on the far horizon.<sup>52</sup>

Lefebvre’s linking of the production of space to the “project of a different society”<sup>53</sup> may be found in the work of many postcolonial theories today.

In *Postcolonial Contraventions*, Laura Chrisman concludes her analysis of Fredric Jameson and Spivak by noting that each draws attention to

the need for materialist postcolonial criticism to engage theoretically with the topic of space [...]. What emerges from their work is the challenge of producing an account that neither aestheticizes space nor renders it a synonym for existential aporia but is sensitive both to

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<sup>51</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 418.

<sup>52</sup> *The Production of Space*, 422.

<sup>53</sup> *The Production of Space*, 419.

phenomenological and political processes, to human production of as well as production within space.<sup>54</sup>

But whereas Bill Ashcroft argues that Saidean worldliness provides “a principle which retrieves the materiality of the world for political and cultural theory,”<sup>55</sup> valuing “a text’s ‘affiliations’ with the world rather than its filiations with other texts,”<sup>56</sup> Chrisman is less sanguine. She argues that both Said and Jameson “foreground an aestheticized analysis of colonial space at the analytical expense of space’s human occupants.”<sup>57</sup> Throughout the present essay, I have tried to stress the ways in which space is produced by human communities in ways that always incorporate an imaginative geography, which in different societies has produced radically different conceptions of what space is and how it may be inhabited.

I have attended to the spatial metaphors of globality as a way of trying to understand what motivates people to act on the global stage, and how and where they locate themselves when they think of global action. Spivak provides an important test-case for the ways in which postcolonial criticism now locates itself between indigenous groundings in the land and planetary perspectives on global destiny.

Chrisman concludes, not entirely correctly, I think, that

The preferable political option for Spivak is, it seems, for subjects, like Kantian imperatives, to learn their limits, stay in their naturally separate places, as taught by Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The spatialized conception of subjectivity as occupying a distinct, fixed and rightful domain, is marked here; imperialism becomes the by definition expansionist and dominatory movement across these delineated territories.<sup>58</sup>

Chrisman has accurately described what seems to be one tendency in Spivak’s work. Can such a conclusion be reconciled with Spivak’s advo-

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<sup>54</sup> Laura Chrisman, *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003): 68.

<sup>55</sup> Bill Ashcroft, “Edward Said: The Locatedness of Theory,” in *Futures of Critical Theory: Dreams of Difference*, ed. Michael Peters, Mark Olssen & Colin Lankshear (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003): 262.

<sup>56</sup> Ashcroft, “Edward Said: The Locatedness of Theory,” 263.

<sup>57</sup> In her view, Said’s worldly criticism is further weakened by its problematic presentation of economics. See Chrisman, *Postcolonial Contraventions*, 67.

<sup>58</sup> Chrisman, *Postcolonial Contraventions*, 57–58.



cacy of planetarity as the imagined project that may prove the antidote to globalization? Perhaps, depending on how we read her various invocations of 'earth' in *Death of a Discipline*. Spivak writes: "The Earth is a paranational image that can substitute for international and can perhaps provide, today, a displaced site for the imagination of planetarity."<sup>59</sup> The Earth as a displaced site for imagining planetarity? Does she mean that instead of imagining it from above, from outer space, the Earth can help us see the world as interconnected from below? Or is she also suggesting displacing the globe of globalization by Planet Earth, as invoked by environmentalists and especially the world's indigenous peoples, who claim a special relation to the concept? What kind of work can such displacements do to negotiate the contradictions between Planet Earth, as seen from outer space, and the earth as imagined in indigenous philosophies? For me, Spivak's spatial metaphors oscillate between these different concepts in troubling ways, as they may well be designed to do.<sup>60</sup>

Mette Bryld and Nina Lykke argue in *Cosmodolphins* that

NASA's Blue Planet photo presents us with a modern version of the story of the Garden of Eden, mingled with a radically updated narrative of the 'sacred home' of nineteenth-century Romantic evangelism.<sup>61</sup>

In other words, Planet Earth as a concept is available for appropriation by environmentalists of all political stripes, by New-Age advocates, and by the military-industrial complex. Indeed, their book is designed to address the slippages between New-Age and Space-Age discourses. As Bryld and Lykke warn, "the lofty panoptican view of Earth, created by space flight, is definitely not an innocent one,"<sup>62</sup> a point also made in Stephen Slemon's review of Spivak's book, when he notes that "*Death of a Discipline* ends with a kind of mountain-top vision of future possibility, one that will not

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<sup>59</sup> Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 95.

<sup>60</sup> For an evocative meditation on the phenomenological productivity of "Dis/place," see Marlene Nourbese Philip's essay "Dis Place – the Space Between" in *A Genealogy of Resistance* (Toronto: Mercury, 1977): 74–112, and Selena Horrell's MA thesis, "'Worlding' Corporeality, 'Dis/Placing' Globalization" (August 2004, Centre for Theory and Criticism, University of Western Ontario).

<sup>61</sup> Mette Bryld & Nina Lykke, *Cosmodolphins: Feminist Cultural Studies of Technology, Animals and the Sacred* (London: Zed, 2000): 2.

<sup>62</sup> Bryld & Lykke, *Cosmodolphins*, 2–3.

be enacted here on earth in especially short order.”<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, Slemon generously finds potential in Spivak’s “planetarity” as a thoughtful transformation of “globality.” In his analysis, Spivak sees globality as “a conceptual mechanism for access and regulation,” in contrast to planetarity, which “imagines worldly connectedness neither through ‘information retrieval’ nor through identities, but through literary figuration,” a type of figuration that foregrounds the “arbitrary aspect of meaning-construction.”<sup>64</sup> This interpretation links Spivak’s position very closely to Dimock’s as analyzed above, while also showing how important the choice of spatial trope remains. There is little to separate the practised reader’s postmodern acclaim for diversity from the saving potential of the arbitrary aspect of meaning-construction.

In the meantime, the spectator-position that Bryld and Lykke find in the NASA Blue Planet photo seems further entrenched by the planetary perspective that Spivak employs from her airplane seat high above the earth. As Bryld and Lykke note, this picture

demonstrates perfectly the vantage point of the scientific world view in general, and positivist epistemology in particular: the disassociated gaze, which can command and keep everything under control.<sup>65</sup>

Although Spivak writes of the view from her airplane seat, she invokes this gaze as in dialogue with more grounded positions. For example, she writes about “peripheral Islams” to ask: “Can the foothold for planetarity be located in the texts of these spread-out sectors of the world’s literatures and cultures?”<sup>66</sup> The awkward, catachrestic notion of a foothold for planetarity underlines her refusal of the usual associations of these images. Spivak clearly states her refusal of the NASA perspective when she muses: “The planetarity of which I have been speaking in these pages is perhaps best imagined from the precapitalist cultures of the planet.”<sup>67</sup>

But her account of how that imagining might work is vague indeed:

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<sup>63</sup> Stephen Slemon, “Lament for a Notion: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline*,” *English Studies in Canada* 29.1–2 (March–June 2003): 216–17.

<sup>64</sup> Slemon, “Lament for a Notion,” 216.

<sup>65</sup> Bryld & Lykke, *Cosmodolphins*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 87.

<sup>67</sup> *Death of a Discipline*, 101.

The ‘planet’ is, here, as perhaps always, a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right. Its alterity, determining experience, is mysterious and discontinuous – an experience of the impossible.<sup>68</sup>

The impossible for whom, from what perspective? We know that we must read this word in Derridean terms, yet the questions remain. When read in the context of Bryld and Lykke’s critique of the ways in which Space-Age and New-Age narratives intersect with colonialism, I find Spivak’s Derridean utopianism troubling. And while I share her search for an alternative to the current status quo, I am less convinced by her idealization of the “precapitalist cultures of the planet.” She devotes considerable space to canonical Western and postcolonial texts but only gestures toward the indigenous as alterity and impossibility. She quotes no indigenous writers or theorists. Spivak counsels that

The ghost dance does not succeed. It can only ever be a productive supplement, interrupting the necessary march of generalization in ‘the crossing of borders’ so that it remembers its limits.<sup>69</sup>

But is that the case? From a Western utilitarian perspective, the ghost dance does not succeed, but according to Henderson, that is to misunderstand its purpose and the nature of its success. Menezes writes that, for the people with whom he is working,

the ‘Vision’ does not treat past/present/future as separate entities but as superimposed dimensions difficult to conceive through the metaphor of space [...] like amazon philosophies, the ghost dance may not be using the metaphor of space or its imposition on time. It may be simply re-establishing the connectivity between subjects and different knowledges – those of the past and the present, where the past coexists on a different dimension with the present. I would see the ghost dance as a recuperation of a non spatial, lost concept of agency and knowledges.

As employed by Henderson and Menezes, then, the ghost dance always succeeds in its very re-enactment of an alternative world-view. The post-

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<sup>68</sup> *Death of a Discipline*, 102.

<sup>69</sup> Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 52.

colonial indigenous critic, as described by Henderson, stands in a distinctive relation to earth, land, articulation, and space.

The question this essay asks, “where does the postcolonial critic stand?” needs to be modified to reflect these various answers, perhaps to something like “where do various postcolonial critics stand?” or “where and how might a postcolonial critic stand, and take a stand?” Spivak advocates a tricky kind of planetarity, in which literary study functions as an appropriated kind of ghost dance rather like a Greek chorus, which interrupts the work-drama of the social sciences and requires interrupting by them. For those uncomfortable with the difficulty of finding a foothold on such constantly shifting ground, Spivak’s reasoning can lead to the kind of conclusions drawn by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, who believe that “the term *postcolonial* blurs the assignment of perspectives,”<sup>70</sup> or Chris Bongie, who terms the postcolonial “a geographically free-floating concept.”<sup>71</sup> Spivak refuses to ground her work in the standard expected ways. She notes:

Politically correct metropolitan multiculturalists want the world’s others to be identitarians; nationalist (Jameson) or class (Ahmad). To undo this binary demand is to suggest that peripheral literatures may stage more surprising and unexpected manoeuvres toward collectivity.<sup>72</sup>

These surprising and unexpected manoeuvres toward collectivity are precisely what our globalization team is documenting in our various field-work projects. By grounding her thinking in the concept of planetarity, Spivak seeks to undo this binary demand while finding an alternative to the almost-exhausted figures for a comparative literary practice provided by the “continental, global, or worldly.”<sup>73</sup> She warns:

To talk planet-talk by way of an unexamined environmentalism, referring to an undivided ‘natural’ space rather than a differentiated political space, can work in the interest of this globalization in the mode of

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<sup>70</sup> Ella Shohat & Robert Stam, *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, ed. Shohat & Stam (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003): 14.

<sup>71</sup> Chris Bongie, “Exiles on Main Stream: Valuing the Popularity of Postcolonial Literature,” *Postmodern Culture* 14.1 (September 2003): 10.

<sup>72</sup> Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 55–56.

<sup>73</sup> *Death of a Discipline*, 72.

the abstract as such. (I have been insisting that to transmute the literatures of the global South to an undifferentiated space of English rather than a differentiated political space is a related move).<sup>74</sup>

I read this as a warning against the kind of ‘global soul’ arguments advanced by Pico Iyer and gratefully embraced by a Canadian media overly anxious to see nationally based writers as ‘world-class’. It is also, of course, an argument that Spivak’s project of “transnational literacy” might be better advanced through the carefully orchestrated collaboration, in the USA, of comparative literature with area studies rather than through English departments or cultural studies, as is the trend today.

Outside the USA, disciplinary alignments are organized differently, but the substance of Spivak’s message stands. English departments must resist the trend to imagine that they can encompass interdisciplinarity simply by absorbing the texts of other disciplinary practices into the protocols that have been developed for interpreting literature. There are other, differently constituted, “practised readers” out there. Because nothing can be taken for granted if we are to move towards achieving the conditions that could enable genuine dialogue to begin across currently privileged and eclipsed cultures, we need to continue to pay attention to theory and the arts, even when at first sight they may seem to divert us from the urgent social issues of our day.

To return to the questions with which this essay began, I have surveyed debates about the appropriate language for conveying what is at stake in thinking about globalization, to conclude only that the challenge is serious and has not yet been resolved. What postcolonial theory can offer to globalization studies is precisely this caution about rushing too quickly to conclusions based on unexamined assumptions and this reminder to pay attention to other modes of knowledge production and other priorities in imagining human relations in spatial and temporal modes.

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<sup>74</sup> *Death of a Discipline*, 72.

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# Affirming Diasporas as National Antinomies



VIJAY DEVADAS

IN HIS EDITORIAL PREFACE to the inaugural issue of the journal *Diaspora*, Khachig Tölölyan announces that “diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment [...] because they embody the question of borders, which is at the heart of any definition of the Others of the nation-state.”<sup>1</sup> He then cautions that the affirmation of diasporic narratives “is not to write the premature obituary of the nation-state which remains a privileged form of polity.”<sup>2</sup> While pronounced some time ago, in the early 1990s, these statements remain of particular relevance, a decade and a half later: the continued racial discrimination faced by the minority Indian diasporic community in Malaysia in 2009 is a case in point. The struggle between the demands of the diasporic community against racial discrimination and the operations of a Malaysian nation-state built upon racism testifies, first, to the precarious and unstable condition under which identity, home, and belonging are articulated and, second, it reminds us of Tölölyan’s point about the tension that embodies diasporic lives whose relationship to the nation is fractured by traces of other homes, histories, heritages, and traditions that constitute a sense of who they are and which at times does not necessarily sit comfortably with the nation-state’s project of fostering a unified national identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Khachig Tölölyan, “The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface,” *Diaspora* 1.1 (1991): 3–4.

<sup>2</sup> Tölölyan, “The Nation-State and Its Others,” 3–4.

In this essay, I begin with an exploration of the proposition that affirms diasporicity as a strategy of disrupting the certainties of national identity based on the notion that the diasporic community's displaced identities challenge the easy and neat categorization of a national people that the nation-state seeks to project. In short, the diaspora remains as the excess that cannot be contained: an excess of histories, cultures, practices, homes, and identities that threatens the attempts at circumscribing the national imaginary. Such a proposition is productive insofar as it poses a challenge to a hegemonic condition of inscribing national identity; but there remains the question of how such connections with other histories, spaces, times, homes, and identities are staged. It is to the latter concern that the essay then turns: how to forge a responsible relationship with the trope of diaspora, with its 'lost', 'buried', and 'foreclosed' narratives, its excesses, in a non-partisan way, without falling into the trap of essentialist positions? That is, how to form and enter into an ethical relationship with the trope of the diaspora? It is to Jean-François Lyotard that I turn to negotiate this problematic, drawing on his notion of bearing negative witness as a way of forging an ethical relationship with the spectre of the diaspora to intervene in preconstituted and unproblematic notions of national identity. Let me begin with a reading of Paul Gilroy's *'There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack'*, a consummate instance that affirms diasporas as national antinomies, and as an exemplary representation of scholarly work on diasporas that take up this position.

### Diasporas as National Antinomies

Placed between quotation marks, the title of Gilroy's book indicates a spoken utterance, an address to the nation. This is an address that emerges out of disdain for the absence of 'black representation' in the red, white, and blue configuration of the Union Jack. And it is an address that recalls to mind the presence of racism in institutions such as the mass media and the legal structures, and conjures up the "exclusionary effects of racism"<sup>3</sup> in contemporary Britain. The address is also an effective intervention that reveals not only the absence of 'blackness' in the flag but also the damage

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991): 153.

inflicted by the institutional fixing of the signifier of 'blackness'. The absent 'black' from the Union Jack that Gilroy has in mind is a resident of Britain who is also a member of formerly colonized Africa and of the African diaspora. This is the translated 'black' figure whose sense of identity exceeds the spatial and temporal lexicons of British national culture but who is not constituted as part of the national culture because the procedures of institutional representation maintain an unchanging signifier of 'blackness'. In operation, therefore, is a colonial sensibility in the national landscape; the sign of 'blackness', for the purpose of institutional interests and calculations, is maintained in terms of an absolute signifier: as the savage and violent native. And in the contemporary British landscape, the colonial signification of 'blackness' is re-employed, for example, in the services of constructing a "racialized crime imagery" to legitimize the "differential police practice between areas."<sup>4</sup> Against the national arrest of the sign (and the signifier) of 'blackness' Gilroy affirms a strategy of opening the sign in terms of a politics of reconnection *and* fracture. A politics of reconnection *and* fracture affirms the connection of those of the diasporic community to the African continent *and* simultaneously fractures the connection by revealing the absence of the translated spectre of Africa and of the diaspora in British national culture. Such a move contaminates the institutionalized imagining of the sign of 'blackness', contaminates the diaspora's imagining of 'Africa', and contaminates the imagined purity of British national culture to illuminate "an additional failing in the rigid [...] definition of national culture."<sup>5</sup> A politics of reconnecting *and* fracturing brings back into the frame of the present the 'there', undoing the absolutism of national culture and ethnic signification by affirming an-other presence. And this strategy of reconnection *and* fracture, for Gilroy, is located "within the framework of a diaspora as an alternative to the different varieties of absolutism which would confine culture in 'racial,' ethnic or national essences."<sup>6</sup> This is the paradigm within which Gilroy suggests that the litany of "black" cultural production in Britain be constituted; a paradigm in which "black expressive cultures affirm while they protest," affirming 'there' in protest of the absolutism of 'here'.

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<sup>4</sup> Gilroy, *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, 99.

<sup>5</sup> *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, 154.

<sup>6</sup> *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*, 155.

Gilroy's appeal is thus for a brand of cultural critique that is engaged with the "'war of position'" – the position of pluralists and absolutists – and which is keen on "transcend[ing] both the structures of the nation-state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity."<sup>7</sup> In other words, the narration of black cultural productions within the national narrative demands an ambiguous articulation, one that maintains a symbolic relationship to the homeland that it can mobilize to emphasize the diaspora's difference without being obsessed with and restricted by "a teleology of 'return'."<sup>8</sup> In this way, "linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed, future: a renewed, painful yearning."<sup>9</sup> Such an affirmation must be careful:

critical space/time cartography of the diaspora needs [...] to be re-adjusted so that the dynamics of dispersal and local autonomy can be shown alongside the unforeseen detours and circuits which mark the new journeys and new arrivals that, in turn, release new political and cultural possibilities.<sup>10</sup>

The upshot of these reconsiderations suggests that an attempt at affirming diasporicity must move away from essentializing the cultural capital of the diaspora and attempt "to use the signifier"<sup>11</sup> – *use* in the same way that the pagans *used* the sign 'God' by entering into a dialogue with the sign

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Gilroy, "Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson & Paula A. Treichler (London and New York: Routledge, 1992): 188, 195.

<sup>8</sup> James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 306. I must emphasize, with Vijay Mishra, that an affirmation of diasporicity works through an unresolvable anxiousness that "reminds us of the contaminated, border, hybrid experience of diaspora people for whom an engineered return to a purist condition is a contradiction in terms because when they returned to the quay their ships had gone"; Mishra, "New Lamps for Old: Diasporas Migrancy Border," in *Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*, ed. Harish Trivedi & Meenakshi Mukherjee (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1996): 79.

<sup>9</sup> Clifford, "Diasporas," 318.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1993): 86.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," in *Culture, Globalisation and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1991): 53.

and its associated signifiers without (up)holding the sign of God as Absolute(ness).<sup>12</sup> Because “black is not a question of pigmentation,” an *epidermal surety*, but an “historical category, a political category, a cultural category,”<sup>13</sup> a *constructed uncertainty*, there is a need to learn to unlearn the essentializations surrounding the signifier ‘black’, to learn to unlearn by re-investing, re-interrogating, re-claiming, and re-defining the signifiers that circulate within the sign ‘black’. Thus, in the telling of the little stories, in the “act of [...] imaginary political re-identification, re-territorialization and re-identification [...] the margins begin to contest, the locals begin to come to representation.”<sup>14</sup> An attempt to seize the diasporic histories, pasts, and practices, as difference must do so

not as a simple, factual ‘past’, since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is always-already ‘after the break’. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. [...] This is [...] not an essence but a *positioning*.<sup>15</sup>

The notion of difference is central to the affirmation of a cultural politics of diaspora in both Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. That is to say, their critical energy is located in an avowal of diasporas as difference or, more precisely, as participating in a cultural politics of diasporic difference. The aim of maintaining a diasporic politics of critical difference is, as Cornel West points out,

not simply [to gain] access to homogeneous communities. [...] Nor is the primary goal here that of contesting stereotypes [...] but to] construct more multivalent and multidimensional responses that articulate the complexity and diversity of [...] diasporic] practices.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> On the critical effectivity of paganism, see Jean-François Lyotard, “Lessons in Paganism” (*Instructions païennes*, 1977), in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, tr. David Macey (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989): 122–54.

<sup>13</sup> Hall, “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities,” 53.

<sup>14</sup> “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities,” 53–54.

<sup>15</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990): 225.

<sup>16</sup> Cornel West, “The New Cultural Politics of Difference” (1990), in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London & New York: Routledge, 1993): 212.

What is called for, therefore, is a spirit of resisting closure, to maintain a sense of difference by living on the borderline, to live as a foreigner, as Julia Kristeva puts it in *Strangers to Ourselves*. According to Kristeva,

with the establishment of the nation-state, we come to the only modern, acceptable, and clear definition of foreignness: the foreigner is the one who does not belong to the state in which we are, the one who does not have the same nationality.<sup>17</sup>

The foreigner thus presents a *threat* that must either be “assimilated or rejected.”<sup>18</sup> At the same time – and this is the paradox – as much as the figure of the foreigner poses itself as a *threat*, it is also a *necessity*, because the foreigner defines all that is (not) a citizen. The figure of the foreigner thus interferes in the narrative of the nation to open the texture of the nation and the citizen’s own sense of identity and belonging to expose the vulnerabilities in the current national and community imagining.

The point that Hall and Gilroy are driving at reminds us of the dangers of not leaving town “to know how high the towers are.”<sup>19</sup> At the same time, they champion the possibility of seeing the town from an-other perspective, from that of the diaspora as difference. In the spirit of Frantz Fanon, who reclaims the figure of the blackman as a dangerous supplement to disrupt the legitimacy of the colonizing narrative, Hall and Gilroy affirm the transgressiveness of seizing upon a cultural politics of diaspora to avoid the pain that Salman Rushdie laments about when he says, “I felt as if I were being claimed, or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions, and that this continuity was the reality.”<sup>20</sup> Seizing a cultural politics of diaspora opens up a critical disjuncture from the topos of nationhood, reminding us of the injustices of the pedagogic fixing of identities and at the same time commits the diasporic community afresh to forming another relationship with a heritage that is proximate yet dis-

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<sup>17</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, tr. Leon S. Roudiez (*Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, 1988; New York: Columbia UP, 1991): 96.

<sup>18</sup> Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 96.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1882; New York: Vintage, 1974): 342.

<sup>20</sup> Salman Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands” (1982), in Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (London: Granta/Penguin, 1992): 9.

tanced. The issues raised and the concerns addressed thus ask for a politics of *claiming diaspora* as a strategy of reasserting diasporic identity and as a way of appropriating “an alternative history.”<sup>21</sup> It is about the irreconcilability of difference and the need to maintain a sense of critical difference in order to engender a productive engagement with the discourse of the nation.

The formation of a relationship, a dialogue, with the ‘there’ disrupts the certainty of the notion of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ to ask “where is home? Home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination and home is also the lived experience of locality.”<sup>22</sup> It is within this diasporic dilemma that Ien Ang poignantly asks “can one say no to Chineseness?” On the one hand, one must insist on saying no to ‘Chineseness’, insofar as this is confined to “a seemingly natural and certain racial essence.”<sup>23</sup> That is to say, when the signifier of ‘Chineseness’ is imprisoned within predetermined codes and assumptions, it is unproductive to seize upon it. On the other hand, insofar as a re-claiming of ‘Chineseness’ is “prepared to interrogate the very significance of the category of Chineseness per se as a predominant marker of identification and distinction,”<sup>24</sup> a concession to ‘Chineseness’ is productive. In the latter case, ‘Chineseness’ is open and fluid and is able to include someone like Ang, who, while able to be

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<sup>21</sup> Gayatri Spivak, “Who Claims Alterity,” in *Remaking History: Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Barbara Kruger & Phil Mariani (Seattle WA: Bay Press, 1989): 269.

<sup>22</sup> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996): 192.

<sup>23</sup> Ien Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm,” *Boundary 2* 25.3 (1998): 241.

<sup>24</sup> Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness?” 241. See also Ang, “‘On Not Speaking Chinese’: Postmodern Ethnicity and the Politics of Diaspora,” *New Formations* 24 (1994): 1–18. In this essay, Ang’s argument is concerned with the need to recognize and deal with the issue of difference between the diasporic Chinese self, whose subjectivity is in constant flux, and the ‘native’ Chinese, who has yet to experience displacement from the homeland. Ang’s point in raising the differences in and between ‘Chineseness’ is to emphasize its polysemic nature. And it is this polysemousness that leads Ang to conclude, in an autobiographical style, “if I am inescapably Chinese by descent, I am only sometimes Chinese by consent” (18). Consenting to ‘Chineseness’ is contingent on what is meant by ‘Chinese(ness)’. The problem with a wholehearted consenting or an unproblematic alliance to ‘Chineseness’ is that the category is assumed to be homogeneous and non-differential, whereas the reality is otherwise.

“recognized [...] as Chinese,”<sup>25</sup> is unable to speak the language. It is an affirmation of ‘Chineseness’ on the contingency that the signifier is not imprisoned, and the call for an opening of the sign of ‘Chineseness’ is an attempt to learn how to unlearn without submitting oneself to a certain singularity. One step in this direction is to seek to “transcend and transform”<sup>26</sup> the singularity of diasporic identity, a move that “foregrounds the ability of diasporic subjects to build alliances with struggles for social justice in *both* [...] homes.”<sup>27</sup> A step in this direction is also cognizant of the fact that “submission to consanguinity means the surrender of agency.”<sup>28</sup>

What is cogent about a politics of re-telling critically is that it aims to tell the story with the intent of “*refus[ing] to mortgage it*”<sup>29</sup> either to a national discourse that forecloses critical difference or to a master-story that “naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference.”<sup>30</sup> Such a move, of accepting the invitation to participate in the cultural politics of diaspora as a transnational collectivity, pushes at the discursive boundaries of the nation and challenges the temporal and spatial frontiers that constitute national identity. Keeping in mind the two provisos – that the notion of diaspora is heterogeneous and that participating in the transnational diasporic collectivity is mindful of the fact that “you can’t really go home again”<sup>31</sup> – the affirmation of membership to another collectivity outside the national imaginary opens up other temporal and spatial lexicons that are *necessarily different yet part of* the rhythm, timing, and spacing of the nation.

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<sup>25</sup> Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness?” 240.

<sup>26</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Meaning of New Times,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley & Kuan-Hsing Chen (London & New York: Routledge, 1996): 223.

<sup>27</sup> Purnima Mankekar, “Reflections on Diasporic Identities: A Prolegomenon to an Analysis of Political Bifocality,” *Diaspora* 3.3 (1994): 368.

<sup>28</sup> Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1993): 24.

<sup>29</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, “From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall & Paul du Gay (Thousand Oaks CA & London: Sage, 1996): 24.

<sup>30</sup> Stuart Hall, “What is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” in *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video*, ed. Valerie Smith (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997): 130.

<sup>31</sup> Stuart Hall, “Ethnicity: Identity and Difference,” *Radical America* 23.4 (1989): 20.



The call to affirm diasporicity attempts to work against the negation of diasporic pasts, histories, and to form an ethical relationship involving a responsible response to the silenced figure of the diasporic trope; a response from that oblique and conundrical space that both prohibits response and demands it.<sup>32</sup> To respond in the way of telling a story about the diaspora is

precisely a way of making some linkages between these different personalities [citizen, wo/man, diaspora, ethnic, minority and so on]. We are always involved in producing something more than the mere fragments.<sup>33</sup>

To make this reconnection is to genealogically reconnect with a diasporic past in the name of “preserv[ing] the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten”,<sup>34</sup> not in terms of museumizing the remainder, for this both forecloses and canonizes, but in terms of unmasking “the lack in discourse-construction [...] that cannot be admitted into the circuit of exchange.”<sup>35</sup> Hence the urgency of forming a relationship with the heritage of the diaspora, to play out a cultural politics of diaspora against the pedagogic essentializing of identities.

Inasmuch as the re-telling of the diaspora’s story of travel and travail is disruptive, as shown by Gilroy’s re-telling of the African diasporic root and route and by Jon Stratton’s re-telling of the story of the Holocaust in contemporary multicultural Australia,<sup>36</sup> it needs to be asked how such a story is to be re-told. How do we enter into dialogue with the trope of the diaspora and bear witness to the “heterodidactic space [...] [suspending]

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<sup>32</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Passions: ‘An Oblique Offering’” (*Passions*, 1993), in Derrida, *On the Name*, tr. David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., & Ian McLeod (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1995): 23–24.

<sup>33</sup> Les Terry, “‘Not a Postmodern Nomad’: A Conversation with Stuart Hall on Race, Ethnicity and Identity,” *Arena* 5 (1995): 52.

<sup>34</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and “the jews”*, tr. Andreas Michel & Mark Roberts (*Heidegger et “les juifs”*, 1988; Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990): 26.

<sup>35</sup> Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 118.

<sup>36</sup> See Jon Stratton, “(Dis)placing the Jews: Historicizing the Idea of Diaspora,” *Diaspora* 6.3 (1997): 301–29.

life and death”?<sup>37</sup> To these questions, I suggest, response can be found in Lyotard’s notion of bearing negative witness.

### Bearing Negative Witness

Lyotard’s *The Différend* opens with two parties attempting to legitimize one side’s status at the expense of the other. The conflict remains unresolvable and irreducible not because both sides are right or that both sides are wrong. Rather, the irreducibility stems from the attempt to impose “a single rule of judgement”<sup>38</sup> to resolve the differences. To institute a singular rule to which either party must accede to maintain its legitimacy “would wrong (at least) one of them (and both of them if neither side admits this rule).”<sup>39</sup> Against the damage(s) the institutionalization of a singular rule of judgement would incur, Lyotard calls for one to bear witness to the *différend* – to the impossibility of resolving a conflict through a single rule of law. To bear witness to the *différend* is disruptive, insofar as it denies to the rule of Law its logocentric superiority, by suspending the singularity and mourning the pluralities of possibilities that can be, but are not, instituted as Law. Insofar as this possibility is borne witness to, the rule of Law undermines itself. But in *The Différend*, I wish to argue, Lyotard stops short of showing how he wishes to affirm the call to bear witness to the *différend*, and it is, rather, in *Heidegger and ‘the jews’* that he clearly outlines his strategy of bearing witness to the *différend*. Here he proposes that one bear witness negatively. The introduction of negativity is a crucial intervention, since it conveys that it is impossible to bear witness to the *différend* as “positive affirmation. Instead [it must be] affirm[ed] [as...] negativity itself – [...] antagonism.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of the Mourning, & the New International*, tr. Peggy Kamuf (*Spectres de Marx: L’état de la dette, le travail du deuil et La Nouvelle Internationale*, 1993; New York & London: Routledge, 1994): xvii.

<sup>38</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Différend: Phrases in Dispute*, tr. George van den Abbeele (*Le Différend*, 1983; Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988): xi.

<sup>39</sup> Lyotard, *The Différend: Phrases in Dispute*, xi.

<sup>40</sup> The line of thought that I am developing in responding to the notion of negative witness closely follows Chow’s affirmation of Slavoj Žižek’s notion of the sublime as the negative unrepresentable, as excess within history and politics, as a more cogent way of dealing with the singularization of History. It is more cogent, according to Chow,

The central concern in *Heidegger and "the jews"* is set out in the form of a "plea/command that the forgotten and the unrepresentable not be forgotten and left unrepresented."<sup>41</sup> The forgotten that Lyotard has in mind is the Final Solution. And the plea is against forgetting this traumatic moment. More specifically still, the plea is that

the Forgotten is not to be remembered for what it has been and what it is, because it has not been anything and is nothing, but must be remembered as something that ceases to be forgotten. And this something is not a concept or a representation, but a 'fact' a *Factum* [Kant ...]: namely, that one is obligated before the Law, in debt. It is the 'affection' of this 'fact' that the dismissal persecutes.<sup>42</sup>

Two things are going on in this pleading: one is an attack on those who restrict themselves to a politics of forgetting. The second, which is the more interesting, is a critique of remembering or, more precisely, the way in which remembering is played out. Taking to task the "work of the historian": i.e. the effort of the historian to memorialize, Lyotard argues that "this memory of the memorial is intensely selective; it requires the forget-

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because Žižek does not affirm the sublime as (re)presentable; it is always already un(re)presentable, ambiguous, irreducible and is always present as absent whenever a singularity is established as Law. A positive affirmation, a presencing of the sublime, makes the sublime vulnerable to the mastery of the Beautiful. The Žižekian argument that Chow is re-reading, in "Ethics After Idealism," appears in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989). See Chow, "Ethics After Idealism," 16–17.

<sup>41</sup> While Lyotard writes with the Nazi extermination of the Jews as a case in point, the in-roads that he gestures to and opens in terms of the question of bearing witness apply beyond the specificity of the genocide. As he himself says of 'jews' in the title: "I write 'the jews'; this way neither out of prudence nor lack of something better. I use the lower case to indicate that I am not thinking of a nation. I make it plural to signify that it is neither a figure nor a political (Zionism), religious (Judaism), or philosophical (Jewish philosophy) subject that I put forward under this name. I use quotation marks to avoid confusing these 'jews' with real Jews. What is most real about real Jews is that Europe, in any case, does not know what to do with them: Christians demand their conversion; monarchs expel them; republics assimilate them; Nazis exterminate them. 'The jews' are the object of a dismissal with which Jews, in particular, are afflicted in reality"; Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 3. See David Carroll, "Foreword: The Memory of Devastation and the Responsibilities of Thought: 'And let's not talk about that,'" in Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, xiii.

<sup>42</sup> Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 3.

ting of that which may question the community and its legitimacy.”<sup>43</sup> Even though the historian (and the memorial) “may and must represent,”<sup>44</sup> the representational task of the historian (and the signifiers that circulate as part of the memorial) nevertheless singularizes the heterogeneous representational possibilities. War memorials testify to this. As Lyotard confirms, the procedures of monumentalizing the war closes down, surmounts, the heterogeneous possibilities of the sign, and of the various ways of remembering itself, to shore up a singularized sign and a singular procedure of remembering. There is, therefore, an arresting of the sign, a limitation on the heterogeneous signifiers that can possibly make up the sign. Granted, representations may vary “with respect to genre as well as to *topoi*, tropes, and tone,” but “as a re-presentation it is necessarily a sublation (*re-lève*), an elevation (*élévation*) that enthralls and removes (*enlève*).”<sup>45</sup> Underlying the principle of representation is thus a foreclosing operation; a foreclosure of “not only [that which] is heterogeneous to the Self but heterogeneous in itself.”<sup>46</sup> The reformation, restoration, and re-living of the forgotten confront a paradox: the desire to edify history, to monumentalize the ‘dead’, prohibits the entry of narratives that are not mobilizable in the service of the dominant discourse.

It is such an operation that underwrites the hegemonization of multiculturalism, globalism, transnationalism, corporatism, nationalism, and any other discourse instituted as Law, as well as the work of historians who historicize in terms of “history-as-science” and deny the possibility of “telling [other] stories.”<sup>47</sup> And this is an operation that is all the more necessary to ensure the survival of the nation as law when the nation is instituted in terms of a limited, and hegemonically defined, historical imaginary. In other words, for the hegemony of the nation to survive, historical representations are represented and imagined in a set way, synchronous with the nation as Law. For any present-day hegemonic structure to survive, it “must make itself ecumenical.”<sup>48</sup> Unlike the Nazi and

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<sup>43</sup> Lyotard, *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 40.

colonial regimes, the episteme of the nation is less fascist, and this is why narratives that are potentially disturbing are invited into the space and time of the nation. It is an invitation that is extended in the spirit of tolerance. This is precisely why “today, [as compared to the Nazi and colonial regimes], hatred comes softly as integration of ‘the jews’ into a permissive collectivity in the name of the ‘respect for differences’.”<sup>49</sup> This is also precisely why historical representations that show the ‘other’ side of the nation, that remind the nation of its racism, of the colonial ‘logic’ of *terra nullius*, of the genocide of the indigenous population and so on are part of the national imagining. The example of Australia’s nationalization of the gravesite of the Indigenous Australian Eddie Mabo, a pioneering land-rights activist, is a case in point. The disturbing reminders are edified as part of the Australian national imaginary. A process of edification closes down the signifiatory (im)possibilities and imputes one and the same story as “a past that is not past, that does not haunt the present, in the sense that its absence is felt.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, contradictory to the motif of maintaining the trace of the Other as *trace* and as *Other*, the Other is presenced, hence remains less menacing to the Same. The historian soothes the anxiety of the Other in the service of the Same. The historian, working in a system of “history-as-science,” in a passaged and institutionalized order, bears witness to the trace of the past in the spirit of tolerance, in the spirit of not disturbing the stability of the Same and in the space–time tolerated by the Same. Not only is the historian thus committed to a systemized process of remembering but also lays claim to bearing witness to the *différend* positively, in the sense of being able to represent or conjure the Other as Other, in its original and untranslated form. A positive bearing-witness, an historian might reply, at the very least “inscribes [the past] in memory, and this might seem a good defense against forgetting.”<sup>51</sup> To the historian’s claim that at any moment in which “one represents” one is foregrounding remembrance and condemning oblivion, Lyotard has this to say: “It is, I believe, just quite the opposite.” And this is why the historian’s defence is porous:

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<sup>49</sup> Lyotard, *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 39.

<sup>50</sup> *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 26.

only that which has been inscribed can, in the current sense of the term, be forgotten, because it could be effaced. But what is not inscribed, through lack of inscribable surface, of duration and place for the inscription to be sustained, what has no place in the space nor the time of domination, in the geography of and the diachrony of the self-assured spirit, because it is not synthesizable [...] cannot be forgotten, does not offer a hold to forgetting, and remains present ‘only’ as an affection that one cannot even qualify, like a state of death in the life of the spirit. One *must*, certainly inscribe in words, in images. One cannot escape the necessity of representing. It would be sin itself to believe one self safe and sound. But it is one thing to do it in view of saving memory, and quite another to try to preserve the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten, in writing.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, in the terms outlined here, an attempt to re-signify the stories of the diaspora in the space–time of the nation, the call to form an alliance with the larger diasporic paradigm, and the suggestion that it is urgent to enter into an ethical relationship with the spectre of the diaspora must be made with the (im)possibility of representing the representation in mind.

In the slippery space of bearing witness that Lyotard opens up, one bears witness to the ‘event’ in terms of not being able to bear witness; in terms of being able to bear witness negatively. This is the slippery space in which one bears witness to the *différend*; a space that does not settle the issue of representation in terms of a ‘once and for all’ logic and in terms of the rule of writing (law). In the writing of the ‘event’ as an act of preservation, the representation is represented under the rule of writing – the privileged form of representation. Here, the representation and the representational possibilities of the representation are determined by the absoluteness of writing (law). More so, when the representation is written in terms of writing (law), it becomes sensationalized; and this sensationalization (of representing the past itself – which shows the ‘openness’ of the status quo, its affection – and of the absoluteness of the writing of the representation – which reinforces the rule of writing) puts a stranglehold on the representation and consequently puts the representation to death, maintaining hegemony. This is why the task of representing, when performed from a non-slippery, absolute space, for Lyotard is not done

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<sup>52</sup> Lyotard, *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 26.

“in view to saving memory” but, rather, seeks to affirm hegemony. Considering this, Lyotard posits the notion of bearing witness negatively, which is akin to Derrida’s affirmation of a politics of hauntology – to mourn the impossibility of representing the other (Marx) in the landscape of capital even though the spectre is an always already presence.<sup>53</sup> Both Lyotard and Derrida thus affirm a politics of (im)possibility that is “resistant to the formation of representations [... so as to] nourish [...] writing to the ‘everything is possible’.”<sup>54</sup> The critical move is from a politics of homogeneity – of one possibility – to a politics of heterogeneity – of more than one possibility – that opens the ‘event’ and its interpretation. There is no claim to absoluteness of the ‘event’ (this is how it happened) or to its historical memorialization (this is how it should be remembered). A politics of bearing witness negatively brings into the ‘event’ other possibilities without affirming one possibility as paradigmatic. It prises open the event (this is how it could possibly have happened) and its historicization (these are the various ways in which one can remember the event). As Lyotard writes,

I cannot light the fire, I do not know the prayer, I can no longer find the spot in the forest, I cannot even tell the story any longer. [This is the story of Auschwitz]. All I know how to do is to say that I no longer know how to tell this story. And this should be enough. This has to be enough ... enough to bear negative witness to the fact that both the ‘prayer’ and the history of the prayer are impossible, and that to bear witness to this impossibility remains possible.<sup>55</sup>

In the midst of the impossibility of bearing witness positively and the affirmation of a politics of bearing witness negatively, what remains possible is the impossibility of bearing witness to. This remains the only possibility. Like Derrida, who affirms the productivity of mourning the spectre of Marx in the time of capital, Lyotard affirms the impossibility of representing ‘Auschwitz’ as a cogent way of reminding oneself of the haunting spectre of ‘Auschwitz’ in the space–time of the present. The very impossibility of imagining ‘Auschwitz’ in terms that are not rooted

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<sup>53</sup> See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

<sup>54</sup> Lyotard, *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 48.

<sup>55</sup> *Heidegger and “the jews”*, 47.

or prescribed illuminates a disparity within the system. This is how a critical politics of re-telling other stories, of forming a relationship with the diasporic Other, can be ethically staged as disruptive.

It is crucial to take this lesson of Lyotard's on board. To negotiate a relationship with this absenced presence, the foreclosed diasporic Other, one must suspend the law of the nation and fashion a heterogeneous relationship with the diasporic trope that is open to more than one possible relationships and to more than one past. Such a conjuration of more-than-one, multiple, relationships disrupts established, history-as-science, rememberments of the diasporic community's historical sense of belonging. What is opened up is a recalling of the narrative of the diaspora outside the nationally perpetuated logic. At the same time, such a move, of bearing witness negatively, of opening the 'event' to a politics of heterogeneity, also threatens the conviction with which the story is told, putting authority in question. This is how a relationship with the trope of the diaspora can be fashioned to open singularities and certainties upon which national identity is predicated. In turning to Lyotard, I have attempted to consolidate the various critical voices discussed, who, in tandem, affirm a cultural politics of diaspora as an effective way of opening other spaces and times that are not synchronous with the national texture. The turn to Lyotard also returns to the central concern of the present essay – on how to form a responsible and disruptive relationship with the muted past of the diaspora. And Lyotard further supports the suggestions I have made, to the effect that a relationship with the diasporic condition is underscored by a politics of impossibility (of non-arrival) that threatens to disrupt the singularization of identities.

## Conclusion

In a socio-cultural climate where the nation writes itself in terms of tolerating difference, staged through the discourse of multiculturalism, the emphasis on affirmatively evoking the strategic difference of the diasporic citizen becomes all the more urgent. This is because the reconciliation of difference under multiculturalism seizes upon the possible anxiousness that a politics of contamination opens up. Not able to embrace the heterogeneous as heterogeneous, the nation embraces the heterogeneous in terms of the singular, in terms that suit the national 'sense of timing'. But



the presencing of the heterogeneous Other through multiculturalism is politically paralyzing, because the national presencing of diasporic identities in the space of the nation/culture dialectic closes down the possibility of keeping alive the question of the other(ed) self. A foreclosure takes place, because the moment the other(ed) self is presenced, the possibility of (im)posing the question of the Other is frustrated, rendered unnecessary.

In consideration of this, what becomes urgent and pressing is the need to re-think the presencing of diasporic identities within the national texture in order to question the surety of the nation and to re-think the matter of (im)posing the Other. However, an attempt at resurrecting the diasporic past outside the terms set out by Tölölyan becomes problematic, as the diasporic trope is instituted as law and the logocentric equation of dominance persists. More importantly, such a critical endeavour remains irresponsible precisely because the institution of the Other forecloses the presence of the nation. Thus, it is not simply a question of bearing witness to the *différend*, to staging the Other *as is*, but, more importantly, a question of bearing witness negatively; in terms of the impossibility of bearing witness. It is on these terms that the relationship formed with the diasporic Other in the space-time of the nation does not foreclose the nation and the diasporic Other. To borrow a remark by Sara Suleri, the staging of the diasporic condition within the nation must operate “as a mode of cultural tale-telling that is neurotically conscious of its own self-censoring apparatus.”<sup>56</sup>

Such a strategy therefore does not involve an eagerness to affirm one particular narrative, the diasporic, over another, the national. Instead, it calls for the inversion of the dialectic from within to reveal spaces of critical difference. Such a performance aims at displaying “the ‘in-between’ [... and,] in the process of its discussion, [opening] the problem of judgement and identification that inform the political sphere of its enunciation.”<sup>57</sup> This is not simply to “ventriloquize the fact of cultural difference,”<sup>58</sup> but is about a critical and self-conscious affirmation of diasporic differences

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<sup>56</sup> Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago & London: U of Chicago P, 1992): 3.

<sup>57</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994): 29.

<sup>58</sup> Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, 11.

as *non-presence*. Thus, in order to disrupt the stability of the national agenda and the excision of the diasporic trope from the national landscape, it is necessary to enter into a relationship with the diasporic trope as an excessiveness that cannot be silenced. It is this (im)possibility, of being both silenced and represented, that must be exploited to re-signify the timing of the nation, distanced as it is from a diasporic poetics that necessarily haunts national time.

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# Australian Infernos

## Janette Turner Hospital's Translation of Dante's Hell into Contemporary Australia



MARY McLAUGHLIN

within the bounds imposed by another language and another culture, the art of translation smuggles in a thousand inventions which, before the author's dazzled eyes, transform his book into a new creation.<sup>1</sup>

**T**HIS ESSAY IS A STUDY of the transl(oc)ation – the carrying into a different cultural and geographical space – of Dante's "Inferno" in two novels by Janette Turner Hospital.<sup>2</sup> *The Last Magician* and *Oyster* are the only two of Hospital's works to be set almost entirely in Australia, and were published in 1992 and 1996. Critical writing on these two novels tends to focus on four issues: Janette Turner Hospital's perspective as an Australian (and specifically a Queenslander) who has spent much time away;<sup>3</sup> the politics embedded in her work;<sup>4</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Certeau, "Preface to the English Translation" of de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, tr. Steven Rendall (*Arts de faire*, 1980; Berkeley: U of California P, 1988): ix–x.

<sup>2</sup> I gave the first version of this essay at the "Transl(oc)ations" Symposium held at the University of Otago in 2004.

<sup>3</sup> David Callahan, "Janette Turner Hospital and the Discourse of Displacement," in *Nationalism vs. Internationalism: (Inter)National Dimensions of Literatures in English*, ed. & intro. Wolfgang Zach (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1996): 335–40, and Alis-tair Stead, "Notes from Underground: *The Last Magician* and Janette Turner Hospi-

density of intertextual references on which she draws;<sup>5</sup> and her treatment of space, time, knowledge, and truth.<sup>6</sup> This essay sits within these fields, particularly concentrating on the intersections between Dantean imagery and contemporary politics of poverty, class, and land rights in post-bicentennial Australia.

In 1988, Australia marked its bicentenary of European settlement/invasion. For some this was a celebration, for others a challenge to remember fully Australia's past – including the convict base of settler life and the massive dispossession of Aboriginal peoples which accompanied and followed the British presence in Australia.<sup>7</sup> These two hundred years of history had to be set in their place as part of the at least 60,000 years for which Aboriginal people had lived on and in relationship with the land.<sup>8</sup>

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tal's Underworlds," in *Janette Turner Hospital*, ed. Selina Samuels (London: Sir Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, University of London, 1998): 17–30.

<sup>4</sup> David Callahan, "Acting in the Public Sphere and the Politics of Memory in Janette Turner Hospital," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 15.1 (1996): 73–81; Richard Carr, "'Just Enough Religion to Make Us Hate': The Case of *Tourmaline* and *Oyster*," *Antipodes* 18.1 (2004): 9–15; Fiona Coyle, "A Third Space? Postcolonial Australia and the Fractal Landscape in *The Last Magician* and *Oyster*," in *Mapping the Sacred: Religion, Geography and Postcolonial Literatures*, ed. Jamie S. Scott & Paul Simpson-Housley (Cross/Cultures 48; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 2001): 111–30; Sue Lovell, "Janette Turner Hospital's *The Last Magician*: 'A Feminist's Nightmare'?" *Hecate* 28.2 (2002): 46–63; Russell West, "'Multiple Exposures': Spatial Dilemma of Postmodern Artistic Identity in the Fiction of Janette Turner Hospital," in *Flight from Certainty: The Dilemma of Identity and Exile*, ed. Anne Luyat & Francine Tolron (Rodopi Perspectives on Modern Literature 23; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001): 177–90.

<sup>5</sup> Stead, "Notes from Underground," 17–30.

<sup>6</sup> Coyle, "A Third Space?" 111–30; West, "'Multiple Exposures'," 177–90. Note that these issues are also raised in relation to earlier works; see Diana Brydon, "The Stone's Memory: An Interview with Janette Turner Hospital," *Commonwealth Novel in English* 4.1 (1991): 14–23..

<sup>7</sup> Klaus Neumann comments that, through actions such as the Australia Day march in 1988, Aboriginal Australians are often the most effective at reminding the nation of its occluded histories; Neumann, "A Postcolonial Writing of Aboriginal History," *Meanjin* 51 (1992): 281.

<sup>8</sup> David Day discusses research around the length and sophistication of Aboriginal presence in Australia, stating that archaeologists believe that Aboriginal people have been in Australia for 40–60,000 years, with some circumstantial evidence that the

In the next decade, native-title debates would keep these issues at the forefront of national life. In this context, my interest lies in what happens in the act of translating ideas across time and space from medieval Italy to late-twentieth-century Australia, in the meanings that “Inferno” takes on when it is relocated in the political, geographical, and cultural landscapes of Australia.<sup>9</sup> What is evoked (or invoked) when Hospital suggests that Sydney is Hell?

I argue that Hospital’s translation of “Inferno” – the first book of the *Divina Commedia* – into post-bicentennial Australia makes clear the re-encounters and rememberings by which Australian settler identity is destabilized. Hospital does not perform a linguistic translation (only a few precise phrases from Dante are used) but, rather, takes “Inferno” as one of the frames through which she observes and fictionalizes contemporary Australian life. As a medievalist, Hospital is deeply familiar with Dante’s work and that of other medieval writers, working them into many of her novels.<sup>10</sup> Here, I argue that Dante’s themes and images illuminate specifically Australian concerns; Hospital’s “Inferno” is conditioned by the location (environment, politics, and culture) into which she translates Dante, and she makes use of his imprecisely translated geography and ethical framework to tell Australian stories.

Hospital translates two key aspects of “Inferno”: the geographies and uses of underground space; and the ways in which sin, guilt, and retribution operate.<sup>11</sup> In these texts, Hospital’s translation of Dante’s underground space is *imperfect*; her undergrounds are diffuse and difficult to map, spaces in the body of the earth are sometimes sanctuaries or repositories for precious things, hellish things can take place above ground, and

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figure for human occupation might be closer to 120,000 years; Day, *Claiming a Continent: A New History of Australia* (1996; Sydney: HarperPerennial, 2005): 1–10.

<sup>9</sup> Stead discusses Hospital’s use of the underground and points out that this trope has flourished in literature written in English, particularly from the late-nineteenth century. Stead, “Notes from Underground,” 21–22.

<sup>10</sup> Hospital discusses her literary influences in an interview with Diana Brydon, suggesting that her sense of imagery seeps to the surface like old inkings on lithographic stones; Diana Brydon, “The Stone’s Memory,” 15–16, 20.

<sup>11</sup> I am grateful to Ian Wedde, whose question at the “Transl(oc)ations” Symposium brought home to me the importance of this second aspect of “Inferno” in Hospital’s writing.

the border between surface and underground space is permeable, easily breached. Secondly, there is a strong sense in these two novels that penance must be done for past wrongs (personal or communal), and much attention is paid to the haunting presence of guilt and coming retribution. It is these two aspects of “Inferno” that enable Hospital to examine questions of Australia’s past and contemporary re-encounters with that past. The most startling and evocative imagery in “Inferno” is of the landscapes of Hell, and this draws our attention both to the aesthetics of particular Australian landscapes and to debates around land ownership and rights. Likewise, the significance of guilt and retribution in Dante’s poem brings into focus the centrality of these issues in Australian history and in post-bicentennial reflections on convict heritage and Aboriginal dispossession.

In my reading, the unsettling and haunting nature of Australia’s past in Hospital’s novels also reflects a key theme in postcolonial theory. The particular experiences of settler peoples and the ways in which they are unsettled or struggle to be at home is an emerging area of interest in postcolonial theory and related fields. From the mid-1980s, writers such as Stephen Slemon and Alan Lawson staked claims for investigating settler experience, identity, and texts, arguing that the tension of being part of the project of empire and the work of colonization – and at the same time unable to call imperial nations ‘home’ – produces an ambivalence in the settler subject, which means that, in Slemon’s words, “the sites of figural contestation between oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized, have been taken *inward* and *internalized* in Second-World postcolonial textual practice,” rather than being directed outwards at an external hegemonic power. Slemon argues that this internalized resistance is potentially useful to postcolonial critics developing theory about the nature of literary resistance as “*necessarily* complicit in the apparatus it seeks to transgress.”<sup>12</sup> More recently, in a collection of essays from the emerging field of settlement studies, Alex Calder and Stephen Turner state that their goal “has been to investigate the ways in which foundational problems of settlement are enacted, repeated, modified and continued in literature, art,

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Slemon, “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World,” *World Literature Written in English* 30.2 (1990): 37–38, italics in original.



and other cultural forms.”<sup>13</sup> In *The Last Magician* and *Oyster*, Hospital’s rendering of “Inferno” into Australian landscapes and situations draws our attention to settler unease and complicity in graphic form.

Translated into Australia, ideas about land and guilt resonate with a more general sense of settler unease, destabilizing any attempts to narrate an agreed or comfortable past, and raising questions about the present and future shape of the nation. This destabilization is mirrored in the complex effects of underground spaces in Hospital’s work, as places that can undermine, hide, or protect; for the world beneath the surface is as textured and multivalent in these novels as the world above. Partly, this is what Dante’s “Inferno” brings to contemporary Australia; partly it is a result of the intersection between a translated geography and (variant) local understandings of deep and surface land, the anxieties and hopes arising from these understandings, the range of ways forward which Australia faced in the 1990s. To clarify these arguments, I will start with Hospital’s first transl(oc)ation of “Inferno” into Australia – *The Last Magician*.

### Quarrying a Convict Past

Gestures to “Inferno” are rampant in *The Last Magician*, which concerns the Queensland childhood of five characters: Charlie, Catherine, Robbie, Cat, and Willy, the last of whom is killed in a railway accident. The horror of that accident and its violent aftermath scatter the children, but their lives reconnect, entangling a second generation, many years later in Sydney. Deciphering the riddles of the past triggers further violence, cataclysm, and disappearances. Opening with Dante’s introductory lines, “In the middle of the journey, I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost,”<sup>14</sup> the novel uses elements of “Inferno” to map a quarry spreading, tunnelling under Sydney. Charlie makes a film (*Charlie’s Inferno*), in which this quarry dissolves into a set of falls in Queens-

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<sup>13</sup> Alex Calder & Stephen Turner, “Introduction: Settlement Studies,” *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 20 (2002): 9.

<sup>14</sup> Janette Turner Hospital, *The Last Magician* (St Lucia: U of Queensland P, 1992): 3. Further page references are in the main text, after “LM.”

land and a photograph by Sebastião Salgado in the camera's dizzying and repeated plummet through hell.<sup>15</sup>

Conscious not of movement nor of any actual detail of change, but only of mutation, I watch the rainforest deconstruct and remake itself, I slide down the declensions of Cedar Creek Falls into the vortex of water which is the funnel of Dante's hell which is the Serra Pelada mine which is the Newtown quarry which contracts to one of its ladders which is a railway line which is Cedar Creek Falls in the middle of a dark enveloping wood. (*LM*, 63–64)

The film ends with a woman on a rock at the falls (where the children spent an enchanted summer and where Cat's bones are eventually found), holding a chain on her outstretched hand. The woman, Lucia/Lucy, is the narrator of the novel and it is the shock of seeing herself in this film, holding that chain, that leads to the disorientation she voices in the opening lines.<sup>16</sup>

The secrets and geographies of the quarry undergird the novel and shape the lives of various characters. Charlie runs a pub (in which Lucy works as barmaid and prostitute) in the quarry's "first circle, the limbo of hot neon and strip joints and the retail trade in young girls and the little boys waiting in doorways" (*LM*, 14). Charlie and Gabriel (Robbie's son) map the quarry obsessively, seeking Cat, who was sent to the Holy Family School for Little Wanderers after her brother's death and retreated into silence and self-mutilation. Their mapping leads to their disappearances and possible deaths. Robbie, outwardly privileged and respectable, is implicated in these disappearances and the secrets of the quarry. Seen by others as "Australia's golden boy, the Grammar School prefect, the man

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<sup>15</sup> Salgado's photographs of the Serra Pelada mine in Brazil are part of a series on workers around the world; Sebastião Salgado, *Workers: An Archaeology of the Industrial Age* (London: Phaidon, 1993): 300–19. A further connection to these photographs is made when Gabriel looks at one of Charlie's photos, depicting "a swarm of backs, laden with sorrow, rising up a laddered wall" (*LM*, 279). When Charlie acknowledges that the photo was taken on the law-court steps, Gabriel circles one of the backs. This strongly evokes one of Salgado's photos, which shows the backs of workers climbing the rickety ladders of the mine.

<sup>16</sup> There are some hints in the novel that Lucy is Cat's daughter, or that she echoes her; she is a foundling and unconsciously mimics many of Cat's mannerisms and gestures. The chain bears earrings which had belonged to Cat.

who became a judge and ascended into the Order of Australia” (*LM*, 71), he is portrayed at times with eerie and demonic qualities; Lucy looks into his eyes and has the sensation of looking into deep, black pits, reminiscent of the quarry (*LM*, 263, 315). When Gabriel and Charlie disappear, he is haunted in his dreams by the idea that he has become the quarry.

*They start in his head, chip chipping away at his skull, but they are everywhere, they have taken over his arteries, his veins, his capillaries, he has been invaded, he has been quarried, the Mole People have set up camp in his intestines, they are photographing him from the inside out, making flowcharts, keeping notes. He is mapped and drawn and quartered. He is known. He has become the quarry.*

*He writhes and beats off their maggoty advance and wakes. (LM, 314)*

Perhaps the first thing to note is that Hospital is not engaging here in a straight translation. Rendered as a vast network of tunnels blasted out of rock by society’s outcasts, spreading out from a granite cut around either the Newtown or the Redfern railway station, incorporating sewers and subway lines, and digging under the manicured lawns and quiet sleep of suburbia, this Australian inferno is indeterminate, unmappable, and porous; the traffic between upper and lower worlds is both constant and hidden. While some pretend the quarry doesn’t exist, others are haunted by it, some cannot leave, and many travel in the border lands, the Limbo.

The quarry is far larger than it appears on the map. Far larger. Nobody knows exactly where it begins or where it ends, most people have only hearsay and their fears and nightmares to guide them. Everyone knows certain details of course, the quarry brushes us like cobwebs in unused rooms, some of us descend into it and climb back out (and yet our memories remain very unclear, our memories are instinctively – *protectively* – fuzzy), some merely descend, everyone has felt glancing blows (panhandlings, muggings, fights, stabbings, sexual assaults, drug transactions, break-ins, the numerous small acts of arson, the blastings and tunnellings) but it is difficult to pin down facts. (*LM*, 86)

In *The Last Magician*, it is suggested, the quarry and the underclass to which it is home are an inheritance – a trace passed through the genera-

tions – from the settlement of New South Wales as a penal colony.<sup>17</sup> This settlement left a legacy of class separation and a memory of convict heritage which is both repressed and repeated, which is pushed underground, and which cannot be contained there. Similarly, the historical record has traditionally been somewhat reticent about speaking of the convict origins of European settlement in Australia.

When Manning Clark published *A Short History of Australia* in 1963, he did not hesitate to tell the stories of Australia's convict past, but his work was radical in this regard. The best-known book on Australia's convict history is *The Fatal Shore*, by Robert Hughes. This book, with an epigraph from "Inferno," explores the complexities of the penal system, going beyond both the silences of official memory and the horrors of folklore to uncover real convict voices.<sup>18</sup> The journalist John Pilger grew up not knowing of his convict ancestry, and proclaiming the truth when he did discover it led to estrangement from his family. In *A Secret Country*, a book chronicling many of the secrets and silences of Australian history, he writes:

It is not possible to understand present-day Australian society without appreciating the indelibility of the 'Stain' and its heritage. It is such a potent part of our psyche that its appanage is passed to newcomers who are not from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. It touches the way we are with each other, our language and humour; where else but in Australia is the vocabulary of irony, even perversity, such everyday currency?<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Coyle argues that the quarry represents Aboriginal land claims and that "the mole people who inhabit the quarry are predominantly Aboriginal" ("A Third Space?" 120). One of her main premises is that the suburb of Redfern is frequently referenced in the novel (118), however, it should be noted that Newtown is also a prominent location and the point from which the main characters usually enter the quarry. In fact, Hospital suggests that there are tensions between Redfern and Newtown elements in the quarry, as when Lucy is told that "some fucker from a Redfern gang ripped us off," taking the blanket that belonged to her group in the quarry (*LM*, 18).

<sup>18</sup> Also reflecting the Infernoesque theme, White entitles *Inventing Australia's* second chapter – which is about Australia as a penal colony – "Hell Upon Earth" (16–28). Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688–1980* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981).

<sup>19</sup> John Pilger, *A Secret Country* (London: Vintage, 1990): 95.

Various characters in *The Last Magician* reflect on this legacy, Robbie (now Judge Robinson Gray) talking to Catherine in very similar terms about the palimpsest nature of history: “‘The penal colony, you could say, was our seedbed, the mulch of all that which is distinctively Australian’” (*LM*, 103). He goes on to suggest that the striations made in rock at The Cut by Sydney Cove convicts act as a prophecy of the quarry. A further connection between past and present is made when Lucy attempts to understand Cat’s self-mutilation by comparing it to the actions of convict women, using journal entries quoted in *The Fatal Shore*.<sup>20</sup> The potency of this past, and the ways in which it lingers and repeats, produces an uneasiness, a desire to assert order.

In marked contrast to the quarry and its underclass, Robinson Gray depicts the law as steadfast, reliable. Standing on the footbridge above the railway lines where the accident happened, he tells his son: “‘The law is like railway lines, Gabriel, straight and true. The law protects the truth. What the law decides *is* truth’” (*LM*, 199). However, this certainty is undercut by our knowledge of Robbie’s involvement in the accident on the railway line, by Gabriel’s attempts to map the distortions and untruths of the law in the quarry, and by the image of the bridge in Charlie’s film, under which he and the judge (figured as Dante and Virgil) swim in a river of shit in the eighth circle of Hell. In these disjunctions, the thinness of the membrane between the ordered world and the world of the quarry – a thinness which the wealthy and powerful deny – is exposed; as the novel progresses, the policy of triage and containment adopted with regard to the quarry is revealed as a cover for undocumented deaths and undisclosed crossings of the border lands.

The quarry is leaking into the city, and the city is seeping quarrywards. Everyone knows this, but everyone denies it. The quarry is growing, imperceptibly, relentlessly, inch by inch. This is held to be inevitable, given the time, the nature of the times, the limited wars here and there, the worldwide recession, the unemployment, the migrant problem, the angers, but infiltration of the city proper is denied and the spreading is not a problem, not a problem at all, officially speaking. Officially, there is a policy of containment. Conditions with respect to the quarry,

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia 1787–1868* (London: Harvill, 1996).

the government announces daily on national television, are stable. The boundaries and demarcation points are clear, although they cannot be shown on a map. Between city and quarry, the division is absolute. (LM, 89–90)

It is this falsity of the official position (and the determination to maintain it) that points to a way of reading “Inferno” in Hospital’s work. Dante entertained precisely this idea that perceived divisions are not absolute; much of the emotional force of his story comes from the fear, confusion, and wonder witnessed when those in the Other World realize that Dante is alive – an unprecedented visitor who can leave, and therefore put into practice the lessons of his voyage. Translated into Australia, the underground world becomes the repository for all that people wish to forget or to hide from view – overtly the outcasts of society, but more subtly memory, the past, knowledge, true names. Underground things are not always negative (indeed, some have the powers of liberation or balm) but they are often invisible, intangible. They cannot be contained, as Hospital demonstrates, and it is their seeping into the world above, the awareness that they burrow under the tidiest, most well-ordered of lives, that haunts the novel, reflecting the unsettlement of modern Australia by its secrets and its past.

### Memory and the Apocalypse

When we turn to *Oyster*, the translation of underground geographies is shifted into the outback of western Queensland, to Outer Maroo, a town that deliberately keeps itself off maps, a town for those who wish to be lost and to escape their pasts. In this novel, published four years after *The Last Magician*, the relationships between underground spaces, memory, and unsettlement are depicted as even more devastating, but also deeply engrained in Australian culture. In Outer Maroo, life is deeply disturbed by two strangers; a schoolteacher, Susannah Rover, who is determined to uncover the secrets of the town, and a cult messiah, Oyster, who draws the young and foreign to his Reef, where they mine opal and descend as a community from Eden to hell. A triumvirate of Andrew Godwin (redneck grazier), Mr Prophet (fundamentalist Christian and South African grazier), and Bernie (publican and gem-maker) run the town and make vast amounts of money dealing in opals (using the unpaid labour of Oyster’s followers)

and weaponry. The tension between the town and Oyster's colony reaches its climax when the Reef and all its inhabitants are engulfed in a huge explosion, possibly accidental, possibly set off by Oyster, by townspeople or by Aboriginal activists.<sup>21</sup> The ensuing guilt, shame, and complicity which settle on the town are stirred up by the arrival of two more strangers (Sarah Cohen and Nick Makarios), who come looking for their children.

Throughout *The Last Magician*, suggestions are made that the quarry should be destroyed for the good of society.<sup>22</sup> This is voiced most explicitly near the end of the novel by a taxi driver, Joe Blake, who recommends: "They should drop a bomb on it, blow the whole quarry to kingdom come" (*LM*, 330). In *Oyster*, this apocalyptic ending comes to pass as the people of the town destroy themselves in a blazing bushfire started by arson and a shooting spree. We know of only two groups of potential survivors: Jess, Major Miner (war veteran and opal lover), and Ethel (a Murri woman, waiting for her people to return) sit in the breakaways and

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<sup>21</sup> Coyle ("A Third Space?") argues that this last possibility is the most likely, that when the Murri people left and moved to Bourke, they took with them the knowledge needed to blow up the quarry, but Major Miner suggests that the explosion may have been set off by the increasingly paranoid Oyster or by people of Maroo, who wanted the Reef gone – *Oyster* (Milsons Point, NSW: Vintage Random, 1997): 412–13). Ethel claims that the town has been "sung" (*O*, 152) and is destined for destruction, but this seems to refer more to the last fire, which engulfs the town, rather than the explosion at the quarry. — As indicated, further page references to *Oyster* are bracketed in the running text, after "*O*."

<sup>22</sup> In February 2004, Aboriginal riots in Redfern were sparked by the death of a seventeen-year-old, Thomas J. Hickey, who was allegedly being chased by police. Following calls from the Opposition, the New South Wales Government announced plans to demolish Aboriginal housing in the area. See: AAP, "Brogden's Riot Response: Bulldoze The Block," *Sydney Morning Herald* (16 February 2004): <http://www.smh.com.au/cgi-bin/common/popupPrintArticle.pl?path=/articles/2004/02/16/1076779880553.html> (accessed 15 June 2005); Mami Cordell, "No Black Faces on the Block?" *Signature* (May 2005), ed. Eve Vincent & Marni Cordell, <http://spinach7.com/signature/sig-stories.php?id=408> (accessed 15 June 2005); Vanessa Jones, "An Aboriginal Boy Dies, Chased by Cops: This Week in Redfern," *Counterpunch* (20–22 February 2004), Weekend Edition, ed. Alexander Cockburn & Jeffrey St Clair, <http://www.counterpunch.org/jones02202004.html> (accessed 1 July 2005); Susan Price, "The Redfern Block vs Developer Greed," *Green Left Weekly Online* (3 March 2004): <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2004/573/573p11.htm> (accessed 1 July 2005); "Religious Leaders Claim Block Policy 'Racist'," *ABC News Online* (8 June 2005): <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200506/s1387392.htm> (accessed 8 June 2005).

watch fire lick the horizon; and Mercy (young heroine of the story) drives Sarah and Nick for the gap between the flames, heading for the golden city, Brisbane. Having developed a sense of the Australian Infernoesque in *The Last Magician*, Hospital presents a more diffuse and imperfect mapping of infernos in this later novel; her translation here is further conditioned by the local, by the politics of land, and by a physical environment of expansive space, searing heat, and subterranean beauty and refuge.

Reflecting on the arrival of Oyster in the town, Jess articulates the ways in which the inhabitants of Outer Maroo are haunted by the pasts they flee. As in *The Last Magician*, secrets go underground and disturb the sleep of those who had believed themselves safe, which we see when Jess reflects back on Oyster's arrival in Outer Maroo.

He is one of us, we thought, relaxing a little, for nobody lives in a place like Outer Maroo unless he has things to hide (certain private details to bury, certain details to flee), and these hidden matters are so legion that they populate the desert places quite thickly, they sigh and leer and whisper and flaunt themselves, they fill sleep with a crowd of witnesses, they appear and disappear and reappear in such a way that even after a fugitive has safely reached nowhere, even after he has preened himself on his absolute exit from the map of his life, he will never feel secure [...]. A man with a past to hide can hear the soft splash of evidence far below him, a thin but detectable stream polluting the Great Artesian Basin, bubbling and broiling away down there, its temperature increasing under pressure, its will to erupt growling and growing. It is biding its time. It is waiting to blow. It is waiting only for a new bore to be sunk, a new vent, a new opening, and then it will announce itself in a savage, showy, scalding explosion.

People who flee to nowhere are always waiting for retribution to catch up with them. (*O*, 299–300)

In this speculation about the inner life of Oyster, Hospital develops a theme (and a character type) introduced in the person of Robbie in *The Last Magician*. Continuing her reflections about people like Oyster, Jess lists among their possible childhood deeds the daring of children to lie on railway lines, creating a further echo of Robbie in the reader's mind (*O*, 300). Although the tone here is one of wary acceptance, at their most sinister, these men are seen as having nothing at their core, as being untroubled by their pasts and their actions. Threatening as it is, the experi-



ence of being haunted by one's history is a shared experience in Hospital's work. More alarming, and incomprehensible, is the idea that the past might mean nothing, might linger no more. Unsettlement, the unease of an unresolved and uncomfortable past, is somehow part of settler identity in Australia, and those without it are deeply unpredictable and dangerous. This reminds us of Slemon's articulation of the settler subject as ambivalent, contradictory, divided by loyalties that cannot be given without compromise, tied to a past that allows no simple resolution of self.

However, the people of Outer Maroo are haunted not only by the past, but by the fear that the nation might turn against them (might no longer protect their interests), by the multifarious threats of the federal government, Aboriginal land rights, taxation, national parks, republicanism. In essence, all these threats are about sovereignty, based on land ownership. The graziers of the town (led by Andrew Godwin and Mr Prophet) take extreme measures to keep Outer Maroo off the map, fearing that they might lose their land and sovereignty, and they have huge arsenals lying in wait. Explaining this to Nick, Jess says: "Cow cockies always buy big, whatever they're into. It's for when the government, or the Aborigines, or whoever, comes to take their land" (*O*, 245). While claiming the rights of uncontested settlement ("their land"), the graziers are obsessed by the threat that others might see the land differently and might also have valid, and enforceable, claims to the land.

Watching the fire, Jess ponders the possibilities of survival – of individuals and of her story, which she will put in a metal toolbox and hide down an opal shaft, and I want to turn for a moment to the abandoned opal shaft where Mercy hides Miss Rover's books and writes in her diary, for a strange thing happens to "Inferno" here.

The walls of the Rush curved around Mercy, they folded her in. They were the colour of whipped cream, fluted like drifts of silk, and if she stood and stretched her arms above her head, she could brush the arc of the roof with her fingertips. On the other side of the roof, thirty feet above, the parched red earth broiled and cracked; but underground, in the creamy Rush, the air was cool. Mercy could feel the picked seams of where opal used to be, she could feel the shimmering echoes of the blues and teals and greens, she could see the phantom tongues of fire. (*O*, 75–76)

Hospital's undergrounds are never simply hellish, and her infernos are sometimes above ground. Susannah and Amy compare the heat above ground to Hades and an inferno, respectively, setting this against the coolness, the refuge of land below the surface of the earth. Major Miner is both seduced and haunted by opals and the violent precision of his work with explosives, and although nothing remains after Miss Rover's body is thrown down a shaft with a feral pig, her voice and perfume take up residence with those who loved her. There is a strange beauty in the most torment-laden landscapes, seen when Sarah and Nick restore the creaminess of the ash-covered walls of the tunnels where their children died and Oyster raped Mercy. In the midst of horror, re-living family nightmares of concentration camps, trying to understand how all this could have happened, they make a small space where the resistance of the ocean can surround them.<sup>23</sup>

Her sobbing is noisy now. It bounces off the rock walls and reverberates and echoes back from deeper down. An ocean of mourning fills the tunnel. They sit in the small cleaned sand-coloured space and listen to the dirge of it. The light from the torch washes them. He strokes her hair. He kisses her. They huddle like frightened children, holding each other, and stare into the dark. (*O*, 424)

For readers of *The Last Magician*, this is deeply reminiscent of the ways in which underground space *can* be experienced. Lucy is pulled back to the quarry by the “hibernation ritual” of warmth and companionship (*LM*, 14–19) and Charlie is momentarily hypnotized by the rhythms of hammers and patterns of light as he descends into the quarry after a woman who might be Cat (*LM*, 87–94). Remembering his first dive into the pool at Cedar Creek Falls, it seems to Charlie that “they spent that whole hot summer under the skin of the pool” (*LM*, 189), in the place of enchantment and happiness. The ways in which Australian spaces inflect Hospital's translation of Dante's underground remind us of the range of meanings accreting to land in this era.

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<sup>23</sup> For this sequence and our first full sight of the scorched remains of the Reef, see Janette Turner Hospital, *Oyster*, 409–24.

## Troubled Land

Through the 1980s and 1990s, land ownership and use were highly contested in Australia. Responding to growing Aboriginal pressure for recognition of their rights to land and self-determination, governments and courts made several attempts to clarify the legal status of native title. In a period of deregulation and mineral discovery, three (somewhat competing) sectors of Australian life claimed rights to land: mining companies, farmers and pastoralists, and Indigenous Australians. In 1982, Eddie Mabo, David Passi, and James Rice went to the High Court and claimed that the Meriam people had native title over their land. After a decade of legislation and court rulings, “the High Court ruled that native title did exist in common law, its source being the traditional occupation of land.”<sup>24</sup> Following this ruling, the assumptions that British settlement had extinguished Indigenous land rights or that settlement had been legitimately based on *terra nullius* (empty, unowned or uncultivated land) could no longer be sustained. The Keating Government attempted to clarify, formalize, and limit processes for recognition of native title, an attempt which was complicated by the 1996 Wik decision in the High Court that native title and pastoral leases could coexist. Responding to the disquiet aroused by this political and legal environment – a disquiet fomented by mining and pastoral lobby groups – the Howard-led coalition which won the 1996 election went on to severely restrict the Aboriginal land rights recognized in the Mabo and Wik decisions.<sup>25</sup>

Around this time, the connection between Indigenous Australians and land was also debated in relation to sacred sites, and the extent to which their presence should be allowed to ‘disrupt’ activities such as mining or tourism.<sup>26</sup> Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs have described the unsettlement caused by negotiations between the ‘modern’ and the ‘sacred’ as an

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<sup>24</sup> Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996): 3.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000): 236–73. John Pilger describes the growth of Aboriginal-rights movements up to the end of the 1980s (*A Secret Country*, 21–82).

<sup>26</sup> Many of these issues are discussed in David Marr’s essay about a struggle between a mining company and Aboriginal people of the Gulf of Carpentaria; “Mad about the Buoy,” in *The Best Australian Essays 2001*, ed. Peter Craven (Melbourne: Black-Schwartz, 2001): 91–105.

Australian uncanny, which can lead to a curious inversion of power-relations in which the majority perceives and represents itself as an ‘embattled minority’. They developed their concept of the uncanny from the work of Durkheim, Freud, and Kristeva (among others), and articulate it as follows:

An ‘uncanny’ experience may occur when one’s home is rendered, somehow and in some sense, unfamiliar; one has the experience, in other words, of being in place and ‘out of place’ simultaneously.<sup>27</sup>

In *Uncanny Australia*, they describe the reactions of a group of wealthy pastoralists to the Wik decision in these terms:

One of the central debates following the *Wik* decision was about the possibility of leasehold pastoralists becoming freeholders, and thus themselves having more than their ‘proper’ share. So the pastoralists designate themselves as an embattled, impotent minority in order then to be able to claim rights they have never been able to claim before. Indeed – and this is the uncanny feature of this process – by imagining themselves as a minority, the pastoralists are then able to stride right into the centre of the national consciousness and demand its attention: “And who will feed Australia then?” they wonder, apocalyptically fancying their *own* extinguishment.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, the people of Outer Maroo (divided into fervent Christians and rowdy alcoholics) agree with each other and with Oyster on two points: the value of their economic activity (opal mining) and a sense of impending apocalypse. Refusing to send his daughter away to acquire refinement and education, Andrew Godwin voices an extraordinary collation of anxieties.

“That’s what the graziers thought up in Cape York Peninsula,” Andrew says. “They thought they were off the maps and off the edge of the world. You can’t even get to them by road, you can’t even get

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<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Gelder & Jane M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne UP, 1998): 23. Exploring similar issues, Roslynn D. Haynes writes extensively on unsettlement and the gothic in the Australian desert; Haynes, *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Gelder & Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia*, 137.

there by four-wheel drive, for God's sake. You've got to fly in. And has that protected them? No. The government ups and takes their land. Someone in Canberra signs on a line and that's it. All this bowing and scraping to world opinion and the United Nations, all this Indigenous People's crap, all this stuff forced down our throats by Canberra, I mean Oyster was absolutely right about that, even Dukke Prophet (and I hate the guts of that holier-than-thou crim), but he is right about that: it's in the Book of Revelation, it all adds up, the Beast and the Whore of Babylon, there's no question they are the federal government and all these World Thought Police organisations: give us a break. The greenies, the Abos, the unions, all these communists, they've got the government over a barrel. National Parks, Land Rights, I tell you they are coming to take our land and we have to be ready, and I'm certainly not giving them Alice as a pawn in their game." (*O*, 265)

Stephen Turner suggests that "decency and indignation form the dialectic of unsettlement, the unstable rhetoric of colonial being";<sup>29</sup> here, the uncertainty of settler Australians is revealed in extremes of fear and anger, and in the willingness to use violence to maintain control over land. However, such unsettlement is far from new in Australia. In his histories of the long-running battles on the 'frontiers' between European and Indigenous Australia, Henry Reynolds traces the toll of anxiety exacted by white-black conflict, and argues that settlers' unwillingness to negotiate land rights "explains, if not the conflict itself, which had many causes, then certainly its bitterness, ubiquity, longevity. It also accounts for the persistent undercurrent of guilt among settlers – the whisper in the heart."<sup>30</sup>

The unsettling trace of historic conflict and the peculiarities of an Australian uncanny emerge in *Oyster*, troubling the certainties by which land is claimed and the rules of life set down. Before Outer Maroo, there was Maroo, where unrest developed after miners sank their first opal shaft inside a bora ring,

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<sup>29</sup> Stephen Turner, "Being Colonial/Colonial Being," *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 20 (2002): 51.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1987): 187. Peter Read also explores the complexities of non-Indigenous belonging in a land where Indigenous Australians have been dispossessed; Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

those mazy circles of stones placed here who knows how many millennia ago? There are gigantic rings and small ones, and rings within rings, a paisley surface, complex, a great corroboree ground and meeting place for five tribes. (*O*, 151)

Blaming the Murris, the miners massacred their camp and three years later the town burned to the ground. The story is rarely spoken of openly, but Mercy recalls it in the opal shaft where she hides knowledge and counter-truth: “Everybody says that the Murris who escaped the massacre came back and did it. Everybody said the place was jinxed” (*O*, 78). In a similar way, the details of Oyster’s camp, the laws of land ownership, the quiet subversion of those laws in Outer Maroo, and the resistance of the Murri people to the desecration of their sacred sites are passed to Sarah from her step-daughter, Amy, in a postcard sent in a dream (*O*, 74–78, 174–78). Brief details of Aboriginal understandings of the land are presented in epigraphs, contested in pub arguments, and passed on in second-hand lessons. The disjunction between black and white relationships to the land (the sacred and the modern highlighted by Gelder and Jacobs) appears most overtly as Jess records her narrative of events and Ethel waits out the fire – by which time almost everything is gone.

Consider Ethel. She sits there, cross-legged in the red dust at the edge of the bora rings, smiling to herself, rocking gently backwards and forwards as though she hears singing and the rhythmic stamping of feet in the gidgee boughs. She has been putting the scattered rocks back where they belong, filling gaps in the circles and centuries. They have been here, the bora rings, for over twenty thousand years, it is believed; it is only in the past hundred, a hiccup in time, that indifferent graziers and the treads of their four-wheel drives have scattered the stones and have imprinted zippered scars across their sacred clay skin.

From time to time, Ethel grins at me, and her teeth flash in her black face like stark white lightning.

“My mob chuckling up their sleeves,” she tells me. “My mob been here all along. They been waiting for this.”

“I wouldn’t have thought your mob were wearing sleeves.”

“Fuck off, Jess,” she grins. “Whitefella Maroo been and gone once, and been and gone twice, and we’re still here, my mob and me.”

[...]

“Reckon us Murriss got the last laugh,” she says complacently. The Murriss in their serried invisible ranks crowd around her. She sees them all. “You just johnny-come-latelies, Jess. You and Major M.”

As for what is visible: there are only three of us left here; one Murri woman, and two of us johnny-come-latelies. (*O*, 44–45)

That this is a story as much about how hidden things endure as it is about self-destruction alerts us to the complexity of Hospital’s sense of geography, presence, reality, time, and how it shapes her translation of Dante. In an Australia divided by class and race, where settlement is contested and unsettlement is everywhere, Hospital is able to use the underground spaces and moral frameworks of “Inferno” to explore long-standing and unspoken conflicts, and to engage with the myriad meanings and uses of land (deep and surface). Rather than focus on translation in a strict, linguistic sense, Hospital allows Dante’s imaginary world to inhabit the spaces and histories of Australia.

## Final Notes

Homi Bhabha offers an intriguing reflection – via Ernest Renan’s argument that the nation is based on the “*will to nationhood*”<sup>31</sup> – which I would like briefly to explore by way of conclusion. Bhabha suggests that

Renan’s will is itself the site of a strange forgetting of the history of the nation’s past: the violence involved in establishing the nation’s writ. It is this forgetting – the signification of a minus in the origin – that constitutes the *beginning* of the nation’s narrative.<sup>32</sup>

For Bhabha, it is forgetting – the deliberate elision of massacre, violence, force – that makes citizens of us and allows the nation to be narrated. I suggest that this is particularly salient in settler societies where forgetting may be one of the more potent strategies available to help the settler negotiate their necessary ambivalence. But Hospital’s translation of “Inferno” reveals that what is forgotten can also be remembered, re-encountered, and this may open up new forms of nationhood. Turner writes of

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<sup>31</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; London: Routledge, 2004): 229, italics in original.

<sup>32</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 229–30.

New Zealand in the following terms, his words producing an evocative and striking echo of Hospital's Australian infernos.

In other words the history of the place, considered as singular, continuous, now unified, the foundation therefore of identity and nationhood, is *broken*. The idea of one history/nation/people flies in the face of this historical discontinuity, making the attendant narrative a rickety footbridge thrown over an abyss. Colonial being registers the unstable ground of place, the hole beneath the whole, moral pit of settlement.<sup>33</sup>

By bringing the imagery and moral world of "Inferno" to bear on contemporary Australia, Hospital forces our attention to questions of guilt, land, and memory. In her writing, those things that are pushed underground – the outrageous, the precious, the restorative – seep back into the everyday. As traces, ghosts, they weather fire and indignation to trouble stories of land and nationhood. For Hospital, this troubling is illumination as well as unsettlement; it is here that we find light in her dark and burdened world.

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<sup>33</sup> Stephen Turner, "Being Colonial/Colonial Being," 63.



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# Between Mother Tongue, Grandfather Tongue, and Foreign Tongue

A Turk in Translation



ALYTH GRANT AND KATE ROY

Narratives that originate at border crossings cannot be bound by national borders, languages, and literary and critical traditions. Born of crisis and change, suffering alternately from amnesia and too much remembering, and precariously positioned at the interstices of different spaces, histories, and languages, they seek to name and configure cultural and literary production in their own terms and to enter novel forms of inter/transcultural dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

**B**ORN IN MALATYA, EASTERN ANATOLIA, in 1946, the Turkish-German writer Emine Sevgi Özdamar first travelled to Germany when she was nineteen, to spend two years in Berlin as a guest-worker. She returned to Turkey in 1967, and trained to be an actor at an Istanbul drama school. After the military putsch of 1971 she was arrested and briefly detained for socialist activities. The continuing political instability in Turkey motivated her return to Germany, this time to East Berlin, to work with the Brechtian theatre director Benno Besson,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation* (Princeton NJ & Oxford: Princeton UP, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> The renowned Swiss director of Brechtian and classical works, a former assistant of Brecht who began his career with Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, and later worked with two further Berlin theatres, Deutsches Theater and the Volksbühne.

whom she later accompanied to France. Returning then to Germany, she settled into a position at the theatre in Bochum, and it was there that she began to write, while continuing to act, direct, and appear in films. Her freelance writing later took her to Berlin, Düsseldorf, France, Frankfurt (as the thirtieth writer in residence for Bergen-Enkheim), and, most recently, back to Berlin, where she was the 2009 recipient of the Kunstpreis Berlin. She has written short stories, plays, and novels, using her adopted language of German.

As a former guest-worker who has made Germany her home, writing in German, she represents one of the new “diasporas of advanced capital” in the metropolitan centres of Europe, as Vijay Mishra calls them.<sup>3</sup> Gayatri Spivak refers to these groups more polemically as “transnationals” in the context of a “‘neo-liberal’ world economic system, which, in the name of Development [...] removes all barriers between itself and fragile national economies, so that any possibility of building for social redistribution is severely damaged.”<sup>4</sup> Her description of the migrations and ‘border crossings’ in response to economic factors over which the migrants have no control conveys a sense of the essential rootlessness and powerlessness of such people; the term ‘diaspora’, on the other hand, suggests groups who – for whatever reason – have arrived and settled in a new place and – in the case of the ‘old’ diasporas – try to maintain their sense of identity located in the homeland, or – as with the ‘new’ diasporas – have undergone an evolutionary process toward a new hybrid identity through the productive friction with the community of which they have become a part. Discussing the films of Hanif Kureishi, a “first-generation British hybrid,” Mishra asserts: “Kureishi stages the triumph of the hybrid, the power of

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<sup>3</sup> See Vijay Mishra, “The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora,” *Textual Practice* 10.3 (1996): 421–47. The focus of Mishra’s article is the Indian diaspora, which he divides into the “old” and the “new,” the latter located in “the metropolitan centres of the Empire, the New World and the former settler colonies” (442), but the term may easily be applied – although without the postcolonial component – to the migrant labour force of continental Europe, of which the Turks form one of the largest groups.

<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World,” *Textual Practice* 10.2 (1996): 245.

the in-between to express the new and to occupy a space from which a critique of the old may be mounted.”<sup>5</sup>

The choice or appropriateness of the term – ‘transnational’ or ‘diasporic’ – will depend on factors such as the particular sub-group being considered, the period of time the displaced group has spent in its new context, the degree of integration into the new homeland, as well as the nature of the questions being asked: whether the intent is to point to the traumatic consequences of displacement – the powerlessness, the outsider status, the cultural and linguistic loss of migrant groups – or whether the focus is, rather, on the shifts over time in their culture, language, and sense of identity. Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s writing offers insights in both areas of interest. In her plays, she has described vividly the experience of the migrant worker in the capitalist environment, deprived of agency and reduced to a productive capacity – the existence of the ‘transnational’;<sup>6</sup> but in her novels and short prose she has become a voice for the evolutionary potential of those living in the diaspora. Özdamar uses German to explore an evolving new identity, which includes loss (of the mother tongue as well as the homeland),<sup>7</sup> but also a gain, in using a kind of cultural ‘inter-language’<sup>8</sup> in which language itself becomes a tool of ‘the power of the in-between to express the new’.

The economic migrants in continental Europe, who include a subset of political refugees, share many of the characteristics of the colonial and postcolonial diasporas of which Mishra writes, but there are also significant differences, which can help sharpen one’s understanding of the situa-

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<sup>5</sup> Mishra, “The Diasporic Imaginary,” 437.

<sup>6</sup> See particularly her plays “Karagöz in Alamania” [Blackeye in Germania] and “Keloğlan in Alamania” [Baldboy in Germania].

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Azade Seyhan, who includes a discussion of Özdamar’s early texts in her “investigation of stories and histories that recuperate losses incurred in migration, dislocation, and translation, those deeply felt signs and markers of our age.” Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, 4. Although it is not just migration that is the cause of “loss” in Özdamar’s work, as will be discussed below, this is nonetheless an important theme in her writing.

<sup>8</sup> This term is commonly used by applied linguists to describe a process in foreign language acquisition, in which learners acquire a grammatical system that is somewhere between the mother tongue and the target tongue, approximating the grammar that is gradually being acquired. In the case of Özdamar’s writing, the ‘somewhere between’ is to be found in the lexis and idiom used, rather than in grammatical forms.

tion of, for example, the Turks in Germany. In particular, the nature of the journey continental migrant workers undertake differs. For the indentured Fiji-Indians of the 'old' diaspora, the journey represented the traumatic loss of homeland; the idea of return could only be a utopic dream, for the ship sailed away, leaving the people stranded in a new land. It was a one-way journey, the ocean representing an un(re)crossable barrier.

In the case of migrant worker populations in Europe, the situation is different. Coming mostly from impoverished and underdeveloped regions of southern Europe (or, in the case of the Turks, from 'Asian' Anatolia), they responded in the 1960s to the call of the capital-rich countries in the north (in particular, Germany) for labour. Initially, they saw in this journey the opportunity to earn money which they could remit to their families, who remained at home, and later to return home themselves, where they hoped to establish themselves in a small way in business with the capital they had accumulated. Their dream was essentially one of upward social mobility through self-employment. However, that goal remained elusive for many. Instead, they became repeated journeyers between the home country and the adopted one. The railway network can be seen as the symbol of those journeyings, the railway line being, in a material as well as a symbolic sense, reassuring proof of continuing connectedness with the homeland. It is not surprising that many migrants habitually frequent railway stations – the station itself is an in-between space that offers the possibility of being both 'here' and 'there'.<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, through humanitarian programmes of family reunification introduced in the 1970s by the host country, the migrants' families were able to join them, and a new generation was born abroad. The 'guest' status of the German *Gastarbeiter* was revoked, and it was accepted at least to some degree that these workers were in the country to stay and with a certain right to do so.<sup>10</sup> Today we have to speak of second- and

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<sup>9</sup> Rail travel is the context for connections between migrant groups as well, who frequently encounter each other en route. Özdamar recounts her observations of guest-workers on such journeys, using a hybridized German to communicate; Özdamar, "Living and Writing in Germany," in *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*, ed. David Horrocks & Eva Kolinsky (Providence RI: Berghahn, 1996): 47.

<sup>10</sup> The word *Gastarbeiter* was replaced by the term *ausländische Arbeitnehmer/Mitarbeiter* (foreign employees). While the German state had no historical sense of obligation toward the guest-workers in the way the UK had toward the citizens of its

even third-generation migrant groups. Yet they remained for the most part – until a new citizenship law in 2000 – “passive” rather than “active” citizens, as Mishra defines them, excluded from being “models of the nation.”<sup>11</sup>

Connected, as they remained, the modern diaspora of migrant labour cannot be viewed as mourners for a lost homeland in quite the same way as the indentured labourers were. Nevertheless, their sense of displacement was strong, and is described creatively in Özdamar’s *Bridge of the Golden Horn*. They remained obvious Others, not made to feel at home in their new country. In the post-1989 period, Germany has been obliged to look at itself seriously, as new xenophobic elements, particularly in the east of the reunified country, but not only there, resulted in numerous outrages against the Turkish community (e.g., in Solingen and Mölln). Although there have been no such extreme events recently, xenophobia is always present, and can be found in institutionalized forms. Seemingly contradictory phenomena are observable. On the one hand, the authorities are, more than ever before, making an effort to come to terms with the implications of an ethnically mixed population, and questions are being asked about what it takes to achieve a harmoniously integrated society; but at the same time discrimination is often institutionalized: there have been repeated instances of women who have been dismissed from their jobs for refusing to give up wearing a headscarf, even when the State is their employer.

In such a case, in the town of Bergkamen in the Ruhr district, where a popular kindergarten teacher was dismissed for this reason, the mayor went public on the internet in order to justify the decision in terms of civil law.<sup>12</sup> His description of the population patterns in his town and the ef-

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former colonies, once it had accepted the positive effects their labour had on the national economy, a sense of duty did grow. However, until very recently Germany did not accept that it was a country of immigration and did not readily grant citizenship to the newcomers. Only since 2000 have second-generation migrants had dual citizenship until the ages of 18–23, granting them the possibility of ‘choosing’ whether they wish to retain German citizenship during this time.

<sup>11</sup> Mishra, “The Diasporic Imaginary,” 435.

<sup>12</sup> This incident happened in the period 2002–2003, but the mayor’s argument relating to his ‘findings’ of the time (as well as some additional material) is still accessible on the internet: <http://www.roland-schaefer.de/kopftuch.htm> (accessed 4 April

forts of the city fathers to foster integration bear witness to the complexity of the situation. Despite a whole series of projects aimed at fostering integration, a trend toward ghettoization of the Turkish population persists. The degree of latent racist sentiment among Germans is evident in the mayor's claim that where two Turkish families move into a six-family apartment block German families begin to move out, so that the landlords, rather than lose rental income, go in search of further Turkish tenants. Yet, at the same time, migrant Turks have been so successful in integrating economically that a virtually complete Turkish infrastructure of shops and services exists. For Ruth Mandel, this in itself offers proof of transnational capabilities:

The stereotype that would isolate a mustached Turkish migrant slicing meat off his rotisserie in a kebab shop fails to recognize that an entire transnational world unfolds within these very boundaries. On the contrary, this shop owner has acquired basic accounting skills, has learned to negotiate with German health and sanitation authorities, and, using his German-language skills and communicative practices, often sells his sandwiches to Germans and other non-Turks. [...] A more nuanced understanding of the immigrant population might view Turkish Germans less as ghettoized victims than creative players whose skills may be transferred across boundaries – geographic, political, or cultural.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, the mayor of Bergkamen cites the Turks' declining interest in his council's "offers of integration," and their belief that it is a German problem, not a Turkish one, yet he appears to see no tension in his own later assertion that "Integration is first and foremost an obligation of the migrant."<sup>14</sup>

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2009]. This in itself attests to the longevity of the debate, which could perhaps also be attributed to the persistence of the belief in the existence of a Turkish 'parallel society' on German soil, more recently fanned both by the media obsession with 'honour killings' following the murder of Hatan Sürücü, a young Turkish Berliner, by her brothers in 2005, and by books such as Necla Kelek's *Die fremde Braut: Ein Bericht aus dem Inneren des türkischen Lebens in Deutschland* [The Foreign Bride: a Report From Inside the Turkish Community in Germany], published in 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* (Durham NC & London: Duke UP, 2008): 312.

<sup>14</sup> "Integration ist in erster Linie eine Bringeschuld [sic] der Zuwanderer"; <http://www.roland-schaefer.de/integration.htm> (accessed 28 May 2009).



This supposed voluntary and involuntary ghettoization of the Turkish population is thus, from the German point of view, a sign of the failure of integration – indeed, the mayor claims that the homeland culture is being ever more frequently re-imported into the new homeland through marriage. Marriage partners are, he states, frequently brought from Turkey, and with them more culturally conservative customs. The kindergarten teacher dismissed for wearing an Islamic headscarf [Turkish: *türban*] had only begun doing so after marrying a man newly arrived from Turkey. The irony of this is that Turkey has been a secularized state since Atatürk's reforms in the 1920s. Proportionately more Turkish women in Germany now wear the headscarf than in Turkey.<sup>15</sup> The visual assertion of otherness, of non-belonging, must be read as a conscious response to a politics of exclusion over several decades on the official level and to the reluctance of the majority population to embrace not just the enhanced cuisine and excellent produce sold by the newcomers, but the newcomers themselves in their difference.<sup>16</sup> Non-acceptance in the new place gives rise to the “diasporic imaginary,” the displaceds' shared idea of the homeland, the headscarf being the sign of an increased need to identify with the ‘homeland’.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Özdamar also comments on this: “The wearing of head scarves is a case in point. They may have been largely discarded in Turkey as a result of Atatürk's reforms, but Turkish girls in Germany can now often be seen wearing them. In doing so they are primarily demonstrating a feminist attitude.” David Horrocks, “In Search of a Lost Past,” in *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*, ed. David Horrocks & Eva Kolinsky (Providence RI: Berghahn, 1996): 49. See also Ruth Mandel, who discusses how the headscarf has come to represent “a sartorial form of resistance” for Turks “reacting” both to Germans who see the headscarf as proving “the fundamental ‘non-integrateability’” of Turkish immigrants (erroneously believing it to be essential to Turkishness), and, simultaneously, to left-wing feminists, who see it as sexist and “backward.” Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties*, 304–10.

<sup>16</sup> Helga Kraft comments on this in the context of her discussion of a play by Anna Langhoff, *Transit Heimat/Gedeckte Tische* [Transit homeland/Laden table], in which food is the signifier for ethnic difference, but fails as a mediator of inter-ethnic harmony. Kraft, “Staging Xenophobia in the 1990s: The Political Plays of Bettina Fless, Anna Langhoff, & Emine Sevgi Özdamar,” in *Writing Against Boundaries: Nationality, Ethnicity and Gender in the German-Speaking Context*, ed. Barbara Kosta & Helga Kraft (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2003): 122.

<sup>17</sup> See Mishra, “The Diasporic Imaginary,” 423.

Ghettoization and the apparent failure of integration are clearly of concern to those interested in the peaceful coexistence of an increasingly multicultural society. Yet even the question of what we actually mean by the word 'integration', or how we can know when it has been achieved, is a difficult one. These sentiments are reminiscent of the journalist Mely Kiyak's ironic question to herself, which she then poses to the politician Lale Akgün, a specialist in such matters: "Ms. Akgün, on the way to your office I asked myself whether I was well integrated."<sup>18</sup> Mandel asserts that the term integration "euphemizes" assimilation.<sup>19</sup> This latter term is understood by "many of those who are supposed to do it" [*viele derjenigen, die es tun sollen*] as complete adaptation, to the extent of having to deny [*negieren*] their Turkish roots.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, is the question 'How can we help them to integrate?' the right one? Is it not asked from a position of paternalistic arrogance, implying as it does that integration is a one-way process? It sounds all too much like the question Mishra, following Sartre, identifies as the one the settler cultures ask about the native populations, as did the Nazis about the Jews: "What do we do with them now?"<sup>21</sup> It also erroneously assumes homogeneity of identity in the minority group, overlooking the inherent diversity and hybridity present within the group, who indeed are only constituted as a group by virtue of being 'Other'.<sup>22</sup>

Literary documents such as Özdamar's are of particular value in giving voice from within to the suppressed voices of others of the German com-

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<sup>18</sup> "Frau Akgün, auf dem Weg in Ihr Büro habe ich mir die Frage gestellt, ob ich gut integriert bin"; Mely Kiyak, *10 für Deutschland: Gespräche mit türkeistämmigen Abgeordneten* (Hamburg: Edition Körber Stiftung, 2007): 38.

<sup>19</sup> Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties*, 317.

<sup>20</sup> Hilke Gerdes, *Türken in Berlin* (Berlin: be.bra, 2009): 182.

<sup>21</sup> Mishra, "The Diasporic Imaginary," 422.

<sup>22</sup> My (AFG) essay on *The Bridge of the Golden Horn* discusses this at greater length, arguing that Özdamar shows there that the issue encountered in much post-colonial literature of (European) centre versus margins is to be found within Turkey itself. The newly arrived guest-workers in *Bridge* take some considerable time to begin to define themselves as a group, as the many different dialects they speak are evidence, rather, of the 'otherness' of the others within the group. They only gradually become participants in the 'diasporic imaginary' of the homeland. See Alyth F. Grant, "Bridging Cultural Divides: Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn*," *International Journal of the Humanities* 1 (2003): 753–64.

munity in ways other kinds of analysis cannot. While tracing her own path, she looks to her culture of origin, questioning it from a position marked by her own cultural transformation. In so doing, she offers the reader of German an insight into the metaphorical journey that migrants must take in order to be able to hybridize: i.e. to integrate while preserving a sense of their own origins. She also shows the variability in cultural identity among what is generally perceived as ‘Turkish’, a variability that applies equally to the cultural production of migrants generally, as Eva Kolinsky points out in her conclusion to the book *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*:

Literature has a special role to play in rewriting the agenda of exclusion. The writers, their stories, their imaginary worlds and their language all defy the generalisations and stereotypes that underpin exclusion. The ‘migrants’ who write and publish today in German come from a variety of national and cultural backgrounds. There is no such things [sic] as *Ausländerliteratur*, a literature of non-Germans in Germany, nor is there a German-Turkish, German-Portuguese, German-Greek school of writing. Each writer is an individual with his or her own cultural or cross-cultural identity.<sup>23</sup>

This may be taken as a warning not to over-generalize on the basis of one case-study, but to observe and value the insights into the hybridizing processes of becoming that creative writing can offer.

### Emine Sevgi Özdamar and her Short Stories “Mother Tongue,” “Grandfather Tongue,” and “The Yard in the Mirror”

The Turkish-German literature-immigrant<sup>24</sup> Emine Sevgi Özdamar sees herself as no “typical migrant,” and says she has “no story of woe to

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<sup>23</sup> *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*, ed. David Horrocks & Eva Kolinsky (Providence RI: Berghahn, 1996): 188.

<sup>24</sup> This term is translated from the original – “die türkisch-deutsche Literatur-Immigrantin” – and was originally used by Gunhild Kübler, in her article “Was heisst fremd sein?” *Die Weltwoche* (26 March 1998), to define Özdamar’s position. It is used here because it encapsulates the essence of the hybrid nature of Özdamar’s works and of the nature of her immigration.

offer.”<sup>25</sup> Her transition to life in Germany has seemingly been overwhelmingly positive, largely due to the political circumstances that caused her to leave her homeland, and her subsequent reception in Germany. During her first stay in Germany in the late 1960s, while a guest-worker, she learned the German language, and although, as she says, her German words have “no childhood,” this is no impediment to her feeling at home in German. Her prior knowledge of the German theatrical tradition of Büchner, Kleist, and Lenz, and especially Brecht – first in their Turkish translations and later in the original language – provided her with a personal ‘bridge’ to German culture. This position as an ‘artiste’ – first as an actor, later as a director, playwright, and author – enables her to go beyond the confines of the Turkish sub-community, yet, through all her arts and on the basis of her early experiences as a guest-worker, she can also tell the story of those within it. This is especially evident in her two plays, “Karagöz in Alamania” (‘Blackeye in Germania’: based on the life story of a guest-worker and sourced from authentic personal papers in which this worker had begun to write about his life) and “Keloğlan in Alamania” (‘Baldboy in Germania’: one of Özdamar’s most strongly politicized works, about the position of a second-generation Turk in German society).

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<sup>25</sup> Angela Gutzeit, “‘Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei...’: Interview mit der Schriftstellerin und Schauspielerin Emine Sevgi Özdamar,” in *Annäherung an die Fremde* (Osnabrück: Rasch, 1992): 36–40. In saying this, she appears to wish to distance herself from some of the earliest texts written about the situation of migrants living in Germany, whose aim was that of cultural mediation. See Heidrun Suhr, “Ausländerliteratur: Minority Literature in the Federal Republic of Germany,” *New German Critique* 46 (1989): 71–103.

*Translation of words*<sup>26</sup>

Özdamar has been described as an author “so concerned with language itself that it becomes a central theme of much of her work,”<sup>27</sup> and it is within the language of her works that the concepts of identity and cultural translation present themselves, revealed by the hybrid Turkish-German in which they are written. What Walter Benjamin says in “The Task of the Translator” about the good translator can provide insight into the processes Özdamar employs in seeking the appropriate linguistic means to express her *intentio* as an individual undergoing cultural transformation and with a consequent need to “harmonize” her two “modes of signification.”<sup>28</sup>

Benjamin claims for good translation the capacity to take language to a higher plane, one on which the different languages, “supplemented and reconciled in their mode of signification, harmonize.”<sup>29</sup> Such a language he calls “pure”:

It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another [...]. For the sake of pure language he breaks through decayed barriers of his own language.<sup>30</sup>

The process of translation is thus not concerned with ‘correctly’ conveying what has been said in one language in the words of another, producing a product that reads as if it were originally written in the language of the translator. What Benjamin suggests is that what should be conveyed is the *intentio* of the words: “not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supple-

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<sup>26</sup> The analysis of Özdamar’s linguistic techniques that follows is further elaborated in my (KMR) MA thesis on Özdamar, “‘Powerfully affected by the foreign tongue’: Language in the works of Emine Sevgi Özdamar” (University of Otago, 2003). See also, for example, Sohelia Ghaussy, “Das Vaterland verlassen: Nomadic Language and ‘Feminine Writing’ in Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei*,” *German Quarterly* 72.1 (Winter 1999): 1–16, Luise von Flotow, “Life is a Caravanserei: Translating Translated Marginality, a Turkish-German *Zwittertext* in English,” *Meta* 45.1 (2000): 65–72, and Bettina Brandt, “Collecting Childhood Memories of the Future: Arabic as Mediator Between Turkish and German in Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s *Mutterzunge*,” *Germanic Review* 79.4 (Fall 2004): 295–315.

<sup>27</sup> David Horrocks, “In Search of a Lost Past,” 24.

<sup>28</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” (1923), in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, tr. Harry Zohn, ed. & intro. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968): 77.

<sup>29</sup> Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 77.

<sup>30</sup> “The Task of the Translator,” 80.

ment to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intention*.<sup>31</sup> Such a translation can take into account the fact that language is a way of being, not just a syntax. For Benjamin, “a real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light”;<sup>32</sup> rather, the language it creates in the medium of – in this case – German, reflects the intention of the original as a cultural artefact. He quotes the words of Rudolf Pannwitz as an excellent expression of the theory of translation: “The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue.”<sup>33</sup> The idea of the original language “powerfully affecting” the language of the “translation” suggests that the term *transformation* is more appropriate for discussing Özdamar’s use of language. Transforming one language into another facilitates the expression of the (hybrid) self, making apparent the thought of the speaker in its original structure.

Özdamar’s approach is not concerned with making it easy for her German reader, ‘correctly’ finding the idiomatic German equivalent for Turkish words. She is far more concerned with, as she names it, “turning the tongue,” in itself a metaphor for transforming language, for, as she tells us in the first line of “Mother Tongue,” “In my language tongue is called: language”<sup>34</sup> (While English and Turkish share this term ‘mother tongue’, German does not, so for a German reader this phrase has a shock-factor English readers do not experience.<sup>35</sup>) Words are on the move, and as they move, they change in ‘appearance’. The narrator in “Grandfather Tongue” speaks of the difference between the Arabic words still present in her language – Turkish – and those same words spoken by her Arabic tutor: “In the time it took for these words to get up in your country and walk to my

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<sup>31</sup> “The Task of the Translator,” 79.

<sup>32</sup> “The Task of the Translator,” 79.

<sup>33</sup> Pannwitz, quoted in Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 81.

<sup>34</sup> “In meiner Sprache heißt Zunge: Sprache”; Emine Sevgi Özdamar, “Mother Tongue,” in *Mutterzunge: Erzählungen* [Mother Tongue: Stories] (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1998): 9. All translations from the original texts are our own.

<sup>35</sup> The disconcerting nature of the term is further detailed by von Flotow, “Life is a Caravanserai,” 67.

country they changed somewhat along the way”<sup>36</sup> In utilizing word-for-word translations instead of searching for a German equivalent, Özdamar makes transparent the transformation the language is undergoing, “convey[ing] in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own.”<sup>37</sup> Like the great translators of whom Benjamin speaks, she “breaks through decayed barriers” of German,<sup>38</sup> re-contextualizing it and changing its nature, making it into an integrative mode of expression. In so doing, she creates a tool which not only expresses a Turkish-German identity but also, by forcing German readers to have another look at their native language, she brings a Turkish world closer to them and, in the encounter, renders this world tangible for them.<sup>39</sup>

This is first evident where the Turkish language enters the text via syntactic and phonological difference: features of Turkish become apparent through Özdamar’s construction of the text. These include the obvious lack of the definite article in some places (in Turkish, a noun phrase is understood to be definite by virtue of not being marked as indefinite)<sup>40</sup> and the (albeit simplified) use of Turkish spelling, which could prove ‘problematic’ for a reader who is uncertain of how to pronounce these words.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “Bis diese Wörter aus deinem Land aufgestanden und zu meinem Land gelaufen sind, haben sie sich unterwegs etwas geändert”; Özdamar, “Grandfather Tongue,” 29.

<sup>37</sup> Raja Rao, quoted in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989): 61.

<sup>38</sup> Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 80.

<sup>39</sup> Brigid Haines & Margaret Littler identify the link between the aesthetic and the political in Özdamar’s language: “These alienating effects express a political as well as an aesthetic agenda; they are calculated to pose obstacles to comprehension and make the German-speaking reader share the linguistic estrangement experienced by foreigners in Germany”; “Emine Sevgi Özdamar, ‘Mutter Zunge’ and ‘Großvater Zunge’ (1990),” in Brigid Haines & Margaret Littler, *Contemporary Women’s Writing in Germany: Changing the Subject* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004): 122.

<sup>40</sup> Jaklin Kornfilt, *Turkish* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997): 273.

<sup>41</sup> Examples of difficult words are “mücamele” and “muvacehe,” and of simplifications “gecirmek” and “ducar,” which in Turkish would be spelt with ‘ç’. Emine Sevgi Özdamar, “Grandfather Tongue,” 41.

Primarily, however, Turkish enters the text via semantic and idiomatic difference. Benjamin's sense of "in the beginning was the word"<sup>42</sup> takes on real significance here: Özdamar begins from words to effect her recontextualization of German. Untranslated words are an example of this – for example, "Bakshish" in "Mother Tongue," likewise the greeting-and-reply sequence "Selamünaleyküm"/"Aleykümselam" in "Grandfather Tongue." As in postcolonial texts, these words represent the culture they convey and "inscribe difference" on German.<sup>43</sup>

Özdamar uses neologisms, created in the space between the two languages, capitalizing on the opening both languages offer for generating words by forming compounds and fusing two ideas to give voice to concepts German does not have, yet needs, in order to tell her Turkish-German story ("Patience-stone," "Life-accidents") [*Geduldstein, Lebensunfälle*]. The meeting of what Gürsel Aytaç has termed "Turkish thinking" [*türkisches Denken*] and the German language is further conveyed through the "cultural dimension" of the text, where the Turkish nature shows through in a word-for-word translation of names, idioms, sayings, and songs.<sup>44</sup> Özdamar's works are full of these, as in this example from "Grandfather Tongue," where the narrator and her tutor speak of friends and family who have died during political turmoil in their respective countries: "İbni Abdullah said: 'Death is a black camel, it sits down before every door.' I said: 'Is death in a faraway place, death is between eyes and eyebrows'."<sup>45</sup> This exchange on the topic of death continues over several lines, each speaker capping the comment of the other with a further idiomatic saying. In this process, they exercise the potential for intercultural communication while identifying common ground between Turkish and one of its source languages: Arabic.

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<sup>42</sup> Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 78.

<sup>43</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 53.

<sup>44</sup> Gürsel Aytaç, "Sprache als Spiegel der Kultur: Zu Emine Sevgi Özdamars Roman *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei*," in *Interkulturelle Konfigurationen: Zur deutschsprachigen Erzählliteratur von Autoren nichtdeutscher Herkunft*, ed. Mary Howard (Munich: iudicium, 1997): 171.

<sup>45</sup> "İbni Abdullah sagte: 'Der Tod ist ein schwarzes Kamel, es setzt sich vor jeder Tür nieder.' Ich sagte: 'Ist der Tod an einem weiten Ort, der Tod ist zwischen Augen und Augenbrauen'"; Özdamar, "Grandfather Tongue," 16–17.



In “Grandfather Tongue,” the use of metaphoric language from Arabic love poetry and religious metaphor from the Qur’an, explored through German, colour the story’s language in a unique manner, bringing the reader into contact not only with Turkish culture, but also with its cultural antecedents. The words the narrator regains from her learning of Arabic are themselves translated (or transformed) into a German that conveys a sense of words common to Turkish and Arab culture for which there is no German equivalent. These words (with some notable exceptions, such as “*Leb* – Mouth” [*Mund*]) form three main categories: polite, courteous words, such as “*Mücamele* – International politeness” [*Internationale Höflichkeit*]; words expressing destruction and desperation – and therefore undoubtedly the migrants’ recent experiences of their countries – such as “*Muzmahil* – Completely destroyed” [*vollkommen vernichtet*]; and words which arguably in themselves express the link, but also the distance, between past and present, such as “*Medyun* – Beholden” [*verbunden*] and “*Muvacehe* – Confrontation” [*Gegenüberstehen*]. The collected words appear in four lists interspersed in the narrative, lists which, for Bettina Brandt, “form the most intimate connection between the language student and the Arabic teacher who becomes her lover.”<sup>46</sup>

The narrator in “Grandfather Tongue” teaches the reader about Turkish while being taught herself through the language that is common to teacher, student, and reader: German. Thus the cultural interlanguage they use – German infused with Turkish and Arabic – becomes a trans-language, bridging the gap between German and Turkish (and Turkish and Arabic) so that, to draw on Benjamin again, “both the original and the translation [are] recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, it is important to note that these are fragments of the vessel that contains hybrid German-Turkishness. In Turkey, Özdamar’s works, translated into Turkish, have not caused as great a sensation as they have in Germany, because their language does not stand out

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<sup>46</sup> Bettina Brandt, “Collecting Childhood Memories of the Future,” 302. Brandt further compares Özdamar’s narrator to a Benjaminian collector – who begins a collection with a book s/he never intends to return or read – because she seeks out “loaned” Arabic words for her “Turkish collection” and has “no intention of returning them.” Brandt, “Collecting Childhood Memories,” 306.

<sup>47</sup> Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” 78.

as a feature and contains none of the ‘magic’ commented on by German reviewers. Translated back into Turkish, Turkish idioms become everyday; they are no longer transforming a tradition.<sup>48</sup>

“The Yard in the Mirror,” published in 2001 – eleven years after the collection *Mother Tongue* appeared – is written in a more ‘standard’ German, though Özdamar departs from this for the remembered words of her mother and grandmother, for example: “Come, eat, my rose, I give you my life, my kidney, light of my eye, eat, my child, I take all your sins upon my back, eat something, my child”<sup>49</sup> However, as a literature-immigrant working with the nature of words, Özdamar demonstrates the ability at once to go back to the roots of a word and to disturb its meaning, as in the example of *Sehnsucht* (‘longing’), which she deconstructs as if it were one of the neologisms she herself had constructed. She comments on her own wordplay: “Sehnsucht: Sucht nach Sehnen, [...] in no language is there a word so powerful. Addiction to longing. Sehnsucht”<sup>50</sup> In taking the word apart, its meaning, literally disturbed, is intensified. The word no longer represents ‘longing’ but expresses a new meaning through its rearranged components. Leslie Adelson has identified a similar dynamic at work in another word from this short story: *Fernsehnachrichtendienst*, which she translates as “long-distance-viewing news service.”<sup>51</sup> This term has nothing to do with television [*Fernsehen*] or the transmediated representation of images, but refers instead to the South African television repairmen who can supply the narrator with information about her neigh-

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<sup>48</sup> Kader Konuk calls Özdamar’s language accented, as it sits between German and Turkish, acting as an irritant. She comments that the striking effect of Özdamar’s style is largely diluted when it is translated back into Turkish, as the degree of ambiguity and multiplicity of associations is lost. Konuk, “Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei: Heim-at bei Emine Sevgi Özdamar,” in *Kein Land in Sicht. Heimat – weiblich?* ed. Gisela Ecker (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1997): 150–51.

<sup>49</sup> “Komm, iß, meine Rose, ich gebe dir mein Leben, meine Niere, mein Augenlicht, iß mein Kind, ich nehme auf meinen Rücken alle deine Sünden, iß etwas, mein Kind”; Emine Sevgi Özdamar, *Der Hof im Spiegel* [The Yard in the Mirror] (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2001): 32.

<sup>50</sup> “... es gibt in keiner Sprache so ein kräftiges Wort. Sucht nach Sehnen. Sehnsucht”; Özdamar, *Der Hof im Spiegel*, 42.

<sup>51</sup> Leslie A. Adelson, *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 43.

bours, thanks to their access to their homes.<sup>52</sup> Significantly, in another text Özdamar takes this approach to the word *Gastarbeiter* – an expression which, Azade Seyhan concludes, “makes no sense in any idiom”.<sup>53</sup> “The word ‘guest-worker’: I love this word, I always see two people before me, one sits there as a guest and the other works.”<sup>54</sup> Splitting the word in this way allows it to simultaneously express its sense, and its incongruity comes to the fore.

Thus Özdamar’s approach to language transforms not only her Turkish-German words but also, through such word-alienations, standard German itself. Above all, however, its hybrid nature reveals itself to be instrumental in standing as a metonym for the identity of its author and the Turkish-German/*Almanyalı* community in Germany. In “Grandfather Tongue,” it is significant that the two “orientals” must communicate in German: “It seems quite wrong to have to speak German to an oriental, but at the moment we really only have this language.”<sup>55</sup> Yet German proves insufficient for expressing their deepest feelings: to express their grief at the deaths of friends and family members, both the narrator and Ibni Abdullah resort to transforming idioms from their native languages into German, as in the examples quoted above, and the narrator also takes this approach to express her love for her tutor:

Love is a shirt of fire. Press a stone against my heart. With which language should my mouth speak that my beloved can see it, his eyebrows have burnt me. A lover and a fool have something in common. The first does not laugh, the second does not cry.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, 101.

<sup>54</sup> “Das Wort ‘Gastarbeiter’: Ich liebe dieses Wort, ich sehe vor mir immer zwei Personen, eine sitzt da als Gast, und die andere arbeitet”; Özdamar, *Der Hof im Spiegel*, 47. In “Schwarzauge in Deutschland” [‘Blackeye in Germany’], a text from the collection *Der Hof im Spiegel* [The Yard in the Mirror] dealing with Özdamar’s reflections on the inspiration for and inaugural production of her first play, “Karagöz in Alamania.”

<sup>55</sup> “Es ist eine Gemeinheit, mit einer Orientalin in Deutsch zu reden, aber momentan haben wir ja nur diese Sprache”; Özdamar, “Grandfather Tongue,” 15.

<sup>56</sup> “Liebe ist ein Hemd aus Feuer. Drücke mir einen Stein auf das Herz. Mit welcher Sprache soll mein Mund sprechen, daß mein Geliebter es sieht, seine Augenbrauen haben mich verbrannt. Eine Liebende und ein Narr haben Gemeinsames. Der erste lacht nicht, der zweite weint nicht”; Özdamar, “Grandfather Tongue,” 40.

Özdamar's narrative German is thus indeed "powerfully affected by the foreign tongue." The terms and phrases of her mother tongue resonate through it, bringing German readers into direct contact with the 'Other' on the personal level of their own language, a language now transformed.

### *Translation of identities*

Language's role as a means of self-expression is crucial to the discussion of the translation (or transformation) of identities. Özdamar's creation of an extended hybrid language thus provides her with the means of expressing an extended hybrid identity with more "terms [...] with which to talk about the world."<sup>57</sup> Through the fusion of the two languages, she can articulate more and therefore 'be' more. She resolves the question of her own identity by achieving a 'double passport', both literally<sup>58</sup> and figuratively. Yet double citizenship does not imply two separate selves: there is always fusion. Özdamar's narrator undergoes a continual process of becoming and journeying (physically and within her mind and her memory), as can be traced through these three short stories. Her second novel, *The Bridge of the Golden Horn*, made clear that even within Turkey her narrator's life revolved around a continual East–West border-crossing in her almost daily crossing of the Marmara Sea from her parents' house on the 'Asian side' to the theatre school on the 'European side'. Even in her first novel, *Life is a Caravanserai*, the family's constant journeying within Turkey as the father goes in search of work leads them to many different communities and, as illustrated by her references to dialects, several different ways of expressing 'Turkishness'. This becoming-identity, which

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<sup>57</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, 44.

<sup>58</sup> This literal possession of two passports is in reference to Özdamar's short story "Die neuen Friedhöfe in Deutschland" ['The New Cemeteries in Germany'], published in 2001 in the same collection as "The Yard in the Mirror." In literal terms, a "double passport" is no longer available to her, and the utopian closing sentences of this short story – "One passport for everyone is best. The world passport" [*Ein Paß für alle ist am besten. Der Weltpaß*], Özdamar, *Der Hof im Spiegel*, 124 – have perhaps taken on greater meaning. As Tom Cheesman stresses, since the law prohibiting dual citizenship was passed (as a later addition to the 2005 Law of Settlement) "Turkish German literature of settlement can only take an ironic view of 'cosmopolitanism' or 'world citizenship'"; Cheesman, *Novels of Turkish German Settlement: Cosmopolite Fictions* (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2007): 20.

has been described as a “nomadic consciousness,”<sup>59</sup> is ongoing, and the language that relates it is not just nomadic in providing the means for the continual journey undergone, but nomadic in its opposition to the ‘state’ language and, most of all, in its transformation of German to narrate an identity that is continually produced, focused on the future and a “people to come.”<sup>60</sup> In her acceptance speech for the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize, Özdamar herself quotes a Japanese saying: ‘The journey alone is good, not the arrival’, and adds: ‘Perhaps it is this very journey that we love about a foreign language.’<sup>61</sup>

This sense of onward movement conveys the shifting position from which she writes. As she says in an interview, “Writing is a journey in itself,”<sup>62</sup> and her stories are markers of her personal, tongue-turning journey. The reader is aware of this progression – indeed, there is barely a gap between the first two short stories. “Mother Tongue” sees the narrator in Berlin searching for the lost language and remembering (and re-remembering) it in German. She takes the words of Turkish she recalls: *Görmek*: to see, *Kaza gecirmek* [sic]: to experience the accidents of life, and *İSÇİ* [sic]: worker, the basis for her new identity inscribed in her passport. The three words together make up the sum of her movement from Turkey to Germany: she both saw and experienced political injustice, and the time she had previously spent as a worker in Germany gave her the impetus to leave. Haines and Littler argue that this third term, representing the İSÇİ stamp which so embarrassed the narrator in the train to Germany, also evokes a “fear of discrimination in the West.”<sup>63</sup> Armed with these words, she goes to knock on Ibni Abdullah’s door to ask for lessons in Arabic.

“Grandfather Tongue” is a story firmly situated in Berlin. Locations in the city are often mentioned, creating a German narrative of a Turkish woman trying to learn Arabic. As it opens, the narrator has crossed into

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<sup>59</sup> Sohelia Ghaussy, “Das Vaterland verlassen,” 1.

<sup>60</sup> Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002): 89.

<sup>61</sup> “‘Nur die Reise ist schön – nicht das Ankommen’. Vielleicht liebt man an einer fremden Sprache genau diese Reise”; Özdamar, *Der Hof im Spiegel*, 131. The speech is entitled “Meine deutschen Wörter haben keine Kindheit” [‘My German Words Have No Childhood’] and is included in the collection *Der Hof im Spiegel*.

<sup>62</sup> *Ich habe eine fremde Sprache gewählt: Ausländische Schriftsteller schreiben deutsch*, ed. Lerke von Saalfeld (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1998): 180.

<sup>63</sup> Haines & Littler, “Emine Sevgi Özdamar,” 124.

West Berlin, and stands outside Ibni Abdullah's door in Wilmersdorf. Having had her first lesson, the narrator then takes her first five Arabic letters to the park in East Berlin near the theatre of the Berliner Ensemble<sup>64</sup> to rehearse them, sitting near the statue of Brecht. This pattern is repeated. The journey between Ibni Abdullah's room and the Berliner Ensemble involves another border-crossing, that between East and West Berlin. In a period when Ibni Abdullah is absent from Berlin, the love-sick narrator goes to the Kurfürstendamm to "count Arabs." This is symbolic of her desire both to connect with Berlin as a hybrid community and to be part of the Arab culture within the city. After the recommencing of her lessons, Ibni Abdullah confines her to his room for forty days. During this time there is no Berlin. After her 'escape', she returns to the 'Kudamm' to count the Arabs backwards "to zero,"<sup>65</sup> perhaps as a form of exorcism. This journey into Arabic and back again represents going back to the Turkish past in order to go forward, and all the words she re-gathers through the Arabic lessons acquire at the same time their German translations. She breaks out of Ibni Abdullah's oriental "mosque" as a "word-collector," but not as a successful scholar of Arabic.

In "The Yard in the Mirror," the narrator is in her own apartment in Germany, yet here Turkey expands the immediate German context. In the mirrors she sees herself in the German world around her, while Turkey enters this world via the telephone. Mirror and telephone are used as motifs that furnish a connection between the two spaces and thus further the narrator's personal hybridity: "I was happy in the mirror because in this way I could be in several places at the same time."<sup>66</sup> Often she finds herself looking in the mirror at her German yard while on the phone to Turkey: first to her mother, then to her father, and, after their deaths, to the poet Can.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The Berliner Ensemble is the theatre company founded by Bertolt Brecht and made famous for its productions of his plays. Since 1954 it has performed in the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin.

<sup>65</sup> Özdamar, "Grandfather Tongue," 45.

<sup>66</sup> "Ich war glücklich im Spiegel, weil ich so an mehreren Orten zur gleichen Zeit war"; Özdamar, *Der Hof im Spiegel*, 31.

<sup>67</sup> Can Yücel (1926–99) is directly present in the text, quoting his poems over the telephone to the narrator in response to the external happenings in her German yard.

There are many mentions of the unnamed German city in this story, yet Turkey is always present in a virtual sense, and the narrator's sense of loss following the deaths of both parents in the space of a week prompts her decision to return to Istanbul to visit her friend Can at the close of the story. Within the mirror, the narrator's identity is mapped in a range of images of those who are important to her, both Turks and Germans, whom she visits and has visited in her two cities. The mirror overcomes the constraints of space and time; it contains past and present, reflecting memories, the yard outside, and the narrator herself, itself composing her hybrid identity:<sup>68</sup>

All the dead live in this mirror. The woman butcher, her son Georg, her daughter-in-law. The old woman butcher weighed 300g of mince, the young woman butcher [...] speaks to her husband, who chops the meat in the basement below, through a microphone "Georg, can you bring up some calves' kidneys? The actress is here." [...] The Jewish picture-framer who wanted to marry Renate soon. [...] My mother. My father. They all live in this mirror in the kitchen.<sup>69</sup>

The three stories together form stations of a journey, meditations on Turkish-Germanness. In "Mother Tongue," the narrator, already firmly situated in Germany, ponders the loss of her mother tongue: here she is a German-speaking Turk needing to re-connect with a language she has repressed as a consequence of her country's painful past. The journey to find the mother tongue (narrated in "Grandfather Tongue") takes her metaphorically back in time, to the other (West) Berlin and Arabic. Ultimately rejecting the strict discipline of Arabic lessons and Islam, she returns along the path she has come, but she has nonetheless been enriched in her cul-

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<sup>68</sup> See Margaret Littler for an extensive discussion of how, through the Deleuzian notion of the virtual inherent in the mirror motif, the short story overcomes spatial and temporal distance to "[allow] us to imagine as yet unrealised possibilities of community." Littler, "Intimacy and Affect in Turkish-German Writing: Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *The Courtyard in the Mirror*," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29.3 (2008): 331.

<sup>69</sup> "Alle Toten wohnen in diesem Spiegel. Die Metzgerin, ihr Sohn Georg, ihre Schwiegertochter. Die alte Metzgerin wog 300g Hackfleisch ab, die junge Metzgerin [...] spricht mit ihrem Mann, der unten im Keller das Fleisch hackt, durch ein Mikrofon: "Georg, kannst du Kalbsniere hochbringen? Die Schauspielerin ist da." [...] Der jüdische Rahmenmacher, der bald Renate heiraten wollte. [...] Meine Mutter. Mein Vater. Alle wohnen in diesem Küchenspiegel"; Özdamar, *Der Hof im Spiegel*, 24.

tural identity by the encounter. Although she does not acquire any real competence in Arabic, her connection with it on a symbolic and visual plane has perpetuated her (re)collection of Turkish words and phrases. Her return to her life in East Berlin, now a self-professed ‘word collector’, paradoxically moves her significantly along the way toward the hybrid identity epitomized by the mirror in “The Yard in the Mirror.” The stations of the journey are expressed in three symbolic locations: Ibni Abdullah’s mosque-like residence in West Berlin, a re-creation of his homeland away from home; the Berliner Ensemble, the focus of her life in East Berlin; and the mirror in her apartment that integrates her past and her present. The closed “mosque” in which she tries to learn Arabic is not a viable existence, because “the curtains to the grey yard” – in other words, to Germany outside – “are closed.”<sup>70</sup> This ‘view’ is essential to her, and the lack of it draws her out of the room, on to the German street and thence back towards East Berlin. “The Yard in the Mirror,” the latest of the stories, underlines and confirms the narrator’s adoption of the possibilities offered her by her now fully realized hybridity: her “curtains” (or eyes) are very much open, and her German “yard” is constantly reflected in them. Now that she is in re-possession of Turkish, the death of the mother, who, in “The Yard in the Mirror,” has subsequently come to ‘live’ in her mirror, will not mean the death of the mother tongue.

*Dealing with political trauma, linguistic and cultural loss*

In the story “Mother Tongue,” the much-quoted opening reflection concerns the pliant nature of the tongue, which is both the physical and the linguistic means of self-articulation.<sup>71</sup> It makes personal cultural translation possible. In translation, original cultural practices of the translated self are not lost: at the sight of a stale croissant left on a plate in a Berlin café, the narrating persona gives ‘Bakshish’ so that the waiter – who might presumably be held responsible – need not feel ashamed. Yet the mother tongue itself may be lost: in the next sentence, she wonders how

<sup>70</sup> “Die Vorhänge zum grauen Hof sind zu”; Özdamar, “Grandfather Tongue,” 23.

<sup>71</sup> “In my language tongue is called: language. Tongue has no bones, wherever one turns it, it turns itself in that direction” [In meiner Sprache heißt Zunge: Sprache. Zunge hat keine Knochen, wohin man sie dreht, dreht sie sich dorthin]; Özdamar, “Mother Tongue,” 9.



that has come about. This is the central question that the story seeks to answer. By metonymic association – Özdamar’s most characteristic narrative strategy – the question of language-loss is related to the political experience of the narrating persona: she recalls the grief of a mother whose son has been executed, as a consequence, the reader assumes, of political persecution under the military dictatorship. Clearly, the story’s reflection on the loss of the mother tongue is a means of coming to terms with a painful aspect of the displaced persona’s personal history.<sup>72</sup> Significantly, the words in which she remembers the Turkish mother’s words are German, not the Turkish the woman undoubtedly used; a fact that puzzles her.

The Turkish migrant group in Europe (like numerous other internal European migrant groups) contains a subset of those whose migration, like that of the story’s persona, is forced by such persecution, many of them asylum-seekers. For this group, migration is indeed associated with trauma, as in the case of the indentured Indian labourers, while that of the purely ‘economic migrants’ is not. Mishra argues that in the “diasporic imaginary” the idea of homeland is a means of identification for the displaced group, albeit essentially a fantasy, “since it is built around a narrative imaginatively constructed by its subjects.”

The fantasy of the homeland is then linked, in the case of the diaspora, to that recollected moment when diasporic subjects feel they were wrenched from their mother/fatherland. [...] but the ‘real’ nature of the disruption is not the point at issue here; what is clear is that the moment of ‘rupture’ is transformed into a trauma around an absence that because it cannot be fully symbolized becomes part of the fantasy itself. Sometimes the ‘absence’ is a kind of repression, a sign of loss, like the holocaust for European Jews after the war.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> For Yasemin Yıldız, it is the “violence of the state” that “continues to haunt as a loss,” and migration is, rather, a gain, where German becomes the enabling language “in which a traumatic story can be told,” rather than itself functioning as the “traumatizing” agent. Yıldız’s convincing analysis of “Mother Tongue” through trauma theory finds that the short story “is itself constituted by a traumatic structure: the paradoxical coexistence of literal recall and amnesia.” Yıldız, “Political Trauma and Literal Translation: Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s ‘Mutterzunge,’” *Gegenwartsliteratur: Ein germanistisches Jahrbuch* 7 (2008): 259–60, 265.

<sup>73</sup> Mishra, “The Diasporic Imaginary,” 423.

The “absence” felt by Özdamar’s literary persona in “Mother Tongue” is that of the language itself, and can thus be explained as the consequence of repressed mourning.<sup>74</sup> The narrator can only access such painful memories through her adopted tongue, which is the medium of a culture in which she feels liberated, free, and happy.<sup>75</sup> The mother tongue, meanwhile, has become alienated, seeming at best like “a well learned foreign language.”<sup>76</sup> As Mishra puts it, there are always spectres behind mourners: “The spectre delivers the unspeakable statement of the rottenness of the state,” in this case, of the homeland, Turkey, the memories of which are blighted; whenever she indulges her desire for what is lost – the mother tongue representing a lost cultural identity – its fulfilment is thwarted by the memories of the traumatic realities which brought about the rupture.

Her sense of loss, lack of direction, and dividedness is symbolically reinforced by that of her present location, Berlin, with its half-and-half existence. Her continual crossings of the border between the two halves of Berlin are in themselves a reminder of the “borderlands”<sup>77</sup> which she inhabits, but the roots of her loss of the mother tongue go deeper than just the political present. Her dis-ease is overcome finally by her decision to learn Arabic, in the hope of finding her way back to the mother tongue by confronting a loss that is not just a personal, but a national and generational one: that of the “grandfather’s tongue” – lost to the generations who

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<sup>74</sup> In a series of lectures given as a William Evans Fellow at the University of Otago, 2003, in which he further elaborated his theory of the Diaspora, Mishra spoke – drawing on Freud – of the “diasporic melancholia” consequent upon the traumatic loss, and of the “spectres” that are inevitably behind mourners. In this case the spectre might be understood to be the horrific transformation of the motherland into an unjust and persecuting fascist state.

<sup>75</sup> See the text of her acceptance speech for the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize, “Meine deutschen Wörter haben keine Kindheit”; Özdamar, *Der Hof im Spiegel*, 125–32. Yıldız also argues that “German offers the means to remember and rework a Turkish trauma – a trauma brought on by state violence, but brought to language in migration.” Yıldız, “Political Trauma and Literal Translation,” 265–66.

<sup>76</sup> “wie eine von mir gut gelernte Fremdsprache”; Özdamar, “Mother Tongue,” 9.

<sup>77</sup> This is a term used by Petra Fachinger in her discussion of Barbara Honigmann and Renan Demirkan in *Rewriting Germany from the Margins: “Other” German Literature of the 1980s and 1990s* (Montreal & Kingston, Ontario: McGill–Queen’s UP, 2001): ch. 4.

grew up after 1928 when Atatürk's reforms introduced the Latin alphabet in place of the Arabic one.

This loss is, of course, one that applies to Turks at home and abroad. The nation is, as it were, exiled from its own past and cultural artifacts. This disconnection from the past cuts even into familial bonds. As the narrator puts it, "if my grandfather and I were dumb and could communicate only via the written word, we could tell each other nothing."<sup>78</sup> The story "Grandfather Tongue" allegorically narrates the attempt to re-connect the nation's past with its linguistic present. But that attempt is largely unsuccessful, for, while this aspect of the homeland is psychologically important to her – as the strong sexual attraction to her teacher conveys – the attempt to return is essentially nostalgic. The original culture of the homeland is now an unattainable ideal. The confrontation with the reality, embodied in the figure of Ibni Abdullah in the Islamic microcosm he has created as the scenario for his Arabic lessons in West Berlin, disillusiones her. His "mosque" becomes her prison; the relationship between them seemingly enacts an 'Islamic' gender dichotomy – the man goes out into the world while the woman remains indoors, screened off from other eyes; the punishing God of the Qur'an is contrasted with the poetry of the creation story or a Turkish love song – both conveying "Islam with a Turkish accent"<sup>79</sup> – which speak to her much more strongly; Ibni Abdullah's desire for an ascetic, non-physical love is at odds with her desire for a sexually expressive one. She comes to the conclusion: "The knots made by a tongue cannot be undone by the teeth."<sup>80</sup> After forty days of semi-voluntary imprisonment in his room, she gets someone to unlock the door and walks out. Back on the streets, where German is spoken, she feels

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<sup>78</sup> "wenn mein Großvater und ich stumm wären und uns nur mit Schrift was erzählen könnten, könnten wir uns keine Geschichten erzählen"; Özdamar, "Mother Tongue," 14. Yasemin Karakaşoğlu observes a trend among young German Turks in their search for identity to "develop their own approach to Islam. This includes learning Arabic so as to be able to read the Koran in the original." "Turkish Cultural Orientation in Germany," in *Turkish Culture in German Society Today*, ed. David Horrocks & Eva Kolinsky (Providence RI: Berghahn, 1996): 163.

<sup>79</sup> Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, 146.

<sup>80</sup> "Die Knoten, die eine Zunge gemacht hat, können die Zähne nicht aufmachen"; Özdamar, "Grandfather Tongue," 44.

relief: “In a foreign language words have no childhood.”<sup>81</sup> In using her adopted language, she is not hindered by the past. Living in her hybrid present, open to further translation, is the way forward. Having at least re-connected to the common cultural heritage of Arabic and Turkish that is still evident in the spoken word, she is content to leave her relationship to the written language as it always was – primarily an aesthetic and emotional one: the shapes of the letters are pleasing to her for the playful images they evoke and for the childhood associations they have, in particular with her beloved grandmother (a relationship warmly portrayed in *Life is a Caravanserai*). It would seem that past modes of being are incompatible with her present consciousness, particularly from the point of view of a woman but, more generally, for those citizens for whom the secularization of the state has made a more open, liberated, and liberal society possible.

In the third, most recent story discussed here, “The Yard in the Mirror,” the three mirrors in the narrator’s apartment play a central part in the integration into the hybrid self of the aspects of the two cultures that are perhaps most in tension. Here the past is no problem; rather, it is those differences in patterns of everyday living that perhaps most give rise to homesickness – the loneliness and relative isolation in which northern Europeans live in their communities.

The urbanologist in Paris once wrote about the aesthetics of oriental dwelling. The people there extended their houses out into the alleyways. Suddenly one window was directly in front of a neighbour’s window. The houses merged into each other, so that something like a labyrinth arose. The neighbours woke up nose to nose. I had extended my flat with three mirrors to the house across the courtyard.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> “In der Fremdsprache haben Wörter keine Kindheit”; Özdamar, “Grandfather Tongue,” 44.

<sup>82</sup> “Der Urbanist in Paris hatte einmal über die Wohnästhetik des Orients geschrieben. Die Menschen dort verlängerten ihre Häuser bis zu Gassen. Plötzlich befand sich so ein Fenster vor dem Fenster der Nachbarn. Die Häuser mischten sich ineinander, und so entstanden fast Labyrinth. Die Nachbarn wachten Nase an Nase auf. Auch ich hatte diese Wohnung mit drei Spiegeln bis zum Hofhaus verlängert”; Özdamar, *Der Hof im Spiegel*, 25–26.

She goes on to describe how the reflections and counter-reflections in the three mirrors, one placed in each room, enable her to participate in the lives of the people in the apartments on several floors across from her. In her own building, the stairwell and the sounds through the walls and ceiling give her access to the lives of the neighbours above and below her. She passes, like Alice, through the looking-glass.<sup>83</sup> Through her mirrors she re-creates a refracted labyrinth, as if in the Orient, and is thus enabled to live – on a virtual plane at least – simultaneously in the Orient and in Germany, with audio provided via the telephone. She relays to her mother at the other end of the phone-line what is happening in her mirrors, and receives her commentary in return. Like the Lady of Shalott, she by this means participates vicariously in the lives of those around her.

The story ends with a poem by Can Yücel, which, as Adelson notes, is not encased in quotation marks, and which, she argues, through its placement in the text after the word “Tomorrow” [*Morgen*], sets the readers free from the world of the short story and points toward “future-oriented worlds and ethnoscapas.”<sup>84</sup> Translated, the poem reads:

A sky, wet through  
Had got caught up in the nets  
Sky-blue now all  
Fishermen<sup>85</sup>

The poem seems impenetrable, yet it is perhaps through its form in particular, through the lack of quotation marks and the foregrounding of the word “all” [*alle*] in its placement at the end of the line, that the poem and the text extend into the world. The sky is at once territorialized (caught in the nets) and deterritorialized, in its nature as sky, and particularly as “a sky” [*ein Himmel*], repeating the single sky over a divided Berlin and over

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<sup>83</sup> *Alice in Wonderland*, significantly enough, is the book an elderly nun living opposite is reading when she dies.

<sup>84</sup> Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, 75.

<sup>85</sup> Ein Himmel, völlig durchnäßt  
Hatte sich in den Netzen verfangen  
Himmelblau nun alle  
Fischer

— Özdamar, *Der Hof im Spiegel*, 46.

the Bosphorus often referred to by Özdamar's narrator in other stories from the collection *The Yard in the Mirror* [*Der Hof im Spiegel*].<sup>86</sup> Like the railway lines and the telephone, the sky spans Europe from the Marmara Sea to the Baltic. The fishermen's nets can be read as a further image of connection: the cultural and historical connections that no nationalist ideology can disentangle. The sky, however, displays its transformative potential (it has transformed all those it has come into contact with by rendering them sky blue), and, as Adelson suggests, "takes flight" from the courtyard.<sup>87</sup>

From Özdamar's position in the new diaspora, she sees connections rather than divisions. Now comfortable in that fused space of the borderlands, she leads the reader, in the main, to see similarities, common ground shared between the cultures involved in the migratory transformations, rather than difference. That in itself is an important shift in emphasis and understanding for the 'unhyphenated' German reader. Perhaps she, like Salman Rushdie, by now conceives of the hybrid as "the natural condition of humanity" (Mishra, lectures). She would certainly concur with Gisela Brinker-Gabler in her introduction to *Encountering the Other*:

Exploring one's location by examining the ways one has been positioned and by creating ways to re-position oneself allows for resistance and transformation. It also opens up the possibility of making *chosen* alliances within specific cultural and historical contexts and their power mechanisms.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Özdamar's novel *Strange Stars Stare Down at Earth* (2003) offers a fascinating perspective on the divided Germany of the mid-1970s, when the narrative persona was doing what no German at the time could do: regularly crossing between East and West Berlin. The narrative reflects the political situation in both German states – aftermath of terrorism (Stammheim) in the West; house-arrest and extradition of political dissidents (Bahro, Biermann) in the East – seen against the narrative persona's concern for her friends in Turkey, who are constantly at risk of violence at the hands of the military regime. By this means, the reader's reception of history, with its "normal" polarization of East versus West, is subtly questioned, inviting a less eurocentric approach to understanding European politics.

<sup>87</sup> Adelson, *The Turkish Turn*, 74.

<sup>88</sup> Gisela Brinker-Gabler, *Encountering the Other. Studies in Literature, History and Culture*, ed. Brinker-Gabler (Albany: State U of New York, 1995): 7–8.

In the case of Özdamar, “resistance” is as much a response to the traumatic events in the homeland as to being ‘othered’ in the new land. At the same time, her achievement – as Kolinsky reminds us – is that of an individual, not reproducible for all. Class is another key factor that must be considered in the possible responses open to a migrant in the process of personal cultural transformation and translation. Özdamar belongs to the elite of the educated for whom, as Spivak observes, “transnationality” has quite different connotations.<sup>89</sup> Although she well understands from first-hand experience that of the ‘guest-workers’, Özdamar finds her ‘homeland’ primarily in the international languages of the intellect and high culture, which connect rather than estrange, offer choice rather than force assimilation.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, her new location within a transforming and transformed language has empowered her to articulate a new subject-position. She has traced critically the transforming journey from her place of origin to her new home of choice. While that experience cannot be generalized for the entire diasporic community to which she belongs, the challenge that her innovative use of the German language represents to those for whom it is the mother tongue can be construed as a politically transforming act: the ‘passive’ migrant-citizen becomes an ‘active’ one, who may be a possible ‘model of the nation’, for accepting hybridity as the new norm must be a necessary precondition for a truly multicultural state.

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<sup>89</sup> Spivak, “Diasporas old and new,” 250.

<sup>90</sup> Tom Cheesman views Özdamar’s “fate” as similar to Brecht’s in this respect: “Like Brecht, she suffered the fate of becoming a darling of the international bourgeois intelligentsia, because she was taken to represent the downtrodden, the exploited, and the inarticulate”; Cheesman, *Novels of Turkish German Settlement*, 74.

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# A Poetics of Translocation

Yang Lian's Auckland and Lyn Hejinian's Leningrad



JACOB EDMOND

一个字，一个人，移动。

A word, a person, moving.

– Yang Lian, “Why There Has to Be Prose”

The border is not an edge along the fringe of society and experience  
but rather their very middle.

– Lyn Hejinian, “Barbarism”

## Transcultural Poetics, Dislocation, and 1989

THE SEARCH FOR A POETICS that traverses the boundaries of nation and culture has been a major driver of avant-garde poetics for the past one hundred years, creating a powerful if ill-defined imagined transnational poetic community whose shared sense of location is based, paradoxically, on its very valorization of dislocation. The Chinese poet Yang Lian (b. 1955) and the American poet Lyn Hejinian (b. 1941) exemplify the persistence of this transcultural vision based on aesthetic and lived dislocation, which I here term *translocation*. Their poetics of translocation illustrates a tendency in contemporary poetry that emerges in relation to the period of geopolitical and cultural transition precipitated by events that took place in and around the year 1989 and that are associated with the wave of globalization and transnationalism that followed. These events provide the specific context for Yang's work written in Auckland exile (1989–92), imposed by the Tiananmen Square

massacre of 4 June 1989, and Hejinian's *Oxota: A Short Russian Novel* (1989–91), written in the context of her close artistic and personal connections with Russian writers during the final years of the Soviet Union. As I argue, these works emerge out of a poetics that draws on but also revises the transcultural poetics and transnational imagined community of the avant-garde partly in response to the condition of social and political dislocation and uncertainty under which they were written. They do so through a commitment to address but not subsume the Other, foregrounding the dislocations and estrangements of the transcultural encounter that they describe.

Articulated perhaps most influentially by Ezra Pound, the concept of a transcultural poetics, with its ambivalent position between acknowledgement and appropriation of the Other, has been a powerful force in twentieth-century avant-garde poetry. As Yunte Huang points out, "Pound assembled the data [from world cultures] to document his theory of culture and to 'immediately' reach in to the 'essence of culture'."<sup>1</sup> Charles Bernstein, a member of the same avant-garde Language poetry group as Lyn Hejinian, describes how Pound in his *Cantos* sought

to create a work using ideological swatches from many social and historical sectors of his own society and an immense variety of other cultures. This complex, polyvocal textuality was the result of his search – his unrequited desire – for deeper truths than could be revealed by more monadically organized poems operating with a single voice and a single perspective.<sup>2</sup>

As Huang has shown, Pound's project was deeply problematic not only in its search for the "essence of culture" but also because it involved the re-creation of the Other in a form that related to his own purposes.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, Pound's practice resonates with Walter Benjamin's "The Task of

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<sup>1</sup> Yunte Huang, *Transpacific Displacement: Ethnography, Translation, and Inter-textual Travel in Twentieth-Century American Literature* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002): 90.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1992): 123.

<sup>3</sup> See also Haun Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center; Harvard UP, 2001): 35–74, on this re-creation of the Other in Pound's presentation and translation of Chinese poetry.

the Translator,” in which the translator is urged “to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite the problematic invocation of essence or purity and the potentially appropriative nature of such re-creations, the idea of a transcultural or translational poetics, as put forward in different ways by Pound and Benjamin, has remained powerful within avant-garde poetry. One of the reasons for this ongoing attraction is clear from Bernstein’s description of the *Cantos*, quoted above, in which he describes approvingly Pound’s “polyvocal textuality” even as he distances himself from Pound’s “search [...] for deeper truths.” Pound’s poetic theory and practice and Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” have remained compelling precisely because of this duality, offering, on the one hand, the utopia of “essences,” “pure language” and “deeper truths,” and, on the other, resistance to such perfection through “polyvocal textuality” and “the spell of another.”

The continued attraction to this transcultural poetics in US post-World War II avant-garde poetry is exemplified by Jerome Rothenberg. As von Hallberg argues, “Rothenberg and other poets, particularly avant-gardists, of the 1960’s and 1970’s had a vision of global culture, a poetry ‘of a fundamental human nature’.”<sup>5</sup> While Rothenberg’s interest in ethno-poetics and his work as an anthologist differed from Pound’s approach in many respects, he nevertheless maintained a commitment to a transcultural poetics built upon a belief in a universal element of human culture. As Peter Middleton notes, in Rothenberg’s many transcultural anthologies “the usual markers of poetic identity drop away in the face of the transitivity he produces by his disembedding of the poems from their usual locations,” an effect that, Middleton argues, has been central to new developments in avant-garde poetics over the last few decades.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” (1923), in *Illuminations*, tr. Harry Zohn, intro. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968): 80.

<sup>5</sup> Robert von Hallberg, “Poetry, Politics, and Intellectuals: A History of American Poetry, 1945–1995,” in *Cambridge History of American Literature*, vol. 8, ed. Sacvan Bercovich (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996): 171.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Middleton, “The Transitive Poetics of Rothenberg’s Transnational Anthologies,” *West Coast Line* 34.2 (2000): 103.

While Middleton does not address fully the problematic question of appropriation, he nevertheless points to, in Huang's words, "an American literature that transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries, a national literature rooted in transnationalism and committed to translingual practices."<sup>7</sup> This transnational, translingual vision of literature is especially notable in the case of the poetic avant-garde, where, as the examples of Pound and Rothenberg suggest, transcultural practice has been at its most stridently overt. Nor, of course, are the processes of textual migration and transformation that Huang explores limited to the USA. For example, Chen Xiaomei has documented how Western modernist notions were imported and transformed, or "misunderstood" in her non-pejorative sense, during the craze for modernism in China in the 1980s, in which so-called modernist poetry written by young Chinese poets such as Yang Lian played a particularly important role.<sup>8</sup>

Accompanying the transcultural strategies of various avant-garde poe-tries have been, as Romana Huk points out, the persistent

imaginations of a global avant-garde community [...] even mid- to late-twentieth-century discourses on cultural relativism [...] have continued to be read comfortably alongside unspoken assumptions in postmodern poetics that its overall project does or should transcend such boundaries.<sup>9</sup>

Huk argues that the rejection of all notions of identity (such as the dis-embedding from usual contexts that Middleton identifies in Rothenberg) in the avant-garde, postmodernist poetics of writers such as Bernstein ignores "differences *between* national imaginaries."<sup>10</sup> Instead, she asserts the importance of a transnational perspective that reveals differences, rather than eliding them. Huk's distinction between the "global" and the "transnational" resembles that put forward by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih:

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<sup>7</sup> Huang, *Transpacific Displacement*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Chen Xiaomei, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Romana Huk, "Introduction" to *Assembling Alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetics Transnationally*, ed. Romana Huk (Middletown CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003): 2.

<sup>10</sup> Huk, "Introduction," 4.

whereas the global is, in our understanding, defined vis-à-vis a homogenous and dominant set of criteria, the transnational designates spaces and practices acted upon by border-crossing agents, be they dominant or marginal.<sup>11</sup>

This distinction could be taken as paralleling that which I drew above between the universalizing, essentialist aspects of Pound and Benjamin's transcultural poetics and their polyphonic practices that acknowledge the presence of the Other. Where Huk sees Bernstein's continuation of Poundian poetics as perpetuating a singular, totalizing, global poetics, it is possible to recognize both tendencies in Pound and Benjamin, and in Bernstein's reading of Pound. As Lionnet and Shih point out, "transnationalism is part and parcel of the process of globalization," even as it resists the totalizing aspects of globalization by being "less scripted and more scattered."<sup>12</sup> The same can be said of avant-garde poetics.

Just as transcultural poetics has a long history in the twentieth-century avant-garde, mobilized to claim, if not achieve, a transnational avant-garde poetic community, so too does the value placed on dislocation in this community. The vision of an international avant-garde as, in Benedict Anderson's terms, an "imagined community"<sup>13</sup> of intellectuals has been discussed by Svetlana Boym precisely in terms of dislocation and exile.<sup>14</sup> Boym suggests that Anderson's conception of imagined communities through the equation of biography with nation leaves no room for those whose stories start not at home but in exile. Further, Boym argues that the modernist approach to biography with its emphasis on dislocation finds no place in Anderson's account. In a dialectical corrective, Boym suggests that we can think of a modernist or avant-garde "imagined community" as being founded on dislocation, homelessness, and estrangement, qualities precisely opposite to those that underpin the "imagined community" of a nation. Dislocation here means not just a sense of separation from home,

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<sup>11</sup> Françoise Lionnet & Shu-Mei Shih, "Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally," in *Minor Transnationalisms* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 2005): 5.

<sup>12</sup> Lionnet & Shih, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2nd ed. 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Svetlana Boym, "Estrangement as a Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky," *Poetics Today* 17.4 (1996): 511–30.

but an aesthetic that questions the solidity of the relationship between word and world through writing that foregrounds estrangement. Boym writes of the modernist avant-garde community, but her analysis is equally applicable to the imagined community of the postmodernist avant-garde in the post-1989 era of globalization. Arjun Appadurai, for example, demonstrates how Anderson's theory can be extended to include the transnational "imagined worlds" of this era.<sup>15</sup> Like Anderson, however, he does not discuss the place of an "imagined community" based on an aesthetic of dislocation, rather than belonging. As I have argued elsewhere, however, the combination of aesthetic and literal estrangement described by Boym has continued to provide the basis for imagined transnational communities of avant-garde poets.<sup>16</sup>

In his article "Avant-Garde Poetries after the Wall," Jonathan Monroe posits a change in avant-garde poetics, primarily in poetry from the USA, which relates to the end of the Cold War. He contrasts the "oppositional rhetoric" of the 1980s with the "multicultural poetries" of the 1990s. According to Monroe, 1989 "dramatically changed the lens through which any and all of the century's avant-gardes must be considered."<sup>17</sup> Monroe's primary reason for this assertion is that, at this time, socialism and Marxist ideas ceased to be seen as a compelling justification for avant-garde practice. In the case of the avant-garde in the USA, and particularly Language poetry, Monroe identifies the after-effect of 1989 with "ideological disorientation, dislocation, and uncertainty," a situation in which "opposition" was replaced by "apposition."<sup>18</sup> The resultant "multicultural poetries,"<sup>19</sup> I want to suggest, not only reflected a shift away from the oppositional poetics of the 1980s but also provided a different, retrospective way of understanding the avant-garde poetic tradition, not as oppositional Marxism-informed resistance to capitalist commodification but, rather, as a polyvocal, transcultural poetics that resisted the singularity of the new

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<sup>15</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Jacob Edmond, "Lyn Hejinian and Russian Estrangement," *Poetics Today* 27.1 (2006): 97–124.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Monroe, "Avant-Garde Poetries after the Wall," *Poetics Today* 21.1 (2000): 101.

<sup>18</sup> Monroe, "Avant-Garde Poetries after the Wall," 102, 125–26.

<sup>19</sup> Monroe, "Avant-Garde Poetries after the Wall," 95–96.

unipolar world of the 1990s. Thus Hejinian comes to employ her estranging poetics to address the problem of transcultural encounter raised by her experiences of physical dislocation in Russia: how to encounter and write of the Other without subsuming the Other in the self.

Monroe's analysis is clearly applicable directly only to countries, such as the USA, in which Marxist ideas remained attractive. In the socialist world, avant-garde artists by the 1980s generally saw Marxist ideas as irrelevant at best. Nevertheless, Monroe's key insight that 1989 marked a critical shift in avant-garde poetics has validity both in the capitalist West and in countries that were or are ostensibly communist, including China. The events of 4 June 1989 marked a change in Chinese avant-garde poetry, precipitating the creation of a new literature of exile already latent in the poetic practices of a number of avant-garde PRC poets, including Yang. As Maghiel van Crevel argues, "June Fourth and Yang's ensuing exile function[ed] as catalysts of an individual track of poetic development that had started a decade earlier."<sup>20</sup> Yang's emphasis on dynamic dislocations of the subject and of language in his work from the 1980s develops in post-1989 exile into a poetics in which such dislocations emerge out of transcultural encounter.<sup>21</sup>

In what follows, I compare the exile poetics of Yang with Hejinian's post-1989 poetics of transcultural encounter to demonstrate how both respond to the sense of disorientation and uncertainty caused by 1989 and its aftermath. In both cases, the transcultural vision of the modernist avant-garde, put forward by writers such as Pound and Benjamin, became increasingly attractive and preferable to more 'oppositional' understandings of avant-garde praxis, with a concomitant shift in emphasis toward strategies that emphasized the acknowledgement, rather than domination, of the Other. These strategies combine with a positioning of poetry characterized by transnational dislocation, the basis, as I suggested, for the poetic avant-garde's imagined transnational community. Thus I argue that 1989 crea-

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<sup>20</sup> Maghiel van Crevel, "Exile: Yang Lian, Wang Jiaxin and Bei Dao," in van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money* (Sinica Leidensia Series, 86; Leiden & Boston MA: E.J. Brill, 2008): 162.

<sup>21</sup> On such dislocations in Yang's work from the early 1980s, see Jacob Edmond, "Beyond Binaries: Rereading Yang Lian's 'Norlang' and 'Banpo'," *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 6.1 (2005): 152–69.



ted an opportunity for writers such as Hejinian and Yang to explore the intersection between dislocation and transcultural avant-garde poetic strategies – in short, to create a poetics of translocation.

### Yang Lian's City of "Incomprehensible Street Names"

Yang Lian's exile from China in 1989 marked the beginning of an acute confrontation with the problem of transcultural encounter within an avant-garde aesthetic of physical and linguistic dislocation. Born in 1956, Yang was one of a number of experimental poets who came to prominence in 1978 and 1979 as contributors to *Today* (*Jintian* 今天), the first independent literary magazine to appear in mainland China after the Cultural Revolution. While suffering periodic bouts of persecution, by the late 1980s Yang had come to be recognized officially and unofficially as one of China's leading poets writing in the so-called modernist style.<sup>22</sup> From 1986, Yang was able to travel abroad and, in 1988, while in Australia, he was invited by John Minford to the University of Auckland to teach Chinese poetry in the 1989 academic year. Thus Yang came to be in New Zealand in the run-up to the June Fourth massacre. At this time, Yang took up the role of political dissident, leading protests against the Chinese government. In retaliation for his strident stance, the Chinese authorities refused to renew his passport, so that he had no choice but to apply for refugee status in New Zealand. For the following three years, Yang was based in Auckland and unable to return to China, so that the city in his work is inextricably bound up with his experience and poetics of exile.

Yang has described poetry as "an attempt to exceed the boundaries of language," an attempt that he explicitly associates with the dislocation of exile and the transformation of reality into literature.<sup>23</sup> Reflecting on the period between 1989 and 1992 when he was based in Auckland, Yang has described exilic dislocation in terms of the transformation of the relationship between words and reality, writing of exile as involving "the depar-

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<sup>22</sup> For a history of Chinese avant-garde poetry from the 1970s to the early 1990s, see Maghiel van Crevel, *Language Shattered: Contemporary Chinese Poetry and Duoduo* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> Yang Lian, "Zhuixun zuowei liuwang yuanxing de shi" 追寻作为流亡原型的诗, YangLian.net, [http://yanglian.net/yanglian/pensee/pen\\_wenlun\\_02.html](http://yanglian.net/yanglian/pensee/pen_wenlun_02.html) (accessed 3 March 2009). My translation – all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

ture of reality” and “the return of literature.”<sup>24</sup> Isolated geographically and linguistically, Yang at this time produced poems and essays that are not located in his homeland but are, rather, located in surreal Auckland landscapes. Thus the avant-garde aesthetic of dislocation develops into a poetics of transcultural encounter with the strange land in which he found himself.

In one of Yang’s prose works written during his period of exile in Auckland, “Ghost Talk / Lies” (“Guihua” 鬼话), one finds the dislocation of exile reflected in the radical translocation of the normal relationship between words and world:

你说你在逃，在这座陌生的城市里逃。从一个路口到另一个路口，那些同样读不懂的街名，与你有什么关系？从一只手到另一只手，你读一部上千页的书，与仅仅有的一页翻动上千次，有什么区别？流亡者，无非沿着一条足迹的虚线，在每一个点上一动不动。比站着还痛苦，你被钉着，没那么光荣，你不动只是因为你无力移动。活埋进每天重复的日子，像你的诗，一个关于真实的谎言。从什么时候起，辞像陈年的漆皮一样，酥了，碎了，掉下来。<sup>25</sup>

You say you’re on the run; you’re on the run in this strange city. From one intersection to the next, what have all those incomprehensible street names got to do with you? What’s the difference between you reading a book of more than a thousand pages and turning the only page you have from one hand to the other a thousand times? All an exile can do is follow a dotted line of footprints, stopping motionless on every dot. It’s more painful than standing still. You are nailed down, not at all gloriously. You don’t move simply because you haven’t the strength to move. Every day you are buried alive in days that keep repeating themselves – it’s like your poetry, a lie about reality. At some point, words have become brittle and cracked and have flaked off, like a time-worn coat of paint.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Yang, “Xunzhao zuowei liuwang yuanxing de shi.”

<sup>25</sup> Yang Lian, *Guihua: Zhili de kongjian: Yang Lian zuopin 1982–1997 sanwen, wenlun juan* 鬼话：智力的空间：杨炼作品1982–1997散文，文论卷 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 1998): 16.

<sup>26</sup> Yang Lian, *Unreal City: A Chinese Poet in Auckland*, tr. Hilary Chung & Jacob Edmond, with Brian Holton, ed. Jacob Edmond & Hilary Chung (Auckland: Auckland UP, 2006): 75–76. For an alternative translation, see Yang Lian, “Ghostspeak,” tr. H.R. Lan & Jerry Dennerline, *Renditions: A Chinese English Translation Magazine* 46 (1996): 92–96.

In this passage, the translocation of exile leads to a transformation in the position of language and reality. The physical world becomes a world of language and vice versa. The physical reality of the city, through its “incomprehensible street names,” comes to resemble “a book of over a thousand pages.” At the same time, poetry becomes like life: “it’s like your poetry, a lie about reality.” The linguistic sign of “a dotted line” (*xuxian* 虚线) on the page, which in Chinese implies a ghostly “emptiness” (the word *xu* 虚 means ‘empty’), has the power to nail the poet down. Physical reality becomes an empty linguistic reality devoid of meaning as the movement from dot to dot or page to page signifies the passage of time.

The “strange city” is the starting-point for an inquiry into the boundaries of reality and language that emphasizes the materiality of language in an unreal city. The city becomes a linguistic landscape, a conglomeration of incomprehensible street names. Exile in the city becomes a process in language, but one devoid of significance. Instead of words, there is simply a dotted line. But the strangeness of language revealed in the strange city draws attention to the materiality of language – to its physical qualities as a thing in itself. Thus, while the world becomes like language, language also becomes part of the world, when words start to resemble “a time-worn coat of paint.” The translated encounter with an untranslatable reality becomes an opportunity to see language anew, to make it as perceptible to the poet as peeling paint is to the touch.

Here the upsetting of the relationship between words and world relates to the problem in transcultural avant-garde practice of writing without subsuming the Other. One cannot simply use the language of the self to describe the situation of otherness one encounters without denying difference. In the “strange city,” therefore, language becomes a part of the otherness, transforming into the peeling paint of a decrepit Auckland house. By foregrounding the estrangement of language in his writing about Auckland, Yang attempts to preserve the otherness of the transcultural encounter.

In another of Yang’s Auckland prose works, entitled “City of One Person” (“Yi ge ren de chengshi” 一个人的城市), paint comes to signify not the materiality of language but the artificiality of a landscape that appears utterly strange to the dislocated Beijing poet:

这是只有一个人的城市。这城里只有你。

到处布满了死火山。山坡上的草，像绿色的岩浆，一股一股朝下流，从季节到季节，无声地流。你说“四季”，这只是习惯。这座城市一年到头是绿色。绿，像旧木板上洗不掉的油漆，有云的日子，变成一片灰色。<sup>27</sup>

This is a city of only one person. In this city there is only you.

There are extinct volcanoes everywhere. The grass on their slopes flows down in torrents, like green magma; it flows soundlessly season after season. You say “four seasons” only from habit. This city is green all year round. The green is like paint on an old wooden plank that won’t wash off. On cloudy days it becomes an expanse of grey.<sup>28</sup>

The city is empty and also solitary (“one person” [*yi ge ren* 一个人] also means ‘alone’ in Chinese), reflecting not just the introspection of the essay but also the dislocating experience of living in a city a fraction the size of Beijing. Everything in the city is presented as strange: extinct, or literally “dead,” volcanoes (*si huoshan* 死火山) are everywhere. Unlike in northern China, it remains green all year round. The image of the green paint that will not wash off emphasizes the strange unreality of this world and the translocation of the relationship between artifice and reality, language and the world. While the paint of the strange landscape is secure on the hills, the paint-words of the poet start to peel off. The paint image in “City of One Person” detaches greenness from nature, making it artificial and thus beyond the real world, but at the same time the paint image in “Ghost Talk” makes words a part of the material world. The paint descriptions here point to the translocation of both the world and language, binding the strange artifice of the Auckland landscape to the less secure, peeling artifice of Yang’s Chinese words.

The transformation of language and landscape in Yang’s Auckland work enacts an exilic dislocation that is also evident in the upsetting of temporal and spatial relations in his poetry, in which John Cayley identifies a desire “to create shared poetic space out of linear historical time, to bring luminous moments of the past into the timeless present of what he calls in Chinese *gongshi*, shared time or simultaneity.” As Cayley suggests, Yang’s emphasis on simultaneity arises partly out of his “translingual engagement” with Western literature, notably with the work of

<sup>27</sup> Yang, *Guihua*, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Yang, *Unreal City*, 87.

Ezra Pound.<sup>29</sup> As Yang's Auckland work shows, however, the dislocation of exile and the transcultural encounter with Auckland also helped to develop his poetics of spatial and temporal simultaneity. Yang's desire to create a shared transnational imagined community of avant-garde poetry, built on a Poundian aesthetic, can be seen as developing out of the translocational aesthetic of his Auckland work.

Yang's Auckland poem "Grafton Bridge" ("Gelafudun qiao" 格拉夫顿桥) plays on spatial and temporal relationships in the world and on the page to achieve this effect of simultaneity. The effect of strange language mirroring a strange environment is immediately apparent in the title, which in the original contains a transliteration of the English name "Grafton." Yang uses the standard Chinese transliteration for Grafton, so that, like many other foreign names, instead of normally meaningful characters, it is based simply on transliterated sounds. This strikingly un-Chinese title places the Chinese reader in a situation of confrontation with foreignness from the outset, a technique also found in Yang's use of a non-Han Chinese place name in "Norlang" from the early 1980s.<sup>30</sup> In this 24-line poem, Yang takes as his starting-point the act of crossing Grafton Bridge, a well-known landmark in central Auckland, which Yang walked over every day on his way to and from his workplace at the University of Auckland:

桥下的墓地 在你过桥时 逼近  
 松树抬起一张张孤疑的脸  
 死者的海面 铁块般散发腥味  
 铁锈色的阳光绕过去  
 像一只老狗嗅嗅你  
 一只狗眼盯着 风景在桥上格外清晰  
  
 死火山萎缩的天空 一个暗红的拳头  
 廉价墓碑上一滴过时的血  
 云 汇合了昨天所有的风暴  
 却被鸟爪弄脏

<sup>29</sup> John Cayley, with Yang Lian, "Hallucination and Coherence," *Positions* 10.3 (2002): 781.

<sup>30</sup> See Jacob Edmond, "Locating Global Resistance: The Landscape Poetics of Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Lyn Hejinian and Yang Lian," *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language & Literature Association* 101 (2004): 71–98, and Edmond, "Beyond Binaries."

被带你回家的栏杆 敞开透明的窗户  
 你在家过桥  
 整整一座城市住进一间病房  
 碧绿的野草把那么多脚步连在一起  
 石头的主人在石头屋顶下逼近  
 铁的主人在铁的走廊里逼近  
 用眼睛幻想 死亡就无须速度  
 你走去的还是你被变老的那一端  
 草地上的死者俯瞰你 是相同的距离

而你得回来 像被玻璃手铐铐着  
 检修每座今天的罪恶的桥墩  
 一群雪白的海鸥里一个狂奔的孩子  
 突然站住 为星星高呼  
 为黑夜中陡然延长的疼痛 放声哭泣<sup>31</sup>

when you cross the bridge the graveyard below closes in  
 the pine trees look up faces wary  
 the surface of the sea of the dead like iron smells of fish  
 rays of rusty sunlight pass by  
 like an old dog sniffing you  
 a dog is staring the view from the bridge is especially clear  
 a sky shrivelled by extinct volcanoes a dark red fist  
 a drop of dated blood on a cheap headstone  
 clouds converge into all the storms of yesterday  
 but are fouled by the claws of birds  
 the railings that guide you home open transparent windows  
 you cross the bridge at home  
 an entire city is lodged in a sick room  
 jade-green weeds join so many footsteps together  
 under a stone roof the stone master closes in  
 along an iron corridor the iron master closes in  
 hallucinate with your eyes then death won't need a speed  
 that point you walk to is also the point where you are aged  
 the dead in the grass look down at you it's all the same distance  
 but you have to come back as though handcuffed in glass  
 to repair every pier of today's crimes  
 a child runs wildly among snow-white seagulls

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<sup>31</sup> Yang Lian, *Dahai tingzhi zhi chu* 大海停止之处 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 1998): 341-42.

suddenly stops short   calls out for the stars  
 weeps aloud   for the pain unexpectedly prolonged in the night<sup>32</sup>

Despite the precise, realistic setting, dimensions are radically altered in the poem: “you cross the bridge at home / an entire city is lodged in a sickroom.” Normal boundaries between the subject and the world are placed in flux when the exterior city becomes interior to the subject’s home. The dislocation of the relationship between city and subject resembles the dual process in “City of One Person,” in which the city is made interior and, simultaneously, the person is made exterior and comes to resemble a city: “You sit in the room; you and the room forget each other. [...] When the trees finally get up and walk, the critically ill patient silently retreats. You turn back into the cavern within yourself. The city is inside one person.”<sup>33</sup> The sense of claustrophobic interiority is reflected elsewhere in the poem: in the first line, where the cemetery “closes in,” implying a movement of the ground upwards to meet the subject, as if he or she were falling; in the second line, where “the pine trees look up faces wary”; and in lines fifteen and sixteen, where the iron and stone masters close in. Through this entrapping movement, the view of the city, sea, and extinct volcanoes from the bridge becomes compacted into a room in an act of spatial translocation that echoes both Yang’s exilic dislocation to New Zealand and the translocation of reality into literature that Yang associates with exile.

In “Grafton Bridge,” as in his Auckland essays, Yang seems to attribute this translocation of reality to the experience of the strange city. In addition to the bridge, he refers to several other prominent features of the Auckland landscape, including, significantly, the “extinct” or literally “dead” (*si* 死) volcanoes that, as noted above, are also central to his Auckland essay “City of One Person,” and that here resonate with the other references to death in the poem.

Towards the end of the poem, spatial distortion combines with the theme of death when we are told that “death won’t need a speed.” No speed is required, because our movement through space and time leads inevitably to death. The description of space and time as dimensions in the

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<sup>32</sup> Yang, *Unreal City*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Yang, *Unreal City*, 89; tr. of Yang, *Guihua*, 29.

same continuum changes the way in which we look at the world: “that point you walk to is also the point where you are aged.” To walk across the bridge involves a movement in space and time, just as the distance between you and death is a distance in time and space. We age as we walk, but we could also fall off the bridge to a much quicker death. In fact, Grafton Bridge was dubbed “Suicide Bridge” by locals, because of its popularity in this regard. But the “dead” who look up from below are not just the imagined leapers. There is an old graveyard below Grafton Bridge, so the poem also refers to the dead looking up from their graves. Both the instant death of suicide and the inevitable death of all human beings are evoked. The length of time to death is measured at once by the length of time it takes to fall and by footsteps, where with each step you “are aged.” Yang crossed the bridge each day on his way to and from work while living in Auckland, so that the ritual of bridge-crossing also becomes a palpable measure of the passing of time and thus of aging.

“Grafton Bridge” is made up of separate, fragmented phrases, or points, on the page, separated from one another by a line break or a gap within a line. Thus the movement between points – the time it takes to read – is also enacted in the layout of the poem. Fragmentation also works to create a kind of simultaneity through the juxtaposition of perspectives: the view from the bridge, the sense of spatial and temporal dislocation, the masters closing in, and the child and seagulls at the end of the poem. The moment of hallucination (“hallucinate with your eyes”) becomes one of simultaneity, revealing that everything happens in the same instant of space and time: “it’s all the same distance.”

The act of hallucination (*huanxiang* 幻想) recalls the title of the series of poems from which “Grafton Bridge” comes. This poetic cycle features aspects of the Auckland landscape and is collectively entitled “City in a Mirage” (“Huanxiang zhong de chengshi” 幻象中的城市). In Chinese, the noun ‘mirage’ and the verb ‘hallucinate’ share the character *huan* 幻. The dislocation from reality, which Yang, like other avant-garde poets, sees as central to the process of poetry (the “departure from reality”), is associated with his transcultural encounter with the illusory, unreal nature of the city itself. Through a poetics of translocation, Yang undermines the sense of reality, so that poetry and reality merge and become equally illusory. The otherness of the transcultural encounter is preserved with



neither the ‘poem’ nor the ‘reality’ of Auckland taking precedence. As Yang asks in another essay on exile, “literature and reality, who is whose mirage? Or are they both mirages, gazing at one another in stunned silence?”<sup>34</sup>

The sense of dislocation in “Grafton Bridge” becomes more pronounced with the closing-in of the masters and the point of realization of illusion through hallucination. The final stanza moves away from any clear reference to the situation on the bridge, and the subject moves from being on the bridge to being underneath it, working to keep it up, “to repair every pier.” The “crimes” perhaps invite a reading along political lines, but they also suggest, more generally, the predicament of being in a liminal position on the bridge, because the subject seems to be caught between “crime” and “repair.” This sense of being in-between is also accentuated by the handcuffs of glass, an image simultaneously of the brutal power of torture and the fragility of the subject and that which binds the subject to the bridge. The description of the child and seagulls stands in imagistic relation to the rest of the poem, conveying a sense of being caught between black and white, day and night, just as the position on the bridge related in the poem marks a dynamic sense of being in-between, of being in translocation.

“Grafton Bridge” is one of a series of poems Yang wrote in Auckland that recall prominent downtown features, including the Auckland Hospital (“The Hospital”), the Auckland War Memorial Museum (“Museum Windows Carved with the Names of Different Oceans”), and the Winter Gardens (“Winter Garden”).<sup>35</sup> The transformation of landscape into language in Yang’s poetry is thus repeated on another level. The Auckland landmarks are made strange by being translated into Chinese. But at the same time Yang’s poems have been translated into English and presented as New Zealand poems, and there are indeed intriguing points of contact with the local tradition. Yang is by no means the first poet to have made use of Grafton Bridge. For example, Mark Young published a poem in 1965 entitled “Grafton Bridge,”<sup>36</sup> and Murray Edmond’s collection *Entering the Eye* not only refers to the bridge (as an eye) through its title but

<sup>34</sup> Yang, “Xunzhao zuowei liuwang yuanxing de shi.”

<sup>35</sup> All in Yang, *Unreal City*, and Yang, *Dahai tingzhi zhi chu*.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Young, “Grafton Bridge,” *New Zealand Listener* (5 February 1965): 5.

also makes the reference overt through the pictures of Grafton Bridge on the cover of the book and the inclusion of a poem addressed to a bridge.<sup>37</sup> Yang befriended Edmond soon after arriving in Auckland and so may have been aware of this connection when he wrote "Grafton Bridge." Although Yang's English at this point was limited, the two could well have discussed the similarities in their circumstances, with Yang then living in a dilapidated and soon to be demolished house in Grafton and Edmond having lived in a part of Grafton that overlooked the area newly cleared of buildings to make way for the motorway around the time when he wrote *Entering the Eye*. The position of Yang's "Grafton Bridge" and other Auckland poems within New Zealand literature, suggested by these connections with poems by Young and Edmond, has recently been asserted in a number of ways. First, Yang is a featured author in the *New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre*, a major online resource for New Zealand poetry based at the University of Auckland. Second, Yang received official New Zealand government sponsorship for his appearance as a New Zealand poet at the 2003 Third Moscow Poetry Biennale. Third, a collection of his New Zealand work, entitled *Unreal City*, has been brought out by Auckland University Press, one of New Zealand's leading poetry publishers.

Locatable within the New Zealand and Chinese traditions simultaneously, Yang's Auckland writing is inherently translocated. His Auckland poems translate Chinese poetry into New Zealand poetry and New Zealand into Chinese poetry. At the same time, the location of the term 'New Zealand poetry' is already uncertain. The boundaries of New Zealand's national literature and the borderlines of nation are disputed and fluid.

The translational border between Māori and English has been central to the contestation of New Zealand poetry, a fact that is perhaps most apparent in the debate surrounding two generalist anthologies of New Zealand poetry. In 1985, the editors of the *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*,<sup>38</sup> Ian Wedde and Harvey McQueen, broke new ground by including a significant selection of Māori poetry, inviting criticism from conserva-

<sup>37</sup> Murray Edmond, *Entering the Eye* (Dunedin: Caveman, 1973).

<sup>38</sup> *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, ed. Ian Wedde & Harvey McQueen (Auckland: Penguin, 1985).

tive critics keen to police the linguistic boundaries of New Zealand poetry.<sup>39</sup> In 1997, the editors of *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English*, Jenny Bornholdt, Gregory O'Brien and Mark Williams, attempted to delimit a section of New Zealand poetry on linguistic grounds, recognizing work in Māori but placing it outside the bounds of the anthology, arguing that Māori poetry was better served by anthologies devoted to Māori-language literature.<sup>40</sup> In so doing, however, the editors invited criticism for excluding from what has become the leading generalist anthology of New Zealand poetry the problems of linguistic and thus cultural translation which are arguably central to New Zealand society. For Alex Calder, "excluding considerations of translation from an anthology of New Zealand poetry has done this canon, this nation, no service whatsoever."<sup>41</sup> While the debate over the representation of Māori poetry in these two anthologies focused on the place of biculturalism and bilingualism in New Zealand poetry, it tended to ignore the broader issue suggested by the debate about the place of multilingualism and translation in New Zealand poetry as it develops in an increasingly multicultural and multilingual New Zealand society. Although Yang is a New Zealand citizen and his Auckland work is located in specifically New Zealand landscapes, his work would have no place within New Zealand poetry if one were to follow the logic of the editors of the Oxford anthology, for whom the only other language of New Zealand poetry is Māori, and even that a marginalized one. Yang's position illustrates the fact that Yunte Huang's call for a rethinking of American literature "in the context of transnationalism," "no longer confined to national, cultural, or linguistic boundaries," is in-

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Karl Stead, "Wedde's Inclusions," *Landfall* 155 (1985): 289–302, repr. as "At Home with the Poets: *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse* (1985)," in *Answering to the Language* (Auckland: Auckland UP, 1989): 133–45.

<sup>40</sup> *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English*, ed. Jenny Bornholdt, Gregory O'Brien & Mark Williams (Auckland: Oxford UP, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Alex Calder, "Unsettling Settlement: Poetry and Nationalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand," *New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre*, ed. Michele Leggott (University of Auckland, 17 September 2003), [www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/misc/calder.asp](http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/misc/calder.asp) (accessed 20 June 2005). Repr. from *Literature and the Nation*, ed. Brook Thomas (*REAL: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 14; Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1998): 165–81; see also Murray Edmond, "Then It Was Now Again: New Zealand Poetries and Colonial Histories," *UTS Review* 6.1 (2000): 104–29.

creasingly applicable to New Zealand literature.<sup>42</sup> The translocated nature of Yang's work challenges the boundaries of New Zealand literature, a literature already subject to contested, translocated flux.

Yang's work, although precisely located, is translated and transient in multiple senses. This apparent contradiction reflects the poetics of translocation operative in his Auckland work, which acknowledges but does not appropriate the Other. The strangeness that Yang experiences in his transcultural encounter with a foreign language and land, accompanied by his avant-garde emphasis on linguistic and physical dislocation, leads him to emphasize translocation on multiple levels, from the transformation of language and the world to dislocations in space and time. Words take on the quality of things, while the city becomes an artificial interior landscape divorced from reality, preserving the otherness of the transcultural encounter – the untranslatable strangeness of Yang's Auckland exile.

### Lyn Hejinian's Encounter "Launched in Context"

Like Yang, Hejinian responded to events in and around the year 1989 by addressing the problem of transcultural encounter within an avant-garde aesthetic of physical and linguistic dislocation. Just months after the June Fourth crackdown in China, which began Yang's Auckland exile, she travelled to Leningrad to take part in the Language–Consciousness–Society conference. The conference brought together writers and theorists from Russia, the USA, and a number of other countries with the ambitious aim of re-thinking these three fundamental aspects of human existence.<sup>43</sup> This transcultural encounter between Russian and Western writers in 1989 would have been inconceivable without the relationship between Hejinian and the Russian poet Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, who headed the conference organizing committee. Hejinian had met Dragomoshchenko in 1983 on her first visit to the Soviet Union, and the two had established a close friendship that extended to their translating each other's work.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Huang, *Transpacific Displacement*, 187.

<sup>43</sup> For a first-hand account of the conference, see Michael Davidson, Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman & Barrett Watten, *Leningrad: American Writers in the Soviet Union* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991): 1–8.

<sup>44</sup> For more on Hejinian's contact with Russia and her collaboration with Dragomoshchenko, see Jacob Edmond, "'A Meaning Alliance': Arkadii Dragomoshchenko

From 1983 to the early 1990s, Hejinian engaged in an intense personal transcultural encounter with Russia and Russian writers, visiting the country frequently, learning some Russian, and immersing herself in Russian literature and culture. The conference marked the climax of the utopian desire, which emerged from this encounter, to cross the Cold-War divide through an imagined transnational community of avant-garde poets who shared an aesthetic of linguistic and physical dislocation.<sup>45</sup>

This dream and the sense of dislocation upon which it was founded were further enhanced by the series of dramatic geopolitical changes dating from 1989. The period between 1989 and 1991 was one of global flux, spanning the collapse of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, the integration of East Germany into the West, and the break-up of the Soviet Union. In response to her experience of transcultural encounter with Russia and building on her aesthetic of dislocation, Hejinian addresses this time of global uncertainty through a focus on the problem of borders, boundaries, and cross-cultural encounters in her work from the early to mid-1990s. She thus develops a poetics of translocation that reflects the transition from oppositional to appositional aesthetics and the emphasis on transcultural encounter and dislocation that I have associated with this tendency. In her 1994 essay "La Faustienne," Hejinian writes that the "global political configuration is in flux" and describes the present as a "liminal period" in which "the question of boundaries, of possible shifts or displacements along them, and the question of what is being bounded (or unbounded) are preeminent ones."<sup>46</sup> In another essay from the mid-1990s, she argues, "poetry [...] has the capacity and perhaps the obligation to enter those specific zones known as borders, since borders are by definition addressed to foreignness, and in a complex sense, best captured in another Greek word, *xenos*."<sup>47</sup> According to Hejinian, *xenos* stands for

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& Lyn Hejinian's Poetics of Translation," *Slavic and East European Journal* 46.3 (2002): 551–63. For a comparison of the two writers in relation to romanticism, see Stephanie Sandler, "Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Lyn Hejinian, and the Persistence of Romanticism," *Contemporary Literature* 46.1 (2005): 18–45.

<sup>45</sup> See Jacob Edmond, "Lyn Hejinian and Russian Estrangement." See also Dragomoshchenko's description in "Arkhiiv" [Archive], *Big Information System Project*, <http://nmsf.sscf.ru/Welcome.asp?vw=book&bo=4305> (accessed 8 March 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000): 234.

<sup>47</sup> Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 326.

both ‘guest’ and ‘host’ and for the relationship between the two, a relationship that “comes into existence solely in and as an occurrence, that of their meeting, their encounter.”<sup>48</sup> Hejinian also connects this idea of an encounter – what she elsewhere refers to by the phrase “something comes along – launched in context” – with the Russian term for ‘occurrence’, *sobytie*, which is made up of the prefix meaning ‘with’ and the word for ‘being’ in Russian, so that for her it implies “being with,” “a with-being” or “co-existence.”<sup>49</sup> Through an act of translation, Hejinian imagines her poetics of encounter as providing a vision of connection, of “co-existence” across a border, a situation of translocation through encounter: “Every encounter produces, even if for only the flash of an instant, a *xenia* – the occurrence of co-existence which is also an occurrence of strangeness or foreignness.”<sup>50</sup>

For Hejinian, the border is centrally translocational, in that it puts location into question and presents it as something that takes place through encounter. Rather than ‘globalizing’ through the rejection of identity or a universalizing discourse, Hejinian’s poetics of the border acknowledges the existence of the Other by questioning the positionality of the subject, so that it comes into being only through encounter. The border-zone of Leningrad and of Hejinian’s encounter with Russia becomes the place in which she creates an encounter on paper, a “co-existence” that, like her experience of dislocation in Russia, occurs only in the context of mutual strangeness.

Hejinian’s *Oxota: A Short Russian Novel* can be seen as her central translocational work from the early 1990s, because it deals directly with her transcultural encounter with Russia and the poetics of dislocation on which it was based and because it occupies a temporal and physical borderland.<sup>51</sup> A “Russian novel” written by an American author between December 1989 and February 1991, it spans the most important border of the second half of the twentieth century – the Iron Curtain – at the moment in which this border was disintegrating.

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<sup>48</sup> Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 326.

<sup>49</sup> *The Language of Inquiry*, 335.

<sup>50</sup> *The Language of Inquiry*, 326.

<sup>51</sup> Lyn Hejinian, *Oxota: A Short Russian Novel* (Great Barrington MA: Figures, 1991).

*Oxota* draws on Hejinian's extensive contact with Russian writers and Russian literature, especially on her experiences of Leningrad. *Oxota* is dislocated and transcultural in multiple senses. This "Russian novel" is written in English and is not a novel at all but a poem, although, at almost three hundred pages, it is the length of an average-sized novel. A work of postmodernist American poetry, *Oxota* is formally modelled on the nineteenth-century Russian classic *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander Pushkin (both works use a fourteen-line stanzaic form, though Hejinian's line is a sentence of greatly varying length, rather than the iambic tetrameter of Pushkin's poem), so that the poem is located in an uncertain position between American literature and Russian literature. These internal temporal and spatial dislocations are mirrored on the historical and geopolitical level of the poem's setting – Leningrad. Created by Peter the Great as part of his drive to westernize his country, St Petersburg/Leningrad has traditionally been considered to occupy an uneasy border-position between Europe and Russia, fitting satisfactorily into neither realm. *Oxota* focuses on Hejinian's experiences in Leningrad in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but shortly after Hejinian published *Oxota* in August 1991, the poem's location had vanished from the map. Leningrad and the Soviet Union had ceased to exist. Just as with Yang's work, Hejinian's poem is translated in several senses and is located in an even more transient nation.

Rather than dislocated, however, Marjorie Perloff sees *Oxota* as avoiding location altogether, as presenting "in Wallace Stevens's words, 'description without place'."<sup>52</sup> According to Perloff, "Words like 'there' are always suspect in Hejinian's scheme of things, origin and location, whether of speech or event, being all but impossible to define." For Perloff, such a dematerialized vision is typical of postmodern poetry's representation of the city as "cyberspace."<sup>53</sup> Perloff's interpretation resembles Huk's analysis of fellow Language poet Charles Bernstein's poetry as rejecting identity, which I equated with the globalizing mode of transcultural poetics.

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<sup>52</sup> Marjorie Perloff, "John Cage's Dublin, Lyn Hejinian's Leningrad: Poetic Cities as Cyberspace," *Electronic Poetry Center*, ed. Charles Bernstein (SUNY, Buffalo, 19 October 2000), <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/cyber.html> (accessed November 2004).

<sup>53</sup> Perloff, "John Cage's Dublin, Lyn Hejinian's Leningrad."

Perloff has in mind the way in which *Oxota* resists the norms of narrative coherence by placing sentences alongside one another so that “the reader feels as if she has come in on a conversation whose participants cannot be located.”<sup>54</sup> As Brian McHale has shown, Hejinian achieves this effect in *Oxota* at least partly by splicing up various narratives and distributing them across several chapters, so that parts of the narrative are supplied incrementally and are interspersed with apparently unrelated material. According to McHale, the effect of this technique is “weak narrativity,” a term that points to the place of translocation in Hejinian’s work: the combination of dislocation through narrative dispersal and the retention of the transcultural encounter through the continued impression of narrative.<sup>55</sup> Location and narrative retain their importance but are placed in constant flux, translation or translocation.

In *Oxota*, location-specific names play an important role in conveying a sense of location and narrative, even as the conventional assumptions about place and plot are subverted. As Perloff puts it,

the rejection of *representation* does not, as many readers have assumed, entail the loss of *reference*. A Hejinian stanza, that is to say, does not present us with a coherent picture of something external to it, a photograph *of* or picture *of*. But reference, whether to persons (Zina, Olga, Natasha, Vodonoy, Alexei, Arkadii, Gavronsky) or places (cities, rivers, streets, houses), is essential to the poem, the necessary peg upon which speculation can take place.<sup>56</sup>

There is, however, more to this strategy of dislocated, non-representational reference. The names and places are more than a “necessary peg” for speculation. They serve to underscore the importance of context to Hejinian’s poetics, where context for her involves dynamic encounters, so that *Oxota* is simultaneously located and in transit. Hejinian emphasizes the importance of context to her poetics at the beginning of her essay “Reason” with the phrase “Along comes something – launched in con-

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<sup>54</sup> Perloff, “John Cage’s Dublin, Lyn Hejinian’s Leningrad.”

<sup>55</sup> Brian McHale, “Weak Narrativity: The Case of Avant-Garde Narrative Poetry,” *Narrative* 9.2 (2001): 161–67.

<sup>56</sup> Marjorie Perloff, “How Russian Is It?” review of *Oxota: A Short Russian Novel*, *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* 18.1 (1992): 204, repr. in Perloff, *Poetry on and off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions* (Evanston IL: Northwestern UP, 1998): 222–42.



text.” For her, strangeness arises not so much from dislocation as through border-crossing encounters, interactions that place location in flux and in doubt. Such interactions are central to her work, and she describes them as involving

conjunction: encounter, possible confusion, alteration exerted through reciprocal influence, etc. – the kind of situation that is typical, I might add, along borders between nations, between speakers of different languages, between neighboring ecosystems, etc.<sup>57</sup>

Rather than happening in an “unspecifiable space/time realm,” as Perloff would have it, in *Oxota* Hejinian locates her encounter in an historically specific Leningrad, creating many chapters from material drawn directly from the journals she kept while in Leningrad,<sup>58</sup> and supplying precise commencement and completion dates.<sup>59</sup>

In *Oxota*, Hejinian searches for a kind of location or context that is not there prior to the encounter and that takes place in the liminal, historically and geographically translocational space of Leningrad. As Perloff points out, Hejinian does not map Leningrad out with a compass, as James Joyce did Dublin.<sup>60</sup> Instead, she aims at writing the city as a continuous moment of encounter, in which the object that is being described, the describer, and the context of that description are simultaneously ‘launched’ together. The location comes into being at the very point of its translation into experience and into the poem. We can see evidence that Hejinian thought of her Russian poem in this way in her essay “Reason”:

The context, in other words, is the medium of our encounter, the ground of our becoming (i.e. happening to be) present at the same place at the same time. [...]

As strangers (foreigners), it is hard for us to find the “right words” (themselves simultaneously demanding context and serving as it) for what we experience in that perception and involvement.

Usually comparisons are the first things foreigners make. [...] “The pink wet light in Saint Petersburg on a winter day is like a summer San

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<sup>57</sup> Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 339.

<sup>58</sup> See Lyn Hejinian, “Soviet Diary” (MS, Lyn Hejinian Papers, MSS 74-47-8, Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California, San Diego).

<sup>59</sup> Hejinian, *Oxota*, 293.

<sup>60</sup> Perloff, “John Cage’s Dublin, Lyn Hejinian’s Leningrad.”

Francisco fog,” etc. Such comparisons, reaching out of the present situation to another, previously experienced, recollected one, may appear to constitute the “making of a context” for the current context, but a context made in such a way is a transported one, acquired by way of metaphor. And such metaphors, cast in the form of similes and intended to smooth over differences, deny incipience, and to the degree that they succeed, they thereby forestall the acquisition of history.<sup>61</sup>

Hejinian here gives as her example precisely the problem that a poet from San Francisco confronts in an encounter with St Petersburg. She insists that context must not be transported wholesale from another place – rather, that it comes into being in the moment of encounter, thus preserving the strange otherness of that context.

Where metaphor creates a context that smoothes over difference, metonymy perhaps offers Hejinian a way to create context while maintaining difference and therefore the possibility of translocational encounter. We can see this in Chapter Eleven of *Oxota*:

With exhilarating humility we watched the accumulating snow  
 The shifting of greenish drifts, the yellow silent wind  
 Not defiant but obsequious in storm, at kitchen window  
 Money is not unlucky  
 But a whistling man is luckless in money  
 What then if snow is the substance of an accounting  
 No objects of metonymy, of economy  
 A colonel’s daughter drew in the frost like a vandal to the colonel  
 The wolves whistled in the forest near Pavlovsk  
 Little Dima bravely raced toward the palace parking lot  
 A poetry and with fear of authority – as if that were your sole  
     justification, in itself, not in what you wrote  
 Simple being – simple agoraphobic being  
 Its meals  
 Their daily huntress<sup>62</sup>

Different pieces of information, phrases, and combinations of language are brought together here to create a context that seems to defy the norms

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<sup>61</sup> Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 342.

<sup>62</sup> Hejinian, *Oxota*, 21.

of language and narrative. Strange word-combinations such as “exhilarating humility” and “obsequious in storm” combine with strange shifts between lines, such as from “being” to “meals,” to resist a totalizing narrative or a singular location. Metonymy seems to dominate over metaphor. The work neither layers things up nor disperses them, but places them in positions of contiguity, so that locations are multiple and uncertain.

One can see the basic connections in this chapter from *Oxota* as metonymic, particularly if we consider rhyme, rhythm, and other material qualities of language to be more metonymic than metaphoric, in that they are based on contiguity of sound and spelling. The first three lines belong to a single theme: the observation of a snow storm. But they are also bound together by wordplay. The end of the word “snow” in the first line and the word “wind” at the end of the second line combine in the word “window.” Meanwhile, the final *ow* links “yellow” in line two with both “snow” and “window.” The caesurae in the second and third lines, followed by three and two pure iambs respectively, also help to give the lines surprising weight and beauty.

Elements within the poem are connected not so much by layered significance, based on a single metaphor, narrative, or centering location, as by simple relationships of metonymy or rhyme. In fact, the word “metonymy” in the chapter quoted motivates the word “economy” in this way. Both in turn are related through paronomasia, and, in the case of “economy,” through metonymy, to the word “money.” That is, both “economy” and “metonymy” contain all the letters of the word ‘money’ and money is, of course, central to the economy of a nation. The constant exchange of money in an economy can also be viewed as mirroring the metonymic movements of language in the poem. Just as no piece of money has value outside exchange, so, too, no single location or narrative in *Oxota* functions outside the constant process of interaction with other locations and narratives. Such movements between things do not give one description power over another; there is no key. Instead, Hejinian creates what is intended to be poetry of exchange and encounter, in which “authority” is relinquished to multiple metonymic conjunctions and translocations in and through language.

For Hejinian, then, American poetry transferred to the Russian context requires an emphasis on non-hierarchical relationships between lines

based on metonymic and paronomastic connections. Through this approach, she emphasizes the materiality and untranslatable qualities of language and the world. Rhymes rely on certain words; we cannot substitute synonyms and achieve the same effect. Similarly, the act of placing different sentences side by side without a symbolic or metaphoric superstructure emphasizes the “co-existence” critical to her concept of *xenos*. In this way, she allows different ideas and phrases to brush against one another without an authorial organization that privileges any one account, sentence or theme. By mobilizing weak narrativity, metonymic connectives and other devices that promote circulation and guard against conclusions, Hejinian aims at preserving the perpetual moment of encounter that is central to her poetics of translocation.

### A Common Strangeness

In their work written between 1989 and the mid-1990s, both Yang and Hejinian investigate how poetry can address the Other and bring a transcultural perspective without falling into the position of dominance. The resultant poetics foregrounds the dislocations and estrangement of the transcultural encounter that they describe. Hejinian’s poetry refuses to create a context that elides difference, favouring instead a metonymic poetics as a way of achieving what she terms “co-existence.” Yang’s exile work preserves the radical otherness of his transcultural encounter with Auckland through a poetics that foregrounds the radical dislocations of exilic space, time, and language. Thus both authors produce a poetics of translocation, which combines transcultural engagement with an aesthetic of textual and physical dislocation.

At the same time, the work of both writers is situated in an uncertain, transitive position between national literatures and geographical nations during a period of global political flux. The two writers employ their poetics of translocation as they grapple with strange new locations, both geographic and literary, even as those locations are themselves placed in transit and in doubt by the increasingly transient nature of the national, literary, cultural, and linguistic boundaries of contemporary poetry.

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PART TWO  
MUSICAL TRANSLOCATIONS



# Fusión Rapa Nui

## Mito Manutomatoma and the Translocation of Easter Island Music in Chilean Popular Culture



DAN BENDRUPS

EASTER ISLAND, or Rapanui,<sup>1</sup> occupies a prominent place in Pacific studies because of its unique archaeological heritage<sup>2</sup> and positioning in discourses of human migration,<sup>3</sup> and in theories of collapse<sup>4</sup> and survival<sup>5</sup> in precontact Polynesian history. The postcontact history of Rapanui is also of interest to studies of Pacific culture because of the island's unique positioning as a South American territorial possession in the Pacific.<sup>6</sup> Through more than a century of cultural contact with

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<sup>1</sup> Rapanui is the indigenous name for Easter Island. In this article, the term 'Rapanui', rather than 'Rapa Nui', refers to the island, its people, and their culture. This usage reflects a Polynesian rendering of the term, in concordance with views expressed by the anthropologist Grant McCall, *Rapanui: Tradition and Survival on Easter Island* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2nd ed. 1994): 15. References to proper names (Tapati Rapa Nui, Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui) are rendered as they appear in print.

<sup>2</sup> Jo Anne Van Tilberg, *Easter Island: Archaeology, Ecology and Culture* (London: British Museum Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> John Flenley & Paul Bahn, *The Enigmas of Easter Island* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> McCall, *Rapanui: Tradition and Survival on Easter Island*.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas J. Porteous, *The Modernization of Easter Island* (Western Geographical Series volume 19; Victoria BC: Department of Geography, University of Victoria, 1981).

Chile, Rapanui islanders have developed sophisticated responses to the dominant hegemonic influences of Chilean culture, expressed strongly in areas such as language revival and cultural performance. Within this, musical performance is one of the key mechanisms through which Rapanui islanders are able to express and reinforce their indigenous cultural heritage. In the area of popular music, this cultural expression has the potential to reach a broad national and international audience through mass-mediated communication and the global entertainment industry.

This essay presents an examination of the Rapanui cultural presence in Chilean popular music in the twenty-first century, focusing on the artistic trajectory of the indigenous singer-songwriter Emilio 'Mito' Manutoma-toma (henceforth Mito) and his mainland Chilean band, Fusión Rapa Nui (Rapa Nui Fusion).<sup>7</sup> In 2002, Mito revolutionized Chilean popular music by winning the acclaimed Festival del Huaso song competition held annually at Olmué.<sup>8</sup> While Chile has many festivals and competitions devoted to national *folklore*,<sup>9</sup> this was the first time that an indigenous Rapanui performer had won such an event, making it a very special occasion. Subsequent to his win at Olmué, Mito was offered numerous high-profile performance opportunities, obtained the backing of the multinational recording label Warner, and took his band Fusión Rapa Nui on national and international performance tours. Since then, Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui have maintained a high performance profile in Chile.<sup>10</sup>

Mito is not the first Rapanui musician to 'translocate' to urban Santiago in search of work. Since the 1960s, Rapanui islanders have travelled

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<sup>7</sup> An earlier version of this chapter, "Navegando, Navegando: Easter Island Fusion and Cultural Performance", was published in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 10.2 (2009): 115–28. The author gratefully acknowledges TAPJA for their support in facilitating the further development of the research presented here.

<sup>8</sup> The popular and widely followed Festival del Huaso or 'Cowboy Festival' is held annually in the small Chilean city of Olmué. Among other events, the song competition provides a forum for performances of Chilean folk and popular music.

<sup>9</sup> The Spanish term *folklore* is understood in much the same way as its English counterpart 'folklore', with one specific variation. In Chile, and in much of South America, *folklore* represents both 'folk' culture and a specific category of 'national and traditional' music and dance. In this chapter, the term *folklore* refers to the 'national' musics of Chile, including traditional Rapanui music.

<sup>10</sup> Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui maintain a website (<http://www.mitoyfusionrapanui.cl>) and a MySpace social networking web page (<http://www.myspace.com/mitofusionrapanui>).

to mainland Chile in increasing numbers, sometimes supported by government funding, or sponsored by influential individuals. In many cases, these musicians have collaborated with established Chilean musicians (such as *folklore* specialist Margot Loyola) or developed niche markets for teaching Rapanui music and dance to a receptive Chilean clientele. Performers such as Poki Hey have been particularly successful in this endeavour, clearing the path for more recent performers including Mito. The translocation of Mito's music to the urban Chilean context offers particular insight into the issues of identity and cultural hegemony that envelop the complex neocolonial relationship between Chile and Rapanui and the consequences of this relationship for the representation of Rapanui culture. Mito's music is of specific interest to this investigation because of the ways in which he has attempted to create a cultural bridge between Rapanui and Chile through music. The examination presented in this essay draws on musical examples from Mito's debut Warner recording, *Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui*,<sup>11</sup> and is informed by my own ethnographic fieldwork on Rapanui and in Chile over the course of the last eight years.

### Rapanui and Chilean Contact

Prior to the expansion of Chilean interest in the Pacific, Rapanui served as an occasional re-stocking point for explorers and whaling ships in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While anthropologists such as Grant McCall stress that the Rapanui people developed sophisticated mechanisms for trade and negotiation with explorers, missionaries, and other visitors,<sup>12</sup> contact was on many occasions also a catalyst for disaster. In the 1850s and 1860s, the 'blackbirding' efforts of privateers seeking human cargo for the labour markets of Peru resulted in the decimation of the Rapanui population through forced migration and introduced disease.<sup>13</sup> Rapanui was annexed by the Republic of Chile in 1888, and remains an

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<sup>11</sup> Mito Manumatoma, *Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui* (Warner Music Chile 0927498692, CD, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> McCall, *Rapanui: Tradition and Survival on Easter Island*, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Hermann Fisher, *Sombras Sobre Rapa Nui: Alegato por un Pueblo Olvidado* (Santiago de Chile: LOM Ediciones, 2nd ed. 2001); Henry Maude, *Slavers in Paradise: the Peruvian Slave Trade in Polynesia, 1862–1864* (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1981).

integral part of the Republic of Chile to this day. The contemporary population includes Chileans and other foreigners, and hosts in excess of 40,000 tourists each year.

Chile's initial interest in Rapanui was both symbolic and strategic. First, the Republic of Chile was keen to declare itself the political equal of better-established nations in the Pacific region, and saw territorial expansion as a means of achieving this. Rapanui had been overlooked by other colonizing nations, and its size, small population, and relative proximity to Chile – the nearest sovereign nation – made it an attractive option for Chilean expansion. Secondly, the Chilean government of the 1880s mistakenly believed that Rapanui would become a strategic port after the opening of the Panama Canal, and moved quickly to claim the island.<sup>14</sup>

In 1896, after a series of abortive attempts by Chileans to colonize Rapanui, control over the island was delegated to a private pastoral company. In the early-twentieth century, successive military governors managed Rapanui on behalf of the Republic of Chile, until the promulgation in 1966 of the 'Easter Island Law' (*ley* 16441) granted citizenship and democratic rights to the indigenous Rapanui population. Since the 1970s, Rapanui islanders have depended on international tourism as their main source of income, and, since the 1970s, indigenous Rapanui culture-bearers have succeeded in generating a movement of cultural revival by fostering traditional practices in performance, agriculture, and art. This process of "decolonisation of the mind"<sup>15</sup> is particularly evident in Rapanui music and dance, both of which reveal unequivocal similarities to other Polynesian cultures, and complete dissimilarities to the other traditional musics of Chile.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Porteous, *The Modernization of Easter Island*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> Some descriptions of traditional Rapanui music follow, but more comprehensive explanations can be found in English: Mervyn McLean, *Weavers of Song: Polynesian Music and Dance* (Auckland: Auckland UP, 1999); in Spanish: Ramón Campbell, "Etnomusicología de la Isla de Pascua," *Revista Musical Chilena* 42.170 (1988) and *La Herencia Musical de Rapanui: Etnomusicología de la Isla de Pascua* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1971); Margot Loyola, "Mis Vivencias en Isla de Pascua," *Revista Musical Chilena* 42.170 (1988): 48–86; Eugenio Pereira-Salas, "La Música de la Isla de Pascua," *Revista Musical Chilena* 17–18 (January 1947): 9–24.

## Hybridity in Rapanui Music

The popularity of Rapanui cultural performance among locals and tourists has contributed to the establishment of a niche for Rapanui music in the context of Chilean national culture. However, this niche of ‘cultural practice’ may be both liberating and restrictive for performers, as James Clifford states:

what matters politically is who deploys nationality or transnationality, authenticity or hybridity, against whom, with what relative power and ability to sustain a hegemony.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of Rapanui cultural performance, the liberating expression of indigeneity is mediated within the context of Chilean *folklore* as one facet of a diverse national culture. In reaction to this, Rapanui performers wishing to assert cultural independence have, in recent years, begun to focus their performance efforts on international rather than Chilean audiences, and have sought relationships with performing arts groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand, cultural performance troupes in French Polynesia, and performance opportunities at world-music festivals. Those who continue to perform in Chile accept that they will be presented within the context of national *folklore*.

This performance environment provides the framework for a great deal of cultural flexibility. On the one hand, the *folklore*-ization of Rapanui music can be viewed as neocolonial appropriation, as ancient songs handed down through Rapanui oral tradition for many generations have, under the umbrella of *folklore*, been contextualized as aspects of Chilean national culture. On the other hand, the Chilean annexation of Rapanui opened the island to commercial entertainment industry influences that have been incorporated into Rapanui music tradition.<sup>18</sup> An example of this

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For a comprehensive explanation of Chilean *folklore*, see Ercilia Moreno Chá, “Music in the Southern Cone: Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay,” in *Music in Latin American Culture: Regional Traditions*, ed. John Schechter (New York: Schirmer, 1999): 236–301.

<sup>17</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1997): 10.

<sup>18</sup> Alejandra Grifferos, “We are Merely Asking for Respect: The Reformulation of Ethnicity in Rapa Nui (Easter Island 1966),” in *Pacific 2000: Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Easter Island and the Pacific*, ed. Christopher Stevenson,

is the 'Rapanui tango', a perceived traditional genre that arrived via Chilean recordings in the 1920s and 1930s, the era in which tango was most popular in Chile and became localized.<sup>19</sup> Also, Rapanui performance troupes have adopted Chilean *bombo* (a side-drum typical of Chilean and Argentinean *folklore*) and various Latin American percussion instruments in their shows, and rarely perform without them.

Most importantly, commercial popular music genres of rock and pop, including both Anglo-American and Chilean performers, are equally popular in Rapanui and Chile. Rapanui has its own heavy metal and reggae subcultures, and local media broadcasts present the stars of Chilean mass culture to a Rapanui audience. The instrumentation and style characteristics of commercial pop provide yet another means of cultural communication between Rapanui and Chile (and the rest of the world). Reggae-style or rock-style songs with Rapanui lyrics resonate with Chilean audiences, despite the language barrier, because of their familiarity with this globalized genre. Mito and his contemporaries inhabit this cultural realm, and engage in a hybridizing process by experimenting with the progressive inclusion of aspects of traditional Rapanui music.

Mito's music epitomizes Rapanui music hybridity on many levels. First, his artistic ambiguity and physical translocation recall Marwan Kraidy's description of the prefix 'trans-', which "suggests moving through spaces and across borders, not merely between points."<sup>20</sup> Secondly, the stylistic hybridity of Mito's music is both straightforward and complex. While his combination of Rapanui and Western musical influences is 'hybrid' in the sense that it "juxtapose[s] and fuse[s ...] languages and signifying practices from different and normally separated domains,"<sup>21</sup> it is also demonstrative of what Deborah Kapchan terms "strategic essen-

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Georgia Lee & F.J. Morin (California: Easter Island Foundation/Bearsville P, 2001): 378.

<sup>19</sup> Juan Pablo González & Claudio Rolle, *Historia Social de la Música Popular en Chile 1890-1950* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 2005): 456.

<sup>20</sup> Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia PA: Temple UP, 2005): 14.

<sup>21</sup> Pnina Werbner, "Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity," in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. Pnina Werbner & Tariq Modood (London NJ: Zed, 1997): 2.

tialism”<sup>22</sup> in using widely accessible structures of commercial music to present a representation of Rapanui-ness.

Mito’s musical hybridity may be framed as a “celebration of cultural difference and fusion”<sup>23</sup> or even a “reverse appropriation,”<sup>24</sup> rather than just an imposed state of subjectivity to Chilean cultural dominance. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the diversity of interest groups that this music affects. Chilean audiences with little knowledge of Rapanui music may see Mito as an authentic representative of Rapanui tradition. Conversely, many elder Rapanui culture-bearers view him as modern, experimental, and innovative performer. When Mito uses perceived traditional Rapanui song-texts or melodic forms in his contemporary compositions, a further blurring of boundaries occurs.

### The Artistic Trajectory of Mito Manutomatoma

Mito has been a prominent figure in Rapanui popular music throughout the 1990s and 2000s, but his musical output has been criticized by his peers because of his willingness to commercialize Rapanui songs for a Chilean audience. Mito’s recent performance credits include television and feature-film performances that have earned him a high public profile in Chile. While some Rapanui culture-bearers view this as a positive counter-hegemonic influence, others are suspicious of the misrepresentations that may result from cultural commodification by the mass media. Other factors also contribute to the ambiguity that surrounds Mito’s public figure. His youth (he was less than forty years old at the time of writing) prevents him from attaining ‘culture-bearer’ status among his indigenous peers and elders, but his commercial success in mainland Chile places him in precisely this role when dealing with Chilean audiences. Furthermore, Mito draws inspiration from two distinct spheres of musical influence – Rapanui tradition and Western pop – and the hybrid songs he

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<sup>22</sup> Deborah Kapchan, “Hybrid Genres, Performed Subjectivities: The Revoicing of Public Oratory in the Moroccan Marketplace,” in *Performing Hybridity*, ed. Joseph May & Jennifer Natalya Fink (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999): 208. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, 20.

produces do not conform entirely to the norms and conventions of either. Finally, there are geographic and demographic factors. A performer from an island of around 4,000 inhabitants, located 3,600 kilometres from the Chilean mainland, Mito is thus forced into a unique artistic bind; his cultural difference is precisely what makes him interesting to Chilean audiences, and he has been more successful than any other Rapanui performer at engaging mainland Chilean interest in Rapanui music.

Mito was born into a musical family and learned traditional songs from his parents, aunts, and uncles from an early age. This repertoire of songs included non-melodic chants (called *patautau*) and monophonic melodic songs (called *riu*). Like most of his generation, he was involved as a child in performances associated with the annual Tapati Rapa Nui ('Rapanui Week') festival and other events. Since its formalization in the early 1990s, Tapati Rapa Nui has included a string-band competition, where ensembles composed mainly of guitar, ukulele, and voice perform *riu* with string accompaniment.<sup>25</sup>

As a young adult, Mito experimented with setting the melodies and texts of many of the *riu* he knew to more elaborate guitar and electric-guitar accompaniment, emulating the chord patterns and electronic textures of popular American rock musicians of the late 1960s and 1970s. These early experiments were met with some disapproval by older musicians, not because of the musical adaptation, but because of the treatment of the text. In some cases, Mito was employing quite old song-texts with very complex accompaniment, subverting an aesthetic characteristic of traditional performance, which stresses the primacy of song-text above all other aspects of the music. He was encouraged by older musicians to write his own songs, and to leave the traditional repertoire alone.

Mito's first professional engagement as a musician occurred in 1996, when the Chilean national television network TVN decided to use Rapanui as the location for a soap-opera production titled *Iorana* ('Greetings', in the Rapanui language). The production, which was broadcast nationally in 1998, was based on the social and romantic lives of a fictional community on Rapanui. It was one of a series of similar dramas based in diverse geographic and cultural settings, and all employing the same en-

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<sup>25</sup> Dan Bendrups, "Pacific Festivals as Dynamic Contact Zones: The Case of Tapati Rapa Nui," *Shima* 1.2 (2008): 14–28.



semble of actors. Subsequent versions have been set in marginal or marginalized settings such as a nomadic gypsy community and a squatter settlement. The production team for *Iorana* sought Rapanui community input at various stages of the production process, and invited Mito along with several other Rapanui musicians from the band he was performing with to record a Rapanui-language title-track for the series. The musicians selected a traditional *riu* called *E Nua e Koro* ('Oh Mother, oh Father') for this purpose, performed both *a capella* and with rock-band accompaniment, as well as some other incidental music for the series.

For this recording, the band was flown from Rapanui to the Chilean capital of Santiago, and remained there for a few months. During this time, they established a good rapport with the TVN recording engineers, and developed enough of a local profile with Chilean fans to warrant the production of their own CD, released in 1998. The band adopted the name Matato'a (an ancient Rapanui term for 'warrior' or 'guardian') and performed in Chile throughout 1998. Initially, the music of Matato'a reflected the combined creative input of two songwriters, Mito Manutomatoma and Keva Atan, and their songs ranged from re-creations of traditional *riu* to reggae-inspired love songs written in both the Rapanui language and Spanish. In keeping with the warrior image of their name, Matato'a also cultivated performances of traditional *patautau* chants and dances with bellicose themes.<sup>26</sup>

In 1999, Mito decided to leave the group to pursue a career as a solo vocalist on the mainstream Santiago music scene. Initially, Mito departed from his culturally bound musical niche to seek singing engagements across a variety of commercial music genres. While Matato'a continued to cultivate a cultural performance repertoire of traditional music, Mito looked to incorporate more influences from jazz, salsa, and other Latin American popular music styles that were already popular in Chile. Both Matato'a and Mito expanded their performance profiles into the twenty-first century, with some commentators in the Chilean mass media declaring a 'Rapanui conquest' of Chilean popular music in 2003. Meanwhile, Mito's attempts at situating himself within mainstream Chilean popular music

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<sup>26</sup> Dan Bendrups, "War in Rapanui Music: A History of Cultural Representation," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 38 (2006): 25–30.

allowed him to connect with a wide audience and were ultimately proven successful with his high-profile victory at Olmué in 2002.

Mito won the Festival del Huaso with a song that demonstrated both his artistic ability and his aptitude for predicting the Chilean audience's expectations of a Rapanui performer. His winning song, "*Voy Navegando, Navegando*" ('I'm Sailing, Sailing'), composed in collaboration with Elías Llanos and arranged together with Jaime González Parra, combined unmistakable Rapanui music elements such as prominent ukulele and accordion accompaniment, shouted interjections in the Rapanui language, and other Rapanui lyrics with Spanish-language text, evocative references to an exotic homeland, and short balanced phrases cast over standard Western harmonic patterns. The combined effect of this music was a song redolent with representations of cultural identity and intercultural exploration. Most of it was sung in Spanish, with the Rapanui verses loosely repeating the Spanish-language text, making it easily intelligible to a Chilean audience. Most evocatively of all, the singer is cast by the lyrics as an outsider fascinated by Chile, with a desire to explore the unknown land that considers him a citizen.

Shouted [Rapanui]:

*Hoe tatou i te vaka!*

All aboard, row!

Spoken [Rapanui]:

*Aroto i te hetu 'u, a au i oho mai ai*

By the stars I came

*E koro, ko poreko ana a au*

Oh father, from my birthplace

*I to 'oku oho ki hiva*

I am going to a faraway place

Verse 1 [Spanish]:

*Voy navegando, navegando*

I'm sailing, sailing

*Voy navegando muy feliz*

I sail very pleased

*Llevo en mi bote muchas frutas*

I carry, in my boat, many fruits

*Y todo lo que aprendí*

And all that I [have] learned

Verse 2 [Spanish]:

*Dejó mi tierra y a mis hermanos*

I've left my land and my brother

*Por conocer más de mi país*

To get to know more of my country

*No soy del norte ni del sur*

I am not from the north or the south

*Porque yo soy de Rapanui*

Because I am from Rapanui

Shouted [Rapanui]: <i>Tahi rua toru ha</i> ( <i>Hea e ho hi e...</i> )	One, two, three, four...
Chorus [Rapanui]: <i>Aroto i te hetu'u,</i> <i>A au i oho mai ai</i> <i>E koro, ko poreko ana a au</i> <i>I to'oku oho ki hiva</i>	By the stars I come Oh father, from my birthplace To a distant land
Chorus [Spanish]: <i>Por las estrellas me voy guiando</i> <i>Como lo hizo mi abuelo ayer</i> <i>Me prometí venir un día</i> <i>Y al conti a conocer</i>	I go guided by the stars As my grandfather did in the past I promised myself to come one day To get to know the <i>conti</i> [Chile]

“*Voy Navegando, Navegando*” excerpt. English translation by the author.

The Rapanui *folklore* elements of the performance – Mito’s costume, uku-lele, and language – served to reinforce the exoticism that mainstream Chileans often project onto Rapanui, and therefore succeeded in demonstrating cultural difference without threatening the heavily nationalistic context of the competition. Furthermore, Mito included cleverly orchestrated tempo changes in his song to correspond to the chorus sections sung in Rapanui (marked each time with a rock cliché ‘one, two three, four’ count-in, shouted in Rapanui), so that these were faster and more energetic than the Spanish-language verses. Most significantly, the bilingual song-text reveals Mito’s clear understanding of how to elicit support from a nationalist audience. There is just enough Rapanui text to capture the attention of the audience, but not enough to generate any real feelings of isolation, and any sense of bewilderment is quickly erased by the Spanish-language rendering of the Rapanui chorus. The text of “*Voy Navegando, Navegando*” refers directly to issues of cultural and geographical translocation, carrying overtly political messages that extend past the material/symbolic dualism of culture identified and critiqued by Peter Wade.<sup>27</sup> Chilean audiences are not excluded from the full meaning of the text, and the song can be conceptualized as both *folklore* and mainstream pop.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Wade, “Working Culture: Making Cultural Identities in Cali, Colombia,” *Current Anthropology* 40.4 (1999): 449–71.

Geographically, the song-text is far more explicit, making direct references to transportation, distance (symbolized by the need for supplies), and traditional Polynesian astrological navigation. The boat full of fruit depicted in the first verse is symbolic rather than factual, but it serves to set up the final association that Mito draws between his ancestors' voyaging into an unknown ocean and his own personal exploration of an unknown and unfamiliar Chile. Even Mito's sense of indigenous alterity is expressed through a geographical reference, 'I'm not from the north, or the south', implying a subtle challenge to the mainstream conceptualization of Chilean geography, where the capital Santiago sits at the nation's 'centre' with peripheral zones located to the north and south along the Andes.

Back on Rapanui, "*Voy Navegando, Navegando*" was well received, even by many of Mito's former critics. It was an original composition, and therefore not perceived as a commercialistic appropriation of traditional music. More importantly, Mito had succeeded in bringing Rapanui music to national attention without relying on Chilean interlocutors. Shortly after the Festival del Huaso, Mito returned to Rapanui for the 2002 Tapati Rapa Nui festival as a guest of the Rapanui municipal government. He also performed some private concerts that were well attended by islander and tourist audiences. In confirmation of his contribution to a growing national profile for Rapanui performers, Mito began his Tapati Rapa Nui performance with the comment "¡Estamos presente! Estamos más cerca a Chile ahora [sic]" ('We are present! Now we are much closer to Chile').

### Fusión Rapa Nui

During 2002 and 2003, Mito was invited to appear on a number of Chilean television shows, including a guest appearance on TVN's *Tocando las Estrellas* ('Touching the Stars') talent quest as a Rapanui dance instructor.<sup>28</sup> In mid-2002 he provided part of the soundtrack for Chile's first animated feature film, *Ogú y Mampato en Rapanui*, based on a popular children's comic-book character and his magical journey to Rapanui. He collaborated with the well-established Chilean guitarist Joe Vascon-

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<sup>28</sup> A Chilean version of globally popular reality television franchise formats like *Pop Stars* and *Pop Idol*.

cellos on this film, which attracted immense press coverage on release. With astute cross-marketing strategy, Warner Chile signed Mito to produce the CD *Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui*, of (mostly) original music, including his songs from *Ogú y Mampato en Rapanui*. To capitalize on the film's success, Mito toured throughout Chile with the studio session musicians who accompanied him on the album, marketing themselves as 'Rapanui fusion', though Mito was the only Rapanui musician involved. Their collaboration was so successful that many of the session musicians agreed to continue performing with *Fusión Rapa Nui*, even travelling at their own expense to accompany Mito to the 2003 Tapati Rapa Nui. The saxophonist Renato, who had not travelled to Rapanui before, was demonstratively excited about working with Mito in this context:

This music is so different, so new. We do the same sort of jazz and rock that we have been doing forever, but Mito gives the music his own flavour [...] We were touring in Puerto Mont, I think, when Mito suggested that we should continue playing together. It seemed like a really good idea [because] our new brand of fusion has the potential to go far.<sup>29</sup>

The 'new brand of fusion' that Renato refers to is indeed unique within Chilean popular music, because it is anchored in cultural representation as well as stylistic hybridity. Strictly speaking, most Rapanui 'fusion' songs are not structural hybrids, as they draw their tonal frameworks exclusively from Western pop and jazz-rock fusion while eschewing characteristic Rapanui musical structures such as antiphonal vocal phrases, narrow melodic range, irregular metre, and trailing cadences.<sup>30</sup> The Rapanui aspect of *Fusión Rapa Nui* centres mainly on the visual image and instrumentation of Mito himself, and on the Rapanui lyrics of the songs. Far from just a syncretic overlay of indigenous language on Western musical structures, Mito's manipulation of language conveys a sense of Rapanui-ness by separating and privileging the text, and demonstrates an awareness of Chilean reception by persevering with inclusive bilingualism.

The song "*Rapa Nui*" provides a clear demonstration of these characteristics in the chorus. While the language used is Rapanui, the objects

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<sup>29</sup> Tr. Dan Bendrups (February 2003).

<sup>30</sup> McLean, *Weavers of Song: Polynesian Music and Dance*, 288.

and characters it refers to are known internationally by their Rapanui names, and a sense of the meaning can be divined in the chorus simply through the association of these terms. First, *moai* is one of the names colloquially given to the monolithic stone figures that Rapanui is world-famous for. Secondly, the term *manu uru*, meaning ‘wise men’, has entered Chilean parlance through its use in film and television contexts. Thirdly, the *rongo rongo* (or *kohau rongo rongo*) are the ancient wooden tablets containing the mysterious pictorial writing-system devised on Rapanui. Like the *moai*, the *rongo rongo* are referred to internationally by their Rapanui name.

<i>Rapa Nui</i>	Rapanui
<i>E henua era</i>	The [home]land
<i>O te moai</i>	Of the <i>moai</i>
<i>O te manu uru</i>	Of the <i>manu uru</i>
<i>O te rongo rongo</i>	Of <i>rongo rongo</i>
<i>O Rapa Nui</i>	Rapanui
<i>Henua era</i>	The [home]land
<i>O te ma ‘ohi</i>	Of the <i>ma ‘ohi</i> [Polynesian] people

“*Rapa Nui*,” chorus. English translation by the author.

Musically, the song “*Rapa Nui*” is replete with strong signifiers of Rapanui *folklore*. It presents a timbre combination of ukulele, accordion, guitar, and *bombo* instrumentation, and is sung entirely in the Rapanui language. The melodic line is, however, overtly Western in character. The chorus is broken into very short phrases not usually found in traditional Rapanui music, and part of the chorus resembles the iconic John Denver song “Take Me Home, Country Roads” in melodic contour and harmonic structure. This melodic similarity, whether deliberate or not, establishes a subliminal association between the obscure and unknown “*Rapa Nui*” and a much better-known song that is central to mainstream Western popular music. An unfamiliar audience, on hearing “*Rapa Nui*” for the first time, is therefore likely to associate the song with mainstream pop, without necessarily being able to identify specifically why.

Fusión Rapa Nui usually perform in rock-band attire lacking substantial Rapanui signifiers, making them the first Rapanui-associated band to do so. Without the powerful visual signifiers of traditional dress, Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui are free to explore many more musical

frameworks than Rapanui ensembles that perform solely within the historically mediated realm of Chilean *folklore*. The CD *Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui* contains examples of ska, jazz, and rock, as well as love-songs performed in the style of contemporary Latin crooners such as Marc Anthony, Cheyenne, Luis Miguel, and Ricky Martin. Intriguingly, the CD contains a dance remix of “*Rapa Nui*,” complete with the high-paced electronic drum-and-bass patterns characteristic of contemporary commercial ‘house’ music, which was briefly picked up and played by DJs in the Suecia nightclub district of Santiago in early 2003.

Since 2003, Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui have toured internationally to Spain and Mexico, and performed on a regular basis in Santiago. In late 2004, Mito was still drawing large crowds to live performances in Santiago’s *barrio* of Bellavista – a suburb otherwise known for salsa dance venues and nightclubs. Interestingly, these performances were attracting a growing crowd of Rapanui youth (islanders who were living temporarily in Chile for secondary and tertiary education) alongside mainstream Chilean audiences, and their presence on this scene has led to the recent establishment of a Rapanui-themed pub in Bellavista.

### Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui Since 2008

I returned to Chile in 2008 after a four-year absence. In Santiago, I discovered that Bellavista had undergone significant re-development, with new bars, restaurants, and a tourist-oriented shopping and dining precinct featuring indigenous handicrafts and exhibitions of contemporary art. Among the fifty or so outlets within this complex, one particular stand drew my attention. It had on display a range of Rapanui artefacts – carved statues in the likeness of *moai* and *kavakava* figures, shell necklaces, and other items associated with Rapanui. Among the merchandise was placed a prominent advertisement for ukulele lessons with the still famous Mito Manuatomatoma, who also turned out to be the proprietor of the stall.

I contacted Mito and learned that sales of his carvings were now providing a steady income to support his continuing musical endeavours. His ukulele students were few, owing to the difficulty of obtaining good-quality ukuleles in Chile and the general absence of the ukulele in Chilean music, but he was proud to claim that he was the first and only Polynesian ukulele teacher in Chile, and probably one of only a handful throughout



Figure 1: The Rapa Nui Pub in Bellavista, Santiago, decorated with characteristic Rapanui symbols. Photograph by the author.



Figure 2: Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui at the Tahai archaeological site. Photograph by the author.



Latin America. His fan base had grown as more and more Rapanui students arrived in Santiago who, unlike previous generations, were making effective use of social-networking internet sites to develop a sense of community. To these new arrivals, Mito was an established figure in Santiago, and his exploits at Olmué were enshrined in *folklore* history. Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui had undergone some changes in personnel, but they continued to perform and were due to return to Rapanui that week to once again perform for Tapati Rapa Nui. Alongside founding members of the band (Luis ‘Jano’ Díaz, Jaime ‘Jimmy’ González, and Mito’s older brother Jorge ‘Manuto’ Manutomatoma), the group now included the drummer Francisco Horta and the saxophonist Rodrigo ‘Iti’ Meza.

Two weeks later, I touched base with Mito and his band on Rapanui. Just as had happened with the first incarnation of Fusión Rapa Nui in 2003, the new band members were amazed by the physical and cultural environment of Rapanui, so different from that of urban mainland Chile. All of these musicians maintained active performance lives outside of their work with Mito, but their trip to Rapanui represented a deepening commitment to Mito’s work. Not only were they gaining first-hand experience of the Rapanui environment, but they were also immersing themselves in traditional forms of Rapanui music, the Rapanui community and language, and developing a relationship with Mito’s extensive network of family and friends. These musicians now sang along in many of Mito’s Rapanui-language songs, and even contributed to writing songs with Rapanui lyrics. Despite the limited income available to Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui, the band members’ presence on Rapanui reflected a desire to continue their participation for the long term.

During their stay, Mito and his band performed during Tapati Rapa Nui, and organized a launch party for their recently produced CD *Here Meta*.<sup>31</sup> This CD included elements of stylistic hybridity that had not previously appeared in Rapanui music, such as a Rapanui-language version of the well-known Bob Marley song “Jammin” complete with ‘toasting’ provided by the Chilean reggae artist Boomer, and a reggae version of the iconic Rapanui song “*Sausau*” – perhaps the best-known song in the perceived-traditional Rapanui repertoire. During the launch party, Mito invited his teenage son to perform, who obliged with an impressive rap

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<sup>31</sup> Mito y Fusión Rapa Nui, *Here Meta* (independent production, CD, 2008).

improvisation. While fleeting, this moment was a turning-point in Rapanui music history, as it was the first example of elements of hip-hop culture being included in a Rapanui performance.

On Rapanui, the band toured iconic landmarks and archaeological sites to take promotional photographs and film themselves for the purposes of producing a music video. Lacking a touring budget, the band members accompanied Mito on fishing trips and gathered fruit and vegetables from properties owned by Mito's extended family. Over the course of two weeks, they lived on what food they could gather in this way, and on occasional meals provided by Mito's friends and relatives. While Rapanui does have a fully modernized produce economy with butchers, bakers, supermarkets, and other outlets, the musicians' experience of Rapanui daily life more closely resembled that of islanders who continue to rely on a subsistence diet, something which is impossible in metropolitan Santiago and unusual in modernized, contemporary Chilean society.

Mito, meanwhile, took the opportunity to reconnect with family members, some of whom he had not seen for years. Despite his prominent

nent media profile, Mito's earnings were modest and the cost of flights to Rapanui made it impossible for him to return with regularity. Mito had now spent nearly a decade based in Santiago, and this is where his main fan base had developed. Due to his long absence, Mito was faced with the problem of not having an identifiable place within the local Rapanui music scene. Furthermore, his continued preference for a fusion repertoire of Rapanui, rock, and reggae influences, while immensely popular in Chile, was at odds with live music-making on Rapanui, where conceptual boundaries between traditional song forms and contemporary influences from global popular music are more stringently observed and mediated differently. These conditions affect Mito's capacity to earn a living as a performer at home.

## Conclusion

The music of Mito Manutomatoma embodies the tensions, difficulties, and possibilities offered by cultural translocation. As a young performer in a music culture dominated by notions of tradition and authenticity, he

learned the value of music as a vehicle for the expression of cultural identity. However, his subsequent success in the Chilean mass media led to musical experimentation that departed from the expected norms of Rapanui performers both in Chile and at home. This placed him in a position where each step towards commercial success in Chile drew him further away from Rapanui musical life, even though it was his evocation of Rapanui that made him marketable in Chilean popular music in the first place. Mito has made numerous attempts at re-engaging with Rapanui, reflected particularly in his film-music contributions, which would suggest that he is keenly aware of the tensions inherent in his culturally bound translocated music. Nevertheless, his ability to continue performing for a living depends on maintaining a public profile within urban Chilean popular culture.

Despite these challenges, or perhaps in response to them, Mito has succeeded in widening the performance niche for Rapanui musicians, both at home and in Chile, to include performance styles that do not conform to the stereotypical expectations of Rapanui cultural performance. With "*Voy Navegando, Navegando*," Mito translocated a marginalized indigenous culture to the heart of the Chilean mainstream. Simultaneously, he laid the groundwork for his own ambitions as a culture-bearer within his community in the future. He achieved this through a subtle integration of performance styles and influences associated with Rapanui, Chilean, and North American genres, creating a medium in which musical fusion and hybridity function as constructive elements in the articulation and mediation of cultural identity.

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# Interactive Environments and the Context of Heritage

## Culturally Engaged Research and Facilitation in Small-Island Societies<sup>1</sup>



PHILIP HAYWARD

**T**HIS ESSAY INTERWEAVES three strands of discussion concerning small-island cultures (SICs). These are offered in order to identify and advocate a method of research and engagement with SICs in a twenty-first-century context of globalizing economies and media operations. For the purposes of this discussion – and the projects referred to below – SICs are identified as those arising from populations living on small islands or small island groups which, whatever their geographical proximity or distance from more major centres, have a significant degree of cultural difference and/or autonomy from neighbouring larger communities and/or the nations that they politically adhere to. While precise thresholds of ‘smallness’ (in land mass and/or population size) are, to some degree, subjective, Eric Clark offers a useful working

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to this essay’s initial presentation in Dunedin in October 2004, a summary version of section III was delivered at the First International Conference on Small Island Cultures, held in Kagoshima, Japan in February 2005 and aspects are also included in Hayward, *Bounty Chords: Music, Dance and Cultural Heritage on Norfolk and Pitcairn Islands* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2006). My thanks to Jonas Baes, Godfrey Baldacchino, Denis Crowdy, Steven Feld, Henry Johnson, Junko Konishi, Danny Long, and Eve Semple for the various assistances and inputs to the essay.

definition of ‘islandness’ based on insularity, with smallness as an extreme within this:

Three variables stand out as central to insularity: size, distance to a continental mainland and intensity of contact and exchange with other places... other things being equal, the smaller, the more insular – with Manhattan and Greenland underlining the weight of ‘other things equal’.<sup>2</sup>

For the purposes of this essay, this strategic definition will suffice, particularly since the research locales upon which this essay draws are ones that congregate relatively unproblematically within the lower band of land mass and population size. Specifically, this essay draws on SICs which I and my colleagues in the Department of Contemporary Music Studies at Macquarie University, Sydney have worked with over the last decade: namely, the Whitsunday archipelago (off mid-north-coast Queensland, Australia), Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island (south-eastern Pacific), East New Britain and the Mioko islands (Papua New Guinea), the Ogasawara islands (in Japan’s far south-eastern territorial waters), and Pitcairn Island. (Together with these, this account is also informed by additional secondary-source research on Atlantic comparators, such as Tristan da Cunha, St Helena, and the Scilly Islands.)

Drawing on these specific examples and references to a broad field of research, this essay sets out to do the following:

- a) characterize aspects of the relationship between natural and social heritages in SICs;
- b) argue the relevance of an ecological approach to SICs; and
- c) identify the most socially appropriate and sustainable way for external researchers to engage with SICs.




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<sup>2</sup> Eric Clark, “The ballad dance of the Faroese: Island biocultural geography in an age of globalization,” *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie/Journal of Economic and Social Geography* 95.3 (2004): 288.

## I. The Situation of Small-Island Cultures

SICs that have existed across several generations – let alone those whose origins stretch back into antiquity – are simultaneously fragile and tenacious. This fragility is caused by their low population, their limited resources, their minimal crisis/contingency safeguards, and their isolation from adjacent sources of support.<sup>3</sup> The tenacity of SICs is due to precisely the same factors. In his recent volume *Collapse: How Societies Chose to Fail or Succeed*, Jared Diamond<sup>4</sup> outlines five factors that determined whether societies (in general) sustain or collapse:

- 1) the degree and nature of the damage that human societies inflict on their environment;
- 2) climate change;
- 3) the degree and nature of hostility of neighbouring societies;
- 4) the degree and nature of support of neighbouring societies; and
- 5) the nature and effectiveness of society's response to the above factors.

Significantly for the purposes of this study, Diamond applies this framework to a number of Pacific SICs – pre-contact Rapa Nui (Easter Island), Tikopia, Pitcairn, and the Henderson islands – together with the medieval Viking Atlantic empire that spanned Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroes. While Diamond's principal focus is on social viability, we can also examine and inflect his list from the perspective of cultural continuity and development. There are two levels to this. The first is the manner in which SICs interact with and are dependent on the broader social factors that envelop them. The second is the manner in which cultural factors replicate this pattern.

Unsurprisingly – given the fragility/resilience aspect of small-island societies (where specific local factors are more obviously apparent than in cocooned metropolitan societies where place and location is increasingly

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<sup>3</sup> See, for discussion of this, Ilan Kelman, "What are islands, isolated geographies, and small states?" *Island Vulnerability* (c.2005), <http://www.islandvulnerability.org>

<sup>4</sup> Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Chose to Fail or Survive* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005): 11–15.



abstract and/or virtual) – SICs tend to reflect their geo-physical and environmental situation explicitly in various aspects of their cultural production.<sup>5</sup> With regard to the second aspect, ‘damage’ can be considered in terms of the impact of new social practices and media forms on existing cultural ones. In almost all SICs I have worked with (and/or researched), the introduction of television (in particular) has diminished live and/or social music performance. ‘Damage’ is, however, a somewhat over-stretched concept here, since other aspects of the informational and entertainment cultures of small-island societies can be seen to have been enhanced by access to new media and communicative possibilities (particularly those of new forms such as the Internet). While climate change doesn’t cross over so easily as a cultural factor (unless we force the analogy and consider socio-economic globalization as somehow akin to global warming), relationships to neighbouring societies are relevant. While none of the SICs I have studied have had to engage with actively hostile neighbours, all have had to deal with initiatives and interventions from colonial/neocolonial powers that have been either detrimental and/or opposed. In some instances, such as the cultural revival of Norfolk Island language in the 1980s, this has been a direct response to political interference from outside (from the Australian Commonwealth, in Norfolk’s case). The ‘degree and nature’ of cultural ‘support’ from neighbours has had discernibly different impacts in the Pacific cultures I have identified than in mid-Atlantic ones. Various regional and international initiatives – particularly the Festivals of South Pacific Arts – have boosted and inspired many Pacific SICs. The DCMS’s own (far more modest) collaborations and facilitations have also played their part in assisting continuation and development. By contrast, the lack of any such inputs and encouragements to mid-Atlantic cultures has resulted in declines in repertoire, performance, and sense of cultural significance. The nature of external hostility/support is also significant in shaping local cultural reactions to all the above – the greater the external acknowledgement and validation, the greater the local support for cultural continuance and development.

In an historical context, issues of cultural *heritage* and its relation to the broader environment are central. The DCMS’s understanding of this inter-

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<sup>5</sup> See Philip Hayward, *Bounty Chords*.

relation converged with – and was encouraged by – a set of documents published to accompany UNESCO’s ‘Year of Cultural Heritage’ (YCH) in 2002 (archived online at <http://portal.unesco.org>), particularly the following assertion:

Today, the notion of heritage is an open one which can develop new objects and put forward new meanings as it reflects living culture rather than an ossified image of the past. We have become aware over the last thirty years that nature and culture cannot be separated in our approach to heritage if we are to render a true account of the diversity of cultural manifestations and particularly those in which a close link is expressed between human beings and their natural environment.<sup>6</sup>

Our continuing research supports the perception that the most productive study of culture should seek to *implicate* specific genres (such as music and dance) in an interactive, shifting continuum of heritage. While any study of specific forms must, necessarily, *extricate* these from a wider field (in order to focus on them), it is important to acknowledge and analyze the skeins of meanings and associations that bind them to broader sweeps of heritage.

## II. Pacific Environments and Ecologies

In our work over the last decade, a prime model – and principle-as-manifesto – has been one adopted from ‘green’ philosophy: namely, that just as it is important to maintain biodiversity in (and *through*) diverse local habitats, so it is important to maintain cultural diversity and distinct local heritages. In order to study and apply ourselves practically to contexts in which we have worked, it has been necessary to attempt to understand culture’s position within (interactions) of the human, environmental, and locational contexts of island cultures. In this, our work has been convergent with the development of island studies within the discipline of cultural geography. Adapting the notion of ‘biogeography’ (the study of the geographical distribution of species and the manner and history of their interaction with local environments), a number of theorists have used the notion of ‘biocultural geography’ to address the nature of human societies

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<sup>6</sup> Virginia Teehan, “Cultural Heritage,” *Heritage Outlook* 6 (2003): <http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/outlook/contents6/14.html> (accessed 24 June 2008).

and cultures and their relation to environments. Eric Clark has characterized the study of island biocultural geography, in particular, as a strategic and informative project, contending that it

[...] holds considerable potential to contribute to our understanding of processes of globalisation and how these are involved in generating and linking ‘the sixth extinction’ – the first such marked fall in biodiversity generated by the dominion and activities of one species – and the ‘extinction of experience’ [...] associated with a coeval decline in cultural diversity, most obviously manifested in the death of languages [...].<sup>7</sup>

While biodiversity is a useful point of orientation for island studies, human culture and the natural environment are obviously significantly different entities, in that forms of culture are far more fluid and volatile than biological species and heritage is far less fixed and able to be ‘restored’ than local biological habitats. At this point we take a cue from the founding principles of the quadrennial Festivals of Pacific Arts (discussed in various essays in this volume). The inaugural FPA was held in Suva in 1972 with the express aim of *preserving* traditional forms of culture, *protecting* traditional culture against swamping by outside cultures, and *developing* local culture.<sup>8</sup> In ecological terms, the first two aims are also those of environmentalists, the latter – and its conjunction with the former – are a point of difference. The FPAs were established to preserve and promote traditional cultures simultaneously with their development. The emphasis here is not so much on a purist ‘freezing’ and protection of traditional cultures as maintenance of the old along with the new.

With particular regard to Pacific cultures, I have regularly recalled the principles and components of the FPA agenda while familiarizing myself with other recent research in Pacific communities. Each time I read some scholar’s (learned and conscientious) account of some (supposedly) doomed and disappearing practice, I have recoiled at the passivity involved. Time and again, I have also recalled a different text that has become something of a shadow referent for many of the academic work and strategies I have pursued. The text is a novel by a British writer, Clive

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<sup>7</sup> Clark, “The ballad dance of the Faroese,” 285.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.festival-pacific-arts.org/hisuk.htm>

Barker, best known for his metaphysical horror stories and films. Entitled *Sacrament*,<sup>9</sup> the book follows the parallel and intersecting paths of two linked characters, a supernatural being in human form named Jacob Steep and a photographer named Will Rabjohns. Each is preoccupied with the extinction of species of animals. Steep roams the Earth with his consort Rosa McGee, finding and killing the last surviving members of a species, while Rabjohns records the last moments of endangered animals and their environments. The similarities between the academic documenting final cultural moments in parallel with global and local enterprises' destruction of unique local habitats are troubling ones. In my case, they proved so troubling as to galvanize my resolve to pursue a different path.

### III. Culturally Engaged Research and Facilitation

Between 1999 and 2004, I worked with my Macquarie University colleague Denis Crowdy and various postgraduate students to develop an approach we came to term Culturally Engaged Research and Facilitation (CERF), which we deployed in our interaction with the SICs discussed above. From its outset, CERF was consciously conceived of as an activist project. It is one of the paradoxes of much anthropological and ethnomusicological work that it tries to explore and document the inner workings of societies and cultures in an essentially passive manner. 'Deep contact' is seen as exemplary, whereas active involvement and development are always wrapped as problematic. Even with the tendency in ethnomusicology to learn music through traditional methods of training and/or participation in community music-making, the emphasis has been on learning a set of established musical (and knowledge) 'grooves'.

One of the more welcome developments in anthropology and ethnomusicology (and linguistics) over the last two decades has been the combination of traditional forms of scholarly research with subsequent community-orientated and/or community-beneficial outcomes. The practical-political result of such research is made manifest as a complement to its gathering and analysis. CERF retains a major element of traditional academic inquiry, in that scholarly documentation, analysis, and historical research is regarded as a primary and essential part of its project. In com-

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<sup>9</sup> Clive Barker, *Sacrament* (London: HarperCollins, 1996).

mon with more progressive developments in other disciplines, it also advocates a shift to thinking of members of local cultures as *collaborators* rather than research *subjects*. As other researchers have found, this approach has major benefits all round. Collaborative research is a reciprocal, engaged, and interactive mode that can prove far more productive than passive observation. Yet it also raises an immediate issue. It is clearly not enough for the researcher to ask someone to collaborate with them in undertaking *their* research. The collaborative aspect requires consideration of what the collaborator wants.

Our research and collaboration with various SICs has been enabled by (and is reflective of) the needs, desires (and sometimes unintended stimuli) provided by collaborators. The needs and desires of collaborators are not simply those that exist fully formed and ready to be asked of the CERF worker, they are also ones that can be stimulated and formed through discussion of what the CERF worker can realistically offer.

In our CERF work, at least, traditional academic research and publication form a component of a series of collaborative interactions. Other activities vary depending on the nature of the community and individuals involved. Some insight into the nature of these can be ascertained from the following list of reciprocal activities my DCMS colleagues and I undertook while working with Norfolk and Pitcairn Island performers and cultural activists in 1999–2005:

- 1) Transfers of old vinyl records, reel-to-reel tape, and cassette tapes to CD for individuals.
- 2) Location recordings (using a digital minidisk recorder) that were subsequently transferred and mastered to CD format for musicians, either for individual reference or as the content of self-released CDs.<sup>10</sup>
- 3) Location recordings (using a digital minidisk recorder) that were subsequently modified, enhanced, and mastered to CD and duplicated, either as a small private run<sup>11</sup> or for manufacture and retail as a self-released CD.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Such as Eric Craig & Don Christian-Reynolds, “Unplugged” (self-released, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Such as Kath King, “Teach me how fer lew” (DCMS, 2002)

<sup>12</sup> Meralda Warren, “Pitcairn Songs” (DCMS, 2000)

- 4) The studio recording, mastering, and packaging of an album of material for commercial release.<sup>13</sup>
- 5) The recording of a CD album on location on Norfolk Island for commercial release using portable studio equipment.<sup>14</sup>
- 6) Funding, design input, and facilities assistance for song contests.<sup>15</sup>
- 7) Funding and institutional assistance for performers to visit island events.<sup>16</sup>
- 8) Assistance in arranging performances of artists at international events.<sup>17</sup>
- 9) Promotion of artists through media interviews, mail-outs (etc.).
- 10) Provision of professional advice about music, education, and funding opportunities; writing letters of support (etc.).<sup>18</sup>

While we are not claiming any originality in contributing the above (as researchers from various fields have provided similar ‘extended services’ to other communities), it is pertinent to note that the activities go beyond those usually expected of a researcher and are more akin to those expected of/provided by a community arts worker. The professional function of the latter is to enable communities to collaborate in artistic enterprises that stimulate bonds and interactions and produce work that is expressive of those communities. While discussion of the history of community arts activity is beyond the scope of this essay,<sup>19</sup> it is notable that the principal

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<sup>13</sup> George ‘Toofie’ Christian, “Pili Lornga N.I.” (DCMS, 2001)

<sup>14</sup> George ‘Toofie’ Christian, “White Rose” (DCMS, 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Such as those held on Norfolk Island in 2001 and 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Such as Denis Crowdy, Erik Damberg, and Ruth Wilson’s visit to the 2002 Norfolk Island Multicultural Festival.

<sup>17</sup> Such as George ‘Toofie’ Christian’s appearance at the Australian National Folk Festival in Canberra in 2003 and at the Canadian–Australian music conference in St Johns, Newfoundland, in June 2005.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to other activities on the island to assist research collaborators (driving, moving equipment, childcare, erecting a watertank, running other errands etc.).

<sup>19</sup> Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard provide a useful interpretation and advocacy of community arts work (based on North American experience) in terms of culturally democratic *animation*. Adams & Goldbard. “Animation – what’s in a name?” (1982/1996), <http://www.wwed.org/animation.html>

critiques of this activity have been in terms of the (implicit) assumption that communities require intervention; the nature of the interventions supplied; and the relation of their organization and outcomes to pre-existing community networks and expressive traditions. The similarity of aspects of CERF work to community arts facilitation necessitates consideration of these critiques.

Western community arts work largely originated in the 1960s and was derived from models of local experience in communities that were perceived to have suffered from socio-economic disadvantage and various kinds of social disruption, decay and/or demoralization. Community arts work was seen (by its advocates and practitioners, at least) as a corrective and empowering project that allowed communities to create focal activities and channels of expression. Its agendas and, often, chosen activities and media were, however, largely imported into the communities that workers dealt with. As such, it was open to criticism that it did not so much encourage and facilitate distinct, autonomous cultural expression as replicate a series of cultural practices (community murals, inner-city garden projects, video polemics etc.) in different localities.

One fundamental difference between established Western community arts practice and CERF work is that CERF is fundamentally committed to (the FPA model of) preserving, protecting, and developing *distinct* local practices. This necessitates a more responsive, reactive perception of local cultural character and its potential. It is important to acknowledge that any individual or enterprise comes laden with ideology – in the form of values, preferred models, and perceptions that have been inculcated through institutional training and broader cultural osmosis. Far from claiming or attempting to transcend an ideological position (and thereby bias), CERF operates within a specific ideological position. This said, it attempts to minimize its presumption of required intervention and privileged practices in favour of flexible, locally appropriate activities. The question remains however, of the extent (if any) to which it is legitimate to ‘interfere’ in local culture: i.e. to encourage and/or facilitate developments that may not have occurred without external intervention.

With regard to the SICs we have worked with, my colleagues and I have clearly intervened through our support and facilitation of local songwriters’ recordings. Even if it were simply the ‘benign’ intervention of

helping record, release, and promote songs that already existed, it might be considered to be interference. The fact that we have (deliberately) sought to stimulate the production of new songs represents more than facilitation. In this regard, the purist might want to identify our actions as a *pollution* of pre-existent music cultures. But while it is possible to make such a case, the purist would also have to consider the string of cultural outsiders who have exercised a powerful influence on the music and general culture of the Pacific SICs we have worked with since their foundations. Settlers, whalers, whalers' wives, missionaries, educators, visiting artists and others – not to mention various external media forms – have all played an important role in developing local music and dance culture. In this regard, as my colleague Steven Feld suggested to me,<sup>20</sup> individuals such as CERF workers are just the latest in a long line of foreigners who have connected with local communities in order to follow and deploy their own agendas. From this perspective, communities such as Norfolk and Pitcairn are not so much isolated, pristine environments as localities within a global matrix that experience and accommodate aspects of cultural change as part of their dynamic.

Aside from Christianity and the imposition of colonial power, late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century globalism (and its regional fractals) has provided the most significant impact on local Pacific cultures experienced over the last three hundred years. It can be seen to have unrolled in a dual form, as both specific media imperialism (through conscious attempts to destabilize and penetrate local markets) and as the indiscriminate 'collateral' impact of internationalization in general (GATT, the general agreement on trades and tariffs, being a prime example). The volume of external input increasingly challenges the limits and elasticity of local cultural identity. Compared to these massive forces, CERF workers are minor players. Their influence is dependent on various factors, chief among which is the degree to which they establish trust with communities and find collaborators. Assessment of the CERF worker's success and/or the appropriateness of their actions and outcomes is, of course, highly complex. Whereas there is no requirement for globalism to be *anything but* indiscriminate in its impact, the CERF worker is accountable on

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<sup>20</sup> In the course of a wide-ranging discussion with the author conducted in Sydney in Spring 2001.



several levels. Most importantly, they are responsible and answerable to the community. This characterization only gets us so far, though, since communities are inevitably diverse, with various factions and various concepts of cultural purity and integrity (and micro-personal perceptions of these).

Ultimately, then, CERF is far more risky and problematic than conventional research, whose professed distance and non-disruption of its object of study gives it a distinct (if often dubious) rhetorical armour. There are no hard-and-fast guidelines for CERF but, rather, a broad set of protocols that serve to orientate its workers and their projects. As identified and formulated in the projects described above, these comprise:

- a) *Methodological, contextual, and precedential study* – This is the familiar territory of academic training, literature study and consideration of methodologies. By the study of precedents, I refer to research into similar cultures and cultural situations and into research conducted in them.
- b) *Possession of relevant skills/access to relevant resources and expertise* – Intellectual training is not on its own sufficient to ensure the effectiveness of CERF activities; other skills and access to equipment and facilities are also essential. The nature of these varies with specific fields of activity.
- c) *Project design* – This involves the CERF worker's being able to formulate and modify project design with regard to the perceptions and suggestions of the communities involved (rather than the simple retention of a provisional design or the imposition of one that does not complement local perceptions). It also depends on:
- d) *The ability to acquit project design and/or to sustain continuing project development* – These require the CERF worker to ensure (to the best of their abilities and facilitation) that they can acquit the project they design and agree to undertake. If they cannot, they should either only agree to undertake a suitable part of this or else obtain assistance with the broader project.
- e) *Returning produced materials/ensuring circulation of materials* – It is increasingly recognized that any materials produced by a researcher should be returned (in appropriate forms) to the in-

dividuals and communities involved. There are various levels to this. At its most basic, this involves the provision of scholarly publications to individuals and community resource centres (such as libraries); more importantly, it involves the provision of what might be considered 'byproduct' by the researcher – word-processed copies of various accounts or transcribed cultural texts, audio or audiovisual recordings etc. to various members of communities.

- f) *Producing locally accessible and useful materials* – In addition to written and/or audiovisual material aimed at a scholarly audience, the CERF worker should also aim to present their research to communities in various appropriate formats, through talks, accessibly written essays, locally orientated publications etc. presented in appropriate style(s) (and/or language[s]).
- g) *Assistance with the publication/presentation of cultural work by local producers* – In parallel with f), the CERF worker should assist in the public presentation and circulation of cultural work in a manner that is advantageous to the cultural producers concerned.
- h) *Access to funding/funding knowledge networks capable of acquitting the above* – Aspects d–g (above) all require funding and resource assistance, and it is a prerequisite of any CERF activity that the worker should have access to either (and ideally both) designated funding or schemes for provision of funding for CERF activities. Such provision should be a prerequisite for any CERF project (not something that a CERF worker should be expected to conjure up as a test of ingenuity and/or undertake as part of a research rite of passage).
- i) *Commitment and ability to impart skills and facilitate autonomous production and development* – The essential corollary of the CERF worker's involvement as an external agent is that they communicate and convey as many of their skills and knowledges to the local community as possible to ensure that local, self-initiated projects can develop along with those the CERF worker has been involved in.

CERF work is essentially interventionary, in that it involves itself in stimulating and facilitating cultural activity (within the ambit of local cultural heritage). A further level of intervention is contributed when the CERF worker is an outsider to the community concerned (a common though by no means necessary or universal situation<sup>21</sup>). Whatever the status of the individual worker, one of CERF's aims is to empower the community to develop autonomously (rather than slip into a relation of dependence on the worker). At the same time, it must be acknowledged that CERF is not simply a package that can be delivered; it is one that requires servicing (in both senses of the word); periodic upgrades (of technology, knowledge, and training); and also benefits from being linked into and informed by the experiences of communities and initiatives in other regions.

In these respects, small-island (geographically isolated) cultures are no differently placed than any geographically located community on a 'mainland' (or elsewhere). Specialized centres and facilities cannot be replicated in each and every community. The ideal is a mixture of as many locally accessible and autonomously used facilities as possible with as much access to external facilities and equipment as is necessary (the balance changing at different times and in different circumstances). This recognizes not only that technology changes at a rate that small communities (let alone arts and academic institutions) find it hard to keep up with, but also that information agendas, processes, and bureaucracies are also constantly modifying. Technologies also 'leap', new hardware and software offering new potentials while previous technologies are still being sought and applied. Rather than dependency, we need to imagine a global grid of resources and communications that communities can access, share, and dialogue within.

For many more politically progressive researchers, much of the above will be an increasingly assumed 'common-sense' ethical framework for practical research. It has been one of the more reassuring aspects of late-

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<sup>21</sup> On Norfolk Island, for instance, I have worked with the local museum curator Eve Semple, who has an active approach to developing the museum's project and community links informed by her training in Australian universities. The Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta's (Cultural Centre's) community fieldworker scheme is another notable regional example.

twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century academia that there is a declining cohort of vampiric researchers (in the field of culture, at least). Few researchers would be prepared to admit to simply latching on to informants and communities in order to extract knowledge ‘blood’ and then flying on to use its nutrition to further academic careers; far fewer still would seek to publicly defend such a position (even within terms of an inflated academic rhetoric of the virtues of knowledge-gathering and theorization as worthwhile things-in-themselves).

What is still prevalent, however, is an assumption that the CERF components identified above should eventuate as a gift – a form of beneficence – from the committed researcher working with a deserving (i.e. compliant and [ideally] grateful) community. The model here is that of the religious missionary or altruist doing ‘good works’. As should be immediately apparent, such a model is so untenable as to be offensive. Conventional researchers and CERF workers alike are involved in remunerated and/or or grant assisted professional activities that require the input and assistance of the communities they target. If beneficence still has any currency as something that communities and external groups acknowledge, it simply shows that traditional researchers and the research enterprise have tapped into a persuasive paradigm that continues to cover itself with rhetorical smoke and mirrors. Perhaps, in this regard, a further category needs to be added to the above list:

- j) *The ability to communicate the nature of CERF activity in such a manner as to demystify and enable it.*

In terms of *all* of the above, my colleagues and I would argue that it is a fundamental ethical responsibility of universities and research and arts funding organizations to affirm and support CERF’s model of engaging with cultural communities. As should be apparent, this is a radical idealistic call in the current intellectual, educational, and cultural climate of the West. In the early-twenty-first century, ‘economically rationalist’ notions developed in the 1980s have come to dominate research policy and funding to the extent that any alternative approaches are openly denigrated and disadvantaged by national, regional, and institutional bureaucracies – choked as ‘deviant’, dismissed as ‘naive’, and disparaged at every turn. With a few exceptions, CERF activities continue to be largely dependent

on its workers' successful exploitation of niches within institutional and research bureaucracies and an extension of their work into collaborative projects at one remove from their principal professional activities. Commendable as this might be, it must also be fundamental to CERF's broader project for it to seek and obtain a firmer and more facilitated institutional base and international network.

#### IV. Conclusion: Strategic Planning for the Twenty-First Century

As discussed above, my colleagues and I developed the notion of CERF in 1999–2005 through reflection on activities conducted with SICs and through familiarization with similar projects on other islands. We were also informed by dialogue with colleagues engaged in parallel work and reflections, such as Jonas Baes.<sup>22</sup> We should also acknowledge the importance of Baes's reflections on the nature of ethnomusicological fieldwork in the Philippines<sup>23</sup> as an influence and as a forceful reminder of the need to consider factors such as human rights, land rights, and security as fundamentally intertwined with the maintenance and development of culture.

While the DCMS's focus has been primarily on musical activity in a specific area of the west and central Pacific, we have been aware that the CERF approach was one that had wider application and ramifications. Contact with a group of interdisciplinary researchers concerned with the Ogasawara islands<sup>24</sup> who were also committed to community facilitation and development proved insightful in expanding our agenda. The work of the linguist Danny Long (from Tokyo Metropolitan University) and the ethnomusicologist Junko Konishi (from Shizuoka National University) was particularly convergent with ours, and an exchange of expertise and engagement took place, with me accompanying Konishi and Long on a research visit to Ogasawara in mid-2003 and Long accompanying me to

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<sup>22</sup> Jonas Baes contributed to a research colloquium entitled 'Trajectories' that we hosted at Macquarie University in 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Jonas Baes, "'That's Ethnomusicology!' – or – 'Could my study of songs help indigenous Philippine peoples in disputes over ancestral domain?'" *Perfect Beat* 5.4 (January 2001).

<sup>24</sup> The Ogasawara islands have a history of occupancy by a mixed European/North American and Pacific Islander community and Japanese migrants, several linguistic hybrids, and syncretic music and dance practices.

Norfolk Island in early 2004. By far the most productive aspects of these visits were our mutual opportunities to meet local cultural activists and to familiarize ourselves with locally originated projects and their perceptions, needs, and ambitions. What became apparent was that there were many factors in common between the communities (and other similar ones that we had been involved with).<sup>25</sup>

One outcome of this sharing of knowledge and contacts was our resolve to initiate an international network of small-island cultural activists and researchers. This was established in mid-2004 as the Small Island Cultures Research Initiative (SICRI). Its designation as an *initiative* (rather than a society or association) reflected the manner in which we designed it as a coalition of researchers and island activists and communities involved in collaboration, networking, and development. While the specific CERF designation and agenda was one developed by the DCMS at Macquarie University, our shared vision for SICRI was one in which CERF's principles were fundamental (and which inform the organization's "Background and Mission" statement).<sup>26</sup>

One key aspect of SICRI is its intended function as a communication network. While we were fully aware that the Internet is far from the universal, transglobal service it is often hyped as, we envisaged an online resource function as a key aspect of SICRI's operation. In addition to the

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<sup>25</sup> This is not to argue that the CERF model is (necessarily) universally applicable, it is at an early stage of design and testing in different locations and with researchers from different research cultures and academic 'heritages'.

<sup>26</sup> SICRI Mission statement ([www.sicri.org](http://www.sicri.org)), which states: "SICRI was established in 2004 to facilitate communication and collaboration between researchers and cultural practitioners working with small island communities; SICRI's principal aim is to research and assist the maintenance and development of the language, music, dance, folkloric and media cultures of small island communities. It aims to identify potential research partners and appropriate strategies and funding sources to benefit small island cultures and those researching them; the key to SICRI's activities is the principle that external researchers should develop their projects in consultation with island communities and should reciprocate such co-operation with appropriate assistance and facilitation of local cultural initiatives; SICRI operates with reference to broader concepts of cultural heritage" – see UNESCO, "What is Cultural Heritage and Types of Cultural Heritage," UNESCO *Year of Cultural Heritage* (2003): <http://portal.unesco.org> (accessed May 2002); consideration of island communities as (simultaneously) isolated and connected; and is concerned to address the impacts and potentials offered by tourism.

development of SICRI's main site, my colleague Eve Klein designed an online bibliographic database and project register ([www.sicref.org](http://www.sicref.org)) entitled 'SICREF' that was launched in February 2005 at the inaugural international meeting of SICRI, held at Kagoshima University (Kyushu, Japan) at the Research Center for the Pacific Islands.<sup>27</sup>

Fittingly enough, for such a culturally vibrant community and one that has been involved in collaborative interactions with CERF workers over the last eight years, the second international SICRI conference was held on Norfolk Island in February 2006, chaired by Henry Johnson and hosted by Norfolk Island Museum with the assistance of the Community Arts Association. The event incorporated presentations on various aspects of Norfolk Island culture, cultural policies, and initiatives to the international delegates, and sought to encourage discussion of these and SICs internationally. As such, both SICRI and the conference are projects that have been envisaged as interactive and collaborative, positioning island cultures as developing entities in twenty-first-century contexts (rather than as peripheral relics of cultural diversity that flicker on the edge of disappearance in an increasingly 'grayed-out' international cultural order).

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# Constructing an ‘Other’ from Your ‘Own’

## Localizing, Nationalizing, and Globalizing Nēnēzu (Nenes)



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HENRY JOHNSON

### Introduction

IT WAS A SUMMER’S EVENING in 2003 in Koza (Okinawa City) on the island of Okinawa, just over 1500 km southwest from the hustle and bustle of Tōkyō. I had taken a bus from the city of Naha, Okinawa prefecture’s capital, to see the all-female group Nēnēzu (‘elder sisters’; also romanized as Nenes). I had heard Nēnēzu back in the 1990s when they became big on the world-music scene, making European tours, appearing at the Newport Jazz Festival and WOMAD (World of Music, Arts and Dance), and working with artists such as China Sadao, Peter Gabriel, Ry Cooder, Sakamoto Ryūichi, and Michael Nyman. I was also taken aback by their distinctly Okinawan mix of music for the *sanshin* (three-string snake-skin lute) with popular music (i.e. Western-sounding pop) and other world-music styles.

Waiting for the venue to open, I was increasingly surrounded not by the usual younger audience that is mainly associated with popular music, but more by middle-aged and older women, a generation I had connected, rather, with Japanese traditional music performances on instruments such as the *koto* (thirteen-string zither) or *shamisen* (the mainland version of the *sanshin*). But, then again, this music was not typical popular music; it was hybrid music: mixing the old and the new, celebrating Okinawan

roots in an age of global flows and cultural routes, and maintaining a vocal quality that was not too far removed from some styles of Okinawan folk music.

There was another aspect of the group that was very different from when I had first been attracted to their neo-traditional popular sound. The members were completely different. Their manager, China Sadao, was the same, but the line-up had changed from somewhat ageing members to a much younger group who brought with them a slightly different take on the music. I wanted to know more about the group's background and the phenomenon of changing their line-up. What was the history of the group? How did they mix the old and the new? How could they simply change their members?

This is a study of a Japanese popular music group from Okinawa in connection with the localization, nationalization, and globalization of its music. Nēnēzu is discussed in connection with its place in the world-music industry<sup>1</sup> and with regard to its role in creating images of an 'Other' within and across local (i.e. Okinawan), national (i.e. Japanese), and global cultural spheres.<sup>2</sup> The discussion argues that the popularity of

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\* An earlier version of this essay entitled "Nationalisms and Globalization in Okinawan Popular Music: Nēnēzu and Their Place In World Music Contexts" was presented at the 13th New Zealand Asian Studies Society International Conference, University of Otago, New Zealand, 1999, and was published in the collection of essays that was a result of that conference. See Henry Johnson, "Nationalisms and Globalization in Okinawan Popular Music: Nēnēzu and Their Place in World Music Contexts," in *Asian Nationalism in an Age of Globalisation*, ed. Roy Starrs (London: Curzon, 2001). The current essay is a re-working and extension of the previous research. The changes that have taken place since that time with Nēnēzu have necessitated further study, which included a period of field research in Okinawa in 2003. I am particularly grateful to the University of Otago for making this possible. In the text, Japanese names are given using the Japanese manner of placing family name first. This is reversed in references, following English practice.

<sup>1</sup> The equivocal term 'world music' was coined by the British-based popular-music industry in 1987 and first used by the US record company Folkways. The significance of this media-made genre of commercial music in contemporary cultural studies is highlighted by Richard Middleton, who notes that "as the transnational corporations plunder the musical assets of the Third World, 'world music' can hardly be a neutral term"; Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open UP, 1990): 293.

<sup>2</sup> There are many conflicting uses of the terms 'Other/other' and 'otherness' in the field of cultural studies, and I use the terms herein to refer to a person or object that is

the group is partly a result of the cultural dynamics in identity-formation between a nation and one of its distinct regions. The production and mass distribution of the popular music of one regional culture is concerned not only with cultural hegemony, but, because of the commercialization of a home-grown roots music, is also a contribution to a reaction against a dominant culture. I argue that in Japanese roots or world-music consumption, both mainland Japanese and Okinawans help construct an 'Other' from their 'own'.

Over the past few decades, Okinawan popular music in all its forms has captured the attention of several scholars (Japanese and non-Japanese), perhaps in part thanks to the distinct sound of the music when blended with traditional Okinawan forms, and also owing to the unique historical place of Okinawa in the Japanese nation-state: politically, culturally, and ethnically. In a contemporary scholarly environment that has opened up the boundaries of music research on Japan,<sup>3</sup> never before has the neo-traditional popular music from Okinawa been so visible and relevant, whether through the popular media of album sales, live performances, or academic scholarship. Indeed, scholarly work on Okinawan popular music has steadily increased over the past decade or so. For example, Japanese literature on the island's and prefecture's music includes the work of several key thinkers,<sup>4</sup> and even the more popular or general writings of

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bracketed as culturally different in a 'self'/other' nexus of identity construction. Cf. *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas*, ed. Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2004); Osamu Tada, *Okinawa Imēji no Tanjō: Aoi Umi no Karuchuraru Sutadīzu* (Tōkyō: Tōyō Keizai Shinpō-sha, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Ian Condry, *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 2006), Jennifer Milioto Matsue, *Making Music in Japan's Underground: The Tokyo Hardcore Scene* (New York: Routledge, 2009), and Carolyn Stevens, *Japanese Popular Music: Culture, Authenticity and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Susumu Kumada, "20 Seiki Okinawa ni okeru Popyurā Ongaku no Tenkai: Shin Min'yō kara Okinawa Poppu e," in *Shominzoku no Ongaku o Manabu Hito no tame ni*, ed. Tetsuo Sakurai & Nobuo Mizuno (Kyōto: Sekai Shisōsha, 2005); Susumu Kumada & Kazuhiro Shinjō, "Okinawa Poppu to wa Nan datta no ka, Ushinawareta 90 Nendai o Megutte," *Wander* 34 (2003): 9–35; Hiroshi Ogawa, "Nihon no Popyurā Ongaku ni Arawareta Okinawa," in *Oriente Gensō no naka no Okinawa*, ed. Fukazawa Tōru (Tōkyō: Kaifūsha, 1995): 149–73; Miki Takahashi, "Okinawa Popyurā Ongaku shi no Hensen: Kaku Janru no Seisei o Chūshin toshite," *Kochi Daigaku Kyōikugakubu Kenkyūhōkoku* 66 (2006): 161–76; Miki Takahashi, "Sakushika,

China Sadao does much to help show the phenomenal rise in popularity of this type of music over the past few decades.<sup>5</sup> Non-Japanese scholarship on Okinawan popular music in all its manifestations has been explored in various ways by several scholars.<sup>6</sup> These writers and others have begun to examine the context of Okinawan music and culture locally, nationally, and internationally, and future scholarship in this area will undoubtedly extend the field in ways to match the plethora and diversity of music that is created on and linked to Okinawa.

As a nation-state, Japan is often perceived – at home and abroad – as an ethnically and culturally homogeneous country, which is sometimes thought of as uniquely unique. Contrary to ideas or theories of Japanese uniqueness (*nihonjinron*), it is important to recognize that Japan has several minority peoples (e.g., Ainu, Korean, Chinese, and Okinawans), regional cultures, of which Okinawa is particularly visible and often foregrounded in studies of Japanese regionalism and minority issues (there are subcultures in Okinawa, too), and a range of other subcultures that might be defined in terms of their multicultural difference.<sup>7</sup> In recent years there

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Sakkyokuka to shite no China Sadao: Orijinaru Sakuhin ni Miru Ongaku Yōshiki no Yūgō 1,” *Okinawa Geijutsu Kagaku: Okinawa Kenritsu Geijutsu Daigaku Fuzoku Kenkyū-jo Kiyō* 18 (2006): 117–76; and Miki Takahashi, “Sakushika, Sakkyokuka to shite no China Sadao 2: Nēnēzu’s ‘Tēgē’ and ‘Umukaji,’” *Okinawa Geijutsu Kagaku: Okinawa Kenritsu Geijutsu Daigaku Fuzoku Kenkyū-jo Kiyō* 19 (2007): 95–125.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Sadao China, *Utamāi: Shōwa Okinawa Kayō o Kataru* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 2006). On music in Okinawa, see also Atsumi Kaneshiro, *Okinawa Ongaku no Kōzō: Kashi no Rizumu to Gakushiki no Riron* (Tōkyō: Daiichi Shobō, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> For example, Matt Gillan, “Treasures of the Island People: Tradition and Modernity in Yaeyaman Pop Music,” *Asian Music* 39.1 (2008): 42–68; Philip Hayward & Sueo Kuwahara, “Transience and Durability: Music Industry Initiatives, *Shima Uta* and the Maintenance of Amami Culture,” *Perfect Beat* 8.4 (2008): 44–63; Johnson, “Nationalisms and Globalization in Okinawan Popular Music”; James E. Roberson, “Uchinaa Pop: Place and Identity in Contemporary Okinawan Popular Music,” *Critical Asian Studies* 33.2 (2001): 211–42; and James E. Roberson, “Loochoo Beat(s): Music in and out of ‘Okinawa,’” in *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*, ed. Matthew Allen & Rumi Sakamoto (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006): 202–20.

<sup>7</sup> On the notion of *nihonjinron*, see especially Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (New York: St Martin’s, 1986). Some other minority groups in Japan include *burakumin* (outcasts) and *nikkeijin* (recent migrants of Japanese descendants living overseas, especially South America). See further, for example, George A. De Vos & William Wetherall, *Japan’s Minorities: Burakumin, Koreans, Ainu and Okina-*

have been many arguments against ideas of Japanese uniqueness; Sugimoto, for example, insists that Japanese society should be studied in terms of its complexities of social stratification and multiculturalism.<sup>8</sup> As "Japan has a variety of minority issues, ethnic and otherwise, which the proponents of the homogeneous Japan thesis tend not to address,"<sup>9</sup> the notion of homogeneity must lose its *raison d'être*. Within contemporary Japanese society, the effects of regional difference, or multiculturalism, are particularly felt by Okinawans, whose cultures are celebrated as an 'Other' within the nation-state, yet at the same time so often surrounded by a notion of difference: "few 'Japanese' [...] are] capable of accepting Okinawans as full-fledged members of the national family regardless of the degree of Okinawan 'improvement'."<sup>10</sup> There is a stigma attached to Okinawan identity in modern Japan.<sup>11</sup>

Over 1.2 million Okinawans who live in the Ryukyu islands at the southern end of Japan face bigotry from time to time on the basis of the belief that they are ethnically different, and incur suspicion because of the islands' cultural autonomy over centuries.<sup>12</sup>

Such prejudice also extends to the Okinawan diaspora in mainland Japan.

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wans, updated by Kaye Stearman (London: Minority Rights Group, 1983); and Michael Weiner, "Introduction" to *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, ed. Weiner (London: Routledge, 1997). See also the regional music discussed in Henry Johnson, "To and From an Island Periphery: Tradition, Travel and Transforming Identity in the Music of Ogasawara, Japan," *The World of Music* 46.2 (2004): 79–98; Johnson, "Tsugaru Shamisen: Regional, National and International Flows," in *Tsugaru: Regional Identity on Japan's Northern Periphery*, ed. Nanyan Guo, Seiichi Hasagawa, Henry Johnson, Hidemichi Kawanishi, Kanako Kitahara & Anthony Rausch (Dunedin: U of Otago P, 2005): 87–98; and Johnson, "Tsugaru Shamisen: From Region to Nation (and Beyond) and Back Again," *Asian Music* 37.1 (2006): 75–100.

<sup>8</sup> Yoshio Sugimoto, *An Introduction to Japanese Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997). See also Ross Mouer & Yoshio Sugimoto, *Images of Japanese Society: A Study in the Social Construction of Reality* (London: KPI, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Sugimoto, *An Introduction to Japanese Society*, 171.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1999): 154.

<sup>11</sup> Koji Taira, "Troubled National Identity: The Ryukyuan/Okinawans," in *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*, ed. Michael Weiner (London: Routledge, 1997): 140–77.

<sup>12</sup> Sugimoto, *An Introduction to Japanese Society*, 6.

Okinawa has a place within the Japanese nation-state as part of the national self (in terms of national identity) and as a cultural 'Other' that is part of home yet geographically and culturally distant from mainstream Japanese life (or, at least, a notion of mainstream culture). On the positive side of cultural difference, Okinawa enjoys a place in Japan that celebrates its cultural difference through the consumption of this peripheral prefecture and island chain, whether in tourism or in consumer fetishism. Okinawan identity is articulated at many sites across Japan, where its place and identity within the nation-state continue to be negotiated through celebration and indifference. Okinawan culture seems periodically to become popular within the wider nation-state, yet its people often face discrimination in terms of their cultural alterity.

In his discussion of Okinawan identity in connection with the small Okinawan island of Kumejima, Allen discusses Okinawa in terms of how it is imagined locally and within the broader nation-state.<sup>13</sup> Placing his study in the context of the work of such thinkers as Homi Bhabha and Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>14</sup> Allen notes that

Within Okinawa today, foregrounding of local festivals, language, dance, ritual, music, and so on is taking place as the so-called Okinawa boom (*buumu* [*būmu*]), an ill-defined but substantive resistance to the homogenizing influences of Japan and the United States, occurs. A celebration of difference that has led to the hybridization of some cultural forms within Okinawa, the Okinawa boom continues to ride a wave of populist support.<sup>15</sup>

It is in this context that Nēnēzu has been foregrounded in this study as a significant group within a revitalization movement. Nēnēzu enjoys local and national recognition as an important group that helps some Okinawans, Japanese, and non-Japanese to imagine Okinawa as a place of sameness and difference. As Roberson notes in connection with his study of Okinawan pop and local identity,

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew Allen, *Identity and Resistance in Okinawa* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, tr. Gino Raymond & Matthew Adamson (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Allen, *Identity and Resistance in Okinawa*, 11.

Uchinaa [(Okinawan)] Pop is one kind of a cultural practice that is involved in the creation of local Okinawan identities of place, within broader cultural and political contexts.<sup>16</sup>

It is this notion of difference that is central to the dialectic of identity-construction between the mainland and Okinawa, and one that does much to foreground Okinawan music as a kind of Japanese roots music that is simultaneously Japanese and an 'Other'. As Iwabuchi has commented, "Japanese hybridism aims to discursively construct an image of an organic cultural entity, 'Japan', that absorbs foreign cultures without changing its national/cultural core."<sup>17</sup>

Nēnēzu are Okinawan; they are also Japanese, and part of a continually growing global trend in a commodity-driven world-music industry.<sup>18</sup> A study of the local, national, and global consumption contexts of a group such as Nēnēzu offers a unique perspective on this particular brand of world music. As Hosokawa has noted,

Music offers a powerful case study for globalization in part because it is regarded both as a universal language and as a particular expression of certain groups of people.<sup>19</sup>

While not arguing that music is a universal language, I do show that in an age of global pop, Nēnēzu's music sound and eclecticism have a propensity to cross cultural borders and bring the group's music to a wider audience. This group's particular style of local roots music, as well as its moulding or branding in the music industry through various imagery and reincarnations (currently in its third totally different line-up), helps to show how it contributes to the dialectic of place and identity within Okinawa and beyond.<sup>20</sup> As well as identifying components of the group's

<sup>16</sup> Roberson, "Uchinaa Pop," 213.

<sup>17</sup> Koichi Iwabuchi, "Pure Impurity: Japan's Genius for Hybridism," *Communal/Plural* 6.1 (1998): 72.

<sup>18</sup> See Martin Stokes, "Music and the Global Order," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004): 47–72.

<sup>19</sup> Shuhei Hosokawa, "'Salsa no Tiene Frontera': Orquesta de la Luz and the Globalization of Popular Music," *Cultural Studies* 13.3 (1999): 513.

<sup>20</sup> See Roberson, "Uchinaa Pop."

musical style and eclectic elements, its seminal album *Koza Dabasa*<sup>21</sup> and several of the tracks from it are outlined in order to ascertain the musical elements that help provide a marketable product within and across regional, national, and international borders.

### Okinawan Musical Identity and the World-Music Industry

Okinawa has an ambivalent place in Japanese history. Once independent as part of the Ryūkyū kingdom, Okinawa, as well the other Nansei (Southwest) islands, was forcibly absorbed into Japan from 1872 to the mid-1880s.<sup>22</sup> More recently, Okinawa was occupied by the USA from 1945 until 1972 (like Ogasawara, about 1000 km to the south of Tōkyō, which was returned to Japan in 1968), and is currently well-known as a US military base and a tourist resort. Four main island groups constitute the Ryūkyū island chain: Amami, Okinawa, Miyako, and Yaeyama, each with their own subcultures, dialects, and music styles; today the islands of Okinawa, Miyako, and Yaeyama form Okinawa prefecture (Okinawa-ken), with the name Okinawa also describing the largest island in the Okinawan group, as well the second-largest city on that island (Amami belonging to Kagoshima prefecture).<sup>23</sup>

As one of Japan's ethnic minorities or regional cultures, Okinawa – including the various subcultures in this part of Japan – has retained its distinctive dialects and cultures vis-à-vis the dominant mainland (especially Tōkyō) culture. Using the dichotomy of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside), which so often divides Japanese social structures into concepts of 'us' and 'them' respectively, Okinawans hold the unique position of being both insiders to Japan in terms of their place within geographic and political boundaries, and outsiders to Japanese hegemonic culture as one of the nation's largest minority groups. With regard to the place of Okina-

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<sup>21</sup> Nēnēzu, *Koza Dabasa*, Sound recording, Ki/oon KSC 2-83 (1994).

<sup>22</sup> A similar fate met the Ainu people of northern Japan around the same time.

<sup>23</sup> In this discussion the word Okinawa is used broadly to describe a general notion of Okinawan identity, even though there are many local identities within Okinawa prefecture. On Okinawan/Ryūkyūan identity see Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu*, and Taira, "Troubled National Identity." For discussions of the relationship between Japan and Okinawa, see *Japan and Okinawa: Structure and Subjectivity*, ed. Glenn D. Hook & Richard Siddle (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).



wan music in the global world-music industry, it is perhaps its ethnic, or cultural, difference that has made it attractive to Japanese and non-Japanese consumers as an 'other' or minority music on the global roots-music scene. That is to say that, while not all world music focuses on minority cultures, Okinawan neo-traditional popular music was one of the first genres of Japanese music to be popularized as commercial world music.<sup>24</sup> As Mitsui has recently commented, "many young Japanese enjoy the modernized music of Okinawa,"<sup>25</sup> a product sometimes labelled 'O-pop' (Okinawan pop). Internationally, Okinawan music has considerable ethnic appeal, both in terms of Okinawa as part of the Orient and as music of one of Japan's minority cultures. Such influences are also observed in the work of Iwabuchi with regard to wider Asian cultural flow: "Cultural globalization has accompanied the activation of intra-regional cultural flows."<sup>26</sup>

As interest in world music in the West was rapidly growing, Okinawa was named on a world-music map, whereas mainland Japan was not.<sup>27</sup> Sweeney commented at the time that "the updated roots music of Japan's southern island, Okinawa, is flavour of the month among European enthusiasts."<sup>28</sup> As a nation-state, Japan is mentioned in the comprehensive *World Music: The Rough Guide*, a survey of world music in the mid-

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<sup>24</sup> For useful discussions of the interactions of imported and indigenous musics in Japan, see Hosokawa, "'Salsa no Tiene Frontera,'" and Toru Mitsui, "Domestic Exoticism: A Recent Trend in Japanese Popular Music," *Perfect Beat* 3.4 (1998): 1–12.

<sup>25</sup> Toru Mitsui, "Interactions of Imported and Indigenous Musics in Japan: A Historical Overview of the Music Industry," in *Whose Master's Voice? The Development of Popular Music in Thirteen Cultures*, ed. Alison J. Ewbank & Fouli T. Papageorgiou (Westport CT: Greenwood, 1997): 172.

<sup>26</sup> Koichi Iwabuchi, "Introduction: Cultural Globalization and Asian Media Connections," in *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japan TV Dramas*, ed. Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2004): 2; cf. Iwabuchi, "Pure Impurity."

<sup>27</sup> Andy Gill, "Putting Music on the Map," *The Independent* (9 July 1992): 23. An early book on world music, which mentions Japan only in connection with the Kodō drummers who frequently tour overseas, was Peter Spencer, *World Beat: A Listener's Guide to Contemporary World Music on CD* (Pennington NJ: A Cappella Books, 1992). Cf. also Peter Manuel, *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World: An Introductory Survey* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988).

<sup>28</sup> Philip Sweeney, "The World Made Flesh," *The Independent* (9 July 1992): 22.

1990s by Broughton et al.,<sup>29</sup> as well as in the second edition of this work.<sup>30</sup> In the first edition, as well as noting some traditional and contemporary Japanese mainland music genres, Okinawa is mentioned in terms of its geographic isolation and ethnic and cultural difference from mainstream, or dominant, Japanese culture, “which has helped preserve a thriving traditional culture, which is just as exotic to the Japanese as to anybody else.”<sup>31</sup> In connection with Japan’s interest in world music, it should be mentioned that

Japan is, after America, the world’s largest market for recorded music – and its appetite is voracious. The Japanese are into just about every kind of rock music, not to mention bluegrass, reggae and salsa, and in each genre they have top-class bands of their own.<sup>32</sup>

The second edition of *World Music* notes the Japanese “roots boom” and provides a summary of the Okinawa popular music scene.<sup>33</sup> Nēnēzu is mentioned in connection with their links to China Sadao, Ry Cooder, and Michael Nyman and their WOMAD appearance in the UK in 1998.

As well as Nēnēzu, several other Okinawan popular music artists and groups have enjoyed commercial success outside Okinawa with their mixture of traditional and popular sounds.<sup>34</sup> For example, even in the 1970s and 1980s, Kina Shōkichi made his name as an artist who blended traditional Okinawan and international popular music styles. The 1990s saw

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<sup>29</sup> *World Music: The Rough Guide*, ed. Simon Broughton, Mark Ellingham, Dave Muddyman & Richard Trillo (London: Rough Guides, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> See John Clewley, “Japan: The Cultural Blender,” in *The Rough Guide to World Music*, vol. 2: *Latin & North America, Caribbean, India, Asia and Pacific*, ed. Simon Broughton & Mark Ellingham, with James McConnachie & Orla Duane (London: Rough Guides, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Broughton et al., *World Music*, 464.

<sup>32</sup> Broughton et al., *World Music*, 459.

<sup>33</sup> Clewley, “Japan.”

<sup>34</sup> A useful guide to the contemporary Okinawan popular music scene, especially popular crossover styles, is given by *Okinawan Myūjikkū Gaido jō Bigināzu*, ed. Kenichirō Isoda & Shūji Kurokawa (Tōkyō: Tōshiba Ongaku sha, 1995). For mention of other Okinawan artists and groups who are popular in the world music scene, see Steve McClure, *Nippon Pop* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1998), and *World Music*, ed. Broughton, Ellingham, Muddyman & Trillo. McClure includes Okinawa as part of a discussion of Japanese “ethnic pop.”

the success of Rinken Bando (Rinken Band), which has a similar cross-over style to Nēnēzu (the group has several male singers, but just one female vocalist). The group Shang Shang Typhoon should also be mentioned; it plays “an eclectic mix of Okinawan, Latin, reggae, Chinese and southeast Asian pop,”<sup>35</sup> although actually coming from mainland Japan. With performers and bands such as these, the study of the production of Okinawan home-grown world or roots music shows how a region can express itself in commercial popular culture in a range of contexts for diverse consumers.

### Nēnēzu: Localizing, Nationalizing, and Globalizing

Nēnēzu mixes ideas of indigenous Okinawan folk music with contemporary popular music – Japanese and non-Japanese – among other styles of world music. The band’s style is distinct from mainstream Japanese popular music (i.e. J-pop) – rather than using mainly Japanese lyrics (or other Japanese popular-music traits) in a musical soundscape that instrumentally sounds essentially very similar and often identical to Western (or global) popular music, Nēnēzu includes the unique sound of Okinawan lyrics and musical and instrumental elements.<sup>36</sup> The members of the group are not national idols in the way that many other teenage-oriented pop stars are; nor are they politically as active as some other Okinawan singers working in the same medium (e.g., Kina Shōkichi). Rather, the band’s music is more passive, or sentimental, creating images of harmonious Okinawa and Japan with a depiction of traditional and contemporary life.

Nēnēzu is the creation of China Sadao, who is the group’s composer, producer, and *sanshin* player, as well as a well-known solo performer and recording artist of Okinawan music in his own right. Over the last few decades, China and Nēnēzu have performed regularly at their live-house restaurant/bar, which was located in Okinawa city and then Ginowan, and now more recently on the very touristic Naha scene. Indeed, their performance schedule in, for example, April 2009 at this venue, “Live

<sup>35</sup> Clewley, “Japan,” 460.

<sup>36</sup> On popular music and local language, see *Global Pop, Local Language*, ed. Harris M. Berger & Michael Thomas Carroll (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2003).

House Shimauta,<sup>37</sup> sees the group playing four or five times a week throughout the month, with China and other artists appearing in-between. This type of venue is one that allows the group a regular spot for promoting their music at a local level – for Okinawans and tourists alike.<sup>38</sup>

The group was formed in 1990, and its first album, *Ikawū*, was released independently in 1991 by Disku Akabanā, although the band was soon signed to Ki/oon Sony, a subsidiary of Sony Records (Table 1). Nēnēzu was especially popular in the early 1990s, both in Japan and internationally among world-music fans, when there was increased awareness of Okinawan music as part of the rise of the world-music industry. Globally, the group’s difference has been celebrated with two European tours and appearances at such festivals as the Newport Jazz Festival in 1994 and WOMAD in 1998, later recording at Peter Gabriel’s Real World studios.

YEAR	TITLE	LABEL
1991	<i>Ikawū</i>	Disuku Akabanā
1992	<i>Yunta</i>	Ki/oon Sony
1993	<i>Ashibi</i>	Ki/oon Sony
1994	<i>Koza Dabasa</i>	Ki/oon Sony
1995	<i>Nārabi</i>	Ki/oon Sony
1995	<i>Natsu: Urizun</i>	Ki/oon Sony
1996	<i>Koza: Nēnēzu Besuto Korekushon</i>	Ki/oon Sony
1997	<i>Akemodoro: Unai</i>	Antinos Records
2000	<i>Okinawa: Memoriaru Nēnēzu</i>	Antinos Records
2002	<i>Chura Uta</i>	Dig Records
2002	<i>Saudāji Okinawa: Hīringu Serekushon</i>	Antinos Records
2002	<i>Saudāji Uchinā: Nēnēzu &amp; Furenzu, Serekushon</i>	Ki/oon
2004	<i>Goruden Besto</i>	Sony
2004	<i>Shū</i>	Dig Records
2008	<i>Sai</i>	Dig Records

Table 1: Discography

Nēnēzu is a group that has had the ability to re-invent itself. While many groups the world over re-invent themselves when some members leave, with the Nēnēzu their line-up has completely changed on several

<sup>37</sup> The name of the establishment is written in English and Japanese, the latter being romanized as “Raibuhausu Shimauta.”

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Chris Gibson & John Connell, *Music and Tourism: On the Road Again* (Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2005).

occasions over its nearly two-decade existence. In a culture where copying has been a topic of much scholarly intrigue,<sup>39</sup> Nēnēzu's propensity to re-fashion itself several times is a phenomenon that perhaps says more about the group as a product or brand than about the artists themselves. Such are the differences in the group's line-up that commentators nowadays often refer to three distinct stages in their career: Nēnēzu 1, Nēnēzu 2, and Nēnēzu 3 (Table 2 overleaf).<sup>40</sup> This re-invention of the self is perhaps comparable to artists who totally change their style of music at various stages in their career, but with Nēnēzu it is not just about changing styles, which the band does, but more about continuing a product devised by China Sadao, a brand that maintains currency in Okinawa and the world-music industry, where the name and music continue regardless of who performs it.

November 1999 was especially significant for the group, in that the four-girl line-up performed their last concert together and four new members were announced.<sup>41</sup> The latter were singers in their late teens and early twenties, who, apart from one and unlike the original members, had no expertise in traditional Okinawan music.<sup>42</sup> The reason for the break-up, as given by Yoshida Yasuko, one of the original members, was: "some of us want to get married, have children."<sup>43</sup> At a time when there was a "demise of the so-called Okinawan music 'boom'," <sup>44</sup> the new Nēnēzu released their first and only album in 2002.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> For example, *The Culture of Copying in Japan: Critical and Historical*, ed. Rupert A. Cox (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> By 2002 on the *Saudāji Okinawa: Hīringu Serekushon* album, three incarnations of the group were noted in the liner notes based on the 1992–6, 1997, and 1999 line-ups, although only later, with the third complete change of line-up in 2004, were the group sometimes referred to as the Nēnēzu 3.

<sup>41</sup> See Nēnēzu, *Okinawa* (sound recording, Antinos ARCJ-127, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Paul Fisher, "The Times for Nenes, They are a-changin'," *Japan Times* (26 October 1999): 14.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Fisher, "The Times for Nenes, They are a-changin'." Koja Misako, who quit in the mid-1990s, was replaced by Tōma Eriko on the 1997 album *Akemodoro*.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Fisher, "The Best of the Year That Was," *The Japan Times* (12 December 2000), [www.japantimes.co.jp](http://www.japantimes.co.jp)

<sup>45</sup> Nēnēzu, *Churauta* (sound recording, Dig Records DCA-003, 2002).

YEAR	MEMBERS	INCARNATION
1990	Koja Misako	
	Miyazato Yasuko (=Yoshida Yasuko)	
	Miyazato Namiko	Shōdai
	Hiyane Yukino	Nēnēzu
1997	Miyazato Yasuko (=Yoshida Yasuko)	(Nēnēzu 1)
	Miyazato Namiko	
	Hiyane Yukino	
	Tōma Eriko	
1999	Koyama Yoshiko	Nidaime
	Miyagi Erina	Nēnēzu
	Ikei Kiyoka	(Nēnēzu 2)
	Hirata Keiko	
2004	Yonaha Ayumi	
	Higa Ayano	
	Nīzato Natsuko	Sandaime
	Kinjō Izumi	Nēnēzu
2005	Yonaha Ayumi	(Nēnēzu 3)
	Higa Ayano	
	Uehara Nagisa	
	Kinjō Izumi	

Table 2: Members

There was again a total change of line-up, and by 2004 the third-generation Nēnēzu appeared.<sup>46</sup> The various incarnations of the group since 1999 are still viewed as the new Nēnēzu vis-à-vis the original group. Asked why he wanted to create a new group, China explains that he thought it would be meaningless if the singing of Okinawan folksongs was restricted to only those who had studied Okinawan folksongs,<sup>47</sup> thus emphasizing the lack of traditional training in Okinawan music of the new group.

<sup>46</sup> An album was released late 2005. For an interview with “Nēnēzu 3” which provides interesting information on their musical background, see <http://okinawa.rik.ne.jp/contents/okinawa/speak/nenezu/index.html>

<sup>47</sup> Nēnēzu, *Saydā Uchinā* (sound recording, Ki/oon KSCL-479, 2002).

Even though its albums never reached the same heights as some internationally released world music, Nēnēzu was a much-sought-after import and well-known in the world-music industry.<sup>48</sup> While the potential regional market in Okinawa itself might be understood in terms of the local accessibility and understanding of aspects of the group's music and cultural point of reference, one is left wondering what it is about Nēnēzu that allows the band to be consumed outside its immediate context of music production. Two immediate answers come to mind: the first relates to the group as a marketed package, a cultural product for consumption within regional, national, and global markets; and the second concerns the sonic elements inherent in the group's music that allows consumers accessibility to (not necessarily an understanding of) appealing sounds.

Nēnēzu has a musical style that accommodates two main elements: Okinawan traditional music, on the one hand, and international (or global) popular music, on the other, which shows a mixture of cultural homogenization and heterogenization (some other world musics are also sometimes included).<sup>49</sup> While historically there has been significant Western influence on many genres of Japanese music, especially from the late-nineteenth century, today the language of popular music is best understood in terms of its international content. A musical language that was once promulgated by the West is now an international idiom that has been appropriated, indigenized, or localized the world over, albeit still sometimes globally controlled mainly by a handful of major multinational record companies.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For a study of the diversity of Japanese popular cultures, see *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture: Gender, Shifting Boundaries and Global Cultures*, ed. Dolores P. Martinez (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). Martinez, while examining Japanese popular culture in a global perspective, comments that "Japanese rock stars do not travel well" (9). This is primarily owing to the inability on the part of non-Japanese to comprehend the lyrics of Japanese songs.

<sup>49</sup> Compare Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Theory, Culture & Society* (special issue, 1990): 295.

<sup>50</sup> For a study of music and mass media that includes an examination of influences on music in terms of cultural exchange, cultural dominance, cultural imperialism, and transculturation, see also Kirster Malm, "Music on the Move: Traditions and Mass Media," *Ethnomusicology* 37.3 (1993): 339–52.

Nēnēzu is eclectic in its influences. The band's characteristic style, consisting of a "trademark sound of the four women's enchanting chorus vocals, and China's *sanshin* weaved around a rich variety of keyboard textures, stringed instruments and percussion, quickly earned them many fans."<sup>51</sup> The group's "influences were adjusted in varying measures – from Balinese gamelan and Brazilian samba to Mexican and Hawaiian music to rap and reggae."<sup>52</sup> Nēnēzu's second album, *Yunta*,<sup>53</sup> included a version of the "Banana Boat Song" entitled "Day-O! ('Banana Bōto')," and the group's third album, *Ashibi*,<sup>54</sup> included a cover version of Bob Marley's "No Woman, No Cry" ("Nō Ūman Nō Kurai"). This cover version includes new lyrics that specifically index symbols of Okinawa in an international song that is so often linked with the Rastafari movement and images of repression. For example, the piece begins (in Okinawan):

Stolen my heart and body by that man  
 Already five years have gone.  
 The beauty of the singing of *shimauta* [island song]  
 The macho *sanshin* player  
 I who can love that man so much,  
 am the happiest woman in the world.<sup>55</sup>

The new lyrics show none of the original suffering so often evident in Bob Marley's music, and instead have been transformed into a song of love and a broken heart. This international influence is extended on the album cover, where the English words "International Uchina Pop Group" accompanies the name of the group, album, and tracks, which are also written in English.

The high porosity of Nēnēzu to global influences shows a cosmopolitanism that identifies the group with a cultural 'Other', which is very much unconventional in the seeming homogeneity of mainstream Japanese popular music. Nēnēzu is not afraid to experiment with diverse musical styles, something that has become a feature of the band's eclectic

<sup>51</sup> Fisher, "The Times for Nenes, They are a-changin'," 1999.

<sup>52</sup> "The Times for Nenes, They are a-changin'," 1999.

<sup>53</sup> Nēnēzu, *Yunta* (sound recording, Ki/oon Sony KSC 2-16, 1992).

<sup>54</sup> Nēnēzu, *Ashibi* (sound recording, Ki/oon Sony KSC 2-48, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> All song texts in this chapter have been translated into English by the author.



style. The track "Kuduchi" from the album *Akemodoro: Unai*<sup>56</sup> is an example of a piece of rap music, which shows the group's eclectic and contemporary influences, as well as increasing their accessibility internationally. Nēnēzu is possibly challenging in its music articulations: blending the modern and the old; reacting against Japanese homogeneity; and, through local musical expression, confronting and challenging Western hegemony and global capitalism.<sup>57</sup>

The album *Koza Dabasa* was seminal.<sup>58</sup> It was partly recorded in Los Angeles and, adding to the band's international flavour, features the well-known American guitarists Ry Cooder and David Lindley, and the studio drummer Jim Keltner. Other international artists featuring on the album are David Hidalgo (accordion), Bob Glaub (bass), and Sweet Pea Atkinson and Harry Bowens (vocals). Two tracks on the album that represent Nēnēzu's primary influences are "Tunē" and "Amerika Dōri," which are now explored as a way of illustrating the local and global sounds inherent in the band's musical style.

"Tunē" introduces the album and has a distinct contemporary sound, but features a traditional Okinawan music sound. Accompanying the female vocal line are a slack key and Mexican guitar played by Ry Cooder, acoustic guitar played by David Lindley, twelve-string guitar, keyboard, and computer programming. The melody has a traditional sound and uses a characteristic Okinawan scale<sup>59</sup> and *sanshin*, but the text is by the band's producer, China. Like many other tracks on this album and others, it is sung in Okinawan (the sleeve notes provide a translation into Japanese). Many Okinawans would understand the Okinawan lyrics, but most mainland Japanese would not, let alone international consumers. The use of some Japanese words would certainly be useful to a non-Okinawan-speaking Japanese listener, but the Okinawan language adds to the album's minority status. The idea of harmony between Okinawan people, Japanese

<sup>56</sup> Nēnēzu, *Akemodoro: Unai* (sound recording, Antinos Records ARCJ-69, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> See also Veit Erlmann, "The Politics and Aesthetics of Transnational Musics," *The World of Music* 35.2 (1993): 3–15, and Veit Erlmann, "The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s," *Public Culture* 8 (1996): 467–87.

<sup>58</sup> Nēnēzu, *Koza Dabasa*. Koza is now known as Okinawa City; *dabasa* means 'the way it is'.

<sup>59</sup> This is characterized by its major third and major seventh.

people, and others permeates the lyrics – here is a translation of “Tunē” (Kumi Odori Chō).<sup>60</sup>

We have made this CD  
 With the hope  
 That all the people  
 Will feel peaceful.  
  
 Okinawan people, Japanese people  
 And people who speak different languages from ours.  
  
 Let’s enjoy ourselves  
 Singing “Nēnēzu”  
 Together in chorus  
 Cheerfully.

The second track on the album, “Amerika Dōri” (“America Street”), has its text in Japanese with a few Okinawan words.<sup>61</sup> This track, which mentions much American influence on Okinawa, shows a number of influences from international popular music such as verse–chorus song structure, popular-music instrumentation, and an international line-up of accompanying musicians.<sup>62</sup> The celebration of a modern, culturally diverse Okinawan setting is evident in the song-text. As with the first track, there is an emphasis on social harmony among all Japanese and non-Japanese, and no suggestion of political, social, or cultural protest that is so often found in popular music lyrics. “‘America Dōri’ valorizes a vision of a dream-like champuru [mix] Okinawa that does not really exist but, perhaps, could”.<sup>63</sup>

“Amerika Dōri”<sup>64</sup>

The streets are flooded  
 With languages of various countries

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<sup>60</sup> *Tunē* is the term for a Shintō ritual prayer used as an introduction to *kumi odori* (also called *tsurane*), an Okinawan performing art including music, dance, and song.

<sup>61</sup> See also Roberson, “Uchinaa Pop,” 219–20.

<sup>62</sup> On Okinawan responses to American and Japanese power, see *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power*, ed. Laura Hein & Mark Selden (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

<sup>63</sup> Roberson, “Uchinaa Pop,” 220.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Roberson, “Uchinaa Pop,” 219.

Twilight, between day and night  
 The din and bustle of pawn shops  
 The neon signs of audio shops  
 Clothes shops run by Indians  
 We can see foreign languages here and there  
 Like foreign countries.

The evening of Amerika dōri [America street]  
 Rock, *shimauta* [island song], rap and reggae  
 Our island and the streets of Koza [Okinawa City]  
 Chanpon chanpurū [mixed]  
 Chanpon chanpurū  
 Amerika dōri.

A thread of a jet stream  
 Drawing a picture in the sky  
 Twilight, between day and night  
 Light-skinned women  
 Dark-skinned men  
 Brown-skinned islanders  
 Lovers are reflected  
 In display windows.

(Chorus)

The shops looking like movie sets  
 Shining on the streets  
 Twilight, between day and night  
 Smiling faces of GIs  
 Blond hair streaming in the wind  
 Weird English by street vendors  
 The streets look like a toy box  
 With dreams and romantic adventures.

(Chorus)

Other songs on the album refer to a range of subjects, including love, traditional life on Okinawa and Okinawans in Japan: “Jerashī” (‘Jealousy’), “Tōi Michi” (‘A Long Way Away’), “Koza Dabasa” (‘That’s Koza’), “Ōgon no Hana” (‘Golden Flowers’), “Kurushima Kuduchi” (a traditional folksong and dance), “Mayonaka Doraivā” (‘Midnight Driver’), “Katada-yori” (‘One-Way Letters’), “Chin Tun Ten” (onomatopoeic beating words),

and “Shimajima Kaisha” (‘Pure Islands’). Several tracks on *Koza Dabasa* make verbal reference to Okinawa, including “Koza Dabasa,” “Kuru-shima Kuduchi,” “Mayonaka Doraivā,” and “Shimajima Kaisha.” On these tracks, the lyrics index Okinawa in various ways, usually depicting images of an idealized life on the islands and replete with local, traditional symbols of Okinawan identity. For example, the first verse of “Mayonaka Doraivā” begins:

If you rode in a taxi in the middle of the night  
And hear some *shimauta* [island song] using the *sanshin*  
Please ask him if he is from Okinawa  
He may be my boyfriend.

The last track on the album, “Shimajima Kaisha,” also has similar local symbols, especially indexing local life and social harmony, as the following extract shows:

How pure the islands are, castles and oratories  
The rice paddies before me are reflecting the glow of sunset  
How pure is the smoke from the burning grass in the field  
  
How pure the villages are, *fukugi* [trees enclosing a house near the sea] and  
stone fences  
All the people have been waiting, to hold a summer festival  
How sweet the roadside smells, how pure *kunibu* [small mikan] are.

The use of the traditional Okinawan *sanshin* and traditional-looking Okinawan costume is at the heart of the branding of Nēnēzu in sound and symbol through a kind of self-exoticism and differentiation vis-à-vis mainland Japanese culture. But while Nēnēzu’s music is regional (culturally or ethnically Okinawan), it is also Japanese and international, part of the global village of world music. As products of the world-music industry, which is driven by both economics and transcultural aesthetic tastes, many international consumers might be oblivious to the place of Okinawa or Ryūkyū within the Japanese nation.<sup>65</sup> They might also be ignorant of the meaning of the lyrics (Okinawan and Japanese), which so often emphasize the place of Okinawa as a region influenced by the USA and

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<sup>65</sup> Compare Rebee Garofalo, “Whose World, What Beat: The Transnational Music Industry, Identity, and Cultural Imperialism,” *The World of Music* 35.2 (1993): 16–32.

other international elements. Within this context, one wonders just how many international consumers are really concerned about more than the sound of the music itself, or even the package and its cultural association. As Tony Mitchell has noted, "to the white Western listener, world music may often be an entirely synthetic sonic experience of surface impacts."<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the experience might include the commodity-fetishism associated with popular music, as well as a fetishism towards the exotic, ethnic, or cultural 'Other'. Even the cover image on the album *Koza Dabasa* has ethnic appeal by utilizing visual symbols of Okinawan identity. It underscores the album's traditional roots by showing the four female singers in their neo-traditional Okinawan costumes, with two of the members holding *sanshin*.<sup>67</sup> In other words, consumers might hear common elements found in many other cultures, but usually do not understand the music from its original cultural perspective. Such music is transformed into an international or global culture that is consumed by international fans who recognize commercial elements of the music or have been sold the package as part of consumer-fetishism within the commercial 'world-music' industry.<sup>68</sup> Still, while there are certainly sonic elements in the group's music that transgress cultural and national borders, the group will mean different things to different people, whether regionally, nationally or internationally.

From the perspective of the group's producer, Nēnēzu is on a mission to educate Okinawans. The group has a distinct local and nostalgic meaning, which points towards promotion of Okinawa, on the one hand, and protection, on the other.<sup>69</sup> China notes that

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<sup>66</sup> Tony Mitchell, *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (Leicester & London: Leicester UP, 1996): 85. See also Tony Mitchell, "World Music and the Popular Music Industry: An Australian View," *Ethnomusicology* 37.3 (1993): 309–38.

<sup>67</sup> Compare Tada, *Okinawa Imēji no Tanjō*.

<sup>68</sup> For a valuable study of identity and the global, see Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in *Modernity and its Futures*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held & Tony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity, 1992): 273–325. On the importance placed on the local, see Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1996): 28.

<sup>69</sup> Compare Jocelyne Guilbault, "On Redefining the 'Local' Through World Music," *The World of Music* 35.2 (1993): 33–47.

From the beginning, our aim was to encourage young people in Okinawa to know about Okinawan minyō [folk song], to pass our tradition onto the next generation, and in that we've succeeded.<sup>70</sup>

This heuristic or altruistic aspect of the group's purpose is surpassed by their consumption in other contexts. China does not mention the commercial side of the business, which is, after all, the major part of the activities of any successful professional group whose members make their living in the music business. Surely, if the group wanted solely to educate Okinawans, it would do so in a more charitable way without the commercial razzmatazz that accompanies their national and international success? It might be noted that the personal objective of the group, or at least their producer, might never be realized by the unsuspecting (non-Okinawan) consumer.

### Closing Thoughts

Nēnēzu can claim Okinawan, Japanese, and international identities. But within the national sphere of identity-construction, Okinawans speak of harbouring a sense of unease concerning Japanese dominant culture.

Most, or even many contemporary Okinawans necessarily derive a strong sense of identity as Ryukyuan or Okinawans. Furthermore, inhabitants of Okinawa Prefecture typically imagine Ryukyu or Okinawa in ways that differ widely from one person to the next.<sup>71</sup>

Nēnēzu help construct ideas of nostalgic regionalism.<sup>72</sup> Interactions across regional and national boundaries have contributed to the construction of local identity. Even though Japan is perhaps at the periphery of the world-music scene, groups such as Nēnēzu have successfully negotiated paths to diverse audiences by exploiting concepts of 'otherness' while utilizing transnational music styles. Nēnēzu's relative success is due in part not only to their skill as performers but also because they are branded in the world-music sphere. Consumption of such minority music strengthens

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<sup>70</sup> In Fisher, "The Times for Nenes, They are a-changin'," 1999.

<sup>71</sup> Smits, *Visions of Ryukyu*, 1.

<sup>72</sup> Compare Frederick Buell, *National Culture and the New Global System* (Baltimore MD & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994): 40–71.

Okinawan identity, on the one hand, but also contributes to Okinawan marginalization, on the other, by reinforcing an idea of 'otherness' within the hegemony of the Japanese state.

Nēnēzu project sameness and difference,<sup>73</sup> and the group is a product of globalization, rather than the result of influences from a single cultural hegemony. They are a multivocal symbol; a number of different cultural elements are found among the group's musical influences, including Okinawan, Ryūkyūan, Japanese, Western, international popular music, and world music. In the negotiated space between Okinawa and mainland Japan, Nēnēzu help in constructions of Okinawan 'otherness'. Similarly, in a global context, they are positioned in the world-music industry as an ethnic 'Other', whether Okinawan or Japanese. The group's success within the world-music industry, like that of many other world-music groups, lies in their ability to create identities of themselves – an 'Other' – in different contexts and to show local transformations of global pop, or global transformations of local pop.<sup>74</sup>

While relating to the nexus of global and local, and also national and local, the various contexts in which Nēnēzu's music can be understood and consumed according to its place of origin shows how the 'Other' can be constructed from your 'own', and the extent to which the globalization of the world's musics influences contemporary culture and identity-construction.

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996).

<sup>74</sup> See Timothy D. Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

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PART THREE  
VISUAL TRANSLOCATIONS

# Rejecting Words

## Illiteracy, Silence, and the Visual<sup>1</sup>



PAOLA VOCI

SINCE THE MID-1990S, visual culture and in particular the significance of image-making in contemporary China has moved beyond the study of Chinese feature films and acquired a broader dimension. Scholars working on images (from the traditional fine arts to posters, pictorials, scrolls, films, videos, performing arts, and Internet websites) have begun to break boundaries and engaged in truly multi-layered and multifaceted discussions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on one chapter of my doctoral dissertation, “Visual Dissent in Twentieth-Century China: A Study of the Exhibitionist Mode of Representation in Cinema, Literature, and Media” (Indiana University, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> In the field of Chinese studies, the problematic meaning of the visual has been addressed by Craig Clunas in his pioneering work on visual materials produced during the Ming Dynasty. In *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1997), Clunas raises several questions about the nature and meaning of pictorial representation. Clunas sets himself up for a journey in a “history of images,” fully aware that his main question – what did it mean in Ming Dynasty China to ‘look at a picture?’ – can never be fully answered. His fascinating, scholarly, and outstanding book is in itself proof that some unanswered questions can nonetheless lead to extremely interesting findings, hypotheses, and conjectures. Clunas’ historical retrieval takes into consideration social practices, cultural symbolism, and historical boundaries which all contribute to giving meaning to pictorial representation and understanding it as part of a history of images (and not just ‘of art’) in which modernity is only one possible interpretative angle.

I wish to further explore the potential of an interdisciplinary approach and a cross-cultural perspective by looking at a trope which I consider crucial in the making, perception, and, remembrance of the Cultural Revolution: the depiction of an illiterate rural China in relation/opposition with its literate urban counterpart. I analyze how and why rural China and, more specifically, its inhabitant, *nongmin* (rendered as the peasant/farmer/villager) has been defined by illiteracy and silence. Two films are at the core of my study: *Juelie* (Breaking With Old Ideas, 1975), and *Haizi wang* (King of the Children, dir. Chen Kaige, 1987). These two movies both deal with the value of images and words and show the conflict between literacy and illiteracy on several different levels. *Breaking With Old Ideas*, produced under the direct control of the communist authorities, can inform us about how the Chinese government perceived literacy (and education) as a means to re-define (re-imagine) the ideal and ideological communities of urbanites and villagers.<sup>3</sup> I also analyze the metaphoric twists in the meaning of literacy and illiteracy displayed in *King of the Children*, a film that re-thinks Chinese language and culture and the role that literates have chosen for themselves, from a later perspective (the film was produced over a decade later, in 1988).<sup>4</sup> As Paul Cohen has convincingly argued in his study of the Boxers, historical events can be better understood by combining a multiplicity of perspectives.<sup>5</sup> Through

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<sup>3</sup> For more about the cinema of the Cultural Revolution, see Régis Bergeron, *Le Cinéma Chinois: 1949–1983* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983), vol. 3: 7–244, and Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge UP, 1987): 125–54.

<sup>4</sup> *King of the Children* has been analyzed in different contexts and from a variety of perspectives. See Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995): 108–42, Xudong Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-Garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema* (Durham NC & London: Duke UP, 1997): 282–306, and Tonglin Lu, *Misogyny, Cultural Nihilism, and Oppositional Politics: Contemporary Chinese Experimental Fiction* (Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 1995): 46–57.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Cohen analyzes the Boxers first by constructing a narrative history of their movement/revolution, and then including an ethnographic historian perspective that focuses on how the participants to this event experienced it (e.g., mass spirit possession, magic practices, female pollution, etc.). Finally, Cohen looks at both the mythological past from which the Boxers took inspiration and the mythological revival of Boxerism as a patriotic/anti-imperialist spirit during the Cultural Revolution. See

the analysis of these two films, I look at the Cultural Revolution as an event, an experience, and a myth, to prove that in a time where empty literacy dominated, illiteracy and silence were experienced and mythologized as a form of resistance.

Finally, I explore the possibility that in postmodern/post-socialist China a similar criticism of empty literacy can be found in some popular and 'highbrow' visual products which have equally attacked words and their power to adequately express meanings, represent communities (including the subaltern or the weak), and protect/enhance cultural diversity.

### Powerful Illiteracy and Empty Literacy

Literacy's revolutionary effect on society and on people's thinking (Walter Ong) as well as its discriminating and conservative side (Harvey Graff) have been widely debated. But while focusing on the phenomenon of literacy, one question has been neglected: what is the value and role of illiteracy in a modern society?<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, literacy has been opposed and/or compared to its alternative (and older) cultural mode, orality. Illiteracy, on the other hand, has neither an independent status nor an historical value; it simply refers to the absence of literacy. I believe that a

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Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Harvey Graff points out the negative side of literacy, noting that "the provision of mass schooling; the working class' acceptance of it, though a questioning one; and universal, public education all served this direction: promoting discipline, morality, and the 'training in being trained' that mattered most in the creation and preparation of a modern industrial and urban work force. These were the purposes of the school—and one use of literacy"; Graff, *The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick NJ: Transaction, 1991): 233. Walter Ong, by contrast, stresses the tremendous potential of literacy in transforming society through a technology that radically changes the way people think. Although Ong is very careful not to attribute an overtly positive value to this transformation, he describes it as a very useful and enhancing element in the progress towards a better, "more human life." Making a comparison with the mastery of music (i.e. the ability to play a violin), Ong notes "the use of a technology can enrich the human psyche, enlarge the human spirit, intensify its interior life. Writing is an even more deeply interiorized technology than instrumental performance is," and he also notes: "writing heightens consciousness"; Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982; London: Routledge, 1995): 82–83.

more precise definition is that illiteracy is the negation of literacy, not just its absence. While orality is based on the absence of literacy (orality precedes, can complement, and may substitute for literacy), illiteracy, because it necessarily follows the advent of literacy, negates it. In other words, one may choose to become illiterate. Illiteracy can therefore be an acquired condition rather than a status, and it is legitimate to analyze why one might become illiterate and what this means.

Most studies explain illiteracy in economic or cultural terms. People are illiterate because they are poor or they have a strong oral culture. Scholars generally do not see any conscious agency in the choice of the illiterate to remain such. In other words, the assumption is that if a villager did not have to work all day to support him/herself, he/she would certainly go to school and become literate. Or, if a rural centre had the same exposure to written and printed materials as a modern commercial city generally has, literacy would gradually replace orality. While this is true in most cases, there are times when being illiterate can become or be perceived as an act of social resistance. In other words, literacy's role in empowering people and giving them a chance to improve their status both economically and socially has too often been overestimated. Does literacy empower people? It depends on whose literacy as well as whose power we are talking about. Yet literacy has been generally viewed as a powerful tool to build 'better', more democratic, and free societies. To dispel this myth, Harvey Graff has tried to take the perspective of the illiterates to show that literacy, far from having emancipated people socially and economically, has more often been used to oppress them and create even stronger social discrimination.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Others have been more cautious in attacking what Graff calls the "literacy myth," pointing out that literacy has an ambivalent function. For instance, in their study of the spread of literacy in France (from Calvin to Jules Ferry), François Furet and Jacques Ozouf argue that literacy neither democratized France nor determined a significant change in the economic and political dynamics. Instead of allowing social emancipation and class improvement, literacy "obeissait au contraire à la distribution préalable des chances" (was, in fact, the logical outcome of the preexistent distribution of opportunities): i.e. more often than not, literacy simply strengthened the status quo; Furet & Ozouf, *Lire et écrire: L'alphabétisation des Français de Calvin à Jules Ferry* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), vol. 1: 176. On the other hand, Furet and Ozouf also point out that literacy had a major role in changing the way individuals and institutions relate; it has created a new contract between the citizen and the state, based on the acceptance



Although, ideally, literacy could be viewed as a skill that allows one to read and write *anything*, more often than not one can only become literate in *something*. In China (but probably also elsewhere), literacy's limitations more than its ideal theoretical potential are what make literacy either powerful or empty. For instance, the communist regime successfully increased the number of literates. Scholars tend to agree on the success of the schooling programme during the over fifty years of communist administration. Yet some scholars have pointed out the deficiency of this apparently fully successful literacy campaign. Susan Shirk's analysis of the Chinese schools' virtocratic system (from the early 1950s to 1976) and the more recently established meritocratic system after the Cultural Revolution gives a different perspective by including many interviews with ex-students. According to Shirk's study, schools in China were less concerned with creating literate and emancipated people than they were with creating "competitive comrades." Discrimination against non-activist students (i.e. those who did not join the Youth League) was so strong that the entire learning process was seriously compromised.<sup>8</sup> After reading Shirk's book, one can argue that – at least until the late 1970s – literacy was only a by-product of political education, wholly subjugated to the need to promote a specific ideology.<sup>9</sup>

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of generalizations (laws) made possible by the written word (360–63). Keith Thomas, on similar ground, notes how, in early modern England (1500–1750), literacy did not necessarily play a subversive role and instead "appeared to the authorities as a route to obedience and docility"; Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986): 118. Nevertheless – Thomas also points out – the written word, once it became widely distributed in print, spread information, and sharpened individual critical attitudes to society (*The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, 119).

<sup>8</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *Competitive Comrades: Career Incentive and Student Strategies in China* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982): 124–25.

<sup>9</sup> In Asia, another example of literacy myth can be found in the Meiji reform movement. Not only the Meiji leaders themselves, but also many scholars, in Japan and in the West, stressed the link between Meiji modernization and a mass campaign to promote literacy. Koji Taira questions this positive, progress-oriented, and socially empowering vision of literacy and suggests that the increase in literacy has not only been overestimated quantitatively but also misinterpreted qualitatively. Taira notes, that despite their literacy, "Japanese masses and workers as of 1910 had acquired no suffrage, no trade unions, no social protection against sweating or unemployment, and no experience in major political decisions of any form"; Taira, "Education and Literacy in

Furthermore, in China as elsewhere, reading is not an abstract activity but refers concretely to texts available to the reader. This is particularly true in schools where the acquisition of literacy is subordinate to political educational plans. That is why the way literacy is perceived can be even more important than its actual acquisition. It is only if people believe that literacy is – or *should* be – powerful that they will expect literacy to change their lives. Conversely, a government that wishes to build consensus can advertise the image of a powerful literacy to promote its ideology while delivering to its citizens only an empty shell.

In view of this analysis, one needs to ask the following question: What happens when scripts and the ability to produce them or decipher them are not only criticized as useless, but also perceived as dangerous? When *words* are the main focus of both the dominant ideology and the counter-ideology that tries to replace it, the perception of literacy plays a fundamental role in explaining why – given specific circumstances – people may choose a ‘powerful’ illiteracy over an ‘empty’ literacy. I want to show how such powerful illiteracy can offer an alternative to the pressures of ideology. In particular, during the Cultural Revolution, illiteracy was not only a condition that isolated and insulated illiterates but also was an upsetting and somehow enlightening experience for those literates (i.e. the *zhiqing* 知青) who were forced to share the lives of the illiterates.

In 1970, Mao Zedong was willing to accept only one title for himself, ‘the Great Teacher’.<sup>10</sup> What did he teach? The answer seems obvious: how to be good communists: i.e. how to honour – obey – him, the revolution, and the Party.<sup>11</sup> This teaching took place in many different environments; one of the most obvious ones is the school. The way literacy was perceived by both those who were already literate and those who were illiterate is one of the keys to understanding to what degree Mao’s teaching effectively penetrated Chinese people’s lives.

Contrary to what one might assume, literate people – by their own admission – seem to have been more vulnerable to the effects of political propaganda, while villagers appeared to have more often resisted and dis-

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Meiji Japan: An Interpretation,” *Explorations in Economic History* 8.4 (Summer 1971): 389. Literacy, in other words, did not really emancipate the newly literate.

<sup>10</sup> Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (1937, rev. 1968; New York: Grove, 1977): 210.

<sup>11</sup> The reference here is to Liu Shaoqi’s lectures *How to Be a Good Communist* (1939).

regarded the imperatives of communist ideology. For instance, an interviewee from Chen village, after having been exposed to the Cultural Revolution in Canton, returned to the village and realized that nothing was happening there, “We discussed among ourselves why the Cultural Revolution was only erupting in cities and not the countryside.”<sup>12</sup> Although the Cultural Revolution eventually erupted in Chen village, the interviewee often points out how the village – though shaken by political changes – was cut off from what was happening in the cities.

During the Cultural Revolution the two communities (the urban literates and the village illiterates) were forced to confront one another more closely. The Cultural Revolution praised the villagers as those from whom the urban literates should learn. While villagers were called to universities to share their experience with students, the government initiated a campaign to send educated youth to the countryside.<sup>13</sup>

## Looking at China During the Cultural Revolution

### 1. *Beyond Words*

The Cultural Revolution has been re-told and re-thought through an astonishing number of cultural products and events, such as memoirs, novels, films, photographic and poster exhibitions, documentaries, roundtables, a privately owned and run museum of posters in Shanghai, and a state-promoted virtual museum.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Chen Village: The Recent History of a Peasant Community in Mao's China*, ed. Anita Chan, Richard Madsen & Jonathan Unger (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992): 113.

<sup>13</sup> For an extensive analysis of the effects of the Cultural Revolution in Chinese schools (e.g., the rise of the Red Guards' movement and the countermovement that replaced students with workers and peasants as leaders in the movement), see Julia Kwong, *Cultural Revolution in China's Schools, May 1966–April 1969* (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution P, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> In mainland China, during the years immediately following the end of the Cultural Revolution, many *zhiquing* revisited the ‘lost years’ in the *shanghen wenxue* 傷痕文學 (wounded literature or scar literature). Nowadays, memoirs about the Cultural Revolution are still very popular. For instance, *Zhongguo zhiquing minjian beiwang Wenben* 中國知青民間備忘文本 (Memos of Chinese educated youths' literature), a six-book collection of autobiographical reminiscences of the years spent in the countryside, became a best-seller in March 2001. On this collection, see an article published in *China Daily* (22 March 2001), <http://www.china.org.cn/english/9510.htm>. For a

In 1999, a book on the posters of the Cultural Revolution edited by Harriet Evans and Stephanie Donald, a series of related exhibits, as well as an online catalogue brought new attention to the importance of image-making not only in the promotion of the Cultural Revolution ideology but in broader cultural terms. *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China* includes six studies from different disciplinary perspectives which, in the intention of the editors, without claiming to provide a history of the Cultural Revolution posters or offer a "definitive analysis" of their aesthetic techniques and political functions, all contribute to a better understanding of "a particular visual form that was central to the political culture of the time."<sup>15</sup> The main priority is to examine posters as a dominant visual discourse that uses diversified composition, colour, and style techniques but is consistent in its politicization of aesthetics and direct appeal to the audience.<sup>16</sup>

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sampling of recent scholarship about the Cultural Revolution, see *The Cultural Revolution: A Bibliography, 1966–1996* (a bibliographical compilation of secondary sources), and Roderick MacFarquhar's three-volume history of the Cultural Revolution, *The Coming of the Cataclysm, 1961–1966: The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (Studies of the East Asian Institute, Columbia University; Oxford & New York: Published for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Studies of the East Asian Institute by Oxford UP and Columbia UP, 1997); primary documents drawn primarily from public and classified Chinese sources are included in *China's Cultural Revolution: Not a Dinner Party*, ed. Michael Schoenhals (Armonk NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996). On the broader implications of the Cultural Revolution in relation to political dissent, see the collection of writings by poets, novelists, filmmakers, and political prisoners in *Seeds of Fire: Chinese Voices of Conscience*, ed. Geremie Barmé & John Minford (New York: Hill & Wang, 1988). For visual documents (posters, photographs), see the exhibition "Picturing Power: Posters of the Cultural Revolution," <http://kaladarshan.arts.ohio-state.edu/exhib/poster/exhibintro.html> and Stefan Landsberger's Chinese Propaganda Poster Pages, <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/>. Also online, but mostly text-based (pictures are present only on the introductory page of the site), is the Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution (<http://www.cnd.org/CR/halls.html>). For different film perspectives on the Cultural Revolution, see Xie Jin's *Furong zhen* 芙蓉鎮 (Hibiscus Town, 1986), Jiang Wen's *Yangguang canlan de rizi* 陽光燦爛的日子 (In the Heat of the Sun, 1994), and Wu Wenguang's documentary *1966 nian: wo de hongweibing de shidai* 年: 我的紅衛兵的時代 (1966: My Time in the Red Guards, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Harriet Evans & Stephanie Donald, *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, ed. Evans & Donald (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999): 2.

<sup>16</sup> Evans & Donald, *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, 4.

Their [the posters'] aesthetic construction grew from a sophisticated notion of political spectatorship. They had to compress information, and provide contextual hints on that information, in visual forms to which their audience could respond. A successful poster had to retain an internal aesthetic cohesion in order both to attract the eye of the beholder and to lend visual coherence to the political message expressed through the image.<sup>17</sup>

The key words here are “contextual hints,” “cohesion,” and “coherence.” One should not overlook formulaic variations and mistakenly consider the Cultural Revolution posters as uniform, straightforward, and uncomplicated examples of social-realist art. At the same time, I believe it is equally important to recognize their communicative goal as primarily verbal. By verbal I mean a mode of communication with tell-to-teach purposes in which texts are constructed so as to reduce or even eliminate (at least in intention) ambiguity. In fact, a very careful and sophisticated coherence is the means by which the poster is supposed to efficiently deliver a clear message to the audience. Although words might or might not appear to give added meaning, the images themselves are texts that the spectator is expected to decipher without ambiguity.

I agree with Evans and Donald that “additional meanings are not always obvious.”<sup>18</sup> Posters are not only political in their content and often refer more generally to “how to live.”<sup>19</sup> Further, their meaning is broadened and complicated by other factors such as the time and the place of their distribution as well as the background of their audience. By stating that the communicative goal of posters is mainly verbal, I do not mean they are transparent carriers of meaning. I am simply arguing that the Chinese political discourse of the time expected them to be so. Ambiguity can never be avoided completely, and that is why attempts on the part of totalitarian regimes to achieve complete control are doomed to fail. In the ultimate analysis, the viewer/reader of the posters has the power to challenge the assumption of transparency and restore ambiguity even to the most highly ideological (verbalized) image.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Evans and Donald, *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, 97.

<sup>20</sup> The issue of spectatorship is also addressed by Xiaomei Chen, who succeeds in

Among its various merits, the major contribution of *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China* to an understanding of visual culture in a Chinese context has been to show how pictures talk to each other through different media and across different space and time frames. For instance, in analyzing the ways children are represented as political messengers, Donald not only shows us the dialectic of the Cultural Revolution posters, but also “looks outside the bounds of the period and the medium,” by referring to later films and posters – such as Tian Zhuangzhuang’s *Lan fengzheng* 藍風箏 (The blue kite, 1993) and the images of the Heinz advertisement for a “Superbaby” that appeared in the Beijing subway in the mid-1980s.<sup>21</sup> In other words, posters function on at least two main levels: they are products of the official political discourse but they also belong to a visual culture that transcends the political discourse.

In 2003, Long Bow’s documentary *Morning Sun*, in conjunction with its interactive website, brought back not only the Cultural Revolution’s images but also its sounds. *Morning Sun* differs from the many recollections of the Cultural Revolution that have been shared publicly in a variety of media (e.g., books, films, memoirs), which attacked both from a political and a personal standpoint the official rhetoric of those “lost ten years.”<sup>22</sup> *Morning Sun* does not search for victims and culprits but, rather,

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integrating the public (academic critical analysis) and private (personal and emotional recollections) in a unique piece that contextualizes and complicates both the posters and the Cultural Revolution by adding several layers of historical and autobiographical events; Xiaomei Chen, “Growing Up with Posters in the Maoist Era,” in *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, ed. Evans & Donald, 101–22.

<sup>21</sup> Evans & Donald, *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China*, 97.

<sup>22</sup> For English-language publications on the *zhiqing* experience, see Laifong Leung’s collection of interviews with twenty-six writers of China’s *zhiqing* generation, *Morning Sun: Interviews with Chinese Writers of the “Lost Generation”* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), and Feng Jicai’s first-person accounts in *Voices from the Whirlwind: An Oral History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: Pantheon & Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1991). Feng put an advertisement in a newspaper, looking for people who would share their past experiences. From the several thousands respondents, he recorded hundreds of oral histories. Many of the experiences were those of former *zhiqing*. For analytical studies of *zhiqing*, see Xiaowei Zang’s *Children of the Cultural Revolution: Family Life and Political Behavior in Mao's China* (Boulder CO: Westview, 2000). For a gender perspective, see Nora Sausmikat, “Can Western Academics Penetrate the Scars of Chinese History? Western Zhiqing Research, Collection of Biographies from Female Zhiqing in China,” *China Studies* (Hongkong)

sets out to restore complexity and ambiguity to this event, pointing out how the process of remembrance is characterized by a cluster of contradictory emotions: sorrow, shame, and nostalgia.<sup>23</sup> The documentary and the video and audio files available on the *Morning Sun* website have brought together pieces of a larger puzzle and have allowed us to see (and listen to) the cultural space in which revolutionary messages contained in posters, performing arts, and other media products were created, received, and decoded. Most importantly, the authenticity of the recollection never points to one historical truth but, in fact, to the necessity of going beyond the political narrative and search for other cultural explanations. It is in this context that one of the most interesting contributions of *Morning Sun* is its inclusion of clips from *Ovod* (The gadfly), a 1955 Russian movie that, it is argued, played a role comparable to the cult of Mao in the Red Guards' idealistic search for heroism. By exposing the visual dialectic created by the protagonist of *The Gadfly* and other revolutionary images, the documentary enlarges the cultural space in which the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution thrived and deepens our understanding of its complex mechanisms.

My own study draws its inspiration from the premises and methodology at work in *Picturing Power* and *Morning Sun*. The common denominator of these two different projects revolving around the Cultural Revolution is a new way to approach the visual by both focusing on the details of the visual product itself and yet moving "outside the bounds of the period and the medium." Only if we recognize the complex and unique nature of images in constructing distinct meanings and creating independent though not isolated cultural spaces can we find a new way of interpreting both the rhetoric of propaganda and the language of resistance.

## 2. *Looking at films produced 'by' and 'about' the Cultural Revolution*

Few sources document how the literate and illiterate perceived their encounters. The study of Chen Village provides us with some direct testi-

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55 (Fall 1996): 111–24, and *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up In the Mao Era*, ed. Xueping Zhong, Wang Zheng & Bai Di (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> The documentary focuses on the initial 'manic phase', 1966–68, and the years preceding it; the years following the 1969 congress are briefly summarized and mostly recalled through voice-over narrative.

monies of the confrontation between intellectuals and villagers. Most of the reported interviews, however, do not deal specifically with questions of literacy. However, other sources on literacy are abundant. Aside from speeches and essays on the subject of education produced by state officials (including, of course, Mao Zedong himself), there is an enormous mass of data – also relative to the Cultural Revolution’s ‘dark age’ – on the number of people who attended schools, completed their courses, and advanced to a further level of education. The Ministry of Education accurately collected and ordered this data to prove the tremendous progress that schooling had after the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. According to this data, there seems to be no doubt that the Chinese population, including the vast majority of villagers, became literate thanks to the efforts of the Communist Party. It is officially admitted that the Cultural Revolution caused “unprecedented harm to the country’s educational work.”<sup>24</sup> But it is equally stressed that “fundamental changes have taken place on the educational front after stupendous efforts have been made to remedy the chaotic situation created by the Gang of Four and set education on the right course.”<sup>25</sup>

I do not deal with official data, for two main reasons. The first is that most of those data refer only to school attendance. A significant number of scholars have argued against the assumption that school-attendance data (both in the West and in Asia) directly reflect the literacy rate.<sup>26</sup> I

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<sup>24</sup> China Handbook Editorial Committee, ed. *Education and Science* (Beijing: Foreign Language P, 1983): 21. This is an interesting handbook published in the P.R.C. but obviously addressed to the foreign public. The book is a concentration of all possible data proving the equality and modernity of the Chinese school system (from both a gender and an ethnic perspective).

<sup>25</sup> *Education and Science*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Furet and Ozouf defines schools as the “shell” and not the heart of literacy: “l’école n’est pas le cœur de l’alphabétisation, mais seulement sa forme” (Furet and Ozouf, *Lire et écrire*, vol. 1: 176). Richard Rubinger notes that one should achieve “a more relative view of literacy, defined according to cultural contexts, with schooling almost an afterthought, resulted not only from a failure of large-scale efforts to eradicate illiteracy through schooling alone”; Rubinger, “Literacy West and East: Europe and Japan in the Nineteenth Century,” *Senri Ethnological Studies* 34 (1992): 79. Roger Schofield points out that “early nineteenth-century surveys showed time and again that the number of children enrolled at school was no guide to the number actually receiving instruction”; “Dimension of Illiteracy, 1750–1850,” *Explorations in Economic*



believe that school attendance can, at best, prove that a certain number and a certain type of people went to school. The second and most important reason is that data cannot answer questions related to ‘perceptions’. Even if we determine the degree to which villagers learned to read or to produce a certain number of characters or – on the other hand – how skilful in farming the students sent to the countryside became, we still do not know much about what impact the enforced encounter between the two communities had in the way they viewed/imagined themselves. In particular, one question seems crucial to me: was literacy perceived as a divisive or a unifying element between the two communities? Looking into narratives about this encounter can help us to answer such a question.

### The Proletarian (II)literate

(*Juelie*, Breaking With Old Ideas, 1975)

When communists tried to transform Chinese society, the Chinese Communist Party carried out a systematic attack against Confucian elite culture.<sup>27</sup> This was a task that could not be achieved simply by supplying literacy to the masses. Political education was the real priority. After 1949, Chinese cinema produced many examples of the total identification between literacy and political engagement. Learning how to read meant learning how to read about the Communist Revolution; learning how to write meant learning how to write according to Mao’s thoughts. In many films produced between 1949 and 1964, literacy appears as an enlightenment that cannot be separated from political emancipation.<sup>28</sup>

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*History* 10.4 (Summer 1973): 439. Although, in more recent times, the equation between school attendance and acquisition of literacy seems to be more sustainable, the astonishing numbers of ‘illiteracy’ for both adults and children of school age seem to confirm that school and literacy should indeed be considered two separate matters.

<sup>27</sup> For a narrative summary of the Cultural Revolution’s main events, see Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990): 602–52.

<sup>28</sup> One example is shown in *Wutai jiemei* 舞台姐妹 (Stage sisters, aka Two actresses), dir. Xie Jin 谢晋 (1964). Chunhua, one of the two protagonists, is illiterate. At the very beginning of the film, when she joins the opera troupe, she signs her contract with a ‘cross’. In the film, it is assumed that Chunhua has learned how to write thanks to her training in opera; however, it is only when Chunhua joins the communist revolutionary struggle that the audience can directly witness her strong literate behaviour in opposition to her weak position as an illiterate. When she decides to establish a cooperative

*Breaking With Old Ideas* deals with literacy in a more complex and ambivalent way. During the Cultural Revolution, communist ideology demonized Confucian traditional culture and praised proletarian culture. Inconveniently for the communist leadership, Chinese villagers were no less Confucian than their educated counterpart.

Villagers had a more popular vision of Confucianism, but they were far from embodying the ideal of a communist proletarian class. It was necessary to imagine a villager community that could be a real model for the revolutionary ideology. *Breaking With Old Ideas* aimed at providing a brand-new image of a villager who did not have any link with the traditional (Confucian) popular culture and could be literate exclusively within the boundaries of communist educational ideology.

*Breaking With Old Ideas* celebrates the radical change in the educational system at a college that the Communist Party opened to the villagers in 1958. Out of a mass of characters, two protagonists emerge. Long Guozheng, an emissary of the Communist Party, starts and supervises the whole revolutionary process. Li Jinfeng is one of the many villagers who have entered the college. She encourages all the other students to study hard without forgetting their proletarian roots. After several conflicts with some college authorities, Li Jinfeng is about to be expelled, but during an open trial in which the whole community also takes part, she defends herself and fights back. She delivers a speech pointing out the values of the proletarian revolution and quoting Chairman Mao's teachings. At the end of the film, a message coming directly from Mao Zedong arrives to support Li Jinfeng and Long Guozheng's revolutionary action.

The plot provides a positive image of the new literate villagers, who not only emancipate themselves by attending colleges but also improve the university by making it less intellectual and closer to the practical needs of the masses. The plot is not the only meaningful element in the definition of the new literate villager.<sup>29</sup> The film never tries to be realistic;

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of women actresses engaged in political and social issues, we see Chunhua's neat characters describing the cooperative's goals. Her acquired literacy is explicitly associated with her acquired political awareness through a close-up of the document that symbolically embodies and emphasizes both these achievements.

<sup>29</sup> In an article on the filmic language of the Cultural Revolution, Wang Tugen points out that in the Cultural Revolution's films what matters is not the story itself but its external referent: i.e. the Cultural Revolution. According to Wang, the revolutionary

everything is absolutely symbolic – even though the symbolism is very simple and direct. The presence of declared symbolism reduces the importance of the plot and increases that of details. In the celebration of the Cultural Revolution, the focus is on *how* the event is represented and not on the event itself – which is accepted as omnipresent and omnipotent.

In *Breaking With Old Ideas*, this *how* also includes the representation of the revolutionary heroes, the literate villagers, as physically strong fighters, opposed to their intellectual enemies, who are characterized as having old and/or weak bodies. Wang Tugen points out that, in all Cultural Revolution films, the presence of desire for the Revolution is overwhelming and based on a conflictual film language (i.e., light vs. dark, low-angle shot vs. high-angle shot, etc.) that stresses the opposition between good and bad characters.<sup>30</sup> I believe that in *Breaking With Old Ideas* the passionate desire for the Revolution is transferred metaphorically to the enthusiasm to become educated, through a process that becomes very physical.

The literate villager is young, healthy, and straightforward. Sweaty chests and shining muscles characterize the young villagers who enter the college. The villagers in *Breaking With Old Ideas* embody the monastic rule ‘*ora et labora*’ (pray and work) where ‘*ora*’ can be re-interpreted as ‘praise the communist revolution, instead of God’.<sup>31</sup> Because they have a ‘*mens sana in corpore sano*’ (a healthy mind in a healthy body), the villagers, like monks, do not question the dogma of their faith, and, like monks, they dedicate themselves totally to serving a superior cause, en-

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cinema is not a real text but a meta-text; its content is not the fictional event that happens on the screen but the real one—the proletarian revolution – to which the film constantly refers; Wang Tugen 王土根, “‘Wuchan jieji wenhuadageming’ shi/xushi/yishi xingtai huayu ‘無產階級文化大革命’ 史/敘事/意識形態話語” (History/Narration/Ideology Discourse on ‘The Proletarian Cultural Revolution’), *Dangdai Dianying* 3 (1990): 40.

<sup>30</sup> Wang Tugen, “‘Wuchan jieji wenhuadageming’ shi/xushi/yishixingtai huayu,” 41. The conflict occurs on the level both of film narrative and of film language. In particular, the three ‘prominences’ (*san tuchu* 三突出) stress the moral differences between the two opponents and the importance of the good characters dominating the evil ones.

<sup>31</sup> Spence quotes one of these prayers: “We respectfully wish a long life to the reddest sun in our hearts, the great leader Chairman Mao. And to Chairman Lin Biao’s health: may he forever be healthy. Having been liberated by the land reform, we will never forget the Communist Party and, in revolution, we will forever follow Chairman Mao”; Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 615.

during hardship and sexual abstinence (the last can be assumed from the absence of active or conscious eroticism).

The physicality of the literate villagers paradoxically reveals them as inherently illiterate. During the entrance exam to the university, the educational system becomes almost a parody of itself. Long Guozheng lowers the university requirements to the most basic literacy (and in some cases even that is not explicitly required). The most important qualifications for being admitted to college are having a clear proletarian background, having callouses on one's hands, and being a member of the Youth League. The (il)literate villager is also very much masculinized. For instance, Long criticizes one student, Jiang Danian, for not speaking out for himself and being shy "like a girl." In other words, the revolutionary hero must have both male (aggressive) behaviour and a male (strong) body.

Female fighters are supposed to be equally important, but they are a minority in this choral narrative. Furthermore, the emancipation of female characters is weakened by certain narrative moments in which women are described as inferior or victimized. For example, only Jinfeng's level of literacy is tested (either the other male students are assumed to be at least basically literate or – for them – the priority is to have a strong body and a proud attitude). When Long asks Jinfeng to prove she is literate, he says, "Let me see some characters. Just write. Anything is fine." What Jinfeng writes, though, is not just *anything*, but the only thing that is, in reality, acceptable: "Mao Zedong is our liberator." Her association with the revolution emancipates her, transforming her into a more aggressive person. Yet, in the end, even when she courageously faces the college authorities, she is still protected and supported by Long, who encourages her to speak out.

By the time *Breaking With Old Ideas* was released (1975), the experiment of sending urban youth to the countryside was seen to be a failure and the entire Cultural Revolution ideology was already dying out. Urbanites had been transplanted to the villages and had come into contact with a very different image of the literate villager. The *zhiquing* – the educated youth sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution – tell us a different story about how they viewed themselves (literate) as opposed to the villagers (illiterate) during the encounter that took place in the villages and, more specifically, in the village schools.

## The Urban *zhiquing*

(*Haizi wang*, King of the Children, 1987)

The encounter/clash between the two communities of urban literates and rural illiterates (which becomes most evident during the political campaign known as *shang shan xia xiang* 上山下乡 [up to the mountains, down to the countryside]) is a highly significant metonym for the Cultural Revolution itself, because it captures one of the central traits of those times of political and social confusion: the inadequacy of the Communist Party's words to reflect, explain, and control reality.

The *zhiquing* ended up being mediators between the government's claim that communist education aimed at emancipating people from the oppression of feudal society and the villagers' reaction to this type of propaganda. Because the *zhiquing* came from outside – the cities – and were ignorant of rural life, they did not make a favourable impression on the villagers. For instance, one of those students, the Red Guard Li,<sup>32</sup> recalls:

They [the villagers] were told we were a *bunch of kids, not knowing what we were doing* [...] The commune's public security head ran all the way out to the brigade, took me to one side and asked me why I wrote this big-character poster, under whose order was it. I said, "no one asked me to, I did it on my own initiative." I also said, "if you think that is something special, you should go *outside*, to Canton, to have a look and you'd understand."<sup>33</sup>

The students were – at least initially – perceived as “a bunch of kids” who did not quite know what they were doing. Vilma Seeberg notes: “Cultural Revolution students were called one-legged illiterates because their reading and writing were limited to the political slogans of that decade.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> I should note that not all the *zhiquing* were Red Guards (although the large majority were) and not all the Red Guards were blindly supportive of the Cultural Revolution. Because I focus more on the contrast between urbanites and peasants than on political differences, I consider Li's testimony as simply that of an urban student (who also happened to be a Red Guard).

<sup>33</sup> *Chen Village: The Recent History of a Peasant Community in Mao's China*, ed. Chan et al., 114. My emphasis.

<sup>34</sup> Vilma Seeberg, *Literacy in China: The Effect of the National Development Context and Policy on Literacy Levels, 1949–1979* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1990): 52. Seeberg does not specify the source of this statement, but simply indicates that it comes from personal communications.

Mostly, though, the villagers' perspective is, once again, to be inferred from what the *zhiqing* themselves tell us about their experience.

*King of the Children* (technically not an autobiographical film) shows an educated youth's experience among the uneducated villagers. The director, Chen Kaige, was himself a *zhiqing* and – although he did not explicitly identify himself with the protagonist of the film – he wrote, “Like the urban youths depicted in *King of the Children*, Ah Cheng and I went to live in rural China at that time.”<sup>35</sup> In an interview I had with Chen Kaige in 1991, he said:

What I expressed in *King of the Children* is that, although people need civilization and culture to evolve and improve themselves, culture ended up being like a rope that has tied and imprisoned people. Chinese people are still all proud of their 5000 years of civilization and of its greatness – like the Great Wall that passes the test of time. This prevents them from thinking something new, better than the past. Now, this old culture has become a comfortable bed where everyone can lie down and sleep [... In *King of the Children*] there is sense of impotence, of *not knowing what to do* ....<sup>36</sup>

The film's protagonist embodies this sense of impotence. As an inexperienced teacher in a village school, Lao Gan represents not only Chen Kaige's and Ah Cheng's memories, but also those of “tens of millions” of other urban youth between the age of fifteen and twenty.<sup>37</sup>

*King of the Children* is a critique of literacy, exposing “empty words” both in its subject-matter and through its cinematic practices. As a result, on the level of both film-content and form, *King of the Children* questions the value of writing-systems and their ability to express and convey meanings. I see in the film proof that De Francis' faith in “full/unlimited/real writing” (i.e. the belief that scripts can convey clear and unambiguous meanings) is nothing but a bluff, a dangerous lie.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Chen Kaige & Tony Rayns, *King of the Children and the New Chinese Cinema* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989): 61. The film is an adaptation of a novella written by Ah Cheng, Chen Kaige's ex-*zhiqing* friend.

<sup>36</sup> Paola Voci, “Il mito dell'immobilità nel cinema cinese” (thesis, University of Venice, 1991): 235.

<sup>37</sup> Kaige & Rayns, *King of the Children and the New Chinese Cinema*, 61.

<sup>38</sup> John DeFrancis, *Visible Speech* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1989): 47–56.

The film's plot is very simple. The *zhiqing* Lao Gan, who has been working in a production team for some seven years now, is asked to teach in a village school. When he starts this new job, he realizes that the school does not provide the students with textbooks. All he can do is to write the text of the lesson on the blackboard and ask the students to copy it. Later, he also finds out that the students, for the most part, cannot recognize the characters that they were supposed to have already learned in the past. In his attempt to make the students 'literate', he discards the content of the textbook (and the political indoctrination that is part of it) and instead encourages his students to learn characters and to write short essays about their own lives and families. One of his students, Wang Fu, takes this very seriously; he copies Lao Gan's dictionary and memorizes a great number of characters. One day, Comrade Wu, the local Party leader, finds out about Lao Gan's teaching methods and dismisses him. Before leaving, Lao Gan teaches the students a song about becoming 'literate' (written by Lao Gan's friend, Laidi) and gives the dictionary to Wang Fu.

The film asks one major question: what does language, writing in particular, mean in China "now?" 'Now' is the period of the Cultural Revolution but also, implicitly, the post-Cultural Revolution time – the clear perspective of the film. Lao Gan realizes the emptiness and the weakness of his literacy, which made him first a Red Guard controlled by the Party, and then a teacher of political formulas (empty literacy).

Several scenes in the film show the impotence of language and script to be meaningful communication tools. For instance, at a certain point Lao Gan writes a 'wrong' character on the blackboard, putting *niu* 牛 (cow) on top with *shui* 水 (water) on the bottom. When Wang Fu reveals this non-existent character to him, Lao Gan quickly rubs it out and laughs, embarrassed at his mistake. Before leaving, though, he explains:

You may remember during one lesson, I wrote up a word on the blackboard. Wang Fu underlined it and then I rubbed it out. It was a word that I made up. (Pause) Back at the team, I used to gaze at the cows. Cows are very stubborn creatures. You can beat them and curse them, but they just blink at you and go on eating what they want. Sometimes they go wild. That's when I pee. (One child laughs. The others shush him.) Cows love salty things, and pee is salty. Usually they can't get it. Sometimes I'd hold myself in and wait until we got

up the mountain before I'd take a pee. [...] That day, I saw the cow-herd peeing for his cattle.<sup>39</sup>

Lao Gan at this point once again writes the wrong character and then stares and smiles at the children.



Figure 3: The 'cow-piss' character.

A close-up of his face emphasizes his own surprise and incredulity. This is Lao Gan's last lesson and arguably the most important. In fact, the film ends with a last shot of the 'cow-piss' character on the blackboard, followed by an extreme long shot of the mountain range and of a medium long shot of the empty classroom.

The literate Lao Gan has given up his literacy. He leaves the school after having taught his students a character that does not exist, but which seems to have more meaning than the real ones. What gives meaning to the 'cow-piss' character is not only Lao Gan's own experience, but the fact that he shares it with the cowherd. It is when he sees the little cowherd urinating for his cattle that Lao Gan makes up the character. A connection is finally established with the silent cowherd who has refused to go to school and to learn characters. Lao Gan realizes that the script the cowherd rejected was one that did not communicate what was real for the cowherd: his life, his experience, his cattle. The 'cow-piss' character represents what literacy should be – a tool to express (and tell others about) oneself and one's culture. It is as though Lao Gan were saying that a writing-system should be able to express everything that one can think.

Empty literacy is also symbolically represented in an earlier scene. Lao Gan is flipping the pages of his dictionary, sitting alone in his room, while the soundtrack fills the screen with distorted and confused voices reading the *Baijiaxing* 百家姓 (The book of surnames), the *Qianziwen* 千字文 (The commentary on one thousand characters), and the *Mengzi jian Liang Hui*

<sup>39</sup> DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, 117.



wang 孟子見梁惠王 (Mencius meets King Hui of Liang). The voices stop and, hearing the sound of a cowbell, Lao Gan slowly lifts his head and walks out of the shot. Seconds later, Lao Gan and the cow are staring at each other. This empty literacy is what created and defeated the literate Lao Gan. When he realizes his defeat, Lao Gan seems to choose the path of resistance indicated by the little cowherd who never went to school: negation of the codified writing-system, silence, and isolation.

The perspective of the illiterates is filtered through that of the *zhiqing*. One could possibly claim that such a filter is no different from the distortion/idealization of the villagers represented by *Breaking With Old Ideas*. Yet, the main difference is that *King of the Children* does not pretend to speak for the villagers; we are constantly reminded of Lao Gan's and the director's point of view. In the movie, the illiterates – represented by the little cowherd and Wang Fu's father – are merely looked at and their actions are left unexplained. The two characters never speak; Wang Fu's father is mute and the cowherd does not want to speak.

The illiteracy of the cowherd and Wang Fu's father's does not constitute a return to orality. As I pointed out earlier, while orality has a cultural dimension that is not necessarily dissenting, illiteracy exists only as a negation of literacy. Wang Fu's father cannot speak; the cowherd does not speak, because he chooses not to, but once draws provocative circles on the blackboard, which – like the 'cow-piss' character – belong to un-codified (illiterate) writings. By drawing those circles, the cowherd expresses his choice to *become* illiterate. In a film that clearly shows the failures of the Cultural Revolution's rhetoric, the cowherd's circles and Lao Gan's 'cow-piss' character are examples of visual dissent; they are ambiguous images that simply *show* themselves as *non-words* pointing to a free space outside the codified space of the controlled and controlling dictionaries.

On his way back to the production team, after being dismissed from his teaching position, Lao Gan again sees the little cowherd, in the morning mist of a dream-like sequence. The cowherd and Lao Gan stare at each other amidst of tree trunks of different shapes and sizes. Soon after, they both disappear in the landscape. The following shots of the empty school and the blackboard with the 'cow-piss' character comment on this last encounter between the literate teacher (who could not teach) and the illiterate villager (who never became a student). Schools are empty because

there are no characters to express what the cowherd (and, at this point, also Lao Gan) thinks.

## Resistance and Change

The Cultural Revolution is a unique event in the history of China, and arguably in that of humanity. As a result, the dynamic that created what I have defined as a resistance-generated powerful illiteracy (as opposed to the government-imposed empty literacy) might have been exceptional in such peculiar years. Although illiteracy is more often than not imposed on people and not chosen by them, I believe that the films I have analyzed can offer an important clue to one, although certainly not the only, role played by illiteracy in a time when hegemonic speech and writing were implemented in an attempt to control and suffocate any unorthodox thought.

James Scott provides an analysis of a village in Malaysia where he spent some time studying the villagers' behaviour and their forms of resistance to the richer and dominant class. Scott notes that, in this village, resistance begins as "all historical resistance by subordinate classes begins: close to the ground, rooted firmly in the homely but meaningful realities of daily experience."<sup>40</sup> The "weapons of the weak," as Scott defines them, often assume the silent appearance of passive rejection. To oppose the claim of hegemonic ideology to be representative of the villagers' needs, the weak can use articulate arguments neither nor sophisticated weapons. Yet they can use the practical reality of their experience to unmask the unjust nature of a system that demands their support but does not really speak for them. In this context, Scott explains the villagers' backwardness and conservatism. "If they defend a version of the older hegemony, it is because it has a certain legitimacy rooted in earlier practice."<sup>41</sup> The villagers' behaviour in relation to the land reform in Malaysia may be a key to understanding what happened in China during the Cultural Revolution. Rural inhabitants managed to isolate themselves in what urban literates viewed as a "secluded land" and to resist the pressure of political propaganda.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven CT: Yale UP, 1985): 348.

<sup>41</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 347.

<sup>42</sup> The isolation and the anomaly of the villagers' behaviour are described as such ('secluded land') in *Red Guard*, Dai Xiaoi's memoir of his experience as a student on

On a broader level, rural illiterates might also have contributed to changing the way people viewed Chinese culture itself. Illiteracy's usefulness as a weapon of resistance may allow for a change and for a new consciousness of the value of literacy. What is powerful in the Cultural Revolution's illiterates is not their illiterate condition in itself, but the way they *might* have managed to resist – in some cases more than their literate counterparts – the demands of hegemonic ideology. This is not to say that everywhere in China villagers opposed the Cultural Revolution simply by *becoming* illiterate, by refusing to read and write what they were asked to. Mine is a discussion of representations of events, rather than historical events; to measure the extent and success of illiterates' resistance to the pressures of political propaganda is beyond the scope of my research. Yet much evidence (personal accounts, prose fiction, and films based on memories of the Cultural Revolution) suggests that, although many other factors contributed to changing views of literacy and the mind-set of the two imagined communities I have analyzed, one should not underestimate the role of illiteracy as a form of critical resistance.

If the question of whether or not literacy changes society and is a subversive element that challenges hegemonic ideologies can be answered only with a cautious 'it depends', the same is true for its opposite and too often neglected side, illiteracy. Illiteracy is as complex and diversified as literacy is.<sup>43</sup> Depending on the circumstances, illiteracy can acquire a subversive value and can contribute to social change. In particular, it is not the fact of illiteracy – just like the fact of literacy – that undermines authority, but the meaning that people attached to it, its perception, its imagined value in a specific historical and social context. This type of subversive illiteracy does not simply define itself as an absence of literacy but ac-

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a farm, working with villagers. Dai Xiaoi also comments on the political incorrectness of the villagers, which did not fit the image that the Communist Party had previously given him. Gordon A. Bennet & Ronald N. Montaperto, *Red Guard: The Political Biography of Tai Hsiao-ai* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1971). 109.

<sup>43</sup> The fact that illiteracy is as complex as literacy is also historically true. David Johnson points out how in late imperial China "illiterates were no more a single homogeneous social group – or audience – than the classically educated were"; Johnson, "Communication, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson, Andrew Nathan & Evelyn Rawski (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985): 67.

tively uses other means of expression (non-words) to create alternative forms of visual/exhibitionist communication.

Other meaningful 'non-words' still fill the non-verbal space of contemporary Chinese culture. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, a new and powerful illiteracy has found its space in popular culture and has been re-drawing the boundaries between the urban and the rural world, literacy and orality, rational and intuitive, intellectual and practical, verbal and visual.

Popular culture is an active element in shaping and changing Chinese society. Andrew Jones has pointed out that, in contemporary China, popular culture has challenged the traditional division between elite culture (as peculiar to the ruling classes) and popular culture (as peculiar to the lower classes, and often associated with illiteracy and/or orality). The appropriation of popular music by highly educated youth shows that, today, the literates in China have also embraced what were once only the modes of expression of illiterates.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, I believe that in the past ten years Chinese documentarians and art videomakers have increasingly challenged the supremacy of words and their narratives, through both subject-matter and filming techniques. For instance, in *Yici shehui diaocha* (A social survey, 1998), Zhao Liang uses a series of long takes, all with a hand-held camera, to record crowds of people who are either walking towards the camera or standing/sitting alongside, while he walks around Beijing's streets, shops, and subways. Zhao adds a surreal detail to this seemingly *cinéma-vérité* video. In the left corner of every shot, we see a gun pointed at the people captured by the camera; it looks as though the gun is actually placed on the camera itself. Everybody seems to ignore the gun, and, for that matter, the camera. The 'survey' ends when someone

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<sup>44</sup> See Andrew F. Jones, "The Politics of Popular Music in Post-Tian'anmen China," in *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China: Learning from 1989*, ed. Jeffrey Wasserstrom & Elizabeth Perry (Boulder CO: Westview, 1992): 148–66. Through the perspective of an American teacher, John Willinsky also stresses the importance of dealing with the increasing presence of a "popular literacy" (i.e. rock lyrics, slogans, etc.) among children and adolescents. He also notes the importance of an "active literacy" (with reference to Paulo Freire) in order to succeed in adult literacy programmes. See Willinsky, "Popular Literacy and the Roots of the New Writing," in *Rewriting Literacy: Culture and the Discourse of the Other*, ed. Candace Mitchell & Kathleen Weiler (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1991): 255–70.

reacts to the ‘shooting’ and looks angrily at the camera/gun. No inter-titles supply explanations, no voice-over narration directs/controls the viewer’s interpretation. The visual stands on its own to express meanings.

In sum, twenty-first-century illiteracy is a more sophisticated negation of literacy; it is not so much the negation of the ability to read and write as an attempt to eliminate the ideological limits and cultural conventions that have been responsible for the creation of an empty literacy. Through the fine arts, motion pictures, independent documentary films, websites, and rock songs, new communities have been trying to explore alternative ways to say what words do not seem to be able to say.

In the blurring space between popular and ‘highbrow’ culture, one can find an example of the artistic subversion of literacy in the work of Xu Bing, the Chinese artist who created four thousand *meaningless* character blocks. None of these characters exists in Chinese; they are all the birthings of Xu Bing’s imagination. While the international recognition accorded Xu Bing and his status as a Chinese intellectual residing abroad both place him in a wholly different situation from the ‘weak’ figures I have analyzed in this article, his ‘non-words’ also challenge the supremacy of the Chinese writing script as a system that has become an empty and even tyrannical means of distorting and alienating reality.

While analyzing Xu Bing’s work, Benjamin Lee explores the idea of “a systematic deconstruction of the written word and a denial of Chinese culture, a criticism of the politics of the Chinese nation-state, whose bureaucracies have inundated and controlled everyday life in a meaningless yet systematic fashion.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, the non-words of Xu Bing are actually very meaningful. What is especially interesting is the fact that their meaning does not reside in themselves. Xu Bing’s characters can be decoded only by referring to something beyond them; they are completely

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<sup>45</sup> Benjamin Lee, “Going Public,” *Public Culture* 5 (1993): 165–66. For more on Xu Bing, see Britta Erikson’s book published to coincide with an exhibition at the Sackler Gallery; Erikson, *The Art of Xu Bing: Words Without Meaning, Meaning Without Words* (Washington DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery/Smithsonian Institution & Seattle: U of Washington P, 2001); also, for a study of his non-characters, see Stanley K. Abe, “Reading the Sky,” in *Cross-Cultural Readings of Chineseness: Narratives, Images, and Interpretations of the 1990s*, ed. Yeh Wen-hsin (Berkeley: U of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 1999): 53–79.

made-up, chaotic, free combinations of strokes, radicals deprived of their original sense. Only those who can recognize them as non-characters (i.e.

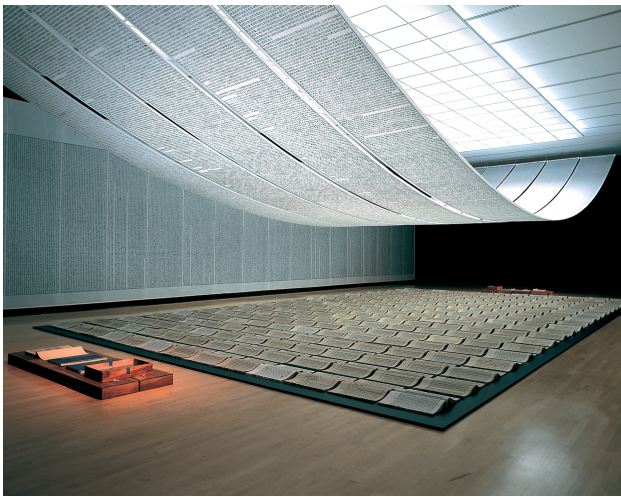


Figure 4: “Book from the Sky” (1987–91), Xu Bing.



Figure 5: “Book from the Sky” (1987–91), Xu Bing.

those who can see the visual exhibitionism implicit in their illegible nature) can understand their meaning.

Xu Bing reminds a Chinese audience that its point of view is created by the ability to read and to understand that these are nonsense characters. This act of reading takes place in the publicly delimited space of the exhibition, which itself is subject to political commentary and criticism.<sup>46</sup>



Xu Bing's non-words have no codified meaning; they simply exhibit themselves. Their meaning lies in their reception, at the moment of their non-reading, which is the moment of their re-thinking, re-interpretation, re-creation. In other words, Xu Bing pushes Lao Gan's 'mistake' to its edge and explores its infinite possibilities by deconstructing and reconstructing Chinese script.

Attacking empty literacy by means of powerful 'non-words' – as expressed by the circles drawn by the little cowherd, the cowpiss written by Lao Gan, or the subversive literacy of Xu Bing's non-characters – is one possible avenue for non-mainstream culture(s) to become visible. Rejecting words can become a meaningful act of resistance and can allow otherwise marginalized groups to challenge the very existence of a mainstream logocentric culture which does not/cannot represent them and in fact has misrepresented, deceived, and often excluded them.

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<sup>46</sup> Lee, "Going Public," 166.

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- Furong zhen* 芙蓉鎮 (Hibiscus Town), dir. Xie Jin 謝晉 (screenplay by Ah Cheng, from a novel by Hua Gu; Shanghai Film Studios, 1986; 164 min.).
- Haizi wang* 孩子王 (King of the Children), dir. Chen Kaige 陳凱歌 (screenplay by Chen Kaige and Wan Zhi, from a story by Ah Cheng; Xi'an Film Studio, 1987; 106 min.).
- Juelie* 決裂 (Breaking With Old Ideas), dir. Li Wenhua 李文化 (screenplay by Chun Chao and Zhou Jie; Pechino Studio, 1975).
- Lan fengzheng* 藍風箏 (The Blue Kite), dir. Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壯壯 (screenplay by Xiao Mao; Shanghai Film Studios, 1993; 138 min.).
- Nü Shu – A Hidden Language of Women in China*, dir. Yueqing Yang (Canada/China 1998; 58 min.).
- Wutai jiemei* 舞台姐妹 (Stage Sisterss/Two Actresses), dir. Xie Jin 謝晉 (screenplay by Lingu Wang and Xie Jin; Shanghai Film Studios, 1964; 112 min.).
- Yangguang canlan de rizi* 陽光燦爛的日子 (In the Heat of the Sun), dir. Jiang Wen 姜文 (screenplay by Jiang Wen, from a story by Shuo Wang; China Film Co-Production Corporation, 1994; 134 min.).
- 1966 nian: wo de hongweibing de shidai* 年我的紅衛兵的時代 (1966: My Time in the Red Guards/My Red Guard Period), dir. Wu Wenguang 吳文光 (1993; 165 min.).

### Online Collections of Visual Material

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- Picturing Power: Posters of the Cultural Revolution (<http://kaladarshan.arts.ohio-state.edu/Exhibitions/picturingPower.html>).
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- Transnational China Project Image Archive (<http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~tnchina/>).
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# Integral Culture

## Agora-Phobia at the Polynesian Cultural Centre



CHRIS PRENTICE

THE POLYNESIAN CULTURAL CENTER (PCC) – a cultural theme-park in Laie, on the northern side of the Hawaiian island of Oahu – presents ‘culture/s’ in terms consistent with what Jean Baudrillard has named “integral reality.”<sup>1</sup> As well as in its status as a cultural theme-park, the Center’s aesthetic and dynamic organization illustrates integral reality as characterizing the contemporary world of globalization, digitalization, and virtualization. Integral reality emerges with the loss of the three-dimensional representational space that underpinned a prior order of reality, and its (critical) articulation, sustaining and sustained through the representational functions of ‘message’, ‘meaning’, or ‘discourse’.<sup>2</sup> It is, Baudrillard argues, being absorbed by the emergence of the fourth, as it were, “dimensionless space-time.”<sup>3</sup> Integral reality – and, by extrapolation, what I cast as integral culture – is characterized by the ‘technical perfection’ of reality, its clarification through purging of any ‘noise’, its prevention at the ‘genetic’ level of any chance or accident, programmed to exclude negativity, the immediacy of feedback.<sup>4</sup> My concern

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments: Conversations with François L’Yvonnet*, tr. Chris Turner (*D’un fragment l’autre: Entretiens avec François L’Yvonnet*, 2001; London & New York: Routledge, 2004): 45.

<sup>2</sup> Baudrillard, *Fragments: Conversations with François L’Yvonnet*, 65–66.

<sup>3</sup> Baudrillard, *Fragments: Conversations with François L’Yvonnet*, 65.

<sup>4</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “The Violence of the Virtual and Integral Reality” (2002), tr. M.

is with the implications of such a shift for those causes that articulate their concerns in the name of 'culture', 'cultural identity' or 'cultural difference' – those who would invoke culture as the basis of decolonization struggles, who seek to decolonize through culture, or as cultures.<sup>5</sup> To the extent that they appeal to a politics of culture, or a cultural politics, that presumes the stability of a representational space, integral reality threatens to defuse 'political' programmes and goals that continue to be named in the terms that the 3-D spatial order offered: opposition, resistance, representation, democracy.

Drawing on my 1996 visit to the Center, as well as on print, audio-visual, and on-line materials gathered at the time and subsequently, and on scholarly analyses of the PCC's exhibition of both Polynesian and contemporary tourist culture(s),<sup>6</sup> my intention is neither to add to existing scholarship on the PCC as such, and still less on Pacific or Polynesian cultures. Rather, I propose the PCC as an exemplar for the more general 'integralization' of contemporary 'culture' in and through the global West. Here I am using the term 'global' in the sense that Baudrillard distinguishes it from the 'universal', arguing that they

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Lambert-Drache, *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 2.2 (July 2005): 3–5, [http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2\\_2/baudrillard.htm](http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol2_2/baudrillard.htm) (accessed 27 July 2005). Note: pagination refers to A4 printed pages from this website.

<sup>5</sup> The slight distinction between 'culture' and 'cultures' here already suggests the dispersal and complexity of the word as its passage into and through modernity has been shaped by colonialism. Culture has become associated not only with the processes and materials of a collective patrimony but also with the 'identities' that invoke them; at the same time, it has become another economic resource and commodity on the global market, whose logics and mechanisms render it virtually impossible to attach culture to specific identities or value(s). This gives rise to the various moves to assert property rights in culture, something that both perpetuates the reification of culture and runs into the same problems that face any attempt to control intellectual or intangible property in the global virtual domain of information.

<sup>6</sup> The basis of my visit to the Centre was a combination of cultural studies and tourism. Participants in the American Culture Association and Popular Culture Association's combined Conference in Honolulu, 1996, were escorted to the PCC. The conference package deal coincided with the budget version for independent visitors, which includes access to the villages, the IMAX film, the canoe pageant featuring performance of traditional legends, a buffet dinner (not the luau), followed by the spectacular night show. We were also hosted as a conference group by Brigham Young University staff for a lunch, and addressed as academics in a lecture.

are not equivalent terms; in fact they could be considered mutually exclusive. Globalisation pertains to technologies, the market, tourism and information. Universality pertains to values, human rights, freedoms, culture and democracy. Globalisation appears to be irreversible; the universal on the other hand appears to be disappearing, at least as far as it constitutes a system of values for western modernity with no counterpart in any other culture.<sup>7</sup>

At the culmination of this process, he argues, “The universal is itself globalised; democracy, human rights circulate through exactly the same channels as any other global product – like oil or capital.”<sup>8</sup>

In his 1994 study of the Center, Andrew Ross had noted that the term ‘theme-park’ was taboo in Laie, despite the fact that the PCC “obviously belongs to the broad spectrum of constructed tourist environments that can be grouped under this rubric.”<sup>9</sup> By 2005, its website explicitly used the term, while by 2008 it was more implicit in the designation ‘theme attraction’, pointing to the shift I want to explore. Its development from a multi-perspectival cultural complex into its acknowledged status as a theme-park or theme attraction renders pointlessly belated any exposé of the cultural presentations as those belonging to the theme-park genre; however, this development is consistent with a larger process, the implosion of ‘cultural’ discourses into the one dominating logic. In other words, in both the logic of its cultural presentations and larger spatio-temporal rhetorics, and the processes by which its potentially disarticulable complex of interests and objectives have converged into a unified totality, we can identify the emergence of integral reality generally, and specifically integral culture. The very possibility of a cultural theme-park is inseparable from a colonial history of exploratory, trade, missionary, territorial, and anthropological incursions into the Pacific.<sup>10</sup> Since 1963, the PCC has

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<sup>7</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “The Global and the Universal” (“Le mondial et l’universel,” 1996; tr. 2001), tr. Deborah Walker & Raylene Ramsay, in *Baudrillard West of the Dateline*, ed. Victoria Grace, Heather Worth & Laurence Simmons (Palmerston North: Dunmore, 2003): 23.

<sup>8</sup> Baudrillard, “The Global and the Universal,” 24.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature’s Debt to Culture* (London & New York: Verso, 1994): 53.

<sup>10</sup> As Andrew Ross reminds us, “Cultural theme parks or centers [...] are the primary spectacle of ethnographic tourism [...]. The historical lineage of the indigenous

presented ‘cultures’ collected and formatted as displays, framed by missionary, scholarly, and entertainment discourses and by religious, pedagogical and economic imperatives, all with their roots in colonialism. However, the PCC’s sites and performances have changed over time, and I argue that this change has been in the direction of integral reality.

The axiological basis of my argument is consistent with Baudrillard’s notorious claim that “Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real.”<sup>11</sup> While the advent of a ‘theme-park of’ something – nature, animals, history, even modes of production – signifies the (symbolic) death and *simulated* resurrection of that thing, the extension and dispersal of the theme-park logic through the socio-cultural sphere dissolves it, in turn, as a specific space. In other words, when the theme-park logic captures and neutralizes culture in the name of access and diversity, there does not have to be an actual theme-park. Although the PCC has invoked a basis in cultural authenticity for its exhibits and performances, guaranteed by both ‘native informant’ and anthropological expertise, today it does not so much mask its artificiality as alibi the contemporary state of culture more broadly. To that extent, any contemporary theme-park would illustrate the development of integral reality, but in my focus on a *cultural* theme-park oriented to ‘ethnic tourism’, I posit the poignancy of the PCC’s ‘translocation’ of culture(s) within integral reality. It calls for a re-thinking of the terms of ‘culture discourses’ in postcolonial attempts to dismantle Western (neo)colonial structures of power, to contest the continuities of colonial relations of knowledge and power, and to articulate (collective) sovereignty as ‘cultures’.

The intensification of the ‘politics of culture’ – culture as the object of political analysis, or struggle – toward ‘cultural politics’ – politics as articulated *through* culture – points to the collapse of the specific ground of either term as a basis for appeals to the other, not by eradication of one by the other in antagonistic struggle or the dialectical production of a third term but, on the contrary, by virtue of their extension and proliferation

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exhibit, however, lies in the great imperial expositions and world’s fairs, where ‘the native village’ was a showcase for the colonial powers to display their territorial possessions and subjects to visitors” (43).

<sup>11</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*; tr. Sheila Glaser (*Simulacres et Simulation*, 1981; Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994): 12.

through one another. In this sense, we are in the realms of what Baudrillard had already characterized as 'trans': a state in which "every individual category is subject to contamination, substitution is possible between any sphere and any other: there is total confusion of types."<sup>12</sup> In developing this argument, he suggests that "Each category [sport, sex, economics, politics, art, etc.] is generalized to the greatest possible extent, so that it eventually loses all specificity and is reabsorbed by all the other categories."<sup>13</sup> In other words, 'everything' is political, 'everything' is sexual, 'everything' is economic, and so on, while, for example, sporting imperatives infiltrate sex, politics, and business, in terms of 'performance'. Baudrillard continues:

This paradoxical state of affairs, which is simultaneously the complete actualisation of an idea, the realization of the whole tendency of modernity, and the negation of that idea and that tendency, their annihilation by virtue of their very success, by virtue of their extension beyond their very bounds – this state of affairs is epitomized by a single figure: [the trans....].<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, the 'space-time' of integral reality constitutes a 'trans-location', and the 'culture' that occupies it is 'trans-cultural'.<sup>15</sup> Appending 'trans' to the root word 'culture' therefore signals a problematic that shadows cele-

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<sup>12</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, tr. James Benedict (*La Transparence du mal: Essai sur les phénomènes extrêmes*, 1990; London & New York: Verso, 1993): 8.

<sup>13</sup> Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> *The Transparency of Evil*, 9–10.

<sup>15</sup> Clearly, my use of 'trans-culture(s)' must be distinguished from Mary Louise Pratt's reference to 'transculturation', used by ethnographers to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. "While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone"; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992): 6.

Contrary to the suggestion, in Pratt's definition, of the persistence of clearly individuated terms/subjects exercising agency in relation to implicitly identifiably distinct 'cultural materials', picking and choosing among matter or even practices reified into 'culture'-objects, 'trans' admits of no such distinct agencies, no 'ours' as opposed to 'theirs', and no 'this' as opposed to, or even as well as, 'that'.

bratory or admonitory proclamations that ‘everything is cultural’. The extension of culture into all spheres is its fullest realization but also its loss of referential specificity. While recognition of the implication of such domains as art, politics, economics, and culture in one another has been fundamental to interdisciplinary critical enterprises that invoke them, ‘trans’ points to the radical loss of irreducibility to one another that would enable them to be articulated as standpoints of critique, or as ‘stakes’ in political contestation. The culmination of the ‘trans’ phenomenon is integral social space, integral culture.



The PCC was established in 1963 and its theme-park site is attached to the Brigham Young University at Hawai‘i (BYU-H), an institution run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), or Mormon Church. The Center is staffed mostly by students of the BYU-H, working to fulfil the terms of the scholarships that fund their education, as guides or ushers, on ticket sales, or as entertainers or performers of the ‘traditional’ cultures represented in eight reconstructed ‘villages’ (designated synecdochally as ‘islands’): Hawai‘i, Samoa, Tonga, Tahiti, Aotearoa (Māori New Zealand), the Marquesas, Fiji, and, since 2003, Rapa Nui, or Easter Island.<sup>16</sup> There is also a ‘Mission Village’. Architectural, ecological, and artifactual authenticity has been overseen by a research team headed by an environmental historian, the director of the Institute of Polynesian Studies at BYU-H and of Cultural Development at the PCC.<sup>17</sup> However, the PCC website draws attention to direct Pacific Island involvement in the Center’s establishment. Many Pacific Island people had moved to Laie to be closer to what was then the one LDS temple for the Asia–Pacific region, and in 1951 Elder Matthew Cowley announced, in the paternalistic terms of the time:

*“I hope to see the day when my Maori people down there in New Zealand will have a little village at Laie with a beautiful carved house.*

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<sup>16</sup> Ross points out that thirty percent of BYU-H’s students are Pacific Islanders, and eighty-five percent of those work at the PCC; Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature’s Debt to Culture*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 45.



*The Tongans will have a village out there, and also the Tahitians, Samoans already have a start – all these islanders of the sea.*<sup>18</sup>

From this, the concept of ‘little Polynesian villages’ was developed, with the support of Oahu Stake President Edward L. Clissold. Yet, emphasizing the participation of “these islanders” and their role in shoring up the ‘authenticity’ of the villages, we are told that

A special contingent of over 100 Maori came from New Zealand to help get their “village” ready and participate in the opening ceremonies. Other Polynesians from the South Pacific had contributed building materials, and the late Queen Salote of Tonga sent two of her master builders to ensure that the quarter-scale model of her summer palace we [sic] created appropriately.<sup>19</sup>

The participation of Pacific Island church members and cultural and political leaders, and the concern with establishing a cultural ‘base’ for those living (even temporarily) in Laie, and with ensuring and preserving authenticity, invoke the value of self-representation as subjects without necessarily being-themselves-for-others<sup>20</sup> beyond the demands of Mormon conversion itself. The involvement of Pacific/Polynesian peoples in the PCC from its inception through to the present-day operations of the Center might be posited as signalling agency rather than any notion of colonial imposition. However, the ability of neocolonialism and globalization to co-opt or absorb localized sites of action points to the need for caution in reading such sites or actions as decolonizing positions. We might recall Gayatri Spivak’s warning that “Neo-colonialism is fabricating its allies by proposing a share of the center in a seemingly new way (not a rupture but a displacement). . . .”<sup>21</sup>

The development into tourist entertainment and culture as ‘show-business’ took place through a slightly different combination of local (indige-

<sup>18</sup> Polynesian Cultural Center, 2005, “Purpose and History: Polynesian Villages,” <http://www.polynesia.com/purpose/purpose.html>

<sup>19</sup> Polynesian Cultural Center, 2005, “Purpose and History: Polynesian Villages,” <http://www.polynesia.com/purpose/purpose.html> (absent from 2008 website).

<sup>20</sup> See Dean MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992): 103.

<sup>21</sup> Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993): 57.

nous Hawaiian) tradition, Pacific student social and economic creativity, and institutional harnessing of these as potential resources for growth of the Church and its College. Students of the Church College of Hawai'i (later BYU-H) "began to perform respective traditional songs and dances in Waikiki. Calling themselves the Polynesian Panorama [...] by 1961 [...] they were performing to sell-out crowds."<sup>22</sup> However, this self-motivated performance for tourist entertainment, whether as a means of retaining contact with home traditions or of earning money, was soon seen as a way of alleviating the problem that most students, both local and international, needed financial assistance to fund their studies:

Recognizing these needs, Church and college leaders merged elements of the community *hukilau* program, the ideas for Elder Cowley and President Clissold's 'little villages,' the successful Polynesian Panorama performances, and the students' need to earn money ... and decided to create the Polynesian Cultural Center as a visitor attraction.<sup>23</sup>

The development of the PCC therefore saw a mobilization of culture through a range of institutional and discursive inflections, from a local cultural programme, the articulation of the Church mission in the cultural terms of re-created villages, and the convergence of entertainment and economic success. Polynesian cultures are framed by an intricate meshing of discourses of church/religion/community, college/education/anthropology, and entertainment/economics/tourism.

Throughout his discussion, Ross points to the fundamental mutual implication among the fields and disciplines involved. As well as describing Mormonism as a variant of US colonialism in the Pacific,<sup>24</sup> he argues that, "just as they shared more than they cared to recognize with the detested missionaries who preceded them, anthropologists have a good deal in common with the tourist." He continues: "In fact, it is invariably the mass tourist who is now invited to play the role of the classical ethnographer."<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the economic register that points to the *business* of tourism, with its commodification of identity and experience, reaches back to an

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<sup>22</sup> Polynesian Cultural Center, 2005, "Purpose and History: Polynesian Villages," <http://www.polynesia.com/purpose/purpose.html>

<sup>23</sup> Polynesian Cultural Center, "Purpose and History: Polynesian Villages."

<sup>24</sup> Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 41, 42.

imperial-colonial history of intercultural encounter. Alluding to the economic register of colonialism, Ross points out that the PCC has also returned the Laie community to economic dependence on Salt Lake City, echoing the “earlier sugar-plantation economy founded by Mormon missionaries to supply Utah.”<sup>26</sup> As the narrator of Ian Wedde’s novel *Symmes Hole* reflects of Pacific history, “Nowhere to go on land or sea without gilling yourself in the cross-hatch of stories.”<sup>27</sup> A detour through *Symmes Hole* is supported by the presence at the entrance/exit of the PCC of a McDonald’s outlet – arguably the ‘theme-park of food’, ‘integral food,’ or “zero-degree” food<sup>28</sup> – and a figure of the contiguity of the theme-park with its ‘outside’, suggesting both (mutual) extension and absorption.

Much of the burden of the novel’s diatribe on Pacific history concerns what the narrator constructs as a plot to ‘get inside the Pacific’. The plot (in both senses) culminates in the emergence of a McDonald’s franchise in Courtenay Place, Wellington, New Zealand. The narrator speculates:

The Renaissance wanted to ‘civilise’ Caliban [...] the Enlightenment wanted to appropriate ‘natural innocence’ [...] and Jeremiah Reynolds wanted to get *inside* – and his descendants did: nuclear submarines and fast food....<sup>29</sup>

At the PCC, colonial powers display their territories and subjects, missionaries display their converted souls; tourism displays its ethnic and cultural commodities.

The political, educational and religious ‘missions’ explicitly coalesce in a mosaic located at the entrance pavilion, and the photograph, housed inside, on which it was obviously based. The accompanying plaque refers to the visiting Elder David McKay, attending the flag-raising ceremony: “Deeply stirred as he watched the children of many races [singing and praying and] pledging allegiance to the American flag” and envisioning “a school of higher learning [...] to go along with the recently completed Temple, making Laie the spiritual and educational center of the

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<sup>26</sup> *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 45.

<sup>27</sup> Wedde, *Symmes Hole* (Auckland: Penguin, 1986): 81

<sup>28</sup> Baudrillard, “The Global and the Universal,” 33.

<sup>29</sup> Wedde, *Symmes Hole*, 154.



Figure 6: The entrance/exit of the PCC McDonald's.



Figure 7: Mural – saluting the US flag.

LDS Church in the Pacific.”<sup>30</sup> Its temporal oscillation between commemoration and prophecy is consistent with Mormon ideology concerning the people of Polynesia, whereby conversion would constitute a return to a past truth: back to the future, forward to the past. This ‘Mormon’ temporality shapes the cultural sites and performances.

The mission of the PCC, the “higher purpose” it attaches to its function as a “world-famous cultural theme-park” (2005) or “one of the world’s most successful theme attractions” (2008) is stated on its website:

The Polynesian Cultural Center is a unique treasure created to share with the world the cultures, diversity and spirit of the nations of Polynesia. In accomplishing this we will:

- Preserve and portray the cultures, arts and crafts of Polynesia
- Contribute to the educational development and growth of all people at Brigham Young University-Hawaii and the Polynesian Cultural Center
- Demonstrate and radiate a spirit of love and service which will contribute to the betterment, uplifting and blessing of all who visit this special place.<sup>31</sup>

This statement indicates at least a cooperative alliance of interests among Church, University, and theme-park, as these intersect on the terrain of ‘culture’. However, the very project of preservation has been identified as bound up with the selections made by the subjects of a ‘salvage’ discourse – anthropologists, missionaries, collectors, and curators – and its construction of a timeless cultural ‘eternity’. James Clifford discusses the “desire

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<sup>30</sup> The whole plaque reads: “This mosaic depicts an incident on February 7 1921 here in Laie. On that day Elder David O. McKay of the Council of Twelve and Elder Hugh J. Cannon on a world tour of the missions of the Church attended the flag raising and devotional exercises of the grade school conducted by the missionaries. Deeply stirred as he watched the children of many races singing and praying and pledging allegiance to the flag, Elder McKay envisioned a Temple of Learning to complement the House of the Lord in making Laie the spiritual and educational center of the Church in Hawaii. This vision remained his inspiration and that of his associates until they brought about its literal fulfilment – the Church College of Hawaii.” See PCC, “Purpose and History.”

<sup>31</sup> See Polynesian Cultural Center, Mission Statement,” [http://www.polynesia.com/pcc\\_mission\\_statement.html](http://www.polynesia.com/pcc_mission_statement.html)

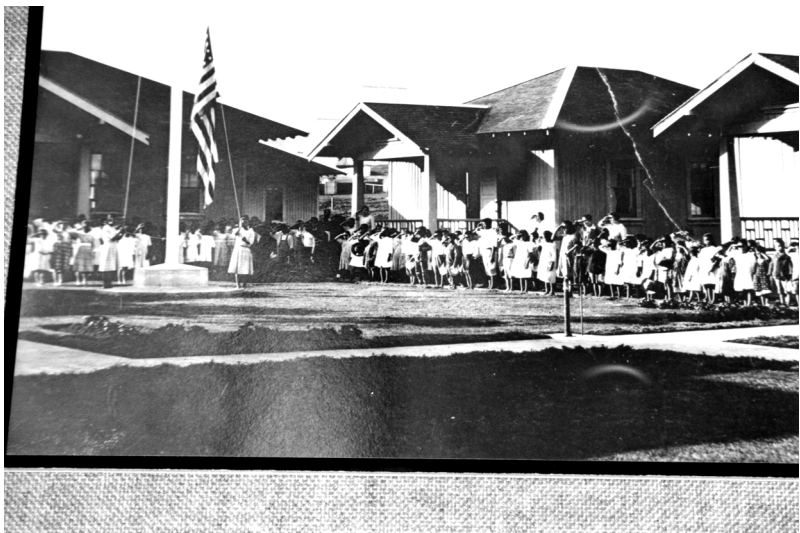


Figure 8: Photograph housed inside.



Figure 9: Publicity poster for the PCC.

to rescue ‘authenticity’ out of destructive historical change,”<sup>32</sup> and this is suggested in the purpose of the PCC, listed among answers to ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ as being “to help preserve and perpetuate the more ideal aspects of Polynesian culture.”<sup>33</sup>

It might be argued that one should distinguish the Center’s publicity and even policy statements about itself from ‘behind the scenes’ internal politics. Against its promotional claims of harmonious cooperation among the institutions involved in its establishment and operation, Andrew Ross observes that

Historically, the PCC has been shaped by the often competing interests of three institutions – LDS, BYU, and the industry-minded administration of the PCC [...]. Every aspect of its construction and administration has been fraught by internal politics from its inception.... Theology, academic scholarship, and commerce, each vying for control over the right to preserve Polynesian culture.<sup>34</sup>

However, specific institutional stakes and investments engaged in struggle over an object do not preclude converging interests among them. More to the point, nor do the ‘fraught internal politics’ imply that their disputed object, ‘culture’, still exists in the specific terms that each discourse – religion, knowledge, and entertainment – might suppose. Similarly, while the rivalry Ross cites points to the possibility of disarticulating the discursive frames containing the representation of Polynesian cultures, preventing their coalescence into totality, what has happened today to ‘behind the scenes’ and ‘internal’ spaces, with their presupposition of 3-D space? Tourism (like visual media) has now breached the frontier separating the exhibition from ‘behind-the-scenes’, where the latter is now the privileged site of display. The displays and performances at the PCC suggest the erosion of discursive specificity among institutional investments as their respective interests and stakes infuse one another. Are there any actual or potential spaces or instances of singularity?

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<sup>32</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge MA & London Harvard UP, 1988): 121.

<sup>33</sup> Polynesian Cultural Center, “Frequently Asked Questions,” <http://www.polynesia.com/faqs.html>

<sup>34</sup> Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 56.



The PCC is promoted as a major public tourist attraction on Oahu. In an August 1996 issue of *Oahu Gold*, the weekly tourist guide to the island, there are nine different advertisements, package price lists, vouchers, and other promotional material, while a June 2003 issue lists over eleven. They vary in extent of information and/or visual appeal, and one of the more informative, included in both sample issues, begins:

One attraction that should not be missed is the Polynesian Cultural Center. Located a scenic hour's drive from Waikiki on Oahu's North Shore, this landmark introduces you to the culture of Hawaii and the major South Pacific island nations.

Here you'll be greeted by friendly islanders representing the seven different Polynesian groups. [...] You'll be able to explore their villages, learn their songs and dances, and admire their beautiful arts and crafts.<sup>35</sup>

Established at the outset are the important tourist priorities of convenience and pleasure of access from the key tourist site of Waikiki, in a discourse that links implicit first-contact anxieties of the tourist with those of the explorer/colonist – the (clichéd) ‘friendliness’ of the islanders and opportunities for discovery. Any suggestion of the scholarly commitment to authenticity in cultural preservation is complicated by PCC publicity that invokes the traveller's fantasy and desire, offering “the islands as you always hoped they would be,” as the PCC tourist brochure has proclaimed.<sup>36</sup> One advertisement in the 2003 issue of *Oahu Gold* extends the theme of visitor convenience:

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<sup>35</sup> Spotlight's *Oahu Gold* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: Inflight Marketing, August 5–21, 1996; June 2–18, 2003): 116, 103.

<sup>36</sup> See Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 44. T.D. Webb, “Highly Structured Tourist Art: Form and Meaning of the Polynesian Cultural Center,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6.1 (Spring 1994): 59, and Christopher Balme, “Staging the Pacific: Framing Authenticity in Performances for Tourists at the Polynesian Cultural Center,” *Theatre Journal* 50.1 (1998): 53.



Why travel thousands of miles to Polynesia and never really see it?  
The Polynesian Cultural Center is only a 35-mile scenic drive from  
Waikiki to Oahu's North Shore.<sup>37</sup>

The activities and performances on offer (song, dance, arts and crafts), along with the invitation to admire and learn, cast culture as entertainment for others. Yet the contemporary students of BYU-H, implicitly the heirs and the subjects of their cultural heritages and identities, have often had to learn their 'traditions' specifically to perform them at the PCC.<sup>38</sup> The Center's disavowal of this points to Ross's suggestion that

The net effect is to reinforce what some scholars think of as a specifically 'Western' idea of ethnicity [...] emphasizing the homogeneity of a local culture transmitted without variation down through history.<sup>39</sup>

Dean MacCannell refers to "reconstructed ethnicity," and the performative imperative of postmodernity's demand for ethnicity as a commodity for tourist consumption: "Apparently, at some point in the postmodernization process, it becomes necessary not merely to *be* [an ethnic subject], it becomes necessary to start *acting* like one."<sup>40</sup> This effectively conveys the precession of the simulacrum, pointing to the production of cultural identity out of its model, the *conflation* of cultural identity with its model, the immediacy of image-feedback that characterizes integral reality. Another reading might, however, focus on the term 'acting' as signalling precisely the spatio-temporal distance or negativity that integral reality absorbs and destroys. It might suggest an *ironic* performance of 'ethnic identity'. Indeed, a number of the performance sites do not simply point in this direction – a shadow disturbing the coherence and unity of the performance for the 'audience' – but overtake it in a ludic short-circuit of irony by comedy, culture by show-biz, and the 'audience' fully participates in the game. I discuss this more fully below, with reference to specific performance sites.

<sup>37</sup> Spotlight's *Oahu Gold*, 76.

<sup>38</sup> Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 45.

<sup>39</sup> *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 49.

<sup>40</sup> Dean MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992): 101.

The range of arts, crafts, and other material practices represented, performed, or displayed, stage difference (diversity) within overall identity (sameness/coherence). Representations of dancing, coconut husking, bark cloth-making, construct a Polynesian cultural ‘whole,’ unified under the auspices of the PCC. The depiction of diversity suggests the unifying exoticism of the tourist appellation, ‘the islands’; it certainly offers the convenience of the postmodern theme-park: publicity announces that “the PCC features all of Polynesia in one place” – truly a trans-location!

Echoing Ross, Balme observes that “This eclectic practice suggests that something close to the notion of a ‘generic’ Polynesian underlies the idea of authenticity at the PCC,”<sup>41</sup> introducing the Western notion of ethnicity with reference to selective representations of culture that cohere around domestic, performance, and material cultural priorities. Similarly, after presenting a couple of sample village schedules from the 1987 PCC brochure, Webb notes:

Although schedules change from time to time, the village programmes are very similar in content. Aside from differences in costuming and a few culture-specific activities, a program from one village could easily play in any other.<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, the objective of showcasing distinct cultures is compromised by the larger framing of culture as such by Western (neo)colonial discourses of ‘Polynesia’.

Indeed, Ross and others have noted the practice of performers of one ‘culture’ standing in for those of another. However, this is invariably either concealed or its critical edge, in relation to the Center’s operations or to the very notions of ethnicity and tradition, is comedically blunted. Ross’s impression, on visiting the PCC, was that

the Polynesians who work there were comfortably ambivalent about the overlap between (a) their given performing identities as Tongans, Samoans, Hawaiians, etc.; and (b) the faux identities that they often take on as performers – Tongans playing the part of Marquesans, because of the shortage of Marquesan students, Samoans playing Hawaiians just for the hell of it, and Filipinos playing the role of Poly-

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<sup>41</sup> Balme, “Staging the Pacific,” 68.

<sup>42</sup> Webb, “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 67.

nesians in the night show, because sometimes any brown body will do on stage.<sup>43</sup>

The sanctioned use of humour in the performances short-circuits any challenge or negativity. Sielu Avea, a principal performer at the Samoan ‘village’ at the time I visited, has also worked as a stand-up comedian in downtown Honolulu and in television appearances. His performance ‘as a Samoan’ was in large part a comedy routine, with significant amounts of parody of both his ostensible role/identity for the PCC, and of audience expectations and responses. He joked that sometimes he performs in the Tongan village because there aren’t enough Tongans, but audiences don’t know the difference.<sup>44</sup> There are layers to this form of humour, including the ‘defusing’ reference to a kind of ‘ethnic cross-dressing’ that occurs at the PCC for the reasons he suggests, among others; but it also invokes ‘in-jokes’ relating to Samoan–Tongan ‘rivalries’. The question remains open as to how the humorous ‘edge’ will survive the assimilative processes of integral reality. Ross has suggested that

Nothing is more contested among the thousand-odd Pacific island cultures than ‘culture’ itself. . . . In the Pacific, culture is not a colorful appendix to power, it is the normative medium of political contests.<sup>45</sup>

However, this is an understanding of ‘culture’ that, for all the possibility that it may be enacted in competitive performances or displays, signifies something very different from the staging of its reified ‘traditions’ as entertainment at the PCC. While it is conceivable that in the interstices of the staged diversity – with its largely scripted performances and ‘dialogues’ with audiences – participants may, among themselves, play out political stakes beyond those of the Center’s institutional interests, integral reality signals the disappearance of the beyond, the implosion of the interstices.

The PCC’s identification, in *Oahu Gold*, of the selective representation of cultural groups as those of the ‘major’ island nations suppresses any

<sup>43</sup> Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 51.

<sup>44</sup> This differs from Andrew Ross’s transcript of Avea’s (scripted) performance in which he described himself as “from New York,” while Balme’s transcript shows him (again humorously) identifying himself as “a real Samoan Chief.” See, respectively, Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 47, and Balme, “Staging the Pacific,” 58.

<sup>45</sup> Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 25–26.

more ideologically specific discourse constituting the Center's attractions – the determination of its inclusions and exclusions. Among the silent exclusions are the Pacific's non-Polynesian islands and peoples, those of Melanesia and Micronesia, for example. This points to the intersection of Western discourses of ethnicity and Mormon doctrine. Ross explains that the theological basis of the LDS involvement in the Pacific (the mission of conversion), along with the project of cultural preservation, relates to the Church's belief that Polynesian islanders are descended from a group of Israelites who escaped captivity in Babylon and were led to Central America, where they settled until journeying to Polynesia when their Hebraic culture was torn apart in factional strife, and they were given dark skins for their ancestral straying from the gospel. As descendants of the House of Israel, they occupy a putatively privileged position, as Ross puts it,

within a church especially committed to their redemption. Consequently, they will revert to their ancient historical identity and become 'properly' Caucasian again as the latter days come around. . . .<sup>46</sup>

While Ross adds that doctrinal and anthropological doubt over this exists in and around the PCC, its status as official Mormon narrative is arguably confirmed by the ways that movements between past, present, and future, the prophecy of reversion, the tensions between preservation and conversion – both integral to the hastening of the 'latter days' – are superficially echoed in the formal or aesthetic dimensions of the PCC's representation of Polynesian culture(s). Indeed, Webb argues, "The entire PCC suggests the journey motif," both in its Polynesian significance and in the sense that "The village track restates the Book of Mormon cyclical journey pattern with the tourists themselves making the Hagoth voyage."<sup>47</sup>



The *Oahu Gold* advertisement cited above proceeds to attract visitors with the "entertaining and educational" film, "shown in the IMAX<sup>®</sup> Theater, a state-of-the-art facility featuring a screen that's [...] nearly seven-stories

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<sup>46</sup> Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 74–75.

<sup>47</sup> Webb, "Highly Structured Tourist Art," 79.

[sic] high and 96 feet wide – and six banks of speakers for wrap-around [stereophonic (2003)] sound.”<sup>48</sup> Ross observes that “The effect of IMAX’s famous air-borne sequences is to simulate weightlessness and freefall at the same time; for many spectators, this also induces motion sickness.”<sup>49</sup> In many ways, this theatre offers an exemplary instance of integral reality. The reference to the wrap-around stereophonic sound system recalls Baudrillard’s own example of ‘virtual’ music, one of whose characteristics (apart from its digital perfection) is its total saturation of space, developing with the “quest [...] for adding new dimensions: triphony, then quadriphony, then multiphony,”<sup>50</sup> to the extent that there is no distance between the receiver and the ‘source’ of the music; rather, the listener is immersed. Similarly, the specific camera-effects and scale of IMAX film, referred to by Paul Virilio as the “‘cinema of the future’,”<sup>51</sup> are consistent with the Mormon vision itself, ‘global’ or ‘planetary’ in perspective. The possibility of an ‘outside’ to this saturated and weightless universe would seem to have disappeared. The theatre further offers an instance of the larger rhetorics of space and time enacted in the Center’s displays and performances, pointing to the paradoxical centrality – the formal alibi – of imagery of movement within a space that has absorbed and dissolved its three-dimensional predicates.

Central to the PCC’s avowed rhetoric of cultural representation, and ambivalently referring to three-dimensional space without exactly partaking of it, are the pervasive evocations of liminality. The narrator of the IMAX film “Polynesian Odyssey” proclaims, “‘Our odyssey is an epic of departures and arrivals, our journey is but a shadow of eternity and endless progression...’.”<sup>52</sup> Liminal spaces are literalized in the pathways, gateways, entrances, and exits that ostensibly mediate discrete cultural performances and exhibits, while establishing a fractal repetition of cultural representations throughout the Center, an unbroken continuous thematization of ‘Polynesia’. While liminality, in other words, implies as its Other

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<sup>48</sup> Spotlight’s *Oahu Gold*, 116 and 103, in the 1996 and 2003 publications respectively.

<sup>49</sup> Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 81.

<sup>50</sup> Baudrillard, *Fragments: Conversations with François L’Yvonnet*, 66.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 81.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, 83.

the stability of 'location', the certainty of source and the teleology of arrival, its own destabilizing effect is neutralized by the convergence of these spaces and their 'in-betweens' in an integral whole system.

Spaces and activities of arrival and departure are foregrounded in the PCC's performative, verbal, and visual presentations. Signs offer their 'Welcome to Polynesia', suggesting that the Center is the point of access to the whole island group (a gateway that is nevertheless already in Polynesia), and the restaurant is called the "Gateway." Following the pathways between the different 'villages' (or 'islands', since signs along the route point to 'Tonga' or 'Samoa' or 'the Marquesas'), visitors symbolically identify with, or are reconstituted as, the Polynesian voyagers themselves;<sup>53</sup> or is the visitors' identification more properly with the Mormon missionaries as they move from island to island in their quest for converts?

This undecidability is an example of the immersion and loss of distinctive positions of subject and object in an integral order. Indeed, the 'miraculous' ability to walk from one 'island' to another with dry feet points to the weakening distinction between the performance sites (landfall) and the passage between them: both are safely contained within the PCC – the lagoon offers no such dangers as the Pacific Ocean itself afforded its Polynesian voyagers. Further, the 'colonial' Hawaiian/American location of Oahu intensifies the problem of defining an 'outside' to the exhibition of cultural 'possessions'.

One performance space that does retain its separation from audience space, both literally and in not calling for participation, is the canoe pageant which extends the theme of ocean voyagers: journeying along the lagoon that runs through the PCC estate, each canoe serves as the stage on which performers act out scenes from traditional legends, passing by an audience seated along the banks. The audience, in 'PCC time' observes (and applauds) as each canoe/stage passes along and out of sight – back to the future (emerging from 'traditional' time of the legend and returning to PCC performance time)? or around a bend (out of audience sight in

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<sup>53</sup> Epeli Hau'ofa describes the world of his ancestors as "a large world in which peoples and cultures moved and mingled, unhindered by boundaries of the kind erected much later by imperial powers"; Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, ed. Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu & Epeli Hau'ofa (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific with Beake House, 1993): 33.

PCC time) into traditional (cyclical, non-historical legendary) time itself? As one passes by, a canoe from another ‘island’ appears. The exchange between movement and stasis blurs performer/audience positions in time, rather than in space.



Figure 10: Spaces of arrival – entry.



Figure 11: Spaces of arrival – restaurant forecourt.

Those located in ‘historical’ time remain still as ‘traditional’ time passes them by. Yet any potential interruption to the totalizing pretensions of Western modernity figured in this exchange is already absorbed by the PCC’s touristic frame of theme-park postmodernity. Webb counters anthropological complaints of the PCC’s “serious period inconsistency” and “‘anthropological science fiction,’”<sup>54</sup> with the suggestion that its validity is precisely in its status as “tourist art,” which “should be examined not as a degradation of some earlier style, but as a distinct social and aesthetic phenomenon.”<sup>55</sup> Yet this argument is grist to the mill of integral reality: rather than encountering negativity – otherness – as signalling a stake in challenging the Center’s framing of Polynesian cultures, it affirms another, arguably more totalizing positivity. The Center’s anthropological and pedagogical aims have been captured by those of tourist entertainment. The standard against which the presentations may be evaluated as *not* authentic or consistent dissolves in the flotation of cultural value shaping the logic of entertainment. The image needs no prior referent in the real; indeed, it is no longer an image in the representational sense.

While the ‘curated’ presentation of Polynesian cultures invokes the museum chronotope,<sup>56</sup> much of the PCC’s attraction is presented less in terms of the spiritual–pedagogical benefits of contemplation than in those of participation. As promised in the publicity in *Oahu Gold*’s ‘Sight-seeing’ section,

Put on a grass skirt and the Tahitians will show you how the hip-swinging *otea* dance is done. Pick up two sticks in New Zealand and

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<sup>54</sup> Webb, “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 61.

<sup>55</sup> “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 61.

<sup>56</sup> The museum is defined by Tony Bennett as realizing its canonical form in the nineteenth century with the organization of exhibitionary space constraining the visitor to perform the museum’s “narrative machinery” in the “walk-through,” characterized by moments of stasis and contemplation (subject approaches/views object) before the object sited and framed for display. See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995): 186. While the PCC inscribes its own narrative machinery, it conforms more to the postmodern museum of the late-twentieth century, with its emphasis on interactivity, connectivity at an interface, characteristic of integral reality. See Baudrillard, *Fragments. Conversations with François L’Yvonnet*, 91.



learn how the rhythmic Maori stick game *tititorea* is played. Provide the beat for Fijian musicians with the *derua* or bamboo resonators.<sup>57</sup>

While answering to the entertainment imperatives of contemporary tourist attractions, these invitations to participate blur the distinct positions of performer and audience, scene and spectator. In the Samoan 'village', Sielu Avea's performance turns a cultural 'tradition' (coconut-husking) into a twentieth-century comic performance, with references to McDonald's and microwaves as more convenient options. Playful 'language lessons' draw the audience in to make them the butt of some of the humour, enacting a (safe) reversal of the position of cultural 'superiority' which generally underlies the ethnographic enterprise, touristic or not.<sup>58</sup>

Such humour is consistent with what Dean MacCannell identifies as "intercultural burlesque."<sup>59</sup> Similarly, "Welcome to Polynesia," a video produced by the PCC includes a visual 'journey' through the theme-park guided by a young man poling a canoe. He introduces himself as a student of BYU-H, majoring in political science with a minor in paddling canoes. He takes the viewer past a 'traditional village', pointing out the Chief's Hut, a family hut, and Pizza Hut. Christopher Balme invokes Homi Bhabha's (1994) account of colonial mimicry, and its ability to disarticulate authority through reflecting back to the colonizer ambivalently (self-) confirming and menacing (partial and displaced) repetitions of colonial authority. Now, Balme suggests that in the more comedic PCC Samoan and Tongan villages,

instead of imitating the colonizer and developing forms of subversion by holding up a distorted image of the European, the Samoans and Tongans appear to be mimicking European projections of *themselves*.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> See Spotlight's *Oahu Gold*, 116 (1996), 103 (2003).

<sup>58</sup> From Ross's transcription of this parodic 'language lesson': "We also use this object. Now this is what we call a *mele'i*. Say it [audience complies]. In English 'sharp stick.' Say it [audience says 'sharp stick']" (47). See also Balme's transcript of the language lesson ("Staging the Pacific," 58). The similarities across three experiences in three different years indicates the relative closure of the scripted routine, connoting the closed circuit of 'interactivity' rather than the (relative) openness of 'dialogue'.

<sup>59</sup> MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds*, 32.

<sup>60</sup> Balme, "Staging the Pacific," 60 (my emphasis). A similar vein of comedy informed the patter of the tourist guide I met at New Zealand's Māori tourist thermal



Figure 12: Māori canoe pageant.



Figure 13: Samoan ‘language lesson’ performance.

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village, Whakarewarewa, as she referred to the steaming pools of hot water as “Māori microwaves.” The similarity underscores a repetition across the series, “‘ethnic’ or ‘cultural’ theme-park.”

While I would fully agree with this reading of what has to be seen as a 'risky' humour – where the risk is its confirmation rather than alteration of stereotype – it is also uncertain that it would be an effective strategy against an authority whose discourse, in the broadest sense, is dispersed rather than ambivalent, whose subject-position is diffused throughout the group in participation and interaction. After all, the humour gravitates toward sameness, shared knowledge, and understanding, counting on 'in-jokes'.

If what most villages offer is the opportunity for participation, the humour tends more toward complicity in the subversion of some of the underlying principles of the PCC's anthropologically informed mission of 'cultural preservation': ethnic identity, cultural essentialism, the 'pre-contact' time of tradition through which that culture is defined. The question of whether some function is served *for* the Center in the very appearance of its subversion is a difficult one. Perhaps the humour 'relaxes' the audience while speaking to anxieties of intercultural encounter; on the other hand, its ludic oscillations between confrontation and reassurance might also disorient the audience and revive some of the 'danger' of such encounters that has otherwise been largely expunged. However, there is something reminiscent of the carnivalesque in this space of intentional and sanctioned subversion. As MacCannell points out,

Carnival parody in its original form [...] was inclusive of the parodist as well as the butt. It functioned to make the community whole at the same time that official rituals were establishing hierarchies and distinctions as between the sacred and profane spheres of life.<sup>61</sup>

So, the visitor to the PCC is now drawn into the frame, included – a Polynesian; even the challenges are playful. This does not preclude some alteration in an audience member's expectations or attitudes, but when the 'difference' of the Polynesian performer from the tourist is minimized, the larger frame is one of assimilation. While the visitor can 'experience' being 'Polynesian', the representation of these Pacific cultures is already incorporated within Western neocolonial tourist terms. This neutralizing dynamic points to the important question of whether there is anything that cannot be incorporated or assimilated in these terms; anything that would

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<sup>61</sup> MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds*, 231.

constitute a singularity with respect to the Center's totalizing pretensions.<sup>62</sup>

Not all island/village exhibits are presented in a humorous vein. Balme refers to the Māori and Hawaiian villages, where cultural practices and performances of 'traditions' take a more didactic tone.<sup>63</sup> While participation is still featured in the Māori village, whether in the form of the tititorea stick game, or the waiata poi that was presented on the occasion of my visit, Balme suggests that these island/villages represent Fourth-World cultures subsumed under majority colonizing culture. As such, "in the face of heavy pressures to assimilate," the presented traditions are too fragile for self-irony.<sup>64</sup> Yet how can culture/s survive such assimilative pressure, now not simply from the majority culture of the nation-state, but from globalization's demand for cultural commodities, from the intensification of integral reality? Is earnest didacticism any safeguard? Has even poignant vulnerability not been recuperated as anything from a 'moral stance' to a marketing strategy? Attributes such as spirituality, community, and ecological harmony are no less attractive to the Western/tourist consumer than humour and play. If the 'culturalism' built and sustained by protection and re-creation of 'traditions' has contributed to the development of the theme-park logic and phenomenon, now the problem is becoming the 'feedback loop' from the theme-park back to the wider cultural sphere, "escalating the process by which way of life becomes heritage," materializing culture according to a "museum effect."<sup>65</sup> Consequently, what is *lived* comes to relate more to the hyperreal production of

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<sup>62</sup> An example of this 'incorporation' occurred during my visit to the PCC. During the lecture, a palagi (European) Mormon elder who held a respected position in Tonga made a flippant remark about Samoan practices of conferring chiefhoods. A young Samoan woman in our group challenged his claim, and his use of humour as the cover under which to make it. Church members present visibly disapproved of this challenge. The speaker assured her that "some of [his] best friends" were Samoan, then after the lecture the male elders paternalistically drew her to the front of the room, not to continue the discussion, but to compose themselves with her into a group photograph representing nothing if not 'incorporation' and neutralization of her challenge.

<sup>63</sup> Balme, "Staging the Pacific," 64.

<sup>64</sup> "Staging the Pacific," 64.

<sup>65</sup> See Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: U of California P, 1998): 6–7 and 45–46 respectively.

‘culture’ out of the precession of its ‘heritage’ or ‘traditions’. In this case, manifesting as the ‘difference’ of heritages or traditions, assimilation is raised to the next power. Baudrillard writes that

What used to be separated is now merged; distance is everywhere abolished: between the sexes, between opposite poles, between stage and audience, between the protagonists of the action, between subject and object [...] With the abolition of distance and of the ‘pathos’ of distance, everything becomes undecidable, even in the physical realm.<sup>66</sup>

Referring to the ‘Larsen effect’ in feedback, produced when the source is too close to the receiver (of transmission), he insists that “We are in a kind of generalized Larsen effect,”<sup>67</sup> part of the implosive nature of integral reality, which “refers to everything that works in an integrated circuit.”<sup>68</sup>

Changes that have taken place within the larger spatio-cultural organization of the PCC reveal more explicitly structural processes of assimilation. Webb describes a transformation from assimilation of the villages to a Mormon spatial allegory to that of contemporary tourist entertainment. He argues that “The center’s overlooked aesthetic [...] is supplied not by any Polynesian tradition, but by Mormonism.”<sup>69</sup> Identifying Mormon ‘meanings’ throughout the PCC, he points to the earlier A-B-A formal pattern denoting a passage through the gaiety of the first villages encountered, into sombreness – exemplified in the early presentation of the Marquesan exhibit as “a monument to culture loss”<sup>70</sup> – and back to gaiety with more lively villages beyond,<sup>71</sup> culminating in the “night show and its glorious refrain of the day’s activities.”<sup>72</sup> This figures forth the “Mormon perspective of the world and mortal life,” the “Mormon habit of seeing

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<sup>66</sup> Baudrillard, “The Violence of the Virtual and Integral Reality,” 7.

<sup>67</sup> “The Violence of the Virtual and Integral Reality,” 7.

<sup>68</sup> “The Violence of the Virtual and Integral Reality,” 8.

<sup>69</sup> Webb, “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 59. By contrast, Balme insists that “Tongan and Samoan performances work to subvert whatever [Mormon] aesthetic ‘master-plan’ may or may not be in place,” though the limits of sanctioned subversion have already been discussed (“Staging the Pacific,” 56).

<sup>70</sup> Webb, “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 68.

<sup>71</sup> “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 70.

<sup>72</sup> “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 74.

heaven as the culmination of every material, every mortal operation,” a rhetoric of “rise, fall, and glorious restoration.”<sup>73</sup> However, Webb goes on to observe that even this A-B-A pattern has been compromised by later alterations to the Marquesan exhibit.

The Marquesan pavilion was first opened in 1975 as a *tohua* or ceremonial compound whose buildings and material remnants were presented without any element of performance or cultural identification on the part of PCC staff, whose function was to greet and guide visitors through its sombre spaces.<sup>74</sup> Webb cites an early greeting script that explains the purpose of the *tohua* as being “‘to remind you that a once great and proud people is almost forgotten and extinct.’”<sup>75</sup> By 1987, the PCC schedule still offered only a truncated version of the attractions presented at other villages, including food preparation, an historical lecture, and legend-telling, with more emphasis on the material remains of the culture identified by signs through the different built spaces,<sup>76</sup> such as are represented more actively in other PCC villages. Thus, as Webb points out, the same principles of selection underlie this compound as define the representations of Polynesian culture elsewhere at the Center.<sup>77</sup> However,

Recently [the PCC’s] formal clarity was significantly damaged by the inflation of the program. [...] Like the other villages, the Marquesan exhibit now features costumed villagers, chant, weaving, and ‘songs of the isles’. It even offers a special ‘serenade’ for tourist couples celebrating their honeymoons or anniversaries.<sup>78</sup>

While the PCC presents this as a more accurate reflection of Marquesan culture, apparently found on closer research not to have been as damaged as first thought, Webb argues that it nevertheless both obscures the reality of culture damage and loss, and dilutes the Mormon A-B-A rhetoric, bringing the exhibit more into line with tourist tastes and resulting in a flattened A-A-A structure. Indicative of the assimilative pressures of

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<sup>73</sup> “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 77.

<sup>74</sup> Webb, “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 68.

<sup>75</sup> “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 70.

<sup>76</sup> “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 75.

<sup>77</sup> “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 76.

<sup>78</sup> “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 81–82.

integral culture, the relative loss of even the Mormon element that offered the PCC some distinctiveness among theme-parks threatens its survival not simply in the funding terms that Webb notes,<sup>79</sup> but also in the sense that it ‘disappears’ among the multitude of theme-parks and visitor centres advertised in *Oahu Gold* as offering very similar attractions.



Ultimately, the specific PCC, LDS, and BYU frames around Polynesian culture merge not only with each other but also with what lies ‘beyond’, so that it becomes a fractal of a wider cultural predicament of translocation. This is suggested in the numerous tourist sites on Oahu offering cultural displays, lu’au, and night shows, as well as the gift shop at the PCC and at the Royal Hawaiian Shopping Center in Waikiki.<sup>80</sup> Just as the PCC means you do not have to visit all the many islands of Polynesia in order to ‘experience’ it, ironically you do not have to visit the PCC to be entertained by, and purchase, its cultural goods. If you do, though, you remain reassuringly close to familiar pleasures and conveniences. On the other hand, Webb cites one Hawaiian performer’s concern that the night show has become “more Hollywoodish,” with orchestral accompaniment, and performers lip-syncing.<sup>81</sup>

There are exclusions that shape the PCC’s exhibition of Polynesian cultures, and, despite the formal dilution of a Mormon aesthetic noted by Webb, the exclusions are still largely shaped by Mormon values and beliefs. Apart from the absence of coffee, alcohol, tobacco, and other stimulants, he cites a village worker’s concern that

Because of the church standards and the church beliefs, we can only show so much of the culture. We cannot show the things that would

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<sup>79</sup> Webb, “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 83.

<sup>80</sup> See Spotlight’s *Oahu Gold* (2003): 128.

<sup>81</sup> Another performer at the Hawaiian village complains that they have to teach the tourists “a haole hula,” a song in English about the beach at Waikiki. No doubt this could be understood as protecting authentic hula from tourist trivialization, but the didactic pretensions of the PCC complicate this gesture. On the other hand, if performers often have to ‘learn’ their ‘traditions’ at the PCC in order to be able to perform them, this adumbrates the ‘feedback’ phenomenon whereby the haole hula displaces and then becomes the ‘(hyper)real’ hula.

conflict with the church, such things as “black magic” that they did.  
[...] the culture takes a kind of back seat to the way of the church.<sup>82</sup>

Further, an exploration of the tensions between cultural inclusion and exclusion, as figured in the visual promotion of the PCC in the 1996 issue *Oahu Gold*, indicates a symbolic excess that haunts the cultural exhibits and performances with that which is unassimilable to the celebratory theme-park presentation of ‘cultures’, an absolute otherness that defies the “cul-de-sac of ‘ecumenical humanism’.”<sup>83</sup> Relegated to the space of tourist promotions in the mode of tabloid sensation are images and discourses that evoke that otherness. One image, captioned “girl falls for eel,” alludes to legend while invoking the fear of, and fascination with, ‘native sexuality’, positioned in the colonial Western imaginary on the animal–human boundary. The tourist is invited to collude with a representation of Polynesia from a position of cultural superiority, including recognizing the popular cultural semiotics of tabloid journalism. At the same time, this implicates the tourist in both that cultural reference and in the production of the colonial gaze. Another familiar trope of the Western imaginary concerning the ‘native’ (a term used in PCC advertising) is cannibalism, alluded to in an image captioned “natives fatten up tourists.” While the joke sensationalism blurs the distinction between the subject and the target of the joke, it returns to tourist publicity to challenge the PCC’s laundered representations of cultural difference, haunting it with what it cannot encompass: the possibility of real stakes in the encounter with an *other* culture. At the same time, ironically, it points to the assimilation of Polynesian culture(s) by the mechanisms of Western signification, absorbing cultural difference itself – “the cultural logic of late cannibalism.”<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, the 2003 issue of *Oahu Gold* dispenses with any sensationalist allusions, any apprehension of negativity and thus perspective in

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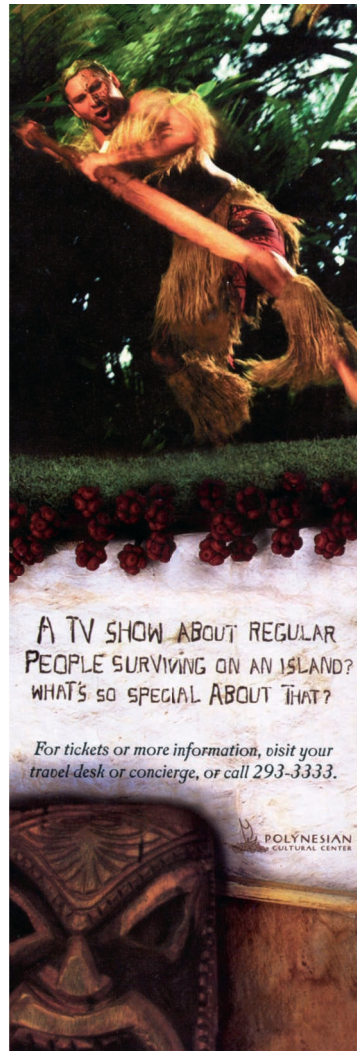
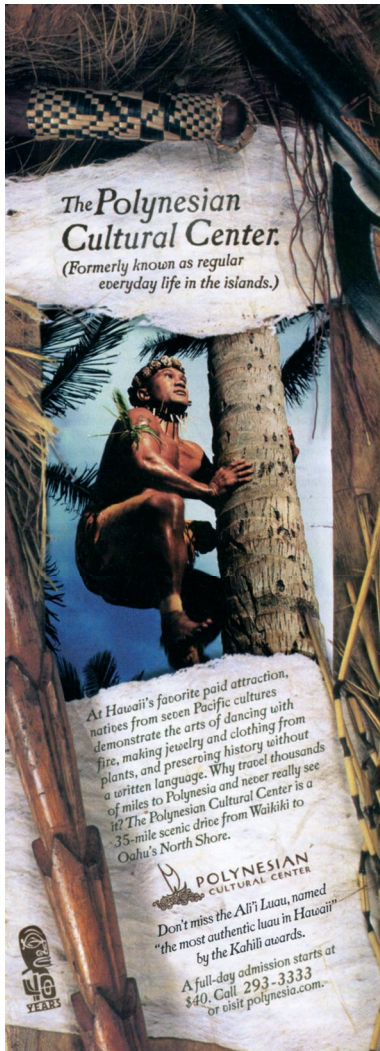
<sup>82</sup> Cited in Webb, “Highly Structured Tourist Art,” 67–68.

<sup>83</sup> See Victoria Grace, *Baudrillard’s Challenge: A Feminist Reading* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000): 92. Grace is citing Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, tr. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1996): 122.

<sup>84</sup> Crystal Bartolovich, “Consumerism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Cannibalism,” in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme & Margaret Iversen (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998): 204–37.



relation to the cultural presentations. The joke in the later issue turns indeed on the “everyday ordinariness” of the PCC’s exhibits, with references to



Figures 14 and 15: Advertising the PCC.

such ubiquitous reality-TV formats as “Survivor” shows. One image is captioned, “A TV show about regular people surviving on an island? What’s

so special about that?”<sup>85</sup> Another reads: “The Polynesian Cultural Center. (Formerly known as regular everyday life in the islands.)”<sup>86</sup>

These anti-sensational, anti-exoticist promotions again allude to media formats that would be familiar to visitors; if irony is intended, it is neutralized – subject to the Larsen ‘feedback’ effect. Blurring distinctions between the theme-park and reality TV invokes precisely the constructed nature of the media/exhibits they both embody, as the images point to culture’s passage through theme-park/reality-TV formatting. At the same time, the invocation of ordinary familiarity negates the ‘difference’ of the culture/s on display. The question, in relation to integral reality, is not simply where, but whether, any frames can be drawn around theme-park and (reality) television to maintain them as distinctive cultural spaces, or whether we live in television reality, in theme-park culture.



At this point, the PCC’s status as a theme-park could be seen as a spatial alibi for ‘cultural exchanges’ within postmodernity more generally, posing significant challenges for *postcolonial* culture/s. Colonial suppression, exclusion, marginalization or non-recognition in a hegemonic monoculture or, indeed, neocolonial exploitation or assimilation are forms of cultural violence that presuppose culture ‘framed’, ontologically and historically, as object. Such objectified culture has often then been resurrected and ‘protected’. Those who have suffered such cultural violence have first suffered the framing of their culture in these terms. The PCC presents ‘cultures’ neutralized and framed for ‘protection’, to be learned and performed or displayed by their supposed subjects for the edification and entertainment of others. However, the multiple frames of church/mission, university/scholarship, and entertainment/economics have increasingly converged on the latter of these – globalization’s domain is, precisely, the market – the theme-park identification emerging as paramount. As colonial modernity has given way to globalized postmodernity, culture is no less subject to what Graham Huggan terms ‘exoticism’; rather, he argues, exoticism has transformed “from a more or less privileged mode of aes-

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<sup>85</sup> Spotlight’s *Oahu Gold* (2003): 96.

<sup>86</sup> Spotlight’s *Oahu Gold* (2003): 76.

thetic perception to an increasingly global mode of mass-market consumption.”<sup>87</sup> Now, as one fractal of ‘integral reality’, this ‘theme-park Polynesia’ also merges with its surroundings, less in the sense of being geographically located within Polynesia than in the sense of the sheer number of similar ‘cultural’ experiences, displays, products, performances, and souvenirs available. Advertising references to tabloid print media and reality-TV formats extend this implosion of the distinct and distinctive space of cultural performance. The effects of participation and humour through much of the PCC are undoubtedly ambivalent: participation complicates the “epistemic violence”<sup>88</sup> of the tourist gaze, locating the spectator within the scene, and in some cases generating (mutually sanctioned) humour at the tourist’s expense, to consolidate the performer’s status as cultural subject rather than ethnic object. However, now subject and object are both absorbed and rendered indifferent by the larger processes of containment by scripting, the conventions of participation and entertainment, the comedic imperative of resolution, and the neutralization of challenge – the integrated circuit of carefully prepared and skilfully managed sanctioned interactivity. Integral culture is culture technically ‘perfected’, excluding the element of chance, unpredictability, and imperfection, so that “Straightaway, it will be what it should be ideally; it will never become what it is.”<sup>89</sup>

Baudrillard acknowledges:

Focusing on a perfectly integrated reality is bound to entail many forms of exclusion, of eccentric or parallel worlds – not only marginal or peripheral ones [...] but worlds that find themselves clearly dissociated at the very core of this total integration.<sup>90</sup>

I have pointed to indications of exclusion with reference to the PCC, and now suggest that, more generally, the point is surely not to draw them in, to *include* them within this integrating system. If colonial violence involved suppression and exclusion, resurrection and protection of culture,

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<sup>87</sup> Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001): 15.

<sup>88</sup> Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 280–83.

<sup>89</sup> Baudrillard, “The Violence of the Virtual and Integral Reality,” 4.

<sup>90</sup> “The Violence of the Virtual and Integral Reality,” 12.

decolonization will not mean inhabiting those forms, or the subject-positions that issue from the colonial episteme. It will not mean inclusion or recognition within that system, whether in monocultural or derivative 'pluri-cultural' forms (biculturalism, multiculturalism). Nor will agency in decolonization mean taking up what has been 'protected', and 'developing' or 'promoting' it on the local or global stage. The liberation of culture/s from the legacies and power-relations of imperial colonialism requires the dismantling of epistemic violence, not simply of 'bad' or 'false' representations that situated them within its own knowledge-formations and inevitable power-relations, but of totalizing systems that absorb culture (and, indeed, its decolonizing struggles in the resistant, oppositional mode)<sup>91</sup> into an integrated circuit that has "absorbed all negativity," where "head-on resistance" or oppositional critique is no longer viable.<sup>92</sup>

The radical Other of integral culture is not difference/s but singularity. With regard to singularity, the strategy of the 'fragment' is the challenge to (re-)create space, restore the void between culture and all other discourses that draw it into uninterrupted contiguity or even fully absorb it – economic, social, pedagogical, moral; an opening and closing to what surrounds it in what Baudrillard refers to as a "diastolic-systolic rhythm."<sup>93</sup> The strategy of the virus, by contrast, is to push the system to and beyond its own limits. It is not a question of participation, inclusion, visibility within an expanded system, but of bringing the system to crisis by overloading it to the point of collapse. The PCC itself presents a viral instance in the sheer extremity of its integration of culture/s to the point where neither culture nor cultural difference can be said to have survived.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, integral reality, integral culture will, according to its own logic, undoubtedly give rise to unpredictable, and potentially fatal, singularities. As Baudrillard warns, "What takes the place of the central is not the local, it is the dis-located. What takes the place of the concentric is not the de-

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<sup>91</sup> See Graham Huggan's argument that "in the overwhelmingly commercial context of late twentieth-century commodity culture, postcolonialism and its rhetoric of resistance have themselves become consumer products." Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Baudrillard, *Fragments*, 71.

<sup>93</sup> *Fragments*, 68.

<sup>94</sup> I am grateful to Victoria Grace for this observation on the basis of having read a draft of my essay.

centred but the off-centred. Disintegration of the universal. Virtual totalisation of the world, and fragmentation.”<sup>95</sup> Culture that enters into the theme-park condition signals the ‘trans’-location of culture in integral reality. The decolonization of culture is a stake that calls for new strategies cognizant of the emergence of integral reality.

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<sup>95</sup> Baudrillard, “The Global and the Universal,” 24.

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## *The Kumars at No. 42*

### The Dynamics of Hyphenation, or Did Sanjeev Take Parkie Down?



BRETT NICHOLLS AND ANDY BARRATT

**T**HE *KUMARS AT NO. 42* has rapidly established itself as one of the most successful British TV shows of recent times. First screened in Britain in November 2001, it immediately topped the ratings for the comedy zone and has retained a large audience throughout the seven series that have been produced. Its popularity has been matched by its critical recognition: *The Kumars* was nominated for a BAFTA award in 2002, the same year that it won an Ethnic Multicultural Media Award for Best TV Entertainment Production. Our purpose in this essay is to explore what we might reasonably call the ‘Kumars phenomenon’ by concentrating in some detail on the feature of the show which was immediately identified by most commentators as a defining characteristic: namely, its curious generic status as a mixture of sit-com and chat-show. Whereas most discussions speak of that mixture in terms of *hybridity*, we will argue, as our title suggests, that *The Kumars* is best defined as a *hyphenated* text and one that actively traces the experience of postcolonial migrancy in Britain. As opposed to the organic hybridity of television forms such as ‘dramedy’, ‘docudrama’, ‘realitygameshow’, and the like, *The Kumars* is a unique product, a ‘sitcom-talkshow’ in which the hyphen is as important as the genres it connects. Our discussion will be in two parts. In the first, we provide a careful description and analysis of the show’s basic format, focusing on the all-important initial episode

(featuring guests Michael Parkinson and Richard E. Grant). In the second, we consider the broader cultural significance of the series, situating our findings, in particular, against certain contemporary ideas in postcolonial theory.

## I

The basic structure of the first episode of *The Kumars* is easily described. It comprises eleven parts: (1) the opening credits; (2) a family sit-com sequence in which the Kumars prepare for the arrival of the first guest; (3) the arrival of the first guest; (4) the shift of the family to the TV studio where Sanjeev Kumar conducts the first interview; (5) a break for advertisements (as screened in New Zealand on TV One); (6) the family prepares for the arrival of the second guest (replay of (2)); (7) the second guest arrives (replay of [3]); (8) the second guest is interviewed, with the first guest still present (replay of [4]); (9) the guests and the family retire to the domestic space, from where the guests depart; (10) the family reviews the success of the show after the guests have left; (11) closing credits. With minor variations, this structure has been utilized in all episodes of the show.<sup>1</sup>

This bare description enables a number of preliminary observations. First (and most obviously), it lays bare the operation within the show of the two genres which combine to produce its hyphenation – the sit-com and the chat show. It is important to note, however, the precise manner in which this hyphenation is constructed. Leaving aside the opening and closing credits, each episode of *The Kumars* employs the family sit-com as a frame for those parts of the show involving the guests.<sup>2</sup> This means that the sit-com sequence is a remarkably *privileged* textual space. Not only is it the first and last moment of each episode, it is also the only occasion within the show that a genre operates in a ‘pure’ form, uncontaminated by any other generic system. What is more, the family sit-com

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<sup>1</sup> One such variation is evident in the first show of the second series, where the first guest (James Merchant) follows the Kumars into the family space in the segment immediately preceding the ad break.

<sup>2</sup> Again, there is the occasional variation on this pattern. The Christmas Special that followed the first series did not close with the family sit-com. Instead, the show ended with a performance of “Winter Wonderland” by Scary Spice in the domestic space.



also serves to forge a crucial bond between the family and the audience, who are invited to share these moments of family interaction that are inaccessible to the guests. In this way, *The Kumars* sets up a fascinating game, in which the guests are required to orientate themselves within the hyphenated space of No. 42 while the audience looks on from a position of comfortable superiority.<sup>3</sup>

The family sit-com ([2], [10]), then, can be said to function as a dominant genre in *The Kumars*, providing a frame for the hyphenated text which includes the guests. Again, it is important to be precise, for the hyphenated portions of the show ([3], [4], [7], [8], [9]) demonstrate a significant progression which is reflected in the physical spaces employed in the show. First ([3], [7]), the guest has to enter the world of the family sit-com, a moment which signals the disruption of the scripted genre by an encounter which is more unpredictable than the rehearsed material of the sit-com. Even though they remain 'masters' in their own home, the Kumars now have to react appropriately to unscripted responses by the guest. This first hyphenated space (the family domestic area) is thus a place of initiation for the guest and a first test of the Kumars' control, and it is only after traversing this space that the entire group can proceed to the studio, which is the proper environment for the chat-show itself to take place ([4], [8]).

This physical movement between the two locations is, of course, a literal enactment of a textual shift: the hyphenated sit-com (involving the family and guest) now 'invades' the studio world of the chat-show. The effect of this is curious. The Kumars and their guest move from one hyphenated space to another in a manoeuvre that again ensures the dominance of the sit-com. Never for a moment is the audience able to forget that Sanjeev's chat-show is a function of the family sit-com and that the supposed centrepiece of the show is nothing more than an elaborate pantomime. As we shall see, this is the crucial component in the complex power-relationship at the heart of *The Kumars*.

Before we examine the particular way in which this power-relationship is played out in the show's first episode, it will be helpful to pass some further comments on the individual elements described above. To begin

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<sup>3</sup> Establishing shots of the studio reveal that the audience observes the sequences in the domestic setting on large-screen monitors.

with, let us consider the opening credits. To the accompaniment of rather anonymous, yet brash, 'mainstream' theme music, the first shot displays the exterior of a suburban house (we learn later that this is in the London suburb of Wembley), a signifier of affluent middle-class Englishness. The following shot lets us know, however, that this is no ordinary house, for there is a sign in the front garden directing the audience to the right and the guests to the left (an important metatextual clue to the distance that separates the audience from the guests in the dynamics of the show). These establishing shots give way to a steadicam point-of-view shot which dramatizes what might be best understood as the master-trope for the entire series. By means of a rapid and somewhat unsettling series of images, the viewer is invited to engage with a hyperbolic display of *Indian hospitality*, complete with the tossing of flowers and the offer of food. This is a point to which we will return later. For the present, it will suffice to note that this master-trope may be understood as a typically playful, postcolonial inversion of the original colonial moment.

Turning to the family sit-com, we have already remarked that this functions (up until the arrival of the guest) as a 'pure' example of the genre. Thus, as in all sit-coms, the opening segment performs the predictable function of establishing (in the first episode) and reinforcing (in subsequent episodes) the characters of the participants and the basic situation they find themselves in. And, again like all conventional examples of the genre, both the situation and the characters in *The Kumars* are readily understandable. The house at No. 42 is introduced as the site of a remarkable (and highly unlikely) venture: with money supplied by the father, Ashwin, and a garden sacrificed by the mother, Madhuri, the Kumars have attached a TV studio to their home so that their son, Sanjeev, can pursue his ambition of becoming a successful chat-show host. As for the characters themselves, the two parents are quite recognizable stereotypes. Ashwin is every inch the immigrant entrepreneur, for whom financial profit is the guiding principle in all things. As for Madhuri, she represents Indian domesticity and, above all, a maternal concern that Sanjeev should marry appropriately (and soon!) to ensure the continuity of the Kumar line.

If the two parents conform only too readily to recognizable stereotypes, the other two residents of No. 42 add significantly to the representation of

Indianness in *The Kumars*. Most striking in this respect is the character of the grandmother (“Ummi”), played by Meera Syal, one of the writers of the show. In Syal’s own words in an interview with BBC’s “What’s On,” “Ummi” is the “wild card” of the family.<sup>4</sup> Although her dress and her involvement in the making and serving of food are marks of her ‘Indian-ness’, her behaviour is far more unpredictable and outrageously subversive than that of the stereotypical Ashwin and Madhuri. Syal captures this aspect of the show well in the same interview, where she talks of “Ummi” having “free rein to ask all the questions we might privately think but never actually say,” adding that “because she is so old, it’s almost impossible to take offence.” In the interactions between the family and the guests, “Ummi” is often deployed as a secret weapon of sorts, functioning as the voice of what might be termed a primal Indianness which has never been fully assimilated into the British way of life. Her mock denial to Richard E. Grant, the show’s first guest (“I’m sorry, Richard, we’re not going to embarrass you”) tells it all: the desire to cause embarrassment is very much the name of the Kumars’ game.

If “Ummi” can be said to embody the show’s unconscious desire, it is Sanjeev who supplies the conscious motive that drives the master-narrative of *The Kumars*. His role can be described variously. In his dress, demeanour and (in particular) locution, Sanjeev represents that new generation of British Indians who have lost all marks of their Indianness other than their physical appearance. And his ambition – to succeed in the world of show business – is couched very much in terms of working-class Cockney aspiration. It is, of course, the gap between Sanjeev’s values and those of his parents that provides the family sit-com with its primary conflict. But, even though the situation can be readily understood in terms of the conventional generation-gap, it is crucial to note that at the heart of the relationship between Sanjeev and his parents there is a most revealing paradox. This paradox can be articulated in two ways. If Sanjeev is obviously embarrassed by his parents and wishes to dissociate himself from their attitudes and values, he is nevertheless utterly reliant on their financial and emotional support for his chat-show venture. As for the parents, their willingness to support Sanjeev’s project does not totally vitiate their sense of his complete unsuitability for his chosen role. This ensures that

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<sup>4</sup> BBC What’s On, “Interview with Meera Syal,” [www.bbc.co.uk/whatson](http://www.bbc.co.uk/whatson)

the discourse between the Kumar generations involves a constant *doubleness*, a doubleness which, in turn, informs the chat-show component of the entire show.

Let us now consider the chat-show that stands at the centre of *The Kumars*. We should note first the nature of the studio space in which the chat-show takes place. The studio is defined in two ways: it is an *annexe* to the Kumar family home; and it is also *Sanjeev's* room (a sign on the door actually proclaims it as such). From the very outset, then, we are reminded of the studio's *subordinate* place in the Kumars' scheme of things, and that Sanjeev's ambition is, both literally and metaphorically, determined by the figures of his parents. Nevertheless, in its physical layout, this studio is in every way "Sanjeev's Room." Despite a few token markers of family domesticity (there is a shelf with trophies, framed diplomas and ornaments), this is a garish space which stands in marked contrast to the conventional middle-class home that the family occupies. Pride of place here is accorded to the chair in which the guest will sit. Bedecked with flashing lights, it complements the overall tackiness of the studio set, which features a mural depicting (in rather violent shades of orange and red) a scene of mountains and desert. Prominent against this background is a gun-toting Bollywood cowboy who bears a distinct resemblance to Sanjeev himself, and a purple convertible with an Indian male in the driver's seat. Every detail here speaks of Sanjeev's ambition and his values. The Bollywood cowboy – whose aggressive pose is mimicked in Sanjeev's trademark opening gesture, the pointing of the index finger at the camera/audience – signifies the 'new' Indian as hybrid, symbolically representing Sanjeev's own ambition to assume an 'alien' cultural identity. Taken as a whole, then, the *mise-en-scène* is an unashamed statement of an americanized Indian brashness designed as a deliberate affront to the middle-class English gentility with which his parents have identified and which, in the field of television, is represented by Michael Parkinson, Sanjeev's first guest. Even before Sanjeev speaks a word, therefore, his chat-show signals an incongruity that appears to border on cultural illiteracy.

Before we consider the dramatic operation of the first episode of *The Kumars* in some detail, there is a final feature of the chat-show that requires comment. As we have already seen, the chat-show segment is the

main site of textual hyphenation in *The Kumars*. And, just as the configuration of the house at No. 42 can be understood as an objective correlative of the social and cultural forces at work in the show, so the studio space itself can be seen to function as physical metaphor of the hyphenated nature of Sanjeev's chat-show. This set is made up of three elements: the chair in which the guest sits; the desk behind which Sanjeev sits; and the couch on which the other three Kumar family members sit. If this triangular seating arrangement reflects perfectly the incursion of the family sit-com into the domain of the chat-show, the interactions it enables are best described in terms of a discursive doubleness in which all participate. Thus, Sanjeev and the other Kumars can (and do) function as interlocutors of the guest in terms of the conventional chat-show. And yet, at the same time, the guest is also invited to participate in the family sit-com, a game which, as we have seen, has a doubleness of its own, oscillating between support for Sanjeev's show-biz venture and denigration of Sanjeev for his multiple failings. This latter point will become clear from an analysis of the first episode of the show's first series.

The first show, with guests Michael Parkinson and Richard E. Grant, is – like all first episodes of new series – of crucial importance for initiating the audience into the mechanisms of its own operation. More than this, however, the first episode of *The Kumars* also announces what is to be the master-narrative for the entire series. From the very beginning, it is made quite clear that the key figure here is Michael Parkinson and that the encounter between him and Sanjeev is to be understood as a battle to determine who is to be the master of the British chat-show. As for Richard E. Grant, who actually has the honour of being the Kumars' first guest, it soon becomes evident that his main role is to serve that larger purpose. What this practice means, therefore, is that the process of entering the Kumars' domain involves each of the guests in a negotiation of the family sit-com and, in so doing, an accommodation with the show's master-narrative.

To this end, the main objective of the sit-com component of the first episode is to ensure that the audience is let in on the family's agenda *before* the arrival of the guests. In this, as in almost every aspect of the show, the Kumars display no subtlety. From Madhuri's opening plea – "May Michael Parkinson be struck dumb by Sanjeev's wit and intelli-

gence” – to “Ummi’s” feeding her grandson “brain food” and the mock-interview with Ashwin playing the part of Parkinson, the show speaks its purpose with disarming directness. And yet, even at this early juncture, the family sit-com announces the paradoxical doubleness to which we have already referred. This is nowhere more evident than in the mock-interview, in which the ostensible purpose of having the family bolster Sanjeev’s confidence for the forthcoming duel of wits with Parkinson is undercut by the family’s huge pleasure in enacting Sanjeev’s defeat at the hands of a superior foe. This is a crucial moment, as it is not only the first occasion in *The Kumars* that the paradoxical relationship between Sanjeev and his family is played out, but it also initiates one of the show’s prime moves. Even though the family appears to be fully supportive of Sanjeev’s ambition, their other role is constantly to reveal his *ineptitude* as a rival to the ultra-successful Parkinson.

Sanjeev’s unsuitedness to his chosen task comes immediately to the fore in his encounter with Richard E. Grant. Before they even enter the studio, Sanjeev reveals that he has none of the necessary facts about his guest at his fingertips. His introductory remarks within the studio confirm his inadequacy. Presenting Grant to the audience, Sanjeev announces: “As well as starring in the cult classic *Withnail and I* he’s done loads of other films and some telly an’ all.” His failure, we should note, is twofold: it is not just that Sanjeev appears not to have done the research required of the chat-show host; it is also evident that he has not mastered the appropriate linguistic register for the man who aspires to be the new Parkinson. As for Grant, his job (and that of all the guests who will follow) is to learn how to perform successfully in Sanjeev’s room, which means that he must demonstrate his ability to function within a hyphenated textual space of which he has had no previous experience.<sup>5</sup> In order to do so, he has to understand three things: that the chat-show is not intended in good faith; that the primary requirement of him is that he *supplement* the family sit-com; and that he has been assigned a crucial part in the master-narrative involving Michael Parkinson. The interview thus conforms only in the most minimal way with the requirements of the chat-show genre. True to his ostensible role as “guest,” Grant does get to answer a few token ques-

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<sup>5</sup> The ‘shock’ factor of this moment cannot be over-estimated. This is a point to which we will return at the very end of this essay.

tions about his life and career. He is allowed to say something about his experiences working in Hollywood, about Keanu Reeves' inability to master an English accent for the film *Dracula*, and about his new house in London. But, in the vast majority of cases, these 'chat-show' questions and answers are far more important in the way they serve the purpose of either the sit-com or the master-narrative. Thus, the subject of Grant's education provides an occasion to illustrate Sanjeev's academic failures, and the discussion of Hollywood enables Madhuri to voice her fears for her son, who is already busy imagining his future successes in the movie business, and so on. If these sit-com moves supply a great deal of the surface interest in the Grant interview, it is, nevertheless, the demands of the master-narrative that have overall priority. This is clear from very first question – about Grant's experience as a guest on *Parkinson* – a moment which is just the opening move in a game to trap him into passing judgment on the relative merits of Parkinson and Sanjeev as chat-show hosts. What is, perhaps, most interesting here, however, is the main strategy employed by the Kumar family in this game of entrapment. Once the appeal to Grant as a past guest of Parkinson has been made, the Kumars deploy their most potent weapon, which is to identify their guest as a *fellow immigrant* to Britain. What is more, as Ashwin is keen to point out, Grant is, when viewed from this unexpected perspective, an outstanding example of the immigrant *success story*. And it is in this guise of the successful immigrant that Grant will be finally called upon to attest to the superiority of Sanjeev's chat-show over Parkinson's.

As the first interviewee, Richard E. Grant proves to be the ideal player, ideal in the sense that he instantly gauges the nature of his task and – more important still – *submits* absolutely to the Kumars' collective will. Happy to join in the family game of putting Sanjeev down, he is even more willing to identify with Ashwin as a fellow immigrant, a willingness signalled by the flamboyant gesture of a spontaneous handshake. Only at the very last moment, when called upon to adjudicate between Sanjeev and Parkinson, does he demur. At first, he deflects the question by declaring his experience at the hands of the Kumars as "unique." But, when pressed, he can do nothing more than comply meekly by telling the Kumars what they need to hear: "This [the Kumars' show] is better [than Parkinson's]."

Thus, even before Michael Parkinson has been greeted at the front door of No. 42, the game has effectively been won.

After the break for advertisements (5), it is, at last, time for the main combatants to face each other. In the brief preamble to Parkinson's arrival the audience is reminded of the master-narrative: as Sanjeev himself puts it, "Me an' Parkie are going head to head." As this mock challenge suggests, Parkinson is to be subjected to a rather more testing induction into the world of Kumars. Even as he enters the family home, he has to work hard to preserve some dignity while extricating himself from the extravagant attentions of "Ummi," who is intent throughout to make a merciless play on her guest's status as an elderly sex symbol.<sup>6</sup> But, just like Richard E. Grant before him, Parkinson proves more than adept in his gamesmanship. And here, as before, the key to his success lies in his readiness to *comply* with the unwritten codes of the hyphenated text. This adroitness is apparent from the very first moment, when Sanjeev reveals his ambition to have Parkinson end his career so as to leave the chat-show field clear for him. Parkinson's responds by entering into mock-negotiation with his would-be successor over the timing of his retirement. As it turns out, this is one of the show's defining moments, for it enacts another of the show's most telling paradoxes. Parkinson's instant *success* as a guest of the Kumars is guaranteed by his pretence of acquiescence in the face of Sanjeev's brash insolence, an acquiescence that is, in a literal sense, the acceptance of his *defeat*. Later in the interview, this paradox is re-played in reverse, when "Ummi" – the very same "Ummi" who had sought so hard to shake Parkinson's composure – concludes by praising his mastery over the upstart by conjuring up the image of Parkinson as the "silver-haired mongoose" to Sanjeev's "overweight cobra."

As always in *The Kumars*, the discourse of Indianness betrays a seemingly inescapable doubleness, a point on which we will expand in the second part of this essay. Ummi's brief act of subversion notwithstanding, the first episode ends on an unequivocal note. After the two guests have departed (Parkinson in a Mercedes, Grant in a Nissan), Madhuri turns to Sanjeev. With evident pride, she pronounces the words they have all been longing for: "You took him down." Sanjeev's reply reflects the same

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<sup>6</sup> As is explained in the interview itself, a recent poll had seen Parkinson voted Britain's sexiest male in the over-sixties age group.



satisfaction: “Yes, I did.” With this in mind, we can turn to the question of what, exactly, we might make of this bold claim.

## II

Let us begin by considering the dramatic enactment of the Kumars’ announcement of their success. Like many moments in the show, the hyperbolic moment of victory is played for maximum comedy. The three characters, Ashwin, Sanjeev, and Madhuri, are framed in a brightly-lit mid-shot, with the front door behind them. Character performance at this moment – it takes place, let us remember, in the sitcom space – represents Sanjeev’s claim of victory as a *family* affair. Ashwin raises a clenched fist, while Madhuri claps her hands together as if she has caught something. The grinning parents frame the figure of Sanjeev, who, with head held high, is shot in profile, his gaze directed off-screen towards a ‘radiant future’. His is the classic pose of the model in the work of art, or modern philosopher, or explorer, but the shot is too wide for this pose to be fully realized. Like the laugh track that follows his quiet pronouncement (“Yes I did”), the use of the camera ensures that the show ends with irony as its dominant tone.

Given the arch comedy of this final scene, which reinforces the disjunction between Sanjeev’s desire to displace Michael Parkinson as Britain’s leading chat-show host and his evident unsuitedness to the role, it is tempting to draw the simple conclusion that *The Kumars* is nothing more than an extended joke at the expense of the immigrant family. As we have seen, Parkinson emerges from his absurd encounter with the Kumars with his reputation fully intact. Indeed, his ability to deal with their antics in the manner required of the archetypal ‘good sport’ could even be said to *enhance* his elevated status. We would suggest, however, that things are not quite so straightforward as this. It is of course true that, on the purely textual level, *The Kumars* never pretends to be anything other than an elaborate game, which functions self-evidently as a game and one which – in much the same way as a sporting event – ensures that conflict is played out in space that nullifies any deep rifts, tensions, or incommensurability. But to read the show in this way alone is to ignore its more subtle effect as metatext (or, more precisely, metatelevision). In what follows, we will consider the ways in which *The Kumars* can be seen to function as a

highly self-conscious reflection upon both the television industry and cultural politics in contemporary Britain. Despite its prevailing comic tone, the show foregrounds a very real entrepreneurial endeavour – the production was, after all, designed to be a commercial success – as the expression of an equally real desire by the migrant to achieve recognition and agency within mainstream culture. When viewed from this perspective, Sanjeev's arrogant claim is anything but absurd. As we will argue below, there are good reasons to believe that he really *did* “bring Parkie down.”

Our argument traces three interrelated trajectories. First, we will explore the contest between Sanjeev and Parkie as a clash of new and old forms in the marketplace of contemporary British television. Then we will consider the confrontation between the two in terms of cultural politics. Finally, we will seek to place *The Kumars* against other representations of the South-Asian diaspora, considering in particular the curious way in which the show deploys the well-worn trope of mimicry.

When one looks back on *The Kumars*, it is clear that one of the most significant features of its opening show was its dramatization of a crucial *transition* in the British television industry, a transition that is marked by the shift from one mode of celebrity chat-show – the minimalist (and middle-brow) *Parkinson* – to a new and more obviously market-driven mode – the hyperbolic, playful, and ‘outrageous’ evening chat-show. The novelty of the show's hyphenated form is, in fact, most readily understandable within the context of an industry which has become increasingly reliant on productions capable of ‘shocking’ their way into the ratings: as witness *So Graham Norton*, *Friday Night with Jonathan Ross*, and the non-studio celebrity show, *Ruby Wax Meets*. (It is surely no coincidence that both Graham Norton and Jonathan Ross appear in the guise of ‘fellow travellers’ in the first series and third series of *The Kumars*, respectively). Interestingly enough, when one surveys the immediate response to the show, it was this *novelty* factor that dominated popular discussion. Despite its self-conscious and comical reflection on the hegemony of market logic, and the inflection of that logic through the migrant desire to occupy mainstream culture, *The Kumars* inspired very little commentary of a social or political nature. A glance at the BFI's online web site bears this out. Whereas the comic sketch show *Goodness Gracious Me* (the precursor of *The Kumars*) was

commended for its role in “exploding Asian stereotypes,”<sup>7</sup> *The Kumars* itself was celebrated for being “original”<sup>8</sup> with no mention of its cultural politics at all. This focus upon originality, differentiation, and novelty reflects a market logic that had already become well entrenched in the operations of the BBC and in British cultural production generally by the time of the second show’s launch. We might say, then, that Sanjeev’s claim of victory functions metatextually as an announcement of the ascendancy of concept television, market forces, and proprietary rights.

No one is more keenly aware of this new production context than Michael Parkinson himself. After thirty years as a broadcasting institution (his final show went to air in 2007), Parkinson regularly utilized his public status to challenge the market logic that has come to drive the television industry today. Thus, on the occasion of his retirement he took the opportunity to express his distaste for “young men in dark suits and tieless outfits who head up focus groups, know everything, debate everything to the last percentage point, with graphs.” As reported in *The Age*, he claimed to be “tired of fighting a rearguard action against a youth-obsessed organisation with a target demographic profile of 16–34.” On the subject of the chat-show format itself, he went on to suggest that the “conversational-type talk show” will fade away and comedy chat-shows, such as Jonathan Ross and Graham Norton, will follow in its wake.<sup>9</sup> Although it would be easy to dismiss Parkinson’s observations as an exercise in nostalgia, they point towards a deeper (and perhaps more unsettling) awareness of the shift that has taken place in the logic of cultural production. Parkinson voices his disapproval of the new wave of chat-shows as part of a general assault on an industry fixated with such things as ‘brand identity’ and ‘market share’. Yet, in the case of *The Kumars*, at

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<sup>7</sup> Shalini Chanda, “Goodness Gracious Me (1998–2000),” *Screenonline: The Definitive Guide to Britain’s Film and TV History* (2007), <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/521352/index.html> (accessed 21 October 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Mikey Robinson, “The Kumars at No. 42 (2001–2003),” *Screenonline: The Definitive Guide to Britain’s Film and TV History*. (2007), <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/535279/index.html> (accessed 21 October 2007).

<sup>9</sup> “The Time for Talk is Over,” *Daily Telegraph, Theage.com.au: The Age* (2008), <http://www.theage.com.au/news/tv-radio/btvb-michael-parkinson-looks-back-on-a-lifetime-talking-to-the-stars/2008/01/16/1200419867232.html> (accessed 17 January 2007).

least, the show's undoubted novelty-appeal is understandable in terms other than pure market logic.

In its explicit challenge to the Parkinson show, *The Kumars* does far more than establish its own particular 'brand', even though this is what Richard E. Grant suggests when pushed to voice his opinion on the virtues of the two shows – "you are unique." By flaunting its difference from *Parkinson*, the new show implicitly questions the unspoken assumptions on which it relies. The outlandish set employed in *The Kumars* stands in absolute contrast to the stylish minimalism of *Parkinson*, a minimalism designed to create the impression that the guests on *his* show (most of whom are major entertainment, sporting, and political figures) are being enabled to stand out in their own terms. The success of the show depends entirely upon how well the guest is able to occupy the minimalist space provided, with Parkinson himself functioning as a mere 'facilitator' in this process. As for the process itself, this draws upon a beguiling fantasy. Enconced within a set stripped of adornment, and in the company of the most self-effacing of hosts, Parkinson's celebrity guests are apparently enabled to cast aside the trappings of their public persona to reveal the 'authentic' personality beneath. In this way, *Parkinson* neatly feeds into its host's well-publicized denunciation of the cult of celebrity in contemporary society.<sup>10</sup> In its radical reversal of the *Parkinson* format, *The Kumars* effectively exposes the earlier show to a withering critique. Unlike Michael Parkinson, Sanjeev is determined above all to feed into (and feed off) the discourses of celebrity. And, in his own unashamedly *playful* performance of the chat-show host, Sanjeev ensures that the audience is incapable of buying into the fantasy of 'authentic conversation' promoted by the Parkinson show.<sup>11</sup> In so doing, *The Kumars* also undermines what

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<sup>10</sup> Tim Randall, "Interview – Michael Parkinson – Why I've banned the Big Brother Stars," *Daily Mirror* (22 September 2001): 6. See also Tim Teeman, "Parky Parky, a little bit Narky," *The Times* (21 September 2002); David Thomas, "I hate it that chat shows are seen as a refuge for failures. It is insulting; Michael Parkinson brands many chat show hosts as wannabes and losers. But some critics feel he is going soft on his guests. Is he still such a fearsome questioner?" *The Mail on Sunday* (28 September 2003): 22.

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly enough, when this issue is raised in Sanjeev's interview with Parkinson, it provokes a rare moment of resistance, albeit disguised as sarcasm. When Sanjeev points out to his guest that his desire to avoid the spotlight has been his greatest

is perhaps the greatest conceit of the earlier show: no matter how much Parkinson might have inveighed against celebrity culture, his immense success served only to *guarantee* his own celebrity status – hence (in a consummate irony) the very title of the show, *Parkinson*. Whereas the middlebrow style of *Parkinson* is premised on a denial of the processes of commodification – which, paradoxically, is its form as a commodity<sup>12</sup> – *The Kumars*, in a complete reversal, foregrounds the celebrity as commodity and *nothing but* commodity. Thus, *Parkinson* (like most conventional chat shows) unwittingly supports Richard Dyer's proposition that such public quests to locate the 'authentic self' behind the veneer of celebrity are, in the end, just part of the self-perpetuating discourses of celebrity.<sup>13</sup> *The Kumars*, by contrast, is a show that prefers to accept – and even to celebrate – the inauthenticity of public life as the new 'authenticity'. Rather than try to locate itself outside the commodity form, the new show rests on its understanding that media culture consists of nothing more than surface play. It is from this position that it can claim to have displaced the great man, Parkie himself.

*The Kumars* confronts Parkinson with a hyperbolic and novel format, one conceived and produced within an unashamedly market-driven production context. Of all the show's fictional characters, it is the father, Ashwin, with his undisguised anxiety about the wisdom of his investment in his son's endeavour, who speaks the logic that drives the new show. And, in a very real sense, he is the one who would most readily appreciate the actual success that has come from the marketing of the show's hyphe-nated format, which was sold to the Fox network in the USA and the Seven Network in Australia. The Fox network made *The Ortegas* in 2004, with a fictional Mexican-American family living in Los Angeles. Six episodes were produced, but the show did not go to air.<sup>14</sup> The Seven Network made *Greeks on the Roof* in 2003, with a fictional Greek family living in Melbourne. Twelve episodes were produced and aired. The for-

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mistake, he receives the following response: "You've opened my eyes. I might change my style after seeing this. On the other hand, I might not."

<sup>12</sup> Graeme Turner, Frances Bonner & P. David Marshall, *Fame Games: The Production of Celebrity in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000): 178.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979): 24.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Lowry, "The Kumars at No. 42," *Variety* (30 August 5 September 2004): 30.

mat was also sold to networks in Germany, Israel, and the Netherlands.<sup>15</sup> In addition to these franchises, Sanjeev Bhaskar published a book, *Help Yourself with the Kumars* (2006).

It is important to note that what has been sold in these franchises is not Indianness as content but, rather, the general concept of the migrant or minority ethnicity parodied and re-arranged via a hyphenated textual form. In this market-driven environment, *The Kumars at No. 42* is a kind of source code, or blueprint, for arranging content. The proprietary rights of the show's creators are, therefore, somewhat curious. We can be sure that they themselves never paid for the use of the sitcom or chat-show formats that are employed in the show. After all, who would be paid? This is not a trivial matter. And, again, it signals a way in which Sanjeev can be said to have 'taken down' the redoubtable Parkie. Unlike *The Kumars*, *Parkinson* could never have been sold to other networks as a *format*. The new, market-driven, television is all about securing and maximizing proprietary rights, and this is why *The Kumars* is the consummate success story. The confrontation with *Parkinson* can thus be read as a clash of televisual cultures, in which *The Kumars* is comfortably – all too comfortably, perhaps – aligned with the new dominant form.

While Sanjeev's 'victory' over *Parkinson* in *The Kumars* powerfully enacts the shift to new market-driven modes of television production in the contemporary world, this clash of economies is also self-consciously entangled with cultural politics. This leads us to the second of our trajectories. Sanjeev's desire to displace *Parkinson* from his iconic position represents a fundamental challenge to the British popular imagination. At the time that *The Kumars* first went to air (2001 on BBC 2), *Parkinson* was enjoying renewed success with its return on BBC 1.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, ever since his return to the BBC in 1995, *Parkinson* had enjoyed a growing status as a British media institution. The following description by *The Independent's* Gerard Gilbert is typical:

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<sup>15</sup> "Kumars at No. 42 to End," *AIM Magazine* (17 October 2006): <http://www.asiansinmedia.org/diary/?p=10> (accessed 21 October 2007).

<sup>16</sup> The show first ran from 1971 to 1982; returned with a "Best of" series in 1995; came back with new shows from 1998 to 2004 on BBC 1; and finally moved to ITV, where it remained until its end in 2007.

[Parkinson is] the chat equivalent of jazz saxophonist Lester Young in his “Statesman-like chat show host” prime – mellifluous and seemingly effortless, but the result of a finely honed talent. Last Saturday, for example, Parkinson featured the outwardly uninspiring line-up of Michael Aspel, Charlotte Church and Lionel Ritchie. And yet he managed to elicit absorbing mini-dramas from each.<sup>17</sup>

This fulsome endorsement of Parkinson-as-media-statesman is echoed in an *Evening Times* profile, which praised the chat-show host, among other things, for his ability to speak in depth to anyone.<sup>18</sup> ‘Depth’ here is the key word, of course, and it functions as the signifier of respectable Culture, over and against the ‘trash’ culture that the writer, like Parkinson himself, so obviously detests. This is the culture of the respectable middle class, and it finds its natural figurehead in Michael Parkinson, the embodiment of professionalism, intelligence, and reasonableness. It is no surprise, then, that Parkinson is invoked as a model for emulation by the *Times* columnist Tim Hames in a piece excoriating the British Conservative Party. “Can the Tories,” he writes, “be transformed from Basil Fawlty to Michael Parkinson?”<sup>19</sup> Oddly enough, and quite inadvertently, Hames’ comment points in the direction of Sanjeev Kumar, who – no less than John Cleese’s celebrated creation – is the epitome of comic ineptitude. And, as in *Fawlty Towers*, a great part of the fun derives from the clash between the anarchic incompetent and the forces of British decency and civility.

In the light of our discussion so far, it could be argued that the choice of Michael Parkinson as the focus for the all-important first episode of *The Kumars* was perhaps its moment of greatest inspiration. Certainly, the characters of the show never appear more committed to their roles than in their initial engagement with the master of the chat-show genre. Given Parkinson’s status and, especially, his stated resistance to the cult of cele-

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<sup>17</sup> Gerard Gilbert, “TV Heroes – #93 – Michael Parkinson,” *The Independent* (27 November 2002): 23.

<sup>18</sup> “Star Profile: Michael Parkinson,” *Evening Times* (3 December 2002): 23. There are exceptions of course. See Andrew Pierce, “Meg Ryan and Michael Parkinson,” *The Times* (24 August 2004): 7.

<sup>19</sup> Tim Hames, “Can the Tories be Transformed from Basil Fawlty to Michael Parkinson?” *The Times* (4 October 2004): 16.

brity, his immediate inscription within *The Kumars* as chat-show ace and sex symbol demands to be seen as a calculated assault not so much on the man as on everything he stands for. The indignity is even more palpable when one recalls Parkinson's declared distaste, in an interview with *BBC News*, for the "way the talk show had gone" in recent years. Complaining of the way that such shows had become like most TV – "gimmicky, very loud, vulgar, disjointed and totally incomprehensible" – he went on to describe a situation which displays more than a passing resemblance to the fictional Kumars. In the words of the interview: "The straight-talking Yorkshireman aimed his criticism at personalities who are offered shows but find themselves out of their depth." He also fires a broadside at shows that "had become a vehicle for the interviewer and not for the person they were interviewing."<sup>20</sup> At the textual level, then, *The Kumars* confronts Parkinson with everything that he has publicly denounced as bad television, and forces him into a strange kind of complicity with it. From the moment that he sets foot inside the front door of the Kumars' Wembley home, Parkinson finds that he has walked into a trap set by the show's writers. In the event, he is subjected to a radical deconstruction, being obliged to play the game of celebrity against the grain of his own style. Even though he emerges from this exercise with his reputation apparently intact – he is, as we have seen, a quintessential British 'good sport' – he has nevertheless played into the Kumars hands by the simple fact of his apparent willingness to serve a cause he so obviously detests. The point is made with exquisite dramatic economy when Parkinson is escorted to the front door. Having been once again exposed to the unwanted sexual advances of Ummi, the guest is warned that his face is now liberally adorned with her lipstick. "Is it bad?" he asks. Sanjeev's reply is a masterpiece of double meaning: "No. It's fine. It suits you."

The 'taking down' of 'Parkie' can, then, be understood quite literally. In industrial terms, *The Kumars* signals the irrepressible rise of the 'new' British television over the 'old'. Indeed, as if to rub salt into the wound, the show even presses the old model (in the person of Michael Parkinson himself) into its own service. At the same time, the rise of Sanjeev Kumar, the brash young migrant, enacts the huge concomitant cultural shift, as a

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<sup>20</sup> "Parkinson Attacks TV Talk Shows," *BBC News* (6 March 2001): <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1204780.stm> (accessed 21 October 2004).



previously marginalized group is now accommodated within mainstream British culture. Sanjeev can thus claim to have been doubly victorious. As for 'Parkie', his adeptness at playing the game set up by the family at No. 42 can be read as a perfect demonstration of the ultimate incapacity of an old-style liberalism to resist the new industrial and cultural forces at work in contemporary Britain.

Our discussion thus far might suggest that Sanjeev's challenge to Parkie is an uncomplicated affair. This is, in fact, anything but the case. This will become clear if we explore what is arguably the most interesting feature of *The Kumars* in terms of cultural politics – the *representation* of the migrant. When viewed from this perspective, the fictional Kumar family can be seen to conform to the well-worn trope of the migrant as alien invader, taking jobs and displacing the white, mainstream cultural establishment. In short, the show draws on – and re-works – what can be called the 'revenge of the migrant' texts that have been central in depictions of South-Asian life in Britain. The key word here is *re-works*, a point which will be appreciated if we situate *The Kumars* against other recent representations of the South-Asian diaspora in Britain.

As we have already remarked, *The Kumars* clearly draws its impetus from the forerunner show, *Goodness Gracious Me* (1998–2000). *Goodness Gracious Me* was a BBC comedy sketch series that began its life on radio in 1996 (Radio 4) and then migrated to television (BBC 2) and ran for three series through to 2001. The show fitted the BBC's then commitment to, as Simon Cottle puts it, "the provision of targeted ethnic minority programmes and enhanced mainstream programme representations."<sup>21</sup> At this time, multiculturalism was an integral component in the overall educative objectives of the BBC. Accessible to the predominantly white audience, the show claimed to comically debunk the culture and values of the South-Asian diaspora, along with white British attitudes to South-Asians.

It is the self-parody of *Goodness Gracious Me* and its successor *The Kumars* that is its most striking feature, especially when it is contrasted with the more stark and violent representation of South-Asian experiences in literature and film that had hitherto been common in both film and

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<sup>21</sup> Simon Cottle, "Making Ethnic Minority Programmes Inside the BBC: Professional Pragmatics and Cultural Containment," *Media, Culture & Society* 20.2 (1998): 296.

literature. To take a typical example, the British Film Institute's drama *A Private Enterprise* (dir. Peter K. Smith 1974) traces the many conflicts within family, with friends, unions, and potential customers that the entrepreneurial Shiv Verma encounters on his way to setting up a business in the West Midlands. In like manner, the Film Four production *Bhaji on the Beach* (dir. Gurinder Chadha, 1993) explores the intergenerational conflict within South-Asian families in the 1970s, as well as the hostile British context in which they attempt to make a living through a small business. Set a decade later, two celebrated Frears/Kureishi films, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), map the inherent racism within neoliberal British society, exploring the disjunction between Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's rhetorical promises of a classless society and the violent realities of everyday life for South Asians as they attempt to build businesses. As Joel Krieger argues in his book *Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Decline*, Thatcherism presided over the "gradual transformation of black citizens into trespassing aliens."<sup>22</sup>

No writer has captured the xenophobic hostility in British society better (or more controversially) than Salman Rushdie. His landmark novel *The Satanic Verses* depicts the repressive state apparatus of 'Maggie the torturer's' Britain in the starkest terms:

Mishal had developed the habit of talking about the Street as if it were a mythological battleground [...] From her Chamcha learned the fables of the new Kurus and Pandavas, the white racists and black 'self-help' or vigilante posses starring in this modern *Mahabharata*, or, more accurately, *Mahavilayet*. Up there, under the railway bridge, the National Front used to do battle with the fearless radicals of the Socialist Workers Party [...] Down that alley was where the Brickhall Three were done over by the police and then fitted up, verbed, framed; up that side-street he'd find the scene of the murder of the Jamaican, Ulysses E. Lee, and in that public house the stain on the carpet marking where Jatinder Singh Mehta breathed his last. 'Thatcherism has its effect', she declaimed [...] 'No pitched battles these days', Mishal elucidated. 'The emphasis is on small-scale enterprises and the

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<sup>22</sup> Joel Krieger, *Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Decline* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986): 102.

cult of the individual, right? In other words, five or six white bastards murdering us, one individual at a time.<sup>23</sup>

Needless to say, this list of quite deliberately disturbing accounts of migrant experience is by no means exhaustive. But these examples will suffice to illustrate two points. First, these texts (and others like them) explore the violent disjunction between, on the one hand, the harsh realities of the xenophobic society in which postcolonial migrants have found themselves and, on the other, the neoliberal promises of a prosperous life for all within in this society. Second, these texts all work (Rushdie's 'magical realism' notwithstanding) within the logic of a social realism that makes no bones about its political purpose. Viewed in this context, *The Kumars* suggests that a significant shift has occurred. In the first place, its fictional migrants are located in what seems, on the surface at least, to be a much more tolerant Britain.<sup>24</sup> And its parodic representation of the three generations of Indian migrants marks a playful, postmodern turn which appears at odds with the overt social purpose of the earlier texts.<sup>25</sup> The question thus remains: what are we to make of this shift? Does the sit-com situation of *The Kumars* reflect a new and more equitable terrain in Britain for the South-Asian diaspora? Is it the case that Sanjeev's desire to take Par-  
 kie down is now accepted and valued in the British popular imagination? Is the figure of the migrant no longer a disturbing menace in this imagination? It is too soon, perhaps, to propose definite answers to such questions. What is certain, however, is that any such venture will have to take account of the *parody* that marks *The Kumars* from beginning to end. It is with this topic that we will conclude.

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<sup>23</sup> Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (Dover DE: The Consortium, 1992): 283–84.

<sup>24</sup> Of course, the literature dealing with racism in Blair's Britain is immense. See, for example, Les Back, Michael Keith, Azra Khan, Kalbir Shukra & John Solomos, "New Labour's White Heart: Politics, Multiculturalism and the Return of Assimilation," *Political Quarterly* 73.4 (2002): 445–54, Mike Cole, "'Brutal and Stinking' and 'Difficult to Handle': The Historical and Contemporary Manifestations of Racialisation, Institutional Racism, and Schooling in Britain," *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 7.1 (2004): 35–56, and David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005): 59.

<sup>25</sup> It should come as no surprise that discussions of *The Kumars* have tended to say little, if anything at all, about the show in terms of its politics.

What *The Kumars* foregrounds in its metatextual engagement with Parkinson, and the established Britishness that he represents, is the figure of the migrant entrepreneur. This is a show, after all, about the business of television. And it is this business theme that links *The Kumars* directly to representations of the entrepreneurial aspiration of South-Asian migrants in the filmic and literary works that we have cited above. As we have suggested, these films and literary works operate as migrant-revenge texts, in the sense that the migrant embraces wholeheartedly the neoliberal rhetoric of the entrepreneurial self. The backstory of *The Kumars* re-plays this motif. Most significant in this respect is the figure of Sanjeev's father. Every inch the quintessential migrant entrepreneur, Ashwin bears the trace of Thatcherism,<sup>26</sup> embodying the neoliberal ideology captured in the former Prime Minister's most notorious soundbite: "there is no such thing as society."<sup>27</sup> The Thatcher government reforms, which worked to remove what had previously been state functions and obligations – such as welfare provision and ownership of utilities – and spawned atomized entrepreneurial individuals operating on a 'level playing-field', fits perfectly with Ashwin's own desire. And, as we have seen, it is this same desire that drives the entire Kumar endeavour, Sanjeev's show-business ambition being merely the vehicle for a money-making opportunity enabled by Ashwin's business acumen and Madhuri's willingness to sacrifice the gar-

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<sup>26</sup> See Rachel S. Turner, "The 'Rebirth of Liberalism': The Origins of Neo-Liberal Ideology," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12.1 (2007): 67–83.

<sup>27</sup> "There is no such thing as society"; *Margaret Thatcher: Complete Public Statements 1945–1990*, ed. Christopher Collins (CD-ROM, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999). Thatcher clarified this statement in a later radio interview: "Let me make this absolutely clear! I do not care what people's background is, where they come from. I want them to have the same opportunities. I had a good education on the State. We now have more teachers in proportion to pupils than ever before. We have more spent on every pupil than ever before. I want them, regardless of background, to have the chance to own property. More are doing so than ever before. I want them, regardless of background, to have the chance to have an occupational pension scheme. That was a great prestige symbol. More are doing so than ever before. I want them, regardless of background, to have the chance of owning some shares like British Telecom, like shares in the business they work in or shares in someone else. More people are doing so than ever before. ... In other words, I want to get totally rid of class distinction"; radio interview for BBC Radio 4, *The World This Weekend* (5 May 1985); *Margaret Thatcher: Complete Public Statements 1945–1990*, ed. Collins (CD-ROM, 1999).

den – the space of leisure – to the unrelenting demands of her husband's business interests. Interestingly enough, it is the father and mother who are also the most obvious – even outrageous – stereotypes of British Indianness. Such reliance on stereotypes is always dangerous, of course: even when deployed with the obvious playfulness of the cast of *The Kumars*, there is the risk that they will serve only to reinforce ingrained prejudices. Notwithstanding this danger, the show does permit a more nuanced reading. By converting the well-worn trope of migrant entrepreneurialism into a comic mode, *The Kumars* works against its capacity to be perceived in terms of a *threat* to established values of Britishness. What is more, Ashwin's specific location, within the show, as the voice of an *older* generation of migrants ensures that he is identified, both historically and ideologically, with the neoliberal ideology now popularly labeled as 'Thatcherism'. In this way, *The Kumars* captures what may well be seen as a key moment in the British experience of postcolonialism. In a most curious paradox, it might be said that Ashwin Kumar has become the 'natural' spokesman for an unrepentant (and uncompromising) neoliberal agenda. And, finally, by showing so clearly the material reliance of Sanjeev's show-business venture on Ashwin's support, *The Kumars* identifies Sanjeev himself as a principal *beneficiary* of Britain's neoliberal revolution.

But what of Sanjeev himself in terms of the representation of British Indianness? In distinct contrast to the figures of his parents, the youngest of the Kumars is not readily understandable as a comic stereotype. As we have seen in the first part of this essay, his character is constructed around two principles: an intergenerational tension that works against the family's common business endeavour; and Sanjeev's all-too-evident demonstration of his unsuitedness to the task of becoming the new Parkinson. We will suggest that these two features are interconnected. In order to do so, we will draw upon the work of Homi Bhabha and his well-known ideas about mimicry.

In Bhabha's theory, mimicry is a crucial component of the colonialist enterprise. It is defined as an assimilationist discourse designed to ensure the dominance of the colonizing culture over that of the colonized subject. With the arrival of the colonizer, the colonized is required to mimic the colonizer's culture, an act that effectively proves to the colonizer the ac-

knowledge by the colonized of their ‘inferiority’, ‘backwardness’, or lack of ‘civilization’. The key point in Bhabha’s theory is that this entire process is predicated on the unstated understanding that the colonized subject will always fall short in the endeavour to mimic the dominant culture of the colonizer. As he puts it,

colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite* [...] the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.<sup>28</sup>

In this (now classic) formulation, mimicry is set forth in the language of Freud (fantasy) and Lacan (camouflage), and addresses the relationship between the civilizing colonial and the colonized subject. The civilizing mission of the colonial aimed to transform the native into the colonizer’s own image. The colonized subject was thus situated as a mimic with the task of copying, reflecting, and conforming to the image of the colonizer and his way of life. But, as the colonial draws his subjects into a narcissistic structure of identification, to make them ‘the same’, to draw them into the light of Culture, a gap appears between the possibility of that sameness and its impossibility. The mimic never becomes the same – close, maybe, but always ‘not quite there’. The colonized thus always retains the trace of his or her nativeness, that other world outside of the Culture of the colonial. In this way, the subject of mimicry is marked by a sameness that is also a difference, a visibility that is a menacing camouflage which, as Bhabha writes, problematizes “the very notion of ‘origins’ [...] It is a form of colonial discourse that is uttered *inter dicta*: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed.”<sup>29</sup>

The trace of otherness marks the colonized subject in two ways. On the one hand, it engenders the colonial game of inviting the native to be the same while at same time denying this possibility, a doubleness that both reinforces and justifies colonial authority and paternalism. On the other hand, the trace of otherness marks the colonized as menacing, as a prob-

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<sup>28</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): 86.

<sup>29</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 89.

lem, as a subject not completely tamed. It is in this split between recognition and camouflage, the disciplined and uncultivated, that mimicry becomes politically charged, for it is from this point that Bhabha launches his controversial claim that the logic of mimicry opens up the potential to disturb and transform the dominant culture.

This account of Bhabha's theory, although seriously incomplete, will suffice for our present purpose. In the light of Bhabha's work, Sanjeev's ambition to become Britain's new number-one talk-show host can be read as a contemporary representation of postcolonial mimicry. What is more, his comic failure to meet the standard set by his illustrious model, Michael Parkinson, makes obvious sense in terms of Bhabha's insistence that there must always be a gap between the ostensible goal and its achievement. Equally understandable is the role played by the other Kumars. In their open mockery of Sanjeev for ever imagining that he might prove a match for the magisterial Michael Parkinson, they, too, operate within the logic of mimicry. But, if Bhabha's theory provides a framework for the textual analysis of *The Kumars*, the show itself suggests that the theory may require further elaboration. To put the matter in concrete terms: what, exactly, are we to make of Sanjeev's performance of inept mimicry?

In order to answer this question, it will be useful to turn once more to Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* – specifically, to the story of Saladin Chamcha. In the character of Chamcha, Rushdie plays out, in typically literal terms, the tragic game of mimicry. Like many Indians, Chamcha is seduced by the promise of an assimilationist discourse which encourages accession to the demands of 'Britishness' as the means to escape from his mother country. In his acceptance of the colonial myth of progress and liberation, Chamcha proves the ideal mimic and becomes the 'perfect' British citizen, even to the point of supplying 'British' voices for commercials. But, despite his total submission to discourses of assimilation, Chamcha is subjected to a violent assault at the hands of the British police, as a result of which he is transformed into a goat. On the face of it, nothing could be more unjust, not to mention absurd. But both the injustice and the absurdity are precisely what make the point. In his perfect reproduction of the voice of Britishness, Chamcha has *overperformed* the part of the colonial mimic, to the extent that he threatens to erase the gap between the colonizer and the colonized. His punishment by the brute

force of xenophobia is quite logical, therefore, as is the magical nature of his transformation. After all, in his overzealous adoption of mimicry, Chamcha has indeed been 'acting the goat'.

The story of Saladin Chamcha is wholly understandable – even exemplary – in Bhabha's terms. But what, then, about Sanjeev Kumar? Quite clearly, he is anything but the perfect mimic that Chamcha is. And, equally clearly, his fate is marked out altogether differently: instead of becoming the victim of British bigotry, Sanjeev emerges victorious, having succeeded in the task of bringing Parkie down. But to read *The Kumars* in this way – which would be to endorse its effectiveness as a straightforward tale of migrant revenge – would be to ignore entirely the irony that suffuses the entire project. Here we need only refer to three points covered fully in our analysis of the opening episode. (1) Sanjeev plays the part of the incompetent mimic apparently *without any awareness of his ineptitude*. (This, as we suggested earlier, constitutes a major danger for the show: that it might be read without irony as an endorsement of the racist argument that South-Asian migrants are incapable of properly filling the place of British workers.) (2) Sanjeev's incompetence lies at the root of the unresolved ambivalence demonstrated by the other members of his family. While they all join wholeheartedly in the final celebration of Sanjeev's success, this does not alter the fact that, throughout the entire show, they have delighted in pointing out his inferiority to Parkinson at every point. (3) As for Parkinson himself, despite his ostensible 'defeat', he emerges from the show – as does Richard E. Grant, who, despite Sanjeev's father's protestations to the contrary, is exempt from the logic of mimicry by virtue of his skin colour – as the quintessential British 'good sport'.<sup>30</sup> In each of these instances of comic playfulness we find – and this is quite crucial – that *The Kumars*, in its representation of both the colonizer and the colonized, insists that the gap between the two cultures remains *intact*.

What this means, of course, is that – unlike *The Satanic Verses* – *The Kumars* cannot function in any real sense as a political text. The actor, Sanjeev Bhaskar, quite obviously doesn't perform mimicry as a means to

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<sup>30</sup> In this respect, the show is curiously reminiscent of the celebrated moment in the history of cricket when an English team bringing the sport to the Indian subcontinent for the first time used umbrellas rather than bats to play the game, which resulted in a 'victory' for the Indians.



refashion and alter dominant forms.<sup>31</sup> What we are suggesting, then, is that, despite its much-acclaimed novelty, the show operates solely on the terrain of existing stereotypes and offers nothing in the way of alternative cultural representations. This is to argue that *The Kumars*, in effect, amounts to nothing more than a novel way of presenting well-worn images of South Asians in Britain. For all its intelligence and self-awareness in deploying the logic of mimicry, the show suggests in the end that there are no other possible ways of representing migrant life. In *The Kumars*, the stereotype and mimicry are all there is. What is more, by re-configuring the discourses of assimilation in such a self-evidently *playful* mode, the show signals a shift away from the confrontational cultural politics typical of the Thatcher period. Rather than the intractability and possible hubris of migrant culture – which constitute a *real* problem for British xenophobia – what we find in *The Kumars* is an acceptance of the inevitability of a representative order that relies on the figure of the mimic and the stereotypes through which it functions.

In the end, what *The Kumars* demonstrates most starkly is a postcolonial migrant desire emptied of politics. For all its ‘knowingness’ about the operation of contemporary British cultural life, the show does not translate into a call for political or social change. But this is not to say that it does not represent a significant turn in the recent history of the media in Britain. Indeed, it could well be that *The Kumars* tells us much more about the logic of television than it does about the South-Asian diaspora. As we suggested above, the neoliberal context in which *The Kumars* is produced is driven above all by the search for new formats to gain a share in what is considered to be a young and progressive audience. In this quest for the new, for the ‘next big thing’ to capitalize on, established cultural traditions – to be specific, the textual forms through which they have been realized – have become understood as obstacles to be dismantled and challenged. It is within this same context that the rise of cultural forces previously marginalized by the mainstream demand to be viewed. The marginal, whether it be understood in terms of ethnicity (*The Kumars*, *The Omid Djalili Show*), sexual orientation (*So Graham Norton*), or just a general flouting of ‘civilized’ values (*Green Wing*), has proved remark-

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<sup>31</sup> See C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (1963; Durham NC & London: Duke UP, 1993), for an account of re-fashioning logics from within existing regimes.

ably capable of appropriation by the cultural industry. The very fact of that appropriation inevitably means, however, that the marginal has begun to function in a new way. Instead of harnessing the oppositional, counter-cultural possibilities offered by these other positions, the media industry today has learned simply to exploit their novelty as a means of attracting 'market share'. In this new marketplace, the Kumars' representation of the South-Asian diaspora, like Graham Norton's representation of gay culture, has become just another commodity. And this has happened because these previously marginalized forms of expression have lost their capacity to shock a significant proportion of the mainstream audience. Along with other 'risqué' comedy forms, *The Kumars* has very quickly come to represent a new wave of what we might call the 'not-mainstream mainstream'.

We have chosen this term, 'not-mainstream mainstream', to identify the curious logic at work in the neoliberal production context exemplified by *The Kumars*. In this logic, 'tried and true' British values, represented in the text by Michael Parkinson, signify the outmoded cultural expressions that have been replaced by the supposedly more progressive and liberated values of a younger generation. Whether or not that generation actually is more progressive in outlook is not really relevant here, although it may well be so. The important thing is that the previously marginalized cultural expressions have now become the *signifiers* of such progressiveness. It is interesting to note that, in both *The Kumars* and the Graham Norton shows, the new chat-show format is constructed around the same mock opposition of the 'marginal' and the 'mainstream', an opposition which is also to be understood as a challenge by the forces of progress to the dead weight of conservatism. In both shows, it is the task of the guest to 'pass the test' posed by this encounter. It does not matter if, like Michael Parkinson and Richard E. Grant, the guest proves more than capable of surviving the 'shock' of this clash of values; the only important thing is that the shows create the *idea* of such a shock and that the audience responds to their performance in such terms.<sup>32</sup> As for the audience itself, its position is constructed in precisely the same terms, whether this be the more

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<sup>32</sup> In this connexion, it is interesting to note the role played by non-British (especially American) celebrities in both shows, for it is they who have most often performed the role required of them, expressing what at times appears to be a very real culture shock when confronted with the antics of their hosts.

comfortable, voyeuristic experience of those on the studio set of *The Kumars* or the more confrontational, participatory mode employed by Graham Norton. In the end, all those involved in these shows are involved in the same seductive game, the name of which is cultural tolerance. As examples of the 'not-mainstream mainstream', these shows *have to* manufacture a clash between the 'progressive' and its rival (an older, more repressed, less liberal Other) in order to create the beguiling fiction of a cultural sphere that is more tolerant, more liberated and open, than that of the past. This is to suggest, therefore, that when reading *The Kumars* the real issue is not to labour over its potential ambiguity (whether it confronts or perpetuates racist attitudes), but to confront the cultural logic that drives the 'not-mainstream mainstream' of which it is an expression.

Let us conclude, briefly, with a few comments about the entire *Kumars* enterprise. We have concentrated our attention on its very first episode for a number of reasons, not least because it is a *tour de force* that stands comparison with the very finest pieces of comic television. It is also, as we have demonstrated, a text of remarkable density and one that rewards critical attention in all manner of ways. For our purpose in the present essay, however, its main importance resides in its *novelty* value. As both commentators and viewers at the time were immediately aware, *The Kumars* was, quite literally (and to borrow unashamedly from the lexicon of British TV comedy) 'something completely different'. In both its hyphenated form and its initially 'shocking' collision of cultures, this was a show that (in retrospect, at least) seemed destined for the success that came its way. By the same token, however, the initial series of the show inevitably proved a hard act to follow. From the second series onwards, the cat was already out of the bag: the Kumars' guests could no longer be seen as the neophytes that those who appeared in the first series were. The unmistakable 'edginess' that surfaced from time to time in series one (the interview with Stephen Fry is a case in point) has given way to a parade of encounters which have become more and more comfortable and predictable with each new series. In fact, in more recent shows the hyphenated textual form has been transformed into little more than a means for the repetitious arrangement of jokes, and confrontation has given way to the celebration of entertainment celebrities. The show has settled into a formula, and jokes about the appearance or idiosyncrasies of the celebrity

guest merely function to reinforce their celebrity status. Celebrities promoting their wares require safe, predictable environments in which to shine as a desirable commodity.<sup>33</sup> (The most shameless of these promotional appearances include: an *Eastenders* special [series 2], Boy George promoting his West End show, “Taboo” [series 3], Donny Osmond promoting his UK tour [series 3], Westlife performing their new single [series 3], Madness performing their hit “Our House” as icons of British popular culture [series 3], Emma Bunton performing her newly released single “Maybe” [series 4], Alice Cooper promoting a tour [series 6], and so on.) Equally interesting is the way in which the show’s major formal innovation – the hyphenation of which we spoke at the outset – has slowly collapsed under the pressure of repetition. Most interesting in this respect is the way in which some later shows – the one involving Robson Green is a memorable example (series three) – involve encounters within the sitcom space that smack very much of rehearsal or, at the very least, of some form of prior arrangement. But perhaps most important of all is the fact that all series after the first have *erased* the logic so openly expressed in the very first episode: the desire to *take Parkie down*. In so doing, *The Kumars* effectively charts its own trajectory from the status of ‘not-mainstream mainstream’ to that of mainstream, pure and simple. And herein lies perhaps the most telling – and depressing – lesson for the student of the media in the neoliberal marketplace.

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<sup>33</sup> Against this demand for safety and predictability, which *The Kumars* manages to deliver, a show such as *Parkinson* looks strangely dangerous. A minimally structured space for the celebrity, to make of it as they will, seems far more perilous than formulaic spaces for promoting up-coming concert tours and newly released albums.

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*My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir. Stephen Frears, screenplay by Hanif Kureishi (UK 1985; 97 min.).

*A Private Enterprise* (dir. Peter K. Smith, screenplay by Dilip Hiro (UK 1974; 78 min.).

*Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (dir. Stephen Frears, screenplay by Hanif Kureishi (UK 1987; 101 min.).



# Transl(oc)ating the Player

## Are Some Computer- and Video-Game Players Also Unpaid Workers in the Information Economy?



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SIMON RYAN

THE DIGITAL PROSTHESES with which we daily surround ourselves are steadily breaking down the barriers between our social and personal being, between our work and our leisure time, exposing the illusory nature of many earlier distinctions between interior and exterior, self and other. The technical images we produce and consume with these cybernetic machines clamour to cover every available surface as if the only purpose of the Earth is to carry them. Several million people across the planet, especially boys in their teens and student years in countries whose per capita income places them on the prosperous side of the digital divide, are now playing every day with elaborately encoded 3-D technical images in the form of computer or video games, sometimes for several hours at a stretch, alone, in small or large groups, in stand-alone format, on LANs (Local Area Networks) or online. We may be aware of the industrial origins of these images but we cannot claim that we have yet really more than just begun to understand how they are transforming the everyday lives of those who daily play the games they enable.

By the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, we are already at a relatively late point in the history of computer games. These games no longer constitute a largely sub-cultural activity presided over by a hacker community sharing a public-spirited, anti-corporate, even anarchic

hacker ethic aimed at promoting open access to game code.<sup>1</sup> In the wake of the failure of Sega's *Dreamcast* launch in 1999,<sup>2</sup> we have witnessed the rapid and seemingly relentless concentration of the computer- and video-games industry into a global, vertically integrated system of production, publishing, and marketing, a system that at the present time is considerably less subject to the threat of competition from independent production sources than even Hollywood or the music industry. This essay examines the way computer games enable the translocation of important processes in the development, enhancement, and marketing of these digital commodities from the corporate headquarters and high-tech production sites of the games industry's dominant transnational manufacturers and publishers like Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo, Atari, Activision, EA Games, Sega, and Ubisoft, to the bedrooms and living-rooms of the ordinary suburban houses of their consumers, in effect enlisting many of the more dedicated players as industry outworkers.

Computer-games players do not usually think of their activity as anything other than a highly engaging leisure pursuit in which they and many of their peers freely engage. They do not usually reflect on why they find playing computer games so compelling or why they are prepared to invest so much of their time in playing them, sometimes to the detriment of their studies, other social activities, and even their physical health. Seemingly, they share only one collective aim, to master the intricacies of the game-logic and rise to the challenge to 'level up' as quickly, as skilfully and, in the case of top gamers, as impressively as possible. Like others who are highly motivated or even mildly obsessive in the pursuit of their hobbies or interests, computer-games players would be reluctant to describe their activity in any way as work. Yet, as the investigations of Hardt and Negri; Klein, Dyer-Witherford, de Peuter; Graham, and others demonstrate, in the post-Fordist economies characteristic of contemporary capitalism, social relations arising from computer-based or digital modes of produc-

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<sup>1</sup> See Pekka Himanen, Linus Torvalds & Manuel Castells, *The Hacker Ethic: A Radical Approach to the Philosophy of Business* (New York: Random House, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witherford & Greig de Peuter, *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing* (Montreal & Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's UP, 2003): 173–74.



tion,<sup>3</sup> including those structurally coupled with the programme strand of the mass media identified by Niklas Luhmann as ‘entertainment’,<sup>4</sup> are undergoing a profound transformation that is bringing into ever sharper focus Adorno’s nascent sense in the America of the 1940s that leisure time was already becoming in part a “shadowy continuation of labour.”<sup>5</sup>

To examine the possible erosion of the boundaries between play and work in computer gaming, it is necessary to identify distinguishing characteristics of each mode of human activity. As this essay draws on studies of the political economy and sociology of post-Fordist production, the preferred term for ‘work’ here will be ‘labour’. Crucial to any attempt to demarcate the limits of play from labour in computer-games culture at the level of ordinary language are the following considerations:

1. play is a voluntary activity that is not productive of economic value;
2. labour signifies the engagement of living bodies in socially recognized value-creating practices, an engagement which in post-industrial societies is currently almost totally reduced to the recognition of the production of economic value only.

In stressing the voluntary nature of play, I wish to open a path between Friedrich Schiller’s ground-breaking analysis of the division of labour and his operative linking of aesthetic play as the ‘art of semblance’ to the Kantian category of freedom in the late-eighteenth century,<sup>6</sup> and Luhmann’s late-twentieth-century discussion of entertainment as ‘a doubling of reality’<sup>7</sup> and his account of the undermining of the cognitive conditions of freedom in society by the mass media, conditions which might otherwise allow computer games to operate in a zone free of coercion. It is the mass

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *The Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form* (Minneapolis & London: U of Minnesota P, 1994): 291.

<sup>4</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, tr. Kathleen Cross (*Die Realität der Massenmedien*, 2nd rev. ed. 1999; Stanford CA: Stanford UP, 2000): 51.

<sup>5</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991): 168.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson & L.A. Willoughby (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, 1795; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967): 30–43, 190–203.

<sup>7</sup> Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, 51–62.

media that worldwide now produce the vast bulk of contemporary leisure culture. The definition of labour as value-creating practices invoked here draws on that produced by Hardt and Negri in *The Labor of Dionysus*, a study which takes as its starting-point Marx's concept of *living labour*.

While it is possible to complicate this basic distinction between play and labour in a number of ways, the theoretical and historical tension between the voluntary or coercion-free nature of the activities we wish to designate as play and the coercive conditions governing our labour, including the 'immaterial labour' towards which our societies are increasingly tending to lean, refuses to collapse. Underlying this insistence on an unresolved tension is the desire to mobilize Marx's affirmation of living labour as the vast force which produces all human life and society, including play, and acts as the constant source of antagonism to the enforced equilibrium of capital. In this connection, Hardt and Negri stress that

labor should not simply be defined as activity, any activity, but specifically activity that is socially recognised as productive of value. The definition of what practices comprise labor is not given or fixed, but rather historically and socially determined, and thus the definition itself constitutes a mobile site of social contestation.<sup>8</sup>

In relation to the current shift in the historical and social determination of labour practices, Philip Graham observes that in the informational economy the production, circulation, and consumption of goods and services are showing a marked tendency towards analytical convergence, a situation which, he concludes, "implies that the production of particular mental dispositions has become a central focus of globalised production processes."<sup>9</sup> The precise nature of these mental dispositions is examined in detail in relation to the games industry by Kline, Dyer-Witherford, and de Peuter, who construct a more complex model to analyze the interactivity between what they call the "three circuits" of technology, marketing, and culture, the informational flows within which computer and video games are produced. Under such conditions, the suspicion arises that the domain

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<sup>8</sup> Hardt & Negri, *The Labor of Dionysus*, ix.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Graham, "Hypercapitalism: A Political Economy of Informational Idealism," *new media and society* 2.2 (2000): 137.

of consumption or, as Kline et al. define it, the three circuits in which players/consumers interact with games producers, is far from an ideal zone of free play. Instead, it situates players within a cybernetic loop through which capital in the form of mass-media entertainment seeks to engage further in 'the continuous production of constructions of reality'<sup>10</sup> from which economic value can be derived.

How might the everyday activities of computer-games players and the games' apparent leisure status be analytically coupled with the production of economic value? Here it is necessary raise a number of questions. First, are computer games already a part of the system of the mass media? The marketing of computer games firmly positions them as entertainment which, along with sports games, is a "component of modern leisure culture, charged with the function of destroying superfluous time."<sup>11</sup> In the case of computer games, this destruction of time suggests an analogy to Hegel's definition of work as a 'positive destruction of the world'<sup>12</sup> on which Marx later drew for his labour theory of value. The computer-games industry has by now established itself as a substantial domain of the world's entertainment industry. The structural profile and level of capital investment evident in the games industry since the mid-1990s have now risen to the extent that computer games can be seen to function as a new-media formation which exhibits a number of the characteristics delineated by Luhmann as the markers of the general system of the mass media. Established game categories, genre divisions, and general rules of orientation for actual gameplay help to generate and reproduce the schema which aid a mass-media mode of comprehensibility. Comprehensibility is of high value in the communication system of mass media and is "best guaranteed by the schemata which the media themselves have already generated."<sup>13</sup> Like popular literary texts or films, computer games constitute double-sided objects which, Luhmann argues, are designed to readily

<sup>10</sup> Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, 86.

<sup>11</sup> *The Reality of the Mass Media*, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, tr. David E. Green (*Von Hegel zu Nietzsche: Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 1950, 2nd ed. 1964; London: Constable, 1965): 265.

<sup>13</sup> Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, 110.

facilitate the transition from real reality to fictional reality: their seeming 'inside' is the world of the imagination. As 'instruments of forgetting and learning' in the construction of the social memory necessary to ensure the functioning of this mass-media system, the schemata operating in and around computer games function to set limits to their conceptual flexibility as digital texts and thus help to separate off the reality perceived as the game from the everyday environment for a given period of time without actually uncoupling game and environment altogether.

Secondly, it is necessary to examine how gameplay is connected with the environment. The immaterial labour of the entertainment industry produces communication "generally associated with human contact, but that contact can be either actual or virtual."<sup>14</sup> In the case of the mode of entertainment offered by computer games, this association with human contact is clearly virtual, but the virtual imaginative space of games cannot, even during actual gameplay, entirely negate the surrounding space. At any moment during a game, the doubling of reality which marks the game as a discrete episode can be temporarily or permanently collapsed by contingencies such as an unexpected family event, a competing physiological drive, an equipment failure or an earthquake. Thus, in any actual episode of computer-game play, social, bodily, and environmental dimensions are implicitly co-present.

Thirdly, we need to consider how the activities of computer-games players relate to the social dimension. Relevant to the pursuit of linkages between play and labour is J.C. Herz's analysis of what she terms 'the social ecology of games', in which she highlights the importance in the activities of computer-games players of the social dynamics of status, identity, and affiliation which normally govern interpersonal relations.<sup>15</sup>

Commercial game culture is structured to harness innate human behaviour: competition, collaboration, hunger for status, the tendency to cluster, and the appetite for peer acknowledgement. [...] Tools and editing modes allow players to create assets to extend the game

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge MA & London: Harvard UP, 2000): 293.

<sup>15</sup> J.C. Herz & Michael R. Macedonia, "Computer Games and the Military: Two Views," *Defense Horizons* 11 (April 2002): 6; <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/DefHor/DH11/DH11.htm>

experience. But more important than the standalone benefit of these assets is their value as social currency.<sup>16</sup>

The kudos within the games community which accrues to the winners of on-line tournaments, and the opportunities for dedicated players to display on densely populated internet fan-sites their authoring or editing skills in the form of games patches, other tradeable virtual game assets such as avatars and their equipment, or even an entire game level, are hugely motivating to individuals and groups. Particularly in the case of school-age boys, participation in computer games has become an important element in peer-group affiliation, to the extent that non-gamers can sometimes suffer a marked sense of social exclusion.

The value of this form of social currency to the industry is enhanced when we consider its links to other systems. Kline et al. conclude that

the moment of gameplay is constructed by and embedded in much larger circuits – technological, cultural, marketing – that in turn interact with one another within the system of information capital. [...] the cultural circuit [...] links the player through the game text to its designers; the technological circuit [...] ties the computer or console user through his or her machine to its developers; and the marketing circuit [...] connects game consumers through the game commodity to its corporate promoters.<sup>17</sup>

The social rewards of intensive, non-pathological dedication to games, which parallels forms of fan behaviour in other domains of entertainment and sport, operate as a powerful inducement to players to devote many hundreds of hours a year to activities which amount to a translocation of a portion of their daily lives to an alternative reality. This shift appears to contradict Luhmann's observation that games are episodes and "not transitions to another way of life."<sup>18</sup> Certainly in the case of games involving persistent on-line worlds such as *EverQuest* and *Dark Age of Camelot* there is evidence of the formation of alternative communities whose social interaction takes place in virtual spaces.

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Kline, *Digital Play*, 270.

<sup>17</sup> *Digital Play*, 270.

<sup>18</sup> Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, 51.

Within the post-Fordist social relations of production which we may encounter variously as Luttwak's 'turbocapitalism', Hardt and Negri's 'factory society', or Graham's 'hypercapitalism', it is clear the immaterial labour of the entertainment industry is sharply "focused on the creation and manipulation of affect."<sup>19</sup> As with other entertainment commodities, the entertainment content of computer games is manifestly orientated around a process of marketing affect. The desire of hardcore gamers to imaginatively and even socially inhabit their chosen virtual worlds and adapt them to express their avatars' needs, directly and indirectly assists the games industry in the development and marketing of their products. The industry's ability to manipulate player affect through the programming of gameplay and the marketing of computer-games culture is linked to what Vilém Flusser and others recognize as the mesmerizing power of technical images to programme behaviour by conditioning cognitive and affective dispositions which extend into the social environment well beyond the immediate stimulus to consume a particular product.<sup>20</sup> Some observers of neoliberal societies, like Luttwak, postulate an explicit link between the desire to habitually consume such pre-packaged affective experiences and the emotional destitution stemming from hypercapitalism's promotion of the entrepreneurial self or consumer-citizen who is striving to establish social orientation, overcome isolation, and render habitable the increasingly non-walkable urban sprawl in which they find themselves.<sup>21</sup> The readiness of a substantial section of the gaming community, particularly those playing MMOGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Games) such as *EverQuest*, *Dark Age of Camelot*, or *Fable*, to supply their labour to the industry free of charge or even to pay for the right to do so, suggests that more complex social behaviour is involved than just the playing-out of competitive and aggressive drives. What the source of their social motivation might be becomes clearer when we consider that these digital, high-tech commodities are emerging from the very centre of the new circuits of production, marketing, and consumption. Drawing on Martyn

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<sup>19</sup> Hardt & Negri, *Empire*, 292.

<sup>20</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Kommunikologie*, ed. Stefan Bollmann & Edith Flusser (1996; Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1998): 117.

<sup>21</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *Turbocapitalism: Winners and Losers in the Global Economy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999): 207–11.

Lee's studies of contemporary consumer culture, Kline et al. propose that computer games represent the 'ideal type of commodity'<sup>22</sup> in information societies which are being socially transformed by the post-Fordist re-organization of labour:

In consumption, the video game brilliantly exemplifies post-Fordism's tendency to fill domestic space and time with fluidified, experiential, and electronic commodities. [...] Video and computer games, moreover, are perhaps the most compelling manifestation of the simulacry hyperreal postmodern ambience that Lee and others see as the cultural correlative to the post-Fordist economy.<sup>23</sup>

While forms of 'militarized masculinity'<sup>24</sup> still predominate in many of the most popular games and the industry is reluctant to risk a drop in profits by departing from the schema of hunt, kill, and survive, the complexity of social behaviour encoded in the AI (Artificial Intelligence) of persistent-world on-line games is increasing, particularly in god-games like *Fable*. This modelling of social complexity in games must be taken into account when considering the willingness of players to invest in them time and attention that is then not available to pursue other forms of social activity. We can safely assume that, at the very least, computer games create the illusion of assisting players to accumulate rewarding social capital.

Evidence for the translation of play into labour in cultural practices of the games community is provided by the following examples from current games culture:

### Players as 'prosumers'

It is widely recognized in games culture that player feedback enhances game design and is regarded by the industry as an important element of their asset base. Kline et al. cite Alvin Toffler's definition of the 'prosumer' or the producer/consumer in their account of the way player activity is harnessed by the games industry to develop and market computer

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<sup>22</sup> Kline, *Digital Play*, 75.

<sup>23</sup> *Digital Play*, 75.

<sup>24</sup> *Digital Play*, 253–56.

games. They distinguish five industry processes that effectively convert play into labour:<sup>25</sup>

- i) the marriage of gaming with market research;
- ii) the 'laboratory' model of interactive entertainment centres;
- iii) the use of game testers and expert gamers by major manufacturers;
- iv) the use of shareware and player editing to add value to games;
- v) the role of gaming culture as a training-and-recruitment arena for the industry.

### Pre-order packages

The game *Guild Wars* provides an example of how pre-order packages link player input to marketing and product-testing. The game's title unwittingly points to the attack by the proponents of hypercapitalism on attempts by the state to set limits to the free market, limits that did exist under earlier forms of controlled capitalism in the form of licensed guilds. As the promotional statement below makes clear, the industry quite unashamedly presents its intentions as a win-win situation for players and developers:

We feel that the optimum balance in the use of development resources and in increasing the pre-order package game exposure will be derived by having Beta Events on a regular basis. Scheduled for the first weekend of each month, each 48-hour period will focus on a new experience in the game such as new regions, new missions, new monsters, and new game mechanics. The preorder package will provide an exclusive Beta Event access code as well as a pass code for one friend to participate in one of the events. This combination allows us to minimize development interruption, to reduce support costs and yet still provide additional game exposure for passionate fans who want to experience the evolution of the game in the beta development process.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Kline, *Digital Play*, 202.

<sup>26</sup> "Guild Wars Pre-Order & Events FAQ" (2004): <http://www.guildwars.com/events/faq.html>



## Net Yaroze

Sony's Net Yaroze system (discontinued in March 2004) enabled players willing to purchase a modified PS2 (Sony Play Station 2 games console) and appropriate software to become members of an on-line programming community with restricted access to Sony Entertainment's games software. As well as encouraging potential industry recruits, their programming was carefully monitored for any signs of innovative thinking which might be useful to future product development:

Net Yaroze is *very different* from commercial PlayStation development. The vision of Sony in creating this programme is that of a world-wide group of talented, programming hobbyists developing games to play and share among themselves, connected by the Internet under the help, care, and guidance of Sony. This is not a low-end, alternative entry-point into commercial programming, but a hobbyist's club with many safeguards (or obstacles, depending on how you see it) to prevent the dissemination of hobbyist developed games into the protected, quality-controlled end-user market.<sup>27</sup>

## Hacker-produced games patches and military AI programming

Multiplayer virtual environments like those which can be experienced in first-person shooter games like *Quake*, *Arena*, and *Unreal Tournament*, now predominantly played in teams rather than solo, require complex in-game artificial-intelligence programming to simulate the actions of actual combat opponents. Some of the most sophisticated AI plug-ins for such commercial games like *ReaperBot* for *Quake* have been authored by gamers themselves and have subsequently been built into later releases of the games. Such player AI modifications also inevitably find their way into the combat simulation games authorized by the US Department of Defense. Since the mid-1980s, the Department of Defense has commissioned for training purposes several versions of commercially available games which have been specifically modified to incorporate actual combat zones and the technical specifications of military air, sea, land, trans-

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<sup>27</sup> Ed Ringel & Jeremy Vineyard, "Net Yaroze on the Macintosh OS" (2002), <http://www.mactech.com/articles/mactech/Vol.13/13.12>

port, and weaponry. In 1999, the US Army set up the Institute for Creative Technology at the University of Southern California with the explicit aim of further exploring the military use of computer-games technology and content. Games manufacturers profit considerably from such well tried and tested innovations, while the military system also benefits from the vast collective experience of players whose desire to excel in simulated combat often pushes the envelope of possible programmable responses well beyond the parameters first envisioned and encoded by games designers. Evidence from this quarter underscores James Der Derain's analysis of the emergence of what he identifies in *Virtuous War* (2001)<sup>28</sup> as MIMENET, the "military-industrial-media-entertainment-network."

### Creating and trading 'unreal estate' in EverQuest and other MMOG economies

The 1991 calculation by the economist Edward Castronova of the scale of virtual item trading within the Norrath world of *EverQuest On-line* is by now a legendary topic in e-commerce history. The virtual labour that Norrath's 60,000-strong gaming community channels into the production of game properties is translated through Yahoo and eBay auction sites for game avatars and goods, like weapons, armour, boots, into real currency and constituted at that time an economy with an estimated GNP per-capita income somewhere between those of Russia and Bulgaria.

Many of these players spend no more time in virtual worlds than they do in ordinary hobbies. Many others, however, approach virtual worlds as an alternative reality, devoting a substantial fraction of their time to them. According to a survey in Summer 2001, about one third of the adult players of EverQuest spent more time in a typical week in the virtual world than in paid employment.<sup>29</sup>

Is social and economic activity already in the process of migrating to cyberspace?<sup>30</sup> Castronova raises two questions which challenge us to re-think our current understanding of the relationship between play and work:

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<sup>28</sup> James Der Derain, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Boulder CO: Westview, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Edward Castronova, "On Virtual Economies," *CESifo Working Paper Series No. 752* (2002): 2; <http://ssrn.com/abstract=338500>

<sup>30</sup> Castronova, "On Virtual Economies," 5.

1. Will multi-player online games become an important part of the social life of humans?
2. How would a large emigration of work and play time to these virtual worlds affect the economy of the real world?

From an economist's point of view, real value can be attributed to game avatars and other virtual objects:

If people are willing to incur large time and money costs to live in a virtual world, economists will judge that location to be lucrative real estate, regardless of the fact that it exists only in cyberspace. The mere fact that the goods and spaces are digital, and are part of something that has been given the label 'game,' is irrelevant. Willingness to pay, to sacrifice time and effort, is the ultimate arbiter of significance when it comes to assessments of economic value.<sup>31</sup>

Castronova's research provides further reason to consider that some computer games might indeed point beyond traditional concepts of the game and for some gamers may already mark the transition to another way of life.

Since the watershed year of 1999, the games industry has largely succeeded in turning computer games into the dominant leisure activity of an entire generation. The opening distinction between play and labour insists on the non-coercive nature of play. The liberatory potential of computer gaming – its capacity for resistance in a zone of 'free play' – has already been severely compromised by its subjection to mass commodification by the games industry. While the capacity of computer games as an element of mass culture to reproduce the existing antagonisms within a control society certainly cannot be discounted, the activities of the industry are turning what was only a decade ago a zone of relatively free play and experimentation into an almost inescapable element of socialization. The pressure on the 'Nintendo generation' to consume these digital commodities in order to inhabit the social is becoming coercive. The circuits of production, marketing, and culture/consumption situate players at points which switch some of their play into the production of economic value. To play is to labour in the new visual regime.

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<sup>31</sup> Castronova, "On Virtual Economies," 16.

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