BORDER/INES

CULTURES • CONTEXTS • CANADAS

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HAROLD PINTER
FROM ENGLAND

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THE BORDER/LINES
COLLECTIVE

★ in Africa
★ at the Museum
★ with the Circus
★ turning 50
★ reviewing the Media
For some of us it was a Long Revolution, encountering the ongoing and continuous struggle (with some achievements) against the patriarchs, predators, capitalists, murderers who dominate our lives and our culture. But we were wrong, of course. Either the Revolution would be even longer than we thought, or its location was misplaced, not in London, Havana, Moscow or Paris, but in the closest recesses of the everyday, or in the negotiations through the entanglements of bordercrossings. If the objective conditions changed, the subjective encounters did not.

So who would represent, or speak for us? Was there an "us to represent? This issue of BorderLines, our anniversary one, raises the issue of representation, which is an active buzzword now, but based on selves who negotiated themselves by thinking and living into the present world that they inhabited. As we might expect, the accounts are as eclectic and diverse as the people who wrote them, though they should be read with the last two issues #25, on Native Culture, and #24/25, which included a series of identity-searches as indicating the terrain that we take as our habitat. The styles adopted are varied, from the short and whimsical to lengthy accounts of becoming what we are now; from actual life stories to particular encounters along the way. Harold Passer's difficulties in publishing a poem about the Gulf War (for which we thank Index on Censorship) should be read alongside Christine Vazgal's explorations into becoming a woman vis a vis academic Eastern European household, various jobs, as well as universities studied by our friends. Philip Corrigan's cri-de-cour from England must be set in stark contrast to Yoram Carmelli's identity-search as he read working in a British circus. Janice Williamson, writing from Edmonton, remembers working with us; Alan O'Connor went with some young people to the Royal Ontario Museum; Shon Fogle does the tourist bit in East Africa, hunting for the ideological significance of eukaryons and Gary Genosko deconstructs and reviews various articles about nature. Finally, Joe Gallo looks at media literacy in Ontario. The US that is revealed in all of this contains multitudes, though clearly not Richard Nixon's silent majorities. But there is more to come. The next issue of BorderLines is a special on Latin America, edited by Michael Housman and Alan O'Connor, which gives a voice to people who think theoretically about their culture and history. A people whose identities have been made even more problematic than they were by the creation of the North American Free Trade Association. Beyond that, there are rumours that sometimes in 1993 BorderLines will contain a regular literary supplement. What it all means is that BorderLines is more energetic now than its first, chaotic years. Having Julie Jenkins as managing editor is a major factor in that momentum. A collective editorship policy depends a lot on the voluntary labour, energy and commitment of those who, for whatever private and public reasons, see this venture as being important. But it depends on something else: a sense of stability, a home, a continuity. Julie has provided that and more.

I o a n Davies.
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I was a Teenage FOB
Designed by Celine Cosnier

BORDERLINES

memory tattoos under my skin: intersections of desire - home to certain passions, occasional miseries and lots of critical pleasures. Collective work on a magazine like Border/Lines has had all the makings of what an ideal intellectual community might be: theoretical inventiveness, creative engagement, interdisciplinary richness, compassionate support and an understanding of social justice. While the editorial collective's instilled word & image production, my memories of early Border/Lines days are ordered by domestic locations: the beautiful watery garden I wanted to wander in and the stomach aches I assumed after the populus meetings in Alex Wilson's annual coach house: the wine and discussions about magazine names, types (also, once all my publishing naiveté had, and cultural politics at dinners in Peter Fitzsimmons' backyard: the good talks in my neighbour Christine Davies' installation filled with local working together on my first image/text collaborative work (how can I forget the rude cockroach which one morning emerged from under the box of C. Davidson).

For several years, a number of the women had been meeting independently as The Bad Sisters, a feminist reading group which explored baroqueness between feminism and psychoanalysis. We strategized about how effectively to raise feminist issues in a mixed gender feminist-positive collective full of good will. Origins of the stomach aches. I remembered bad girl belly laughs shared with Rose Basting and Brenda Longmore when we orchestrated our 'Bad Sisters in the Big Apple' piece in three scintillating voices. Consuming Rosa's delicious kitchen cappuccinos, we contemplated the ethics of the outrageous in writing about the wherelse of a feminist film critic's undertrouser.

This is my Border/Lines tattoo: Rind's gorgy, intelligence, and occasional compassionate finger many of us juggling too many parts - life, graduate school and political activism. Oh this spectral nation: a community of placed - scarred tables breaded with food, gardens permitting a new season, and a city busting all over with slap-up all night political and cultural work. I make all but the stomach aches.

Janice Williamson is Associate Professor of English at the University of Alberta and the author of Tellale Signs.
Anthropologist As Clown

In June 1992 a journalist interviewed Yoram Carmeli, Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Haifa in Israel, about his experiences in conducting research in a travelling circus in Britain. Carmeli was at that time a visiting Professor at Victoria College, University of Toronto.

ID: I'd like you first to tell us a little bit about your background and how you came to be interested and involved in studying the circus.

YC: I think that in much anthropological fieldwork there is a hidden side which is probably more directly related to the anthropologist's biography than usually is the case with other scientific work. For the more personal part, the circus initially attracted me as a musician. I wanted to study the problem of doing art, the experience of performing. The other part was shifting from sociology to anthropology. I taught sociology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and we had this postivistic kind of sociology, a theoretical discipline which very often sacrificed the holistic - both the holism of the individual and even the holistic view of the group or the community - in favour of categories and in favour of correlating dimensions, etc. This sociology is old-fashioned now but that was the sociology I was involved with, so I missed something more direct, and more synthesising. The few anthropological works that I read from the English anthropological tradition attracted me. There were monographs about West African societies: Black Byzantium, the Nuer, and Meyer Fortes' work on the Tallensi. I liked these coherent systems. Of course, later criticism and theory made a strong case against that kind of anthropology, against the closed system approach, but I liked it a lot. There was something very aesthetic about it and it appealed to my artistic imagination. That's what attracted me to anthropology. In addition to this, there was this challenge which is now really commonplace but at that time was quite new: that was an anthropology of modern society and anthropologists learning about their own society or at least learning about their own culture. I felt that if I did anthropology it must be an anthropology of modern society. So these elements combined. At the time I was a soldier in the Yom Kippur War: I had six months on the west bank of the Suez Canal to reflect on what I was going to do intellectually. All these together brought me to England, the 'home country' of classical anthropology.

ID: What happened then?

YC: That was a fun story because I came as a mature student. I was thirty-five years old, and a fairly experienced sociologist. I registered at University College, London, as a graduate student to be supervised by Mary Douglas and I was about to start taking courses. However, after two months I realised that I wanted to get cut into the field. The department was flexible enough and, after examining me, allowed me to go and start my fieldwork.

ID: How did you find a circus to work with?

YC: It was Christmas and there was a circus on Clapham Common in London. So I came to the circus and went behind the ring doors. I tried to talk to people but they all discouraged me and said that no one would take me on in the circus because I'm not family.

ID: Because you are not family?

YC: Because I'm not from a circus family and because, well, you see, outsiders come to circuses, for a week or for a few days, if they are journalists, and then go away. They're not very liked by circus people. (TV people are more acceptable because they provide a chance of being seen). But then they all told me about Jerry Cotte (who is Mr. Brown in my paper) and they said that Jerry Cotte might be interested because he is not from a circus family and is more open-minded than others. I met Jerry Cotte at a dance, where his circus was performing its Christmas show. When I offered my services as a cello player he said 'Well we don't need a cello player but can you play a trumpet or saxophone?' We agreed that I would contact him when I was ready to play the saxophone. I bought a saxophone and started to take lessons in London. For five weeks I used to practice in spite of all my neighbors. However, you can't develop vibrate in five weeks. When I came to the circus I talked to the band-leader's son but Cotte agreed to take me as a tentmate and that's where my Circus career started.

ID: Can you say something about the way in which the other people in the circus viewed you?

YC: In the beginning I didn't have accommodation in the circus and as long as the circus stayed in the London area I travelled every day to my work as a tentmate. That kept me a little bit of an outsider and the relationship didn't crystallise, but once I had been allocated some space in the organism's core, then circus people immediately had to categorise me. I said I was a student of the circus and that I wanted to write an Anthropology of the circus but that sounded strange. Besides, I was working on a tentmate. But then again, although I was working and generally considered a tentmate, some of the people knew about me supposedly being a musician or expecting to be a musician in the circus. (There is a big cleavage in the circus between being a musician and being a tentmate). They asked me but couldn't make sense of it: I was a musician, but worked as a tentmate! Also, because I wanted to be honest with them, I told them that I was going to write about the circus. So first they thought that I was simply one more journalist. They were suspicious, but gradually my tentmanship took over. I was a very good worker. I also had this mystique of being an ex-israeli soldier who could handle difficult tasks. The performers, however, were not very cooperative. The issue of hierarchy was very, very strong in circuses. Either you were a tentmate, coming as a draft from somewhere, going away to somewhere else or you were born to the circus. I was a tentmate and I stayed.

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Circus wedding

It was the day the circus came to the Town Hall at Weymouth, the day that unicyclist Roland Santus married 19 year old Anne Strawford...

Two of the bridegroom's five unicycling brothers provide a guard of honour for the circus couple.

ID: On the other hand, being a tentman must have given you the opportunity to view entire performances a number of times and get a sense of what the whole organization was.

YC: That's right. That could be done, also, from an artist's point of view, as happened to me later, but as a tentman I could learn a lot of things. For instance we used to travel every morning underneath the seats to see what people dropped. That was an interesting experience. It was also interesting to see what the tentmen tried to pick up and collect. I always gave this story to students in my anthropology courses as an exotic example demonstrating how responsible anthropologists are as far as data collecting is concerned.

One morning, when we were clapping, my wife Big Briana found a label in my tent and asked me, in her Yorkshire accent, "Read it to me, read it to me." I couldn't understand him at all at that time and he couldn't understand me. Eventually I said "Bread and you'll eat it" and it became very angry. Later I asked someone, "Why was Brian angry?" And they said "Don't you know he cannot read? I found out about Brian's illiteracy by actually confronting it.

Later on, there was another case. We arrived in Portsmouth and he fell in love with a prostitute and really wanted to marry her. He kept dreaming about it, especially the woman would cook for him. When we left Portsmouth the girl was left behind, and then he started corresponding with her, but as he couldn't write his letters, the owner's secretary wrote letters for him. That was another proof that Brian could not read and write. Then there was another occasion when we came back to the Portsmouth area. I was driving a truck and he was sitting alongside me. Suddenly he identified something on the road, on the traffic signs, and he said, "Oh are we around Portsmouth?" I said, "Yes." "O Fuck! I could find this girl! That was another opportunity where I could see that Brian could not read and write. I had gone about this question of reading and writing by using a sociological questionnaire. Brian would have kicked me out of his car. That's a good example showing how anthropologists can collect data so that it moves something. I could learn only these details as a testman. I could, of course, also feel how heavy and crouched in circus tenting paraphernalia and how things are composed of bits and pieces, which was very important to my own experience of the circus. As a testman I had an opportunity for personal experience which I did not have as a performer where I had to cope with the pressures of other performers. I could experience the circus hierarchy from the bottom up. I also gained a sense of English from below, for instance being called "Boy", "Teen's Boy" by T.V. people who come for some shots. I was one of the boys.

ID: Can you say something about the family connections in the circus and how that works at getting people jobs in the hierarchy. For example, to be a performer do you really have to be a relative of an already established person who runs that particular circus?

YC: It's hard to be precise but that's fairly correct. There is some discrepancy, because some people do passports especially by marriage, but then they have to invent family identities. They might call themselves by their wife's name if the wife comes from a circus family. Gradually they become part of the "family". This is the issue of inventing genealogies and relating oneself to a circus figure is very important. Once you're "family" you're entitled to the ring even if you're very bad. And of course if it's a small family circus everyone goes to the ring, as well as doing technical and mechanical and administrative jobs. It is, however, noteworthy that no one in the family really becomes a star because a concept of stardom is something that doesn't go very well with the traditional circus family and family relationships. Stardom is something which is developed in the modern, spectacular circuses and among international performers. Family performance is not based on stars. As a family member you're a performer and even if, at sometimes happens, you're expelled from the family show, someone from the circus world who you are not. Suppose you have a struggle with your parents you want to marry that girl, they don't allow you. You marry her nevertheless, you even go to another circus because you want to take her with you and in that other circus you do have a performing job. Still, you're recognized as circus family, from a circus family, entitled to the ring.

ID: Historically, are the circus families descendents of people who have been in circuses since the year dot?

YC: When I looked at a list of circus people 100 years ago and at an equivalent contemporary list (for instance a guest list of circus restaurants) I found very few common names. This means that there really is a circulation of people in the circus business. Still, once you're in, you consider yourself family, the public expects you to present yourself as family. It's part of the show to be family and also to think about yourself as family because that's part of the existential condition that you are put in. Statistically and demographically, however, there is a rotation of names in the circus and the reason is that every simple people come from the outside by marriage or even as testmen or general workers, who may also seldom marry in. Then people leave the circus because they marry out. Also, because circuses collapse very easily, people have to find somewhere else to go and, if they stay outside the circus business for two years or so, they already have removed themselves. Thus although it is run by families and presents the image of family, the real families are much more flexible and fragile.

ID: Did you get any sense of the length of time a circus survives? Do they collapse easily? Do they reform after a collapse, or do they just disappear?

YC: Well, every season there were two to fifteen new circuses, new small circuses on the road. It's very unusual to launch a small circus. All it takes is one cashier in which you put the tent and one caravan which a lorry pulls and in which you live with your wife. You can make a living. However, if you make two, three or four unremarkable moves with cost money - gasoline, renting the ground, feeding animals, if you have any, and paying the license for them - then the circus collapses. In every season many small circuses collapse, the more established names of companies survive longer. In England they can survive as long as three generations. Beyond that, there is the problem of the expanding family and even the largest or the optimal sizes of circus can feed only so many people. Thus there are processes of fusion in circuses, and then fusion, because these little nuclei, the little fragments of families can combine to form smaller circuses or unite with other circuses so
that saw us start again. But, then, they collapsed exactly, economically and structurally, because of the family cycle and the size.

ID: Let's move on. In one of your papers you deal with being on-stage even if one's off-stage. Can you say something about that, that is, the circus performer's awareness of public perception?

YC: I think that

ID: Now—do you get the point, son?

YC: Life isn't exactly a bed of roses for the eighty-six-year old Tony Wall. He is well aware that his days as an American comic talent are numbered. "I am a clown," he says, "but I am not a Cavendish." He is, in fact, a member of the International Circus Clown Club, founded in 1926 by Harry Houdini to promote the advancement of clowning. The club has a membership of over 1,000 clowns worldwide.

ID: How did you find yourself fitting into that as a participant observer?

YC: First of all, it was hard to be accepted because obviously if we talk about people who live by dis-communicating themselves by displaying their real 'off-stage' life, then showing somebody from the outside becomes very problematic. Those people's life experience involves having a family as a very important dimension. Their lives become in the family to which they belong, and to which they relate. They have their own historical timing, their own biographies, and themselves as a circus people. If someone tries to penetrate from the outside, to break in without being part of the family, in other words to invade the principle of family, then this person will be something very crucial to their life experience and to their survival. Thus, it was hard to be accepted. It was also difficult for me to understand the very experience that I'm now talking about. These people speak a different language and culture.

YC: There were many layers which made my being so flawed: problematic. First of all, they hated my approaching them to talk about what they're doing. That's what was so difficult. They felt that I was making a movie about their lives, and that was the only way they could consider me. Later on, I myself became, to a limited extent, a part of the circus. However, to live the circus experience as an anthropologist, to look at my own performance while I was trying to present myself and write about my own presentation was again something extremely different and difficult.

ID: Can you make that specific in terms of being a clown?

YC: There were many layers which made my being so flawed: problematic. First of all, they hated my approaching them to talk about what they were doing. That's what was so difficult. They felt that I was making a movie about their lives, and that was the only way they could consider me. Later on, I myself became, to a limited extent, a part of the circus. However, to live the circus experience as an anthropologist, to look at my own performance while I was trying to present myself and write about my own presentation was again something extremely different and difficult.

ID: There were times when you left the circus and either went to the United States or back to Israel. What did they think of you after a period of time?

YC: I had become a clown and then, suddenly I'd leave. From their point of view there was something strange about it. I was so successful, and yet I left. The second time that I left was in that sense I brought my story about being an anthropologist. At the same time the whole issue of my identity became less important because by coming and going I was less threatening. They realised I didn't really mean to lie in the circus at all and therefore was not dangerous enough. Later on they thought that being a researcher was a way of life, a way of being weird, of being strange. That was a kind of solution because these people themselves lived the
experience of being weird and I think at that point they could already relate to me, in some ways. Unfortunately the day came when I had to stop my field-work. I wouldn’t say ‘finished’ because there is no end to field-work but I had to stop. When I felt that I was partially accepted and beginning to understand the ‘circuit’ rejection of me and my own rejection of the circuit – it was also the time when I had to leave.

ID: Can you say anything about the background of the people who work in the circus? Gypsies? Working class? Unskilled or semi-skilled? The bourgeoisie down on their luck?

YC: In many cases they or their circus parents came from working class families. However, looked at from a public standpoint, circus people comprise a category of their own. They have the stigma of being vagabonds, which is an old tradition in England. It’s not even that they are working-class entertainers. The idea that they are associated with gypsies is bizarre. Circus people hate the idea and try to differentiate themselves from gypsies. That is seen by them as an externally imposed stereotype. They see gypsies as giving somatization a bad reputation.

Basically, the circus presents a totally different life situation from the gypsies. In the popular imagination, gypsies are outsiders who ignore any social contract. They are people who come to stay, while the circus goes away once it has performed its acts. The circus doesn’t threaten society, nor present an alternative way of life. The circus is perceived as being constantly on the move while enhancing dominant values.

ID: Would you say something about the audiences? Was it similar in every town or did it vary?

YC: Of course it varied. When we performed in Portsmouth, Leicester, or Finchley Park in East London we’d have this rougher kind of public. The reactions were different. When we performed in Kingston Park or in Barnet in North London we had this middle-class educated public. With ‘civilised families’ coming into the circus, the reactions were different. There was a lot of giggling as if they didn’t take it seriously. Ineptly, they were taking the whole thing as an unaccustomed thing, a piece of amusing nostalgia in the working-class areas, or in middle-class areas. The whole experience of being objectified was created in a different manner. In a way it was a much livelier performance than we would have in the middle-class areas. The circus is challenged even from outside. It is subdivided. There was much more tolerance there. You could even see it when the performer did their regular acts. For instance, when performing in the High Wire or when putting their legs on a sword, they acted more enthusiastically and provocatively. Instead of, during the Strong Man’s act, the performance the ringmaster challenged the public. ‘Is there anybody who wants to ring the bell?’ Well, there was this very tall, very strong guy, who came and picked up the Strong Man’s weight. That was a very critical intervention which wouldn’t have happened in a middle-class area. But the Strong Man might have asked someone to top this guy on the shoulders and he took him, in full view of the public, behind the scenes, and there made him a Strong Man as well, rather than turning him into an ordinary human being.

ID: So what is the essential uniquesness of circus?

YC: Circus differs from other genres in its claim to present the ‘real’. In creating a sense of its own reality. In this respect it rejects the clear Illusion and prudence which are_introduced in film games, and yet it is not a performance like a rock concert or a theatre show. The circus performance of the real has its particular characteristic. It is not simply that the circus performs real, rather that the real itself is the subject matter. When I was talking about circus performance of ill-communication and self-justification, that’s what I was trying to describe and it can be done very simply. You don’t have to be a great performer, even the opposite. If you’re a great performer you spoil the whole show, because if you try to attract a public to the way you perform, then it’s already clearly in play, just a performance and not the thing itself. One of the secrets of the circus is that it is seen as a private thing. The public has no high expectations of the English circus. That’s an important part of the significance of the circus, the way it serves as a form of families and a long tradition, beyond history and time. That’s what objectification is all about. But to do that, to create this impression, doesn’t understand - and as a matter of fact somewhat contradicts - the notion of performance as a way of role and even the criteria for good and bad performance. The public is not called to judge the performance. The public doesn’t want to judge the performance. It is not interested in how elaborate the act is; it just wants to see this subject/object play and display, and to have an experience which can be revealed by very simple means. In this respect the circus is different from theatre and any other performing art.

ID: The circus has of course been used metaphorically in different ways. It’s also been painted, photographed, uncaptured into works of literature. Yet in some important respects it sits outside the concern of most critics, or of most historians. I wonder if you can say something about that.

YC: I want to relate both to academic and artistic interest - or lack of interest - in the English circus. When I first tried to write about it I was looking for other writings about circus and I couldn’t find any serious academic material. You can say that the circus is so successful in being outside, or presenting itself as the epitome of being outside, that really rejected researchers who wrote about serious subjects in a way that - according to my understanding - they were actually playing to the public, not participating in the performance, in keeping the circus outside. At the same time, on the continent of Europe things seem to be different. This is true not only for academic but also for artistic interests. It’s interesting that the high culture relationship with the circus is much more developed on the continent than in Britain. There the circus is more of a play, performed by ordinary human beings.

The European circus is more prevalent or attractive as a metaphor. That of Cootcoul is still a marginal phenomenon and it encapsulates modernity, in the sense that it evokes the search or longing for totality: it is alienated, and a metaphor for the experience of alienation. But in order to be observed and used as a metaphor circus needs to be more apparent, more prominent. According to my experience, circus people are considered as outside the social order in some way. The fundamental way that excludes them from counting as subjects for research or metaphor. This in itself is a very interesting research question.

ID: Was that true of the big organizations like Bertram Mills?

YC: Bertram Mills presented a circus which was very similar to the present day big continental circuses. It was much more established and was patronised by royalty. Everyone came to its circus which was mostly performed indoors.

ID: Do you think the concept raises difficulties? The Circus Archaic version is typical. When I saw the production two years ago it had so much ‘Englishness’ in it, and it sort of exploded what the circus always contained in itself and presented by being outside society. Circus Archaic explodes society by exploding the circus’s significances. But once you’ve seen it, that’s enough. You’re not likely to go to the second Archaic year after your and take your children to see it in order to watch how they continued your own tradition, nor how you would grow up compared to your children. That is something that the traditional circus provides by being the same, by not changing. But this doesn’t work. In a way it blows up and estimates the old circus experience. There are other ways of post-modernizing the circus. So far there have been no great successes, which should be somehow related to the particular English context.
Sensing Time

Sunday afternoons (I think) television used to show films not seen for more than a quarter of a century. Immediately, but of course now, the brain makes the indices of memory and the rest which made such a slot broadcast. But then, it was the problem of imagining "a quarter of a century" which sticks in the memory. The War was quite enough about, often intimated by "I knew you remember..." not addressed to me (and how much learning comes from such half-remembered half-conversations? I have listened, for example, my mother and her sister who had survived "the war" together till we were too young, between 1942).

Recollections, otherwise, before my birth, were like those of an occasional reminiscence, especially materialised on walks with some maternal grandmother who had died into his nineties. This talk, his talk, was also materialised (in its subsemantically forever concrete) because we walked whilst he talked, along the river Thames where he'd worked as a Waterman and Lighterman, as a Doctor, and then, so his pocket watch told me, for twenty-eight years more than that "quarter of a century" above for the Woolwich Free Ferry, ending up as a Scoutmaster, check the D.E.C. for titles). The first of my substance "senses" but different from almost all the rest: anarchistic, pleasure-seeking, patriarchal, always angry about any talk of the "Good Old Days" (then was blending hard times, Philip, don't you forget it). When he died, by then within that caring social institution called "sheltered accommodation", his wife, my (maternal) grandmother, threw all his clothes, and a terrible loss for me, his documents, down the rubbish chute, and demanded of her two daughters (North my mother and South, her sister/you may call that his chair, yes 125 chair, he burned in the yard, watched from above by my grandmother, slightly, very so slightly, smiling. Then his long, lingering death, with all his extra labour for North and South (survived close enough to my grandmother's "sheltered accommodation" that they could attend, and so no "bed" for medical/social assistance), but in the end, her calm decision. In my mother I'll not be here tomorrow and dying, passing on, passing away, in that lovely (I try) hospitalised night... Other times, other dreams. Never to be forgotten, the dream, yes (I think in a poem I called it "green" remembering of my running, running the use of (as before into the "maternity hospital" to find Janet half-dead through blood loss, and the little, the dear child born dead at birth (stillbirth, such an "executive shocked category") and all that the State allowed was a "dispensation certificate", sentencing and diagnose, and still die, and die, and die, and die, and die, and die, and die, all that the State allowed was a "dispensation certificate", sentencing and diagnose, and still die, and die, and die, and die, and die, and die, and die, and die, and die, and die, and die, and die..."

Remarks on a personal anniversary

By Philip Corrigan

Courses on a personal anniversary

Obvious is from what normally passes itself as "History" and "Cultural Studies" says nothing of this. Indeed such re-memorising, such senses of time, of being there, no there, are ruled out. Such practices of evocation, denial, and, yet, a violent abstraction which like those chimes as comprehensive and universal, validity what are the sign systems of every very distant (seemingly disembodied) observers. Nothing shown, everything known. Deaths and Entrances I am sure this "quokka" Dylan Thomas, whose Rage, rage against the dying of the light rises with me, as once - to the massive hilarity of my Moons and Dad - brought an Orkney Survey Map which included his place born that of Under Milk Wood, who now amongst my friends recalls, knows, that exact spaced memory of the opening words of the radio (and local) version, spoken by Richard Burton's (I but also a lot of ocean and, being practical, they both guffawed at all the blue space, all that sea.

For Roger Simon, in love and solidarity

Border/Lines 26

Border/Lines 26
5. DIVE IN, THE CULTURES' WARMTH

Someday, sometime, I started to write... I embody these words in the way that someone might say, for example, they started in, to vote, to divorce, to grow rare seeds, to understand astrophysics, and so I started to write in a particularly truly special way—do with a typewriter that was written to me after my Aunt Grace's death who was the sister of my father. There was something, as there is to, quite literally, as I type this, in the action of the hand and the production of some trace which locked quite a lot like the 'primed word' like The Books I had been borrowing from the local 'drugstore', in the way that one must 'grow up'... IN HARD TO DO.

Multiple image trips to Plaistow Library with going to steamlining lessons seems to me entirely exact! Suddenly I could press - and to the bard is hardly in significant ways and produce this trace, these worked out letters. A lot of this is done out of the triple confidence of (1) being silent fascinating, even at home about 'School', (2) encounters with the sung as much as the written word, and also with other music, notably 1942 beat jazz (3) how Antony Harding who suddenly appeared from the YOU/SS/SAA/AAY not to count on 'English'. Indeed, in a peculiarly strong way, I think did my life has been organized, in terms of the Word, by the three sided reality of the familial remembrance, Tony Harding, and VEIS' contradictory the History Mailorder I have then and ever since been another range of my amargile Fashions.

And, so what, when, what, uh, 'lover's guilt', did 'choose' after school? Well it's just a normal story. I had two interviews, one to the morning and the latter in the earlier evening. The first was to become a sabbatical in a Messmerian step, the latter to be an assistant librarian in a Public Library: for the former, I was deemed 'over qualified'; for the latter tall enough to reach the top bookshelves. Hey, heights, avaricious is not it! So, by such decisions are lives made, yet! But concurrently with this 'career move' I also try moved myself from the domestic space to the flat apartment with a friend, called Philip. He was to be involved in the 'upstart' to Central London that was, in a way, so fast and so we made cool, and with what else this called the Scene. London, in track back, had always been too frightening place, especially by I had pronounced there and found on a corner that felt all too reaching the public. Plaistow Library home cum 'in'. Together we discovered the shocking, shadowing circle of both Boose and I like the USA. So, might it right 'The Scene', during the day I was led and jacketed 'The Librarian'. If I was, I'd been split in two, cool, in some extent, severity, reaching, with legs lying, Andy Warhol, alien. Concerning slept on my floor in early 1961.

The practices here as they had been since age 16 were essentially those of the Byrd written and the aural, but always at the engine, not to be realized, was that of my greatest adoration and worship, that of film. Since an early age, say 10, there had been various affiliations to, and illusions from, film, cinema, 'Going to the Pictures'. The other variety of all that passion was music of vortices and contrasting kinds; but, nothing then, or since, has matched going to the cinema, feeling heat, sitting down, the lights down, and then the big far nowadays, also, usually the small screen; attention, muscles, teeth, attention. A chance to be 'lost', a chance to find oneself equally, so, the screen is the 'church,' both, at the same time.

Later, some skills, feeling awkward, feeling queasy, going to the Bitterer Ensemble at Southwell Theatres, and walking in the area, to find the posture, attending, in other words to the PRAXIS hereby wrested, suddenly, slowly, inadequately, discovering PRACTICES, and later, much later, PRODUCTIONS.
allowed discourses, forms, and images which are positive, necessary, and sustainable...

In order to truly understand and appreciate the importance of freedom of speech and expression, one must recognize that the ability to freely express oneself is a fundamental human right. Without the ability to speak freely and express thoughts and ideas without fear of retribution, the democratic process and the very foundation of a free society are at risk.

In the context of the document, the idea of freedom of speech is juxtaposed against the constraints of government control and surveillance. The author emphasizes the need for open dialogue and the protection of individual liberties, highlighting the importance of a free press in a democratic society.

Furthermore, the document touches on the role of the media in shaping public opinion and the impact of censorship on access to information. The discussion underscores the significance of an independent and unbiased press in ensuring that diverse perspectives and voices are heard, thereby fostering a well-informed and engaged citizenry.

By examining the historical and contemporary implications of freedom of speech, the author invites readers to reflect on the broader implications of silencing dissent and the potential consequences for democratic institutions and the rule of law.

In conclusion, the document serves as a powerful reminder of the value of freedom of expression and the role it plays in maintaining a just and equitable society. It challenges readers to consider the importance of safeguarding these freedoms and to remain vigilant in the face of attempts to restrict or curtail them.

Border/Lines 26
N owtime, Song of Various Serpents and Loving for Trees

10. So, Feeling Backwards/Thinking Forwards

what Roland Barthes once called ‘the fires of language’ cannot be entirely (but all, once in every instance) summarised by formalised, indigeneous, sometimes skins and fingers connect, words meld, songs link, images connect, hopes have a way of laughing critically if I come here braided into black coffee, it’s only a possibility [continuing] ‘It’s never been a certain place between words/within sounds/within images. I’d like to embody these as always already hoped for, but I cannot, they can, for two examples: confirm indecision and impotence, but I can also facetiously. Why is there cannot, in its design, in its loving, solidarity, any old/dull/just Open Text. (Peacock’s critique of Derrida is here very exact, or any meaning is possible, then – quite precisely, meaning no possibility. As I wrote in 1985 to say: de/pect: An Old Woman is to provide an encyclopedic of always already known meanings, a reassuring text for some (for many) but a violating text for none (for a few). As I suggested in Border/Lines No 1 (Derrida/Lyotard) – a writing whose love, solidarity and hopefulness I would wish to add almost all are always resources for making differently and, importantly, these need not be those solitary coffins of the lonely last instance, but may indeed be very much in the Now/Time of our lives, may indeed be, in all the bacchanalian senses of the words, coming together. It does not how to happen all ways, it may not happen often, but that it CAN HAPPEN ONLYC. and Murchy, in SOME HAPPPINESS OF SUNDAY UNEXPECTEDLY blows apart Charlie Christian on the first electric guitar is whom I honour here, Master Bathurst, 1942, and the grass of Centuri Sotis’s voice in her reading of e.g., the poem Pense au! out that different time, in 1980 that which was always to be/so seem the case’. Sexuality has been much more discussed in the last 10 or 20 years than previously at least based within the rational spaces of the academic and apparatus publication but the living of varied and variable sexualities does not yet seem to be an approved academic discourse, a lot of the time, indeed, it is the sexualities of Other People that become discussable, not how the worldless mongering and enlightenment of suddenly varied bodies SPEAKING seems to be/coming of a certain soft, gentle silence. That is not, emphasised, witness the chatter which follows this stuttering. Rather a sort of song, the grain again here thus, the voice of the skin, the sing of the stoker, the slipping of the body, in and out, of its skinful container and into a certain, uh, ecologically other. ‘But without the norexic (or aided by the same: flags C, deep dark dots on M. There is, in other words, a grimness and difficulty to word situation ahead bliss for the street, Roland, all ways seen from a distant sneer, (his definition of pleasure). And, in this one case, certainly, there is a certain loss of words, and or a certain sheltering, when it comes to DESIGNING being within the, um, field of cultural productions that reduces, in fact to certain words. like Great, Wonderful, Far Out. Too Much, Cool, WOW and the rest. Now, past, for just a moment, think of the language of love/ing, does not that tend to wordlessness e.g. (the signing) or the sacriafice jubilation (also, not absolutely positioned) of the various (New) Times of the cultural producer...be, be, be, be/cannot be some sort of topographical constraint, can
ne of the deepest contradictions that has influenced the way I see myself, my friends, and my community is the tension between 'Western' and 'Eastern' cultural practices. Being born in New York City and growing up in a multicultural environment has exposed me to a wide range of cultural influences. However, the ways in which these cultures interact with each other can be challenging. For example, the concept of 'face' is central to Chinese culture, and it is important to maintain it in social interactions. On the other hand, the concept of 'face' is not as important in Western cultures. This can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts when people from different cultures interact. To overcome these challenges, it is important to be open-minded and respectful of different cultural practices.
Although partly a Eurocentric reading, these stereotypes also have a basis in reality. How to reconcile my distaste of conspicuous consumption with my disgust for Eurocentric elitism became a source of tension for me.

As I try to reconstruct the development of my gender-consciousness, it seems that in some ways it caught me by surprise to realize that I was a woman. This has partly to do with the fact that as a child I was mostly concerned with my cultural allegiances. As an only child of two people who felt culturally displaced, I spent a lot of time under the influence of a deliberately constructed ‘European’ atmosphere at home.

Accompanying them almost annually on trips to Europe, I was cushioned from Canadian culture outside of school. During the school year I spent almost all my time with one girlfriend. I remember that time as slipping between being a model student and creating a private world of stuffed animals, miniature models and endless conversations. My parents dressed me in the conception of a European schoolgirl dark, woollen tights, dark dress shoes, woolen skirts or dresses, usually in subdued colours, a blouse and hoody. A picture from grade four shows me demurely sitting with hands folded and ankles crossed. Unlike that of my T-shirted schoolmates, this is an almost pointy, typical portrait of a child dutifully picking up middle-class gender-appropriate cues. However, when my best friend moved away in sixth grade, I suddenly found myself on anachronism in the middle of an already developing weather manipulation or assimilation, the fact that I started to doubt my image meant that I began a process of reconstructing the model I felt had been made for me. I remember the dismay my purchase of track pants and a pair of Nike runners caused my parents. I started playing sports and watching hockey games.

"T's entered into my vocabulary. It astonished me even now how almost overnight I metamorphosed from a socially and physically clumsy outsider to a more confident, sports-literate person accepted into the WASP world. This is not to say that I did not have my problems with this world. I remember an artificial separation angered me to the extent that I walked out of the class. But, in general, I am struck by the sense of power and competence that I felt in "knowing." It is also at this time that I noticed my personal sense of dispassion some "natural" traits, such as competitiveness in the areas of sports and academics - in other words, in the 'public' realm outside of emotion and interpersonal relations, in which boys usually outstrip girls. I had a 'buddy' relationship with both boys and girls. (This may have to do with the fact that because to an large extent I was playing a role, I did not dishomogenize much of myself to anyone). I especially found myself relating to boys and sticking up for them in class. Still, more or less, towards the straightjacketing discipline of school than the girls.
related to their predecessor. Later, we began to develop sexual relationships. I found myself tiring fairly routinely, unrealistically and straightforward attitudes and expectations. It was only later that they found me intimidating in that respect. At the same time, though, I had some feminine traits, such as a nurturant, compassionate attitude towards others, a high degree of self-awareness about my personal life and that I never overtly initiated a sexual relationship.

In many ways I was lucky, in that I never had the fact of my womenhood thrown violently in my face by getting pregnant or getting raped. Because of my supportive background and, therefore, my intellectual confidence, I was seldom asked as inferior and destined for the women’s ghetto. My body, until it later began to express a greater confusion of influences upon it, molded itself with an iron discipline to the dictates of my intellect.

This portrait of a semi-assured person, however, began breaking down somewhat along the way. As happens to many girls in their teens, I began to crumm. Whether this is because at this point most girls begin experiencing the conflicting pressures that follow them through much of their lives, to integrate contradictory messages into their identities as women, or whether I felt that I was expected to “prove” more than being a multi-dimensional person, I don’t know. The fact is that I was becoming increasingly depressive and concerned about my weight. I grew more and more incapable of dealing with the meaninglessness of much of what I experienced in school, and what I saw going on around me, especially as I became more politically aware. I particularly found myself unable to manage language. I saw language as being one of the influences upon what I gradually came to see as a constructed experience. I saw wild contradictions around myself. It seemed so strange that the world I had known was steeped in such privilege - for instance, education, the luxury of simple moral choices and the unexamined embrace of limited parameters of acceptability. I saw that privilege being painstakingly rationalized and alternatives relentlessly silenced in attitudes and institutions around me, such as in my school and the mass media. Even something as innocent as trying to start a debate on a political topic at my high school, focused on raising consciousness through alternative avenues of news, was met for a year with resistance by both students and administrators that we were unwanted aggressors. What I saw around me made me mistrust all that I associated with the process of established written and verbal expression. I began to mistrust language as a tool of institutional power, a tool which allowed the manipulation of the perceived realities that society bestowed its value upon.

At this point I was balaicnic close to flunking out of school, suicidal and seeing a succession of psychiatrists. Eventually I was hospitalized for clinical depression. When I was released, I decided to go to an alternative school in Toronto.

So, at the age of 17 I found myself beginning the process of really taking control of my internal and external possibilities, not simply manipulating the facade. I find it sad that the only way that the medical profession knew how to deal with a girl going through existential/identity questions was to medicate her. As I took myself off the antidepressants I began to re-evaluate the possibility of making sense of things on my own and of being an active agent in the community. I began to use the city to access a small community of young, experimental artists, many belonging to different subcultures, such as gays, punks, anarchists. I went to underground music events, exhibitions, theatres, and participated in demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience. I was playing music, experimenting in the visual arts and conducting seminars for classes. I was more creatively active, but I still could not write anything other than fragments, as I could not form coherent conceptions of the world around me. I did not yet understand the power of play and irony or expression through the interconnections of fragments. I came from a background of personally experienced privilege, but with a vicious history of suffering. I could “pass” in the dominant culture, but I did not really belong. I was trying to exist the "establishment," which I connected with a self-conscious reproduction of class and other biases, but I could not deny that a large part of myself was firmly yoked to it. Neither reason nor inclination, nor mindlessly accepting, I felt I was floating between boundaries. My physical image literally reflected this state of mind: I dressed neither conservatively nor playfully, but wore a neutral assortment of baggy, coat-off clothes. I also had a series of emotionally uninvolved sexual encounters with, both men and women. It is telling that something as "radical" as bisexuality almost did not register, as such, with me. That either points to a returned attitude to sexuality or the fact that my body and desires were absent to me, that I could not see my self as a sexual being, other than as subordinate to my intellect. Although desire obviously had a lot to do with the mind, especially the subconscious, my expectation was that if evoking intellect was possible, then evoking my body should follow like a puppet. My state of mind was illustrated by a few fragments from a journal I was keeping at the time: "The city creates things in the imagination that have nothing to do with being day-to-day reality. It’s all film. See takes on the dimensions of non-reality. Packaging."

I thought of how dirty clothes got in the city. It is more than particles of our emission, viruses or even a dead person on the bus. It is the residue of people’s lives and mundane experiences.

"Trash". This is an age of fragments. Nothingness is whole.

Things are parts, artificial, slippery, limited promises. It seems the things are not created, but altered, distorted.

The frenzied depths into the sources of the mind... police raids, descents, killings... The power that comes with the knowledge of the holocaust itself within.

Those fragments display a kind of urban sensibility - the pressure of urban manipulation and seizing the power of subversion through acknowledging the dead underculture. But I didn’t have a language to talk about the shifting, slippery nature of reality - and the power relations that go into its definition. As I was groping my way towards an attempt to understand and define these new perceptions, I made a decision at the end of grade 12 to go to university. This was somewhat of a last-minute to the days when I could not imagine a future for myself other than an institutionally conditioned, intellectual existence. Obviously influenced by a "Europeans" understanding of culture and education, I went to university with a conception of it as being an accepted series of steps to go through to get educated. I therefore chose a variety of first-year survey courses in traditional disciplines and rapidly found myself screaming with frustration. However, I soon realized that I was not looking toories a body of knowledge into an already established framework, but was seeking the beginnings of languages in which to talk about my earlier sensibilities. In Cultural Studies I found a forum for reflection on modernity and transmissions of meaning.

My exposure to and awareness provided me with an alternative realm of space and time, different from the authority of an elitist system where the power over knowledge is in the hands of authority. Through Walter Benjamin, for instance, I was exposed to a language which discussed the role of "authority" in the constitution of meaning. I was led to move towards a new understanding of knowledge as the end product of specific practices and I began to see myself functioning through the problems and phenomenology of the modern and post-modern.

I began to recognize that I had a background of stories and tales upon which I constructed a perception of my parents’ (and, by extension, of my background). The stories I remember with greatest clarity have to do with the prejudices and violence my parents sustained. Trivial concerns about them without understanding others' stories. For instance, my mother yet again voicing her annoyance about my father's incessant smoking drifted into his relating an experience of being imprisoned for political activities and being forbidden to have a cigarette. My father occasionally talked about being a Jew in collaborationist Hungary under the Nazis. He recounted incidents such as Jews being herded stopped in the streets and ordered to pull down their pants so that their penises could be checked for circumcision. He personally escaped being exterminated by the Nazis, as the "Soviet Liberating Army" marched in when the Nazis were literally blocks away from his family's villa. Later, after his participation in the 1956 revolution, he was black-listed from working because of his dissident activities and never lived transmitting writing or writing under other people's names. While I was in Budapest 30-odd years after the event, he showed me the public square where he was shot at in a demonstration in 1956. Again, he was nearly killed and survived because someone illegally hid him in a building. (Thirty-five years later I met the woman who had let him in. She was still working in the same building, which had been converted to archives, and she showed him where the bullet holes had been left in a cubicle.) He once described himself dressing up in his best clothes at the age of ten and going to the "high school" in order to proceed himself a sponsor, which was the only way he could go to secondary school at a time when a restricted number of Jews were permitted to do higher studies. He later worked full-time to support himself and his parents while acquiring equivalent of two M.A.'s and a Ph.D.

My mother came from minor nobility (landowners) and, as a result, was treated as a parish under the existing regime. In spite of her straightforwardness, she was told that she would never be admitted to university and that she might consider becoming a shoeemaker, as she had had polio as a child, and making shoes was not considered heavy labor. Fed up with the system, she once flew to Hungary on a train and stood outside the foreign affairs, she became the official for the infamous zeal of a system persecuting people of a generation who had had nothing to do with the oppression of the lower classes. She ended up persuading him to intervene on her behalf to admit her to university. It was at the age of ten that she had contracted polio, and her mother had proceeded to Austria, leaving her and her
The other joke goes as follows:

Rabbit sits on his doorstep filing his nails. Foxes come by and asks him why he is filing his nails. Rabbit gives the same response. Blackbird comes by and asks him why he is filing his nails and Rabbit answers, "Because when Lion comes they will be sharp enough so that I can bear him to pieces."

Finally, Lion himself comes and asks Rabbit what he is doing. Rabbit replies, "Nothing, I'm just sitting here filing my nails and minding my own business."

These stories constitute a kind of vicarious memory which refers to a time at least a generation older than me. In the fall of ’91 I visited Budapest for the first time since leaving as a baby. This was an occasion to reexamine the place from a mythical narrative told in my parents’ voices: a collection of impressions viewed first hand. While they were lamenting the loss of a café culture, I was meeting a younger generation which was functioning in a milieu of bars, clubs, and fast-food restaurants. The Hungary I’ve carried around in my heart and mind is not particularly related to the reality of today. The narrative that I know, that revolves around an aesthetic of suffering, creates a nostalgic experience of spectatoriality. People living there participate in a reality outside of this aesthetic of suffering. There is an ongoing process of social and political transformation that this historical memory does not include.

My realization of the dynamic and living aspect of Budapest coincides with a theory of popular culture that is interested in the role of the consumer. I carried with me the residue of my father’s concern with the question of intentionality by a narcissistic and commercial incursion with mass culture; I also realized that popular culture traditionally is seen as trivial and shallow. However, differentiating between the production and consumption of mass culture enables one to think of the role of agency. Although the various strategies of mass culture, from fashion to fast food, from TV to pornography, are produced through a series of institutions and corporations with an interest in preserving values conforming to dominant narratives and interests, their consumption is influenced by the interests, experiences and values of a variety of subcultures. In this way, the consumers of mass culture are not necessarily passive objects, but rather agents active in the construction of their own experiences. This interests me as well in terms of representations of women and in terms of how women present themselves in everyday life. Already a veteran of female impersonation, I embarked on a course of playing with my image in the real world. Although I informed Cultural Studies intro the social theories which engage, rather than impose upon, the spaces they try to describe, I became acutely aware that I was not actually inhabiting a space... As I became increasingly uncomfortable with my disemboweled, theoretical approach, I began to fantasize about being a flight attendant. As I had flown a lot when we were moving around in my childhood, I had come to see flight attendants as a kind of ministering angel, always patient, always in control, kindly and glamorous. Of course, later I understood this image to be a consciously and tangibly perpetuated one. It was, therefore, with a self-consciously ironic sense that I prepared for my entrance into this glamorous and gritty world. This job seemed to me to be the epitome of uncomprehending stereotypes of women’s roles. On the one hand, it is a dirty, at times very dirty, job, you are glorified. It is a wonderful opportunity for self-consciously playing with your image and realizing its perfectly constructed vocation. I saw a part of drug queens dressed as flight attendants at Grey Pride Day in Toronto and it pointed out to me exactly how this image is open to appropriation. I began playing with gender identity. The starched trousers have the same longer-dom-like aspect of the very old movie star, with the duality of a real person underneath. Again, I find it amusing how histrionically and intuitively I achieved the hostess image. I had never considered myself typically "feminine," but I instinctively knew how to dress, put on makeup and be graceful and charming when applying for positions as a flight attendant. It later amused me to watch myself negotiating the female trinity of roles that I seem female flight attendants are expected to perform. One is at the same time unremarkable virgin, utilitarian whore and nurturing mother. I wrapped up my entire package. "Well-grounded" was the greatest compliment I heard among my co-workers (as the phrase going in filmland we remain calm and assured, with knotted scarf firmly in place). Although the contract did not state any overt sexist conditions, there were unspoken double standards. For instance, one point in training we were required to jump out the sides of the aircraft and slide down an inflatable slide. We were emphatically told not to wear nylons because the friction had once caused a woman’s nylons to melt on to her legs. However, the woman’s uniform consisted of a skirt and opanka. When we pointed this out, we were told that an emergency was unlikely to happen and, anyway, if it did occur, we would have more important things on our minds.

Although I was ambivalent about the image I was creating for myself, I was also having fun playing with my image. In giving myself over to an inventive understanding of certain social relations I come to an understanding of the body as a visible site of conflicting influences. This process was curiously liberating, as I was using this persona for my own purposes. I got a great deal of pleasure from adopting my different roles outside of their own context. I found that consciously playing with mainstream images, within the mainstream, allows for a certain flexibility in crossing boundaries. It serves a different purpose when played out in a subversive context, such as cross-dressing. It is the context, or intention, which plays a large part in how subversive, pleasurable, or oppressive a role becomes.

At the same time, I realized that the stereotypically feminine image I chose to inhabit requires a degree of attractiveness and "breeding." It is not available to everyone. It is also not desirable to all women to play with mainstream femininity. Some women have undergone a great deal more oppression than others, and they may not want to have anything to do with an oppressive culture, not even in its "subcultured" or "alternative" forms. I was not ready to see, but I think I was ready to understand, what it means to inhabit a role that is not yours, and to inhabit a role that is not yours is an act of transformation. I think it meant to me what it meant to a whole generation before me. I was "feminized" as a result. I was made aware that the idea of my feminization was a fantasy I had been living with for a very long time. The idea of my feminization was a fantasy I had been living with for a very long time. The idea of my feminization was a fantasy I had been living with for a very long time.
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One of the truly necessary publications."—Margaret Atwood
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I started to write this poem on the plane going to the Edinburgh Festival in August 1981. I had a rough draft by the time we landed in Edinburgh. It sprang from the triumphalism, the machismo, the victory paradise, that were very much in evidence at the time. So that is the reason for We blew the shit out of them. The first place I sent it to was the London Review of Books. I received a very odd letter, which said, in sum, that the poem had considerable force, but it was for that very reason that they were not able to publish it. But the letter went on to make the extraordinary assertion that the paper showed my views about the USA’s role in the world. So I wrote back. 'The paper shows my views, does it? I’ll keep that to myself if I were you, chum.' I said. And I was very pleased with the use of the word ‘chum.’

So I sent it to the Guardian and the then literary editor came on the telephone to me and said, ‘Oh dear.’ He said, ‘Harold, this is really... You’ve really given me a very bad headache with this one.’ He said, ‘I’m seriously behind you myself, speaking personally.’ This is my memory of the telephone conversation. ‘But,’ he said, ‘you know I don’t think... Ooh, I think we’re in for real trouble if we try to publish it in the Guardian.’ Finally, I asked innocently, why is that?

He said, ‘Well, you know, Harold, we are a family newspaper.’ Those words were actually said. ‘Oh, I’m sorry,’ I said. ‘I was under the impression you were a serious newspaper.’ And he said, ‘Well, yes, we’re also a serious newspaper, of course. Nevertheless, things have changed a bit to the Guardian over the last few years.’

I suggested he talk to some of his colleagues and come back to me in a couple of days. Because, I said, ‘I do believe the Guardian has a responsibility to publish serious work, seriously considered work, which I believe this to be. Although it is very hot, I also think it is slowly, Hot shit.’

He called me in two days and said, ‘Harold, I’m terribly sorry, I can’t publish it.’ He said more or less said, ‘It’s more than my job’s worth. So that was the Guardian. I then sent it to the Observer...’

Which has published your poems previously...

Oh yes, the Guardian has published me in the past, too—As incidentally, has the Independent. The Observer was the most complex and fascinating web that I actually ran into. I sent the poem not to the literary editor, but to the editor himself.

A couple of days later, he called me and said that he thought it should be published. He thought it was very tempting. Possibly going to be quite a lot of flack, he said. But he thought it should be published, not on the literary pages, but on the leader pages. It was a truly political poem, he said. So I was delighted to hear that. He sent me a proof, which he did.

The next Sunday nothing happened. And then the following Sunday nothing happened. So I called the editor. He said, ‘Oh dear, Harold, I’m afraid that I’ve run into one or two problems with your poem.’ I asked what they were. ‘In short, my colleagues don’t want me to publish it.’ Why not? He said. ‘They’re telling me we are going to lose lots of readers.’ I asked, ‘Do you really believe that?’ Anyway, we had a quite amusing chat. He said, ‘I want to publish it, but I seem to be more or less alone.’ I then said, ‘Look, the Observer, as a serious newspaper, has to publish quite recently an account of what the US tanks actually did in the desert. The tanks had bulldozers, and during the ground attack they were used as roadways. They buried, as far as we know, an unknown number of Iraqi alive. This was reported by your newspapers as a fact and it was a horrific and obscene fact. My poem actually says, ‘They suffocated in their own shit. It is obscene, but it is referring to obscene facts.”

He said, ‘Absolutely right. Look, I want to publish the poem. But I’m running into all sorts of resistance. The trouble in the language, it’s the obscene language. People get very offended by this and God’s why they think we are going to lose readers.” I then sent the editor of the Observer a short fax, in which I quoted myself when I was at the US Embassy in Athens in March 1965 with Arthur Miller. I had a chat with the ambassador about torture in Turkish prisons. He told me that he didn’t appreciate the realities of the situation vis-à-vis the Communist threat, the military reality, the diplomatic reality, the strategic reality, and so on.

I said the reality I was referring to was that of electric current on your genitals. When the ambassador said, ‘Sir, you are a guest in my house,’ and turned away. I left the house.

The point I was making to the editor of the Observer was that the ambassador found great offense in the word genitals. But the reality of the situation, the actual reality of electric current on your genitals, was a matter of no concern to him. It was the use of the word that was offensive, but not the act. I said I was drawing an analogy between that little exchange and what we were now talking about. This poem uses obscene words to describe obscene acts and obscene attitudes.

But the editor of the Observer wrote to me and said he couldn’t publish, with great regret. I’ve been going serious enough through the publication of your poems on the Gulf War. A few things were in favour, despite warnings by senior colleagues that many readers would be alienated... I admit to having cold feet. Recently an Observer columnist spoke of his paper’s rejection of the poem and referred to his editor’s concern for its shortcomings as a piece of verse. This was
not of course true. The editor showed no such concern — to me, at least.

Then sent the poem to the literary editor of the Independent, saying I hadn’t sent it to him in the first place because I did not think the Independent would publish it. But now that everybody had turned it down, the London Review of Books, the Guardian and the Observer, perhaps I was wrong about the Independent! To cut a long story very short, the literary editor wanted to publish it but he felt he had to show it to the editor. The editor sat on it for a few days and then made no comment except to say the Independent was not going to publish the poem. And I’ve never had any explanation. Nothing. It was simply No.

The London Review of Books’ letter was dated 24 September 1951; the Guardian’s rejection came in a conversation on the telephone at the beginning of October. The letter from the editor of the Observer was dated 5 November 1951, and that from the Independent was dated 8 December 1951.

In conversation earlier, you said you would rather not write down the record of this poem yourself, because it would sound as if you were whining. But there is no issue here beyond the complaint of the rejected poet. This poem has been dropped by the mainstream press, which would normally have snapped up anything written by Harold Pinter.

I did incidentally send it to the New York Review of Books, just as a laugh. The editor treated me warmly for sending the poem, but said he was afraid they couldn’t use it. So finally I did not waste any more time. I heard that a magazine called Books, a very well-produced publication in the West Indies, might be interested, and indeed they published the poem.

It was one finally published in Britain, in January 1952, by a new newspaper called Socialist, with a limited circulation. But as far as national newspapers go, it was a total failure. It appeared in one of the major British dailies, the Independent, in an important form, too, with an article on the repression in England, written by me. And it was also published in Bulgaria, Greece and France.

It is interesting, isn’t it? At a time when papers are not too troubled by the severity of the language, when it is about the body, sado-eroticism, sexual, or whatever. We have overcome the years you had to put a series of dots in place of an ‘F’ word. The objection to your poem was justified in your use of some strong words.

This may be because it is a formal piece at work and perhaps it is where its strength lies. It is a deliberate piece of work. So to this, too, I’d like to point, that I regard it as a very odd form of this kind of poetry.

But every artist says: ‘Don’t think this poem is good enough. It is not a successful piece of work.’ Nobody has ever actually said that.

I feel particularly sensitive about the language. I am the editor of Index on Censorship responsible for looking Index an annual general at the editorial board. We are often asked to write in an article in our special issue on women. Breaking the silence (1990), I thought the word, though strong, was in context. However, although I do not know the exact details, many funding organisations obviously took exception.

I wonder what would happen if your poem were to be re-submitted now, as an exercise. People and editors change. Perhaps it would be an exercise worth pursuing. The reactions seem to be final for the strong reasons: ‘family paper’, or ‘offending readers’...

Oh no! I have no intention of re-submitting it or anything else — to any of these newspapers. Unless I decide to write nursery rhymes.

At a time when we have become far more accustomed to strong language in print, it is almost amusing to find sensitivities expressed in this way. Perhaps it reflects this very peculiar political period we are living in. There is a rather sly and false reaction to matters and events, which are ‘strong’ in themselves. Brutal language is shamed as a way of avoiding brutal issues.

I think that is a valid conclusion to be drawn. It was well known and has been often asserted that the sanitisation of the Gulf War was palpable. The actual nature of the horror was barely even noted, or seen on TV. Such a thing as this poem, for me, is opening a current which many people would prefer to see remain closed. And it is in the interests of government that the curtain, that roll, is forever drawn over the nature of reality.

Every war has its share of blood and dripping guts, and bodies blown to pieces, but barring one photo published by the Observer, as it happens, of a carbonised figure above a tank, there was no one who dared to look at it.

None of it then, and none of it wanted us to remember now. You can trace the history of the present series of attacks in a series of events through the 1980s, which I am quite clear about. I am talking of the US invasion of Grenada in 1983, the ‘low intensity’ war against Nicaragua, the invasion of Panama in 1989, followed by the Gulf War. I do believe this is what I am writing is the last line of the poem: ‘Now I want to come over here and kiss you in the mouth.’ It refers to all the lines before: the kiss is also the monster.

But the behaviour of the media is crucial in all this. Dick Hebdige’s Subculture was a million copies in 1980, but in 1991 it was only 4,000 copies.

The United States has led the world in pop culture. In 1991 there were about 3,000 film and television media for Americans to watch. But the United States is by far the most samples, and most culturally influential. The American media is very much the standard. The United States is very much the monster.

For me it is really about control of the media. What the Western media are really interested in is to blow up and exaggerate certain things in order to interest the public in the government’s interests — and ignore and suppress others. The death in Iraq and the continuing deaths in Iraq are hardly front-page news.

This piece has been reprinted courtesy of Index on Censorship (Vol 21 No 5, May 1992) London, England.
The study of youth subcultures in Britain was developed at a small graduate research centre at the University of Birmingham. Related concerns were developed at the same time by other radical intellectuals as either individual or collective projects. Among these were Jeffrey Weeks' historical research on homosexuality, journals such as Feminist Review and Race and Class, and also Marxist studies of the mass media. These concerns were woven into Cultural Studies, sometimes implicitly and other times in explicit challenge.

From the early 1970s the modern lesbian and gay movement developed its own specific intellectuals, journalists and artists, usually outside the university system. It took an inspired guess to realize that Howard Backen was gay. Hedgire wrote a book that today we’d call “queer.” But in the late 1970s and early 1980s we didn’t know the word and I never expected to find Hedgire’s book on subcultures in a lesbian/gay bookstore. There was evidently a kind of block.

A highly developed school of writing on subcultures and style apparently had nothing at all to say about the most damned obvious historical and contemporary subculture: that of lesbians and gay men.

The third section of Toronto Teenagers is devoted to the problems and concerns most often voiced by the young interviewed. These are as follows: the environment, family relations, racism, multiculturalism, sexuality, dating and their own futures. The difficulty is that complex problems cannot be properly described or analysed in television-style soundbites. The presentation is cautious. The section on dating is a timid exploration of teenage sexual activity but it does at least touch on the issue of safer sex. The section on racism says nothing about police shootings of Black men and women. Most tellingly, the complex and diverse lives of lesbian and gay youth are completely silenced.

Among the most interesting moments of the exhibition are segments of the displays on youth subcultures. The video clips present for each subculture testimonies about the transition of youth from one style to another. One white boy used to be a Preppy but now he’s a B-Boy- and for the first time hangs out with Black friends. A punk woman tells about the necessary steps to becoming accepted as a punk. This sense of emergence is important—vital for the queer youth who are not present here.

The experience of immigration is important for many Canadian young people. Their peers can be merciless about kids who are “fresh off the boat” and try to fit in but get it all wrong (dark-washed jeans). Children born of immigrant parents have well-known problems with the conflicting demands of two worlds; that of their parent culture and that of school. Styles and images cross borders like Black leather jackets, shaved heads and Doc Martens have crossed and recrossed the Atlantic. What does it mean to be a teenager in Canada, crossing the Atlantic do subcultural styles lose meaning and gain other meanings? Are they often simply fashions? A serious investigation of subcultures in Canada will have to address such issues.

Another serious issue to investigate is hostility, racism and conflict between youth groups and cultures. In the Toronto Teenagers exhibition these issues are there very briefly in soundbites about parents and about racism. But overall the show presents a rather descriptive approach of unproblematic homophobia, police beatings don’t exist. The power of adults over teenagers is glossed over. Is life ever ordinary, or just weird? We brought two small children with us and they spent the afternoon at the Royal Ontario Museum fascinated by the prehistoric animal skeletons.

Our focus was on the materiality of culture. Material objects are especially important in a culture like our own. Once you’ve said something about the symbolism of an object you’ve said something about the world from which that object comes. One of the purposes of the show was to create archives that people can visit in a hundred years from now to glimpse the last decade of the twentieth century. What we wanted to do was to capture the objects. That is after all the traditional focus of the museum and of the Royal Ontario Museum in particular. We wanted the viewer to look at the objects, but through them to glimpse something of the world from which those objects came.

The second part of the show selects five subcultures for attention.

What are the major subcultures in Toronto today?

That’s a very difficult question to answer and it was hotly debated within the museum. When we made our proposal for the exhibition there was some concern that we were just talking to marginal groups of teenagers. We had a group of eight teenagers who were our advisory committee throughout. They told us that B-Boys and B-Girls were fifty percent of some high schools, rockers were about ten percent, hippies about fifteen percent but growing, preppies were sometimes thirty percent but dropping in numbers.

The last part of the exhibition is about problems and concerns that most affect young people. What were the major concerns?

How would you respond to the criticism that the lives of Black and gay youth are silenced by this exhibition?

It is certainly true that some of the teenagers we talked with are gay. That has to be the case. They don’t identify themselves as being gay and that’s a kind of problem. So the show certainly fails to tell their stories. The show fails to tell the stories of a lot of groups. There seem to be as many fifteen clearly defined subcultures in as many high schools. We had room only to show five. There were limitations on what we could do. But I absolutely agree with the criticism. This is one of the faults of the show.

Even though your intention was to allow young people to speak for themselves, clearly you and your team shaped the exhibition. What was your theoretical framework, your political framework, for shaping the exhibition in the way that you did?
Our theoretical framework comes from a school of anthropology that undertakes ethnography from the point of view of the material culture of the culture in question. The notion here is that material culture carries and creates and organizes various kinds of cultural meanings. More particularly we understood that the world of adolescence is now an extraordinarily rich and varied world. This was not the case even three decades ago. A woman who was a teenager in the 1950s told us that then you had only two choices: you could be mainstream or James Dean. Now there are as many as fifteen possibilities. There is a kind of archaeological accumulation of possibilities. There are new stylistic innovations that take place. Instead of fudging, the older ones continue to exist as possibilities. We wanted to look at this world of choice. Teenagers are called upon to make a selection from this world. These choices made as stylistic decisions have profound ideological and political implications. This is not just weekly dressing up. The choices that people make from the envelope of stylistic possibilities reflect an ideological position and this is what we wanted to show: the cultural, the ideological, the social and political meanings with which each of these stylistic categories is charged.

**Comments by**

**MARIAM DURRANI, ANDREW KIM AND ALBERT KIM OF THE CLASSROOM STRUGGLE ON CKLN 88.1 FM.**

> "It was refreshing to see that the introductory video was done by a person of colour. I thought that was pretty cool, the first thing we saw. And a female too."

> "And also the enjoyment of clothing styles and people reminiscing about their youth from 1930 to 1980. We really liked that part because it made us aware of how styles come back, even though it's different now."

> "When we got into the present we didn't like the way that teenagers were put into specific little boxes: preppies, hipsters, b-boys and b-girls. And you really only focused only on downtown schools. And there's a certain way in which, for instance, gay youth dress and you really didn't cover that."

> "When we went through the exhibit we thought that this is a white-washed exhibit. It seemed centred towards parents."

> "I know about the b-boys and the b-girls then in the things they wear there is a political statement they're trying to make. And some groups really hate each other. You should have brought out the emotions of youth, the raw emotions of wanting to belong and not wanting to belong."

> "The section on racism, sexism, environment and so on should have been much more specific. That's what kids went to talk about. When we went into racism we didn't talk about the police and tension between coloured youth and the police. When we went into sexism it was like you just asked what's your opinion about sexism and they just, rammed on. They're big issues. You should have broken them down; there's not just dating, there's inter-racial dating, homosexual dating, parents' input into your dating, who you date, ageism. The topics are way too broad to make any sense to us whatsoever."

> "What's the use of telling the adults what they already know. Tell them what they don't know."

> "Youth have much more to say. We wish you had asked questions that challenged the kids and made them think. It seems a bit too empty. The issues are way too sugar-coated. If this is supposed to be about us then we get the feeling that it's not us. You should have brought in issues: the Gulf War, what do you think about that? The feminist movement, what do you think about that? You could have asked them all about these things. If my parents came in there they would not see the reality of what students are thinking now."

> "As a student I want to talk about the youth that are trying to fight racism and sexism in their high schools. And about their families, how they limit you."

> "The youth that were interviewed were the ones who think of themselves as the popular ones. The youth who don't think of themselves as being popular weren't interviewed."

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**Impressions of Africa**

By Stan Fogel

At the Egypt Air office in Cairo where I went to purchase my Cairo-Nairobi, Kenya ticket I was greeted by a dazzling Cairo. She made me forget Cairo's monotonous traffic jams, its obsessive beggars, its monuments ringed by tour buses. Instead of kebabmeat, a handout, I would have handed out myself...as ramusan. In the dense dark souk or market, which travel books invariably describe as colourful, I would have shopped for her: an umbrella whose one peluch produces a ripple that, in their crowded confines, registers on the drier scale I would have ridden to the movies. The movies, themselves, make Bruce Lee kung-fu films seem like they were done by Burgman, but I would have watched them avidly.

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All this I told her, but nothing, surprisingly, wooed her as much as the succinct statement of my profession: "Professor of Literature." I do not know whether there are antomologists out there who make "tong" swan merely by muttering "Bugs," but periodically the love of literature, long since forgotten by a faded academic who says it for his supper, erupts in his presence. Such was the case here. Despite the line expanding behind me, which no doubt joined the one winding around the Sphinx and/or the pyramids, crowds being a Cairo's constant companion, the Egypt Air clerk told me at length her own hobby goals. She was a student of English literature in Cairo who worked part-time in the airline office. Her love was Jane Austen. And Egypt's authors? As easily as if she could blow the city's
emerg from the sky, she dismissed her countrymen and -women and lived in the England of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries invested with values by English professors who, I am convinced, are spread across the world preaching a sherry party utopia of urban speech and English gardens. Although I would have given to that kingdom with her had she envied my hand in those elongated fingers of hers that can make poetry out of a pen writing "Fogel," "Sight time" and "date." I had to leave her where she was. Jane Austen's pride, I could have told her, read like it was written by blunt fingers, but I said she should graduate work in Canada or my university where she would no doubt find "Paradise Regained." Even though other blunt fingers produced that text, it was one, I promised her, I would emiss with my own more poetic digits. I gave her an academic address and moved on to Nairobi where her literature lecture was expected. Still the thrill of that encounter or ones like it are what propel me across the world or around the block repeteadly. I beg my Long for an- d-ond. I am still in most of those situations. I'm gracious, attentive, sensitive to nuances that are otherwise lost on the bulldozers that built the pyramids. Most monuments are built from those latter, large chunky blocks. I can only respond on an archeologist when I glosn something erotic. Then till for hours through the equivalent of a desert stretch of men and sand for the Tutenkhamen gold at a profile or a glosn in an accidental groaning. Such rigorous consumption of a desert has made me more open on my already announced departure. This time for sure, securing the possibility of the oil dale and the postgrad school, but I promise you I'll move on to Nairobi.

Bright to Nairobi's bookstores, in fact, where a Kenyan literature student with the taste of the Cosmopolitan did the shopping. Indigenous writers are on the bottom shelves and even the most of degenerates. Thus, in the third-bred aesthetic gene, is an unedited, raw product not nearly as crafted and magnificent as Out of Africa. The book which Karen Blixen wrote as look Dinesen is everyday—and usually it's the glossy new edition with the glossy new cover photograph which clearly shows the book's secondary status to the movie. Aptly named is Out of Africa because, except for the African men and women shooting around to facilitate the amours and intrigue of a bunch of, what else, boxed Europeans, and except for the other background shots of lush acacia, the book and film could certainly have taken place out of Africa, say in a Florida health spa. It wouldn't have had, however, the cachet of a continent that is still provided by travel agencies as unsouled; thus, it would have failed as anything except, done a lot more smoothly, as a-rated romp for the home video market. The Blixen house, too, is there for those who can't get enough of the expatriate ambiance. It's a nice country house in a suburban setting, without mystique except, again, for its African allure. Although the house is now a museum kept up for tourists, down the road is a golf course still crammed with rich, lolling white men and women served by deferential Africans. Segregated by club fees rather than culture now, it offers about the same ratio of integration that Beverley Hills, California does, though a few African government officials remain pretty wealthy by the public purser keep the golfer's handicaps from too closely resembling apartheid.

If this wasn't enough, there are safari-going tourists to provide after-the-fact dress rehearsals for the set born out of Africa. While the Kenyans I met professed little interest in the organised camping trips that seem to rank among the highest of supposedly authentic travel experiences, they are the same now as of adventures for what is becoming herd's European and American. So my friend, Julie, and I went on a safari; we had a driver/guide. His peceting order firmly in place, he was determined to spot us a great spotted baboon. Despite Julie's illus, the lingetering stomach malaise that took hold in Cairo and kept her company over roads and smiles designed to torture her. I was quite asante as we wandered the Mossi Mara National Park where wild animals do roam in abundance. Emilie refused to take us directly back to our hotel. Sensing that a cheetah lurked nearby, he wheeled around and around in the tall grass, elephants, giraffes, wildbeastes, rhinos and even lions a mere schizo to his greatest revelation. Prostrate in the back of the van Julie would not out have been able to see the cheetah unless it leaped through the hole in our retractable roof. Regardless, we were on the hunt, in the Masai game park, we were going to win big if hers was going to be a short life, it would be a short, happy one. Sure enough we sighted a cheetah. Emilie, spotting a large tip tied to his arching hair and a sneering crow, coaxed the van to within a few feet of the animal. Luckily the cheetah bounded off to our right as the six or seven others that gave the group spot the book of a cheetah burcky parking lot. Oblivious to themselves of the sounds of metal purring more loudly than the cheetah, if purring is what cheetahs do, the satisfied safari-goers trained their video cameras onto the animal, thereby getting a protruded still, the cheetah immobile there. Pleased that our score card was complete, score card being literally in evidence in my life the game park lodges, Emilie finally returned us to our hotel.

The only times that he was ever that audacious again were when we stopped for our tour breaks at those where a signpost showed them all the start of his adventure, the safari, the warden who took our signs and the "hotel" were juxtaposed over two dialogue but fascinating listening establishment that were side by side, we were of beginning this exploit. EmilieGIS to tell me that such places were too dangerous, that butchery and hotel were co-operative enterprises and that some submit to smoke and toilet facilities existed. Whereupon he would stop at an exporting shop in a small store to hundreds of other tourists, their vans and land rovers as familiar as yet another sighting of a herd of wildebeest. Lest one harbour any illusions about the remoteness of those remote tourist trains, they were dispensed with as when I was given a sales pitch by a guy wearing a t-shirt with a reproduction of a Chicago, Illinois newspaper headline dated May 28, 1896. The same was cloudered something on a Chicago baseball fan could ardently respond to: the occasion to first pass the day before the Chicago Cubs, a team rarely encountered in such quiet rural realms. Since it was barely five months after the date on his t-shirt, I assumed in jest he was an avid it slightly dislocated Cubs fan and tried to talk bubbing averages, the revel of day versus night baseball, the beauty of Wrigley Field, etc. His only interest in averages was the seller's equivalent of the Dow Jones. His Cubs t-shirt had been borrowed for and I quickly realised anything I had in mind, his mind, as currency. Fena- he was reaching into the van for a book. It was the book of his life. Emilie I could augment the Kenyan shilling and even a half for space, safariers, tiny machine-run animals. The sights offering such nick-sacks fitter the lead. One can no more relax at one of the rest stops than one can walk uninterrupted on Kenyan beaches. The minute one leaves one's hotel, itself protected by guards, one is confronted by a stampedes of elephants, or rather howlers of those replicated ones. Instead of ones of tranquility by the Indian Ocean, itself edged with seaweed that makes swimming unpleasant, one gets portable shopping malls, the males selling their wooden wares, the families their bodies. In the shallows of the ocean, within sight of the hotel, prostitutes splash and play languidly until their silent silver coins are heard by a hotel guest who needs one in. Augmented by herds of school children, too young it seems to sell but old enough to demand spots for them to walk, run or whatever in some charity-thon, the busman offers everything except an uninterupted time. It seems most tourists are unsatisfied. The irony of burnt white bodies, fat and soft, severely by black ones, thin and attenuate, goes unnoticed.

The hotel, both in the same parks and along the ocean, do their best to conform to the definition of the generic tourist hotel. What gives them a little twist in Kenya is the abundance of no doubt delightfully pure bushbuck, baggage carriers and cats etc. who howar. In the dining room of our Mombassa beach hotel cutlery comes and went at moments, a note of the bullets visits by the Germans in tour groups. Also, bills are dealt with and money transferred to the operators can only be described as raw capitalism. No New York dirtbag or French hocke here; coins are picked up and pocketed as quickly
plenty of, then bailed him away. Blind-sided he was taken to a prison where he was placed in solitary confinement. For four years he was held without trial, always in solitary confinement. Finally, on a hunger strike and with Amnesty International’s support, he was summarily released without explanation or apology. He had been shanghaied from his home and subjected to a good many abuses simply for being on the executive of his university’s financial committee. He had not been married to a woman who was not Kenyan and whose embassy was appeased of his detention, perhaps an even worse fate would have ensued. (Edward told me these things in an easy conversational manner.) An amiable but charismatic person, he was returned to the freedom he had hoped for from, but without the rank and status he had previously attained. He joked that the most difficult adjustment he had to make after being released from prison was to the comfortable bed that for four years had been replaced by a concrete floor and one woolen blanket.

The remaining days I spent with him as he conducted Julie and me around the unofficial Kenya. Tourist dollars U.S. money and aid money from abroad have clearly not been channelled by the one party state into a party for all. All the clichés of poverty and degradation that mix with some modern Nairobi apartment buildings, lavish hotels and quirky monuments built to encourage the age of Kenya’s leaders were in place and placed in full view for me. Edward, himself, lives on the border between the power brokers who have already once attempted to breed him and the majority of Kenyans who have much less than he does. He lives in a middle class section of Nairobi in a large now house with ample grounds and servants to tend to them as well as other domestic staff. Sitting cosily in his living room sipping a beer, I thought, previously to his opening up to me, that he, like many academics around the world, held his comfortable pact with a world that for the most part is sympathetic towards some academics’ taciturn scrutiny of the social order. The house has bars on the windows and doors; there are even bars blocking the sleeping quarters in case ruthless intruders manage somehow to get by the second line of defense, the first being the barred wire fences and dogs that surround the house. This, I was assured, is a necessity to repel the hordes in a society where few have been. Caught in the middle of corruption Edward must lecture severely during the day about the conditions of his country, then retreat to his home where he barricades himself against people disadvantaged by those conditions so that he can take the time to reflect on that impetuous set of circumstances. Thus, the roads to the city are marked and those that ring Nairobi are paved with the good intentions of European and North American travelers and governments whose dollars line the pockets of a handful of men who, no doubt, prepare to drive over smoother roads in other countries.

The car that opens the Out of Africa crew can put up with the monotonous disk of any road. It’s their top-draw lifetime and, besides, comfortably packed hotel suites cushion them as they arrive on their destinations. That they are warned not to go out in the evenings, that the main streets so in part because of a mean government, is not much an impediment to a week or two of holidays. Like the gong that fascinated, making white misted in the days when Out of Africa was lived instead of filmed, they are oblivious to the political and social milieus of the majority of the population. Only the tourist, an era or of bypassing African self assertion, should be filmed and the novelist and her catonic glorification is a question that can probably be answered by one word, nostalgia. Hollywood would have trouble existing money for an African project unless Mary Streep’s white face was allowed to peak out of a sea of black ones. Although Kenya has a more secure sense of its nationhood than many African countries and although it has swept its colonial British masters out of power, there is a lingering difficulty with identity that goes beyond literature and golf clubs. At the New Stanley Hotel, a rather snobish hotel in the center of Nairobi that is also the center of safari activity for the nation, two African women168 bought a seat in the coffee shop for ignoring them. They accused him of paying attention to later arriving white tourists by whom, they said, he was hoped to be tipped profusely. Such friction rarely surfaces now that the colonial presence in the government is paramount. One of the more intriguing parts of the colonial post is the train that slowly makes its way between Nairobi on the plains and Mombasa on the coast. The journey of the day takes about thirty-six hours or so to accomplish. Stops along the densely populated strip are infrequent and thus is made much going and going. There are still
fantastically records
the coronation of Tshok
VII, Emperor of
Damballul. For his
desecration Europeans,
cooperated after a storm
had wreaked their ship
nearby, admonished the
Emperor-King and his
people by setting up a
miniature Paris Bourse
or stock market to take
bets on the best
performers and
performances; by
training two teams of
cats in different
coloured ribbons to
play "Prisoner's Rescue":
by having one of their
toupe, a manuscript,
shoo away the white
on an egg to reveal an
intact yolk. Other
delighting acts of
European lapidarians
are missed with
indigenous ones
more or less ludicrous
than the others.
Boureau's Africa is more
interesting than the
spectacle-index; one can
imagine them anywhere.
For a Kenyan, to cross
one country, that is less
fictional, you might try
a tour conducted by my
friend Edward; some of
his places on his
tinerary, however, are
off limits.
Stan Fopse is trying to
invent himself as a travel
writer.
Vinales : J, 89K.

Here is no doubt that the mass media are a
crucial political and public issue. That is why
media literacy at high school and university
levels has been recognised as a crucial
component of the curriculum. Today's
postmodern culture requires a critical and
active audience that not only can scrutinise the
persuasive power of the word but also must increasingly
know how to deal with the power of the image, for
the image has become the dominant form of public address.
Ideally the mass media, both audiovisual and print,
are supposed to offer a wide variety of voices and help
sustain the political pluralism of our society. For too long,
however, the media have been allowed to develop pretty
much as they wished in the pursuit of the commercial
imperative and in the process have managed to undermine
cultural considerations and to alienate the very voices they
are supposed to have aided. Broadcasting and publishing
facilities are now in the hands of large global corporations.
The media are the ones who control the sale of its
most concentrated. Any attempt at meaningful change
becomes particularly difficult since alternative programs
and publications are either edged out silently by
subtly or drowned out by the stentorian voice of the
corporate media.
There are ways to start taking some control over
the very media that define much of our daily life. Community
radio, alternative magazines and community cable
are some of the obvious places where people can begin to
make their own culture and pursue their creativity. This
is not to suggest that the television and radio spectrum
should be immediately crowded with amateur TV and
radio shows, but that professional and semi-professional
alternative stations can be created where ordinary
individuals and groups formally excluded from the
mainstream media—Native people, working people,
lesbians and gays, people of colour and people with
disabilities—can tell their own stories in their own way
without appropriation by the corporate world.
The educational system is another place
where the cultural battle over meaning can be fought. Here,
issues such as media ownership, as well as
skills such as analysing television and film,
and rudimentary hands-on skills for students'
own media productions can be discussed and
bought. Once again here is no point
minimizing the difficulties of these tasks.
In today's educational curriculum there is little
that prepares the student to make sense of the
chaotic of the image or the historical
development and social implications of
popular culture, and there is still less
opportunity to study how to use the media
for oppositional rather than for corporate
were rooted in folk tradition, the family, religion and other traditional institutions. The most accessible cultural materials used and circulated within culture, such as music, songs, visual images, fashion, entertainment and ideas are the outgrowths of a varied and vast mass media apparatus. The culture produced largely by the mass media and selected by the audience is powerful because it addresses ideas simply, emotionally and with a great deal of feeling. Admittedly, many of these cultural messages knock around, vibrate and rely on multiplying formulas for arguments, yet their directness and accessibility are their major source of strength. The success of the mass media rests precisely on their ability to deliver a clear emotional message with a mind-numbing repetiton and with a good deal of entertainment. The more powerful the feeling, the more important the message, and the more often it is repeated. But there is a further point: the media have been successful in shaping our culture, partly because they have been able to deliver messages that make at least partial sense to a large segment of the audience. The recent wave of subversive Brown's is clearly indicative of the ability of the media to touch issues that resonate with a majority of people. Vice President Quayle may rail about the failure of Hollywood to reinforce mass values—read-heterosexual, middle-class, white Christian values—but the reality is that it is a significant number of women who help support parents juggling work, home and child-rearing, usually with considerable less money than Murphy Brown. There is an ongoing negotiation between the audience and the media, with the audience choosing to explore those messages that reflect aspects of their everyday experiences and overlooking and rejecting other aspects that do not.

The cultural industries know quite well that their interests are closely connected with the moods and feelings of the majority of the people; that is why they are actually sensitive to the nation's many publics. Virtually every product of the cultural industries is intended to satisfy some fundamental wish and desire of their audiences. Over the past decade programming and advertising have become more specific in their demographic: that abstract and ever-changing concept known as the "mass audience" has now been broken down into more detailed and particular categories. The "mass" has become more segmented, with

more individual pockets of audiences who have specific interests, ambitions, desires, motives, and so forth. The pressures of a consumer society, the extra strain imposed on women who are working and at the same time raising a family, the distant racism throughout society, the economic depression and the effects of free trade which have led to plant shutdowns, underemployment and mass unemployment, all of these forces affect individual audiences in a number of concrete and different ways.

These are issues of which the cultural industries do take account through a sophisticated technology of polling and the surveying of market preferences—popular preferences are far more difficult to identify and control than the people believe. If the cultural industries failed to accommodate these factors and offered only escapist fare, their ability to grab and involve an audience would effectively evaporate. The corporate world is compelled to tap into these desires and anxieties and to examine the needs of their audiences. Nevertheless, the individual feelings and the political ideas of specific popular groups cannot be completely incorporated into the products of the cultural industries or can they be disseminated without alteration by the media since that would represent an unwelcome challenge to their hegemonic power. The media's role has traditionally been to naturalize the status quo, make it look normal and commonplace, by orchestrating a political and cultural consensus and by selling what Hans Blumenberger call "the existing order." Public issues such as the Gulf War, the environment, feminism, ethnic race, and gay and lesbian concerns are at best contained by the mass media. These issues are sometimes addressed obliviously and sometimes directly. Most of the time, however, these questions and others as important are domesticated, and, as in the recent case of the Atlantic articles, they are not even referred to.

We don't need to be isolated against the media as much as we need to know how to work within them, and how the underlying values and messages of shock, news, and films are structured. Who gets represented in the media and how? Who gets excluded and why? Media literacy should empower every student with how the media are organized, what policies have been promoted to regulate the media and how these policies can be changed in order to empower excluded publics, and how to use effectively the media to reach these audiences. Finally, media literacy should examine how different audiences use the messages of the media. One thing that becomes obvious is that the market is not everywhere about the media, but about fundamental social and political issues that have been worked on, transformed and constructed by the media. The task of the instructor is to encourage a critique of the media's naturalized constructions and to stimulate a larger analysis of social, economic and political power. How then have we arrived in teaching the market? In Canada we have moved, perhaps further than many other provinces. In September 1989 Media Literacy became a mandatory component of the English curriculum in Ontario High Schools. One key organization that has promoted the teaching of the media at the high school level has been the Association for Media Literacy (AML) which at a great degree has set the media
The recent publication of the Ontario Media Literacy Resources Guide (1990), and the production of CBC’s video program Inside the Box (1989), as well as the NFB’s Media and Society (1980) video program, have all been prompted in some degree by the efforts of the AML. The rationale behind media literacy is to enhance students’ critical faculties with regard to new and emergent audiovisual technologies. It is a demand for the effective presence of dominant ideologies: patriarchy, commodification, sexism, racism, heterosexism, and consumerism. An awareness of the effects of the AML is eclectic, influenced by McLuhanism, semiotics, feminism and social movement analyses of the media. Much of this falls into the tradition of media studies, but in this case influenced by the engaged position of cultural studies through the tradition of critical pedagogy in the writings of Henry Giroux, Stanley Aronowitz, and Roger Simon, and more specifically by work of Australian and English where media literacy programs at the secondary school level have been in place for many years—indeed, where the AML originally turned for its pedagogical models.

The most important factor that influences the development of media literacy is classroom practice itself. This is because the media literacy quickly realizes that because they deal with popular texts of which students often have more knowledge than teachers, they are being challenged to rely on the media in a kind of teaching that casts role is question to the very power and discipline of the classroom. Lenwordpress, an English educator, author of the Media and a participant in the post two AML conferences emphasizes this crucial point:

"Studying the media," he said in an interview, "actually involves a new way of education. In traditional pedagogy the student/teacher relation is part of what Paul Friesen called the backing process of education. which does not encourage critical understanding. The expertise of the tutor is tied up with the education. What is interesting about media analysis is the relationship of the author to the text. The role of media literacy is essentially to teach analysis of media and integrated the areas of educational policy, communication and media production so that the student can understand the messages in the media. Media literacy is often a course disconnected from other courses. And while as much it offers a critical analysis of the media and the messages should be made available to people who want to take the next logical step and move on to the production of the media. This requires some alternative programming and develop useful skills that can be used in the classroom.

The fact that media studies in growing in Canada is heartening, though as I have noted, what gets defined as media literacy is often diffused across a disorganized curriculum both. I would venture to say that at the university and the high school levels. Every student should be made aware of the issues in the media. And there is also little sense that one must conduct the investigation further into the areas of the family, school, the work place and politics. It is encouraging that at least in Ontario media literacy programs have emphasized an "inculcation approach" to teaching about the media. There is the opposite danger that in teaching media literacy and in stressing an active audience that produces its own unique popular culture we begin to attribute to the audience too much power to decode the messages in their own interests. When media literacy engages the popular forms of entertainment it must be careful that the resistance that is attributed to audiences--its perceived ability to read in its own interests--is read rather than imagined. It is imperative not to succumb to a subjectivist and popular model that easily dismisses the power of the media and returns to power that to the institution is viewed as crucial.

Media literacy must not stop at the classroom door. The most important work is done outside the classroom. For those interested in an activist position there are other venues such as the Canadian magazine Adbusters and its parent organization the Media Foundation. Despite its amoral and simplistic attacks on consumerism, Adbusters does provide an alternative that, if not emulated, at least can be modified. Media analyst John Fluke in a letter to the author printed in last issue of Adbusters had this to say: "Your message is wonderful and needs to be widely heard--but boy oh boy, do your tactics suck!" Fluke was complaining about the magazine's irritating habit of positioning the audience as mindless couch potatoes and frenetic consumers. Fair criticism. Adbusters and the Media Foundation have managed, on the other hand, to attract the attention of a generation of students where a new critical academics have flourished. Part of the reason for the success of Adbusters is its uncensored cultural guerilla tactics: a form of artistic terrorism that is both anarchic and locally based, directed against the media and cultural industries.

The most successful Adbusters campaign has been its production of what it calls television non-commercials. The tapes are made available to the public free with information about how to buy local media time and how much it costs. Individuals can then purchase that second spot to show their non commercials, which are often related to a range of topics: TV addiction, with a commercial aptly named "Studsheim"; an anti-liposuction ad called "Taking Tongue"; and one against commercial "Bluegrass Bazaar." So far this campaign has raised its share of controversy. Last year NBC, CBS, and ABC affiliates in Boston refused to show the commercials on the grounds that they represented a threat to the legitimate advertising that was "too controversial." In Canada, the CBC has recently relaxed its 30 year old policy against controversial advertising, and the Media Foundation will be testing the limits of the new regulations.

Adbusters promotes a form of "cultural gymnastics" a subversive attack on the symbolic power of the media which takes apart media generated images and turns them upside down, a kind of carnivalesque attack on the power of the media. Billboard posters who deface billboards to make ironic and anti-commercial messages are the best examples of ways of disrupting the media and turning our familiar commercial world upside down. These kind of artistic strategies are significant in that it allows people to get involved in an individual and immediate way in subverting the power of the media, but they should not be seen as a replacement for a first-rate education in the media and for the building of a wide network of local and oppositional cultures.

Joe Gutho teaches media at York and is a member of the Border/Lines Collective.
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By Gary Genosko

Urban Ecosystem (I.L., No. 4, 1985-86), furthered theoretically his activist goal of remaking the city in biologically and culturally diverse ways, while Grahame Belknap’s review of Urban Nature (I.L., No. 7/8, 1987) of ‘deep ecology’ literature, a monkeywrenching handbook, and Neil Evernden’s The Natural Alien, a book inspired in part by Heideggerian phenomenology as European biology, interrogated the diversity of contemporary environmental thought - from how to disable construction equipment through how to do things with the bio-semiotics of Jakob von Uexkull to how, if possible, to take seriously Whitmanian American versions of the Norwegian tradition of lightsteine, the ‘open air’ life. Jim Herdman, I think, summed up the matter rather well when he sang ‘I curse me when I kiss the sky.’

What my former teacher Evernden taught me was to be suspicious about environmentalism. For, in short, the environmental crisis is the crisis of environmentalism, the splitting apart of environmentalism from the environment. When certain factions in environmentalism began to borrow the methods of their opponents, supporting their own positions with techniques which were once anathema to them, they ensured a future for themselves among the ecocrats and solar-powered barbecues. Such, for instance, the so-called under the internal inconsistencies of their newly acquired methods because these methods enabled them to invalidate certain kinds of claims and show them to be true in the very forums to
which they were once denied entry or were received very poorly. This trial by paradox has exacted a heavy toll on what is called environmentalism. It is laughable but very marketable.

One of the issues here is that nature has been reconstituted, like a malt drink, as a natural treasure. It is manufactured. It has been elaborated on and developed in order to be sold. There is a great deal of effort to make nature more accessible, more touristable, more big business.

When environmentalism was first conceived, it was seen as a way to protect nature, to give it a voice, to give it a say in the world. But now, in the age of global capitalism, the environment is just another commodity, another asset to be bought and sold. It is a commodity to be traded, a resource to be exploited.

The environment is no longer seen as something to be preserved, but as something to be used and abused. The idea of sustainability has been replaced by the idea of maximum extraction. The environment is no longer seen as a living thing, but as a resource to be plundered.

The environment is no longer seen as a place of beauty, but as a place of profit. The idea of nature as a sacred space has been replaced by the idea of nature as a place to be exploited. The environment is no longer seen as a place where we can learn and grow, but as a place where we can make a profit.

The environment is no longer seen as a place where we can find solace and rest, but as a place where we can find materials for industry. The environment is no longer seen as a place where we can find inspiration and wonder, but as a place where we can find resources for our daily needs.

The environment is no longer seen as a place where we can find peace and calm, but as a place where we can find profit and gain. The environment is no longer seen as a place where we can find beauty and wonder, but as a place where we can find resources for our daily needs.

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describe "the pre-eminent manner in which our culture recoups its losses." The circle of conditions, the pseudo-species of all kinds in artificial environments not only furthered Darwin's sense of his own ontological dominance over the earth, but also inspired his thinking about the environment and the peculiarities of physically and mentally challenged adults and children. Ronald McDonald, The Hamburger, etc.) to promote his simulation of food. If Baudrillard is the theorist of the conditions which obtain after nature, then Disney and Kroce were true frontiersmen and promoters from this object of criticism. Lest we forget that Vancouver too had its "Disneyland," all we need be reminded of is that Brian Fawcett used the very term to describe Expo 67 in his article "How Walt Disney Invented the Design of Expo 67 and Why we Should all be Frightened as Hell about it..." (BJ/1. No. 7/8, 1987). Not only did Disneyfied (senior administrative staff from Disneyland and Disney-inspired projects) come to dominate Expo 67, "The real, ideological monument to geopolitical globalization, which is to say, to propagandistic commercial values, and to degenerate any other form of consciousness," but they put into place a great deal of "Americanized novelty" to stereotype the critical imagination of, Fawcett fours, many young people. Greater Vancouver, Vancouver already had its own third rate, "dehumanizing factory," after all, in Fantasy Gardens. France has its Eurodisney; Alberta has its indoor beach, petting zoo, and exotic animal displays in West Edmonton Mall; Ontario has its fiberglass mountain at the heart of Canada's Wonderland, and Arizona has its pseudo-planet Biosphere; but there remains the massive intrusion of Hydropower (B.C. and Alberta 1 & 2). Winona LaDuke's critique of Canadian "environmental racism" in her article "The Culture of Hydroelectric Power" (BJ/1. No. 23, 1991/92) exposes provincial and federal environmental and biological diversity, perpetrated in the economic name of "cheap electrical rates," with reference to the concept of "sustainable development" as an endocontantial strategy. The culture of nature, treat the expansion of "landscape" toward the artificial (chemical, technological, monocultural) as inevitable but not irreversible. Wilson's redemptive vision and commitment to natural restoration based upon topo-sensitivity is at odds with the dark scenes of the death of nature which I have discussed. This is the tension which has run through and animates investigations of "natural phenomena in B.). What makes Wilson's project an exception is his ability to rethink in-between places such as parkettes, empty lots, degraded river banks, and everywhere designated by the Canadian term 'weasteil, ' including many people's backyards, as well as overlooked green spaces. He tries to reseed these places in terms of a democratic, interventionist, environmental ethic cognizant of its own history, pitfalls and successes. His position will be tested every time the results of the most site design competition are announced, when the disarray of the landscaping profession redresses itself, and during the debates in which fight green to hunter green revolutions engage in hot pursuit of their educational goals.

Gary Genakos is a member of the Border/Lines Collective and a McLabair Program Fellow at the University of Toronto.

Books Mentioned


The Principal Meal

By Neil Eveready


I suspect that a person's initial reaction to seeing this book on the dealers' shelves would be mixed. There is no ambiguity about the prominent title Meat, nor any doubt about the appropriateness of the redshirts cast to its cover images. I also suspect that an ambiguous response to the book is entirely appropriate to its topic: we are both attracted and repelled by this material entity that plays such a central role in our social life. The term "meat", on one hand, an easy, apparently neutral means of identifying a range of foodstuffs. Yet on the other hand, it can leave slightly troubling aftertastes: it sounds slightly vulgar, a little raw, and could quite easily be turned into a derogatory term if transposed to other contexts. It is a highly valued indicator of civilized dining, but its history is inevitably bloody and "promptive." And it constitutes a very rich topic for discussion, since it involves so much about our association with the natural world.

Fiddes' choice of title was felicitous; yet it does have one failing: it fails far short of indicating the full range of his discussion. One might expect to encounter discussions of nutrition and the history of meat eating in such a book, but perhaps not cannibalism, pet-keeping, and sex. Yet so central is meat to our ordering of affairs that very nearly any social activity may be shown to have some connection to it. That is, meat constitutes the kind of symbolic entity through which we think about a wide range of social and material relations. It is, as the subtitle asserts, a "natural symbol." As the author says, "what meat exemplifies, more than anything, is an attitude: the masculinity worldview which has so much about our association with the natural worlds. Fiddes' choice of title was felicitous; yet it does have one failing: it fails far short of indicating the full range of his discussion. One might expect to encounter discussions of nutrition and the history of meat eating in such a book, but perhaps not cannibalism, pet-keeping, and sex. Yet so central is meat to our ordering of affairs that very nearly any social activity may be shown to have some connection to it. That is, meat constitutes the kind of symbolic entity through which we think about a wide range of social and material relations. It is, as the subtitle
Reading Transvestism

BY Patricia Elliot

Marjorie Garber: Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety, New York: Routledge, 1992

On February 8, 1992, headlines "Burghers in Drag" and "Dressed to Steal" drew the attention of Globe and Mail readers to Eric Mogerenthaler's story from West Palm Beach, Florida where "a shadowy gang of 100 transvestites has been terrorizing Florida's up scale boutiques". What makes a "big-time burglary ring manned by female impersonators" shadowy is the success in eluding police who "don't seem keen to go undercover themselves." The transvestite gang appears to have captured not only sequined gowns, but also the attention of "law-enforcement professionals" who attend transvestite beauty pageants in voyeuristic fashion, to videotape, photograph, and take notes. Transvestite beauty contestants appear to the police as suspects, transgressing the border between law abiding and law-breaking citizens. But the elusive nature of their criminal activities is repeatedly brought back to the elusive nature of their gender, hence to another transgressed border. According to detectives, the transvestite criminal eludes the police because society has sanctioned the transgression of gender borders, so that the transvestite no longer "stands out like a sore thumb." In this case, the failure to nail the transvestites as men is displaced onto, and given as a reason for the failure to nail the suspects as criminals. Although the detectives warn against the temptation to regard all transvestites as potential criminals ("These are criminals who just happen to be transvestites"), it is clear that they also regard cross-dressing as a clever way to elude the law.

Neither the conclusion nor the appeal of cross-dresser as criminal would be news to Marjorie Garber, author of Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety. Professor of English and Director of the Center for Literary and Cultural Studies at Harvard, Garber draws on an impressive knowledge of cultural history to explore the nature and significance of cross-dressing and to account for our fascination with it. Garber contends it is important to look closely at the transvestite, rather than looking through or past him/her, because the transvestite is a complex and overdetermined cultural signifier.

To facilitate focusing our gaze on the transvestite, Garber has included forty pages of photographs and illustrations of transvestites (both familiar and obscure). These images are helpful reminders of the prevalence of transvestism in culture, and reinforce Garber's claims that transvestism both creates culture and is created by culture. Vested Interests is organized into two sections, 'Transvestite Logics' and 'Transvestite Effects', where arguments for these two claims are made and supported by an almost overwhelming number of examples. It is clear that the transvestite defined by Garber, perhaps too broadly, as any cross-dresser, from Tosole to transsexuals appears in
all forms of culture: theater, literature, music, sports, film, and art—and has a very long history. Many social historians will undoubtedly find Garber’s research compelling reading as it is laced hundreds of examples from classical Greek theater to Madonna, from Elizabethan dress codes to contemporary clubs for cross-dressers. The cultural index also serves as a useful guide to anyone in search of examples of transvestism. But it is not the sheer volume of examples that leads to Garber’s more radical claim that “there can be no culture without the transvestite.” Rather, this claim is part of an extended argument concerning the meaning and function of transvestism in predominantly Western culture.

Unfortunately, Garber’s theory is never very clearly stated, nor is it located in one place in the book. Often presented as a kind of Lacanian riddle (“There can be no culture without the transvestite because the transvestite marks the entrance into the Symbolic” [438] which is likely to baffle even those readers familiar with Lacan, Garber’s theory does not compare favorably with her excellent anecdotes and textual readings of particular instances of transvestism. Despite this lack of clarity, it is the theory I find most engaging, and other readers will probably share my desire to have more of it. In what follows, I discuss the central tenets of Garber’s theory, with particular emphasis on those aspects that most interest me: transvestism as signifier of “cultural crisis,” and transvestism as cultural fetish.

Garber employs Lacanian theory to make sense of the phenomenon of transvestism, primarily by drawing an analogy between the function of the phallos in what Lacan calls the Symbolic order, and the function of the phallic signifier in the realm of culture. Just as the phallos in Lacan’s schema plays its role “only when veiled” (the repression of the desire to be the phallic allows the subject to emerge as a separate and desiring being), so too the transvestite, who blurs the distinction between male and female, must be repressed or reified by cultural signifiers of gender difference are to appear. Moreover, as long as there is no culture without gender categories, then, regardless of how the content of those categories is defined, there will be no culture without the (repressed) figure of the transvestite.

When the transvestite appears, or rather, returns, as the repressed is bound to do, it serves as a troubling reminder that binary sex and gender distinctions are social constructions, cultural fictions, not natural facts. In other words, the (un)function of the transvestite is to indicate what Garber calls a “cultural crisis,” which is “a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one apparently distinct category to another.” At one level, then, the transvestite makes his/her cultural appearance at those historical moments when some aspect of gender has been seriously questioned. Garber describes transvestism as the “third term” that “challenges the possibility of harmonious and stable binary symmetry.” Like the appearance of the phallos (according to Garber’s reading of Lacan’s theory), the appearance of the transvestite marks a “space of possibility” or “space of desire.”

Although I have some questions about the analogy between the transvestite and the phallos (does it matter that the transvestite is a person?) and about Garber’s reading of Lacan (doesnt the presence of the phallos obstruct the circulation of desire and eliminate the possibility of consciously choosing to embrace ambiguity?), I find Garber’s description of transvestism as a signifier of gender crisis convincing. But this is not its only role.

The transvestite signals a crisis not only in the category of gender, but also in other categories such as those of class, race, and sexuality. Through detailed analysis of many historical texts and contexts in which gender distinction appears (e.g., Garber observes that the transvestite is an “index of destabilization” marking not only illicit boundary crossings of male and female, but also of black and white, and gay and straight—of other categories that have been displaced into gender). Thus, the presence of the transvestite in a context that does not seem to be primarily concerned with gender difference, but rather reflects a crisis elsewhere. For example, official concern with “excessive” men’s dress in Elizabethan England was provoked not so much by a fear of crumbling gender codes, or of female impersonators, but by a fear of loss of status and social position. According to Garber, the figure of the transvestite appears at moments of social or political crisis, whenever distinctions of class, race or gender seem to be threatened. To take another example Garber discusses at length, transvestism in Barbara Streisand’s Yentl signals more than a crisis of sexual distinctions that excluded women from participating in intellectual life. It also signals a crisis of race—the oppression of Eastern European Jews, a crisis of sexuality—Yentl is married to and loved by another woman; and, at another level entirely, a crisis of power relations in the film industry—Streisand’s personal struggle to be both a woman and produce a film that is highly respected and its covering over. Thus, for Garber, the transvestite on stage is involved in enacting the fetishistic dynamics of transcendence and its denial, of phallic presence and absence, what she describes in the last chapter as the enactment of a “primal scene.”

Needless to say, this fetishistic drama does not belong to the transvestite alone; for the spectator also fetishizes the transvestite. Garber argues that images like Elvis or Madonna are “transvestistic symptoms” of popular culture which serve to gratify a social or cultural scenario of desire. The on stage transvestite is the fetishized part-object for the social or cultural script of the fan.” Scattered throughout the book are endless examples of transvestite writers, rock stars, musicians, artists, actors and actresses who are fetishized by fans and who are more adored the more category boundaries they cross. Garber’s reading of Elvis as a “living category crisis” is perhaps the best example of this fetishization.

What accounts for our attraction to transvestites, and why would we be bound to create them if they didn’t already exist? Vested interests may be read as an elaborate response to this question, although the focus is more on the functions and effects of transvestism than on the reasons why it is so compelling. Garber’s analysis suggests, however, that the transvestite is a signifier of category crisis and as fetishized fetishist may serve as a clue to our fascination. Like the phallic sign, the transvestite is both despised—a scapegoat for our fear when identities are threatened, and loved—the star whose imagined ability to transcend his categories of gender, class, race or sexuality makes him/her an object of desire. Garber sugest that the combination of pleasure and danger evoked by the figure of the transvestite is due to the fetishistic provocation and dissipation of our anxiety around phallic loss: “The theatrical transvestite literalizes the anxiety of phallic loss. The overdetermination of phallic ideas, verbal and visual, that often accompany transvestism on stage, is a manifestation of exactly this strategy of reassurance for anxiety through artifical overcompensation.”

One need not subscribe to the theory of universal nostalgias for “originary wholeness,” as Garber sometimes appears to do, to grant a certain unconscious power to the enactment of the drama of loss and recovery played out by the transvestite. Insofar as the construction of any identity involves loss, separation and the formation of boundaries, the transvestite dramatization of loss and recovery may well have some kind of universal appeal.

On the other hand, what seems to appeal most to Garber about the transvestite is his or her power to do with any symbolic function or fetishistic appeal it may have. Rather, her interest lies in the transvestite as an enigmatic figure who occupies a space of seeming or appearance where every gesture not only is a complex cultural sign that defines any simple translation into meaning.” Developing an idea from Severo
Sarday's essay "Writing/Transvestism" where the politics of reading transvesticism are explored [Review 9, Fall 1972]. Garber claims, "this emphasis on reading and being read, and on the deconstructive nature of the transvestite performance, always undoing itself as part of its process of self-erasure, is what makes transvestism theoretically as well as politically and erotically interesting, at least to me." Garber’s fascination with the transvestite is a fascination with the imaginary space where the "transvestite fantasy," characterized by the complex interplay, slippage, and parodic recontextualization of gender markers and gender categories' demands to be read.

While the "theatrical" transvestite, as opposed to the actual transvestite, does indeed provide ample ground for the textual play in which Garber indulges, we should also remember that to be on the wrong side of the distinctions the transvestites transcend is to be marginalized, oppressed, even endangered. Garber does not ignore the negative implications of calling into question those categories that structure society, but in her idealization of the transvestite's desublimation of binary terms she does seem to gloss over some important distinctions. First, is there a difference between the way we might read the theatrical or on stage transvestite and the way transvestites read themselves? Would discussions with transvestites corroborate Garber's reading of their function in society or suggest something else? I am not suggesting Garber write a different kind of book, nor would I introduce the disputed distinction of original and imitation, but I do suggest the construction of real transvestites with fictional or theatrical ones might well be problematic.

Second, the inclusion of transsexuals in the broad category of transvestite raises another set of questions. While Garber makes some interesting observations about transsexuals, particularly with respect to issues of gender and subjectivity (see chapter 4), her location of transsexuals on a "transvestite continuum" where the difference is reduced to one of degree, is highly questionable. If the transvestite fantasy is to engulf gender categories into play, and to keep the fantasy in play, as Garber claims, then how can transsexuals who, as Garber acknowledges, "wish to literalize fantasy through an alteration in the body" be seen as sharing the same fantasy? To take another example from Garber's theory, she claims that "if transvestism offers a critique of binary sex and gender distinctions, it is not because it simply makes such distinctions reversible but because it denaturalizes, destablizes, and defamiliarizes sex and gender signs." While Garber's multiple examples of transvestism appear to corroborate this claim to function as critique, her descriptions (and my understanding) of transsexuals blatantly contradict it. For transsexuals, sex distinctions are reversible, genitalia are essentialized (as Garber also notes), gender identities are considered stable and fixed, and corresponding sex and gender signs and roles rigidly upheld. Other instances of what I would call underestimating differences could be mentioned, but my point is that Garber's inclusion of transsexuals in the category transvestite undermines rather than supports her theory.

Another distinction that becomes blurred in the transvestic space of Garber's book is the distinction between what is conscious and what is unconscious. It seems to me transvestism's potential for critique, "for rupture and for the reconfiguration of the cultural imaginary" will be rather weak as long as that critique functions at an unconscious level for both transvestite and spectator. Garber has a tendency to idealize the figure of the transvestite (both the theatrical and the actual) whose actions are not necessarily freely chosen or consciously embraced, but the result of compulsion. Likewise, our fascination with transvestism, our desire to cross gender boundaries as well as other boundaries, may only exist at the level of the unconscious. Garber is fond of psychoanalyst Robert Stoller's phrase "a fetish is a story masquerading as an object" because, like the transvestite, the fetish only works when it is disguise, when the story remains unconscious. However, Stoller also warns that "if the text becomes conscious, the fetish no longer to itself causes excitement, is no longer a fetish." To continue the analogy, then, the transgressive power of the transvestite can only function at an unconscious level, it cannot be realized in the world. What is disconcerting is that neither the transvestite, nor those who are fascinated by her/him consciously embrace the deconstructive potential of/expression. Until we find some way of making the unconscious desire a conscious one, we will continue to be haunted by that phantom, the transvestite. On the other hand, perhaps that means Florida's transvestite thieves will continue to shuffle the voyeuristic police who, not having read Vessels, have not learned to see in the transvestite the embodiment of their own desire.

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Blank Generation
By Todd Dunfee and Clara Sascheelli


Generation X chronicles the search for meaning and identity in our post-mortem, post-structural and, in particular, post-baby boom world. In effect, and not unlike Bret Easton Ellis' Less Than Zero, Coupland captures the fragmentation of modern life experienced by the "next generation" - the so-called 'X generation.' In the process he introduces the reader to 96 seductive, often amusing, anecdotal characterizations of postmodern culture. And these he places, parodying into textbooks everywhere, in the book's wide margins.

Structurally and thematically, the novel opens under the ominous shadow of a solar eclipse over the Manhattan prairies in the late 1970s. Also, this significant image marks an opening which is already a closing, a blowing out of the sun, of reason itself. It also marks, of course, the promise of rebirth, of a new day in the sun. This, then, is the crux of "a mood of darkness, intensity and fantasy" that characterizes the characters (and perhaps the readers) of Generation X. The eclipse can thus be read, and even demands to be read, as the beginning of the end of our posted values (or lack thereof). Or again, the eclipse marks a first step in Coupland's Christian revalorization of our postmodernist devaluations. That is, at least, the subject-tau upon which the novel operates.

In Generation X, the search for meaning functions almost entirely in the most negative and reactive terms. Coupland's enemy is predominantly the economic and social culture of the hippie turners who, like hipsters, culture of (or shadowed to) which he directs sometimes funny, but always resentful, arrows of hostility. For instance, one of Coupland's anecdotes reads: "Blindly任然: An elderly sold-out baby boomer who pines for hippie or pre-seventy days. But such resentment is not limited to the baby boom generation. Raging against his parents, one character states: "Sometimes I'd just like to do more than I envy their upbringing that were so clean, so free from contamination. And I want to throttle them for blithely handing over the world to us like so much shit-marked underwear." Siblings are also attacked ("Collegial Teens"), and so are the "sub-groups" which comprise the X generation. Coupland characterizes for, if your prefer, caricatures this subgroup thus: "Tuppie Wannabes" (those who desire and affirm the yuppy lifestyle), "Squirre" (those couples who yearn for "Eisenhower-era" plenitude), and "Black Hole" (those who romantically reject this).

In addition, Coupland adds a fourth, undefined group: a group which is either the true X generation or that which goes beyond it's (coopted) devolutions. This is a group, in other words, which mediates Coupland's more disguised attack on postmodern values. Not unlike the "Black-Holes," they have chosen "by free will to inhabit that hither side of the fence." Escaping their unfurnished lives, each character enacts the logic of the desert father and relocates to the desert town of Palm Springs. Claire, for instance, leaves her old job in Los Angeles as a garment buyer, leaves her "unremarked" moments and escapes the "endless, compulsive and indulgent" family discussions of Nostradamus. "Plu Wahan," Tylene, and milking horses. Dog, having suffered his (seemingly inevitable) Mid-Twenties Breakdown, "My crisis wasn't just the failure of youth but also a failure of class and sex and the future and I still don't know what" - leaves his job as a "Tuppie Wannabe" and escapes the "Veal-Fattening Pera" and "Sick Building Syndrome of"
Toronto office life. And finally, Andy leaves his former employment with a "teenybopper magazine office in Japan" and, in the process, escapes his history: "I needed less in life. Less past."

Out in the desert, the three diagnose the sickness that had once made them, among other things, "confuse shopping with creativity." In the process, they invent funny, morbid, bitter stories about real and imagined life, stories that are cathartic and foundational. They invent, in other words, intersubjective "tales for an accelerated culture" which overturn values and "make their lives worthwhile in the process." Claire states: "Either our lives become stories, or there's no way to get through them." One product of this work-in-progress is the mythical asteroid world of "Fredahoma" - a place where citizens are routinely fired from their "Mojos," and where kids take drugs and fantasize about "pulling welfare-check scams as they inspect each other's skin for chemical burns from the lake water." Notably, it is also where "the year is permanently 1974... the year starting from which real wages in the U.S. never grew over again." It is also a year, we might add, when war-marching, flag-burning hippies slowly began turning into bar-bopping, briefcase-toting yuppies.

In the course of the novel, we learn that these tales of revaluation, of resentment, are modeled on Andy's experience at Alcoholics Anonymous. There he was advised: "Never be afraid to cough up a bit of diseased lung for the spectators... How are people ever going to help themselves if they can't grab onto a fragment of your own horror?" Once again, postmodernity (in the largest sense of the word) is treated as an addiction which must be overcome, posted. The novel's reactive structure, or meta-structure, is thus mirrored in its prescriptive advocacy of AA's confessional approach to addiction. It functions, that is, not by self-assertion but by negative self-abdication. Not surprisingly, then, Coupland depicts the self as transcendental, liquidated. And thus, for instance, Andy happily dreams of the day when his "brain will turn into a thin white cord stretched skyward up into the ozone layer and humming like a guitar string."

The combination of transcendental values with a reactive structure of overturning finally designated Coupland's reductive effort as essentially Christian. At its deepest level, then, Coupland's enemy is less the baby boomer and late-capitalism than it is the figure of Nietzsche and post-structuralism. In effect, Coupland announces the resurrection of Nietzsche's dead God, of meaning itself. It is surely to this end, for instance, that his novel opens with the chapter, "The Sun Is Your Enemy." And closes with the slogan, "The Sun Is Not Your Enemy." Meaning and identity are salvaged, in other words, in the salvation of the desert sun, of God as ultimate signified. But to this end, all segments of our postmodern society are rejected - from yuppies to X generation.

These Christian (re)values find expression in a number of ways throughout the novel and operate structurally in the passage from darkness to light, paradise to desert, libidinal (as Platonic cult to sun, eclipse to apocalypse (the last chapter, "Jan. 01, 2000"), death to rebirth, yuppie to Christian. But Christianity is also present through the dreams and aspirations of the three main characters. Andy dreams, as suggested, of transcendence and communton. And Day - who, not unimportantly, resembles "the lapsed half of a Mormon pamphletting duo" - also imagines the day of his transcendent resurrection, stating: "The sun will be right overhead and behind me there'll be this terrific flapping of wings - louder than the flapping any bird can make."

However, and this cannot be surprising, Claire does not imagine the angel who will carry her "directly into the sun." Rather, she imagines "drowning for water" in the desert, her hope limited to finding a certain "someone": "Someone who's drowning for water, just like me." So doubt, tarnished by her encounter with a "Yuppie Wannabe," Claire seeks love and purification from a latter-day John the Baptist. Women, then, are the included excluded of Coupland's dream of escape from postmodernity. But such misogyny, of course, is just another instance of the Christian resentment which pervades the novel.

Generation X is written in a sexy, aphoristic style and certainly tops into some real and often justified anger. Consequently, the Christian content of its popular surface is easily missed, or dismissed, treated uncritically like a twenty second commercial or a six syllable "sound bit." But for these reasons Coupland's novel is an especially insidious and dangerous piece of pamphleteering. It is, therefore, unfortunate that many critics - apparently enamored by its glittering surface - have reviewed Generation X as the "defining document" for a lost generation. As two undefined parts of that generation, we can only pray they are wrong.