LET'S CALL THIS
"Race and Representation"

"Race and Representation" is a precarious title. All the political and epistemological quagmires, even antagonisms, which charge the formulation of this phrase insistently return to prevent its fate—its potential to become an empty slogan circulating through the networks of crisis management. Although the appellation suffers from previous some folks might say "done to death," the practice of working through the tensions of race and representation and its allied concepts remains a vital, contested, and transformative cultural praxis.

While there has been a flurry of activity on the immediate affects of racism in the cultural arena—panels, workshops, equity reports, etc.—there has been not been enough of an extend ed, critical interrogation of the concepts and terms through which anti-racist discourse is conveyed. The tendency to flatten out, to simplify, to take up terms of reference as given, leads to positions that very few of us are content to adopt without qualification. In a related manner, there is a danger that debates needed to address the issue of access might be reduced to simple demands for funding. A call to arms does not necessitate closing down the intellect—these are no times for anti-intellectualism.

Race and representation, of course, is set within a larger political and social frame. Our commitment to critical debate here does not undervalue or minimize the lived experience of racialized identities. In fact, it is constitutive of it. In dialogue with "the real" and the represented, the mediations between this issue of Border/Lines is not content with the readymade. It attempts, through the exemplary articles collected herein, to reframe and complicate some of the questions in the hope of offering a space for criticality, both here and elsewhere.

Yo! Winston, finally get over to the other side. Although a long time comin', race is taken up as always already here.

Kass Banning, Gail Fairsou, Rinaldo Walcott

Many thanks to Roger Belco, Stan Fogel, Natalie Greenbaum, Sophie Thomas and Handel Keshope Wright.
Artists From the Hell Screen; Reports, Observations and Other Disturbing Things

by Reece Auguste

In 1943 the Bulgarian writer Elias Canetti provided a disturbing observation: "I cannot look at any more maps. The names of cities reek of burning flesh." In 1993 the European atmosphere still reeks of burning flesh. Ethnic cleansing is on the political agenda, a new Europe is being born. Maps, as they represent historical, contemporary or future scenarios of national sovereignty and geopolitical boundaries, help define nation, identity, epic narratives of self, cultural differences and racial belonging, out of which flow immigration, quotas and controls. Maps are the cause of warfare and cultural genocide.

At a party I listened to an enlightening discussion on Europe. A man of the old European imperial school was forced to concede that Europe was now practising on its own people what it had for centuries practised on the "darker races", cultural genocide and barbarism. As he put it, "The beast had turned upon itself." Science, discarded, a few walked away, others picked up the courage to say that war and death are part of the post-modern condition. The irony was not missed.

With the 500th anniversary celebration of Columbus's Atlantic voyage of "discovery" and cultural destruction came the idea of the "new Europe", a Europe estimated to have 30 million people of non-European origin by the year 2000. Approximately 18 million already possess citizenship in a European state. Europe's internal boundaries have been dismantled and it is now creating a new identity characterized by a sense of cultural unity shared by all its citizens. The byword is that we are all Europeans now. At least, that is the official version. It's picturesque, pastoral and consumer friendly.

The Bosnian experiment of ethnic cleansing and the frightening growth in racial attacks from Rostock to London, Vienna to Paris, Amsterdam to Milan, makes it difficult, and maybe even suicidal, to believe that this new identity is based on some shared notion of "cultural unity." [can the sentence be read as "cultural unanimity"] I see only further fragmentation, an increase in racial intolerance, once-declared and suffering.

This practice of racial intolerance, bigotry and xenophobia recently made the headlines in certain sections of the British press. Not another Zionist attack or some human foetus being barbed from a factory. It was the actions of a small group of art curators that opened the floodgates. In the spirit of cultural diversity, hybridity and cross-cultural exchange, they mounted a touring exhibition called "In Transit - New European Art." On display were the works of eleven non-European artists living and working in various European states. Their points of origin are as diverse as are their actual places of residence. Coming from the Caribbean, Iran, Africa, Latin America, China, Turkey and Lebanon, they found only that their presence was not welcome, but that their art was not considered art.

With the Birmingham Post's headline: "Travesty Blasted Exhibition of Foreign Art Out of Sight" and the Daily Mirror's headline: "IM Art Show a Load of Rubbish," the bells of intolerance began ringing. Although most of the controversy focused on British Telecom's £1 million dollar sponsorship deal with the South Bank Centre for British art shows over the next three years, the monetary factor was a convenient excuse for attacking the kinds of issues and subject matter that the artists chose to address in their work. Attack by Birmingham's conservative councillor Alan Blundell, the exhibition was dubbed "...a diabolical liberty that we have to pay for this so-called art through our phone bills. If this is all BT can come up with they should spend the £1 million dollars on reducing the customers' bills." This outrage forced the ION Gallery director Elizabeth McGregor to comment: "I don't know why Tory politicians are complaining about BT's excess profit when they privatized it...I am always happy to debate the work we show, but I object to politicians condemning things they haven't seen.

Even more alarming is the fact that this backlash occurred in an English city that attempted to promote itself as a European centre of arts and culture last year. As the Birmingham Post's art editor Terry Grimley said, "Conservative councillors...struck a blow against Birmingham's international aspirations by condemning an exhibition they had not even seen..." It is this parachismality, a product of the English village pump mentality, with its congenital capacity for always looking inwards, of which in a paradoxical way the work on exhibition was a critique. In my estimation the In Transit exhibition was one of the best curated exhibitions so far this year. For their inventiveness, courage and capacity to provoke doubts, and even wonder, the eleven artists have demonstrated that the racial factor is at the cutting edge of what is defined as the "new Europe." Again, in a strange twist of historical and geographical circumstances, the works on display point to new possibilities, what Europe may become once it is stripped of its privileged position on the custodianship of a singular truth. It is about what will happen to white ethnicity when the dynamic influx of new identities, formed as they are by a set of distinctively non-European attributes, are woven into the social fabric of European nations, states and European culture in general.

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur in an essay, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures," made overtures to precisely this new development when he wrote: "No one can say what will become of our civilization when it has really met different civilizations by means other than the shock of conquest and domination.

But we have to admit that this encounter has not yet taken place at the level of an authentic dialogue. This is why we are in a kind of lull or interregnum in which we can no longer practise the dogmatism of a single truth and in which we are not yet capable of conquering the skepticism into which we have stepped."
It is this skepticism that fuels the utopian ambition in nationalist paranoia and xenophobia currently engulfing Europe. And it is also this skepticism and its effects on transnational consciousness that will deliver a mortal blow to the current idealistic edifice which says that Europe is becoming a post-modern cultural space, where ethnicity, cultural pluralism and racial difference coexist. The post-modernist critique against the hegemony of modernism has had its advances and successes, but its attempts to incorporate the post-colonial imagination into its general strategy against the grain of modernism only serves to highlight the theoretical and political limits of post-modernism itself. It is incapable of addressing race or ethnicity as a concrete, lived experience. How does a post-modernist address the choice in Bosnia war as a post-modern condition?

This is the sociocultural context in which the exhibition has to be read and the controversies generated understood. Twentieth century history is one of migration and cultural displacement, whether or not the movement is the result of political upheavals or the search for inspiration in another country. From Genghis to Macquarie, from Dali to the African American artist David Hammons (recently resident in Europe), migration and cultural interaction have been potent sources of inspiration for artistic production and cultural engagement.

Indeed, migration is the organizing theme of the work of Lebanese artist Rami Effat. Currently based in Aix-en-Provence, Effat's installation entitled Ancef Espressa was originally conceived as video- tapes and TV monitors placed on horseback and carried to a certain location. An installation continually mobile thus reinforces the themes of cultural flows, disorientation and the lived experiences of exile.

Within the physical confines of the art gallery Effat has tried to introduce a degree of stress, nonetheless with tremendous impact. Here we have a long line of video machines and corresponding monitors placed on wooden supports with an abundance of diverse images flooding across the screens: images of migration and cultural dispersal, of boat people drowning in the process of finding their own niches. African political refugees, scenes of cattle and an endless stream of people on the move. Suggestive and moving, Effat's work is about the world outside the art gallery and that world's impact on the artistic imagination. Ancef Espressa is about the ecological/anthropological changes of the latter part of our century and a hint of the future cataclysm in the next. The contrast between hi-tech electronic displays and horses quietly grazing on dry grass in the background brings into focus Effat's central motif of motion and the logic of migration/spatial dispersal.

Like Effat, the Brazilian Claudio Godse is concerned with exploring in a spectacular way the experiences of travel and dislocation. Godse's installation consists of 100 gold-foiled suitcases juxtaposed with images of conquest and exploitive brutality. These images of texture and human depravity echo the frightening canvases of Cesarine Bocc. Godse's selection of images deliberately goes against the dominant representations that European artists produced of America. Commenting on this strategy, Godse declared that:

"...most of these artists who made them (images) never left Europe and consequently their production is saturated with idealizations and is on the border, if not pure fantasy."
archaeological site of the racial self and its psychic foundations in Western culture. It's a complex visual testament of the processes of cultural domination and its philosophical and political impact on the black self, resulting in psychic scars, ontological bruising and spiritual fragmentation.

Paradoxically, the Negrophilia collection is also an inversion of the discourses of racial domination and dislocation in that it also reverses the psychic orientations of post-Enlightenment man in his relation to and representation of the racial other. It occupies a space of racial phantasmagoria, a figure of cultural perversion invested with a delicious identity. And it is probably in this context that the collection has its greatest value as a repository for the study, reflection and analysis of Europe's historical and contemporary relationship with diasporic subjects.

Placed between the notions of cultural relation and historical demand is the work of German artist Chloë Feyerholt. The Temptation of Rebel. The grammar of her exhibits are so culturally specific that even the phrase "Product of Chloë Feyerholt" reinforces a heteronormative discourse of the representation of the other. Its beauty is that it demands a recontextualization of modernity by placing it in the center of the dance of the artist and her work. The immediate, most striking thing about Feyerholt's "protest" is the color black. Every single object is stained with charcoal or chalk dye and arranged in precise, systematic order. This pairing of objects (pillows, jars, boxes, books and boxes of different sizes) functions as an ironic statement on the way the West's obsession with finity as it struggles to exclude and maintain its grasp on modernity as essentially a white aesthetic edifice.

Feyerholt makes obvious to new possibilities of an "inscriptive culture" in which the guardians of modernity accept their cultural debt to ancient traditions and the aesthetic tropes of ex-colonies in the formation of modernity itself. But it has to be understood that Feyerholt's chamber of objects is a call for recognition that goes far beyond the West's classical notion of "cultural influences." It is quite often the case when art historians refer to the primitivist forms and utopian aesthetics in Picasso. Her argument is for a recognition of syncretism and Europe's acceptance of occultation as an evolving and intrinsic component of its symbiotic relationship with diasporic culture. In our modern babel, linked by satellite systems producing a circuitry of electronic images underpinned by systems of migration and exile, cross-cultural translusions become the new paradigm through which identities can be expressed.

In the Uruguayan artist Carlos Capelan's work we encounter a subliminal expression of the self as Europe begins to fragment under the ten-sions of nationalism and ethnic conflict. In an interview with a British newspaper, Capelan declared the nature of his trajectory: "I am trying to focus on the Western self and otherwise in relation to this self." But it is the manner in which he visualizes this relationship that holds the greatest fascination for it is predicated upon the historical conditions of a Uruguayan exiled in Sweden.

For the construction of his "chamber of identities" Capelan used 75 liters of mud carefully poured over four walls, 300 old books, 40 rocks and an assortment of furniture, with which he created a living room. At once private and yet public, this living room is also a museum that houses objects "with which we surround ourselves to establish our identity." Capelan uses old books nearly positioned in stacks held down by blocks of rocks; the mud walls are inscribed with quotations from linguistics, sociology, philosophy, art history and friends. Personal items invested with sentimental value are encased in glass cabinets. The room's ambience is further heightened by a sepia quality of lighting produced by reading lamps and triangular standing lamps. On the walls are also fragments of a tree root—elongated objects like dislodged flowers/shells hung off the walls, held together by black strings.

Capelan's room is like an ancient shrine. Devotional and ritualistic, it is a kind of cultural testament to the complex issues confronting Europe, issues pertaining to the recolonized self, cultural boundaries, linguistic borders and spiritual location. Ultimately Capelan's project is about making contact with others, of forging through a dialogue free of the violence associated with xenophobia and cultural arrogance. "What I'd like," he says, "is to build a self that is not hegemonic—which is in contact with nature and with what is happening outside the home and which doesn't believe this culture is superior to other cultures." On entering Capelan's living room one sees a sign on the wall that reads: WELCOME TO MY ROOM. Capelan's room, like the work of the artists I have discussed and those whose work for reasons of space, I am unable to discuss, presents us with a non-hegemonic global vision of a culture that is synergistic and shamanic. Together or as individual pieces, the work of these artists constitutes a living map: a map of the self and its psychic foundations as we approach the next century, a map built on a new set of philosophical and cultural values. Perhaps it's the kind of map that Elias Canetti would have liked to have seen.

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THE ELUSIVE SIGNS OF AFRICAN-NESS:
RACE AND REPRESENTATION AMONG
LATINAS IN THE UNITED STATES

GLADYS M. JIMÉNEZ-MUÑOZ

Border/Lines 29/30
African heritage constitutes a shared element among Latin American and Caribbean cultures. Yet, if this is one thing we all have in common as Caribbean and Latin American peoples, how and why is it that most of us do not want to recognize this African legacy? Why the reluctance? Why does this African past remain invisible? Why does this African presence remain absent? What is specifically Caribbean or Latin American about this invisibility and this absence?

Yet I remember that it wasn’t until I was seventeen years old that I explicitly became aware of my Africanness. When at that time I enrolled as a student at the Rio Piedras Campus of the University of Puerto Rico, my friend Anelizamia Dávila designated me as a “jibar’. (This term is roughly equivalent to what people in the United States refer to as a ‘high yellow’). You see, I had rapidly and all my life become because my father is a poet and poets have the power of invoking beings, identities. And who was I to dispute a poet’s power of convocation? But why did this part of me remain silent until someone else summoned it? If this was something I already was, why wasn’t I aware of it before? Why did my Africanness require a wake-up call?

There is a large number of Lottines in the United States who have not recognized their African heritage. Some people require a poet to signalizing them as being of African descent. Others never needed this detox, being marked by third persons at having self-recognized themselves at an early age. Still others daily all attempts of African identification by claiming affiliation within a culture or geographical space (such as the Caribbean) where — except in St. Vincent — Indians have not existed for over two hundred years.

As with many people who come from the Larger Antilles, I would have to define this African-ness as one that begins at home. Among my immediate family, this meant my father, my paternal grandfather, and my maternal grandmother. But let us not relativize only a few times in all my life, while I never met my paternal grandfather. You see, this side of the family was literaly — it seemed to me, in any case, that my mother’s side of the family who did not meet my father because he ran away with my mother and because he was not the one who married her, who was, in a sense, of “black color” (that black man) or of “desendiente esclavo” (“slave’s misbegotten’).”

Mind you, my father was no saint. In trying to reclaim these lost meanings, I am not revising what my father did. Rather, I am trying to do two things here, starting with understanding the meanings associated with the physical appearance of Puerto Ricans such as my father: blackness and mulattos. My second aim in this regard is to unpack and explore the links (past and present) between Latin American and Caribbean cultural productions and similar productions originating in Africa.

Let us first look at the meanings attached to physical appearance. The divisions within my immediate family not only illustrate the divisions within most Puerto Rican families (on the island and in North America). Such divisions also illustrate the existing splits within Puerto Rican national culture itself. As with most Caribbean and Latin American peoples, I must first clarify that Puerto Rican racial divisions and the racism that undergirds them are different from the ways in which the races are designated and positioned in most of the United States. Like Latin Americans and Caribbean cultures (particularly Spanish-speaking ones) position people in a broad racial spectrum, going from different shades of white at one end to various forms of blackness at the other, with an even wider band of intermediary categories: “blanco,” “blanquita,” “jibar,” “color,” “mestizo,” “huaso,” “mestiza,” “azúcar,” “indio,” “moreno,” “trigueño,” “negro liso,” “negro,” “retinta,” etc. Often, a person can shift from one color to the other by simply becoming more educado or acquiring more money: the saying goes, “el dinero y la educacon , cuando quiere, la coloración necesita.”

But let us not relativize only a few times in all my life, while I never met my paternal grandfather. You see, this side of the family was literaly — it seemed to me, in any case, that my mother’s side of the family who did not meet my father because he ran away with my mother and because he was not the one who married her, who was, in a sense, of “black color” (that black man) or of “desendiente esclavo” (“slave’s misbegotten’).”

Then, we should not be surprised that most of the intercultural categories that constitute the Puerto Rican population have tradi-

BLANCA
BLANQUITA
JINCHA
COLORÁ
JABA
SACALUGA
CUARONERA
MULLA
ZAMB
GRIFA
AINDA
MORDA
TRIGUEÑA
NEGRA FINA
NEGRA
RETINTA
ETC.

tionally perceived and understood blacknesses on something literally invisible. This tradition has a long and sorry history, going back to the nineteenth century. Let me give you a recent example: a black Puerto Rican friend of mine from Carolina (one of several municipalities in Puerto Rico with large concentrations of blacks and mulattos) was recently asked if she was from the Dominican Republic. The implication is obvious: if she is black then she must be from some other country or island, not from Puerto Rico. Interestingly enough, in the Dominican Republic black Dominicans are often asked if they are Haitians.

While the Hispanic heritage is much celebrated and praised, African heritage is avoided and ignored. This is even true among those corresponding to the darkest-skinned of the spectrum, where the emphasis is on non-African identifications: either toward the non-existent “Indian” element among mulattos and blacks in the Caribbean or toward the “whiter” element among the mestizos and mixed populations of Mexico, Central America, and South America.

But African heritage among Caribbean and Latin American peoples is not just a matter of attributing specific racial meanings to such things as dark skin, nappy hair, forero afores, and/or broad nose, nor of the cultural expressions that define our peoples originated on the African continent, particularly in Western Africa. The most obvious case is music. In the Amazon Antilles, in the coastal areas of the Yucatan peninsula and Central America, as well as in the Caribbean or coastal zones of South America, it is almost impossible to dance and listen to any popular music that has been influenced by, or is not a derivative of African musical forms and instruments, from specific percussion to the polychromy and syncopation that structure entire musical genres. Can you imagine salon music without bongos, congás, timbales, bata, guiro, and so on? Can you imagine cumbia, merengue, plena, bomba, danza, bolero, guaguanco, soco, ragga, calypso, samba, joropo, etc. without syncopation and rhythmonic? Leaving aside laughable products such as the movie, The Mambo Kings, you can imagine Tito Puente without timbales or, better yet, Carlos Cruz without “Quimbo, Cumbala, Bumbali”?

Bamba.” (Talk about the construction of imagined communities and of ways of fashioning collective identities! As an cultural demographer, she is an obvious illustration of the point I am trying to make. Other references points could be included: from food to religion, from dress to funeral rites, from forms of greeting to vocal inflections.

Now then, we should not appos-
Lorde in her biomythography Zami: A New Spelling of My Name. Here Audre Lorde addresses many topics that are central to my work, such as sexuality, race, and gender. In Zami, Lorde illustrates the connection between self-acceptance and survival.

Every Black woman in America lives her life somewhere along a wide curve of ancient and unexpressed consciousness. My Black woman’s anger is a molten pond at the core of me, my most fiercely guarded secret. I know how much of my life as a powerful feeling woman is crushed through this set of rage. It is an electric thread that runs through, encompassing the way we as women value each other, the way we feel about ourselves, the way we feel about each other, the way we politicians and our society upon us the power of the women we have fought so hard to create.

The signs of blackness are written on skin, on space, on paper; reading these signs always tells us what we must do, what we must learn, what we must be. Audre Lorde, African-American woman, anthropologist, and poet, on writing and art.
women. It can also be used in favor, that is, as one of the ways in which we can come together as women by structuring a specific collective identity that will help us resist both types of oppression (that is, racial domination and gender subordination).

Nevertheless, the racial and national-cultural common identity that we share as Latinos is still even more complex than that. On the one hand, what is something that already, from the start, unites us, among ourselves, as women who share the common condition of general racial subordination —something that, by the way, we also share with African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian women in this country. On the other hand, as Chandra Mohanty and Anaís Nin Johnson Reagan have pointed out, this is only a starting point —and a very difficult and uncertain starting point at that. Merely sharing this condition of oppression does not in and of itself guarantee the political consciousness of promoting such a unity and cooperation. It makes solidarity possible and at the same time becomes a hope of emancipation —building and rebuilding, as we struggle to survive in a colonialist (externally and internally) and white-supremacist fortress like the United States. This is the way we must also strive to build coalitions, among Latinos and between Latinos and other women of color, and so on.

What does it mean to embrace our African heritage and how important is this? What is at stake when we re-think our Latinidad as inherent to our African-ness and vice versa? To embrace African-ness means to contain, to incorporate, to adopt, to defend, to include a network of identities that for centuries have been excluded, deported, refused, repudiated, erased, ignored, and attacked. This is yet another element that includes our experience within the African diaspora like our slave ancestors —particularly the captive women— today in the United States we continue to live in multiple ways the experience of exclusion, deportation, refusal, repudiation, erasure, ignorance, and attack.

Especially for those of us of Caribbean ancestry, any attempt to construct a Latinidad that denies our African-ness is, ultimately, just a defense of a European-ness that—particularly in the United States—nobody acknowledges: it is another attempt at “passing.” As Latinas, to embrace an African heritage is to embrace ourselves—"all of our selves."
THAT WAS THEN

M. Nourousseh Philip

Axiety in society may spring from diverse roots such as national economic uncertainty, irrational economic uncertainty; a realistic fear of death or a pseudo-realistic fear of magically induced illness. To meet and deal with these, society provides the means through which it can believe, ritual activities, art, drama, or even daily work can operate in such a way as to relieve chronic anxiety arising from the individual’s own view about his inadequacy, or lack of status, or even his own belief that his ego is threatened by conditions around. Art is a cultural product and its execution is an experience which at once integrates the personality and unites the individual with society and its traditional values.

As part of the cultural product of American society, the musical Show Boat functions to demean Blacks; it also functions to make whites "feel good about themselves." And as Toni Morrison argues, we need to combine the study of the impact of racism on its victims with "a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behaviour of masters."

Historically and right up to the present time in the United States, race, and in particular Blackness, has been a significant number of many types of activities: sexuality, danger — the Black roper or criminal; normal or cool as in popular culture to generalize. But more than anything else, as Morrison and, in another way, Baldwin have argued, Blacks and Blackness have become the marker against which every group of immi-

grants has assessed its American-ness — depending on the distance from the place of the Black unknown.

There is, therefore, every reason why cultural works which manipulate race and the racial tensions between Blacks and whites in the United States have a lasting seduction. When Joseph Swin杆 wrote that "the influence of Show Boat was perhaps subliminal and subconscious" he was referring to its technical and musical innovations. This subliminality and subconsciousness, I suggest, go deeper than just the techniques, to the deep mechanisms around race.

Show Boat is not intended for Black people; it never was. Its intended audience has always been a white one. One year after the Yongsai incident, what are some of the messages that Show Boat is bringing to white audiences in Toronto?

The first message is linked to Blacks not being the intended audience and that is that Blacks are ciphers, having no meaning except and in so far as they embellish and further the interests of whites; our only function in Show Boat, in all its incarnations, has been to further the interests of whites — within and without the story.

Our history and our culture, this message implies, are unimportant and it does not matter if we hurt deeply because of what this show means to us. This is the first message of Show Boat; that we are there for the interests of whites — in this case to make them money.

The second message is that whites need not concern themselves with us — and this appears to be borne out by how the media and other institutions have succeeded in treating us so far. Julie’s actions in Show Boat itself underscore this message — her disappearing acts which further the plot and the white characters’ desire to hurt herself to benefit a white person. This is the message that audiences will take away, that after we have served our purpose — as ciphers — we will disappear.

Yet another message is that Blacks are essentially servants whose role is to be resigned to their lot in life. Why? Just because. Just as the river is always there, so is black resignation and acceptance.

A fourth lesson for whites is that we are there as eth-
nic flavour, as markers of entertainment and pleasure; that they need not concern themselves with the real and not cause of injustices Blacks face in Canadian society. This message underscores an attitude that goes right back to the early development of racial stereotypes (as mentioned in Part I, Showcasing, Showboating North of the 45th Parallel in which Blacks are seen as per-

nently different with no attempt made to see the link between their present position and the exploitation of white society.

White society does have tremendous power in relation to Black lives — the power of life and death as man-

ifested in police shootings. With respect to the pre-

sent issue of Show Boat this power — of the media, for instance — is demonstrated daily in the almost complete exclusion of the views of the imposing Show Boat. However, anyone who has taken the time to understand and know Black human beings (I use the word Afro-Can, in place of descendant) knows that the history is essentially one of resistance, begin-

ning even before the slave ships had left the coast of

West Africa.

Uprisings on board were a frequent occurrence.

Twelve years after the first slaves landed in Haiti in 1803, there was a slave rebellion and in 1801, under the leadership of a former slave, Toussaint L’Ouverture, African descendants Napoleon’s army and sent shock waves around Europe and the New World. In 1840 Haiti became the second independent country in the Western Hemisphere.

Brevity took place with disastrous and alarming regularity for slave owners in North and South America and the Caribbean. Independent maroon comm-

unities established themselves in Jamaica, Dominica, Brazil and Suriname and waged war with European powers.

Resistance took the form of "escapes, revolt, theft, destruction of crops and machinery."

(Bronis Bartold, Black Time: Fiction of African Americans’ resistance to slavery and their commitment to freedom in documented time and time again, primarily in the documents of their former masters, which unambiguously means there was even more resistance than has been doc-

umented. "Hundreds of slaves used for their freedom, ran away from their masters,acusculated, robbed, poisoned and murdered whites, burned their masters’ dwellings, and committed suicide" (Judicial Coms Concerning American Slavery and the Negro were published in Washington, D.C. 1938-27).

Given this history, and given what is happening in society today, why does white society want to be hulled into a false sense of security? It took the burning of a city by those who felt they had nothing to lose to achieve some sort of hell-baked justice in Los Angeles. It took the Yonge Street uprising to bring some attention to the concerns of young people, Black and white, in Toronto. What will it take to make those with the privilege of race, skin colour, class and gender — rich white man — realize what is at stake here? Furthermore, why is the message of ‘happy singing, darkies’ being given to whites at this time? Paul Robeson changed the words of ‘Ol Man River’ — he sang of fighting and being thrown in jail for ‘showing a little groan’. He understood only too clearly what the producers of this show will not understand.

Whites must ask themselves the following question: Why are they being carried up

entertainment whose function is to reassure their deep-seated and often unacknowledged anxiety about race and class, and to encourage belief that everything is in its place and the ‘Ol Man River’ of racism runs as usual? Nothing and no one is in their place any longer. We need only look around and wonder who is being fooled here. Certainly not Black people.

Most of us know the message we are supposed to take from the artificats like into the Heart of Africa and Show Boat. Do whites? While white? And so Raro tiddies while Roman bars.

The ROM exhibit, Show Boat, the recreating of films like "Gene with the Wind." "Black Finn," all of these cultural products are an integral part of a society in crisis, a society.
Black Studies, Cultural Studies
PERFORMANCE ACTS

Manthia Diawara

One of the most important, and appealing, aspects of cultural studies is its critical, or even polemical, attitude toward every form of theoretical orthodoxy. The term, also used by Antonio Gramsci to sketch and test the limits of Marxism, captures the sense of critical attitude I have in mind here. Elaboration has become, within cultural studies, a means to make use of some of the approaches and methodologies of poststructuralism while being critical of its utopian/utopizing tendency.

Cultural studies often delineates ways of life by elaborating them quite literally, embarrassing and deflating previous theoretical understandings of those forms of life. This ethnographic approach has helped cultural studies ground some of its key concepts in material conditions for example, uneven development, cultural articulation, postcoloniality, and specificity. Through the "literal reading of events," cultural studies explicates the material bases and implications of world views we assume, and analyses identity politics as moments of difference and rupture in the hegemonic status quo described by the discourses of Marxism or psychoanalysis.

I want to follow the elaboration of the practice of elaboration from its development by early practitioners at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, through its use by London-based black artists and writers to its deployment in the United States, particularly in departments of black studies and in feminist studies. I would like to distinguish what I call the London-based black British cultural studies from the tradition derived from work at the Birmingham Centre. In the 1980s and 1990s researchers at the Birmingham Centre were mainly interested in the British working class and in an attempt to constitute a unique and alternative British Marxist theory around that subject. They were concerned to generate a British Marxism that would challenge the theoretical work of Louis Althusser, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the Frankfurt School. In contrast, in the 1980s black filmmakers, artists, photographers and writers were decomposing and restructuring the terms of Britishness using race as the modality through which to read class.

Black cultural studies took on its main subject the elaboration of Black Britishness over against ethnocentric absolutism in Britain, the constitution of a hegemonic blackness by black Americans, and
other manifestations of diaspora aestheticism.

London-based black cultural workers found the
language specific to their condition of black Britishness by
subordinating to a critical reading not only the texts of the
white left, which often ignore race, but also texts from the
black diaspora. Some of the most fascinating
moments in Paul Gilroy’s Three Acts (No Black in the
Union Jack (1987)) involve a critique of the work of
George Orwell and Raymond Williams on their English
ethnocentrism. In order to carve out a space for black
ness in Britain, Gilroy had to denounce Williams and
Orwell in a similar way that he denounced British right-
ingers such as Enoch Powell for their nostalgic cele-
bration of a mythical, homogeneous way of life of the
English working class. Isaac Julien similarly developed
his film language through a critical reading of the
avant-garde cinema. Julian states that:

On the left of avant-gardism is pleasure, which the
avant-garde itself denies, clinging to the pur-
temnament of its constructed ethos, reasoning itself
against a refusal to indulge in narrative or emo-
tions and indeed, in some cases, refusing rep-
resentation itself, because all those systems of signs
are fixed, entrenched in the “sin or evil” of rep-
resentation. The high moral tone of this discourse is
biased on a kind of anachronistic self-censorship
that raises the indulgence of a colonial history and a
post-colonial history of cinema or white rep-
resentations biased on our black absence. The
problematic that surfaces when black filmmakers
experiment with the idea of black film text and the
subjective camera is that subjectivity implies con-
troduction. But this is not, in itself, fixed.

(Undercut: A magazine for independent video and
filmmakers, 1988, p. 36)

Black British cultural workers also engage with
the black American culture of the 1960s and 1970s and elab-
orate it into something energetic and specifically
British. Some of the most significant diagnostic influ-
ences on black British cultural studies have been the
works of Black Americans such as Jana Jordan, whose
Civil Wars (1981) helped young British black thinkers to
theorize “policing” in their own context: Manning
Mambole, Cedric Robinson, James Baldwin, Toni Cade
Bambara, Mzuko Longbe, and Toni Morrison.

Caribbean influences included C.L.R. James, George
Lomming, Wilson Harris, Franta Fanon, Ayesu Cesarii,
Edward Brathwaite, and Jackie Walcott, and African
influences included Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Oumou
Sembene. But these diagnostic texts were articulated
with African American texts in new approaches that
were attentive to the fluidity of identities, classes, and
sexual politics in the British context.

While the “Birmingham school”—an economic,
class-based cultural studies — and a “black British school”— a race —, or ethnic
identity-based cultural studies — may be difficult to
maintain in light of the fact that figures such as Stuart
Hall, Gilroy, and Dick Hebdige played and continue to
play key roles in our understanding of both of these
strands of thought, it is a useful distinction to consider
if we want to understand why in the U.S. academic con-
text there appear to be two different kinds of “cultural
studies” even though both are said to be derived from
“British cultural studies.”

One prevalent strain of cultural studies in the U.S.
points toward at its center and uses metaphors of racial
construction to bring to light the ways of life of
oppressed groups. It is concerned with issues such as
black appropriation of the discourse of modernism, the
performative character of the construction of identity,
cross-over texts, cultural ambivalence, and sexism and
homophobia in black communities. Thus, it combines
benelements of what we might call “oppression studies” —
historical and sociological work that has concerned
itself with uncovering the various modes of oppression of
black men and women, the black family, etc. — with
descriptive and semantic studies of the ways of life and
artifacts of black individuals and communities. Writers
such as bell hooks, Michelle Wallace, Marta Higgin,
Walshawa Luhiano, Tom Lott, Henry Louis Gates Jr.,
Houston Baker Jr., Cornel West, Jane Griffin, Cora
Coppin, Hazel Carby, and Herman Gray, to name a few,
have entered into dialogue with the strand of black
British cultural studies that focuses on issues of hybrid-
ity, assimilation, etc. — for example, with the work of
Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer, Sonio Boyce, David Bailey,
Sanketo, and the Black Audio Film Collective.

The December 1986 conference “Black Popular Culture,”
organized by the Dia Center in New York City, brought
together many of these critics and reassessed the cen-
trality of the discourse of blackness to cultural studies.

The other cultural studies in the U.S. explicitly links
itself to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary
Cultural Studies. Taking as its starting point the
description of people’s whole way of life, it focuses
on cultural practices and texts such as rock music,
Hollywood and independent films, and so-called new
aesthetics. Practitioners of this form of cultural studies
also describe the impact on culture of, for example,
the medical profession, leisure industries, and corporate
control of electronic media. While these theorists main-
tain a strong anti-essentialist perspective, their
abstract discourse belies the fact that they have been
more influenced by certain strains of poststructuralism
than by recent developments in the black strand of

cultural studies. The conference “Cultural Studies Now
and in the Future,” held at the University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaigne April 4-9, 1990, represented not
only the broadest and highest levels of abstraction in the
discourse of this strand of cultural studies, but also its
tendency to evacuate race and gender as primary
issues.

This genealogy of cultural studies obviously over-
simplifies the field: for example, the forms I have
described are not simply in opposition; many cultural
workers cross the boundaries of many of these
approaches. The purpose of constructing a typology is
that comparing and analyzing loci of each form facili-
tates exposing its advantages as well as its limitations.
For example, British cultural studies theorists have criti-
cized some black cultural workers for essentializing
blackness by relying black ways of life even as they
debunk the ethnic absolutism they associate with
Englishness and black nationalism. This anti-essential-
ist critique of black cultural work suggests how an
embrace of identity politics can encourage people to
forge the project of coalition building and actually
fragment revolutionary struggle.

Similarly, contradictions within U.S. cultural studies
underlie the fact that the importation of theoretical tra-
ditions of the Birmingham Centre to the U.S. must
school tradition and of black cultural studies have much to learn from black studies and feminist studies as they have been developed in the U.S. Black British writers, studying, for example, the implications of postmodern films or theories of global systems might do well to look at work that has been done in such areas as African studies, Asian studies, and Latin American studies before declaring that we are beyond history, development, and recovery. The perspective of British cultural studies researchers on such issues as essentialism and binarism would also be complicated by the examination of case studies produced by U.S. feminists and African American scholars on racism, oppression, and exclusion.

The challenge of black Americans is to engage British cultural studies and to develop cultural work that addresses issues such as the plight of inner city youth as well as what Cornel West calls the "institutions of caring" in the black community (Cornel West, "Nihilism in Black America," Dissent, Spring 1991, p.223).

To analyze effectively the specificity of the black public sphere in the U.S. black studies must engage both the epistemographic approach of the Birmingham school and the woman-centered approach of the black British school. We must ground our cultural studies in material conditions. We cannot wait for Hall or Gilroy or Boyce or Julian to tell us how to do this. On the contrary, we have to elaborate the U.S. context in light of the work of Hall and other British scholars, not find replications of their epistemological assumptions. We must read their work in such a way that they do not recognize themselves.

Cultural studies in our hands should give new meaning to terms such as hybridity, essentialism, archive-ness, identity politics, and the black community.

Black studies in the U.S.

If the BFI "Black Popular Culture" conference is any indication, the centralization of elements from both strands of British cultural studies promises to enhance black studies in the U.S. to expand "in purview as well as depth, shifting its emphasis from "oppression studies" to what I call "performance studies."

"Oppression studies" has historically done much to uncover and decipher the exchase of blacks from the inventions, discourses, and emancipatory efforts of modernity, and much still needs to be said about this. A good deal of contemporary work seeks to continue this line of study, and is furthermore concerned to respond to the critiques of postmodernism and cultural studies. In an effort to break down the so-called "black community," these theorists focus on analysis in subgroups delineated through such categories as class, race, sexuality, gender, etc. The importance of specificity in narratives about discrimination and oppression is undeniable. However, in the literature on this subject, one is struck by the fact that black women, "the young, undamaged black male," the black gay or lesbian, "the middle-class black," within the materialist black studies, excluded or erased a danger to the theoretical project of essentialism of its own kind: the refutation of discursive arguments. At the same time, practitioners of the Birmingham social and material conditions of culture in the U.S. Unfortunately, a good deal of U.S. cultural studies that involves the Birmingham Centre discards theory from its spaces of application. The perspectives of the Birmingham school cannot simply be lifted and applied to the U.S. whose traditions of family, nation and spectatorship, for example, are quite different—without a renegotiation and repackaging of the tools of ethnography and analysis in the context of U.S.

include an engagement with the material conditions of culture in the U.S. Unfortunately, a good deal of U.S. cultural studies that involves the Birmingham Centre discards theory from its spaces of application. The perspectives of the Birmingham school cannot simply be lifted and applied to the U.S. whose traditions of family, nation and spectatorship, for example, are quite different—without a renegotiation and repackaging of the tools of ethnography and analysis in the context of U.S.

events such as the Mike Tyson trial or the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings that may call for unity across lines of class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Furthermore, "opposition studies" need not overshadow the actions of black people that helped to refine the tools of solidarity and advance its democratic ideals. Black "performance studies" would mean study of the ways in which black people, through communicative action, created and continue to create meanings within the American experience. Such an approach would contain several intersected notions: among them the notion that "performance" involves an individual or group of people interpreting an existing tradition—reinventing themselves—in front of an audience, as public; and that black agency in the U.S. involves the redefinition of the tools of Americanness. Thus, the notion of "study" expands not only to include an appreciation of the importance of performative action historically, but also to include a performative aspect itself, a reconfiguration of a text or a style or a culturally specific response in a different medium. At the "Black Popular Culture" conference, for example, Greg Tate explored a new realm of urban life calling his knowledge of rap, funk, and science fiction to his familiarity with the dramatic, audience involving traditions of preaching and music within black communities. Such a "performance" is both political and theatrical; it refers to and draws on existing traditions; represents the actor or occupying a different position in society; and interprets the audience's response to emerging images of black people.

In the U.S. today writers, artists, and performers such as Trixie Ross, Liza Kennedy, Jorja James, and Tate are interested less in what legal scholar Regina Austin has called "cross-over dreams and the narratives of the 'dream deferred' as in the notion of a black public sphere. These cultural workers are heirs of the civil rights movement and the black nationalist movement of the 70s, but differ significantly in focus and perspectives from both. They are different from the civil rights intellectuals and activists in that they are not as concerned with forwarding integration and the development of "oppression studies," which dominated black studies, women studies, and Chicanos studies in the 70s. Their ideology is also significantly different from the black nationalism of the 60s which is in the context of white supremacy developed strong strains of sexism and homophobia.

These thinkers are motivated by social and economic changes among black communities occasioned by the combination of post-World War II patterns of migration and urbanisation and the civil rights movements. This has also growth of an accelerated media industry among blacks, who earlier depended on the church and popular music as their primary areas for cultural production and identity. The popularization of the black public sphere has shaped the stage for an environment in which books, films, the visual arts, and music no longer take an interest in interpreting the experience of black life, or in belonging to the society of the "good life," which is increasingly recognized as being white.
Instead, seeing one's life reflected at the center of books, films, visual arts, and music takes precedence. Indeed, the shifting of the new black public sphere has been accompanied by the evolution of a new version of black nationalism. The traditional extracurricular themes of black nationalism are transformed in the works of writers such as Tony McMillan and filmmakers as diverse as Deirdre Judkins, Spike Lee, Julie Dash, and Charles Burnett into the themes of a black "good life." Elements of black nationalism are reinscribed in contemporary material and cultural conditions to construct a different black version of the American dream. Today, black artists, from rap musicians to filmmakers and writers, are deriving fame and success from exploiting the theme of a black public sphere, as Public Enemy puts it, a "black planet." The consummates of art about the black "good life" society are not only the black and white, but also existential. This "black life" has become the object of interest and envy of Americans of different origins and races.

Civil rights activists feared that black nationalism would enhance ghettolization, but the white youth and an international audience have become increasingly fascinated by cultural production that calls itself authentically black. Reasons for this attraction, ranging from the pull of the exotic to the incorporation of liberal themes into resistance to present anachronistic features of that position themselves as universal. Rap, for example, has moved from the underground toward the center, making it the subject of incorporation by white pop musicians as well as the object of parody by "Deadheads" and country musicians. As the work of younger scholars has already shown, cultural studies of the black British and black America's black culture can make an important intervention in the analysis of the art sphere produced about the black good life society. Emphasis on hybridity, cross-over, and the critique of homophobia yields some tools with which to check the repressive consequences of any nationalism. Black British cultural workers have a love and hate relationship with black American culture, and the British should be using American culture as a raw material for its own critical and cultural formation, and promoting the British to criticize American culture for being obsessed with the discourse of race and slavery, being nationalistic in the worst sense, and not being reflexive or self-critical. Black British viewers do not identify with the notion of a black good life society, let alone with the consummates of a Spike Lee film.

I submit that a measure of identification with the U.S. black public sphere, its cultural consumers and producers, is necessary for the production of engaging texts on the black good life society and its arts. In addition, it is not sufficient to analyze only the art of the good life society and the remembrance of that product. One must understand the forms of life of blacks and whites in the U.S. in order to appreciate the techniques that black artists engage in transforming well-established white meanings.

Conditions of black life in America have resulted in a black American response to modernity that is both innovative and mimetic. Blacks have constantly redeployed the meanings imposed on the tools and products of modernization by a linear and often destructive Eurocentric. For example, the acts of black leaders such as Malcolm X, Fredrick Douglass, and Martin Luther King Jr. served as the backdrop to the rewriting of words that were written to protect the rights of whites only. At the same time, by being situated at the margins, black people observed the advancement of the most efficient modernity in the world outside. As a result, black people were provoked—and continue to provide—some of the most important critiques of modernity through what might be called techniques of reversibility. Take, for example, black people's iconoclastic direction of instruments used in classical music and army bands, which violated many levels of order to create jazz, the music of modernity.

I suggested earlier that the civil rights movement contributed to mass literacy among black people, but the failure of civil rights politics of integration has left this mass starved for black-centered books, films, painting, music, etc. At the same time, black nationalist's legacy of emphasis on identity, political struggle, and self-determination cannot be placed in the shadows, for it survives in the structures of the new black public sphere. In fact, many black thinkers have a suspicious attitude toward poststructuralism and postmodernism in part because they interpret the emphasis that these theoretical projects put on decentering the subject politically—as a means to once again undermine the black subject. The historical and ideological discontinuities between those giving voice to the black good life society and their predecessors in the civil rights and black nationalist movements need to be understood urgently in order for the black public sphere to continue to develop its black-centered perspectives and techniques.

To reproduce itself, the new black public sphere needs both an economic base that provides jobs for young people and definitions and discussions of the culture it is producing daily. U.S. black studies can develop performance studies as a mode of interpreting people in the black cultural sphere, positioning the people of the black good life society as its "ideal readers." Such a method of elaboration promises a way to narrate the break with the excesses of the civil rights movement and black nationalism, and move on to higher levels of abstraction along the lines of sexual politics, class, and labor relations.

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Necrophilia and the Black Imaginary

An Interview with John Akomfrah

John Akomfrah, member of the London-based film workshop, Black Audio Film Collective, was in Toronto at the Festival of Festivals with his film Seven Songs for Malcolm X, a meditation on Malcolm X. Akomfrah is and was at the centre of the black British wave that took both the black diaspora and international film community by storm in the "90's and '94 in Birmingham and London at its starting point, Handsworth Songs (1990) offers an unforgettable, poetic meditation. Juxtaposing found images of struggle within the public sphere with moments of intimacy, the film offer up archeological accounts that insistently gesture towards their origin — colonialism. Two innovative narrative films with overarching archeological projects, Testament and Who Needs A Heart, swiftly followed. These works signalled "new times" — offering an aesthetic intervention around race — dismantling earlier designations of what black cinema could and should be. They have met with unprecedented success (and debate).

Seven Songs For Malcolm X is no deviation from the project. Reflecting earlier successful collaborations, archival footage and Malcolm's extracted writings, words by cultural commentators and friends are punctuated by hauntingly stylized tableaux which, ultimately, rework Malcolm X as icon. While stressing his more internationalist political views, what emerges, unexpectedly, given the broad global canvas of his thought and the film's interpretative formalism, is a more tense, and hence more human Malcolm figure than is usually conveyed. Maliciously wearing from exterior to inner speech and back again, the voices of Toni Cade Bambara, and Giancarlo Esposito alongside typically to it all together. Stellar participants include Patricia Williams, Betty Shabazz (at her most disarming), Yuri Kochiyama, Robin Kelly, Thulani Davis, William Kunstler, Greg Tate, and others. Given the timing of its release, we can only read this (comparatively) modest film as a compelling footnote to Spike Lee's Malcolm X, but a most necessary one. In addition to its overwhelming inherent value, Seven Songs' exegesis will exchange debates specific to black filmmaking and the difference difference makes.

B/L The first film I saw by you was Handsworth Songs. I believe it was here in Toronto at the Festival of Festivals, at least six years ago, folks were blown away by it. There was a sense that the film signalled something new. Dealing with the politics of representation and displacement, but at the same time plausible and smart, it constituted a riveting mask of politics and "realness."

I think Seven Songs negotiation a similar structure: real folks, fellow activists, friends, giving differing testimony juxtaposed with canned tableaux and archival footage that similarly excavates the imaginatory while building up "the idea" of a person. Why Malcolm, why now?

J.A. I think you're right to say that there's a connection between Seven Songs and Handsworth, and you're right, they're much more formal connections. I think, talking personally about the work that I've directed for Black Audio, Touch of the Far Branch and Who Needs a Heart were very much deliberate attempts to think through questions of representation by the route of other cinemas, individual in particular. With Seven Songs I wanted to return to the idea of a fixed narrative that you couldn't change and try to build counterpoints with poetry within that. With Handsworth Songs there's a fairly straight story, there's been a plot, it had a beginning and an end, and you have to make sense of that. It's the in-between that mattered. I think the same applies to Seven Songs.

B/L Formally I had, I don't know if ambivalence is the right term, much more differing.

J.A. Handsworth is more of a friend, much more open-ended, and built into the structure was the notion of ambivalence because it was very clear that the predetermined readings of the riots were either pathologising — this is an act of criminality — or humanising or rationalising it by saying they were a product of unemployment. What we wanted to do was work through some of the more intangible reasons why rupture and outbreak may well be the outcome to blocking desire.

B/L How this is translated to cinema makes the work so effective.

J.A. I think there is a sense that we look for moments of solitude and intimacy, not even necessarily look for it but constant moments of intimacy and solitude through which one can then look at very public information, a black leader, for example. The question is trying to find a way of providing people with a vantage point which is not current affairs but poetry if you like. So you, there is that similarity, but I have to say that I do think Seven Songs has a lot more a rigid structure because we actually thought through the structure so clearly.

B/L Purposely so, the end is rather overdetermined as well, as you do begin with Malcolm's death.

J.A. It's incredibly overdetermined in a way in which Handsworth wasn't. It was an incredibly open text, it wasn't even the same film. We shot a series of tableaux about the surplus underclass which are the sequences that appear at the end of the film, we moved to Handsworth to document what was happening and then we had already a tape slide interest in photography which we were pursuing throughout the work. So in many ways what you got in the structure of Handsworth is a combining together of a series of concerns which were at that point mutually exclusive and the tapes slide carries on to show these relations. The reportage stuff was simply done as part of a desire to keep an archive, there was never a film in mind, just a series of things which lines, at some point somebody, I think it was Trevor or Reece (Agie) said we should pull it all together, make a film. That's bow that arrived, a very different emphasis.

B/L The original screechbomb, in conversation with mutual friends about Seven Songs For Malcolm X, was that it was going to provide a different angle on Malcolm, that it would recontext what Spike Lee left out in his epic Malcolm X. Given what I perceive to be a radical difference, in emphasis, or politics, if you will,
I was frankly surprised to see Spike in the film. Why Spike, was this an ironic commentary on the commodification of the figure of Malcolm X?

J.A. He’s partly there in that form, but the point was that the time we started the name Spike Lee and Malcolm X had become almost synonymous. With Spike to Malcolm X what we were witnessing was a kind of return of Malcolm through commodification. So in a way any attempt to go to the source had to go through him. The desire certainly wasn’t to include Spike Lee in the film as a palpable figure, but as a kind of a sign for this intervention of an Africentric Malcolm, but he was so uncooperative as that sign, so he remains effectively as a kind of elliptical specimen.

B/L He looks uncomfortable, as usual.

J.A. He does. It was difficult. I tried to get a decent interview with him but he didn’t want one. I think he felt at the time he had sent everything he had to say on it so the interview he gave us was frankly boring. I remember him coming to London a couple of weeks afterwards and telling me that the reason he gave us a boring interview was because I asked him stupid questions. Wait a minute. I did not.

B/L Rejection. When did you conceive of the project?

J.A. Immediately after we finished Who Needs A Hero? What we wanted to do with this film was to find, if we can call it that, the geneses of black radicalism, or the strands that led into the geneese.

B/L In London.

J.A. Yes. It became clear in the course of the research that there was a very straightforward transference going on because Malcolm came there and met Michael X, who was then called Michael De Freitas, and he said, you should be doing what I do. And at that moment Michael X was born. It seemed almost inevitable that we would arrive at some point at a project about Malcolm. And it just so happened that at the moment we then thought about doing this project, we also heard that Spike Lee was making his major film. We thought, this is even better, it would mean there would be a huge explosion of interest that we could ride and sneak cars in. Of course, once he started it, and we read about his project and what else was being written in the States, it became clear that other things were not being included that had to be included.

B/L Obviously it is quite fitting, starting with Michael X, and then moving to Malcolm. This relation crystallizes or is an exemplary instance of the inherent transmigration of ideas (and bodies) in the black diaspora. In your hands, this relation was foregrounded in Who Needs A Hero? the meeting of Malcolm and Michael, how black anticolonialism was played out and became quite something else in London in the sixties and the extradition of Michael X back to Trinidad, towards death, viscerally marks the darker side of that exchange.

J.A. The diasporic sensibility, as you know in my work, is quite ingrained. The theme of memory is something I return to again and again and I think the trans-Atlantic nature of that memory is also important to evoke — where it’s possible to do. I think in this particular instance, rather than simply investing that memory or reactivating it, we simply had to highlight an ongoing one which is the figure of Malcolm X. The very invoking of the same Malcolm is also then to invoke the emergence of that intricate variant of that diasporic sensibility. Here’s the fellow that said Africa, the Caribbean and Europe are all connected because they are peopled by blacks and all have something in common which is their African origin. Ehoh blah blah.

B/L So you stress that international aspect by the people you chose to interview.

J.A. Very much. It was important to us that the participants in the film who really knew about Malcolm, had, if not the semblance of, at least the presence of a semblance of diversity. The minute you say lets look at who can represent his life, all kinds of things happen.

B/L A rhetoric emerges.

J.A. Yes, it was difficult in a way to get a much more even-handed performance from people if I can use a dramatic metaphor.

B/L Is that why you punctuated the interviews with black and white, to tune it down.

J.A. Yes.

B/L Really. I thought it was a marker for memory or a postpresent device.

J.A. There was partly a desire to shift from black and white and colour, which was then to be a kind of postpresent device, but then once we started thinking through it, it became clear we couldn’t sustain that.

B/L It does initially trick and pull you into how the narrative works.

J.A. I think partly why the drama and the portraiture of black and white, which is interspersed between interviews of people and so on, evolved because of an unconscious with the deploying of rhetorics about Malcolm X. The minute you start listening to people talking to you, my God, this is not history. The terror of being accused of being biographical, I think, necessarily forced us to make a choice about whether we were going to be even-handed and objective or to push the biographical further than it was at the time. I’m glad we did it in the latter way.

B/L Yes, I think it’s tempered somewhat by the film’s overarching movement, the subjective narrative, Malcolm moving towards death as well as the flattening effect of the tableaux. They seem to have been relatively dispersed, not privileging any particular moment of his life.

J.A. There are two things that I wasn’t very comfortable with. One is the way in which Malcolm’s life has always been romanticized as a movement from darkness to light. Which frankly I don’t believe. The other was the way in which death functions in the narrative of Malcolm X as sign of victimization, when he roars his head and goes down and snarls his head again, we weren’t comfortable with that.

B/L You work against that though, it was a sliding rather than...

J.A. We tried to construct a more circular structure. At the very beginning we start with the death and work our way backwards, and that was a way to try to avoid melodrama.

B/L Do you think the tableau format works against that?

J.A. The tableau format sometimes helps and sometimes works against that. They work for me because
they help to disrupt this notion that he came out of darkness into light. To be very specific, we tried not to light things in terms of that narrative structure. Each moment of his life was given the reverence and respect.

B/L They are beautifully done, such artistry there.

J.A. You it was very much a way of getting away from starting his life in red, then orange, then blue when he died. I didn’t want that because I thought that would be, thematically, the wrong pattern at. We didn’t believe in that dark and light trajectory and it would have been wrong to then reproduce it at the level of form. That’s partly why we divided it into seven sections with each section playing a theme, helping us to find a theme that each section could play rather than on overall theme, hence the bonding. There really isn’t an overall theme if you watch it at all carefully, over and above a clear narrative curve, if you like, there is no overall theme. And I’m much more comfortable with that, it’s fragmented and uneven, but it’s a deliberately constructed unevenness, it’s creative disjunctiveness, it’s fragmentation. I tend to always purposely the structural conveniences, except in this case, as well as in Handsworth Songs, those were already existing components that we then tried to weld into a creative block. We went looking for blocks.

B/L And you got them. That’s a good word, actually, block. Gromiak’s block fit, with the working of the sequenced sections of the film.

J.A. One of the problems with the documentary is the cut away, you have to have it partly because it’s just technically difficult to avoid. What we wanted to do was find formal reason for cutting away as opposed to pragmatic ones. It was completely random, joy and I would shut our eyes and say, cut there.

B/L Seven Songs looks like your slickest film to date, the production values were higher, was this due to the backing of Channel Four?

J.A. I think the production values were certainly a lot more slick than they hoped for, but that had a lot to do with our collaborating with Arthur Jafa (cinematographer for Jules Dassin’s Daughter of the Dust). That’s where the slickness comes in because we had talked for a long time about trying to do work together and trying to do work towards a homage toward people we had liked in the past, Jans, Tarkovsky, Dreyer, people like that. As well as Van Der Zee, the Harlem photographer. Van Der Zee is the most explicit reference in the film through The Book of the Dead. That book made it explicit for us what we were trying to do. In a way it is an act of necrophilia to try and resurrect a dead figure. Van Der Zee’s mode, the whole line of benches, the opulence of death, etc. That’s what necrophilia is.

B/L Now I understand the extended return to the table, the elongated frames and lines, the kids with the balls, the choir. (A photograph by Van Der Zee also inspired Toni Morrison’s novel Jazz).

J.A. I mean necrophilia not in a literal sense, but in a postmodern sense in which people are invoking figures, there is an act of leading off the dead. This was one way of making it more explicit, underwriting it is a desire for opulence.

B/L It was also the look you wanted.

J.A. Yes. For example the very last set of stuff that James Van Der Zee did was a picture of John Michale Vasquez sitting in a chair, the same chair that we used in the film. He uses a vellum effect that led to the use of lenses that we used. So there is a very specific and explicit acknowledgment of that work.

B/L Perfect marriages, I should have known, given that the past, or at least referencing is your thing. Your collaboration with AJ obviously worked. But tell me something, what do you think of his theory that I have heard him elaborate on several occasions, you know, the idea that a "bad" black cinema comprises of or is the visual equivalent of black music, jazz, is particular? I don’t really see this played out in your film.

J.A. I just don’t buy AJ’s thing about the essential black cinema residing in rhythm. In cutting, I think it is in the frame, hence we went for those elongated lens, he called them his Manal lenses, where the participants looked somewhat skewed, stretched out. This was an opportunity for him to do his thing.

B/L And he did it well.

B/L Why the omni-presence of the corpse in Black British film? Looking for Langston, Dreaming Rivers, Mysterious July, this film?

J.A. Again, I think necrophilia is at the heart of black filmmaking. I wanted to make that very explicit with this film. I think that it always was apparent.

B/L It’s not a negativity, it’s a marker. The way that imagery works in other forms of filmmaking. Here, there is mourning, but much more.

J.A. It’s a definitive marker. This is why I suddenly thought about why certain filmmakers would also be so attractive, Chris Marker, Pana Lassor. In terms of death. Why certain ideas are so attractive, the "Mourning and Melancholia" piece, and what has been done with it in terms of AIDS activism and so on, has to do with getting to the heart of something that is inanimate, a memory of ourselves.

B/L Without an original memory.

J.A. But that is where the melancholia comes in because there never is, but when you think you’ve located it, it becomes...

B/L An icon?

J.A. Right. I think that in the beginning we were disturbed by that, the way in which when you seize hold of these figures they literally turn into icons and statuses in your hand, but when you get over it you I think it happens, as in the case of Looking for Langston, where you are comfortable with that mask, when the desire shifts from melancholia to necrophilia almost. You almost begin to desire these figures particularly because they are irretrievable, impossible to capture, therefore dead.

B/L Is that a contemporary corollary to the bones of the ancestors?

J.A. The most powerful moment actually in Testament for me is the very end and the very beginning, both images really of death, a kind of stultification, atrophy, when she goes to the graveyard at the end and buries her father, or when the man walks in the beginning of Testament, a wish fulfillment of death, a crowing wish going on there. There is a kind of level of morbidity which I think people have to realize in the quest for identity. It is morbid business.

B/L Solidarity and rigidities.

J.A. The attempt is to find a solid thing and when you can’t find it you begin to literally patch it together which is a process of numification of ideas in a way.

B/L Do you want to disclose your next project, or not?

J.A. I can talk about two projects. I don’t know if that’s the one you’re talking about. I’m just finishing a
feature script, finally, for the BFI (British Film Institute) kind of adaptation of Visconti’s *Hocoe and His Brothers*.

B/L. Oh really, your neo-realist phase. I think not, not enough layers for you.

J.A. You’ll see, it’s an important work, but that’s another interview. Also I have got to finish off a project on the nineteenth century emergence of the African middle class. A new diaspora adventure.

B/L. You just can’t give it up.

J.A. In order to survive I may well have to take a job called Northem Diary, to fashion a film out of the work of a black anthropologist, Terry Williams, who has spent the last twenty years on this project.

B/L. Well, archaeology is your thing. Not in a literal sense, a Foucauldian sense. Excavating.

J.A. You’re right. And taxonomizing, and building inventory, the usual standard nineteenth century obsession of the older middle class gentleman married to neo-post marxist obsessions of the minutia of the everyday. I think you become aware that the diatomic is an act of will and memory because there are very few institutions that can substitute that purpose. There are no statins, no buildings, no libraries, no ‘here is the black history.’ These are acts of will and memory and the very mode of remembering is essential for any historic project and I am not talking about just the very obvious mode of remembering history.

B/L. Recently, a number of ‘emerging’ Canadian filmmakers have adopted memory as a defining trope, without, unfortunately, the deeper, more sophisticated resonances, including historical, evident in work such as yours. I bear this clichéization, if you will, against or collapses memory into a simplistic rendering of the autobiographical.

J.A. Any project which doesn’t realize the potential that the end of its quest is a cul-de-sac, is headed for disaster. We use these categories in a very Descartian way, in essence. We are very aware of the pitfalls now of invoking identity and evoking memory. On the other hand, you have to be strategic, as Stuart Hall says, you have to write the sentence, you can change your mind afterwards, but you have to write fast. So you are caught in a double bind because you want to both be agnostic enough about the transcendentals values of a category, but you also know that the notion of these categories than allow you to open areas for illuminating what otherwise would have remained closed. Without invoking the notion of identity we would never have gotten into the business of the connection between document and poetry. Simply because each case has had a very clear agenda. Use poetry for self-expression, the document for validation, or whatever the binary was. Invoking a notion of identity and cleave it and use it as antithesis somehow creates an abyss between the two.

B/L. In spite of all the dialogue in the past, say fifteen years at least, individual ethnic or racial identity remains on an equal plane. Single-issue work often prevails, this is how identity is mostly being invoked, especially by a new generation of filmmakers, here, in the New World. I think this is a problem, it has institutional roots, and is perhaps, generational.

J.A. I think people should not invoke identity as a way of side-stepping turbulence, then your heading for the cul-de-sac that I am talking about.

B/L. Exactly. The essentialist route, it’s tricky.

J.A. You can use essentialism but you have to be strategic.

B/L. The flip side of single-issue identity politics is that things get done.

J.A. I have to keep reiterating that there are pitfalls of identity politics and one of the major ones is to invoke identity politics as search for harmony, for wholeness. We have never done this, we’re biologically.

B/L. Some young people, especially coming out of universities, are more inclined to interrogate rather than reduplicate the hegemony of the Hood. I have seen films influenced by your work and others, but I think our proximity to the States has made more of an impact, more of a swing toward feature filmmaking. I also think it’s gender specific. Women seem more influenced by the ideas that have informed your work, and I think this is due partly to the points of contact with your project and the feminist one that preceded it in Britain.

J.A. But I think personal, reflective black cinema has been elicited in a way by much more aggressive, marketed cinema that speaks certainty in the language of violence.

B/L. And realism.

J.A. I think there is very little room now for the kinds of work that we were seen as pioneering, the cinema of ideas, of agonism, of invoking turbulence, desire for history.

B/L. It’s a longer funded?

J.A. It’s no longer desired. People are now aware that there are easier ways of doing this work. It’s no longer about to disappear. I wish people were invoking it but I don’t think that’s the case. I don’t want to sound like an old man whose time has come and gone, but our exploration had to stop.

B/L. You anticipate my next question. It would seem that the main achievement of the Black British film movement, and I include intellectual movement, has been to complicate the old oppositions and to question the uniformity of black struggle, and to articulate the complexity of black experience in the diaspora. Is that something you agree with?

J.A. Wholeheartedly. I wouldn’t claim it all for us. A lot of interesting stuff came out of Britain in the eighties, fine art, literature, photography. At the heart of it was not simply just the work done by Hall and Gilroy, Kabena Mercer. But also the work of the likes of Hami Blak, the return to Fanon, Locarno, differently. The return of the specular as a legitimating area of black interest was incredibly useful and valuable for re-engaging in cultural work and defining cultural norms.

J.B. You formed a different kind of rabid politic.  

J.A. My generation, the bastard children of 68, who came of age in the early eighties were the first generation to be fully processed by British society. Other people had allegiances, alternative histories, which
they fused with British history but we were the people who were first fully formed by British culture and had to, in a sense, discover inharmonies accidentally, as a supplement. The very act of being treated as bourgeoisie in cultural studies departments meant that we were going to be clearly the ascendants of that work in Britain at the time. Screen, Atlanticum Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis. These were some of the discourses, along with national identity, cultural identity, that were being contextualized at the time, as well as investigations of spectatorialship.

B/L. Indeed, I come out of that theoretical moment as well, but positioned more here, and perhaps that colonial distance, if you will, internalized my desire for works that, similarly, came out of these concerns. I had a long time writing. Perhaps that’s why I have left so connected to your project. But why do you think this moment is over, or at least has waned?

J.A. People want the earnestness which characterizes that moment to disappear and they want a much more ironic invocation of it that tells a story.

B/L. It has been suggested that work by people of colour arises out of duty—what has come to be known as the classness of duty. This strikes me as somewhat rudimentary, but sometimes necessary. I tend to fall into the trap, and it is difficult to avoid, of framing this kind of work in an evolutionist manner, in stages if you will. Over the years I have come to see as related to the classness, which is often voiced by discussions of that nascent term modernism.

J.A. Specifically, the notion of duty. Yes I think that is clearly the case. Yet this is another case of the flip side of identity politics, what Kobena Murphu has referred to as the burden of representation. The very act of evoking a cultural identity at the same time on one evokes their personal identity—I’m a black filmmaker—means that there are certain prescriptions that you’re expected to take on board. I’m not particularly troubled by that because that is part of the course. What I am troubled by is the Kromian nature in which that prescription is placed on us as a separate categorical imperative—a black filmmaker has to do this. I think this is not just wrong because it forecloses questions we need to ask. It prescribes in a very teleological way what it is that should be the curve of the black narrative. What I am troubled about the term black filmmaker is that the very way in which it gives you the impression of a term incoherent, unknown territory, unknown quantity, the possibility of stripping away determining prescriptions. The extent to which people read this as a call to arms in the name of duty, I had a problem with, with not the expectations. I think it’s still right that people had expectations because that is one of the ways to talk about what an audience was in classism; if you could miss out what an act of expectations were, you’re already half way through working out what a critical community could be, what I mean an audience was. The business of duty was a problem because underpinning the notion of a transcendental value of black filmmaking serving a transcendental god, duty, was that it was underwritten by an essentialist code.

B/L. You responded because you were I.T. You were right, we were I.T. We were the best thing that ever happened to that country. We were strategically placed to answer some of the major questions about that culture. And this is not only of value for rare, here you’re talking about the intersection with national identity. Through race, people were beginning to experience a sense of nationhood. In order to do that we were either the trope of terror or the tropes of desire. One is the same as the other. We were at the crossroads, I.T., a mutant strain. I think that gave our work a very specific inflection, it freed us from the burden of marginality. It also produced the terror of uncertainty, we felt trapped in a decade Wallouci poem, writing everything down. Which partly accounts for both the excesses of the films and the iconography, the feeling of liberation.

B/L. It translates to the work.

J.A. I am also conscious of the fact that maybe what I’m offering is strengthening the uniformity of the moment at the expense of diversity because clearly people experience this in different in this moment very differently. Someone like Zaire Julien, for example, growing up in the East end of London had a very different experience than mine, growing up in the West of London, or like Lena Cope, or other people in Black Audio. We realized that the real way in which these differences were going to empower or enable was to strike a dialogue so the invoking of race, class, and gender wasn’t just a stigmatic device, it was also a strategy of self-understanding, an examination.

B/L. It seems to me, and this is only from my recent limited experience with the English scene, that there were institutionally based black left writers and thinkers in England who were as influential as the more civil rights or black power leaders. Whereas in the States it seemed like the movement, since the 60s, came from the broad-based grassroots level and there didn’t seem to be the matching institutionally based intellectual response.

J.A. We always did have the Savonarola figure in England. It’s not an accident that most of the major activists were poets or writers in a way. This is really partly an experience of marginalization. People ended up in England for a reason. It wasn’t entirely accidental that at a certain point there were all these intellectuals around, they had to come to study. Whereas the American situation were very different.
by Ramabai Espinet.

Left over black is
What I call myself
On days when skin
Is too thin to take
The rain of blows
Eyes too tired
From frost and worse
To explain

Sneak between two windows
A train whistling, heading
Into God-only-knows-which-territory
I signed by nothing
Neither clothes, nor hair,
Skim or any other mark

I signed by nothing
Leftover black
Is what I call myself
On days when wounds of race
Wounds of love, of war
Cannot heal

(Some hidden truth
Twisting out of reach
Splinter itself
And a wet rain)

(Between two windows
Of a rushing train
I sit still
Wondering about tomorrow)

Days when wounds of race
Wounds of love, of war
Cannot heal
When tears -
Thin skeins of filament
Thin threads of rain -
Wash everything
Even echoes
Out of hair
Flown past
Like corbels’ wings

Most days seem themselves
Over like this
Fingerling the map

Chorus:
Of a home
Still to be found
A home
Not found today,
Tomorrow
And tomorrow too

Could only imagine
Finger, groaning fingers
Her unborn child’s tears
The desperate climb
Away from the immigration
Hurdle men
And how
In haste and miscalculation
She stood
And then
The fallen heap below.
A knock on the door
That day in summer
And she knew
She was alone.

For Patricia Deanna

(In the summer of 1976 a young pregnant
Caribbean woman, Patricia Deanna, fell to her
death from a balcony as she tried to escape
from immigration officials who had broken
down the doors to the apartment where she
was baby sitting. She was in Canada, preg-
nant, illegal and utterly alone).

That day Patricia fell
No elements grieved
And all the stars swung safely
Through their accustomed orbits.

(I, leaning over a balcony
Found I could not measure
The quantum and heartbeat
Of her dead fall)

Kosa Rasingi is a Toronto critic, cultural theo-
rist, and lecturer in film.

For Audrèa Besanc. Ramabai Espinet,
NEW CHINESE ART IN EXILE

There are a number of tales circulating among the Chinese, explaining the origin of the world's human races. One tale recounts that humans were created when one day the fiercely creative and ambitious creator used clay and moulded it into a human figure and put it into the kiln. The first mould was fired too long and turned all black. He felt unsatisfied and threw it far away—to Africa. The second one was allowed to bake only for a short while. He thought that it was too white and threw it to Europe. The third was baked to perfection. It was all yellow. The Creator was pleased and put it on the ground and hence afterwards everyone was yellow except the Creator.

Putting aside its patriotic overtones, the tale's racist implications are consistent with the discourse of race in China up to the 20th century. As suggested by the mythology, classical texts and popular lore, the Chinese imagination was trapped in a narrow dichotomy that opposed a civilized centre (China) to a barbarian periphery (foreign) and by assumptions of its cultural superiority, and of the centrality of the colour yellow in the universe. All converged in the ascription of a negative ontological status to foreigners, who appeared in pictorial texts as furry borne-men, animallike creatures, and were consistently referred to as "barbarian devil" and "foreign devil". Ethnocentrism, however, is only one term to understand the racist representations of non-Chinese. The Chinese experience of modernism, their violent encounter with the imaginary (white) Other in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century may be another factor. Most Chinese know that it was the Europeans who sided China's imperial cities with advanced weapons and helped the Chinese Emperor suppress Chinese peasant uprisings. Armies of eight to ten thousand troops also stormed Beijing leaving ruins of an imperial palace standing alienly in the city's northern suburbs as a witness of that destruction and robbery. While racial prejudices against black people continue, from the Opium Wars onwards, the Chinese are no longer able to absorb or expect the (white) Other through imagination. Now they are located in a shifting world power relation—the centre of the world has moved to what was formerly considered the "barbarian" West.

The perception of the West as furry borne-men, animallike creatures, and were consistently referred to as "barbarian devil" and "foreign devil". Ethnocentrism, however, is only one term to understand the racist representations of non-Chinese. The Chinese experience of modernism, their violent encounter with the imaginary (white) Other in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century may be another factor. Most Chinese know that it was the Europeans who sided China's imperial cities with advanced weapons and helped the Chinese Emperor suppress Chinese peasant uprisings. Armies of eight to ten thousand troops also stormed Beijing leaving ruins of an imperial palace standing alienly in the city's northern suburbs as a witness of that destruction and robbery. While racial prejudices against black people continue, from the Opium Wars onwards, the Chinese are no longer able to absorb or expect the (white) Other through imagination. Now they are located in a shifting world power relation—the centre of the world has moved to what was formerly considered the "barbarian" West.

being the modern world's "centros can be easily traced in the public, popular discourses and everyday actualities when taking a work today on the streets of China's cities, and scanning the signals of Western pop culture and lifestyle. Never has there been a moment in China's history when both the officials and populace are so enthusiastic about the West. Chinese national pride has given rise to a general acknowledgement that the (white) Other has created, in the past few decades, a culture "appropriate" to the indigenous, judging by its technological material development, and cultural/artistic innovations.

Rather than write about how the West (Euro-America) is represented in China today, I will turn to a broader issue—that of the current Sino-Western exchange by looking specifically at some practices of visual arts in China since the 1980s. As a student and later an instructor in Chinese universities during most of the 1980s, I witnessed the advent of a "new Chinese art" and the struggle surrounding it. Last year I was delighted to meet in Toronto some artists from the same university I attended. Since then we have been discussing many of our concerns, all related to China's cultural predicament and identity, and its cultural future. Clearly, the years in Canada have failed to undo who we are. To a large extent, our diasporic experience serves as a symbolic return to "home".

Earlier this year my Chinese friends and Canadian artist Bruce Priceca organized an exhibition of contemporary Chinese Art at ArtSpace, in Peterborough, Ontario. The art was on show for three weeks. In Canada, it displayed selected works by 14 artists created between 1988 and 1993. These works do not represent the ecstatic radical art movement so significantly affected the context of the 1980s, but they offer a glimpse of the social changes, shifts of perceptions, cultural borrowing and assimilating taking place. Thematically, they narrate experiences of repression by both traditional and current authorities, thoughts about modernity and globalization, and apprehensions of cultural breakdown. They display a fusion of Western modern art forms, indigenous cultural symbols and local concepts. The type of artistic practice called "Western Art" in China (which originated from the transplanted style of European classical painting to China in the early twentieth century and continued to Soviet socialist realism for three decades after the 1949 revolution) is characterized by DADA, surrealism, American pop art, abstract expressionism, and impressionism. Even the traditional Chinese ink painting bears the mark of modernity and of aesthetic transmutation. For instance, in an interpretation of an ancient Chinese poem, human skits are scattered on the long way of the quest, vanishing in infinity, which violates traditional, elitist aesthetics. In short, the show unveiled a significant phenomenon Chinese artists have absorbed forms of modern Western art and translated them into the language of Chinese avant-gardeism.

The rise of a "cosmopolitan avant-garde" art in China, as dabbled by a Western sociologist, is intrinsically connected to both local realities and globalization. These art works visualize transitions in the social and aesthetic history of China in the process of modernization and particularly, the increasing presence of the (white) Other in the yellow Middle Kingdom. They may territories of experience shared by those living at intersections of times, spaces and cultures.

Thus these works bear some resemblance to a whole gamut of twentieth-century Western literature proposed by the critic George Steiner as "exterritorial", a literary by and about outsiders. To be clear, these artists are not real exiles—none of them are banished from their homeland for political or other reasons. My some-what strained parallel points to the effects of modernity—the Chinese are losing contact with a sense of wholeness on a result of the rapid changes in the country. The "typical" "structures of feelings" of the exiles, as once outlined by Edward Said, are perceivable in these art works, that is, solitude, estrangement, frustration, cross-cultural vision, critical perspective, intellectual reserve, and moral courage. Caught in a transition to the "modern", the artists have a lucid sense of what it means for all of us to be out of place. While it is obvious that a homocentric is out of the question, most of them are uncertain about their destinations.

Nevertheless, I detect a certain attachment in their detachment, a unique Malaysian national cultural consciousness in their aspirations to the status of the truly world power—what is embedded in the artists' border-crossing in a preoccupation with the lost or transforming "home". The preoccupation has been a key characteristic of Chinese cultural nationalism—since the late nineteenth century, the Chinese intellectuals have engaged themselves in searching for solutions for China's predicaments. The national project of cultural critique and the awareness of China's predicament are accompanied by a number of works. On one hand, the
status, and ethnicity, as well, demands point out, "become commodified as resources for pleasure, the appropriation of Western art forms by Chinese artists acts primarily as a critical intervention challenging repressions, and enabling critical thought and cultural renovation in local contexts."

Looking back, the adoption of Western modern modes of representations emerged in the early 1980s as an integral part of a cultural struggle engaged in several fronts first to break down official dogmatism of traditions and restrictions (i.e., Soviet socialist realism); second, to express forbidden subject matters and emotions; and third, to move out of the shell of tradition and forge a cultural renewal. Given the fact that the art has grown out of government condemnations and frequent closures of exhibitions, the representation of local realities and popular sentiments through foreign and hybrid forms demonstrates its significant role in the Chinese popular struggle against the totalitarian regime.

Trends of thought exist behind these activities. They are reminiscent of the African critic Soyinka’s discussion about the various attitudes held by writers in post-colonial Africa toward their encounter with alien cultures. These include those who negate or hold a “paganist affirmation” of traditional societies, those who advocate “Negritude” and those who achieve “stylistic bridging” through a synthesis of indigenous and alien cultural elements, and those who strive to root their creativity in the authentic tradition in the cause of society’s transformation process. Needless to say, some of these attitudes can be traced in the exhibition in Петербург. It seems works been made of self-negation in the mode of cultural critique. Most of them can be seen as examples of “stylistic bridging,” that is, a mix of foreign and indigenous techniques and cultural codes. Some, like the traditional inking-printing, try to incorporate modern Western elements while rooted in Chinese cultural heritage. However, these attempts do not necessarily reduce the pressure on the avant-garde artists who practice a primarily imported form of art.

If Western modes of representations are readily adopted for local political projects, Chinese artists face an identity crisis and other consequences of borrowing from a powerful Other. How can they clear themselves of accusations of imitation and insubstantiality? Furthermore, although the original transmutation of Western art to China can be seen as a fact of cultural exchange, its location in the aftermath of the European imperialist crusade cannot be erased. The origin of China’s “Western art”, and the positioning of China at the world’s margins, circumscribe Chinese practices to the judgement of the dominant aesthetic and cultural discourses, i.e., those of the West. Chinese art’s claim of originality, creativity and universality at home, and their recognition by the “world” — or the West — depend greatly on their seeming identification with Western aesthetic configurations.

Even leaving their traditional ethnocentrism and national pride behind, a sense of inferiority and dis-orientation lingers. After over a decade’s ardent exploration and experiment, it is still not clear how they can maintain their identity as Chinese while employing a visual language primarily invented by Others. To describe their predicament, I would use the term “Chinese complex”: their feelings of subordination, marginalization and despair are mingled with their recognition of existing world power relations, admiration for Western innovation, anxiety about the increasing pressure from outside, and desire to rise from the predicament.

Such a typical “Chinese complex” clearly imbues a number of works. The Unfinished Book, an installation in the form of an ancient Chinese book, narrates the invasion of Linton’s fantasy world by the Western imperialist war machine and commercial culture. The work is in a sense a text of China’s modern history and consciousness, capturing a fragmentation in process and the ambivalence toward the West.

The Second State, where Andy Warhol’s influence is visible, can sense the terror of being squeezed by state restriction and pressures from beyond national-cultural boundaries. What should be pointed out is that the major problem may no longer be state restriction since the artists have become quite skilled in skirting official routes. The fact that a cultural renewal has been built upon modes of expression and representation borrowed from Others, and that foreign commercial cultural products are pouring into the country as China’s modernization course is becoming more capitalist-oriented, makes it an urgent task for Chinese artists to find specific paths through modernity. To be able to live as Chinese and at the same time to participate in a global dialogue, understood by these artists in disjuncture, is the imperative project of identity reconstruction. Such an awareness seems to open up possibilities to deal with the problems inherent in the art of borrowing.

The Unfinished Book and The Second State reveal feelings of melancholy, anxiety, indignation and subjugation, other works stress the artists’ desire and determination to make a modern art of their own. As both a survival and resistance strategy these artists play with the Centre to transform what originates from the Centre in the specific needs of the Chinese. The works by He Gong, Li Ning and Gu
Xiong, three artists currently living in Canada, suggest a trend of subversive appropriation in a cultural encounter marked by unequal power relations.

Gu Xiong's Pizza! Pizza! and other works not only register the transgression of his own identity—often a university instructor at home to a bunny in a classroom in Vancouver—they also whip consumer culture in North America, and ridicule the corporate capitalist dream of capturing the world as market. Installations by He Gong and Li Ming, This Is Not The Way Flowers and The Visit Of Medusa, trespass the historical European-American events by shifting our attention to the voyages made by millions of migrants to North America, who were up-rooted by war, economic hardship, and political turmoil—largely outcomes of imperialism, modernism, and capitalist expansion into the Third World. Their struggle for survival is told by the steering wheel mode of cooking pots and cats made of patched, faded T-shirts of a variety of colors and sizes, with phonomes of Chinese, Spanish, Vietnamese, and other languages from the world's margins. These works, in other words, visualize a mode of "travel" which James Clifford calls attention to the "periphery" made by those纵横 invisible because of their class, gender, ethnicity and race. Employing a language from the Centre, these artists not only assign central importance to those in the margins, they also make possible the articulation of marginalized experiences at the very core of world power and art.

Despite their shared experiences of uprootedness and act of borrowing, compared to practices at home, the diasporan practice entails a special consciousness to strike a balance and reverse the norm of Euro-American art. In my view, the diasporan practice is particularly significant, not merely because it can enrich discussions on "traveling theory" and "traveling cultures", but also because it may offer a breakthrough in Chinese artists' learning from the West. The "new Chinese art" would not be possible without the traveling of modern Western art and ideas to China under its "open-door policy", and that travel, to a certain extent, also anticipates its journeying to North America and Europe. In this a return of the Western elements which have voyaged to the Far East mediated by Chinese artists.

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**Bibliography**


Impersonal Ideology in the Disney Comic (1977), originally published in 1971, is a critical study of transnational corporations and US ideology. It no longer dominates the field. It is in part because of the reputation of many intellectuals from Marx and others. It is also in part because of an increased sophistication in Marxist cultural studies under the influence of Gramsci and other writers who stress cultural processes and mechanisms rather than an imposition of ideology.

More than a decade ago a cultural studies that was transnational might also have meant the writings of the Frankfurt School when its members were in exile from Europe in the United States. Their shattered lives and the personal and cultural dilemmas of Adorno and others in exile in the US entered into their writings on "mass culture." Although still of some importance, especially among intellectuals, particularly the 1990 generation in the United States, the most generalised perspective of the Frankfurt School seems to have made it increasingly irrelevant to later generations who understand popular culture to be a diverse and contested field.

Today what does it mean to speak of transnational cultural studies?

Most obviously, research activities involving themselves cultural studies now exist in many countries: not only in Britain and the US but in Italy, Australia, South Africa, and Canada. There are related activities in other parts of the world. In India it has the name of "Subaltern Studies." In Latin America there is a well-established line of writing on popular culture in Sweden some work is done as sociology of communication. Although the distinction is somewhat different in each nation, the activity is recognizable cultural studies.

Beyond this, there is an increasing amount of research that is related to the emergence of regional blocs of nations, especially the European Community. An example of this is the collaborative international study of television drama, published on East of Dallas. A collaborative project alone does not create a new collective identity. However, the book-up and reformation of political collective is of central importance for cultural research. Consider, for example, a recent issue of the journal Media, Culture and Society, which is dedicated to the problem of mass media in small European countries.

Nonetheless, a strong tendency remains for cultural studies to be grounded in a national culture. Although the internationalism of the 1960s, the experience of global war, and support for independence of the colonies are not absent in the founding texts of British cultural studies, the emphasis in writers as diverse as George Orwell and Raymond Williams tends towards a sense of English culture and experience. With this implicit assumption in place, the nature of activists and intellectuals such as C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon and Edward Said are acknowledged but seem to belong anywhere on lists of cultural studies writers.

Recent books in Cultural Studies do move to an international or transnational focus. This is certainly to be welcomed but a careful review of these books reveals that their projects are quite divergent. It will be useful then, as this book has, to examine and carefully access their intentions, styles and arguments.

Paul Gilroy's There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack (1987) is characterized by a blunt rejection of most of the trappings of actually existing cultural studies. In various places he distanced himself quite sharply from Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson and Lain Clanchex. Gilroy's work is a critical sociology drawing on Alain Toussaint's writings on new social movements and Michael Castells' studies of grassroots urban movements. Although he distances himself, there is a dialogue with cultural studies, not only in his discussion of punk and Rock Against Racism in the late 1970s, but in a brilliant overview of diaspora, utopias and cultural practice which makes up the longest chapter of the book.

There is a pressing intellectual tension set up within There Ain't No Black. On the one hand, the book is an important argument against any essentialist discourse on race. The book makes an argument against a politics based on Black cultural nationalism. There is a sharp argument against the keyword 'culture' itself, which has been articulated to resist political arguments that Black traditions should be defended against people of other cultures. Gilroy's most important move is against such cultural essentialism. Nonetheless it is equally important for him to show that there is a foundation for grassroots movements against white racism in Britain. Such a notion of shared experience may even more to Fanon than to Williams. There is no need for Gilroy to use the term culture, though others have used it at this point. This tension in Gilroy's work may be responsible for different readings of There Ain't No Black. Where some have seen a hidden essentialism in Gilroy's work, others have seen voluntarist assumptions about apparently spontaneous protest movements.

The lengthy chapter on cultural practices is innovative in that it describes diaspora and therefore transnational cultural practices. Ragga music is clearly a movement between different parts of the world. Although fragmentation, carnival, borrowing and cross-over are the themes of Gilroy's narrative of Black culture, he also demonstrates that there are bloody limits to the notion of carnivalisation. There is no cultural cultural studies through the writings of Michael Burawoy. Gilroy's narrative describes the deliberate blocks placed by racist whites and the state against a canaveralised cultural exchange between blacks and whites. White women who were fans of Black British
musicians and dancers in the late 1940s and early 1950s were 'protected' against their will by dance-hall owners and other white men. Sharp limits were imposed on transcultural exchange by the dominant culture and the state. As the patterns are laid down, blocks see no good reason to allow just anybody into their language, practices and spaces. Trust has to be earned. Thus, cultural studies based on notions of postmodern fragmentation, transnational exchange and carnivalesque body politics needs to entail itself of dispossession, exclusion and policing.

As equally important book on transcultural studies is William Rowe and Vivian Schelling's 'Popular Culture in Latin America' (Luna culture and New York: Verso, 1981). The most extensive book on Latin American cultural studies in any language, it provides the first map for cultural studies in Latin America. They incorporate, but move some distance from the earlier critical work on transcultural culture. Rowe and Schelling very carefully distinguish what they do from studies of folklore and popular culture. They insist, with Gramsci, that the understanding of culture cannot be separated from relations of power. In Latin America this includes colonization and resistance not only military movements but also cultural practices. A number of topics have emerged in Latin American cultural studies of Rowe and Schelling include indigenous beliefs and culture in the Andean region, Mexican haciendas, festivals and popular tourism, Brazilian 'favelas', Olympic media, carnival andamba music, and Brazilian soccer. By any standard these are reasonable choices. What makes Rowe and Schelling different from the American tradition of popular culture studies is that they are not attempting to provide a comprehensive survey of topics in Latin American popular culture. They deal with topics from popular religion to intellectuals in their emergence. They are not topics so much as instances of how modern culture is layered over other memories of Latin America. In each case they show how a form of popular culture such as Samba music is historically transformed and how its commercial and hegemonic appropriation is in part resisted by committed cultural producers.

This emphasis on cultural transformation, hegemony and resistance leads into an important examination of populism in Latin American politics. Popular culture creates collective identities of both divers, participants and fans. Political parties including the Partido de los Pobres in Paraguay and the Partido de los Obreros in Argentina, have attempted to articulate such collective identities with a popular nationalism. Rowe and Schelling argue that the left should not seek to imitate this and they offer as alternatives the examples of cultural transformation in revolutionary Nicaragua, the emergent challenge to the notion by indigenous movements throughout Latin America, and the rejection of the myth of mass movement by the mothers of the "disappeared" in Chile.

Whereas the division between high culture and popular culture was important for certain hegemonic variations of nationalism, Rowe and Schelling show that the distinction breaks down in recent Latin American novels. The writings of Manuel Puig and Luis Rafael Sanches are neither wholly nor the other, but fictional essays or explorations of processes of culture and hegemony.

The strength of Memory and Modernity is similar to those of British cultural studies influenced by Gramsci. The book offers a detailed historical and political framework in which to situate the transformations of popular culture. Rowe and Schelling have conceptualised on providing a map of the field rather than engaging in theoretical debates. Nonetheless at this point it would be useful at this point to have clarified the quite different theoretical positions of Latin American writers such as Nestor Garcia Canclini, Jesus Martín Bareroun and others. Rowe and Schelling offer only a brief critique of the Journal of Popular Culture approach to the subject. They give no theoretical intervention of some other practices. Nor do they attempt to resolve differences between a political economy of mass media and a cultural studies approach.

Clearly more research needs to be done for the smaller Latin American countries. On the other hand, Rowe and Schelling offer a brief sampling of the very extensive existing literature on alternative media. Community radio is especially important in the Andean region and there is a powerful grassroots video movement in Brazil. The topic of women and communication is not given separate emphasis but is integrated throughout the book. The very important issue of the collapse of the public spaces under military dictatorship and its poletic reconstruction is touched upon in a discussion of Chilean popular culture. Here again, a full treatment of this issue would require a discussion of the economics of information and culture industries in the current economic crisis and under neoliberal economic policies.

There is a diversity of politics and intentions in emergent works of transcultural studies. An unresolved tension exists between the work of Paul Gilroy and a cultural studies based on the work of Gramsci. This is summarised in the following diagram.

---

**Popular culture creates collective identities of believers, participants, fans.**

**Gilroy**

- Gramscian Cultural Studies

- race as fundamental

- non-negotiable demands

- control of field: immediate satisfaction of desires

- body, spirituality

- intellectual discipline

**Gramscian Cultural Studies**

- social class category

- coalition politics means moving away from a corporatist position

- coalition-building: long-term "war of position"

---

**Gilroy's point is that a Gramscian politics, or the creation of a national-popular culture in England, has frequently been at the expense of the resident "non-British" population. It has been created on the foundations of white working-class racism. The tension between an analysis based on Alian Touraine's theory of social movements and Antonio Gramsci's theory of coalition-building remains to be resolved both in theory and in practice.**

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- Queer landscape...

- Cops, Indians and Homos in the environmental movement

- Queer and the self-reflexive social elements...

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once
when they fed me potato salad
and cold roast beef
with mustard on the plane
I found myself wondering if sometimes right before
we fuck for an unconscious second I might of
thought of the desire of the feeling of wanting
to fuck a man and then let it pass like some
ill-fated pavlovian impulse that exists
only in the retrospect of my memory and
get lost in your my
mouth hands breasts feeling feet

once
when they fed me potato salad
and cold roast beef like the British used to eat
with mustard on the plane I realized
that sometimes for an unconscious second right before
we our mouths dance on one another's
bellies flickering candle flame lips kissing sweetly wet
oblivious to the coming morning I might of
thought of the desire of the feeling of wanting
and then let it pass ill-fated history reconstituted
memory cold sliced roast beef and potato salad
remind me of some foreign form of life
that never tasted quite right

Jennifer Kawaja
a letter for Iraq

Dear friend,

Sitting in cafes and museums of Europe, Americans can be so preoccupied with what you have not been able to rend the dark and the green that is to say, all the beautiful times of your past. In the cut of your eyes, are now reflected. I carry you in the lines of my poems.

Except perhaps in their frozen, colonial museums, where you have been displayed in the curio-like manner by which they have been brought from their homelands, by which they are now displayed. There is no ancient city or ancient foreign city that has not been a museum, a place where the dead are shown as the living, a place where the living are shown as the dead.

And now there is spring in Europe, the sweetness of the purple crocuses, the white of the myrtus, the blue of the Mediterranean. You are the one who called them all your own. You are the one who called them all your own.

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Your singed skin. A hundred thousand parties without blood. The stel of your singed feet, your child's body covered in a charred graffiti of history, your old man's unruly tears, swollen veins, in the hillsides, your young woman's defiant beard, your old woman's hands raised to an Allah who has died the city of warfare and whose refuge is the West on the mountain of the hill.

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read according to the protocols established by poststructuralism. In fact, the book that I’m writing has very little engagement with these protocols at all. And if I were to come back to any of these things it would probably take the form of an actual engagement in the very terms of that thought and, in that, Derrida is very fundamental. I mean, if you’re going to do epistemology, Derrida is fundamental to that. Myself, I wouldn’t say that Foucault’s work, especially his historical books, means a lot more to me. And I personally think that when the dust settles, Derrida will last, essentially, in the field of hermeneutics—and not much beyond that, whereas Foucault’s influence would be found across the social sciences, essentially through the work he has done in what one might call history. In that, I think the marvelous thing about Foucault is that with Discipline and Punish onwards his whole sense of the fundamental historical shift in the seventeenth and eighteenth century is related to Marxist ways of periodizing history.

Derrida and Derrida are most often associated with poststructuralism. But people often use poststructuralism as an umbrella term to cover a variety of thinkers and approaches. What about some others, for instance, Bakhtin, Heidegger, Gadamer?

Ahmad: Well, they are all quite differently positioned. One very central position would be that of Lacan. For example, if you’re dealing with, let’s say, people like Homi Bhabha whose influence in literary theory is now quite considerable.

BL: You also have to deal with how Lacan and Foucault don’t fit together.

Ahmad: That’s right. And Foucault and Derrida. Foucault and Derrida don’t fit together philosophically at all. So you know, this sort of eclecticism which is already there in these derivative positions, one would have to come to terms with Bakhtin. Yes, and no. Bakhtin essentially answers the questions posed by structuralism in the sixties. Before those questions were raised but in response, precisely, to that particular kind of linguistics on the basis of which structuralism was then staged some forty years later. So in that sense Bakhtin is both pre-structuralist and post-structuralist. As far as French structuralism is concerned, his rediscovery in France was one of the central moments of the crisis of structuralism. And one of the reasons why structuralism enters into crisis very quickly, within a matter of a decade or so, is the rediscovery of Bakhtin’s texts which had already posed the critique.

BL: But as you also point out, in your essay “Between Orientalism and Historicism,” one thing that is different about Bakhtin is that his theorizations of language are always sociological.

Ahmad: That’s right. It’s right. Which is partly why two quite different things happen. One is that although Bakhtin is discovered—his texts are rediscovered by people like Kristeva and Todorov—he’s also very quickly suppressed as the major critic of structuralism. In fact, that is also the moment in which Derrida’s critique of European philosophy comes up to and including structuralism becomes the dominant one in France while Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucault’s shifts become the major engagements with structuralism. Bakhtin in Paris is actually discovered and suppressed in the same moment within those two or three years. So just as the insurgent moment of ’68 is both an insurgent moment and a normalizing moment, the use of ’68 for stabilizing an anti-communist left takes place very quickly by ’71-’72. I think that’s the sort of thing that happens to Bakhtin in France. By the time his work comes to North America interesting things happen. First, the disconnection of Bakhtin from Volosinov. There is the suggestion that everything is written by Bakhtin and so the work that we know as Volosinov’s has no autonomy outside the Bakhtinian imagination for example. Volosinov becomes a kind of pre-history of the later writings of Bakhtin which consequently become the more mature writings. It is the Bakhtin of Rakovskii, the Bakhtin of the Dialogic Imagination which is said to be the real Bakhtin. There is a sense of unease about those earlier writings but essentially Bakhtin has staked his claim, then, as a person who is always an anti-communist and anti-Stalinist. This identification of anti-Stalinism as anti-communism per se is also of some interest because if you do not belong to a politics which makes a distinction between these then to say that someone is anti-Stalinist is to say that they are anti-communist. So Bakhtin has immediately locked into a double origin. Marxism as a purely formal position, so as to survive Stalinist autocracy, but much
more fundamentally Russian mysticism...someone who was...always unhappy about the Bolshevik development of the Soviet Union. In many circles what most celebrated Bolshevism was this very quickly...lated here into a politics of pleasure. The emphasis here is...not on the dialectic of opposition to orthodoxy, to dominance, in which literature can play a formulating role by which people actually pos...their politics against the church in the form of the car...was a kind of better, more usable, more people-friendly version. This is...the pre-capitalist form of class politics, if you wish. Instead of that, the emphasis here, in terms of Bakhtin, shifts to a politics of...ure, erosion of desire, desire for a desire, as in that, the work of Bakhtin becomes a kind of early Deleuze and Guattari, an "anti-Godiva." 

BL: But classic politics has also had its own cultural...tics all along however much this has been, from situation to situation, either kept under...or allowed to run loose and intensely. Isn't this the significance of the medieval carnival for us today? Wasn't it the impetus behind the 'politics of desire' the creative element of the politics whose...point of departure in class politics but which refus...story down into only that fight that's taken at other targets such as the social bodies of...think: 'the politics of desire' is...the problem of things that I feel need to be...But in Th and in your talk yesterday, you disaggregated with multiple voices from the Third World. You invoked Cabral, you talked about...Negritude, and you talked about these as interesting ways to think about culture and how nationalisms are...and class and class formations are struggled over across and through. It seems almost as though contemporary theories do not take the voices of theorists like Cabral and Nkrumah and others seriously enough to engage them. In the sixties and early seventies those voices were engaged but that dialogue has now vanished. It seems as though a type of Eurocentric theorizing is...there to invoke the voices of...etc., is to be theoretical. Even a voice like...and its colonial role in history, it is actually the strongest of any critiques of imperialism. One of the things...what makes Theory an important book, in my view, is that it takes this claim seriously, at the work of people like Said, Bhabha, and Rushdie. But I'm still wondering, not only at the obsolescence, but also at the diminishment of the book, which for understandable reasons has not been noticed in the American discussion. It is the simple fact that...the Jimenez and...have published in India, published in India, before it entered London. It was not destined to address questions which are pressing...the American or the...American, or the Academy, or the American obligation...research, questions which, because of the power of the American Academy, are...It's purely a...they're the voices that are being...pressing us in India because of the power these...Stalin might have been...there are certain questions which are pressing...true, but we're talking about the post-revolutionary...are...there is a sharp distinction there because...questioning the power of China or the power of China, the power of...Classical China, you call yourself A Third World person. peoples...would send you to, to your own performance. There was...there is a reason of...something to do with the cultural alienation...it is a problem essentially of the petit-bourgeoisie who lose their roots in their own culture. Considering that...in Dakar, you say today is actually based on twenty years of thinking about all that. I agree entirely with what Cabral says about cultural alienation...as a result of this completely...is the removal of the colonial state is absolutely central for recovering the national culture — which in the case of Guinea-Bissau is the culture of peasants. Now in a very different way, evident was saying that the third world development five...tions think of nationalism is in one respect remarkably similar to the way...the intellectuals think of nationalism, both...speak to those in the...the upper-class intelligentsia, the canonical figures. I think the...peasants have to be back in the room, at the beginning of the book. Now then, once the book begins, the first thing it...in great many other things as well...but that, for example, has still left its traces, the sense in which that which is occupied with three definitions in...method and you knew, these sorts of things...method and Historicalization. That is one sort of answer I would give, that in my work, these...notices to either...sorts of emphases...Derrida but not Cabral — come partly because of the positions they occupy in the academic world which then pressures on academic work.

BL: I would like to push the question a little more and try to come across more clearly. I feel that you are willing to classify with...that often get cut out of the debate around post-colonial theorizing. To invoke people like Cabral and Nkrumah as examples of some of the people who participated in anti-colonial, nationalist organi...Third World and who were intellectuals...thought is hardy taken up in...current debates - what we make you continue a dialogue with that have not necessarily. Nationalist struggle were not uncomplicated sites but rather that they represented a complex mix of intellectuals and peasants/workers within a class organization of cultural nationalism that imagined the peasant/workers as being the "core" of the new nation in very contradictory and complex ways.

Ahmad: In my own development Cabral's writing, espe...his essay "The Weapons of Theory" — and another essay of his was very interesting because it had something on the question of roots (Return to the Source) — writings of that kind and also writings on the actual organization of the struggle in Guinea-Bissau have been very inspiring for me. When I was in my early twenties the writings of the Le Duc Dao who became General Commissar of the Communist Party, and a great deal of works of the kind that was undertaken in Vietnam was something very central to me. Vietnam is not a model of the post-revolutionary society but also on the reproduction of the bourgeoisie. in post-revolutionary are not exceptional commodities, production, these things were very important to me at a certain point. So I'm actually very much informed by what you have to say, of course. Much more I feel today is actually based on twenty years of thinking about all that. I agree entirely with what Cabral says about cultural alienation...as a result of this completely...is the removal of the colonial state is absolutely central for recovering the national culture — which in the case of Guinea-Bissau is the culture of peasants. Now in a very different way, evident was saying that the third world development five...tions think of nationalism is in one respect remarkably similar to the way...the intellectuals think of nationalism, both...speak to those in the...the upper-class intelligentsia, the canonical figures. I think the...peasants have to be back in the room, at the beginning of the book. Now then, once the book begins, the first thing it...in great many other things as well...but that, for example, has still left its traces, the sense in which that which is occupied with three definitions in...method and you knew, these sorts of things...method and Historicalization. That is one sort of answer I would give, that in my work, these...notices to either...sorts of emphases...Derrida but not Cabral — come partly because of the positions they occupy in the academic world which then pressures on academic work.

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BL: I would like to push the question a little more and try to come across more clearly. I feel that you are willing to classify with...that often get cut out of the debate around post-colonial theorizing. To invoke people like Cabral and Nkrumah as examples of some of the people who participated in anti-colonial, nationalist organi...Third World and who were intellectuals...thought is hardy taken up in...current debates - what we make you continue a dialogue with that have not necessarily. Nationalist struggle were not uncomplicated sites but rather that they represented a complex mix of intellectuals and peasants/workers within a class organization of cultural nationalism that imagined the peasant/workers as being the "core" of the new nation in very contradictory and complex ways.

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don't write realistically, that's all.

BL: I'm wondering if it's not possible to think of multiple modernisms. I'm thinking here of African-American work, in particular literature. I understand that you have taught courses in African-American and Caribbean literature. Do you think of that work — for example the work of Richard Wright — as realist tradition while also struggling around questions of modernism, people like Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston. Zora Neale Hurston whose work I would place between a realist and a modernist tradition with other kinds of influences coming into place such as anthropological themes. How do you speak to that work as a moment in modernism or if you can speak of multiple modernisms?

Ahmad: Generally speaking I would say that one of the striking features about, let's say, the canonical modernism is that the commitment to certain kinds of politics is extricated from the surface of the texts, and especially notable is the suppression of class politics. What happens in the Caribbean and African-American modernisms is that the issue of race particularly, and of class, being what it is, they cannot evaporate these issues even if they want to. The theme is much less, but even when there is a desire they simply cannot evaporate these issues in the same way. So that Aimé Césaire actually finds a way of writing a modernist poem foregrounding the whole issue of race, colony, etc. The same thing happens to lesser or greater degrees with the African-American modernism. The other thing that I think is the canonical modernism most writers situate themselves politically quite consistently in the anti-imperialist trend, whereas in the United States the black intelligentsia of the interwar periods have a very different relationship with the communist party. Their perception of the labour movement, their perception of the communist party is very different. Many of them started careers in the communist movement, published in the communist press and some of them were even members of the communist party. So even in terms of organized politics they are located very differently. You know even Langston Hughes, not to speak of Richard Wright, was involved with the communist party. So what I'm suggesting is that the modernism of colonized people, of the black people, cannot really observe the strategies of the canonical modernism of people like T.S. Eliot, or Ezra Pound, or Gertrude Stein.

BL: It seems to me that we are in a very ambivalent place right now because on the one hand we've got the virtual can- onization of Zora Neale Hurston for example, being led by Henry Louis Gates. Houston Baker and others. Hazel Carby has provocatively asked the question of why is it that Hurston gets all of the attention at the expense of people like Richard Wright who have articulated a very clear grounded political vision of the world. She challenged us to think what is being lost when black academics and scholars are not willing to take up explicitly political work.

Ahmad: But you see this is the same thing, the same move in that direction. It actually starts in the '50s going to the '60s. The lucky break that they got was that one of the most talented black novelists, Ralph Ellison was an anti-commu- nist. It is with the publication of Invisible Man that the develop- ment of Richard Wright actually begins. Wright and Ellison are pitched as the two opposites in black fiction in which Richard Wright is a mere naturalist. Native Son is said to be deeply married as a novel because of this naturalistic need and it's becoming a mouthpiece of the communist party at the end of the book etc., etc. and for twenty years you had the Ellison hegemony. Now what is happening with Zora Neale Hurston is that it is partly sort of pandering—Henry Louis Gates's pandering to black feminism —where he himself is deeply patriarchal, but this is his way of pandering to black feminism. Now with Ellison so much we will also include Zora Neale Hurston in that same project. She is of course a very significant novelist but what interests me here is the politics of this appropriation and the overall reshuffling of the African-American counter canon.

BL: I'd like you to talk a little more about how you see the relationship between feminism and Marxism. because as I was reading your book it seemed to me that this relationship wasn't problematized as much as I thought it should be. What I mean is that I think that a number of feminists originally located theoretically within Marxism, moved away from that position because of the failure of traditional categories of Marxism in addressing questions specifically related to gender politics. And even those who remained within the framework of Marxism, did not reposition, or negotiate with Marxism, often in a way which drew on other approaches derived from theore- rists such as Freud, Lacan, Foucault etc.

Ahmad: I think what needs to be problema- tized is both the category of feminism as well as the category of Marxism. I don't think that the term feminism is any less problematic because there are so many kinds of feminism. There are certain kinds of feminism which can have a deeply educative function for classical cate- gories of Marxism, but there are certain kinds of feminism which are irreconcilable, so that, in fact, one of my regrets about the question which you are raising in terms of the book is that the term 'feminism' is used too broadly, with- out specification or qualifiers. About that, in fact, I'm much more unhappy than that some post-structuralism is used too broadly. The second thing that I will say is that yes, absolutely, historically there has been an immense failure in the history of both Marxism and of feminism in addressing the question of gender, and what we now call feminism in the history of Marxism. I mean, most starkly when you deal with the issue of gender, far more starkly than it does in issues of modes of production and things like that. In fact, I'm much softer on what is called capitalism when you're dealing with periodizations of history. I still want to keep a lot of the energy of what has been affected today on economics by those who want to deny the centrality of the economic structure as such. But when it comes to the issue of gender I think that the problems of economics become much clearer.

However, I also think that Marxist engagements with the question of gender have not been quite as mechanical as many strands of modern feminism suggests, either in writing, or in the practice of communities, in other words, it is from the standpoint of revolutionary trans- formations that those insufficiencies stand out most starkly. After all, it is recognized there that one decide that this is something important, it is worth being exported to the world market and so on. Now in the imperial- istic countries there is a very different kind of situation, espe- cially with the mobility not only of capital but of what I call —Turkey, Iran and Tanska, the showcase of modernization in the Islamic world. So that's simply to say that one needs both to respond to and to very, very seriously about the kinds of criticisms that are needed. But that also needs to keep, you know, some sense of history. After all, from Engels through Luxembourg, Kollontai and many others, there was a Marxist tradition that was not inferior, let us say, to their contemporar- ious suffragettes. Now having said that, my sense is that the refounding of the communist movement, which is what I'm most interested in, is in going to involve not only different kinds of organizations and different kinds of social agents but also some very fundamental rethinking of the very historical cate- gories of Marxism. My sense is that the very category on which Marxism has historically rested, namely, labour, is going to have to be theoretically rede. Just what do we mean by this category labour, and how does it surface in classical Marxism as a theoretical category. That is something that we have to understand historically.

However, it is my sense that it is not only Marxism which has to gain from the encounter with feminist writing, but feminism itself needs to actually encounter Marxism, beyond the polemic, in all its categories and all its histories. That cer- tainly is my position. There isn't some unified thing called feminism that has the pedagogical status of correcting the theory and history of Marxism. It has to be a much more reciprocal relationship. Just as we can no longer think of labour, of the proletariat, of the working class, of workers, purely in non-gendered terms. I think that you have to confront that through feminist writing by going through all of these material processes and trajectories that constitute gender in actual history. Gender is a his- torical category. It is even a way of appropriating certain cul- tural realties socially. Gender is, so to speak, the social and historical ways of appropriating nature and biology.

BL: You said in your talk 'Theorizing Nations: Nationalism and its Political Trajectories' that the nation-state is a necessary terrain for anti-imperialist struggle. I want to ask about your thoughts on solidarity or the international level both between national labour movements and with other movements for social justice? Also, how do you theorize the place between the local and the global in terms of the fluidity of international capital. For example, I'm thinking of the North American financial crisis how that capital can move to Mexico unconventionally but Mexican labour moves to North America only under restrictive and disadvan- taged conditions. How do you theorize that kind of address localized contextualized realities but also address international reali- ties and not displace the two.

Ahmad: The situation is at least in one respect very differ- ent in countries like India. The global situation presumes you essentially in relation to the imperialist countries. Even when we read an African novel it comes to us published from London, it is published there, it is recognized there. Then you decide that this is something important, it is worth being exported to the world market and so on. Now in the imperial- istic countries there is a very different kind of situation, espe- cially with the mobility not only of capital but of what I call —
techno-managerial and professional strata. The number of people in India today who have been trained in the advanced countries is so vast compared to the colonial period that there is no comparison. The impact of the metropolitan university on everyday life in India is very, very direct for the middle classes but then through them to the country at large. This impact is far greater today than it was in the colonial period. So these lines of demarcation do not hold any longer.

I think the way the world is actually constituted global transformation actually goes through the local and the local is the actuality of the local. It is absolutely essential to have movements and politics which address issues of particular forms of local oppression. But it is essential that the national state continues to be the moment of contestation for all of those structures of power you have to have, at some level, what one might call a counter-state which is to say a party. It is simply not possible to struggle eventually against any form of structural oppression without going through the national state and what you find is that it is in fact the same single structure which holds together patriarchy, class oppression, racism. The logic of capital is such that this concentration in fact increases whereas its organization of social life mystifies that as if it is in fact getting more dispersed which it is not. Revenue powers, legal powers - all of this is getting much more centralized, so that you in fact need very flexible forms of politics - not the classical communist party forms but very flexible forms of both dispersion and concentration. In the military arena, that was invented by the Vietnamese dispersion and concentration. That was their great contribution to military theory. We need a political strategy which in fact does both. That is why some dialectic between what we now call social movements and what has historically been called communism has to be re-thought in very different sorts of ways.

Dil: It seems that we've now posed the challenge of articulating a postmodern/poststructuralist politics, given the way that you have just described the concentration of capital which is happening at the exact moment when social movements are becoming more and more fragment.

Ahmad: Well I don't know whether I would so quickly pretend that I understand what a poststructuralist form of politics means in the sense that the history of the communist movement has always gone through local politics of organizing the locality on the immediate issue that is facing the locality. When Pakistan came into being and brand new industrial cities started to form and the proletariat came in from the ends of the world, who do you start organizing those people? What is their main anxiety? - that they would die away from home that is their main anxiety. For a peasant just recently having become one of the proletariat, the horror is that you would die away from home. So how do you organize the first union you collect money to send the corpses back to the village. That is what you do first, that is how communism organizing in Karachi started, by starting a collective fund for the workers to send the corpses back and to buy the right clothes to wrap the bodies in and to do the ritual by preparing the corpse and sending it back home. Now this is not poststructuralism, this is communism. I want to know what poststructuralist politics is. Micro-politics as what communism always did. It is the aggregation of these things. You started by identifying particular problems in particular places and you organize people on those issues and the sense that you need a common organization, a single political party to create linkages among local struggles, grew among the people from the experience of how difficult it is to win in an isolated placeno more difficult to defend the gains in a local circumstance. Party building always went from the local to the general, from factories and neighborhoods to the country as a whole. Nor did the theoretical primacy of the working class prevent you from party work among other classes and social strata. None of it is new. What is new is the claim that different groups have interests so different as to be exclusive, that problems can only be addressed at the immediate level where they arise, only by those who are directly affected by them, that no one has the right to represent anyone else because no representation can be true, that there are only particular interests - no universality. This Marxists will not accept. Because neither politics nor morality can be left to mere contingency. There has to be some idea of universality and the common good.

Seuraj Manak's and Kathryn White's PhD candidates in the Department of Social and Political Thought at York University. Anselmo Valenti is a member of the Border/Lines collective.
Race doesn't prescribe the experience or predict emotional depth, but there are historical experiences only being Black in space, time and mind will make possible.

_The Village Voice, Greg Tate_

IT is a testament to many things that my first exposure to racial tyranny and genocide was an imaginative one. It is a testament to a happy childhood, albeit one in a former colony; it is a testament to the psychological routing that often happens when one lives in a Black society, albeit one subject to the whims and fancies of the metropolia. It is a testament to the very colonial status of the islands I grew up in, Trinidad and Tobago, that I was not exposed either in school or imaginatively through library books, to the horror that was the Middle Passage and African life under slavery in the New World. I was sixteen before I began to learn West Indian history. I had read neither _The Souls of Black Folk_ or _Up From Slavery_. There wasn’t a copy of either of my library — I had read virtually all the entire collection and those books I hadn’t read. I knew of.

It is a testament to power. The overwhelming and oppressive weight of colonial power which attempts to create subjects in their own image — the good colonial; the power of those who are able to withhold your history in an attempt to control your thoughts.

The imaginative exposure to what we now euphemistically call “whites cleansing” come through the books of Leon Uris, in particular, Exodus. At twelve, possibly thirteen, I was outraged and upset at what had happened to the Jews. In the silence surrounding my own history and my own memory, I took to myself the notion of what had happened to Jewish people in Europe. Perhaps — I am sure that at some deeper level I knew what had happened to my own people (this knowledge, even if not spoken, is passed on, sometimes infamously narrated from one generation to another), and that I was on the journey to my own past albeit through surrogate issues. It matters not how we come to understand oppression, provided we take the lessons to heart and apply them to our lives.

I knew the exposure to be a significant one because it continued to crop up in my own imaginative and poetic life. In “St. Clair Avenue West” (Salmon Courage) I wrote:

_Eyeglasses taken from prisoners killed in Auschwitz._

I stared
saw
(believed for the first time I knew all along)
the blue veins
the numbered wrist

_I had given ‘It’s a name—Suffering silent you shook your head, mouthing “Persecution” white they called it likeings
and we were the B.C.Ds._

_Basic Common Denominators— silence divided by time one oppression by two realities the only reminder one scrutiny wrist tattooed blue with numbers branded memories that balt at talk_

D'you think it was like this when Salmon showed his ways his wisdom to the stranger eyes of the black Queen from the South? Did they bargain like this shakling each other's memories casual to avoid each other's potholes of personal truth...
One of the most distressing aspects of the situation is that the aggregate of blacks and Jews is the sense of competition for position of the privileged minority—the least oppressed group. The hierarchy of oppression such as was facilitated by recent statements of William F. Buckley (The New York Times, June 2, 1968) are offensive and should be avoided. Whose interests are being served when a jaded anti-Semitic dismisses the concerns of Blacks over Jews while one may be preposterous or a “victoration of the rights of the people of New York” and praises Jewish “hyper-sensitivity” because “the Holocaust, Jews earned distinctive immunity,” Buckley is quoted as saying: “indifference to that, hypervisibility on the subject is correct.” Each aspect claims the uniqueness of their oppression—and so it should be. Often that uniqueness is all the members of the group have to hang on to, and so they should. What happened to Native people is very different from what happened to Africans, which is in turn very different from what happened to Jews. It would be permissible and very wrong of us, however, to tell a Native person that the problem is so much worse because they are people. Not because they are people.

The African scholar, Ali Murray, has argued that unlike in the case of Africans who had a commercial price put on them, Negroes have a price put on them because they are a race which has come from Africa. The blackness of the African like the blackness of the Jew, was credited to the effect of certain diseases specifically syphilis, on the skin of the African.

"Lady of Laughter" by R.H. Pett, 1932

Border/Lines 28/00

That was in 1963. In 1969, Mrs. Blowchow, an old Jewish woman in my novel, Mavo's Daughter, leaves something for the fourteen-year-old Margaret/Maressa, the young African American girl. What Miss Blowchow has left for Margaretha is unknown to me, but it does have to do with the gift of understanding another's pain that was given to another young girl many years ago on a Caribbean island. I was also conscious of laying the ground work for a sequel that would explore the possible links between a Jewish survivor of the Nazi holocaust and the descendants of the African holocaust.

Recently in Toronto, there has been much talk of Jewish/Black tensions; it is also difficult not to be aware of the alliances and counter-alliances south of the border between Jews and African Americans. Some of the sensitivity on both sides comes from the identification of Jewish involvement in the slave trade. It is clear to everyone who has more than a cursory understanding of the period of time of the African slave trade that any group was involved in the African slave trade. There is blood on everyone’s hands: Christian, Jew, Muslim and African—Black and white alike. Even Native people bought, owned and sold slaves. As a descendant of survivors of the Middle Passage, and the atrocity of slavery, I am pinned to hell with all of them.

Research and writings that attempt to blame Africans for the slave trade, as I read recently in an article in the Toronto Star, are as reprehensible as those that attempt to suggest that Jews were the main culprits. African involvement was driven by the great need of the European powers for slaves and is similar to the plight of Colombian peasants who are forced into growing coca to support America’s addiction. So too having been forced by anti-Semitism in Europe into money-lending, some Jews were able to undermine the expansion of the trade. This is not to excuse and absolve those involved but to explain and understand, which is what responsible scholarship is all about.

The irony of these tensions between Jews and Blacks is that both groups have been inextricably linked in European thought and practice around anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism. As Joe Ndeyamo Peters notes, for more than a century’s creators have sketched and outlined, and the Medusa-like division of the world into the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth and ancestors of Asia, Africa and Europe respectively underscore these lines. Simplicity and Hanita are outside the Christian world and play the Other to straight Europe. The Jews were the representatives of Asia in Europe but linked to Africans who were placed at the foot of the human ladder. Sander Gilman the Jewish scholar writes:

The Jews are black, according to nineteenth-century racial science, because they are not a pure race, because they are a race which has come from Africa. But the blackness of the African like the blackness of the Jew, was credited to the effect of certain diseases specifically syphilis, on the skin of the African. The blackness of the Jew was written on the skin. The "blackness" of the Jew was not only a mark of racial inferiority, but also an indicator of his or her diseased nature... African blacks, especially the Black Americans, became the epitome of the "ugly" race. And being ugly... was not merely a matter of aesthetics but was a clear sign of pathology, disease. Being black was anathema, it was institutional. Instead, the blackness of the African, like the blackness of the Jew, was believed to mark a probable change in the skin, the result of congenital syphilis, any emphasis.

Sander Gilman, The Jew's Body

Gibson marshals overwhelming evidence to show how European racial science linked both groups: Jews had "interacted with Africans during the period of the Adoration of the Magi": the Jew's Africanism was evident in "his unworldly, unworldly, and thus removing him from certain other races"... and "a vital biological current... the... whole physiognomy, when studied, as it often is, has an African look."

Hilbert argues in Mein Kumpf that it is "Jews who bring the Negroes into the Rhineland, always with the same secret thought and clear aim of raising the hated white race by... bastardization... Together with gypsies, homo-normals, Communitarians and Freemasons, Jews and Blacks would become the target of New Germany."

It is deeply significant... that each of these exclusions — of Jews and Blacks — has led to a holocaust on a world scale. The centrist of the African slave trade followed by colonial domination, and the recurrent pogroms against Jews culminating in the Shoah — in the first of which millions of Africans, and the second millions of Jews, lost their lives." (White on Black, Ian Nederwater, et al.)

But race is infinitely malleable and as Gilman writes, despite these links Jews appear to have metamorphosed into being white in the United States. Gilman writes that Jews could not turn their noses up at the "dust of invisibility, the desire to become 'white,' lies at the center of the Jew's flight from his or her own body." Gilman raises the issue of whether Jews are white as did Melanie Kaye Entwistle at a recent speech described Jews as the darkest of the whites and the finest of the Blacks suggesting a sort of alpaca on being part of the construction of Jewishness in North America. Gilman's words capture best the historical link between Blacks and Jews and the "American" society, where distance from Blackness continues to be a marker of progress. He sees Al Jolson's role as a Symko figure in the construction of a Jew's Blackface in the consumption of this contradiction:

Are Jews white? Or do they become white when they turn Black Jolson? No, is the answer, since in the last century, even though the Jews were identified as such, they were still a race, and the possibility of being Black was also a race, and the possibility of being Black was also a Jewish characteristic. Does Blackface make everyone put it on white?

Sander Gilman, The Jew's Body
What can be argued is that once the need for Africans had waned, they too were devalued as shown in the movement to deport them from the United States. Might there, therefore, not be a connection between what happened to Blacks and what would eventually happen to Jews when a state could bring about against them and other, all the technological means of death in its disposal? What of the prototype of concentration camps at Goraes and all along the west coast of Africa? Still these differences are very real, nuanced and important.

Jews and Blacks are presentinserted very differently in North American society, and while Blacks are neither entirely powerless, nor Jews all-powerful, the disparity in power between the two groups is very real. The crushing weight of white racism is manifest in all the institutions of society: one expects to further the lives of citizens; Blacks and Africans often see these organizations as enemies arrayed against them. Education has served them badly; health care—particularly in the United States—is often minimal; and between them the police and the justice system so effectively manage the claustrophobic windings of racist discourse, almost fifty percent of the jail population in the United States is comprised of Blacks. As Melanie Kay Kastrowitzes wrote at a speech in Toronto (CRE), April 17, 1980, the killing of the Jewish student in Crown Heights, after a Black child was run over and died, was an exception; the beating of Rodney King by the police was an act of normalcy. Jews today say “never again” and so they should. Blacks and African peoples say “again and again” as we see the broken bodies on television, Somalia, South Africa, as we hear of Black youth being shot, as we see the horror while life breaks on Black people.

Jews face different problems: their concern with and sensitivity to identification is understandable given what this has meant for them historically. But the ability to pass comes with its own peculiar set of burdens. Given the latest and so not latent anti-Semitism in Western societies, reminders of the Jewish holocaust serve the very necessary function of keeping that anti-Semitism at bay and in check.

While anti-Semitism against Jews presents itself most often as non-institutional, racism against Blacks is both institutional and non-institutional. Both these facets of racism are linked, however—a system that is less than committed to fighting the systemic racism within its own institutions will encourage the flowering of neo-Nazi groups. The fight against one must include the fight against the other.

One Jew sent to the camps was too much. One African captured and taken out of Africa is too much. One Native person killed as a result of European expansionism, One Japanese sent to the camps is too much. One is too many. And that is where we may be able to locate a politics with the possibility of communication in the fight against what Murui calls “systems of humiliation.”

Blocks—African Caribbeans whom I know best—have had a long history of resisting these systems. We understand what the fight against Hitler meant and many Black men joined up and fought over on behalf of the Allied powers to prevent the culmination of an obscene racist ideology that had festered everyone who wasn’t ‘white.’ As a matter of course, many of us have taken the Jewish experience in World War II into our lives. We have to. I believe some of the anger expressed over the last few months comes from the desire for some show of reciprocity. Maybe the horror of the Shoah has been so great that there is no room for the concerns of others. That too would be understandable, but there have been sufficient examples otherwise, to show that this is not necessarily the case.

The contradictions of life are such that one can be a member of an oppressed group and be powerful. Coming from Trinidad where Indian/African relations are often tense, it was a disturbing but useful experience to observe how Asians saw Asians as being powerful and oppressive. This image is, of course, at odds with the one we hold of ourselves, and there was truth on both sides. Those are some of the contradictions that arise, particularly where groups have been powerfully shaped by external events. The experience of oppression is, however, no guarantee that former victims will not themselves become oppressors. At my most cynical I have often argued the only thing oppression guarantees is further oppression when the former victims gain power. We cannot, therefore, afford to rest on our experiences, group or present, of oppression. We have to consciously work to make links, and be vigilant that we not use our oppression to justify oppressing or hurting others.

Our ethnicity and race do not insulate us against racism and anti-Semitism. Racism exists among Jews as surely as anti-Semitism exists among Blacks. Unfortunately, the pathologies of these social illnesses have affected us all; what we need to do is first be conscious of this real finger-pointing until we have examined the motives or logic in our own eyes and work to understand how systems of power work to pit us against each other.

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Trying To Pin Myself Down in History: Race, Sex, and Colonialism

Since the emergence of post-structuralism and the social movements of the late-1960s and 1970s, scholarship in the social sciences and the humanities has taken some steps in bridging the study of what Stuart Hall terms, "the insides of people, ...subjectivity and sexuality" with the study of "social relations, production and the 'hard edge' of productive systems" (Hall, 102-3). This has marked a shift from assuming the context of identity categories to examining the assumptions/truths which conflictingly constitute subjects as bounded to specific socio-historically grounded identities, from exploring the intersecting tropes of historical reality and identity formation to mapping the genealogy of instantiated identities. This article is primarily aimed at raising some questions about—as well as partially exploring—the tensions that exist between post-structuralist and post-colonial perspectives on "race," on the one hand, and the historical social sciences and the humanities, on the other. Ultimately, does "race" necessarily inform the ways in which these academic disciplines are imagined and practiced? Is the bridge mentioned and encouraged by Stuart Hall actually possible and is it necessarily racial? Is the very notion of such a "bridge" necessarily heteronormative (suggesting a "marriage" between the disciplines)? Would it be more interesting to perceive such efforts in terms of erasing frontiers or cross-dressing? What is at stake when all of these attempts and practices are only partially successful or even when they fail?

Subaltern Writing and the Claims of History

One of the principal limits of prevailing post-structuralist perspectives in general is that they tend to sideline the subjects, recipients, etc. of racial oppression, namely, the subaltern subjects of Western colonialism. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has pointed out in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" her critique of Michel Foucault et al., "the seemingly decolonial Western author/subject of poststructuralist discourse inevitably becomes recuperated precisely because 'he' is abstractly theorized within a Crusoe-like universe that originally only contains the West (and no "natives" and/or no "women")." On the contrary, most post-colonial literature and social inquiry arise within the context of anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles—precisely to address this Euro- or Euro-American-centric vision.
Because of the continuous battle against racial erasure that Black women and Black men share, some Black women still refuse to recognize that we are also oppressed as women, and that sexual hostility against Black women is practiced not only by the white racist society, but also within our Black communities as well. It is a disease striking at the heart of Black nationhood, and silence will not make it disappear.

She then adds:

Differences between ourselves as Black women are also being misunderstood and used to separate us from one another. As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and as a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to black out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful white,elliging or denying the other parts of self. (Lorde, 118-119)

Here Audre Lorde broadly gestures to racially gendered wage inequalities in the United States and instances of homophobia within the Black community, as well monitoring the brutality and exploitation that limit women-of-colour’s reproductive health and family planning efforts. Yet there does not appear to be any broader sense of the unevenly changing and contradictorily institutional materiality that contextualises these atrocities making them not only possible, but usually reasonable—even to most of their victims. I could have picked any other example from Audre Lorde’s work or from any of the other examples of this genre of criticism. This is usually the terrain of autobiography, where one clearly gets a sense of how personal experience (i.e., an individual history) authorises a particular viewpoint, thus empowering specific members of oppressed groups to tell their story and change their lives. Important is the reinvention of memory within these testimonial and empirical points of departure. Despite diverse perspectives and memoirs, the impression of assuming that experience is a transparent event through which the utilitarian understanding (i.e., literally “said”—literally—speaks for itself. These viewpoints are finally individualised and examined in the political, economic, and cultural apparatuses that have structured such experiences in different ways, making them meaningful to those individual subjects. In this sense—as well as in this sense—they would seem to assume that personal experience is not a social and historical product.

Do notions of “Black nationhood” or “Black women” ultimately make any sense, even within narratives of memory, without the not always named referent of “origins,” “inequality,” “descent,” etc.? Aren’t these referents always already evocative of the “natural” and of its principal signifiers (i.e., race and sex)—which, by the way, was one of the few themes Patricia Williams in the first epigraph above? How can subaltern social subjects “pin” (ourselves) down in history, place (ourselves) in the stream of time as significant within a web of processes and structures of this history? . . . Or, rather, am I making the mistake of assuming a far too constricting view of history, am I overlooking the pluralism ‘always’ present within ‘subaltern’ histories? Are these testimonial narratives offering another, different, yet just as pertinent, perspective on what history and the writing of history means?

What about the other, presumably more macro-structural, ways in which those personal experiences have been affected and even determined by the transformations and conflicts within these institutions and technologies of power—changes to a large extent due to the resistances of expressed groups? . . . Which brings us back, not only to the second epigraph by Carol “Smith-Rosenberg that opened this paper, but also to the questions raised in the work of the other two scholars that I have just cited for being Eurocentric (not to mention misogynist).

The journey from the historical social sciences to the humanities, as well as the intellectual transgression between the two, has raised numerous questions about what exactly is history and historical writing. Although many of those questions are still hotly debated, one of the threads in the debate is whether the historical social sciences means to change and change the lives of individuals and groups, the critical importance of thinking and doing historical research and even on the white scholar’s workplace. One of the most important of the new historical forms of inquiry has been on the work of “Third World” women authors? Are or should subaltern peoples and others Third World women literatures really be compelled to address such questions? Perhaps the answer lies in writings such as Audre Lorde’s. The Color Purple, As Called Audre Lorde, et al. for being historians or—Oh, my—sociologists.

This critique is aimed, rather, at subaltern and feminized perspectives that tend to simplify or to not even recognize the importance of addressing something else. I am referring to what Audre Lorde has called in her many works “the politics of ‘difference’” —which is also a historian—has called the need to re-examine “how historical narratives are negotiated” (Spivak, 26f). Shouldn’t this too be an important part of “dismantling the master’s house”? Are these different ways of doing the same thing? Rather, do they suggest that the distance between the camps both in terms of academic fields and in terms of intellectual exchange of knowledge and hegemony of voice and politics and that of the humanities is insuperable? If, in the end, we are all just telling stories, histories, discourses about the new ways (and events) by extremely varied socio-political effects, is it even fair to raise the following questions: How does the connection between past history, current historical practice, and subaltern memory/identity become masculinised and heterosexualised in each of these different subaltern communities? How do race and sex give meaning to the organisation of historical knowledge and subaltern/colonial memory and how do these meanings vary across time? Does not, hallucinatory, and the other not just be “too unvarnished, too spontaneously astral, too dangerously malleable in the hands of those who would rewrite not merely the past but [our] future as well?” If this is not an apocalyptic posture, what does it precisely mean then? Is, on the contrary, this indeed a historical posture, doesn’t it run the risk of reinforcing the meaningful conceptual territory, not only of masculinised and homophilic subaltern practices, but also of the still hegemonic Euro- and Euro-American-centric subject?

**The Colonial Question**

Hence, we are back to the problem of colonialism. To my mind, this is one of the most economic, and cultural apparatuses that have not only socially structured, but historically defined and produced subaltern experiences (both individual and collective). As called Audre Lorde (118), “The Color Purple” and “The Space Between Women”, Audre Lorde et al. for being historians or—or—my—sociologists.

This critique is aimed, rather, at subaltern and feminized perspectives that tend to simplify or to not even recognize the importance of addressing something else. I am referring to what Audre Lorde has called in her many works “the politics of ‘difference’” —which is also a historian—has called the need to re-examine “how historical narratives are negotiated” (Spivak, 26f). Shouldn’t this too be an important part of “dismantling the master’s house”? Are these different ways of doing the same thing? Rather, do they suggest that the distance between the camps both in terms of academic fields and in terms of intellectual exchange of knowledge and hegemony of voice and politics and that of the humanities is insuperable? If, in the end, we are all just telling stories, histories, discourses about the new ways (and events) by extremely varied socio-political effects, is it even fair to raise the following questions: How does the connection between past history, current historical practice, and subaltern memory/identity become masculinised and heterosexualised in each of these different subaltern communities? How do race and sex give meaning to the organisation of historical knowledge and subaltern/colonial memory and how do these meanings vary across time? Does not, hallucinatory, and the other not just be “too unvarnished, too spontaneously astral, too dangerously malleable in the hands of those who would rewrite not merely the past but [our] future as well?” If this is not an apocalyptic posture, what does it precisely mean then? Is, on the contrary, this indeed a historical posture, doesn’t it run the risk of reinforcing the meaningful conceptual territory, not only of masculinised and homophilic subaltern practices, but also of the still hegemonic Euro- and Euro-American-centric subject?
Fall Man, the Church, the Humanist, the Civilized-COLONIZER, and the Professional-ANTHROPOLOGIST all have a human face and are close male agnates descending from the same key ancestor (Minh-ha, 54).

The opposite of the colonized, i.e. the "colonizer," primarily refers to Europeans, their recognized descendants, and the social space thus constituted as dominant within national-cultural/social hierarchies. Such a process has constructed both these subordinate and hegemonic spaces and their corresponding populations as two poles within a colonial relationship, in other words, both the various "mother countries" (or metropolises) and their respective colonies—overseas and internal, direct and indirect (neo-colonies)—are colonial social spaces, both the racially/nationally-cultural hegemonic social subjects (the colonizers) and the subaltern subjects (the colonized) are colonial subjects.

In more immediate terms: the United States today and the university where I teach are colonial spaces where we are all colonial subjects, but some of you are colonizers while some of us are colonized. Japan is the only exception that confirms this originally Western taxonomical rule. This colonial reality produced the world that Jean Paul Sartre described in the 1950s as numbering "two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men [sic], and one thousand five hundred million natives" (Sartre, 7). Or, to place this in the more immediate context of the war's over Western hegemony, the lethal results of the Gulf War of 1991 were officially translated in the United States in terms of the "unfortunate deaths" of 100 heroic U.S. soldiers vs. over 200,000 unforeseeable casualties of "collateral damage" among Iraqis/natives.

To my mind, this is part of what is at stake in the ways that past history, current historical practice, and the prevailing forms of identity/memory are produced, particularly within the sciences social or, allegedly, natural, and the humanities—Marxism, feminism, queer theories, and post-stratificationism included. Both colonizer and colonized social subjects continue to resist an interface within these lived texts and textualized lives.

On the other hand, and as in the case of their late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century forerunners, most post-colonial writing persists in fashioning the subaltern subject of Western colonialism along strict masculinist and heteronormative lines. This too overlooks issues of historicity insofar as it reimagines the metaphysical otherness of always already sowed/pressed race/nationalities. In this manner, these perspectives also end up validating the still hegemonic epistemologies of ahistoricism. Any timelessness ultimately resonates with the metaphysics of Euro- and Euro-American-centric subjects, male, proper, and sexually correct.

The questions thus remain: How does race (as well as sex, nationality, and class) give meaning to the organization of historical knowledge, existing colonial memory, and the lived colonial present? And what are the implications of all this?

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This colonial reality produced the world that Jean Paul Sartre described in the 1950s as numbering "two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred million men [sic], and five hundred million natives" (Sartre, 7).

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Seeking Wholeness

IN AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN VOICE

BY ALTHEA PRINCE

The Roadmap of Elder Voice

Creating the road-map of Elder Voice lineage is a dynamic process. There are no 'just' prescriptions for doing so; for this roadmap is in the doing and the harvesting of the doing in cumulative.

Elder Voice Lineage, by its very name, rejects the foolishness of starting anew. It presents its inheritors with a task — that being, to receive their inheritance. Having received it, what will they do with it? To whom do they owe it? On whose behalf do they receive it and what are the accompanying responsibilities?

Put simply, the basis of 'voice' lineage means that the whole is the basis of the people's 'Story', their 'voice', their worldview. Their perspectivism on a people is dependent on the wholeness of 'The Story' being passed on and being received.

It is this very wholeness that James claims to look for and attempts to rescue from among the work of Caribbean artists. In the Jamaican reading of Caribbean society, that wholeness lends 'The Story' authenticity. James points out that the work of Caribbean writers will show the difference between wholeness (authenticity) and the fractured self. He insists that wholeness will come to be given more 'voice' in the literature from the area. He shows that the incorporation of British hegemony crested the danger of losing the real self as it became submerged in favour of what he calls "the code" of British culture.

It is important and ironic to note that even as he makes a case for wholeness and authenticity, James presents a fractured view of the very people he seeks to rescue; he excludes from his discussion the 'voice' of women and the 'voice' of Caribbean people of East Indian descent. Even though he does discuss the work of two East Indian novelists, he does so without examining whether or not the fact that these two writers are East Indian has anything to do with their capacity to find their authentic voice. The question of authenticity then requires further clarification for wholeness.

The exclusion of women from James's discussion on authenticity as serious as the exclusion of East Indians; for women are the overwhelming majority in Caribbean populations. In Trinidad, East Indians make up just under fifty per cent of the population and in Guyana, just over fifty percent of the population. It is interesting to note, too, that there were at least two women colonizers who had wide popular support at the time that James presented his discussion of The Mighty Sparrow. James can only be described as a product of his time. For his particular sociocultural moment the exclusion of women's voices. To be brief, it should be remembered that this operated in the Caribbean particular, within the political vision of the united forces of East Indian and African workers.

James shows, in an autobiographical work using cricket as a metaphor for the indoctrination of hegemony, that his upbringing was identical to that of an English boy's, with the added dimension of African Caribbean culture. Young James makes a choice to adapt the

British code, sublimating his African-Caribbeanness along the way. He writes retrospectively about his socialization and its juxtaposition with his authentic voice, stating that the things he did not notice and took for granted were... the avid British middle class, Puritans incarnate, of the middle of the nineteenth century. He points out that juxtaposed to this British Puritanism is the Caribbean creole culture which manifests behaviour that is quite the opposite of the imposed culture.

Wholeness clearly demands the inclusion of women writers in this discussion of authenticity. I will examine whether or not their work manifests the authenticity that James searches for so diligently in the work of male writers and male colonizers.

The coming West Indian novelist will show the clash between the native temperamental environment, and this doctrine from a sterner clime. [Beyond A Boundary]

Applying the Jamaican notion of authenticity to the work of the three Caribbean women writers opens up the discussion of ways to read James as a theorist for Caribbean epistemology:

Elder Man and Elder Woman in Trotman's Fiction

In my series of children's stories, I seek to release the voice of the Elder women of the area as a source of survival in a system of plantations slavery in Antigua. Enslaved in Mother Silliah, in Elder woman and Young Bigman. This Elder Voice Lineage is shown through the telling of The Story. Mother Silliah teaches ways of birthing, healing, praying, planting,

[Continued on next page]
growing, living, loving and learning. Creation and pro-
cration are her special areas of knowledge and she
owns great goals to impart to the people on the
estate and to the children in particular.
Mother Sillith's knowledge of 'The Story' enables her
to teach things otherwise not to be known for instance,
when the large-scala slaves revolt has been betrayed
and seeks to put her knowledge into the hands of the
leaders of the new movement.
Finally, see pronouncement on life to a young infor-
mator of 'The Story':
Is just so it is with lid like things...what you put in,
you get back out. It don't matter how bad it seem; if
you put in good things, you get
good things out of it. Look and see how dis leat
parlick, perlick. All you put in is little used in
in dirt clumpy ground on you get big base with
parlick head. Eh chile, you see how it go, you
see how de earth is plentiful?
Mother Sillith makes sure that people understand
the connection between the spirit world and the physical
world as a 'living' connection. She cautions:
You not supposs to wear other people things.
You not good for your spirit. Each person have
some of day bringings in day things chile. Only
use you own things, or if somebody you close
to offer you something, or unless somebody you care
'bout dead and love you something. Den day spirit
on 'poor link up between death on lid life' is all
tight, but only is somebody close to you, who
love you, you love you. Otherwise it can have bad
link up between death on lid life too.
In another story (How The Mosquito Got Its Sting),
Mother Sillith tells a story to two girls about the precious
value of freedom. She says, commenting on the mosqui-
to's desire for freedom, that "all living creature like
to be free, mosquito is no different". Mother Sillith is work-
ing to create authenticity for the African-Antiguans,
a part of whose reality includes empowerment. "All living
creature" includes the children and the entire African
population in Antigua at the time.
Whereas the Elder woman taught the children about
different powers, the Elder man, Papa Bigna, speaks
of perseverance, courage, discipline, metamorphosis and
physical survival. This adequately complements the
women's contributions.

Papa Bigna tells his portion of 'The Story', teaching
some of the physical tools of survival. He tells a tale to
a group of children on a sugar estate about a star who
decided to tumble down to the earth and do nothing but
live idly day after day. Soon, he loses his shine and when
the rainy season comes, is washed away along with
the debris on this footpath - to the sea.

Two buildings against gravity were given simply: "Stuff ya
guts today an' eat the stones of the wilderness tomor-
row.
But not all tellings of 'The Story' were done through
formal proverbs and maxims. Too, the main character,
experiences Mo's unfolding daily. It brings her
understanding of Mo's relationship with the physical
world.
M awoke every morning with a grin quickly
rooted by a brief loud chuckle (a sound made by
sucking her teeth). The cheers with which Mo
greeted the day expressed her essential attitude
before the whole experience - what you must beat-up
yourself for. In the base of the distilled and
unavoidable, the unexpected and irreversible... Mo
sucked her teeth and turned her book.
The 'Story' includes the excitement caused by rain.
Cleanliness and purity at the same time that it brings
grief. For these are leeks in the house and here
those clothes which had been hung out to dry just before
the rain came. If the rain fell heavily enough, there
would be joy at the slicing of a trip to observe how nature
had swelled the river. Hodge's account of this experience
shows Mo's role in the tellingsharing of 'The Story':
When the rain had stopped we dressed up
in Grumpy's old jackets and went out with Ma to
look at the river. This was like a ritual
following upon the rain - she had to go and
see the river. We walked behind her squelching
joyfully in the now paddies and mud...if the
river came down every week Mo's capture would
be quite as new.
Tale also exclaimed, and then fell back into her
trance. Then a little later on Tale's
shaking her head from side to side, "Well yes, well yes! We
stood around her in an unusually silent like
spatulata splatteries in our jumble-sate clothes, in
the bright air breathing out crisp and cool to dry,
and the rice puffing up with the dirt and
drenched bowing and satisfied and
redizing before the world started up again from
the beginning.
Clearly, Mo feels a communion with nature and she has
found a way of sharing that connection with the chil-
dren. She feels a connection with the spirit world.
Hodge continues throughout the novel to show the
telling of 'The Story' by the Elder woman as a "tale
that is complex and powerful. She moves the reader
through the upbuilding of Tree by three Elder women:
Auntie Beatrice, Tantia and Ma. Each Elder woman's
telling of 'The Story' is different, yet similar enough
that a synthesis is possible, presenting the African-
Trinidad Elder woman's voice of a particular period
of that island's social history: the late 1940's to 1960's.

JAMAIKA KINCAID ON HEGEMONY AND HER QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY

For Antiguan novelist Jamaica Kincaid, 'The Story' was
told to her in a way that a particular child (Kincaid),
its receiver. Finds oppressive only when bar
mother inexplicably withdraws her all-encompassing
love from the child. The complexity and the tensions
between the child and the teller of 'The Story', her moth-
er, are unbearable to the child. Before the break in
the bond of love between them, the child accepted the
proscriptions for life which she inherited. For example,
in Annie John the links between the spirit world and
the physical world are clearly defined as they are in my
children's stories and in Hodge's novel.

Tee expe-
rinces a certain
duality as she
moves between the
pretentiousness of the
middle class and the
vibrancy and realism of the
working class. 'The Story' stimulates both socio-economic
spaces. With Ma, 'The Story' is spiritually nurturing,
yet not limited to the private realm. She possess
important lessons of interrelationship, creation and
transformation, embodiment and survived. The
'Story' does not extend itself in a cultural vacuum; it is dynam-
ically reflects the environment in which its tellers live.
In the mother's telling of 'The Story', the incoherence of the spirit world can be combated by several methods. Kincard recounts one method which the child experienced with the mother and which utilized both herbal and psycho-spiritual means.

Eventually, the girl leaves the island, Antigua, but takes with her the kernel of 'The Story' told her by her mother. She assembles to build on it, constructing for herself a more dynamic version of it, grounded in the physical realities she experiences. Her construction extends her mother's telling of 'The Story': As she prepares to leave Antigua, she starts to make conscious choices about those things that she will keep and those she will leave behind. She holds some things in a treasured place in her heart, but others, she consciously discriminates will be discarded. So begins for this one girl, the editing, the re-sequencing, the continuance of 'The Story'.

I breathed quickly in some warm dark wares that my mother had prepared for me. I put on my underwear— all of these while and all of them smelling funny. Along with my earrings, my neck chain, and my bracelets, all made of gold from British Guiana, my underwear had been sent to my mother's wife, woman, and whatever she had done to my jewelry and underwear would help protect me from evil spirits and away kind of misfortune. The things I never wanted to see or hear or do again now made up at least three weeks' worth of grocery lists. I placed a mark against all women, jewelry and white underwear.

In a later work of Kincard's, Lucy, the main character seeks to construct a social reality in which she is comfortable. Kincard moves beyond a role of passivity to the next step which Lorde refers to as "...the language to express and chart this revolutionary demand, the implementation of that freedom...".

For Kincard, the step from receiving 'The Story' to charting the new language takes time. This is the process that is described by her as "the dream and vision...the skeleton architecture of our lives...the foundations for a future of change...a bridge across our fear of what has never been before—action in the now."

In Lucy, Kincard demonstrates the need for reconstructing the reality, the charting of the new road map. She takes the reader through her character's processing something as mundane and yet as important as a change in the weather, moving from Antigua to New England. 'The Story' received in Antigua had not included differences in weather. 'The Story' had fitted 'The Island' and had included a relationship with the physical environment as well as the metaphysical one.

Kincard describes the charting of the new road map as Lucy comes to terms, not just with her new physical location, but also with a whole difference in hegemony and hence, reality. This new reality appears to be more than just about weather. This new reality appears to be about knowing and not knowing, being and not being. As Kincard concludes, "I felt that I wanted to be back where I come from. I misunderstood what I knew where I stood there."

Lucy, anger at the dominant British hegemony washes over the main character when she recalls a poem about daffodils, a flower that is foreign to the Caribbean.

I remember on an old poem I had been made to memorize:

When I was ten years old and a pupil at Queen Victoria Girls' School, I had been made to memorize it, word for word, and had recited the whole poem to an audience full of parents, teachers, and my fellow pupils. After I was done, everybody stood up and applauded with an enthusiasm that surprised me, and later they told me how nicely I had pronounced every word, how I had placed just the right amount of special emphasis in places that was needed, and how proud the poet, now long dead, would have been to hear his words ringing out of my mouth. I was then at the height of my two-layered, that is, outside I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false, inside true. And so I made pleasant little noises that showed both modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by line, every word of that poem.

She tells her white American employer who has taken her to see a field of daffodils, "Martha, do you realize that at ten years of age I had to learn by heart a long poem about some flowers I would not see in real life until I was nineteen?" Her strong resentment, rather than her continued acceptance of this imposition, is the character's step towards reclaiming the soil.

RESCUING JAMES FROM INAUTHENTIC EXCLUSION OF WOMEN'S VOICES

Bell hooks, an African-American critic, suggests in 'Troubling Race Like James, that the process of telling 'The Story' is the method by which an authenticating experience can take place.

...symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of reunion and a sense of release.

Bell books tells of the telling of the individual, personal story, but makes the connection between the personal and the collective and the importance of telling
The [collective] story. She goes on to describe the act of telling The Story as "liberating."

In the work of the time Caribbean women writers we have examined here, we can what could be considered individual, personal stories. They tell "The Story" from varied perspectives - similar, yet not the same. Each writer has received "The Story" and has undertaken the task of passing it on, adding her interpretation. All three are alike in that they provide both the storytellers and the receivers of "The Story" with material for the construction of an authentic worldview.

C.L.R. James's description of what constitutes writing within an authentic framework seems adequately to fit the work of these three Caribbean women. Their use of language, the context, the undertaking itself, demonstrates that quality which James in The Birth of A Nation describes as ..."people...in charge of their own reality."

Perhaps he would have described them, as he did two male African-Caribbean writers, Michael Anthony and Earl Lovelace, as "...active and national in a sense that the previous generation is not."

James searched diligently among male Caribbean writers and apologists for what exists quite abundantly in the work of Caribbean women writers. It is useful to note here that the work of several other Caribbean women demonstrate the qualities which James suggests are a work "authentic." It would seem, then, that James, while suggesting that there is consciousness raising that needs to be done by Caribbean people, actually demonstrates, by his exclusion of Caribbean women writers, that he too needed to work at the same task. He did not identify the issue of women of whom attention was to be paid if wholeness is to be accomplished by all members of Caribbean society. His exclusion of Caribbean women writers demonstrates a problem for his discussion of authenticity and wholeness. It is difficult to conceive of whole men without the voices of such large segments of Caribbean society.

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Illustrations by Grace Channer.

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Politics & Pleasures in the Nineties

BY Darrell Moore

Black Popular Culture: A Project By Michele Wallace
Gina Dent, ed. (Seattle Bay Press 1992) 379 pp illustrations

Black Popular Culture marks a stirring watershed in the ways in which Black intellectuals produce, theorize, and interpret Black culture. The book, edited by Gina Dent, is based on presentations and panel discussions at the "Black Popular Culture" conferences held at The Studio Museum in Harlem and the Dia Center for the Arts in December 1991. The conferences, conceived and executed by Michele Wallace, brought together 28 distinguished Americans and England-based black intellectuals from the academy and art world into the same space for three incredible days. The alchemy created by the mixture of a supportive physical space and the exchanges generated by the presentations of Hazel Carby, Julianne Malveaux, Isaac Julien, Manning Marable, Marlon Riggs, Tricia Rose, and Judith Wilson (to name a few) resulted in exciting and stimulating discussions that ultimately moved the idea of "Black studies toward an historical articulation of the contradictory and complex manifestations of black presence in the diaspora, particularly in the United States."

Black Popular Culture is the collection of participants' presentations, most of which were written specifically for the conference. Also included are the discussions following each panel. Although the text cannot be expected to recapture the conference's energy, it is so insightful. The book is organized into five chapters that correspond to the panels at the conference: "Popular Culture: Theory and Criticism," "Gender, Sexuality, and Black Images In Popular Culture," "The Urban Context," "The Production of Black Popular Culture," and "Do The Right Thing: Post-nationalism and Essentialism." This enables Dent to maintain the coherence of the conference and to include more discussion of the individual essays that are engaging and sharp. As a whole, it stimulates critical reflection and a recognition of the need to evaluate the assumptions and terms of the study and discussion of black popular culture.

In her 1990 essay "Modernism, Postmodernism and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture," Wallace argued that:

how one is seen (as black) and, therefore, what one sees (in a white world) is already always crucial to one's existence as an Afro-American. The very markings that reveal you to the rest of the world, your dark skin and your kinky/curlf hair, are visual. However, not being seen by those who don't want to see you because they are racist, what Ralph Ellison calls "invisibility," often leads racists to the interpretation that you are unable to see.

Wallace pointed out something that had up to that moment eluded me: that there exists an internal and external collusion to draw parallels between Afro-American music and everything else cultural produced by black Americans. To bring Wallace's point of contention home for me, an ad for a retrospective of painter Archibald Motley's oeuvre at the Chicago Historical Society came across the airwaves of Chicago's public radio station the same afternoon I received the essay. The ad described Motley's work explicitly and exclusively in terms of jazz. I was struck by the ad's manifest contempt for black cultural production, regardless of what the object or experience might be, is presently defined and coded into black musical production; or if not then ontological and aesthetic processes. Everything denoting black genius, an oecumnic and consequently problematic notion, is filtered through music and/or sport; or, in another word, the popular. The "popular" is the reproduction of the familiar under necessarily commodified circumstances. According to Stuart Hall, the popular is simultaneously rooted in folk experience and available for commodification. Consequently, it seems necessary that a white-run museum under pressure to become more "multicultural" in its presentation and audience, in a city that has a white-run museum would appeal to us at the level of the (commodified) familiar. On the one hand, we have the familiar and, on the other, the commodification of the familiar. Hall, in his brilliant opening presentation "What is the 'black' in black Popular Culture?" argued that:

However defaced, incorporated, and inauthentic are the forms in which black people and black communities and culture appear and are represented in popular culture, we continue to see, in the figures and the repertoires on which popular culture draws, the experiences that stand behind them. In its expressivity, its musicality, its irony, its rich, deep, and varied attention to speech, in its infections toward the vernacular and the local, in its rich production of counternarratives, and above all, in its metaphorical use of the musical vocabulary, black popular culture has enabled the insiders, the mixed and contradictory modex even of some mainstream people of color, to participate in a discourse that is different — other forms of life, other traditions of representation.

Cornel West's sobering analysis of "Silentium in Black America" makes a connection between the breakdown of black community traditions that support black individuals in racist America, and the commodification of those traditions. He argues:

The proper starting point for the crucial debate about the prospects for Black America is the illusion that increasingly pervades black communities that the kind of language we understand here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational reasons to reject and as nonstandard or authority: it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) loneliness. This usually results in a mounting detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others.

Corporate market institutions have contributed greatly to the above by producing the illusion that their products provide pleasure and status to consumers. Thus, one of the questions is how to talk meaningfully about these seemingly contradictory analyses together. One way is to recognize that ideology, or the assumed reality, in an unstable interaction between the social, political, and economic structures and specific historical conditions that creates meaning for practices. Thus, underlying the ways in which the Chicago Historical Society went about advertising that Motley retrospective represents the structures of exclusion and operates in a political and funding climate that advocates equality based on the shifting meaning of multiculturalism.

The struggle to create meaning and practices conducive to the emancipation of black people is serious business to the contributors to this volume. It is a conscious struggle waged primarily among self-conscious intellectuals, who, according to bell hooks, endeavor "to see things that other folks don't and to call them out." Calling out or "thinking critically about a cultural product" enhances rather than reduces the pleasure we derive from a text. According to hooks:

[Experiencing black cultural production from the standpoint of] progressive critiques does, in fact, change the nature of our pleasure. It compels the black consumer to make a break with modes of passive consumption. It intervenes in the kind of consciousness that might have us assume anything done in the name of blackness is righteous and should be celebrated. As well, it breaks with that other critical tradition that merely raises the single question of negative and positive representation. Ironically, it is this power to intervene and disrupt that renders critics essential to cultural production and yet leads us to be regarded with fear and suspicion (by blacks).

Similarly, progressive critique of "aestheticism" (to use Hall's concept elaborated earlier in "Rediscovery of Ideology") takes on a position that can be won, but cannot possibly capture popular culture for itself against the opposition. The "enhancement of pleasure" leads to the possibility of joy which is ultimately possible because of joy is an essential concept that, according to West, forces one to look out and make connections so that there's the possibility of collective engagement. To the contrary, pleasure is commodified and individuated, the consequences of production, distribution, and consumption in capitalist societies. How do we create and experience joy in our capitalist society? And what does this have to do with "the problematic of the visual" (text, image, photography, and video) in black culture?

For Wallace, the conference represented a space where her "view against music," to the extent that it defines the parameters of intellectual discourse in black communities, could be waged, hopefully in solidarity, with other black intellectuals struggling toward emancipation. Such a struggle necessarily utilizes the resources historically developed within black communities. Greg Tate, on "Miles Davis and the problem of black male genius," argues that the seductiveness of artists like Davis isn't from awe at their skill. It's the integrity of their vision, the way they unleash in others that make them truly arresting and irresistible, that makes them the ones to decolonize our audience's dream spaces. Or to unlock their nightmares.

The struggle will, in what seems to me to be a central way, utilize those resources to break free of the traditions that have colonized the range of black production, consumption, and critique. The discussion of the ways in which we understand our relation to the visible clearly has a role to play in the emancipatory process. In her "Afterword" Wallace reiterates that the purpose of the conference was to...
nurture critical practice among African-American intellectuals... to move the center of African-American discourse beyond literary criticism into other politically significant practices such as popular culture. In the process of planning this conference, I anticipated that black analysts might be critical of my analysis, and artists would be neglected (even though the conference would be given by two fine art institutions). And so, I named my talk 'Why Are There No Great Black Artists?' to address this lack and to specifically challenge the wis
dom of excluding regimes of visu-
ality from discussions of black popular culture. What will ultimately 'cut' the visual, as it were, are two intimately connected notions that are re-presented in myriad ways by the contributors to this volume. First, most of the contributors question the foundations of mainstream culture rather than posit a universal notion of "black-
ness" that has in the past been equated with a notion of "whiteness." Such questions emerge from the recognition that to define black authenticity is ultimately rooted in the possibility that black consciousness signifies black people, in the United States and the African diaspora, into something other than the argument against universal or essentialized blackness stems from an examination of the material condi-
tions of existence within black communi-
ties. By taking into account the actual per-
formance of black peoples within oppres-
sive structures they arrive at questions and conclusions that challenge heretofore assumed knowledge. The resulting norms of excellence for black cultural products arise from a discussion of authenticity that does not reflect a socio-historical experience. Thus, Jacqueline Bobo and hooks argue that the in-
tuitive world of the black prescriptive critic is imperative not because it includes dialogue with other prescriptive critics, producers, and audiences. The audience must be afforded space for its voice and interpretation of the text. This space must meaningfully interact with black critics. This will necessarily strengthen any analysis of blackness and culture and the idea of the popular. To take one example, Manthia Diawara's "Art Kicks" calls into ques-
tion some discourses of blackness and Afrocentricity. According to Diawara, some Afrocentrists have turned his book into a "living experience of black people in New York, Detroit, Lagos, and Dakar." They have substituted one grand narrative for another in the recollection of Egypt without saying anything of note about homeless individuals and families in Philadelphia. The result, argues Diawara, is a lack of blackness — an ini-
tiation of the discourse of liberation and "a refuge from the material realities of being black" in London, Dakar, and Lagos. The point then is simple: the reality of black and queer in the mind's eye of the black church and of the conservative ideology of the black family. In fact, much of the work in this vol-
ume speaks to the narrowness of many con-
structions of the "black" in black poe-
cy, books, jazz, poetry, painting, film, theater, music, or philosophical methodology to bear on (a subject(s) or phenomena(s)). The con-
tinuum actors appear to be more interested and moved to examine from a variety of posi-
tions the economic, political, sociological, and philosophical processes that enable subjects to live as they do or for specific events to occur. Thus, the impact of Black Popular Culture lies in the contribution to an adequate explanation of the material bases and the implications of the world views that we possess. It builds on the foundation of previous works that has uncovered and enlightened the exclu-
sion of black peoples from the inventions, discourses, and emancipatory effects of mainstream society. The impediments is to talk about these events beyond their actual specificity is that they highlight long-
standing struggles of importance to the black community and the connection of black suffering or racism. Ada Griffin argues that "many aspects of mainstream culture...which virtually everyone assumes original in some myriological, perfect Europe... are actually products of black struggle, such as universal literacy. Public education, for example, did not exist as a system in this country until it was designed and fought for by former slaves." Similarly, the very idea of conceptualizing being black as a film made in the Supreme Court, "judge and a woman law professor, and the mayor of a major city as a coherent possibility is the product of historical struggle." To add the historical fiction, black and free from sexual exploitation and harassment. Granted both Hill and Thomas will understand the need for both black and brown activism for the black Progressive-Activist Award as both claimed victim status.

Thomas: I have never asked to be nominated. Mr. Chairman, I am a victim of the pro-
cess. Hill: It would have been more comfortable for me, the "victim", but I took no initiative to inform any one. I could not keep silent. However, neither Hill nor Thomas could have been principals in what sparked a fierce debate about sexual harassment, the make up of the Senate, and the requisites of black solidarity and coalition building if they were not benefici-
caries of a long history of struggle against public and visual nature of the televised hearings holds the problematic to con-
sciousness. To be sure, the black feminist struggle against sexual harassment and exploitation predicates this particular tele-
vised event. This struggle of difference was not because, to quote Griffin, the impor-
tance of film and video lies in its position as "the primary apparatus for the commu-
nication of information, ideas, and history in this country," and in no doubt throughout the diaspora. The hearings visualized crises — crises among blacks over the pivotal questions of identity: "Who are we?" and "How does one know what the right thing to do is?" — performance anxiety in the face of the acknowledged white other and (however defined) differences. These acknowledgement are essential if blacks are to claim legitimacy in spaces that at present appear alien, spaces such as the United States Senate, the Supreme Court, University of Oklahoma Law School, and the Diaspora Center. Thomas Harris argues in "About Face" that black films are superficial, deeply personal, and tony spaces must be publi-
ically addressed to be truly able to claim a space like the Diaspora Center as our own. It is necessary to privilege contradictions, the ambivalence, the fluidity, and the com-
plexity of black diasporic cultures in the "postmodern world." Kimshawa Cornwell, the Museum's director, felt compelled to close off a dis-
cussion between Houston Baker, whose presentation began "I am not gay, but I have made friends with our gay friends," and co-assistant Martin Riggs and audience members Wellington Love and Robert Reid-Pharr. The discussion centered around the question why Baker chose to begin his presentation by informing us of who he is, not was, interrupted by Cornwell: I feel compelled to say that it would be unfortunate for the many people in here — whom I am sure do not know who Baker is, do not know very much about black popular culture, or black culture period, who are kri-
ters... I think it would be unfortu-
nate for African American people to use a forum like this to one-
up each other, because the thing is that something incredibly brilli-
ant people from across the spec-
trum have been speaking about today and yesterday... Cornwell's suggestion that we not get "sidetracked from the issues" reflects a knowledge and experience with the his-
torical and contemporary burdens of race and racial identity. She also illus-
strates that the problem of the visual artists not skipping away the discussion but raise a new issue, but a sentence that it leads to a loss of control of interpretation and autonomy of the self. Swing more directly influences one's own perception and thinking from the visual is its connection to the social construction of knowledge and its role in the creation and discussion of racism. The harm of racism is significant because it attacks the black self. It is moti-
vated by the creation of socio-economic and socio-cultural expectations, features, and hair textures — all, almost always, readily recognized by simply looking. From a simple look or glance, racism enables us to look at a person and to pose a whole host of socially construct-
ed metaphysical conclusions. See John. Jeffries' "Taboo" for a superb description of the historical social
construction of man.) The history of race and Rights, Patricia Williams names racism spirit murder — an injury to an individual’s and collectivity’s self, spirit, and humanity through the absence of privacy, contract, and law upon the objects of property, contract and law. And if we take Hall seriously when he argued in a 1961 essay, the critical thing about identity is that it is partly the relationship between you and the Other. There is no identity, without the dialogic relationship to the Other. The Other is not outsider, but also inside the Self, the identity. So identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent identity. It is also the relationship of the other to oneself.

Black people cannot help but “see” the socially constructed pathology that much of the white other “sees,” especially if it takes the form of a crisis that brings up other crises and is captured on television. The visual is problematic in ways that we face-to-face with our disowned selves in ways that are not available to other media. Many of the essays in this volume indirectly argued that the answer to the problematic of the visual is to recognize that black respect for the Enlightenment values of truth, justice, and the good, contrary to cinema, is a matter of argument and as a liberal through the popular. The spirit-releasing qualities within black life have been manifested in the dominant institutions of the black-controlled church and the tradition of the music. The problematic of the visual can render a broad understanding of blackness and blackness and blackness can incorporate those aspects of black life that have fostered joy over time.

The most interesting and interconnected and related essays. First, Griffin, executive director of Third World Newreel, argues for black control of the production of the moving image. For her, black control amounts to nothing less than those productions directed by black artists on subjects and terms that reflect the black experience and that direct productions in which the artistic vision is controlled by a person of African descent. Thus, according to Griffin, blacks need to own their production and distribution of the moving image. This includes developing a new narrative to nurture and support the work of producers who are struggling to bring their visions to an audience, including film and video artists Caprice Billings, Zanebuddin Ahsan, Cheryl Dunye, Ethel Kyadaga, Daresia Kyu, and Michele Parkerson, to name a few.

Arthur Jafa, cinematographer of Julie Dash’s Daughters of the Dust, argued that due to material conditions black culture is the staff of that which we carry around in our heads: ornamental prose, music, and dance. The question for Jafa is how to make black films that have the power to allow the emancipatory desires of people of African descent to manifest themselves. Black cinema should attempt to capture distinctively black movements and (first) qualities. It should be able to capture how Aretha sings a song. It should be raising questions about black visual interaction.

And third, as I have previously stated, is the creation of a public sphere in which critics can work and provide criticism that is not necessarily interpreted as a threat or a denial of pleasure and which takes the pleasure and concerns of the audience seriously. As Dent observes in her introduction, the conference and consequently the volume endeavors to “understand the complexities of video imaging, the dynamics of representation, and reception theories.

Black Popular Culture is so wide-ranging and thought provoking that most of my criticisms can be found in the essays themselves. One of the most striking was the lack of the black producers of popular culture at the conference. The conference and volume could have been benefited from the thoughts of the artists discussed. Lee, Monie Love, Singleton, and Salt-n-Pepa come to mind. This is particularly the case given the kind of public spaces that many of the contributors work to create and, more importantly, that the clear impact of the work of Hollywood- produced films and rap have a wide ranging impact on how black people see themselves and on, for example, white suburban youth who want to grow up to be black teenagers.

Interestingly enough, none of the papers explicitly addressed black religion. Given its mythic presence in the history of black struggle, the political power that can be mobilized through it in the present, and its slow response to recognize gays and lesbians in their midst as well as the AIDS epidemic, essays on the Church would have been a welcome contribution.

Lastly, the volume lacks a sustained theme. The individual essays address a variety of concerns and I take this to be at least part of its significance. It’s modernist, modernist, modernist challenge to “exclusivity of insight.” In the case of Black Popular Culture, postmodernism is a process of inquiry and desire that renews doubts to exclusivity or purity in the name of something serious and meaningful that recognizes multiplicity and historical specificity.

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See Justice Done
BY DILIP YOG Anderson


Clarence Thomas was nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court because he was an ideological conservative, because he was black, and perhaps because he was barely qualified to do the job — a Republican take on the value of affirmative action. There were other potential black candidates who had better credentials and could be considered right-leaning. But it was Thomas — a political hack with little to speak of in the way of judicial experience or scholarship — who was catapulted out of relative obscurity to "inherit" the seat vacated by Justice Thurgood Marshall, the only African-American and last liberal on the high court. This did not stop his Republican sponsors from presenting Thomas as someone who had experienced racial injustice but had overcome its legacy by will and perseverance, understanding, as they did, that being the "boat man for the job" should and could have nothing to do with race — as witness this, his crowning career achievement.

For 30 years U.S. conservatives have attacked the legitimacy of affirmative programs by arguing that the high court's interpretation of civil rights constitutional validity has been too broad; therefore interfering with subjects properly left to the legislatures. But the Republicans' claim to be taking politics out of judicial review — the act of political interference — is a complete lie. The real decision was all the more absurd because it was against a background of public concern over affirmative action, and in a period of civil rights activism and educational activism which would increase the pressure to protect the civil rights of all Americans against infringement by the Courts.

The many issues involved in the nomination of Clarence Thomas are not lost on any of the writers in this collection brought together by noted fiction writer Tom Morrison. When Anita Hill, a black, conservative activist herself, was brought on the scene — with allegations about Thomas' workplace behavior, which, if true, would amount to sexual harassment and to conduct unbecoming of a future Associate Justice — her testimony and the subsequent reaction threw into stark relief the problems confronting the articulation of social justice, struggle and anticipated remedy. The essays in the book reflect strongly the concern about the articulation: the crisis of black political culture, the "theorably burdensome" position of black working-class, the importance of "willing" the separation between the fiercely independent Black political culture of the "boiling race" by the cry of racism, and the public function of "fervency." The authors take it as an indication of the more interesting potential of this volume to address these issues.

Historian and political scientist Manning Marable, in his place, takes stock of the current state of black political culture, whose middle-class members mostly generated a representation which came of age after the key victories of the civil rights struggle. Once upon a time, African-Americans could claim their interests to be
relatively homogeneous, identified in a narrative of injustice requiring clear social and legal action to end, and gained at the expense of the women who, like the "welfare queen," are thought to be dependent. Law teacher Kristen Crenshaw suggests that to make visible the black women exist doubly marginalized not only by race and gender but also in the "empty spaces between" (p. 401) an occupation whose very existence resists telling. The position of black women, then, is also a point of view for thinking about the double relationship of real interests to symbolic representation without resorting too quickly to a given narrative of experience, and for designing that unassimilable experience of interactions. Crenshaw's essay focuses on how feminist and anti-racist discourses implicate these empty spaces through the tropes of rape and lynching, respectively.

At the hearings, the Senators were scandalized that the level behavior, described by Hill of Thomas, could occur — Thomas would have to be a sex fiend, etc. But this treatment of the behavior as outrageous gave way to a discussion, mostly outside the hearings, of the endemically social factor that supports sexual harassment. That, in the most melodramatic moment of the hearings, Thomas finally played out the race card, depicting himself as the victim of a bi-tech lynching. (As Kendall Thomas notes, no black man has ever been lynched on the word of a white or black woman.) The most refreshing essay in the book belongs to Claudia Brodsky Lacour, a literary critic who is not on a personal quest to demonstrate just how the use of the word "racism" in this context effectively obscures the difference between "legal" harassment and put it end to the threat to the nominalism.

Abigail Hill's testimony, somnolent, was a melancholy detailed account of events, matter of factly delivered; not once did she resort to general accusations of harassment. Thomas, in his stentorian style, and, on the other hand, were of a different order and Lacour fixes on the perfunctorial function of Thomas' "bi-tech" rant: it presented itself as a description of the situation but performed something else altogether, capitalizing on the tenor which the word "racism" remarks. The charge of "racism" could drive a wedge between the literality of Hill's narrative and its significance precisely to the extent that the charge had no immediate referent and could only refer to unknown forces operating behind the presentation. As Lacour points out...

Lacour argues that such a usage of "racism" — invoked, acknowledged and disavowed, in the discursive vacuity and obscure reality by removing any specific target to which the word "racism" could be attached and examined. Moreover, Thomas' non-response to Hill, served also to mystify and bury the misogyny enacted in such a reply only while squelching the concern raised by the participants in her testimony. The speech act of racism, which does something to displaces specific by saying something empty, is in its form also a model for the operation of sexual harassment. Lacour calls the performance of an act of deploying words as unanswerable actions that thereby compound power differences, differentials which in turn make possible the appearance of such a normal and smooth everyday occurrence. Lacour doesn't stop there. Remembering to a different end of this speech act, she continues to demonstrate how social differences are constructed by the performance of the act. Lacour argues that...
Don't Worry (About Racism), Be Happy (on The Cosby Show).

By Michael Hoehnemann

The Cosby Show allows white people the luxury of being both liberal and intolerant. They reject bigotry based upon skin color, yet they are wary of most working-class black people. Color difference is okay, cultural difference is not.

The reemergence of 'Cultural Studies,' this time on the North American continent, has offered a conjuncture for both a reflection on, and a re-occupation of, the project of cultural critique that has traditionally articulated in the British context. At last, the newly emergent U.S. cultural studies has moved towards the consciousness of the vertical axis of British Cultural Studies' class-consciousness. Perhaps this levelling comes with the territory, occurring, as Andrew Ross points out, in a culture where "popular culture has been socially and institutionally central," and where "the popular sovereign goes forth in a more modest, respectable garb, and drinks a less expensive, carbonated version of the water of life." (1989:7-14). More significantly, however, the movement of cultural studies in the U.S. towards a more horizontal, if unevenly developed, axis analysis signals the (inaudible) articulation of critical thinking and social movements of the past thirty years.

The result of this shift for cultural studies is to move "in a totalistic focus away from the contest between dominant and popular cultures, conceived as unilinear blocs, to its turn its attention to the axis between central and marginal cultures, conceived as pluralities." (Ross, 1990:28).

This shift allows, or requires, that social change be seen as an uneven, often contradictory, process. At worst, however, cultural studies in the U.S. is emerging as a type of "modern response" to the media of the overload, by a sometimes impenetrable dose of high theory. As the 'Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future' conference at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, April 4-5, 1990, Stuart Hall stated that though he did not want to close or police the field, he was nonetheless concerned about "the overwhelming textualization" of theories of power, politics, race/class/gender, etc. Says Hall, "Culture will always work through its textualities. Textuality is never enough." (284). What is vital for Hall is that theoretical and political questions are kept in permanent tension, that one will always "irritate, bother, and disturb the other." And this ultimately requires not confusing "the politics of intellectual work (by substituting intellectual work for politics)" (286).

One of the original strengths of British Cultural Studies was the recognition of the limits of abstract study, and the consequent valorization of "other" voices than those of the traditional intelligentsia. The method of choosing the universe of the street from the everyday streets of ethnography, which offered both a galaxy of popular 'common sense' knowledge and an index of the intelligentsia's, in its discussion of the Cosby Show's new political agendas. The ethnographic work of scholars such as Paul Willis and Angela McRobbie offered a 'fieldwork' equivalent to popular consciousness, often with very surprising results. Of course, ethnography does not provide some preordained route to the truth, nor does it permit the ethnographer to pop the bubble of 'false consciousness.' However, while textual readings of everyday life project an economic analytical efficacy, created in the scholarly solitude of the 'junior' intellectual, ethnography provides a vital, though not guaranteed, 'way in' to how Gramsci's "mass of people" are "led to think coherently...about the real present world." (025). And if ethnography does not necessarily provide all of the answers, it does seem to raise the right questions.

Had Jhally and Justin Lewis confined themselves to a textual study of The Cosby Show, they would have written a very different book. Enlightened Racism is the product of an ambitious research project which looks at how white and black audiences react differently to The Cosby Show, and how, within these two groups, socio-economic status affects audience reaction. At the outset of their research, the authors were generally well-disposed to The Cosby Show, and even to the extent that Bill Cosby's series, we were inclined to think, had pushed popular culture over so gently in a positive direction. However, the conclusions which they later drew from their ethnographic research regarding "the show's effects on racism" were "pronouncedly pessimistic." (Jhally and Lewis: 284). What we discovered, in essence, was that the social and cultural context that gives the show its meaning turned it into a "vehicle of damaging, delusions." For white audiences, "The Cosby Show strikes a deal. It asks for an attitude that welcomes a black family onto TV screens in which it is thought that in return it provides white viewers pleasure without culpability, with a picture of a comfortable, ordered world in which white people land the nation as a whole are absolved of any responsibility for the position of black people."

This reductive justification for the deprecration of material success of white people validates the myth of meritocracy and implies that the condition of black people in the U.S. is just and desirable. For black audiences, on the other hand, "The Cosby Show" serves "attunement from the class-based causes of racial inequality...and in terms of their own experiences as black people who are trying to comprehend the inequalities of racism." While black audiences were "happy to finally have 'successful' role models, the equation of social success with material wealth "detracts satisfaction with the system and converts it, almost miraculously, into acceptance of its values." Thus, argue Jhally and Lewis, "In a culture where white people now refuse to acknowledge the existence of unequal opportunities, the political consequences of this acceptance are, for black people, disastrous.

Life in the 1980s, outside of the gentle confines of the text at hand, has been quite woeful for African Americans. In fact, the reality of life for young black people living in U.S. inner cities becomes increasingly bleak. Out of sight and out of mind, the central core of many American cities is "characterized by extreme poverty, high crime, high rates of drug addiction, permanent joblessness and welfare dependency, and dramatic increases in AIDS and (incarcerated) black family acceptable — and respected — among the majority of TV viewers (who are white)." Thus, The Cosby Show "has been pivotal in redescribing the way African Americans are depicted on television in the 1990s."

According to Jhally and Lewis, "Including black people in TV land, the home of 'the American dream can come true' where 'everyone with an ounce of merit is making it' is "to foster damaging delusions." For white audiences, "The Cosby Show strikes a deal. It asks for an attitude that welcomes a black family onto TV screens in which it is thought that in return it provides white viewers pleasure without culpability, with a picture of a comfortable, ordered world in which white people land the nation (as a whole) are absolved of any responsibility for the position of black people."

Hall's study of 'That's Right,' it tries to locate popular 'common sense' conceptions, regardless of the (poetically passive) mimetic outcome. This is both a strength and weakness of the book, as Jhally and Lewis slight the potential for resistance on the part of black audiences who identify with the Huxtables. The possibility that the imaginary identification with the Huxtables could be a socially useful sublimation of black people's real conditions of existence is pooh-poohed by Jhally and Lewis, who suggest that the blurring of fantasy and reality by black viewers is "a wish that everyday life were like television."

Nonetheless, Enlightened Racism deserves to be widely read. Much to the authors' credit — and unlike this very review — the book eschews theoretical Jargon wherever possible, in order to be accessible to as broad an audience as possible. Given this factor alone, Enlightened Racism is an exemplary work for an intellectual community which spends more time textualizing the 'popular,' than communicating to anyone more 'unwashed' than a graduate student.

Michael Hoehnemann is a member of the Border/Lines Collective.

Works cited


Andrew Ross. "Balloons, bullets or bats: can communities do the right thing?" Stone, 31:1, Spring 1986.

On The Contradictions of Civil Rights Legislation and Other Such Racial Matters.

BY David Seely


...the law works for the Man most of the time, and only works for us in the short run as a way of working for him in the long run. (25)

From Cornell West's Race Matters and Patricia Williams' The Alchemy of Race and Rights, to Michael Eric Dyson's Reflecting Black: African American Cultural Criticism, there have recently emerged a slew of provocative commentaries on the paradoxic nature of American race relations. Derrick Bell's Faces At The Bottom of The Well is an excellent addition to this debate.

Written in a style reminiscent of his first book Are We Not Saved, Bell combines autobiography anecdotes, with fictional narratives, and traditional prose, attempting to re-think and "rescue the worth of the racial assumptions on which without careful thought, we have presumed too much and relied on too long." (34) Geneva Crenshaw, the black lawyer heroine of Bell's Are We Not Saved, as well as a host of other imagined characters, figure prominently in a series of fictional narratives; all designed to expose the extent to which racism is, and always will be, a permanent undergirding of American society. To his credit, Bell does not simply address questions of race from a purely jurisdictional posture, but uses allegories to provide poignant and gripping examples of the egregious effects of racism on the personal lives of its victims. For example in a chapter entitled: "The Race Preference Licensing Act" Bell, in a dialogue with Geneva Crenshaw, explores the bankruptcy of present civil rights strategies, and suggests that what is needed is a more realistic approach to alleviating some of the more insidious effects of racist practices.

Let us suppose that the American government enacted a Racial Preference Licensing Act, based on a principle of racial realism which "seeks to balance the discrimination of our black citizens to fair treatment and the no less important rights of some whites to an unfettered choice of customers, employees, and contractors." (47)

Under the new act, all employers, proprietors of public facilities, and owners and managers of dwelling places, could, in an application to the federal government obtain a license authorizing the holders, their managers, agents and employees to exclude or separate persons on the basis of color. The license itself was expensive. (48)

Establishments which adapt these racial preference practices must display their licenses in a public place and operate their establishments in accordance with the racial preferences stated in their license. License fees and commissions paid by license holders would be placed in an "equality fund" used to underwrite businesses, to offer no-interest loans to black home owners and to provide scholarships for black students seeking college and vocational education.

The point here is, at present, despite efforts to legalize the use of racism (i.e., segregationist policies) in housing and public facilities, in landmark decisions such as Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, (1954) the racial preferences mandate an enduring feature of American society. This law would therefore acknowledge this de facto racial preference, with the additional proviso that one must pay to practice this racial preference. As Crenshaw states:

...the law enforcement model for civil rights breaks down when a great number of whites are willing to compromise the principle of convenience, habit or distaste, fear or simple preference to violate the law .... (59)

"Racial nepotism" rather than "racial animus" is a major motivation for much of the discrimination blacks experience. It is therefore time that both blacks and whites, acknowledge the ineffectiveness of the present law and order civil rights policies, and address themselves to contradictions of present race policy. Bell's point here is incisive. In the wake of the failure of traditional civil rights legislation we must begin to rethink the ways we construct our legislation: we must become more realistic. The battle against racism must continue, despite the inevitable reconfiguration of traditional civil liberties legislation into more complex ways of maintaining the status quo.

The purported gains of the civil rights era are mere chimera, civil rights legislation is an updated version of the glass teakets and combs they used in Africa a few centuries ago to trick some tribes into selling off their brothers and sisters captured from neighboring tribes. (19) In fact, civil rights legislation has done little to prevent and may have contributed to the contemporary statistics regarding black crime, broken families, devastated neighborhoods, alcohol and drug abuse, out-of-wedlock births, illiteracy, unemployment, and welfare dependency. (80).

Americans, Bell contends, echoing the position of the late great black Harvard historian Nathan Huggins, "view history as linear and evolutionary and tend to see slavery and racism as an aberration or pathological condition." Yet despite the ending of slavery and the adoption of anti-racist legislation, racism remains a dominant force in American life. The American dogmas of automatic progress has always failed those who were marginalized and poor, of which blacks are an exceedingly poor part. Even noble and well intended attempts on the part of black people, to find a black homeland are not an answer. Those attempts often fall short as they deny and dis-acknowledge the way all notions of blackness and black people are deeply imbricated in any notion of America; and the key role Black Americans have played in building America. Black Americans have always actively shown America what content to give to its talk of freedom and democracy. "We (Black Americans) are Americans.

We are not aliens. We are a component part of the nation. We have no disposition to renounce our nationality", said Frederick Douglass.

But this is not a reason to despair. According to Bell, we must no longer look for inspiration in the "sacrosanct, but utterly defunct, glory of ideals that for centuries have proven unattainable and poisonous. We must look to the lives of our foremothers and forefathers who despite ineradicable odds, produced music, poetry and art, insisting on their humanity despite a social consensus that they were a "brutish sort of people". We must learn from the "unremitting struggles" of our forebears; we must in a willful attitude of engagement and commitment, face squarely the unbearable landscape and the climate of that survival, "beating the odds while firmly believing in and knowing the odds are stacked against you". We must realize that despite the fact that our actions may not be transcendental and may in fact help the system more than hinder it—we must persevere. It is not a question of choosing between strategies of civil liberties and recognition that racism is a permanent fixture of American society, but of pursuing both at the same time, in the unalterable awareness that we must never give up.

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Border/Lines 29/30
Reclaiming Our History and Sovereignty

BY A. Rodney Bobiwash

Haumani-Kay Trask, From A Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii
Common Courage Press, Maine, 1993

In From A Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii Haumani-Kay Trask has done a remarkable job of expressing not only the frustrations and experiences of Native Hawaiians under colonialism but also those of indigenous people around the world. This collection of essays, speeches, and assorted submissions is based on the one geopolitical reality shared by all indigenous people—that the denial of ownership of our lands makes possible, and indeed inevitable, the denial of our history, culture, and right to be. The reality that in the modern world our existence as indigenous peoples is not just an inconvenience to developers but is in itself an act of subversion, is the central theme of all true resistance literature produced by indigenous peoples. Trask's work is in every sense a true and a powerful piece of indigenous resistance literature.

At first this work can at times seem repetitive, a weakness inherent in the sources the material is drawn from. For instance, the history of Hawaii is repeated throughout the various pieces. However, a more thorough reading of the work uncovers not repetition, but rather a growing conviction that a reader must take this history as meaningfully as the writer intended it to be. The repetition would be irritable coming from a casual observer, but coming from Haumani-Kay Trask it underscores a fierce and uncompromising conviction that history is important, understanding is essential, support is necessary, and all of these must be on Hawaiian terms. The unwavering stance that historians must first know the language of the people they study is given without apology, and somewhat ironically embodies the very problem of the inevitability of racism within colonial institutions, including universities. The essential problem of relationships within the colonial context is that the colonized can never escape hegemony, while the colonizer can never confront it.

There are several important arguments presented in this work, although analysis is limited to problems generated by the colonial experience rather than suggestions for solutions. Given the context of the work, however, this is understandable. The work confronts non-Native people with the need to do something themselves about their attitudes and privilege, taking responsibility for their history. Certainly this is an important book for non-Native people interested in supporting Native struggles to read. The experiences the author outlines in the section on building coalitions have warnings for Native people involved in struggle and for their non-Native allies. The particular emphasis on the experience of working with white liberals is important—that they will support you with words only but will not go to the barricades with you because even their support is a result of hegemony. Trask's experience in academia is one which is all too familiar to Native people who work in Canadian universities. Racism is an institutional fact and the institution has no stake in reading it. Even those universities supposedly progressive, remain incorrigible in the face of criticism from dispossessed peoples. Disciplines like History remain the reserve of white males, and indigenous knowledge continues to be at worst denigrated and at best appropriated and exploited. Indigenous knowledge is forced of necessity into an academic ghetto, in Native Studies departments, which perpetuates its marginality. At the same time non-Native academics continue to govern the grants industry, in which the exploitation of Native peoples constitutes yet another colonial abuse.

Those who have read Na'oa Chomsky will find familiar ground in the author's discussion of the new World Order and the role of the Pacific Islands in the U.S. military complex. There is little new in this, but like all good activist writing it is immediate and painfully local.

Finally, for those interested in cultural appropriation the article "Loving Hula Hands" (also featured in BorderLines no. 23) is important on a number of levels. It draws upon the metaphor of the body as a woman's body and the reality in indigenous societies of woman as bearer of culture. In the metaphor of prostitution, Trask makes a compelling case against corporate tourism, seeing in it the horrific specter of the rape of the land, the rape of the culture, and the literal rape of Hawaiian women.

The appendices included in the book are useful and of particular interest to aboriginal peoples. The United Nations Draft Declaration on The Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the U.N. Conventions on Genocide will be useful to human rights practitioners and educational to those who have yet to read them. Further to this, the inclusion of these documents again underscores the scope of this work—local, but with definite international implications and usefulness. This is activist writing at its best.

A. Rodney Bobiwash works in the areas of Native issues, human rights, and anti-racism. He currently lives in Ottawa.
Selected Further Reading: On Race and Representation


