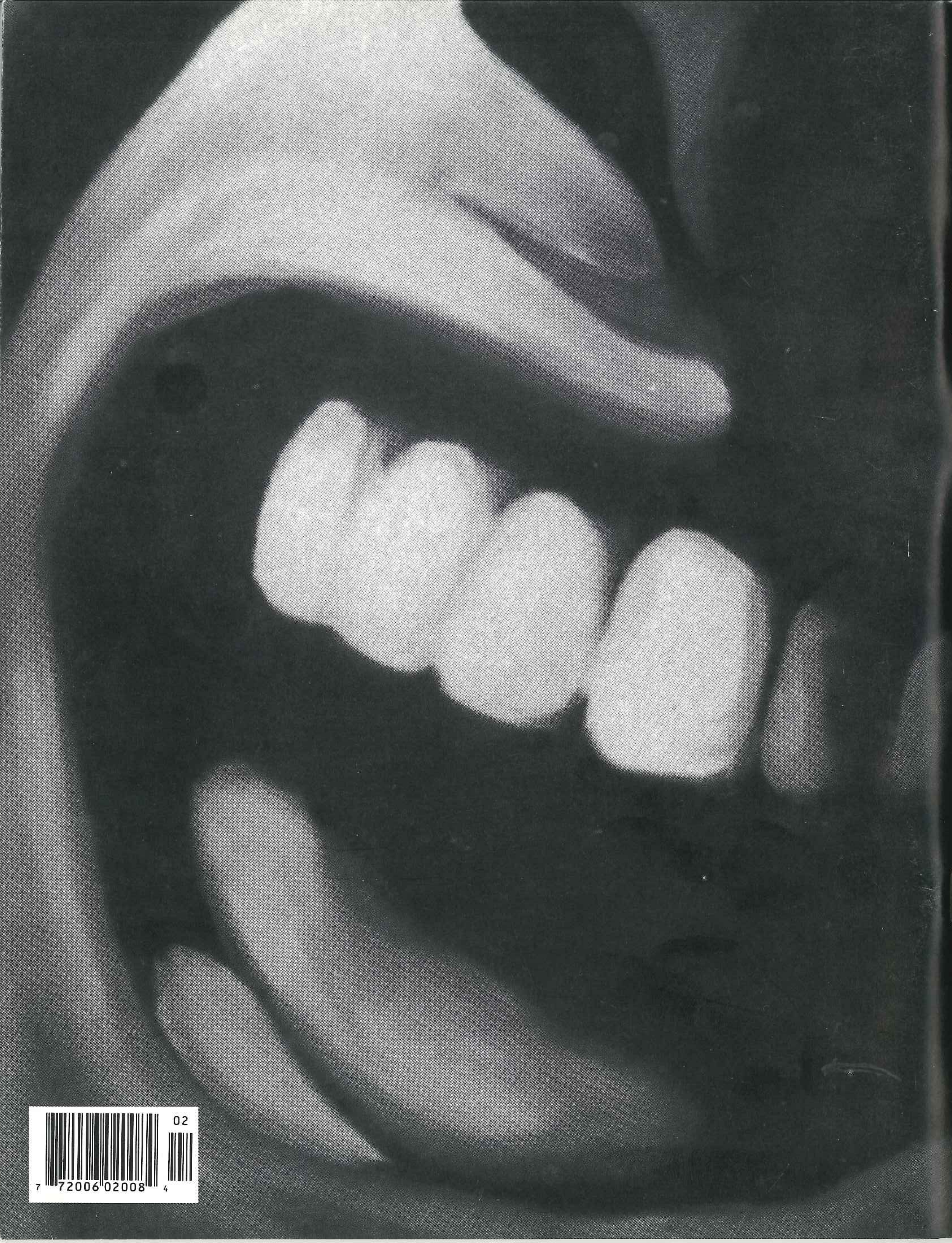

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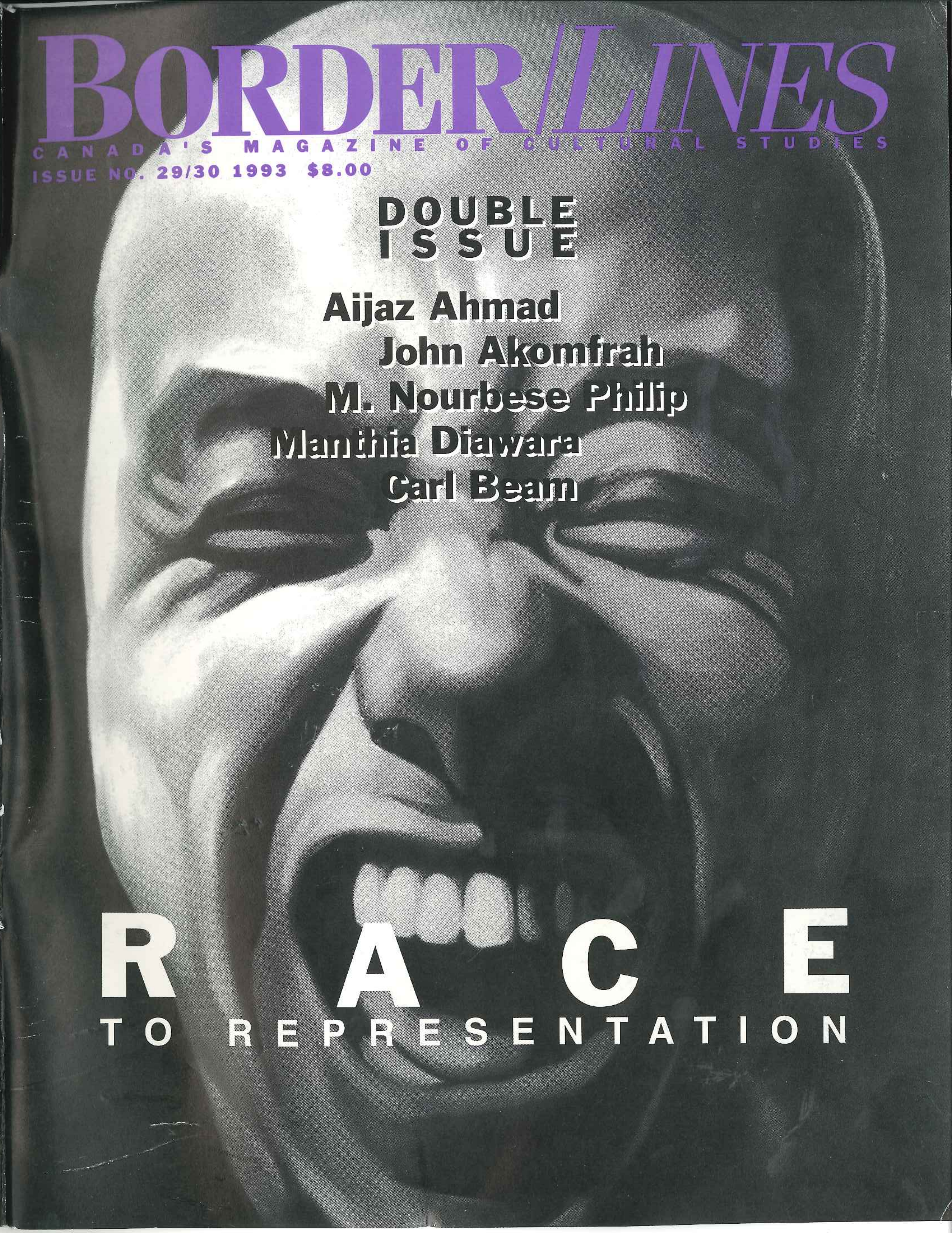

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ISSUE NO. 29/30 1993 $8.00

DOUBLE ISSUE

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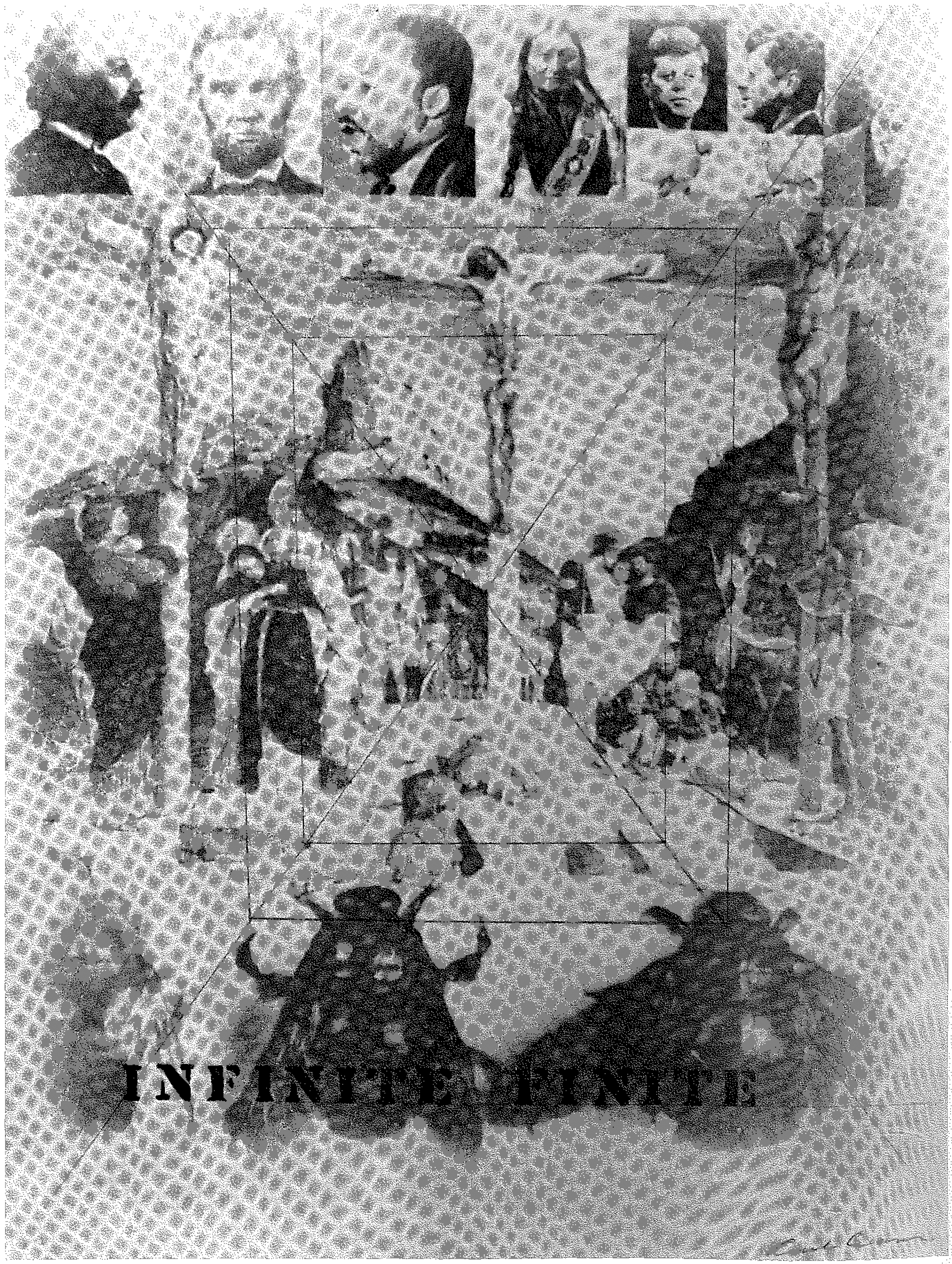
John Akomfrah
M. Nourbese Philip
Manthia Diawara
Carl Beam

RACE
TO REPRESENTATION



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 overuse, 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 effects of racism in the cultural arena —panels, workshops, equity reports, etc. — there has not been enough of an extended, 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 got over to the other side. Although a long time comin', race is taken up as always already here.

Kass Banning, Gail Faurshou, Rinaldo Walcott

Many thanks to Roger Babcock, Stan Fogel,
Natalie Greenbaum, Sophie Thomas and
Handel Kashope Wright

BORDER/*LINES*

CANADA'S MAGAZINE OF CULTURAL STUDIES ISSUE NO. 29/30 1993

Editorial

Kass Banning, Gail Faurschou, Rinaldo Walcott

Articles:

Reece Auguiste **4.** Artists From the Hell Screen: Reports, Observations and Other Disturbing Things
Gladys M. Jiménez-Muñoz **9.** The Elusive Signs of African-Ness: Latinas in The United States
M. Nourbese Philip **16.** That Was Then, This Is Now
Manthia Diawara **21.** Black Studies, Cultural Studies Performative Acts
Xiaoping Li **40.** New Chinese Art In Exile
Alan O'Connor **46.** What Is Transnational Cultural Studies
M. Nourbese Philip **64.** Black/Jewish Relations
Kelvin A. Santiago-Valles **72.** Trying To Pin Myself Down In History: Race, Sex, and Colonialism
Althea Prince **78.** Seeking Wholeness In African-Caribbean Voice

Interviews:

Kass Banning **28.** Feeding Off The Dead: Necrophilia and the Black Imaginary (an interview with John Akomfrah)
Sourayan Mookerjea, Rinaldo Walcott, Kathryn White **55.** Interview with Aijaz Ahmad

Poetry:

Ramabai Espinet **39.** Left Over Black and For Patricia Deanna
Jennifer Kawaja **51.** foreign matter
Himani Bannerji **54.** A Letter for Iraq

Reviews:

Darrell Moore **88.** On *Black Popular Culture*
Dilip Yogasundram **93.** On *Race-ing Justice*
Michael Hoechsmann **96.** On *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show*
David Sealy **98.** On *The Permanence of Racism In America*
Rodney Bobiwash **100.** On *Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii*
102. Selected Reading on Race and Representation

Visuals:

Roger Babcock: **16.**
Licia Bronzin: **9. - 15.**
Carlos Capelan: **4.**
Grace Channer: **78. - 82, 85.**
Felix De Rooy: **6.**
Chohreh Feyzdyou: **7.**
Lu Jia: **40., 42.**
Brenda Joy Lem: **70.**
Qin Ming: **43.**
Shani Mootoo: **45.**
Shelly Niro: **3, 52, 53.**
Jin-Me Yoon: **27.**
Dean Goodwin: **31.**
Li Yiam Qian: **43.**

Cover:
Geng Jianyi,
The Second State

Inside Covers:
Carl Beam
Front: *Wonderful Koan*
Back: *The Ant-Eater*

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"The Rebel" from the exhibition Mohawks And Beehives
by Shelly Niro

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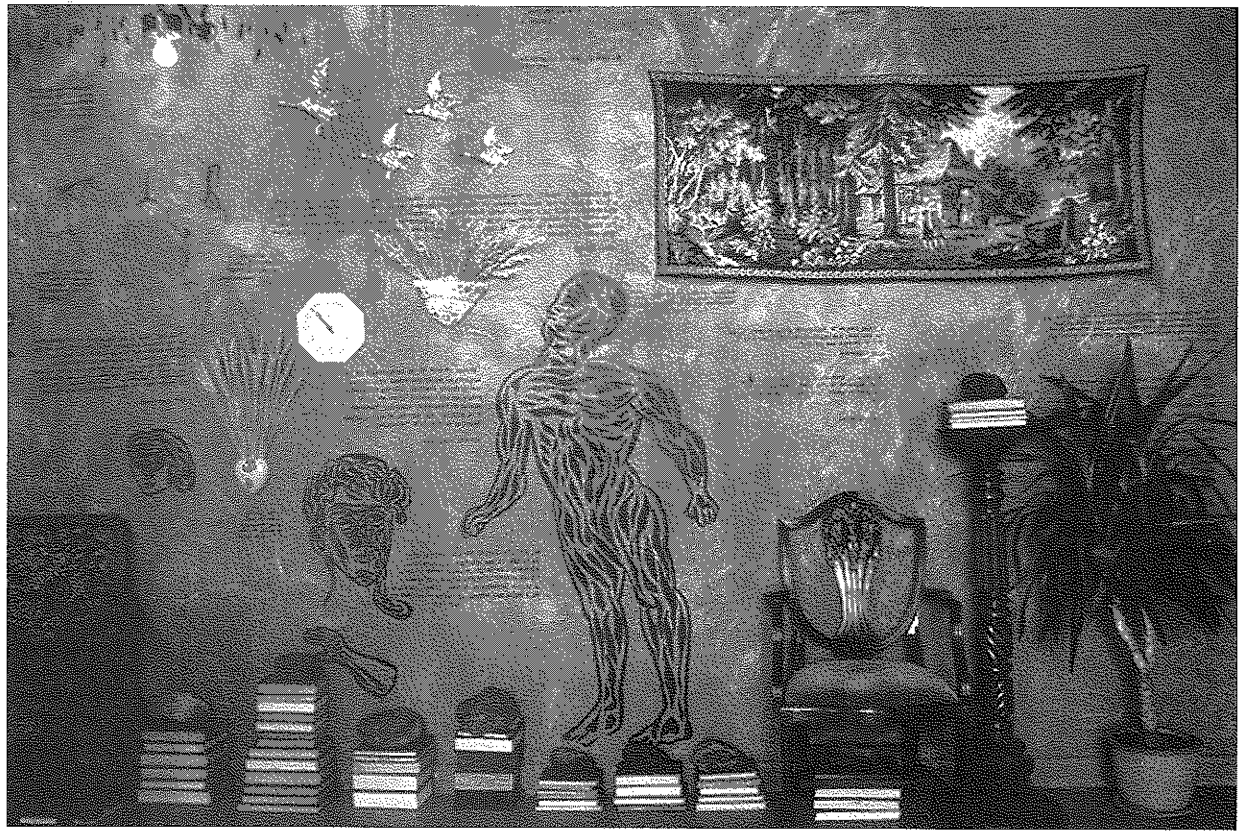


Carlos Capelan, from "Chamber of Identies"

Artists From the Hell Screen: Reports, Observations and Other Disturbing Things

by Reece Augiste

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, be they historical, contemporary or futuristic, go beyond notions of national sovereignty and geo-political boundaries. Maps help define national identities, epic narratives of self, cultural differences and racial belonging, out of which flow immigration quotas and controls. Maps are often 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." Silence descended, a few walked away, others plucked 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 deracination came the idea of the "new Europe," a Europe estimated to have 50 million people of non-European origin by the year 2000. Approximately 16 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, make it difficult, and maybe even suicidal, to believe that this new identity is based on some shared notion of "cultural unity." I can see only further fragmentation, an increase in racial intolerance, more deaths and suffering.

This practice of racial intolerance, bigotry and xenophobia recently made the headlines in certain sections of the British press. Not another arson attack or some human flotsam being barred from entry, 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 Fusion - 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 their current places of residence. Coming from the Caribbean, Iran, Africa, Latin America, China, Turkey and Lebanon, they found not only that their presence was not welcome, but that their art was not considered art.

With the *Birmingham Post*'s headline: "Tories Blast Exhibition of Foreign Art Out of Sight" and the *Daily Mirror*'s headline: "1M 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.

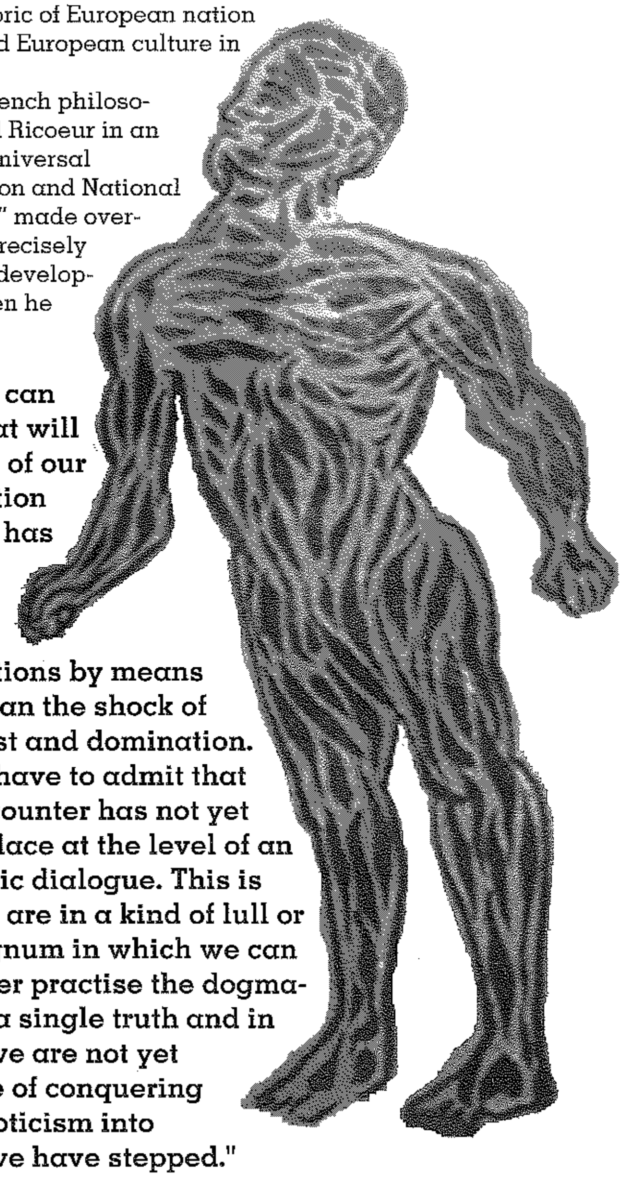
Attacked by Birmingham's conservative councillor Alan Blumenthal, the exhibition was dubbed "...a diabolical liberty that we have to pay for this so-called art through our phone bills. If this is all BT can come up with they should spend the 1 million dollars on reducing the customers' bills." This outburst forced the Ikon Gallery director Elizabeth McGregor to comment: "I don't know why Tory politicians are complaining about BT's excess profits 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."

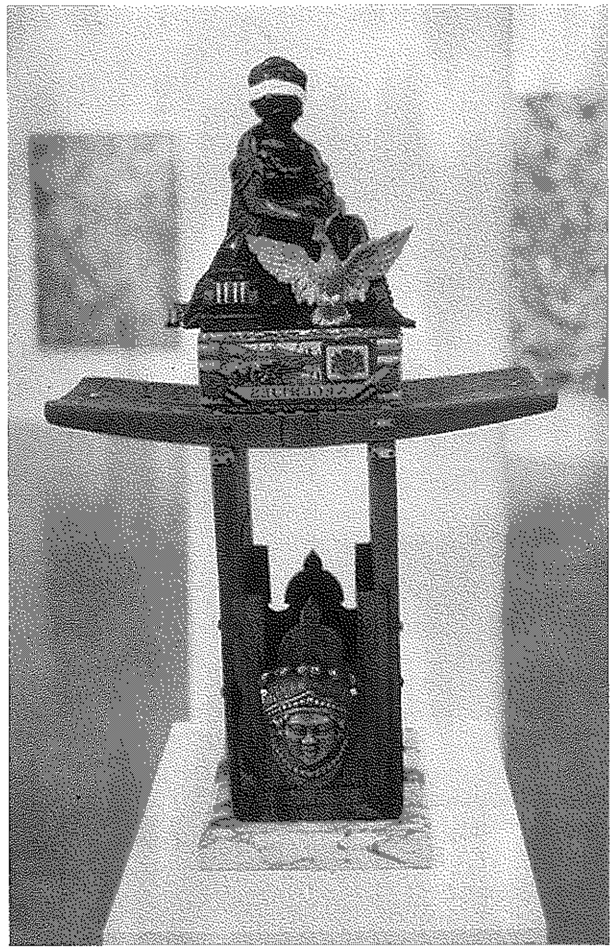
Even more alarming is the fact that this backlash occurred in an English city that attempted to promote itself as a European centre of arts and culture last year. As the *Birmingham Post*'s art editor Terry Grimley said, "Conservative councillors...struck a blow against Birmingham's international aspirations by condemning an exhibition they had not even seen."

It is this parochialness, 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 Fusion* exhibition was one of the best curated exhibitions so far this year. For their inventiveness, courage and capacity to provoke debate, 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 as the custodian of a singular truth. It is about what will happen to white ethnicity when the dramatic influx of new identities, framed as they are by a set of distinctive non-European attributes, are woven into the social fabric of European nation 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."**





Felix de Rooy,
"Ave Regina Europa/White on Black"

It is this skepticism that is fuelling the upturn in nationalist paranoia and the 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 plurality and racial difference co-exist. The post-modernist crusade 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 limitations of post-modernism itself. It is incapable of addressing race or ethnicity as a concrete, lived experience. How does a post-modernist address the chaos in Bosnia: war as a post-modern condition?

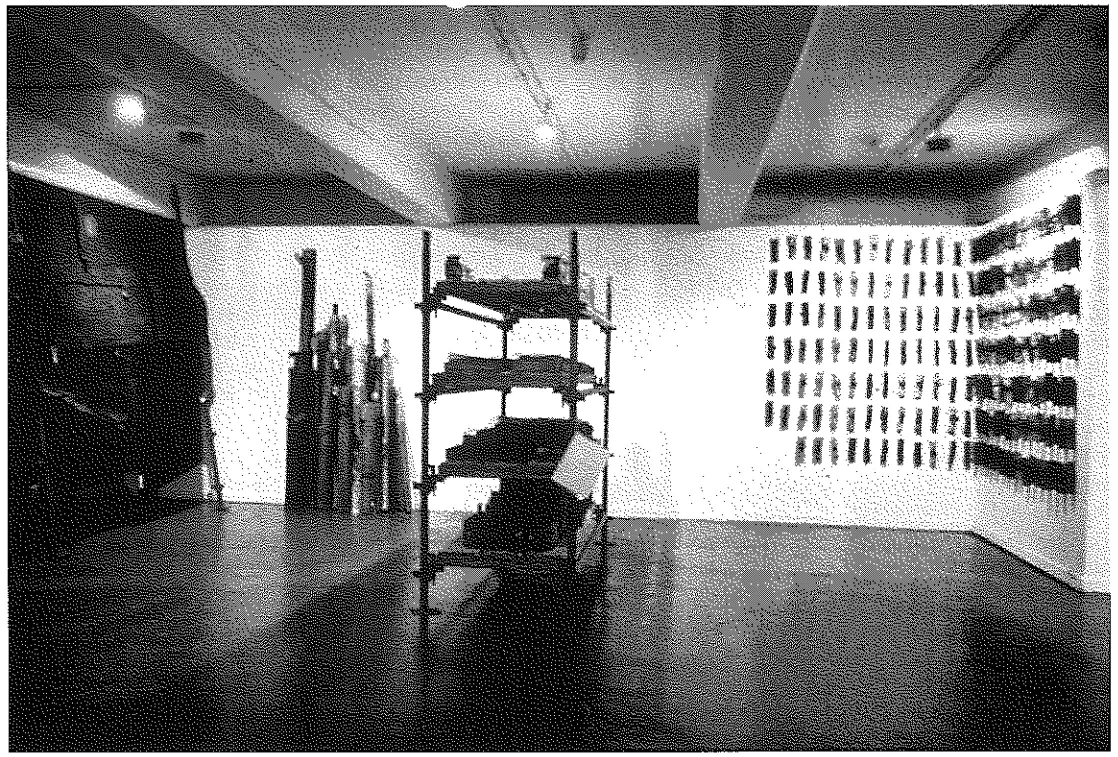
This is the sociocultural context in which the exhibition has to be read and the controversies generated understood. Twentieth century history is one of migration and cultural displacement, whether or not the movement is the result of political upheavals or the search for inspiration in another country. From Gauguin to Modigliani, from Dali to the African-American artist David Hammons (currently 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 Benni Efrat. Currently based in Antwerp, Efrat's installation entitled *Ararat Express* was originally conceived as videotapes and TV monitors placed on horseback and carried to a certain location. An installation continuously mobile thus reinforces the themes of cultural flows, disorientation and the lived experiences of exile.

Within the physical confines of the art gallery Efrat has had to introduce a degree of stasis, 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 flicking across the screens: images of migration and cultural dispersal, of boat people drowning in the process of finding their own niche of Nirvana, political refugees, hoards of animals and an endless stream of people on the move. Suggestive and moving, Efrat's work is about the world outside the art gallery and that world's impact on the artistic imagination. *Ararat Express* is about the ecological/demographic changes of the latter part of our century and a hint of the future cataclysms in the next. The contrast between hi-tech electronic displays and horses quietly grazing on dry grass in the background brings into focus Efrat's central motif of motion and the logic of migration/dispersal.

Like Efrat, the Brazilian Claudio Goulart is concerned with exploring in a spectacular way the experiences of travel and dislocation. Goulart's installation consists of 100 gold-lacquered suitcases juxtaposed with images of conquest and exploitive brutality. These images of torture and human depravity echo the frightening canvases of Hieronymus Bosch. Goulart's selection of images deliberately goes against the dominant representations that European artists produced of America. Commenting on this strategy, Goulard 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."**



Chohreh Feyzdjou,
"Products of Chohreh Feyzdjou"

Vitor Meirelles's nineteenth century painting *The First Mass in Brazil* falls into this genre. In deconstructing this nineteenth century fantasia, Goulart presents a series of black and white prints which depict cultural confrontation defined by the parameters of subjugation and cruelty. These are images of mass executions, dismemberment and beheadings. Entitled *It's Worth Its Weight*, Goulart's installation is an ironic statement on contemporary Europe and its cultural genesis.

The cataclysm hinted at in *Ararat Express* we find at the centre of Felix de Rooy's installation as it traces the origins of European conflict through a series of collages. Framed by de Rooy's themes of racial fusion, religions and languages, his work explores, through allegory, the seemingly disparate cultural and historical elements that best define Europe's symbiotic relationship with its illegitimate children. His use of brilliant light to underpin the religious intensity of his subject matter serves to highlight the chaotic and cataclysmic forces stalking the European landscape. In fact, these collages present emblems of European trade, conquest, cultural imperialism and remnants of its classical age. In a piece entitled *Resurrection* de Rooy addresses the themes of life and death through a complex juxtaposition of shattered Greek statues and skeletal remains reminiscent of an Egyptian mummy, set against a luminous landscape of mysterious images. Pagan and subliminal, these images seem to carry a message of redemption through resurrection, while at the same time recasting Europe's sense of itself as a higher civilization in the context of cultural domination.

This theme of cultural strangulation is most clearly expressed in another piece entitled *Cry Surinam*. Using a paraffin heater (an object common to immigrant homes in the 1950s, 60s and 70s) upon which is placed three artifacts, a book with Surinam written on it, a large human bone, a black head with its mouth open as if in a scream, and an effigy of a Christian saint stuck half way down its throat, de Rooy expresses the historical terms of Europe's relationship with its former subjects who now populate its landscapes.

However, the significance of de Rooy's installation is that it is directly related to his *Negrophilia* collection, an archive of over 5000 items/objects of "Western popular culture containing representations of black people from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day." Encyclopaedic in scope, the collection is a meticulous documentation of every racist stereotype ever propagated by the West. In fact, the collection exists as a 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 bruisings and spiritual fragmentation.

Paradoxically, the *Negrophilia* collection is also an inversion of the discourses of racial domination and dislocation in that it also reveals the psychic orientations of post-Enlightenment man in his relation to and representation of the racial other. He occupies a space of racial phantasmorgia, a figure of cultural perversion invested with a delirious 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 demands is the work of Iranian artist Chohreh Feyzdjou (based in Paris), *The Bazaars of Babel*. The grammar of her exhibits are so culturally specific that even the phrase "Product of Chohreh Feyzdjou" reinforces a hermetic discourse of the representation of the other. Its beauty is that it demands a recasting of modernity by placing at its centre the desires of the artist and her work. The immediate, most striking thing about Feyzdjou's "products" is the colour black. Every single object is stained with charcoal or a black dye and arranged in precise, systematic order. This fixing of objects (scrolls, jars, crates, bags and boxes of different sizes) functions as an ironic statement on the West's obsessions with fixity as it struggles to exclude and maintain its grasp on modernity as essentially a white aesthetic edifice.

Feyzdjou makes overtures to new possibilities of an "imaginative 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 Feyzdjou's chamber of objects is a call for recognition that goes far beyond the West's classical notion of "cultural influences," as is quite often the case when art historians refer to the primitivist forms and aesthetic textures in Picasso. Her yearning is for a recognition of syncretism and Europe's acceptance of acculturation 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 syntaxes of migration and exile, cross-cultural translations become the new paradigm through which identities can be expressed.

It is in the Uruguayan artist Carlos Capelan's work that we encounter a subliminal expression of the self as Europe begins to fragment under the tensions 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 otherness 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.

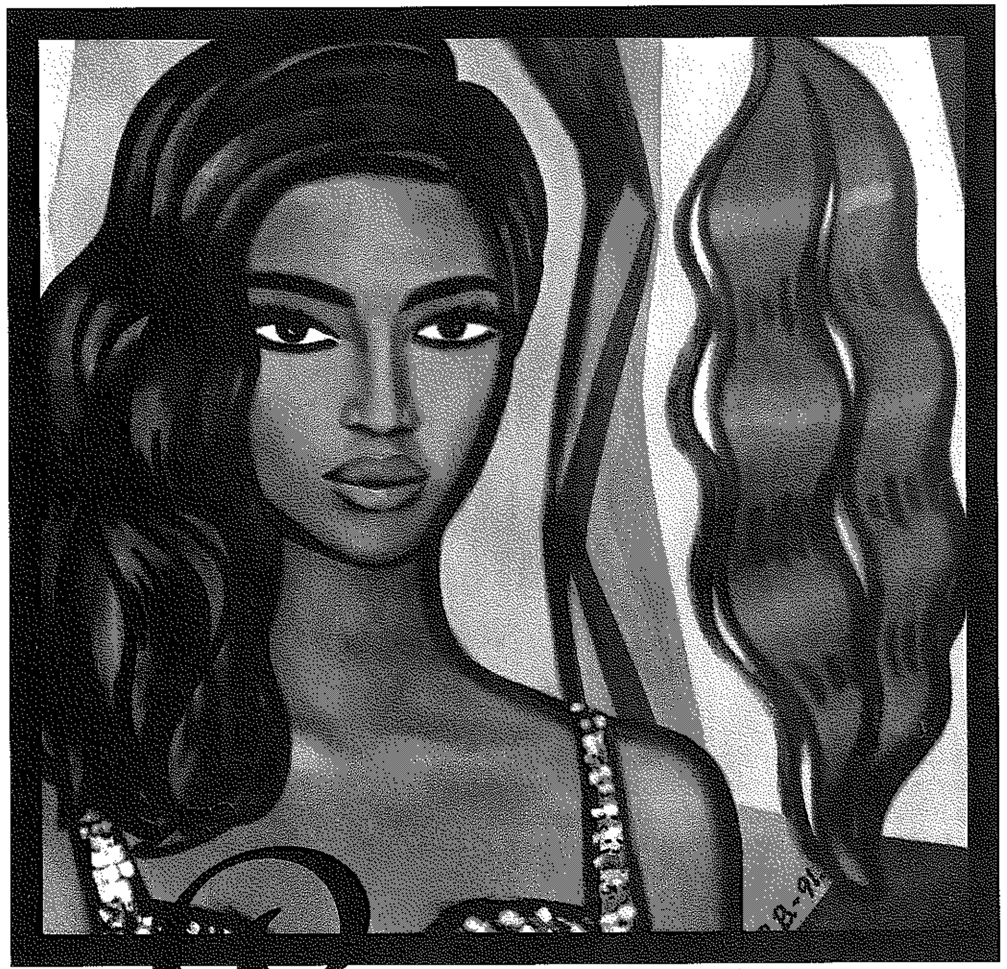
For the construction of his "chamber of identities" Capelan used 75 litres of mud carefully pasted over four walls, 300 old books, 40 rocks and an assortment of furniture, with which he created a living room. At once private and yet public, this living room is also a museum that houses objects "with which we surround ourselves to establish our identity." Capelan uses old books neatly 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 values 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 dried bones/shells hang 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 racialized self, cultural boundaries, linguistic borders and spiritual location. Ultimately Capelan's project is about making contact with otherness, 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 nonhegemonic global vision of culture that is syncretic 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.

Reece Auguste is a British filmmaker and writer. He is a member of London's Black Audio Film Collective.

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



Woman with Colours, Licia Bronzin

GLADYS M. JIMÉNEZ-MUÑOZ

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?

BLANCA,
BLANQUITA,
JINCHA,
COLORÁ,
JABÁ,
SACALAGUA,
CUARTERONA,
MULATA
CLARA,
ZAMBA,
GRIFA,
AINDIÁ,
INDIA,
MORENA,
TRIGUEÑA,
NEGRA FINA,
NEGRA,
NEGRA
RETINTA,
ETC.

Yet then I remember that it wasn't until I was seventeen years old that I explicitly became aware of my African-ness. When at that time I enrolled as a student in the Río Piedras Campus of the University of Puerto Rico, my friend Anjelamaría Dávila designated me as a *"jabá."* (This term is roughly equivalent to what people in the United States refer to as a "high yellow".) You see, I have remained a *jabá* all my life because my friend 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 African-ness require a wake-up call?

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

As with most 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 paternal grandmother. I saw this last relative only a few times in all my life, while I never met my paternal grandfather. You see, this side of the family was literally invisible. They were rendered that way by my mother's side of the family who detested my father because he ran away with my mother and because he wasn't white. He was always referred to, contemptuously, as *"el negro ese"* ("that black man") or *"el desgraciao ese"* ("that miserable man").

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: namely, blacks and mulattoes. My second aim in this regard is to identify 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 accompanies them are different from the ways in which the races are designated and positioned in most of the United States. Latin American 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: *"blanca," "blanquita," "jincha," "colorá," "jabá," "sacalagua," "cuarterona," "mulata clara," "zamba," "grifa," "aindiá," "india," "morena," "trigueña," "negra fina," "negra," "negra retinta,"* etc. Often, a person can shift from one category to the other by simply becoming more educated or acquiring more money: as the saying goes, *"el dinero y la educación enblanquecen"* ("money and education make a person whiter"). Except in places such as New Orleans and South Florida, in much of the dominant Euro-American culture of the United States one is simply "white" or "black," with very little room for anything in between. These differences, however, should not delude us into thinking that racism and racial divisions simply don't exist among Caribbean and Latin American people (there and in the U.S. mainland).

But let us return to the ways in which racial divisions represent the existing splits within Puerto Rican national culture itself. Like all cultures, Puerto Rican national culture has primarily defined itself not only as what it is, but —even more importantly— as what it is not. To be Puerto Rican is to have nothing to do with that which is alien and strange to Puerto Rican-ness. Historically, one of the principal symbols of such strangeness and non-Puerto Rican-ness has been blackness and, specifically, African-ness. Whites and most of the intermediary racial categories that constitute the Puerto Rican population have traditionally perceived and understood blackness as something literally foreign. 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 mulattoes) was recently asked if she were 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 Haitian...)

While the Hispanic heritage is much celebrated and praised, African heritage is avoided and ignored. This is even true among those corresponding to the darker-skinned end of the spectrum, where the emphasis is on non-African identifications: either toward the non-existent "Indian" element among mulattoes and blacks in the Caribbean or toward the "whiter" element among the mestizo and mulatto populations of Mexico, Central America, and South America.

Yasmeen, Licia Bronzin

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, flaring nostrils, and/or broad lips. Many 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 entire Antilles, in the coastal areas of the Yucatán peninsula and Central America, as well as in the Caribbean coastline of South America, it is almost impossible to dance and listen to any popular music that hasn't been influenced by or is not a derivative of African musical forms and instruments, from specific percussion devices to the polyrhythms and syncopation that structure entire musical genres. Can you imagine salsa music without bongos, congas, timbales, batás, quintos, and so on? Can you imagine cumbia, merengue, plena, bomba, danza, bolero, guaguancó, soca, reggae, calypso, samba, joropos, etc. without syncopation and polyrhythms? Leaving aside laughable products such as the movie, *The Mambo Kings*, can you imagine Tito Puente without timbales or, better yet, Celia Cruz without "Químbala, Cumbala, Cumbaquím Bambá"? Celia Cruz has been singing and dancing for more years than I have been on this earth. Most people have heard of her —she has even given concerts in Japan! I don't know anybody who has not danced to "Químbala, Cumbala, Cumbaquím Bambá." (Talk about the construction of imagined communities and of ways of fashioning collective identities!) As a common cultural denominator, she is an obvious illustration of the points I am trying to make. Other reference 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 separate our Latina-ness from our African-ness because much is at risk when attempting to disengage the two. Perhaps the best way of addressing this directly is by raising another set of questions. Take for instance the recently deceased Caribbean writer and poet Audre

Lorde in her biomythography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Here Audre Lorde explores many topics that are central to my own work, such as race, sexuality, and gender. In *Zami*, Lorde illustrates the connection between self-identity and language. By reclaiming her African heritage, she affirms her ability to rename and re-identify herself. In the beginning of her book she asks: "To whom do I owe the power behind my voice... To whom do I owe the symbols of my survival"? Lorde recognizes her debts. Do we? What is the nature of our debts? What symbols are these? What history is this and why is this history ours? What power is this? What and where is our voice?

What happens when this African past remains invisible and when this African presence remains absent? What is the difference between this invisibility and absence in the U.S. mainland and such invisibility and absence in the Caribbean or Latin American. Would this part of me have remained silent in the same way if I had been brought up in the United States instead of in Puerto Rico? How is being of African descent different there than here? And, most importantly, what does this signalling, these detours, these self-recognitions, as well as these invisibilities, these absences, and these silences have to do with relations of power? Would recognizing one's African heritage be so difficult and complex if it didn't go against ruling interests and predominant identities? What happens when one goes against such powerful interests and identities?

Mayra Santos, a black Puerto Rican poet and cultural critic, suggests that we carry out a reading of our skin by understanding history and relations of power in ways that are very much related to the visibility or invisibility of our bodies. She explains in "*Sobre piel o sobore papel,*"

> *Los signos de la negritud, están escritos sobre piel, sobre espacio o sobre papel, siempre suelen ser problematicos en su lectura. ...Una vez se aprende a escribir se añaden nuevas marcas al cuerpo, o se le acondiciona a asimilar y romper espacios alternos. Se utiliza esta tecnolojía para crear nuevos universos de sentido. Aparecen otras marcas (diplomas, palabras, slogans) que las y los negros debemos llevar encima como tatuajes para probarnos lo suficientemente "negros" o lo suficientemente "decentes."*

> The signs of blackness are written on skin, on space, or on paper; reading these signs always tends to be problematic. ...When one learns to write, new scars are added to the body, or the body is conditioned to assimilate and break with alternate spaces. This technology is used to create new universes of feeling. New scars and signs appear (diplomas, words, slogans) that we black women and black men have to wear like tatoos to prove that we are sufficiently "black" or sufficiently "proper."
>
> (My translation.)

She speaks of "race" as something that is not natural, fixed, or always obvious to everyone, everywhere, and at all times. Rather, Mayra Santos sees "race" —white, black, mulatto, etc.— as socially constructed. Specifically, she sees blackness as being constructed in particular ways:

> *O los pelos planchados o las trenzas africanas, o el beeper o los ilekes santeros, o la conversación intelectual o el remeneo de nalgas—estas contraposiciones escinden a las comunidades negras por el medio y decididamente delatan una horrible confianza en la transparencia (o en su contraparte, la posible invisibilidad) de la negritud.*

> Or the processed hair or the African braids, or the beeper or the orisha icons, or the intellectual conversations or the undulation of somebody's butt —these contrasts split black communities through the middle and decidedly betray a horrible trust in the transparency (or in the case of its opposite, the possible invisibility) of blackness.

Hence, blackness that is "too transparent" can also be threatening. In other words, being black is located within a set of rules and regulations that are acceptable only when and if being black is associated with power structures. This type of pressure, according to Santos, "does not only come from reactionary spaces." It can also come from those spaces that are "self-proclaimed as the ones which define what is considered beautiful and politically proper in alternative ways."

This is why embracing our African heritage is something very complex. Charlotte Neuhaus, a light-skinned black half-Puerto Rican student in my Williams College course this spring ("U.S. Women of Color and Cultural History"), continually pointed out that it is one thing to claim our African-ness and quite another thing to live it, to endure it, and to survive it. Black and mulatto Latinas do not necessarily have the same options, undergo the same experiences; neither are they the subjects of the same social effects. This is particularly true in the Caribbean and Latin America, as well as within Latina/Latino communities in the United States. It is one thing to be able to identify ourselves and quite another to have people identify us against our will and before we have any say in the matter. Latinas who are light-skinned or mulattas must recognize our relative privileges over darker-skinned or black Latinas. Among us, as well as between us and the white communities, there is also the much overlooked phenomenon of "passing." This is evidently similar to what happens to light-skinned African American women, a phenomenon and a process that requires greater study, discussion, and scrupulous problematization.

Another one of my students, an African-American woman by the name of Nicole Moore, called to my attention Audre Lorde's observations in her essay "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger":

> Every Black woman in America lives her life somewhere along a wide curve of ancient and unexpressed angers.
>
> 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 laced through with this net of rage. It is an electric thread woven into every emotional tapestry upon which I set the essentials of my life —a boiling hot spring likely to erupt at any point, leaping out of my consciousness like a fire on the landscape. How to train that anger with accuracy rather than deny it has been one of the major tasks of my life.

EVERY BLACK WOMAN IN AMERICA LIVES HER LIFE SOMEWHERE ALONG A WIDE CURVE OF ANCIENT AND UNEXPRESSED ANGERS

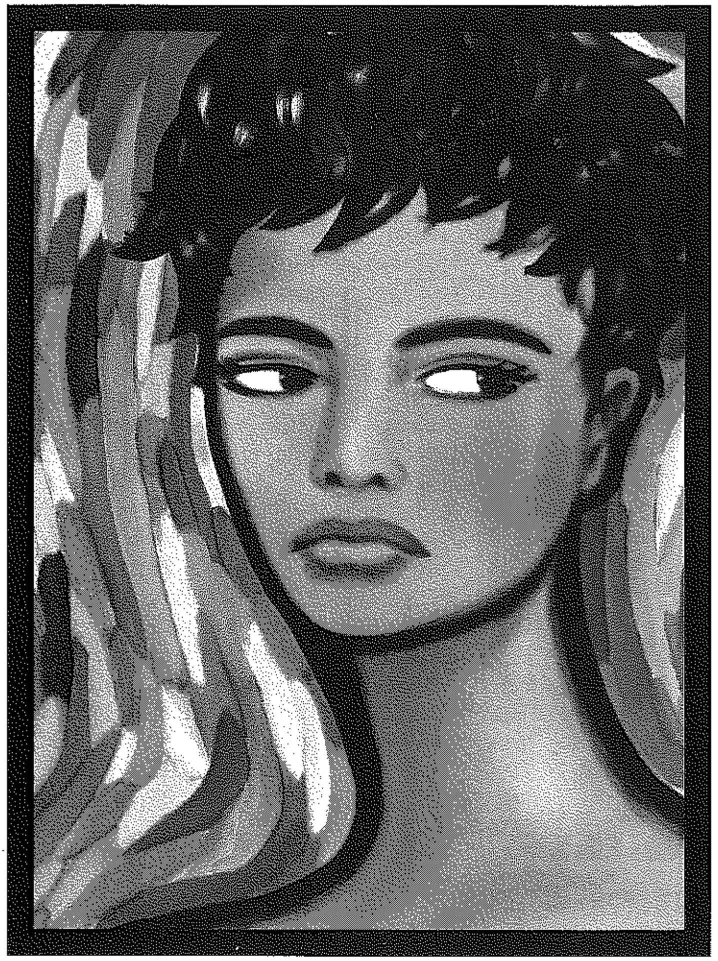
It is true that we live in an age in which many people want to claim the term "minority"; for some this is a matter of convenience. But I know few minorities that want to claim their African heritage.

As a Puerto Rican woman living in the United States today, I first encountered "Latina"as a category and self-consciously began to adopt it when I came to New York State. In Puerto Rico I never used this expression, among other things, because we assumed our Puerto Rican-ness in many problematic and contradictory ways: as a way to differentiate ourselves from those who were not considered Puerto Rican and lived in the Island ("dominicanos," "cubanos," and "americanos") and as a way to distance ourselves from those Puerto Ricans born and/or brought up in the United States. But this national-cultural identity was and is also assumed in the Island to establish distinctions between degrees of Puerto Rican-ness. The members of certain political parties are perceived as more Puerto Rican than others. Men are understood to be more representative of Puerto Rico (ideologically and politically) than women. Educated people of means are seen as more Puerto Rican than the ignorant and poor majorities of the population. The lighter skinned you are, the more Puerto Rican you feel and are treated. Heterosexuals are perceived as more Puerto Rican than lesbians and gays, and so on. You see, we continuously struggle with our Puerto Rican-ness in a national, political, cultural, gendered, sexualized, and racialized context.

When I came to the United States I had to distinguish between, on the one hand, being a Latina or "hispana" (from, "hispanoparlante" or Spanish speaker) and, on the other hand, being what the U.S. Census Bureau calls a "Hispanic" (literally: having a Spanish surname). As a Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican woman who has learned to treasure the rejection of the colonizer —of being IN but not OF the United States— these two categories confronted and positioned me in completely different ways. For me, being Hispanic was not the same as being Latina. Being a Latina meant (a) coming from the racially mixed populations of the Caribbean and Latin America and (b) being a product of the cultures that unevenly combined as a result of the Iberian Conquest. All over the Americas, historically this mixture has a totally different racial inscription than simply having a Spanish surname because this last category includes Europeans. Moreover, in the United States today, only Europeans are white.

What are the politics of location of the term "Hispanic"? Whom do we identify with —in terms of power within the racial hierarchies (not only in the United States, but in Latin America and the Caribbean) —when we all become "Hispanic"? To whom do we owe our heritage in each case? For instance, if we identify as "Hispanics," who then has a claim on this identity? Who can cash this cultural I.O.U.? Can Europeans claim an African heritage? Would they want to? What are the symbols that we use in expressing our cultural identities? What is at risk when we use, live, and circulate these symbols? How are these symbols related to those things that oppress us and continue to position us as "inferior" cultures and "lesser" peoples?

One of my principal contentions here is that, regardless of whether we were born in the United States, were raised here, or migrated here from elsewhere, and regardless of how we perceived ourselves racially in our countries and communities of origin, Latinas in the U.S. mainland should be aware of our common identity and condition as racially oppressed women. Since we come from geographies understood to be the products of racial and cultural mixture —specifically, a mixture that contains considerable measures of African "blood" and African cultural elements— our claims to a European heritage and identity always remain suspect, no matter how fair our skin, how Castilian our Spanish, or how "American" our English. Whether we like it or not, this is an integral part of the ways in which we are positioned as social subjects in this country. This is one of the contradictions represented in the way in which our national-cultural identities intersect our gender identity. But this not only takes place against us, that is, to oppress us by constituting us as racially inferior



Nadedge, Licia Bronzin

women. It can also be used in our 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 Latinas is still even more complex than that. On the one hand, this 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 American, Native American, and Asian women in this country. On the other hand, as Chandra Mohanty and Bernice Johnson Reagon 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 bone of contention, precisely because this potential unity encompasses so many differences and contradictions among ourselves: as Latinas from different national backgrounds, specific racial categories, social classes, sexual identities, levels of education, political ideologies, etc.

Likewise, sharing a general racial oppression —that, to a greater or larger degree, is historically part of the African diaspora— is a phenomenon that encompasses many differences and contradictions among us as people of Latin American and Caribbean background, and among us as part of the racially oppressed peoples in North America. Too often, many Latinas are asked to choose between being a Latina OR being of African descent. And, to far too many of us, this strikes very close to home. Literally, it means having to choose between who we are going to recognize as our legitimate grandparents and who we are going to deny. Culturally, it means having to sort out and separate the elements of the music we dance and listen to, of the food we eat, the spiritual beliefs and practices we have lived, and so on, until we distill the purely European ingredients that we are expected to call "our own."

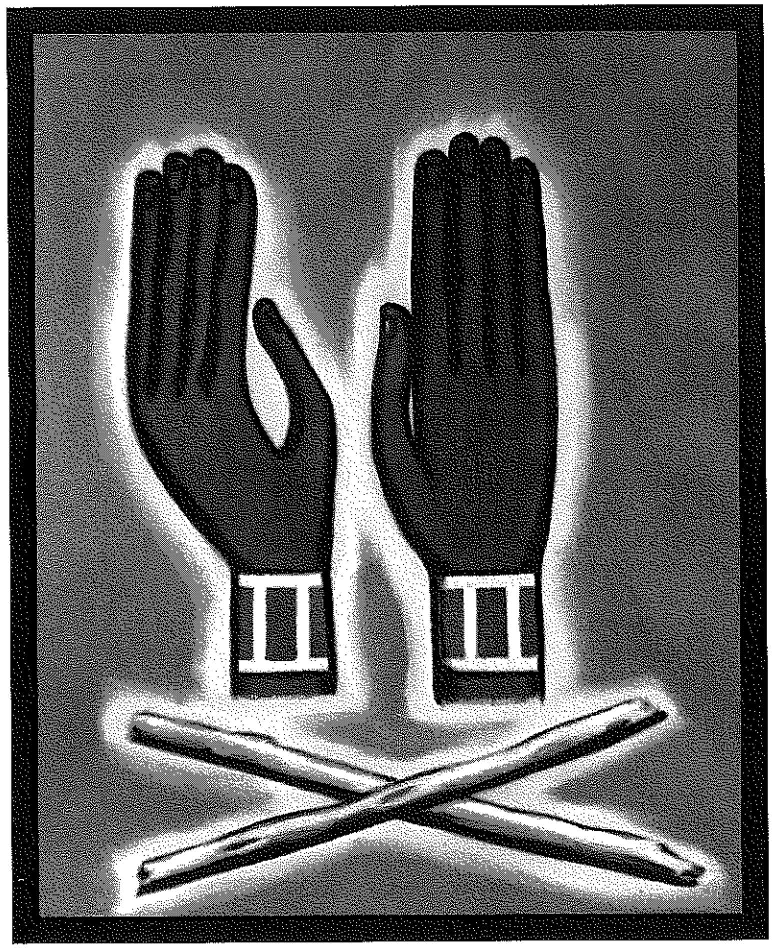
My position on this matter is that one cannot be a Latina without recognizing one's African heritage: without it, we are caricatures of the Iberians, or we are "American" simulacra, not Latinas. While this may be less true for Chicanas and Mexicanas, this is unavoidably the case for those of us of Caribbean descent. This African background and present influence is an integral part of our identity and it is immediately related to that which defines us as Latinas in general and as Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans, Panamanians, Venez-uelans, Colombians, etc., in particular.

It is VERY IMPORTANT that we ask ourselves: what have women who do recognize their African heritage (puertorriqueñas, dominicanas, Haitienes, West Indians, African Americans, and others) taught us in terms of being a woman of color in the United States in general and being a Latina in particular? What debts do we have in this case? Recognizing our African-ness within *this* context helps build coalitions not only *among* Latinas but also *between* Latinas and other women of color in the U.S.

This unity, if it is to succeed, must be a pluralistic and ongoing project. As Audre Lorde says, "meeting across differences always requires mutual stretching." The beauty and simplicity of Audre Lorde's suggestion here is that such an effort, that is, the linkage of disparities, should not, in and of itself, erase the disparities being joined. It is something we have to be constantly working at and within —and, sometimes, even against (when it is used to deny the possibility of creative difference) — building and rebuilding, as we struggle to survive in a colonialist (externally and internally) and white-supremacist fortress like the United States. This is why we must also strive to build coalitions, among Latinas and between Latinas 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 risk when we re-think our Latinaness 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 Latinaness that denies our African-ness is, ultimately, just a defence 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.



Mystery Of Nature, Licia Bronzin

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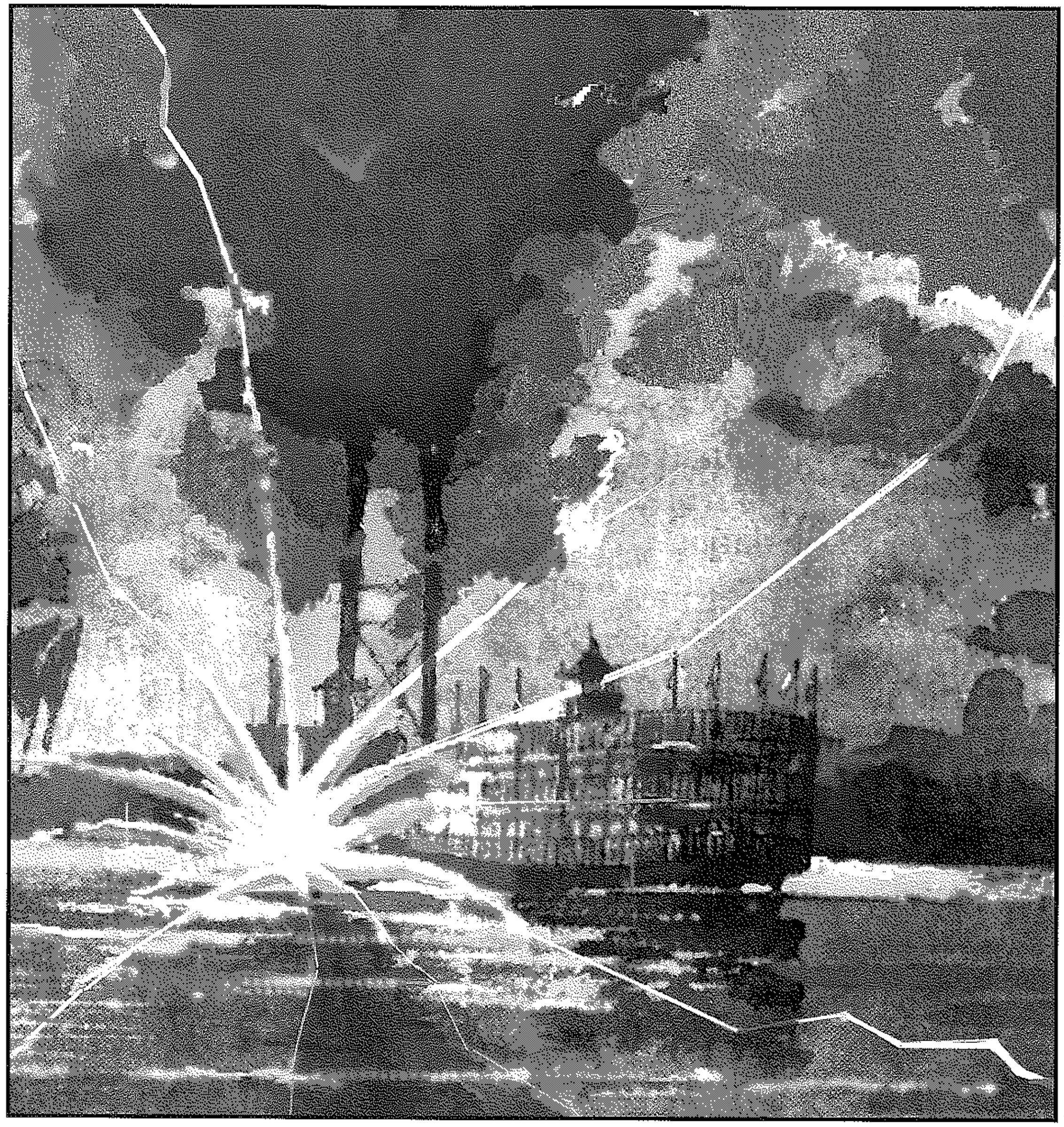
THAT WAS THEN



Roger Babcock

THIS IS NOW

M. NOURBESE PHILIP

> **Blaming the Negro...gives the white a stronger sense of identity, or rather it protects an identity which is seriously threatened with pathological dissolution. It is by blaming the Negro that the white man tries to hold himself together. The Negro is in the unenviable position of being used for everything, even for the white man's psychological security.**
>
> *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander,*
> Thomas Merton

In Canada the condition of African Canadians has not yet reached the desperate levels of the United States, but there are troubling similarities. The Stephen Lewis report (1992) reveals that anti-Black racism in all aspects of life in Ontario is a vigorous, hardy plant. Despite this reality, however, many would have us believe that *Show Boat* should be seen as a bench mark of how far we have come. *Show Boat* **is** a bench mark but of how the more things change, the more they remain the same. That Garth Drabinsky can write in *The Toronto Star* (June 2, 1993) that he intends to continue with the production of *Show Boat* over the loud outcry of African Canadians, tells us how far we have come. That *The Toronto Star,* one of the sponsors of *Show Boat*, can, with impunity, tell African Canadians that they should "join people like former lieutenant-governor Lincoln Alexander in fighting the more tangible injustices that many blacks must confront every day," tells us how far we have come. That the (Dis)United Way and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), when faced with a choice between offending cabals of rich white men, or Black people, decide that they would much rather offend Black people, tells us how far we have come. Was there ever any doubt as to who would win in that choice, if choice there ever was?

The bottom line is the dollar; the motive profit, as it was during the slave trade. The same motive that makes a mockery of the (Dis)United Way that has, for the last two years, insisted that organizations receiving grants from it demonstrate that they do anti-racist work, and yet, at the expense of Black people, itself continues on in a distasteful exercise that passes for entertainment. This has all the overtones of Romans throwing Christians to the lions while they party.

It was, in fact, the very organizations that had engaged in anti-racist work who were most vocal in calling for the (Dis)United Way to disengage itself from its support of *Show Boat.*

That *Show Boat* is being mounted here in Toronto and at this particular time is not a coincidence. We are presently living in very crisis-ridden times. Both national and provincial economies are contracting in the post Free Trade environment of Canada and the world-wide depression. Jobs are being lost at a record rate with no prospect of replacement. No longer can Canadians, or North Americans for that matter, relax and expect that life will improve exponentially for them — as it always has.

The small gains made over the last few years by Blacks and other peoples of colour, women and gays, albeit in the context of a capitalism in world-wide crisis, has galvanized strenuous opposition, the expression of which stretches from the racist rhetoric of the neo-Nazis to that of the self-proclaimed foes of political correctness. This rhetoric is to be found in the pages of the Heritage Front newspaper, as well as *The Globe and Mail*, on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), as well as on CFRB.

We are witnessing an enormous backlash to the small gains made by those groups which mainstream society has traditionally excluded: there has been an upsurge in racism and anti-Semitism; we have read of gays being killed, of Jewish cemeteries desecrated; we have seen the police beat Rodney King in Los Angeles and we continue to read of Blacks being killed by police here in Canada. In the continued attacks, sexual and otherwise, against women, it is business as usual.

There has, however, been no let up in the demands by Blacks and groups which society has traditionally oppressed. All continue to challenge sexism, racism, classism, and all the other systemic practices which limit the full potential of individuals and groups. In addition to making demands to change the material and social reality, these emancipatory and liberation movements also demand changes in their representations, since they understand only too well that their representation is closely tied to their traditional roles in society. The unravelling of one inevitably leads to the unravelling of the other. The women's movement, for instance, is not only about employment equity and better child care, but also about how the media represent women. What Blacks and African Canadians are opposing in the production of *Show Boat* are the historically stereotypical images that sanctify the inequality and exploitation of their lives. And one of the most traditionally effective ways of sanctification is through the mechanism of "harmless" entertainment.

The unravelling of the stereotypical image is always discomforting for the mainstream, and so the dominant culture fights back. It fights back by resisting social changes such as employment equity; it fights back by raising the spectre of political correctness and so trivialising the very real pain of people struggling to redefine themselves; it fights back by bringing to the fore and rearticulating the very stereotypes that have been used to manage groups like Blacks; it fights back by saying these representations are "historically accurate" and therefore true. It fights back by trying to convert the liberatory struggle of African Canadians for some control over the representation of their lives, and their history into a Black-Jewish controversy. It fights back by attempting to isolate and smear the reputation of various individuals involved in the struggle. And as in earlier times it fights back by drafting culture into its service.

Culture is the mechanism by which a society equalizes, balances itself, diffuses anxiety, building and rebuilding its self image. It is central to every society - determining the way we marry, eat, worship and dance. It is the mechanism through which a society reaffirms itself through image and representation, and when a society perceives itself under threat- as white society presently does, culture's role is to assuage this anxiety and to encourage, in the populace in general, a feeling of well-being, that God is in his heaven and everything is in its place - the river continues to flow as it always did. In *Magic, Science and Religion*, the anthropologist,

Bronislaw Malinowski writes:

> **Anxiety in society may spring from diverse roots such as rational 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 ritual beliefs, 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.**
> **(my emphasis)**

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 marker of many types of activities: sexuality; danger — the Black rapist or criminal; hipness or cool; as well as popular culture in general. 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 immigrants has assessed its Americanness — depending on their distance from the Black underclass.

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 Swain 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 messages 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 Yonge street riots, 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; her 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.

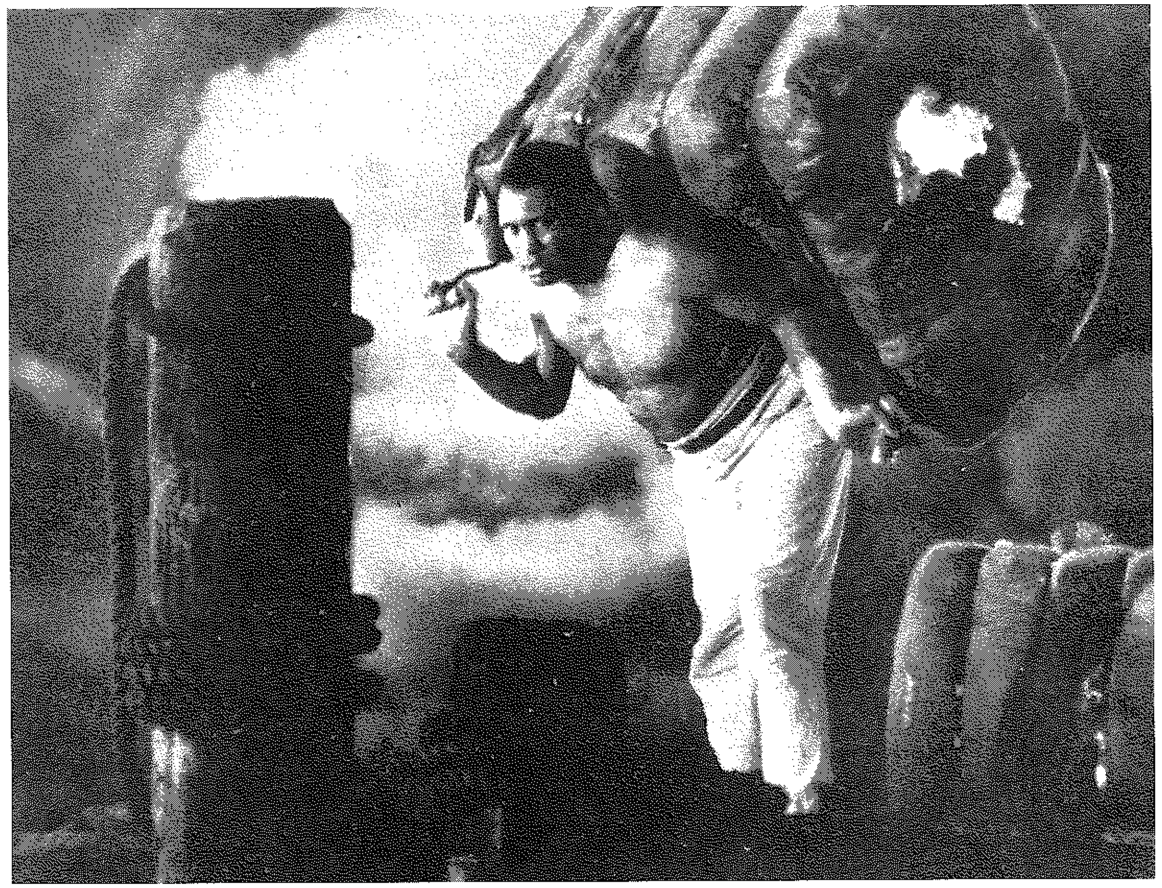
Yet another message is that Blacks are essentially servants whose role is to be resigned to their lot in life. Why? Just because. Just as the river is always there, so is black resignation and acceptance.

A fourth lesson for whites is that we are there as ethnic flavour, as markers of entertainment and pleasure; that they need not concern themselves with the real and root cause of injustices Blacks face in Canadian society. This message underscores an attitude that goes right back to the early development of racial stereotypes (mentioned in Part I , *Showing Grit, Showboating North of The 44th Parallel)* in which Blacks are seen as permanently 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 manifest often in police shootings. With respect to the present issue of *Show Boat* this power — of the media, for instance — is demonstrated daily in the almost complete exclusion of the views of those opposing *Show Boat*. However, anyone who has taken the time and trouble to understand Black history in the Afrospora, (I use the word Afrospora, in place of diaspora) knows that the history is essentially one of resistance, beginning 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 1502, there was a slave rebellion and in 1801, under the leadership of a former slave, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Africans defeated Napoleon's army and sent shock waves around Europe and the New World. In 1804 Haiti became the second independent country in the Western Hemisphere. Revolts took place with distressing and alarming regularity for slave owners in North and South America and the Caribbean. Independent maroon communities established themselves in Jamaica, Dominica, Brazil and Surinam and waged war with European powers.

Resistance took the form of "escape, revolt, theft, destruction of crops and machinery." (Bonnie Bartold, *Black Time: Fiction of Africa*) Africans' resistance to slavery and their commitment to freedom is documented time and time again, primarily in the documents of their former masters, which undoubtedly means there was even more resistance than has been documented: "hundreds of slaves sued for their freedom, ran away from their masters, assaulted, robbed, poisoned and murdered whites, burned their masters' dwellings, and committed suicide" (Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro were published in Washington, D.C. 1926-27).



Paul Robeson in *Showboat;* courtesy of *Slow Fade To Black.*

Given this history, and given what is happening in society today, why does white society want to be lulled 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 half-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 men — 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 grit." 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 served up entertainment whose function is to assuage their deep seated and often unacknowledged anxieties 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 artefacts like *Into the Heart of Africa* and *Show Boat*. Do whites? And so Nero fiddles while Rome burns.

The ROM exhibit, *Show Boat*, the resurrecting of films like "Gone with the Wind," "Huck Finn," all these cultural products are an integral part of a society in crisis, a society trying to deal with Blacks out of their assigned place. *Show Boat* is intended to make whites feel good about themselves: those who are lulled by this must bear some responsibility for the outcome of this disastrous exercise in insensitivity and racism, because the wave of change, the heartfelt and deep urge to live lives of dignity, will not die. It may go underground, but it will not go away.

My arguments linking the production of certain works, like *Show Boat*, to the state of society is further supported by looking at when this particular show boat has set sail.

1927: stage premiere — the romantic racialism typing Blacks as exotic pets and highly sexualized people has gained some prominence, but scholars like Franz Boas are mounting a challenge to the theories of inherited racial characteristics;
1929: silent film — this is the year in which `Black' Friday occurs and the US stock market collapses;
1932: the Great Depression has begun;
1936: Universal film — the depression continues;
1947: Broadway production — World War II has ended and Blacks are returning from the war with increased demands; they have fought for America and they want something in return; women too have had a taste of independence but the return of the `fighting men' will drive them back to the home `front';
1951: MGM film — the civil rights movement has got underway;
1954: an opera — this is the year of the landmark decision, Brown vs the Board of Education which ended segregation in education in the USA;
1966: a stage production at the Lincoln Center in Washington — this is the year following the assassination of Malcolm X;
1983: a Broadway production and an opera in Houston — by 1983 the economy of the US has begun to go into a tailspin; inflation is on the rise. In fact between 1980 and 1990 there has only been a 2% wage gain for workers in North America.

The pattern that results from this analysis may be purely coincidental; if it is it is, coincidence with a capital C. My intent in drawing links between the production of this "revered classic" and wider crises within US society is not to suggest that there is some sort of free floating conspiracy of impresarios who are consciously looking at society and making artistic decisions based on what is happening there. I am suggesting a far more complex and nuanced set of factors that are at work, and if we understand that culture is at its most effective when it appears to be harmless and organic - merely happening - then we understand how *Show Boat* has become an invisible but crucially important part of the fabric of a white supremacist society. Producers and impresarios, like Ferber and Kern were, are a part of society; they feel the tensions and crises as members of the cultural fabric and unconsciously work to "integrate the personality and unite the individual...with society and its traditional values."

The result of this sort of analysis shows what happens when, as Morrison argues, we "avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served." We begin to ask other questions which yield fruitful answers. Because when whites are creating images of Blacks and other subjected groups they are, in fact, creating images of themselves.

The various groups — I am tempted to say cabals - that form part of the network of power in Canada, have decided that Black pain has a price — that it comes cheap; they are also telling us that they are anxious, worried and concerned.

The affront at the heart of *Show Boat*, beginning with the book with its negative and one-dimensional images; the colossal and deliberate omission of the Black experience, of the pain of a people traumatized for four centuries of genocide and exploitation; the anger at seeing our music appropriated and turned to the profit of the very people who oppressed us; all that is still very alive today — the `Ol' Man River of racism continues to run through the history of these productions, and is very much a part of this production. It is part of the overwhelming need of white Americans and white Canadians to convince themselves of our inferiority — that our demands don't represent a challenge to them, their privilege and their superiority.

The attempt on the part of *Livent*, Garth Drabinsky's company, to use *Show Boat* as a teaching tool to educate Canadians about racism, would be laughable if the stakes weren't so high — namely the education of children who are targeted in this enterprise. These educational packages are nothing but an attempt to justify and rationalize the exercise of power in bringing a racist show to Toronto. The best example and lesson in racism that exists is what has transpired to date in this city around the production of *Show Boat*.

While education is crucial around issues of race, in highly charged situations like these it can have limited impact as was borne out by what happened at Stratford on some occasions when *Merchant of Venice* played there some years ago: some members of the audience threw pennies at Shylock.

Furthermore, the involvement of a noted right-wing personality like William F. Buckley, who has openly expressed contempt for Blacks, and continued to do so when interviewed in Toronto recently, does not bode well for any `educational process' undertaken by the producers of *Show Boat*.

M. Nourbese Philip is a poet and a writer living in Toronto. Her most recent book, Showing Grit: Showboating North Of The 44th Parallel, *is excerpted here.*

Julie Dash, director of *Daughters of the Dust*

Black Studies, Cultural Studies PERFORMATIVE 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, *elabore*, used by Antonio Gramsci to stretch 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 it as an institutionalized discipline.

Cultural studies often delineates ways of life by elaborating them quite literally, embarrassing and baffling previous theoretical understanding 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, positionality, and specificity. Through the "literal reading of event," cultural studies explicates the material bases and implications of world views we assume, and analyzes 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 evolution 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 1960s and 1970s 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 Levi-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 British cultural studies took as its main subject the elaboration of black Britishness over and against ethnic absolutism in Britain, the construction of a hegemonic blackness by black Americans, and other manifestations of diasporan aesthetics.

London-based black cultural workers found the language specific to their condition of black Britishness by submitting 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 *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) involve a critique of the work of George Orwell and Raymond Williams for their English ethnocentrism. In order to carve out a space for blackness in Britain, Gilroy had to denounce Williams and Orwell in a similar way that he denounced British right-wingers such as Enoch Powell for their nostalgic celebration of a mythic, 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. Julien states that:

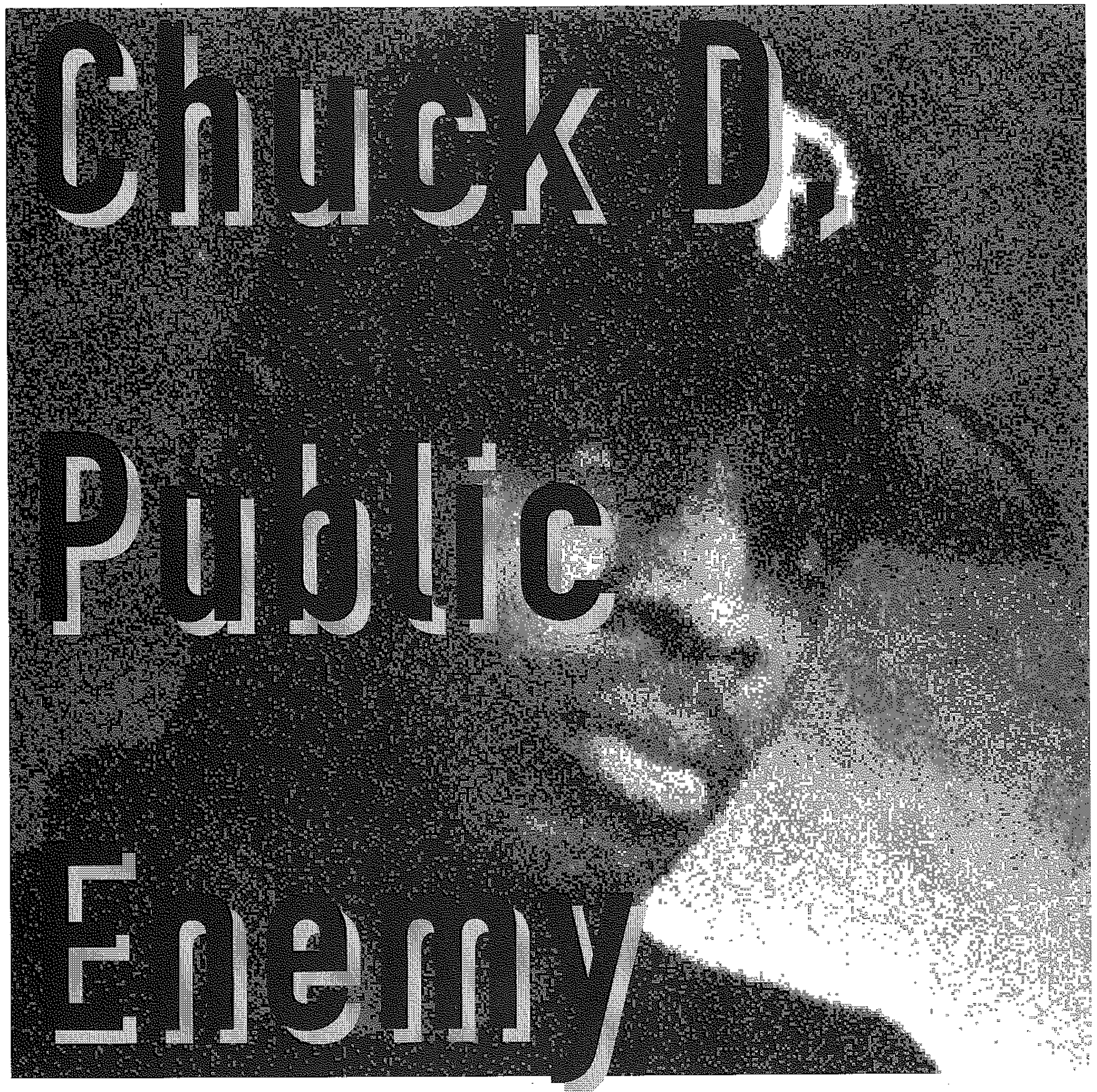
> On the left of avant-gardism is pleasure, which the avant-garde itself denies, clinging to the puritanism of its constructed ethics, measuring itself against a refusal to indulge in narrative or emotions and indeed, in some cases, refusing representation itself, because all these systems of signs are fixed, entrenched in the "sin or evil" of representation. The high moral tone of this discourse is based on a kind of masochistic self-censorship that relies on the indulgence of a colonial history and a post-colonial history of cinema or white representations based 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 contradiction. 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 elaborate it into something energetic and specifically British. Some of the most significant diasporic influences on black British cultural studies have been the works of Black Americans such as June Jordan, whose *Civil Wars* (1981) helped young black British thinkers to theorize "policing" in their own context: Manning Marable, Cedric Robinson, James Baldwin, Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange, and Toni Morrison. Caribbean influences included C.L.R. James, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Edward Braithwaite, and Derek Walcott, and African influences included Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Ousmane Sembéne. But these diasporic texts were articulated with black Britishness to create new approaches that were attentive to the fluidity of identities, class, and sexual politics in the British context.

While the distinction between the "Birmingham school"— an economic, or 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 these strands of thought, it is a useful distinction to consider if we want to understand why in the U.S. academic context there appear to be two different kinds of "cultural studies" even though both are said to be derived from "British cultural studies."

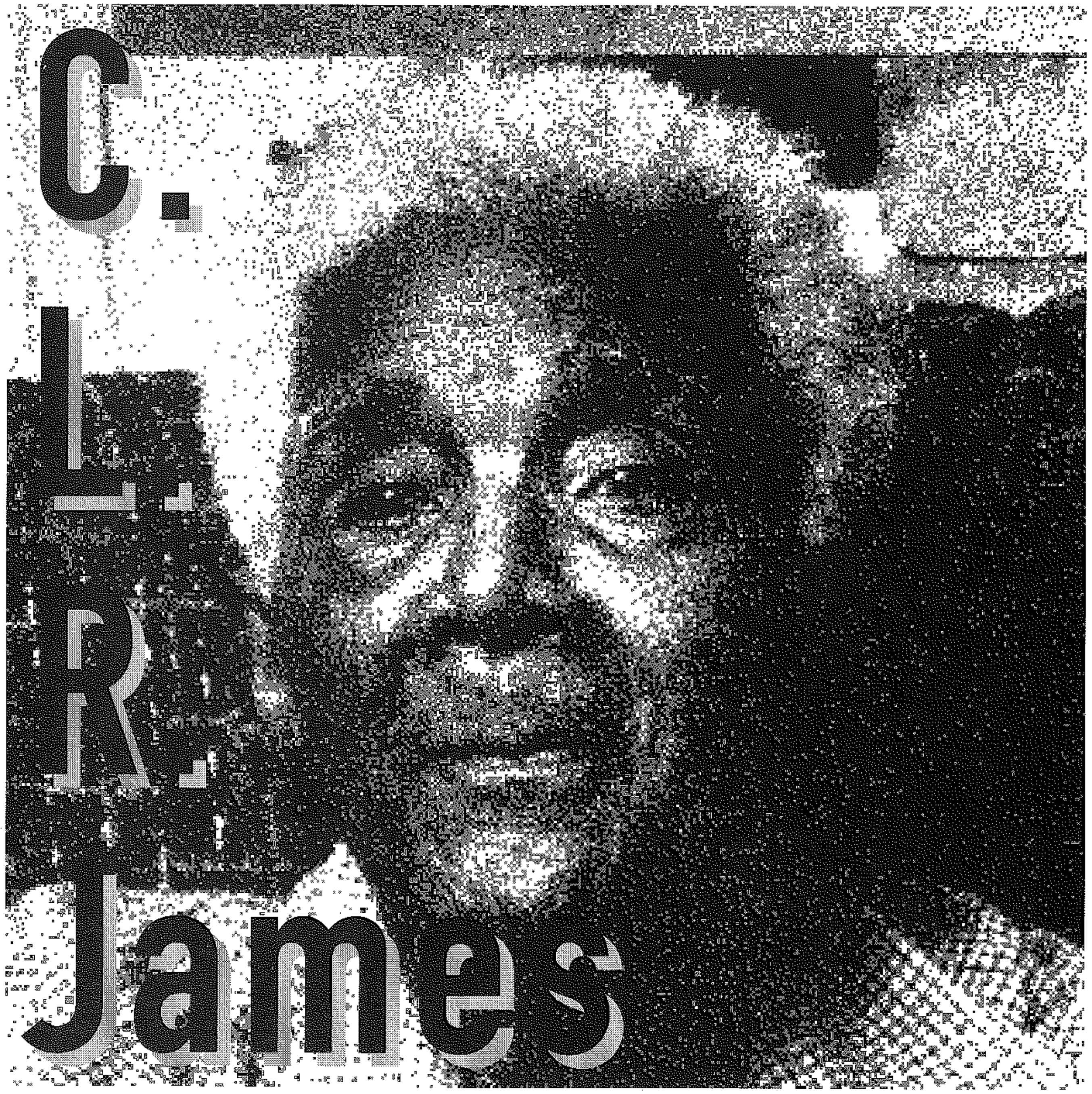
One prevalent strain of cultural studies in the U.S. posits race at its center and uses metaphors of racial construction to bring to light the ways of life of oppressed groups. It is concerned with issues such as black appropriation of the discourse of modernism, the performative character of the construction of identity, cross-over texts, cultural ambivalence, and sexism and homophobia in black communities. Thus, it combines elements 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 semiotic study of the ways of life and artifacts of black individuals and communities. Writers such as bell hooks, Michele Wallace, Marlon Riggs, Wahneema Lubiano, Tom Lott, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Houston Baker Jr., Cornel West, Jane Gaines, Cora Caplan, 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 hybridity, essentialism, etc, — for example, with the work of Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer, Sonia Boyce, David Bailey, Sankofa, and the Black Audio Film Collective. The December 1991 conference "Black Popular Culture," organised by the Dia Center in New York City, brought together many of these critics and reasserted the centrality 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 one of its primary projects 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 ethnicities. 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 maintain 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-Champagne April 4-9, 1990, represented not only the best and the highest levels of abstraction in the discourse of this brand of cultural studies, but also its tendency to evacuate race and gender as primary issues.



This genealogy of cultural studies obviously oversimplifies 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 foci of each form facilitates exposing its advantages as well as its limitations. For example, British cultural studies theorists have criticized some black cultural workers for essentializing blackness by reifying black ways of life even as they debunk the ethnic absolutism they associate with Englishness and black nationalism. This anti-essentialist critique of black cultural work suggests how an emphasis on identity politics can encourage people to forego 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 traditions of the Birmingham Centre to the U.S. must



include an engagement with the material conditions of culture in the U.S. Unfortunately, a good deal of U.S. cultural studies that invokes the Birmingham Centre disengages theory from its spaces of application. The perspectives of the Birmingham school cannot simply be lifted and applied to the U.S.—where traditions of family, nation and spectatorship, for example, are quite different—without a negotiation and reapplication of the tools of ethnography and analysis in the context of U.S. social and material conditions. In their attempt to replace deconstruction with cultural studies as a new academic discipline, its practitioners have made anti-essentialism their strongest critical tool, and turned their backs on the theoretical and methodological contributions of Marxism, feminism and black studies. The anti-essentialism of this cultural studies has become an essentialism of its own kind: the reification of discourse.

At the same time, practitioners of the Birmingham 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 examination of case studies produced by U.S. feminists and African American scholars on racism, oppression and exclusion.

The challenge of black Americans is now 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 ethnographic approach of the Birmingham school and the race-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 Julien 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 ethnographies or abstractions. We must read their work in such a way that they do not recognize themselves. Cultural studies in our hands should give new meanings to terms such as hybridity, essentialism, ambivalence, identity politics, and the black community.

Black studies in the U.S.

If the Dia "Black Popular Culture" conference is any indication, the careful integration of elements from both strands of British cultural studies promises to enable 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 exclusion of blacks from the inventions, discourses, and emancipatory effects of modernity, and much still needs to be said about this. A great deal of contemporary work seeks to continue this line of study, and is furthermore concerned to respond to the critiques of poststructuralism and cultural studies. In an effort to break down the so-called "black community," these theorists focus analysis on subgroups delineated through such categories as class, sexuality, gender, etc. The importance of specificity in narratives about discrimination and oppression is undeniable. However, the identification of study subjects as "the black woman," "the young endangered black male," " the black gay or lesbian," "the middle-class black," within the larger political context has posed a danger to black studies. The fragmented perspective of such narratives can exacerbate political divisions in responses to 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, "oppression studies" need not overshadow the actions of black people that helped to refine the tools of modernity 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 themselves within the American experience. Such an approach would contain several interrelated notions, among them that "performance" involves an individual or group of people interpreting an existing tradition—reinventing themselves—in front of an audience, or 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 reenactment 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 realism of urban life adding his knowledge of jazz, 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 theoretical: it refers to and draws on existing traditions; represents the actor as occupying a different position in society; and interpellates the audience's response to emerging images of black people.

In the U.S. today young writers, artists, and performers such as Trish Rose, Lisa Kennedy, Jacqui Jones, and Tate are interested less in what legal scholar Regina Austin has called cross-over dreams and the narrative 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 '60s, 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 Chicano studies in the '70s. Their ideology is also significantly different from the black nationalism of the '60s which in the context of white supremacism developed strong strains of sexism, racism 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 urbanization and the civil rights movements. This period saw the growth of an unprecedented mass literacy among blacks, who earlier depended on the church and popular music as their primary arena for cultural and political debate. This broad cultural shift to a new black public sphere set the stage for an environment in which books, films, the visual arts, and music no longer principally exhibit an interest in the project of integration, 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 shift to the new black public sphere has been accompanied by the evolution of a new version of black nationalism. The traditional exclusionary themes of black nationalism are transformed in the works of writers such as Terry McMillan and filmmakers as diverse as Reginald Hudlin, 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 themes of a black public sphere, or as Public Enemy puts it, a "black planet." The consumers of art about the black "good life" society are not only both black and white, but exist internationally. This "good life" has become the object of interest, and even envy, of Americans of different origins and races.

Civil rights activists feared that black nationalism would enhance ghettoization. But white youth and an international audience have become increasingly fascinated by cultural production that calls itself authentically black. Reasons for this attraction range from the pull of the exotic to the incorporation of liberatory themes into resistance to parent ethnic cultures 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 variety can make an important intervention in the analysis of the new arts 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 regressive consequences of any nationalism. Black British cultural workers have a love and hate relationship with black American culture; this both enables the British to use American culture as raw material for its own critical and artistic endeavors, and prompts the British to criticize American culture for being obsessed with the discourse of race and slavery, for being nationalistic in the worst sense, and for 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 consumers of a Spike Lee film.

I submit that a measure of identification with the U.S. black public sphere, its cultural consumers and reproducers, 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 consumers 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 antimodern. Blacks have constantly redefined the meanings imposed on the tools and products of modernization by a linear and often destructive Eurocentrism. For example, the acts of black leaders such as Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, and Martin Luther King Jr. served as the background to the rewriting of laws 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 upside down. As a result, black people have provided—and continue to provide—some of the most important critiques of modernity through what might be called techniques of reversability. Take, for example, black people's iconoclastic redirection of instruments used in classical music and army bands, which violated many levels of order to create jazz, the music of modernity.

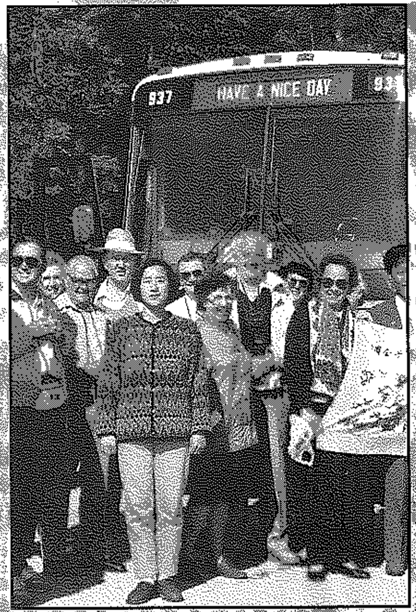
I suggested earlier that the civil rights movement contributed to mass literacy among black people, but the failure of civil rights' politics of integration has left this mass starved for black-centered books, films, painting, music, etc. At the same time, black nationalism's legacy of emphasis on identity, 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 addressed 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 interpolating 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 tenets 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.

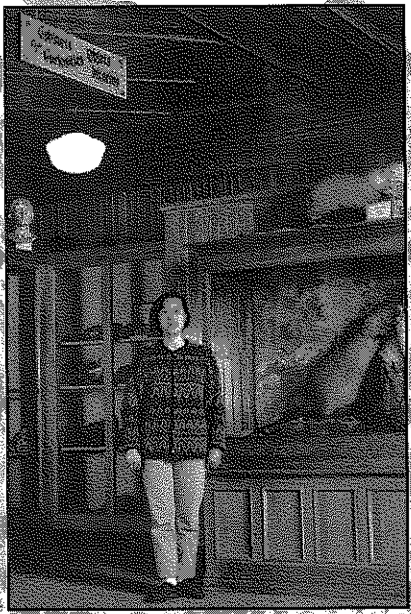
Manthia Diawara is a professor of Comparative Literature and Film, and is the Director of Africana Studies at New York University.

This article is a reprint courtesy of Afterimage, *October 1992.*

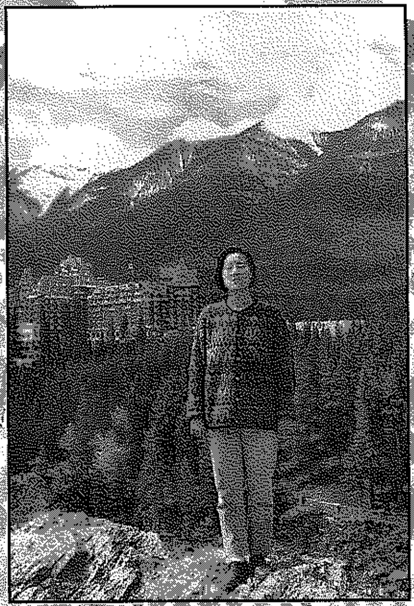
Souvenirs of the Self: A project of six postcards by Jin-me Yoon



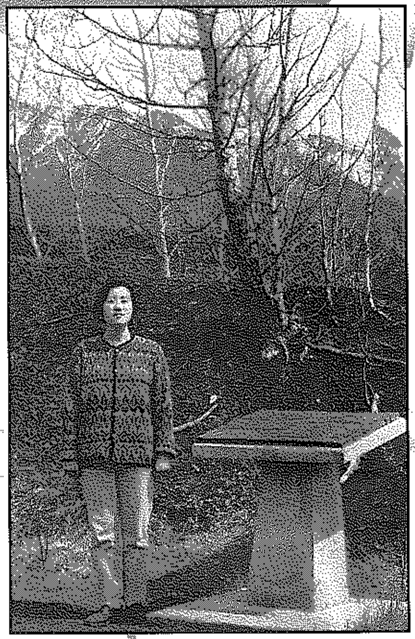
Rocky Mountain Bus Tour – Come and enjoy the great Canadian wilderness. As they parted she wished them all a safe journey home.



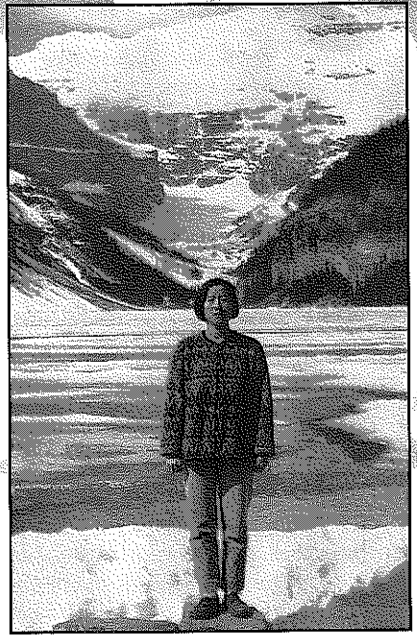
Banff Park Museum – Marvel over the impressive collection of Western Canada's oldest natural history museum. She looks with curiosity and imagines life beyond the rigid casings.



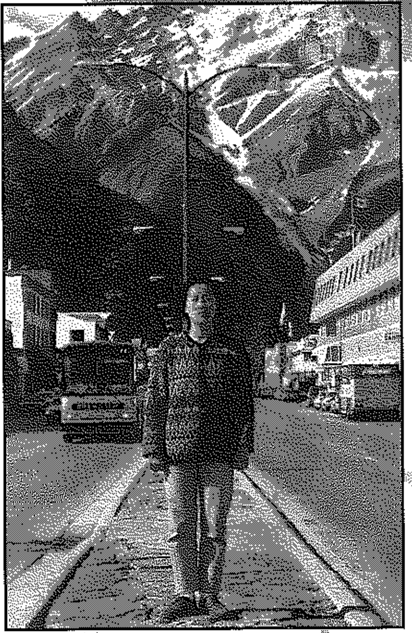
Banff Springs Hotel – Indulge in the European elegance and grandeur of days gone by. She remembers being told that tradition is something you can always count on.



Bankhead (1904-1922) - Explore the riches to rags drama of this historic coal mining town. She discovers that Chinese workers lived on the other side of the slack heaps.



Lake Louise – Feast your eyes on the picturesque beauty of this lake named to honour Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, daughter of Queen Victoria. She discovers the lake on a sunny day; before that she did not exist.



Banff Avenue – Banff has ben charming visitors from around the world for over a hundred years. She has trouble finding that perfect souvenir for herself.

Feeding off the Dead:

Seven Songs For Malcolm X

Necrophilia and the Black Imaginary

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN AKOMFRAH

Critic Kass Banning and British filmmaker John Akomfrah on necrophilia, *Seven Songs for Malcolm X* and Black British cinema.

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 new wave that took both the black diaspora and international film communities by storm in the eighties. Taking the "riots" of '81 and '84 in Birmingham and London as its starting point,* Handsworth Songs *(1986) offers an unforgettable, poetic rumination. Juxtaposing found images of struggle within the public sphere with moments of intimacy, the film offers up archeological accounts that insistently gesture towards their origin—colonialism. Two innovative narrative films with overarchingly 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. Re-forging earlier successful combinations, archival footage and Malcolm's extracted writings, words by cultural commentators and friends are punctuated by haunting stylized tableaux which, ultimately, rework Malcolm X as icon. While stressing his more internationalist political views, what emerges, surprisingly, given the broad global canvas of his thoughts and the film's insistent formalism, is a more tenuous, and hence more human Malcolm figure than is usually conveyed. Melodiously weaving from exterior to inner speech and back again, the voices of Toni Cade Bambara, and Giancarlo Esposito eloquently hold it all together. Stellar participants include Patricia Williams, Betty Shabbazz (at her most disarming best), 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 as a most *necessary* one. In addition to its overwhelming inherent value, *Seven Song's* emergence will recharge 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 this film signalled something new. Dealing with the politics of representation and displacement, but at the same time pleasurable and smart, it constituted a riveting mesh of poetics and "realness."

I think *Seven Songs* negotiates a similar structure: real folks, fellow activists, friends, giving differing testimony juxtaposed with surreal tableaux and archival footage that similarly excavates the imaginary 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 Tar Brush* and *Who Needs a Heart* were very much detours into attempts to think through questions of representation by the route of other cinemas, independent in particular. With *Seven Songs* I wanted to return to the idea of a fixed narrative that you couldn't change and try and build counterpoints with poetry within that. With *Handsworth Songs* there is a fairly straight story there, there's been a riot, it had a beginning and an end, and you have to make sense of that. It's the in-betweens that mattered. I think the same applies to *Seven Songs*.

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

J.A. *Handsworth* is more of a blend, 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 pathologizing — this is an act of criminality — or humanizing or rationalizing 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 evocative.

J.A. I think there is a sense that we look for moments of solitude and intimacy, not even necessarily look for it but construct 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 yes, 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 Purposefully 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 tableau 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 get in the structure of *Handsworth* is a coming together of a series of concerns which were at that point mutually exclusive and the tape 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 then, at some point somebody, I think it was Trevor or Reece (Auguste) said we should pull it all together, make a film. That's how that arrived, a very different emphasis.

B/L The original scuttlebutt, 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 redress 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 by the time we started the name Spike Lee and Malcolm X had become almost synonymous. With Spike's *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 reinvention of an Afrocentric Malcolm, but he was 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 did feel at the time he had said 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 Heart*. What we wanted to do with this film was to find, if one can call it that, the genesis of black radicalism, or the strands that fed into the genesis.

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 this 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 ours 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 Heart*, the meeting of Malcolm and Michael, how black nationalism 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 we do. I think in this particular instance, rather than simply inventing that memory or reactivating it, one simply had to highjack an ongoing one which is the figure of Malcolm X. The very invoking of the name Malcolm is also then to invoke the emergence of that inordinate 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. Blah 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 diversity, at least the pretence 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 tone it down.

J.A. Yes.

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

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

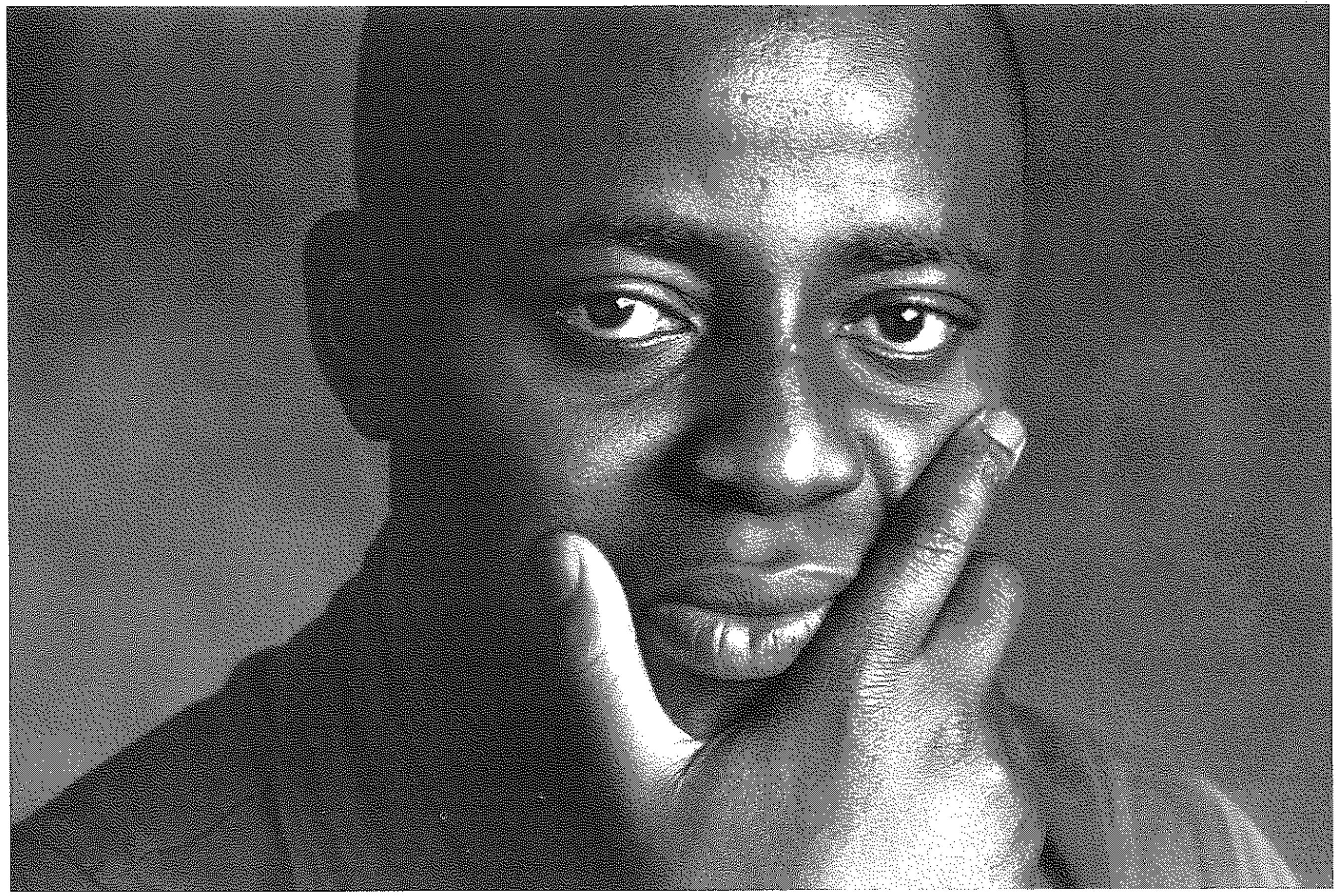


Photo: Dean Goodwin

John Akomfrah

B/L It does initially trick and lull 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 uneasiness with the deploying of rhetorics about Malcolm X. The minute you start listening to people talking you feel, my God, this is not history. The terror of being accused of being hagiographic, I think, necessarily forced us to make a choice about whether we were going to be even-handed and objective or to push the hagiography further than it was at the time. I'm glad we did it in the later 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 tableau. 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 narrativized as a movement from darkness to light, which I frankly don't believe. The other was the way in which death functions in the narrative of *Malcolm X* as sign of victimization, when he rears his head and goes down and rears 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

John Akomfrah's *Seven Songs For Malcolm X*

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 due reverence and respect.

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

J.A. Yes it was very much a way of getting away from starting his life in red, then orange, then blue when he dies. I didn't want that because I thought that would be, thematically, the wrong pattern set. 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 an overall theme, hence the headings. 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 bricolage. I tend to always parody the structural canvas size, except in this case, as well as in *Handsworth Songs*, these were already existing components that we then tried to wield into a creative block. We went looking for blocks.

B/L And you got them. That's a good word, actually, block, Gramsci's blocs fit, with the working of the sequestered 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 reasons 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 Jaffa (cinematographer for Julie Dash'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, Janov, Tarkovsky, Dreyer, people like that, as well as Van DerZee, 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 chair. (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 feeding 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 Michele Vasquez sitting in a chair, the same chair that we used in the film. He uses a vaseline effect that led to the use of lenses that we used. So there is a very specific and explicit acknowledging of that work.

B/L Perfect marriage. 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 "real" black cinema approximates or is the visual equivalent of black music, jazz in 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's in the frame, hence we went for those elongated lenses, he called them his Masai 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 omnipresence of the corpse in Black British film? *Looking for Langston, Dreaming Rivers, Mysteries of 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, its a marker. The way that imagery works in other forms of filmmaking. Here, there is mourning, but much more.

J.A. It's a definite marker. This is why I suddenly thought about why certain filmmakers would also be so attractive, Chris Marker, Para Jenov, 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 intangible, a memory of ourselves.

B/L Without an originary moment.

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 masks and statues in your hand, but when you get over it I think it happens, as in the case of *Looking for Langston*, where you're comfortable with that mask, when the desire shifts from melancholia to necrophilia almost. You almost begin to desire these figures precisely because they are irretrievable, impossible to capture, therefore dead.

B/L Is that a contemporary corallary 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 burys her father, or when the man walks in the beginning of *Testament*, a wish fulfillment of death, a drowning 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 Solidifies and rigidifies.

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 mummification 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) a kind of adaptation of Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*.

B/L Oh really, your neorealist 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 diasporic 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 *Harlem 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 diasporic is an act of will and memory because there are very few institutions that can substantiate that presence. There are no statues, no buildings, no libraries, no "here is 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 fear this clicheization, if you will, flattens 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 Derridean way, in erasure. 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 first. So you are caught in a double bind because you want to both be agonistic enough about the transcendental value of a category, but you also know that the erosion of those categories then 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 one of them 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 anticlisis 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 an end point. 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'm 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 a search for harmony, for wholeness. We have never done this, we're bricoleurs.

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 eclipsed in a way by a much more aggressive, marketed cinema that speaks certainty in the language of violence.

B/L And realism.

Handsworth Songs

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 agnosticism, of invoking turbulence, desire for history.

B/L It's no longer funded?

J.A. It's no longer desired. People are now aware that there are easier ways of doing this work. It's potentially 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, Kobena Mercer. But also the work of the likes of Homi Bhabha, the return to Fanon, Lacan, differently. The return of the specular as a legitimate area of black interest was incredibly useful and valuable for re-engaging in cultural work and defining cultural norms.

B/L You formed a different kind of race 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 blackness accidentally, or as a supplement. The very act of being trained as bourgie bourgie kids in cultural studies departments meant that we were going to be clearly the ascendants of that work in Britain at the time, Screen, Althusserian 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 spectatorship.

B/L Indeed, I come out of that theoretical moment as well, but positioned from here, and perhaps that colonial distance, if you will, intensified my desire for works that, similarly, came out of these concerns. I had a long time waiting. Perhaps that is why I have felt 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 invoking 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 cinema 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 it as related to the class issue, which is often veiled by discussions of that nebulous term audience.

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 Mercer has referred to as the burden of representation. The very act of evoking a cultural identity at the same time as one evokes their personal identity— I'm a black filmmaker— means that there are certain proscriptions that you're expected to take on board. I'm not particularly troubled by that because that is par for the course. What I am troubled by is the Kantian 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's absurd, but it's also 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 always liked about the term black filmmaker was that the very way in which it gave you the impression of a terra incognita, 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, not with 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 cinema; if you could suss out what a set of expectations were, you're already half way through working out what a critical community could be, what I assume 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. Being a black filmmaker, therefore, these are the rules of the game to being black and they should apply equally to the rules of the game for being a black filmmaker. The transposing of one set of rules to the next is simply essentialist because it assumed the categories filmmaker didn't exist. The familiar I'm a black person, you wouldn't necessarily know what the law of the narrative should be for black filmmaking. I never accepted it because of the essentialism as well as the philistism of the position.

B/L Could you talk about the conditions and your previous work that produced your generation of filmmakers, and theorist-filmmakers, specifically in England. It seems to me that a lot of what you were dealing with and reacting against was the civil rights and black power movements in America. Was there anything specific about the British context that produced that? That is precisely what *Who Needs a Heart* does.

J.A. What was unique about "my generation," it is a necessary point of departure. A number of currents were running concurrently at the time when we came of age, an anxiety of national identity, what Englishness constituted in a world where the foreigners were within.

B/L Thatcher's swamping speech, before that with Enoch Powell.

J.A. Right, he started in the sixties. The fear that Britain had produced a surplus mutant population which had no roots, no connectedness, to home, elsewhere or here. We seemed very much a wild card and also a surplus, people didn't know what to make of us. I think in their anxiety about who we were they found an anxiety where Britain was going. At the same time finally the major gains of the sixties were played out in institutional terms. Socialists who grew up in the sixties were finally in institutions of power, places of learning, local government; there was a desire and an anxiety about what difference that generation could make.

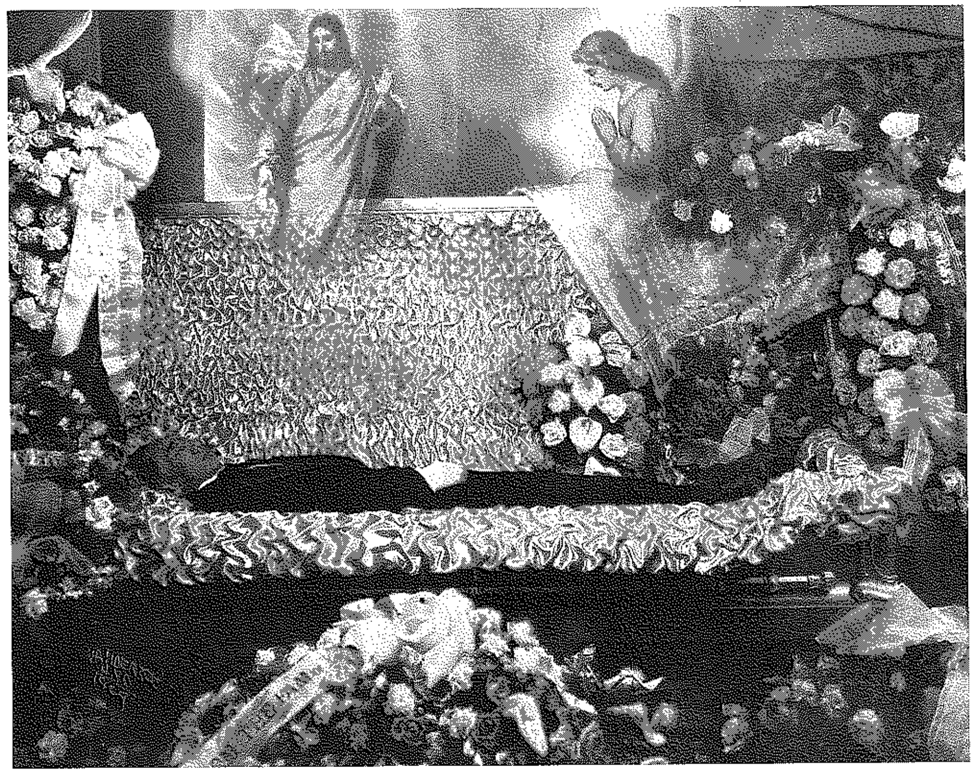


Photo: James Van Der Zee

B/L You responded because you were IT.

J.A. We really were, we were IT. 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 race, 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 trope of desire. One is the same as the other. We were at the crossroads, IT, a mutant strain. I think that gave our work a very specific inflection, it freed us from the burden of migranthood. It also produced the terror of uncertainty, we felt trapped in a Derek Walcott poem, writing everything anew. Which partly accounts for both the excesses of the films and the icons, 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 stressing the uniformity of the moment at the expense of diversity because clearly people experience this mode and lived this moment very differently. Someone like Isaac 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 (Gopaul) , or other people in Black Audio. We realized that the only 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 stylistic device, it was also literally a way 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 60's, 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 Sartrean 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 migranthood. 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 come to study. Whereas the American situation was very different.

B/L Could you talk about the importance of critical writing to the development of a black film culture in England. One of the things that impressed me, and others in Canada, was the strategy of creating a discourse around the Sankofa and Black Audio films, and also the "taking over" of *Framework* and for a short while *Screen*, as you know that was indeed short lived. Or was that moment symptomatic of a flavour of the month syndrome?

J.A. I think the flavour of the month syndrome is a simple reading for things that were done in good faith. They weren't necessarily acts of benevolence, but they were in the end concessions which were acts of good faith. Kobena, Isaac, Martine, myself, went to the *Screen* board, for example, and did push for it. This is something I'm thinking through now, I think the major difference with black filmmaking of the eighties, as distinct from other black filmmakers at the time, is that so many of us came through the academy. That wasn't the traditional mode of independent emergence. People either tried to do things within the BBC or got fed up and left. One advantage was that we were familiar with the texts. So it wasn't by accident that we got into this.

B/L There is still the current notion (within more nationalist strains here) that theory is inappropriate or suspect as far as the black struggle goes, and that white-informed or European-informed ideas don't engage with the majority of black people's lived experience. This has been levelled at Black Audio, and Sankofa, it's even in *The Passion of Remembrance*. How do you answer that question?

J.A My sense is if people think that theory doesn't apply for them, that's fine, but it would be an act of denial on our part because it is through theory that we got into filmmaking in the first place. The second is that underlying the assumption that theory has no value, is the assumption that we are still in what Stuart Hall calls the moment of innocence, that somehow there is a moment that you can unproblematically fall from grace to bear witness, either to joys or disaster. I think we're too aware of the modes of constructing identity to simply go back to unproblematic representation. We're not in church anymore, Sunday is over.

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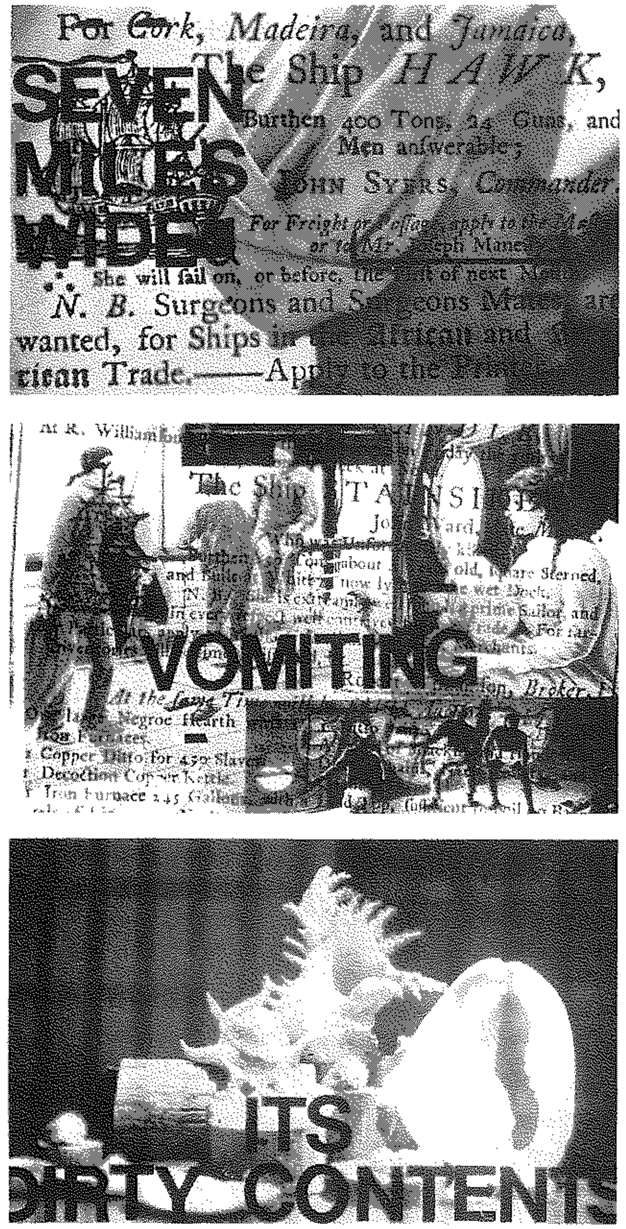
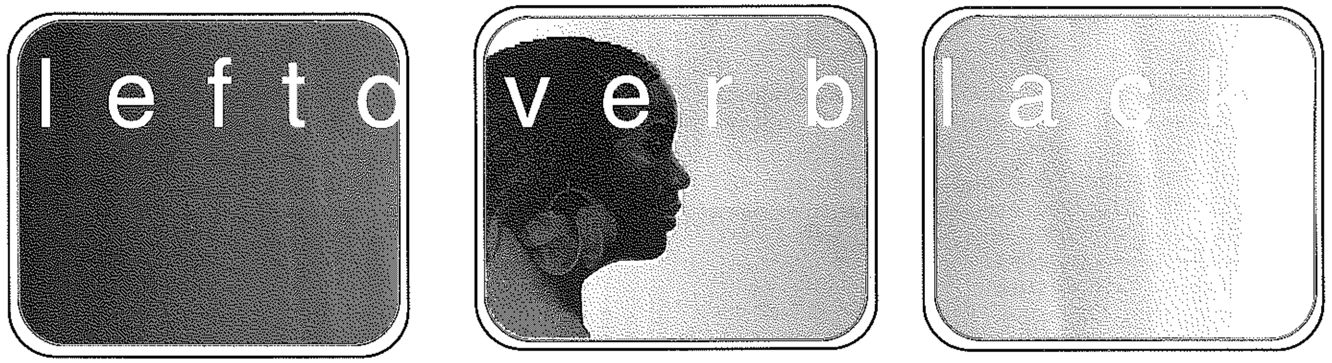


***Expeditions*, Black Audio**

by Ramabai Espinet.


l e f t o v e r b l a c k

Leftover 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

Seated between two windows
A train rushing headlong
Into God-only-knows-which-territory

I, signed by nothing
Neither clothes, nor hair,
Skin 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
Spitting itself
Into a salt 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 corbeaux' wings

Most days seam themselves
Over like this
fingering the map

Chorus:

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

Excerpt from Poetry/Dance Performance piece "Indian Robber-Talk" by Ramabai Espinet. Choreographed and danced by Sudharshan. Presented at Desh Pardesh, 1993 and at Harbourfront's Rhythms of India Festival, 1993)by Ramabai Espinet.

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, pregnant, 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 dread fall)

Could only imagine
Panic, groping fingers
Her unborn child's tears
The desperate climb
Away from the immigration
Hunter-man
And how
In haste and miscalculation
She missed
And then
The fallen heap below.

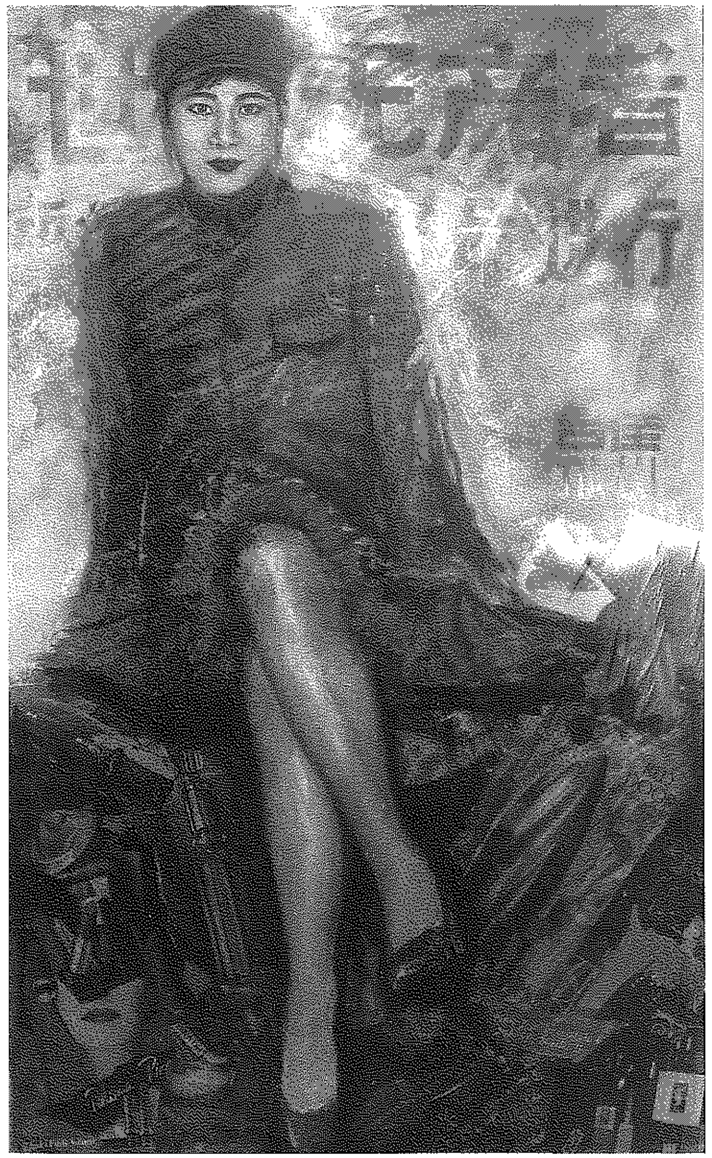
A knock on the door
That day in summer
And she knew
She was alone.

From *Nuclear Seasons*,
Ramabai Espinet,
(Sister Vision Press, Toronto, 1991).

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 lonely 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 very satisfied and put it on the ground and hence afterwards everyone in Asia was yellow.

Putting aside its patriarchal overtone, 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 bogeymen, animalistic creatures, and were consistently referred to as "barbarian devils" and "foreign devils".

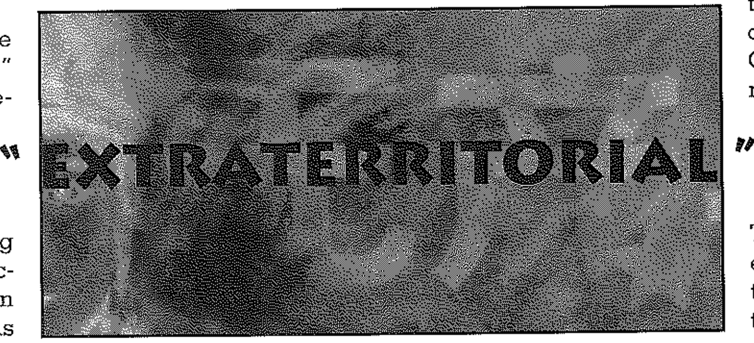


Red, Lu Jia

By
Xiaoping Li

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 raided China's coastal cities with advanced weapons and helped the Chinese Emperor suppress Chinese peasant uprisings. Armies of eight European countries also stormed Beijing, leaving ruins of an imperial palace standing silently in the city's northern suburbs as a witness of that destruction and robbery. While racial prejudices against black people continue, from the Opium War onwards, the Chinese are no longer able to absorb or expel the (white) Other through imagination. Now they are located in a shifted world power relation — the centre of the world has moved to what was formerly considered the "barbarian" West.

The perception of the West being the modern world's "centre" can be easily traced in the public, popular discourses and everyday actualities when taking a walk today on the streets of China's cities, and scanning the signs of Western pop culture and lifestyles. 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 in to a general acknowledgement that the (white) Other has created, in the past few hundred years, a culture "superior" to the indigenous, judging by its technological material development, and cultural/artistic innovations.



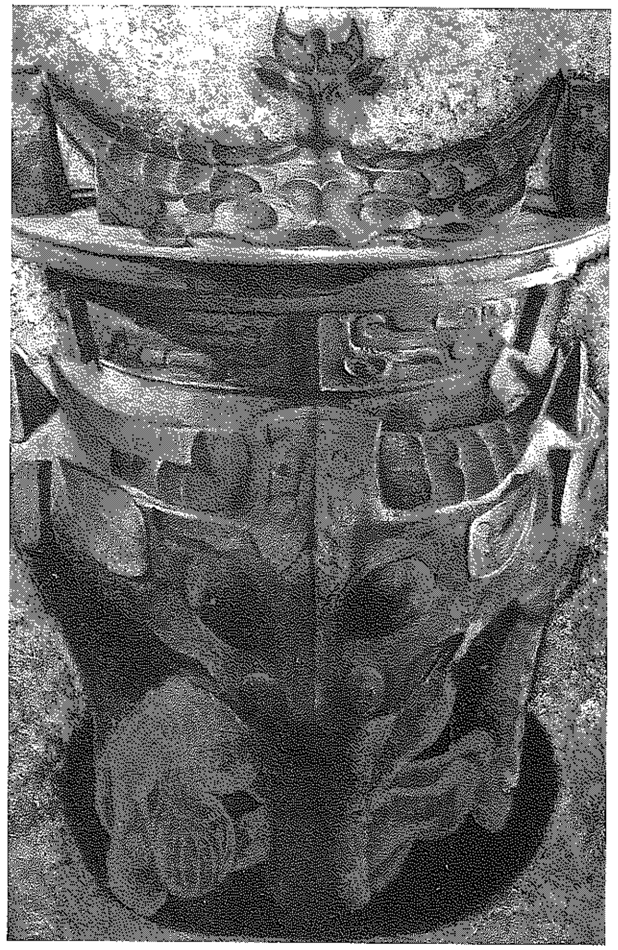
Rather than write about how the "West" (Euro-America) is represented in China today, I will turn to a broader issue -- that of the current Sino-West encounter by looking specifically at some practices of visual arts in China since the 1980s. As a student and later an instructor in Chinese universities 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 diasporan experience serves as a symbolic return to "home".

Earlier this year my Chinese friends and Canadian artist Bruce Parsons organized an exhibition of contemporary Chinese Art at Artspace, in Peterborough, Ontario. The first art exhibit of this scale from mainland China, it displayed selected works by 14 artists created between 1986 and 1993. These works do not represent the entire radical art movement which so significantly affected the nation in the 1980s, but they offer a glimpse of the social changes, shifts of perceptions, cultural borrowing and inventions 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 transplantation of European classical oil-painting to China in the early twentieth century and confined to Soviet socialist realism for three decades after the 1949 revolution) is enriched by DADA, surrealism, American pop art, abstract expressionism, and impressionism. Even the traditional Chinese ink painting bears the mark of modernity and of aesthetic transgression. For instance, in an interpretation of an ancient Chinese poem, human skulls are scattered on the long misty way of the quest, vanishing into infinity, which violates traditional, elitist aesthetics. In short, the show unveils a significant phenomenon: Chinese artists have absorbed forms of modern Western art and translated them into the language of Chinese avant-gardism.

The rise of a "cosmopolitan avant-garde art" in China, as dubbed by a Western sinologist, 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 map territories of experience shared by those living at intersections of times, spaces and cultures.

Thus these works bear some resemblance to a whole genre of twentieth century Western literature proposed by the critic George Steiner as "extraterritorial", a literature by and about exiles. To be clear, these artists are not real exiles — none of them are banished from their homeland for political or other reasons. My somewhat strained parallel points to the effects of modernity — the Chinese are losing contact with a sense of wholeness as a result of the rapid changes in the country. The typical "structures of feelings" of the exile, 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 homecoming is out of the question, most of them are uncertain about their destinies.

Nevertheless, I detect a certain attachment in their detachment, and facets of typical Chinese national/ cultural consciousness in their aspirations to the status of the transcendental. What is embedded in the artists' border-crossing is a preoccupation with the lost or transforming "home". This preoccupation has been a key characteristic of Chinese cultural nationalism — since the late nineteenth century, the Chinese intelligentsia have engaged themselves in searching for solutions for China's predicament. The national project of cultural critique and the awareness of China's predicament are accentuated by a number of works. On one hand, the Chinese must move into the outside world as a strategy to eradicate feudalism and local repression, as *Self-Portrait* and other works suggest. On the other hand, the



Self Portrait, Lu Jia

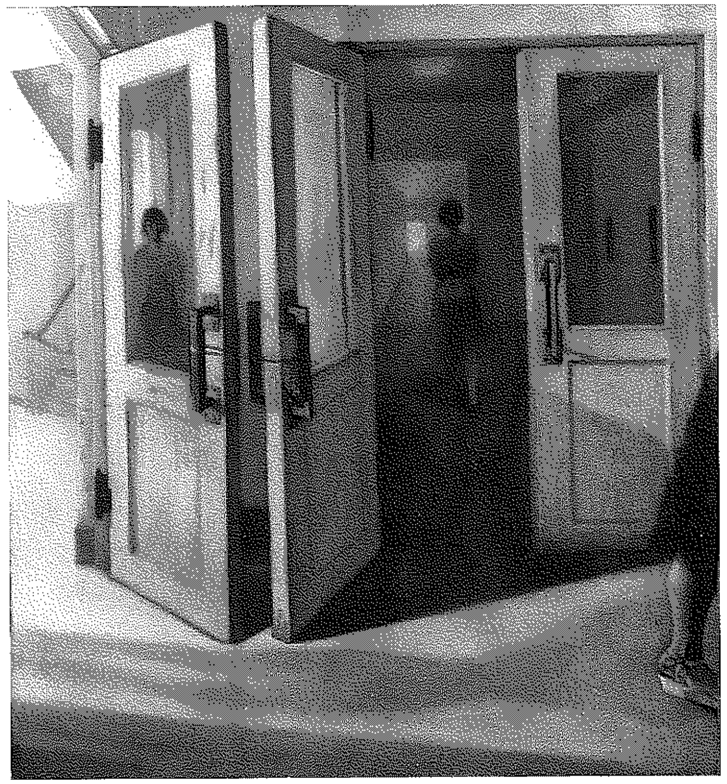
artists feel threats from another front, that is, consequences of the current Sino-West encounter, which is clearly marked by unequal power relations. *Open Door*, for example, captures accurately the perplexity of the Chinese at the moment when they were finally allowed to step out of the space in which they were restricted to. *Red* reveals a contradiction in Chinese life after the "door" is open: a female PLA (People's Liberation Army) soldier, dressed in an army jacket, red skirt and red high-heeled shoes, sitting against a golden background with the slogan — "World Proletariat are determined to carry the revolution to the end" — juxtaposed with fragments of Western advertisements of cars, cosmetics, and fashion. Under the PLA cap, her young, innocent face smiles through a veil of make-up. The artist's critique of an emerging social formation in China, a hybridity of totalitarian politics and Western capitalist consumerism is apparent.

All the works exhibited indicate a further appropriation of modern Western forms of expression by Chinese artists since the early 1980s. However, unlike what happens in a consumer culture, where race and ethnicity, as bell hooks points out, "become commodified as resources for pleasure," the appropriation of Western art forms by Chinese artists acts primarily as a critical intervention challenging repression, and enabling critical resistance and cultural reinvention in local contexts.

Looking back, the adaptation 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 doctrines of tastes and restrictions (i.e. Soviet socialist realism); second, to express forbidden subject matters and emotions, and to voice criticisms; and finally, to move out of the shell of tradition and forge a cultural renewal. Given the fact that the new 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 self or hold a "poignant affirmation" of traditional society, those who advocate `Negritude' and those who achieve "stylistic bridges" 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 Peterborough. If some works bear traits of self-negation in the mode of cultural critique, most of them can be seen as examples of "stylistic bridges", that is, a mix of foreign and indigenous techniques and cultural codes. Some, like the traditional ink-painting, try to incorporate modern, Western elements while rooted in Chinese cultural heritages. However, these attempts do not necessarily reduce the pressure on the avant-garde artists who practise a primarily imported form of art.

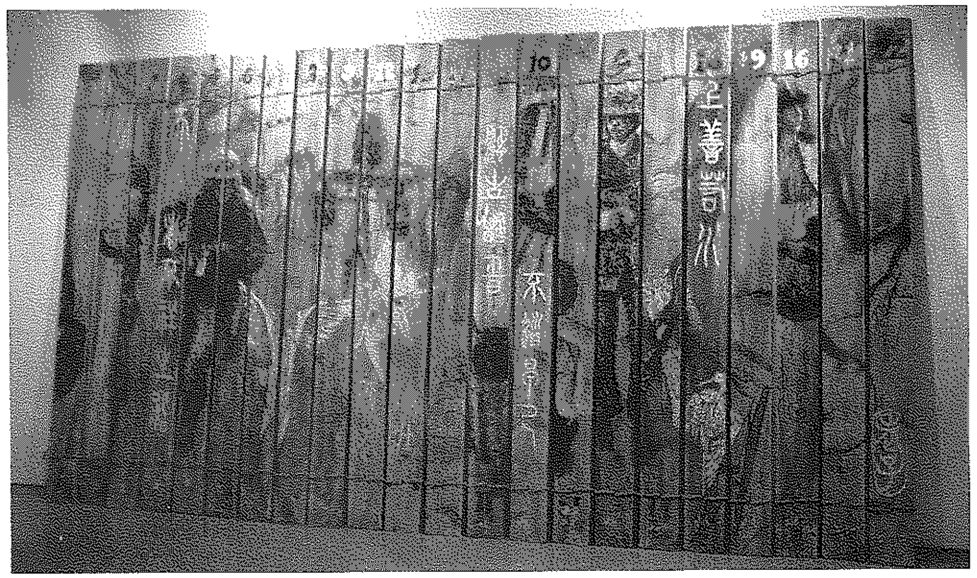
If Western modes of representations are readily adapted for local political projects, Chinese artists face an identity crisis and other consequences of borrowing from a powerful Other. How can they clear themselves of accusations of imitation and inauthenticity? Furthermore, although the original transplantation 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 artists' claim of originality, creativity and universal validity at home, and their recognition by the "world" — or the West — depend greatly on their seeming identification with Western aesthetic configurations.



Open Door, Li Yian Qian

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 Other(s). 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 at 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 intrusion of Laotzu's serene 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. From *The Second State*, where Andy Warhol's influence is visible, I can sense the terror of being squeezed by state restriction and pressure 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 skillful in skirting official routes. The fact that a cultural renewal has to be built partially upon modes of expression and representations borrowed from Other(s), and that foreign commercial cultural products are pouring into the country as China's modernization course is becoming more capitalist-oriented, make 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 those artists in diaspora, is the imperative project of identity reconstruction. Such an awareness seems to open up possibilities to deal with the problems inherent in the act of borrowing.



The Unfinished Book, Qin Ming

If *The Unfinished Book* and *The Second State* reveal feelings of melancholia, 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 to meet 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 — from a university instructor at home to a busboy in a cafeteria 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 Ning, *This Is Not The May Flower* and *The Raft Of Medusa*, transgress the historical Euro-American events by shifting our attention to the voyages made by millions of migrants to North America, who were up-rooted by war, economic hardships 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 made of cooking pots and sails made of patched, faded T-shirts of a variety of colours and sizes, with phrases 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 "journeys" made by those rendered 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 margin, they also make possible the articulation of marginalized experiences at the very centre of world power and art.

Despite their shared experience 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 terms of Euro-American art. In my view, the diasporan practice is particularly significant, not merely because it can enrich discussions on "travelling theory" and "travelling 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 travelling of modern Western art idioms to China under its "open-door" policy, and that travel, to a certain extent, also anticipates its journeying to North American and Europe. Is this a return of the Western elements which have voyaged to the Far East mediated by Chinese artists?

Said points out that as a theory travels, the new location in time and space would necessarily affect how it is accepted (or rejected). In the Chinese case, although all artists make use of Western modes of representations, the outcomes bear the mark of the specific locations in which they are practised. While those at home strive to achieve a sameness (as close as to that of the West) in order to declare their radicalism and rebellion against Chinese authority and tradition (which, unfortunately, could mean the internalization of the self-as-other), the diasporan practice suggests that the "return" of the travelling cultural elements to their origin is subject to the influence of the mediators, or the artists' re-insurgent racial, ethnic, cultural and national consciousness and their positions in the margin. Unlike those at home, artists in the diaspora are conscious of the significance of remaining Chinese while speaking through a cosmopolitan language. Therefore, striving for differences rooted in their own cultural heritages while achieving certain identification with practices in the centre is the other strategy of resistance used by Chinese artists in the diaspora.

Such consciousness and efforts indicate the positivity of diasporan experience, or the "exile consciousness" celebrated by Said. He ascribes "a scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity" to the exile. It is the capability to see "the entire world as a foreign land" that gives rise to a plurality of vision and an awareness that is "contrapuntal". As both in/outsiders, these artists' critical awareness of cultures, self and others, their own (cultural, racial, social and political) locations in the margin of a white-dominant society compel them to articulate from what Stuart Hall calls "a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position as "ethnic artists". This enables them to maintain their difference through creative ways of interrogating and appropriating what they borrow from the Centre. I am anxious to see the impact of the diasporan practice on the development of a modern Chinese art once it travels back "home".

Xiaoping Li is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at York University. She is currently working on contempory Chinese art, culture and politics in China and the diaspora.

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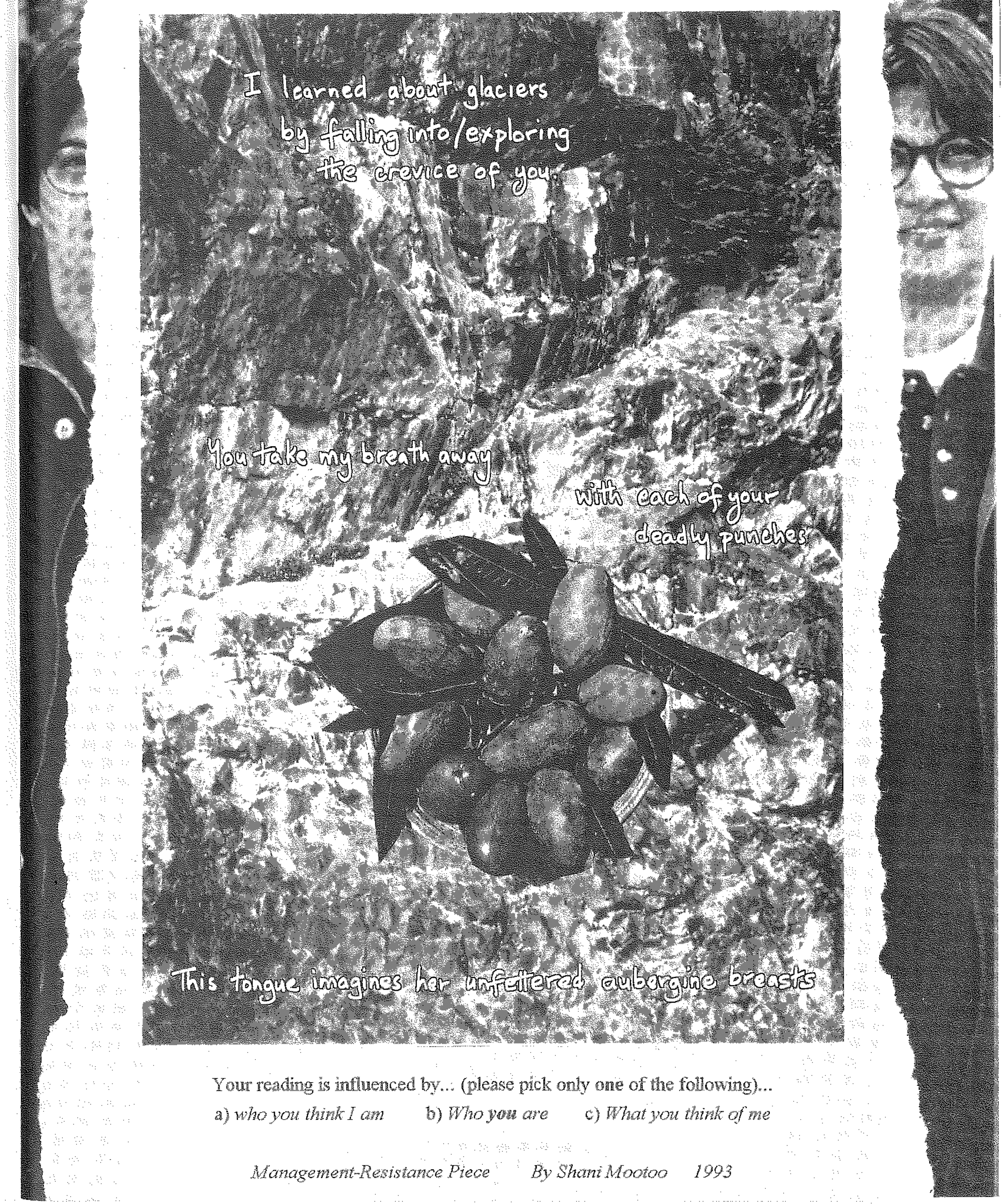
There once was a woman from...

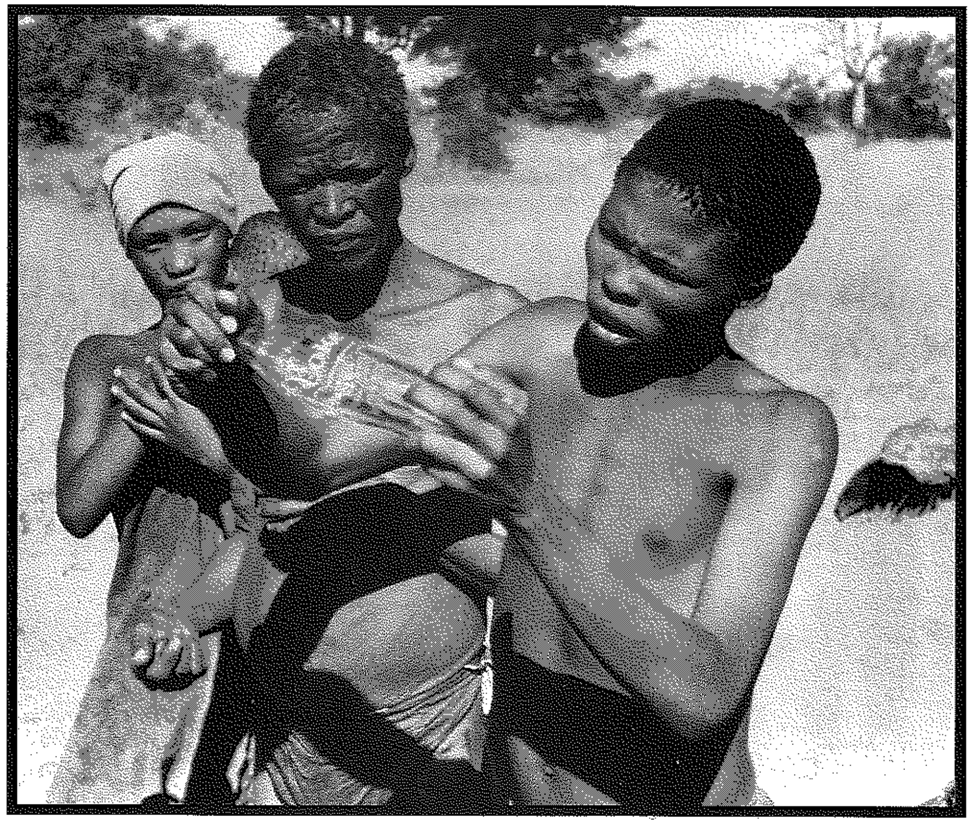


Your reading is influenced by... (please pick only one of the following)...

a) *who you think I am* b) *Who **you** are* c) *What you think of me*

Management-Resistance Piece *By Shani Mootoo* *1993*

What is Transnational Cultural Studies?



The God's Must Be Crazy

Alan O'Connor

A decade or two ago, transnational cultural studies would have meant something quite different. It might have meant research from Latin America which stressed the role of transnational corporations in shaping a global culture of consumerism. The best known example of this research genre is probably Dorfman and Mattelart's *How to Read Donald Duck:* *Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic* (1975), originally published in 1971 in the context of Allende's radical government in Chile. Such studies of transnational corporations and US ideology no longer dominate the field. This is in part because of the retreat of many intellectuals from Marxism during the past decade. 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 mediations 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 difficulties of Adorno and others in exile in the US entered into their writings on "mass culture." Although still of some importance (especially among intellectual formations of the 1968 generation in the United States) the generalized cultural pessimism 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 calling 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 inflection is somewhat different in each nation, the activity is recognizably 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 as *East of Dallas*. A collaborative research project alone does not create a new collective identity. However the break-up and reformation of political collectivities is of central importance for cultural research. Consider, for example, a recent issue of the the journal *Media, Culture and Society* which was dedicated to the problems 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 1930s, 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 names of activists and intellectuals such as C.L.R. James, Frantz Fanon and Edward Said are acknowledged but seem to belong nowhere 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 therefore, in this emergent moment, to pause 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 distances himself quite sharply from Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson and Iain Chambers. Gilroy's work is a critical sociology drawing on Alain Touraine's writings on new social movements and Manuel Castells' studies of grass-roots 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, utopia 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 racist political arguments that British 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 owe 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 diasporic and therefore transnational cultural practices. Reggae music is clearly a movement between different parts of the world. Although fragmentation, carnival, borrowings and cross-overs are the themes of Gilroy's narrative of Black culture, he also demonstrates that there are bloody limits to the notion of carnivalization (which has entered cultural studies through the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin). Gilroy's narrative describes the deliberate blocks placed by racist whites and the state against a carnivalized 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 trans-cultural exchange by the dominant culture and the state. As the patterns are laid down, blacks 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 carnivalization badly needs to remind itself of diaspora, exclusion and policing.

An equally important book of transnational cultural studies is William Rowe and Vivian Schelling's, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* (London and New York: Verso, 1991). 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 transnational 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 as not only military movements but also as cultural practices.

A number of topics have emerged in Latin American cultural studies. Rowe and Schelling include indigenous beliefs and culture in the Andean region, Mexican handicrafts, festivals and popular theatre, Brazilian literatura de cordel, the telenovela, alternative media, carnival and Samba 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 telenovelas 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.

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

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 believers, participants, fans. Political parties including Apra in Peru, the PRI in Mexico and the Peronists in Argentina, have attempted to articulate such collective identities with a populist 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 nation by indigenous movements throughout Latin America, and the rejection of macho militarism by the mothers of the "disappeared" in Chile.

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

The strengths of *Memory and Modernity* are 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 concentrated on providing a map of the field rather than engaging in theoretical debates. Nonetheless, it would be useful at this point to have clarified the quite different theoretical positions of Latin American writers such as Nestor Garcia Canclini, Jesús Martín-Barbero and others. Rowe and Schelling offer only a brief critique of the *Journal of Popular Culture* approach to the subject. They give no theoretical assessment of semiotics in Latin America. 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 only 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 sphere under military dictatorships and its painful reconstruction is touched upon in a discussion of Chilean *arpilleras*. 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 transnational cultural studies. An unresolved tension exists between the work of Paul Gilroy and a cultural studies based on the work of Gramsci. This is summarized in the following diagram.

Gilroy	Gramscian Cultural Studies
race as fundamental	social class category
non-negotiable demands	coalition politics means moving away from a corporatist position
control of field: immediate satisfaction of desires	coalition-building: long-term "war of position"
body, spirituality	intellectual discipline

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 foundation of white working-class racism. The tension between an analysis based on Alain Touraine's theory of social movements and Antonio Gramsci's theory of coalition-building remains to be resolved both in theory and in practice. But we must conclude by noting yet again how much *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* and *Memory and Modernity* have moved away from the assumption that culture is a national culture.

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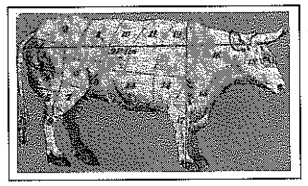
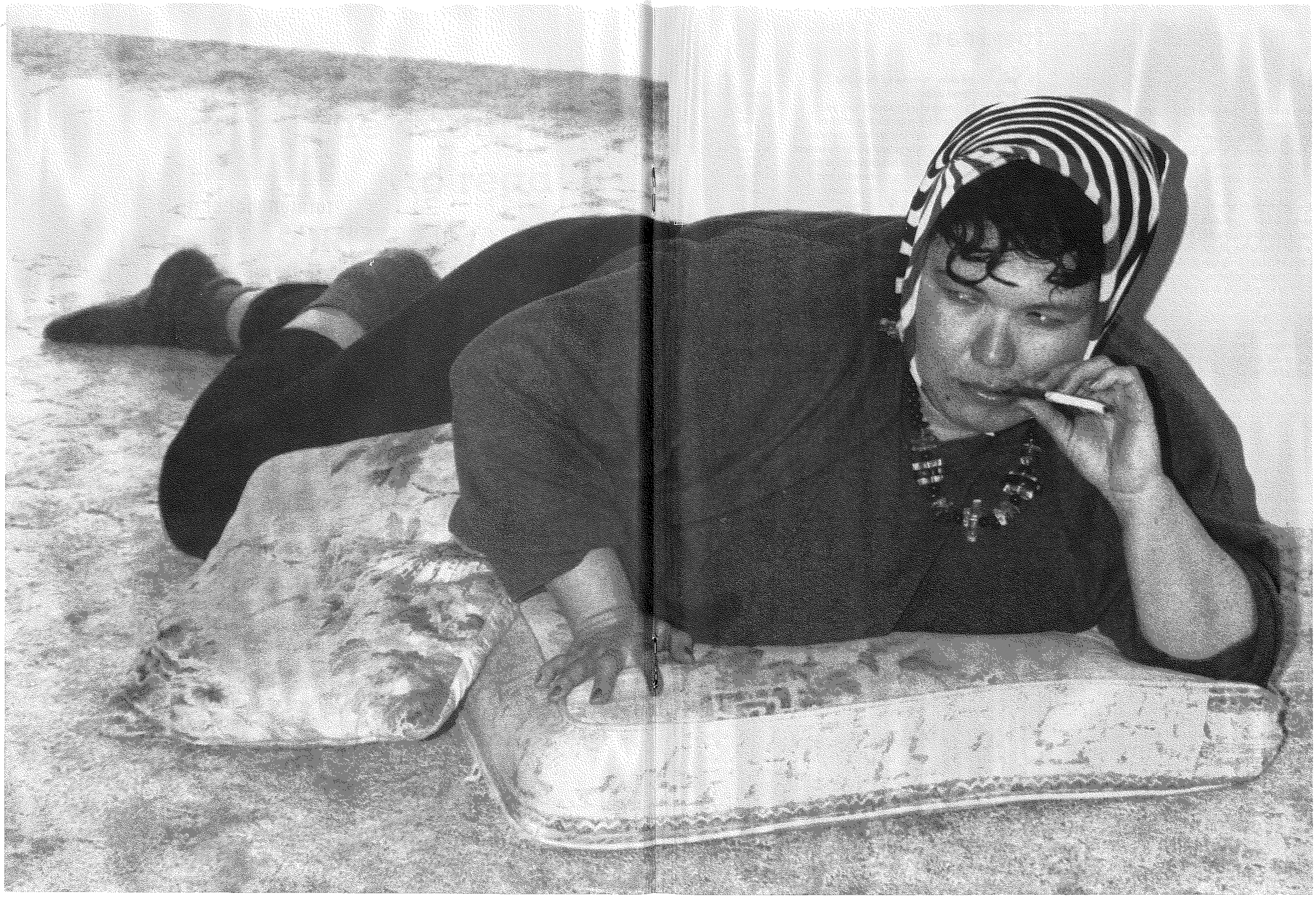


foreign matter

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 anothers
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



"Mohawk on a Cloud" from the exhibition Mohawk and Beehives by Shelly Niro

a letter for Iraq

Dearest,

Sitting in cafes and museums of Europe,
Amsterdam to be precise, places where you
have not been, nor where the dark and the
green that is in you, in the delicate lines of
your face, in the curves of your eyes, are never
reflected, I carry you in the lines of my palms.

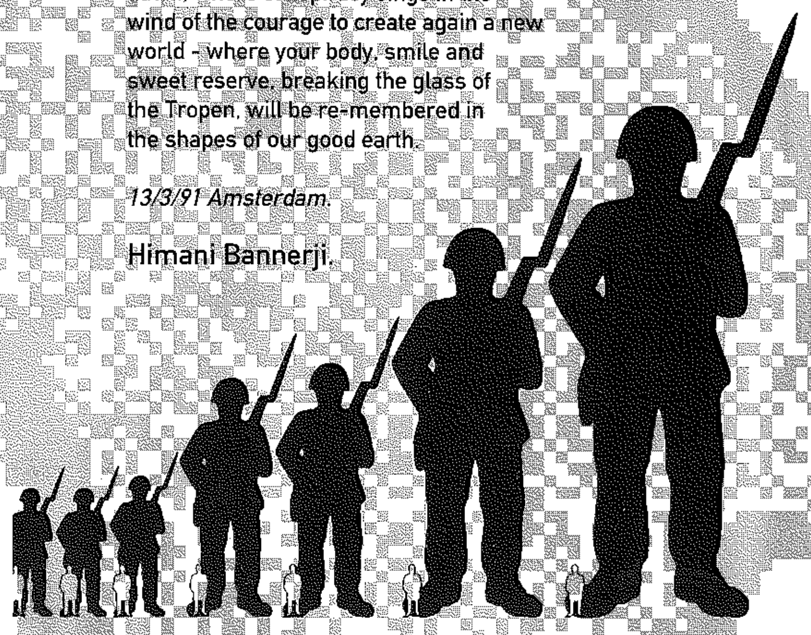
Except perhaps in their Tropen, colonial museum,
where you lie fragmented in the objects
which they have torn apart from their history,
like limbs from the whole, live body, and put
on display. There my sweet, in clay, wood,
beads, pieces of bamboo, your humble body
is offered to my sight as artefacts. I cannot
touch you; this is Europe, you are a museum
piece, a million miles of distance by air, a
fantasy formed in airline posters and
shatterproof fibreglass which preserves the
death of our everyday lives, to create their
civilization.

And now there is spring in Europe,
the sweetness of the purple crocusses, the
white of the hyacinths, the blue of the iris
melt you with their sun. Trees whisper their
green secrets and in the official museum
of the city they display their prizes, horrors,
visions of war and peace, in an exhibit
of photo journalism. For decades Europe nurses
its sores. When they heal they are
photographically provoked to bleed, to let
the pus of memory ooze out. Europe re-
members - its nazi past. In slow rhythm
strikes chest, forehead, forces
tears and grimaces. But behind the collage of guilt,
memories and predations of the past,
Tropens, British museums, nazis later,
send bombs, cameras and transforms
a war into lightshows and videogames.
Your body- arab, indian, black,
vietnamese, chilean, panamanian,
nameless, dark, splinters, cracks into
a thousand pieces thrown up into the sky
by jets of oil: Every pore of your body
visible to the radar eye of the dark.
Wind of peace blowing in the operation
desert storm whistles through the pores of
your singed skin. A hundred thousand
sorties without blood!
Dearest, the soles of your singed feet, your
child's body charred- a charcoal graffitti of
history, your old man's unruly tears, swollen
veins in the hands, your young woman's defiant
curse, your old woman's hands raised to an
Allah who has fled the sky of starwars and
taken refuge with the dead Mesopotaian
gods. Ya Ali, Ya Hassan, Ya Hussein,
Karbala in flames a second time and a
horse runs wild, with hooves of fire through
the bombed streets. And the good King Haroun
al Rashid once upon a time in Baghdad
in a child's book flees with Duldul into an
ocean of blood. Your cry rips apart the
television screen - will no one stop this war
machine? My sweet, say nothing to them. Nothing
has stopped their march of civilization, while
their blind hearts whisper tales of our savagery
and their strategic adjustments. Let us hold
each other by the hand and walk together
through our myriad lives.

In this terror of a golden spring, where
the clay jar holding the ashes of our ancestors,
the gentle hand of time reaching out to be held,
is smashed, crushed, thrown into the grime
of betrayals, wars, cynicisms, let us my
love go together into that cave, where
others wait with a secret
sign, where darkness holds the key to
dawn, where conspiracy sings in the
wind of the courage to create again a new
world - where your body, smile and
sweet reserve, breaking the glass of
the Tropen, will be re-membered in
the shapes of our good earth.

13/3/91 Amsterdam.

Himani Bannerji.



Interview with Aijaz Ahmad

April 9, 1993 Toronto, Canada

(with Sourayan Mookerjea,
Rinaldo Walcott, Kathryn White)

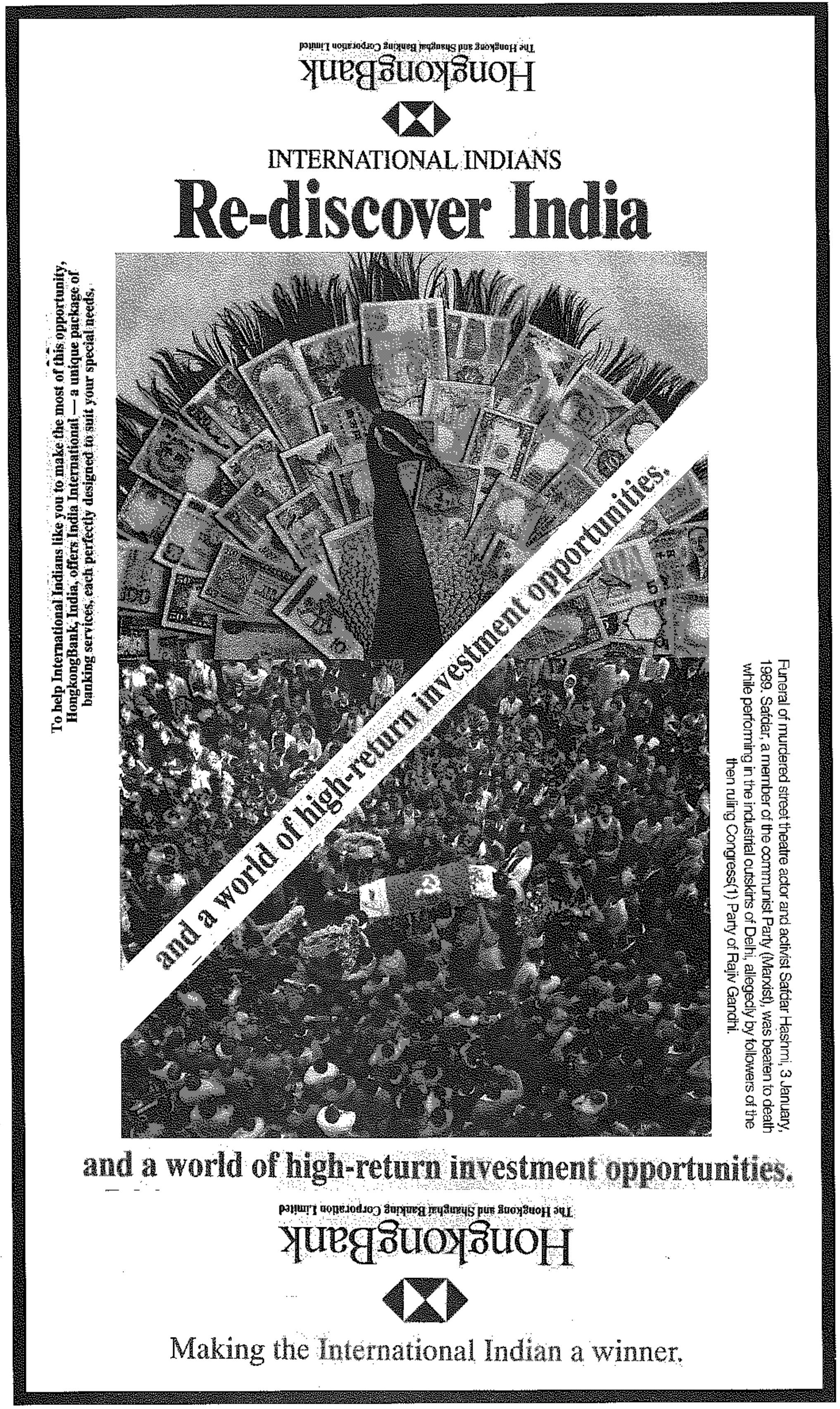
Professor Aijaz Ahmad has taught English literature at Rutgers University in the United States for the last twenty years. Before going to the U.S., Ahmad had lived in both Pakistan and India and established a considerable reputation as a political activist and organizer with the sub-continental left and as a contemporary poet of Urdu. Recently he returned to India to take up a research post at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. Over the years he has published poetry in Urdu, translations of poetry from other languages as well as various books and articles on society and politics. His most recent book, *In Theory,* published by Verso, is a comprehensive and historical exploration of the politics of the intersections of post-colonial, postmodern and-poststructuralist theory which has quickly provoked considerable controversy and, in some quarters, even hostility. His next book, forthcoming from Verso, is entitled:*Contested Terrains: Studies In the History and Historiography of Nationalism.*

Border/Lines: The three of us have talked about how today there is, on the one hand, an openness to theory but at the same time there also seems to be a shutting down of certain questions or positions particulary those related to Marxism.So while we were all pleased that your book seemed to open up a space to address these issues again, one of our questions to you would also be to tell us more specifically what you mean by poststructuralism?

In the beginning of the book you talk about a whole engagement with continental theory—hermeneutics, Bakhtin, Benjamin, Gramsci, but then later on, I guess as a polemical term, this whole conglomeration becomes simply poststructuralism. Yet I know from another of your essays that you speak positively about Bakhtin, for example—who is someone I'm quite interested in. So I guess what I want to ask you is, firstly, how do you conceive of poststructuralism and secondly, what, if anything, would be the positive side of this movement?

Aijaz Ahmad: Ok, a couple of things. You might have noticed that in my talk yesterday I said that I regret I will postpone my own engagement with poststructuralism yet again. I was joking with myself because that is actually how I see what I've done in this book. I have referred to poststructuralism but my concern has not been a systematic engagement with, or developing a critique of it as a whole, but with the ways in which certain poststructuralist positions resurface in the kinds of writing and critical discourse I'm engaged with. In other words, for me it is not an engagement with Foucault, but the way Foucault resurfaces, let's say, in Said's thought. In the use that I make of Althusser's work, the engagement is not with him but with how Althusser's arrival in the Anglo-American academy is used to stage a new kind of Marxism in which the question of class political agency and those kinds of questions have been suppressed under the weight of very heavy kinds of theoreticisms. Now in retrospect, I think that it is somewhat unfortunate that I did that, that perhaps I should have engaged somewhat more systematically with these other positions that I'm mentioning. In the writings of the kinds of critics that I'm talking about, poststructuralism very often resurfaces in the form of platitude, vast sorts of generalizations, but also as a reference point which somehow validates this kind of work. So that's one sort of thing. [Secondly], poststructuralism, as you very well know, is so vast a thing that its boundaries are very hard to fix. Is Foucault a post structuralist? Was Foucault a structuralist? At what point does he cease to be one? If he never was a structuralist in some precise sense, then in what sense could he himself be a poststructuralist? The book that I'm doing now is not going to be about literary theory. The historiography of Indian nationalism will be a major concern there. There will be a very lengthy chapter on Islamic movements and Islamic nationalism.

I do think that one of the things one absolutely has to do is to refuse this pressure that now all of history has to be re-



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Funeral of murdered street theatre actor and activist Safdar Hashmi, 3 January, 1989. Safdar, a member of the communist Party (Marxist), was beaten to death while performing in the industrial outskirts of Delhi, allegedly by followers of the then ruling Congress(1) Party of Rajiv Gandhi.

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 would 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 marvellous 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.

B/L: Foucault and Derrida are most often associated with poststructuralism. But people often also use poststructuralism as an umbrella term to cover a variety of thinkers and approaches. What about some others like, 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.

Sheba Chhachhi

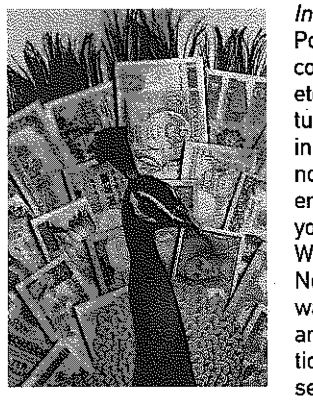
B/L: You also have to deal with how Lacan and Foucault don't fit together.

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 a poststructuralist. 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 less, is the rediscovery of Bakhtin's texts which had already posed the critique.

B/L: 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, that'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 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 uses 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 disassociation 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 *Dialogic 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 *Rabelais*, 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 is staged here, 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 is immediately slotted 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 is most celebrated about Bakhtin is the carnivalesque and this is very quickly assimilated here into a politics of pleasure. The emphasis here is not on the dialectic of opposition to orthodoxy, to dominance, in a medieval form of politics — in which the people actually posed their politics against the church in the form of the carnival before class politics was available to them. 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 pleasure, eruption of desire, desiring machines, so that the work of Bakhtin becomes a kind of early Deleuze and Guatteri, an 'anti-Oedipus.'

B/L: But class politics has also had its own cultural politics all along however much this has been, from situation to situation, either kept under guard or allowed to run loose and intensify. Isn't this the significance of the medieval carnival for us today? Wasn't the impulse behind the 'politics of desire' the creation of a form of politics whose point of departure is class politics but which refuses to settle down into only that fight and takes aim at other targets such as at the social bodies of patriarchy, racism and homophobia? Wasn't that the impulse behind these ideas even if one wanted to then say all of this was received and taken up in North America in an aggressively anti-Marxist context where class politics is carefully taken out of everything.



I want to pursue this issue of your evaluation of the politics of the 'theory' of the title of your book. Now, with regard to this question of the politics of this 'theory'—if you mean by this only poststructuralism—one of the claims that is always advanced on its behalf is that its critique of 'Western' rationality, of the subject, of the philosophy of history, is actually the strongest of any critiques of imperialism. One of the things that makes *In Theory* an important book, in my view, is that it takes up this claim by looking at the work of people like Said, Bhabha, and Rushdie. But I'm still wondering, not only at the absence of Spivak from your considerations, but also at what an evaluation of the politics of these particular theories, especially on the question of imperialism, that does not also address the work of people like Derrida and Foucault directly can teach us in the long run.

Ahmad: Well one thing is that I think it is unfair to either like or dislike a book because of what it does not talk about. A book can not talk about everything and should be read mainly for what it sets out to do. I think I have made it quite clear that the book is really about a certain historical moment in which literary theory increasingly calls itself theory in general. What is going on is something of a take-over of the humanities by literary theory in which disciplines like history, disciplines like sociology, disciplines of this kind are tremendously under pressure to institute methods in which everything is read as a text, so that very literary kinds of hermeneutics get privileged over painstaking archival research. Books which have a very thin archival base or no original archival work but which fall within these thematics are getting to be highly valued in the field. Literary history is claiming to be history. As for your specific points (a) that I do not refer to Spivak and (b) that we might learn something about imperialism by looking at positions inspired by Foucault, Derrida et. al.— well, the omission of Professor Spivak was a matter of politeness, and I now believe I should have been equally polite toward Homi Bhabha as well. The interesting thing about Foucault is that he has virtually nothing to say about imperialism. We should have examined this silence, instead of simply adopting his protocols for the study of imperialism— even cultural imperialism. Derrida speaks of such things more directly, but what he has to say hardly ever goes beyond the familiar liberal positions.

B/L: For me the question of the politics of theorizing and how it is being contested arises in reading your book *In Theory* and listening to your talk yesterday. Poststructuralist thinkers who work on colonial discourse and or Third World literature and nationalism etc. hardly engage the voices of Third World intellectuals. I think that much of the theorizing taking place in the academy today does not go far enough, does not engage some of the voices that I feel need to be engaged. But in *In Theory* and in your talk yesterday, you dialogued 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 constituted, and how classes and class formations are struggled over, across and through. It seems almost as thought contemporary theorists 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 that a type of Eurocentred theorizing is flourishing where to invoke the voices of Foucault, Derrida, etc. is to be theoretical. Even a voice like Derrida with its colonial origins is not located in Algeria where we might be forced to think differently about the contributions that he makes to current debates. I'm just wondering if you can talk about that in the context of your own work.

Ahmad: Well okay. Let me start by saying something somewhat different from what you present. One aspect of the book, which for understandable reasons has not been noticed in the American discussion, is the simple fact that other than the Jameson piece, the book was written in India, spoken in India, published in India, before it arrived in London. It was not designed to address questions which are pressing the American, or the Western, academy, or the American obligation regarding research; but questions which, because of the power of these academies, are pressing the Indian intelligentsia. You see, there isn't a sharp distinction there because questions that press these academies immediately start pressing us in India because of the power these academies have. But then, there are certain questions which are pressing here that do not press there. One very striking thing is — you know this question of the Third World ? — it is in these countries that somebody becomes a Third World person; you're a Third World person because you're in Canada. In Calcutta, you call yourself a Third World person, people would send you to a psychiatrist. But because this happens and because of many other reasons—some very weird ones— one does, in India, deal with the category "Third World literature," "Third World politics". In India, Third Worldism has a very different shape, a very historical shape—after all, it goes back to Nehru in 1955—so one then deals with it in those terms. So what I deal with, and what I don't deal with, in the book has a lot to do with the questions that one was facing there. The occasion for me to start writing about Edward Said was because Edward Said was being taught in the methodology course in the graduate programme in the university in Delhi, and I said methodology! and that was the beginning of it. Now then, once one starts writing about it, one starts writing about a great many other things as well. But that, for example, has still left its traces, in the sense that much of the book is occupied with three definitions in Foucauldian method, and you know, those sorts of things: methods and historicizations. That is one sort of answer I would give, that in my work, these references to either Eurocentred sorts of emphases— Derrida but not Cabral—come partly because of the positions they occupy in the academic world which then presses on academic work.

B/L: I would like to push the question a little bit more and try to come across more clearly. I felt that you were willing to dialogue with voices 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 organizing in the Third World and who were/are intellectuals though their work is hardly taken up in the current debates - what made you continue a dialogue with this work? We know that these nationalist struggles 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 peasantry/workers as being the "soul" of the new nation in very contradictory and complex ways.

Ahmad: In my own development Cabral's writing, especially his essay "The Weapons of Theory"— and another essay of his which I've forgotten the exact title of but it's 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 were very important for me. When I was in my early twenties the writings of the Le Duan who became General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and a great deal of work of the organizational kind that was undertaken in Vietnam was something very central to me. Writings of Mao on the programs of post-revolutionary society but also on the reproduction of the bourgeoisie, in post-revolutionary society on the basis of ongoing commodity production, these were things that were very important to me at a certain point. So I'm actually very much formed by what you're calling these other voices. Much of what I say easily today is actually based on twenty years of thinking about all that. I agree entirely with what Cabral says about cultural alienation — that it is a problem essentially of the petit-bourgeoisie who lose their roots in their own culture. Considering that in Guinea Bissau there was no bourgeoisie (there was a petit-bourgeoisie there), "Return to the Source" essentially meant going back to the peasants. What he actually says is that 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, yesterday, I was saying that the way the subalternists historians think of nationalism, is in one respect remarkably similar to the way Congress intellectuals think of nationalism, both identify nationalism with Ghandi, Nehru, the great leaders, the upper-class intelligentsia, the canonical figures. I think the starting point has to be the opposite one. Some twenty million peasant households participated in the national movement, but under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. This discrepancy between the immensity of the mass base and the hegemony of a relatively weak national bourgeoisie is the real problem in understanding the trajectory of this nationalism. It was, in numerical terms, the largest peasant movement in history, more numerous than Mao's movement in China — but the popular forces could never effectively challenge the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. Instead of facing up to this problem, the subalternists speak of "dominance without hegemony," as if the Congress had some sort of army to force the peasantry. Simultaneously, they vastly understate the level of mobilization — as if anything other than mass pressure can account for the departure of the British. In effect, they simply evaporate the problem. A good beginning was made with Sumit Srkar's *Modern India*, but the ascendency of people like Partha Chatterjee in the subalternist's, ranks has served to disorient the project as a whole. I think we need to return to those basic questions and some comparative understanding of those Asian and African countries which have undergone analogous processes should be very helpful — more helpful than the turn to poststructuralism etc.

Likewise you know what has been suppressed is part of my development. Someday I will write about it, but part of my anger at subalternists in India is that the whole history of communists both organizing and writing about the peasantry, all the tribals in Central India and so on, is simply denied as if it never existed, as if the writing about these classes starts with the subalternists.

B/L: You mean how the subalternists have been taken up both in the Indian academy and in North America.

Ahmad: One of the reasons why the subalternists have a greater influence abroad than in India is this enormous claim of originality, as if things start with them, as if there were no histories which they are both suppressing and quoting. I may write about this particular phenomena at a future date, but this claim of utter originality is true of avant garde groupings generally, something I talk about in the book in a very different way where I talk about modernism. Modernism claims that its forms of narrativity have no pre-history. As if Kafka could write his novels without a nineteenth century tradition available to him. The reasons why something like *The Trial* appears so realistic once you have exercised your suspension of disbelief, or "The Metamorphosis" reads so realistically once you have accepted that this person has become a beetle, is that all the techniques of realistic writing are there and Kafka knows how to write a realist novel, except that he

Sheba Chhachhi

doesn't write realistically; that's all.

B/L: 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 inhabiting a realist tradition while also struggling around questions of modernism, people like Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes, Zora Hurston. Zora Neale Hurston whose work I would place between a realist and a modernist tradition with other kinds of influence coming into place such as anthropology. I'm just wondering if you can 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 evaporated 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 desire is much less, but even when there is a desire they simply cannot evaporate these questions 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 is that in the canonical modernism most writers situate themselves politically quite consciously in the anti-communist 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 presses 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 protocols of the canonical modernism of people like T.S. Eliot, or Ezra Pound, or Gertude Stein.

B/L: It seems to me that we are in a very ambivalent place right now because on the one hand we've got the virtual canonization 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-communist. It is with the publication of *Invisible Man* that the devaluation 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 marred 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 we won't talk about Ralph 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.

B/L: I'd like you to talk a little bit 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 to address questions specifically related to gender politics. And even those who remained within the framework of Marxism had to rethink, or negotiate with Marxism, often in a way which drew on other approaches derived from theorists such as Freud, Lacan, Foucault etc.

Ahmad: I think what needs to be problematized 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 feminisms. There are certain kinds of feminisms which can have a deeply educative function for classical categories of Marxism. There are other kinds of feminisms 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, without specification or qualifiers. About that, in fact, I'm much more unhappy than the fact that the term poststructuralism 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 communism in addressing the question of gender, and what we now call economism in the history of Marxism itself surfaces. I think, 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 economism when you're dealing with periodizations of history. I still want to keep a lot of the energy of what has been rejected today as economism 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 economism become much clearer.

However, I also think that Marxist engagements with the questions of gender have, even in the past, not been quite as mechanical as many strands of modern feminism suggests, either in writing, or in the practice of communist countries. In other words, it is from the standpoint of revolutionary transformation itself that those insufficiencies stand out most starkly. After all, women had dreadful pay in the Soviet Union certainly, but in no part of this world did Muslim women go as far as they did in the Asian republics of the U.S.S.R. You only have to compare the status of women in the Asian republics, which were historically far less developed, with countries like Turkey, Iran and Tunisia, the showcase of modernization in the Islamic world. So that's simply to say that one needs both to respond to and to think very, very seriously about the kinds of criticisms that are raised. But one also needs to keep, you know, some sense of history. After all, from Engels through Luxemberg, Kollontai and many others, there was a Marxist tradition that was not inferior, let us say, to their contemporary suffragettes. Now having said that, my sense is that the refounding of the communist movement, which is what I'm most interested in, is 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 categories of Marxism. My sense is that the very category on which Marxism has historically rested, namely labour, is going to have to be theoretically redone. 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 certainly 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 it's not really possible to think of gender except by going through all of these material processes and trajectories that constitute gender in actual history. Gender is a historical category; it is even a way of appropriating certain natural realities socially. Gender is, so to speak, the social and historical ways of appropriating nature and biology.

B/L: You said in your talk "Theorizing Nations: Nationalism and its Potentialities" that the nation-state is a necessary terrain for anti-imperialist struggle. I want to ask you about your thoughts on solidarity at 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 which recognises the fluidity of international capital. For example, I'm thinking of the North American Free Trade Agreement and how capital can move to Mexico unconditionally but Mexican labour moves to North America only under restrictive and disadvantaged conditions. How do we do politics that must at once address localized contextualized realities but also address international realities and not dissipate the two.

Ahmad: The situation is at least in one respect very different in countries like India. The global situation presses 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, they decide that this is something important, it is worth being exported to the world market and so on. Now in the imperialist countries there is a very different kind of situation, especially 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 those lines of demarcations do not hold now.

I think the way the world is actually constituted global transformation actually goes through the local and by the local I mean certainly the locally local. It is absolutely essential to have movements and politics which address issues of particular forms of local oppression. But to the extent that the nation 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 nation 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 is in fact increasing whereas its organization of social life mystifies that as if it is in fact getting more dispersed, which it's 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 form 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.

B/L: 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 fragmented.

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's facing the locality. When Pakistan came into being and brand new industrial cities started and the proletariat came in from the ends of the earth how do you start organizing these 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 communist organizing in Karachi started, by starting a collective fund for the workers to send the corpses back and to buy the right cloth 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 is what communism always did. It is the aggregation of those 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 place - and more difficult to defend the gains in a local circumstance. Party building always went from the local to the general, from factories and neighbourhoods 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 effected 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, Marxism 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.

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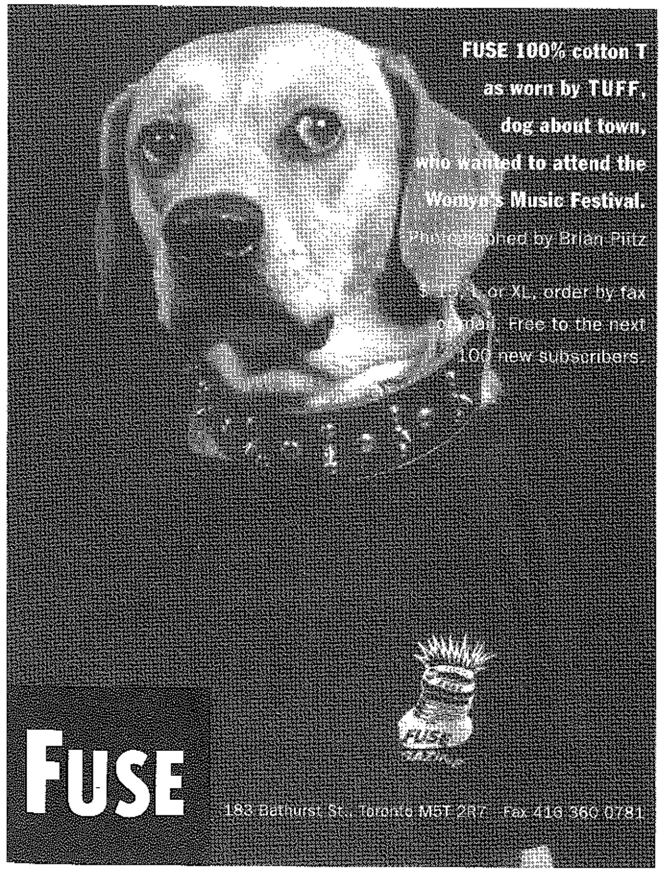

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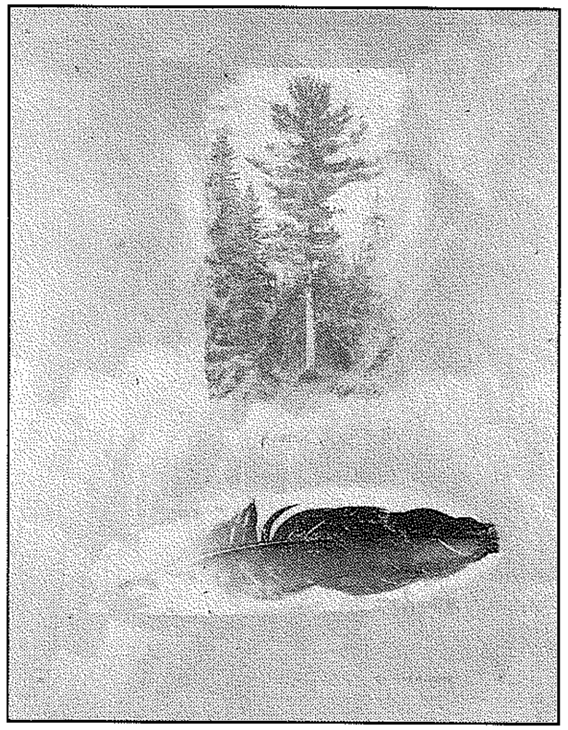

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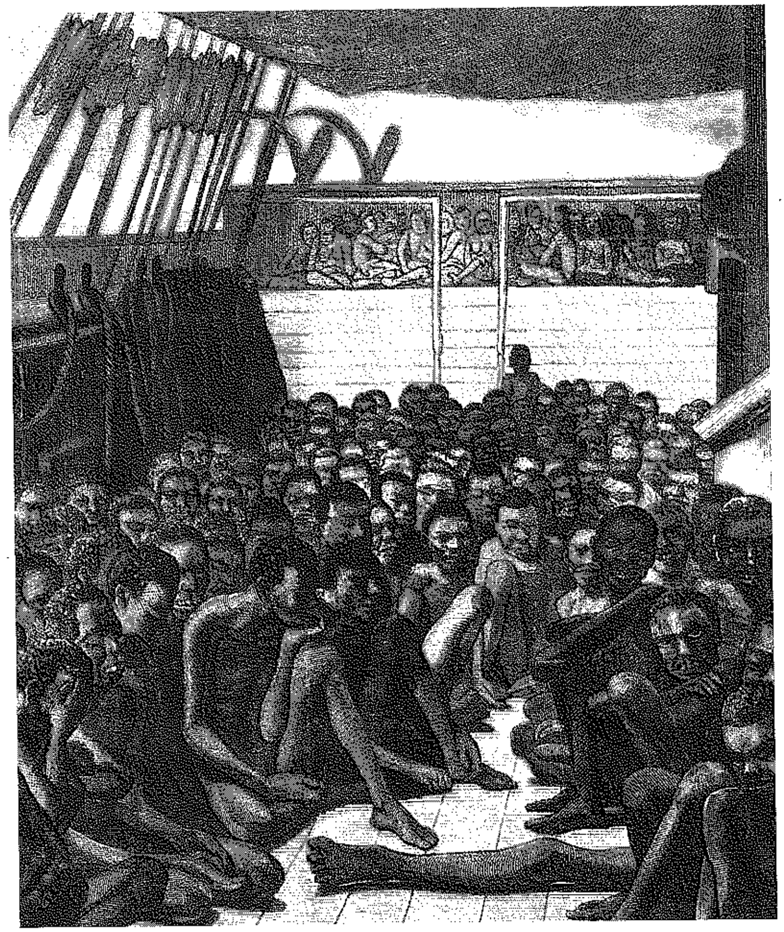
BLACK JEWISH RELATIONS



by M. Nourbese Philip

There are things the Negro knows that the white man can never know. Things which belong to the pure, unique, spiritual destiny of America, and which have been denied to the white man, will be denied to him forever because of his brutality to the Negro and to the Indian. So too there are things the Jew alone can know, things closed forever to the gentile even to the best of Christians.

(Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, Thomas Merton)

Race doesn't prescribe 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 rooting that often happens when one lives in a Black society, albeit one subject to the whims and fancies of the metropolis. 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 at my library — I had read virtually 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 `ethnic cleansing' came 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 pain 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 infinitely nuanced from one generation to another), and that I was on the journey to my own past albeit through a surrogate issue. It matters not <u>how</u> we come to understand oppression, provided we take the lessons to heart and apply them to our lives.

I know the exposure to be a significant one because it continues 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 though I knew all along)
the blue veins
the numbered wrist
...
I had given `It' a name-
Suffering
silent you shook your head, mouthed
"Persecution"
while they called it Ratings
...
and we were the B.C.Ds -
Basic Common Denominators -
silence divided by time
one oppression by two realities
the only remainder
one scrawny wrist
tattooed blue with numbers
and branded memories that balk at talk
...
D'you think it was like this
when Solomon showed his wares
his wisdom to the stranger eyes
of the black Queen from the South?
Did they bargain like this
stalking each other's memories
careful to avoid each other's potholes of
personal truth...

That was in 1983. In 1988, Mrs. Blewchamp, an old Jewish woman in my novel, *Harriet's Daughter*, leaves something for the fourteen-year-old Margaret/Harriet, the young African Canadian girl. What Mrs. Blewchamp has left for Margaret is still 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 descendant of survivors 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 allegations and counter-allegations 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 anyone who has more than a cursory understanding of the period of time of the African slave trade that every 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 pissed 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 cocoa to support America's addiction. So too having been forced by anti-Semitism in Europe into money-lending, some Jews were able to underwrite the expenses 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-African racism. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse notes, far more than their creator links Shylock and Othello, and the Medieval division of the world into the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japhet and ancestors of Asia, Africa and Europe respectively underscore these links. Semites and Hamites 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 is 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 Hottentot...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 not beautiful. Indeed, the blackness of the African, like the blackness of the Jew, was believed to mark a pathological change in the skin, the result of congenital syphilis. (my emphasis)**

Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body*

Gilman marshalls overwhelming evidence to show how European racial science linked both groups: Jews had "interbred with Africans during the period of the Alexandrian exile"; the Jew's Africanness was evident in "his muzzle-shaped mouth and face removing him from certain other races...lips (are) very full,(the) mouth projecting...the whole physiognomy, when swarthy, as it often is, has an African look."

Hitler argues in Mein Kampf that it is "Jews who bring the Negroes into the Rhineland, always with the same secret thought and clear aim of ruining the hated white race by ...bastardization..." Together with gypsies, homosexuals, Communists and Freemasons, Jews and Blacks would become the target of Nazi Germany.

It is deeply significant ...that each of these exclusions — of Jews and Blacks — "has led to a holocaust on a world scale the centuries 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*, Jan Nederveen Pieterse)

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 the "desire for 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 Katrowitz at a recent speech described Jews as the darkest of the whites and the fairest of the Blacks suggesting a sort of slippage as 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" reality where distance from Blackness continues to be a marker of progress. He sees Al Jolson's role as a Sambo figure performing "Mammy" in black-face as the consummation of this contradiction:

> **Are Jews white? Or do they become white when they, like Jack Robin, acculturate into American society, so identifying with the ideals of "American" life, with all of its evocation of race, that they — at least in their own mind's eye — become white? Does blackface make everyone who puts it on white?**

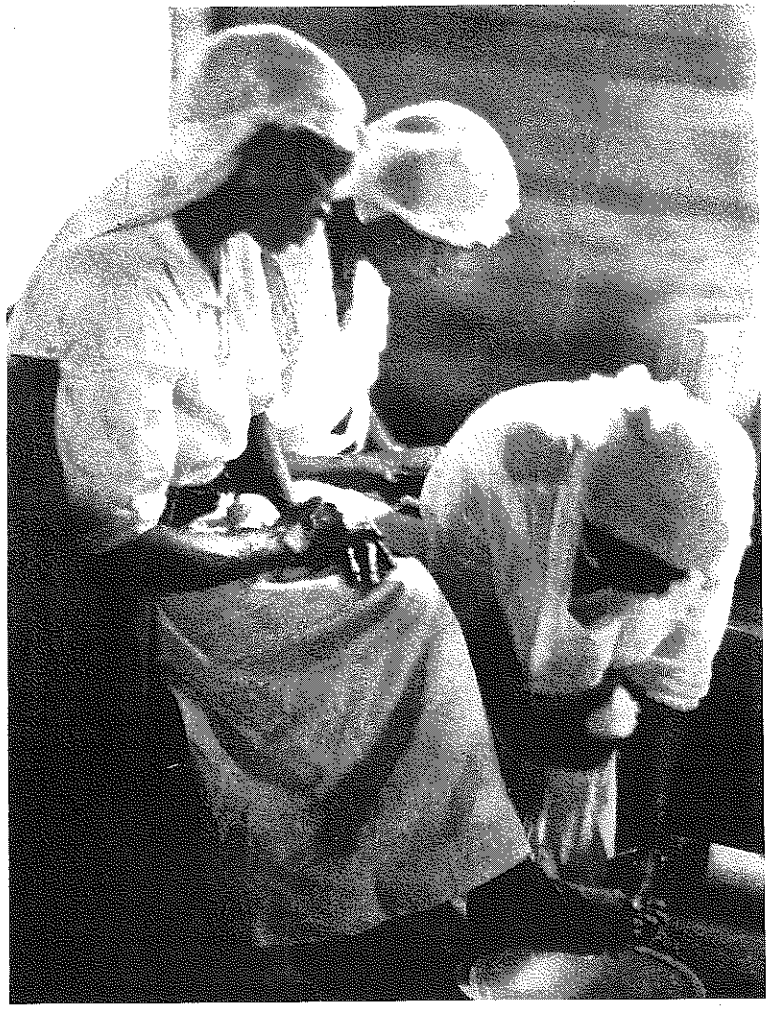
Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body*

"Lady of Tuskegee" by P.H. Polk, 1932

One of the most distressing aspects of the tensions between Blacks and Jews is the sense of competition for position of the privileged minority — the most oppressed group. The hierarchy of oppression such as was fuelled by recent statements by William F. Buckley (*The Toronto Star*, June 2, 1993) are offensive and should be avoided. Whose interests are being served when a lapsed anti-Semite dismisses the concerns of Blacks over *Show Boat* as preposterous and a "violation of the rights of the people of Toronto" and praises Jewish `hypersensitivity'? "Because of the Holocaust, Jews earned distinctive immunities," Buckley is quoted as saying; "indifference to that, hypersensitivity on the subject is correct."

Each group 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 in turn differs from what happened to the Jews. It would be presumptuous and very wrong of me, however, to tell a Native person that they didn't suffer as much as African people did. Maybe they did, maybe they didn't. But while we fight about who suffered most, we deflect energies from what the real struggle is all about.

The African scholar, Ali Mazrui, has argued that unlike in the case of Africans who had a commercial price put on them, Nazis hunted Jews purely to murder them. His argument, as stated in his book *The African Condition*, is that "they were not only dehumanized; they were totally devalued." Herein lies one major difference. On the other hand, the historian, Orlando Patterson has argued compellingly about the fact that for Africans slavery represented a `social death.' Will we African and Jew, therefore sit picking over the bones of our dead, our ancestors, arguing about which was worse, the social death or the real death. This would be a travesty to their memories and lives. And those who traffic in death and discount horror at bargain basement prices like nothing better but to see us fight among ourselves.



"Washing The Souls Of The Feet" by Doris Ullman, 1930
Tuskegee Institute Archives

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 to bear against them and others, all the technological means of death at its disposal. What of the prototype of concentration camps at Goree and all along the west coast of Africa? Still there are differences which are very real, nuanced and important.

Jews and Blacks are at present inserted 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 chaff the winnowing winds of racism discard, almost fifty percent of the jail population in the United States is comprised of Blacks. As Melanie Kay Kantrowitz stated at a speech in Toronto (OISE) on April 17, 1993, 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 havoc white life wreaks on Black peoples.

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 it own peculiar set of burdens. Given the latent and not so 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 faces 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.

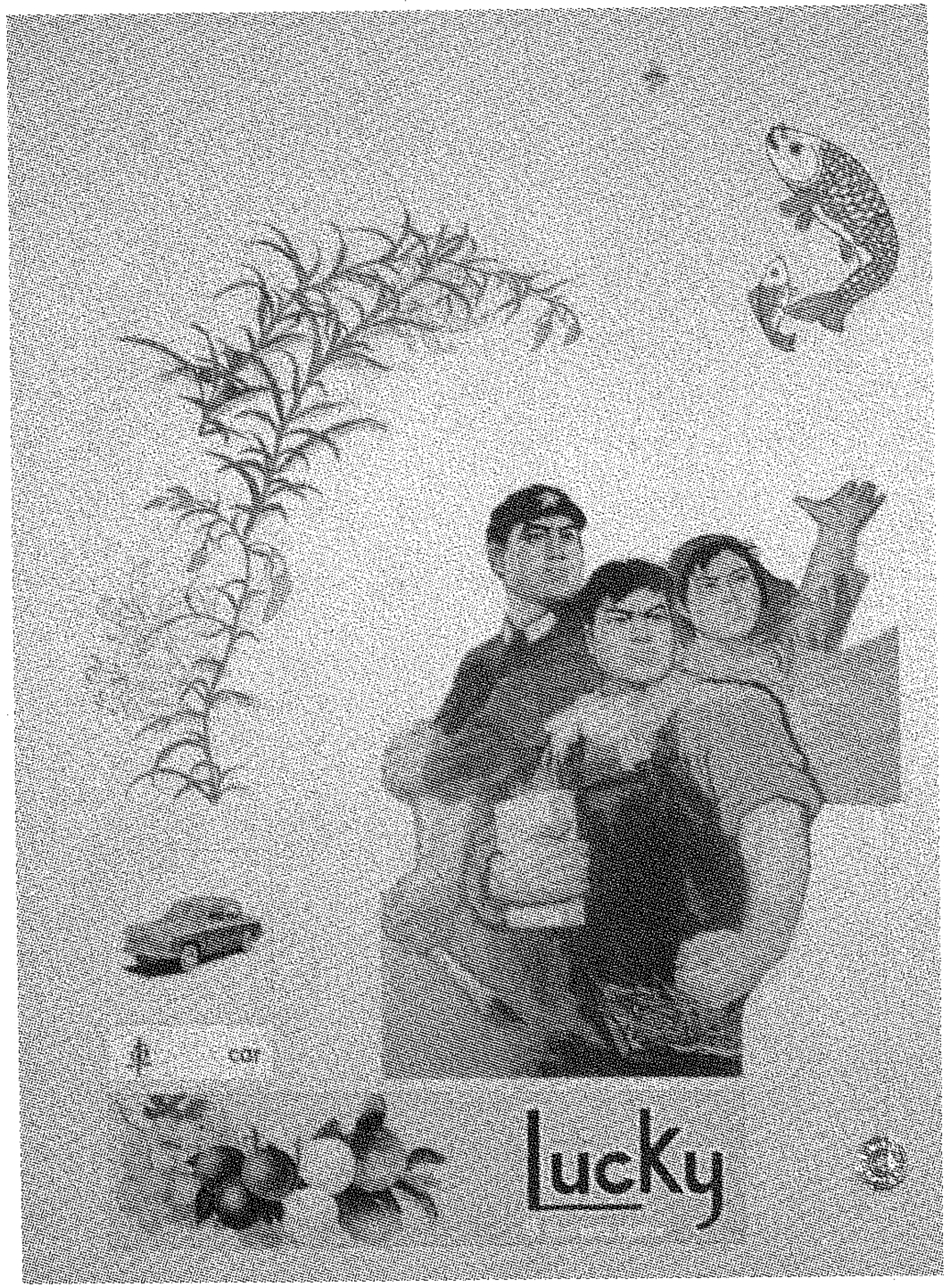
One Jew sent to the ovens is too much. One African captured and taken out of Africa is too much. One Native person killed as a result of European expansionism. One Japanese sent to the camps is too much. *One is too many.* And that is where we may be able to locate a politic with the possibility of communication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

Blacks — African Caribbean people whom I know best — have had a long history of resisting these systems. We understood what the fight against Hitler meant and many Black men joined up and fought overseas on behalf of the Allied powers to prevent the culmination of an obscene racist ideology that had fingered 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 had 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 Africans 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. These 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 personal, 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 inoculate 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, resist finger-pointing until we have examined the motes or logs in our own eyes and work to understand how systems of power work to pit us against each other.

M. Nourbese Philip is a poet and a writer living in Toronto. Her most recent book, Showing Grit: Showboating North of The 44th Parallel, *is excerpted here.*



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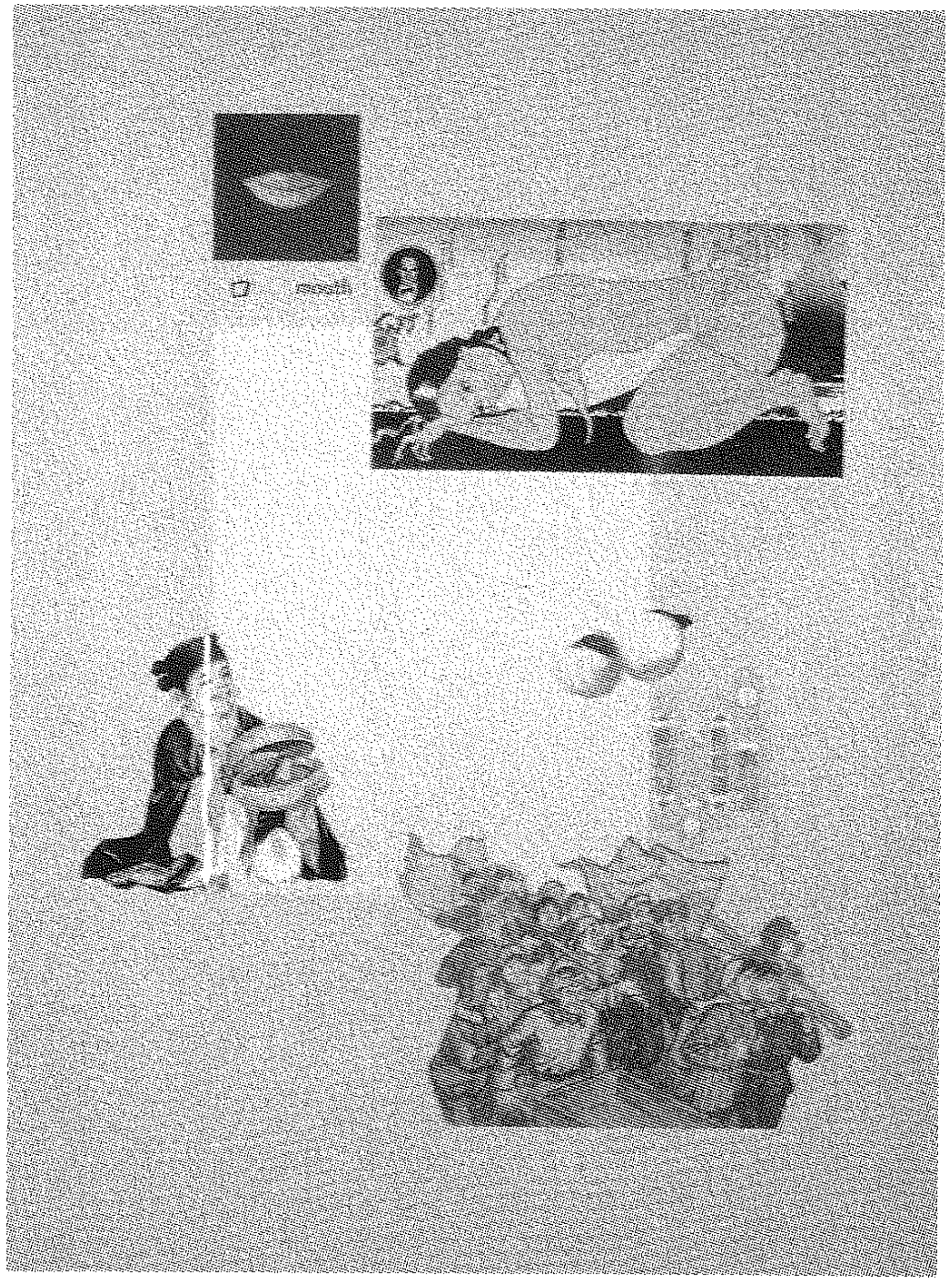
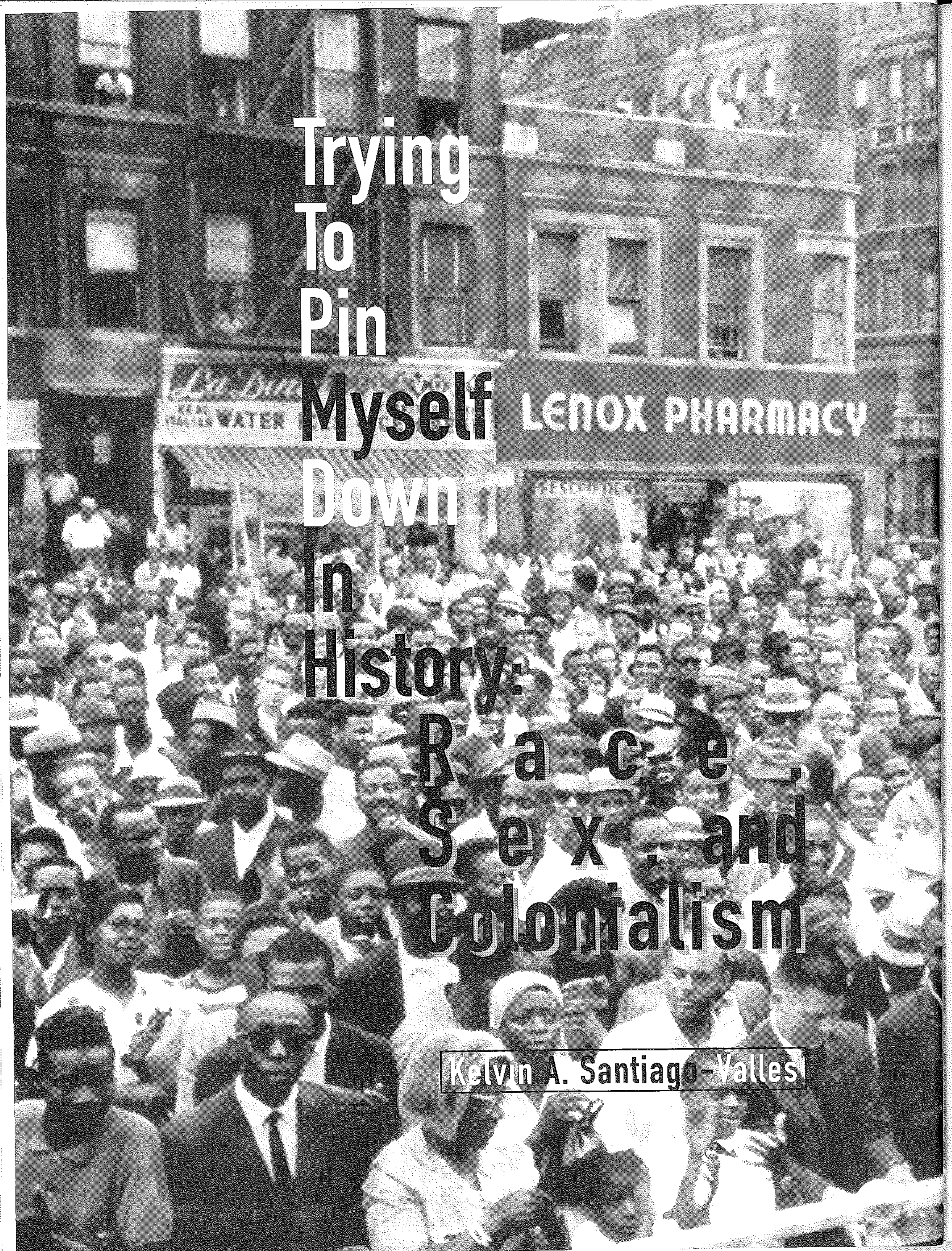


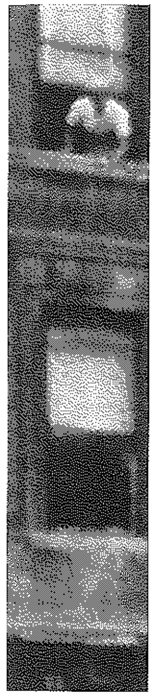
LEAP FROG

BRENDA JOY LEM

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

Kelvin A. Santiago-Valles





> I, like so many blacks, have been trying to pin myself down in history, place myself in the stream of time as significant, evolved, present in the past, continuing into the future. To be without documentation is too unsustaining, too spontaneously ahistorical, too dangerously malleable in the hands of those who would rewrite not merely the past but my future as well.
>
> Patricia Williams

> ...if we accept the post-structuralist argument that it is language that endows the social with meaning, we must also insist that language, itself, acquires meaning and authority only within specific social and historical settings. While linguistic differences structure society, social differences structure language.
>
> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg

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 content of identity categories to examining the assumptions/truths which conflictively constitute subjects as bound to specific socio-historically grounded identities, from exploring the intersecting topics of historical reality and identity formation to mapping the genealogy of historicized 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 practised? Is the bridge mentioned and encouraged by Stuart Hall actually possible and is it necessarily raced? 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 elide 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 decentered Western author/subject of poststructuralist discourse inevitably becomes recentered 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 arose —within the context of anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles— precisely to address this Euro- or Euro-American-centrism. This went from the turn-of-the-century works of W.E.B. DuBois, José Martí, and Arturo Schomburg to the 20th-century precursors involved in the Harlem Renaissance, the socio-historical work of José Carlos Mariátegui, the literary production of the Caribbean and African exponents of negritude, and the post-war anti-colonial writings of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Amilcar Cabral, and Roberto Fernández Retamar.

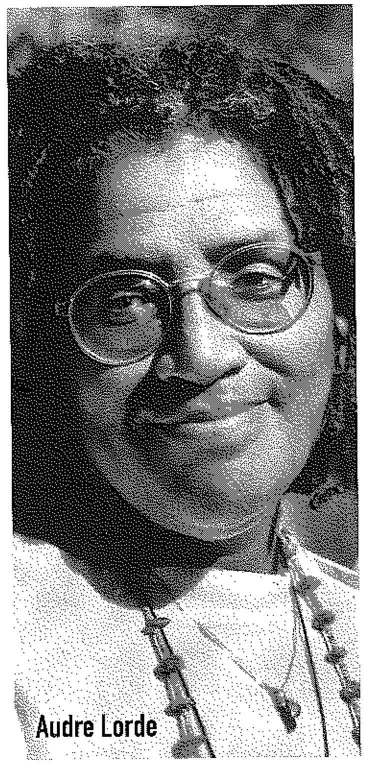
However, and as Cherríe Moraga, Barbara Smith, Essex Hemphill, María Lugones, et al. have argued justly, much of the writing and broader social practices of the subaltern subjects of Western colonialism/racism unfortunately continues to define these normative yet colonized social spaces as perpetually in need of centering straight men within these communities. In other words, subaltern national-cultural/racial communities are incessantly imagined and re-membered within heterosexist and masculinist horizons. This is how they are historically represented in lived experience, this is how they are socially represented in memory. The political effects of such perspectives have been disastrous: from the misogynist backlash that followed the Algerian and Viet-Namese wars of independence to the implosion of the Civil Rights and National Liberation movements within the United States, these last tragedies also partially resulting from the authoritarian substructures of their patriarchical leaderships.

Nevertheless, one of the tensions within most of these critiques from feminist women of color and/or lesbian and gay "Third World" writers seems to be the question of historicity. For example, Audre Lorde, in an essay that has become a touchstone for so many of us ("Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference"), says:

> 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 practised not only by the white racist society, but implemented 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 misnamed 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 expression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self.
> (Lorde, 119-120)



Audre Lorde

Here Audre Lorde broadly gestures to racially gendered wage inequalities in the United States and instances of homophobia within the Black community, as well mentioning the brutality and exploitation that limit women-of-colour's reproductive health here and in other countries. Yet there does not appear to be any broader sense of the unevenly changing and contradictory institutional materiality that contextualizes 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 exponents 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) authorizes a particular viewpoint, thus empowering specific members of oppressed groups to tell their story and change their lives.

Important as the reinscription of memory is within these testimonial and empirical points of departure, at times such perspectives give me the impression of assuming that experience is a transparent event through which the ultimately unfettered (i.e., spiritually) self —literally— speaks for itself. These viewpoints appear to offer an extremely individualized examination of the political, economic, and cultural apparatuses that have structured such experiences in different ways, making them meaningful to these individual subjects. In this sense — and only in this sense — they would seem to assume that 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," "lineage," "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 points made by 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" without examining the processes and structures of this history?....Or, rather, am I making the mistake of posing a far too constraining view of history: am I overlooking the pluralism, the "altern[ative]," within "subaltern" histories? Are these testimonial narratives offering another, different, yet just as pertinent, perspective on what history and the writing of history means?

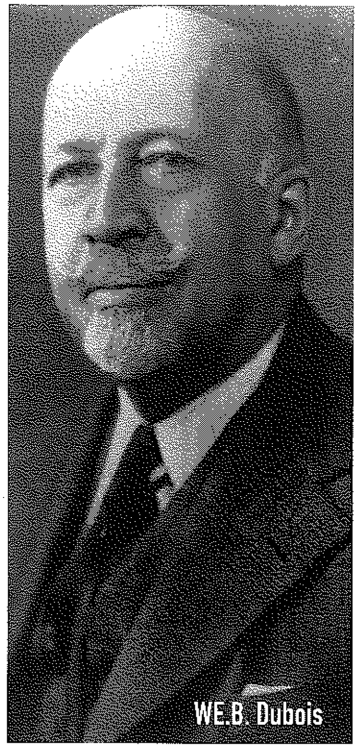
What about the other, presumably more macro-structural, ways in which these personal experiences have been affected and even determined by the transformations and conflicts within these institutions and technologies of power —changes to a large extent due to the resistances of oppressed groups? ...Which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

The journey from the historical social sciences to the humanities, as well as the intellectual transvestism between the two, has raised numerous questions about what exactly is history and historical writing. Although many of these questions are still hotly disputed, one of the threads in the drag apparel draping both the historical social sciences and the humanities displays an acknowledgement and a working through of the textual[ized] structure of history and society.

Nevertheless, has there been a shift in the opposite direction or an attempt to don the other's clothing (from the humanities to the historical social sciences)? What does such a shift or cross-dressing look like, in this case? More specifically, if the work of feminist women of colour, et al. has had some impact on the new ways of thinking and doing historical research (and even on white scholarship), what impact have the new historical forms of inquiry had on the work of "Third World" women authors? Are or should subaltern poets and other "Third World" women literati really be compelled to address such questions? Perhaps the answer lies in writings such as Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Playing in the Dark*, and/or Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.

I am not criticizing Audre Lorde, et al. for not being historians or —Oh, my!— sociologists. This critique is aimed, rather, at subaltern perspectives that tend to simplify or to not even recognize the importance of addressing something else. I am referring to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak —who is also not a historian— has called the need to re-examine "how historical narratives are negotiated" (Spivak, 269). Shouldn't this too be an important part of "dismantling the master's house?" Are these two different ways of doing the same thing (i.e., history) or, rather, do they suggest that the distance between the camps —both in terms of academic fields and in terms of intellectual drag— of the historical social sciences and that of the humanities is insuperable?

If, in the end, we are all just telling stories (viz., fashioning disputed narratives of lives and events) with 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 masculinized and heterosexualized in each of these different subaltern communities? How do race and sex give meaning to the organization of historical knowledge and subaltern/colonized memory and how do these meanings vary across time? Doesn't overlooking issues of historicity eventually lead to reinscribing metahistorical paradigms and timelessness? Recalling the Patricia Williams epigraph, again, wouldn't this be "too unsustaining, too spontaneously ahistorical, 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 ahistorical posture, what does ahistoricism mean then? If, on the contrary, this is indeed an ahistorical posture, doesn't it run the risk of reinforcing the meaningful conceptual territory, not only of machista and homophobic subaltern practices, but also of the still hegemonic Euro-and Euro-American-centric subject?



WE.B. Dubois

The Colonial Question

Hence, we are back to the problem of colonialism. To my mind, this is one of the fundamental political, economic, and cultural apparatuses that has, not only socially structured, but historically defined and produced subaltern experiences (both individual and collective). Any discussion of colonialism in the United States today is immediately complicated by the fact that, particularly within the academic discipline of History (with a capital "H"), colonial matters are usually understood to be a question that was resolved in 1776 —just as any discussion of white supremacy tends to evoke the bad old days of Jim Crow and legal segregation. I think these perspectives —which are commonplace even among post-structuralists, feminists, and queer theorists— need to be seriously re-examined. As bell hooks has argued, speaking of white supremacy and, particularly, of colonialism in the present tense helps to de-individualize and re-historicize racial/national-cultural conflicts and hierarchies within contemporary North America. What would a post-colonial perspective mean, then, within this context? What follows are some suggestions regarding conceptual points of departure.

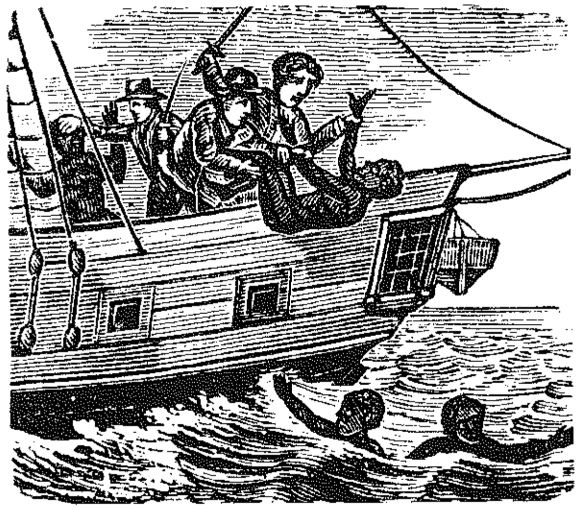
The history and current reality of colonialism is not only about how oppressed cultural-national/racial groups have been created. It is simultaneously about how the very categories and structures of "race," "nationality," and "ethnicity" originated and continue to be socially produced, embodied, and "naturalized" in various ways (particularly in how they are gendered, sexualized, and class-determined). This is another way of saying that subaltern experiences have been affected and even determined by the transformations and conflicts within colonialist institutions and technologies of power, which, in turn, is another way of saying that the history of actually existing colonialism is still about the world as we know and live it today, under Western hegemony.

At issue are the cultural practices and representations that necessarily accompanied and helped make possible a particular collection of colonialist and neo-colonialist enterprises that, not accidentally, and as Samir Amin has show in *Eurocentrism*, coincided with the creation of a world capitalist market: the phenomenon otherwise known as the "Rise of the West."

I am alluding to the politico-economic structures and dominant knowledges, constituted specific social-geographic spaces and their subordinate inhabitants. Referenced is any and all encounters marked by national-cultural/racial hierarchy and inequality. This conceptual point of departure allows for a critique of the era of colonialism (including neo-colonialism) that aspires to question the nexus of power and knowledge that made and still makes such colonial situations possible. The intention is to anticipate and further a non-colonialist age by identifying and critiquing, not just the socio-economic and political roots of colonialism, but also the systems of meaning and ideological representation that ground colonialism. Broadly understood, this is what I mean by a post-colonial perspective.

Given the sadly pervasive reality of neocolonialism, my use of the term "post-colonial" is very different from a simple allusion to the period after a former colonized people have gained political (though not economic) independence. In my mind, the economic, political, and particularly cultural effects of neo-colonialism are still colonial. A post-colonial perspective, on the other hand, designates the political, economic, and cultural efforts to uproot and dismantle colonialism altogether —particularly its Western underpinnings.

Likewise, I use the term "colonized" to denote all those populations and spaces that became the object of national-cultural/racial oppression by the West as part of the historically concurrent and overlapping emergence of capitalism, colonialism, and chattel slavery on a world scale 500 years ago. The colonized subjects were thus produced as part and parcel of the transformation of "Christendom" into "Europe" and of Christian



universalism into Eurocentric universalism. It is no accident that the rise of the colonialist culture of capitalism also brought into "common" —that is, Western— usage the term "ethnic": This signals the shift from the Greek "éthnos," meaning "nation" and "people," to the Catholic-Latin "ethnicus," referring to "heathen," "pagan," and "savage;" hence, the intertwined genesis of modern racism, colonialism, and nationalism. As Trinh Minh-ha has pointed out,

> **[t]he perception of the outsider as the one who needs help has taken on the successive forms of the barbarian, the pagan, the infidel, the wild man, the "native," and the underdeveloped. Needless to say, these forms whose meanings helplessly keep on decomposing can only exist in relation to their opposites. ...Thus the invention of "needs" and of the mission to "help" the needy always blossom together. The Full Man, the Church, the Humanist, the Civilized-Colonist, 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/racial 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 (neocolonies)— are colonial social spaces; both the racially/national-culturally 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 wars 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 cases of "collateral damage" among Iraqi "natives."

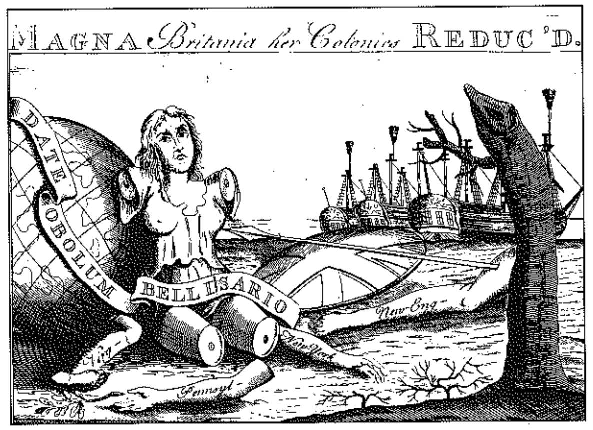
This colonial reality produced the world that Jean Paul Sartre described in the 1950s as numbering "two thousand million inhabitants: five hundred milllion men [sic], and five hundred million natives"

(Sartre, 7).

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-structuralism included. Both colonizer and colonized social subjects continue to resurface intertwined 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 heterosexist lines. This too overlooks issues of historicity insofar as it reinscribes the metahistorical timelessness of always already sexed/oppressed races/nationalities. In this manner, these perspectives also end up validating the still hegemonic epistemologies of ahistoricism. Any timelessness ultimately resonates with the metahistory of Euro- and Euro-American-centric subjects: male, propertied, 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 of this?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SEEKING WHOLENESS IN AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN VOICE

BY ALTHEA PRINCE

THE ROAD-MAP OF ELDER VOICE

I search in this article to make a path — a road-map — to and through what I elect to call Caribbean Elder Voice Lineage. I do so by examining the voice of an Elder Caribbean man, Trinidadian social and political theorist, C.L.R. James and the voices of three Caribbean women writers, Antiguan writer, Jamaica Kincaid, Trinidadian writer, Merle Hodge, and my children's series which is set in Antigua during the nineteenth century. bell hooks provides a useful comparative theoretical framework for James.

C.L.R. James discussed the search for writers and calypsonians whose work can be considered "authentic." The authentic voice is, in his view, liberating in that it speaks with the wholeness of a Caribbean world view. A search for Elder Voice Lineage is this same search for wholeness.

Creating the road-map of Elder Voice lineage is a dynamic process. There are no 'pat' prescriptions for doing so, for this road-map is in the doing and the harvesting of the doing is 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 perpetuation as 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 Jamesian reading of Caribbean society, that wholeness lends 'The Story' authenticity. James posits that the work of Caribbean writers will show the difference between wholeness (authenticity) and the fractured self. He is confident that wholeness will come to be given more 'voice' in the literature from the area. He shows that the inculcation of British hegemony created 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 is 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 percent 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 calypsonians 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 socialization meant the exclusion of women's voices. To be fair to him, it should be remembered that he 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 inculcation 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 adopt 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 solid British middle class, Puritanism 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 calypsonians.

> The coming West Indies novelists will show the clash between the native temperament environment, and this doctrine from a sterner clime.
>
> (*Beyond A Boundary*)

Applying the Jamesian 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 woman and Elder man as major sources for survival in a system of plantation slavery in Antigua. Embodied in Mother Sillah, an Elder woman and Papa Biggis, an Elder man, Elder Voice Lineage is shared through the telling of 'The Story.' Mother Sillah teaches ways of birthing, healing, praying, planting, growing, living, loving and learning. Creation and procreation are her special areas of knowledge and she takes great pains to impart them to the people on the estate and to the children in particular.

Mother Sillah's knowledge of 'The Story' enables her to know things others do not. She knows for instance, when the large-scale slave revolt has been betrayed and seeks to put her knowledge into the hands of the leaders of the revolt.

Finally, her pronouncement on life to a young inheritor of 'The Story' is:

> Is just so it is wid life chile....what you put in, you
> going get back out. It don't matter how bad it seem; if
> you put in good tings, you get
> good tings out of it. Look and see how dis leaf
> perfeck, perfeck. All you put is one little seed
> in dat dutty ground an' you get big tree with
> perfeck lead. Eh chile, you see how it go, you
> see how de earth is plentiful?

Mother Sillah makes sure that people understand the connection between the spirit world and the physical world as a 'living' connection. She cautions:

> You not suppose to wear other people tings.
> Is not good for you spirit. Each person leave
> some of dey feelings in dey tings chile. Only
> use you own tings, or if somebody you close to
> offer you someting, or unless somebody you care
> 'bout dead and leave you someting. Den dey spirit
> an' yours link up between death an' life an' is all
> right, but only if is somebody you close to, who you
> love an' who love you. Otherwise it can have bad
> link-up between death an' life too.

In another story (*How The Mosquito Got Its Sting*), Mother Sillah speaks to two girls about the precious value of freedom. She says, commenting on the mosquito's desire for freedom, that "all living creatures like to be free, mosquito is no different". Mother Sillah is working to create authenticity for the African-Antiguan, a part of whose reality includes enslavement. "All living creatures" includes the children and the entire African population in Antigua at the time.

Whereas the Elder woman taught the children about woman power, the Elder man, Papa Biggis, speaks of perseverance, courage, discipline, metamorphosis and physical survival. This adequately complements the woman-focus of Mother Sillah.

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

Papa Biggis seeks in his fable to give the children hope, even those who wish to avoid the work of the estate. For the star undergoes a metamorphosis and is able to survive in the sea by becoming a star-fish. The message is clear: to manage the environment in a way that enables one's survival is to triumph over any difficulty.

Like Mother Sillah, Papa Biggis adds to 'The Story' his own, individual act of rebellion. He gives the children more food than they are supposed to receive, allows them to take long rests and nurtures their spirit with Elder love and kindness. In him, the author gets an opportunity to make sense of the realities of the survival of the African in the Caribbean. The image of the obsequious 'male slave.' saying 'yassuh,' 'no suh,' 'thank you suh,' is transformed by the characterization of Papa Biggis. The old image of docility is contradicted by the realities of survival of Spirit and consciousness of the African.

The 'male slave' is further rescued in 'The Story' by the man who is detailed to whip Mother Sillah. He is reluctant to do so, but recognizes the need for survival. The author relieves him of the violence in the role:

> Mother Sillah got lashes for sending the warning, but the man they put to beat her wouldn't hit her hard. He could not disobey the overseer or he would have received lashes himself, but he made sure that the old woman whom he so respected didn't suffer too much.

MERLE HODGE, MYSTICISM AND ELDER VOICE LINEAGE

In her novel of childhood, *Crick Crack Monkey*, Merle Hodge, demonstrates an Elder woman's voice working its teaching magic in the socialization of the young. She looks at the teachings that the Elder women impart to the children during food preparation. Sometimes they use a proliferation of proverbs to pass on 'The Story' to the children:

> Who 'as
> don't get
> Who don't ask
> don't want
> Who don't want
> don't get
> Who don't get
> don't care.

The fatalism in that maxim was not lost on the children. They found other proverbs and sayings more rational and useful as life lessons:

> Them that walketh in the paths of
> corruption will live to ketch dey
> arse.

Teachings against gluttony were given simply: "Stuff yu guts today an' eat the stones of the wilderness tomorrow."

But not all tellings of 'The Story' were done through formal proverbs and maxims. Tee, the main character, experiences Ma's awakening each day. It brings her understanding of Ma's relationship with the physical world.

> Ma awoke every morning with a groan quickly routed by a brief loud cheups [a sound made by sucking her teeth]...The cheups with which Ma greeted the day expressed her essential attitude before the whole experience - what yu mus' beat-up youself for? In the face of the distasteful and unavoidable, the unexpected and irreversible... Ma sucked her teeth and turned her back.

'The Story' includes the excitement caused by rain. It cleanses and purifies at the same time that it brings grief. For there are leaks in the house and there are 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 sharing of a trip to observe how nature had swelled the river. Hodge's account of this experience shows Ma's role in the telling/sharing of 'The Story':

> When the rain had stopped we dressed up in Grampa'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 joyously in the new puddles and mud......If the river came down every week Ma's rapture would be quite as new.
> 'Eh!' she exclaimed, and then fell back into her trance. Then a little later on 'Eh!' shaking her head from side to side, 'Well yes, well yes!' We stood around her in an unlikely silence like spattered acolytes in our jumble-sale clothes, in the bright air hanging out crisp and taut to dry, and the river ploughing off with the dirt and everything drenched and bowing and satisfied and resting before the world started up again from the beginning.

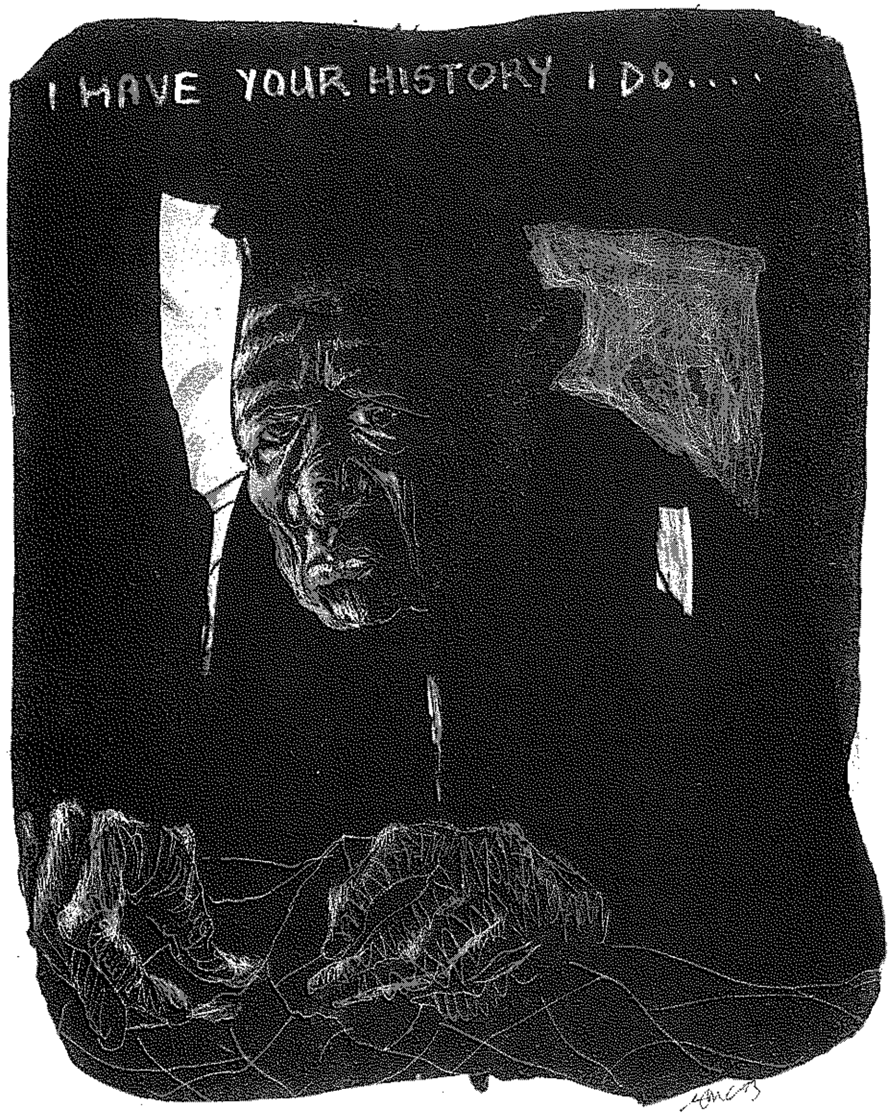
Clearly, Ma feels a communion with nature and she has found a way of sharing that connection with the children. She feels a connection with the spirit world.

Hodge continues throughout the novel to show the telling of 'The Story' by the Elder woman as a lineage that is complex and powerful. She moves the reader through the upbringing of Tee by three Elder women: Auntie Beatrice, Tantie and Ma. Each Elder woman's telling of 'The Story' is different, yet similar enough that a synthesis is possible, presenting the African-Trinidadian Elder woman's voice of a particular period of that island's social history: the late 1940's to 1960's.

Tee experiences a certain duality as she moves between the pretentiousness of the middle class and the vibrancy and realism of the working class. 'The Story' straddles both socio-economic spheres. With Ma, 'The Story' is spiritually nurturing, yet not limited to the private realm. She passes on important lessons of interrelationship, creation and transformation, embodiment and survival. 'The Story', does not indeed exist in a cultural vacuum; it is dynamic and reflects the environment in which its tellers live.

JAMAICA 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 her mother inexplicably withdraws her all-encompassing love from the child. The complexities and the tensions between the child and the teller of 'The Story', her mother, are unbearable to the child. Before the break in the bond of love between them, the child accepted the prescriptions for life which she inherits. 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 series and in Hodge's novel:


I HAVE YOUR HISTORY I DO....

I WAS AFRAID OF THE DEAD, AS WAS EVERYONE I KNEW. WE WERE AFRAID OF THE DEAD BECAUSE WE NEVER COULD TELL WHEN THEY MIGHT SHOW UP AGAIN. SOMETIMES THEY SHOWED UP IN A DREAM, BECAUSE THEY USUALLY ONLY BROUGHT A WARNING, AND IN ANY CASE, YOU WAKE UP FROM A DREAM. BUT SOMETIMES THEY WOULD SHOW UP STANDING UNDER A TREE JUST AS YOU WERE PASSING BY. THEN THEY MIGHT FOLLOW YOU HOME, AND EVEN THOUGH THEY MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO COME INTO YOUR HOUSE, THEY MIGHT WAIT FOR YOU AND FOLLOW YOU WHEREVER YOU WENT; IN THAT CASE, THEY WOULD NEVER GIVE UP UNTIL YOU JOINED THEM. MY MOTHER KNEW OF MANY PEOPLE WHO HAD DIED IN SUCH A WAY.

In the mother's telling of 'The Story,' the malevolence of the spirit world can be combatted by several methods. Kincaid recounts one method which the child experienced with the mother and which utilizes 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 seeks 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 determines will be discarded. So begins for this one girl, the editing, the reshaping, the continuance of 'The Story':

> I bathed quickly in some warm bark water that my mother had prepared for me. I put on my underclothes - all of them white and all of them smelling funny. Along with my earrings, my neck chain, and my bracelets, all made of gold from British Guiana, my underclothes had been sent to my mother's obeah woman, and whatever she had done to my jewelry and underclothes would help protect me from evil spirits and every 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 obeah women, jewelry and white underclothes.

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

For Kincaid, 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 fears of what has never been before...action in the now."

In Lucy, Kincaid demonstrates the need for reconstructing 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, having moved from Antigua to New England. 'The Story' received in Antigua had not included differences in weather. 'The Story' had fit 'The Island' and had included a relationship with the physical environment as well as the metaphysical one.

Kincaid 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 Kincaid concludes, "I...felt that I wanted to be back where I came from. I understood it, I knew where I stood there."

In *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 remembered 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, verse after
> verse, and then had recited the whole poem
> to an auditorium 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 where
> 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-facedness: 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, "Mariah, 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 self.

RESCUING JAMES FROM INAUTHENTIC EXCLUSION OF WOMEN'S VOICES

bell hooks, an African-American critic, suggests in *Talking Back* 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 hooks 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 three Caribbean women writers we have examined here, we see 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 content, the undertaking itself, demonstrate 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 "...native and national in a sense that the previous generation is not."

James searched diligently among male Caribbean writers and calypsonians 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 demonstrates the qualities which James suggests make 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 sexism as something to which attention would have to be paid if wholeness is to 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 wholeness without the voice of such large segments of Caribbean society.

Althea Prince is a writer living in Toronto.

Illustrations by Grace Channer.

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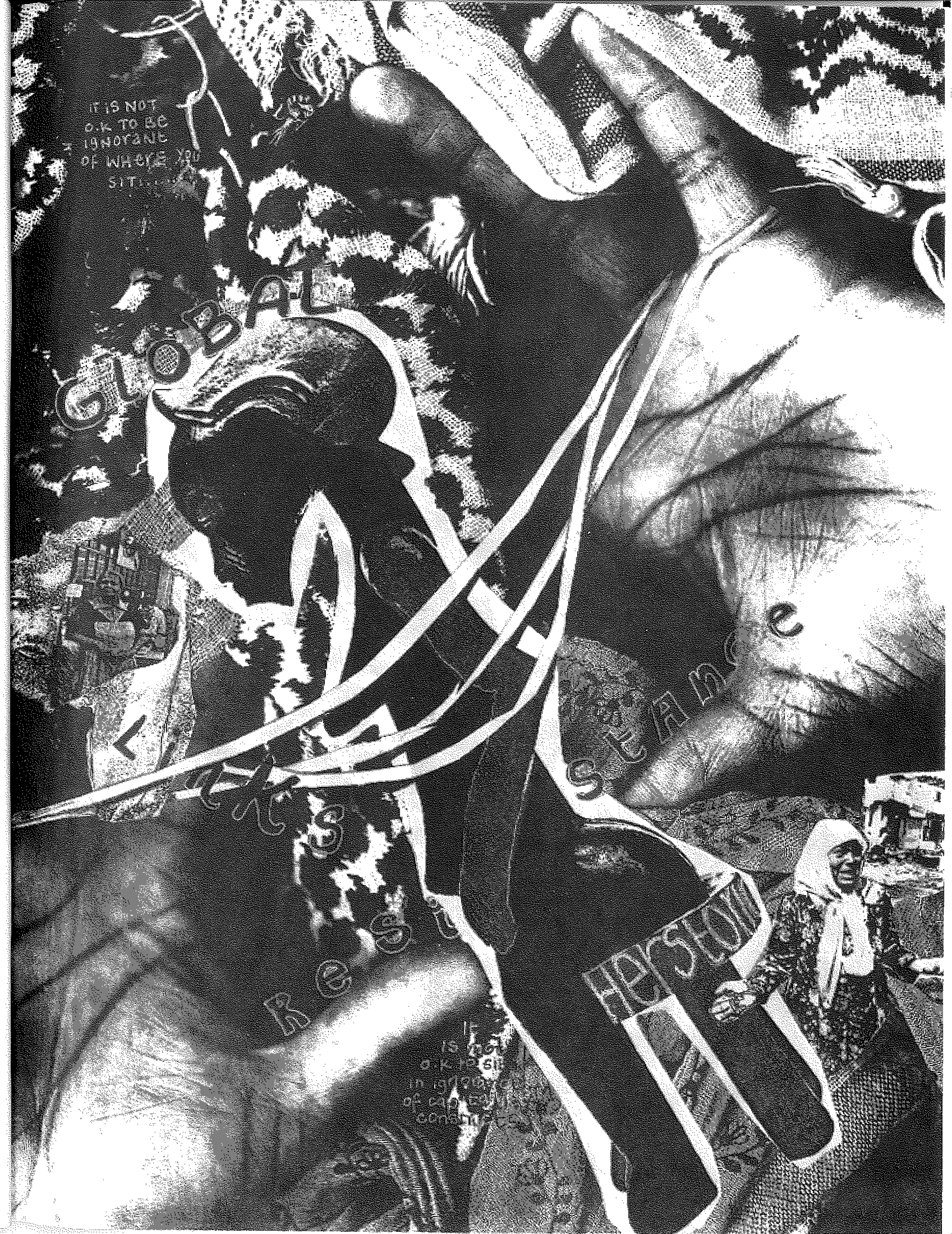

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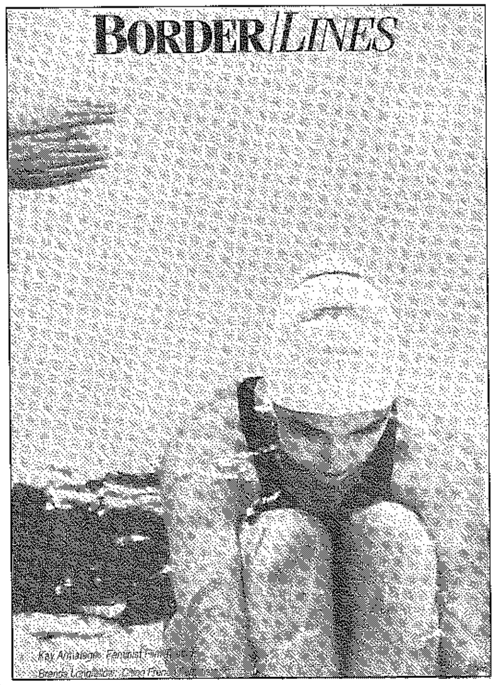
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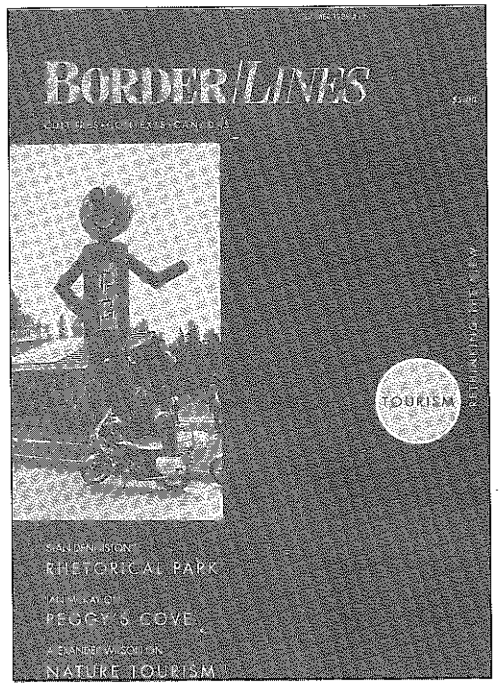
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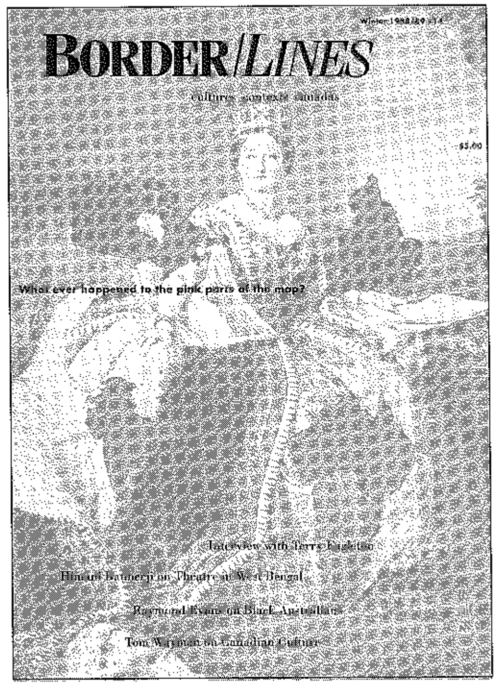
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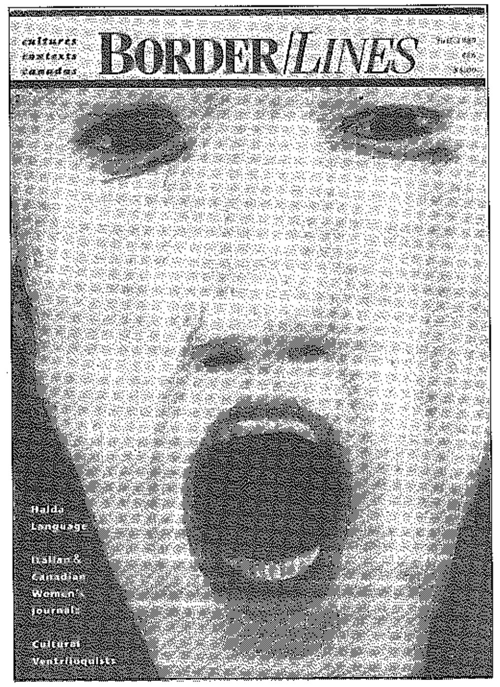
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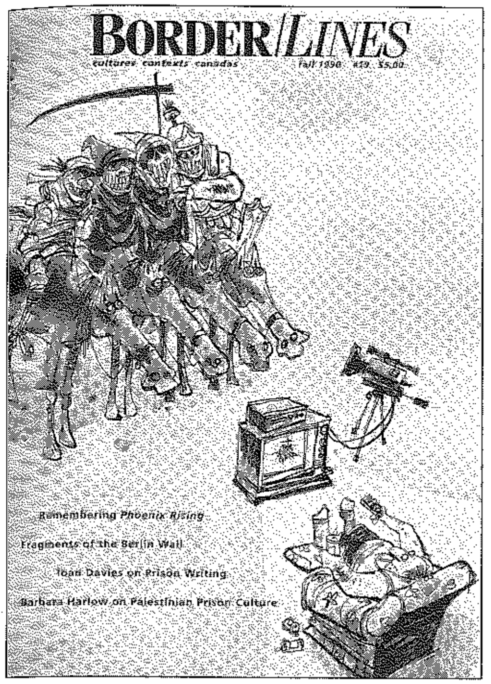
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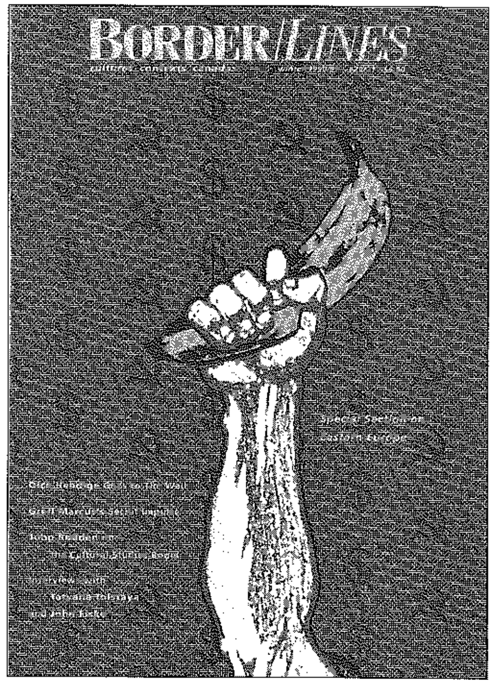
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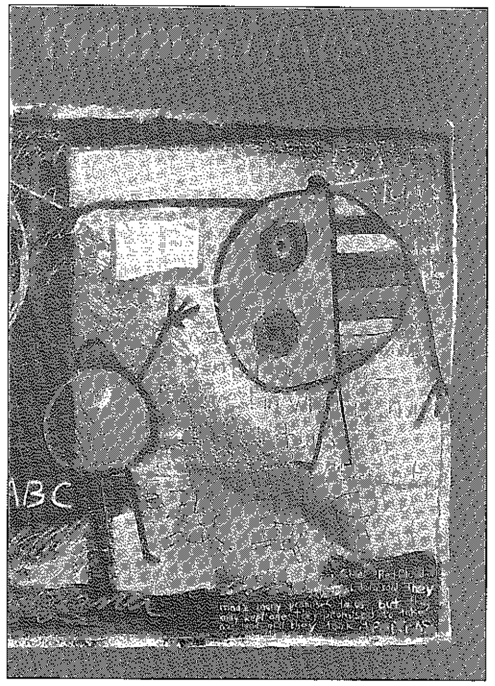

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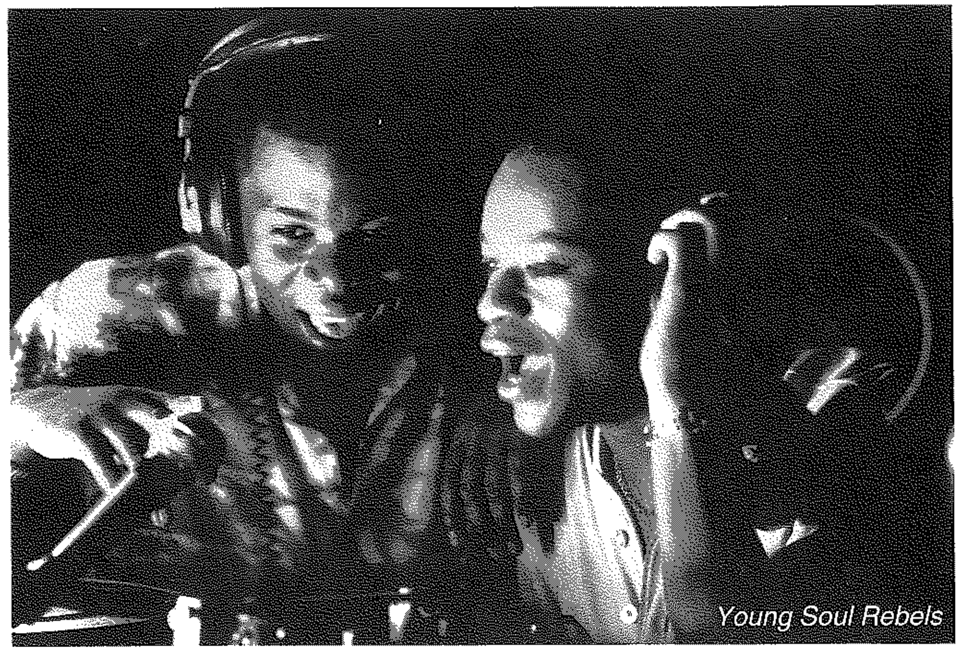

Young Soul Rebels

Politics & Pleasures in the Nineties

BY Darrell Moore

Black Popular Culture: A Project By Michele Wallace.
Gina Dent, ed. (Seattle: Bay Press 1992)
373 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" conference held at The Studio Museum in Harlem and the Dia Center for the Arts in December 1991. The conference, conceived and executed by Michele Wallace, brought together 28 distinguished American- 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 move 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 recreate the conference's energy, for me it somehow does. 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 much of the discussion. The individual essays are engaging and sharp and, as a collection, it stimulates critical reflection and a recognition of the need to re-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 always already crucial to one's existence as an Afro-American. The very markers that reveal you to the rest of the world, your dark skin and your kinky/curly 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 volition 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 read her essay. The ad described Motley's work explicitly and exclusively in terms of jazz. I was struck by the timely incisiveness of her critique: black cultural production, regardless of what the object or experience might be, is perennially defined and coded into black musical production; or if not music, then oratorical and athletic prowess. Everything denoting black genius, an oxymoronic 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 no longer has a white majority, 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?" argues:

> However deformed, incorporated, and inauthentic are the forms in which black people and black communities and traditions 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 orality, in its rich, deep, and varied attention to speech, in its inflections 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 surfacing, inside the mixed and contradictory modes even of some mainstream popular culture, of elements of a discourse that is different — other forms of life, other traditions of representation.

Cornel West's sobering analysis of "Nihilism 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 nihilism that increasingly pervades black communities. Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. This usually results in a numbing 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, is 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 their 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,

> [E]xperiencing 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 essentialist thinking that would 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 simple question of negative and positive representation. Ironically, it is this power to intervene and disrupt that renders criticism so essential to cultural production and yet leads it to be regarded with fear and suspicion [by blacks].

Similarly, progressive critique of "articulation" (to use Hall's concept elaborated earlier in "Rediscovery of Ideology") stakes out a position that can be won, but cannot possibly capture popular culture itself for our side against the opposition.

The "enhancement of pleasure" leads to the possibility of joy which is ultimately what culture is about. Joy is an experiential 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" ('fine' art, film, photography, and video) in black culture?

For Wallace, the conference represented a space where her "war 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 dangerous visions they unleash in others that make them truly arresting and irresistible, their power as dreamers to decolonize their audience's dream spaces. Or to unlock their nightmares.

The struggle will, in what may seem to be a contradiction, utilize those resources to break free of the traditions that have colonized the range of black production, consumption, and critique.

The deconstruction of the ways in which we understand our relation to the visible clearly has a role to play in the emancipation 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 cultural discourse beyond literary criticism into other politically significant precincts such as popular culture. In the process of planning this conference, I anticipated that black visual art, art criticism, 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 wisdom of excluding regimes of visuality from discussions of black popular culture.

What will ultimately 'out' 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 univocal notion of "blackness" that can stand in opposition to a notion of "whiteness." Such questions emerge from the recognition that efforts to define black authenticity are ultimately rooted in an essentialism that homogenizes black people, in the United States and the African diaspora, into something artificial. Second, the argument against univocal or essentialized blackness stems from an exploration of the material conditions of existence within black communities. By taking into account the actual performance of black peoples within oppressive structures they arrive at questions and conclusions that challenge heretofore assumed knowledge.

The resulting norms of excellence for black cultural products arise from a process that includes an accounting for socio-historical experience. Thus, Jacqueline Bobo and hooks argue that the interactive world of the black progressive critique is tripartite in composition for it includes dialogue with other progressive critics, producers, and audiences. The audience must be afforded space for its voice and interpretations as well as the space to meaningfully interact with black critics. This will necessarily strengthen any analysis of blackness and black culture and the idea of the popular.

To take one example, Manthia Diawara's "Afro-Kitsch" calls into question some discourses of blackness and Afrocentricity. According to Diawara, some Afrocentrists have turned their backs on the lived experiences of black people in New York, Detroit, Lagos, and Dakar. They have substituted one grand narrative for another in the recreation of Egypt without saying anything of note about homeless individuals and families in Philadelphia. The result, argues Diawara, is a kitsch of blackness — an imitation of the discourse of liberation and a "refuge from the material realities of being black" in London, Nairobi, and Toronto. Or to take Julien's example, the realities of being 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 volume speaks to the narrowness of many constructions of the "black" in black popular culture. hooks, Jacquie Jones, Lisa Kennedy, Valerie Smith, and Wallace subject many of the Hollywood financed films (most notably Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* and John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood*) produced during 1991 (the year of the black film) to a black feminist critique which questions the positing of a bourgeois patriarchal family as a solution to black problems. Kennedy comes right out and asks *"where are the women?!?"*

> From House Party to Sleep with Anger to Mo' Better Blues to Boyz N the Hood, the sons are working overtime to secure the place of the father, and in doing so, themselves. If ever there was a symbolic effort to counteract a sociological assertion — that of paternal abandonment — it has been these films, which depict a world of fathers and sons. Need I add, this does not take care of all of us who partake and make the collective body's life

In a similar vein, Paul Gilroy critiques the "Americocentrism" of many American blacks who use the symbolism of the patriarchal family (a sign of the crisis of black masculinity) to create an illusion of black solidarity.

Positively stated, these essays collectively shun the idea that our complicated and contradictory baggage and understanding of the world should or must remain suppressed and repressed in the closet. Attempts to create a metaphysical notion of "blackness" to ground black culture rests on the ability to snuff out, by any means necessary, differences that make a difference. Julien argues that the preacher in Ellison's *Invisible Man* defines blackness in the call and response dialectic present in the oratorical exchange between the preacher and his congregation. The fluid continuum of blackness is, for Ellison, made and remade. Consequently, "black" is an empty signifier to be found in the practices of black identified people.

The indication here, made possible with the immense impact of the work of black British cultural theorists present in the volume (Kobena Mercer is a notable absence), is the movement away from bringing a specific economic, sociological, or philosophical methodology to bear on (a) subject(s) or phenomenon(a). The contributors appear to be more interested and moved to examine from a variety of positions 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 commitment of the contributors 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 work that has uncovered and made intelligible the exclusion of black peoples from the inventions, discourses, and emancipatory effects of modernity. The impetus is to talk about black performance rather than simply, black oppression: how do black peoples create and continue to create ourselves within the diasporic experience? Any answer to this question will include an examination of black people as performers in public and as interpreters of our own experience. A corollary gesture is the movement away from the black church and music as the primary arena for black public discourse. The shift to film, literature, painting, sculpting, and video as the sites of public identity formation on a continuously evolving historical foundation of the church, orality, and music takes precedence. More specifically, the foundation and structure of black religiosity and musicality are being carried into new, more visible, spaces.

The conference poster was a juxtaposition of newspaper images of Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas. For Wallace, their confrontation had come to represent multiple issues having to do with the hybridity of black popular culture. Interestingly, officials of The Studio Museum in Harlem found the poster problematic and, as a result, it was not on display at the opening of the conference which took place at the Museum.

Curiously, or perhaps not, in addition to being the year of the Hill-Thomas hearings and of the black film, 1991 was also the year of the Rodney King beating and video, the trial and conviction of Mike Tyson for rape, and the video of Washington, D.C. mayor Marion Barry and Rasheeda Moore drinking Courvoisier and smoking crack. What's interesting about these events beyond their actual spectacality is that they highlight longstanding struggles of importance to the black community and the connection of black struggle to American culture in general. Ada Griffin argues that "many aspects of mainstream culture — which virtually everyone assumes originates in some mythological, perfect Europe — are actually products of black struggle, such as universal literacy. Public education, for example, did not exist as an institution in this country until it was demanded and fought for by former slaves." Similarly, the very idea of conceptualizing being black *and* a film maker, *and* a 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 that I add the idea of being black and free from sexual exploitation and harassment.

Granted both Hill and Thomas are unlikely candidates 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 process.
>
> **Hill:** It would have been more comfortable to remain silent...I took no initiative to inform anyone...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 beneficiaries of a long history of struggle. The public and visual nature of the televised hearings brings the problematic to consciousness. To be sure, the black feminist struggle against sexual harassment and exploitation predates this particular televised event. This site of struggle was different because, to quote Griffin, the importance of film and video lies in its position as "the primary apparatus for the communication of information, ideas, and history in this country," and 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 internal (however defined) differences. These acknowledgements 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 Dia Center. Thomas Harris argues in "About Face" that the difficult, deeply personal, and funky areas must be publically addressed to be truly able to claim a space like the Dia Center as our own. It is necessary to privilege contradictions, the ambivalence, the fluidity, and the complexity of black diasporic cultures in the (post)modern world.

Kinshasha Conwill, the Museum's director, felt compelled to close off a discussion between Houston Baker, whose presentation began "I am not gay, but I have many gay friends...," and co-panelist Marlon Riggs and audience members Wellington Love and Robert Reid-Pharr. The discussion which centered around the question why Baker chose to begin his presentation by informing us of who he is not, was interrupted by Conwill:

> 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 kibitzers...I think it would be unfortunate for African American people to use a forum like this to one-up each other...because the real thing is that some incredibly brilliant people from across the spectrum have been speaking here today and yesterday...

Conwill's suggestion that we not get "sidetracked from the issues" reflects a knowledge of and experience with the historical and contemporary burden of race and racial representation. It also illustrates that the problem of the visual stems not simply from a lack of a rich tradition but a sense that it leads to a loss of control of interpretation and autonomy of the self. Seeing more directly influences one's actions than does hearing or reading. To borrow a phrase from Baldwin, it leads to a fear of the graver questions of the self. What distinguishes the aural (music and orality) and the theological from the visual is its connection to the social construction of knowledge and its role in the creation and perpetuation of racism.

The harm of racism is significant because it attacks the black self. It is motivated by the creation of socio-economic distinctions based on skin color, body features, and hair texture — all, almost always, readily recognized by simply looking. From the simple look or glance, racism enables us to look at a person and to posit a whole host of socially constructed metaphysical conclusions. (See John Jeffries's contribution to this volume for a superb description of the historical social construction of race.) In *The Alchemy 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 abuse of property, contract, and law upon the objects of property, contract and law. And if we take Hall seriously when he argued in a 1991 essay that,

> the critical thing about identity is that it is partly the relationship between you and the Other...there is no identity...without the dialogical relationship to the Other. The Other is not outside, but also inside the Self, the identity. So identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity 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 because it put us 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 dominant cultural assertions, is filtered through the popular. The spirit-restoring qualities within black life have been manifested in the dominant institutions of the black-controlled church and the tradition of music. The problematic of the visual can render a broad understanding of blackness and of culture only by incorporating those aspects of black life that have fostered joy over time.

The text offers three distinct and interrelated answers. First, Griffin, executive director of Third World Newsreel, 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 forms that reference the black experience and imagination. They are 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 ways to nurture and support the work of producers who are struggling to bring their visions to an audience, including film and video artists Camille Billops, Zeinabu Davis, Cheryl Dunye, Elspeth Kydd, Daresha Kyi, 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 stuff of that which we carry around in our heads: oratorical prowess, music, and dance. The question for Jafa is how to make black films that have the power to allow the enunciative desires of people of African descent to manifest themselves. Black cinema should attempt to capture distinctively black movements and tonal qualities. It should be able to capture *how* Aretha sings a song. Jafa is developing an idea called black visual intonation (BVI). BVI consists of "the use of irregular, nontempered (nonmetronomic) camera rates and frame replication to prompt filmic movement to function in a manner that approximates black vocal intonation."

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. Most striking was the lack of black producers of popular culture at the conference. The conference and volume could have benefitted 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 kinds of public spaces that many of the contributors want to create and, more important, 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 postmodern, not in the ameliorated sense, in its challenge to "exclusivity of insight." In the case of *Black Popular Culture*, postmodernism is a process of inquiry and desire that rejects claims to exclusivity or purity in the name of something serious and meaningful that recognizes multiplicity and historical specificity.

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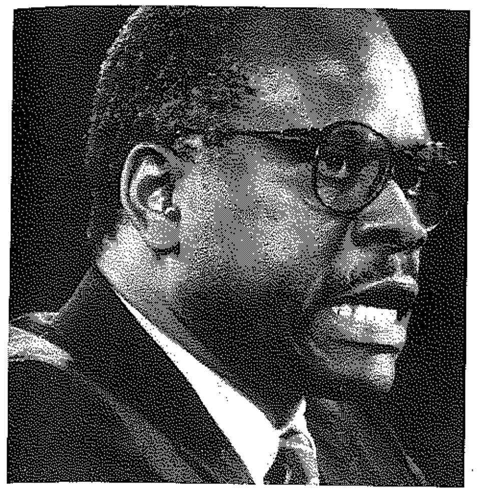

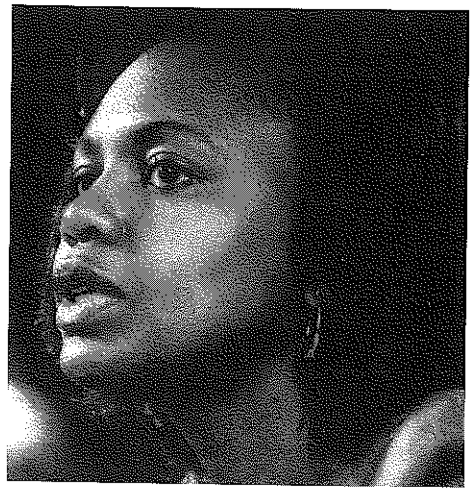

Seeing Justice Done

BY Dilip Yogasundram

Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality, edited with an Introduction by Toni Morrison (Pantheon)

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 for 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-wing to boot. 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 other 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 "best man for the job" should and could have nothing to do with race — as witness this, his crowning career achievement.

For 30-odd years U.S. conservatives have attacked the legitimacy of social programmes by arguing that the high court's interpretation of civil rights constitutionally guaranteed has been too broad, thereby interfering with subjects properly left to the legislatures. But the Republicans' claim to be taking politics out of judicial review — all the while stacking the court with conservatives who could be counted on to limit minority rights and access to abortion, and to reverse the years of liberal activism — has had the predictable counter-effect of charging approaches to constitutional interpretation as never before. This has meant that the elaborated opinions of the legal establishment have come to be quickly identified as falling into one ideological camp or the other. The fractious Robert Bork nomination loss produced this lesson: the lesser the candidate's judicial profile, the easier it would be to present a non-ideological face, the easier it would be to brand opposition attacks as "politicizing justice."

In such a situation, with a Democratic Congress and Republican President in gridlock, political calculation is apt to get entropic fast. Perhaps it's always a question of margins anyhow: getting a nominee confirmed requires that the narrative of justice, represented by and embodied in the nominee, outstrip the opposition's ability to affix political motivations to that narrative, and exceed politics in general. If the criteria of judicial fitness have come to ring hollow, race could stand in, unacknowledged, to elevate one bitterly opposed to any kind of affirmative action. Conversely, if race was nevertheless tacitly understood to be the main criterion in play, it was unassailable, given the vulnerability of this issue within liberal political ideology. How better to discredit and exploit the issue of race than by making of it an absent presence complicit in the calculation of political advantage and the largesse of patronage, signalling race to be indeed extraneous to considerations of a universal justice?

Thomas could therefore afford to be an evasive candidate at his confirmation hearings, shrugging off responsibility for past reactionary public comments made, and offering nothing consistent about his approach, if he had any, to handling social issues. It is now *de rigeur* not to discuss issues at these hearings that might subsequently come before the Supreme Court, on the grounds that it would prejudice proper evaluation (i.e. it would politicize justice), but Thomas didn't bother to plead this excuse. In one of his more notorious moments, he claimed never to have even *thought* about abortion rights and the constitutional implications of *Roe* v. *Wade*.

The many ironies involved in the nomination of Clarence Thomas are not lost on any of the contributors to this collection brought together by noted fiction writer Toni Morrison. When Anita Hill, a black conservative herself, was brought on the scene — with allegations about Thomas' workplace behaviour, 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 injustice, struggle and anticipated remedy. The essays in the book fall roughly into four areas in dealing with that articulation: the crisis of black political culture, the "doubly burdened" position of black women, the trumping of the sexual harassment charge by the cry of racism, and the public function of "diversity." What follows here is an indication of the more interesting attempts in this volume to address those areas.

Historian and political scientist Manning Marable, in his piece, takes stock of the current state of black political culture, whose middle-class members mostly represent a generation 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 political redress. But as Marable describes it, the successes of the civil rights movement and of affirmative action have had contradictory effects. Those successes have been marked, within the liberal ideology of integration, through the symbolic representational value of individuals: if individual African-Americans have achieved social prominence, this has been understood as an advance for the black community as a whole. In turn, black nationalism and self-help doctrines (of which Thomas was an adherent) have also come to feed off these symbols in attacking the "dependency" of welfare liberalism. That the interests of an emergent black middle class might diverge from those that it leaves behind — while still laying claim to race solidarity, while capitalizing on the symbolic value of individual achievement — produces a dilemma about what black interests really are.

Of course the distinction between real interests and symbolic representation is itself problematic, and Marable doesn't adequately confront the fact that there isn't, and likely never was, a homogeneous narrative of African-American experience and history to which to return. While sexualized representations of African-Americans have always circulated in the general economy of race, black culture has long maintained strong patriarchal overtones of its own.

Both historian Nell Irwin Painter and English professor Wahneema Lubiano, in their respective essays, examine circulating notions of black women as pathological, showing how the presentation of Hill and Thomas as equal individuals obscures the disproportionately powerful stereotypes that Thomas was able to marshall. Years earlier, in a public speech to conservatives, Thomas had contrasted his own initiatives for success to his sister's indolence, falsely representing her as a "welfare queen." At the hearings, some of the innuendo used to discredit Hill suggested she was either a psychopath subject to sexual fantasies or a cold calculating careerist.

This scorned/scheming scenario retains currency in segments of African-American culture: black women are held capable of betraying racial solidarity and their men for personal ends, while social achievement is assumed to be a male preserve, often to be gained at the expense of women who, like the "welfare queen," are thought to be dependent. Law teacher Kimberle Crenshaw suggests that black women exist doubly marginalized not only by race and gender but also in the "empty spaces between [them,...] a location whose very nature resists telling" (p.403). The position of black women, then, is also a point of departure for thinking the doubled relationship of real interests to symbolic representation without resorting too quickly to a given narrative of experience, and for describing that unassimilable experience of intersections. 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 lewd behaviour, described by Hill of Thomas, could occur — Thomas would have to be a sex fiend etc. But this treatment of the behaviour as outrageous gave way to a discussion, mostly outside the hearings, of the endemically social, familiar and mundane character of sexual harassment. Then, in the most melodramatic moment of the hearings, Thomas finally played out the race card, depicting himself as the victim of a hi-tech lynching. (As Kendall Thomas notes, no black man has ever been lynched on the word of an aggrieved black woman).

The most refreshing essay in the book belongs to Claudia Brodsky Lacour, a literary theorist who uses speech act theory to demonstrate just how the use of the word "racism" in this context effectively silenced the question of sexual harassment and put an end to the threat to the nomination.

Anita Hill's testimony, remember, was a painstakingly detailed account of events, matter of factly delivered; not once did she resort to general accusations of harassment or sexism. Thomas' statements, on the other hand, were of a different order and Lacour fixes on the perlocutionary function of Thomas' hi-tech rant: it presented itself as a *description* of the situation but *performed* something else altogether, capitalizing on the tensions which the word "racism" remarks. The charge of "racism" could drive a wedge between the literality of Hill's testimony and its significance precisely to the extent that the charge had no immediate referent and could only refer to unknown forces operating behind the presumably non-racist Anita Hill.

Lacour argues that such a usage of "racism" — invoked, acknowledged and denounced — served to justify and obscure real racism 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 while squelching the concerns raised by the particulars of her testimony. The speech act of racism, which *does* something to displace specifics by *saying* something empty, is in its form also a model for the operation of sexual harassment. Lacour calls harassment the act of deploying words as unanswerable actions that thereby compound power differentials, differentials which in turn make possible the appearance of such a statement as a normal and smooth everyday occurrence.

Lacour doesn't stop there. Resorting to a discussion of Rousseau, she demonstrates how literality and significance are interdependent and do not function except in relation to each other. The example of the institution of property as the first speech act is apposite: the statement "this is mine" in its saying secures the conditions which allow the statement to be a description with content.

It is at this point that I have some quibbles about what is still an audacious and illuminating essay. In the circularity and double function of the speech act — of the doing/saying of "racism" on the one hand, and the thing, racism, on the other — what precisely is racism? Does it constitute itself identifiably outside of the speech act, or does it reside in the displacement enacted by speech acts? Unfortunately, Lacour gives no description or definition of racism except to equate it with hatred and unanswerability in general, so that the effect a differential economy of race and gender might have on her analysis is unclear. The claim that crying "racism" is itself racist in this context is thereby in danger of losing its own specificity. In addition, I wonder also if part of the efficacy of the charge of racism couldn't be due to the swift delegitimation of the political process of the hearings, with nine white male Senators, some with chequered images, arbitrating between a black woman and man. The cynical political context of the proceedings was clear to viewers and participants alike, and Thomas' "hi-tech lynching" made use of the committee's exhausted credibility. Wouldn't that accelerate the circulation of the general charge of racism and undermine the literal quality of Hill's words?

Now, part of my shock in watching the Hill-Thomas hearings was seeing the arrival of issues of social justice, such as sexual harassment and racism, played out in a dizzying manner, all spectacle and obscure political calculation. Talk of "diversity," and all that it involves, has become part of the dominant discourse of the public sphere and citizenship; it is key to understanding the functioning of this discourse and its relationship to surplus social repressions.

Cultural critic Homi Bhabha is the only contributor who pursues this direction in a dense and wild-ranging essay typical of his style. (I must confess my weakness for his writing, as his approach overlaps a fair amount of my own, but it can get to be ugly sometimes).

Bhabha explores how justice can be seen to be done when the legitimation of a common culture uniting the political process with society has become visibly cynical, and has no more need for a fixed national representation of itself. It is multiculturalism, "diversity," he suggests, which steps in to police the common culture after the end of the American dream and the reality of social chaos. Here, the crisis of value expressed in the notion of cultural difference becomes itself a value. The common culture protects itself by addressing, while containing, the issues of racism and sexism: it displays the implicit perfectibility of an imperfect system, unrepresentable in itself, where cultural exclusions are revealed and healed, and minorities become the icons of the continued existence of that common culture.

But if pluralism obscures systemic differences as it reveals them, then exposing the real structure of difference is not enough — since the presentation of that exposure is precisely in question. And if the common culture talks of the very real issues of racism and sexism, causing them both to "spin" out of control, calling those issues a sham is most certainly not the point. My own sense is that talk of "diversity" and all that it represents must remain the locus for a political ethics which, in spite of its complicity with a certain form of liberalism, is able to displace, radicalize etc. that form. Or rather, it should remain that locus precisely *because* it is complicitous in producing a terrain of political discourse which describes the functioning of a culture driven by the assertion of civil rights. As Bhabha puts it, the social inequalities which structure cultural differences are also the affective sites of empowerment.

The containment of cultural differences that prevents them from being articulated is also what produces excesses and displacements in the field of differences. This has, in a way, been noted all along in the other essays discussed here.

Manning Marable shows us how extolling the ascendancy of Clarence Thomas involved making of him a representative of his race who overcame race by his individual achievement. Painter, Lubiano and Crenshaw demonstrate that this symbolic success of an individual depends on an appeal to black culture charged by sexual and familial stereotypes. Thus, a defender of Thomas could write that if Thomas did indeed behave as alleged, it merely represented a down-home style of courtship, warranting only minor sanction within the black community — Hill, knowing this, must therefore have had other motivations.

Such a familial characterization serves to deflect the guilt over sexual difference. Lacour describes how Hill, in speaking out, exposed what Bhabha calls a crepuscular knowledge: a common knowledge kept quiet in a conspiracy of knowing and unknowing. In the transfer from sexual harassment to racial victimage as the site of the problem, "Thomas activates a primal guilt — between men" — Bhabha argues, " which can be assuaged by a pious commitment to the myth of the ‘common culture,’ and an invitation to join the plural world of ‘individuals’ — both ethical acts easily accomplished in the elevation of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court" (p.247).

In concluding this loose reading of the book, I hold on to a sense that much more needs to be argued about the issues raised by the Hill-Thomas affair, that there is something incomplete about the pieces in this volume. The essays discussed here are, dare I say it, diverse, each coming to the issues from different angles, each provoking a reflection about the intricate double character of narratives of social in/justice and their public function. As for the essays not mentioned here, a few are informative, most of the rest mediocre. As is to be expected in such a collection, there is much repetition of details, much groping around similar stakes, and a failure in some essays to register the impact of problems discussed in the others. Many of the essays can be tedious as a result, and at the end of it all the reader might suspect that a critically satisfying account of the subject suggested by the book's clumsy title still needs to be put together.

This could be because the essays in the book were written a year after the hearings, too soon to register their full impact or too long after to maintain any more currency. But I suspect it's neither. The problem might lie in the very nature of cultural studies, which thrives on the gaps and duplicities in the narrative presentation of critical issues, and which is understandably averse to totalisation. But just as the notion of "diversity" needs to be examined with respect to its public function, so too does this analysis need to be turned up a notch to take stock of the proliferation of writing which is self-consciously positioned on the margins. If value is capitalized on the margins, if the stratagems of political calculation are conducted there, then it may be time to open up the question of justice without counterposing its universal character to its "empty spaces." If justice lives interstitially in a "location whose very nature resists telling," does anyone know what it looks like?

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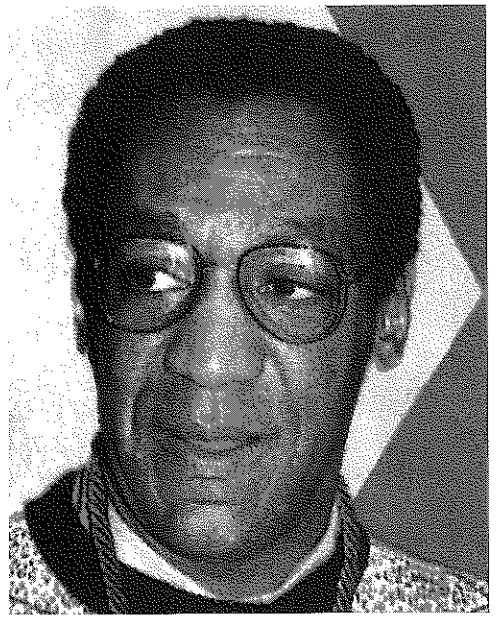
Don't Worry (About Racism), Be Happy (on *The Cosby Show*).

BY Michael Hoechsmann

Sut Jhally & Justin Lewis, **Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream.**
Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1992.



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-vision of, the project of cultural studies originally articulated in the British context. At best, the newly emergent U.S. cultural studies has moved towards the flattening out of the vertical axis of British Cultural Studies' class-centeredness. 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, republican 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 of analysis signals the (tenuous?) `articulation' of critical theory in the context of social movements of the past thirty years. The result of this shift for cultural studies is to move "its traditional focus away from the conflict between dominant and popular cultures, conceived as unified blocs, [to] 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 `reader-response' theory of the media, overlayed by a sometimes impenetrable dose of high theory. At the "Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future" conference (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, April 4-9, 1990), Stuart Hall stated that though he did not want to close or to 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, [but] 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 choice for this extension of the university to the streets of everyday life was ethnography, which offered both a gauge of popular `common sense' knowledge and an index of the intelligentsia's efficacy in disseminating its new political agendas. The ethnographic work of scholars such as Paul Willis and Angela McRobbie offered a `way in' to conceptualizing popular consciousness, often with very surprising results. Of course, ethnography does not provide some privileged route to the truth, nor does it permit the ethnographer to pop the bubble of `false consciousness.' However, while `textual' readings of everyday life offer an economic analytical efficacy, created in the scholastic solitude of the `genius' 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" (325). And if ethnography does not necessarily provide all of the answers, it does seem to raise the right questions.

Had Sut 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*, admitting that "for all of its flaws, Bill Cosby's series, we were inclined to think, had pushed popular culture ever 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 "profoundly pessimistic." State Jhally and Lewis: "What we discovered, in essence, was that the social and cultural context that gives the show its meaning turns its good intentions upside down."

At the base of much of Jhally and Lewis's analysis is the statement by Benjamin DeMott that people in the U.S. "can't think straight about class." Television fiction has played a direct role in creating "a world that shifts the class boundaries upward so that the definition of what is normal no longer includes the working class." Thus, for *The Cosby Show* to be normal on television, the show's characters had to be middle or upper middle class: "What, after all, could be more routine than a lawyer and a doctor, two of television's favorite types of professionals?" For the majority of *The Cosby Show* audience, schooled on the typical class status of television families, the only thing upper middle class about the Huxtables is their material wealth; otherwise they are just a "normal" family. On the other hand, upper middle class viewers, who are "unthreatened by [class] barriers," tend to identify with the Huxtables' upper middle class cultural ethos.

Jhally and Lewis argue that, "having confused people about class, [television] becomes incomprehensible about race." Drawing on the resources of George Gerbner and associates at the Annenberg School of Communications and on their own one week study of prime time television in November 1990, Jhally and Lewis demonstrate that "African Americans have been the beneficiaries of significant upward mobility on television" since the 1970s and that now "working class blacks (particularly those in major roles) are rare on television." (The exception to this is the network news where, for example, black people are still overrepresented in association with drug stories). It is in this context that Bill Cosby intervened to make "a black family acceptable — and respected — among the majority of TV viewers (who are white)." Thus, *The Cosby Show* "has been pivotal in redefining the way African Americans are depicted on television in the 1990s."

According to Jhally and Lewis, to include black people in TV land, the home of "the American dream come true" where "everybody 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 white homes, and in return it provides white viewers pleasure without culpability, with a picture of a comfortable, ordered world in which white people (and the nation as a whole) are absolved of any responsibility for the position of black people." This retroactive justification for the disproportionate 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 deserved.

For black audiences, on the other hand, *The Cosby Show* diverts "attention from the class-based causes of racial inequality. . . [and] it throws a veil of confusion over black people who are trying to comprehend the inequities of racism." While black audiences were happy finally to have "successful" role models, the equation of social success with material wealth "derails dissatisfaction 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 television set, has not been quite so rosy for African Americans. In fact, the reality of life for young black people living in U.S. inner cities has become increasingly bleak. Out of sight and out of mind, the central core of many American cities is "characterized by extreme poverty, serious and violent crime, high rates of drug addiction, permanent joblessness and welfare dependency, and dramatic increases in out-of-wedlock births and female-headed families." Drawing heavily on the work of William Julius Wilson, Jhally and Lewis describe the decline of the U.S. inner city since the 1940s, documenting not only the withdrawal of industry to the city perimeter, but also the eventual flight of the black middle class. It is the irony of "a racially inflected class structure" that allows affirmative action, an accommodation to the black middle class, to substitute for the social infrastructure which is needed to sustain hope in the U.S. inner cities.

Enlightened Racism pulls no punches. In contrast to the populist tendency in U.S. cultural studies, *Enlightened Racism* does not as much chart 'resistances' to dominant media forms, as, in the spirit of Stuart Hall's studies of 'Thatcherism,' it tries to locate popular 'common sense' conceptions, regardless of the (possibly pessimistic) outcome. This is both a strength and weakness of the book, as Jhally and Lewis slight the potential for resistances 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 Hoechsmann is a member of the Border/Lines *collective.*

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

BY David Sealy

Derrick Bell, **Faces At The Bottom Of The Well: The Permanence of Racism In America**
(Basic Books, New York, 1992).

...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 paradoxical 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 auto-biographical anecdotes, with fictional narratives, and traditional prose, attempting to re-think and "reassess the worth of the racial assumptions on which without careful thought, we have presumed too much and relied on too long"(14) 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 remain, a permanent undergirding of American society. To his credit, Bell does not simply address questions of race from a purely jurisprudential 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 insidous 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 rights of our black citizens to fair treatment and the no less important rights of some whites to an unfettered choice of customers, employees, and contractees." (47)

> Under the new act, all employers, proprietors of public facilities, and owners and managers of dwelling places, could, on 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 adopt these race preferential 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 black businesses, to offer no--interest--loans for black home owners and to provide scholarships for black students seeking college and vocational education.

The point here is, at present, despite *dejure* illegalization of racial preference (i.e., segregationist policies) in housing and public facilities, in landmark decisions such as *Brown vs. The Board of Education*, (de facto) racial preference is an enduring feature of American society. This law would therefore acknowledge this defacto 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 because of convenience, habit or distaste, fear or simple preference -- to violate the law —.... (56)

"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 trinkets 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"
(58).

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 dogma of automatic progress has always failed those who were marginalized and poor, of which blacks are conspicuously at the centre. Even noble and well intended attempts on the part of black people, to find a black homeland are not an answer. These 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 "sacroscant, 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 inexorable 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 forbearers; 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 recognize that despite the fact that our actions may not be transcendent, 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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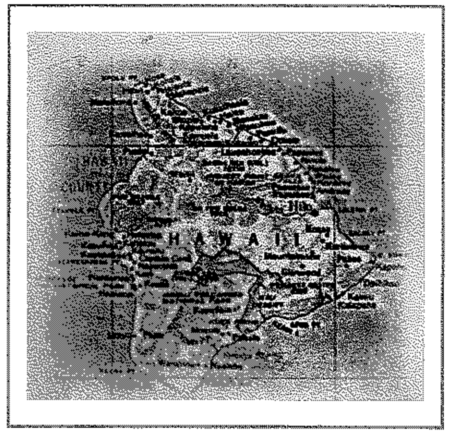

Reclaiming Our History and Sovereignty

BY A. Rodney Bobiwash

Haunani-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* Haunani-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 people is not just an inconvenience to developers but is in itself an act of subversion, is the central thesis 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 Haunani-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 academe 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 eradicating 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, ie., 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 Noam 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 "Lovely Hula Hands" (also featured in *Border/Lines* no. 23) is important on a number of levels. It draws upon the metaphor of the land 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 spectre 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.

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