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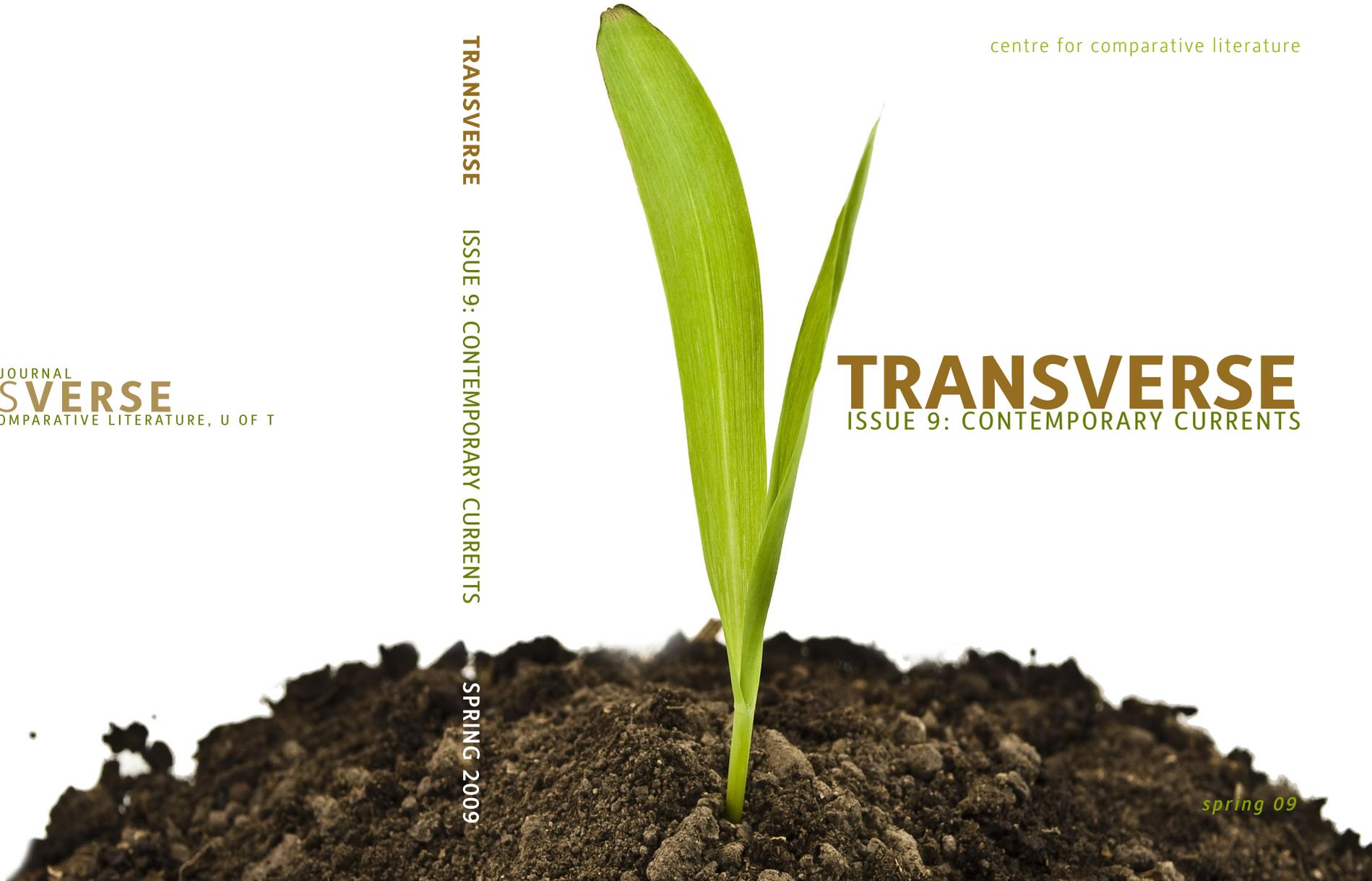
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editor's preface

Katie Brennan opens this issue of *Transverse* with a question: “What do we search for when we travel?” Her subsequent investigation of the quest for authenticity and the desire to recover a lost origin reveals the complexity of what, intuitively, seems a relatively straightforward query. It is only fitting that an issue devoted to charting “Contemporary Currents” should begin with an essay on travel. For although we are not the mountaineers described in Justin Allec’s piece on military rhetoric in climbing narratives, we comparativists are also travelers. In spite of the consistent identity crises that have rightly kept us reevaluating the nature and pertinence of our discipline, we nevertheless remain united in our commitment to bringing different scholarly traditions into conversation with one another. These papers show how such theoretical voyages can engender fruitful meetings that result not only in new readings, but also in new ways to read. Justin shows us how writing about climbing a mountain can actually determine the experience of standing atop a Himalayan peak. Likewise Jonathan Allan argues that the subversive content of Luisa Valenzuela’s *Cola de lagartija* can only emerge if the reader adopts a queer methodology; he insists that the meaning of a text is intimately connected to the rubrics according to which we understand it. Jason D’Aoust’s piece touches on many of the same themes, tracing the insidious elision of Evelyn Lau’s private and authorial personae. He also advocates the need for an alternative praxis that focuses a renewed critical gaze on the content of Lau’s fiction rather than its context. Rachel Freedman likewise offers critical thinking as a potential antidote to the zombification she suggests is plaguing our carefully planned suburban landscapes. Similar considerations resonate in the artistic and creative pieces of MaryAnne Laurico, Marc Foley and Anna Wong.

In true comparative style, these pieces bring together a range of topics, traditions, and theoretical vantages. In spite of their differences, however, they share a preoccupation with space and the way we inhabit it. We navigators of the World Wide Web are constantly in motion; even when our bodies are firmly planted in front of our computer screens. It is important, on occasion, to take a moment to reflect on our trajectories and establish what exactly it is we are searching for. As graduate students in one of the most fraught economic times in recent history, when so many are denied the possibility of meaningful work, it is necessary that we recognize the privilege of being able to give our time to projects that interest us. From within the protected space of our various insti-

tutions, it is essential that we continue to challenge ourselves and each other to replace rhetoric with real thinking, platitudes with passion, indifference with insight.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have made *Transverse's* journey to publication not only possible but more importantly, enjoyable. After a decade of firm leadership, the Director of the Centre for Comparative Literature, Roland LeHuenen, is finally charting a course for other waters. We want to thank him for everything he has done for the Centre, including a move to the Isabel Bader Theatre for which we are eternally grateful, and wish him the best of luck in all his future endeavours. We also welcome the new Director, Dr. Neil ten Kortenaar, to the fold. Thanks to Professor Barbara Havercroft for her guidance; to Aphrodite Gardner for her helpfulness and support; to Julie Parisien for her organization and management skills; to Martin Zeilinger for his electronic know-how; to Ryan Culpepper and the student executive; to all the copy editors and proofreaders. Last and most, a resounding thank you to Bao Nguyen who designed the beautiful cover, salvaged the second half of this journal when my vision outpaced my technological ability, and who quietly holds it all together.

I hope you enjoy!

myra bloom,
editor

traveling spaces: imagination's passport, memory's suitcase

katie brennan

What do we search for when we travel? What is it about the places that we visit that is compelling enough to make us leave the comfort of our homes? In his book *The Tourist*, Dean MacCannell claims that the modern man leaves home in search of authenticity, that it is the mark of the modern individual to discount the authenticity of one's everyday life and to search for the genuine in some other place and some other time (3). For him, travel and the search for authenticity in tourist destinations is prototypical of modern society, placing travel and leisure at the height of the modern's consciousness. Travel is an escape from the monotonous work-a-day world, something to be looked forward to and sought out- something to work for. Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space* identifies the home as a special place that provides an individual with an embodied basis and shelter for the memory and the imagination (5). While Bachelard does not, like MacCannell, engage in a discussion of authenticity, he does place childhood memories of home in a privileged position, claiming that they are essential phenomena upon which to base a phenomenological inquiry of the interior (12). Thus it seems that the observations of MacCannell are in conflict with the theories of Bachelard, each placing the value of the interior and the exterior in vastly different planes. By examining what happens when we travel and the spaces in which we reside when we do, we find that these divergent theories can come to an accord- that the intimate spaces that are treasured by Bachelard travel with the modern man even when he thinks he is fleeing from them. When the modern man travels, he takes home with him, whether he is aware of it or not.

The advertising campaign for Sheraton Hotels and Resorts boasts "You don't just stay here. You belong" (About Sheraton). In these hotels you can "be away without being apart" and "collapse into the world's best catnap" (About Sheraton). While many other hotel advertisements emphasize the hotel's location and the exciting activities to be found outside of the hotel, this slogan emphasizes the inside of the hotel: "beds that make dreams better," "the most comfortable room you've seen in weeks," and "the morning paper, coffee" (About Sheraton). While travel is usually about time spent visiting exotic places, this hotel wants to emphasize the time spent at rest, within the protective and welcoming walls of a temporary home. Dean MacCannell's classic, *The Tourist*, examines modern society through the lens of travel

and leisure, viewing the tourist structure as a starting point or prototype for a full sociological analysis of modern life. MacCannell sees modern tourist attractions as akin to the religious attractions of older times, when people made trips to churches, sacred places and relics in order to complete a spiritual journey. Today, historical sites and cultural attractions stand in for these spiritual relics as places of true meaning that we must visit in order to find.

For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles. In other words, the concern of moderns for “naturalness,” their nostalgia and their search for authenticity are not merely casual and somewhat decadent, though harmless, attachments to the souvenirs of destroyed cultures and dead epochs. They are also components of the conquering spirit of modernity- the grounds of its unifying consciousness. (3)

For MacCannell, authenticity is not found in the day-to-day lives of modern individuals. Instead, the truly authentic exists in another place and another time. This displacement of the authentic is what MacCannell calls the “dialectics of authenticity” (145) In this dialectic, the modern individual is driven further and further away from his domestic, work-a-day life in search of authentic society. While reminders of authenticity are always present in everyday life, appearing in the form of souvenirs, photographs and wall-calendars, the genuine is always held at arms length, never fully attainable.

Pretension and tackiness generate the belief that somewhere, only not right here, not right now, perhaps just over there someplace, in another country, in another life-style, in another social class, perhaps, there is genuine society. (155)

Reality is always elsewhere and can only be found in another, more genuine, way of living. This dialectic does not place just any “other” on the throne of authenticity; not all tourist attractions are genuine. Thus, one must know the difference between the genuine other and the specious other. This genuine article cannot be wholly commercial or completely fabricated. Instead, these genuine sites must exist as a learned cultural symbol of what is authentic. The White House, the Grand Canyon and the Eiffel Tower are examples of authentic touristic attractions that are not “in it for the money.” These

types of genuine or authentic attractions are contrasted with inauthentic “cheesy” attractions, which have been created as a gimmick in order to generate profit, like Disney World or the “South of the Border” chains that pop up along the Southeast coast of the United States. These attractions are not genuine because of their transparent commercialism. Real tourist attractions exist without economic motives and achieve their “authentic” status by being generally regarded as valuable by the whole society.

In his book *The Architecture of Happiness*, Alain de Botton’s description of his visit to Japan in many ways exemplifies MacCannell’s dialectic of authenticity. De Botton describes his experience at the Hotel de l’Europe which is part of a 152-acre theme park named Huis Ten Bosch Dutch Village. This village, located in a rural part of Japan, thoroughly and painstakingly attempts to replicate an “authentic” pre-twentieth century Holland (219). Needless to say, de Botton does not find his Japanese experience in this simulated Dutch town at all authentic. Even when he decides to stay in an old-fashioned inn, or a ryokan, that remains faithful to the architecture of the Edo period (1615-1868), this decidedly more “authentic” inn also falls short of creating a genuine attraction for him because it fails to cohere with the rest of the country, existing as a mere relic instead of an authentically integrated part of Japanese life (223-224). What de Botton calls for in architecture is not mere nostalgia, but the integration of the traditional with the modern, the old with the new (38). For him, it is only when the traditional and the modern are integrated that true architectural integrity can be achieved. As he puts it, the goal is an architecture that succeeds “in succumbing neither to nostalgia nor to amnesia” (238). Thus MacCannell’s analysis is in some ways proven true. De Botton’s search for an authentic Japanese architecture, which will ultimately produce a genuine travel experience, exemplifies the dialectic of authenticity that MacCannell has identified because De Botton is continually searching for an authentic other. For de Botton, the authentic Japanese style is almost always elsewhere; his search for the genuine in Japanese architecture results in his finding very few examples worthy of the title “authentic.”

For MacCannell, the experienced traveler comes closest to understanding what authenticity is because he spends most of his time away from home, away from what is not authentic and in search of what is.

Similarly, the position of the person who stays at home in the modern world is morally inferior to that of a person who “gets out” often. Vicarious

travel is freely permitted only to children and old folks. Anyone else may feel a need to justify saving picture postcards and filling scrapbooks with these and other souvenirs of sights he has not seen. Authentic experiences are believed to be available only to those moderns who try to break the bonds of their everyday existence and begin to “live.” (159)

“Life” begins away from the home and everyday life- it must be sought. For modern man, reality exists outside the sphere of his daily life and activities. In order to live authentically we must flee our daily lives in search of an authentic other. Thus, even our most intimate experiences become suspect. The time spent with our spouses, our childhood memories and our family gatherings lack the stamp of authenticity. If we want to attend a “true” family dinner, we should travel to Italy and enjoy a homemade dinner cooked by our Nonna, not spend time in our own kitchens with our own families. Our domestic experiences can never be as authentic as the domestic experiences in another time and another place.¹ As MacCannell puts it: “The dialectics of authenticity insure the alienation of modern man even within his domestic contexts” (160).

The implications of MacCannell’s argument, that modern man can never be authentic, even within his own home, his own intimate spaces, complicates the already complex notion of “home.” Is home a place we should be perpetually fleeing? If we are always looking outside of ourselves for what is genuine how can we ever get in touch with who we are? Does the dialectic of authenticity, the perpetual movement away from our intimate spaces, jeopardize the formation of personhood, the core of who we understand ourselves to be?

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard investigates the spaces we love- the spaces that protect (xxxi-xxxii). For Bachelard, the home is a safe-haven for our memory and imagination, which work together to reconstitute the poetic image. Bachelard calls the poetic image “a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche” (xi). The poetic image is the birth of poetry, a result of our creative imagination and a manifestation of our soul. Poetry allows us to record and share these powerful images, which are intensely subjective and personal. The poetic image causes a deep resonance in the reader of poetry, connecting a reader not with the idea of the poet, but instead with memories from his or her own experiences. The images of our childhood home form a sort of foundational or instinctive memory of our familiar, protective spaces. The home of childhood, then, becomes the fertile ground of the poetic image, of images that

can be communicated because we all share the protection of spaces. For Bachelard, a deeper understanding of the self is found through an excavation of memory and the imagination, of childhood spaces (7). We must look inward, not outward, in order to uncover a genuine experience. Intimate spaces shape our lives and our personhood in a significant way. Bachelard's emphasis on domestic spaces and the interior offers a sharp contrast to MacCannell's dialectics of authenticity, which is almost wholly concerned with the exterior. Is it still possible for modern man to be formed by childhood images and memories or are the memories that the modern holds dear comprised of trips to the Grand Canyon and the Eiffel Tower? Do the theories of Bachelard still hold true today?

Whereas MacCannell's modern individual looks for an authentic reality outside of himself and his home, Bachelard looks within an individual's home and an individual's imagination as a way of understanding the importance of the interior. For Bachelard, the interior is the realm of greatest interest.

Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost. (6)

Focusing on the home, Bachelard emphasizes the distinction between our memories of the outside world (our experiences of travel, work, society) and those of our intimate spaces. Our memories of home are different from those of the outside world because they are connected to our daydreams. "If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (6). The home allows the child to dream safely and to dwell poetically in an intimate space. While Bachelard speaks of our childhood home, the home that we were born in, the power of home and its relationship to daydreaming is applicable to any space we inhabit: "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (5). Our daydreams, young and old, connect the intimate spaces that we inhabit- uniting time and space through imagination and memory.

While Bachelard's notion of home may assume that we all indeed have an actual house with an upstairs, downstairs and a basement, ignoring the concerns of the homeless and assuming a privileged socio-political background, Bachelard's arguments

are capable of transcending these seemingly narrow socio-political boundaries. Bachelard himself states that “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (5). The need for shelter is something all humans share. The power of the childhood imagination is also something that all humans share. While difficult political situations, poverty or war may make it extremely difficult to hear the echoes of childhood, daydreams survive the difficulties of the outside world, waiting to be heard when all is quiet.

Perhaps in agreement with MacCannell, Bachelard acknowledges that our adult lives are vastly disconnected from the intimacy of the home. He realizes that many adults lack the feeling of their first home because they are constantly caught up in the distractions of life.

our adult life is so dispossessed of the essential benefits, its anthropocosmic ties have become so slack, that we do not feel their first attachment in the universe of the house. There is no dearth of abstract, “world-conscious” philosophers who discover a universe by means of the dialectical fame of the I and the non-I. In fact, they know the universe before they know the house, the far horizon before the resting-place. (5)

In accord with MacCannell’s analysis of the dialectic of authenticity, Bachelard notices that the majority of adults no longer feel inclined to daydream, having become too caught up with the externals of life. This adult tendency to focus on the exterior is manifested in the ideas of many philosophers, whose theories locate truth in other worlds, ideal forms and abstract universes. In his observations about “our adult life,” Bachelard appears to agree with MacCannell’s assessment of modern man, noting that he searches outside of himself in order to find truth, reality or authenticity. However, unlike MacCannell, Bachelard suggests a means of reconnecting to ourselves and this means is poetry.

Reading poetry gives our imaginations the ability to function as they did when we were children. For Bachelard, “the great function of poetry is to give us back the situations of our dreams” (15). A good poem allows us to reconnect with our imagination at its most powerful, when we were children. It enables us to re-envision the vivacity of our childhood daydreams, undiluted by the burdens of our adult lives.

Poetry gives not so much a nostalgia for youth, which would be vulgar, as a nostalgia for the expressions of youth. It offers us images as we should have

imagined them during the “original impulse” of youth. Primal images, simple engravings are but so many invitations to start imagining again. (Bachelard 33)

Poetry re-opens the doors of our childhood home and allows us to visit the same place as a different person. It does not crudely bring us back to the time of our childhood, producing a naïve nostalgia, but instead connects the past and the present, creating an entirely new, and enriched experience.

The home is a uniting force for the psyche, providing an individual with a space that travels with the individual long after he has left his childhood home.

Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being's first world. Before he is “cast into the world,” as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle. A concrete metaphysics cannot neglect this fact, this simple fact, all the more, since this fact is a value, an important value, to which we return in our daydreaming. Being is already a value. Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house. (Bachelard 7)

The memories that the individual holds closest, the ones that he or she bothers to carry around throughout his or her life are not necessarily represented by snapshots of the Grand Canyon or an “I heart NYC” keychain. Instead, the memories which unite the individual are those of his or her first intimate space, protective like a cradle and “warm in the bosom of the house.”

When we travel, we carry our spaces with us, transporting the feel of home wherever we go. Whether we have just moved into a new home or are staying in a hotel, the places we inhabit take on the quality of home through the forces of the daydream. As Bachelard states: “An entire past comes to dwell in a new house” (5). While MacCannell believes that the traveler is always looking to escape his intimate surroundings because he does not believe that there is authenticity to be found in his home, Bachelard would assert that this traveler cannot help but carry some part of his home with him wherever he goes.

Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and

retain the treasures of former days. And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. (5-6)

Thus MacCannell's traveler, in search of authenticity in the culture of the other, can never escape the walls of his home. The desire to escape these dream-walls would, for Bachelard, be a mistake. The dream house constitutes an important part of the individual's psyche, and is what allows the individual to go searching for another in the first place. We are only capable of leaving home because we are always already rooted in one. The memories and images that we carry with us across time and space are not merely imbedded in our minds but also become a part of our bodies. Home can never exist as an abstract concept. "The word habit is too worn a word to express this passionate liaison of our bodies, which do not forget, with an unforgettable house" (Bachelard 15). If we were to travel to our childhood home, we would know exactly where to place our keys and would never risk stubbing our toes in the dark of night.²

But over and beyond our memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, in spite of all the other anonymous stairways, we would recapture the reflexes of the "first stairway," we would not stumble on that rather high step. (Bachelard 14-15)

Our bodies retain a memory of the floor plan of our childhood home, carrying the spaces of our past into the future. Thus, whenever we travel, whenever we stub our toe on the side of the bed in the middle of the night, we are in communication with the home that our body remembers-when we wake in the dark, we think we have woken in a familiar place and it is only when we are fully conscious that we realize we have left the protective bosom of our home.

For Bachelard, the imagination and memory are capable of providing an experience that is far richer than any experience of the outside world. What we imagine will always be greater than what we see, for the imagination is not bounded by the constraints of actuality. As Bachelard puts it: "To verify images kills them, and it is always more enriching to imagine than to experience" (88). Traveling to Paris or London can never have the value and depth that a childhood memory contains. What one imagines Paris or London to be will always surpass the experience of actually seeing the Eiffel

Tower or Buckingham Palace. One can never imagine what is right in front of him and what is right in front of him can never be imagined. Thus, while MacCannell's modern individual travels to exciting locations in order to have a genuine experience, Bachelard seems to suggest that the most vivid experience, even of a foreign place, is the one that is imagined, long before we have ever seen the location that we hope to visit.

Therefore, Bachelard's theories about the importance of childhood spaces, memories and imaginings come into conflict with MacCannell's dialectic of authenticity. For Bachelard, what is most vivid is always internal- both in the sense of internal space, the space of the home, and in the sense of the interiority of the mind, existing within a person's memory and imagination. For MacCannell, the interior is a place which must be fled. Can MacCannell's dialectic of authenticity and the theories of Bachelard co-exist, acknowledging both the modern tendency to find the authentic in the other and allowing truth to exist in the interior?

In order to answer this question, let us revisit the experience of Alain de Botton in his travels through Japan. While de Botton seems to participate in MacCannell's dialectic of authenticity in his travels through Japan, searching for authenticity in the Japanese other, his first encounter with a genuine architecture appears to him within the intimate setting of his hotel room.

I noticed for the first time just how unusual were the light switches and plugs in my room. The excitement of having arrived in an unknown country coalesced around these fittings, which can be to a building what shoes are to a person: unexpectedly strong indicators of character. I discovered in them harbingers of the national particularities that had motivated my travels. They were promises of a distinctly local kind of happiness. My feelings stemmed not from a naïve longing for folkloric exoticism, but from a wish to discover that the genuine differences that exist between lands might find adequate expression on an architectural plane. (221)

de Botton's first glimmer of a genuine Japanese architecture appears to him as he lies in bed, attempting to sleep, daydreaming about the light switches in his hotel room. Considering the importance that Bachelard places on home and on daydreaming, is it possible that the genuine feeling that de Botton experiences is generated from being in an intimate space, comparing the genuine feelings of his catnaps at home with the feeling of a catnap in this land of foreign light switches? While a hotel room is not the

same as a home, Bachelard's arguments suggest that our daydreams can be sheltered by any number of roofs. The power of the daydream can transform any form of shelter into our childhood home, uniting a foreign shelter with a familiar one. de Botton's hotel room may not be his home, but it does provide an intimate setting which is translatable to his home. The foreign light switches of his hotel room connect him to the familiarity of the light switches in his own or childhood home. The past comes to inhabit a new place. Is it possible that de Botton's experience is a synthesis of the analyses of MacCannell and Bachelard or is this simply a manifestation of the dialectic of authenticity?

Alain de Botton's experience in his Japanese hotel room illustrates that MacCannell's dialectic of authenticity can be compatible with the theories of Bachelard. That de Botton is able to have an authentic experience in something as ordinary as a hotel room suggests that the intimate space has a greater tendency towards the genuine. This tendency towards the genuine in intimate spaces is created by the juxtaposition of one's home space with the new place in which they are dwelling. The experience of the novel necessarily carries with it the experience of the ordinary: if de Botton did not have light switches in his own bedroom that looked a certain way, he would not be able to differentiate them from the ones in his Japanese hotel room. Thus, the dialectic of authenticity and the authenticity of the domestic space do not have to come into conflict. Instead, they can work together, providing modern man with an escape from escape, allowing him to find authenticity within his own four walls, if he is willing to listen to the whispers of childhood, whether they are in the form of poetry, imagination or memory.

notes

¹Reality television seems to have proven MacCannell prophetic in regards to the intense interest in the other as more interesting than ourselves. The recent fascination with reality television is an extreme example of the fascination with the other. After work we watch the Real World or the Hills and talk about it around the water cooler at work the next day. Our conversations with friends revolve not around what our friends did or said, but what one of the characters on our favorite shows have said or done. Our own work, our own friend and families are not what can ground us in authenticity. We become fascinated by the other and the “reality” of their lives.

²Bachelard’s comments here assume a rooted lifestyle. Living in various homes as a child might prevent the channels of habit to form around any one home, making it impossible for any one place to serve as the sole protector of our childhood memories. Instead, there might be a more vague amalgamation of multiple childhood homes which combine to form our initial protective space.

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**“conquering” annapurna: the influence of military rhetoric in mountaineering
accounts**
justin allec

Mountaineering expeditions travel to remote, isolated landscapes, with the experience limited to the immediate participants. Part of an expedition’s significance is the promise of personal satisfaction achieved by reaching the goal of the mountain’s summit. However, public significance can be given to this particular experience through the publication of an expedition’s account, which retrospectively describes the ascent for the mountaineering subculture and the rest of society. According to ecocritic Jeffery McCarthy, an expedition account frames the ascent as a significant negotiation between the climber and the landscape (179). Along with documenting the individual details of an ascent, an account conveys the author’s personal experiences, and through these descriptions contextualizes the expedition’s importance within climbing history. The account thus becomes both the evidence that the expeditions was successful as well as proving that the experience was worthwhile.

Part of a climber’s motivation for writing an account is to contribute to the body of mountaineering knowledge, where the account acts as a guide, or resource, to the subculture for a particular mountain (Kelsey 109). Ostensibly, reading an account can help prepare later expeditions for greater success on the same mountain through the knowledge of the past climber’s descriptions of the landscape and details of logistics and travel. What is not considered by these subsequent expeditions is the initial account’s influence on other aspects of their ascent. The initial account, as the sole representation of the mountain, can become dominant and dictate what an expedition, and an account, should be, by way of ‘frameworks’. A framework, as defined by sociologists Williams and Donnelly, structures the “social reality” of climbing by establishing “what being a climber entails” and how a climber’s actions should be described (10). The initial account can influence a later expedition’s choice of route and definition of success, thereby encouraging narrow, and predictable, standards. These standards are conventions of the mountaineering subculture, yet by remaining static they conflict with the feeling of freedom that many people cite as their reason for climbing (Williams and Donnelly 7). Because of the focus on these acceptable goals, when the subsequent expedition writes its own account, the ideals and definitions of past frameworks are again rein-

scribed. Some frameworks can be considered harmful due to their perpetuation of negative perceptions of indigenous cultures and exploitative ideas regarding the landscape.

Historically, military rhetoric was a prevalent framework used to structure the ascent and the account. While attempting an ascent, climbers applied hierarchies of labour and descriptive language adopted from the military to justify and organize the expedition (Ortner 47). The traditional military models designated roles, a chain of command, and the ideals necessary to justify the cost of the ascent. This framework easily extends to the account of the expedition. For climbers recounting their expedition's efforts, the use of military rhetoric "amplifies" their personal risks as heroic, the summit as a universal goal, and the mountain environment as a threatening enemy (Bayers 35). Reaching the summit becomes synonymous with achieving victory.

Anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner writes that the military framework was used to structure expeditions up until the 1970s. Part of the reason for the popularity of the framework is that in many cases the climbers were former members of the military or had been involved in combat, a historic reality in post-World War II Europe (Ortner 47). Because of mountaineering's isolated setting, an expedition may not be interest in much more than the goal of reaching the summit. In the words of geographer John Brinkerhoff Jackson, though, the military framework portrays "the environment as a kind of setting or empty stage" for "certain alarming and unpredictable decisions and actions" (133). To counter the perception that an activity such as mountaineering is, in fact, pointless, costly, and wasteful of resources and lives, the military framework bestows the distinction of exciting "values and ideals of Western masculinity" (Ortner 46), such as courage or perseverance, on an expedition in conquering a foreign and unknown landscape.

My analysis will begin with the account of the first ascent of the Himalayan peak Annapurna by the French in 1950. In expedition leader Maurice Herzog's account, *Annapurna* (1951), he describes the ascent as a violent struggle where reaching the summit equals individual domination of the landscape for the prestige of France. This account establishes the dominance of the martial framework. Later expeditions to Annapurna engage with Herzog's account in order to validate their own ascents within the subculture, even when a different route is attempted. Sir Chris Bonington's account, *Annapurna South Face* (1971), and Arlene Blum's *Annapurna: A Woman's Place* (1980), attempt to introduce other strategies of ascent and representation as challenges to Herzog's dominant representation, but these efforts become compromised. These attempted variations by Bonington and Blum

intend to demonstrate that other frameworks are possible in mountaineering, but that the goal of the summit ultimately demands that the military framework is the definitive one.

The goal of the French expedition to the Himalayas in 1950 was to summit the tenth-tallest mountain in the world and one of only fourteen peaks over 8000 meters. The unique opportunity to climb one of these peaks was not left to chance. Mountaineering is an endeavor that often requires a high level of funding and organization from various government agencies. In the complicated international atmosphere following World War II, some nations, such as France, attempted to regain prestige by forming committees and councils to decide on sensational goals in the Himalayas, as well as which climbers would be allowed to participate (Roberts 30). Though the biggest of the Himalayan peaks had been attempted, but not summited, in the 1930s, most notably Everest and K2, Annapurna had been relatively ignored, and not even accurately mapped. However, it was still selected by France's mountaineering council as a goal due to its scale and location.

On the eve of the French expedition's departure from Paris the team members gathered to learn of the goals and expectations for Annapurna's ascent. The severity of the moment was conveyed by Lucien Devies, a legend in French mountaineering, who was president of the Club alpin français, the Fédération française de la montagne, and the Groupe de haute montagne, in a speech dispelling any fear of failure. The expedition had been bolstered by a national subscription campaign that raised 14 million francs, and this popular support framed the ascent as "a campaign of national honor" (Roberts 32). Annapurna would not be climbed for the pleasure of the activity or adventure, but for the sake of the nation and international prestige. Devies charged the climbers with the following mission:

The Himalayas, by their size, fully merit the title of the 'third pole'. Twenty-two expeditions of different nationalities have tried to conquer an 'eight-thousander'. Not one has succeeded...Only after you have become familiar with the lay of the land, and have drawn up a plan of attack, will the Expedition be able to launch the attempt. (Herzog 24)

France's expedition is contrasted by Devies with the twenty-two other expeditions that had preceded it. He demands that the team, with Herzog as their leader, succeed where others had failed by framing the expedition within a military framework. Victory for France will not only come out of the domination of the mountain landscape and the achievement

of the summit, but also through the domination of other nations lacking France's mountaineering prowess. Devies even represented the Himalayas as the "third pole" of the world, a metaphor which implies the importance of reaching the summit first, at the same time as it invokes the nationalistic races that typified Arctic and Antarctic exploration (Clark 127).

When the meeting was about to conclude, Devies stood first and demanded that the climbers all swear an oath of loyalty to Herzog, "I swear upon my honor to obey the leader in everything regarding the Expedition in which he may command me" (25). Each climber had to repeat the oath in the presence of the others. The effect of the repetition is disconcerting as it establishes the dominance of the military framework over the possible motivations of the other climbers, yet this fact only comes to light once other accounts of the expedition are read. Critic David Roberts writes that for climber Gaston Rebuffat, the oath only convinced him of the "depersonalization... a certain nazification" of the mountaineering experience, a harsh opinion considering France's recent history (33). In Herzog's account, though, the oath stands as a uniform display of confidence from his team-mates, and the leader concludes that, like him, the other climbers are heading to the Himalayas in pursuit of "a great ideal", the top of Annapurna and victory (23). The submission of the climbers to Herzog, and his perception of their motivations, enforces the use of the military framework that influences the rest of the expedition. In emphasizing obedience, authority is entrusted to the expedition leader, Herzog, who is vested with the power to lead, and describe, the ascent.

When the French expedition reached the base of Annapurna, Herzog used the martial rhetoric to structure the expedition's interactions with the landscape. The expedition leader describes the chosen plan of ascent: "Instead of immediately making an all-out attempt on Annapurna, we'll send out a large reconnaissance party to find the best route up...As soon as the advance party sees a possible route the whole reconnaissance will, upon definite orders from me, be transformed into an assault party" (98). Herzog's instructions, like Devies', focus on victory through planning the domination of the mountain. This is accomplished by learning which route will lead to conventional success, and from this, the fulfillment of "the ideal".

Over the course of two weeks, the French expedition climbed Annapurna, slowly ferrying supplies up the mountain to a series of higher camps with the intention of being in a position to make a summit attempt. Conventionally known as 'siege style' mountaineering, this method, as described by Herzog, necessitates that the climbers display resilience

to terrain and weather in order to make steady progress. Like a soldier in battle, hardship and sacrifice must be endured in order to conquer. When Herzog and fellow climber Louis Lachenal approached the summit amid a growing storm and the suffering brought on by dehydration and frostbite, the expedition leader was ecstatic at reaching the summit. He writes, "Our mission was accomplished. But at the same time we had accomplished something infinitely greater...What an inconceivable experience it is to attain one's ideal, and at the same moment, to fulfill oneself" (208). In effect, this comment removes emphasis from the act of reaching the mountain's summit in favor of celebrating dominance. In the expedition leader's hoisting of flags and insistence that Lachenal take his picture in worsening weather, it is clear that he regards climbing as simply a means to an end.

Sociologist Richard Mitchell writes that "mountain summits are small places with large symbolic potential" (130). What photographs demonstrate is that the summit of Annapurna is less important than Herzog's victorious, and conventional, pose on top of it. When the mountain is named as an enemy, reaching the summit is akin to its defeat, and the "mountain conquest transfers prestige from the mountain to the climber" (Hansen 317). In learning how to overcome the challenges of Annapurna's terrain, Herzog can assume the power and mystique of the mountain. The blank space on the map, or the unknown mountain peak, can now be occupied by Herzog's experiences through a photographic, as well as verbal account, and become associated with France's might. In the conclusion of his account, Herzog effaces references to the actual mountain of Annapurna, and replaces the experience with a metaphysical claim more in keeping with the expedition's "ideal": "There are other Annapurnas in the lives of men" (311), Herzog writes, a claim that emphasizes hardship leading to triumph in pursuit of an elusive ideal.

Within the mountaineering subculture, an account can function as a guide for later expeditions. While Herzog's account does provide direction for how an expedition might climb Annapurna, his descriptions also enforce a particular framework. When later mountaineers Sir Chris Bonington and Arlene Blum acknowledge Herzog's representation in their accounts of their own expeditions, they also extend the scope of the martial framework. In trying to climb Annapurna using a style other than siege tactics, Bonington's 1971 expedition attempted to avoid the military framework in favor of a different ideal, one found in the actual activity of climbing among friends. Bonington writes that "the truest joy of mountaineering" is "being a very small party in the midst of some of the most impressive mountains in the world" (35). Initially, conquest is second to the activity. Though

Bonington has no national agenda and his authority over the expedition comes through consensus, the difficulty of ascending Annapurna eventually forces the 1971 expedition to resort to the same tactics as Herzog. In Bonington's account, this compromise inevitably leads to reaching the summit, but also the adoption of the martial framework.

The same could be said of Blum's 1978 expedition, which, though it repeated the route of the 1950 expedition, attempted to change the sexist preconceptions within the mountaineering subculture through an all-woman expedition team. Blum offers another ideal for this expedition. Rather than focus on prestige or dominance, Blum's ideal focuses on women "climbing for the fun of it", and argues that the experience of mountaineering is fleeting, yet worthwhile (188). However, in sharing the traditional definitions of success, Blum's expedition and account also becomes compromised. By putting the goal of the summit, and the concerns of the subculture, before her own ideals, Blum begins to rely on the martial framework for significance.

As Bonington's expedition is attempting a new line of ascent on a peak that has already been climbed, his justifications must necessarily take into account Herzog's experience. Trevor Williams and Peter Donnelly argue that within the climbing subculture an expedition's applying a different style of ascent to a previously climbed peak indicates a "dissatisfaction with a previously accomplished ascent" (13). In Bonington's second chapter, "Why Annapurna," he recounts a brief history of Himalayan mountaineering. Bonington begins with listing the order of the 'eight-thousander' peaks in order of ascent, which starts with the original "conquering" of Annapurna (28). However, this "conquering" of Annapurna's north side by the French team is conditional: "[The 1950 approach march] was fairly easy-angled up a huge glacier leading to the upper slopes, but the party must have been tired by their exertions and had very little time before the arrival of the monsoon" (30). By discounting the French expedition's efforts Bonington can justify the need for a new ascent as well as a different framework.

The south face proved to be more formidable than Bonington had suspected, and several weeks later the expedition did have to resort to siege tactics. When more climbers were added to the team to justify safety and ensure success, the expedition changed in his words "from a rapid blitzkrieg into a full-scale siege" (34). This martial terminology compromised Bonington's own personal ideal, and eventually the account will describe the overall experience as a violent struggle. The military framework becomes more prominent as the climbers grew weary with the effort and routine of climbing. A

combative view begins to be adopted, and Bonington writes that “the climb was developing into a slow war of attrition, which we seemed to be losing” (200). This is a statement that, though containing an awareness of defeat, could have come from Herzog’s account.

A principle difference from his predecessor’s ascent is Bonington’s failure to reach Annapurna’s summit. Some of Bonington’s original ideals are communicated through the words of climber Dougal Haston. In allowing Haston to represent this part of the expedition, Annapurna South Face attempts to provide an alternative to the military framework by allowing a different definition of success. Though Haston and partner Don Whillans do engage in the expected ritual of photographing each other on the summit, there is little else to convey the accomplishment in conventional terms. Instead, Haston remains focused on the activity of climbing, perhaps anticipating the difficult descent: “We didn’t speak. There was no elation. The mind was still too wound up to allow such feelings to enter” (Bonington 279). This absence of emotion even moves into disappointment, as, due to cloud coverage the panoramic view of the Himalayan chain, which Haston was looking forward to, was obscured. Compared to Herzog’s elation, Haston’s description of his mental state challenges the dominant representation’s equation of victory to the summit. But Haston’s ideal is merely personal, and contains none of the public attraction of Herzog’s nationalistic motivations; as Haston is only a part of Bonington’s team, the last word ultimately lies with the expedition leader.

Bonington’s conclusion to his account provides the final reiteration of Herzog’s ideals and the martial framework. In order to justify the ascent of the south face, Bonington has to reduce the importance of the French expedition’s efforts; however in order to provide his expedition with an equal level of meaning, Bonington repeats Herzog’s metaphysical claim: “I know my life will be a constant search for Annapurnas and, having found one, I shall feel forced to seek the next” (292). Wishing for an endless series of challenges, Bonington only considers his efforts meaningful when they result in conquest. Even if his personal ideal is satisfied through the act of climbing, in representing the experience in an account, the conventional ideals of domination become more important.

The next generation’s ideals attempted to balance some of the conventional aspects of past expeditions with personal motivations, such as those suggested by Haston. As Ortner has argued, the military model of expeditions was beginning to wane by the end of the 1970s. With most of the major peaks in the world having been climbed and documented, climbers began considering the style of ascent and the make-up of their team to provide significance.

Prior to the 1970s women had climbed mountains, but their accomplishments were mostly ignored in history and practice. Due to the subculture's value of heroic ideals, women were either seen as a burden for the expedition, or as a sexual distraction for the male climbers (Blum xxii). Blum initiated the 1978 expedition as a challenge to this sexism by adopting a feminist framework and by the fact that the climbing team and supporting labourers would all be women. Much like Bonington's expedition, Blum wanted her team's accomplishments to be valued by mountaineering's subculture based on the methods these women used to reach Annapurna's summit, and not on negative expectations of gender. Along with other feminists in the period who were willing to challenge the ideology of patriarchy through cultural action (Moi 23), Blum's feminist perspective includes an awareness of the mountain as a sacred space, as having significance for the indigenous populations, and a genuine love for the activity and social situations of mountaineering.

[[[While Blum's ideal is a genuine challenge to the preconceptions of the subculture and martial rhetoric, the methods the expedition team are forced to adopt in striving for the summit compromise the feminist framework. While the feminist framework celebrates the inclusion and contributions of women, it is also firmly located in this particular era of the North American women's movement. The women's expedition originally intended to employ female Sherpanis instead of their male counterparts. Rather than see this as an opportunity for female emancipation, though, the Sherpanis viewed Blum's decision as threatening their culture's primary industry (80). The expedition leader is eventually forced to fire the Sherpanis after a violent disagreement, which indicates that Blum "believed in the worth of the individual and the need for equality [but] did not understand that [she] contributed to inequalities based on class, race, and sexual differences" (Rak 34). Like Bonington's personal ideal, Blum's feminist framework has difficulty in extending to or influencing the public.]]]

Certainly there are differences between the French expedition and women's, but the expectation of the summit blurs some of those distinctions. Blum's assumption of difference based on framework does not recognize that her definition of success in mountaineering is still based on convention. The women climbers must still contend with the fact that their actions, like their goal, become increasingly similar to those of their predecessors over the course of the ascent. Despite wanting to climb Annapurna in their own way, Blum dismisses alternate styles of ascent suggested by her teammates in favor of the siege style and the inclusion of Sherpas; this indicates a very conventional definition of success that only values the summit. The rest of the mountain be-

comes a necessary hurdle, and Blum finds herself acting as an “authentic army general” in order to control the expedition (29). Blum actually terms the siege style more “pragmatic” (21), and eventually justifies the inclusion of the Sherpas not just over the Sherpanis, but also over other female team members: “Having a Sherpa on the summit team would be less of logistical burden than having an additional member who would use oxygen for the last day” (76). In disregarding the contributions of her own team in order to ensure success, Blum has subscribed to the familiar ideals of the military framework.

The final lines of Blum’s account are yet another reiteration of Herzog’s meta-physical conclusion, as she directly quotes the French expedition leader’s phrase. But if Herzog claims that there are other Annapurnas in the lives of men, Blum adds that there must be other such challenges in the lives of women as well (232). In adding onto Herzog’s statement, Blum has not quite avoided the issues of dominating a mountain through reaching the summit, but expanded the number of participants. The use of Herzog’s words to conclude the account also reinforce his ideals, especially as he was asked by Blum to write an introduction to the account. Overall, Herzog is quite supportive of the expedition and rails against the sexism of the climbing community and society at large which would prevent such opportunities for women. But this emotional diatribe to prejudice becomes limiting and even damaging when Herzog writes “why shouldn’t women be chiefs of state, Nobel prize winners, heads of multinational corporations” (Blum xi). This perspective reflects a troubling expectation similar to Blum’s, with regards to the Sherpanis. Rather than have women achieve success on their own terms, which was one of the ideals of the expedition, Herzog defines success as women being able to reach the same level as men. In supporting this conventional definition of success, Blum has compromised her own ideals and reiterated the importance of the military framework.

Although my analysis reveals the extent to which the accounts of later expeditions were ideologically compromised through a capitulation to past frameworks, other aspects of the expeditions of Blum and Bonington do stand as challenges to the martial framework. First, a willingness to share the account through the inclusion of the voices of other climbers, such as Haston, disrupts the monologue of Herzog’s narrative voice. Second, the recognition that there are alternatives available aside from the military model of organization indicates that mountaineers are aware and critical of the ideals inherent in past accounts. Finally, the expeditions of Blum and Bonington were only compromised when the summit, and conventional success according to the subculture, became the

ultimate goal. Had these mountaineers maintained their original frameworks, supported by their personal ideals, then these accounts might have been able to conclude in a different fashion. There might not have been the customary celebration on the summit, but at least the representation would have been more honest. If Herzog's metaphysical claim continues to be expanded and adapted by mountaineers, eventually it may one day be ignored in favor of a definition of success that has a goal other than domination.

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giving birth and delivering the reader in luisa valenzuela's *cola de lagartija*
jonathan allan

In 1983, the Argentine author, Luisa Valenzuela followed the patriarchal order of Gabriel García Márquez, Augusto Roa Bastos, and Alejo Carpentier¹, with her own version of the novel of the dictator, *Cola de largartija* (*The Lizard's Tail*, translated by Gregory Rabassa²). The novel, like those of her predecessors, tells the story of a mad dictator attempting to gain absolute power, by all means, including, the eventual desire for the dictator to become pregnant himself. The text requires that the reader actively engage with the text, in that the readers must not only be conscious of the undertones and the politically charged narrative, but also of their own role within the textual experience. This study, therefore, considers the role of male pregnancy – in which the male is pregnant – in Luisa Valenzuela's *Cola de lagartija*.

The act of reading, and simultaneously, the act of interpreting a text is ultimately defined by the reader's experiences within the framework of the text and their own prefiguration. Paul Ricoeur, for instance, speaks of prefiguration as “familiarity, the prior acquaintance with the order of action, that by way of the mediation of fiction will be intensified, magnified, and, in the strong sense of the word, transfigured (140). Hence, it is necessary, I argue, to speak of the “repertory” (141) of the reader; the read is, thus, naturally reading through his or her own prejudices, ideas, and experience. In this regard, Wolfgang Iser argues that, “[t]he phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text, but also and in equal measure, the actions involved in reading that text” (274). Further to this, in complicating the repertory and the question of reception, we must also establish the definition of the cultural space in which the book is produced by Valenzuela. It has been adequately argued that her book is an allegorical reading of “López Rega, a self-proclaimed witch doctor from the days of Juan Perón” (Magnarelli 135). For the Latin Americanist, this perspective is evident throughout the reading process; however, in the desire to *open* the text, I seek to follow Roland Barthes' suggestion that: “to give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified [...] to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (1469-70). The use of Barthes in this study functions as

a sort of literary insurance; that is, the reader is able to read the text without the literary ramifications of the “Author” that imposes (at one level or another or various levels) an interpretation of the work. Keeping in mind that this final signified Author often provides a trump value in “the actions involved in reading that text” (Lser 274), it becomes necessary to look beyond textual authority toward the text itself. Hence, to allow for a different reading of *Cola de lagartija* that is not fundamentally prefigured by the space in which it was written, it is necessary to “overthrow the myth” (Barthes 1469).

This study focuses primarily on questions of gender, sex, and sexuality, and as such, in one regard adopts a queer methodology that “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherency” (Halberstam 19) In particular, the study addresses male pregnancy in *Cola de lagartija*; an aspect of the text that has been, for the most part, “deliberately or accidentally excluded” (19) from most studies of the novel.

Sherry Velasco, one of the few Hispanists dealing with male pregnancy, has argued that male pregnancy evokes “fantasies of male omnipotence” (193). This idea works particularly well within the framework of the novel of the dictator, which always presents the dictator as “male, militaristic and, wield[s] almost absolute personal power” (González Echevarría 1). The idea of male pregnancy would thus maintain these notions of the absolute and power by removing the need for the female altogether. Further, it should be noted – though this is not overly difficult to recognize – that “the biological impossibility of male pregnancy” (Thompson 323) would evoke similar notions of power insofar as he would be able to transcend the limitations of nature. Thus, if the dictator were able to become pregnant, he would not only control personal power, but also, he would be able to manipulate notions of biological and scientific truths.

Regarding the sexual and/or corporeal construction of *el brujo* (the dictator), it seems quite probable that he ought to be categorized as male. While it is true that the *brujo* maintains that “Yo vengo con una mujer incorporada, soy completo” (32),³ it must equally be recognized that this “mujer incorporada” takes the form of a third testicle, a manifestation and proof of his very male-ness. Further, it ought to be acknowledged that the dictator makes use of the grammatical masculine “soy completo” (32).⁴ To continue, the reader becomes aware that, “Manuel tiene tres pelotas, Manuel tiene tres pelotas” (13)⁵ which is one of the very first lines that evoke the corporeal image of the dictator; this image demonstrates to the reader that his body – though different – is indeed male.

The role of the testicles in *Cola de lagartija* almost seems to be as important as the role of pregnancy; the reader learns very quickly the *history* of the dictator's testicles: "[e]n mi pubertad también yo supe a quien querer. Cuando me bajaron para siempre los testículos y mi hermana Estrella, aún desconocida, se quejó por primera vez y única vez antes de encontrar su cálido acomodo en medio de mis dos huevos" (13).⁶ Within this history, the reader can assume that the testicles remain in the normal area of residence and that Estrella finds comfort between the two testicles.⁷ The notion/image is quite important when attempting to understand the corporal construction of the dictator because it allows for the reader to arrive at some conclusion surrounding the supposed, ambiguous, sex of the dictator. These notions of the body put into perspective – however different – the importance of the male/masculine that González Echevarría stresses in his study of dictators in the novel of the dictator.

Male pregnancy, as I have already suggested, plays a central role within the text and it is accordingly necessary to consider the possible hermeneutical considerations and theorizations that can be derived from the text. In particular, I will address the question of a hypothetical reader who should attempt to interpret the text from an anti-feminist standpoint. Such a reading would overtly contradict the majority of critical interpretations of the work, which generally position it as a feminist response to the novel of the dictator. By anti-feminist, I refer here to an anti-woman perspective (a position in which women are regarded as inferior or are to be feared), or perhaps, better, a misogynistic interpretive mode.

Sherry Velasco illustrates that this notion of male pregnancy "may seem over-the-top [but] the concept is not new" (192). In this paper, I place the notion of male pregnancy within the framework of recent theorizations of gender that might fit best under the rubric of queer theory, and in particular, the obvious gender trouble. Judith Butler – through Monique Wittig – has noted: "the binary restriction of sex serves the reproductive aims of a system of compulsory heterosexuality; occasionally, she claims that the overthrow of compulsory heterosexuality will inaugurate a true humanism of 'the person' freed from the shackles of sex" (Gender 26). It can be argued that Valenzuela's novel permits this departure from the idea of compulsory heterosexuality; and, moreover, that the text can be read as a negation of the necessity of the binary and restrictive construction of sex precisely because it allows for – if not encourages – the world of the dictator to be reduced to one man, himself.

The notion of pregnancy has historically been coded as feminine/female; that is, to date, men have yet to gain the ability to become pregnant; although, such a possibility has been explored in many folkloric and mythic traditions as well as popular cultural forms.⁸ Roberto Zapperi has noted these traditions in his book *The Pregnant Man* which provides a history of male pregnancy in folkloric and ancient traditions as well as Christian traditions. Zapperi writes that “God extracts the whole body of Eve from the body of Adam” (5) and that “Adam himself procreates her” (5). Likewise, Velasco (alongside Zapperi) notes these same images and also points to the myth of Zeus’s delivering Athena (193).

It seems necessary to now turn to the notion of male pregnancy and offer an interpretation of the text that one reader may choose to use, namely, the anti-feminist approach. Ultimately, I argue that this anti-feminist approach is not wholly satisfactory or appropriate, nor is it adequate. As such, I argue that may be best problematized by the introduction of queer theory in an attempt to work through the questions of gender, sex, and sexuality in *Cola de lagartija*. While it is true that feminist and anti-feminist readings are useful in illuminating the text, it is my position that a queer approach offers a way to negotiate a passage through these readings.

The anti-feminist reading of the text will likely seem to be overtly obvious – as I shall demonstrate – once the reader discounts the Author, that is, as Barthes has suggested, once the reader is born. One must recognize that the anti-feminist reading would masculinize the text by means of the words and ideas of the *brujo* and his quixotic search for a personal utopia, a utopia of *his* own. In the novel, it is as if the only purpose woman could maintain in the *brujo*’s ideal society is that of religious icon: “me informan que antes que nada irán al santuario de la Muerta a expresar su devoción” (128)⁹ and further that, “Ella es nuestra madrecita [...] Macharemos hasta Ella con la frente en alto para encarar al enemigo donde quiera que se agazape y pretenda detenernos. Sortearemos el río de sangre del que habla la antigua profecía, esperaremos junto a Ella la paz que merecemos” (133)¹⁰. The text continues, focusing on the idea of “Ella” who, if the reader should so desire, will evoke biblical images, such as the Virgin Mary; or if the reader should decide to look at the text with a culturally-inflected gaze, the figure of Eva Perón.

The notion of the political possibility of utopia maintains itself throughout the text, and the utopia is without doubt a male-centred one. Maggie Humm has proposed that “[u]topian thinking has always been a source of political inspiration for feminists” (290) and moreover, what ought to be noted is that this very hope functions paradoxically within

Valenzuela's novel precisely because it is so violent with respect to the place of women. It is possible to argue that the utopia envisioned within *Cola de lagartija* would be defined by its lack of sexes, and not only this, it would present a uniquely male society. This utopia is being built by a man for a man, and as the text demonstrates, time and time again, his disdain and distrust of women. These observations allow for the evocative notion of the dream of a male-centred utopia (this anti-feminist interpretation). The reader will quickly recognize how this ideological position penetrates the text in various places, for instance,

Importante la ausencia de sangre. Ese cuerpo tan muerto remuerto embalsamado, ni una gota. ¡Y tanta sangre que usan las mujeres, tanta que derraman, despilfarran, derrochan! Por eso las desprecio—salvo ésta—por no valorar el líquido sagrado, por no impresionarse ante la gran presencia roja.
(100)¹¹

It would seem rather obvious, painfully so, that this example presents an anti-woman ideology, and it is the *brujo* who proposes that women who waste this “líquido sagrado.” He further expresses his disgust for women with reference to his own mother: “Dicen que mi madre menstruó durante todo su embarazo, no le déjé ni un momento respire. Esa sangre tan densa, tan poco estimulante” (100).¹² It is the woman, for the *brujo*, who contaminates society because she squanders this sacred liquid.

Moreover, to return to the notion of pregnancy, it function as yet another performance of power insofar as the *brujo* is able to discontinue the pregnancies of women throughout his land by means of violent methods. Thus, not only is his own pregnancy pivotal to the text, the pregnancies of others is summarily terminated to further reinscribe his ultimate and absolute authority.

The only other female figure in the novel is the character Luisa Valenzuela, who appears in the second part of the novel: “Yo, Luisa Valenzuela, juro por la presente intentar hacer algo, meterme en lo posible, entrar de cabeza, consciente de lo poco que se puede hacer en todo esto con ganas de manejar al menos un hilito y asumir la responsabilidad de la historia” (139).¹³ This second part of the narrative is written by Luisa Valenzuela (a character not the author) who is writing the biography of the dictator; and what is more,

it further permits an anti-feminist interpretation of the work because Luisa Valenzuela is the only female figure and she takes on this position of the “enemy” of the dictator. This second part of the text includes instructions for the reader, such as, “creo en la virtud de leer entre líneas” (198).¹⁴

The notion of pregnancy begins to re-appear in this section of the narrative, but this in the form of metaphor; the notion of explicit male pregnancy will only appear in the third and final part. The *brujo*, according to Luisa Valenzuela is building a pyramid – quite literally – which she suggests is cliché. However, at one level, the reader ought to recognize this construction be a creation – a giving birth – for the male; that is, the *brujo* can create something and be the father of this metaphorical child (the pyramid). The interpretation of the pyramid and its construction seems to function well within the text when one considers Valenzuela’s observation that:

Ya eran como las 11, yo había estado tratando de escribir a pesar de todo, tratando de imaginar qué estaría tramando el brujo en esos momentos. Me había venido a la mente la idea de un padre; por más brujo que fuera, eso de haber nacido de si mismo ¿no? puras fantasías de hombre, sueños de autosuficiencia. (206)¹⁵

Luisa Valenzuela has here demonstrated that the construction of the pyramid functions metaphorically, as well, to represent a womb. That is, the pyramid that the *brujo* constructs also protects. The pyramid thus permits the continuation of, “[I]o vamos a meter en el interior de la pirámide aunque no esté terminado. Ahí va a estar fresquito, así no se nos insola, no se deshidrata. Además, él dice de la pirámide no le llegan las malas vibraciones” (156).¹⁶ That is, metaphorically, the reader can “hacer la virtud de leer entre líneas” (198)¹⁷ and come to understand the pyramid functions as a womb; the *brujo* thus creates his own womb in which he can and will be protected.

Finally, the reader arrives at the third part of the novel and returns to the actual novel of the dictator and not the interior discourse of Luisa Valenzuela; and it is in this section of the novel that the dictator begins to speak to the reader and is able to penetrate his or her consciousness. Moreover, this third part of the narrative returns the reader to the presence of male pregnancy: “Igual reconozco tu extrema feminidad y sé que sos parte de mí y te voy a hacer un hijo, vamos a hacer un hijo vos y yo, yo y yo. Me haré un

hijo que también será de mí, y lo llamaré Yo. Un hijo con el que saldremos—saldré—a dominar el mundo” (251).¹⁸ The central idea here being that the *brujo* wants to make and be with a child, and it will be part of him, as we can see through the titular “Yo.” There is always this notion of ‘two-in-one’ (Estrella and the *brujo*): “yo seré tu pollen, tu pistilo” (252)¹⁹ and it thus becomes quite obvious that the *brujo* wants to create his own child.

It is this third part of the text that fully demonstrates – and embraces – the confusion that the reader may have with respect to identifying the *brujo* in some tautological fashion: “Brujo, travesti, transsexual, puto, reputo, brujo de mera transformaciones, brujo de confusas gónadas” (276)²⁰ and so forth. Obviously, there are indeed problems in identifying the *brujo* and the reader is ultimately forced to deal with this confusion which is only further complicated by the now even more pronounced gender trouble that will envelop the text.

Through the assistance of structuralist linguistics we can attempt to grasp the confusion at one level; however, because of this gender confusion, we must furthermore being to enter the realm of queer methodology. The reader during much of the novel has been able to rely upon a binary founded in gendered language: masculine/feminine; however, in the third part of the novel, the dictator’s name is changed from *el brujo* to *le brujo*²¹. Saussure has proposed that “[t]he linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image” (963). With respect to the text at hand, the sound has changed to something new; the word is reduced from two syllables to one, etc. Saussure continues, observing that:

Because we regard the words of our language as sound-images, we must avoid speaking of ‘phonemes’ that make up the words. This term, which is vocal activity, is applicable to the spoken word only, to the realization of the inner image in discourse. We can avoid misunderstanding by speaking of sounds and syllables of a word provided we remember that the names refer to the sound-image. (963-4)

Thus, with respect to the study of language, the text has changed the reader’s notion of who is the dictator by means of the changing of his – or dare I now suggest, its – name, and further, the sound of that name. Hence, the sign has been radically distorted and now the reader must re-understand the signified and signifier to formulate this new sign.

The new sign, as already suggested, lacks the original syllables and it has become a monosyllabic word; this fact becomes important for the reader dealing in these questions of gender precisely because the word now seems to lack an apparent gender. The vowel that more often than not determines the gender has been excised. Further to this, the article which is used has been inverted to “le” which does not specify a masculine or feminine understanding of the sign.²² The reader is also permitted to encounter his or her own interpretations of this refiguration: “La pura transición, no se lo puede calificar con género definido alguno y hay que crearle nuevos adjetivos. No neutros porque de neutro nada tiene le Bruj, sino adjetivos ambiguos, mutantes” (265).²³ This ambiguous nature of gender also evokes the queer interpretations that deny the rigid, essentialist notions of sex.

Visually, the dictator maintains, to a certain degree, his maleness (the biological condition of being male) in the figure of Estrella, his third testicle: “Crecida, ahora, Estrella de primera magnitud ocupando todo el espacio visible, y sobre todo plenamente a sus anchas en el otro espacio” (274).²⁴ The testicle maintains its position; and the reader will understand precisely how the testicle takes on the de facto role of womb:

Mientras, el Garza prepara los elementos que poseen el esplendor de la simpleza. Tan sólo una jeringa de vacunar ganado con chorro a presión y la compuesta inodora, incolora, insípida a la que hace más de mil años de dedicó el exbrujo . Era un líquido hermano del agua destilada que falló como solvente de úteros ajenos pero que ahora cumplirá la nueva misión de ablandarla a Estrella y volverla proclive. [...] Y los espermatozoides deben sentirse alegres coleteando en el líquido, [...] La inyección ya ha sido aplicada. (275)²⁵

In these paragraphs, the reader comes to understand the manner in which the dictator is able to become pregnant, via his own sperm; a syringe penetrates his testicle, and eventually, he becomes pregnant.

The reader must constantly negotiate the juxtaposition between gender and sex, and must also become aware of the weakness of any attempt at an anti-feminist reading. The text continually returns to the question of gender and in so doing reinforces notions of masculinity, as in *le bruj's* statement, “[a]hora seré mi propio hijo como una vez fue

mi propio padre” (277).²⁶ Further, it is shown that he is able to go about giving birth “sin ayuda de mujer alguna” (277).²⁷ The *brujo* maintains, in all instances, thus far his masculine position. It is important here to note that while the dictator has changed, so too has the figure of Estrella:

...son los retortijones los tirones de esta que era mi Estrella y es ahora mi vientre, algo bajo eso sí pero redondo, un vientre que me da los retortijones y sé que no es el parto, no parto todavía, me quedo por aquí y grito. No, no grito aunque quisiera y aun si nadie me escucha no grito, es el hijo que está creciendo en mí que me patea y yo tengo que asumir ese hijo en el mayor silencio. No romperlo de un grito. Este es un dolor feliz de procreación. (281)²⁸

The reader here will note that the man who is pregnant must remain silent so as to protect his masculinity; for should he scream he would appear to be less of a man, and thus, more like a woman. He would putatively appear to be less of a man, less powerful, less in control; the notion of being omnipotent is ubiquitous in the narrations of the *brujo*, the act of screaming would thus permit an interpretation of the absence or loss of absolute (personal) power.

As the narration continues, the reader learns more about the pregnancy of the *brujo*, whose third testicle has now grown to the size of a watermelon due to the injections: “[s]iete inoculaciones se le han practicado a Estrella que ya tiene el tamaño de una sandía, y el éxito de mi proyecto” (285).²⁹ Finally, the text arrives at the moment of climax – and delivery: “Ay, ay, ay, el momento del parto” (286).³⁰ Further, “el vientre seguirá creciendo” (286)³¹ evokes the notion that the pregnancy is continuing towards its conclusion. The text reads: “[c]omo empollando el huevo filosofal del que nacerá el Ave Fénix, mi hijo” (289),³² maintaining the notion of delivery that has undoubtedly penetrated the consciousness of the reader throughout this last part of the novel. It is these notions of pregnancy and now male delivery that have been able to last throughout, and moreover, continue to evoke questions of this male-centred utopianism in which there would be no need for “ayuda de mujer alguna” (277).³³

Why does this utopianism penetrate the conscience of the reader? This notion of utopian is able to penetrate the reader precisely because it permits the imagining of a

society without the complications of gender and sex, in which, man would be able to produce without the aid of woman; as such, the anti-feminist, anti-woman, misogynistic interpretation might believe that it is able to come to the conclusion that this novel is about a male-exclusive, male-centred utopia. However, and unfortunately for such an interpretation, the text does not sustain, nor does it permit such a reading. At very moment the *brujo* – now, *bruj* – is to give birth and deliver, the reader reads: “Hubo un estallido seco, un chorro granate se elevó en el aire, allá arriba, desprendiéndose en la cima” (300).³⁴ The man, the *brujo*, in all of his misogynistic fantasies never achieves his goal. Giving birth to his own child “sin la ayuda de mujer alguna” (277)³⁵ is ultimately nothing more than the dictator’s wet dream.

Because of this conclusion, it is often argued that this novel thus offers a feminist perspective on the novel of the dictator. Indeed, the novel does offer a criticism of patriarchy; however, the text is far more fastidious in its critiques of the establishment in a more general sense. Again, the feminist perspective may continue to feel it has the textual support necessary to make such an argument. However, a question remains: what is the significance of the inclusion of a pregnant male? It is for this reason that I would suggest that a feminist approach, like the anti-feminist approach, is inadequate, and that we must ultimately turn to a queer theory if we are to seek an explanation. The answer, I argue is that there is a rejection of the binary masculine/feminine altogether because the narrative at the very least questions conceptions of pregnancy and parenthood; intrinsic to this questioning is the demand the text puts upon the hegemonic notion of compulsory heterosexuality which is the essentialist and necessarily defines sexual stratification, binary understanding of the world which has been constructed. *Cola de lagartija*, thus, compels the reader to question his or her conceptions, ideas, and perspectives on sex and gender. Its notion of male pregnancy therefore demonstrates that there are possibilities – at least textually – outside of: “the binary restriction on sex [that] serves the reproductive aims of a system of compulsory heterosexuality; occasionally, she [Wittig] claims the overthrow of heterosexuality will inaugurate a true humanism of “the person” freed from the shackles of sex” (Butler *Gender*, 26). The text, following Monique Wittig, proposes a notion of overthrowing the rigid definition of pregnancy as being so rigid, and its metonymous relation to compulsory heterosexuality that continues to imprison society in its ideological predilections.³⁶ Thus, *Cola de lagartija* functions in a manner which questions notions of sex and gender; and proposes a rejection of the essentialist world. And, this is precisely

what the text has done; it has questioned the reader's notions of gender, sex, sexuality, and the body. Thus, the text that scholarship has examined through an anti-feminist possibility or feminist lenses is actually best interpreted by way of a queer methodology and theory. By using such a theoretical framework the reader can thus focus instead on the ways in which the text illuminates and questions the reluctance to leave the world of binary constructions used to manifest and promote notions of patriarchy and power. Perhaps the text does give birth to the reader, albeit in a very queer world.

notes

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¹These three authors are seen as having written the canonical "novels of the dictator" all within a couple of years of one another; Gabriel García Márquez's *El otoño del patriarca* (*The Autumn of the Patriarch*) appeared in 1975, Roa Bastos' *Yo, el supremo* (*I, the Supreme*) in 1974, and Carpentier's *El recurso del método* (*Reasons of State*) in 1974. Legend has it that the three agreed to write these novels of the dictator.

²All translations are from Gregory Rabassa's translation of *Cola de lagartija*.

³"I come with a built-in woman, I'm complete." (24)

⁴"I am complete." (24)

⁵"Manuel's got three balls, Manuel's got three balls." (5)

⁶"In my puberty I'd also learned whom to love. When my testicles dropped for good and my sister Estrella complained for the first and only time, before finding warm comfort between the two of them." (5)

⁷There is, of course, another level to this discussion which remains untouched in this paper: familial relations, questions of incest, etc.

⁸Sherry Velasco in her recent book *Male Delivery: Reproduction, Effeminacy, and Pregnant Men in Early Modern Spain* (2006) includes a chapter which considers popular culture

including Hollywood cinema from the 1990s, such as, *Junior* (1994) which starred Arnold Schwarzenegger as a pregnant man.

⁹“they tell me that, before anything else, they are going to the sanctuary of the Dead Woman to express their devotion.” (113)

¹⁰“She is our Sacred Mother [...] We will march to Her with our heads held high, facing the enemy wherever he may be crouching and trying to stop us. We will cross the river of blood that the ancient prophecy speaks of, we will wait by Her side for the peace we deserve.” (118)

¹¹“The absence of blood is important. That body so dead, so forever dead, did not shed a drop. With all the blood women use, all they overflow, squander, waste! That’s why I look down on them—[save this one]—because they don’t appreciate the sacred liquid, because they are not impressed by its scarlet presence.” (85-6)

¹²“They say that my mother menstruated all through her pregnancy, I didn’t give her a moment’s respite. That blood so thick, unstimulating.” (100)

¹³“I, Luisa Valenzuela, swear by these writings that I will try to do something about all of this, become involved as much as possible, plunge in head-first, aware of how little can be done but with a desire to handle at least a small thread and assume responsibility for the story.” (125)

¹⁴“I believe in the virtue of reading between the lines.” (179)

¹⁵“It was around eleven o’clock, I’d been trying to write in spite of everything, trying to imagine what the Sorcerer [brujo] could be plotting at that hour. I’d hit upon the idea of a father; no matter how great a witch doctor he was, that business of having been born from himself, right? nothing but man’s fantasy, dreams of self-sufficiency.” (186)

¹⁶“We’ll bring him inside the pyramid, even if it isn’t finished. He’ll be cooler there, he won’t get sunstroke there, he won’t dehydrate. Besides, he says the bad vibrations won’t

reach him inside the pyramid.” (141)

¹⁷“I believe in the virtue of reading between the lines.” (179)

¹⁸“Just the same, I recognize your extreme femininity and I know that you are part of me and I shall make you a son, we will make a son, you and I, I and I. I’ll make myself a son who will also be part of me and I shall call him I. A son with whom we shall go forth—I shall go forth—to dominate the world.” (233)

¹⁹“I will be your pollen, your pistil.” (234)

²⁰“Transvestite, transsexual, sodomite, catamite Sorcerer, witchdoc, magician of mere hormonal transformations, necromant of confused gonads.” (256)

²¹This playing with the rules of gender in Spanish is not unique to Luisa Valenzuela; Manuel Puig also makes use of this trope in his book *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976), in which Molina, the gay character, takes on a feminine voice by means of feminizing his language.

²²The English translation is unable to render this problematic and maintains the article as “the.”

²³“Now neither man nor woman, nothing but transitions, s/he can’t be classified and new genders and new pronouns have to be invented. Not neuter ones, because there is nothing neuter about Sorcer. Mutant pronouns are needed.” (246)

²⁴“Grown already, Estrella, star of the first magnitude, occupying all visible space and especially at ease in the other space, the invisible.” (254)

²⁵“Meantime, the Egret is preparing elements that have the splendor of simplicity. A syringe for vaccinating cattle with a pressure jet, and odorless, colorless, tasteless compound to which the ex-Sorcerer had devoted his attention more than a thousand years before. A liquid akin to distilled water, which had failed as a solvent of the uteri of others but

which will now fulfill the new mission of softening and awakening her position. [...] And the spermatozoa must feel happy wriggling in the liquid, leaping about again, [...] The injection has been given.” (255)

²⁶“Now I shall be my own son, as once I was my own father.” (257)

²⁷“without the help of any woman.” (257)

²⁸[what] doesn’t go away at all is the cramp, the tugging in what was once Estrella and is now my womb, rather low, I admit, but round, bulging, a womb that gives me cramps, and I know they’re not birth pangs, I’m not giving birth yet, I stay here and I shout. No, I don’t shout, it’s the son who’s growing inside me that’s kicking, and I have to allow that son to grow in the greatest silence. Not break it with a shout. This is the happy pain of procreation.” (261)

²⁹“Seven inoculations have been given to Estrella, who is the size of a watermelon now, and the success of my project.” (265)

³⁰“Oh, oh, oh, the moment for birth.” (266)

³¹“The womb will keep growing.” (266)

³²“Hatching the philosopher’s egg from which the Phoenix Bird, my son, will be born.” (269)

³³“without the help of any woman.” (257)

³⁴“There was a big bang and a crimson jet rose up in the air, spouting forth from the summit.” (279)

³⁵“without the help of any woman.” (257)

³⁶There is, of course, a critique to be made here regarding compulsory heterosexuality and

its relationship to parenthood. The argument being made here – within the framework of this study – is not so much that the opposite of compulsory heterosexuality is homosexuality but rather a redefinition of sexuality as a more generalized notion.

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**evelyn lau's persona and *choose me*:
the aesthetics of pathos, pathology and racial melancholia**
jason d'aoust

Enlightenment cannot be duped [...]. Pity stands in disrepute.
Adorno & Horkheimer

*Le pathos représente une manière de socialiser l'affect
et de l'intégrer dans un ordre qu'il risquerait de perturber.*
Anne Coudreuse¹

*D'après nos habitudes, rien ne communique moins de soi qu'un tel sujet
qui en fin de compte ne cache rien, qui n'a qu'à nous manipuler,
et je vous assure qu'il ne s'en prive pas.*
Jacques Lacan²

Reception of Evelyn Lau's fiction has either criticized her self-involvement as a writer or has sought to see past authorial self-reflexivity and establish her as a new kind of minority writer. Both of these critical stances locate "Lau the writer" on the fringe of the social: while the former critics address her pathological identifications, the latter welcome her marginal point of view as an authorial locus from which renewed social criticism might come forth. Such conflation of the author's figure with her work has led to a relative disregard for the aesthetics of Lau's writing. Unfortunately so, for the tension produced by the silent pathos in *Choose Me* – the discrepancy between the characters' passionate emotions and their restrained physical expression – informs both of these critical stances. On one hand, it demonstrates how this written tension can be criticized as the acting out of the author's previous suffering in a narcissistic use of literature as the public exorcism of her daemons. On the other hand, this represented gap between emotion and its expression allows critics of minority politics to speak on behalf of the alienation of racial subjects. By foregrounding the pathos of these stories – a term that also implies a conscious appeal to the reader's pity – through a discussion of Anne Coudreuse's *Le goût des larmes au XVIII^e siècle*, and by insisting on the text's multiple layers of representation,

I distance myself from the criticism relying on autobiographical arguments and focus on the writer's deliberate display of pain patiently endured in *Choose Me*.³
lau the pathological writer

Whether accusatory or in defense of Lau, the following comments foreground how her self-reflexive style, read onto her ethnic public persona and her authorial figure, is not easily sidestepped in critical writing on her work. This is in part due to the fact that her literary output is somewhat framed by the publication of her diary at the onset of her career in 1989 and by the early appearance of her memoirs in 2001. For example, in a short book review of *Inside Out: Reflections on a Life so Far*, Chinmoy Bannerjee recalls the author's teenage prostitution, her eating disorder and her troubling childhood memories while hoping "for the sake of her art" that she will forget her past problems, move "beyond her own *pathology* and [develop] an interest in others" (Bannerjee, my italics). Similarly, commenting in 1997 on Lau's first book *Runaway, Diary of a Street Kid*, Jan Wong from the *Globe and Mail* describes Lau's reaction to the hardships of her Chinese Canadian upbringing as "self-indulgent melt-downs" (Wong). Lily Cho, distancing her literary criticism from these judgmental comments, remarks how Lau "[...] is a writer who is largely understood as deeply individualistic, who seems to revel in her isolation [...]" (174). In a similar scholarly vein, Charlotte Sturgess observes how "the types of self-representations which Lau projects through her work into the public domain, seem to have discredited her in terms of implicit rules of 'ethnic correctness'" (78).⁴ Therefore, before moving on to the pathos in Lau's work, I will address how the public eye finds Lau's persona "pathological" by framing the question within the debate on the pathology of racial melancholia.

melancholia and minority politics

"N'ont-ils donc pas, s'ils croient avoir meilleure oreille que les autres psychiatres, entendu cette douleur à l'état pur modeler la chanson d'aucuns malades qu'on appelle mélancoliques."
Jacques Lacan⁵

Over the past few years, there has been a fruitful scholarly debate on the

validity of qualifying racial or ethnic subjects as “melancholics.” The discussion starts with Sigmund Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia,” in which he defines melancholia as the result of a narcissistic choice of object, an identification that cannot be easily severed after the actual withdrawal of the object, which in turn hinders the subject’s capability to make new identifications (248). One should not lose sight of the quantifying judgment implied in the diagnosis of melancholia. Excessive compulsion to play out fantasies – i.e. the imagined presence of an absent object – incur an expenditure of time and energy that are no longer available for securing ties to the social. A person’s excessive inner turmoil must be addressed to prevent the unraveling of his or her social bonds. In this sense, the pathological narcissism described in melancholia is not a permanent psychical subjective structure but a state of mind susceptible to transformation. As such, Anne Anlin Cheng’s *The Melancholia of Race* considers the larger contemporary problem of diagnosing melancholia in subjects who, for ethical reasons, will not or cannot let go of the socio-political past. In a further elaboration on this discussion, David Eng and Shinhee Han in their article “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia” argue for “depathologizing melancholia” to accommodate their minority politics of racial subjectivity (363-367). I disagree with such a project because it only amounts to a shift in terminology. The problem of melancholia will remain, but sociopolitical fields of inquiry will have deprived themselves of a valuable conceptual tool. There must be better ways of promoting socio-historical awareness as well as subjective and social wellbeing than by invalidating psychological theories that are highly relevant to personal therapy.

The crux of the theoretical problem in “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia” is its failure to aptly point to the quantifying aspect of identification in melancholia that led to its qualification as a pathology. Since one of the author’s, Shinhee Han, is a psychological clinician, it is surprising to read how the article equates loss of desire with the impossibility to attain the American Dream, “a set of dominant norms and ideals—whiteness, heterosexuality, middle-class family values—often foreclosed to [racial subjects]” (344). Eng and Han believe that the American Dream is a narcissistic object choice and that the racial subject’s identification with the Dream later gives way to symptomatic depressions when a white patriarchal society withholds the dream-object from him or her on a racial basis. In this context, thinking of a dream as an object is far less unsettling than hearing a clinician promote a view of a normal desiring subject in terms of its completeness, of “*being whole*”: “We are dissatisfied with the assumption that minority subjectivities

are permanently damaged—forever injured and incapable of ever *being* ‘whole’” (363, my italics).⁶ Eng and Han fail to question how the American Dream is itself a fantasy of completeness that calls for a constant consumption of its ideal made object, an ideal that acts as the overarching fetishism of commodities. As Slavoj Žižek points out in his section on commodity fetishism in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: “the repressed truth – that of the persistence of domination and servitude – emerges in a symptom which subverts the ideological appearance of equality, freedom, and so on” (26). Eng and Han’s demand that minority subjects “be whole” in the context of the American Dream points to their failure in deconstructing a fantasy that demands constant *jouissance* on the subject’s part. In any case, the “realization” of such a dream would only mean the repression of the persistent domination the fantasy exerts on the subject. Rather, I advocate the minority subject’s right to lack, the right to be a subject of desire.⁷

While Lau’s work is not included in the corpus analyzed by the preceding critics of minority politics, her unwillingness to identify to “her” ethnic community has come under fire by Rita Wong for its implicit collusion with quite similar “dominant norms and ideals.” Lily Cho summarizes Wong’s point:

[...] Lau’s writing nonetheless lends itself too easily to the commodifying mechanisms of a patriarchal, heterosexist, capitalist machine in part because its eschewing of markedly racialized characters leaves it vulnerable to being claimed by the default position of whiteness. (175)

Lien Chao also points out how “Lau has won herself the reputation of a Vancouver writer and poet, rather than a ‘Chinese’ Canadian writer” (172). Such criticism of Lau’s refusal to identify with “her” ethnic community reveals how divergent critics have developed a doubly bound theoretical argument for racial pathology as problematic bonds with diverging definitions of the social. On one hand, white capitalism is responsible for melancholia in racial subjects who identify as such. On the other hand, racial subjects who do not identify with their ethnic community do so because of exacerbated individualistic traits of character. This leads me to conclude that Lau is not at all preoccupied with a self-reflexive ethnic public persona. Rather, mirrors already surround the racialized stage she has walked onto.

the pathos of lau's persona

*Persona... is the person we are in public,
the person our culture or society wants us to be.*

– Thomas Larson

Further reflection on Lau's persona can be gathered from her relation to the media—her constant public disclosure of personal, intimate information—which destabilizes reading strategies based on authorial intention. Lau's work—every word she makes public, in the broadest sense: either spoken or written—has the potential of placing her readers into a virtually interminable *mise en abyme*, as they stand fascinated between knowledge of her life—the spoken words she *publicizes*—and the meanings to give to her texts—the written words she *publishes*. Sturgess remarks on the very same element in Lau's reception: “[...] her ongoing self-reconstruction through the media, contributes to the confusion between textual and self-representation” (79). However, in reference to the narcissistic self-involvement that some find in Lau's books, it strikes me as quite interesting that people who have met her say how outgoing she is:

When the camera comes out, it's like a curtain drops. Gone is the engaging woman-child that I've feel I've come to know a little bit over the two-odd hours we've been talking. She has been replaced with the pouting artiste. Is it a pose or just protectiveness? I'm not sure. I only know that it prevents me from sharing her smile with you. And I'm a little sad about that: Evelyn Lau has a wonderful smile. (Richards, my italics)

If anything, this testimony suggests that Lau's apathetic pose is an act for her audience and would best be described as happening when the *curtain comes up*. This insight into the workings of media further entertains the fantasy of authorial intent by implying that even when Lau seemingly reveals part of herself, part of that same revealed self still remains hidden behind yet another dropped curtain. Nonetheless, we should keep in mind that an artist's public involvement with his or her work, whether it is self-reflexive or not, is still in and of itself a social activity. In other words, to suggest that Lau is narcissistic because of her self-reflexive work misses the point that she is not self-reflexive to the

point of pathology: of having no activity in or contact with society. Anne Coudreuse helpfully distinguishes the poetics of pathos from the representation of the pathological: the pathetic is not “the continual repetition or the permanent turning around the beloved ego” (“[...] le ressassement ou le tournoiement permanent autour du cher ego [...]”; 239). For Coudreuse, the pathetic is constitutively theatrical and representational:

In the pathetic discourse, [...] there is no pure ego [...]: the pathetic always presents itself more or less as a staging of itself, even when the stage is not that of a theatre.

Dans le discours pathétique, [...] il n’y a pas d’ego pur, [...]: le pathétique se présente toujours peu ou prou comme une mise en scène de lui-même, même quand cette scène n’est pas celle d’un théâtre. (239)

In other words, pathetic representations are not necessarily the work of unbelievably narcissistic artists. In the preceding example, the change of persona as the media’s curtain is lifted points to Lau’s conscious representation of her public self. Rather than labeling Lau’s writing as narcissistic because of conjectures between her publicized past and her persona, we should question the pathetic style for its unveiling function: “With pathos [or the pathetic style], suffering unveils itself and becomes spectacle” (“Dans le pathos la souffrance se montre et se fait spectacle”; 8). In Lau’s case, it unveils problems that lie on the edge of the heart of our contemporary social stage. Her stories induce anxiety as they shatter the status quo while covering it with an apathetic gloss that conveys a sense of emotional imprisonment.

choose me: bodily pathos

There is perhaps no literary mechanism more evocative of the body than the representation of a gaze. As such, feminist and ethnographic criticism of the white masculine gaze has not been lost on Lau’s writing, especially in relation to the representation of passive female subjectivity (Sturgess 85-86). In an expansion of this criticism, Rita Wong remarks “[h]ow the women gaze and are gazed upon,” becoming a point of “entry into reading the volatile power relations [...] in *Choose Me*” (125). However, Wong laments that the female gaze does not amount to a transformation of the power structure in question,

“it does not seem to challenge or change anything” (126). Lily Cho’s reading of *Choose Me* interprets “the gaze of the oppressed subject” in light of Lau’s self-reflexive authorial representation (177). By taking into account the multiple female gazes in the collection of short stories, Cho’s reading enlarges its interpretative frame as it moves away from a specific gaze to encompass the author’s overall female gaze. Such a reading strategy reconciles the fact that the characters do not “‘find themselves’ in the reflected gaze of the very men for whom they have so much contempt” (Cho, 183). I suggest yet another step back to consider what *Choose Me* offers its readers’ gaze.

In a discussion of the self-censorship involved in the expression of affects, Anne Coudreuse writes:

Pathos is not a physiological reaction to suffering or the verbal translation of an unarticulated cry that would tend to conflate affliction with brute pain. Rather, the formalization of suffering, in the moment when it makes itself into a spectacle, submits to a human consciousness. Pathos represents a way of socializing affect and integrating it into an order that it would otherwise risk destabilizing.

Le pathos n’est pas une réaction physiologique à la souffrance ou la traduction verbale d’un cri inarticulé qui tendrait à confondre l’affliction avec la douleur brute. Il s’agit plutôt d’une mise en forme de cette souffrance qui, dans le moment où elle se fait spectacle d’elle-même, se soumet à une conscience humaine. Le pathos représente une manière de socialiser l’affect et de l’intégrer dans un ordre qu’il risquerait de perturber. (215)

In other words, if pathos unveils bodily suffering it does so through a codified representation that has as much to do with its aesthetic reformulations than it does with normative social conventions of emotional display.⁸ In this sense, Lau’s writing is less intent on imagining new subjective possibilities for minorities as representing contemporary manifestations of human suffering. For example, where Rita Wong sees an empowered sex-worker in “The Outing” (125), I on the contrary find that its pathos reveals the multiple ways in which the body cannot express the full extent of its suffering. “The Outing” is a story about a wealthy middle-aged divorced man who hires a sex-worker that he has previously employed to escort him to an exchange club in order to fulfill his sadistic misogyny and

same-sex desires. The story starts with the description of a bodily unease, denoting tension, discomfort and contortion:

Sybil's stomach cramped with *tension*. She uncrossed her legs and *tried to relax*, but the chair she sat in was a modern structure of chrome and bars, and *she could not get comfortable* [...]; she was *forced* to wait for him with her *body bent* and her *knees canted* into the air by the angle of the seat. (31, my italics)

The confinement of the body to a chair is then displaced to a car seat, where a metallic structure is once more an accomplice in reducing Sybil to a suffering body, while Hugh, her john, treats her as if she doesn't "have a mind worth knowing" (35). This emotional imprisonment is further exploited by the text when we read: "Once in a while he put his hand on her knee and she trembled, from what she wasn't sure—surprise, disgust" (35). Already, we have a strong sense of Lau's pathetic style: the description of the scene shows Sybil's compliant apathetic attitude while the omniscient narration gives us direct access to the character's emotions.

However, emotional silence and the submission to the patriarchal power structure, is the show Sybil puts on for Hugh, not the theatre Lau stages for her readers. This remove from the action clearly demonstrates that although Lau's writing might be inspired by autobiographical elements, the fictionalization of the material is formally organized in a highly critical manner. In other words, the narration not only unfolds the story, it also reveals the social mechanisms that codify affect. Therefore, I cannot share Rita Wong's concern that the absence of racialized characters might subject her writing to a potential collusion with dominant ideology. When Wong writes in her essay that Sybil's "refusal of emotion is a strategy to define her boundary between physical labour and emotional investment" (142), I get the sense that Lau's style has captivated her: she is no longer reading a book but acting out in her essay the pathos it describes. Clearly, *Choose Me's* critical pathos is working on our critic: "[s]ince pathos proper can occur only after previous incarnations of emotion have been anatomized, pathos [...] would indeed be the emotion criticism is most likely to induce" (Terada, 70). Therefore, I would say in Wong's very own words – give or take a few – that "[a]s the gazed upon gazes back, we are left with the sense that [Lau] has a double consciousness, a knowledge that evades the [critic]" (Wong,

126).⁹ This reversal is not simply a play on the critical gaze; it is also an observation of the many levels of reading called for by the aesthetics of pathos.

choose me: silent pathos

As noted above, the interpretative gap I point to is best bridged in paying close attention to the depiction of silence in *Choose Me*. Although an economy of pathos seems to lend itself to exaggerated emotions, which do not frame well in Lau's restrained descriptions of them, literary criticism engaging with suffering cannot neglect the emotionally charged silences that authors painstakingly represent. In other words, some pains are too numbing for characters to give way to theatrics. Once more, I turn to Anne Coudreuse who distinguishes the limits of language from those of suffering:

If pathos is above all characterized by hyperbole and excess, it is also always turned towards silence. But this is a written or represented silence that is meant to have more value than the hyperbole or exclamations of pathetic bewailing. Suffocated by emotion, one can only remain silent because words reach their [descriptive] limits faster than human suffering does.

Le pathos, s'il se caractérise surtout par l'hyperbole et l'outrance, est toujours également tourné vers le silence. Mais il s'agit d'un silence écrit ou représenté, dont la valeur se veut plus grande encore que toutes les hyperboles et les exclamations des déplorations pathétiques. Suffoqué par l'émotion, on ne peut que se taire, car les mots atteignent plus vite leurs limites que la douleur humaine. (290)

At this point, a feminist reading of *Choose Me* might best explain the violence Lau asks her readers to witness. While the previous sections of my article deal with the criticism of Lau's unwillingness to identify with the Chinese Canadian community, this part relates directly to the power relations between men and women in the stories. Perhaps the most tell tale sign of masculine domination in this collection of short stories is the control exerted over the women's speech. If the women do not speak it is because the male protagonists will not listen to them or talk to them without asking what's wrong. I am thinking of how critics foreground the undesirability of the ageing man in "A Faithful Husband" (Cho, 177-178), while overlooking how Lau represents his need to constrain his

wife's activities. In this story, Gordon, a retired lawyer, sends his wife Melody, who is thirty-six years younger than he, to Italy on a holiday and finds her a changed woman when she returns after unexpected romance in Rome. In Melody's recollection of her marital life with her husband, she remarks for example how Gordon makes it clear that she should have no other interest than him by disrupting the silence she needs to work (104-105). After having had an affair in Italy with Stephen, a younger man, Melody tells Gordon that their "marriage wasn't working, that maybe they had made a mistake" (105). The scene is set in the bedroom, where the miserable couple lies in bed. Gordon, indignant, asks several questions without obtaining answers. One of these questions also reveals his need to pinpoint his wife's thoughts: "Is there something you're not telling me?" (105). Lau stages Melody's pathos in telling the reader everything her husband is to ignore. Once again, the body is contorted ("she curled away from him") and the voice is "muffled." (105). The pain is described as such an intense feeling that speech recedes and humanity seems to follow suit: "she was hunched into herself like a *sick creature*" (105, my italics). Lau then moves from an evocation of animality to one of inanimate objects: "[s]he was floppy as a doll" (106). Coudreuse also remarks how silent suffering borders on the non-human:

Silence, with all the artifices that its literary inscription assumes – how does one write silence? – incessantly recalls how the body intervenes in speech; under the blow of suffering, the body takes up all the space and can impede this specifically human faculty.

Le silence, avec tous les artifices que suppose son inscription dans le texte littéraire – comment écrire le silence? –, rappelle sans cesse combien le corps intervient dans la parole; sous le coup de la souffrance, le corps prend tout la place et peut entraver cette faculté spécifiquement humaine. (209)

Apart from describing the suffering body as inhuman, Lau also uses literary devices to write Melody's silence. As noted above, the author has the male protagonist doing all the talking. At the end of this two page diatribe, Lau's omniscient narrator states: "*He* stopped. The room was silent but for the sound of *his* rapid swallowing" (107, my italics). Thus, Melody's silence over the last pages is recapitulated, amplifying each of her refusals to answer Gordon's questions. In a similar narrative strategy as observed in "The Outing," the narration here also gives the reader access to Melody's thoughts as

her husband looms over her: “[s]he saw Stephen’s smile flickering behind her eyelids [..]” (106). Her desire for “the smoothness of [her lost lover’s] cheek under her fingers” (106) contrasts with Gordon’s “ruined and sagging face” (108), making her predicament all the more pathetic—“Pity welled in her” (107). Of course, Lau’s stories in *Choose Me* are not constantly describing her main character’s pathos. What I am arguing is that they are set up in order to culminate with pitiful endings, thereby leaving her readers to retrospectively construct the pathos of the female characters.

conclusion

Although constrained bodies are a constant theme in Evelyn Lau’s book and its narratorial remove gives the reader a rather unnerving nostalgia for more fully expressed emotions, it is reductive to qualify her writing as pathological because she uses disturbing autobiographical material in her fiction. Furthermore, my discussion of racial melancholia and pathology underlines methodological problems concerning narcissistic object choice on a sociopolitical level, in contrast with the investigation of the individual psyche. I have done so because discourse on racial melancholia informs criticism on Lau’s writing and, in a broader discussion of subjective alienation, contributes to a strain of autobiographical criticism that judges Lau’s work in view of her pathology rather than by its literary merits. I have argued that *Choose Me*’s pathos, its display of suffering, is a way of aesthetically negotiating the representation of emotion “when emotion, to express itself, must now blend into a neutral writing, minimalist and without effects” (“[...] quand l’émotion, pour se dire, doit désormais se fondre dans une écriture blanche et neutre, minimaliste et sans effets [...]”; Coudreuse, 14). The author’s representation of pain patiently endured does not amount to an unconscious ply for the reader’s pity; it is above all the writer’s conscious decoding of the individual and social mechanism at work in our contemporary society’s exploitation of women. By underlining Lau’s use of silent pathos and the narrational strategies she employs, I have sought to present her as an artist who successfully formalizes such difficult experiences.

notes

¹Coudreuse, Anne. *Le goût des larmes au XVIIIe siècle*. PUF, 1999. (*The Taste for Tears in the 18th Century*). In English: “Pathos represents a way of socializing affect and integrating it into an order that it would otherwise risk destabilizing” (my translation, 215). In the absence of an English edition, I have translated all my cited references to this work.

²Lacan, Jacques. *Le Séminaire, livre XVIII: D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*. Paris: Seuil, 2007. In English: “According to our habits, nothing communicates less of itself than such a subject who, at the bottom line, hides nothing, who has only to manipulate us, and I assure you that this subject does not deprive itself from doing so” (my translation, 126).

³For a critical discussion on the implications of life writing for marginalized subjectivity in Evelyn Lau’s autobiographical work, as well as for her public persona, see Larissa Lai’s book chapter “Strategizing the Body of History: Anxious Writing, Absent Subjects, and Marketing the Nation” in *Asian Canadian Writing Beyond Autoethnography*. Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn, eds. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008. 87-114.

⁴Lily Cho and Charlotte Sturgess both read Lau as a writer critical of the status quo of minority identities: Cho reads Lau’s critical stance toward ethnic identification in a broader discussion of Diaspora; Sturgess examines her work as part of a feminist deconstruction of national identities.

⁵Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. Paris: Seuil, 1966. 777. In English: “If they believe that they have better ears than other psychiatrists, have they somehow escaped hearing such pain in a pure state model the song of certain patients referred to as melancholic?”

Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York, London: Norton, 2002. 655-656.

⁶Their dissatisfaction here, to be precise, is not with “being whole” as an impossible subjective stance imposed on the racial subject, but with this subject’s unfair chances of ever attaining such an impossible state of happiness.

⁷Notwithstanding my reservations on the conclusions they draw, Eng and Han’s analyses of the racial subject’s loss of its mother tongue through various social constraints are very interesting.

⁸Rita Wong writes: “While the individual writer cannot be held responsible for power structures that are larger than any single individual, how Lau negotiates them becomes a matter to consider” (123). I am in complete agreement with this statement. However, the development of my argument and my conclusions will demonstrate to which point our methodologies differ.

⁹Rita Wong’s original sentence reads: “As the gazed upon gazes back, we are left with the sense that Sybil has a double consciousness, a knowledge that evades the john” (126).

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the radiant city at night: zombies in suburbia

rachel freedman

*Lost in the high street, where the dogs run
Roaming suburban boys
Mother's got a hairdo to be done
She says they're too old for toys
Stood by the bus stop with a felt pen
In this suburban hell
And in the distance a police car
To break the suburban spell ("Suburbia," The Pet
Shop Boys)*

The December 2007 issue of *Toronto Life* magazine featured an article titled "The Scarborough Curse," by Don Gillmor, which traces the development of Scarborough, Ontario, a suburb of Toronto, from post-war utopia to isolated wasteland over the course of forty years. The white, working-class, homogenous community of the 1960s and 70s has given way to the transient, multicultural—and at times violent—isolated suburb of the 1990s and 2000s (Gillmor 88). The symbiotic dream built around that single, unsustainable ideal—the car—has turned into a site of alienation, "one that carries a hint of menace rather than complacency" (89, 88), as the suburban landscape slowly evolves from peaceful and hygienic to nightmarish and terrifying, as industries move offshore in search of lower costs, making ghost towns of industrial parks and stifling the economy, forcing residents to commute long distances to their jobs. The peaceful landscape so prized in the aftermath of the violence of World War II, "the perfect setting for escape" as John Archer writes, which sprang up in what Gillmor calls "a spirit of post-war optimism [...] a place for war veterans who would leave behind the violence of Europe and return to a world that was egalitarian, green, harmonious and hopeful" (92), has become isolating and, eventually, terrifying.

The movement towards suburbanization began at the end of the nineteenth century as the mass immigration of the industrial revolution overcrowded cities and a sentimental nostalgia emerged for an idealized vision of the country market town, a contained, well-planned environment surrounded by a pristine green belt of agriculture.

Ebenezer Howard proposed the “Garden City” plan in 1898¹ as a response to overcrowded Victorian industrial cities, and gained a huge popular following, leading to the building of Letchworth Garden City, north of London, in 1903, and later Welwyn Garden City, each designed for an optimum population of 30,000 to 40,000. The effects of Howard’s “Garden City” plan have influenced urban—and suburban—planning ever since, rejecting densification and advocating rigorous zoning, keeping residential, commercial, and industrial areas far apart. French urban planner Le Corbusier’s “Radiant City” project (c. 1935) was just as idealistic as Howard’s “Garden City.” But while Le Corbusier was not afraid of densification—he advocated building *upwards*, creating massive skyscrapers occupying a tiny surface area surrounded by open spaces—he, along with Howard, rejected diversification, leading to each area being isolated and zoned to a specific and limited use; movement between zones would have to rely on cars.

The development of the suburbs in the second half of the twentieth century, heavily influenced by Howard, resulted in a collection of single-family homes in a spacious and well-planned greenspace, with doublewide driveways, and everything within a convenient ten-minute drive. Their post-war popularity provided quick and affordable housing for returning veterans and their rapidly growing families. The strong consumer and capitalist impulses of the 1950s saw large shopping malls spring up to serve the purchasing needs of the isolated boroughs that peppered the outskirts of major cities. Suburbs created havens for the baby-boom nuclear family, providing a sense of security against the threat of Cold War apocalypse—after all, who would bomb the ‘burbs?

The “symbiotic dream” cited by Gillmor is one of “workers who earned a living wage, lived close to the industry that employed them, and made things that they then bought at the nearby shopping centre”; malls in the end became instead the “symbols of suburban alienation, the enemy of urban cores” (89). In addition, such unintegrated zoning creates no interdependence, no personal interaction if an individual can go from house to car via carport, and from there to the mall, the office, or the airport without ever setting foot in the street.² Jane Jacobs, a life-long campaigner for urbanism who lived the latter decades of her life in Toronto, writes in her final book, *Dark Age Ahead*: “One can drive today for miles through American suburbs and never glimpse a human being on foot in a public space, a human being outside a car or a truck. [...] a visible sign that much of North America has become bereft of communities” (36).

The suburbs, as we know them, come in two forms: the pristine, planned

community and the dilapidated, devastated wasteland. “Remember,” says the voice-over narrator of a 1958 promotional film for Denver, Colorado, suburb Broomfield Heights, *Birth of a City*, “some of the slum areas of today were the suburban hopes of yesterday.” These “hopes” frequently begin as idealized planned communities, with a place for everything and everything in its place, and yet they frequently fail, within a short period of time, often a matter of decades, to live up to their promised ideal. Many urbanists have posited reasons for this, from contemporary critics of Howard’s and Le Corbusier’s, to Jacobs in the 1960s. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, she argues for the “ubiquitous principle [which] is the need of cities for a most intricate and closely-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially” (14); lack of diversity is problematic and eventually fatal for their development. But Jacobs was far from the first object; John Archer in his recent book, *Architecture and Suburbia*, cites Christine Frederick, a consulting household editor for the *Ladies’ Home Journal* and other magazines from 1912-1948, writing that “the suburban house [is] so pathetic in its pretense of an individualism which doesn’t exist. The little gingerbread attempts to achieve difference are so palpably hollow and unsuccessful” (qtd. in Archer 254). This “gingerbread-ness” is symptomatic of the institutional collaboration that so offends Jacobs. She writes:

Extraordinary governmental financial incentives have been required to achieve this degree of monotony, sterility, and vulgarity. Decades of preaching, writing and exhorting by experts have gone into convincing us and our legislators that much like this must be good for us, as long as it comes bedded with grass. (*Death 7*)

The monocultures created by planning committees, where all the houses are grouped together in one section, all the commercial areas in another, and industry tucked well away out of sight, have ended up creating an environment more forbidding and terrifying than many a city street at night. The fragmentation of physical and social interactions, as well as the growing popularity of suburban gated-communities, leads to a further emphasis on separation, seclusion, and segregation based on a variety of factors (Archer 300).

Physical and psychological isolation and fragmentation is created by the artificial design of the suburbs with its uniform zoning and social and economic monocultures, an

isolation that is an unexpected (by the planners, at least) result of an attempt to escape from “urban” concerns; instead Suburbia creates and preserves a sanitary distance between the commercial, industrial, and domestic spheres, as well as inhabitants from different social and economic groups. In correlating the middle class exodus to Suburbia and the search for the American Dream, Archer notes that:

As early as 1954, critic William J. Newman [...] had indicted Suburbia as “the perfect setting for escape.” [...] noting that it] afforded complete physical and social disconnectedness of the individual from the community. “Nowhere else but in the suburb can middle-class man achieve so perfectly the isolation he seeks from the rest of mankind [...]. In the desert of the suburb, community life has lost whatever vestiges of meaning it ever had for Americans...” (256)

Lack of diversity initially seems to stifle the creation of community, and later, as non-homogenous groups move in, they lack a community superstructure within which to position themselves. The empty streets and parks, the lack of sidewalks, the dependence on cars, all contribute to an isolated and alien, alienated, and alienating landscape, as horrific as any zombie, monster, or serial murderer.

The cinematic representations of Suburbia have been many and varied, from the utopian and pro-capitalist advertising campaigns of the 1950s and the black and white paradise of *Leave it to Beaver* to the stark, isolated, and frequently bloody Suburbias of horror movies. It is in the latter that we see the suburban landscape becoming horror itself, beyond the zombies, mutants, monsters, serial murderers, and aliens with which it is populated. Horror movies—some of the most “popular” representations of pop culture—have long commented on the misinformed planning and attempted systematization of community life that has led, in the course of a generation, from utopian Suburbia, home of the American Dream, to suburban nightmare.

The promotional film *Birth of a City*, mentioned above, is a panegyric for the post-war suburbs that were sprouting across North America in the 1950s. Each was a “dream city, as perfect as men can conceive.” The promo bills Broomfield Heights as the perfect place for young families, only a seventeen-minute commute to downtown Denver by means of the conveniently located freeway. The complete dependence on the car for transportation is praised as a sign of prosperity and the “American Dream,” a car for every

family. As the ultimate consumer good, Jacobs writes: “The most serious and widespread increase was for the need for an automobile. Public transportation declined or was altogether absent, especially in the suburbs. [...]” (*Dark Age* 34). Similarly, a 1957 film, *In the Suburbs*, presents an ideal of life for young adults with “similar interests and goals,” with families; a social and economic monoculture. These young families are, according to the narrator, entering the “purchasing stage” of their lives: a new home, a new car, and babies on the way all mean that these young couples are on a “wild, non-stop ride” in a “happy, go-spending, world.” The shopping centre is the social nexus of this suburban life, created in the image, and to fulfil the needs, of suburbanite shoppers, determined consumers with homes and lifestyles in constant need of expansion, who buy in quantity, and take home their purchases in their cars, who “live by the automobile,” a veritable incarnation of the American Dream.³

Twenty-one years later, in 1978, George A. Romero filmed his cult-classic zombie movie, *Dawn of the Dead*, at the Monroeville Mall, in Monroeville, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Pittsburgh. The action of the movie takes place as the four main characters—Special Forces commandos Peter and Roger, Stephen, a pilot, and Francine, a TV producer—escaping a poorly explained zombie outbreak in Philadelphia, take refuge in a suburban shopping mall. The mall supplies them with everything they could conceivably need: clothes, food, a skating rink, a barber shop, fire arms, and a car. They are in a consumer heaven.

They are not alone in the mall, however: it is full of aimlessly wandering zombies, there despite the fact that there are no humans left for them to eat; more and more of them keep congregating there, walking into the glass doors that they cannot open. When the protagonists first arrive at the mall, landing on the roof in the helicopter, they peer down through a skylight to see the zombies milling about:

FRAN: [...] What are they doing? Why do they come here?

STEVE: [...] Some kind of instinct. Memory...of what they used to do.
This was an important place in their lives. (Romero, shot 167)

The living dead find their way to an isolated shopping centre solely by their memories—they have only two instincts: to eat humans and shop. But the human characters’ instincts are not all that different: not to get eaten by zombies, and shop. At one point Fran accuses

the men, “You’re hypnotised by this place. All of you. It’s all so bright and neatly wrapped up that you don’t see... You don’t see that it can be a prison [...] What do you want? A new set of furniture? A freezer? A console TV and a stereo? We can take what we need. What we need to survive” (Romero, shot 381). She alone sees the danger of their being seduced into the “happy, go-spending, world” idealised in the 1950s, of the soporific effect of unbridled consumption; the unbridled consumption of consumer-, rather than cannibalistic-, zombies.

Once the protagonists have locked and blockaded all the entrances to the mall and killed all the zombies still inside, they realize that the zombies are still pounding at the doors, and still coming towards the mall:

The people stand at the balcony railing overlooking their realm.

FRAN: They’re still here.

STEVE: They’re after us... They know we’re in here.

PETER: They’re after the place... They don’t know why... They just remember... Remember that they wanna be in here!

FRAN: What the hell are they?

PETER: They’re us, that’s all. There’s no more room in hell.

STEVE: What?

PETER: Somethin’ my granddaddy used to tell us [...] when there’s no more room in hell... the dead will walk the earth. (Romero, shot 590)

When hell is full, it seems instead, the dead will move to the suburbs.⁴ Peter deftly puts his finger on the issue—zombies are human, the dead walking the earth in search of bargains and brains.⁵ Each consumer is as zombie-like as the zombies. In the 2004 tribute movie, *Shaun of the Dead*, set in a suburb of London, England, at the beginning of the film it is impossible to tell the humans and zombies apart the humans are in a trance-like state, not interacting with anyone or anything, simply following their instincts and memories, living by rote. Once again, the distinguishing factor between human and zombie seems to be nothing more than the hunger for human flesh. At the end of *Dawn of the Dead*, Fran and Peter, the two characters least consumed by the abundance of goods surrounding them are the two who survive to fly off into the sunset. They alone are not turned into “consumer

zombies,” escaping with only what they need, unburdened with the excess commodities of capitalism, and thereby avoiding becoming zombies themselves.

Radiant City, a 2004 National Film Board of Canada pseudo-documentary, contends with the issues of a real, modern Suburbia, one inhabited by nothing more monstrous than an average, middle class family. But that does not make the landscape any less horrific. As James Howard Kunstler, author of *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape*, says in the film, “80% of everything that has been built in North America has been built in the last 50 years. And most of it is brutal, depressing, ugly, unhealthy, and spiritually degrading.” Philosopher Mark Kingwell is interviewed talking about Suburbia’s empty streets, where there is “...nobody to be seen. There’s something kind of bizarre and post-apocalyptic about [that], so there is no surprise when you see something like a zombie movie that starts in just that kind of suburb.”

According to urban designer Ken Greenberg, also interviewed by the makers of *Radiant City*, suburbs are “All the things that we would like to have in a congenial, small town environment, which the suburbs aspire to. It’s turned out to be one of the hardest things to recreate in a new setting.” The growth and development of suburbs is being forced and planned—not allowed to develop naturally based on the needs and demands of the inhabitants. Rather, the inhabitants, the families who chose to move to the suburbs, are being told by the developers what they need and want, as Jacobs says above: good, as long as it comes with grass. The suburbs, beautiful, clean, and desirable, are sanitary and strange, isolated and isolating.

Suburbia is frequently a site of horrors, both real and imagined, from stabbings in the subway stations around Toronto to the psychological horrors of isolation, alienation, and frustration.⁶ Suburban monocultures are such that as the inhabitants move in, have families, age, retire, and move out at roughly the same time, communities can quickly die. Similarly, zombies appear suddenly, mindlessly consume all in their path, and eventually die of starvation. I could have chosen from dozens (probably hundreds) of horror movies made in the last forty years as examples of suburban horror: *Poltergeist*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, the *Scream* series, countless zombie movies, *The Birds*, *Rear Window*, *Disturbia*, *A Clockwork Orange*, the list goes on, and includes tributes to horror movies like *The ‘Burbs*, *Fido*, and *Shaun of the Dead*. Nor should we discount movies like *Ghost World*, *American Beauty*, or *The Virgin Suicides*, and the more light-hearted *Garden State*, *SubUrbia*,

Clerks, Mall Rats (set entirely in a New Jersey mall), where the monotonous oppression of suburban life drive the inhabitants to pathetic, sometimes-terrible, sometimes-fatal, sometimes-funny extremes. The constant recurrence of Suburbia in movies, songs, and popular culture goes to show the profound effect that this landscape has had on the popular consciousness. Kunstler describes the twentieth century as “kind of a nervous breakdown for architecture; the builders forgot what to do, the customers forgot what to ask for, and what we ended up with was a kind of cartoonification of our buildings.”⁷ Jacobs has long accused suburban planning of murdering community:

At a given time it is hard to tell whether forces of cultural life or death are in the ascendancy. Is suburban sprawl, with its murders of communities and wastes of land, time, and energy, a sign of decay? Or is rising interest in means of overcoming sprawl a sign of vigour and adaptability in North American culture? (*Dark Age* 169-70)

Kingwell talks about people fleeing towards isolation, but it is this very isolation that exposes them to the threat of the landscape. The zombies who aimlessly wander the mall in *Dawn of the Dead* are more terrifying for their similarity in purpose to the protagonists than for their cannibalistic appetites. Zombies, like the suburbs, rely on unbridled consumption to survive; when there is nothing left to consume, or when consumable goods become inaccessible, they eventually die.

Suburbia is not an inherently bad place, nor one uniquely belonging to horror stories; many people lead contented lives in the residentially-zoned areas surrounding urban cores, while horror, as we know, can occur anywhere. Yet while its advocates make much of the suburbs, from the open green spaces to the airy homes, Suburbia is still a landscape as manufactured one that has attempted to predict all the possible requirements of the community based on theories, formulas, and statistics, not the actual needs or wants of the residents. The recurring failure of suburbs to thrive overall as their designers believe and have calculated that they should always seems to come as a surprise to those very designers. The idealized residential area created by theories of urban and suburban planning has lent itself to an intensely private existence on the part of residents, where absence of community interaction within the domestic sphere has created an alienating experience of the landscape. It is this alienation that is being invoked by the images of

suburbs as landscapes of horror, and that speaks so loudly to modern viewers, urbanites and suburbanites alike.

notes

¹Howard's seminal work, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Peaceful Reform*, was reprinted in 1902 under the title *Garden Cities of To-morrow*.

²Coincidentally, the ad facing the last page of Gillmor's article is for a 4-wheel drive Honda SUV with the tagline "Safe, like cotton balls covered in bubble wrap"—just the vehicle for the suburbs.

³Archer convincingly links the "American Dream" to the single-family "dream house." "Early in the 1920s the goal of housing each American family in a single-family dwelling was thrust upon the nation as a goal of federal policy" (250); this particular facet of the American Dream has sadly been brought home by the recent collapse of the housing market in the United States.

⁴The 2006 sleeper hit, *Fido*, features a little boy whose pet is a decaying zombie named Fido. Trouble hits Suburbia when Fido eats the next-door neighbour, and the boy must fight to save his pet.

⁵Shop Smart. Shop S-Mart." Ash Williams, with a chainsaw for a hand and a shotgun in his other, works in the Housewares department at "S-mart" in Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* series <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igfLZIZzKUD> (6-Jan-08).

⁶Besides the escalating violence between immigrant groups, there was the "reign of terror" of Paul Bernardo, the "Scarborough Rapist," who stalked and raped women in their homes outside Toronto from 1987-1991.

⁷*Radiant City*, 2006, dir. Gary Burns and Jim Brown.

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**green cubism: manufacturing aesthetic dissent in a globalized world of simulacrum
and unstable signifiers**

maryanne laurico

This revival of vanished – or vanishing – forms, this attempt to escape the apocalypse of the virtual, is a utopian desire, the last of our utopian desires. The more we seek to rediscover the real and the referential, the more we sink into simulation, in this case a shameful and, at any event, hopeless simulation. —Baudrillard , The Illusion of the End



acrylic foil, clear plastic, photographs and mica flakes on canvas



detail from *green cubism: manufacturing aesthetic dissent in a globalized world of simulacrum and unstable signifiers*

Amidst the cacophonous chaos of life, you stumble upon a very large, very green painting. With an intrusive size of four feet by five feet, this painting interrupts *your space*: it refuses to go unnoticed. The *green* is beautiful. For a moment, you get lost in the aesthetic of it. You refocus. Perhaps your eyes dart over the *green* in an attempt to look for a coherent perspective. That *green* offers no such solace.

You step back. The *green* becomes a background noise and your eyes move to what appears to be the representation of a hole torn in the canvas. You notice that the *tear* in the canvas seems to be the work of some gentle stranger: each segment seems to have been pulled away with the care and tenderness of a lover. The scrolled-up segments of the torn-away canvas reveal two packages of pills. Your eyes settle on the package of red pills. You consider, for a moment, the depth of field it offers. Your eyes glance over at the second pack of pills. You notice the colours of the images in that package. Perhaps you want to touch the pills.

Seduced by your curiosity to get a better look at the images, you move in closer. Your eyes see the images of light at the end of a tunnel; a pink elephant; humans as garbage; a child soldier; Matryoshka dolls; a fish with a gasmask; a woman looking motherly at a child (you know that the child is not hers); and a spiral staircase. You try to make a narrative. You can't because it isn't obvious. Your eyes look up to the *green*. No answers there. You move up close and notice that on one of the packages of pills there is small writing. It says "MANUFACTURED BY DISSENT INC." As close as you are now – you're practically breathing on it – you notice, at the back of the urban landscape, a shimmering building billowing smoke into a starry sky. On that building, you read: "DISSENT INC." Viewer, beware: all that shimmers is not gold!

What pill are you willing to swallow? What pill *can* you swallow? Inspiration for the painting rests in globalization theory and theories that comment on the global and our "post"-modern condition, and from novels and a film that attempt to subvert master-narratives and underscore global dissent. The green part of the painting is my cubist representation of that colour. There is no single dominant perspective, depth, or source of light. Green becomes an unstable signifier. It is an aesthetic representation; however, the painting refuses to be read, simply, as green aesthetic. At the bottom of the painting, there appears to be a gash in the canvas—an interruption and subversion of the green aesthetic. Where can we find dissent in a shrinking world of never-ending referents? Is

there “authentic” dissent? Or is the notion of anything “authentic” our attempt to categorize and value the objects around us? Is dissent simply a manufacturing of information for consumption by few, privileged people? Can useful and meaningful action or dialogue ensue from such manufacturing?

We (humans) manufacture dissent. We are bombarded with literature, art, and modes of communication and marketing that propagate a sense of subverting some governing authority or meta-narrative. Dissent has become a commodity fetish. Yet, despite dissent dissolving into the world of simulacrum, all forms of dissidence serve as entry ways into critical views of our global condition. My painting is an attempt to subvert the aesthetic of “green cubism,” underscore dissent as socially, politically and economically manufactured, and, through the images in the pills, to point to a particular narrative of global dissent: the image of the Matryoshka dolls underscore Baudrillard’s notion never-ending simulacrum; the spiral staircase symbolizes the time and space compression that David Harvey theorizes in his *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990); the pink elephant represents a manifestation of the large and looming issues that no one is willing to address; the image of the child soldier conveys an unsettling violence, like the violence in Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* (2005); the image of the woman looking on a child is from Nilita Vachani’s documentary, *When Mother Comes Home for Christmas* (1996), and underscores the global mobility of the human as commodity; the image of the fish with a gasmask is from the cover of Neal Stephenson’s *Zodiac: An Eco-Thriller* (1988), and points to the accumulation – and our ignorance of such accumulation – of toxins in the environments that surround us; the image of humans as garbage is a poignant image that Jamaica Kincaid draws on in her unapologetic critique of Western tourists, *A Small Place* (1988); and the image of the light at the end of the tunnel reminds us all dissent represents a manufactured, tunneled-vision of particular realities.

notes

These images were found on the Web. Every effort has been made to contact the original artist for permission. Some have not yet replied, but those that have, have granted full permission for the use of their image in my project. In my works cited list, I list the web source for each image.

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creative writing

prussian blue: a response to peter balakian's "the oriental rug"

marc foley

I

There is a boy napping
on a drawing on the floor,
holding in his fist a clutch
of smouldering flies.
His legs dangle over
the one-eighth of an inch
rim of dried Crayola,
and my left thumb catches
falling drop of skin.

Crumbling oatmeal in a pool
near his face – dream resin;
he's floating on vegetables spilling
colour outside the lines
and bits of skin fall from
my thumb into his mouth
pushing out oats that tumble
and arrange themselves,
remembering, on
the drawing of a page.

Are we somewhere near Troy?
(war doesn't live there anymore)
Just sheep and cypress
in swelling pools of green

II

not found in New Jersey
or even Crayola.
I remove my eye and roll it
over to his tightened fingers
and the smouldering flies
reach out their legs and
try my scent
with wings of grass.

He opens his hand
and the flies alight;

they drop eggs into
my trailing optic nerve
still spitting dendrites
and synaptic cleft –
birthed in remembrance,
warmed by bursts of spark

they swell, put forth
a floor-coloured lead.

It cuts the outline
of a boy
in a flurry of splintered wax
he sleeps with flies,
hand curled upon a reddened eye
watching the floor fall through.

Bits of board peel back
flinging up seven thousand books
of six hundred years,
a catalogue of people
turning into dust.

III

The floor opens
to the Sea of Marmara
(is it near Troy?)
where a woman's thighs
aren't propped open
with mallets
and there is no eager queue

only botany
and terra-cotta leaves.
Ethereal, one history
To six hundred millimetres
of Burnt Orange.

IV

The boy rolls over
and my eye begins to smoulder –
the flies are spread
in the water
on a rose by a bee.

Swollen again he
reaches for the wetness
of in-between,

(near Troy on the map)

tongues a hummingbird's wing
for its chalk.

He comes
apart in the thorn
and disperses,
my eye the jackal,
an iris in the earth.

V

He draws his spine in the wax
still holding the flies
with black and yellow stripes,

speaks through
strips of skin on his lips

dirty things
passioned things
loving things
desperate things

dispersed, I rub myself
in the wound of another:
Crayola cut that
from the pack.

faces and places

anna wong

My birthplace and past I meet
A tale of two lives, two cities
Generations walk on separate streets
-Luk Yeung Sun Chuen, Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong

An old man lies face down on the street
Banging a metal bowl on the ground
Bows of skin ties where knees used to meet
-Beggar, Fa Yuen Street, Hong Kong

A mother rocks a child in her arms
Deformity shadows the young boy
Can her tears protect him from harm?
-Mother and child, Summer Palace entrance, Beijing, China

A fair-skinned American rests
At ease in a hip hutong café
Is integration the next big test?
-Man, café in a hutong, Beijing, China

A lone businessman waits in line
Blue blazer and glasses play the part
Is he digging the next big gold mine?
-Business, airport terminal train, Beijing, China

Sweet osthmanthus your beauty shines
Adorning the simple grey mountains
My hand traces your graceful outlines
-Li River, Guilin, China

A sun weathered man gestures
Pointing between my bag, bus and boat
Smiles as he lifts without pressure
-Man, Taman Negara, Malaysia

“Pretty” says the woman on the beach
trinkets of beads spill over her head
to haggle and bargain she does teach
-Vendor, Kuta Beach, Bali, Indonesia

Laughter rings as the girls walk
“Chanti chanti” calls out the street
Lively in step and full of sweet talk
-Random streets, Bali, Indonesia

The shy server breaks into dance
Hands me a rose made of straws
Sweet encounter given by chance
-Thai boy in red aboard the Seacanoë, Phuket, Thailand

On the island he finds his niche
Away from busy Bangkok he came
Leading tours out to sea and the beach
-Guide and survivor of the tsunami, Koh Phi Phi, Thailand

Our ex-boxing, cobra-killing guide
Whom we fondly call ranger Joe
Leads us through with rapids on the side
-“Joe”, Lahu village two hours by truck from Chiang Mai, Thailand

The shy smile says “ten baht”
Raised with elephants not Dumbo
Over her my mind and heart fought

-Girl, Lahu village two hours by truck from Chiang Mai, Thailand

Waters of green and aqua blue
The full moon illuminates the night
Whose eyes dare feast on Koh Samui?
-Chaweng beach, Koh Samui, Thailand

Splashes of rainbow of different shape
Beckons me to this simple cart of fruit
Colours the dull gray landscape
-Lady vendor, Soi Sukhumvit 38, Bangkok, Thailand

Smooth skinned and bright eyed
English speaking student of finance
Waiters at night on the side
-Waitor, Pub Street, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Black, white and orange fly
Over the unmarked grave sites
Where yesterday's forgotten lie
-Butterflies, Choung Ek Killing Field, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

You aim to main and not kill
Marks of your work litter the streets
Shell shocked, I am standing still
-Children of landmines outside tourist spots, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Soft songs sung before the towers
As flocks of visitors stroll
Towards the five lotus flowers
-Mother and children outside the entrance of Angkor Wat, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Did my textbooks tell me all?
I don't know the American War
But these survivors to me call
-Hanoi Hilton, Hanoi, Vietnam and Cu Chi tunnels, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam

contributors

jonathan allan is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Toronto. His paper “Giving Birth and Delivering the Reader in Luisa Valenzuela’s *Cola de lagartija*” represents an earlier interest in questions of gendered reading practices. Current research includes a continued interest in the writings of Northrop Frye, as well as a dissertation which considers the romance in French, Hispanic, and English contexts.

justin allec received his BA from the University of Winnipeg in 2003. A passion for rock climbing meant traveling beyond the prairies, eventually leading to Thunder Bay, and Lakehead University’s MA program, in 2006. In the final year of that program Justin completed his thesis, *Writing the Ascent: Narrative and Mountaineering Accounts*, which allowed him to combine his interest in the culture of rock climbing with scholarship. A recent graduate of Lakehead, Justin lives with his fiancée and hopes to work as a journalist in the climbing industry.

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marc foley is a poet wannabe pursuing a PhD in literature for reasons that have yet to be revealed.

rachel freedman is a Ph.D. student at the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. Through a series of academic accidents, she has realized that zombies are actually a valid research area.

maryanne laurico specializes in Canadian literature with an HBA and MA from the University of Toronto. MaryAnne Laurico is a PhD candidate in the English department at Queen's University. Currently, she is investigating the Canadian tradition of literary hoaxes under lenses of theories of authenticity, genre, canon formation, and identity politics. Painting, for MaryAnne, is a creative outlet that helps relieve the stress of grad school.

anna wong was raised in the westcoast. This grad student loves sushi, sunsets and all things social. Heading into her second and last year in the master of planning program, Anna specializes in social policy and community development at the University of Toronto.

