# Signature

## A JOURNAL OF THEORY AND CANADIAN LITERATURE

NUMBER 3 SUMMER 1990

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# Inside Out: Finding the Author in James De Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*

Julie Beddoes

James De Mille's novel *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* was published in 1888, eight years after the writer's death and, according to Malcolm Parks' "Editor's Introduction" to the Centre for the Editing of Early Canadian Texts edition of the book, at least twenty years after it was written (CEECT xx). When the book was published, it was criticized for its imitation of works by such writers as Jules Verne and Rider Haggard, works that in fact appeared after De Mille's death, even though a note appeared in some editions explaining that publication was posthumous (CEECT xxxviii). Later critics, assuming that it was written late in De Mille's life, mentioned its debt to works published later than the now accepted date of composition. The most recent and better informed criticism has tended to concentrate on its debt to sources presumed known to De Mille in the early 1860s.

Questions of chronology and source are a major concern of the "Introduction" and "Footnotes" to the CEECT edition. Parks examines De Mille's scientific sources as a means of dating its composition, in order to clear him of charges of plagiarism. This gives the editor's commentary an interesting relationship to the book it discusses: first, it repeats the book's own problematization of chronology, in that its hero, author of the strange manuscript, travels in 1843 to a country where long-extinct animals from several ages exist together; second, in its repetition of a discussion that takes place in the book as to the source and authorship of the strange manuscript. In both Parks' "Introduction" and De Mille's novel, questions of date of origin and chronology of scientific publications are crucial to the making of suppositions about the characters of authors.

It is ironic that in order to clear De Mille of accusations that he used other fiction writers' texts as sources, Parks goes to great lengths to establish the exactitude of his use of science writers' texts. This both suggests a different set of assumptions about authorial responsibilities in using fictional and scientific sources, and also blurs that difference in its demand that a fiction writer use scientific research in exactly the same way as a scientist would. Michel Foucault has discussed the epistemic boundaries we erect round different types of

discourse so that literature is indeed distinguishable from science, and also how the notion of authorship is crucial to the erection of these boundaries (in "The Order of Discourse" and "What is an Author"). Foucault's work is evoked by Parks' attempt to fill the space of the author of *A Strange Manuscript* and De Mille's characters' attempts to fill the space of the author of the strange manuscript.

In Parks' essay, questioning the oppositions of before and after, of scientific truth and literary fiction, is part of the process of understanding the character of the author. But like other critics of De Mille's book he has accepted without question the opposition of inside to outside, specifically, in view of the novel's double construction, of main text to secondary text. His "Introduction" begins:

> Set in an imaginary semi-tropical land at the South Pole inhabited by a strange race of death-seekers and by terrifying prehistoric monsters, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* by James De Mille (1833-80) brings a touch of the exotic to the relatively tame landscape of early Confederation fiction. . . . The main narrative is the story of Adam More, the first mate of a British sailing ship homeward bound from Tasmania, whose extraordinary adventures begin . . . (xvii).

Later on the page he refers to "The four yachtsmen who pick up More's manuscript . . . [they] form a secondary plot and supply a detailed and provocative commentary that is interspersed between their readings of More's narrative." The four men on a yacht find, bobbing in the water of the eastern Atlantic, a copper cylinder which contains a manuscript on papyrus, claiming to have been written by Adam More. The four read the manuscript aloud to each other and discuss it over the meals which interrupt the reading. In the age of metafiction it is not so easy to accept the usual hierarchy of main manuscript and frame, especially when it rests on assumptions about authorship and about oppositions which the text itself can be read as questioning.

In his "Introduction" to the New Canadian Library edition of the novel, R.E. Watters points out the the "novel's governing idea" is the "obvious mirror-reversal of values" (xiv) of light and darkness, life and death. This reversal, however, is seen as entirely a product of and contained in More's manuscript in so far as it satirizes the Victorian society in which De Mille lived. De Mille wrote, says Watters, "a satirical anti-utopian commentary on contemporary life with a swiftly paced narrative of travel, romance, and fantastic adventure" (vii). Even if only the story in the manuscript is considered, however, this reversal is ambiguous: the moral code of the dystopia, whose inhabitants are called Kosekins, values poverty and renunciation over the acquisition of wealth, death over life,

darkness over sunshine. Its rich people are reviled outcasts, its lowest social position is occupied by its ruler and its privileged elite are those rewarded with ritual death. Whether this is first of all a satire of the love of money and ostentation or of Christian asceticism carried to its extreme or of the four men holidaying in luxury on the yacht is very difficult to tell. Interpretation depends on an estimation of authorial intention, a choice of main target over subordinate. If More's narrative turns the tables on Victorian society in more than one direction at once, it surely authorizes a critic to make some other reversals, especially of before and after, which permit the invention of an author figure not very much resembling the historical De Mille described in Parks' introduction. Is this author inside or outside the text?

Wayne C. Booth, in his book *Critical Understanding*, published in 1979, makes a useful distinction between the physical/historical human being who produced the book, whom he calls "writer," and the fictional entity posited by critics and interpreters, whom he calls "author" (268). Roland Barthes, in his *Critical Essays*, places both outside the text but makes the distinction fundamental to the definition of the literary: "The author participates in the priest's role, the writer in the clerk's; the author's language is an intransitive act (hence, in a sense, a gesture), the writer's an activity" (147). Authors are concerned with "how to write," writers with what to say. Barthes' distinction, like Parks' defence of De Mille, makes the specificity of literature depend on the stance of its producer. Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, in proclaiming the death or the irrelevance of the author, are in fact banishing the writer and proclaiming the author, as creation of the text and its reading, very much with us.

To be able to perform highly specific activities like literary criticism, it is necessary to make distinctions and oppositions such as literature/science, truth/lies, inside/outside, writer/author, intended/accidental, even before/after. At the same time, if we look at them too hard, or attempt to theorize our critical practice, they dissolve into confusion and undecidability. Jacques Derrida has demonstrated how the conventional oppositions, including that of speech and writing, closely connected to the notion of authorial presence and intention, are fundamental to the belief system within which we work. Like the axioms of arithmetic, however, they cannot be justified in terms of the logic of the system. The system rests on a set of heuristic assumptions which we make to serve the needs of the given situation. Derrida has said in an interview with Richard Kearney:

> We are still in metaphysics in the special sense that we are in determinate language... when I refer to the "closure" of metaphysics, I insist that it is not a question of considering metaphysics as a circle with a limit or simple boundary . . . And as soon as we acknowledge that the limit-boundary of metaphysics is divisible, the logical rapport between inside and outside is no longer simple. Accordingly we cannot really say that we are "locked into" or "condemned to" metaphysics, for we are, strictly speaking, neither inside nor outside (111).

This limit-boundary is the site of the difference, the distinctions, that make meaning, a limit that is always deferred, unreachable, unless we stabilize its location to suit our purposes. These boundaries are not natural objects nor do they depend on content; they are conventions and contexts which distinguish the practice of medicine, say, from other discursive situations in which bodily functions are mentioned; or they tell us whether we should or should not believe what we read. The epistemic boundaries which distinguish the discursive activity of post-structuralist criticism to some extent make it a place in which distinctions like writer/author or before/after can be questioned; when a different kind of literary activity is undertaken, such as the preparation of a critical edition, boundaries and distinctions again become necessary.

*A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* tests the boundary between the inside and outside of both metaphysics and text, and thus comes to have a parodic relationship as much with post-structuralist criticism as with the criticism which avoids the question it asks. One of the ways in which its own inside/outside opposition can be put into question is to raise doubts about the secondary status of its "frame" story which, in any case, not only surrounds but also interrupts More's manuscript. The copper cylinder which enclosed More's papyrus may have kept out the ocean water but it doesn't serve to keep apart the sections of De Mille's novel. On the one hand, the reader is given More's text through its reading aloud by the yachtsmen; it could therefore be seen as no more subordinate to the "frame" text than their conversation. On the other hand, this supposed main story is presented in several chapters, unframed by quotation marks. Paradoxically, such a graphic frame would have abolished the invisible frame presumed to separate the manuscript from the rest of the story. De Mille's text becomes the subversive text which, in Roland Barthes' words, "abolishes quotation marks" which would have juridically distribute[d] the ownership of the sentences" (*S/Z* 45). At the end of the story, however, Lord Featherstone's reading is closed by quotes and we go back to the yachtsmen with no chapter break. The frame is broken by both present and absent quotation

marks; when present they remind of the speaking voice and thus award "ownership of the sentences" upon their reader. In this case, however, there have been four readers-aloud. Three of them are given no claim to ownership by punctuation. Proprietorship of More's manuscript seems to have been bestowed at the end on his lordship.

De Mille's text is framed in the CEECT edition by the various front and end matters which occupy the first 61 and last 54 pages. In their similarity to the yachtsmen's discussions they reproduce the ways in which the sections of the novel comment on each other, making the CEECT text a hall of mirrors of mutually reflecting texts. The yachtsmen, like textual critics, argue about the manuscript's time and form of composition, speculate on the biography and intentions of its author, the means by which it reached its readers, that is, the history of its publication, and its fidelity to known scientific sources. Otto Melick, one of the yachtsmen, insists in 1850 that the manuscript's supposed author, Adam More, could have read recent scientific publications (238); but if the manuscript's claim that More set out on his voyage in 1843 (10) is believed, and this is supported by the apparent age of the copper cylinder, More's descriptions of flora and fauna must have come from his own observation. Here is another doubly paradoxical reversal: More's honesty in writing his non-fiction depends on his not having access to scientific documents; De Mille's honesty as author of fiction depends on his having read them. De Mille is not always exonerated; his text claims that the manuscript was found in 1850 yet like More, another yachtsman, Congreve, occasionally appears to have read works published later than that: "De Mille got away," says the "Introduction," "with stretching Congreve's knowledge a few years beyond 1850, for not one of the known early reviewers of *A Strange Manuscript* so much as mentions this deception" (xxxii). Parks accuses De Mille of Congreve's and More's cheating. In discussing one of the most improbable stories in Canadian literature, critics both fictional and non-fictional have been reluctant to admit its fictionality. It seems sometimes that they would sooner believe in a tropical paradise at the South Pole full of prehistoric beasts than that events can take place out of order in a novel.

Melick plays the role of sceptic. His companions Dr. Congreve, on behalf of science, and Noel Oxenden, on behalf of philology and traditional learning, are convinced that the manuscript's author is truthful and his host, Lord Featherstone, seems to have no opinion. Melick, described as "a *littérateur* from London, about thirty years of age, with a wiry and muscular frame, and the restless manner of one who lives in a perpetual fidget" (60), insists on reading it as "a

transparent hoax" (61). While the choice of the word "hoax" rather than "fiction" reminds one of Parks' use of "deception" in the passage quoted above, neither Melick, the *littérateur*, nor Parks, the professor of literature, pay much attention to literary sources. Parks does so briefly elsewhere, in his article of 1976, "Strange to Strangers Only," but locates them far outside the heart of the text:

> These borrowings . . . attest to De Mille's wide reading, but the more of them one finds the more it becomes clear that the vital aspects of the novel, particularly his ingenious creation of the Kosekin, are very much his own (66).

Melick accuses More of making it up; Parks defends De Mille by claiming the same. Both *littérateurs* are doing the same thing, however: they are recontextualizing a manuscript found floating in the ocean into the discourses of history and science, rather than its literary intertext and the genre called parody. Dr. Oxenden is permitted detailed discussion of the manuscript's scientific plausibility and Parks backs this up by scrupulously detailing De Mille's sources. But Melick makes no close examination of literary antecedents even though it would have strengthened his case, if he had been making a case for fiction rather than hoax:

> I simply criticise from a literary point of view, and I don't like his underground cavern with the stream running though it. It sounds like one of the voyages of Sindbad the Sailor. Nor do I like his description; he evidently is writing for effect. Besides, his style is vicious; it is too stilted. Finally, he has recourse to the stale device of a sea-serpent (66).

(Wayne R. Kime would later point out in 1975 that the stale device of the manuscript, in the water like a serpent, could have come from Edgar Allen Poe.) Melick grumbles that More has not followed the best examples, Defoe and Swift, but that "he is a gross plagiarist, and over and over again violates in the most glaring manner all the ordinary proprieties of style" (228). Melick's language here again suggests deception, even theft. So concerned is this *littérateur* with the true/false opposition that he cannot resolve it by erecting another categorical boundary, that of fiction. Melick's reluctance to recognize the text as fictional, parodic, and self-parodic, that is as literary, suggests that here is another case of abolished quotation marks. Ownership of the "borrowed" passages is not attributed, which suggests that we are reading the kind of parody that, as Barthes says, "subverts the opposition between true and false" (*S/Z* 44). To postulate an author, Foucault says, is both to postulate a text's

proprietor and assign moral responsibility ("What is an Author" 124-5). The book's multiple parodies seem to be a way of relinquishing both proprietorship and responsibility, or of retreating into the space of authorship according to Barthes.

The definition of "fiction" as a function of writer's intention rather than of reference recurs in the discussion of literary texts. Roland Barthes, in "Authors and Writers," reserves for literature the space where the author's only concern is language and so the truth/fiction opposition hardly matters; John Searle, in an article called "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," has said, "The essential rule: the maker of an assertion commits himself to the truth of the expressed proposition" (322); for Patricia Waugh, "Fiction . . . is not a case of simple falsehood. It does not *set out* to inform" (31). Once again, De Mille's text turns the metaphysical tables on itself. It disorganizes the oppositional hierarchy truth/lies by offering itself as fiction, but this disorganizing element depends on the restoration of the old inside/outside hierarchy of meaning determination which privileges the writer's intention. Thus the intention which is always insufficient to account for a text's impropriety is what, in the case of *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, would place both More's and De Mille's narratives outside the truth/lies binary which it itself satirizes. In common with contemporary theory, in questioning reference and intention *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* proposes fiction as the general category, truth and lies as special cases.

One way that a text can observe Searle's essential rule of advertising its commitment is by announcing its fictional status on the cover so that we know what sort of intentions to plug in to our image of the author. In this case we read a text found not floating in the ocean but between the covers of a critical edition, framed by commentary and notes. We have the benefit of Parks' research; the four yachtsmen have nothing more than a manuscript found in a strange context, lacking library classification number or bookstore location among "Canadian Fiction." Cover biography and blurb, comments from famous writers, publisher's brand-image imprint, scholarly introduction, are all missing from the manuscript, though the reader with only such clues can do no more than postulate an author figure. Parks, like most editors of critical editions, had access to a great deal of material, textual, biographical, circumstantial, as well as other writing by De Mille himself. Where such material is inconclusive or contradictory the textual critic is, in the words of Zailig Pollock, editor of the forthcoming *The Collected Works of A.M. Klein*, a "storyteller": "the process through which the editor

transforms the 'tracklessness' of an author's texts into the garden of a book can best be seen as a narrative process," he says (2). Undoubtedly, editor-storytellers do everything in their power to ensure that their story is based on truth and history, that it is the writer not the author who is their main character and whose intentions they struggle to fulfill. All the same arguments can be made against this view as are made against writerly intention in other contemporary theory, with these additional points:

First, as Jerome McGann asserts in his book *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, this view is based on "the concept of the autonomy of the creative artist" (40) whereas "literary works are fundamentally social rather than personal or psychological products" which "do not even acquire an artistic form of being until their engagement with an audience has been determined" (43-4). Thus the editor's necessary positing of an authorial intention makes it a synecdoche for all the processes which determined the form and circumstances in which a text was received by its audience. Pollock's view is that because of this there can be no such thing as a definitive edition; texts will always be continually resituated in new conditions of reading, even if their formal qualities are stabilized in a particular edition, and thus the story told and the nature of its hero the author will be endlessly modified.

Secondly, all of the research material available to the textual editor is itself text; there is no immediate access to the writer. Even in cases where this material suggests a unified, coherent concept of the author, the editor can never be sure she knows enough, that this concept is any more than provisional; she can never reach the deferred referent—or writer—beyond this endless chain of signification. In order that editions get published and into scholars' hands, the editor has to make some decisions about where and how these floating signifiers will hit bottom. In other words she must invent a fictional author figure and say, "This critical edition is defined as the text that I think would have been produced by such an author."

Thirdly, Marxist criticism has taught us to see the formal qualities of the text as the product of specific relations of production rather than an author's intention or psychic state. This has led critics to research not only author biographies but the social and economic circumstances prevailing at the time of the text's production. The editor of a scholarly edition, however, knows that her edition is quite differently located, reproduced in quite different circumstances. De Mille's book, and all others currently issued by or in process at the Centre for the Editing of Early Canadian Texts, was originally published by a commercial publisher in a competitive market. It was subject to the

hegemonic and epistemic determinants described by Marxists and Foucauldians but particular to the 1880s as well as the conditions which operated for Canadian books at the time (discussed by Frank Davey). Its situation in the book trade in 1888, however, was vastly different from that of the CEECT edition, selected by the academics who direct a publicly funded publishing project, issued at a price which in no way reflects its cost of production into a market that can in no way be regarded as competitive, but hedged by its own epistemic "principles of rarefaction" (Foucault "Order of Discourse"). If you are a scholar of Canadian literature and you want to read *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, this is the book you have to buy or borrow. The new author invented by it has been elevated to the company of those above commercial considerations; in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault points out that while statements are in part defined by their speakers, the same form of words can make up quite different statements in different situations. The same text in different publishing situations can thus be attributed to—or give rise to—quite different authors (Chapter 2).

But even if a reader now were to buy in a bookstore an edition with no indication that it is not this year's book, it is impossible that she reproduce the experience of a reader in 1888. To cite Foucault again, "What is an Author" shows how the significance of the word "author" varies enormously, not only when used in different but contemporary discursive fields but over time as well. Not only has the meaning of the text changed since its composition, but the kind of author figure even the same meanings would have suggested is not the same for us. The textual editor poring over manuscript variations, or the Marxist studying the productive relations at the time of first publication, has to be aware that these texts do not mean to her what they meant at the time of the production of the book; our interpretation of that text is mediated, consciously or unconsciously, by our interpretations of an infinite number of other texts. Mikhail Bakhtin (quoted by Tzvetan Todorov) argues that a book is a dialogue with its readers, a claim that again gives the text an unstable, disunified intending voice, indeterminately located inside and outside textual space and chronological time.

An editor facing a text like *A Strange Manuscript* has to make tougher decisions than most readers of the edition. We can afford to notice the way the work mocks the whole idea of definitiveness, how it constantly parodies itself as well as its editor and its critics, even though they were not born when it was written, in what seems like anticipation of Linda Hutcheon's claim that "Art forms have increasingly appeared to distrust external criticism to the extent that

they have sought to incorporate critical commentary within their own structures in a kind of self-legitimating short-circuit of the normal critical dialogue" (*Parody* 1). The editor who has no choice but to operate within the "normal critical dialogue" is parodied by Melick's inability to accept the manuscript as either fictional or parodic.

There seems to be an infinite number of ways in which More's manuscript mocks its repeating series of readers, makes chaos of chronology and the secure location of readers and authors outside texts. But the textual editor is still obliged to restore order. He or she must unravel authorial intentions, in particular here about its abrupt and mysterious end. Parks reports that: "In 1879 De Mille may have revised and polished the whole manuscript" (xxii). His brother, Alfred De Mille, had mentioned in a letter that De Mille had not offered it for publication because of dissatisfaction with the ending but it is not known whether the text we read represents the original or a revised version. De Mille's manuscript was not available to Parks, who assumes that he "would naturally" (xxii) have worked on the ending if he did revise. If we suppose a De Mille who "naturally" revised the ending, we read it into our assessment of the book as a whole; if we believe that it was still unsatisfactory to its author, outside his intentions, then it is the critic's text that is unresolved.

Parks gives evidence that De Mille wrote with the intention of burlesquing sensational fiction and satirizing Victorian society; but to see this as an author's final intention fulfilled in the act of writing the book is to restrict or eliminate possibilities of meanings in further readings. To read the book as also parodying its later critics is to see it as constantly resituated in its changing critical history, supported by the book's own thematization of the importance of the context of reading. Not only must we give up the usual notion of chronology but also the idea of writer's intention which would attempt to make a Victorian, Anglican, anti-Darwinist professor of classics coincide with the character I would invent as author of all this multi-directional parody. Intention becomes something endlessly variable, recreated by the text itself as it is read.

Repeatedly in the discussion of authors and their intentions, the author is seen as a unifying construct. While the CEECT edition is a disunified work with its various parts as much at war as at peace with each other, it is unified by its context, wrapped in a particular cover, all its parts, including the editor's contributions, united under one title. But is it united under one authorial signature? If Parks is to a large extent the author of the De Mille we know by the time we have read the entire volume, inventing his intentions and things he would "naturally" do, what is the name of the author whom we infer as

producer of all the parts? This is a silly question, because we accept the conventions of critical discourse which exclude it in the same way that we ask the editors of critical editions to ignore the ways their materials subvert their enterprise. In the more than fifty years since Wimsatt and Beardsley's classic problematizing of authorship in "The Intentional Fallacy," most critics have assumed that we need a solution that would apply to all texts; it seems much safer to assume that the author must fit the needs of the textual situation in exactly the same way as its main character must; the author is the main character—or perhaps a whole cast.

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# Ethnic Writing in Canadian Literature as Paratext[1]

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"Vanishing"
—R. Kroetsch (124)

It is appropriate to begin by reminding ourselves how the term "ethnic" is defined and understood in official Canadian discourse. I refer, of course, to the *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.* Its terms of reference are quite clear:

> to inquire into and report upon the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada and to recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races, taking into account the contribution made by the other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada and the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution .... (I, xxi)

The assumptions of this statement are not difficult to discern, and they derive from a specific ideology. First, Canada and its culture is the domain of "the two founding races." As a consequence, native populations are explicitly excluded (I, xxvi). Second, "bilingualism" refers exclusively to French and English, a matter expressly challenged by one of the commissioners (I, 155-69). Hence, "other ethnic groups" refers only to cultural contributions. The hierarchical position taken and developed by the Report cannot be stated more clearly. The flaw of the Report was accurately perceived by Commissioner Rudnyckyj, and this is the problem of the relation between language and culture. The Report asserts "that language is in the first place an essential expression of a culture." Indeed, as the sentence just prior to this observes, language "is the principal element" of a culture (I, xxxiv). What is to become, then, of the culture of "the other ethnic groups" if their languages are not preserved? Perhaps not entirely aware of the full significance of what it was saying, the Report platitudinously comments that "nobody will maintain that a group still has a living culture, in the full sense of the term, when it is forced to use another language in order to express to itself the realities which make up a large part of its daily life" (I, xxxv). In an effort to escape the responsibility of not preserving, while appearing to

preserve, other ethnic cultures, the Report indicates how the Jewish community in Canada, Acadians, and English-Canadians originally from the U.K. "are well aware and very proud" of that origin. The Jewish community, needless to say, is an ethnic group that differs in kind from the other two, the latter of whom are perceived as producing the dominant discourse of Canada. Somewhat miraculously, the Acadians persist as a group distinct from, and asserted against, that of the Québécois. No mention is made, however, in this section, which appears as an afterthought in any event, of the German, Icelandic, Italian, and Ukrainian cultures, not to speak of the more recent expansions from continents other than Europe.

A fundamental conclusion one might draw from the argument of the Report is that is seems to follow exactly the syntax of William Lyon Mackenzie King's astounding proposal to resolve the conscription crisis: "Conscription if necessary, but not necessarily conscription." In this instance, the commissioners seem to be declaring: "Preservation if necessary, but not necessarily preservation." The problem, of course, lies with the whole discussion on integration. The Report nobly attempts, in an effort to avoid the assimilative discourse of the United States, to promote integration, which, it states, "does not imply the loss of an individual's identity and original characteristics or of his original language and culture" (IV, 5). "Assimilation," it goes on to say, "implies almost total absorption into another linguistic and cultural group." Bearing in mind that language is an essential element, even "a necessary condition for the complete preservation of a culture, but it is not at all the *sole* condition" (I, xxxvii), it is hard not to believe that the Report is prevaricating in this instance, as well. It is dificult to say whether a true exchange occurs between dominant and "other" ethnic groups, for "contribution," as it is used in the Report, appears to be a complex of feeding systems moving from lesser to greater. It is precisely at this point that the Report explains the importance of the ethnic act, if I may so term it. It is to preserve a group consciousness, rather to foster a sense of origin, for "[t]o stress ethnic origin as a basic principle for shaping society would create closed groups based on accidents of birth" (IV, 7). Hence, in an ineluctable manner—as if the assertions of a Royal Commission, whose assertions appear equivocal only on the surface, could give birth to a new society—the ethnic group is defined as an entity that will arbitrarily, voluntarily, perhaps even rationally, abandon a sense of origin and a linguistic habit, in order to become part of multicultural and bilingual Canada.[2]

It is otiose to remark that the other ethnic groups have not adopted the discourse of the Report with much alacrity as a means of understanding and articulating their situation. It should be evident, however, from my brief reading of the Report as a discursive origin for the discussion of ethnicity in Canada that its problem lies not only in *its* language, but also in the language of ethnic groups in their relation to the official languages. I am more specifically concerned with these problems as they manifest themselves in literature. I want to argue, furthermore, that all ethnic writing is paratextual. I use the term in Genette's sense: "Le paratexte est . . . ce par quoi un texte se fait livre et se propose comme tel à ses lecteurs" (7). As examples he cites the author's name, the title, the use of a preface and illustrations, "dont on ne sait pas toujours si l'on doit ou non considérer qu'elles lui appartiennent, mais qui en tout cas l'entourent et le prolongent, précisément pour le *présenter*" (7). It should also be remarked, as J. Hillis Miller has reminded us, that the prefix "para" is a sign of multiple ambiguity. "A thing in 'para,'" he writes, "is not only simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line between inside and out. It is also the boundary itself" (219). Ethnicity's text, by articulating and presenting itself as other, is at once perceptible as boundary, and the texts it employs are paratextual in that they interfere with canonical or central texts (Conway 63). Thus, its discursive practice is one of continuous equivocation, as I shall illustrate in my subsequent analysis of Suknaski's text.

A major task which preoccupies both the Multicultural Directorate and a variety of researchers is plainly bibliographical and taxonomic, and some of these results may be seen in Jars Balan's edition of *Identifications* and Walter Riedel's edition of papers entitled *The Old World and the New: Literary Perspectives of German-Speaking Canadians*. Reidel's book is the first collection of papers to examine the role of the German contribution to Canadian writing, and, as he states, "[b]ecause of the nature of the hitherto not clearly defined and perhaps not clearly definable area under investigation, the most appropriate method seemed to be a combination of predominantly bibliographical, historical, thematic, and comparative approaches" (7). In his summary of the papers, he notes that three themes may be identified: immigration, exile, and identity (11). What is remarkable, he also notes, is that the literature of the German ethnic group of Canada, written in German, English, and to some degree in French, for both Canadian and German audiences, possesses a "thematic unity that relates to Canadian literature in general" (11). Such a comment reveals, to a certain extent, what appears to me to be central in any discussion of this kind. It also conceals precisely what we need to

know, and precisely what the Report is unable—or unwilling—to articulate. How does the "thematic unity" relate, and would the relation be more or less the same (one suspects that it would) for other New World countries? What the Report emphasizes, as Riedel does not, is that what Canadian official discourse recognizes is the problem of language and the cultivation of difference.

What the essays in Riedel's book suggest, then, is that ethnic writing, unwittingly or not, tends toward assimilation. How difficult it is, furthermore, for the metadiscourse of ethnicity to avoid such a tendency may be seen in Jars Balan's discussion of George Ryga, both of whom claim Ukrainian ancestry. After discussing at length the character of Ryga's work, he concludes by observing that "Ryga's *sensibility* as a writer has been profoundly shaped by his ethnic and rural inheritances." He then immediately denies that he is either a "*Ukrainian* writer, or that an understanding of his *Ukrainianness* will provide one with some sort of all-purpose critical key in analyzing his art and craft." That is followed by the statement that his paper does not wish "to assert that Ryga is a 'Ukrainian,' 'Ukrainian Canadian' or even 'ethnic' writer—assuming such designations would be meaningful or helpful." Such an afterthought, of course, assumes that such designations do not, in fact, help, and so Balan finally decides that "Ryga must be considered as a committedly *Canadian* writer" (Balan 51). Hence, ethnic means Canadian. While I cannot claim to know whether Balan has examined the Report, one cannot escape the sense that he is caught in the net of its discourse, particularly in its reflections and revisions concerning language and culture, as well as integration and assimilation.

Nevertheless, Balan's effort—and I take him as an example among many—to find ethnicity even *sous râture*, as one is tempted to say, finds a certain advantage in the multicultural policy. The argument in favour of the policy, by Joseph Pivato in the introduction to the ideological character of ethnic discourse that ethnicity cannot be avoided (Cf. Deleuze and Guattari 17). The function of the other ethnic literatures of Canada, then, with respect to anglophone and francophone writing, is to weaken the dominance of that particular binary set. What must be addressed, according to Pivato, is the limitation of "linguistic conformity and cultural uniformity." As he goes on to argue,

> A ferocious nationalism will not protect us from American domination, nor will it result in artistic works of quality. The preoccupation with borders, the postulation of unifying theses of history and literature are relics of a nineteenth-century mentality. The regionalism and the ethnic

> diversity of this country are realities that must be recognized in the interpretation of our literature (Pivato 32).

The reference to borders, unity, and regionalism effortlessly widens the scope of the ethnic argument, and had Pivato employed what has now become the Frygian cliche of the "garrison mentality," the whole matter would have been quickly summed up. In this view, the ethnic argument posits a more open society, one that, in George Ryga's opinion, is more tolerant that U.S. society (Balan 72). Appealing as the argument may be, its assumptions, I think, are not widely shared, even by those who compose other ethnic groups, nor does there appear to be much possibility of the open society Pivato seeks being realized.

Pivato signals, however, what I take to be the central issue, that is, the problem of language, by indicating that it too has been polarized. The friendly position states that "true ethnic writing is in a foreign language" (Pivato 27-28). The flaw in this position is that it cannot help but marginalize ethnic writing, at least in respect of what may be identified as "Canadian" in an nationalistic sense (Cf. Conway 56-57). It also supports implicitly and symmetrically the other position which asserts that the ethnic writer cannot use "Canadian material when working in his native tongue" (28). Pivato cites Raymond August, who puts the matter in this fashion:

> The inclusion of local colour, Canadian landscapes, Canadian historical personages, or the translation of Canadian poets into the mother tongue and vice versa does not render it as eligible Canadian literature since it fails to activate the evolution of a unique Canadian consciousness. It is surrogate writing . . . . (Pivato 29).

While no one knows what "a unique Canadian consciousness is," Pivato draws the conclusion from August's argument that ethnic writing is questionable in a Canadian context, that French and English are the only possible languages of Canadian writing, and that assimilation, one might infer, is the only solution.

It is not entirely a negative solution. Indeed it appears to be a necessary solution, as a number of ethnic writers indicated at the conference of which *Identifications* provides the record. While a great deal of spleen was vented on the ease with which "ethnic" suggests segregation and, therefore, the institution of those very borders that Pivato would overcome, the view was also expressed that the official languages were necessary if for no other reason than that through them one could acquire a sense of perspective with respect to one's own group. Furthermore, it is a means of overcoming the

stereotyping that is inscribed in the discourse of a dominant culture (Balan 78). Finally, by being given a certain distinctiveness and visibility as a group, there is a tendency to perceive onself as a part of the larger human family (149-50).

The sub-title of the conference was "Ethnicity and the Writer in Canada," and what none of the writers could come to terms with, despite repeated efforts, was whether their writing had distinctive qualities as writing that might permit us to see in what way it differed from other writing in French and English. For with one exception, these were writers who had chosen an official language. At the end of the conference, Giorgio di Cicco commented upon this omission, noting the concentration on feelings and background, and then asked what the contribution was "in terms of language, of writers from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds writing now in English" (Balan 152). It does not appear to help by replying, as George Ryga did, by referring to "a mystical framework in which you function" (Balan 152), but the same issue is engaged elsewhere by the Italian novelist Fulvio Caccia, who follows the linguist Henri Gobard's model of kinds of language. The first is "*vehicular language*," which, because of its "bureaucratic and commercial" character, serves "as a primary agent of deterritorialization." The other two levels are "*referential language*, . . . the language of culture," and "*mythic language*, the language of religion, of the *beyond*" (Pivato 156). For Caccia, the process of linguistic acculturation begins with the adoption of an official language, usually English, and what occurs corresponds to what Deleuze and Guattari in their study of Kafka refer to as "primary deterritorialization."[3] At the same time, the new language becomes the means by which territory as culture is recuperated. The new language is at once a threat, for it causes linguistic segregation, as well as a possibility, for it provides access to the culture of the dominant discourse. From the perspective of the ethnic minority, the ambiguity of the dominant language is characterized by its ability to continually infiltrate discursive practice, which explains the ethnic fascination for the vernacular language. Because of the continuous fictionalizing of origin, however, which is a frequent mark of ethnic discourse, the vernacular becomes perceived as possessing a mythic power that stands hierarchically above the referential. The minority writer may indeed privilege this special stratum of his discourse, and, following Deleuze and Guattari, Caccia suggests that this is the practice of certain contemporary Québécois writers, which endeavors to assert the referential, while at the same time exposing the difficulties of such an activity. Language and its labyrinths, the thematization of self-loss (deterritorialization), and what Caccia calls "the allegorization of

language" (Pivato 162) all become foregrounded. While Québécois does not seem to have an exit from this dilemna, Caccia argues that postmodernism provides for the younger Italian writers in Canada a means of double acculturation, which, consequently, permits a new centre in the mythic (Pivato 165).

While the postmodern option is perhaps among the most viable solutions to the ethnic writer's dilemna, which is the dilemma of being suspended between two or more discourses and consequent versions of the real, it is a route rarely taken. Indeed, as Boelhower argues, ethnic discourse is opposed to the postmodern. It depends upon a "politics of memory" (174). As a consequence, "the ethnic subject is semiotically strong because of the special status of the original cultural *traditio* which, as an absent presence, solicits ethnic interpretation in a metacultural space that is nowhere and everywhere at the same time" (177). Central to the enterprise of ethnic writing—both its metadiscourse and fictional discourse—is the search (and I am tempted to say "la recherche," in Proust's sense of the term) of the referent by which the real may be articulated. A shared mode is the narration and fiction of the self, that asserts that if I know where I am, I will be able to find a language of the real. According to Sacvan Bercovitch, such an assertion is hindered in Canada, inasmuch as "immigrants have not been provided with a ready framework for acculturation" (26). The matter is simplified in the United States, he argues, because the official rhetoric provides them with a language for the assertion of self.

If one were to scan the initial statements of most of the papers at the *Identifications* Conference, it would be impossible to miss the autobiographical and historical statements that would assert identity. Henry Kreisel opened the conference by remarking: "It was in a large, overcrowded army barracks in the little town of Pontefract, in Yorkshire, that I made the deliberate decision to abandon German and embrace English as the language in which, as a writer, I wanted to express myself" (Balan 1). How complete this statement is! It begins almost nowhere ("It was"), it then discovers place and time, that is, an historical dimension, and then the subject inserts himself into this emerging order of articulation in order to find a language that would construct and constitute the subject. "Pontefract," "English," "German" and "I" all become determinants of the real that would overcome the absolute absence of referentiality with which the statement begins. "It" is a sentence that belongs to both the narration and fiction of the self, characteristic of autobiography, and its exclusions are as significant as its inclusions, for they form part of the repressed traffic between the narrating and narrated subject. It is at

precisely this point that metadiscourse shades over into discourse, producing the paratext of ethnicity.

The example that I would now like to consider as characteristic of ethnic writing is Andrew Suknaski's *Wood Mountain Poems*. They are especially useful, for they illustrate the several problems raised by the Report and by those who have been exercised by the complexities of ethnic writing. No discussion of the book can be fruitfully undertaken, I would suggest, without beginning with it as a book produced in a certain way. On the front cover, staring at the reader with a sad, hypnotic gaze, is a photographic portrait of Sitting Bull, who was a temporary resident of Wood Mountain in the 1870s and 1880s. On the back cover is a photograph of the author, half in shadow, looking with a brooding expression from the side of his face that is shaded in such a way as to urge the reader to turn back to Sitting Bull. At the bottom of the rear cover is a photograph of the town of Wood Mountain with neither a car nor a person in sight. It appears abandoned and forlorn. The blurb first calls attention to the introduction by Al Purdy, a poet known for having searched the referent everywhere in Canada, and developed a language that, as W. J. Keith remarks, "has proved admirably suited to mediate between the contemporary world and a surviving historical tradition to which Purdy is (in the best Canadian sense) a Loyalist" (99). Purdy's paratextual presence significantly provides a tradition (the Canadian referent) and an identity. As he states at the beginning of his introduction, "[t]he hill country of south-west Saskatchewan, including the village of Wood Mountain and the Cypress Hills, has a history . . . ." In the second paragraph of the blurb, we are informed that "Suknaski's biography is given in detail on page 124." Thus one might say that everything is place: time, place, a discourse of self, even a page number, all of which are given legitimization initially by Al Purdy and later by Dennis Lee, whose *Civil Elegies*, beginning with the dedication "pro patria," are well known constructions of the Canadian referent.

The book itself contains nine other photographs, none of which can be considered *hors-texte*, for they are designed to support the significance of the text proper. The first page contains a full portrait of Jerry Potts who, we are told explicitly in the text, "was a legendary halfbreed guide" (97); the last page is a photograph of the significantly named "Trails End Hotel." Not only does the book derive its discourse between the visual opposition of self (Suknaski) and other (Sitting Bull), but it also wants us to be attuned to the ambiguity that Potts represents as halfbreed, as well as to the sense of closure inscribed into the discourse, inasmuch as so many of the poems are

situated in the "Trails End." This insistence of closure is reinforced by the penultimate photograph of a boarded-up cafe, that is preceded by another of a Roumanian cemetery, illustrating an elegy in which the speaker explicitly abandons the other, determining to "cease living like an indian / of old" (122). Similar framing devices are used at the beginning, which provides archival pictures of oxen breaking the land, a sod house, and homesteaders. Clearly the photographs constitute a semiotic system, only one of whose purposes is to design a sense of opening and closure. For, whether consciously aware of it or not, the designers (and I assume Suknaski assisted) insist upon the ethnic as archive, and every effort to ground the real in visual representation has the contrary effect. One cannot fail to observe how carefully posed all the pictures are in both placement and composition. They are timeless, and, as a consequence, they appear to fix history within a certain range of meaning and ideology. Finally, simply as photographs, they possess that repeatability that inheres in the art, suggesting that the real here is at once stylized and re-produced. This is particularly reinforced by the shaped iconicity of Suknaski and Sitting Bull.[4]

The photograph, then, deliberately foregrounds what appears to be the referent of the text—a certain time and certain place—so as to make the real appear as not constructed. The frequent use of dates in the poems serves the same function, grounding the dialogue between self and other in moments of now and then. Purdy's introduction, however, reminds us that dates differ from photographs, "for time exists as a territory to explore; the dead are raised, in the sense of re-creating them on the now pinpoint of here: after which they return to the past, having lighted up a little place in the mind of whoever knows about them" (11). Thus there are three places in the poems—time, Wood Mountain, and the knowing mind—and it is the function of the latter to draw the other two unto itself. Such paratextual commentary can no more be considered *hors-texte* than the photographs: the inscribed self, that Purdy insists is not autobiographical, is designed, nevertheless, to make the absent present, inscribing place as a certain kind of origin.

One cannot escape, however, the signifying function of ambiguity everywhere in the book, which paratextually insists upon re-creation and textually insists upon closure. The final statement of the epigraph, a quotation from Chief Seathl, declares: *"it is the end of living and the beginning of survival"* (15). How much this is an echo of Margaret Atwood I cannot determine. What is clear is that this is one of many texts shaped to indicate how much the recovery of origin is primarily discursive and operates in a multiplanar fashion. As a

result, the referent, which appears to be the central object of the subject's desire, cannot fail to become problematized in some measure. Part of the problem becomes clearer if we view it in the light of Gobard's four-fold order of encoded language. These are the vernacular, the vehicular, the referential, and the mythic levels, and what makes their use complex in the instance of Suknaski is the manner in which they overlap and shade into each other. This is especially true of the relation between the vehicular, the language of commerce, and the referential, the language of culture, both of which blend in Purdy's introduction and the blurb on the back cover. The implication is that the cultural character of ethnicity cannot be easily distinguished from the fact that it requires marketing to move it from margin to centre. For ethnicity is clearly inhabiting a zone somewhere between the deterritorialized and the recuperation of a territory in the imaginary. It is precisely here that the vernacular and the mythic become inscribed into the book's discourse.

We should recall that "vernacular" is not a colloquial speech, but rather the language "of rural and maternal origin." This would mean Suknaski's Ukrainian, spoken before he went to school. It is for the most part repressed, except for such expressions as "geedo" and "babah" that are italicized and footnoted (95), thus marking them as alien to the referential level. Such an origin, then, is other. Sometimes no translation is provided, emphasizing, it would appear, the impossibility of recuperation in the vernacular (93). In his effort to follow the conventions of the "documentary" (the word comes from the blurb), Suknaski adopts a phonetic spelling. Thus his father's boss:

> *you vill be okay meester shoonatzki*
> *dont tell anyvon about dis*
> *commeh bek in coopleh veek time. . . .* (19)

His Chinese cook, a regular stereotype in Western Canadian fiction, is portrayed similarly:

> *all time takkie too much*
> *makkie trouble sunna bitch*
> *wadda hell madder wid you?* (28)

Although whole poems are written in such a manner, the alterity of the speaker is only more clearly marked by being placed in a narrative which is normally grammatically and syntactically correct. Before commenting on the implications of such a practice, let us consider

what appears to be the text's primary concern, which is the elaboration of the mythic.

Unquestionably, the reader's expectations of poetic discourse are especially useful for encouraging the belief that, when legend and history are combined, there is a possibility for a mythic encoding to occur. This is the function of the "Indian" in the text (I use Suknaski's word [124]). A series of poems provides an overture to the native entitled "Chaapunka," "Mashteeshka," and "Big Foot," all dealing with aspects of the comical side of Amerindian myth. They serve as introductions to the longer poem "Mishmish," of which the speaker is an elder native reminiscing about various feats of valor. It is a death song, and the interruption of any linearity, as well as appeals to "mustahyah" (bear), the sundance, windigo, and Keche Maneto, all of which are signs of the religious character of older, native life, are designed to assist the reader in perceiving such a poem as Suknaski's mode of reterritorialization. It also prompts us to understand that the use of dates, which we might associate with a vehicular language, are to be perceived from a native perspective, and thus drawn into the mythic. The dates also serve to distinguish the reader's perspective from that of the native, particularly because of the inherent contradiction between referential and mythic language. Thus a poem begins:

> the sun dance
> and blue smoky hills of 1879
>
> the plains cree called it *the thirst dance*
> but the teton might have renamed it
> *the hunger dance* (64)

The date might be called "white time," useful to evoke a certain guilt with respect to the death of a certain way of life. For the native it would not appear to possess significance, time being understood as a sacred activity (an event that occurs *in illo tempore*) in which one participates, and which "white time" destroys in rhetorical closure.

As a consequence, the mythic gradually makes history appear as fundamentally arbitrary, as he suggests in the poem "Sandia Man," a meditation on the earliest settler in the western plains arriving from Asia. It begins with an invocation to the muse Shugmanitou, shifts in the second stanza to 1929, when Louis Vezina dragged the old telephone office north, and then asks: *"where to begin?"* This overture to origin is responded to with the speaker's consideration of Sandia Man, which is carried forward with a sudden leap to the explorer Anthony Henday in the region in 1874, and then to the

speaker's dream of Sandia Man in 1973. He wakes to hear a storm speaking to him, asking:

> *you are returning*
> *what kind of faith lures you here to build a home*
> *within the dying?* (73)

Such a question, raised on the mythic level, immediately underscores the problematic character of Suknaski's enterprise. At the same time, the poem's subtext emerges, which addresses the speaker's awareness of the alterity of the mythic discourse, which, while originating in native story, is shaped to embrace the ethnic immigrant. As he observes in one of the final poems, he is "leaving home":

> believing something here was mine
> believing i could return
> and build a home
> within the dying (119)

The mythic does not consort well, as the final words of the final poem indicate, with "ordinary earth" (122).

The other that cannot be accommodated leads almost inevitably to threnody and elegy (Staines 33). As I have already suggested, however, part of the problem lies in the manner Suknaski chooses to articulate it. Not only does the effort to be scrupulously mimetic with regard to ethnic speech appear to disadvantage the figure so evoked, but it also generates a hierarchy of discourses, which makes it appear that only the main speaker has access to the language of culture. When the mythic is translated into that language, it can only seem other and foreign. Any effort to recuperate one's own "lot," as the speaker puts it in a fine pun on space and destiny (120), only makes him aware of the impossibility of so doing. This awareness leaves him alone with referentiality, the discourse that refers "over there" (Pivato 156). But if the "over there" is to acquire significance, it must in some way provide access to meaning, the mythic being one of the ways. Suknaski suggests that the problem may have been in choosing the wrong myth, for, as he observes,

> The poems also deal with 'a vaguely divided guilt; guilt for what happened to the Indian (his land taken) imprisoned on his reserve; and guilt because to feel this guilt is a betrayal of what you ethnically are—the son of a homesteader . . . .' (124).

This effort to conflate mythologies, which is rendered problematic by the double bind of his guilt, is manifestly more complex than the situation Caccia addresses. It, therefore, poses with greater acuity the problem the ethnic writer faces, suspended between several discourses, and becomes a trap perhaps more complex than what Frank Davey perceives as a "potentially 'colonizing' relationship with [the writers'] subjects" (219).

I should now like to return to the issue of ethnic writing as the paratext of Canadian literature, which my commentary on the Report has already implicity addressed. It asserts that Canadian literature must encompass both anglophone and francophone writing, and also, in an albeit ambivalently defined fashion, "other" ethnic contributions. Perhaps the problem lies exactly there in the word "other," which in any binary system is always inferior. As we have seen in Suknaski, the other also seems to evade articulation in a referential language; indeed, it enters such a language only to appear dead. Nevertheless, the Report also asserts that no understanding of Canada is possible without constant awareness of the other, whether the other be the relationship of anglophone and francophone Canada or in some other way. It is thus in such a context that I would claim Rudy Wiebe's novel *The Temptations of Big Bear* as emblematically Canadian, within which the long dialogue between the vehicular language of the whites and the mythic language of Big Bear takes place. The scene that develops this relationship superbly is the trial in which the emphasis on translation only makes more emphatic how hopeless the project is.[5] What is the fate of the mythic but to disappear? Although the mythic is given the last word, it is also its final word. The future, it is implied, belongs to the vehicular.

Dorothy Livesay has argued—and many Canadian critics cite her with approval—that Canada's genre is the documentary (Mandel). Rather than assert that the referential is the language of the documentary, I would argue that it is, rather, the object of the documentary's search, as if to answer Frye's question "Where is here?" (Cf. Davey 130-31). As I have argued, identifications of place, the order of history, myths of origin, are in fact made problematic in ethnic writing by the use of various levels of discourse. And it would appear that such metadiscourses like the Report imply that Canada has no single legitimizing discourse. Here, then, would reside the value of ethnic writing for the study of Canadian literature, for the necessities of the referential are held in suspension by the deceptions of the vehicular and the illusions of the mythic. Such suspensions are one way of accounting for, if the speculation is forgiven, the peculiar poignancy of much of Canadian writing, ethnic

or not, its being haunted, as many have observed, by a lack of ghosts, by a myth that is desired but never realized. For this reson, I take the use of translation in Wiebe as emblem, even metaphor, for the Canadian, because it is a discourse that in its efforts to claim a territory is perforce always deterritorializing. The referential—the here—cannot help but be always just "over there," at once desired and somehow eschewed, and consequently always assiduously pursued, thus always invested with the effect of the real.

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NOTES

[1]This paper is dedicated to the Institut für Nordamerikastudien of the Freie Universität Berlin, and especially Heinz Ickstadt, who provided the occasion and the stimulus.

[2]Part of the ambiguity of Canada's language situation was anticipated by the ideologies of language and territory developed during the revolutions of 1848. As Namier asserts, the "British and Swiss concepts of nationality are primarily territorial: it is the State which has created the nationality" (32). By contrast for the Germans "it was not the State which moulded nationality, but a pre-existent nationality which postulated a State. The German concept of nationality is linguistic and 'racial', rather than political and territorial" (34). The coincidence of language and ethnicity may be traced at least to Herder (78 *et seq.*). Part of Canada's politico-linguistic problem, which derives from official bilinguality, is that it is a State that wishes to legislate a nation. I am indebted to my colleague, M.V. Dimic, for the reference to Herder.

[3]Although Caccia uses this term to designate an ethnic minority group, he does not use it with the same intent as Deleuze and Guattari, who observe that Kafka was a member of "an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the [Czech] masses" (16). Nor is reterritorialization in their usage entirely desirable. It is, rather, "deadly" (61).

[4]Benjamin argues that "[i]n photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line" (225). Here lies its fundamental significance in its relation to painting: it assists in the displacing of ritual with politics (223). Nevertheless, early photography privileged the portrait. As a result, "[t]he cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture" (226). Suknaski's use of the photograph is also cult; and the ethnic, the referent and the origin are all, because of the ease with which the constructed character of the text is made to disappear (Davey 219-25), cult as well. Hiding the constructedness does not, however, overcome (sublate) the ambiguity at the basis of the enterprise any more than the discourse of the Report does. In fact, it implicitly privileges it.

[5]Referring primarily to Canadian cultural policy, Onufrijchuk observes that the generation of hopelessness is part of an agenda of trivialization "underway since the

spread of industrialization and the market system" (Angus 13). The effort to erase ethnicity works in a double fashion: "First, the organized forgetting [that] originates from tactical omissions in the narrative that grounds the state, and secondly, by the trivialization, the dismissal of inheritance and project as entirely excessive, residual, incongruent, and irrelevant" (13). Big Bear, as emblem of the ethnic, is without project.

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# Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard: Writing Metanarrative in the Feminine

Susan Knutson

Jean François Lyotard argues that Western civilizations have made sense of life using two master narratives or metanarratives. The first of these, the liberation of the people, embraces heroic ethics, transcendental religions, and Marxism in all of its forms. The second, the perfection of human knowledge, characterizes humanist scholarship and the discourses of science, business, and technology. Because they mask causality with temporal relations, narratives are a medium of subjective interpellation into ideological systems. Lyotard argues, however, that in the postmodern era our culture's metanarratives are in crisis; they have lost the power to legitimate social and economic relations. And, since narrative is the exemplary form of customary knowledge, the failure of these metanarratives provides further evidence, if any is needed, that the customary is in crisis.

This essay situates two feminist narratives, Daphne Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone* and Nicole Brossard's *Picture Theory*, within Lyotard's theory of the postmodern crisis of gender roles which are (were?) profoundly customary; feminist forms of narrative parallel postmodern narrative expressions of customary knowledge in crisis. Pursuit of these parallels, for example in the work of Marlatt and Brossard, opens into theorization of feminist articulations of the postmodern.[1] On the other hand, feminism and postmodernism tend in opposing directions insofar as feminist narratives—as political entities—privilege and recast the metanarrative of the liberation of the people.

The postmodern writer embraces the failure of metanarrative and the ongoing deconstruction of Western metaphysics, becoming, as Frank Davey once put it, a "creative junk collector" (264), an eclectic materialist who raids the ruins of Western metaphysics for materials to generate meaning. Both Marlatt and Brossard work within this problematic and this tradition; we can cite Marlatt's apprenticeship in West Coast postmodernity and Brossard's leading role in initiating *la modernité* in Québec. Both write texts which are typically postmodern: self-referential, parodic, intertextual, indeterminate. However, as feminists, Marlatt and Brossard are also writing from a conviction that masculine/feminine or m/f gender, as it has existed

now for about 10,000 years, should be and can be changed. With Teresa de Lauretis, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, and others, they argue that m/f gender is essential to the system of binary oppositions, such as raw/cooked, dark/light, and centre/margin, which determine the production of knowledge. To change the symbolic underpinnings of Western culture requires, at least, a collective epistemological shift to which feminism is committed. To this end, many Canadian women writers, including Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard, are working to create meaning "in the feminine" in texts which speak from the other side of the symbolic divide which declares that to be male is to be fully human.[2] The refusal of the patriarchal logos opens into the endless multiplicity of women's experiences. Nonetheless, the often utopian projection of a postpatriarchal epistemology is a feminist vision of the metanarrative of the liberation of the people. Marlatt's *How Hug a Stone* and Brossard's *Picture Theory*, while reflecting cultural and linguistic differences, resemble each other in their discovery of motifs and narrative structures appropriate to this paradoxical moment of feminist writing in the postmodern world.

The discovery of narrative structures adequate to feminist meanings necessitates an exploration, creative or consciously theoretical, of the relationship between narrative grammar and m/f gender.

Teresa de Lauretis has shown that traditional quest narratives, based as they are on the subject-object or hero-obstacle opposition, are implicated in the symbolic system which produces and reinforces patriarchal gender ("Desire in Narrative" 103-157). The hero who traverses boundaries and overcomes obstacles is generically masculine, and the matrix or ground which he traverses is generically feminine (119). The project of generating meaning in the feminine therefore necessitates somehow telling stories "differently" (156).

Both Marlatt and Brossard rewrite the traditional quest structure while foregrounding the gender of the fundamental plot positions. The narrator of *How Hug a Stone*, questing for a new understanding of her mother, struggles against "this plot we're in, / wrapped up like knife fork & spoon" (15). In a striking parallel with de Lauretis's work on gender and narrative, Marlatt emphasizes the feminity of the narrative matrix:

> she is not a person, she is what we come through to & what we come out of, ground & source. the space after the colon, the pause (between the words) of all possible relation. (73)

Marlatt honours this "ground & source" as an arché-mother who signifies the primordiality of the earth. *How Hug a Stone* is focalized by a female narrator who is accompanied by her son; therefore the "we" passing through the "ground" or narrative matrix is a gender-inclusive human subject situated as hero by the hero-obstacle opposition. As the poem continues, an intertextual structuring of the narrative becomes more apparent. The heroic narrative subject folds into itself not only the narrator and her son Kit, but also her mother, grandmother, aunts, uncles and cousins. Ultimately, the subject of the narrative is the collective subject of language, a fact which provides real continuity with the Neolithic builders of the great stone circles.

The traditional, singular and heroic male subject is rendered ironic by Kit's play in "on the train," "boy with tape recorder stalking horses in a field of cows:" and "Avebury *awi-speak*, winged from buried (egg":

> – & small, toy pistol in one hand, cupped, & sheltered by the pelvic thrust of rock, jumps, gotcha mom! (74)

"Always having to fight Wild Animals" (36), Kit acts out juvenile yet masculine heroics which reflect the origins of human culture, but which are now linked to war games threatening collective survival:

> [Kit is] happiest in the Lucky Penny counting hits or testing quickness of eye against sci fi enemy bombers in Japanese computer games. divine wind recycled (on & on). while in Chatham they sing the Navy Blues, *getting rid of us at a high rate of knots* (outmoded). Nott planning to plug the Faroe gap with *nuclear-powered killer submarines & radar-equipped reconnaissance aircraft*. (getting rid of us.) (48)

The text thus features the hero motif but ironizes it and illuminates its deadly, monologic implications.

The hero motif is also featured and critiqued in *Picture Theory*. The reitereated image of the golden helmet signifies female heroics grounded in the old opposition, but Brossard specifies that the patriarchal hero is dead:

> Nous parlons de profil comme un propos de civilisation qui marque un temps d'arrêt. "... nous manquons de manuscrits depuis la mort du héros à double sens patriarcal". *C'était absolument dans un autre livre* qu'elle saurait retracer le moment venu, les lignes d'une forme humaine parfaitement lisible. (25)

> We are speaking in profile like an intention of civilization coming to a pause . . . "we lack manuscripts since the death of the double-meaning patriarchal hero." It was absolutely in an other book that she would know how to trace the moment now in place, the lines of a perfectly readable human form.

New texts and new paradigms are needed to express "the moment now in place;" the binary opposition of hero and obstacle is incapable of representing relative and three-dimensional reality as it is in the process of being discovered.

In ways which are too complex to fully explore here, *Picture Theory* suggests the hologram as epistemological paradigm and model for non-binary narrative structure. The gender inherent in the hero-obstacle opposition is undermined by a narrative structure which repeatedly represents a collective and heroic female subject actively traversing the matrix of the continent (79), the island (88), the entrance hall (51) and the forest (59, 71). This traversal parallels the production of a hologram by the interaction of two fields of light waves, a process which also parallels the activities of the human brain in moments of understanding. *Picture Theory* is structured around a hologram of the love scene, or *scène blanche*, between the narrator, M.V., and Claire Dérive. Ironizing the tradition which associates the male with the spirit and the female with the body, Brossard generates a postrelativity reading of the opposition between energy and matter and frees the energy inherent in matter itself. As light energy, her women characters can be incorporated into the hologram:

> Traversières, urbaines radicales, lesbiennes, aujourd'hui jour électrique, leur énergie prenait forme comme l'électricité par la structure de la matière elle-même. Hier à l'origine, leur énergie n'avait été mise en évidence que par leurs propriétés attractives ou répulsives. Maintenant dans l'orbe lunaire, elles avaient précédé la science de l'énergie. (88)

> Border crossers, radical urban women, lesbians, this electric day, their energy was taking form like electricity by the structure of matter itself. Yesterday, at the origin, their energy had only been evident in their attractive or repulsive properties. Today in the lunar sphere, the women have overtaken the science of energy.

Brossard's double strategy associates women with the active principle in the binary opposition while demonstrating that the opposition itself is outmoded. She invents a narrative grammar that is fundamentally dialogic: a multiple subject separates, reassembles, and generates light energy which creates a hologram.

Both Brossard and Marlatt make it clear that the liberation of the people, while it may well be posed, will not be accomplished by a solitary, patriarchal hero. A dialogic collectivity is poised to take the hero's place. Furthermore, both identify fear as the opponent which this collectivity must overcome in order to achieve whole being (Marlatt 76; Brossard 148). Countering fear is the utopian promise of, as Daphne Marlatt put it, "where we would like everything to be" (Wright 5). This promise is affirmed in *Picture Theory* through the hologram, and in *How Hug a Stone* by reading back through William Blake: "you *will* walk in 'England's green & pleasant land'" (9).

The element of utopian fantasy combined with an interrogation of memory and invention points, in each case, to French writer Monique Wittig as a member of the intertextual cast. The narrator of *How Hug a Stone*, "so as not to be lost," determines to "invent" (15). "be unnamed, walk\unwritten, de-scripted, un-described. or else compose, make it say itself, make it up" (35). Her decision recalls a celebrated passage from Wittig's *Les guérillères*:

> [I]l y a eu un temps où tu n'as pas été esclave, souviens-toi. . . . Tu dis qu'il n'y a pas de mots pour décrire ce temps, tu dis qu'il n'existe pas. Mais souviens-toi. Fais un effort pour te souvenir. Ou, à défaut, invente. (126-7)
>
> There was a time when you were not a slave. Remember. . . . You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it doesn't exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.

Women are urged to remember a pre-patriarchal time when they were strong and free, but if the memory is gone and there are no words to describe it, they must invent. In her effort to piece together the "old story" (73) and in her resolution to invent what has never been spoken (73), Marlatt takes up Wittig's challenge. In *Picture Theory*, the refusal to reconstitute the already known accords well with Wittig's imperative to invent. The reiterated lines, "On memory, I nibble," repeatedly pose the suspect yet primordial role of memory.

Marlatt and Brossard reformulate women's relation to memory. In both texts, a chronological framework is constantly interrupted by memory, although the two narrators explicitly refuse to be governed by the past (Marlatt 29; Brossard 19). In *How Hug a Stone*, the narrator is preoccupied with information from increasingly distant history at the same time that she refuses its import. In *Picture Theory* linear chronology is confounded by the synchronic presentation of events occurring over the period of about one year. The narrator rejects the past yet taps memory constantly: "on memory, I nibble"

(19, 43, 149). The more distant past is summoned by the mythic motifs of Oedipus and the Sphinx, and the millenial woman "in the heart of the stone" (88).

If "memory implies a relationship between past and present events" (Barbizet 149), the same could be said of stone. Geological memories of the distant past, stones are the oldest objects in our world, and representations in stone, whether fossils or carvings by our forebears, are our primary source of information about prehistory. Both Marlatt and Brossard suggest that women's emotions have been petrified and are literally lost in stone. *How Hug a Stone* is a meditation on the Stone Age, during which patriarchy is though to have developed. Neolithic megaliths or "*squat stone mothers*" (64) are central to *How Hug a Stone*, as the riddle of the book's title folds into Heidegger's observation that "Earth . . . shatters every attempt to penetrate it" (47). The narrator and her son affirm the spiralling trajectory of life (79), leaving behind ancient Avebury, but pausing once more to see "the white stone lady reclined on her stone couch at the foot of the garden at the end of the Empire . . ." (76). The stone images translate finally into the "rock-dove alone in the ruined palace crying, *ku? ku? ku? (qua?)* where have you gone? first love that teaches a possible world" (78).

The transformation of "*ku*" into the Latin *qua*, "where, which way," reminds us that words, like stones, conceal the being of the past: "remnants of Old English, even *moth, snake, stone*. word henge to plot us in the current flow" (19). Tracing the stories concealed in stones and words is the effort of memory to understand where we come from, because we cannot "leave it altogether." Navigating "in the current flow" towards an open-ended future "where live things are" (79), the narrator of *How Hug a Stone* takes her bearings on the past.

In *Picture Theory*, stone is repeatedly invoked as the repository of the epoch when women were immobilized by patriarchal gender. A metaphorical complex links the stories of the Sphinx, Medusa, Eurydice and Lot's wife, all petrified in "patriarchal time" (81). Their fate is a reminder of the emotional damage patriarchy has inflicted on women. In "L'Émotion," on the day the women visit the cliffs, the text opens into a meditation on what lies concealed in the sedimentation of rock:

> Il en était donc ainsi au coeur de l'île, la pierre et l'eau, l'ardoise et la craie. Il y a des maîtres, des tableaux et des artisans. Il y a des caméras laborieuses et des mains qui travaillent. Il y a des femmes sculptées, des mujeres blanches, des jambes cassées, des fragments célèbres. Il y avait des femmes dans la pierre brute et la pierre "taillée de servitude et de

> ténèbres". Il y a la pierre parlante, les pierres de pluie. Il y a des pierres percées et sonores. Il y a les falaises et la ville de pierre opaque. Il y avait au coeur de la pierre une femme qui disait moi millénaire translucide, gravée dans la pierre utopique. (87-88)
>
> Thus, in the heart of the island, there was rock, water, slate and chalk. There are masters and blackboards and artisans. There are painstaking cameras and working hands. There are sculptered women, white mujeres, broken limbs, celebrated fragments. There were women in the brute stone and stone "fashioned by servitude and shadows". There is speaking stone and stones of rain. There are pierced and musical stones. There are cliffs and the city of opaque stone. There was, in the heart of the stone, a woman who said, I am millenial, translucid, carved in utopic stone.

In the heart of the stone Brossard finds not only memories of women, but chalk and slate, the materials for an immanent writing of civilization's story. At the foot of the cliff women's emotion is preserved:

> aux pieds de la falaise, l'émotion se refermait comme un coquillage. La moindre fente. La Fente faisait un jour qui motivait M.V. dans chacune des surfaces qu'elle explorait avec la sensation de retrouver ses peines perdues dans l'horizon bleu des métaphore . . . M.V. était prête à devenir un buste de femme à la tête orageuse (147-148)
>
> at the foot of the cliff emotion closed on itself like a seashell. The least slit. The Slit made way for light which motivated M.V. on every surface she explored with the sensation of finding her pain lost in the blue horizon of metaphor, where the Sphinx reigns. Trapped in the stone of fear, M.V. was ready to become the bust of a woman with a stormy, threatening head.

Emotion is freed through "an opening in the form of a leaf" (147), and buried emotion becomes visible as light writing in stone—"une lithophanie à l'aspect changeant" (147). Women's stories and emotions which were nowhere visibly written are now flaming with meaning (130).

Both Brossard and Marlatt use the image of the spiral to suggest the fluid and living form of women's stories, counterposed to the rigidity of stone. The narrator of *How Hug a Stone* finds that the story she is part of has only a "blue/black hole at centre" (70). Without fixed origin, the story must start in mid-air: "(inflight? & if the plane goes down?)" (15). She proceeds because "without narrative how can we see where we're going? or that—for long

moments now, we happen" (15). The story must start when "we happen," with Brossard's "the moment in place."

In the theoretical essays collected in *La Lettre Aérienne*, Brossard develops the paradox of the origin and links it to the important motif of the spiral. The spiral is, among other things, an image of women's writing, a writing of the *dérive* (or drift), which manifests what has been unthinkable and unexpressed:

> C'est donc à la limite du réel et du fictif, entre ce qui paraît possible à dire, à écrire, mais qui s'avère souvent au moment de l'écrire, impensable et entre ce qui semble évident et qui apparaît à la dernière seconde inavouable que se trace une écriture de *dérive*. Désir de dérive/désir dérivé de. (*La Lettre Aérienne*, 53)
>
> It is therefore at the limit of the real and the fictive, between what appears possible to say or write, but which at the moment of writing becomes unthinkable, and between that which seems evident and which appears at the last second to be unsayable, that is traced a drifting way of writing. A desire to drift/desire derived from.

The "désir de dérive" in *Picture Theory* is translated into desire for Claire Dérive, desire which illuminates the white love scene of the hologram (27). The appearance of the hologram in turn inscribes a new reality: "I would see this woman manifestly formal writing reality, the ecosystem" (166).

Where Brossard pursues "une écriture de dérive," Marlatt, as Phyllis Webb notes on the back cover of *How Hug a Stone*, writes "about edges . . . where wings are needed for . . . flight." Writing "to speak what isn't spoken, even with the old words" (73), Marlatt's narrator tunes her senses to "the actual character and structure of the real itself" (Olson 51),[3] because it needs to be discovered and told: "narrative is a strategy for survival" (75). In *How Hug a Stone*, subjectivity in language, the knower of the narration, and the "i" whose story is told unite in the figure of a writing woman who tells the truth, and I am remembering here Charles Olson's citation of Melville's definition: "By visible truth we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things" (47). The truth is difficult, and dangerous; as Nicole Brossard puts it: "To write: I am a woman is full of consequences" (*L'Amèr* 43). In *How Hug a Stone* and *Picture Theory*, Daphne Marlatt and Nicole Brossard work through some of those consequences and in so doing, take up the post modern questions of marginality and the difficulty of "Truth" in specifically feminist ways and as components of emerging metanarratives in the feminine.

Two ancient stories about truth are in this way reclaimed. Marlatt affirms the gradual perfection of humankind: the evolution of the human subject towards a better life of freedom from fear and inequality, and Brossard affirms the transcendence of the spirit into a utopia which draws on the lesbian body, sexuality, and Dante's vision of the celestial rose. In each case, the metanarrative is constructed intertextually; Marlatt and Brossard bring forward cultural history as they transform it, and *How Hug a Stone* and *Picture Theory* are each a palimpsest of older texts. A dense network of meaning potentials permits metanarrative reinscription in a different symbolic field, and provides an instance of intertextuality on a large scale (meta-intertextuality?).

Julia Kristeva defines transference or intertextuality, as the "passage from one sign system to another."

> The term *inter-textuality* denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of "study of sources," we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying sytem to another demands a new articulation of the thetic—of enunciative and denotative positionality. (59-60)

Kristeva's specification that the passage of one sign system into another necessitates the destruction of the old thetic formation and the formation of a new one helps us to articulate what happens in cases of feminist transference of patriarchal texts. Both *How Hug a Stone* and *Picture Theory* take up patriarchal signifying systems without reinvestment of patriarchal meaning, through the intertextual construction of a subjectivity in language which is both female and posed as the heir to that language and to all the cultural history which it signifies. In this way the evolution of the human species and the transcendence of the human spirit are retold in the feminine.

*How Hug a Stone* transposes a variety of written and oral texts to inscribe a collective rather than a singular subject, and to suggest at what point the past must be both recalled and refused for a future not yet imagined. "June near the river Clyst, Clust, clear. Clystmois this holding wet & clear," is a meditation on the hay harvest which, taking place in June, the month of Oak, coincides with the summer solstice:

> it's haysel, haymaking time, "Sweet an' dry an' green as't should be, An full o' seed an' Jeune flowers." tedding & cocking going on, shaking, turning, spreading. haytrucks go lorries lumbering by these twisty lanes lined high with hedgerow, no seeing over, cow parsley, stinging nettles, campion, "day's eyes" & snails all colours coiled in their leaf byways.

> jeune the young, green June delayed by rain. June why do you punish me? "Take heede to the weather, the wind, and the skie." indeed, make hay while the sun shines you write, while the moon is on the wane. (25)

We read here phrases from Gail Duff's *Country Wisdom*, an encyclopaedia of "traditional good sense," which itself acknowledges a long list of contributors for their "words of country wisdom." The last lines of "Clystmois" refer to another intertextual system:

> he wanes, my son redeyed & watery, phlegmatic in the face of *phleum pratense* grass of the meadow, timothy spikes erect a masculine given name, god honouring. not her who is cut, full of young vigour, from the living book, from the play of light & shadow, nothing less than herb-of-grace, rue i find, there with the queen's pinks in the clock that is a garden. (25)

The text opens up the meaning of words in order to illuminate immediate reality. The word "hay" comes from the root *kau-* meaning to hew or strike, and Marlatt takes this root meaning as a cue to link the image of haymaking to ancient harvest rituals. Like the moon, an image of cyclic life, the narrator's son wanes; the time is right, then, for the mowing. Gail Duff records the tradition that interprets blades of harvest wheat as young men, noting that folk songs commemorate still the life and death of John Barleycorn at harvest (Duff 23). This image cluster opens into the central archaeological intertext of *How Hug a Stone*.

Daphne Marlatt originally appended a bibliography to *How Hug a Stone*; this bibliography can be found in the manuscript in the Literary Manuscripts Collection of the National Library of Canada. The collection also contains notebooks which provide valuable insight into *How Hug a Stone*. Access to the bibliography facilitates understanding of the archeological intertext which illuminates the narrative as a whole. Michael Dames' *The Avebury Circle* and Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* are particularly critical as sources. They confirm the theme of harvest sacrifice. Dames suggests that a male harvest surrogate was sacrificed at mid-summer rites observed by early Neolithic, agricultural cultures (Dames 104-5). According to Robert Graves, the sacrifice of the surrogate son/king took place for the common good of the people and the recurrence of agricultural, life-supporting cycles; on June 24 an "Oak King" was burned alive, then after a seven day wake the second half of the year began: the Celtic New Year (Graves 177). The month of Oak is June 10 to July 7, which roughly corresponds to the dates of the narrator's journey.

It is important to recognize that the theme of the harvest sacrifice for the Mother is woven into the narrative of *How Hug a Stone* at the same time that it is rewritten and rejected. "Sacrifice of son refused," Marlatt wrote in her notebook. The motif of sacrificing the son is the *raison d'être* behind the narrator's fear that she has put her son at risk in bringing him on her quest. The sacrifice motif lies behind Kit's dream in "on the train," as the notebooks make clear. Kit's fever, in "Pilgrim night," where he is "very hot" and "scared," is a proairetic development of this sub-narrative. The text reconstructs at the same time that it refuses the Neolithic cycle of sacrifice and renewal. Again, the notebooks are relevant: "subtext—illuminates / collision of subtexts." Reified, deified sacrifice is not the point of the story the narrator seeks to reconstruct. Or perhaps reconstruction is not the point: she is "active[ly] misreading" (75). Her misreading spirals into the new, the not-yet thought, the future.

*Picture Theory* is equally intertextual. Lorraine Weir has shown the complex play which links Brossard's "*nuit parfaite*" with Bloom's wanderings through the Dublin night in Joyce's *Ulysses*, illuminating as well Brossard's transference of the texts of Ludwig Wittgenstein (Weir 348-9). Other important intertextual relationships remain to be explored, including those with Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, Michèle Causse's *Lesbiana*, and other texts cited by Brossard in the "Notes" to *Picture Theory* (211). I will discuss here only the intertextual links between *Picture Theory* and Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* and Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* in order to illuminate the image cluster of forest, rain and light.

The intertextuality of *Picture Theory* captures the magnitude and beauty of western culture while criticizing it and reinscribing a lesbian literary tradition threatened with patriarchal censorship. This is particularly clear in relation to Djuna Barnes, who is honoured as an essential link or synapse between the world of Dante (who himself brings forth Virgil, etc.) and the world of the late twentieth century.

In Barnes' *Nightwood*, the characters inscribe a downward and darkening spiral which ends in degradation and despair. Brossard replaces the self-hatred which defeats Barnes' characters with the love and friendship of *Picture Theory*. In "La Perspective," Brossard recontextualizes a series of passages from *Nightwood*. The first is that of "the strangest salon in America" (*Picture Theory* 52). In *Nightwood*, this salon is the American house of the heiress and lesbian lover, Nora Flood: "The strangest 'salon' in America was Nora's. Her house was couched in the centre of a mass of tangled grass and weeds . . ." (50). Nora's house in the weeds becomes Claire's house on the sea island, and the "ranting, roaring crew" (50)

becomes a company of like-minded women, who provide for each other a quality of companionship which Nora Flood tragically lacks.

Other phrases from *Nightwood* transfer intact to Brossard's fiction. In this way, Brossard incorporates Djuna Barnes' fiction into the ecstasy of the *scène blanche* of the hologram. She transforms into a triumphant formula an expression which in Barnes signifies Nora Flood's despair at the moment that she abandons hope in her lesbian relationship: "Robin . . . was protected, moved out of death's way by the successive arms of women" (64). Where Barnes' characters descend into the night, the women in *Picture Theory* spiral into the dawn of paradise and of history. Barnes' lesbian characters are unable to communicate with each other; in *Picture Theory* the lesbian characters are skilled in communication. In *Nightwood*, Robin is the beloved through whom the world comes to an end; in *Picture Theory*, Claire is the beloved through whom all things are possible. Finally, and not least, the nightwood in which Robin and Nora are eventually and irremediably lost is transformed into the forest of "La Perspective" (57, 58, 59, 63, 71), that is, the forested landscape of the island and the body of a beloved woman. Brossard's forest in turn recalls that wood in which Dante, lost in the middle of his life, "came to himself" (I 23).

Dante's *La divina commedia* illuminates the intertextual creation of a new symbolic which is at stake here. Four Dantesque motifs are transformed into elements of Brossard's *Picture Theory*: the forest, the beloved guide, the river of light, and the celestial rose. The forest is the matrix or female ground on which the hero's action is inscribed. For Dante, the forest is feminine, *una selva*, and savage, harsh and dense.

> In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost. Ah! how hard a thing it is to tell of that wood, savage and harsh and dense, the thought of which renews my fear! So bitter is it that death is hardly more. (I 22-3).

Dante is guided out of this dark wood by his first guide, the poet Virgil.

Brossard's forest is feminine also, but *la forêt* is celebrated and passage through it marks the end of a patriarchal night. In "La Perspective," the passage through the forest binds the love-making of Michèle and Claire to the utopian trajectory of the narrative event. Brossard's characters are not lost in the forest but traverse it as far as the sea, *la mer*, which is the dividing line between patriarchal and woman-centred reality. "In the bright morning" of the "dripping forest," "the dew" and "the rain dancing on her helmet," Claire

apprehends a new life, a *vita nuova*, in which heroic action is possible for women. Wearing the helmet of Athena, she moves heroically into a forest which is an erotic, living place. Claire is the beloved guide who replaces both Beatrice and Virgil. Like Virgil, she enters the forest; like Beatrice, she guides the poet into paradise.

Dante's paradise is that of the rose, the river of light, and the light of intellectual love:

> And I saw light in the form of a river pouring its splendour between two banks painted with marvellous spring. From that torrent came forth living sparks and they settled on the flowers on either side, like rubies set in gold; then, as if intoxicated with the odours, they plunged again into the wondrous flood, and as one entered another came forth. (III 432-435)

The vision of the river of light is transformed into that of the heavenly rose, "rising above the light all round in more than a thousand tiers . . . . the eternal rose, which expands and rises in ranks and exhales odours of praise to the Sun that makes perpetual spring" (III 437). Dante's Paradise is characterized by vision unlimited by space and time (III 443), and the vivid light of intellectual love; Brossard transfers each of these terms into *Picture Theory*. Like paradise, utopia lies beyond the range of ordinary reality:

> de faire surgir cette dimension autre
> qui étonne soudain les lèvres au nom de la brûlure
> échapper à toute catégorie niant
> l'espace même et toujours fluide de l'instant (53)

> To bring surging forth this other dimension
> which astonishes, suddenly the lips in the name of burning
> escape all categories, negating
> the space itself, ever so fluid, of the moment

Dante's river of light becomes Claire's gaze which inundates the scene with light (60):

> *Claire Dérive est invisible quand elle inonde la scène de son regard et qu'elle bouge lentement devant moi, légèrement dans la blanche matinée. Claire Dérive est l'onde et l'espace la mémoire miroitante que j'entends comme un sens en liberté* (72)

> *Claire Dérive is invisible when she inundates the scene with her gaze, and when she moves slowly before me, lightly in the bright morning.*

*Claire is wave and space, memory mirroring which I hear like a sense running free*

Dante's vision of the rose of paradise begins with the light of dawn; Brossard's utopia opens with an earthly dawn which is related to the appearance of a rose and an angel:

> dans la clarté, prête à commencer les gestes
> invisibles qui nous lient, une lecture attentive
> pousse les corps à agir
>                                         /posture aérienne
> l'apparence d'une rose double dans la clarté
> mortellement touchée ou traverse le savoir
> si l'ange s'offre à la réflexion dans la lumière
> miroir ardent. (53)

> In the brightness, ready to begin the
> invisible gestures which link us together, a careful
> reading pushes bodies to act
>                                         /aerial posture
> the appearance of a double rose in the light fatally
> touched or traversing knowledge if the angel offers
> itself to the reflection in the light mirror of
> fire.

> *J'étais l'énergie sans fin, la sensation*
> *de l'idée, j'étais dans l'expression de*
> *l'utopie une femme touchée par l'apparence d'une rose.* (72)

> *I was energy without end, the sensation of the idea, I was in yhe expression of utopia a woman touched by the appearance of a rose.*

"La Perspective" closes with this glimpse of utopia, presented intertextually. In bringing forward the richness of history, Brossard simultaneously alerts us to the untapped potentialities of the brain, the body, language and culture.

Evidently, this classical intertext does not implicate Brossard in the reproduction of the symbolic systems it once embodied. As Kristeva has argued, tranference to another signifying system necessitates and inevitably creates a new thetic positionality. Turning then to the tranference of the metanarratives of liberation, through evolution or through transcendance, it can be argued that the reformulation of this metanarrative in the feminine, far from being an essentialist throwback to discredited metaphysics, is in fact an instance of postmodern "creative junk gathering" which focusses on the most important

"junk." The feminist metanarrative in creation is differentiated from its ancestors not because of its materialism, nor because it is fragmented, but because it is grounded in a symbolic shift which displaces the entire symbolic order: the shift in gender. As Teresa de Lauretis argues, differences in gender have a radical effect on the entire signifying process: "gender must be accounted for. It must be understood not as a biological difference that lies before or beyond signification, or as a culturally constructed object of masculine desire, but as semiotic difference—a different production of reference and meaning as such" (*Technologies of Gender* 48). It is in this sense that the generation of meaning in the feminine can be understood, paradoxically, as both a deconstruction of traditional narrative structure and as a feminist version of legitimizing metanarratives of liberation.

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NOTES

[1]Debate on the relationship between feminism and postmodernism intersects with virtually every current philosophical issue, and is beyond the scope of this essay. In articulating a particular point of correspondence from a narratological perspective, I accept Lyotard's work on narrative as such, and disagree with Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson when they argue that "We should not be misled by Lyotard's focus on narrative philosophies of history. In his conception of legitimating metanarrative, the stress properly belongs on the *meta* and not on the *narrative*" (Nicholson 22).

[2]In the early eighties, some feminist writers in Québec began to speak of *écriture au féminin* rather than *écriture féminine* which was the term used by primarily French writers. *Au féminin* is a more open-ended term which, when applied to a range of cultural and social realities, for example in *L'émergence d'une culture au féminin*, indicates a vital shift in perspective rather than the addition of *féminine* as an essentialist but inessential adjective (personal interview with Nicole Brossard, June 8, 1988). *Au féminin* was translated into English as "in the feminine" by the editors of *in the feminine: women and words/les femmes et les mots: conference preoceedings 1983*.

[3]Charles Olson was an important early teacher for Daphne Marlatt. See Fred Wah's Introduction to *Net Work: Selected Writing*, 8-9.

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# The Bias of Theory: A Critique of Pamela McCallum's "Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan: Theories of History"

Judith Stamps

Recent translations have finally made many of Walter Benjamin's fine philosophical works accessible to North American readers. At the same time there has been a recent flurry of posthumous publications of the writings of Marshall McLuhan, including *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, *The Laws of Media* and a republication of *The Medium is the Massage*. Each has spawned a wealth of commentary. As one might expect, since Benjamin and McLuhan wrote on similar themes, comparisons between them are also being drawn. However, whilst this kind of work is potentially fruitful, serious difficulties attend all comparisons of texts derived from different cultural and historical settings. These difficulties are exacerbated when, as in this case, the settings stand in an asymmetrical interpretive and judgemental relation to one another. Only one author is likely to receive a fair hearing and the philosophical framework of the one will both overshadow and obscure the distinctive contribution of the other.

In this essay I argue that such an asymmetry informs and weakens Pamela McCallum's article, "Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan: Theories of History," which appeared in the first issue of *Signature*. Although I believe that much of what McCallum says about their readings of history is valuable, I disagree with many of her specific judgements on the works she considers. Since the burden of her critique falls more heavily upon McLuhan than on Benjamin, my response is particularly concerned to shed light on those aspects of McLuhan's work which she overlooks. In the process I wish to show that whilst such a comparison is important, the very personal mode in which McCallum casts her analysis does not begin to do justice to the issues involved. For what is at stake here is not simply a comparison of two figures, but of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the European and North American philosophical climates from which their respective theories of modernity are drawn.

McCallum opens her discussion with the question, "What is cultural history (71) ?" It is this question, she argues, that informs the work of both Benjamin and McLuhan. She concludes with a call for

historical analysis that does not create a radical dichotomy between formal theory and factual data (86). Whilst comparing Benjamin and McLuhan's analytic practices, she arrives at a set of requirements for avoiding such dichotomies. These then become her standard for judging each author. Consequently, I initially extract this set of requirements from her discussion in order better to consider how the two authors fare when measured against it.

According to McCallum a good cultural history will not close off the possibility of multiple readings (71). We do not want to be saddled with overarching concepts such as declines, ascents and the forward march of reason. Second, such a history will allow us to see a culture as a social totality (76, 83, 85). Further, it will provide detailed analyses of concrete particulars which neither subsume, nor are subsumed by, that totality; the two are to remain in tension. To do this it must include an account of the social relations of production since they are the key mediators between the two levels (74). Otherwise one is left with some variant of one-dimensionality, in this case, mechanism. McCallum modifies these demands by noting that it is permissible to see technological inventions as having some relative autonomy from social relations (82). She adds further that even reductionist accounts are useful insofar as they provide descriptions of everday life in the historical period in question(72). Finally, she warns that it is a mistake to imagine earlier, oral cultures as living in a kind of "unshattered plenitude"(81). This latter point is important since both Benjamin and McLuhan studied the historical transition from oral to literate culture.

Within the frame of these requirements, although McCallum classifies both theorists as determinists, McLuhan is found most seriously deficient. Her comparative analysis of the two authors has two main foci. The first is their respective accounts of key western historical transitions; the second, their method of writing. In respect of transitions, McCallum compares Benjamin's concept of the aura- versus post-aura society with McLuhan's concept of the visual- versus post-visual society. Both concepts attempt to capture an essential difference between societies based on handicraft production and those based on mass production. For both Benjamin and McLuhan, the new forms of reproduction wrought new kinds of cultural/social experience, viz., mass society. For both, the novelty of the experience was bound up with changes in the human sensorium (Benjamin 222). Further, both 'post-aura' and 'post-visual' are terms intended to identify revolutionary possibilities contained in that experience.

The strength of Benjamin's account, according to McCallum, is its portrayal of these changes as mediated by social class relations. The concept of the aura is designed specifically to describe class differences. But Benjamin's account is weakened by its portrayal of these changes as evolving "not so much from self-conscious artistic practice as from the irreversible dynamic of a pure technological impetus" (77). Benjamin, however, is exonerated from the charge of pure mechanism since his discussions are at least mediated by historical figures such as the storyteller. The storyteller provides the element of human participation in technological change. McLuhan is worse; he merely "juxtaposes impersonal forces and objects," such as print technology and related forms of literary expression(82-3). Unlike the terms 'aura,' and 'post-aura,' the terms 'visual' and 'post-visual' do not identify social classes. Further, his accounts are not mediated by real human figures. In addition, McLuhan makes the mistake of embedding his account in a pseudo-history that posits a primitive era of integrated sensibility.

McCallum's second comparative focus is the authors' respective use of ideogrammic literary constructions and mosaics comprised of juxtaposed cultural fragments. Here Benjamin's variant is judged to be superior because he sought to reconfigure these fragments into a constellation whose express purpose was to open a window onto the social totality. McLuhan's mosaic, on the other hand, is classified as one-dimensional on the grounds that it presented its exhibits as a simple series of disconnected instances. McCallum concludes that although both theorists were "implacably determinstic," Benjamin offers the better model of the cultural historian since McLuhan failed to confront the key question of how to understand the relation between fragments (historical particulars) and social universals (85). He simply collapsed the two into one ahistoric universal.

Are these charges plausible? The answer, it seems to me, is a qualified 'yes,' depending first, on which of his works one reads and second, on which universal-particular relations one wishes to address. Both qualifications are crucial and, when examined carefully, considerably weaken the accusations. I propose to consider the first qualification by looking at the charges in light not of *Understanding Media*, McCallums' main source and one of McLuhan's worst books, but rather of *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and to some extent, *The Mechanical Bride* and *Through the Vanishing Point*. The use of these is valid since McCallum refers specifically to McLuhan's contruction of a "gutenberg galaxy" and of "mosaics" as exemplary of McLuhan's historical approach as a whole (80). This will temporarily take us away from the aura-visual comparison. I then return to the aura-visual

comparison and *Understanding Media*. Here I will consider both the question of the use of historical figures as mediators and the larger issue of the general-particular relation.

## The Modern as the Visual: McLuhan's Historical Perspective

It was McLuhan's general project in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* to demonstrate through a series of examples that, as a cultural unit, the West has come to place its trust only in what can be seen with the eyes. Correspondingly it has tended to suppress input from other senses, a bias which reaches its oppressive apogee in the refusal to accept as truth anything that cannot be graphed and/or measured by instruments offering visible read-outs. The term 'visual,' as we will see, encompasses a broad range of personal and social characteristics which such a bias entails.

Consider first his account of oral cultures. They were not characterised by an unshattered plenitude. In McLuhan's words,

> Hitherto most people have accepted their cultures as fate, like climate or vernacular; but our empathic awareness of the exact modes of many cultures is itself a liberation from them as from prisons. (76)

And elsewhere,

> ...any sense when stepped up to high intensity can act as an anaesthetic for other senses...Tribal, non-literate man, living under the intense stress on auditory organization of all experience is, as it were, entranced. (24)

McLuhan's ideal was not the overstressed primitive culture but rather the society of many cultures where each can act as liberator from the imprisoning assumptions of the others (31). For, in McLuhan's view, any single culture is a closed system (*Letters* 368).

Consider next McLuhan's account of the media (modes of reproduction or identification) that bound, and served to unbind, oral societies. Of necessity, oral cultures are relatively small face-to-face social groupings. The advent of writing made possible the transition from community to widespread empire (115). By the same token it made possible the production of the individual at a new level of separation from the social whole. Standard oral cultural expressions, such as sung or chanted historical epics, were necessarily limited to styles that allowed for the memorisation of vast quantities of material.

The styles included elements such as standardised rhymes, stock characters and often, music. The shift from the oral to the written form lifted this burden from the memory and made possible more individualised styles. A key piece of evidence in this regard is the historical correlation of shorter and more personalised epic poems in the West with the spread of alphabetic writing, a correlation noted independently by Eric Havelock(197-210), Harold Innis (*Empire* 61-63) and E. H. Gombrich (132), all of whom McLuhan had read. With the newly found freedom from the dependence on memory, individuals began to experiment with personalised styles. Hence McLuhan's boldface title in this section of the book which reads, "THE HOMERIC HERO BECOMES A SPLIT-MAN AS HE ASSUMES AN INDIVIDUAL EGO" ( 51). Individualism is a key aspect of the visual human. In addition, the shift from speaking/chanting to writing entails a shift from a focus on hearing to a focus on seeing.

The spread of handwriting, which reached its highest development in the manuscript culture of the Middle Ages, had a profound impact both on expressive style and on the social organisation of education, culminating in the development of the first universities. It also had a profound impact on further shifting human concentration toward visual stimulation. At this stage written compositions were read orally rather than silently. The need to read aloud stemmed in part from manuscript orthography itself. Words were not separated by spaces, and spellings varied regionally. Hence, oral phonetic reading. The voice was still heard; intonation, still important. Further, it was common for writers to read to live audiences (85-89). In order to communicate one's ideas to a public, particularly important in a Christian era in which 'spreading the word' was a social mission, the practice of public oral disputation on points of philosophy and theology was a required as well as a standard practice. The practice constituted a distinctive form of social interaction. How many mass audiences today gather to listen to philosophy or theory read orally? If they do at all it is probably in the form of rock music.

The reader-audience social interaction had a profound effect on expressive style as well, since works needed not only to be comprehensible but listenable and generally entertaining. Consider almost any contemporary scholarly article or text which addresses theoretical issues. The present text is as good an example as any. It is certain that I would be writing differently if my intention were to deliver this text orally to a general, even cultured, audience. I would need to take more account of rhythm. I would need to add anecdotes and to develop highly accessible heuristic analogies. Essays such as

this one are visual forms. They need to be looked at for a period of time, preferably in total silence and away from other people. Further, they require the suppression of all but vision. Print, thus, has made possible a style that must be both seen to be understood and approriated in a context that physically isolates reader from writer (85).

Nor is this all. In the pedagogical practice of the Middle Ages consumers and producers of texts were one and the same person. Lectures proceeded at a pace that allowed students to produce verbatim copies. They needed to do so not only because there was no mass production of texts, but because it was a formal requirement in that era that a doctoral student present himself with his texts to his examining committee (96). In McLuhan's words, "The medieval student had to be paleographer, editor, and publisher of the authors he read" (95). In turn, this had profound implications for the concepts both of authorship and private property in literary texts (95-96). In short, they did not exist in the form we know today. Or more emphatically, they could not exist. To repeat a quotation from H. J. Chaytor given in the *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, "To copy and circulate another man's book might be regarded as a meretorious act in the age of manuscript; in the age of print such action results in law suits and damages" (87). If, as deconstructionist critics of modernity suggest, our concept of the author is a myth in a society that imagines itself to be comprised of equally mythic, self-contained individuals, McLuhan's offerings serve in part to trace its emergence from earlier ways of thinking. Authorship and private property in this sense are important aspects of the visual society.

The advent of print intensified this separation. It also intensified the stress both on visual concentration and on specialisation. These were interrelated processes. With printing, producer and consumer became separated, creating a key division of labour that intensified as the technology became increasingly more complex. The act of reading itself speeded up since the new uniform printed product was easier to read. In the process, the voice became silent; hearing dropped away from the experience of reading (43). So did the tactility that came from using the human vocal apparatus. Reading and writing became private things, exacerbating the dichtomous split between public and private realms (167). In McLuhan's words,

> The reader of print...stands in an utterly different relation to the writer from the reader of manuscript. Print gradually made reading aloud pointless, and accelerated the act of reading till the reader could feel "in the hands of" his author. (125)

Further, in the manuscript age, elaborate styles of orthography, coupled with the art of illumination, had to some extent fused the acts of writing, drawing and painting. With the advent of mechanised print this tactility was greatly reduced. Privatisation and specialisms of various kinds were outgrowths of print. They are also essential elements in the visual society.

One could go on but I will stop here and ask, 'Do these really come across as unmediated bits of technology acting upon humans or upon one another in a mechanistic fashion?' On my reading, no. What I see in this text is the historical unfolding of different modes of social interaction, centering mainly on the acts of teaching and general public discourse. The social mediations it portrays, admittedly, are less labour-oriented than McCallum would prefer. They may be less so than is desirable. But they are a far cry from being placed, as McCallum argues, "in unmediated contiguity that fractures history into a series of disconnected instances" (85). The institutions that seem most to have captured McLuhan's attention were literary and educational ones. Thus, in relation to the uniform schooling made possible by the mass production of texts, and as a critique of the myth of individualism, he wrote,

> The school system, custodian of print culture, has no place for the rugged individual. It is, indeed, the homogenizing hopper into which we toss our integral tots for processing (215).

McLuhan was being kind. In *The Mechanical Bride* he had written,

> Hamburger is...more manageable than beef cuts. And the logic of a power economy is rigorous but crude. It laughs at political shadings...but it frowns at heavy-boned characters who knock the teeth out of the meat grinder. Our educational process is necessarily geared to eliminate all bone. (128)

Consider next the question of historiography. According to McCallum, McLuhan's historical method is to "juxtapose and reorganise the isolated impressions of a damaged existence into the interlocking system of a mosaic." It consists chiefly of a set of cultural exhibits which ransack "the junkyard of mass cultural banalities" or the "detritus of commercial civilisation" (74). Not all of McLuhan's work is like this. *The Mechanical Bride* is such a text. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is not. Neither is Part One of *Understanding Media*. McLuhan does indeed refer to *The Gutenberg Galaxy* as a mosaic (and, of course, a galaxy) but it is not the sort of mosaic

McCallum describes. Here the "galaxy" is not so much a series of cultural exhibits as a set of voices. Each exhibit is a lengthy quotation from a scholarly or literary work that deals with an aspect of the historical period under consideration. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* grew out of a collective interdisciplinary project that resulted in a unique and imaginative journal entitled *Explorations*, published between the years 1953 and 1959 (Carpenter ix). The journal had as its key intention the supersession of academic specialism (an aspect of visual culture) by bringing together, first in live format and later in book form, many authors and disciplines. As McLuhan had noted in a 1969 journal interview, he had come to realise soon after the publication of *The Mechanical Bride* that understanding the pervasive effects of communication systems required a collective, not an individual effort (Norden 74). McCallum may have decided that the technique does not work well. But I fear that she misses, rather, this aspect of McLuhan's method. Benjamin's work has a naturally interdisciplinary feel as well, but it is much more the synthetic work of one person.

Three points arise from these considerations. First, whilst searching for signs of production relations in McLuhan's work, McCallum has failed to consider the educative, social relations that he does discuss. Second, perhaps because such discussion as he offers of intra-state political-economic relations is often implicit, she concludes that he does not confront the question of the tension between social generalities and historical particulars at all. This is a narrow view. Third, in comparing McLuhan's historical work with Benjamin's she has failed to see his use of collections of scholarly sources as a distinctive epistemological method. This suggests that McCallum's original frame of the cultural historian may not entirely do justice to McLuhan's work.

## An Alternative Framework

To make this point clearer I propose a broadened, complementary frame which may serve to shed new light on both theorists. The broadened frame addresses both a circularity and an ethnocentric bias in McCallum's critique. The circularity lies in her initial assertion of what questions inform the texts of Benjamin and McLuhan. One needs first to demonstrate what questions inform their work. The ethnocentrism lies in her rigid application of European-Marxist categories to McLuhan's writings. Benjamin and McLuhan share a common western *problematique*, viz., the attempt to make sense of the conditions of modernity. It is for this reason that a comparison

between them is important. But they worked in different social and historical contexts. Each had a unique set of resources and a unique set of difficulties. What we should aim to derive from such a comparison is not simply a point by point contrast between two writers but a broadened view on modernity in the light of the relationship between such critiques and cultural ground in which they are conceived. The following illuminates these points.

McLuhan exemplifies a unique Canadian variant of a more general literature on the critique of modernity which in all of its forms has sought to understand the creation of identites or bounded epistemological spaces. The Frankfurt School, of which both Theodor Adorno (whom McCallum discusses briefly) and Walter Benjamin are key representatives, is another variant. Both schools are grounded in political economy, although they do not share the same political economy. Hence they share some but not all analytic categories. The Frankfurt School, a development of Lukacsian Marxism, was a philosophical response to the acute disillusionment wrought by the failure of socialism and the rise of Fascism in Europe (Kearney 4). The pain of that failure led to an equally acute reconsideration of the role of ideology and consciousness in class formation. The result, in terms of theory, was to supplement Marx's withering critique of bourgeois property relations with a new critique focused on western forms of reason, that is, on the modes of thought that underpinned those relations. This constituted, among other things, a broadened understanding of the nature of domination. Thus of course, as McCallum points out, behind the figure of Benjamin is that of Marx, in the form of categories such as the social relations of production.

In its Canadian variant the political-economic theory is supplied not by Marx but by Harold Innis. Both economists, we might add, had been students and critics of the work of Adam Smith.[1] For Innis the important categories were not social classes, although he did not deny their existence as some North Americans do, but a parallel kind of class structure created by the marginalisation that attends the formation of colonial societies. Innis was what one might call an economic geographer. As a theorist of imperialism he developed a unique geographically-based thesis of economic centre/margin relations which has come to be known as the staple thesis of Canadian economic development (Watkins). In his later writings Innis made the quantum leap from the study of politicial economy to the study of communication, a leap that betokened his attempt to develop a wider grasp of imperialism. In the process he came to recognise that the creation of colonies, or margins, is an act of communicative

identification. Innis did not believe that this sort of identification was logically necessary to human societies, and his move toward the historical study of communication was his self-styled attempt to understand why it had developed in the West. His approach was intensely materialist and, like Benjamin's and McLuhan's, covered an historical period that began with hieroglyph and stone and ended at the modern press and the radio (*Empire*). Like Benjamin and McLuhan, he was particularly interested in the contrast between speech and writing.

When Innis turned from political economy to communication, he became a new kind of theorist. McLuhan, one of the few students of Innis' unique philosophical style, was also such a theorist. Both men sought a new, non-marginalising kind of objectivity. Each tried to exemplify the new objectivity in his work by developing a style that incorporated multiple approaches to the study of communication/identification. Their particular route to this multiple approach was to bring together, in quasi-collage style, the writings of many authors, taken from a variety of disciplines. McLuhan's specific contribution was to bring together materials from and about both non-western and western societies. For each, the style was grounded in the belief that pure relativism was an unacceptable outlook since it only reproduced the world of abstract individualism (Innis "Role").[2] For Innis, an historical analysis of social institutions provided the ground for objective study. For McLuhan, a basic mystical/religious outlook provided a belief in some kind of underlying social unity (*Media* 21). Their respective styles were also grounded in the belief that no single approach could be entirely objective. In relation to this, Innis' ideal lay in the direction of a society in which different modes of communication—each representing one way of identifying—would coincide. McLuhan's, as we have seen, was the multi-cultural social formation.

Both the Canadian and the European schools offered critiques of bourgeois forms of reason, individualism and property. For McLuhan the strongest expression of the critique of property was in his earliest work, *The Mechanical Bride*. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is a reasonable runner-up. Further, he placed particular emphasis on property as ownership of literary and artistic production, an emphasis visible in all his works. It is both true and regrettable, as McCallum points out, that by the time McLuhan wrote *Understanding Media* he seemed have set himself on a progressively unreflective and mechanistic course. But it would be equally regrettable if McLuhan, as an important analyst of the West, were to be reduced to his crudest formulations. It would be worse still if readers were to be left with

the impression that all of McLuhan's works deserve to be relegated to a scrap heap from which better historians can search for bits of descriptive material.

With this in mind let us return to McCallum's comparison of the aura/post-aura and the visual/post-visual. I will say at the outset that I am not entirely convinced this particular comparative focus is the fairest. In many ways *The Mechanical Bride* is closer in spirit to the writings of the Frankfurt School. It comes closer to sharing their historical setting as well. Benjamin may have written quite differently had he been immersed in the 1960's North American world of love-ins, teach-ins and civil rights movements, whilst bathed in the sounds of the Beatles, Mick Jagger, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan's summary Highway 61 question, "How does it feel?" In contrast, *The Mechanical Bride* was conceived in the mid-1940's and deals, as the Frankfurt School theorists do, with the interrelated themes of fascism, narcissism, mechanism and bourgeois individualism. Similarly, it presents mass culture as a banal surface, to use McCallum's phrase, that conceals a world of violence and contorted sexuality for which there is no better example than the iconic image of a mechanical bride. Another possiblity would be to compare Benjamin and McLuhan on the Middle Ages, considering their respective images of the storyteller and the medieval oral reader disputing with his audience. Both deal with the process of social education. Both provide historical figures as key mediators. A third possibility would be to compare their respective use of mystical traditions.[3] On the other hand, a comparison of the 'aura' and the 'visual' highlights one difference in the authors' respective use of analytic categories that is crucial to the present argument. The difference stems in essence from the different schools of political economy that ground the two authors' works. The following is an attempt to illuminate this point.

In order better to do so I will develop my broadened frame of reference further by suggesting that as well as being 'cultural historians' of sorts, Benjamin and McLuhan were philosophers concerned with problems of knowledge (particularly with regard to positivism) and related theories of history. Both wished to explore these topics in terms of the social and inward experiences wrought by the modern world of mass production. Both were convinced that modern, positivist conceptions of knowledge must be understood in terms of what the Annales School of history has termed the *longue durée* . Hence they considered its historical development from primitive antiquity to the present. Both believed that the key historical alterations in experience occurred in the wake of changes in the technologies of production and communication and that these, in turn,

wrought changes in the sensual appropriation of the world. Let us call them concrete philosophers since they addressed these philosophical topics in a highly materialist manner. McLuhan, however, was by far the more concrete because of his relative lack of schooling in western philosophy. Thus, whilst Benjamin's writing clearly demonstrates its European philosophical background, McLuhan's demostrates a self-styled, eclectic, highly improvised mode of philosophical expression. Like Innis', it expresses the resourcefulness required of a theorist working at the margins of western culture. The concrete philosopher studies history and epistemology by studying, in a quasi-archaelogical manner, its material underpinnings, sometimes mediating these with descriptions of historical figures and/or social institutions of some kind.

The concrete philosopher is not bound explicitly to meet all of the requirements of the cultural historian that McCallum has set down. From within this frame, however, the very focus on communications technology already challenges implicitly and concretely the dichotomous base-superstructure thinking that characterised earlier Marxist formulations on the relationship between material circumstances and consciousness. This is true not only for Benjamin, as McCallum points out (75), but for McLuhan as well. It is well known that McLuhan was no friend of Marxism and further, that many of his pronouncements on Marx were grounded in a poor understanding of its basic tenets. Nevertheless he was well aware that the focus on language and communicative forms challenged key aspects of the Marxist framework. Thus in *Understanding Media*, he wrote, "nothing could be more subversive of the Marxian dialectic than the idea that linguistic media shape social development as much as do the means of production" (58). We have seen that the focus on communication similarly implicitly challenges the public-private dichotomy. In this sense both theorists were concrete anti-dualists. For this reason one cannot simply label McLuhan a static, dichtomous or deterministic thinker. There are powerful strains in his work that lean toward dialogic/dialectical formulations. His promotion both of oral dialogue, concretised both in collaborative writing efforts and in the form of a writing style that incorporates multiple literary sources, and of artistic modes of cognition are important examples.

Further, as McCallum has shown, both theorists were anti-elitist. Benjamin welcomed the shattering of the aura because he saw in it the possiblity of shattering elite domination. In its place the post-aura world would feature a politicised art, an art that united egalitarian politics and the aesthetic appropriation of the social and physical world. It would be a participatory world—a world of generalised

creativity. Similarly, McLuhan welcomed the end of the visual society because he saw in it the possibility of shattering the public-private dichotomy, i.e., the world of the isolated, monadic individual (*Media* 54, 204, 175; *Galaxy* 12, 29, 51, 56, 131). The post-visual, like the post-aura world, is a world of integration and mass participation. One of McLuhan's key efforts in this direction was an attempt to retrieve from the ancient art of rhetoric its project of promoting the good political life through the art of eloquence and persuasive discourse as practical wisdom (*Bride* 42; *Galaxy* 24, 99-101). Hence his constant use of rhetorical language. This is an important aspect of his attempt to promote public dialogue and with it, the self-realised society. Undoubtely in McLuhan's case the project eventually ran off the rails, and he ended his career far too much the rhetorician to be a good analyst. Nevertheless it is important to see revolutionary content of his (and Benjamin's) desire to fuse social life and art.

As concrete philosophers, what did Benjamin and McLuhan have to say about the transition from the aura/visual to the post-aura/post-visual societies? In historical terms, both saw the advent of the camera and later, of the moving screen image, as the key historical watershed. For both, the camera was able both to freeze time and to turn the frozen image into a mass commodity. It acted as surgeon upon the human and non-human worlds, carving up reality in a manner dictated by its structural capacities to create frames and angles (Benjamin 233-4; *Media* 174). It acted as social psychoanalyst, revealing aspects of the world hidden to the naked eye (Benjamin 237; *Media* 174). It fostered collective rather than isolated individual experience (Benjamin 234; *Media* 174).

Benjamin, McCallum notes, mediated this kind of account with the figure of the cameraman. In her words,

> Benjamin employed the cameraman—the living embodiment of technical reproducibliy in art—as a historical figure to impart a feeling for the tangible density of real history. (77)

McLuhan, she claims, made no similar effort. This is simply not plausible. Consider the following representative examples taken from McLuhan's account of the photograph in *Understanding Media.*

> A century ago the British craze for the monocle gave to the wearer the power of the camera to fix people in a superior stare, as if they were objects. Erich von Stroheim did a great job with the monocle in creating the haughty Prussian officer. Both monocle and camera tend to turn people into things... (170)

> Perhaps the great revolution produced by photograph was in the traditional arts. The painter could no longer depict a world that had been much photographed. He turned, instead, to reveal the inner process of creativity in expressionism and in abstract art. Likewise the novelist could no longer describe objects or happenings for readers who already knew what was happening by photo, press, film and radio. The poet and novelist turned to those inward gestures of the mind by which we achieve insight and by which we make ourselves and our world. (174)

> No less drastic was the effect of the press photo coverage of the lives of the rich. "Conspicuous consumption" owed less to the phrase of Veblen than to the press photographer, who began to invade the entertainment spots of the very rich. The sights of men ordering drinks from horseback at the bars of clubs quickly caused a public revulsion that drove the rich into...obscurity... On the other hand, the movie phase of photography created a new aristocracy of actors and actresses, who dramatised, on and off screen, the fantasia of conspicuous consumption that the rich could never achieve. (180)

There are more examples, even in this rather short section of the book. Wearers of monocles objectifying others, film-makers, painters, novelists and poets interacting with their publics, and press photographers seeking out the haunts of the rich are not impersonal forces.

We can see, however, that these examples do not address a topic that is central for McCallum, viz. the use of the social organisation of production as a key to social totality. One should begin by noting that in terms of philosophical focus, Benjamin's essay on mechanical reproduction is actually more the exception than the rule. Most of his writing, as Susan Buck-Morss has shown, was far too mystical/surrealist and un-Marxist to please his left-leaning colleagues (126-131). Nevertheless what is important here is McCallum's stress on Benjamin's use of Marxist categories, and for this reason I will focus on these. From this perspective, what did Benjamin say about the relations of production? In his essay, "The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin used the standard Marxist categories of class, based on the relation to the means of production. McLuhan did not. I agree with McCallum that this is a serious shortcoming. But it is an equally serious shortcoming to stop the critical comparison at that point. This brings us to the final charge, viz., that McLuhan never addressed the question of the relations between social generality and historical particulars. The charge is serious, as McCallum points out, since if it is correct then McLuhan, whose work at one level seems to be a study of culture as historical difference, ends in obliterating difference and with it, history itself.

What I wish to show in the next section is that in taking Benjamin's use of Marxist categories as a standard for a theory of 'cultural history,' McCallum takes over as well Marx's blindness to an important dimension of social/cultural difference.

## The Distinctiveness of the Canadian Perspective

Consider for a moment the historical and geographical aspects of the term 'aura.' It delineates an historical time period that runs from the age of cave art to the age of mechanical reproduction. In doing so it seeks to identify human history as a whole. At the same time 'aura' specifically identifies an effective instrument of class domination that (hopefully) comes to an end in the post-aura society. Hence where there is 'aura,' there is class domination of some sort. This is why the aura must be shattered. What needs to be seen is that this kind of historical periodisation is highly problematic. It is part and parcel of a key bias in the Euro-Marxist outlook, a bias implicit in the concept of class that Benjamin uses and McCallum unwittingly takes over. Consider the following from Marx's *Communist Manifesto*.

> The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman—in a word, oppressor and oppressed stood in constant opposition to each other...(McLellan 222)

The historical world here, like the world of the aura, is divided into two parts. The first is characterised by class domination; the second is free from it. In Benjamin's analysis the aura of earlier times was a cult instrument. It had what he called "cult value" (Benjamin 225). Cult value later gave way to elite artistic value. One does not use the word 'cult' to describe the workings of an egalitarian social totality. Cult presupposes a form of organisation with a primal horde-like character. It is hierarchical.

This kind of history is a highly Euro-centric construct which does nothing to promote egalitarianism. It does quite the opposite. When one casts one's eye beyond the European world, it becomes obvious that not all societies have been class-divided societies.[4] There have been relatively egalitarian human societies, most of whom have been historically overwhelmed by Europeans. But some are extant. It follows that it is possible to have 'aura' that needs no shattering because it does not dominate. Of course it would make little sense to use a term such as 'aura' in these contexts since it would not serve to identify anything particularly problematic. In contradistinction to this,

McLuhan has always employed anthropological writings on non-western tribal cultures, both as possible exemplars of oral societies and as a contrast to the West. His choice to do so was not accidental. Rather it was an integral element in his unique, multi-cultural, multi-source approach to the philosophical problem of objectivity. It was an integral aspect of his work as a concrete philosopher. During the publication of *Explorations* McLuhan worked with a number of anthropologists. These included Edmund Carpenter, whose speciality was Inuit culture, and Dorothy Lee, who studied the Wintu. Neither cultural group was class-divided. McLuhan was fond of repeating the claim that, "The Balinese, who have no word for art say, 'We do everything as well as possible.'" (*Vanishing Point* 7) What they 'did' was presumably characterised by an 'aura' but this hardly needed shattering, at least before contact with western groups.

It is not surprising, thus, that McLuhan's category, 'visual,' serves to differentiate western (or other) societies, in which a particular kind of linear sensibility has developed, from alternate cultures, whereas 'aura' does not. This is not a trivial difference. If the supersession of class domination is integral to liberatory practice, then the recogition that human begins have lived and can live in relatively classless states is an important contribution to that practice. The difference in philosophical frames here is not accidental either. It is integral to McLuhan's Canadian cultural heritage. From the Canadian perspective, that is, from the perspective of a culture with a colonial past, the marginalisation of cultures in relation to European imperial domination stands out in sharp relief. Hence, in his analysis of the fur trade in Canada, Harold Innis was able to portray economic relations between native and European traders so as to reveal radically different, culturally conditioned notions of value (Rotstein). Thus what the concept 'visual' loses in terms of its ability to identify historical difference or otherness (that is, class) *within* societies, it gains in its ability to identify difference *between* them. Similarly whilst 'visual' tends to obscure the intra-state social totality, it opens access to the inter-state or global one. From the perspective of political studies, the distinction between the visual and the post-visual is hence capable of capturing the kind of centre-margin relation that charaterises the tension between the first and third worlds in a way that the aura/post-aura distinction can never do.

If one aspect of determinism as a static, linear mode of thought is its blindness to real historical difference, then there is no need to make McLuhan the main culprit here. In this regard I take particular exception to McCallums claim that, "Indeed it might be said that McLuhan goes so far as to channel Benjamin's fondness for historical

detail in the direction of a pure technological determinism"(79). This is not helpful. McLuhan, like Benjamin, channelled his fondness for historical detail in ways that expressed his particular cultural bias. Further, he offered a considerable amount of mediated analysis in much of his important work. If he failed at times to develop the liberatory potential in his writings, we do ourselves no service by failing to see it too.

I began this analysis by considering McCallum's requirements for an adequate kind of cultural history. She called for a history that preserves the tension between general theory and concrete particulars. Her key requirements were first, the portrayal of a culture as a social totality and second, a kind of portrayal that does not close off the possibility of multiple readings. These requirements raise two distinct and interrelated issues. The first turns on how we are to understand McCallum's concept of multiple readings. It seems from her analysis that McCallum shares Marx and Benjamin's concern with superseding domination. But for such a concern to make sense, I argue, the desired multiple readings must be grounded in some overarching concept of human well-being and hence, some overarching reading of history. One would not want, for example, readings that pointed to the possibility of egalitarianism coupled with others promoting Aristotle's notion of natural hierarchies. A coherent call for multiple readings, thus, must close off the possibility of *some* readings. One needs, in other words, to preserve the distinction between multiple readings that open doors onto a social totality and an infinity of readings in which one simply becomes lost.

Second, and on the other hand, to portray a social totality requires the use of specific categories. The categories, in turn, presuppose a theory of society. All such theories have some cultural bias. Benjamin, born and raised in the European heartland of the western philosophical tradition, naturally wrote from the bias of that tradition. McLuhan, raised in the relatively marginalised Canadian setting, wrote from a different one. In comparing them it will not do simply to take the social categories typical of either of these settings as the sole standard for the other. If we do, we simply miss the larger questions that need to be addressed. Rather, we must recognise, as Innis and McLuhan's concrete epistemological approach suggests, that the perspectives of alternate culture settings provide key mirrors, and perhaps the only real mirrors, in which the shortcomings of our own can be reflected back to us.

In sum, to remain coherent, McCallum's requirement regarding multiple readings needs a qualification that would prevent it from sliding into a call for pure scepticism. Following Innis and

McLuhan's lead, I suggest that it needs as well, a call for multiple cultural histories developed in different settings. Within any given setting the closest we can come to a presentation that offers endless readings is one that employs categories the least. The ideal-type in this case would be pure description, if such a thing were possible. But clearly this is farthest from providing any view of social unity. In this regard all concrete theorists are indispensible and ought to be seen not merely as a series of potential scrap bins but rather as key contributors to the study of culture. The totality theorist, on the other hand, stands in constant danger of severe ethno-centrism. To this problem collective intercultural efforts offer hope. The promise of this approach is not only a better grasp of modernity but of ourselves as theorists caught inevitably in a net of assumptions from which only others can release us.

## NOTES

[1] The best source for an analsis of the economic aspect of Innis' theoretical perspective is Robin Neill. *A New Theory of Value: The Canadian Economics of H. A. Innis*. University of Toronto Press, 1972. A rather lengthy but equally good source is A. John Watson. *Marginal Man: Harold Innis' Commuication Works in Context*. Diss. University of Toronto, 1981. Part One.

[2] Innis' article was a response to a relativist argument offered by E. J. Urwick entitled "The Role of Inteeligence in th Social Process" in the same volume of *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, pp. 64-76.

[3] McLuhan was a self-avowed Thomist. Direct and indirect references to Aquinas' theory of knowledge occur throughout his works. Benjamin was influenced by Jewish mysticism, an influence which has been documented and explained by Susan Buck-Morss in her study of *Negative Dialectics*, listed below.

[4] For a good general critique of this aspect of Marxism see Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* Volume I (University of California Press, 1983) For a Canadian critique see Asher Horowitz and Gad Horowitz, *Everywhere They Are In Chains: Political Theory From Rousseau to Marx* (Nelson Canada, 1988), p. 3. For an Anthropological example see Colin Turnbull, *The Forest People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968).

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# McLuhan, Benjamin and Cultural Studies

Pamela McCallum

I would endorse many of Judith Stamps' comments on my article, while at the same time insisting that the issues I raised are worth pursuing and will remain pressing questions for cultural studies. The essay was not intended to foreclose the appropriation of McLuhan's writings in the on-going revision of Canadian cultural studies; rather, it might be seen as sketching out some of the issues which would inform such a revision of McLuhan's work. In this context, the juxtaposition of the writings of a scholar educated in the resolutely anti-theoretical tradition of nineteen-thirties English literary studies to those of a more theoretically grounded cultural critic seemed to be a strategy which would situate the strengths and weaknesses of the texts under investigation. If, as Stamps suggests, others release us from our own assumptions, then only a vigilant examination of identity within difference will permit the lacunae and aporias of a system of cultural analysis to become visible. In what follows I would like to expand on points which continue to be vexing questions for Canadian cultural studies.

Poststructuralist theories and postmodernist aesthetic practices have taught us that the subject is constituted within a network of overlapping, sometimes conflicting, positionings. From such a perspective, the older model of center and margin, based on the geographical space of economic history and development studies, may need to be rethought. I do not wish to imply here that the work of H.A. Innis, A.G. Frank and others is not of the utmost importance. What I would suggest is that a subject may occupy positions which are, at one and the same time, both centre and margin. Obviously, Stamps is correct to draw our attention to the difference between McLuhan's place, within a doubly-colonized Canadian culture, and Benjamin's, within a dominant German tradition in European philosophy. National academic traditions, however, form only a part of the complex network of socio-cultural determinants in which any writer's work takes shape. If we look instead at the situating of the two critics within academic institutions a somewhat different configuration emerges. Here it is McLuhan who speaks from the ideologically influential discipline of English literature and from a department at the dominant university in the country, while Benjamin is the disenfranchised scholar—his *Habilitationsschrift* refused, his

academic career blocked, a maverick even within the Frankfurt School, supporting himself in the precarious existence of a freelance essayist and translator. It would, of course, also be necessary to examine McLuhan's later estrangement from the University of Toronto English Department, but there is little doubt that, while producing the early writings which Stamps considers to be of the greatest interest, McLuhan occupied a space of insitutional power and security. My point is not that the marginality of Canada's national culture and academic traditions are unimportant; it is that they are only one aspect of an intellectual's (often contradictory) positioning within a web of national, institutional, regional, class, ethnic, gender, racial and other allegiances.

A similar and related point is raised by McLuhan's repeated references to anthropoligical examples of non-western societies. It is true that such comparisons can stimulate valuable insights. But it is also true that McLuhan's narratives issue into a myth of originary unity from which there is an unrelenting and uni-directional decline in the human sensorium. Stamps says something like this when she goes on to suggest that western intellectuals often forget "not all societies have been class-civided," and that many societies were "relatively egalitarian" before imperialism and colonization. One would certainly not deny the specificity of class divisions within advanced capitalist societies. It seems to me, however, that we must proceed with caution in ascribing of constructing a nostalgic mythology of a less alienated existence. Western intellectuals ought to be careful always to acknowledge the brutal violence with which imperialism circled the globe. But forms of domination in pre-capitalist and primitive societies—serfdom, caste, slavery, bonded labour, scapegoating, misogyny, tribalism and so on—are deeply inscribed in the lives on some members of these societies. In this context, the example which Stamps cites, the Mbuti pygmies described in Colin Turnbull's book, *The Forest People*, provides a cautionary tale. The Mbuti have captured the imagination of several intellectuals as a possible model of an egalitarian society (see, for instance, Ann Oakley's feminist appropriation in *Sex, Gender and Society*). According to Turnbull's account, the Mbuti appear to have escaped many forms of hierarchy and domination: their decision making is collective, they address their divinity (the forest) as both Mother and Father. Yet in a close reading of Turnbull, Gad Horowitz develops a somewhat more equivocal view of equality among the Mbuti. While the forest is bisexual, he points out, it is addressed as a male when it is a figure of authority, as female when it is nurturing. Or, in another example, made more poignant by the fact that we have

just begun to measure the depth and extent of domestic violence, Mbuti men "are expected to beat their wives; but the women are expected to fight back" (118). Horowitz ends up concluding that the Mbuti represent "incipient patriarchal domination" (119). It is important that he does not go on to assume patriarchy to be inevitable; nevertheless, his rereading of Turnbull articulates hierarchies and modes of social division among the Mbuti. In this context, Gramsci's observation that humanity is a point of arrival, not a point of departure, cautions us against seeking in other societies a blueprint for what we strive to become.

The methodological question which underlies these discussions is that of Identity and Difference. If there is not some initial identity to serve as a point of departure (in this case, the interest of Benjamin and McLuhan in forms of popular culture and new communications technologies), then any comparison would fall into sheer empirical contingency. If, on the other hand, the differences are not attended to with vigilance, then newly constructed affinities threaten to cover over significant tensions and gaps. To my mind, Marxism, with its dialogic structure, with its attention to tension and contradiction, continues to offer a methodology for thinking through both forms of social domination and potential sites of resistance to them. Such a methodology need not be linked to a European tradition: my comments could be rethought and refocused through C.B. Macpherson's remarkable analysis of powers and capacities in *Democratic Theory*, or through Fredric Jameson's luminous pages on the emancipatory potential which the disembodied sensorium offered to modernism in *The Political Unconscious*. Nor, I should stress, are my comments here intended to be prescriptive. Rather, the issues which these essays have raised will remain on the agenda of Canadian cultural studies, and I hope that the discussion will be taken up, expanded and developed by others.

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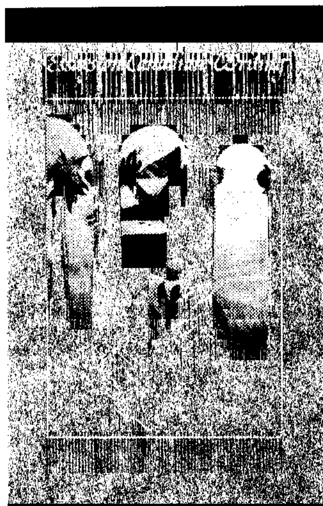

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