

REPLIES/RESPONSES

As Yet Unperceived / Imre Szeman

Neil Besner's overview of this unique encounter between Brazilian and Canadian critics offers proof of how productive such a dialogue can be. Hopefully, it is only the beginning of an ever-greater degree of intellectual interaction between "North" and "South", Canada and Brazil, especially within the field of cultural production and cultural analysis, which has been stifled too long by post-WW II area studies on the one hand, and by the too narrow association of cultures with nations on the other. Whatever else it has done, globalization has created the conditions in which a Canadian can spend his days reading Beatriz Sarlo, Néstor García Canclini or Roberto Schwarz, and his nights watching Walter Salles' *Central do Brasil* or Fernando Meirelles' *Cidade de Deus*, while also wondering about everything he's not reading or seeing in these cultural exports from Argentina, Mexico and Brazil—something he can only learn from his colleagues in these countries.

One issue seems to emerge with particular force from these essays: the need today to establish a new, international *political* discourse, one that attends to the nuances of identity and difference as these get produced at specific sites, but also able to articulate multiple, non-universal global solidarities (which has yet to be grasped in existing formulations of cosmopolitanism or discourses of universal human rights). Globalization has intensified what Adorno and Horkheimer

Ilha do Desterro	Florianópolis	nº 40	p.123-126	jan./jun. 2001
------------------	---------------	-------	-----------	----------------

described more than fifty years ago as the “dark side” of Enlightenment rationality: technology has become destiny, neoliberalism has effectively situated itself as “the only instance of totalization” (Sarlo 155), and populism is expressed only in polls and at the shopping mall. Sarlo suggests much the same response to these forces as Diana Brydon does here: that we “humanize” this rationality, especially through recourse to art and literature, which still “offers an experience of limits” (160). But as Adorno and Horkheimer already intuited, the challenge facing us today is to respond to the discourses of the modernity *without* making recourse to what are, after all, ideas of the function of art and literature which originate within modernity as well. Literature, I fear, is not the solution to our problems, nor are the humanities more generally—which is not to say that they aren’t essential to keeping hope (utopian and otherwise) alive today. At the same time, any sense of the function of culture or the cultural (problematic terms, as Sérgio Bellei points so effectively) needs to retain the value of the considerable critiques that have been launched against them. We cannot forget that “humanism” can be, and has been, a dirty word, a vicious concept. The trick is to neither abandon modernity (an impossibility, in any case) nor to evoke what might be thought to be its Other, but to work both with and against it. This is a difficult task, a hard path to navigate. The only way we are likely to reach the other side is by combining our resources and knowledges, sharing our differences in order to more effectively understand the common obstacles that we face—something we have started to do in the essays in this collection.

Work Cited

Sarlo, Beatriz. *Scenes from Postmodern Life*. Trans. Jon Beasley-Murray. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001.

Mobilizing Globalization's Undertow / Diana Brydon

Sérgio Bellei is absolutely correct in identifying a certain anemic exhaustion within an institutionalized postcolonial theory that seems to have lost its sense of what is at stake in its project through the by now too familiar celebrations of hybridities, scapes and flows. As Besner notes in his summary of Bellei's response to Szeman, this dominant postmodern narrative of postcolonialism cannot "adequately theorize the actual circulation of power" nor understand the dynamics of a capitalism that commodifies and fetishizes difference. To follow this established trajectory of the postcolonial would lead to both belatedness and a dead end. But there are other possibilities within this now capacious field that lead beyond the stalemates of belatedness and the false binaries of native and cosmopolitan. These are demonstrated in the narrative of Jeannette Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows* and worked through, in more conventionally accepted theoretical terms, in texts such as Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*, reviewed elsewhere in this volume.

If the "sea is history," as Caribbean poet Derek Walcott metaphorically insists, then "The refusal to forget that history and the insistence on returning to it in order to perceive the parallels between old and new forms of dehumanization are globalization's undertow, the postcolonial's strategic means of debunking the triumphalist narratives of modernism and postmodernism" (Fusco xvi). These strategic means can be seized by analysts, artists, critics and dissenters to offer alternative metaphors, short circuit the smooth flow of the system, and open avenues that had seemed to be blocked through a combined effort to read and think "otherwise." There is a danger in making such an argument, of allowing utopian impulses to discount the sheer difficulty of such a task, and of privileging the imagination and the literary text above the necessary political work of addressing inequalities and reforming governance. Bellei diplomatically hints at

this danger. In working with traveling theories, one needs to distinguish between those that ride with the waves of the dominant trend and those that pull with “globalization’s undertow.” And each can drown the critic who loses her footing.

As Bellei so perceptively notes, I do indeed wish to redefine rationality to include forms of intuition, humour, and compassion that were excised from its Enlightenment definitions. With Spivak, I believe that it will be important to develop “transnational literacies” and dialogues that cut across many established divisions. The ground for such dialogues, as Bellei reminds us, must involve understanding our own institutional placements and their histories. As he notes, our Canadian “essays speak from a discipline marked by a history of institutionalization.” The complex truth of this struck me immediately when I read his words. In English-Canada, Canadian literature and Commonwealth literature entered the academy together, and often came together in the research and teaching of early practitioners, whose students often continued and developed their practices. If I fall roughly into the third generation of such practices, then the discipline as a whole is well into the sixth generation. The tradition has had its mis-steps, but it has also generated numerous nuanced studies of such unpopular notions as complicity, compromise, and negotiation. It sought alliances, comparisons, and dialogues beyond the England/Europe/US axis, but usually on the basis of shared linguistic traditions. Current realignments in the disciplines of Comparative Literature and Caribbean and Latin American Studies, the development of new areas of investigation such as TransAtlantic Studies, and the rethinking of literary history now provide alternative, and possibly more congenial homes for the continuation of the productive dialogues begun in this inspirational special issue.

Work Cited

Fusco, Coco. *The Bodies That Were Not Ours*. London & New York: Routledge, 2001.