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Contents

Editor's Column: Changes and Continuities in *The Comparatist*
 MARY ANN FRESE WITT 1

ESSAYS

Inter-Art Relations

Robbe-Grillet's and Johns's Targets: Metafiction, Autopoiesis,
 and Chaos Theory 5

BEN STOLTZFUS

I Am Not Who "I" Pretend to Be: *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*
 and Its Photographic Frontispiece 26

CORINNE ANDERSEN

East / West Intersections

EDITED BY JOHN BURT FOSTER, JR.

Gary Snyder's American–Asian Shamanism 38

LING CHUNG

The Center Cannot Hold: Ambiguous Narrative Voices in Wu's
The Journey to the West and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* 63

LIDAN LIN

Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice
 vEmpire, Glocalization, and the Melancholia of the Sovereign 82

DRAGAN KUJUNDŽIĆ

Theatrical Terror: *Attentats* and Symbolist Spectacle 101

ERIN WILLIAMS HYMAN

When Comparative Literature Becomes Cultural Studies:
 Teaching Cultures through Genre 123

KATHERINE ARENS

REVIEW ESSAY

Rosemary A. King, *Border Confluences: Borderland Narratives from the Mexican War to the Present*

148

LUZ ELENA RAMIREZ

REVIEWS

Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*

152

ATTICUS SCHOCH ZAVALLETTA

Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*

153

KYOO LEE

Marilyn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn, *Myth, Montage, and Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture: Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othéa*

155

NHORA LUCÍA SERRANO

Valentina Glajar and Domenica Radelescu, eds., *Vampirettes, Wretches and Amazons: Western Representations of East European Women*

157

MOIRA DI MAURO-JACKSON

Sharon Grady, *Drama and Diversity: A Pluralistic Perspective for Educational Drama*

158

ANNE CIRELLA-ARBUTIA

Dorothy M. Figueira, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity*

159

NANDI BHATIA

Antony Tatlow, *Shakespeare, Brecht, and the Intercultural Sign*

161

MARGARET WOODRUFF-WIEDING

Steven Yao, *Translation and the Language of Modernism: Gender, Politics, and Language*

163

YUNTE HUANG

BOOKS RECEIVED

165

The Rutledge Prize

173

EDITOR'S COLUMN

Changes and Continuities in *The Comparatist*

In introducing my first issue of *The Comparatist*, I am deeply aware of the growth and development of the journal under the guidance of my predecessors. From its beginnings as a vehicle primarily for the publication of papers delivered at the annual conference of the Southern Comparative Literature Association to its status as a nationally and internationally recognized publication in the field, *The Comparatist* has been enriched by the editorial wisdom and hard work of Jeanne Smoot, Mechthild Cranston, Marcel Cornis-Pope, and John Burt Foster. The current issue introduces not only a new editor but also a major change in the journal's publication status: it is the first to be published by the University of North Carolina Press at Chapel Hill. The journal's new look and streamlined distribution, among other changes, come from the press's professional oversight. In addition, the journal has in a sense come home, in that it is now sponsored again by North Carolina State University at Raleigh, where it began.

The contributions to this issue reflect certain traditions of the SCLA and of *The Comparatist*, together with innovative scholarship. From its inception, the SCLA conference offered sessions on literature and the other arts, as well as on East-West literary relations. *The Comparatist* has published a number of essays dealing with the relations of literature to visual arts and music and has been encouraging a more globalized approach to comparative literature. The essays here grouped under "Inter-Art Relations" and "East / West Intersections" offer fresh approaches as well as continuities in those fields. The question of comparative literature's relationship to cultural studies, which has preoccupied our discipline at least since the publication of the Bernheimer report ten years ago, has also been evident in the journal. The authors in the final grouping address that issue from divergent angles.

Ben Stoltzfus's essay on Alain Robbe-Grillet and Jasper Johns approaches the traditional inter-art subject of literature and painting through the lenses of metafiction, autopoiesis, and chaos theory. Robbe-Grillet's text "La Cible" is unique in that it incorporates and reworks in verbal terms items from Johns's painting *Torget With Plaster Casts*. The visual and the verbal artist each restructures the apparently random elements in his composition through the orderly disorder described in chaos theory. Working against the grain of established *doxa*, both painting and text deconstruct meaning, while attaining higher levels of insight. Stoltzfus provides new perspectives on this vital relationship. The possibilities of visual-verbal

Reviews

Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*
New York: Routledge, 2004, 273 pp.


In her most recent work, Judith Butler asks how we can undo the restrictive norms of gender and sexuality and considers the various ways in which we are all undone — by grief, gender, desire, and the Other. Butler maintains that norms are necessary and yet must be exceeded in the name of the future of the human. Perhaps more overtly autobiographical than any previous work, *Undoing Gender* asks what makes a gender livable. Butler's guiding question is one of recognition: "Will the 'human' expand to include me in its reach?" (2).

Not until *Undoing Gender* has Butler seriously addressed the uncertain ontology of the self: the "I" as always already outside of itself, "ec-statically" elsewhere in the intricate web of the social relations that constitute it. With Hegel's notions of desire and recognition underpinning her analysis, Butler presents a self that does not enter the world on its own but is made only by its entrance into culture and is subsequently undone, over and over. For Butler, that means we must think of our being in the world as a being together, never siphoned off from the Other. Consistently, Butler is concerned most with formulating ethical, nonviolent responses to the question posed to the Other: "Who are you?" That means living with an uncomfortable "unknowingness about the Other in the face of the Other that undoes us" (35).

Throughout, Butler theorizes the problem of gender explicitly in terms of recognition and desire. In a work in which she confronts the criticisms of the French philosopher Sylviane Agacinski, who sees alternative kinship models as a monstrosity, and in which Butler responds to Rosi Braidotti's feminist Deleuzism, Butler is also able to pause over the lived lives of gender-deviant persons. Considering Brandon Teena's story, Butler forcefully asserts that, "no anatomy enters gender without being done in some way" (143). She reflects on the life of David Reimer — a person born with a penis that was irreparably damaged in a botched circumcision, and who subsequently underwent "treatment" to become a woman — and interrogates the medico-judicial discourses that decided the futures of transgenders, transsexuals, and intersexed persons. "Longing for Recognition" turns to Jessica Benjamin's recent psychoanalytic work on intersubjective recognition. Butler applauds Ben-

jamin for providing new and useful ways for thinking about the self, gender, and desire that dispense with the binary model of relationality. In the last essay, "Can the Other Philosophy Speak?" Butler reveals her own struggle with philosophy, as a philosopher somehow outside of philosophy but one intimately invested in it. One of the most memorable anecdotes is of a twelve-year-old Butler being asked what she wants to be when she grows up. "A philosopher or a clown" (234). Touché.

Before *Undoing Gender*, Butler never addressed the I or the I (transgender and intersex) in GLBTQI in any sustained way. In turning her gaze toward what is unthinkable even for many gays and lesbians, Butler has continued to push against the boundaries of the field she had a large part in creating. *Undoing Gender* constitutes a thoughtful and provocative response to the new gender politics and elegantly employs psychoanalysis, philosophy, feminism, and queer theory in an effort to pry open the future of the human. Butler carefully attends to contemporary culture, asking questions crucial to GLBTQI studies, ones that are ultimately not only about gays or lesbians but are affirmative of the human and all its possible futures.

ATTICUS SCHOCH ZAVALLETTA  Columbia University

Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*.

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. xii + 215 pp.

There be also other imaginations that rise in men, though waking, from the great impression made in sense: as from gazing upon the sun, the impression leaves an image of the sun before our eyes a long time after; and from being long and vehemently attent upon geometrical figures, a man shall in the dark, though awake, have the images of lines and angles before his eyes: which kind of fancy hath no particular name, as being a thing that doth not commonly fall into men's discourse.

(Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 2)


Next to my copy of Gilles Deleuze's *On the Line* lies *Imagine Otherwise*, invitingly open. The reviewer's personal taste may have something to do with this accident. An academic orientation and obligation too may explain this intertextual disorder coextensive to the transitory chaos of a Sunday afternoon. Yet the contiguity seems more telling than that. A certain force outside the books thus assembled and lined up: a Spirit of the Age, maybe.

"To imagine otherwise is not about imagining as the other, but rather, is about imagining the other differently" (Chuh 9). The beauty of the opening formula is more than skin deep. As promised, the collection of four essays, insightfully con-

textualized by the preface, introduction and conclusion, shows how such adversarial thoughts on the forces of difference can, while retaining their critical agency and cogency, creatively reproduce themselves: without, that is, duplicating their inscribed marginality or parasitism. Each essay rereads familiar conundrums, cases, and tropes, such as “Filipino America” (chapter 1), “Nikkei Internment” (chapter 2), “One Hundred Percent Korean” (chapter 3), and “(Dis)owning America” (chapter 4), while decoding and undoing the regulatory matrices of “Asian American” identity as an epistemological paradigm, constructed and reinforced historically and artificially, by the spatial logic of U.S. nationalism and the commodity logic of U.S.-led global capitalism. Such is the level of critical awareness and sophistication of this text which some readers of ethnic studies, used to anthropological reports, autobiographical narratives, or marketing manuals may find too theoretical, too distant or too strange. But something else indeed is happening. *Imagine Otherwise* exemplifies a generational shift and an evolution in Asian-American studies that began in the early 1980’s, when the theoretical consciousness of modernity awakened or at least disturbed the pastoral and colonial slumber of the expansionist Humanities, including so-called regional studies that draws on the “natural” resources of “native,” that is, “self-subalternized” informants (Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora* [1993]). As a reflexive critique that “emphasizes a necessary reflectiveness of Asian American discourse upon itself (8–9)” and thus “calls for conceiving Asian American studies as a *subjectless discourse*” (9), *Imagine Otherwise*, a critical and self-critical discourse rather than an area study delimited by a subject matter, can be then read as post-Kantian; comparable, in its drive and viewpoint if not scope, to *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason* by Gayatri Spivak (1999), whose incisive deconstruction of identity-based difference Chuh borrows effectively and repeatedly as a point of departure (Chuh 9, 25–26, 28–29, 58, 75, 82, 145–147).

Thus reframed, the puzzle of Asian-American duality and mobility is no longer unique to one individual or to a single group that is perpetually foreign, neither really Asian nor really American. Rather, the puzzle now functions as a case of America. The issue has already turned into, been translated into, the deeper and wider socio-ontological, broadly philosophical question of a *complex* American that now, in the face of blackening, browning, and yellowing, must face, study, and educate the fellow graying whites hassled out of their comfort zone; “then we might write Asian American literatures into the space of theory itself” (18). America and American Studies taken here as a gradationally fluid, transnational plane of existence, on which “professionalized” revolutionaries could and should — as Kandice Chuh suggested at the American Studies Association Convention in 2004 — rewrite their “disciplinary organization.” Chuh’s award-winning strategy (she won the ASA Lora Romero First Book Publication Prize in 2004) of concretizing this space of

enquiry and solidifying it, diversifying it, enriching it, through a specifically and critically Americanist lens is to revisit various legal and literary narratives of Asian Americana, while drawing on theoretical perspectives from American-Continental philosophy, critical race theory, legal theory, and feminist jurisprudential scholarship. Consequently a fresh analysis of Lois Ann Yamanka’s *Bibi’s Hanging*, hitherto read mostly in terms of postcolonialism, rescues the specifically Hawaiian context (chapter 1). Transnationalism passively lodged in racial essentialism, illustrated by the case of Japanese internment during World War II (chapter 2) and that of the Korean diaspora (chapter 3), is brought to the fore, reworked deconstructively into an analytic tool for recognizing the essentially and structurally undecidable spaces of the U.S. nation. Then the final chapter (chapter 4), entitled “(Dis)owning America,” loops back into the twofold critique of Asian-American paradigms and U.S. nationalism by commenting on and theorizing about the twofold analytic strategy itself: the strategy of recovering the new from the old being reworked. Indeed, a different line of thoughts emerging from such a critical repetition, the author claims, “helps us to imagine otherwise in multiple senses” (29).

KYOO LEE  LaGrange College

Marilyn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn,

Myth, Montage, and Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture:

Christine de Pizan’s Epistre Othéa

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003, vii + 3+4 pp., 6 pp., plates

Against the rich historical background of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and the many life-altering historical events that occurred in Western Europe (e.g., the Hundred Years’ War between England and France, the Babylonian Captivity of the papacy, the Black Death, the Peasant’s Revolt, and even a little ice age), Christine de Pizan’s “mirror of princes” (*Epistre Othéa*) is a testament to a burgeoning visual culture in late-medieval France. Taking the illuminations of the *Othéa* as its focus for analysis, *Myth, Montage and Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture* offers a fresh perspective on the study of late-medieval manuscript reading practices in a politically turbulent France by employing modern film theory through a feminist lens.

The two manuscripts of de Pizan’s book were painted and constructed under her watchful eye, and Marilyn Desmond has often analyzed them in earlier books. The first is the duke of Berry’s own personal copy, Bibliothèque Nationale de France fr. 606, and the second is dedicated to the French Queen Isabeau de Bavière, British