



From the Editor's Thinkpad

Like many journals, in determining which essays will appear in a given general issue, *Mosaic's* selection procedure is largely guided by the date at which a submission is ultimately and officially accepted for publication. Similarly, in deciding upon the ordering of the contents, *Mosaic* mainly adheres to chronology, whereby essays dealing with earlier authors or historical periods precede those dealing with later texts and time frames. Undoubtedly, it is such a sense of accidental proximity that lies behind the prevailing notion that general issues are not meant to be read from "cover to cover." Probably herein too lies the reason why general issues are not thought to be candidates for "reviews" in the way that special issues are.

Perhaps, however, it is time to rethink such reasoning and to initiate a new attitude toward the value of general issues by encouraging new ways of approaching such collections. Suppose one were to regard a general issue as posing a particular kind of challenge for the reader, with the challenge lying precisely in the fact that the collection does not have any predetermined prin-

ciple of coordination. Certainly such an attitude would accord with the current emphasis upon the "active" reader, just as an appropriate methodology for such an approach might well be the "orderly disorder" which informs chaos theory. Moreover, it could be argued that the nature of a general issue makes it the ideal reading material in a postmodern climate, foregrounding as it does questions of intentionality, contingency, and immanence. In this light, indeed, what becomes very fascinating is the ironic way that a general issue frequently operates to undermine the very constraints seemingly imposed by adherence to a "chronological" rationale for selecting and ordering of the contents.

In the present general issue, for example, while the ostensible organizing principle would seem to be the historical progression from classic texts and documents in early American literature to 19th-century fiction and folktales to 20th-century film practice and innovative theories of language and canon formation, one might note the way that the concept of "family" seems to serve as a "strange attractor,"

so that the seven essays could be seen to move respectively along the pattern of a) social festivals, b) siblings, c) harems, d) masses, e) cross-class bonding, f) verbal resemblance, and g) generic types. More specifically, one might consider the way that issues of suppression and breaking out in Marty Roth's essay on carnival link up with Laura Getty's discussion of control and escape in folktales and Joseph Cunningham's analysis of the language games and renegade projects of Stein and Wittgenstein. Similarly, one might note how the motif of envy and otherness links together Silvia Tubert's essay on Unamuno's novel and Marsha Bryant's discussion of the nature of the attraction between 1930s documentarists and coal miners. Or again, and with respect to the question of predicting tastes and literary trends, one might observe the way that Richard Salmon's discussion of Henry

James's fate as a popular dramatist begins to dialogue with Willie van Peer's attempt to formulate laws of literary history.

The point of such an exercise is not, of course, merely to identify the cultural matrix which seems to shape current research regardless of the particular historical period or focus but rather to make us more attentive to the opportunities for innovative thinking that arise when one discovers connections where one least expects them. Similarly, the importance of rethinking the nature of general issues lies in the extent to which it alerts us to the way that the very assumption that such issues are not to be read as "wholes" might preclude taking advantage of the intellectual stimulus that comes from chance encounters.

— *Evelyn J. Hinz*

COMING IN SEPTEMBER!
Mosaic's special issue for 1997
The Lure of the Androgyne

Edited with an Introduction by
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