

Introduction

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If the submissions we see coming into *Mosaic* serve as an indicator of academic trends, then the “cultural” is certainly an active discursive site: for instance, *Mosaic* receives many essay submissions from academics working in university departments or programs of cultural studies; cultural memory is a field of keen interest to numerous of our writers and readers; and cultural history issues, after Walter Benjamin, are still very much in debate. The essay that opens this *Mosaic* issue concerns itself with the cultural in a different way: here, with the politics of representation as a central concern, the “cultural” is approached “as a matrix for the social imagination of embodied subjects. The assumption is that these subjects engage in a never-ending process of making significations and being made by signifying systems in local sites of lived networks that fan outward and move inward to include national, transnational, and global interactions.” From this standpoint, as Roy Miki contends in “‘Inside the Black Egg’: Cultural Practice, Citizenship, and Belonging in a Globalizing Canadian Nation,” the “cultural” with which we have perhaps become too familiar, the “cultural” that is the “most visible and most invisible” at once, “needs to be distinguished from ‘culture’ as an achieved state to be possessed, commodified, or otherwise treated as a privileged container that subordinates individual agency to pre-emptive frames of already constituted identities.” For Miki, the “cultural” operates “out of the material exigencies of daily lives” and “can be read as a variable complex of signs, unpredictable in the multiple affects generated in subjects who process them.” Miki turns to Winston C. Kam’s “Inside the Black Egg” as a “social parable” that enables a rethinking of questions of nationhood and citizenship.

Glen Lowry’s “Cultural Citizenship and Writing Post-Colonial Vancouver: Daphne Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* and Wayne Compton’s *Bluesprint*” also enters the field of “cultural citizenship studies” to broach the difficult task of rethinking questions of subjectivity, citizenship, and national identity. Both are challenging essays that work at the

margins, and probe the limits, of such received concepts as “the Canadian nation.” They provide two fitting openings to an issue that, in diverse ways, reads literature as the work of examining power structures: consider Barbara Romanik’s “Transforming the Colonial City: Science and the Practice of Dwelling in *The Calcutta Chromosome*,” for example, and Leonard M. Scigaj’s “Ecology, Egyptology, and Dialectics in Muriel Rukeyser’s ‘The Book of the Dead.’” In Janet Mason Ellerby’s “Untangling the Trauma Knot: Autoethnography and Annie Ernaux’s *Shame*,” the power structures in question are psychoanalytic and therapeutic. For Adam Katz in “Iconoclastic Commitments: Idolatry and Imagination in Cynthia Ozick and Ronald Sukenick,” works of fiction put the Jewish polemic against idolatry to work in broad “epistemological and moral terms, accounting for the relationship between modes of representation and the demand for justice.” Umberto Rossi in “The Alcoholics of War: Experiencing Chemical and Ideological Drunkenness in Emilio Lussu’s *Un anno sull’altipiano*” considers the alcohol abuse depicted in Lussu’s semi-autobiographical novel as contributing to the breakdown of narrative and national structures. Luke Bouvier’s essay, “A Taste for Words: Gastronomy and the Writing of Loss in Brillat-Savarin’s *Physiologie du gout*,” examines Brillat-Savarin’s seminal work as the dramatic staging of a (power) struggle around questions of self-identity and narrative structure. Self-identity—masculine subjectivity—is again in question in Russell J. A. Kilbourn’s “American Frankenstein: Modernity’s Monstrous Progeny,” where, studying a film adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis’s 1991 novel *American Psycho* together with Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Kilbourn argues that “if the hegemonic visibility of contemporary culture, and the nature and the place of the subject within it, are to be understood, then this kind of comparative analysis across genre, medium, discourse, and historical period, becomes unavoidable.” Heta Pyrhönen, in “Bluebeard’s Accomplice: *Rebecca* as a Masochistic Fantasy,” considers masochism as a fantasy that has the power to structure narrative in surprising ways.

As I write this Introduction, early in June 2005, we are at *Mosaic* already thinking and working forward to the final issue of this year, which, despite the winter date of its appearance, will be a special issue on *The Garden*. Look for that in December 2005.