Canadian Multiculturalism
and the Diasporic Critic's (Self-)Location[1]

Smaro Kamboureli

"[D]iasporic consciousness" is perhaps not so much a historical
accident as it is an intellectual reality—the reality of being an
intellectual.

<div align="right">Rey Chow (1993a, 15)</div>

What marks the intellectual task of the diasporic critic? How does she
negotiate her changing subjectivity with her responsiveness to the
various communities—be they diasporic or pedagogical—she is a part
of? How does she straddle the contradictions that appear to frame the
ambivalence of her subject positions? Can she thematize, if not celebrate, the
accomplishments of minority literature without essentializing ethnic identity?
How can she recuperate the histories of diasporic subjectivities without having
her discourse become a vehicle of the pathos and idealization that often
characterize critical discourses on minority literatures? These are large
questions that require careful analysis, but I would like to address them here
only in the specific context of Canadian multiculturalism.

Understanding how diasporic subjectivity is practised today in Canada is
not a simple hermeneutical task. A single theoretical model, however carefully
argued, could not possibly address the historical exigencies of particular
diasporic trajectories. Conversely, it is not just a matter of interpreting,
rendering transparent, as it were, the cultural specificities of Italian, Chinese, or
Trinidadian Canadians and their respective ethnic communities. Nor should it
be a matter of reducing the issues at hand to the "brutal simplicities and
truncated correspondences" (Hall 1996, 288) of the center/margin dialectic.
Instead, it is necessary to proceed dialogically, namely to engage in a critical
"dialogue" as articulated by Michail Bakthin: dialogue not as an exchange of
unique utterances between two or more individuals, but as "communication
between simultaneous differences" (Clark and Holquist 9).[2]

This dialogism, not unlike Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's notion
of *"articulatory practice"* (96),[3] does not consider the formation of the subject to
be autonomous, or independent of the social space the subject inhabits; rather,

it speaks of the contingencies that inform subjectivity. To put it otherwise, the subject is produced by, and itself produces, different social relations. In Laclau and Mouffe's terms, the subject's "articulation is ... a discursive practice which does not have a plane of constitution prior to, or outside, the dispersion of the articulated elements" (109). Far from positing a subject imaged in an opaque fashion, this dialogicality demystifies the formation of subjectivity and exposes, while problematizing, the various forces that constitute its consciousness. Implicit in this approach is the need to do away with representations of diaspora lodged within essentialist theories that assume, for example, "Once a Greek, always a Greek". Along the same lines, the conception of the subject in dialogic and contingent terms also points to the imperative to move beyond the humanistic legacy of binary thinking whereby diasporic subjectivity is assumed to be always already cast as the quintessential site of marginality, locked within a "host" culture invariably configured as the dominant center.

In the same way that multicultural Canada today is both similar to and different from Canada before 1971, the year multiculturalism was introduced as an official policy, the locus of diasporic subjectivity is a discursive site that is marked by the asymmetrical relations linking it to the political and cultural forces that produce it. Thus the postcolonial and multicultural perspectives from which Canada posits itself[4] at present make it necessary that we address diasporic subjectivity without falling prey either to the prevalent binary constructions of minority subjects or to the political and cultural righteousness of "nativism". Equally significant is the need to acknowledge in this context the fictionality of cultural homogeneity fostered by both the Canadian dominant socius and by ethnic communities themselves.

Since ethnicity is an ambivalent concept, at once a cultural synonym of otherness and incommensurability, it would not suffice to pay attention only to the discourse produced by diasporic subjects alone. Because ethnicity is unrepresentable in its totality, it is as important to consider how the diasporic subject is a product of a knitting together of social and cultural factors, including legal realities. When the ethnic subject speaks of and through itself, it does so by interpreting how it has already been constructed, thus speaking back to, or together with, what defines and delimits it as ethnic. Even when it seems to be entirely motivated by a discourse of resistance to the surrounding hegemonic discourses, it cannot distance itself completely from them. Thus diasporic subjectivity is never utterly free and of itself; purity is not an element intrinsic to ethnicity. This does not mean, though, that the diasporic subject becomes entirely alloyed, thus losing its difference, considered as always already lacking agency. If "[i]dentity is always ... a structured representation" (Hall 1997, 174), then the technology of ethnicity, what produces it and is produced by it, is part and parcel of the larger systems within which it operates and/or is contained.

I could not possibly iterate, let alone analyze, in full the historical materiality of Canadian multiculturalism and the various public and cultural

discourses that construct and contain diasporic subjectivities. Instead, I will deal only with those elements of Canada's official multicultural policy that shed some light on how diasporic subjects are defined by the state. Developing an understanding of how the Canadian state attempts to regulate ethnic diversity will help me contextualize my argument as to how the diasporic critic can negotiate the ambivalence that she is constantly confronted with and the discursive sites within which she does so.

I

When the Canadian government introduced multiculturalism as an official policy in 1971, entrenched it in the Charter of Rights in 1982, and tabled the Canadian Multiculturalism Act in 1988, it made substantial proclamations of responsibility concerning ethnic diversity. Bill C-93, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, recognizes the cultural diversity that constitutes Canada, but it does so by practising what I call a sedative politics, a politics that attempts to recognize and manage ethnic diversity in a contained fashion. It pays tribute to diversity and proceeds to suggest ways of celebrating it, thus responding to the clarion call of ethnic communities for recognition. Yet it does so without disturbing the conventional articulation of the Canadian dominant society. Bill C-93, then, sets out to perform the impossible act of balancing differences, thus allowing in the process the state to become self-congratulatory, if not complacent, about its handling of ethnicity.

Even a cursory look at the Canadian media's coverage of diasporic experience or at the catalogues of small and big presses in Canada would testify if not to the popularity at least to the wide circulation of diasporic literature. But the circulatory power of ethnic discourse today is not, I suggest, an unequivocal sign of the success of multiculturalism. Rather, it is a symptom of a culture in which "the contradictions that arise within ... are resolved in ways that assure the continuation of a ruling group's hegemony" (Ryan 11). No matter how we interpret the federal government's legitimation of ethnicity, it is indisputable that the state inscription of multiculturalism, together with some of its implementations, has created the enabling context and supportive ground that facilitated the development of ethnic literary and critical discourses. But the same policy has also given rise to vehement arguments about the representation of ethnicity both inside and outside ethnic sites, hence the need to address the political and cultural exigencies that inform the diasporic critic's task. Multiculturalism may "not [be] by definition good or bad" (Gutmann 172), but the introduction of legislation about it marks a turning point in the Canadian national imaginary.

Because "law ... is fundamentally an interpetive process", because as an interpretive act it also involves a "critique ... of past principles" (Cornell 1136, 1170), law recognizes and acts on the materiality of history. It is a constitutive part of the social technology that produces, and includes, the apparatuses of the discourses that construct and contain us. Multicultural legislation, then,

accounts for the ways in which our knowledge about ourselves and our communities circulates, how ethnicity becomes a discursive sign of differentiating practices. I have examined Bill C-93 in detail elsewhere,[5] but here I would like to draw attention to three of the ways in which it legitimizes diasporic subjectivity: its pan-Canadianism; its definition of ethnic subjects in relation to their ethnic communities; and its emphasis on the "preservation", "enhancement" and "sharing" of these communities' cultural heritage.[6] These are elements that impinge on how diasporic critics are compelled to negotiate their positions as subjects whose task is, partly, to thematize minority cultures within a context which posits multiculturalism as an ideal. If "minority discourse", as Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd argue, "is, in the first instance, the product of damage—damage more or less systematically infliced on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant culture" (4), then it is important to consider how the idealism of the Canadian multiculturalism policy attempts to contain and manage differences.

Legislating on ethnicity signals both a recognition of existing diversities, and a desire to govern, regulate, the phenomenon of disparity. Bill C-93, then, performs what Homi Bhabha calls "the nation as a form of narrative—textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, sub-texts and figurative strategems" (2). Such a nation-narrative, however, does not operate rhetorically alone, as the figures of Bhabha's statement may suggest at first glance. Its rhetoric of articulation is put to the service of the politics of the prescriptive act it performs. Thus the intent to legislate on ethnicity begs a double question of apostrophe. To whom does Bill C-93 address itself? And, as to the referents of ethnicity, is multiculturalism postulated as the supplement to a dominant culture that is persistently occulted by the Bill's discourse? Or is it unwittingly posited as the Canadian culture *par excellence*?

Bill C-93 apostrophizes "all Canadians, whether by birth or by choice". But if "all Canadians" are indeed the subject of apostrophe here, and if the Bill makes multiculturalism the subject of its discourse in that it "reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society", ethnicity strikes a bizarre figure. It appears to be a sign of the equality of "all Canadians" under the letter of the law—a sign of its totalization—but also a strategic gesture.

Treated as a sign of equality, ethnicity loses its differential role. Instead, it becomes a condition of commonality: what "all Canadians" have in common is ethnic difference. As an all-embracing concept, ethnicity ceases functioning as the counternarrative that it has been. No longer a thorn discomfiting Canada's nation-narrative, it affirms that "multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity". It would appear, then, that ethnicity is what sustains Canada's national imaginary: it seems to be "neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself[;] nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The ... problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic" (Bhabha 4). Were this the case, The

Canadian Multiculturalism Act would indeed strive to effect an ideal reality. As it stands, though, it only pays lip service to hybridity.

The Bill endorses, and appropriates, *ethnos* by teasing out a signification of neutrality, inscribing ethnicity within "homogeneous, empty time" (Benjamin 261), a strategy that creates more aporias than it resolves. Canada is conceptualized as a nation-narrative whose mark of difference consists not of hybridity but of yet another kind of commonality: "all Canadians" are members of the same *ethnos,* Canada. This assertion, however, is historically both true and false. It is true in that "all Canadians" are, at least technically, members of equal standing within the state of Canada. But it is false in that it dehistoricizes the social and political conditions that have discriminated against many Canadians, the same conditions which, through colonial history, contributed to the formation of the Canadian state. Moreover, it belies the fact that many Canadians reside within the discursive space of the hyphen. Be it immediately perceptible or not, fully embraced or brimming with ambivalence, the hyphen is the sign of diaspora. A figure at once of double allegiances and "reciprocal displacement" (Radhakrishnan xiii), the hyphen does not necessarily suggest an identity crisis. Instead, it dramatizes the disjunctiveness of history, and the composite genealogies of the self, precisely what the diasporic critic's task entails. By instituting a technology of ethnicity whose performativity inheres in its representational tropes, the Bill recognizes and advocates a sort of pan-Canadianism through a universalizing rhetoric evidenced by the recurrence of such phrases as "all members of Canadian society". By releasing "all Canadians" from the specificity of their histories, this legal act seeks to overcome difference rather than confronting incommensurability. Belying its intent to address systemic inequities, it executes an emancipatory gesture in the name of homogeneity and unity.

This process is the result of Bill C-93 functioning as a speech act reliant on legal positivism. In legal positivism, as Cornell argues, there is "an implicit belief that there is usually a plain and obvious meaning to the words that make up the precedents, the statuses, and the regulations". Thus "law rests on the acceptance of the 'master rule of recognition' which ... [reflects] the certitude of the law ... [as being] dependent on the self-evidence of its meaning" (Cornell 1137). It would, then, be too easy to argue that the Bill simply reproduces what it attempts to remedy; instead, it overdetermines ethnicity. Thus it mimics not so much the desire of diasporic Canadians to be treated with equality and dignity as it does the dominant society's tendency to regulate difference.

What is at stake concerns how the policy proposes to manage its supposed generalized notion of ethnicity by practising a restricted-economy approach. That is, it sets out to apply to ethnicity a proceduralism which is informed by the privileged values of conservation and restraint. It is hardly coincidental that the two central sections of the Bill, "Multiculturalism Policy of Canada" and "Implementation of the Multiculturalism Policy of Canada", are marked by the repetition of "preservation", "enhancement", and "sharing".

More than anything else about the policy, this triad of concepts has been embraced as a facile interpretation of multiculturalism at the same time that it has elicited vigorous criticism. Every time these concepts appear in this legislating act, they constitute a discursive site where ethnicity is at once hailed as a subject position and as the name of Canadian marginality. It is a site where multiculturalism is held together as a manifestation of legal positivism but also where it falls apart, and hence is fraught with ambivalence. Thus mobilized by the law itself, ethnic subjectivity emerges as a condition inhabiting the same discursive site in which it was previously silenced and discriminated against. Because representation is always the product of codes and values that are historically determined, it is inevitable that the enunciation of the ethnic subject take place only within the same codes that have produced the law itself.

The policy may grant subjectivity with one hand while suspending it with the other, but this does not mean that we must consider ethnic subjectivity as permanently reiterating the conditions of its historical marginality. Because the epistemic violence manifest here affects both the law and the ethnic subject, it becomes clear that the ethnic subject's agency is constructed "in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose" (Butler 1997, 382). The discursive site where at once the law attempts to discipline ethnicity and the ethnic subject must inscribe its resistance is found at the conjuncture of this recognition and misrecognition, more specifically in how the "preservation", "enhancement", and "sharing" of ethnic heritage are advocated by Bill C-93. "Preservation" endows the ethnic subject with a stability that belies the incommensurability of identity. Consistent with the other contradictions embedded in the Bill, the insistence on "preservation" affirms the history of ethnic subjectivity as a differential sign, but it does so by appropriating that difference. While no subject can exist outside the history that has produced it, history is imaged here as a finished product—for how else could it be "preserved"? Implicit in this image of history is also the notion of ethnicity as a permanent condition, a permanence which disguises the law's hailing act, while also misstating the impact and discontinuities effected by diaspora.

The policy then inserts a break in historical continuity by locating ethnicity at the limits of dominant history, but it also posits history as a totalization "dependent on a notion of chronology which assumes a synchronic homogeneous notion of time" (Young 1990, 46). Both gestures point to what Spivak calls "'[r]eified' history", "our monumentalized national-cultural history of origin" (1997, 471). "Preservation" of ethnicity, then, can only function, to use Bhabha's expression, through "a syntax of forgetting", a syntax that pays no heed to historical discontinuities, that forgets that a series of events does not always belong to the same temporality. Keeping in mind the Bill's pan-Canadianism, multiculturalism then advocates the co-existence of different, unrelated, and totalized histories within a homogeneous time. Hardly a plausible proposition.

In this context, accepting the Canadian multicultural policy as an ideal,

as, for example, Linda Hutcheon does,[7] amounts not only to discouraging us to probe into the ways in which the Canadian state attempts to regulate ethnic diversity, but also to ignoring the contingencies that inform diasporic subjectivity. This is "idealism as the act of idealizing—of envisioning and asserting goodness and perfection in the thing or person perceived" (Chow 1993b, 10). To idealize Bill C-93 would mean looking at it only from the perspective of those putting it in place, adopting, as it were, their gaze. But since this is a gaze that has displayed a remarkable consistency in objectifying and containing Canadian Others, identification with that gaze would not be an instance of mere complicity, but, rather, an instance of what Slavoj Zizek calls "symbolic identification". Symbolic identification marks "the point from which we are observed", the point "which dominates and determines the image", which we idealize, identify with (108). Because of its structural function, namely that this image does not manifest itself in its entirety, what we identify with is "inimitable, ... eludes resemblance" (109). We idealize it precisely because it seduces us with the performativity which elides its history, which reveals it to be only a positive image. It is because of this factor that "every political demand is always caught in a dialectics in which it aims at something other than its literal meaning" (112). And for this same reason The Canadian Multiculturalism Act pretends to offer us a model of diversity that exceeds its limits while also denying the liminality of dominant as well as minority subjectivities.

II

That "[i]dentity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think", that it is "'a production'" (Hall 1990, 222), has become the *locus classicus* of many discussions of identity and ethnicity today. Nevertheless, that was certainly not the case in Canada in the early 90's—an example, among other things, of how Canadian multiculturalism, despite some of its enabling functions, does not effect an ideal solution to the negotiation of ethnic diversity. The early 90's was the time of the presumed certainties of political correctness, a *"politics of blame"* (Said 45) and vociferous advocacies, which created at once the excitement that comes from feeling one belongs to a "revolutionary moment" (Hall 1996, 288) and the discomfiture that accompanies the donning of ideological straitjackets. The political fervor of those days is, thankfully, gone, but the legacy of positionality still remains a crucial issue, one that exceeds, while remaining responsive to, the particularities of that historical moment. In what follows, I wish to deal with the politics of self-location while also questioning what has become a political imperative in some circles, namely that only by positioning ourselves will our arguments gain credibility, that only by labeling ourselves will we locate ourselves securely within history. But constructing our discourses into mirrors of ourselves does not promise to do away with the persistent question of representation. Nor does adopting the model of ethnic subjectivity promulgated by official multiculturalism promise to

create a position of comfort. The logic of self-location is, it seems to me, as fraught with problems as the positions of alleged neutrality and liberalism are.

Working as self-conscious diasporic critics means, above all, remaining aware of operating from within the debris of Western discourse, but also within the discursive space of power systems. Whatever our ideological and philosophical allegiances as diasporic critics, our task is largely informed by a crisis in identity. This is a crisis that follows what Gramsci identified as "the crisis of authority", namely the pervasive disillusionment with political myths of progress that characterize our post-Eurocentric era. Jürgen Habermas is right when he sees Eurocentrism and the hegemony of Western cultures as "catchwords for a struggle of recognition" (119), but calling them that does not change the fact that it is the fall of Eurocentrism that has caused not only the large cultural paradigm shifts we are witnessing at present, but also the radical changes taking place in academe today.

The relentless questioning of old orthodoxies; the rise and simultaneous problematizing of such discourses as those of modernity, feminism, multiculturalism and postcoloniality; the rhetoric of accountability and positionality; canon debates and curricular reform—these are some of the large issues that speak of what I would call the pathology of the humanities today, and by implication of humanism. The psycho-medical metaphors of, say, Tom Nairn's and Bhabha's theories—the pathology of the body national, the neurosis of the state—often collapse into the literal references of their tenors. Reading "the social body as a process" (Burroughs and Ehrenreich 3) is no longer engaging in figurative speech. As Mary Douglas says, "[t]he human body communicates information for and from the social system in which it is a part" (83). No matter on which side of these debates we situate ourselves, as diasporic critics we remain painstakingly aware of the historical variabilities that constitute us as cultural subjects, and the belated urgency with which we must address them as teachers and writers.

Thus the crisis facing the diasporic critic today is a "crisis [that] consists precisely", as Gramsci put it, "in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (276). No one critic or culture could singlehandedly resolve these "morbid symptoms", precisely what exposes as flawed the idealist perspective of Canadian multiculturalism. Nevertheless, what such diasporic theorists as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Rey Chow and Kobeman Mercer call "the emerging cultures of hybridity" (Mercer 3) promises to offer one of the most "crucial and vital efforts to answer the 'possibility and necessity of creating a new culture': *so that you can live*" (Mercer 4).

III

As theorists and critics of postcolonial and ethnic writing we have devised ingenious and eloquent tropes by which we account for the rifts in identity, for the ways in which we try to negotiate who we write for, and how we address

otherness in our discourses. Irony, inherent contradictions, distanciation, autobiography, reflexivity, ambivalence, *métissage*, filiation, hybridity—all these figures, and others like them, pay tribute to our deliberate attempts to problematize our academic and writerly conditions, to position ourselves in the midst of our academic communities and in between the communities we write about. Still, in my life-narrative as a Canadian citizen who is also a member of the Greek diaspora, I have found it difficult to practise what Bhabha calls "a shared measure of social synchronicity" (2). Negotiating the historicity of my present moment and the materiality of history, namely "routing" (Radhakrishnan 35) the personal through the collective and vice-versa, is not a process I could resolve once and for all. Not only are these modalities that inform subjectivity contestatory by default, but the meaning and value we attach to them are maleable precisely because they are responsive to new cultural events and political crises.

During the early 90's then, when multiculturalism was earnestly attacked either as lacking any political efficacy or as an aberrant interpretation of the liberal values considered to be the foundation of the Canadian polity, it became apparent to me that the material signs of my body—including my whiteness (the whiteness of a southern European), my accent, and stress signs—were symptomatic of the condition of the social body I was trying to understand as a diasporic critic. Through the official discourse of multiculturalism and through the politics of positionality at the time, I had become a medium of representation. I realized at that stage that what Judith Butler says about bodies, namely that their "materiality [must] be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect" (1993, 2) applies as much to the social body with which I remain concerned as to my own social construction as a diasporic subject.

"Practices of representation", as Hall says, "always implicate the positions from which we speak or write—the positions of *enunciation*" (1990, 222). Acknowledging from the start the four most frequently cited factors determining one's subjectivity—gender, race, class, and diaspora—could best provide me with an "imaginary coherence" (Hall 1990, 224): they would locate me unequivocally within a position that would be characterized, at best, as ambivalent. Although my race and class would put me close to the "center" of things, there could be no doubt that they, when combined with my gender and diasporic experience, would also modify that "centrality", would sway my position toward a certain experience of "marginality". I would frame myself within these categories only if I assumed them to be stable and coherent, internally unvaried. But they are not.

Positioning myself, then, in these terms and fashion does not promise to frame my role as diasporic critic productively. If anything, it promises, instead, to reveal my complicity with the kind of "ethnic absolutism" (Gilroy)—once an immigrant, always an immigrant—that I have always found to be reductive. Self-fashioned authenticity can easily take the shape of a straitjacket that is not that

different, either ideologically or structurally, from the social attitudes that make diasporic subjects Other to their host societies.

As Asha Varadharajan writes,

> The reflection on subject positions has become unavoidable for the sympathetic Western critic who chooses to engage with the other without presumption or patronage. The danger of this timely recognition of a perhaps inescapable ethnocentrism is that it could be turned easily enough into an excuse for inaction. This conscientious refusal to speak for those whom the discourse of Empire designates as other would become a way of absolving oneself of the responsibility for the brutality of history. Since the Western critic is inevitably implicated in the history of colonization, any intervention on behalf of the other, it could be argued, will be contaminated by that history and therefore futile. The process of self-scrutiny would then translate itself into consolation for the wrongs of the past and into paralysis in the present. (xvi)

Varadharajan proceeds to show that the "native informant is equally subjected to these problems" (xvii). And, in the case of a diasporic critic like myself, these problems are further amplified by the hybridity of my position.

The pressure I feel to position myself as at once a Canadian and a diasporic critic, instead of resolving my tensions, kept pointing to various layers of my subjectivity, thus revealing my identity to be unsettled, continuously disrupted, determined by different alliances on different occasions. Is this a symptom of the incommensurability of identity or is it a sign of my being co-opted, a symptom of fickleness (capricious or not) in my politics? Whether this kind of pressure is the result of intellectual exigencies that come from within Western theory or specific calls from my Canadian peers at conferences and other such social gatherings to position myself, it takes on the image of disciplinary action. The more I fail to see the salience of giving credibility to my critical discourse by locating myself in precise (and presumably authentic) terms, the more frustrated I feel because of the social and academic pressures to do so. For the location I am expected to inhabit or am allocated to seems to me to be synonymous, on the one hand, with the reification of the categories of race and ethnicity and, on the other, with a withdrawal from the arena of *critical* debates which are themselves seen, more often than not, not as discursive practices but as stances.

The disciplinary, hence totalizing, intent that informs the gestures of self-location might be seen as an instance of restricted economy which articulates historical facts while bracketing the eventualities of their contingency. Moreover, it is posited, too, as a curative device, one which, by its very existence, attempts to avoid or eliminate, at the very least control, the presumed

infection of one's subjectivity by that of an/other. Were unalloyed subjectivities unequivocal entities, such preventive gestures would be necessary. But if subjectivity is the irresolute result, as I believe it to be, of the interlocking of filial as well as of frequently mutilating practices, then reflexivity, as Varadharajan argues, "reveals itself as an inadequate comprehension of the functioning of ideology: it assumes that there are no chinks in the armor of the system and fails to recognize that the processes of both colonization and decolonization were and will remain incomplete" (xviii). Thus the implicit narrative in the politics of self-location, namely that we can only speak for ourselves, often leads to what Linda Alcoff calls a "'retreat' response" (17). This ranges from strategic silence, or self-inflicted silence, to other forms of retreat that renounce advocacy and hence relinquish the intention to incur change.

IV

What then determines the role of the diasporic critic? How does she move inside the cultural and political syntax of the communities in which she participates? And what is her intellectual task?

Given her hybridity, the diasporic critic might function as a "native informant" on a double front. As a diasporic subject, she might easily claim the "authenticity" of her ethnicity. She would thus speak with a degree of authority on what constitutes otherness as a double sign: a sign of (her) minoritization as well as a sign of (her) difference articulated in positivistic terms. As a Canadian subject, she might occupy a different kind of authenticity, that encompassing the presumed cohesiveness of the dominant position. She could then employ this authenticity strategically in order to critique the dominant system from within or, possibly, embrace it with irony, even complicity.

Both configurations of the diasporic critic as "native informant", though, imply ideological contradictions. "[S]potlighting", as Chow says, "the speaker's own sense of alterity and political righteousness" does not automatically "turn powerlessness into 'truth'" (1993a, 13 and 12). By positing herself as ethnic, the diasporic critic practises a "self-dramatization", what Chow calls "tak[ing] the route of self-subalternization, which has increasingly become the assured means to authority and power" (1993a, 13). Conversely, were the diasporic critic to relinquish her claim to ethnicity by adopting a seemingly neutral position, she would hardly have any choice but to resort to a kind of liberal pluralism or relativism, thus facing further entanglement with the forces that demand that she assume a stable position. In either case, the diasporic critic would suffer detrimental effects from the very act of self-positing. Aligning herself with one *or* the other position, she would perform her declared identity while forgetting the incommensurability of history.

As Trent Schroyer says in his foreword to Adorno's *The Jargon of Authenticity*, "[d]ialectically conceived 'subjectivity' is historically formed and yet not reducible to historical determinations" (xii). There are always elements that are unassimilable, that exceed the binary structure within which the

diasporic critic has traditionally situated herself. Thus the pressure to take a position becomes a form of intellectual swindling, of giving in to the "jargon of authenticity" that Adorno calls "a professional illness" (18). The authenticities inscribed in each position are complicitous with each other in their performativity. As Adorno suggests, the jargon of self-positionality aspires to erase the distance between the two positions by representing the critics either as "sharers in higher culture" or as "individuals with an essence of their own" (18). The two positions are "mediated through each other in frightful ways. And since they are synthetically prepared, that which is mediated has become the caricature of what is natural" (19).

Predictably, we can understand the diasporic critic as a Janus-faced figure. She is at once Canadian and ethnic. But this doubleness does not necessarily present her with a choice that will resolve the either/or condition of her hybridity. Like the Janus-faced figure that Bhabha employs to talk about linguistic ambivalence and national discourses, the diasporic critic's twinned figure is characterized by "prodigious doubling" (1990, 3). There is no symmetry between the particularities of the diasporic critic's background and her present condition, no way (and for that matter no reason) to reduce once and for all the complexity that informs either position. As her ethnic background cannot be reduced to a stable and essentially "true" past, so her national identity as Canadian resists simplification. Ethnicity is not a condition that she possesses naturally, nor is her ethnic identity fixed and stable in her birthplace or in relation to her ancestral origins. Her ethnicity is determined as much by her intellectual and life trajectories as by the Canadian state's and Canadian society's construction of the national imaginary and multiculturalism. Were the diasporic critic to speak from the dominant perspective, thus adopting a Canadian point of view (assuming, for a moment, that Canadian is to be exclusively construed as a sign of dominance), she would at once announce her right to do so and run the risk of eliding the particularity of her diasporic perspective. The objective is neither to construct an opposition nor to effect a balance between these positions; instead, the aim is to produce a space where her hybridity is articulated in a manner that does not cancel out any of its particularities.

These particularities, however oppositional they may seem, are related through contextualities and historical contingencies. They are the constituting elements of the *mise en scène* of diasporic subjectivity, a scene that is constantly under revision in a *mise en abyme* fashion. Indeed, these elements apostrophize each other in the way Derrida suggests when he defines apostrophe as "[a] genre and a tone. The word—apostrophizes— speaks of the words addressed to the singular one, a live interpellation (the man of discourse or writing interrupts the continuous development of the sequence, abruptly turns toward someone, that is, something, addresses himself to you), but the word also speaks of the address to be detoured" (4). Such detours are essential to the diasporic critic's vigilance with regard to both her "shuttling self" (Spivak 1993, 63) and the

historical modalities that inform her hybridity.

In the same way that hybridity must be understood not only as the distinguishing characteristic of diasporic subjects but also as a constituent element of the culture they inhabit, so apostrophe as gesture and modality addresses the diasporic critic but is also that critic's address to her culture. It is a gesture that speaks against cultural relativism, that is, against the anthropological view of culture as an organic and cohesive whole. It is also a gesture which should point, given today's global developments, toward a radically revised concept of nationalism. We may live in a postcolonial era, as many insist, but globalism and certain kinds of transnationalism may very well prove to be more than a political and economic phase, possibly even the antecedents of neocolonialism. If the diasporic critic's task includes a foregrounding of hybridity, it should also include vigilance against constructing that hybridity as "a closet idealism" which may "reduce the complex givenness of material reality to its symbolic dimensions" (Cheah 302). Thus an acknowledgment of hybridity does not signal a resolution of the politics and historical materiality of diaspora. It must be accompanied by the will to question the metanarratives of development and progress that accede to hybridity. Lest I be misunderstood, let me say I am not arguing against development in the sense of practices designed, for example, to improve the conditions of ethnic laborers or women immigrants, or programs geared against systemic discrimination. Rather, I am talking about the need to continue questioning the "enlightened" reason in whose name a society, usually mobilized by the juridicopolitical agendas of the state, sets a course toward the future as a means of salvaging itself from history. As prosperity does not guarantee happiness, so progress does not necessarily transform history. As Rudolph Vierhaus puts it, "[t]he suspicion is that progress brings with it immeasurable dangers and that a stage has been reached wherein the social costs have outstripped the gains" (332). Given this state of affairs, what then is the responsibility of the diasporic critic?

V

"[O]ne way of being responsible to the thinking of responsibility", Spivak writes, is "that whatever is formalizable remains in a sort of intermediary stage. ... Full formalization itself must be seen not as impossible but as an experience of the impossible, or a figure for the impossible, which may be to say the 'same thing'" (1994, 22). It is through this spirit of responsibility that we can appreciate what is constructive about the irreducibly ambivalent condition of the diasporic critic. Spivak is persuasive when she observes that "(the thinking of) responsibility is also (a thinking of) contamination" (23), that a "'responsible' thought describes 'responsibility' ... as attending to the call of that irreducible fact" (26).

There are two ways in which I understand "that irreducible fact". Being responsible does not mean feigning disinterestedness in the name of academic

objectivity, what Spivak, like others, rightly defines as "an unacknowledged partisanship to a sort of universalist humanism" (20); nor does being responsible entail the obligation (this, too, part of the humanist legacy) of furnishing solutions to problems, of putting into action a progressivist vision, thus judging the critic's task by the efficacy of his conclusions or the alternate visions he offers. This is not merely a case of the "end" testifying to the validity of the "means", but rather of the "end" being beyond our horizon of understanding. Envisaging a progressivist "end" to the cultural and social malaise of today's society may sound like a worthwhile and heroic project. Nevertheless, it is the kind of project which, I believe, attempts to transgress what is coercive about history, to exit from history instead of employing history against itself; it forfeits the reality of contamination and the perils implicit in emancipatory discourses. As Radhakrishnan writes,

> In our attempts to change the subject on the basis of what we hold to be good and desirable, and moral and politically correct, we cannot afford to forget how this very blueprint or telos that we are acting upon could be potentially wrong and repressive, even barbaric. For example, did humanity always know that racism is wrong and sexism abhorrent, that colonialism and imperialism are illegitimate and unconscionable bodies of knowledge, that homophobia and normative heterosexuality are unacceptable? Briefly, did we always know that our norms have a flip side that is objectionable? Is not the very moment of the emancipatory critique the expression of a contradiction? (20)

Practising responsibility with the intention of leading to teleological narratives in the name of progress is definitely not the answer to the questions concerning self-location, diasporic identities, and accountability. While responsibility is, in part, a response to urgency, to the states of emergency Walter Benjamin talks about, being responsible does not promise a smooth transfer from the position of witness to that of activist.

Instead, being responsible, in my understanding, means negotiating our position in relation to the knowledge we have and to the knowledge we lack. It means practising "negative pedagogy", "inhabiting . . that space where knowledge becomes the obstacle to knowing" (Johnson 166 and 182). Responsibility, then, entails the recognition that what we know may already be contaminated by what we do not know, and vice versa. Thus knowledge is no longer conceived as an object which is already valorized and therefore worthy of remaining in circulation. Rather, negative pedagogy redefines the object of knowledge as nothing other than the process leading toward ignorance. If we are responsible enough to admit that knowledge is at once what fills in gaps and itself creates gaps, what both "enlightens" and destroys, then knowledge produces ignorance, the exact opposite of what we may call positive pedagogy,

teaching as a teleological narrative.

This is what Barbara Johnson, Shoshana Felman, Barbara Freedman, Robert Con Davies, Rey Chow, Gayatri Spivak and R. Radhakrishnan, among others, argue in their different, and often contradictory, ways. Although not all of these arguments have emerged within a diasporic context, the relevance of negative pedagogy to a multicultural society holds the promise of our beginning to address history and the historicity of our present moment *responsibly*, without, that is, maintaining the illusion of innocence or of non-complicity. Whether we call this mode of being and learning negative pedagogy or "oppositional pedagogy" (Freire, con Davies) or "teaching terminable or interminable" (Felman), or "learned ignorance" (Freedman), or "deconstructive", "critical" and "radical pedagogy" (Radhakrishnan),[8] there are some recurring elements in how responsibility materializes in this kind of practice.

This kind of pedagogy thematizes not only the object of knowledge, but also the method of learning and unlearning inherited truths. It is thus self-reflexive with regard to its methods as well as with regard to the positions of teacher and student. In fact, its self-reflexiveness intends to disturb the binary relation, and its accompanied hierarchical model, of pedagogue and student. Since one of the objectives of this method of learning is to radically question knowledge and its modes of production, the teacher can no longer occupy an axiological position: teacher *and* students alike become learners.

Learner does away with *and*, a paradoxical word signaling at once conjunction and separation, the two conditions that conventionally mark the teacher/student dyad, whose dynamics are structurally not that different from the center/margin dialectic. In its traditional usage in education and sociology, learner is employed to suggest the democratization of teaching, yet it retains the stamp of elaborate and careful attempts to measure success and failure, to quantify pedagogical results. In these contexts, learners are conceived, more often than not, as receptacles of knowledge-as-product; they are to be taught through devices tailored to serve knowledge which, although not always axiomatically conceived, is carefully packaged as a "terminable" object with transparent value and truth.

The learner I have in mind, though, is not to be considered as part of a "teaching machine" (Spivak 1993), territorialized and therefore controlled through the desire-machine of the state, the learner as a construction of rampant empiricism that operates through various guises of benevolence. Rather, negative pedagogy creates the conditions for a learner defined not only as someone who desires to learn, but also as someone who learns how to desire. Desire as an intransitive verb.

The primary task of this learner is to decode the guises in which knowledge is made manifest. Thus he is resolutely situated within history, including the history of pedagogy as a teaching practice and as the disciplinary methods employed by the state apparatus. As Radhakrishnan remarks, this

learner's "'subject position' in history precludes the possibility of generating ex nihilo a pedagogical method identical with her desire" (111-12). What this means for learners is that they do not just learn knowledge as a specifically designated object, but learn how knowledge is produced, thus exposing the power relations usually concealed behind the force of knowledge. This pedagogy, then, deals with a different kind of knowledge, the kind that traces the relationship of knowledge to ideology, and vice versa. Far from simply being the task of the diasporic critic, practising responsibility through this pedagogical perspective is one way in which all members of a given community, especially those in the academe, must begin to come to terms with.

University of Victoria

Notes

1. This essay was written with the support of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant. Part of my discussion on the Canadian Multicultural Act appears in my essay, "The Technology of Ethnicity: Canadian Multiculturalism and the Language of Law", in *Multicultural States: Rethinking difference and identity*, ed. David Bennett (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

2. See, for example, Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson, intr. Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

3. On this point, see also Chow 1993a, 94.

4. Whereas most Canadian critics do not hesitate to call Canada a postcolonial state, as far as the First Nations peoples in Canada are concerned, the Canadian reality has not yet advanced to a postcolonial stage. The recent reactions to the negotiations reached between the Nisga'a Nation and the government of the province of British Columbia about land claims and self-government (July 1998) are an example of the colonial ideology that First Nations peoples are still battling against. As Lee Maracle puts it, "[u]nless I was sleeping during the revolution, we have not had a change in our condition, at least not the Indigenous people of this land. Postcolonialism presumes we have resolved the colonial condition, at least in the field of literature. Even here we are still a classical colony" (13). See Maracle, "The Post-Colonial Imagination", *Fuse* 16 (Fall 1992): 12-15. Similarly, The Canadian Multiculturalism Act (tabled in 1988) specifically excludes aboriginal peoples from its mandate of "preserving" and "enhancing" the heritage of ethnic communities.

5. See the chapter, "The Ruse of Sedative Politics", in my book *Scandalous Bodies: Canadian Literature of the Diaspora in English and Its Contexts*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press, 1999.

6. All quotations not followed by page references are from Bill C-93.

7. See Hutcheon's Introduction to the anthology which she co-edited with Marion Richmond, *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1-16.

8. It is not my intention here to collapse the complex differences among these theorists and teachers, but rather to draw attention to what I perceive to be their common concern: the need to question the means in which we disseminate knowledge and the kind of knowledge taught. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Robert Con Davis, "A Manifesto for Oppositional Pedagogy:

Freire, Bourdieu, Merod, and Graff", in *Reorientations: Critical Theories and Pedagogies*, eds. Bruce Henricksen and Thaïs E. Morgan (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Shoshana Felman, "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable", *Yale French Studies* 63 (1982): 21-44; and Barbara Freedman, "Pedagogy, Psychoanalysis, Theatre: Interrogating the Scene of Learning", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.2 (Summer 1990): 174-186. See References for the other references.

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