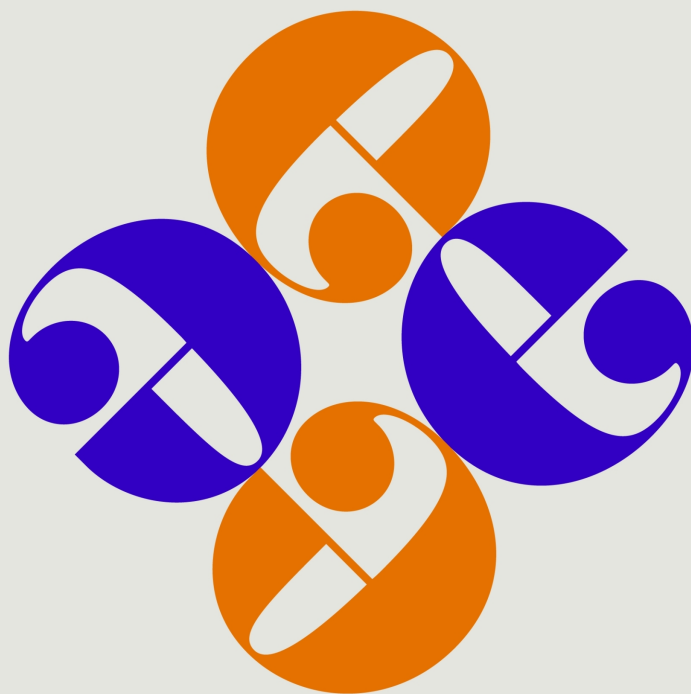


Ewa B. Luczak / Justyna Wierchowska / Joanna Ziarkowska
(eds.)

In Other Words

Dialogizing Postcoloniality, Race, and Ethnicity



encounters

The Warsaw Studies in English Language Culture,
Literature, and Visual Arts

Volume 2

PETER LANG

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Edited by Marek Golebiowski and Justyna Wierzchowska

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Introduction. In Other Words: An Alternative to the Post- in Post-colonialism

Though there is much debate regarding its precise definition, post-colonialism is generally understood as an interdisciplinary field of study, which includes a body of literature, art, and criticism that gives expression to formerly subjugated or subordinated subjects and their histories, cultures and perspectives, and positions itself in opposition to colonial rule, its master narrative, and its cultural legacy. According to some scholars, post-colonial writing and art can only be produced in the wake of independence; yet others argue that oppositional art produced within a colonial context—such as Indigenous, Native or First Nation expressions—may also be considered postcolonial. Although some critics argue for a more expansive definition, which acknowledges that not all post-colonial expressions are counter-colonial and takes account of pre-modern colonial ventures, resistance art comprises the preponderance of works defined as postcolonial and most tend to highlight modern examples of colonialism.

Colonialism—and the consequent phenomena of the plantation, the reservation and the ghetto—provides a connective point of reference for post-colonialists, which focuses on patterns, affinities and commonalities, as opposed to historical, cultural and geographical variables. Nevertheless, the term post-colonial is a *blurry*, heterogeneous, and sometimes contradictory or confusing analytical category or concept that has—like the term identity¹—borne a huge theoretical burden. It has been applied liberally as a unifying theoretical paradigm, which (to borrow Stuart Hall's phrase) imposes *an imaginary coherence* on the experience of colonialism and consequently elides the singularities that distinguish vastly different experiences and forms of imperialism and their attendant ideologies and modes of thought.²

As Nicolas Bourriaud observes in *The Radicant*, a groundbreaking meditation on post-modernism and contemporary art, the troubles begin with the prefix post- as it generates “a mode of thought” that inevitably yokes the present and the future to a past that presumably “cannot be surpassed.” Post-, Bourriaud continues, is “inherently reliant upon, even captive to, [its] origin,” and thereby inadvertently reifies and reiterates the very thing it purports to counter—in the case of this particular study, the colonial past and its legacy. It unites “the most

1 See Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper's seminal essay “Beyond ‘Identity’,” *Theory and Society* 29:1 (2000): 1-48.

2 See “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 224.

disparate domains of thought within the experience of a single undifferentiated afterward," which consequently has a kind of discursive leveling effect.³

Inspired by Bourriaud, I join the dialogue regarding post-colonialism by suggesting an approach to colonialism and its aftermath that emerges from an era defined by the post-. In his analysis, Bourriaud opts for the prefix alter-, which he claims points to "the end of the culture of the post-." Derived from the Latin *alter* or other and associated with the possibility of the alternative, alter- implicitly acknowledges variation and "multiplicity."⁴ "More precisely," Bourriaud observes, "[alter-] designates a different relationship, with time no longer the aftermath of an historical moment, but the infinite extension of the kaleidoscopic play of temporal loops in the service of a vision of history as a spiral, which advances while turning back on itself."⁵ In other words, the concept of the alter-colonial that I am prosing, and which this collection embodies, allows for the idea that the experience of colonialism or its aftermath is relational, contingent, and variable at the same time that it is localized, historically specific, and temporally located. It is a processual, active analytical concept that avoids the limitations and reifying connotations of post-colonial, and acknowledges that ideology and culture are on a continuum, which necessarily connotes a process of translation, re-inscription, and/or transformation.

All forms of cultural translations, re-inscriptions and transformations are (to borrow Bourriaud's terminology) *practice[s] of displacement*. The act of transfer that occurs "sets in motion" colonial signs that were once "strictly codified" and apparently "fixed." In the process, the writer or artist "reject[s] any source code that would assign a single origin to works or texts," and thereby confirms the indeterminacy of any code or sign and consequently "dilutes" and destabilizes its origin.⁶ As the alter-colonial writer or artist undergoes the practice of translating, re-inscribing and/or transforming the colonial sign, s/he also encounters newness and the possibility of the alternative. Although the work of art necessarily remains "inserted" in an historical or temporal chain, the idea of the new and the alternative suggests cultural exchange and the potential for a fortuitous intermixing and interplay of existing signs and codes. In the act of destabilizing signs, the alter-colonial writer or artist extends the meaning of, or poses an alternative to the source code in a non-linear continuum that spirals back yet never completely returns to the point of origin.

Bourriaud's approach is akin to that of Cuban theorist Antonio Benítez-Rojo. In his analysis of the Caribbean, the latter draws upon the basic tenets of Chaos theory in order to establish the resonant elements that define the Caribbean experience of colonialism yet simultaneously distinguish its impact in different parts

3 Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Lucas and Sternberg, 2009), 183.

4 Ibid., 183.

5 Ibid., 186.

6 Ibid., 131.

of the region. “Within the (dis)order that swarms around what we already know of as Nature,” Benítez-Rojo notes:

it is possible to observe dynamic states or regularities that repeat themselves globally . . . Chaos looks toward everything that repeats, reproduces, decays, unfolds, flows, spins, vibrates, seethes . . . Thus Chaos provides a space in which the pure sciences connect with the social sciences, and both of them connect with art and the cultural tradition . . . for the reader who is attuned to Chaos, there will be an *opening* [my emphasis] upon unexpected corridors allowing passages from one point to another in the labyrinth.⁷

Although dynamic states or regularities repeat themselves globally, Benítez-Rojo continues, these recurrent features manifest themselves in a practice of repetition that “necessarily implies difference” and variation.

* * *

In Other Words: Dialogizing Postcoloniality, Race and Ethnicity—a select gathering of essays first presented at the International Conference on Postcolonial Discourse, Ethnicity, and Race in the United States: Past and Present, which took place in Warsaw, Poland in May 2010—provides such an *opening*. In its totality, it reveals a complex and eclectic approach to colonial and what I will term throughout this introduction alter-colonial cultural production. Although it is not organized according to specific thematic sections, the collection opens with a series of related essays that explore the work of writers or artists who have retrieved, reproduced, and transformed cultural narratives and signs that predate intervention in an effort to resist displacement or, in some instances, prevent historical erasure. Shelley Armitage’s “Postmodern and Native Identities: Restor(y)ing Place in Hawai’i” examines the movement to *restore a sense of place* in oral and visual traditions in Hawai’i amid the 1990s push for sovereignty. Contemporary Hawaiian writers, for example, began to use pidgin, as opposed to English, as they recuperated local stories, which they inflected with contemporary meanings. In the same vein, artists such as Anne Kapulani Landgraf, aimed to defy the long-term consequences of imperialist imagery with a series of photographs of Hawaiian sacred places formerly depicted in colonial travel literature as romanticized ‘landscape’. Titling her photographs with original Hawaiian place names, the artist parallels the past and the present and thereby re-inscribes the stories, legends and chants associated with these particular places through the interplay of image and word. Citing bell hooks

7 Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 2-3.

Armitage writes, *to recover one's place may necessitate not a simple reaction to colonizing acts . . . but the revisiting of 'space'.*

In a similar vein, Ewelina Bańka's "Visions of (Post)Indian Country: Gerald Vizenor's *Dead Voices: Natural Agonies in the New World*" explores the manner in which Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor reinvents the colonial construct of Native people in his creation of the "postindian," which implies a specific attitude regarding the way tribal people imagine and perceive themselves in a contemporary world. Vizenor's concept of a 'postindian world', Bańka writes, is anchored in the traditional thought of the Anashinaabeg, which rests on the premise that reality is shaped and validated through ceremonial dream vision; yet the idea of the 'post-indian' speaks to contemporary conditions at the same time that it heralds the future. Through this literary reconceptualization of 'postindian country' as a space for tribal survival, Vizenor—like Anne Kapulani Landgraf—challenges traditional conceptions of space and time, and envisions the manner in which *the tribal world can be imagined anew and how the process of (re)imagination can lead to various forms of liberation.*

In "Africa Lost and Africa Regained: Searching for the Source of African American Identity in Poetry by Sonia Sanchez and Nikki Giovanni," Jerzy Kamionowski considers the manner in which these two notable African American poets sought to recuperate positive paradigms of black femininity through an exploration of their African roots. In works such as *Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women*, Sanchez affirms her African heritage and argues for the existence of a common and collective source of origin in the religion and culture of Islam. In her "African" poems, Giovanni, on the other hand, dismantles the myth of Africa as the Lost Paradise, the Promised Land or the True Home and thereby acknowledges the impossibility of returning to the origin. These poems emphasize a sense of cultural unbelonging, and *express a conviction of cultural separateness existing between black Americans and Africans.*

Ewa Luczak's essay "'The Quality of Hurt': African American Writerly Displacement in Europe in the 1960s" resonates with Jerzy Kamionowski's in that it considers the manner in which African American writers of the 1960s—inspired by the assumption that Blacks born in the United States were part of a larger African diaspora yet rejecting Pan-Africanism's fundamental essentialism—follow[ed] *the path of nostalgic displacement* forged by Richard Wright. *Living in a decade that called for a radical revisioning of African American identity both at home and abroad*, Luczak observes, . . . *African American writers were confronting the myriad of conceptual and discursive possibilities additionally grounded in the long history of African American displacement.* Like Nikki Giovanni, authors such as William Gardner Smith, Carlene Hatcher Polite, and John Williams revised earlier nostalgic African American narratives of expatriation and exile by exposing its romantic, idealistic and sometimes elitist assumptions.

* * *

In a series of linked meditations, Anna Pochmara, Izabella Kimak, and Barbara Leftih turn their attention toward the ways in which U.S. minority authors have countered or revised dominant colonial or imperialist narratives. In “Empire Desires Strikes Back: Early Twentieth-Century African American Rewritings of Empire,” Pochmara reveals the manner in which two prominent African American poets of the twentieth century—W.E.B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes—countered two dominant colonial tropes and images: the concept of ‘the white man’s burden’ put forth by Rudyard Kipling, and the allegorical Columbia, the representation of the United States as a warrior woman. Reflecting his Pan-African sympathies, Du Bois *contrapuntally* reads the construct of the ‘white man’s burden’ *and thereby reveals its hegemonic, racist and sexist tendencies*. Hughes, on the other hand—who was inspired by the anti-imperialist tenets of Marxist rhetoric—*rewrites the myth of a racially marked sexual desire, a colonial fantasy*, Pochmara claims, in which Blackness is characterized as simultaneously *attractive but dangerous and threatening*.

Following a path similar to that of Du Bois and Hughes, self-identified Asian American author Bharati Mukherjee revises an emblematic *narrative symbol of New England literary hegemony*, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, as well as the *quintessential genre* of the Indian captivity narrative. In “Bharati Mukherjee and the Postcolonial Predicament: Looking Back in *The Holder of the World*,” Izabella Kimak focuses on the way in which Mukherjee re-inscribes Hawthorne’s work in order to simultaneously *insert herself boldly into the history of American literature and its canon*, and respond to longstanding critique that her previous work perpetuates the myth of U.S. meritocracy and the converse trope of India *as a place non-conducive to the cultivation of female independence*. In short, Kimak argues that by presenting the United States as a place of imprisonment and India as *the space of liberation and independence*, *The Holder of the World* can be read as a *personal project of reworking*, which represents a *backward glance* directed at Mukherjee’s previous writing and the firestorm of criticism it has generated.

In “Navigating and Resisting Dominant Discourses in Native American Literature of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” Barbara Leftih discusses the various ways in which Native American authors such as S. Alice Callahan, Zitkala-Ša, Charles Eastman and Mourning Dove employed narrative strategies of resistance to *demonstrate a complex and ambivalent engagement with the majority culture* and its discriminatory, racist policies aimed at indigenous peoples. Through the presentation of *oppositional views*, their novels, stories and autobiographies challenged and ultimately undermined dominant imperialist ‘civilizing’ discourses through the introduction of three narrative strategies: *culturally varied characters*, who expound views contrary to colonial discourse;

revising established historiography in order to expose a critique of the violence inherent in Anglo assimilationist policies; and the presentation of alternative images of Native Americans. In the process of “gazing back,” a concept Leftih derives from Ruth Spack, these authors switch subjectivities and assume the position of the observer as opposed to the observed; and in this way they refute the dominant discourse and reclaim narrative voice.

In parallel efforts, Sumit Chakrabartis’s “Towards a Critique of Foundational Historiography: A Brief Look at Gerald Vizenor’s *Hiroshima Bugi*” and Joanna Ziarkowska’s “From Santo Domingo to Nueva York and Back: Multicultural and Diasporic Identity in Junot Díaz’s *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*” treat the work of authors who attempt to re-inscribe and *correct* historiography. In the former essay, Chakrabartis approaches Vizenor’s text from a *post-foundational historiography* and highlights the politically charged nature of his work. His central aim, the author asserts, is to *prize open the very structure of history and historiography in order to attempt an interface between theory and practice*. By manipulating form and narrative voice, Vizenor—like Callahan, Zitkala-Ša, Eastman and Mourning Dove—creates multiple and parallel *micro-histories* or *competing historical counter-narratives*, which trouble and destabilize seemingly orthodox narratives and codes and thereby renders hegemonic historiography contingent and relational. In both structure and form, *Hiroshima Bugi* reveals *the nature of power, discursivity, [and] the politics of dominance*.

In “From Santo Domingo to Nueva York and Back,” Ziarkowska begins with a reflection on the complexity of Dominican history. *From its very beginnings*, she observes, *Dominican identity emerged as a result of complex colonial interactions, first with the Spanish monarchy, then the French and their part of the island, Haiti, and finally, in the twentieth century, the United States*. Any profound understanding of the nation, therefore, must begin with this *triangular dialectic*. In a wildly irreverent reconstructive narrative of the past, Díaz draws obvious parallels between the lives of ordinary characters and the Republic’s master historiography, and challenges traditional and narrative discourses regarding the history of the island and the hegemony of its colonial narrative. He exposes, moreover, the manner in which Dominicans have historically emulated the very forms and narratives that have suppressed them under successive colonial and neo-colonial orders. When read as a whole, the *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is a raucously parodist play on the possibility of returning to the origin—the cherished essentialist myth of ‘returning home’.

* * *

The third constellation of essays focus on communities and texts that inadvertently and ironically reproduce the very colonial paradigms they seek to dismantle.

Taking up the question of alter-colonial identity formation, Ewa Antoszek discusses the ways in which contemporary Chicana lesbian writing exposes the manner in which dominant Chicano discourse and ideology continues to internalize and perpetuate *machismo*, a patriarchal, heterosexist and homophobic order of male dominance that has its roots in both Catholicism and Spanish colonialism. In “Deconstructing the Matrix: Negotiating Chicana Lesbian Identity in Terri de la Peña’s Novels,” Antoszek adopts an intersectional approach of analysis in order to highlight the manner in which race, class, gender and sexuality converge in the suppression of Chicana lesbians. Through an examination of several of de la Peña’s works, she scrutinizes the manner in which the author’s Chicana lesbian characters find themselves caught in the double-bind of facing *multiple marginalizations* in dominant Anglo society, as well as the Chicano imperative of normative gender behavior and *compulsory heterosexuality*. In effect, de la Peña’s writing exposes the constant struggle Chicana lesbians face, as well as the ongoing and embedded legacy of colonialism. In its total effect, de la Peña (as Salvador Fernández so aptly observes) “rejects colonial ideology and the by-products of colonialism and capitalist patriarchy.”

Taking a different tack, Heike Raphael-Hernandez treats Clint Eastwood’s *Gran Torino* (2008), a filmic production that purports to *go postcolonial*, yet inadvertently does so at the expense of both the African American and the Hmong communities. The film ostensibly critiques white America, as represented by Eastwood, who plays a Polish American character who stands for the old immigrant order. *The portrayal of true [white] American masculinity*, Raphael-Hernandez observes, *necessitates the inclusion of the black man, the ultimate threat to white masculinity*. The film, moreover, re-enacts something akin to what Claire Jean Kim terms “racial triangulation,” a paradigm in which Asian and Black characters serve as signifiers for one another in an adversarial, binary relationship put in motion by an unnamed or invisible white protagonist. In the process, it portrays Hmong masculinity as hyper-violent, and applies *uncritically stereotypical images* of Asians to Hmong characters (the ‘new’ non-white America), thereby suggesting among other things that all Asians are somehow alike. According to Raphael-Hernandez, *Grand Torino* perpetuates damaging stereotypes—such as the trope in which the desirable or potentially *moldable* Asian immigrant is pitted against the undesirable or nonconformist black character—and reifies a form of colorism, which fundamentally informs and maintains the normative social and economic hierarchy. Moreover, it reiterates a tired and naïve version of the myth of the American dream, with its portrayal of *self-made success on the home front* and affirmation of a *rescue mission on the international*.

Justyna Fruzińska and Samir Dayal also examine filmic productions that generate stereotypical colonial stereotypes, though they purport guarantee what the former terms *true multiculturalism*. In “How Other is the Other? Appropriation of the Cultural Other in Disney’s Animated Films,” Fruzińska treats four

classic Disney Films: *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, *Hercules* and *Mulan*. In sum, this essay argues that in addition to relying on exoticized, stereotypical imaginings of the Orient (*Aladdin* and *Mulan*), refashioning history in order to suit its ideological purposes (*Pocahontas*), and conflating and overlaying anachronistic cultural elements to achieve its own particular ends (*Hercules*), Disney appropriates and rewrites existing stories and myths from different cultures and regions of the world and endows them with U. S. cultural values and ideals. More specifically, Fruzińska demonstrates the manner in which these films are embedded with what she refers to as *the ideology of individualism—a most representative feature of Americanness*, the author claims—which (according to Seymour Martin Lipset) asserts the idea that “each person’s moral code stems mainly from within and is not imposed by some external force or agent.”

In “Youth in Diasporic Hindi Cinema: Postcolonial Studies and Transnational Perspectives,” Samir Dayal considers the construction and deconstruction of ‘Indianness’ as a transnational project. More specifically, the author discusses the way in which the interpellation of ‘Indianness’ represented in Hindi films has become parceled, fragmented and objectified *as signifiers for identification or transcultural borrowing*. Since gaining independence in 1947, Dayal observes, India has *sought to assert [itself] as a postcolonial presence on the global economic and cultural scene*. Yet this *imagined community* of India—*how Indians actually see themselves and how they fantasize they might become*—found its most visible popular expression in the cinema. Dayal tracks and interprets the various formations and deformations of identity produced in cultural representations of ‘Indianness’. He concludes by proposing a five-pronged rationale for the ongoing need for *a truly transnational postcolonial approach* to Indian cinema in both India and within multi-ethnic Euro-American contexts.

* * *

The final group of essays in the collection question what qualifies as an alter-colonial text; explore fundamental problems regarding such an approach; or seek to expand and complicate the concept of the post-colonial. In “Chicana Texts? Postcolonial Theory? Olga Beatriz Torres’s *Memorias de mi viaje/Recollections of My Trip*,” Jadwiga Maszewska discusses Torres’s epistolary collection, which was first published in an El Paso, Texas newspaper in 1914, and translated and republished in a bilingual volume under the title *Memorias de mi viaje/Recollections of My Trip* in 1994. Edited by Juanita Luna-Lawhn, the latter manifestation of Torres’s letters was presented as an early example of Chicana writing, which treated the author as a kind of cultural broker and marketed *Memorias* as “a story of cultural fusion.” Maszewska challenges the *frame* in which this work has been read and proposes a new historical

approach to Torres's letters. *Let us try to approach Olga Beatriz Torres without reducing her to a stereotype*, Maszewska writes, and interpret her letters as *documents of an episode in the complex and interrelated histories of Mexico and the United States*.

In “Here lies bonded labor spread-eagled Douloti Nagesia’s tormented corpse”: Mahasweta Devi’s *Repaying the Tribals Their Honour*,” Julia Szołtysek discusses Bengali author Mahasweta Devi’s refusal to be treated by the ‘first world’ as *a national cultural artifact*. The author consequently reads Devi’s collection of short stories, *Imaginary Maps*, as representing the *subaltern body* as a *battleground* between the *conflicting interests* of the ‘third world’ bourgeoisie and the *intellectual interests of the intellectual echelons of the ‘first’*. The ‘third world’ subaltern and the Third World as construct, Szołtysek claims, *are turned into saleable ‘exotic’ objects processed and packaged for import to the ‘West’*. The language and means of expression utilized by those *with the power to speak for the ‘voiceless’*, she continues, *often prove to be exercises in demagoguery and manipulation*. By challenging her readers with difficult prose, stark and unvarnished realism, and what some may perceive as advocacy of violence, Mahasweta Devi countermines the narrative tendency to *simplify, abridge and process* the experiences of the subaltern.

“The Return of the Repressed: Tracing Levinas in Gayatri Spivak’s Ethical Representations of Subalternity” considers renowned theorist Gayatri Spivak’s *long engagement with the question of the ethics of subalternity*, and her consequent critique of the western philosophical impulse to *affirm that Subject’s hegemony in spite of its claim to representing the subaltern subjectivity*. Although Spivak roundly denounced philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’s gender-based discourse on the Other, Zuzanna Ładyga observes, which posed the “subjectship of ethics [as being] always certainly male,” traces of Levinas’s thought emerge in Spivak’s work, especially in relation to the former’s notion of *the ethical performative act of language where the Saying hypostatically resonates within the Said*. Spivak’s translation of Mahasweta Devi’s writing represents the culmination of her effort to *create a precise map of the ethics/politics relation* in that it represents in Levinasian terms *an epistemologically non-violent performative act of responding to the radical alterity of the subaltern*. Acknowledging the influence of Levinas’s argument that western philosophical traditions tend toward *totalizing restrictive definitions of subjectivity, of reality, and of metaphysics*—thereby reducing *difference and otherness* to their *sancionable image-representations*—is essential, Ładyga argues, to understanding *the missing piece of the puzzle* in Spivak’s argument in respect to ethics and the discussion of how to attend to a *double session of representation* of the subaltern.

The final piece in the collection—“Polish Colonial Past and Postcolonial Presence in Joanna Rajkowska’s Art”—tends toward the alter-colonial in

that it problematizes and expands the definition of the post-colonial. In her essay Justyna Wierzchowska considers the work of installation artist Joanna Rajkowska. She opens with a reflection on Poland's self-perception as a *once-occupied* nation, and the paradoxical fact that it has also occupied countries located directly to its east, and subordinated and victimized groups—Poland's 'internal' others—within its own borders. This paradoxical politics of self-representation, or as Wierzchowska puts it, *unreconciled dualism* of the Polish historical experience is the subject of much of Rajkowska's art. Working exclusively in public spaces over the last ten years, the artist creates playful and sometimes whimsical installations that *create a new type of discourse* in that they *confront Poland's complex history in a non-binary way and [consequently do] not pass easy judgment*. *Greeting from Aleja Jerezolimskie* (Jerusalem Avenue, 2002), for example, is an immense plastic palm tree installed on an island at the center of a busy intersection in downtown Warsaw. As Wierzchowska points out, the palm (which still stands) *tackles the colonial past* for it is at once an emblem of the Middle East and a reminder of the historical presence of Jews in Poland. Installations such as the palm tree are *blatant misplacements* located in *familiar yet traumatic places*. They function as historiographical adjustments in that they introduce the invisible *category of the other*, or invoke *symbolic ghosts of social or ethnic antagonisms* that have been suppressed. In the act of *bracketing off otherness* and creating a tension between the familiar and the strange, Rajkowska opens up new ways to address the past and clears the path for dialogue in the present.

* * *

Analyzing colonialism and its legacy from the non-linear perspective of the alter-colonial and within Benítez-Rojo's conceptual framework of *repetition* creates an alternative site for us to speak in a more complex way of the cultural and historical permutations that have occurred both within and beyond the colonial.

In the words of Justyna Wierzchowska,

The only way to make sense of the past is to step out of the postcolonial binary of victim/occupier paradigm. . . . the very idea of a clearly-cut national identity is an illusion, and, by the same token, that otherness is not a clearly-cut concept. By lifting the necessity to identify with either, one can possibly relate to history in a way which is primarily not collective but individual. This would however produce a demand to "dismantle dominating mental clichés," [and] look for complexities rather than generalities.

As the various works in this volume suggest, writers and artists have long sought to verbally or visually conceptualize the very complexities to which Wierzchowska alludes. In the act of reconstructing or redefining the particular ways in which they understand and represent their cultures and histories, or perceive themselves as constituting a people or a nation, they present an alternative to the binary of the here and there, the outside and inside, the before and after, the then and now. In this manner they bypass essentialist and territorially-based concepts of origin or source, and present a more complex, alternative understanding of culture and history, which moves beyond a circumscribed, linear structure of the historical, the spatial, and the temporal.

Postmodern and Native Identities: Restor(y)ing Place in Hawai'i

“Stripping away cultural or linguistic accretions, we shall never find pure place lying underneath. What we find are continuous and changing qualifications of particular places: places qualified by their own contents, and qualified as well by the various ways these contents are articulated. . . .The power of place consists of its nontendentious ability to reflect the most diverse items that constitute ‘midst’. . .gathering them together in the expressive landscape of that place.”

– Edward S. Casey

“So long as the human consciousness remains within the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and sky, the term landscape, as it has entered the English language, is misleading. . . .Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on.”

– Leslie Marmon Silko

One of the most recent and fruitful areas of study of indigenous peoples and their cultures has been the critical study of ethnographic photography, largely undertaken by anthropologists or historians of photography and directed toward “documentary” photographs which earlier occupied a minor place within the discipline of anthropology. Recent interest in multiculturalism and cultural revisionism, however, demonstrates that the range of these photo-documents may be most productively understood through interdisciplinary analysis, which attempts to get at interior maps, metaphorical meanings, and perspectives of myth and story. As editor Patricia Johnston noted in *Exposure* magazine: “The strongest studies evince a thorough knowledge of both the culture depicted and the culture depicting. Photographic history must move beyond the analysis of anthropological imagery as simply a generic ‘western’ view of the generic ‘other’ to study the specific circumstances of the contact between the photographer and the photographed and the subsequent use of images.”¹

A number of studies have laid the groundwork for the study of such a “photographic conversation.” Among these are “Notes Toward a History of Photography in Sierra Leone, West Africa,” in which Vera Viditz-Ward reconstructs the history of native peoples’ own photographic traditions. Examining Alaskan groups,

1 Patricia Johnston, “Editor’s Notes,” *Exposure* (1992): 91.

Victoria Wyatt shows how native input affected photographic imaging in the early days of photography when the camera's technology required their acquiescence. Another brief study, "Popular Education and Photographs of the Non-Industrialized World, 1885-1915," suggests how popular forms perpetuated and reinforced well-known stereotypes of race and gender. Implicitly these articles argue that beyond an accurate description of faraway people and places or a patronizing or idealizing vision, ethnographic or documentary photography must be examined as a venue for study of both cultural practices and conventions of representation.

Most recent critical study of historic cultural representations of this sort, whether categorized as ethnographic, documentary or popular—for example studio or tourist photography—has assumed a cultural imperialism. Keith McElroy argues that "of all professional and amateur photographic imagery, geographic and ethnographic photography, which has yet to be systematically treated by historians of photography, comes closest to revealing the essence of the era of international imperialism (1885-1915)."² Unlike earlier periods of colonialism, however, this period saw the advent of new practical systems of photomechanical reproduction which permitted the public to share a sense of participation in imperialist activities through an explosion of profusely illustrated popular publications. Therefore, the information patterns invented at the turn of the century remain part of the perceptions held in common by both industrialized and non-industrialized peoples. Our inadequate understanding and lack of theoretical tools for dealing with these images, and the secondary manipulations which sued them to shape our shared vision, is a continuing threat to understanding a world community locked in the consequence of the imperialist competition. Though McElroy uses the term imperialist to denote a late 19th and 20th century economic and political system used by the industrialized nations to exploit the peoples and resources of non-industrialized areas of the colonial world, his definition may be expanded to how photographs of the non-industrialized world were manipulated by interests in the industrialized nations to produce a vision reduced to terms of race (labor) and commodities. As more recent arguments by Hawaiians and other Native American activists address the long-term consequence of imperialist imagery, we have come to understand that commodified images of paradisaical peoples and places in the 20th century continues the colonial and imperialistic mindset.

Clement Greenberg argues that photography is essentially a "literary art": "Its triumphs and monuments are historical, anecdotal, reportorial, observational before they are purely pictorial. The photograph has to tell a story if it is to work as art."³ Thus, the images which function as commodities themselves and as commodifying

2 Keith McElroy, quoted in Shelley Armitage, "Pa'ki'i and Pohaku: Photographs and Indigenous Values as Narratives of Change," in Shelley Armitage, *Women's Work: Essays in Cultural Studies* (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 1995), 91.

3 Clement Greenberg quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Lure of the Local* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 54.

agents carry their own conversations beyond the exchange suggested as occurring between the culture photographed and the culture of the photographer. This feature may also effect a "postmodern" perspective as forms come to replace original experiences and in fact stand in for them. As a mechanism of the "simulacrae," the stories imbued in such forms carry characteristics of photographic image-making itself. Victor Burgin suggests the photographic image is a "place for work, a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed by, what codes he or she is familiar with in order to make sense" of an image. The image is thus a site of referentialness, a space indexical which "guarantees nothing at the level of meaning."⁴ The story-telling quality Greenberg prescribes for art photography is dependent upon a semiotic process reliant on institutional practices, beliefs, social relations, and of course historic context. But if these images as stories occupy potentially interpretative space, then as both postmodern and postcolonial sites, their constructed meanings may be seen as an act of "restor(y)ing" place. Creating such spaces allow us to reclaim the premodern through postmodern means.

Writing an introductory chapter for *Senses of Place*, Edward S. Casey tracks the phenomenology of "getting from space to place." He reminds us of the pervasive "western" and modern view of place as operative within the "larger" concepts of time and space championed by the Enlightenment thinkers Newton, Descartes, Galileo, and others. The notion of place particularly as connected to localized experience and thus knowledge was completely subsumed under the power of space and time. But he observes:

One way to avoid the high road of modernism as it stretches from the abstract physics of Newton to the critical philosophy of Kant and beyond is to reoccupy the low land of place. For place can be considered either premodern or postmodern; it serves to connect these two far sides of modernity. To reinstate place in the wake of its demise in modern Western thought—where space and time have held such triumphant and exclusive sway—one can equally well go to the premodern moments described in ethnographic accounts of traditional societies or to the postmodern moment of the increasingly nontraditional present, where place has been returning as a reinvigorated *revenant* in the writings of ecologists and landscape theorists, geographers and historians, sociologists and political thinkers—and now . . . anthropologists.⁵

Casey's foray into concepts of space to place are too lengthy and complex to detail here. But despite his persistence in using exclusively western philosophic models to posit the characteristics of place, his valuing of indigenous and local experience and

4 Victor Burgin, "Looking at Photographs," in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (London: McMillan Education, 1982), 153.

5 Edward S. Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time," in *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School for American Research, 1996), 20.

knowledge serves as a grounding for considering place stories as “told” by native artists today. He avers: “Places gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts. . . . What else is capable of this massively diverse holding action? Certainly not human subjects construed as sources of ‘projection’ or ‘reproduction’—not even these subjects as they draw upon their bodily and perceptual powers. The power belongs to place and it is a power of gathering.”⁶ The island of O’ahu in Hawai’i, whose name means “gathering place,” offers a powerful example of a “midst” where indigenous, settler, and tourist groups, through word and image, relate to place variously, very differently, and because of Hawai’i’s colonial and imperial past (and many would say present), conflictingly. What passes as a lush tropical “paradise” in a postcard which signals “I was there,” masks an indigenously storied place, the identity of which contains all that has ever been and will be. Certainly language is a part of this remembering, as are the place names and events called into being by being in place. As Belden Lane reminds us of Native North American peoples, one idea of peace or balance is knowing one’s place. Thus, he does not mean to suggest necessarily a rigid social system, but rather a sense, of both of the material and metaphysical world, that one is emplaced.

Seeking this belonging, what she calls a “yearning,” bell hooks argues for the meaningful role of postmodern thought and styles in countering the appropriating, commodifying, and essentializing colonial agenda. To recover one’s place may necessitate not a simple reaction against colonizing acts—for example, stereotypes, master narratives—but the revisiting of “space,” the creation of a neutral area where we can begin again. In her essay, “Postmodern Blackness” she specifically attends to the complexity of identity as related to image-making and story-telling style. Tracking the divide between intellectual thought and elements of black culture, she addresses the hallmarks of the postmodern agenda: the critique of patriarchy and master narratives, the politics of difference, and specifically the postmodern critique of identity. She notes the essentializing notions of a discourse which had formerly created the idea of “the primitive” and promoted the notion of “an authentic” experience, seeing only certain stereotypic expression of black life as “natural.” Arguing against the “reinscription of modernist master narratives of authority which privilege some voices by denying others,” she argues that the “ruptures, surfaces, contextuality . . . [and other happenings] which create gaps that make space for oppositional practices[,] no longer require intellectuals to be confined by narrow separate spheres with no meaningful connection to the world of the everyday.”⁷ Thus, the “space” of postmodernity need not omit or alienate the diverse identity and experiences of African-Americans but rather is a gathering place for empowering subjectivities.

6 Ibid., 25.

7 bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness,” in *Postmodern American Fiction*, eds. Paula Geyh, Fred G. Leebron, and Andrew Levy (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 626-7.

"A space is there for critical exchange. . . . Postmodern culture with its decentered subject can be the space where ties are severed or it can provide the occasion for new and varied forms of bonding. . . ." ⁸ She concludes the essay by saying that "much postmodern engagement with culture emerges from the yearning to do intellectual work which connects with habits of being, forms of artistic expression, and aesthetics which inform the daily life of writers and scholars as well as a mass population" and reminds us that these spaces for critical exchange can emerge from elite and popular culture or vernacular sources. ⁹

Though directed to the question of the potential divide of the intellectual world from the everyday in her essay on Black America, hooks' points ring true when considered in terms of the issue of the native and the postmodern, or in Casey's terms, the premodern and the postmodern. The restoration of a sense of place in art and literature gained impetus in the 1990s in Hawai'i during the push for sovereignty, in both oral and imagistic traditions. Interestingly, this process necessarily confronted but also utilized the intermediary of colonial constructions—a Western imaginary propelled through word and image. Whether through denaturalizing these constructions, resisting them, or working with them to return to indigenous "emplacement," "insider," or local views, through the gaps and ruptures of this postmodern present, they restore the "gathering place [s]" of Hawai'i.

I

"We are nothing without the stories."

— Leslie Marmon Silko

A few years ago, when I was a professor of American Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, I had a master's degree student—Donna Tanigawa—who asked if she could write a portion of her graduate seminar paper in pidgin. As a Japanese-American raised on the island of O'ahu, Donna sought to express a suppressed aspect of her cultural heritage in the lingua franca of certain identity politics under current debate. She delivered her resulting paper not only in a mixture of pidgin and standard English, addressing issues of representation, but she filled the margins of the paper with iconic drawings—highly stylized Japanese dolls silhouetted in black. The marginalia served to visually interplay with the cultural aspects of pidgin, typically an oral language, so that the paper expressed ideas through written, oral, and visual means. Donna later dropped out of the program when the graduate school refused to allow her a similar approach in her thesis. Today the university has

8 Ibid., 630.

9 Ibid., 631.

changed its policy, at least in terms of the recognition of the value and meaning of Hawaiian Creole English and Hawaiian pidgin, valorizing the study of Hawaiian and related languages. In retrospect, I think of Donna's action as anticipating the success of current local writers such as Darryl Lum, Gary Pak, Lois Ann Yamanaka and others. Behind what Darryl Lum describes as "Local Geology: What School You Went?" or what Lisa Linn Kanae calls "Sista Tongue" is an entire history of language suppression, the complexity of power and class in the islands related to the periods of the Hawaiian monarchy, the American overthrow of the monarchy ushering in a so-called modern Hawaii, and the overall politics of place. The contemporary power of pidgin-inspired literature reinforces in its historical subject matter and theme a "living pidgin," or as Lee A. Tonouchi notes, "contemplations on pidgin culture."¹⁰ Such consciousness of language as agent rather than artifact anticipates a postmodern creative impulse in the overall reclamation process of the arts in Hawai'i.

The fact that at least one-half of the state of Hawai'i's population today speaks pidgin gives a special meaning to this emergence literature and its social history. In 1936, Dr. John E. Reinecke in "The Competition of Languages in Hawai'i" described the function of Creole dialect in plantation communities as "arising in master-servant situations between European employers and (usually) non-European laborers."¹¹ As a medium of communication necessary between several linguistic groups who might not be able to communicate otherwise, it also functioned as a language of command for masters who, seeing Creoles as inferior, "never troubled nor desired to make them speak any language correctly."¹² One can only wonder at the residual effect of such a continually negative perspective as connected to the master's attitude that Creole was the speech of inferior beings. Or as Kanae asks: "What social implication does the language of command (have) upon the descendents of that 'servile' population. . . . after the plantation has closed down and the laborer is revered as ancestor?"¹³

Part of the answer lies in examining the complexity of Hawaiian history, the connection of the monarchy as another dominating entity to the privileging of standard English due to the influence of missionaries and the Christian religion in Hawai'i. Beginning about a decade after Captain Cook "discovered" the Hawaiian Islands in 1778, and as Hawai'i developed as a fur trade port between America and China, a reduced form of English emerged for purposes of barter. By the 1820s, after the sandalwood trade had been replaced by whaling, pidgin English—the blending of Hawaiian, English, and Cantonese—could be heard in

10 Lee A. Tomouchi, *Living Pidgin: Contemplations on Pidgin Culture* (Honolulu: TinFish Press, 2009), 4.

11 John E. Reinecke, "The Competition of Languages in Hawai'i," *Social Process in Hawaii* 24: (1960), 44.

12 Ibid., 18.

13 Linn Kanae, *Sista Tongue* (Honolulu: Tinfish Press, 1993), 3.

port communities from Honolulu to Lahaina to Hilo. In the 1820s, with the arrival of the American missionaries, the Hawaiian language itself was reduced and altered from an exclusively oral language to a written one as a means for the missionaries to convert the Hawaiians. During this decade mission schools and the translated Bible created a religious instruction which formed the basis for formal education in Hawaii. Further, in 1824, Queen Regent Kaahumanu's conversion to Christianity sparked the Kingdom's first education law declaring her support for missionary-led education. Consequently, many native leaders ruled under the influence of "Western" advisors so that the influence of the English language and English education continued. Coupled with the devastation of diseases also brought by foreigners, the Native Hawaiian population felt in this decline a discouragement in the face of Western culture. "Economic and administrative necessities combined to give English currency and prestige," according to Reinecke.¹⁴ "The Hawaiian with a knowledge of English could often obtain a position with a haole firm. By the 1870s, English inevitably became the administrative language of the Hawaiian islands."¹⁵

Parallel to this privileging and institutionalization of English, the development and economic success of the plantation system, beginning in 1835 with the first sugar plantations on Kauai, anticipated the initial hiring of native Hawaiians for the labor-intensive industry, followed by the importation of immigrant workers—the Chinese in 1852, the Japanese beginning in 1868, and the Filipinos in 1907. After the overthrow of the Native Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 and the annexation to the U.S. in 1899, English was declared the required language of instruction in all schools. Not surprisingly, elitist American business and religious establishments had two motives for teaching the English language: religious conversion and the American colonization of Hawai'i's indigenous people. But an irony exists here. Plantation owners were not about to enforce a policy to "Americanize" immigrant children via English language proficiency and education, because, according to Kawamoto, "the spread of education, haole attitudes, and skills made traditional plantation life less and less attractive. It seemed as if the ideals of Americanization and mass education were in direct contradiction to the needs of the sugar industry."¹⁶ Thus, the contract laborers were usually ignorant not only of the native language but of English as well; they were in a dependent position as a result. They were tied for some years to a plantation in a rural district made remote by underdeveloped transportation, exposed to very limited social and linguistic contacts with bosses and the native population.

14 John E. Reinecke, 105.

15 Ibid.

16 Kevin Y. Kawamoto, "Hegemony and Language Politics in Hawai'i," *World Englishes* 12 (1993): 196.

The consequences of Western colonialism as a pragmatic application of the ideals of modernism—progressivism, concepts of intelligence and even success—created alienation, disconnection, and isolation for plantation workers. The laborers learned from their bosses' condensed form of English mixed with Cantonese pidgin expressions such as "can do," "no can," "bumbye," developing their own form of pidginized English later called Hawaiian Pidgin English. Often this language served as a "secondary mode of communication," according to Charlene Sato, "for speakers who conducted the bulk of their interactions in their native tongue."¹⁷ But it was a means through which different immigrant groups could form a single identity. This was especially important to the plantation laborers' children who could connect neither ancestrally with their own culture nor to a relatively foreign mainstream American culture. According to Kawamoto: "By being 'local' one could maintain a sense of ethnic identity while at the same time identifying with a larger more encompassing culture."¹⁸

Coupled with the segregating properties of modernity in the islands was a developing "insider/outsider" mentality, sometimes cast positively and sometimes negatively. On the one hand pidgin helped create an identity and could function as coded, even subversive communication and expression by a disparate but diasporic group. On the other hand, the devaluing of pidgin and those who spoke it was perpetuated through the evolution of Hawai'i's educational system after Hawaii became a territory of the United States in 1900. Theoretically, the majority of children born in Hawai'i were U.S. citizens and thus required to attend public school. But by this time Hawaii's economic and political affiliations with the United States had grown to a point that an ever-increasing English-speaking population—one comprised of middle-level plantation management, physicians, teachers, social workers, and members of the military—could send their children to the limited number of English-language private schools. Consequently, plantation children were separated from their native English speaking peers through the English Standard School System implemented in 1924. The long-term effect of this segregation—the public from the private school systems—was a justification of separateness and inequality. Ironically, a 1920 study of schools in Hawai'i by the U.S. Bureau of Education recommended that in order to enter English Standard School, a child should pass an oral exam and, if appropriate, a written English language test. Students could be admitted on the basis of English language proficiency, then ancestry and class discrimination could be furtively incorporated into the education system under the apparent motive of promoting "good" English. Kawamoto observes: "In fact, it [the study] was an effort to remove these [Caucasian] children from the corrupting influences of the non-Caucasian youngsters."¹⁹ The further irony of this situation was

17 Charlene Sato, "Languages, Attitudes and Sociolinguistic Variation in Hawai'i," *University of Hawai'i Working Papers in ESL* 8 (1989): 259.

18 Kawamoto, 201.

19 Ibid., 202.