

PREFACE

Imagine a frame: its powers of inclusion, exclusion, its ability to introduce subjects into our line of sight and force us to imagine—an imaginary mode of vision Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes later in this collection as “the ability to think something absent and not mine.” The frame as oppressively exclusive, as intrusive, as potentially homogenizing and as an arbitrary border: this is what this journal seeks to call into question, to reconsider. It asks us to imagine the frame as vision, our common mode of vision, and as potential blindness to what is externalized. This collection seeks to stretch frames: the American frame that has traditionally privileged whiteness, masculinity, national interiority or self-reliance, and capitalism, and the broader Western frame that has, for centuries, imagined itself as a socio-political center. It seeks, in the language of Thomas Sayers Ellis, to erase the idea of the “other” and reconsider the identity of the subject as “another,” a phrase that does not exclude what is absent from within the frame, but instead admits the vitality of that marginalized “other” in constructing the privileged center, the positive content of the canvas, thus internalizing what has been too often considered external.

Cicero’s well-known dictum that has served and continues to serve as this journal’s motto takes on a new meaning in the context of this particular collection. If our thoughts are, as the translation suggests, “free,” then our frame might have room for expansion in an imaginary mode of vision. And while the frame might be stretched, while the “other” might be elevated to the status of “another,” the limitations of the frame remain, what it includes and excludes, and the humanities, the underlying subject expounded on in the journal’s final composition, become our weapon in a struggle to continually stretch our frames, to include what we might be unconsciously excluding. The ambiguity and irony of Cicero’s words parallel this edition’s particular project, both struggling to break out of an inherited mode of vision while admitting the necessity of the visual image.

One of the terms I’ve assigned to this collection, the “other,” begins to take shape in John Carpenter’s essay “Fulfilling the Book: Shakespeare, Music, Identity, and Kwame Dawes’ *Requiem*.” Carpenter examines the irony of the other when he describes John

Black/Blancke, a black African trumpeter of the early sixteenth-century English court, as “an individual paid to make music that represented others and consequently helped construct a culture in which, as early modern accounts of blackness tell us, he would have been deemed an outsider.” Here Carpenter is speaking of the methods always-already undertaken by the other in constructing both its own subjectivity and the multifaceted power of its external oppressing force (which, at times, becomes internalized). Carpenter’s essay asks us a critical question: how might we preserve cultural difference while “reinforcing commonalities”? Or, to return to the historical image painted in his essay’s opening, how might we elevate John Black/Blancke to the heights of a notable historical figure, to share a home with his Renaissance contemporaries, while not compromising his unique agency, while not erasing difference? How can he, a figure marginalized in the writing of history, be included in an expansive frame whose canvas paints his otherness as “another”?

Carpenter’s historical example, along with his more theoretical question of how to weave difference and commonality into a democratic setting that resists cultural universality or totalization, recurs in several other pieces. The piece that follows Carpenter’s is concerned not specifically with blackness but with American identity and imperialism, another sub-theme reintroduced by Robert Fanuzzi, Peter McLaren, and Nathalia Jaramillo. In “Ethnic American Literature and its Discontents: Reflections on the Body, the Nation,” Maria Zamora critiques popular sentiment regarding American identity formation. She writes, “That which has been rhetorically understood as ‘exterior’ has continued to produce interior meaning.” Like Carpenter, Zamora gives form to a marginalized body embedded in identity formation, this time illustrating the ways in which excluded cultures dominated by U.S. ethnocentrism actually help shape what is envisioned and accepted as American culture. These first two essays point toward problems of monolithic representations of disparate entities, and grapple with the problem of incorporating the other into an imagined whole, all while acknowledging the problems in undertaking such a project. Here the frame advocates commonalities among disparate subjects, but is careful to call into question that project’s potential for homogenizing its subjects.

“Blackness” comes back into question in Habiba Ibrahim’s analysis of Trey Ellis’ “The New Black Aesthetic” and Andrea Lee’s *Sarah Phillips*, texts that ask us to consider new definitions of black identity in a postmodern setting. Ibrahim uses close reading as a method of cultural examination, calling into question the use of history and memory in the construction of the black female subject. She, like Zamora, imagines the body as

text when she writes, “How does the black female body...become postmodern?” She is asking whether the black female, a kind of subaltern presence, can present itself in a new way, into a mode of being that can overcome a national grammar that forces it into being understood in racist, sexist terms. In her essay, Ibrahim attempts to reveal that history, “unfixed and uncertain,” can be resisted through a skeptical African-American literary postmodernism. Ibrahim’s frame asks us to include black femininity as a mode of agency that can exist within new vision, one that re-imagines the subject beyond the limitations of historical prejudices.

Where Ibrahim imagines history as an organizing principle that must be fragmented into uncertainty, a sort of anti-teleological deconstructive technique, Thomas Sayers Ellis examines ways in which blackness resists being framed. Both are indicating that black culture, particularly that of the United States, can be redefined through a reconsideration of societal constructs rooted in time and place that have, to date, defined their subjects’ positions of otherness. In his photo essay/interview, Ellis reunites us as readers with his cover photograph. In a series of photographs titled *The Saga of Lee Austin Webster Who Had a Stroke in Front of the U.S. Capitol Building*, Ellis provides a landscape in which a homeless black man takes on a position of otherness under the looming shadow of the U.S. Capitol Building. Webster’s story, told through the frame of Ellis’ lens, is reinforced by the poet’s personal narrative and takes on new meaning with the photographs and words that follow. As Ellis explains, movement is encompassed within the frames that present his characters, illustrating the paradoxical crisis of photography, of the subject that resists being framed. The act of framing, Ellis writes, “imprisons, captures, limits.” He goes on to comment on a problem that plagues much of this collection: “Blackness, for many awful reasons, rarely frames itself.” It is, instead, framed by external forces, which posit blackness, as I said earlier, in a position of otherness, what Ibrahim seeks to overcome. One of Ellis’ most pressing objectives seems to be the desire to capture subjects in both his photography and his poetry in a manner that allows them to move and shake within the inherent confines of the visual image.

The problem of American identity formation, first examined through Maria Zamora’s essay, unites with the black American slave in an interpretive historical narrative provided by Robert Fanuzzi in “What is an American? The Problem of the West.” Fanuzzi travels across time through figures ranging from Christopher Columbus and Bartolome Las Casas to Thomas Jefferson and Jose Marti, all in a sardonic attempt to find a unifying American

identity, one rooted in the identity of the other. Through a global examination of the nation's identity formation, Fanuzzi draws out the centrality of otherness in the creation of America, illustrating the complex and diverse forces that formed a nation. Fundamental to his nation, he argues, is a sense of "alienation and belonging." This, for Fanuzzi, leads to an "inescapable truth" voiced by Benito Juárez, the first Indian president of Mexico: "To respect what belongs to others is sacred." Perhaps this journal's climactic statement, this issue asserts a sort of all-encompassing mythos that respects and elevates difference through a paradoxical celebration of commonalities. This is, as I have stated earlier, this collection's primary purpose: to add to an ongoing dialogue through which the other can inhabit a mode of vision that acknowledges difference between and community among heterogeneous subjects, to provide a frame that is more inclusive and self-reflexive, perpetually working towards expansion.

The interview that follows Fanuzzi's essay offers community as an alternative to an American system of capitalism that magnifies difference through the lens of hierarchy. Critical pedagogists Peter McLaren and Nathalia Jaramillo posit socialism as a method of curing America from capitalism, a mission rooted in a desire for "social, economic and political justice." The dislocated and disempowered working class that McLaren and Jaramillo seek to elevate becomes a kind of other that suffers under the edifice of American capitalism. Their interview follows the publication of their recent book, *Pedagogy and Praxis in the Age of Empire*, a text in which the authors outline the goals of critical pedagogy in a twenty-first century largely defined by neo-imperialism and the "war on terror"—two interrelated phenomena, they argue, that are driven by the needs of the market economy. Through a socialist, dialogic approach, McLaren and Jaramillo preach a pedagogical method of inclusive diversity, providing "an alternative way to relate to the 'other.'" Through an awareness of the modes of power enjoyed by the intellectual imperial forces of the corporate media, these educators seek to deconstruct the "negative views of the 'other'" fed to the masses, thus exemplifying the possibility for a kind of Gramscian resistance within an overwhelming Althusserian ideological state apparatus—in this case, socialism pressing against the apparent juggernaut of the American market economy.

What comes last in this collection might best be read first by skeptics of the legitimacy of the humanities, a collection of disciplines now inhabiting, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak demonstrates, the position of otherness in America. In "Thinking About the Humanities," a transcript of a talk given in March 2007, she lays out a persuasive and pragmatic

argument for why such studies are important in our present moment and how these disciplines can combat both cultural and intellectual imperialism. She explores the reasons why the humanities are today considered "irrelevant," and resists that kind of characterization by explaining its disciplines' collective ability to "strengthen thinking" and provide a critical backbone for all branches of knowledge. Her unique combination of case study, literary theory, and textual citation is a brilliantly effective brief in a never-ending case for the humanities as a method of understanding multiplicity—of disciplines, of cultures, and of "others," all in a movement rooted in a desire for a rare sort of globalization that elevates the individual. The frame of the humanities, Spivak suggests, is an infinite frame of the imagination that is all-inclusive in its expansive methods of interrogation and study.

All these pieces work towards seeking identity in a country where the individual is commodified, where the relevance of the humanities, of alternative political approaches, of variants from an imagined norm, a norm shaped by wholly inhumane methods of capital consumption, become lost and irrelevant. Cicero's quote speaks to the possibilities illustrated by the elevation of the other, and serves here as a motto of resistant optimism against seemingly all-powerful imperial forces. In reconsidering the other instead as "another" in an imaginary mode of vision that allows for expansion and resists homogenization (or celebrates difference and commonality in a shared frame), one can hope that this journal works to unite us, subjects of the humanities, into, in Ellis' words, "one yummy body."

Finally, some acknowledgements are in order. I'd like to thank Dohra Ahmad, Granville Ganter, Amy King, John Lowney, Steve Mentz, and Stephen Sicari for their useful suggestions and discussions regarding the development of the review. I am indebted to readers Ownie Lee and Bonnie Shishko for their much-needed diligence during the journal's editing process. To my anonymous peer reviewers, your formal and informal comments immeasurably strengthened this collection and I thank you for your past and present efforts. This collection would, of course, not exist without its contributors, to whom this collection is respectfully dedicated. Finally, this edition of the journal would not be possible without the unending well of emotional and intellectual support of assistant editor Samantha Cohen, whose efforts proved most invaluable. If I have failed to properly acknowledge anyone that is deserving of thanks, it is only because I lack the language or space to do so. In any case, I hope that the fruition of this journal will suffice.

Stephen Pasqualina