

InterCulture



VOLUME 5 NUMBER 1 JANUARY 2008

ISSN 1552-5910



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Introduction: Notes on the Front

Katheryn Wright,
Managing Editor

*If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est
Pro patria mori.*

- Wilfred Owen, "Dulce Et Decorum Est" (1917-18)

How sweet it is to die for one's country is, for Wilfred Owen during WWI, the "Lie" that draws soldiers to the battlefield. Owen describes a front that is visceral and painful, yet clearly distinguishable from civilian life. The separation between Owen's experience of the front and the imagining of war at home is a primary conflict that drives the thematic development of the poem. Watching news stories covering the Iraq war or reading about any number of global conflicts online I feel like I, too, am part of a Lie but by other means. I'm told that I could never comprehend the trauma of military occupation, or the plight of a soldier sacrificing his or her body. There is nothing I can do to understand, and my politics should be guided by *not* understanding; ignorance prohibits any kind of political action. The Lie (like war) is a state of being, perpetual and enduring.

In reaction to this line of thinking, *InterCulture's* editorial board decided to devote an issue towards clarifying the borders of war, specifically in relation to the concept of the front. Interestingly, the essays we received did something else. Marc Lafleur in "The Bomb and the Bombshell: The Body as Virtual Battlefield" points out that once the question of permanent war enters into culture, there exists an urgent need to define the limits of that permanence in order to preserve some form of resistance (29). The goal of clarifying what constitutes the front of war results from the increasing realization that the battlefield is everywhere. Given this context, a more prescient objective would be to attempt to find the politics within (borrowing from David Harvey's

terminology) the uneven spatial, social, and cultural development of permanent warfare. The concept of the front provides a means through which this exploration may occur.

Together, the following essays create a working vocabulary that begins to explore the emergence of the front from historical, sociological, philosophical, political, anthropological and literary perspectives. Dinah Zeiger's "See it Now, the Atomic Drug Store and Las Vegas: At Home in the Cold War" discusses how the CBS public affairs series *See It Now* (1951), using the new medium of television, brings the threat of nuclear annihilation and Communist expansion into the living rooms of Americans. The analyses of a January 1952 segment of an atomic pile in Oakridge, Tennessee and an April 1952 segment of *See It Now* that takes place at a nuclear testing site near Las Vegas, Nevada illustrate how the series frames security issues through narratives of domestication. Ken McLeish also speaks to the domestication of war, opening his essay on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's "war machine" with an anecdote of American Marines conducting a military exercise in a small town that, quite literally, brings war home. "Playing War" draws a parallel between this incident and how children play with war. For McLeish, play is a means through which the world is remade, a way that war is affectively habituated. The front of war is the site of this habituation, and these sites include backyards, living rooms, and children's playgrounds.

Memorials and exhibitions like the Oppenheimer Centennial are sites of accumulation where nuclear proliferation filters through the body. Lafleur looks at a central figure of the Oppenheimer Centennial, the beauty queen, Miss Albuquerque 2004, who 'hosted' the event. Under the condition of permanent war, the body of Miss Albuquerque 2004 representing an American way of life constitutes a "virtual battlefield." At the same time, the body is a site where a counter-proliferation is likewise located; recognizing the affective capacities of bodily proliferation begins to mark out a politics through which a counter-proliferation may occur. The presence of the Beauty Queen at the exhibition made obvious the spectacle of war; this 'making obvious' is a form of counter-proliferation. Her presence, however, marks an absence – a space where war isn't, or a state of exception.

Christina Weber's "Conceptualizing the Embodied Front: An Analysis of *Born on the Fourth of July*" forces a consideration of the front not as a set of coordinates where a battle happens but rather sets of embodied social relations that work through experience, memory, perceptions, narrative and the politics of war. In *Born on the Fourth of July*, Ron Kovic parallels the physical destruction of his body with American society during Vietnam, a correlation made upon his arrival at home. Kovic becomes a void, an absence, where he must learn to reconcile the implications of the ideological expectations of war (soldier as hero) with his paralyzed body. Christian Noll also wants to broaden a conception of the front to include contestations over the construction of identity. For Noll, the front is defined by conflict, and out of conflict (or social practice), narratives emerge. The 'front' of identity conflicts is staged, in part, through mutually-exclusive narrative formations.

Noll's "Narratives: The Front Line of Identity Conflicts" argues that these emerging narratives re-inscribe meanings to identity conflicts, and that conflict resolution must take into account this dynamism in order for resolution to occur. Bogdan Trifunović also focuses on narrative in "Perceptions of the Front by Serbian Civilians during the First World War, 1914 – 1918." Trifunović discusses accounts of the front by Serbians

living primarily at the outskirts of the major battlefields during WWI. While the front was often remembered as a site of heroism for Serbians, it was also a kind of mystery or, again, an absence. News from the converging fronts in occupied Serbia was limited due to geographical constraints and pressure from occupying military and political forces, and civilians tried to piece together a narrative that appropriated characters and themes from Serbian folklore in order to help understand the physical and mental constraints of both the conditions of occupation and modern trench warfare.

Beyond the common themes of domestication, embodiment, affectivity, narrative, and memory, several of the essays in this issue share a common methodological approach – they bring themselves into their analyses and implicate their bodies in the constitution of the fronts that they describe. This approach, I think, is one way to begin to counter the Lie and to articulate the complex power formations that feed into a front-line's emergence.

I would like to thank the editorial board of *InterCulture* who put together an excellent issue, and especially want to acknowledge the dedication of Bo Bentele and Antonio Delgado. Thank you to Jeremy Bassetti without whom nothing would ever get published. I also wish to express gratitude to Dr. Maricarmen Martinez whose constant support for *InterCulture* and the Department of Interdisciplinary Humanities all too often goes unacknowledged. Finally, thank you to Dr. David Johnson and everyone in DIH at FSU who supported and contributed to this e-journal.