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Multiculturalism and Making Difference: Comments on the State of Multiculturalism Policy in Canada

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Encounters with Canadian Women's Writing, Three Times

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DAVID TIPPIN

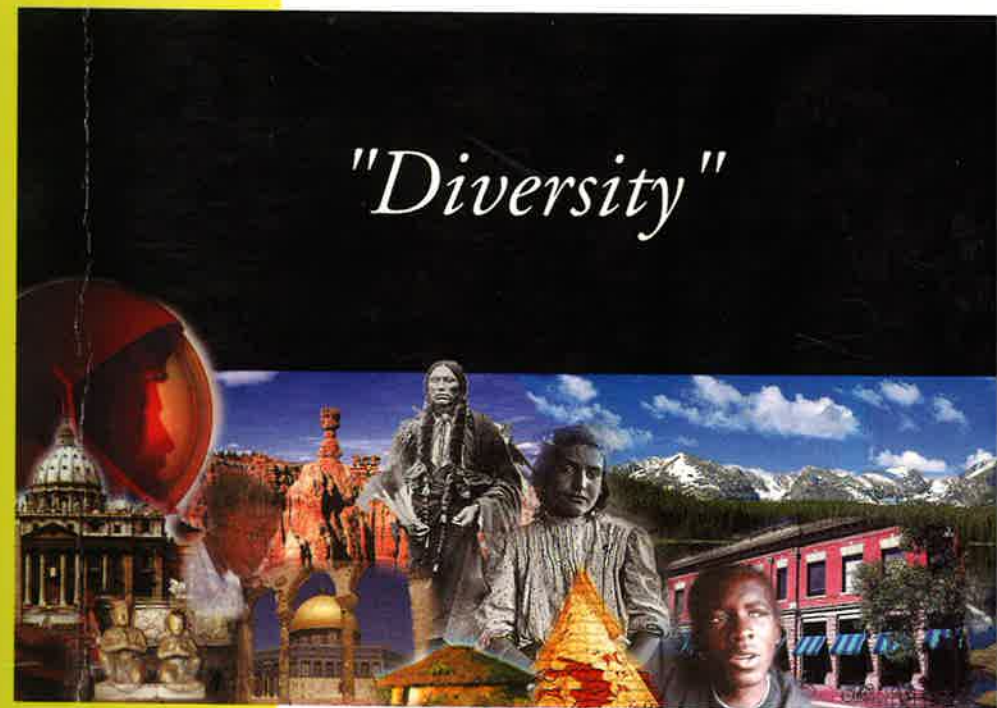
Fighting 'Child Poverty': The Discourse of Restructuring in Canada and Australia

REVIEWS

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AUSTRALIAN- CANADIAN STUDIES

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CONFERENCE
'DIVERSITY'

GUEST EDITOR: DR ANNE COLLETT

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1999

AUSTRALIAN-CANADIAN STUDIES

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SPECIAL ISSUE ON CINEMAS, NATIONS, MASCULINITIES

Guest Editor: Angela Stukator

Cinemas, Nations, Masculinities (The Martin Walsh Memorial Lecture, 1998)

Thomas Waugh

Dead Queers: One Legacy of the Trope of "Mind Over Matter"
in the Films of David Cronenberg

Christine Ramsay

Pit(iful) Male Bodies: Colonial Masculinity, Class and Folk Innocence
in Margare's Museum

Lee Parpart

Hyperbolic Masculinity and the Ironic Gaze in Project Grizzly

Brenda Longfellow

Lonely Boy and the Vérité of Sex

Jane M. Gaines

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EDITORIAL

The 1998 ACSANZ conference 'Diversity in Australia, Canada & New Zealand: Challenges and Opportunities' was held at the University of Macquarie, Sydney, organised by Dr. Wendy Waring, Director of the Institute of Women's Studies. This issue includes a necessarily small but diverse range of papers drawn from what is always a stimulating symposium of disciplines, geographies and personalities. For me, what is surprising is the degree to which a conference that draws upon such great diversity can give rise to so many papers that speak to each other — creating a resonance of ideas that provides the conference participant with a sense of both satisfaction and motivation to inquire further. A century's end seems to create that janus-faced desire to look both backward — a weighing of what has been lost and gained — and forward to what might be: change is charted, analysed, assessed.

Having recently retired from full-time academia, it is fitting that Peter Crabb, the founder and first president of ACSANZ, should contribute to this particular issue of ACS — the last issue of the 20th century — with a history and appraisal of the early years and the future of Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand. Remonstrating against the tendency to sit back 'happy with a job well done', Peter observes that 'The future [of the association] should not be more of the same, no matter how comforting that might be'. This call to vigilance and the need to take on the challenge of a rapidly changing world is one that many of the contributors point to — this is not merely meant as a directive to accept change but to examine and redirect the nature of change — to take on individual and collective responsibility for change.

Many of the papers call for the need to recognise or even actively seek out the diversity of truth that is too often 'papered over' by the lie of the smooth.

Sneja Gunew speaks of the need to recognise the colonial histories that reverberate in the rhetoric of 'multiculturalism' and suggests that the term 'diasporic studies' might allow us the space to better examine relationship between local and global rights and responsibilities. She emphasises the need to 'make visible' the particular within the general, the personal in the political, and to reveal strategies and practices that underscore narratives of universality and assimilation for 'the common good' of nation states or global economies. In a critical examination of the institutionalisation of multicultural policy in Canada, Audrey Kobayashi, like Sneja, directs attention to the impact and meaning of 'European' in a history of racism endemic to colonialist practices. She too asks for a multicultural vision that is both historical and particular and criticises a Canadian discourse of 'multicultural citizenship' that has effectively contained the possibility of a pro-active agenda of anti-racism. She maintains that if a multicultural policy is to have any political merit, it must offer something more substantial than the promotion of cultural diversity; rather it must seek to address and redress conditions of oppression by abolishing the debilitating concept of majority/minority in the first instance.

Kateryna Longley defines multiculturalism as 'a productive and interactive pluralism' and gives as example a collection of stories whose individual fragments refuse to be contained within a unitary frame and yet each is given additional life by the dynamic that operates between them — the multicultural collective does not dissolve differences but rather offers a place for and stimulates dialogue. Kateryna too speaks of the positive dynamic of change — change that is brought about by the involvement and commitment of individual writers — small stories matter: again emphasis is placed upon a commitment to cultural diversity that is ensured only by the practice of multiculturalism. Gillian Whitlock, a pioneer in the comparative study of Canadian, Australian and Caribbean women's writing and someone whose work stimulated my own interest in comparative feminist studies, charts her own development of a sense of gendered self that is shaped by and entangled within her reading of other women writing. She writes of the need to imagine and come to an awareness and understanding of how we are caught up in each other: literary multiculturalism is not best represented as the simplification of a coming together on common ground, but as an awareness of and alertness to the complexity of our entangled histories and our responsibility as critics and teachers to urge a constancy of reassessment and reconceptualisation of our selves in relation to others.

This issue also includes two sociological/legal papers that examine family welfare policy through the tools of comparative cultural analysis. Maureen Baker and David Tippin examine the government rhetoric of 'dependency' in both Australia and Canada, a rhetoric that claims to reduce child poverty whilst failing (in different measure) to take into account the determining factors of reduced social assistance for the unemployed, single parents, childcare and maternity/paternity leave. They remark not only that 'children are poor' because 'their parents are poor', a poverty

that is becoming more deeply entrenched by government policy bent upon reducing 'dependency'; but that reason for and inability to deal effectively with that poverty is clearly related to globalised economies that "inhibit decision-making by national governments especially when free-trade agreements provide a stronger voice and greater protection for capital than for labour". Wayne Babovich and Mitchell Sherr examine and discuss the merits of a variety of approaches to Family Medical Leave policy in Australia, Canada and the U.S., revealing yet again the inevitable tension between employer and employee rights, and again, the relationship between national and global economies, local and corporate business interests. It is, as always, a question of values: What values? Whose values? Like multicultural terminology, policy, and practice, the difficulty of negotiating an acceptable balance between the rights and responsibilities of the individual and the group does not get any easier. David Whitson approaches this same question from a very different direction. His focus is upon the globalisation of sport and its impact upon cultural diversity and local difference, but the same dilemmas and tensions are apparent. What impact does an international or universal currency, such as the notion of 'world class', have upon the possibility and the potential for diversity, choice and the previously important feelings of affiliation and loyalty to a local and known community? Has the 'known' community of belonging been replaced by the 'imagined' community and if it has what will the effects of this change be? What imagination? Whose imagination? As David points out, 'the global consumer is not the same as being a global citizen'. 'We need,' he writes, 'to re-articulate the distinctions between citizen and consumer identities in the contemporary global economy, and to make these the subject of broader public debate'.

The papers included in this issue offer a timely debate on the challenges and the opportunities of an increasingly 'globalised world' in which an understanding of social rights and responsibilities are constantly renegotiated in the light of changing cultural, political and economic dynamics. Although sometimes maligned as inclined toward generalisation, simplification and amorphism, comparative scholarship maintains the presence of 'others' in our fields of individual and collective vision and it insists upon the imperative of examining, imagining and working toward an understanding of relationship.

Anne Collett