



*Transnational Border Shopping:
(Virtual Purchases, Body and Nation)*
what we all long for when we long for crossing over

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[An image of a pair of eyes is projected onto the screen. Ashok takes the podium and addresses the audience with his eyes.]

Seven things I want to talk about today, seven parts. These seven parts could be Beverages, Borders, Belonging, Badmaash, Bhangra, Bullets, and Betrayal; and they might be combined with Adolph Coors, Amitav Kumar, Mohamed el-Sayid, Gayatri Gopinath, George Bush, Jean-Charles de Menezes, and Susan Sontag; and these couplets could be tripleted with Raymond Carver, Dionne Brand, Judith Halberstam, Gautam Malkani, Eminem, Hardt and Negri, Maher Arar . Of course, seven parts could each be punctuated by a sharp shot in the dark, so to speak, seven shots heard not, not surprisingly, around the world, but in a London Underground station. Let me begin, then, piece by piece, holding in the air these three thoughts: what does it mean to trans a border? Whose bodies and what nations are mutually crossed, trans'ed, in such



bordershopping? And what is it we might long for in crossing over? In these questions, this presentation may steer away from the specificities of gender, sexuality, textuality, that have been central to this thus-far fully engaging conference; but I hope this rather peripatetic attempt does show the complexities and complicities of multiple possibilities (and impossible demands) that are placed by and upon bodies and the borders they transgress. I choose to go over seven options here, seven possibilities, to learn from and rest upon seven sounds etched upon the memory of eardrums, seven sharp beats that can help us say both: NO, enough! and no, not enough. Demanding the impossible.

ONE: Beverages, Adolph Coors, and Raymond Carver

Growing up in the western prairies of Canada, there were basically two options for beer drinkers, both produced by major breweries and distributed in brown stubby bottles. It was identity formation in Canada and we were proud of our beer, mainly because all we had to compare it to was our poor American cousins' rendition, a watery broth that we liked to make fun of. That didn't, however, stop us from a particularly exciting act of transborder shopping, the drive down to Montana to buy cans of Coors, for even if the beer was tasteless, the very notion of the aluminum can was a novelty, so we bought our limit of twelve per adult and gallantly sipped them in front of our fall barbecues. Even the type of aluminum was excitingly weak and could be crushed between two fingers, proving, perhaps, that the contents were equally ineffectual, a mere 4% alcohol to the Canadian 5. At the time, I didn't realize that I was merely repatriating that aluminum, since it was Adolph Coors, convinced by an entrepreneurial Viennese pitchman by the name of Lou Bronstein, who struck a deal with Alcan, the now multinational aluminum company that had been itself convinced to build in Kitimat, BC, a plant whose production potential outstripped market demand and was thus quite willing to foist off numerous tons of product to a U.S. beer supplier. Nor did I realize that Mr. Coors was also gaining notoriety for producing homegrown homophobia that was also ready for export, and easily accepted across that very same border that we brought our dozen silver bullet cans every month. (At this writing, Alberta is still seeking loopholes for the federal government ruling legalizing marriage for gays and lesbians, devastating news, of course, for the cowboys out on the range and the riggers in the oilfields.)

But the politics of transborder shopping, post-freetrade, post-neoimperial militarism, has shifted from duties on border-crossing goods to the duties imposed on a public unnerved by what is popularly perceived as ubiquitous violence (named as terrorism) where every backpack could be a bomb, every car an incendiary device, and every bushy-eyebrowd, palloured face, a threat to the consumerist citizen. (Let's not forget Georgie Bush's imploring a shell-shocked American public in 2001 to put on a strong front, gird collective loins, and go shopping for freedom – that is, to shop in the cause of freedom, not look for bargains on a price-reduced freedom at your neighbourhood Walmart.)

So it is with all this in mind that I think of the movement between nations – or, not really so much that, but the liquid sensibility of national identity as it occurs in a

given citizen and how peculiarities of racialization and country of origin inflect that citizenship. This is what could be known as the Multiculturalism Advantage (not to be confused with what a provincial publicity machine has called the Alberta Advantage, which is corporate-speak for having had the good sense to displace First Nations peoples who happened to be living on top of oil reserves and tar sands so that the new citizens can extract these resources and pipe them across the border – contrast that, incidentally, with a similar act of entrepreneurship more recently in BC where a pair of young men decided to build a tunnel under the oddly named zero avenue, a small two-lane road that separates Canada from the US, its purpose not to fulfill a flow of oil [legal] but of BC's largest product for export, known colloquially as BCbud [illegal]. They were busted by legal enforcers on both sides of the border after a trial run where they smuggled not marijuana but, yes, a few cases of beer into Canada, showing that plus ca change..)

But, I digress from what I've named the Multicultural Advantage, that is, namely, the fact that different cultural groups call a particular nation-state home and that such beingness affects the entire country. Of course, jiggle the lens a bit this way and that, and you have the Problem of Illegal Immigration, which we could define as: the fact that different cultural groups call a particular nation-state home and that such beingness affects the entire country. Some of the more astute among you will be saying, hey, he just repeated himself, to which I respond, yes, but not quite. You see, Multiculturalism, in its official capacity in Canadian federal government, has gone through a variety of incarnations and interpretations since its introduction as policy almost thirty-five years ago. If I were being incredibly generous, I would agree to some degree with Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Christina Gabriel who say that what began as a program of cultural maintenance evolved to include (if not embrace) a politics of anti-racism in the early 1990s. (Selling Diversity, 123). But then something happened such that by the year 2000, the federal government was producing, for events no less than the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a teachers' guide that sloganeered "Multiculturalism Means Business." Further, in a world where everything's for sale and the only question is how to package and ship a product across borders, more and more Multiculturalism-Canadian-style is being marketed abroad. Yes, Canada, where the business leaders can proudly say we didn't go into Iraq but we'll be happy to rebuild it, can now proudly say we weren't crazy about the brown hordes coming inside our perimeter, but it's a helluva marketing strategy when we sell that same *idea* back across to other nations. This is the Carver impulse, for what we talk about when we talk about *whatever we talk about* is not the subject itself. When official multiculturalism is touted by government officials, for instance, as a shining example to the world, the unspoken but still official worry is, but if Paris can burn, whither goes Toronto?

Here's where I give some pause: what is being bought and sold across these borders? Aluminum, beer, grass, now multiculturalism as business aesthetic, and, let us not forget, those bodies, corporeal and virtual. In what form do those bodies cross, under what restrictions and what conditions?

TWO: Borders, Amitav Kumar, and Dionne Brand

Amitav Kumar, poet and theorist, writes about ambiguities in thought and action in his poem about U.S. Immigration, which takes off from this line actually found on a government form:

“Do you intend to overthrow
the government of the United States
by force or fraud?”

...

A friend tells me later of someone
who believing it was an either/or question
tried to play it safe and opted
for the overthrow of the government
by fraud
(9)

These are precisely the types of mistakes (if that's what they are) we can make as we traipse over borders. They are cognitive errors, or misplaced signifiers, a type of semiotic narcolepsy. Recall, for instance, George Bush's utter consternation when his chief of staff informed him that, in an unfortunate accident, two Brazilian soldiers were killed. Bush was devastated, speechless, his head in his hands in anguish, finally looking up plaintively at his chief of staff and asking, how many is a brazillion? It is that same puzzled expression, I am sure, that I use upon the security guard outside the Los Angeles County Museum shop as I am about to enter and he, not posted at the door but just passing by, accosts me and suggests my backpack should be checked. I am puzzled because I am outside the building and there appears to be no checking facilities outside and, realizing his error, the guard kindly offers to check the bag himself, further puzzling me because I still think he means check as in tag and store rather than inspect. However, we get through this miscomprehension mire and I do give him permission to search my bag (not that he really asked, just proceeded to do so) and I'm still unclear why a security guard would check a bag before a customer enters into a retail outlet. If commodity shrinkage was the issue, surely it makes more sense to check/inspect my bag as I leave the museum shop (which doesn't happen), and it is only when the guard is fossicking around the bowels of my backpack that I realize several things: it's been less than two weeks since the bombings in the London underground; I'm brown and, owing to my mother's Persian history, perhaps, potentially both/either middle-eastern or south-asian, which signifies poorly on the scale of Asians Who Might Potentially Blow Things Up (or) Potential Asians Who Might Blow Things Up; and I'm carrying a backpack in the largest westcoast city of a nation that colour codes the potential danger of Things Blowing Up Today. The odd element out here is that I'm looking to gain entrance to a museum shop which, even under the most scrutinous anti-terrorist eye is hardly an attractive target, particularly since the main feature at this juncture in time is a King Tut exhibit. Well, I guess there is that middle-eastern connection. But I don't really think of most of this until after the security guard is secure in the knowlege that all I'm bringing into the shop is a digital Nikon, although in my daze I do make the mistake of going out a different exit, looking left and then right to figure out where I need to go next, which is enough of a sign, I suppose, to have the Security Guard assigned to the Other End of the

Museum approach me mindfully, and by this time I probably am acting quite suspiciously as I dart back into the museum shop and out from whence I came.

So in that narrative, what do we all long for, me, the guards, indeed, even double-ya? It recalls a conversation I had with Dionne Brand last year in Banff, me there for a residency on language and art, she there as part of the translator's program. Sitting at the metonymically-named Props Pub, she told me how, for about a year in Toronto, she was going around asking people in the street what they longed for. One incident stood out, her flagging down a city worker busy jackhammering up the streets; she mimed for him to take off his protective ear gear, which he did, shutting down the hammer, and she asked him to tell her what he longed for. He thought about this for a long moment, she told me, then he told her he longed for a world where his children would grow up in safety. In her novel, *What We All Long For*, Brand reveals a city that functions not as a space readily identifiable by national structures nor one keening in on a shared sense of identity with such a nation-state. Indeed, as Brand herself has pointed to elsewhere, hers is not a project toward belonging but, and here I follow critic Kit Dobson and his attendance to critics Bina Toleda Friewold and others, "to fracture any simple notions of belonging through a focus on the component parts of that very word: being and longing" (Dobson). Dobson goes on to say that "*What We All Long For* proposes through [its] characters that communities existing in resistance to racism, nationalism, and oppression need not be formed on a strictly oppositional basis. Instead, [the] lives [of the characters] all suggest in various ways that actively transgressing against borders, while maintaining an openness towards difference and the future, might enable new webs of social relations to form" (Dobson). The question then, in order to move into the narrative space of hope occupied by the interrupted jackhammering city worker, how *to* transgress borders, how *to* maintain an openness towards difference, to use these means to shift into security, whatever that might mean?

Three: Belonging, Mohamed el-Sayed, and Judith Halberstam

In Florida, Mohamed el-Sayed, a U.S. citizen of Egyptian origin, was denied boarding a United Airlines flight to Washington on September 21, 2001. An airport manager told him apologetically that the pilot refused to fly with him on board, explaining, "We've reviewed your profile; your name is Mohamed." Indeed, "Neil Livingstone, CEO of ... an international risk-management firm in Washington, D.C., insists that 'if you are young, male, and Middle Eastern, you are just going to have to be profiled for a period of time'" (Polakow-Suransky). This is one of the few times I've seen the verb-form of "profiling," and I can't help but muse on the other more active verbs that could take its place in that sentence. This was particularly conspicuous for brown men flying business class as it brought up too many nasty reminders of the events of 9-11, or 11-9 as we refer to it in metric. That was followed, as we all recall, by rigorous restrictions on what we could bring on board – how many here have had the one-inch file snapped off their nail clippers at security. I'm sure nail files and toenail scissors are still regularly confiscated, along, now, with toothpaste, hair gel, and tubes of nonoxynol-nine, though the irony is that, with the travel I've been doing in my research chair over the past few months, I've frequently upgraded my seat to business class and have found, quite recently, that Air Canada is happily handing out real silverware (including knives) to

their business class clientele. Even the brown ones. So it appears class privilege trumps racial profiling in this instance, and I have toyed with the idea of trying to file my nails with the knife they bring me to cut into my sausage omelette. Oh, a postscript to this tale: On my flight from Vancouver to Winnipeg to deliver an earlier version of this presentation, I became curious about those knives handed out willynilly by Air Canada. For effect, I suppose, I borrowed one of those knives, insignia-ed with the AC logo, let it fall into my pocket as I left the plane, and during my paper at UW produced same knife to explicate the absurdity of airport security which prevented such things from passing through, only to be handed such items with your food (perhaps with the argument that you can't eat and be violent at the same time).

So then, returning and going through Winnipeg airport security, they want to check the pockets of my Berlin hoodie and find, lo and behold, this aircanada knife.

"You can't take that on the plane," says the security guard sagely.

"It came off the plane," I note.

Another security guard comes by to inspect the knife: "This is not supposed to leave the plane," she notes dourly. (But not having security checks when you leave the plane, hard to prevent.)

"I know," I say. "It fell off the plate into my bag."

They all stand around trying to figure out what to do. A form comes out and one of the guards busily fills out items, telling me to sign here. What am I signing, I ask. He explains that it's my agreement to let them confiscate the knife. And, he says, we will give it back to the airline.

So now I wait to board and, it being breakfast time, am relatively certain the flight attendants will presently hand me yet another full set of cutlery, knife included, for my omelette. And somewhere in the bowels of winnipeg airport security, there are probably many more forms to fill out to figure out how to repatriate that errant knife.

I feel much, much safer.

Judith Halberstam says that "part of what has made queerness compelling as a form of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space" (1-2). "Liminal subjects," however, and this can range from the dragging on queen street to the 'arab-looking' airline customer (my extreme examples), "are sacrificed to maintain coherence within the category of the human" (153) which entails a rejection and abjection "in the formation of human community, and what toll those exclusions take on particular subjects" (153). What this says is that, to take Halberstam's notion of queer time and space seriously and to a logical place, we have to be re-evaluating what we mean by normativity as it pertains to race, gender, and sexuality.

FOUR. Badmaash, Gayatri Gopinath, and Gautum Malkani

A mosque is vandalized in Winnipeg on Sept 17 of this year and the incident is covered by the national media. It is another of many such events that involve mosques, temples,

synagogues, cemeteries, sites that articulate cultural or religious difference and are raged against by a public growing unable to cope with said difference. I say “public” and not “the intolerant few” because there is a growing acceptance, often couched under the notion of ‘free speech’ or the ‘protection of the majority’ to comment disparagingly (and vandalism and graffiti are or can be such acts) on cultural groups or individuals. At any rate, a passing camera shot shows the following spraypainted on the side of the mosque (SLIDE, photo-illustration): “I am a gay packy” along with the requisite swastika. I am a gay packy. It was only a fleeting image but I felt compelled to parse this, parse and



attribute, because as we know in academia, attribution is that necessary grey area between plagiarism and original thought. I am a gay packy. Punctuated with another southasian signifier, the swastika (or svas-teek'-a), a symbol straight out of Zoroastrianism. So what am I to make of this simple sentence and visual imagery? Could it be that a growing south asian queer movement, the likes of which have not been seen since the heyday of Desh Pardesh in Toronto, is taking Winnipeg by force? We're

here, we're brown and queer, get used to it, a radical gay-brown resistance movement that goes about targeting conservative institutions, We Are Part of You and You are Part of Us? [My one-time research assistant and full-time poet Sharanpal Ruprai came up with the term “paqueer” with her brown, um, special friend, a nice pushing together of “paki” and “queer” (informing me too late that this was not to be used by me in any sort of critical or creative work of my own, to which I responded, fuck that, if I can't steal from graduate students what sort of academic was I?)... paqueer, which was nice shorthand until Sp thought it would be nice to call everyone paqueer, somewhat defeating the purpose one might think if you go about calling out to Steven Harper or Vic Toews, “hey bro, paqueer, eh?” in some sort of fraternal or sororal solidarity, although perhaps in the long run, to quote my fave philosopher-artists, Andy and Barry Gibb, hum along “wouldn't it be nice if we were (brownier and queerer), then we wouldn't have to wait so long...”?]

So, yes, I am a gay packy, note the spelling of course, which has as its referents both Pakistani and Pachyderm, so perhaps what the graf artist here is suggesting is a queer animal liberationist movement, particularly focussing on homosocial elephants (which for some odd reason brings to mind the David Bateman joke, prob not his originally but can only now imagine his voice telling it, what did the elephant say to the naked man? How do you breathe through that thing?) so it could be “I am a gay pachyderm” with the implicit critique that conservative organized religious institutions oppress the expressed sexual difference in non-humans. Of course, this confusion is so nicely articulated by Gautum Malkani at the beginning of his novel *Londonstani* where a group of mostly asian youth give a thrashing to a white kid for calling them Paki, not so much because he used a racial epithet (which, incidentally, he did not) but because the epithet was clearly

wrong since this partic group of middle-class street-acting gangsta wannabes, like a large portion of British Asians, were not from Pakistan from which, assumably, the term originates (and I remember my own initiation to grade ten being chased by older white kids yelling 'get the paki,' and my instinctual response was to stop, turn, and say, "Chaps, I believe you have mistakenly identified me as borne of or orignating from Pakistan, which is entirely not the case, so perhaps you could rephrase that epithet and call me, I don't know, Indie, though that doesn't have the satisfactory hard consonants and actually sounds rather cool, so what sort of epithet would that be?" but of course I didn't stop and turn and utter such nonsense because I don't think I would have got past the "chaps" syllable, and if I had, even I would have beaten me up for being such a geek.) The scene in *Londonstani* is more reminiscent, though, of Monty Python's *Life of Brian* where the centurion castigates the graffiti-scrawling Brian for his improper use of Latin, forcing him to correct his grammar and write it hundreds of times on the wall; in *Londonstani*, the youth instruct their victim in the proper form, use, and proper-noun uppercasing of the epithet.

First words:

--Serve him right he got his muthafuckin face fuck'd, shudn't b callin me a Paki, innit" (3). This is uttered by desi/rudeboy leader Hardjit as he lays a beating on a white boy. His posse around soley for verbal support, as the well-cut Hardjit (described by narrator Jas as having a "perfectly built body...perfectly shaped facial hair ...[And] perfectly groomed garms" (4) not to mention pecs so defined they can clench his dog tags in their "deep groove," (testament that while Jas is hot for fit desi girls, his eyes wander about a bit and stay awhile and often on the desi leader...)

But Jas admits being jealous of Hardjit's 'front', his verbal prowess, and after Hardjit alternately kicks and lectures his victim on the finer points of pakidom, Jas feels compelled to contribute with:

--Yeh, motherfucker, an even when you allowed to call someone a Paki, it be a Paki wid a capital P, innit.

--Jas, u khota, Hardjit goes, swivelling around so fast his dog tags would've flown off someone with a thinner neck, -- why da fuck u teachin him how 2 spell?

"I shrugged, deeply lamenting my lack a rudeboyesque panache.

(7)

Of course, all this aside, it's more than likely that *I am a gay packy* was scrawled by someone who was, or represents, neither a queer nor a racialized position. But if the target was a particular racialized or religious group, at a push we might understand, Malkani aside, the use of the non-elephantine Packy, but why and how the 'gay'? An imposition of identity, pushing the first-person pronoun onto the mosque so that, possibly, the graffiti is an utterance coming from within, simultaneously representng and castigating all those who inhabit the space? The "i" is not the first-person singular of the inscriber but the 'you' plural, a well-respected literary device to bring the reader closer perhaps? So 'gay' becomes a signifier not of queerness but a term of derogation that, one supposes, has little to do with sexuality. I think here of gay rights activist Eminiem in the film *Eight Mile* where his character (uncharacteristically, but that's another question)

defends the honour and integrity of a black gay co-worker in an MC showdown with a straight, white, homophobic co-worker. The Eminem character hits it with a final line that says, essentially, that so what if his colleague is gay but that the homophobic character, with his fearmongering and anger, is the real “faggot.” So this is the world we have inherited. Elephants of varying sexualities demanding acceptance by a mosque in winnipeg; everyone from brown-gay to straight-white can be paqueer; and the only real way to be a faggot is to be really really homophobic.

In *Masculinities without Men*, Bobby Noble puts forth the notion of ‘threshold effects’ of gender “where quantitative increments in somatic signifiers of gender along one axis can suddenly appear as qualitative differences on the other....Figuratively, this means that it is sometimes necessary to cross over the threshold of one thing (butchness and queerness), or to flip its switches from on to off, in order to register on an entirely different scale (FTM trans-sexual). In terms of race, however, the opposite is true. It is necessary to invert that which is normally hypervisible (people of colour) in order to see what white people are not supposed to see (whiteness).”

???

But there are, I suggest, possibilities. Gayatri Gopinath draws on Jose Rabasa’s analysis of the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas and his phrase ‘*Exigid lo imposible!*’ (“Demand the impossible”), as a context that “suggests the range of oppositional practices, subjectivities, and alternative visions of collectivity that fall outside the developmental narratives of colonialism, bourgeois nationalism, mainstream liberal feminism, and mainstream gay and lesbian politics and theory” (20). Her work is an attempt to “allow us to identify the ways in which those of us who occupy impossible spaces transform them into vibrant, livable spaces of possibility” (194). While Gopinath writes specifically to queer South Asian subjectivity, I wish to borrow her notion of the “impossible” subject in order to effect a *possibilizing* the impossible in the context of race, sexuality, migration, borders, citizenship, and artistic production in the global/local city-nation scene.

One such impossible demand is presented by David Bateman in his forthcoming poetry volume, ‘he impersonated flowers’, a creative-critical fictively nonfictionary queer-desired tract that shifts between misrecognitions, exemplary of Noble’s ‘threshold effects’ in terms of making-things-visible and, I would argue, demanding the impossible ala Gopinath through Rabasa. The narrator of Bateman’s text speaks a monologuic aside to, but not quite to, his mother:

and no I don’t think Princess Anne is a lesbian I think she’s an equestrian and yes I do think that her dress looks like a table cloth and indeed I do agree that Lulu sang that theme song just lovely in that film with Sidney Poitier and no I do not agree that Poitier is unusually handsome for a black man you inbred cocktail party racist you - if you only knew how attractive I find black men you would report me to race relations
(n.p.)

Inversions abound: Princess Anne either/orring as lesbian/equestrian (but not both?), the multiple white gazes on the black male body, layered with racism and desire, and the comical notion that a sanctioning body arguably set up to address racist encounters might

be approached by a woman hoping it will deal and effectively reprimand to her son's homoerotic miscegenative desire.

Or, to return to the subject focus of Gopinath, in Sharanpal Ruprai's poem, "A New Script," an old script, part bollywood part hollywood, is played out, genderbent and desire-filled:

"In an unfinished basement we re-in-act bollywood...
of course she's
dressed in the lasted fashion she plays sweet sweet shy covers half her face
I the man with a homemade green turban hair sticks out the top...
she stares at the camera her eyes fixed on mine i know the look
she practiced it the point in the movie when her father attempts to marry her off to
some wifebeating older uncle I would swoop in on my broom-horse rescue her
always a happy ending, a bride a groom a kiss there's no
dance in sight she acts out that other ending
we promised to never end our film this way but here you sit in my lap
...
a step back a step forward we promised to never end this way
but here you sit my Indian bride always and I forget my lines and the
broom is no where in sight

A New Script is full of ambivalence in everything but desire. The threshold effect here is all about constructed gaze: simultaneously, the 'she' of the poem stares at the camera while her eyes are fixed on the narrator, conflating the two. The unspoken bond is to 'never end our film this way,' to 'never end this way,' yet still the new script is palimpsested over the old, the bride and groom still destined for the kiss, and yet, there the narrator forgets her lines and that which is no where in sight, is the rescue-device, that is, the broom, or is that an absented groom?

FIVE: Bhangra, George Bush, and Eminem

I – I never really wanted to be an academic. Nah, not what every child dreams of. Wearing Fred Perry jackets. Having undergrads call you Dr. Miki, Dr. Chariandy, Dr. McCall, Dr. Dickinson, Dr. 85 (*citing professors at SFU, present and not*). No, when I was young, I wanted to be a rock star. I'll update that and say, I wanted to be a name in hiphop. That's it. A hiphop star, a dope rapper. Of course, when I was young, there was that other racialized imperative, too, and I wanted to be white. So here I am on Burnaby Mountain, invited by the organizers of sexing the text on the advice of, I am led to understand, Dr Sophie McCall who undoubtedly informed said organizers that ashok might be both available and willing, not to mention cheap and free (terms which are not, in this case, redundantly complementary) and what better opportunity to be a white MC. (*Ashok takes off his Fred Perry jacket and replaces it with the "Berlin" hoodie that is up til now draped across a chair in front. He dons an "eracism" hat.*) Here I am, yo, a brown boy playing a white boy playing a black boy. Oh yeah, I used to run base like Juan

Pierre doncha know. Welcome to the musical portion of the presentation. Pay attention to my bounce, flow.

[plays Indian Tabla #5 world beat from Garageband]

Look at these eyes baby blue baby just like yasef
If they were brown
Shady lose Shady sits on the shelf
But Shady's cute
Shady knew Shady's dimples would help
Make ladies swoon baby (ooo baby)
Look at myself!

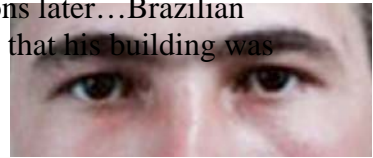
...

When I was underground
No one gave a fuck I was white
No labels wanted to sign me
Almost gave up, I was like "Fuck it"
Until I met Dre
The only one who looked past
Gave me a chance
And I lit a fire up under his ass
Helped him get back to the top
Every black fan that I got
Was probably his in exchange for every white fan that he's got
Like damn we just swapped
Sittin' back look at this shit wow
I'm like
[kill music]

"My skin, is it startin' to work to my benefit now?"

I'd like to take credit for those lyrics but they are, of course, from "White America," by hip-hop icon Eminem. Oh, I mighta laid down a Tabla track to form the percussive line. If music is always a case of ethno-sharing, hip-hop exemplifies the radical shifts employed with race crossovers. In these lyrics, Eminem talks over race in two distinct ways – first, his whiteness prohibits him entry into the black club of hip-hop; second, once he does squeeze in the door, his whiteness is recognized as a shared quality by the hordes of young, white, disaffected, suburban fans, while simultaneously drawing the ire of the white establishment. Liquid race politics, all nicely summarized in that post-identity politics line, "My [white] skin, is it startin' to work to my benefit now?" Eminem crosses that colour line, in a manner of speaking, that race border, not easily, not unproblematically, but it is a border crossing nonetheless. But Eminem enters whiteness through blackness in such a way that a type of white disaffection, far different from white supremacy, is illustrated. "White America," is a strident critique of the Bush White House and a Republican-controlled Congress, with Mistah Mathews as the self-proclaimed "motherfucking spokesman now for white America" "spit[ting] liquor into the face of this democracy of hypocrisy," expressing as much freedom of speech, raps Eminem, as this "divided states of embarrassing will allow me to have."

I want to return to a specific watershed moment in the recent history of global terror, *read*: when bad things happen to good people (in the west,) which is, undeniably, our current definition of terrorism. (Indeed, the notion of 'state' terrorism has been washed off the board of late, apparently with the logic that if you have a democratically elected government, however corruptly it comes to power, than you have the the legitimacy of Use of Force and Military Intervention – terrorism can only be named as such when it comes from a "rogue state" or radical members of a non-state.) In the summer of 2005, the city-state of London was in the post-traumatic throes of the Underground bombings, and two things happened: first, there was this utter disbelief that such a deed could be committed by, and the media term for this was, 'homegrown' terrorists, suggesting some sort of horticulturalist aesthetic that nurtures radical Islamicist factions perhaps. And second, that because of the danger of the enemy within, all bets were off, and the new face of security was the gulag guard, as in, shoot first, ask questions later... Brazilian national Jean Charles de Menezes exited his London flat unaware that his building was under surveillance by Britain's finest.



SIX: Bullets, Jean Charles de Menezes, and Hardt and Negri

The circumstances are unfortunate, but given the circumstances, justified. Plain clothes officers? yes, Were they chasing and not yelling stop! Police!? Doubt it! The enemy is not the police, it is the Islamic terrorists who created the situation. The police were focused and determined and believed they were saving lives. People should be thanking the officers for their extraordinary valor in a very difficult situation.

Comment by Craig — July 25, 2005

While we can criticize the police, you never know what they are facing. A man with a coat runs on a hot summer day. Here in the US, he would have been shot the minute he ran, not wait till he got to the station. What if he was connected and he did have a bomb? Would we have called them HEROS? Absolutely. Because that is what they are, no matter what the outcome turned out to be.

Comment by From America — July 25, 2005

[Ashok starts the audio track of the underground (available in the public directory of amathur61 on .mac.com under the file name "menezes.")

[script on audio tape]

One surveillance officer admitted he could not identify Mr de Menezes because he was relieving himself as the Brazilian left his home - a block of flats in Tulse Hill where it was thought one of the bombers, Hussain Osman, lived.

"As he walked out of my line of vision I checked the photographs and transmitted that it would be worth someone else having a look. I should point out that, as I observed this male exiting the block, I was in the process of relieving myself.

"At this time I was not able to transmit my observations and switch on the video camera at the same time. There is therefore no video footage of this male."

A second officer also failed to give a positive identification but claimed the suspect had "distinctive Mongolian eyes".

[On the audio track seven shots ring out.]

In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri enunciate what they call the “right of the police,” essentially a rhetorical position shored up by a public desire for social equilibrium. The rhetorical force in this case goes like this: it’s a tragedy that de Menezes was shot seven times in the head and killed, but it’s a small price to pay for the rest of us being kept safe. The fact that de Menezes was proven innocent posthumously, does not detract from the *possibility* that he *could have* been a “terrorist,” a possibility that excuses the lethal action. Further, a public bent on this “right of the police” (and I want to make it clear here that it’s not the civil state authority alone, or even in a major way, that should be the focus here) will leave no stone unturned to justify particularized actions on various forms of conjecture. The fact that de Menezes could have been wearing a jacket too warm for the season (even though he wasn’t) is reason enough to shoot him in the head; the fact that he could have run onto the underground (even though he didn’t) is plenty of reason to take him down; the fact that, as an electrician, he might have had wires sticking out of bags (he didn’t – he had left his tools at his jobsite) is the justification to shoot him in the one body part where police are sure will not detonate the explosives; and the fact that de Menezes *might* have ignored shouted warnings that police *must* have given (he did not because they did not) is why he is dead.

Jean Charles de Menezes: is his skin startin’ to work to his benefit now? Or is he just going to have to get used to being profiled for a while? Mr. Bush and other brokers of security and insecurity: exactly how many is a Brazilian? One two three four five six or seven?

SEVEN: Betrayal, Susan Sontag and Maher Arar

Susan Sontag writes “To catch a death actually happening and embalm it for all time is something only cameras can do” (59) and that “the problem is not that people remember through photographs, but that they remember only the photographs” (89). I would take this further and say we have entered into an Xbox reality where the image has ceased to be a representation of an *event* and instead becomes a representation of a *fantasy* composed by fear-mongers and security advisors, all those with a vested interest in keeping it unreal. At what point does the mugshot of de Menezes, swarthy and bushy-eyebrowed, slip in the public consciousness from targeted-bystander-shot-in-the-head to potential underground bomber or certainly a necessary casualty in the fight against terror? It already has. Sontag also says that “There’s nothing wrong with standing back and thinking ... ‘nobody can think and hit someone at the same time’” (118), but the problem with that, of course, is how we are being trained to think, with what factors underpinning our logic. If what we long for is a type of safety or security, are we willing – and I think as a citizenry we have proved ourselves so – to give over to the state a growing amount of power in the name of democracy? Guantanamo has been shown to have no legitimacy, yet it still exists; Maher Arar may have won a battle following his bizarre treatment under ‘extraordinary



rendition,' but neither Canada nor the US have backed off from on-the-books so-called anti-terror legislation that effectively puts the boots to habeous corpus.

Edward Said writes “The intellectual’s role generally is dialectically, oppositionally, to uncover and elucidate the contest (between a powerful system of interests and less powerful interests threatened with frustration, silence, incorporation, or extinction by the powerful), to challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power wherever and whenever possible” (31). Said goes on to say that the staples of dominant discourse employ a rhetoric that has been married to the orthodoxy of globalization: “the free market, privatization, less government” and I would add to that the exponentially growing prominence of terms such as “national security” and “war on terror” and other rhetorical devices specifically designed and expertly manipulated to keep a public imprisoned within capitalist and neo-imperialist frameworks.

A return to the thought that gave me earlier pause: these borders, constituted as abstract and literal, classed and raced, political and social, what is being bought and sold across these virtual and legal lines? Aluminum, beer, dope, multiculturalism as business aesthetic, hiphop and bhangra, and always those bodies, material and imaginary, legitimate and illegal. In what form do those bodies cross, under what restrictions and what conditions?

I want to close with the work of visual artist Ho Tam, currently teaching in Victoria. In February 2006, Tam traveled with the Canadian Navy on the HMCS Calgary from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii back to the Esquimalt Naval Base. The work in this exhibition is based on the experience and made with the support of the Canadian Forces Artist Program. Tam spent his time sketching, photographing, and videotaping the men and women serving on that ship. His was a different form of border crossing, a different form of longing as he talked of the politics of nation, race, gender and sexuality during his time on board. I’ll close with an excerpt from a “letter” that is part of this work:

Dear C _____,

It has been a long time since we met at sea. After a year of not receiving any replies, I am writing one last time to express my feelings to you.

I remember the first time I saw you, walking towards me in your uniform, I was overcome with desire and fantasy. I was afraid, but you gave me strength and told me to stand up for myself. You, strong and confident, always looked forward, ready to fight for justice and your ideals. At that time I pictured you would defend my honour, and protect me from the evils of the world.



In the ocean of love we sailed together, from dusk to dawn, against the high winds. We stood side by side, staring into the waves, exchanging our secret vows.

But I did not know the sea could be treacherous too. Awakened in my sinking boat, I am drowning in shock and disbelief at your betrayal. What is the reason of your sudden change of course?Today as I am left to drift on my own, I lament that part of me that you have taken away. A thousand times I send my prayers and loving thoughts in your direction. I do not want to imagine that you have forgotten our histories and promises. But, am I only deceiving myself? Are we fighting a battle without a justified cause? Will true love prevail? I fear that I am losing my mind. (artist statement)



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