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IDENTITY, POSTCOLONIALITY, TRANSGLOBALISM

EDITED BY
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continuum
NEW YORK • LONDON
CULTURAL CO-ORDINATES OF A BULGARIAN ART-HOAX

"DRAFTS" BY VIRGINIA, A TRAGEDIA DELL'ARTE

Nikita Nankov

[To Dzhinko Terpentinko]

i moite veseli risunki sa mnogo tâzhni risunki . . .

Ilia Beshkov

Politics again? Why can’t they just hear it as a piece of beautiful music?

David Henry Hwang

PROLOGUE

Signore e Signori, welcome to the show!

I mean the one-man show “Drafts” by Parrbenos/Virgo Restored and Presented by Virginia Stoianova or, more briefly, “Drafts” by Virginia. As you see, it consists of 35 sketches by the young Bulgarian artist Virginia Stoianova (“Virzhiinii,” in Bulgarian) and a concept by me. The exhibition takes place in March 1994 in the Lassadra gallery in Sofia, Bulgaria, which was ranked as the best private gallery in the country for 1991, 1992, and 1993 by Kultura, the leading weekly newspaper for culture. The show is a hoax: the obviously contemporary drawings are accompanied by purported scholarly documents which present them as Protesorenaissance works. Taken in by the concept, the visitors and the media become involuntary participants in and propagators of the mystification, thus turning it into a piece of performance art on a national scale. The exhibition, which entwines visual art, performance, literature, and philosophy, both artistically challenges and critically analyzes some mental, social, and cultural paradigms in postcommunist Bulgaria. Its success comes from the fact that some widespread Bulgarian fantasies and assumptions about their national cultural identity are enacted as real.

In Act One, I present the concept of the exhibition as outlined in the pseudo-

scholarly documents which frame the drawings. In Act Two, I review the reaction of the public and the media. Finally, in Act Three, I offer a revised English version of an article I wrote in Bulgaria, which analyzes the meaning of the show and its cultural repercussions, and which ends the performance.

ACT ONE

The concept, which I am sending to the media, consists of four parts, allegedly excerpts from top-tier scholarly publications. Watch carefully, ladies and gentlemen!

Scene 1: The Discovery (Art History)

“In the summer of 1990, Professor Ivan Iordanov of the University of Sofia, while studying the manuscripts and the frescoes in the Bulgarian monastery Zographou in Athos, Greece, came across unknown drawings which he assumed dated from the second half of the thirteenth century. . . . They remind one of some of the famous frescoes in the Boiana Church in Sofia (considered the paramount exemplars of Protesorenaissance art in Bulgaria) as well as some frescoes in the churches of Athos. A marginal note [pripiska] in the famous thirteenth-century Draganov minei (Menoun of Dragan), considered unclear before this discovery, relates the drawings beyond any doubt to the most valuable frescoes in these churches. . . .

“In the spring of the following year, in the Archivo segreto vaticano [the secret archives of the Apostolic library of the Vatican], Professor Iordanov discovered drawings similar to Giotto’s mosaic Nativella in St. Peter’s Church in Rome. . . . The most astounding discovery, however, was that of the preparatory sketches for the decoration of the monastery of Santa Chiara by the same master. Giotto executed the decoration while working in the service of King Robert, but his paintings had been considered irrevocably lost. . . . The likeness between the Zographou and the Vatican drawings was so striking that Professor Iordanov presumed that they belonged to one and the same artist and were, very likely, drafts. His hypothesis was further supported by the fact that texts on the sketches – in Greek and Latin – shared much of the same content and seemed to be parts of a treatise that Professor Iordanov named On the ‘Drafts.’

The author signed both the Athos and the Vatican drawings ‘Parthenos’ or ‘Virgo,’ that is, ‘Virgin.’ This is why Professor Iordanov called the unknown master Parthenos/Virgo or, simply, ‘Virgina.’”

Scene 2: The Feminist Twist

“The scholarly opinions on Parthenos/Virgo or Virginia can be summarized in the following manner: she was born circa 1240 in Bulgaria. . . . The second Bulgarian Empire took up the high artistic traditions of Byzantium after the fall of Constantinople to the Venetians and Crusaders in 1204. After working on the frescoes in the Boiana Church near Sredets – today’s Sofia – around 1259, Virginia parted for Athos. Despite the interdict on women and female animals
entering the Mount of Athos, the most important monastic center of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Virginia, disguised as a man, became a monk first in the Serbian Chilandar and later in the Bulgarian Zographou, and succeeded in working her way up to a position in the Epistasia, the body composed of five representatives exercising executive power over all the Athos monasteries. After Catalanian pirates plundered Zographou and set it on fire in 1275, Virginia concealed herself in the Latin cloister Coenobium Almajfanorum near Chilandar, and later secretly left for Italy. There she changed her identity for a second time and became Giotto di Bondone.... Virginia’s genius and comprehensive education, as well as her successful financial undertakings and her unprecedented social and artistic success, ensured her a prestige that was unthinkable for her female contemporaries in the field of art."

**Scene 3: The Exhibition “Drafts” by Virginia and Ms. Stoe**

(The Burlington Magazine)

“The Zographou and the Vatican drafts by Virginia have been restored and prepared for exhibition by Ms. Virginia Stoe, a famous American painter, gallery owner, restorer, art historian, philanthropist, and art expert for corporations such as Chrysler and Motorola. Ms. Stoe... was born in Bulgaria as Virginia Stoianova. In 1956, in protest against the Soviet invasion of Hungary, she defected to France. Since 1960 she has been living in the US, in New York City and Chicago. In a lengthy interview for The New York Times Book Review, Ms. Stoe says that she has taken to heart the ‘drafts’ of the enigmatic Virginia for several reasons. First, they are ‘an extremely important bridge’ between Eastern European and Western art and culture. Second, the treatise On the ‘Drafts’ more than seven centuries ago ‘anticipated ideas which are at the very core of today’s postmodernism.’ Third, the hypothesis that the anonymous Boiana Master and Giotto were one and the same person who, beyond any doubt, was a woman, is ‘an inspiration for the feminist cause.’

“The exhibition Drafts by Virginia was made possible in part through the generous financial assistance of the Patriarch’s Institute for Patristic Studies in Thessaloniki, Greece, Banco di Santo Spirito Vaticano, and the Rockefeller Foundation....

“The exhibition was shown for the first time at the Art Institute of Chicago (May–July 1993) and after that at the Grand Palais in Paris (August–October 1993) and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (December 1993–February 1994). After its stop in Sofia, Bulgaria, the exhibition will travel to the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. In accordance with Ms. Stoe’s wishes, Drafts by Virginia are exhibited in Sofia in the Lesselei gallery by her protegee, the Bulgarian artist Virginia Stoianova, who is now pursuing her master’s degree in Fine Arts at the Parsons School of Design in New York City. The work of the young Virginia, according to Ms. Stoe, reminds her of her own paintings when she first came to America.”

**Scene 4: From the Treatise On the “Drafts”**

(GESTA, translation from Greek and Latin)

“But, lying to themselves, some say: ‘The draft presupposes a fair copy, an original. The drafts are only the stepping stones leading from the initial idea to the image incarnate. But these stages are ascended only by him who knows, in other words, by him who is skillful in the rules of the artistic craft... The rules describe what the finished work has to be like in order to be perfect, and what skills [technoe] one has to apply. The drafts, therefore, are duration and history. They provide the meaning of the final image: this image is beautiful because it is ripe. The same holds true for the painter: before becoming a master he must be an apprentice. The academy serves precisely this purpose – to create masters from apprentices.’

‘To these madmen we respond with the words of the venerable apostle Peter, who teaches that there are ‘drafts and “drafts”:’ With the ‘drafts’ we do not go anywhere because we have already reached our destination. The ‘draft’ does not presuppose a fair copy because it denies both the draft and the original. The ‘draft’ is born solely of this innervation in the hand that cannot be taught or exercised. The ‘draft’ is not a fruition but an instant. It is not an apprenticeship but mastery in itself. The ‘draft’ does not lead to the beautiful but to the sublime, which cannot be represented and which relishes the heart only because the ‘draft’ is here, it happens. The ‘draft’ is perfect not because it follows the rules but because it overwhelms him who beholds it. The ‘draft’ is an angel who announces its own annunciation. The ‘draft’ does not have any other meaning. Or is it not, ignoramuses, the wonder-working icon of St. George in Zographou, which painted itself in one night, that is the best example of a ‘draft’? Or will you, unbelievers, deny that every creation is perfect, and will you insist on the old fable of the deluge and Noah, which proves God’s imperfect creation? Wretched madmen, if this were so, the spider would have been a more magnificent creator than God, for no spider destroys its own intricate web as God allegedly did by sending the Flood.”

**ACT TWO**

**Scene 1: Numerous Signs**

_Mesdames et Messieurs!_ Numerous signs hint at the jocular character of the exhibition. The opening is on March 8, a day which in communist Bulgaria was celebrated as the Woman’s Holiday comparable with Mothers’ Day in the US; after 1989, however, it was ridiculed as an institutionalization of women’s lower status in society. Two weeks before the opening, an article in a major newspaper announces the forthcoming “Drafts” by Virginia: At the opening Virginia/Visinhinaia appears wearing a theatrical thirteenth-century costume and a mustachio, indicating the parodic verse of this ostensibly historical and feminist exhibition. All these signs, however, are totally neglected by the media and the audience. Too bad.

**Scene 2: The Viewers**

The viewers fall into three groups. Our friends are enjoying the artistic joke which intertwines present-day drawings with a Protorenaissance concept. They are the ideal viewers for whom this is just a piece of beautiful music, and we,
the authors, think that everybody will interpret the exhibition in the way they do. The artists, indifferent to verbal concepts, are focused on the works. The third and largest group consists of the journalists and the ordinary viewers. They believe the concept and never feel any discrepancy between it and the sketches, which clearly are not what the concept maintains (see Figures 1—4). Too bad.

Look to the left, Seniors y Senoritas! This is Mr. X, the Head of the Cultural Heritage Program of the richest foundation in Bulgaria, a professional who has spent fifteen years working on the Boiana Church frescoes as a historian. He is asking Virginia/Virzhienia’s assistance in connecting him with Ms. Stoe. Now look to the right. This is a young Bulgarian film director, dreaming of “making it” in the US. He is encouraging Virginia/Virzhiinia and me to write a script about Parthenos/Virgo, which he will sell to Hollywood. And in the center is an associate professor of art history at the National Art Academy in Sofia. He has brought his students to the gallery and is lecturing on the Boiana Master and Giotto. The Lesehra gallery is frequented by the intelligentsia, who leave content with what they have seen. In order to make the exhibition even more a shrine of national pride, Virginia/Virzhiinia and I start selling expensive tickets, and ask a friend of ours of impressive physique to play guard with a toy gun and to scold every curious viewer who dares to come too close to the drawings.
Figure 3: Boiana master, signed by Parthenos. Study for the fresco decoration "Christ Euergetes (the Benefactor)" at the principal church of the monastery of Chilandar, Mount Athos. c. 1260–70. 50 x 70 cm. Drawing in chalk. Monastery of Chilandar, Mount Athos.

Figure 4: Giusto, signed by Viggo. Study for the fresco decoration "Crucifix" at the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome. c. 1298. 50 x 70 cm. Drawing in chalk. The Vatican, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, ms. F. 216 inf. fol. 11 verso. The work is mentioned by Vasari but has been destroyed.
Scene 3: The Media

And now comes the juiciest part of our show, ladies and gentlemen! What turns the exhibition into a large-scale hoax is the media. Several of the national newspapers, the national television and radio, and some private newspapers and radio stations take the concept at face value, and create the name of Parthenos/Virgo. An article by Mila Vacheva, the art critic of the major socialist newspaper Duma, demonstrates concern for national values: “Viarna ili ne, hipoteza e liubopitna i povdiga natsionalnote ni samochuvstvie.” (“True or not, the hypothesis of Parthenos/Virgo being the Boiana Master/Giotto boosts our national self-esteem.”) After enumerating the powerful foreign institutions which have sponsored and exhibited the show, Vacheva accuses the political opponents of the socialists, who are in power at that time, of neglecting national interests: “Uchudvasho e, che v Bulgaria i domakinstva malkata chastna galeria ‘Lesedra’...” a ne institut ot ranga na izbroenite po-gore.” (“It is amazing that in Bulgaria the show is hosted by the small private Lesedra gallery... and not by an institution whose rank is commensurate with those enumerated above.”

To begin the process of demystification we involve more newspapers in the hoax, informing them of the short-sightedness of their competitors. In her article, Nadia Medeva praises the drawings by Virginia/Virzhinina, not by Parthenos/Virgo, and castigates the naivety of the new-fangled art critics, who degrade the standards of the profession with their ludicrous ignorance. In the April Fool’s Day issue of Kultura, the elitist newspaper promoting postmodern tastes in Bulgaria through ex cathedra dicta, Diana Popova, the art critic of the paper, delivers a didactic lecture on conceptual art overseas and in the fatherland. Kultura publishes a half-page photograph of a fresco from the Boiana Church with an ironic comment: “Kompozitsiia po chernovi na Virzhinina” (“A composition based on Virginia’s drafts”).

The best proof that the show has exposed the manipulative mechanisms of the media is provided in July 1994, when Virginia/Virzhinina and I open her next exhibition Virginia Stoianova in Quotation Marks, also at the Lesedra gallery. It comprises 12 imaginative self-portraits by her and a concept by me, a self-ironic collage of enthusiastic newspaper quotes about “Drafts” by Virginia. The media, which has regularly produced a dozen or so reviews for each of Virginia/Virzhinina’s previous shows, this time remains silent. Too bad, indeed.

ACT THREE

Scene 1: The Sign and the Magic

Meine Damen und Herren, what is the significance of “Drafts” by Virginia? Let me begin my answer by recalling some well-known premises, which, however, provide the semiotic and social prerequisites for the meanings of the exhibition. The sign, if we may oversimplify things, is a unity of signifier and signified. In modern times, that is, during the last five centuries, our civilization has been aware that the connection between these two elements is not natural, as was previously thought, but conventional. Today, if conventionality is dealt with as if it covered the whole of reality, we speak of ideological manipulation. The disclosure, first, of the pretense of natural connection between signifier and signified and, second, of the pretense on the part of ideology to give a total semantic interpretation of the world, is demystification and denunciation of the ideological manipulation. When the media claims that it presents news “objectively,” “such as it is,” it resorts to ancient semiotic magic in order to manipulate the audience. Conversely, when “Drafts” by Virginia, on the other hand, with its drawings (as signified) perspicuously demonstrates that they are works by a contemporary artist and, on the other hand, with its concept (as signifier) affirms that these sketches are the works of the enigmatic Protorenaisance Virginia, it takes aim at the very heart of manipulation, and tests the audience’s immunity to manipulation. The exhibition is widely reviewed by the national media but in a way that naively reiterates that the works belong to the Boiana Master/Giotto. This demonstrates two things: first, through semiotic magic, the media manipulates not only their audience but themselves as well; second, an artistic mystification is an effective means of demystifying mass communication.

Scene 2: Hyperrealism, Manipulation, and Terror

“Drafts” by Virginia is a play of hyperrealism, a juggling of signifiers with no signifieds. However, the exhibition is not only an exercise in fashionable postmodernism in a country hypnotized by American values, but it also acquires concrete Bulgarian meanings by pointing to socio-political and cultural traditions that flourished in this Balkan country during the last one hundred and twenty years. These traditions have consisted in an alternation between manipulation and terror. If manipulation is a form of semiotic and ideological magic, terror is a quasi-alternative imposed by brute force. In Bulgarian cultural history manipulation has been thought of as something civilized, progressive, democratic, and European, whereas terror has been thought of as primitive, conservative, autocratic, and Bulgarian.

In the 1890s, the dawn of the modern Bulgarian state, the unscrupulous parvenu Bai Gan’o, the notorious character created by Aleko Konstantinov, the greatest Bulgarian satirist, proclaimed that he could elect even a donkey as a parliamentary deputy if he had at his disposal a bunch of drunken “prangadzhi” (“jail-birds”). Bai Gan’o opts for terror, not for manipulation. For him, the newspaper as a means of mass communication is first of all an instrument of violence—“psvai naliavo i nadiasmo” (“curse everybody and his mother”) (BG, vol. 1, p. 126)—and, then secondarily, an instrument of manipulation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the era of Bulgarian modernism, manipulation was extolled as coming from the civilized West, whereas coercion was despised as something typically Bulgarian: one of the characters in Pejo Iavorov’s play V polite na Vitocha (In the Skirts of Vitocha, 1911) sighs for Europe where they kill with “igla ot zlato” (“a needle of gold”), while lamenting Bulgaria where they kill with “dårvarska sekira” (“a woodman’s ax”). The book of the prominent sociologist Ivan Khadzhiiski Authorit, datostnosti i maska (Authority, Dignity, and Mask, 1933) is perhaps the first Bulgarian attempt at a detailed analysis of manipulation.
However, Bulgarian history does not consist simply of the advent of manipulation replacing terror but, alas, of the alternation between the two. Geo Miley, one of the most versatile Bulgarian modernists, brilliantly defined this in his poem Septemeri (September, 1924): "Otechestvoto / e v opasnost! / Prekrasno: / no - shto e otechestvot? - / I iarostno laiat / kartechnitse . . ." ("The fatherland / is in danger! / Very fine: / but - what is the fatherland? / And the machine-guns / are furiously barking . . ."). In other words, in the first two lines of the quote, the fatherland is a manipulative notion; in the second two lines, it is demystified; in the last two lines, the debate is silenced by machine guns. During the last fifty years or so the situation has not changed much. Up to the beginning of the 1960s constraint predominated over manipulation, whereas during so-called "ripe" socialism (1970s–the early 1980s) manipulation came to the forefront. Pereistrina and Glasnost in the late 1980s exemplified the demystification of communist mass communication. The boom in the media after the fall of communism in 1989 ushered in not only the heyday of new manipulations, but also the period of using party newspapers in the fashion of B. Gani, i.e., as a means of party terror.

Scene 3: (Anti)performance

The show "Drafts" by Virginia is, in many respects, an (anti)performance. It critically echoes classical Western – predominantly American – performances, as well as the proliferation of their Bulgarian imitators immediately after 1989. Xanti Schawinski described his performance Circus (1924) as a "visual theatre"; in the late 1930s, grafting his Bauhaus experience onto American soil, he used the same phrase for his performance Spectrodrama. In 1959, Allan Kaprow wrote of his 18 Happenings in 6 Parts: "Some guests will also act" (quoted in PAFP, p. 128). In 1970, Yoko Ono, in her contribution to the show "Information" at MOMA, instructed the reader to "draw an imaginary map . . . go walking on an actual street according to the map . . ." (quoted in PAFP, p. 154). Summarizing such examples and somewhat oversimplifying things, we can say that the classical performance is, first, a visual-theatrical spectacle which is restricted in time and space, and in which the performers are separated from the viewers. Second, the borderline between the author and the viewers is trespassed according to instructions given by the author. Third, the viewer, who is also a participant, consciously challenges his or her stereotypes and undergoes a change of his or her identity following the prescriptions of the author. In this, the viewer may succumb to chance and nonsense (as in the case of Ono) or to rituals which are alien to him or her (as in performances based, for instance, on Native American customs which represent a form of foreign collective memory).

"Drafts" by Virginia challenges this poetics in more than one respect. To begin with, the confluence of art and reality – one of the ultimate goals of the classical performance  23 – is achieved at one stroke in the case of our exhibition. It does not confront its viewers and the media with chance, nonsense, or alien rituals but with their own enacted dreams and myths, and in this way it artistically denounces these dreams and myths as nonsensical, fortuitous, and alien. In other words, the show achieves its effect through the Hermetic principle post hoc, ergo ante hoc, that is, a consequence is assumed and interpreted as the cause of its own cause.  24 To use the vocabulary of hermeneutic circularity, the viewer sees what he or she wants to see (but, as the exhibition demonstrates, to see what one wants to see is also to see that he or she cannot see at all).

Next, "Drafts" by Virginia is not restricted in social time and space as its classical predecessors were, for it begins at this unannounced and unpredictable moment when the viewers and the media start believing that they are going to see the drawings of the Boiana Master/Giotto and actually see them. The concept of the exhibition generously offers the viewers and the media their own expectations and prejudices: all of a sudden it turns out that in times of yore Bulgarian culture substantially augmented Western culture; all at once Western scholars of the highest rank and mighty Western institutions hold their breath en masse when encountering Bulgarian genius; all of a sudden, in a patriotic paroxysm, Ms. Stoë sets in motion her multi-faceted talents and almighty connections . . . The very kernel of the illusions of the Bulgarian intelligentsia and the media is expressed by these innumerable and hypnotically sweet – but poisonous – "all of a sudden(s)." The miraculous importance of these mirages in the years after the fall of communism has grown in a geometrical progression paralleling the day-to-day growth of impoverishment, humiliation, and loss of self-confidence. Ironically, the matrix of this postcommunist phenomenon was formulated in the early 1940s by Bulgaria's greatest communist poet Nikola Vapsarov (no longer taught in school after 1989, ladies and gentlemen!), who wrote in his poem "Ne boite se, detsa" ("Don't Be Scared, Children"): "I az, poneze ni amam khrana . . . shte vi nakhraniia / sas vera" ("And I, because I have no food . . . I will feed you / with faith.").

"Drafts" by Virginia parodically models the way Bulgarian viewers and the media identify themselves aesthetically, and demonstrates that if they have ever entered the realm of Kant's aesthetics at all, that is to say have ever contemplated art introspectively, after 1989 they have already left this domain.  25 Art in postcommunist Bulgaria matters, if at all, chiefly as a prop for a deeply hurt national and cultural identity  26 (and also as an investment, of course). This explains why more people visited this exhibition than any other in the history of the Lessedra gallery. By marching away from the politicized art of communism,  27 Bulgarian art and viewers enter the province of cultural nationalism, which characterized the Bulgarian Renaissance in the second half of the eighteenth and the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. The reward – or the consolation prize? – for this paradoxical aesthetic movement forward into the past is the possibility of interpreting contemporary Bulgarian art by using a postmodern vocabulary, insofar as transitive aesthetics and cultural chauvinism color the cultural policy of every minority and periphery struggling for recognition by the majority and the center.  28

The paradox of the "forward = intransitive" versus "backward = transitive" needs historical clarification. From the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, due to the dominance of orthodox Marxism, the prevalent aesthetics in Bulgaria was transitive, in the sense that it served an overt ideological doctrine. From the mid-1960s till 1989 (and after) the struggle against the ideological indoctrination of culture and scholarship proceeds under the banner of intransitive
aesthetics and has two major forms. In terms of methodology, this involves on the one hand the introduction of formalist and structuralist approaches, and on the other a growing thirst for Western scholarship; thematically this is the scholarly rediscovery of Bulgarian and European modernism. To sum up: in Bulgaria’s new cultural history, the alternation of transitive and intransitive aesthetics defines five periods: (i) 1760s–1880s, transitive anti-Ottoman and pro-Russian-European nationalistic aesthetics; (ii) 1890s–1940s, intransitive period, modernism, universal values; (iii) mid-1940s–1960s, transitive communist aesthetics; (iv) 1960s–late 1980s, intransitive era of formalism(s) and resurrection of modernism; (v) 1990s, the beginning of yet another transitive epoch, new cultural nationalism, and post-???ism. “Drafts” by Virginia voices the shift from the fourth to the fifth era, and satirizes the utilitarian verve of every transitive age.

Scene 4: “Who Am I, in Fact . . .”
At the entrance of the Lesedra gallery Virginia/Virzhiniia has placed an autobiographical drawing: a nude woman without a face, hiding her pubic area with a fan, in a bird cage. The inscription on the drawing reads: “Koi sâm az váshtnost . . .” (“Who am I, in fact . . .”).

“Drafts” by Virginia ironically cements the collective narrative identity of the Bulgarian intelligentsia by indefinitely deferring and displacing (or misplacing) the individual narrative identity of its author.27 According to the concept, Virginia/Virzhiniia Stoianova – the virtual author of the drawings – attends the show in Bulgaria upon the insistence of her patron Ms. Stoe. The deferral then continues through the following stages: the Bulgarian-American Ms. Virginia Stoe, who is the ex-Bulgarian Virginia Stoianova (in the virtual reality of the national and nationalistic reverence, Ms. Stoe stands for the ideal intellectual-political dissident who, alas, is nonexistent in Bulgarian cultural history of the last fifty years or so);28 Giotto who is the unknown Boiana Master; the Boiana Master who is Parthenos; Parthenos who is Virgo; Virgo who is Cool; Cool who is Virginia; Virginia who is no more than a set of mysterious signatures in Greek and Latin; finally, all this is only scholarly hypothesizing. On the one hand, the reluctance to acknowledge one’s authorship is the last gasp of the “dying” postmodern author, textual “significance,” and “jouissance,”29 and an index of the openness of the modern art work,30 a tribute to the interpretive activity of the viewer. On the other hand, however, this is an allusion to, first, the paradise lost of the former communist identity of Eastern Europe after 1989, and, second, to the slipping, unidentified identity of the generation of Bulgarian intellectuals who, at the time of the breakdown of communism, were between 25 and 45. In this latter sense, Virginia/Virzhiniia’s exhibition is essentially autobiographical: it mocks the impossibility of a legitimate intellectual biography or, what amounts to the same thing, the impossibility of a coherent narrative identity.

“Koi sâm az váshtnost . . .” – “that is the question . . .”

Scene 5: Comedia as Tragedia
Last but not least, ladies and gentlemen, “Drafts” by Virginia and our modest drama based on this real case do not just ironize today’s Bulgarian and East European realities. They also parody some of today’s Western stereotypes of the postcommunist era in Eastern Europe and the way the West thinks of itself in this respect. To begin with, the very form of our historiions challenges the possibility of perceiving what is happening in Eastern Europe after – and before – 1989 only by means of pedantic charts, diagrams, graphs, and “works cited.” The West views Eastern Europe as the Other and describes it, let us assume, objectively. But in our production we want to blow up this crumb of the Old World by staging it passionately because, for us, it is not an object of examination but our Own World: “those things about which we cannot theorize, we must narrate.”31 And we narrate them even at the price of theorizing. Next, meine Damen und Herren, despite the shared prefix “post-,” postmodernism and postcommunism are different. What works in Alabama does not work in Albania, and what is good for Portland is not good for Poland, be it the purest specimen of democracy or postmodern art. Listen attentively! Comedia dell’Arte reverberates as Tragedia dell’Arte across the Adriatic Sea. If the Grand Narrative is dead, as we all agree, why are we so reluctant to realize that there is no Grand Narrative of Democracy or Grand Narrative of Postmodernism either? Finally, Mesdames et Messieurs, “Drafts” by Virginia pokes fun at feminism (and through it at resurgent Bulgarian nationalism)32 because transitive aesthetics are political no matter what banner they fly, whether of socialist realism or of gender/minority/periphery/etc.-isms. With all these old and new real-isms we re-enter the kingdom of ideology, only now not by its manipulative but its teleological gate.33

Scene 6: Aesthetic Theory of the Drafts “Draft”
The treatise On the “Drafts” “Draft” offers a theory of the draft, an aesthetic category which is often in limbo. The text, stylized as an Orthodox medieval polemic, juxtaposes the two leading paradigms in contemporary Bulgarian art. The first paradigm (where the notion draft is used without quotation marks) was constituted during the Renaissance and legitimized through institutions such as the Academy, the Museum, the Connoisseur, the Expert, the Market, and so on. Its presupposition is the exercise of technique in the form of an individual style; in the path from the sketch to the original, it creates beauty according to certain rules. The second paradigm (in which the term draft is used within quotation marks) is postmodern. In it, the “draft” is viewed as aesthetically and artistically meaningful because it happens,34 that is, it condenses the time-span between the draft and the masterpiece into a single moment, annihilates the classical Renaissance-academic duality of sketch versus masterpiece and, as a corollary, subverts the institutions connected with it. This is how, thanks to a shift from the draft to the “draft,” the Lesedra, a small private gallery in Sofia, can compete with the Grand Palais in Paris. In the former paradigm, the draft and the masterpiece belong to the aesthetics of the beautiful. In the latter paradigm, the “draft” partakes of the aesthetics of the sublime as elaborated by Longinus, Burke, Kant, and Lyotard. The hoax “Drafts” by Virginia is possible solely in the twilight domain where the sublime is taken for the beautiful.
Scene 7: Disparative Theory of the Draft
The mystifying mechanism of “Drafts” by Virginia can be elucidated not only within a socio-cultural and aesthetic framework but also within a theory of the drafts per se. The notion used in my analysis is disparation. It designates, first, an existential modus: our lives are defined by a permanent incompleteness (Heidegger’s ständige Unzulänglichkeit); second, it is an umbrella term for incompleteness, fragmentation, and ruin, which is derived from Greek and means “torn to pieces.” The draft is a disparact: it presupposes a whole, which is the final work. Depending on the type of the whole, we can define four types of draft:

(i) The nominal whole is a phenomenological notion, “a part or portion in a field of perception” (RFR, p. 51). Correspondingly, the nominal draft is one perceived as a part of a nominal whole. For instance, we view as a draft a preparatory sketch, which we can compare with a work that we think of as complete. The nominal draft is a comparison between two stages of completion in our field of cultural perception.

(ii) The contingent whole depends upon the syntactic implication of its parts: “Each conception takes its being from and is defined by the complementarity of the other” (RFR, p. 52). In the case of the contingent draft, we have a series of drafts, which we compare with a finished oeuvre. Every such draft is a part in relation to the contingent whole of the final work. The final work is the stages of the successive drafts. Thus, every draft after the first one in the series is also a potential complete work.

(iii) The whole of faith is “assumed rather than perceived or imagined,” for it is “too large for cognitive perception” (RFR, p. 53). The draft of faith relates to a whole of faith, in other words, we assume a connection between the two phenomena because we cannot verify it with certainty. In practice, such drafts exist by themselves, and it is impossible to compare them directly with the whole, which, for some reason, is absent.

(iv) The true whole is “a transcendentally constituted whole” (RFR, p. 409). The true draft, consequently, is the epiphany, the intuition of the true whole. Such drafts pertain only to a certain type of art – art, which deliberately deals with ontic true reality (Platonic, as in Romanticism, or communist, as in socialist realism).55

In “Drafts” by Virginia, the drafts are presented as nominal and contingent, that is to say as single drawings or a series of drawings directly comparable with well-known Bulgarian, Byzantine, and Italian frescoes, whereas, in fact, they are drafts of faith – preparatory works for nonexistent oeuvres. Most importantly, the exhibited drafts pretend to be true drafts, while, actually, they are parodies of such drafts.

Scene 8: Who Is She, in Fact?
Virginia/Virzhiinia’s drawings fit comfortably into both the academic and the postmodern paradigms, into the aesthetics of the beautiful and into the aesthetics of the sublime; and this is their basic artistic quality. However, their ambivalence becomes palpable only if they are perceived simultaneously as both classical and postmodern. The works of this artist are neither original nor imitative. She draws not objects but styles – often with virtuosity – from late medieval to classical French modernism. Virginia/Virzhiinia is defiantly eclectic in her use of style viewed as an aesthetic and artistic category. Her own style is an apostrophe of styles moving at the Style. To devote an entire exhibition to the styleless style and to offer theories of its significance in the guise of drafts/“drafts” is an artistic novelty – at least in Bulgaria.57

EPILOGUE
After indulging in the conference version of this show, a shrewd colleague asked me whether my presentation of the hoax “Drafts” by Virginia was not itself a hoax. “What do you think?” I answered.

Well, if there are no other questions, our Tragedia dell’Arte is over. Goodbye, Signore e Signori!
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<td>MM</td>
<td>Martin Hollis. “Of masks and men,” in <em>CP</em>.</td>
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**Abbreviations**


ABBREVIATIONS

SPS  Barry N. Oshen. "Subject, Persona and Self in the Theory of
SR  Judith Berling. The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chiao-en. New York:
SS  Diana Tietjens Meyers. Subject and Subjectivity: Psychoanalytic
SZB Barry Schwartz, Yael Zerubavel, and Bernice Barnett. "The Recovery
      of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory," The Sociological Quarterly,
      vol. 27, no. 2, 1986.
TCW Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in
TEBB Mongane Serote. To Every Birth Its Blood. Braamfontein: Ravan Press,
      1981.
TOS Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (eds.)
      Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault. Amherst:
TS  Robert Brinkley and Steven Youla. "Tracing Shoah," PMLA, 111,
      1996.
UC  Robert C. Ulin. Understanding Cultures: Perspectives in Anthropology
WC  J. M. Coetzee. "What is a Classic?" Current Writing, vol. 5, no. 2,
      1993.
WRH James E. Young. Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust. Bloomington:

NOTES

GENERAL INTRODUCTION: THRESHOLDS OF
WESTERN CULTURE (JOHN BURT FOSTER JR.
AND WAYNE J. FROMAN)

   Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), pp. 38-9; Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken:


3 Mihai Spatiou, The Wreath of Wild Olives: Play, Liminality, and the Study of Literature
   (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997). Spatiou credits Turner's "Liminal to Liminoid in Play,
   Flow, and Ritual," in From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play (New York:

4 Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, in The Portable Matthew Arnold, ed. Lionel Trilling
   (New York: Viking, 1949), pp. 482-3; also Jonathan Swift, The Battle of the Books,
   in Jonathan Swift: Selected Prose and Poetry, ed. Edward Rosenheim, Jr. (New York: Rinehart,
   1959), p. 167. In the "Ancients and Moderns" debate around 1700, Swift contrasted the
   ancient bee as a cultural agent with the modern spider; the latter was basically sterile, but
   the former's honey and wax yielded "sweetness and light," the phrase Arnold borrowed a
century and a half later.

5 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Illuminations, ed. Hannah

6 Gaetano Salvemini, The Origins of Fascism in Italy, trans. Roberto Vivarelli (New York:
   Harper, 1973), p. 297; George Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum,

7 Paul Gilroy, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge:
   Harvard University Press, 1993), especially ch. 1, "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture
of Modernity."

8 Steven Tûpööy de Zepetnek, "Configurations of Postcoloniality and National Identity:
   Inbetween Peripherality and Narratives of Change," The Comparatist, 23 (1999), pp. 89-
   90, 92-4.

PART ONE: THE CRISIS OF MODERN SUBJECTIVITY
INTRODUCTION (WAYNE J. FROMAN AND JOHN BURT
FOSTER JR.)

   Row, 1970).
of evil and so little determination to do anything about it. Outrage became a substitute for action: when inaction led to tragedy, there was recrimination. The Americans came to believe the Europeans were gutless; the Europeans thought the Americans were hypocritical. While Washington, London, Paris, and Bonn were arguing among themselves, 250,000 lost their lives, or were seriously wounded in the former Yugoslavia” (“The Missed Chance in Bosnia,” New York Review of Books, October 7 1993, pp. 8–10).


35 Lyotard writes, “And I do not find it fair when Rorty, or others, takes the liberty of reading into my defense of the different, resonances of leftist, revolution, terrorism even. It is one thing to look upon a discussion, or even a conversation (whose aim is to extend consensus), as an important task. It is another to look upon this conversation as the only use we can derive from language” (MP, p. 119, translation mine). In “Un partenaire bizarre” (MP), Lyotard makes his political choices vis-à-vis liberalism very clear, specifically in exploring Donald Davidson’s and Richard Rorty’s different interpretations of dialogue and consensus when faced with contemporary conflicts. While it is true that this essay focuses on several Franco–American misunderstandings, Lyotard also rejects the reduction that both Rorty and Davidson perform upon the purpose and function of language (MP, pp. 119–20).

36 On Hans Jonas, see Ricœur (CR, p. 43), who quotes the translation into French of Le Principe responsabilité (Paris: Cerf, 1990). When Ricœur scrutinizes Jonas’s extension of the notion of responsibility, he interprets it, following R. Spämann, as being placed under Hegelian Sittlichkeit. On Lévinas, see CR, p. 45–8. The text referred to here is Éthiques et souffrance (Paris: Fayard, 1982), where Lévinas defines responsibility as that which is “an essential, primary and fundamental responsibility of subjectivity.”


38 Morris B. Abram, “Peace and Justice in Bosnia are Inseparable,” reprinted in The Globe and Mail, February 19 1996, A15. Abram, who was Chairman of the Geneva-based monitoring group UN Watch and former US permanent representative to the United Nations in Europe, emphasizes: “Peace and justice are not irreconcilable, but inseparable. First is the deterrent effect of enforcing the rule of law, taken for granted as a condition of domestic civil society. Second, war-crimes trials can facilitate interethnic reconciliation. Ethnic groups may be absolved of collective guilt by holding perpetrators individually responsible.” For Abram ad hoc tribunals do not provide long-term solutions; only a permanent court can do so. Václav Havel, in his “Address in Conclusion of the Month of Bosnia Herzegovina in Prague,” Spanish Hall, Prague Castle, October 13 1995, insists that the conflict was not ethnic in nature, but societal. “Two distinct concepts of state and society found themselves on a collision course. One was a modern, open, civil concept in which different nationalities, ethnic groups, traditions can live together and cooperate; the other an archaic, tribal state as ‘a community of people of the same blood.’” Havel reminds us that the Bosnian conflict was never between the Serbs and the rest of the population, but pitted ethnic fanatics, the adherents of an authoritarian state based on national collectivism, against believers in civic principles.

39 Note for instance that Ellerman in “Command of Sovereignty” points to the slow emergence of necessary changes, even in such staunchly non-interventionist bodies as the United Nations. Ellerman argues that the UN stance on humanitarian intervention has increasingly justified intervention, provided it be carried out for humanitarian purposes. On the need to separate war crimes issues from sovereignty issues, see David Martin’s intervention at the “Symposium War Crimes: Bosnia and Beyond,” titled “Reluctance to Prosecute War Crimes: Of Causes and Cures,” Virginia Journal of International Law, 34 (1994), p. 225. As early as 1993 Daniel Eaton deployed American and European slowness to act on the War Crimes aspect of this conflict, in “Bosnia: the War Crimes Dimension,” New Zealand International Review, July 7 1993, pp. 13–15.

40 Fernando Tešón, Humanitarian Intervention: An Inquiry Into Law and Morality (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Transaction Publishers, 1988). Ellerman notes, however, that the doctrine of non-intervention had already been challenged by Henry G. Hodges in The Doctrine Of Intervention (1915). Hodges defined intervention as “interference by a state, or states in the external affairs of another without its consent, or in the internal affairs of another state with or without its consent” (cited in n. 9 of Ellerman article referenced above, n. 18).

41 Robert Block accuses both General Ratko Mladić, described as criminally responsible for murdering thousands of Muslim men and boys in Potocari, and Dutch peacekeepers who were present but unwilling to keep the peace by intervening while organized murders occurred at the very spot where more than 28,000 refugees from Srebrenica had fled in July 1995. Furthermore, as Block puts it, the demand by the top UN military commander, General Janvier, that heavy guns be withdrawn from Sarajevo was rejected by General Mladić who responded, “The more you bomb us, the stronger we are.” Block concludes that by then there had been a catastrophic miscalculation among the Western powers, and particularly French and British diplomats, who saw Mladić as the leader who might potentially bring peace to Bosnia. See Block’s “The Madness of General Mladić,” New York Review of Books, October 5 1995, pp. 7–9.

42 See Weller (n. 4 in article referenced above, n. 18), who examines UN Resolution 713 (1991) and 752 (1992), faulting them for failing either to stop Serbian aggression or to provide humanitarian assistance (pp. 600–2). Weller also criticizes the European Community for inefficiency, before concluding that EC recognition was never understood to constitute statehood or the basis rights (emphasis mine) associated with statehood (p. 605). See also Nigel Rodley, To Loose the Bands of Wickedness: International Intervention in Defence of Human Rights (London: Brassey’s, 1992).


CHAPTER 12

CULTURAL CO-ORDINATES OF A BULGARIAN ART-HOAX:
“DRAFTS” BY VIRGINIA, A TRAGEDIA DELL’ARTE
(NIKITA NANKOV)

1 The Bulgarian epigraph reads: “and my funny drawings are very sad drawings . . .” IIlia Beshkov, Slaveto: États nazismoblèmes, píma, razgovor. Stanislav Sivev, De sámoode (Razgovori i IIlia Beshkov) (Varna: Georgi Bakalov, 1981), p. 359. Taken from Beshkov’s essay on Bai Gan’o and Aleko Konstantinov, it explains Beshkov’s drawings of the relation
between the literary character (Ban Gano) and his author (Konstantinov). See below, note 19.


3 Nikita Nankov, "Nadpis 'Bivol' v kletkata na lâva" ("Inscription 'Buffalo' on the Lion's Cage"), Literaturen vizitnik, April 11-17 1994, p. 3.

4 An anagram of Iordan Ivanov, a renowned Bulgarian medieval specialist.

5 The names for this monastery and the Chilandar monastery vary in English, with some authorities using "the Zograph monastery" and "the Hilendar monastery," while others prefer "Zographou" and "Chilandar.

6 Samantha Krukowsk is (ostensibly) a Professor of Byzantine and Women's Studies and Sheridan Director of the Eisenhower Library at Harvard University, but in reality is a young American artist and art historian on whom I had a crush. Hi, Samantha, wherever you may be!


14 For the Bulgarian intelligentsia in general, including their attitude to Western and Bulgarian values, see Rosen Daskalov, "Transformation of the Eastern European Intelligentsia: Reflections on the Bulgarian Case," East European Politics and Societies, vol. 10, no. 1 (Winter 1996), pp. 46-84.


19 This observation turned out to be prophetic, for in October 1996 after the initial draft of this essay, Andrei Lukmanov, one of the most respected Bulgarian socialist politicians, was murdered in front of his home. The murderer was never found. The case recalls the end of Aleko Konstantinov (1863-97) who also fell victim to political terror. Ilia Beshkov (1901-58), one of Bulgaria's best draftsmen and cartoonists, who for decades had been thinking about and depicting the relation between Konstantinov and his hero Ban Gano as an historical, ethical, sociological, and aesthetic Bulgarian archetype, commemorated Konstantinov's tragic death with a series of drawings in which Ban Gano stands by the mortally wounded writer. The text to the drawings reads "Ban Gano‘u ubiva avtora si" ("Ban Gano is murdering his author") (1947). The patterns linking the media and politics in Bulgaria for more than a century is obvious: terror in the media goes hand in hand with physical terror.


24 Bulgarian national radio prepared a special interview with Virginia/Virzhinzhia for Bulgarians abroad, but it was cancelled once it became clear that the show was a mystification.


28 To this statement, Signore e Signori, you may object: "But what about Tsvetan Todorov, Julia Kristeva, or Christos ...". Well, in Bulgaria, they are seen as luminaries with (almost) Bulgarian names who shine in the West but who are not linked with a Bulgarian cause (if such a cause exists at all).


32 In an interview at the opening of the show, Virginia/Virginia, entwined nationalism and feminism: "Today some scholars and politicians maintain that there was, in fact, no Ottoman yoke in Bulgaria. Well, I declare that Giotti was, in reality, Virginia. What is the proof? My mustachio, of course!" Verily, verily, the personal is political.

33 For another amateur piece about the stereotypes of the West and Eastern Europe in relation to one another, see Nikita Nankov, "The Grand Anti-Communist Narrative Strikes Back: Five Postscripts on Bulgarian Past/Postcommunism," *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Totalitarian Cultures East and West*, Sibelean Forrester and Magdaela Zaborowska, eds., forthcoming.


36 Mimetic art imitates what is there in reality, while neonic art imitates what is not there (RFR, p. 383). The mimetic and the neonic modes are not absolute opposites but the poles of an artistic continuum (RFR, p. 385).

37 Andrei Daniel, one of the most interesting contemporary Bulgarian painters, a teacher and supporter of Virginia/Virginia, contested the very idea of exhibiting sketches. In his opinion, the drafts should remain in the studio, and only the final version of a work should be shown.

### PART FIVE: FAR EAST/FAR WEST

### CHAPTER 13

**CULTURAL HERMENEUTICS AND ORIENTALIST DISCOURSE: LOTI'S SELF-REFLEXIVE JAPONISME (ROLF GOEBEL)**


2. Several recent critics insightfully address Loti's colonialism and exoticism. In *The Colonial Experience in French Fiction: A Study of Pierre Loti, Ernst Pichichi and Pierre Mille* (London: Macmillan, 1981), Alec Hargreaves finds in Loti an ethnocentric fear that the exoticized non-West is disappearing as an object of writerly conquest and penetration (pp. 19–85). In "a kind of literary imperialism," Loti's "conceptual framework, preoccupations and value system were intensely personal, but they owed virtually nothing to non-European cultures" and did not change according to the realities he purported to describe (p. 80). Bongie discusses exoticism as "a discursive practice intent on recovering 'elsewhere' values 'lost' with the modernization of European society" (p. 5); its followers "register the exotic as a space of absence, a dream already given over to the past" (p. 22). While Hargreaves mentions Madame Chrysanthème just in passing (p. 81) and Bongie nor at all, their treatment of Loti's ideological contexts and discursive strategies is pertinent to my argument. Tsvetan Todorov also emphasizes Loti's major place in exoticist French literature. See *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 308–23. Hereafter cited as OHD. For Loti's exoticist construction of women, see Todorov, pp. 314–18 and Irene Syllowicz, *Pierre Loti and the Oriental Woman* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988), pp. 36, 75–6, 80.


11. Commenting on the Polynesian novel *Le Mariage de Loti*, Hargreaves notes similar


Becker, Jared M. *Nationalism and Culture: Gabriele D’Annunzio and Italy after the Risorgimento*. New York: Peter Lang, 1994.

Benhabib, Seyla and Andrew Arato. "The Yugoslav Tragedy."


———. "What is a Classic?" *Current Writing*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1993.


*Diastora: A Journal of Transnational Studies.*


Schnapp, Jeffrey and Barbara Spackman (eds.). Fascism and Culture. Stanford Italian Review, vol. 8, nos. 1–2.
CONTRIBUTORS

Caroline Bayard is Professor of French and Philosophy at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. Her recent research has focused on postmodern theories in the two Europes and on the resurgence of the Nation-Subject in both Europe and Quebec. Recently, she worked with the Center for Theoretical Study in Prague, in the Czech Republic. She has published several special issues on French theorists (Jean Baudrillard in Sémiotic Inquiry, 1996; Jean-François Lyotard in Philosophy Today, 1992) and a book, Transatlantiques postmodernités (Balzac, 1997).

James Berger is Associate Professor of English at Hofstra University. He is author of After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse (Minnesotra, 1999), and is currently working on a book dealing with portrayals of language impairment in modern literature and culture.

Marcel Cornis-Pope is Professor of English and Chair at Virginia Commonwealth University. His publications include Hermeneutic Desire and Critical Rewriting: Narrative Interpretation in the Wake of Poststructuralism (1992), The Unfinished Battles: Romanian Postmodernism before and after 1989 (1996), Violence and Mediaion in Contemporary Culture (coedited with Ronald Bogue, 1995), and Narrative Innovation and Cultural Rewriting in the Cold War Era and After (2001). After seven years as editor of the award-winning journal The Comparatist, he is now coediting a major international project, entitled A History of the Literary Cultures of East Central Europe: Cultural Junctures and Disjunctures in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.

Lars Engle, Associate Professor of English at the University of Tulsa, is the author of Shakespearean Pragmatism: Market of His Time (Chicago, 1993) and a coeditor of English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology (New York, 2002). He began his teaching career in South Africa and writes frequently about contemporary South African literature, often focusing on Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee.

Eugene Eoyang is Professor of Comparative Literature and of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Indiana University, as well as Chair Professor of English at Lingnan College in Hong Kong. He has published Selected Poems of Ai Qing (Indiana, 1982), The Transparent Eye: Reflections on Translation, Chinese Literature, and Comparative Poetics (Hawaii, 1993), Coat of Many Colors: Reflections on Diversity by a Minority of One (Beacon, 1995), and Translating Chinese Literature (Indiana, 1995, coedited with Lin Yao-fu). Many of his translations have appeared in Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry (Doubleday, 1975; Indiana, 1990). One of the founders of CLEAR (Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews), he was President of the American Comparative Literature Association from 1995 to 1997.

Rolf J. Goebel studied German and English Literatures at Kiel University (Germany), Brown University, and the University of Maryland, College Park. He is currently Professor of German at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. His publications include essays on Kafka, Western literary discourse on Japan, and literary theory; a book on Walter Benjamin’s urban discourse, post-coloniality, and intercultural “flanerie” has recently appeared from Judicium Verlag, Munich.

Anthony John Harding teaches at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. He is author of The Reception of Myth in English Romanticism (Missouri, 1995) and of several articles, most recently “Coleridge, Natural History, and the Analogy of Being,” in History of European Ideas. With Lisa Lowe, he coedited Milton, the Metaphysicals, and Romanticism (Cambridge, 1994); and with the late Kathleen Coburn, Volume 5 of The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Princeton, forthcoming in 2002).

Michiel Heyns studied at the University of Stellenbosch in the Republic of South Africa and at Cambridge University; he is now Professor in the Department of English at Stellenbosch. Apart from his interest in postcolonial literature, he has written on the nineteenth-century English novel, notably Expulsion and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: the Scapegoat in English Realist Fiction (Oxford, 1994).

Tomislav Z. Longinović is Professor of Slavic and Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Director of the Cultural Translation Project. He is the author of Borderline Culture: The Politics of Identity in Four Slavic Novels, on works by Bulgakov, Gombrowicz, Kiš, and Kundera. He is also the author of two novels, Moment of Silence and Sama Amerika (in Serbo-Croatian), and of a translation of Serbian women’s songs, Red Knight. He is currently a Visiting Professor at Harvard University.

Nikita Nankov is completing a doctorate at Indiana University, Bloomington, in Comparative Literature and Slavic Languages and Literatures. He has published extensively on various topics in the field of comparative literature, and also writes fiction — tales for children and adults.

Iyunolu Osagie is Associate Professor of English at the Pennsylvania State University, where her research is in the area of black diasporic literatures and theories. She has published articles and a book titled, The Amistad Revolt: Memory, Slavery, and Politics of Identity in the United States and Sierra Leone (Georgia, 2000).

Herman Rapaport is Chair Professor of English at the University of Southampton. He is the author of Milton and the Postmodern, Heidegger and Derrida: Reflections on Time and Language, Between the Sign and the Gaze, and Is There Truth in Art? His most recent book is The Theory Mess (Columbia, 2001).

Robert M. Strozier is an Emeritus Professor in the English Department at Wayne State University in Detroit. He is the author of Epicurus and Hellenistic Philosophy, of Saussure, Derrida, and the Metaphysics of Subj ectivity, and of Foucault, Subjectivity, and Identity.
Mary Ann Frese Witt is Professor of French and Italian at North Carolina State University, and has published widely in the field of twentieth-century literature, including *Existential Prisons* (Duke, 1985). Her most recent book is *The Search for Modern Tragedy: Aesthetic Fascism in Italy and France* (Cornell, 2001).

John Burt Foster, Jr. is Professor of English and Cultural Studies at George Mason University. Trained in comparative literature at Yale, he has published widely in nineteenth- and twentieth-century narrative and thought. He is the author of *Heirs to Dionysus: A Nietzschean Current in Literary Modernism* and of *Nabokov’s Art of Memory and European Modernism*, both from Princeton, and is currently working on Tolstoyan “itineraries” in Western fiction and culture. He recently coedited a forum on Slavic Identities for the *Slavic and East European Journal*, and is also editor of *The Comparatist*, an annual journal of cross-cultural literary study.

Wayne J. Froman is a member of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at George Mason University, where he served as Department Chair from 1989 until 1999. As a Senior Fulbright Research Scholar in 1995–6, he was a Visiting Professor at the Hegel-Archiv, Ruhr Universität/Bochum. He is the author of *Merleau-Ponty: Language and the Act of Speech* (Bucknell), and a contributor to leading journals in the fields of phenomenology, art, and poststructuralism. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the International Association of Philosophy and Literature from 1995 until 2001.