

Notes on Contributors

FRANCESCA BISUTTI DE RIZ teaches American Literature at the University of Venice, Ca' Foscari. She has worked on 19th and 20th century American writers, in particular H.D. Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Edith Wharton, Gertrude Stein, Dorothy Parker. She very recently edited a special number of *Quaderni di Insula*, on *Foreign Travellers in Venice* (April 2004.)

ALESSANDRO CLERICUZIO holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Roma Tre, where he also had a post-doctoral grant. He has studied in Los Angeles and San Francisco. He is the author of the first book-length study of Flannery O'Connor's fiction to be published in Italian and has written essays on 20th century American cinema and theatre, as well as on contemporary fiction. He has taken part in an ongoing research about clothes and identity, directed by Cristina Giorcelli, in two AISNA conferences and a research project on modern American myths directed by Caterina Ricciardi. He has written about Tennessee Williams, Charles Vidor, David Leavitt, John Guare, Sam Shepard, Truman Capote, David Lynch, Cathy Song, Edward Albee, Billy Wilder.

MARIO DEL PERO teaches International History and United States History at the Faculty of Political Science "Roberto Ruffilli" of Forlì, University of Bologna. He was Mellon Fellow at the International Center for Advanced Studies of New York University and Fulbright Visiting Fellow at the Department of History of Columbia University. He is the author of *L'alleato scomodo. Gli Stati Uniti e la Democrazia Cristiana negli anni del centrismo, 1948-1955* [*The Inconvenient Ally. The United States and Italian Christian Democracy in the Age of Centrism, 1948-1955*] Rome, 2001, *La Guerra Fredda* [*The Cold War*] Rome, 2001, "The United States and Psychological Warfare in Italy, 1948-1955," *Journal of American History* (2001), and "American Pressures and their Containment in Italy during the Ambassadorship of Clare Boothe

Luce," *Diplomatic History* (2004). He is currently working on a new research on detente and the American reaction to the 1974 Portuguese revolution.

UMBERTO ROSSI is an independent critic and the translator of novels and short stories by Philip K. Dick, Thomas M. Disch, Harlan Ellison, and Joe R. Lansdale; he has published several essays, both in Italian and in English, in international academic journals, on Philip K. Dick, Jonathan Lethem, Thomas Pynchon, and war literature. His doctoral dissertation in comparative literature deals with World War I narratives, some of which American.

UGO RUBELO is associate professor of American Literature at the University of Rome ('La Sapienza.') He has published widely on African American poetry, both in Europe and in the U.S., and his book, *L'uomo visibile*, Rome, 1990, was the first comprehensive study on the subject to appear in Italy. He has devoted a number of essays to E. A. Poe's literary production, one of the main objects of his research work, and a book, centered on *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*, published in 2000. Other publications include a study on the cultural relationship between the U.S. and Italy, *Mal d'America*, 1987, and a number of essays on such authors as Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Bellow and Auster, among others. He has repeatedly dedicated critical attention to the works of Henry James, whose *The American Scene* he has edited and translated into Italian, Milan, 2001.

ROBERTO SERRAI holds a research fellowship at the University of Firenze and a teaching assignment at the University of Siena. He is currently working on William Bonney (Billy the Kid) seen as a mythical figure, on Tim O'Brien's Vietnam novels and on Virginia W. Johnson's Italian travel books.

FEDERICO SINISCALCO teaches North American Cultures at the School of Humanities of the University of Siena, in Arezzo. His research interests are centered on the relationship between visual images (film and video) and cultural discourse, and more specifically on the documentary film genre and the representation of the culture of the United States. He has written on the history of American documentary, on cultural studies, and on literary theory.

PAOLA ZACCARIA is Professor of American Literature and History of American Culture at the University of Bari; former President of the Italian

Society of Literary Women (SIL); coordinator of the Bari unit of a research project co-funded by MURST ("Networking Women: Subjects, Places, Links Europe-America. Towards a Re-writing of Cultural History, 1890-1950"); head of the Master Course in Cultural Studies, Communication and Visual Culture. Fields of research: 20th-century American and English avant-gardes, semiotics, poetry, Anglo-American feminist criticism, border and diaspora studies, the relationships between literature and visual technologies. Among her works: *Forme della ripetizione: le ipertrofie di E. A. Poe, I deficit di S. Beckett* (1992); *Segni eretici. Scritture di donne fra autobiografia, etica e mito* (1993, co-edited with P. Calefato); *A lettere scarlatte. Poesia come stregoneria* (1995); *Mappe senza frontiere. Cartografie letterarie dal modernismo al transnazionalismo* (1999); (ed.) *Close up. Antologia della prima rivista internazionale di cinema* (2002). In 2000 she has translated Gloria Anzaldúa *Borderlands/La Frontera* and written about border texts in several essays. Forthcoming in fall 2004 a book on art and the politics of transformation.

Abstracts

FRANCESCA BISUTTI DERIZ, *"Walking Walls": Figures of the limit, Figures of the border.*

A land-art work by Andy Goldworthy presents interesting oxymoronic features that apply to American culture. A "walking wall," "flâneur in the wilderness," symbolizes the American soul, nomadic and colonizing at the same time. An analysis of this concept, through some of America's great writers and artists, from the Puritans to Frank L. Wright, leads up to the "mending wall" represented by the 1982 Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, recognized as "The Wall," a surface where life and death comfort one another.

ALESSANDRO CLERICUZIO, *The Destruction of Happiness in American Cinema in the 1990s: Altman, Anderson, Solondz.*

This essay focusses on three American films of the 1990s and on the theme of psychological and emotional destruction. In Anderson's *Magnolia*, Solondz's *Happiness* and Altman's *Short Cuts*, American society is shown as deeply disturbed and forlorn. The archetypal pursuit of happiness still holds true, but it takes place in an environment that in all possible ways destroys human happiness. These movies pick up an apocalyptic trend that had characterized disaster blockbusters, and which is thus taken into the heart of everyday life with an apocalyptic effect.

MARIO DEL PERO, *"Present at Destruction"? George Bush, the Neocons, and the Traditions of U.S. Foreign Policy.*

The article analyses from an historical perspective the foreign policy of the current Republican administration. Contrary to common wisdom, it maintains that the approach to international politics of George Bush Jr. does not fundamentally depart from the most venerable diplomatic traditions of the United States. It argues that it is possible to find a cultural, political, ideological, and even religious, lineage to Bush's unilateralism, as it was most famously expressed in the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States

(NSS). What really characterizes current U.S. foreign policy is the attempt to recompose and synthesize different traditions and approaches. This attempted synthesis, however, has produced a confused and ultimately incoherent policy, whose limits and inconsistencies are quintessentially epitomized by a phrase that recurs five times in the 2002 NSS: the need for America to create "a balance of power that favors human freedom."

UMBERTO ROSSI, *The Great National Disaster: The Destruction of Imperial America in Philip K. Dick's The Simulacra*.

My article aims at reading a well-known SF novel by Philip K. Dick, *The Simulacra* (1964), as a disaster novel. While SF literature usually depicts natural disasters, be they abrupt climate change that may lead to floods or desertification, or the fall of meteorites, or earthquakes, etc., Dick's novel is closer to the subgenre of Nuclear Holocaust SF, in that the disaster he stages in his novel is not caused by natural phenomena, but by a series of deliberate political decisions that lead to the destruction of the USEA, a SFnal version of the USA. What is particularly interesting is that the issue of destruction is tightly interwoven with the question of a postmodern society where politics is radically spectacularized, and where mass-mediatic manipulation of minds has transformed entertainment in a powerful tool of consensus-making. Thus the character of Nicole Thibodeaux - a SFnal First Lady who is also a TV celebrity and the real ruler of the USEA - arguably foreshadows contemporary political figures - both in the USA and in Italy - that derive their prestige more from their massmediatic appeal than from any traditional political legitimation.

ROBERTO SERRAI, *Landscapes of Destruction: Reading Kurt Vonnegut's Breakfast of Champions with an Eye to Walt Whitman*.

Breakfast of Champions, first published in 1973, is probably one of Kurt Vonnegut's most destructive and nihilistic works. Its declared blueprint is to present the reader with an endless catalogue of cultural monstrosities, either contemporary or proven by now to be timeless. At the end of this subtractive process American culture is reduced to a *tabula rasa* where nothing seems to be salvageable. Here, Vonnegut gives the impression of running an opposite course to the one Walt Whitman laid out in *Leaves of Grass*. While developing

a new literature for a new country, the "good gray poet" used the former to celebrate the latter, and wove together long lists of things and human types, as if he planned to compile a comprehensive inventory of all America's gifts, virtues and assets. In *Breakfast of Champions'* destructive context we're led to believe that from the very beginning America's promise was a kind of a fraud, and, why not, that Whitman's work was just a long redundant piece of advertisement *ante litteram*. Although *Breakfast of Champions* may seem like a desperate novel on a helpless country, I believe that it is not entirely correct. It can be read, on the contrary, as another example of how even the most negative constructions and critiques of America seem unable to disown and repudiate it completely. Most of the dissent groups active between the Fifties and the Seventies were inspired in different degrees by a clean nostalgia for the "American dream." Counterculture itself has been presented as "a kind of reform movement, trying to revive a decayed tradition once important to our civilization." The painful awareness of such a "decay" is a factor contributing to *Breakfast of Champions'* sustained, unrelenting anger. Vonnegut attacks the American myth as a disillusioned believer, and with the ardor of a betrayed lover.

FEDERICO SINISCALCO, *From Glory to Destruction: John Huston's Non-fictional Depictions of War*.

During the World War II John Huston became involved, together with other well-known Hollywood filmmakers, in the U.S. government propaganda film production. The essay contrasts Huston's war documentaries with other propaganda films produced during the conflict, and argues that whereas *Report from the Aleutians*, Huston's first non-fiction film, may be incorporated within the propaganda genre and depicts war as an instance where officers and soldiers may aspire to glory, his second documentary, *San Pietro*, breaks free of this label and shows the ultimate destruction which war brings about. The paper also details the predictably unfavorable reaction of the War Department to Huston's anti-war stance, and the reasons why many years would have to pass before *San Pietro* and *Let There be Light*, his subsequent war documentary, would be released for general viewing.

PAOLA ZACCARIA, *Narration, Figuration and Disfiguration in Toni Morrison's Beloved and Jazz*.

In poetic works, voice and face are the most frequent images of the body, and the modality of representing a face or a voice challenges consciousness, blending opacity and transparency. To lose one's voice or face, to become mute, aphasic or disfigured, are experienced as a loss of self. In moments of passage or metamorphosis, it can seem that the voice and the face change, that we speak with a different voice, say something never said: we are faced with a different self who is heard differently, seen differently. In order to go on, narration must create characters, that is 'assume a Figure'. After the semantic analysis of the meanings of 'figure' and 'figuration', the essay proceeds to concentrate on a particularly symbolic figure, which is also highly historicized and politicized: Beloved in the novel *Beloved*, and Wild, a re-appearance of the same figure, complete with new, but equally explosive significance, in *Jazz*. The moment in which Morrison (an expert not only of western traditions of intertextuality but of African oral narratives structured around recall and repetition, as well as the pattern of call and response) took the figure of Beloved into *Jazz*, giving her not a real name but an appellative, a nickname Wild she did so both to re-trace the forgotten story, that can neither be forgotten by passing it on ('It was not a story to pass on'), and to create an historicized link between the two novels, in order to play with the idea of 'Trace', to the point that 'Trace' becomes Joe's surname (Joe Trace) as if it were the title of his project to re-trace his origins, to find traces of his mother, traces of slavery (and of the cancellation of any traces of origins performed by the slave trade) the Africanist traces. Wild is the 'figuration' of the trace and the naming of itself). The essay tries to show how Morrison creates figurations which become imagin-afeltions capable of activating new paths and new processes in American consciousness and culture.