Johannesburg—The Elusive Metropolis

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**Vol. 17, no. 2:**
A special issue on W. E. B. Du Bois, guest edited by Robert Gooding-Williams and Dwight McBride
As many readers of Public Culture will already know, the Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) in the Bush administration recently interpreted the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and the Berman Amendment (enacted in Section 2502[a] of the 1988 Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act, Public Law 100–418) in such a way as to preclude academic journals and presses from modifying the content of certain essays, videos, and other scholarly information submitted to them for publication. The Berman Amendment provided an exemption for “information or informational materials”:

The authority granted to the President by this section does not include the authority to regulate or prohibit, directly or indirectly, the importation from any country, or the exportation to any country, whether commercial or otherwise, regardless of format or medium of transmission, of any information or informational materials, including but not limited to, publications. . . .

But as reported in the New York Times, publishers of texts from countries under embargo have been “forbidden to reorder paragraphs or sentences, correct syntax or grammar, or replace ‘inappropriate words,’ according to several advisory letters from the Treasury Department in recent months. Adding illustrations is prohibited, too. To the baffled dismay of publishers, editors and translators who have been briefed about the policy, only publication of ‘camera-ready copies of manuscripts’ is allowed” (February 28, 2004).

We find this interpretation of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act not only a dangerous assault on the cosmopolitan principles of critical public cir-
calculation this journal has long stood for, but also a deceptive means of producing the illusion of different standards of scholarship internationally. In the spirit of scholarly dialogue and exchange, the editors, editorial committee, and editorial staff of Public Culture work extensively with all of its authors on all levels of thought from the poetics and rhetorics of the text, to its visual illustrations and argumentative logic. And, of course, Public Culture as a collective is richly enhanced by its own continual engagement with material and ideas that refuse its habitual ways of thinking.

In our introductory essay to Public Culture 15, no. 3 (“Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition”), Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and I called for a reconceptualization of translation as transfiguration and for attention to the social life of textual forms rather than denotational meaning. This special issue, “Johannesburg—The Elusive Metropolis,” is an exemplary instance of a transfigurational movement and refashioning of thought that does not respect—indeed often refuses—the national imaginaries of enemy and friend imposed by the state, for example in the 1917 Trading with the Enemies Act that the IEEPA amends. Issues like this one expose the bad faith, and simple untruth, of this national discipline when it is not commodities that are at stake but rather the commodious clash of particularly located essays with a cosmopolitan address. A critical attitude does not have a passport.

But in any case, without active public outcry and resistance to this policy, the uneven distribution of intellectual labor will reappear as the natural outcome of differences in “national genius.” This aggressive assault of the Bush administration on international—and intranational—scholarly dialogue strongly suggests that its militaristic unilateralism and its intellectual unilateralism must be fought rigorously side by side.

Postscript On April 2, 2004, the Treasury Department appeared to reverse its position following protests from scholars, publishers, and professional organizations, notably the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. We are glad to hear of this development; it demonstrates the kind of vigilance we need.

—Elizabeth A. Povinelli
New York City
April 2004
Call for Contributions

**misc-e-l-a-ny**, *n.*: a collection of various kinds, especially news clippings, literary extracts, postcards, and other images. Includes media accounts of items relevant to public discourse and debate throughout the world. The section seeks to highlight not only the reported phenomena as such but also the mediated nature of media coverage. *Public Culture* especially seeks pieces that are witty or (unintentionally) ironic. Submissions should include all relevant facts of publication and should be no longer than three pages.

**ety-mol-o-gies**, *n., pl.*: true sense or form of the network of keywords: *public, publicity, public opinion, public sphere*. Investigates the contemporary uses and meanings of the terms *public, publicity, and public opinion*. Short essays (of approximately six to eight pages) that consider the semantics and pragmatics of one or more of these interrelated terms in the context of a particular language and a particular people are welcome. How do these terms compare across cultures and languages? Do their meanings “translate,” and what do their “mistranslations” bode for comparative social theory grounded in what may be hidden ontological statements about civil society?

**art-works**, *n., pl.*: brief reports (up to 750 words) on innovative critical cultural work within and outside established institutions. Includes new kinds of museums; alternative or oral history projects; the expansion of musical performance and recording into forgotten musical histories or the dissemination of a broader range of musics; alternative publishing ventures or exhibition practices in film, theater, and dance; innovative cultural work with children; public art and art in public such as murals and graffiti; innovative uses of television, radio, or other mass media; and reports on past cultural work—the modernist, socialist, and avant-garde counterinstitutions of the early twentieth century. Send material and proposals to artworks editor Katie Trumpener.

**from the field**, *n., sing.*: briefly annotated single photographs for inclusion as a photo feature at the end of the issue. Submissions are not limited by style or content but should be glossy prints of at least 5” × 7”.

**CyberSalon**: To join *Public Culture*’s on-line discussion group, send an e-mail message, “Add me to on-line discussion,” to public-culture-journal@uchicago.edu.

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