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**THE WORLD AS A SINGLE PLACE:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WORLD IN THREE SITES**

**Colleen Hope Ovenden**

**A Thesis in the Special Individualized Programme**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Magisteriate in Arts at  
Concordia University, Montréal, Québec, Canada**

**December 1995**

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## **Abstract**

### **The World as a Single Place: Representations of the World in Three Sites**

**Colleen Hope Ovenden**

There is a common assumption that representations of the world are transparent representations of reality. This thesis seeks to problematise the notion of "the world" as a single place. It demonstrates instead, that "the world" is an ideologically imbued construction and that the idea of representing the world needs to be considered as a questionable enterprise. In this paper, I identify three distinct cultural sites that claim to represent the world - world maps, the 1989 art exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre* and the multinational clothing company, Benetton. I consider how each "world" is mediated - each with its own agenda, each with its own apparatus.

## Acknowledgements

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And finally, I am most grateful to my partner and best friend, Martin Beaudry, who not only never once thought I wouldn't get through this arduous exercise, but also believed I could sprint to the end. And I did. This thesis is dedicated to him.

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*To make things simple I'd have to think that I was in control of myself, my language, my situation, my world. I'm not; I'm also not completely out of control. I write out of language, out of my world, out of myself but I'm not on top of the world and on top of the language that makes up the world and which makes me up, as I try desperately to make up other worlds. This essay is, in a way, for me, another world, one that I am asking you to enter.*

*Lynn Tillman*

## Chapter I

### Introduction: It's a Small World After All

*The world has ended up as a single world, repetitions of which - in a growing vulgarisation of the similar - now supply a model for the rest of the worlds within it. We know the causes and effects of this vulgarization all too well - I would even say that we are the causes and these are the effects, and that the real world exists in absentia, detached from all of this...This nomadic, unattached culture that we have created has resulted in a surprising paradox of its own encirclement: it is designed for travel but has no where to go, for with no other variety than magnitude, it is already everything in itself.*

*Perejaume*

For my birthday this year, I received a gift that might serve as an allegory for this thesis. The present was a small wooden globe about the size of a billiard ball. Painted on the globe was an image of how the world may once have been represented: the shapes of continents were crude and all of the place names were written in Latin. My gift was made like the Russian dolls I had as a kid where opening up the doll meant discovering another identical doll inside. When I opened up the globe along the Tropic of Capricorn, there was another globe inside of it but, unlike the Russian dolls, this version had a different image than the first. In this rendition, Africa was the only continent covering the whole planet. The third globe was, again, another version. This time China was depicted as the world. When I got to the centre of the globe, to my



surprise, there was a second gift. Inserted as the centre of the world was a sterling silver globe of the world that was meant to be worn on a chain around my neck. My gifts seem to allegorize that, at the heart of things, there is only one earth but couched around the globe are multiple representations of the world.

Since the late 1980s, images of the world have been adopted into everything from songs to ads to children's toys and it is my impression that the image of the world has turned out to be the unofficial logo for the 90s as the infamous Happy Face was in the 70s. Although this phenomenon may have begun with environmental activism that called attention to crises on a global scale, it was in domains such as advertising that we were first treated to images of the world such as in British Airways' overwhelmingly successful campaign. The "world's famous airline" advertisement, with its hauntingly beautiful background music, presented a blue and red rendition of the world that, upon closer viewing, was actually a mass of people holding the airline's colors. Also in the 1980s, we saw large corporations such as Burger King move toward environmental consciousness by replacing their packaging with "New Earth-Happy Packaging." The new packaging was printed on recycled paper and depicted an image of the world shaped like a hamburger. Scrawled in child's writing, it also contained the following message: "Our sandwiches now come served in paper wrapping instead of a box because we figure the world could use a lot less trash." In music, we heard Michael Jackson's and Lionel Richie's recording, *We Are the World*, which was produced in order to raise money for famine stricken Ethiopia. The

popularity of images of the world continued into the early 1990s with financial institutions such as the Bank of Montréal which distributed key chains with a globe attached to them as part of their promotional scheme called "The World is your Oyster." Recently however, the phenomenon of representing the world has exploded. Open any newspaper to find images of the world used in a wide assortment of ads and company logos or go shopping to see two and three dimensional representations of world plastered on toys, beach balls, towels, plates, handbags, t-shirts, umbrellas and stationary.

What was once vast and strange has become localised and familiar. IBM's latest marketing strategy now lets us know that they have "solutions for a small planet." Their suggestion here is that with the advent of technological communications, the world is getting smaller. But is it really? Is Tibet any closer than it once was? Or is the collapsing of the world only an illusion? Implicated in these questions is the assumption, as Catalan artist Perejeume suggested in my opening quote, that the world is a single place (Perejeume, 1989: 134). The *Oxford English Dictionary*, in its four page historical etymology of the word, neatly defines the world as one unit - the whole of humankind, all of society or the entire earth. The word "world" is used as if it were a single unitary logic or, in other words, as if it were something concrete.

This thesis seeks to problematise the notion of "the world" as a single place. It demonstrates instead, that "the world" is an ideologically imbued construction and that

the idea of representing the world needs to be considered as a questionable enterprise. In attempting to represent the world as a unified experience a number of different questions arise. What does representing the world mean? Does it imply that there is a reality behind this representation? Is it possible to see from the vantage point of all nations? Where do we look from? Where do we speak from? And where, then, is the centre of the world?

In this paper, I am concerned with different aspects of visual and spatial culture. I investigate three different yet contemporary cultural sites that claim to represent the world. I explain how each configuration is constructed and reveal how each site plays a role in mediating our experience of the world by defining and positioning it in different ways, each with its own agenda, each with its own determined set of meanings.

The first site, Chapter II, is an examination of territory. The chapter investigates the present crisis in cartography by considering the controversy surrounding topographical world maps. It is a popular conception that maps are a reality in and of themselves, that they give us the world as we know it. If fundamental, geographic relationships, such as shapes, sizes, directions and so on, are distorted, we are inclined to accept them as fact if we see them that way because they are on maps. But this once stable business of map-making is currently being investigated by its own discipline as the assumed objective science of map-making is giving way to current notions of

subjectivity.

Chapter III, the second site, examines cultures as portrayed by *Magiciens de la Terre*, the self-proclaimed "first world-wide exhibition of contemporary art." Although the objective of the exhibition was to question the allegedly false distinction between western and non-western contemporary art practices, I demonstrate that what was presented at the exhibition was something that the spectator already knew and recognized. In an interview, Jean Hubert Martin, the exhibition's curator, explained he didn't want to exhibit Latin American artists that read magazines such as the American based *Art Forum* because our preconceived idea of Latin America is not that. *Magiciens de la Terre* then, was not an exhibition about what was "out there" but about a world we already know and recognize.

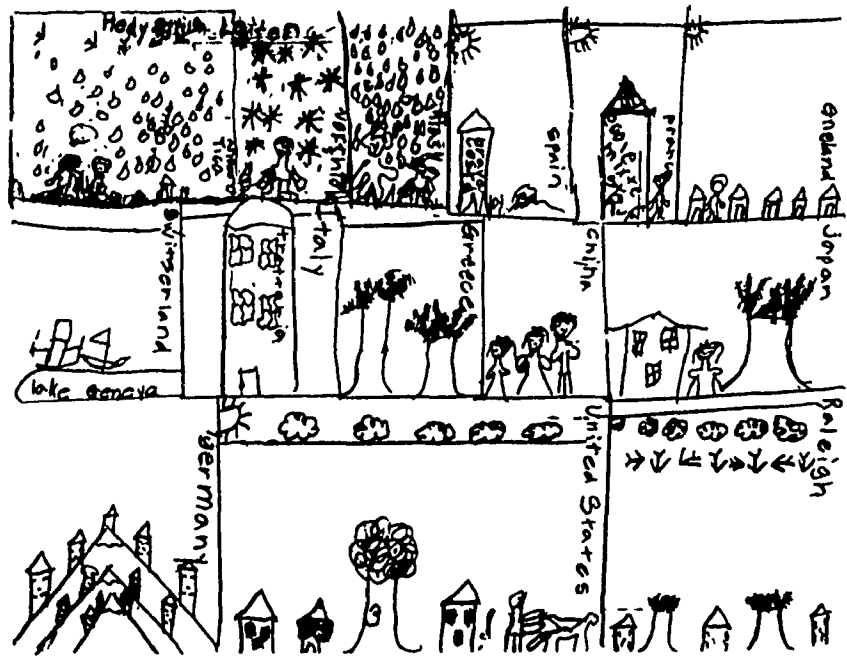
The final chapter, entitled "If You Could Design the Perfect World How Would it Look?", is an examination of people in an investigation of the multinational clothing company called Benetton. The chapter's title is taken from a Benetton t-shirt contest and is the epitome of the Benetton corporate mission: "Benetton is not about selling sweaters but about social responsibility, and it is a company that represents less a product than a lifestyle and a world view." This chapter focuses on the Benetton "world view" as articulated in Benetton's controversial advertising as well as in its magazine, *Colors: A Magazine About the Rest of the World*.

**Chapter II:**  
**Make Me Your Atlas and You Can Be My World:**  
**Power and Projections in Cartographic Representations**

*"Have you used it much?" I enquired.*

*"It has never been spread out yet," said Mein Herr: "the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So now we use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well."*

*Lewis Carroll, Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*



Hedy Ellis Leiter, age 7, draws the world.

The last time I visited my brother Shawn in Calgary, he had recently bought a new house. And, like a lot of families I suppose, his house was scattered, however sparsely, with childhood memorabilia. Next to his business journals and running magazines lay

my grandmother's copy of A.A. Milne's *House at Pooh Corner* and in the closet in the spare bedroom, the old Monopoly board lay beside newer games of Trivial Pursuit and Balderdash. It was only after combing the house that I realised that "The Map" was missing. "The Map" had been a pull-out map of the world from one of the *National Geographic* magazines Shawn had received a subscription to one year. It had hung on the walls of all the houses we had lived in together, then moved away when Shawn did. As children, the map was one of our endless sources of entertainment. We used to play a game akin to pin the tail on the donkey where we would close our eyes and spin then point to the map and whatever place we landed on would be where we would supposedly be going. We would then make up stories about the place - when we would go (we imagined it was always during the school year), what we would do, what we would eat, and so on. I even remember playing the spinning game as late as Grade Seven to decide on what country I would write about for my Geography class. I landed on Ceylon but was very disappointed when my mother told me that Ceylon no longer existed and that Sri Lanka had taken its place.

When I asked my brother where our map was, he told me that he had finally thrown it out because it had become so out of date. *How could the world be out of date?!* He said that East and West Germany were still represented as such and that given the Yugoslavian situation, there was no telling what the world looked like any more.

.....

Our *National Geographic* world map was not just a piece of paper, it was a certainty we grew up with. But this was not simply out of some sort of naïveté. The usual perception of maps is that they are a mirror, a graphic representation of the real world. In a 1992 article in the *Montreal Gazette*, geographer David Knight tells the story of drawing a map for his students in 1975 of what Canada might look like following a Québec separation. A copy of the map fell into the hands of the RCMP secret service, who then asked to speak to him: "What are you doing advocating the break-up of Canada?" they asked (Johnson, 1992: A16). In another case, Australian map-maker Stuart McArthur published a map in which the graphic representation of the world is inverted therefore placing Australia at the top of map. The caption on the map reads, "At last, the first move has been made - the first step in the long overdue crusade to elevate our glorious but neglected nation from the gloomy depths of anonymity in the world power struggle to its rightful position - towering over its Northern neighbours, reigning splendidly at the helm of the universe" (Barber and Board, 1993: 28). The assumption McArthur is playing on with his map is that, like the RCMP's reaction to David Knight's map of Canada, if it is on the map, it must be real or at least have the possibility of becoming real.

My intention in this chapter is to question this assumption - that maps communicate the world as it is, *without a point of view*, that they are a transparent representation of reality. I will do this by examining some aspects of the discipline of cartography itself, the field of study which produces maps. Until recently, cartography had been accepted

uncritically as a scientific form of knowledge creation. Currently however, the discipline is finding itself in crisis and is therefore attempting to redefine itself. In 1964, the highly respected British Cartographic Society defined cartography as "the art, science and technology of making maps, together with their study as scientific documents and works of art." Maps, in this context, were regarded as "including all types of maps, plans, charts and sections, three-dimensional models and globes, representing the earth or any heavenly body at scale" (Harley and Woodward, 1987: 21). With the advent of computer generated mapping (known as Geographic Information Systems or GIS), however, the same Cartographic Society proposed in 1989 that there should now be *two* definitions of cartography, one for practicing cartographers and the other for the general public. The public's definition would be "Cartography is the art, science and technology of making maps." For professional cartography the word "art" would be removed and would read as follows: "Cartography is the science and technology of analyzing and interpreting geographic relationships, and communicating the results by means of maps" (Harley, 1989: 2). One reason for this alteration of definitions is that with the revolutionizing nature of GIS, there are some within the profession who feel that this new technology has allowed maps an even closer representation of reality: "Using this technology, users may begin to map the seemingly spatial worlds of human decision making or crowd phenomena, or more effectively map the multiple dimensions of time, space and self-perception in which every human exists" (Woodward, 1992: 59). Others however, disagree that maps are progressing toward planimetric accuracy; instead, they argue



that maps have a subjective point of view which requires selection and abstraction.

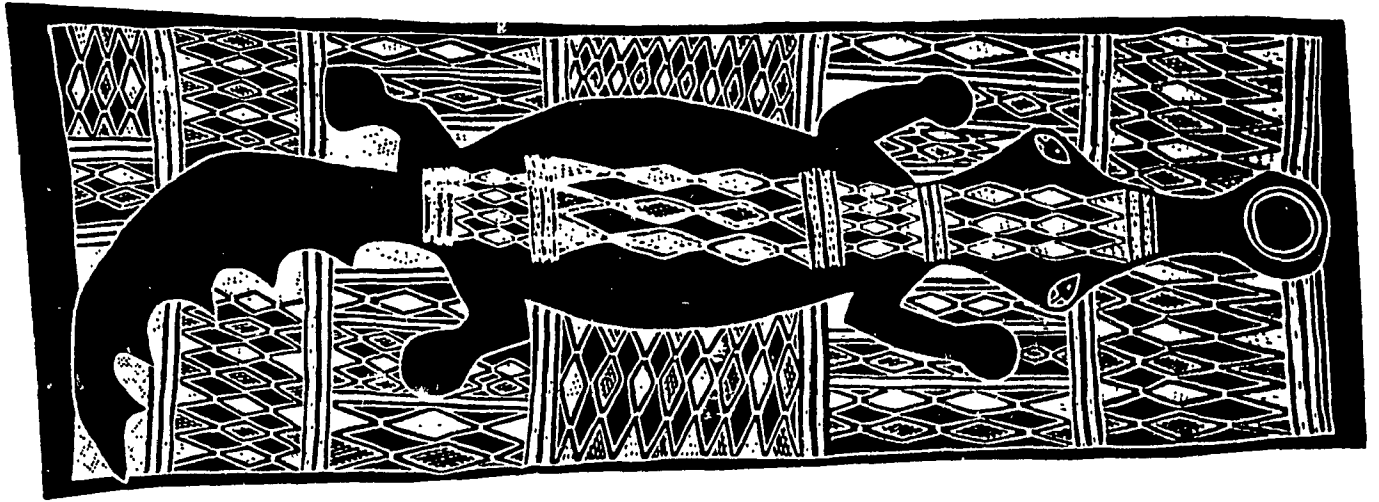
This schism within the discipline suggests a significant need to rethink the nature of maps from a number of different perspectives.

In this chapter, I will focus on two controversial figures within the domain of cartography who maintain that maps *do* have a point of view and that the act of denying this hides the privileging of a particular position. The first figure is cartographic historian Brian Harley whose constant criticism of the notion of the map as an objective value-free document has challenged cartographers to reevaluate their discipline. Harley's publications have resulted in what seems to be the beginning of a radical transformation in the character of cartographic thinking. The other is German cartographer Arno Peters who has constructed a topographical map that shifts the centre of the world, mapwise at least, away from Europe and rich nations of the northern latitudes. His intention with this map is to project a global image that includes, on an equal basis, all the peoples of the world, especially the neglected three-quarters of humankind living in the Third World. Although recent shifts in cartographic thinking are largely owed to these figures, they speak from two very different platforms. I will examine the positions of both Brian Harley and Arno Peters as well as the controversy that surrounds them. In so doing, I hope to help widen the debate on the assumed link between representation and reality that continues to dominate the domain of cartography.

***The Map is Not the Territory: Brian Harley and the Scientists of Cartography***

*A map says to you, "Read me carefully, follow me closely, doubt me not." It says, "I am the earth in the palm of your hand. Without me, you are alone and lost."*

*Beryl Markham*



From the mid 1980s to his early death in 1992, American cartographic historian Brian Harley published a series of articles that attempted to apply theories rooted in the humanities and social sciences to the study of maps. At the heart of all of Harley's work was his challenging of the discipline of cartography as a science seemingly based on objective principles and criteria. Harley's contention was that maps are *not* objective documents and he strove to replace such notion of transparency with one based on social theory. His emphasis was on the "humanistic" aspects of maps, of their production and reception and their function as images of power. Harley's theoretical aim was "to search for the social forces that have structured cartography and to locate the presence of power - and its effects - in all map knowledge" (Harley, 1989: 2).

Harley loosely defines cartography as "a body of theoretical and practical knowledge that map-makers employ to construct maps as a distinct mode of visual representation" (Harley, 1989: 3). As for his definition of maps, he broadens it so as to include celestial cartography and maps of imagined cosmographies: "Maps are graphic representations that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes, or events in the human world" (Harley and Woodward, 1987: xvi). Maps however, are never value free: "Both in the selectivity of their content and in their signs and styles of representation, maps are a way of conceiving, articulating and structuring the human world which is biased towards, promoted by, and exerts influence upon a particular set of social relations" (Harley in Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988: 278). In other words, *maps are socially constructed forms of knowledge*. According to Harley maps, like art, are far from being "a transparent opening to the world," but are "a particular way... of looking at the world."

The culmination of his work is suggested in a thought provoking essay published in the Summer 1989 issue of *Cartographica*, called "Deconstructing the Map" where Harley seeks to outline an agenda for a theoretically informed postmodern cartography. Harley's paper brought about eleven published responses in the following issue of *Cartographica* alone, not including two full articles in subsequent issues as well as a second essay by Harley himself. The responses were not limited to the areas of cartography or geography but ranged from disciplines such as English, Romance Languages and Literatures, German and Design. One response by art historian Robert

Baldwin, although praising Harley's work, cautioned that "Harley's work will be dismissed as a nihilistic or 'extreme leftist' attack on truth, reason, science and the presumption of a knowable, stable, mappable world" (Baldwin, 1990: 89).

As in his earlier articles, "Deconstructing the Map" attempts to interrogate the hidden agendas of cartography. "Much of the power of the map, as a representation of social geography," says Harley "is that it operates behind the mask of a seemingly neutral science." His concern was that "we still accept uncritically the broad consensus, with relatively few dissenting voices, of what cartographers tell us maps are supposed to be. In particular, we often tend to work from the premise that mappers engage in an unquestionably 'scientific' or 'objective' form of knowledge creation" (Harley, 1989: 1-2). Harley's aim in this article is to demonstrate that social theory is a better point of departure for cartography than scientific positivism which presumes that maps only get more reliable with more advanced technologies such as Geographic Information Systems. As a methodology for his inquiry, Harley suggested a "deconstructionist tactic" to break the assumed link between representation and reality (Harley, 1989: 8).<sup>1</sup> With deconstruction, he explains, we learn that cartographic facts are only facts within a specific cultural perspective.

Brian Harley openly states that most of his ideas in this essay are owed to the writings

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<sup>1</sup>Harley uses critical theorist Terry Eagleton's definition of deconstruction as a point of departure. "To deconstruct," says Eagleton "is to reinscribe and resituate meanings, events and objects within broader movements or structures; it is, so to speak, to reverse the imposing tapestry in order to expose in all its unglamorously dishevelled tangle the threads consisting the well-heeling image it presents to the world."

of Michel Foucault.<sup>2</sup> Central to Harley's paper is Foucault's basic assumption of the omnipresence of power in all knowledge, including the invisible or implied knowledge encoded in or deleted from maps. From this premise, Harley asks "What types of rules have governed the development of cartography?" He then goes on to discuss two distinctive sets of rules that have dominated the history of Western cartography since the 17th century and continue to underlie the discipline today. The first set of rules is that which governs the technical production of maps and relates to scientific epistemology. Characteristic of cartographic discourse is the belief in progress; this means that by the application of science, ever more precise representations of reality can be produced. Methods of cartography as a science are supposedly uninfluenced by social factors and thus able to deliver "a true, probable, progressive, or highly confirmed knowledge." Harley explains that the primary effect of these scientific rules was that it created a standard: "a successful version of 'normal science' - that enabled cartographers to build a wall around their citadel of the true map" (Harley, 1989: 8). Harley's principal objection to this standard is that it has led to a tendency to dismiss earlier maps while regarding artifacts that do not conform, such as those of some non-western cultures, as inferior to their European counterparts. For example, in first the volume of *The History of Cartography*, David Woodward tells the story of the turn of the century geographer Charles Raymond Beasley who, in his work on medieval geography, described two of the most renowned world maps of that time as "non-

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<sup>2</sup>Harley also states that he is equally indebted to the work Jacques Derrida but it is the work of Foucault that speaks louder in his essay. To summarize Derrida's influence on Harley, Harley states: "My position is to accept that rhetoric is part of the way all texts work and that all maps are rhetorical texts."

scientific... monstrosities" and wrote of their "complete futility" (Woodward in Harley and Woodward, 1987: 288).

The second set of rules that have dominated cartographic thinking since the 17th century relates to the cultural production of maps which Harley reveals are found between the lines of the technical procedures and "usually ignored by cartographers so that they form a hidden aspect of their discourse." These rules are associated with questions of ethnicity, politics, social class and religion. He suggests however, that these delineations may be as important as surveying, compilation or design in producing statements that cartography makes about the world. Harley uses, as an example, the "well-known rule of ethnocentricity" in the construction of world maps, which has led many historical societies to place their own territories at the centre of their cosmographies or world maps. Significantly, this is contradictory to the 'scientific' history of cartography that sees the development of map-making as proceeding from simple forms toward a more advanced level of numerical application. Thus, the scientific Renaissance in Europe which gave birth to Euclidean geometry (the mathematical coordinate system of map-making we are familiar with), also helped secure Europe's ideological centrality through the Mercator world map projection which placed Europe at the centre of the world. "Such centricity, a kind of 'subliminal geometry'," says Harley "adds geopolitical force and meaning to representation" (Harley, 1989: 7).

Harley concludes "Deconstructing the Map" by emphasizing some of the ways in which power structures influence cartographic practice. He distinguishes between external power relations of the map, such as the commissioning of maps by the military, and internal power relations such as those inherent within the practices of cartography itself. In the end, Harley suggests that cartographers must begin to consider what kinds of effects maps have on human consciousness since maps, by articulating the world, express an embedded social vision.

Brian Harley received a multitude of criticisms for his article, including more contemptuous remarks for matters such as not having read the works of Foucault in their original French version (Belyea, 1992: 2). Another colleague reprimanded him for having pointed fingers at cartographers; it was her contention that it was instead the cartographic historians who lacked a sophisticated sense of their own history: "The responsibility for a simplistic, linear, culturally intolerant and culturally impoverished history of cartography lies not with cartographers but with historians of cartography who do not read, neither do they question" (Godlewska, 1990: 97).

Without reservation, I applaud Harley not for only his views but for going against the grain of his own profession or, as Stuart Hall would say, for "staking out a wager" (Hall, 1992: 276). Michael Blakemore suggested in his comments on "Deconstructing the Map" that cartography is still promoted as a science insofar as the funding of research projects and travel to conferences has been readily available from science

institutions. Blakemore also suggested that within the arena of cartographic conferencing, the kind of social criticism that Harley publicly expounded was, in other circumstances, reserved for the conference bar (Blakemore, 1990: 90-93).

More insightful criticism was put forth by literary critic Richard Helgerson in his article "Dismantle to Build". Helgerson commended Harley's initiative but observed that his article was governed by "one of the fundamental ploys of scientific positivism, the replacement or correction of a less adequate idea with a more adequate one" (Helgerson, 1990: 99). In other words, *Brian Harley replaces one view of the world with another*. Harley's text is scattered with remnants of the scientific rhetoric he is seeking to deconstruct: "It is better," Harley writes "for us to begin from the premise that cartography is seldom what cartographers say it is." Why is it better? Because it will presumably lead to a *truer* understanding of what cartography *really* is. "The object of this paper," he continues, "is to suggest that an alternative epistemology, rooted in social theory rather than scientific positivism, is more appropriate for the history of cartography." The question then is why is it more appropriate? The answer, again, would be because it is truer, because it fits better. While it is sometimes impossible to escape this dilemma, the point is that Harley, or rather those who seek to continue his debate, need to become more aware. In speaking about his own discipline of literary criticism, Helgerson said "The hermeneutics of suspicion must also include self-suspicion."



But if Harley's emerging debate that maps are socially constructed forms of knowledge and not some sort of objective reality is to carry on, the above line of questioning must be even further extended. Questions that need to be asked should then become: who is it better for? and who is it not better for? more appropriate for whom? and who does this appropriateness leave out? As cartographer Robert Rundstrom suggests, "there are people in the world whose mapping culture is not part of this crisis" (Rundstrom, 1991: 2).

Another area of interrogation that needs to be opened up, if the dialogue is to continue, is Harley's surprisingly conservative definition of maps. According to Harley, maps are still a visual paper product. Attached to this notion is a more limiting factor of maps being an end product, something with a fixed meaning. What happens then when the map *precedes* the territory? What happens when the map is not spatial but instead carries a narrative structure? If "maps are cultural texts," as Harley suggests, what happens in the case of many indigenous communities where it is the *landscape* that is the text, i.e., the landscape itself has a meaning system?

Aboriginal Australian maps, for example, appear to have no grid, no standardized mode of representation. Nevertheless, it is possible for Aboriginal people to travel across distant territory using them. In the book *Maps are Territories, Science is an Atlas*, David Turnbull explains how Aboriginal knowledge takes the form of narratives

of journeys across the landscape:

Aborigines inculcate and invoke conventions just as we do, through conferences and agreement. They call them business meetings; anthropologists call them ceremonies and rituals. Songlines (which are accounts of journeys made by Ancestral Beings in the Dreamtime) connect myths right across the country. One individual will only 'know' or have responsibility for one section of the songline, but through exchange and negotiation, the travels of the Ancestors can be connected together to form a network of dreaming tracks (Turnbull, 1994: 27).

Ancestral Beings or spirits traverse the land and *in the process* create the topography.

In so doing, they provide the names of places and the identity of each place then situate it in its connection to other places. The actions of Ancestral Beings are also relevant insofar as they link groups of people which in turn creates a social form that determines the social and political processes of each community. Thus, given that the knowledge and landscape structure and constitute each other, they are one as maps.

Referring to the Yolngu community of Northeast Arnhemland, Helen Watson

comments:

We might say that in a profound way the Ancestral Beings of the Yolngu were mapmakers. They created the landscape and at the same time made the country a map of itself in the knowledge network. They created symbols and the ways of their use so that the map might be read by those to whom these things have been revealed. Reading the map is penetrating deeper into the texture of the knowledge network - the land itself (Turnbull, 1994: 27).

In this sense, maps are not an objectifiable item in the way Harley uses them. Instead they are a set of practices, ways of talking and seeing and knowing. Here, maps communicate the world without unifying authority; instead, there are only specific lines and traces to be followed.

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I turn now to the work of Arno Peters who attempts to put Brian Harley's theoretical aim into practice. If Harley's intention was to "search for the social forces that have structured cartography," Arno Peters claims to have located them and thus rectified the situation with a map projection that seeks to replace Mercator's projection as the cartographic icon of the 21st century.

***The Map is Not the Message: Arno Peters and the Science of Cartography***

*To a remarkable degree the cartographer enjoys not so much a reputation as a mystique of being unerring and infallible. His works may be inked on parchment, but for generations that live by them they might as well be carved in stone. He sets out to depict reality and ends up dictating our perception of it. The map appears so very surely to represent the world of fact - the continents and oceans mapped and measured and laid out with definition and precision according to exact scale.*

*Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sir Shirdath Ramphal*



A joint statement released by six professional organizations of geographers and cartographers in 1989 strongly urged that rectangular world maps, such as the Mercator projection, not be used for general purposes or artistic displays. The organisations explained that while a globe may be the only "true" representation of the spherical earth, flat maps of the world are more accessible and therefore more useful

than globes. Maps however, greatly change the appearance of the earth's features and coordinate system. They proclaimed that "world maps have a powerful and lasting effect on people's impressions of the shapes and sizes of lands and seas, their arrangement, and the nature of the coordinate system" and "frequently seeing a greatly distorted map tends to make it 'look right'" (American Cartographic Association..., 1989: 156). Three hundred copies of this resolution were distributed to the news media accompanied by commentary supporting the statement. Four rectangular and four "recommended for use" non-rectangular world maps were also included as part of the documentation. On June 8, 1989, the *Wall Street Journal* deemed the resolution important enough to mention it on its cover page.

Although it is the Mercator projection that is specifically named, it seems likely that the very resolution itself was put forth as a means to stop the "Peters Phenomenon" from spreading: "The most widely displayed rectangular map is the Mercator..., but other world maps proposed as replacements for the Mercator also display a greatly distorted image of the spherical earth." The so-called Peters Phenomenon is the spread of a world map projection produced by German cartographer Arno Peters<sup>3</sup> [Figure 1]. Although the map projection was originally released in 1972, it did not receive much public attention until the mid-1980s. The first U.S. edition of Peters' book, *Peters' Atlas of the World*, was released, coincidentally or not, at the same time

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<sup>3</sup>There is scepticism over what Arno Peters' professional title is. Some critics point out that he is a historian and *not* a geographer or a cartographer. For my own purposes, he is a cartographer since he is someone who engages in cartography.

as the statement.

While the Peters projection has been vehemently dismissed by almost all of the cartographic profession, it has been equally embraced by others. Organisations involved in issues of world development such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Development Movement, the Centre for World Development Education, the World Council of Churches and Christian Aid have all adopted Peters' map for purposes of fund raising, education and lobbying.

A survey conducted by British geography professor Peter Vujakovic revealed that the primary advantage for choosing the Peters map over other maps is that it is an equal area projection (Vujakovic, 1989: 101). This means that the Peters projection gives an accurate impression of the relative *sizes* of different parts of the world. There are many issues and problems involved in placing a spherical world on a flat rectangle since no flat map can adequately reproduce this. Although there are a number of solutions, each involves some sort of deformation. The cartographer must decide which attributes - distance, direction, shape or area - will be accurate and which will be distorted. Equal-area projections are maintained by decreasing the scale in one direction while increasing it in another. What is compromised in equal-area projections are shapes. In the Peters case, the middle latitudes are severely elongated and high altitudes are compressed so that continents such as South America and Africa appear

twice as long as they are wide. Peters also resituates the equator to the centre thus giving these continents central prominence.<sup>4</sup>

Another major advantage of the Peters map the organisations surveyed gave is Peters' attempt to eliminate a "Eurocentric" world view by replacing it with a view in which the Third World is centrally placed. In the Forward to the *Peters Atlas of the World*, Arno Peters explains that until now all world atlas maps have adhered to Mercator's Eurocentric view of the world:

A year after the discovery of America the Pope divided up the world outside Europe among the most powerful nations of his own continent. A hundred years later Mercator completed his atlas. By this time the Europeanisation of the earth was already far advanced and his atlas was therefore the first expression of the geographical concept in the age of colonialism...Since then thousands of atlases have been published, differing in many aspects from Mercator's Atlas, but all adhering to his Eurocentric view of the world (Peters, 1990: 3).

Peters is referring to Flemish cartographer Gerhardus Mercator who, in 1538, produced what has become the most famous map projection of all time (Figure 2). The problem of depicting a spherical world on a flat surface had assumed great urgency by the 16th century because of the need for sea charts that could compensate, in some way, for the curvature of the earth. Although Mercator's revolutionary projection served its navigational purpose, it greatly distorted the proportions of the world. The Mercator map does not accurately reflect the relative areas of the continents and the oceans, but rather exaggerates the scale of the land masses in the northern hemisphere while

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<sup>4</sup>Peters has also suggested that the Greenwich zero meridian be moved to the date line since it represents the same kind of Eurocentrism he is attempting to overcome with his map.

diminishing the scale of the continents and oceans in the southern hemisphere. The result is that the Mercator shows Greenland to be as large as Latin America when it is in fact only one eighth the size and Alaska appears to be same size as Brazil but in fact is only one fifth the size. Despite these distortions, the Mercator map has provided the geographic framework for wall maps of the world in many nineteenth and twentieth century classrooms. It is still the most widely used as a base for commercial maps and, as well, continues to form a backdrop for evening news programmes on networks such as ABC and NBC and also remains in the U.S. Pentagon.

In his 1984 book, *The New Cartography*, Peters regards world maps as having prime responsibility in the formation of the "world view" of individuals and in the maintenance of the "ideology of continued global exploitation of the Third World by industrial nations" (Peters, 1983: 141). He argues that continual exposure to the Mercator projection has distorted our view. Also in the Forward to the "Peters Atlas", Peters himself says that "If, together with the age of colonialism, the Eurocentric way of thinking is also to come to an end, we need a geographical picture of the world based on the equal status of all peoples of the earth" (Peters, 1990: 3).

As stated earlier, criticism surrounding the Peters projection is both abundant and astoundingly negative. He has been called the *enfant terrible* of cartography and titles of articles such as "Will Arno Peters Take Over the World?", "Distortion in Maps: The Peters Projection and Other Devilments," and "A World Turned Upside Down" are

not uncommon. Arthur Robinson, the leading voice in the attack against Peters, begins his review of *The New Cartography* by saying that "All cartographers should hang their head in shame if one is to believe Arno Peters" (Robinson, 1985: 103). Another critic suggests that the Peters map certainly needs a bold "geographical health warning" (Wright, 1993: 39).

While most of the critics insist that they speak from scientific claims, none of them actually says that Peters departs from reality. The reasons for their dislike are twofold: the aesthetics of Peters' map and his promotion of it. In the article "Distortion in Maps: The Peters Projection and Other Devilments," geographer Phil Porter and social scientist Phil Voxland seem to articulate their own and other critics' aversion to the Peters projection by stating that:

We would probably not single out the Peters projection were it not for two circumstances, one personal and one principled. First, we protest the disfigurement of Africa. Africa is not shaped that way, squeezed out and hung on the 35th parallel like laundry to dry. Second, Arno Peters, who is an able publicist even if a thoroughly confused cartographer, is currently causing much mischief in the Third World and in agencies that take a special interest in the Third World. He does this by arguing that his projection will meet every cartographic need<sup>5</sup> (Porter and Voxland, 1986: 26).

The Board of the German Cartographic Society also felt obliged, "in the interest of truthfulness and of pure scientific discussion on cartographic matters," to contribute to the debate by outlining eight elements of the Peters projection that contradict the findings of mathematical cartography. Point Eight reads as follows:

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<sup>5</sup>Porter and Voxland's laundry metaphor is actually taken from Robinson who criticized the landmasses of the Peters projection as "reminiscent of wet, ragged, long underwear hung out to dry on the Arctic circle" (Robinson, 1985: 104).



By means of his polemic and dialectic argumentation against the fictitious 'old view of the world' which he keeps bringing up, through his subjective depreciation of other scientific achievements, dogmatic over-estimation of certain criteria, and by manipulating of all criticism, Mr. Peters has succeeded in creating - at least with some of the public - the false impression that his world map is superior to all previous maps and that it represents the view of the world of a new era (The Board of the German Cartographic Society, 1985: 110).

In the end, German Cartographic Society can only accuse the Peters map of conveying "a distorted view of the world."

What is paradoxical about this cartographic controversy is that Peters himself also claims to be working in the name of science:

Five thousand years of human history have brought us to the threshold of a new age - the Age of Science has begun....The new cartography, based on and dedicated to objectivity alone, must promote and accompany this breakthrough into the new age of human solidarity (Peters, 1983: 7).

The real issue might be, as Brian Harley suggested earlier, one of power: "While the map is never the reality, in such ways it helps to create a different reality. Once embedded in the published text the lines on the map acquire an authority that may be hard to dislodge." Critics of the Peters projection are defending their established ways of representing the world. While Peters' agenda was the empowerment of those nations of the world he felt had suffered an historic discrimination, the 'truth claims' of other cartographers are at stake. Peters' most vehement opponent, Arthur Robinson, attacks Peters because his projection "looks funny" but then Peters is also his greatest competitor. Of the four recommended-for-use maps that were sent as part of the

resolution against Arno Peters, Robinson's was one. The selection of a map projection involves choosing among competing interests.

Whatever the dilemma, Arno Peters and the controversy that surrounds him at least admits the idea of cartographic authorship. In his comments on "Deconstructing the Map," Michael Blakemore critically stated that an underlying trait in the study of cartography is that of relegating the human below that of the artefact. In this case, we know that the Peters projection *does* have a point of view, and that Arno Peters is accountable for it.

In the case of Peters however, I agree with the critics that Arno Peters does not have *the* point of view. Like Brian Harley (although much more presumptuous!), Peters also seeks to replace one view of the world with another. In *The New Cartography*, Peters presents a catalogue of ten "Attainable Map Qualities" to be used to judge world map projections. Not surprisingly, the Peters projection is the only one to possess all of these qualities. No one map can serve all purposes, as Arno Peters advertises. His map is but one among many visions.

Another problem with the Peters Projection is that the map does not represent the world as it is but how it ought to be. Although it is admirable that Arno Peters attempts to present a non-Eurocentric view of the world, this is *not* the reality of the current global situation. By reconfiguring the map, Peters is in danger of simply

erasing issues of power and privilege.

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The Peters projection has now become accepted as the ideologically correct map to use based on claims by Peters that his map "... alone can demonstrate the parity of all peoples of the earth." Using the Peters map has become a statement in itself: "My projection ceased to be just a piece of mathematics or cartography - it is now a symbol" (Spicer, 1989: 42).

As for Brian Harley, the consequences of his deconstructive work continue to echo, however reluctantly amongst cartographers, after his untimely death. Two years after his passing, in a discussion on the nature of cartographic practice, the International Cartographic Association met to discuss yet another definition of the map. In their summary, aptly titled "Defining What We Do," they reported that the definition "had to be broad enough to embrace both the catholicity of Brian Harley's concept of representation in any kind of socio-political or cultural context, and also to include mental images that appeared to share many of the properties of paper maps" (ICA Working Group on Cartographic Definitions, 1991: 55).

Cartography then, can be defined as not only the drawing of maps, but the making of worlds. In a review of the 1992 *Hammond Atlas of the World*, Scott Malcomson comments:

One probably needs a computer these days to keep up with the changes in place names and borders. Hammond already has Czechoslovakia separated into two states. It has independent Macedonia, and Frunze is now Bishkek. Bosnia, Croatia and 'Yugoslavia' (in this case, Serbia-Kosovo-Vojvodina-Montenegro) are all behind clear borders, a case of wishful thinking. The editorial meetings must have been hell (Malcomson, 1992: 6).

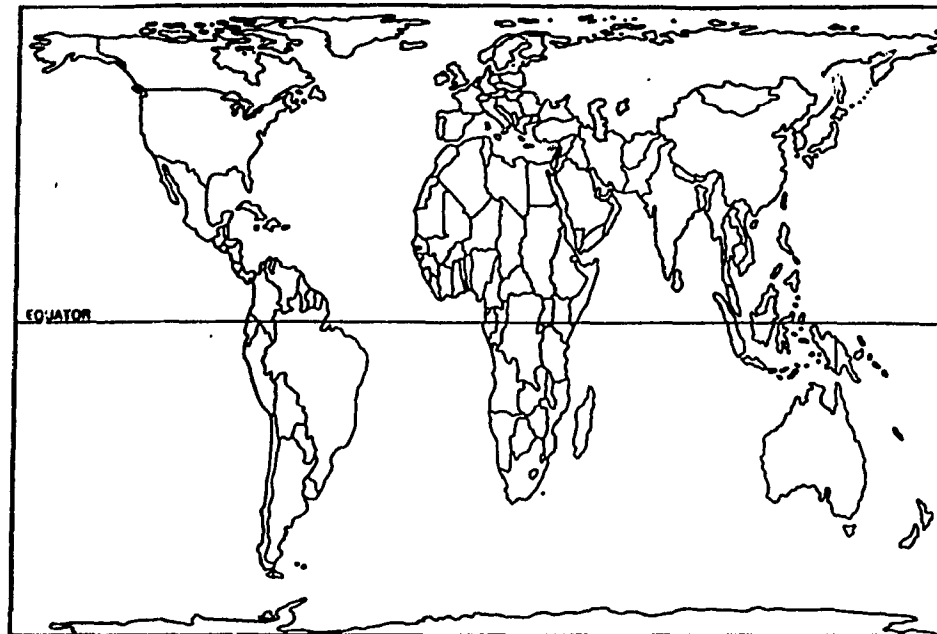


Figure 1 The World According to Peters

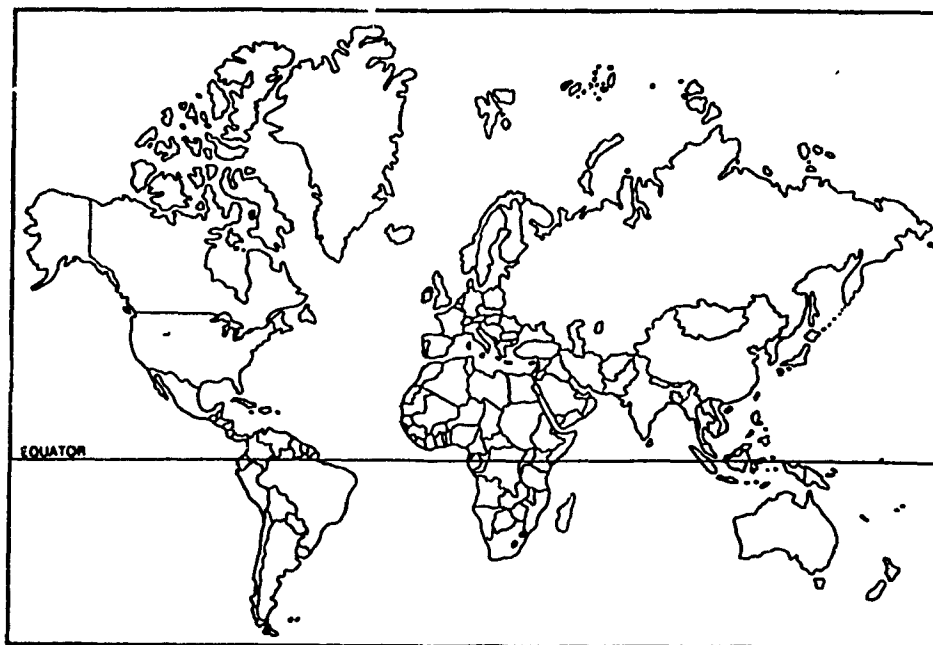


Figure 2 The World According to Mercator

**Chapter III:**  
**From Centre to Periphery Without Ever Having Left (the Centre): *Magiciens de la Terre* and the Tourist Experience**

*Nearly all experience, all reality, it was thought, lay within confines of language. Language, in turn, was structured by the book. Thus, nearly the whole of Western culture was organized around one sense: the eye; expressed in one medium: language; and structured according to one model: the book.*

*Edmund Carpenter, Oh! What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me*

***57°N 3°E (Paris)***

On the very last page of the exhibition catalogue of *Magiciens de la Terre* sits an image of a packsack. This image is relatively small and, with the exception of the printing credits above, it sits alone in the centre of the glossy white page. One must look closely at the bag to realize that the design on its surface is that of a map of the world along with an assortment of flags that runs across its closing flap. The packsack itself appears to have been recently worn: the backstraps are still stiff and the contents seem to have yet to be emptied. It's as if after having read the catalogue we are supposed to feel as if we are tourists and have just come back from a world tour. Ironically, however, the catalogue which holds this image is shaped like a coffee table atlas - large and glossy with cumbersome dimensions - the kind one would never think of actually travelling with but might instead use beforehand to plan a trip. The show for which this catalogue was produced was held in Paris in the summer of 1989 and was self-proclaimed to be the first

was self-proclaimed to be the first world-wide exhibition of contemporary art. The exhibition consisted of 100 participants: 50 from the West's "artistic centres" and 50 from traditionally peripheral locations such as India, Tanzania, and Panama. And so while the smaller image of the packsack seems to be saying we've made our way around the world, the larger metaphor of the catalogue/atlas seems to be telling us that we have yet to leave.

*Magiciens de la Terre* was considered by the press to be a blockbuster show. At a cost of approximately two million dollars U.S., it was so large that it had to be split into two locations: the Centre Georges Pompidou in the centre of Paris and La Villette, an old slaughterhouse on the outskirts of the city. Conceived and curated by the then director of the Musée national d'art moderne, Jean Hubert Martin, along with a team of six assistants, the show claimed to question the allegedly false distinction between western culture and "other" cultures. Martin explains in the preface to the exhibition catalogue that there is a misconception that "art" is solely situated within occidental culture or that creativity is at least occidentally inspired. In an interview in *Art in America* with Benjamin Buchloch, Martin states: "A basic idea of our exhibition is to question the relationship of our culture to other cultures of the world... The exhibition intends to create dialogues. I oppose the idea that one can only look at another culture in order to exploit it. Our first concern is with exchange and dialogue, with understanding others in order to understand ourselves"<sup>1</sup> (Buchloch, 1989: 155). By

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<sup>1</sup>The same interview was also reproduced in a special *Magiciens de la Terre* edition of *Third Text* under the title of "Interview," Spring 1989, p. 155.

juxtaposing half of its contributing artists from "centres" of contemporary culture with half from cultural "margins" in the same common area, all works in *Magiciens de la Terre* were assumed to be presented on 'equal' terms, without regard to their cultural origins. As a result, works from established artists from North America and Western Europe such as Barbara Kruger, Richard Long, Anselm Kiefer and Joseph Bueys occupied the same space as mandalas from Tibetan monks, "dreamings" from Australian aboriginals, and coffins from a Ghanaian coffinmaker. As Martin said in another interview: "For once the point is for two worlds that don't know each other to meet" (Sans, 1987: 92).

Within the realm of critical debate surrounding the exhibition, the show was attacked from all sides and in fact, rumour was that Martin was fired from his position soon after because of it. Most of the criticism was not so much concerned with the actual body of work in the exhibition but was instead aimed at the curatorial practices of Jean Hubert Martin. And although the majority of the criticism was directed at the kind of west/non-west, us/them polarity the exhibition set up, the criticism itself fell into the same dichotomous predicament as the show itself. On one side, critics charged Martin with giving up the western claim of being the more advanced civilization; that he had given up the long-claimed right to judge other cultures from western standards, and to treat these judgements as somehow objective. On the other side, Martin was criticized for depoliticizing the show. The critics remarked on how the curator's reluctance to recognize the colonialized histories of many of the locations represented



led to the perpetuation of the very same assumptions of partiality that the exhibition claimed to question. One point of consensus between these two sides however was, as Catherine Liu stated in her review, "A real global show cannot be curated by the French alone" (Liu, 1989: 172).

Departing from these binary critiques, I want to instead show *Magiciens de la Terre* to be constructed around an invisible centre as described by Russell Ferguson in his introduction to the book, *Out There: Marginalisation and Contemporary Cultures*. Ferguson begins his text by asking: "When we say marginal, we must always ask, marginal to what? But this question is difficult to answer. The place from which power is exercised is often a hidden place. When we try to pin it down, the centre always seems to be somewhere else. Yet we know that this phantom centre, elusive as it is, exerts a real and undeniable power over the whole social framework of our culture, and over the way we think about it" (Ferguson, 1990: 9). In the same interview with Benjamin Buchloch, Jean Hubert Martin maintained that he intended to select objects from various cultures "according to my own history and my own sensibility." His criteria for selection was by visual means alone, "my vision and that of my colleagues... since we're dealing with objects of sensual and visual experience, let's really look at them from our own culture" (Buchloch, 1989: 153).

These remarks of Martin's bring us to the main point I wish to make in this chapter, which is to illustrate how the discourse of the "tourist perspective" informed the

construction of the non-western portion of *Magiciens de la Terre*. The term "tourist perspective" developed by Kenneth Little in his essay "On Safari: The Visual Politics of a Tourist Representation," has to do with the cultural production of the tourist gaze. The term is used in reference to Little's analysis of the Kenyan safari as a genre of cultural production and specifically how the safari is constructed to give the production an aura of authenticity (by which he means 'spontaneous' or 'natural'). Little explains that Kenyan safaris are sold to tourists as a set of images that tourists themselves already know and recognize through mediums such as television and print which are manufactured in the West. Images of Africa as "wild", "exotic", or "primitive", then, are pre-packaged as "already-mades" thus providing a particular framework in which the safari is to be experienced (Little, 1991: 149). *Magiciens de la Terre* was constructed much like these Kenyan safaris. The exhibition's advertising brochure explains that its organizers travelled over a period of four years, from warehouse studios to villages that had just discovered electricity, in search of potential artists for the exhibition. When asked in an interview how Martin would deal with the general lack of information on developing countries, the curator explained that they first went to libraries since they offer much more information than is generally thought on many artistic events occurring in places such as Africa or Asia. After sifting through the library material he recalled, "we then had the massive job of contacting all those who are in close contact with those countries: ethnologists, anthropologists, French universities, the CNRS, etc. ... Later on we will have a plan of *verification* through a series of trips" (my italics). Of Indian artists, the curator explained that "today we are

relatively well informed on modern Indian painting thanks to 'The Indian Year' in France and the exhibition at the Centre Pompidou. It is therefore possible to go about finding these artists more or less in the way one does in Europe or America" (Sans, 1987: 93). But in gathering visual information assembled beforehand and employing vision as the sole criteria, what they came back with was not what was "out there" but what was already here in the Western imaginary to begin with. Jean Hubert Martin's "tourist perspective" of 'the other' in turn became the framing device for the show.

My discussion does not focus on *Magiciens de la Terre* proper but instead addresses two texts that relate specifically to Jean Hubert Martin and his tourist perspective. I begin by going back to an earlier time in the formation of the exhibition when Martin and colleague André Magnin wore the hats of what they called "enquêteurs."<sup>2</sup> I examine a travelogue written by Martin and Magnin in the summer of 1987 while they were scouting for potential artists in Africa. I describe how the artists they encountered were domestically assembled (ie: already-framed) and how Martin and Magnin went to Africa only to confirm that what they had seen in books and articles was 'real'. What they encountered however were only representations of some further reality. I end my chapter by examining the exhibition catalogue. I point out how both the images and the text in the catalogue serve to reinforce the tourist experience for the tourist/spectator. In tracing Jean Hubert Martin's footsteps from Paris to Africa then back to Paris, I hope to reveal how *Magiciens de la Terre* made it possible for

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<sup>2</sup>I will use the original French term of *enquêteur* since it does not translate well into English. The closest word would be investigator.

the tourist/spectator to have made his/her way around the world without ever having left home.

*Points of Departure or Where Do We Land*

Jean Hubert Martin first began thinking about the possibility of a contemporary international exhibition some time in 1982. As the director of the Centre Pompidou, he travelled that year to Australia where he was head of the French participation in the Sydney Biennale. As part of the Australian component of the Biennale, officials had invited Aboriginal artists to make *in situ* works. As Martin recalls in an interview with Thomas McEvilly, "There was a very good mood as these French artists and these Aboriginal artists prepared their work side by side." But, as Martin also points out, it was also very controversial among both curators and artists as they questioned whether it was right or wrong to include Aboriginal artists in a western or westernised art exhibition. "From then on," he thought, "Well, it would be nice to make a global exhibition, including artists from the whole world, just to break this taboo" (McEvilly, 1990: 110).

The foundation for the exhibition was laid as early as 1984 and it was at this time that Martin began to gather colleagues such as Jan Debbaut, Mark Francis and Jean-Louis Maubaut to discuss the feasibility of the project. It was immediately established that non-western experts should participate both in the elaboration of the project and in the selection of artists. It was also quickly realised that these experts might not share their

knowledge or taste in western contemporary art production therefore they first had to find a common criteria and methodology. It was concluded that the criteria used for selecting non-western artists should be based on the following four components: 1. originality and inventiveness in relation to the artist's own cultural context; 2. the relation of the artist with his/her surrounding environment either by adherence or criticism. This meant that the artist's relation to the community had to be able to be appreciated in a significant way within the work; 3. the relationship between the artist and his/her work also had to be evident. His/her intentions and desires must have had to be revealed or at least be verifiable in the work; 4. a sense of adventure and risk must have been able to be felt in the work (Martin, 1989: 9).

The methodology of this search for non-western participants was, as stated in the preface to the catalogue:

The *enquêteurs* never went to countries of the third world to find out what was happening, attempting to see as many artists as possible and thus blurring all categories. The *enquêteurs* always left with visual information assembled [in the West] in accordance with the most diverse methods (bibliographies, conversations with ethnographers, contacts with specialists from the network of the art market, local experts, information communicated by artists). The knowledge they brought with them pertained more to artistic milieus or communities rather than to individuals. Their task consisted of finding and isolating these individuals for their particular creative qualities (Martin, 1989: 9).

I will now turn to the travel notes written while Jean Hubert Martin and colleague André Magnin were in Africa scouting for artists. These travel notes are published in a very obscure little book I received as an accompaniment to a documentary video I rented about the exhibition called *magiciens de la terre...autour de l'exposition*. The

travelogue is located in the back half of this book, after a series of interviews with artists that are featured in the video. By examining this journal, it will become clear that the curatorial selection of artists from Africa was not what was really "out there" but instead was based on what the curators already knew and recognized.

***Do You See a Difference? I Don't See a Difference***

*But is the unicorn a falsehood? It's the sweetest of animals and a noble symbol ...it grieves me to think that this unicorn doesn't exist, or never existed, or cannot exist one day.*

*...Console yourself, they exist in these books, [therefore] if they do not speak of real existence, they speak of possible existence.*

*Umberto Eco, The Name of the Rose*

In July of 1987 Jean Hubert Martin and André Magnin along with their assistants set out for Africa. It is apparent from their travel notes that the two teams did not travel together but split their tasks with Martin covering the northwest (Nigeria, Benin and Ghana) and Magnin covering the southeast (Madagascar and Tanzania).

Jean Hubert Martin first arrived in Oshogbo, Nigeria with his assistant Jacques Soulillou to meet with Twins Seven Seven, a potential artist for the exhibition. They met with him to discuss the project and see his work but Martin was not satisfied with the quality of it. Twins Seven Seven told them, however, that he would prepare six large paintings of the same quality as the work of his that hangs in the National

Gallery of Lagos and from these six they could choose four (Martin and Magnin, 1989: 37-38) [Figure 1].

Being satisfied with this agreement and thus securing Twins Seven Seven a place in the exhibition, the two men left the next day for Calabar to meet with Sunday Jack Akpan, another artist that the curator had in mind. Martin knew well before arriving what he would ask of Akpan for the project: "I'm thinking of a group of traditionally seated Oba figures (the funerary type), a sorcerer with a chicken in hand, Ekbo, etc" [Figure 2]. Akpan was in accord with the request and, after some convincing, also agreed to come to Paris on the condition that he be found a place in the country (Martin and Magnin, 1989: 40).

The two men soon left for Abomey, Benin, where they immediately set out to find Cyprien Toukoudagba. Upon locating him, the artist took them immediately to the museum where he worked as a restorer and gave them a grand tour: "We move amongst heaps on unpaved roads in the outskirts. The figures are a bit too similar [to each other], there is more diversity in the animals. Certain ones are very nice in black and white, like the hyena. In certain sanctuaries, there is a kind of antechamber with abstract motifs on the walls. They are signs, commissioned by priests, corresponding to certain divinities ... The decoration was made by another painter. It seems that there are many copyists." At the end of the tour Martin insisted that Toukoudagba show them a *legba* sculpture that was reproduced in an article of *African Arts* magazine. The

artist explained that it was damaged but that he could show them another one that was the same as the one in the article but that was not quite finished. It is only after seeing this that Martin enthusiastically told the artist about the project: "I propose that he come [to Paris] and make a reproduction. He accepts with joy and seems delighted with the idea. We go back to his place in a quasi-euphoria" (Martin and Magnin, 1989: 48-49) [Figure 3].

In his search for the three artists I have described here, Jean Hubert Martin's experience of viewing the artists' work had been organized not around his encounter with the artists themselves and/or what they produced but around a model; the model that had already been written and read about and therefore assimilated in the West. Martin's pursuit then was not a quest for 'the real', but a quest for a confirmation of sameness, of something already assembled and therefore understood. In relation to the turn-of-the-century World Exhibition in Paris, Timothy Mitchell characterises this framing of perception that I have just described as something particular to Europeans who set up everything as though it were a model or a picture of something. Mitchell calls this process "the world-as-exhibition" where the world is rendered as an object, a framed picture or spectacle. In his discussion of Europeans who went to the Orient, Mitchell explains that the tourists arrived only after seeing plans and copies in pictures, books and museums for which they were seeking the original: "but the reality they sought there was simply that which could be pictured or accurately represented, able to stand apart as something distinct from a subject and grasped in terms of a



corresponding distinction between representation and reality" (Mitchell 1989: 233).

This is especially evident within Martin's travel notes in the case of Cyprien Toukoudagba where Martin was not satisfied by his own encounter with the artist's work but had to insist on seeing what he had already seen in the article of *African Arts* magazine. The text, in a sense, became more than a representation of the other, it became a witness of the other.

Though I was not able to find this article in *African Arts*, I did, however, come across articles on both Twins Seven Seven and Sunday Jack Akpan.<sup>3</sup> Both men, it seems, are famous in their communities and in the case of Twins Seven Seven, famous in the West since, at the time the article was written in 1972, the artist had already been to Europe and was on his way to New York. My point here is not that the two artists were already famous and therefore should not have been included in the exhibition but that the two could only be understood because of their very 'readability' within a Western context. Martin interviewed another artist who explained that he made "metaphysical art" from the skins of goats. When Martin asked him what metaphysical art was, the artist became agitated and asked Martin if he knew what abstract art was. Having an affirmative response, the artist then replied, "metaphysical art is the contrary. It is something that we don't understand at a first glance. It has to be explained." Martin then writes, "I don't think it is necessary to pursue him any further" (Martin and Magnin, 1989: 51). As Edmund Carpenter suggests, "we respond only to

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<sup>3</sup>The articles are: Keith Nicklin and Jill Solmons, "S.J. Akpan of Nigeria," in *African Arts*, October 1977 and A.C. Mundy-Castle and Vicky Mundy Castle, "Twins Seven Seven," in *African Arts*, Autumn 1972.

what we recognize, to what holds meaning for us" (Edmund Carpenter, 1972: 32).

### *A Reversal of Sameness*

After securing contracts with those artists chosen from Nigeria and Benin, Martin left to find Seth Kane Kwei, a coffin maker from Ghana [Figure 4]. Before meeting the artist, he had first visited a neighbouring village to see the work of other coffin makers. Martin had concluded though, that Kane Kwei must be the inventor of this particular genre and that those in the village must be his followers: "I see exact copies, less well executed, models of Kwei ... His followers who have surely worked in his studio for a time, don't they even have the sense to create new models?" Martin met Kane Kwei the following day but the two had to speak through an interpreter since, as Martin says, "he pretended not to speak English." The *enquêteur* asked Kwei his age but the artist forgot; instead, he brought out a clipping of a 1973 article from *African Arts* magazine that related to his sale of seven coffins to Americans (Martin and Magnin, 1989: 55).

At the same time that Jean Hubert Martin was in northwest Africa, André Magnin arrived in Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania. With him, he carried two books: the first was *Modern Age Makonde Carving* (1981), a book on modern Makonde sculpture edited in Japan; the second was by Max Mohl, an African arts collector from Germany who seemed to have singled out nine artists from the area. From these two books, Magnin

made a list of nine "important Tanzanian sculptors," "important" because the artists on his list were cited in both books.

One of the artists who was mentioned in both books was John Fundi. After locating and seeing his work, Magnin exclaims: "Immediately I know I have a great artist. All I might have seen in Mengwe, in Namba Yasana, is erased; and the little interest that I could find, that I would find has disappeared" [Figure 5]. After explaining *Magiciens de la Terre* to Fundi, the artist himself retrieves the same book on the collections of Max Mohl and shows Magnin photographs of himself with Mohl. Magnin then concludes that "John Fundi is a famous figure like one of our great artists, their equal, he knows well that he is creative, he knows that he has nothing to do with craft making." Magnin leaves John Fundi saying, "He has the look [*le regard*], the gesture [*le geste*] and the word [*le mot*]" (Martin and Magnin, 1989: 51-55).

In these encounters that I have described, what both the investigators *and* the artists in question had in common were the books and articles written about the artists. Further than these texts being produced as witnesses of the 'other' as we saw in the previous encounters, the texts here become the mediator - already documented and cited.

Although these encounters arose from the same kind of circularity, I am not suggesting however, that there was an equal exchange taking place. What we know of magazines such as *African Arts* is that they are written by members of what David Howes calls a "literate (or text-producing) culture" and it is therefore this same culture that

authorizes its writing (Howes, 1990: 64). Martin's use of the discourse about the 'other' was used as a means of constructing a discourse authorized by the other thus creating a mirroring effect. But this power of identification is often such that reality and appearance merge while the mirror itself becomes invisible. What I am suggesting is that there is no such thing as direct vision; when we look into a mirror, our image always stares back. In a moment of self-reflection in the last entry of his travel notes, Jean Hubert Martin himself asks: "Has this unreasonable quest for sacred African masks and objects on our part, not lead the Africans to concentrate the sacred into objects such as the legba, 'piles of waste' as Leiris has already mentioned, just like this huge pile of vegetable and animal substances photographed in Abomey [?]" (Martin and Magnin: 1989: 58).

### *When the Familiar Meets the Strange*

*But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?' And that's the great puzzle!*

*Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

After a day and a half of driving to what seemed to André Magnin as "a place at the ends of the earth," he met up with the last of the potential artists on his list, Efiambelo. Efiambelo was not considered an artist but was instead a master wood carver who made *aloaloes* (funerary pieces) for graves. The two men spoke together of the wood carver's traditional techniques of construction, working with neither saw nor sand paper. Efiambelo told Magnin that he does not use these tools only because they are not available to him. Magnin then writes, "It's stupid to think that they mustn't use

for example, sand paper; even they want to use all the techniques at their disposal that make their work easier." After discussing the project, Efiambelo accepted and asked Magnin to pray with him that all would go well. The curator, at that point, began to feel remorse: "All deception on my part will be inadmissible, unacceptable and sad." But because Efiambelo was considered a wood carver and not an artist, he did not share in the decision making of what was to be executed for the graves; his service lent was his knowledge of wood carving techniques, not his imagination: "I find myself embarrassed. He executes work for families of the deceased." Magnin commissioned ten funerary pieces leaving the subject matter free for Efiambelo to decide upon but "I ask him to use his imagination as much as possible to make ten 'modern' *aloaloes*, meaning images brought about by colonization, tradition and European civilization" (Martin and Magnin, 1989: 70) [Figure 6].

.....

As we have seen thus far, what the *enquêteurs* of *Magiciens de la Terre* set out to find was in fact already found, already seen and already written before they left. What they brought back from their trip was not The Reality they set out to find but only a representation of the real that existed (and could only exist) within the confines of their pre-given framework. And by the same token, the artists under investigation, knowing what others say about the 'other', allowed themselves to be inscribed into this Reality. It is not surprising that we read that Sunday Jack Akpan's business card reads

"Undertakes the construction of Images. Statues. Tombstones of all kinds pottery products, painting of houses in the most modern ways, decoration of house furniture, and General Arts" or that the name of his studio is "Natural Authentic Sculptor". In fact, in an interview with Akpan who was invited to the opening of *Magiciens de la Terre*, the artist says: "I came to Paris with this book, *Cement Sculptures in Nigeria* where it speaks of my work" (Martin and Magnin, 1989: 17).

***(Re)Turning to The Atlas/Catalogue: The Post-Tour***

*Williams, who had laboured so hard since his return to Australia to find the appropriate form for the landscape, had now found a mode which rediscovered the Australian bush, making from the discovery a painting on an epic scale yet retaining the personal quality of his handling. This new form was believable because it came from experience.... He had found a geometry for nature, for the untidy, straggly, unpicturesque bush.*

*Patrick McCaughey, Fred Williams*

This quote is meaningful insofar as it serves to metaphorize Jean Hubert Martin's return to Paris. In this passage, Fred Williams, an Australian landscape painter, had just arrived from his European training, an essential experience for artists from the 1950s and 60s: "Fred Williams left as a student and returned, early in 1957, an artist." This same kind of 'rite of passage' is shared by Martin in the sense that upon his return, his role shifted from *enquêteur* to that of *commissaire générale*. And just as Williams was now able to make the untidy, straggly landscape of the bush look like a picture of European landscape, Martin could now move on to his next task: the packaging of artists for the exhibition catalogue. Over and above being the exhibition's principle figure, the catalogue states that Martin, along with André Magnin and two

others were also in full command of the catalogue's conception and realisation. In his production of the catalogue, Martin is no longer a tourist but instead becomes a tour operator who puts together the package to be sold to the tourist/spectator of the show.

The exhibition catalogue, as I mentioned earlier, is shaped like an atlas - and although not especially thick (a mere 272 pages), it is largely oversized as atlases tend to be. The exhibition's logo on the cover is a fluorescent yellow spiral that pays homage to Lama Baiga, an Indian artist originally invited to participate but died in 1987.<sup>4</sup> The first quarter of the text is devoted to essays of which most were written by the show's *commissaires*. While essays such as Jean Hubert Martin's preface and André Magnin's recollections of Africa are, for the most part, explanatory, others such as Lomi Bhabha's and Thomas McEvilly's take a much more critical approach. There is also an interesting photo essay by French anthropologist Bernard Marcadé, entitled *L'Autre, ce grand alibi*.

The remainder of the space in the catalogue is given over to what is called the "Atlas of Exhibiting Artists." In this section, each of the one hundred artists is given a two page spread to present their work. On each page there is a gesture toward dismissing the idea of a centre: at the top right corner is a world map that shows the artist's home as centre of the globe. In each right hand margin the artist was asked to answer the question of "what is art?" While many answered the question, others chose to ignore

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<sup>4</sup>Part of the criteria for participating in the show was that the artists had to be living.

it. Below the question are "notes" - information relative to the artist and his/her work. The majority of the two page layout is taken up by the artists' work, either in the form of sketches or photographs. Many of the non-western images appear to be documentary style photographs, reminiscent of the kind seen in *National Geographic* or *Geo*. Taken *in situ* in their "natural environments," these photographs seem to be showing 'real people in real locations at real tasks.'

Kenneth Little explains that Kenyan tour operators and travel agents are sensitive to the world wide demand for possible tourist dreamlands and have learned to produce and sell safari tours as highly selected and elaborated images of East African nature where indigenous cultures become part of the natural landscape. In the catalogue, the photograph of Wesner Philidor depicts the Haitian artist bending over from the waist and drawing a large symbol on the rocky ground with some kind of chalk or powder [Figure 7]. The photograph is close to the work and cropped so that we only see Philidor's hands at work as well as his bare feet (*Magiciens de la Terre*, 1989: 214-215). In "Documentary Is/Not a Name," Trinh T. Minh-Ha speak of how, in the techniques of film documentaries, any explicit use of the magic, poetic, or irrational qualities specific to the film medium itself have to be excluded *a priori* as non-factual:

The question is not so much one of sorting out - illusory as this may be - what is inherently factual from what is not on a body of preexisting filmic techniques, as it is of abiding by the laws of naturalism in film. In the reality of formula films, only validated techniques are right, others are de facto wrong. All however, depend on their degree of invisibility in producing meaning (Minh-ha, 1990: 85).

The same can be said for the catalogue's photographic documentation. Jean Hubert



Martin uses photography as a way of *transcribing* reality. The images appear to be not statements about the world but pieces of it. In another spread, Nigerian artist Mike Chukwukelu is photographed working on his five meter high *Ijele* mask. The mask sits on the ground covered by a tent-like structure made of bamboo and canvas.

Surrounding the work are a number of people, all with their backs to the camera and appear to be helping with the finishing touches [Figure 8]. It is as if the images in catalogue are presented as evidence - that something did indeed happen - that someone really was there or that the mountain was that large.

The *notes* portion of each artist's spread further adds to the packaging of the tourist experience. The catalogue explains, as I said earlier, that this section pertains to "information relevant to the artist and to his/her work." But in examining this discourse, what appears to be relevant in many instances is the notion of a romanticized distance - that non-western locations are far, far away. The description for Indian artist, Bowa Devi, begins as follows: "Situated in the state of Bihar, between the left bank of Ganges and the first hills of the Himalayas, populated by 35 million inhabitants, the Mithila region is one of the most ancient kingdoms of India" (*Magiciens de la Terre*, 1989: 128-129). The same begins for Haitian artist Gabriel Bien Aimé: "30 km east of Port-au-Prince, in the quartier Noailles, we find the village of Croix-des-Bouquets" (*Magiciens de la Terre*, 1989: 96-97). And just as Kenyan safaris play up the thematic image of the exotic wilderness in which wildlife, landscape and native peoples are rendered up as timeless, unchanging and primitive

entities, so do many of the non-western artist's descriptions. The catalogue describes

Mike Chukwukelu as:

the possessor of one of the most prestigious traditions of tropical Africa: the manufacturing of *Ijele* masks. The mask finds its origin and its objective in the village customs where it expresses its power. The extraordinary profusion of elements that make up this spiritual monument is a survey of igbo cosmology....Its 'outing' [sa "sortie"] constitutes an exceptional event charged with intense excitement (*Magiciens de la Terre*, 1989: 114-115).

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If Jean Hubert Martin was the tour operator, the end of this discussion begs the question as to whether the spectators of *Magiciens de la Terre* in turn became the tourists who were caught up in the tourist perspective. Never having seen the exhibition, I can only speculate that it was one perspective among many. Although the spectators was invited to metaphorically re-enact Martin's travels, this does not necessarily mean that the spectator to could *only* see from the vantage point of the "tourist perspective." After having said all this however, I still wonder what kind of perspective was held by artist Sunday Jack Akpan who came to Paris as a tourist.



Figure 1

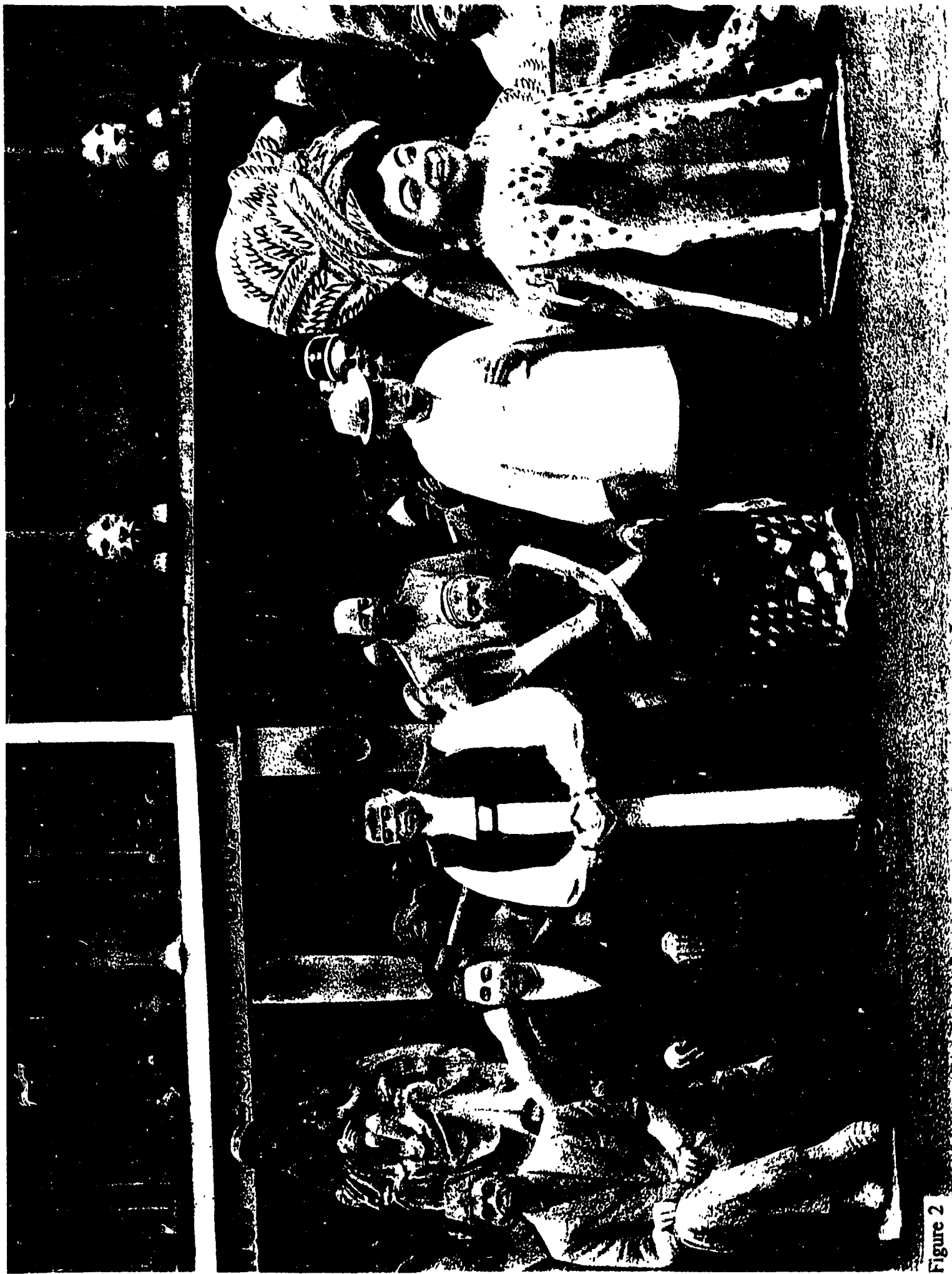


Figure 2



Figure 3

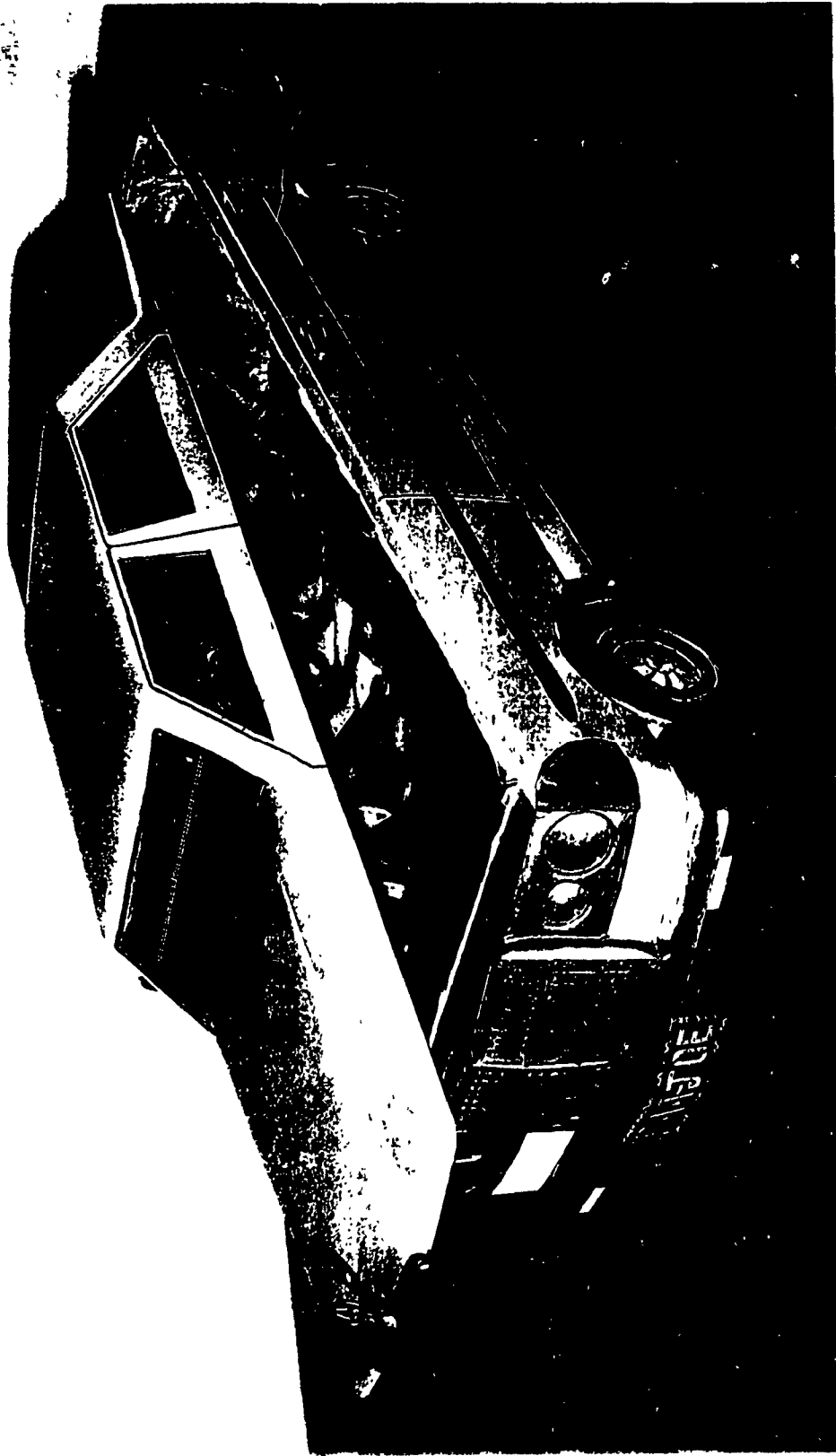


Figure 4



Figure 5

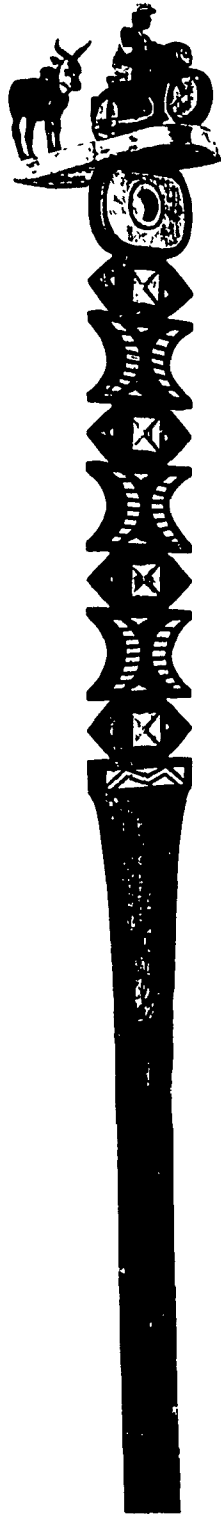
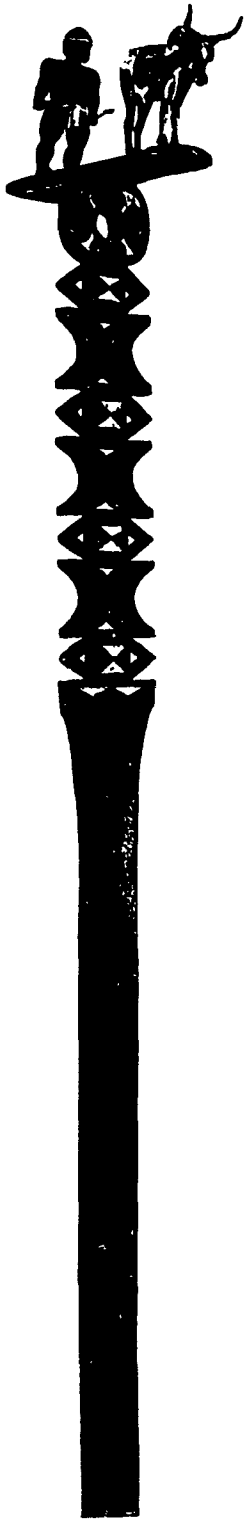


Figure 6





Figure 7

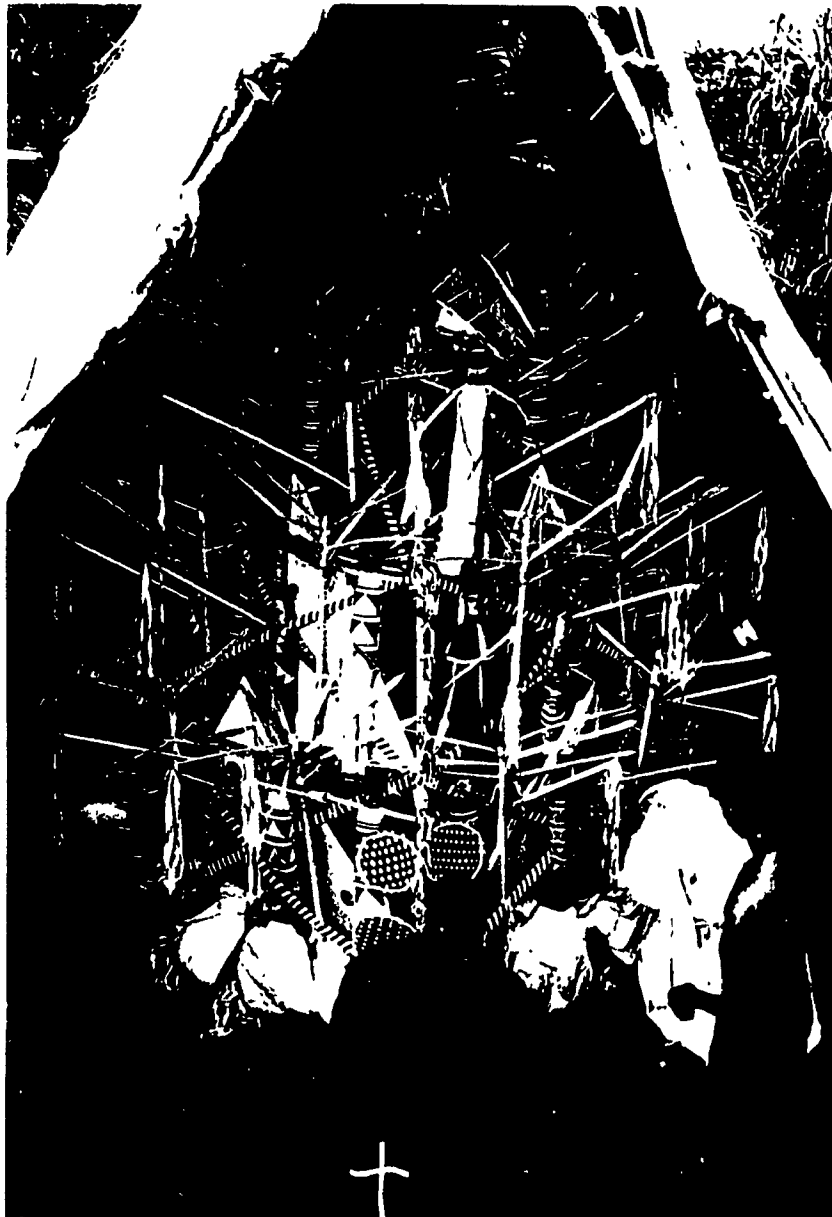


Figure 8

**Chapter IV:**  
**The United Diversity of Benetton or**  
**If You Could Design the Perfect World, How Would it Look?**

*The science of the heart has not been written. Each of us invents it as they like.*  
*Eugenio Montale*

The 1994-95 Benetton advertizing campaign is back to selling clothes. The adverts in the Spring issues of *Vogue* magazine show the development of a more sophisticated Benetton image with older models wearing tailored clothing. The text on several of the season's ads target the working woman: "The right suit. a herringbone suit. kind of professional. kind of, well. not. like a business guy, only without the tie. it puts you on the fast track. helps you stay on the up-and-up. at least until five o'clock."

This kind of advertising is, of course, very different from the controversial ads that Benetton has been known for in the past. But recently, Benetton franchisers have been taking the company to court, lawsuits abound. These lawsuits, which originated in Germany, the chain's second largest market next to Italy, claim that Benetton's controversial ads such the depiction of a dying AIDS victim and the blood-soaked uniform of a Bosnian soldier, have turned shoppers away in droves. In France and

Italy, store owners, faced with consumer boycotts, are also complaining. One Benetton owner in Germany has even posted a sign in his storefront window that says "No Benetton - because we too condemn the scandalous ads with war, disease and death" (Mussey, 1995: 46).

The Benetton chain of retail clothing stores is owned by Benetton Group S.p.A, an international group of manufacturing and retail companies based in Treviso, Italy. The Group also owns subsidiaries such as Colors de Benetton cosmetics and perfume, 012 children's wear and Benetton Sportssystem which includes Rollerblade in-line skates. Benetton Group S.p.A's most recent acquisitions are Euromercato, a major Italian superstore chain and GS Autogroup, a chain of a supermarkets and roadside restaurants. But the Group's most profitable enterprise is its multinational clothing company that sells its now famous brightly colored knits. Simply called Benetton, the corporation had, at last count, over 7000 stores in 120 countries including Cuba, India, Siberia, Croatia and Cameroon with sales totalling 2.2 billion dollars (U.S.) in 1994.

More renowned than its sweaters, Benetton is best known for its association with controversial images that are marked by the green company logo "United Colors of Benetton" on the lower right or left side of every advertisement. These images, such as those that retailers are suing over, have usually dealt with social issues such as racism, ethnic violence and AIDS. Images such as a black woman breastfeeding a white infant, a Catholic priest and a nun kissing each other on the lips and a swarm of

Albanian refugees clambering aboard a huge ship could be seen plastered on billboards and in magazines and newspapers from across the globe. "We use our billboards to overcome indifference," explains Luciano Benetton, the company's president ("United Strategies...", 1994: 4). Benetton's international communications strategy releases approximately six new images per season, spending a total of 4% of its annual sales worldwide.

The sole creative force behind Benetton's controversial advertising is Italian photographer Oliviero Toscani, a man who has been pioneering a trend in advertising towards emphasizing a company rather than its products. Of traditional advertising that still strives to make a direct link between the product and sales, he asks, "Why [must it be] so superficial, so stupid? ...One day there will be a Nuremberg trial on advertising" (Metcalf, 1994:9). Toscani is not interested in selling sweaters but in communicating a vision: "I have no interest devoting my time to shooting pretty girls and tits and ass like almost every other fashion photographer," he says. "Advertising can and should be used for useful communication. The people at Benetton really understand that" (McKay, 1992: 17).

The critical commentary surrounding Benetton advertising has been extensive. For its Autumn/Winter 1991 campaign alone, the company counted 820 articles written about it and 1240 letters received directly from consumers. In 1993, Benetton even published a book in Italian of some of these discussions and titled it *What Does AIDS Have to*

*do With Sweaters: A Hundred Love-Hate Letters on Benetton Advertising.*<sup>1</sup> Much of the criticism has focused on the use of shocking images to sell clothes. Some has berated any absence of context since there is no accompanying text to any of the images. Benetton's response to these criticisms is that "Benetton is not about selling sweaters but about social responsibility, and it is a company that represents less a product than a lifestyle and a world view" (Giroux, 1993-94: 12).

This chapter will trace the Benetton "world view" as articulated in both Benetton's advertising and in its magazine, *Colors: A Magazine About the Rest of the World*. Benetton's early view of the world was based on themes of diversity. In the first issue of *Colors*, produced in 1991, the editorial reads: "This is a magazine about an idea. The idea is a simple one: Diversity is good. Admittedly, we borrowed the idea from Benetton's advertizing. They've built a corporate image around it, we've built a magazine around it" ("Editorial," 1991: 3). In Benetton's later advertising strategy, the company moves away from statements of global harmony towards ones of social change. In this shift however, the "diversity is good" corporate image becomes replaced by assertions of universality: "Our themes are universal and socially oriented because we are speaking to audiences in 100 different countries" ("United Strategies...", 1994: 44).

Although Benetton attempts to keep the two enterprises separate, Benetton and *Colors*

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<sup>1</sup>*Cosa C'entra L'AIDS con I Maglioni: Cento Lettere di Amore-Odio alla Benetton*. Italia; Arnoldo Mondadori, 1993.

are, in fact, intimately bound. In *Print* magazine's column "A Cold Eye," Steven Heller writes: "*Colors* contextualizes Toscani's advertizing imagery...with the advent of *Colors*, the ads now come across as teasers for the magazine."<sup>2</sup> Benetton promotes its magazine as a "...hipper *National Geographic*; an ironic *Life*; an amusing, serious, irreverent, light-hearted, scholarly, over-the-top collection of off-beat and on-target stories about people of the world" (Back and Quaade, 1993: 78). The publication fashions itself in an MTV type of image but more than simply treating such subjects as food, fashion and music, it also deals with more critical issues such as the environment, AIDS, racism, and life on the street.

In my discussion of *Colors: A Magazine About the Rest of the World*, I will reveal that the only diversity in its "diversity is good" motto is in its topics covered. There is no "rest of the world" as the publication's subtitle suggests since *Colors* exhibits a deep confusion between the equality of cultures and the sameness of cultures.

I will begin, in the first section, with a history of Benetton and how Benetton ads have evolved in relation to its changing world view over the past decade. For the sake of clarity, I will discuss Benetton's advertising in the three phases as outlined by Les Back and Vibeke Quaade in their article "Dream Utopias, Nightmare Realities: Imaging Race and Culture Within the World of Benetton Advertizing": from 1984 to

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<sup>2</sup>The other connection is that Oliviero Toscani is also the magazine's editorial director.

1988; from 1989 to 1991; and finally, 1992. In the second section, I will examine three specific issues of *Colors* that illustrate its treatment of all cultures as being one and the same.

### ***The Unravelling of Benetton***

The history of Benetton is told as somewhat of an Italian tale of rags-to-riches. The story goes that the four Benetton children from Treviso, a small town near Venice, lost their truck driver father when the eldest, Luciano, was only ten years old. Soon after, Luciano was forced to quit school and take a job in a clothing shop to help support his family. Meanwhile thirteen year old Guiliana, the only girl in the family, who worked in a knitting factory was also knitting brightly colored sweaters at home on her own time. Luciano became convinced that he could peddle Guiliana's sweaters to local shops for a profit. In 1955, the eldest Benetton tested his conviction by selling his accordion as well as his brother's bicycle to make a down payment on a second-hand knitting machine. The sweaters were a big success and by 1965, the Benetton clan was doing well enough to open a factory. The first store opened in 1968 and, after conquering the local market in ten short years, Benetton soon moved through the rest of Europe and has been expanding internationally ever since. The clothing chain is now the largest single consumer of virgin wool in the world.

The Benetton controversy only began in 1982, some 15 years after the opening of the



first store. This was the year that Luciano Benetton, the company's president, asked Italian photographer Oliviero Toscani to join the Benetton team. A native of Milan, Toscani was educated at the Bauhaus school, Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich. He is one of the fashion world's leading photographers and has worked for international magazines such as *Elle*, *Vogue* and *GQ*. Though Toscani considers himself as a photographer, he is also an important figure in modern imaging and has been influencing fashion retailing trends for decades. In the mid-1970s, Toscani created the Fiorucci concept of throw away clothing and, instead of a fixed logo, hundreds of logos for a single company. By the early 1980s, Toscani was creating the clean elegant lines of Esprit along with its concept of hip catalogue shopping (Hicks, 1994: 35).

Oliviero Toscani spent his first ten years at Benetton transforming the company from one that sold sweaters into one that symbolized universal themes of peace, love and racial harmony. When Luciano Benetton hired Toscani, he was told that he was not to be a salesperson and that his job would be to take care of Benetton's communication, not simply its advertising. Toscani's mandate when he joined the team was "to put an aesthetic face on Mr. Benetton's concept of a world without borders" (McKay, 1992: 17). His aim, over the years, has been to project a philosophy through advertizing: "I'm not here to please my clients. To do that is a waste of everything. I don't want to have ideas: I have my own reality" (Back and Quaade, 1993: 66).

The earliest phase of Benetton's controversial advertising campaigns began in 1984, the first year Oliviero Toscani's ads appeared. Previously, the ads focused on the merchandize itself but in 1984, the "All the Colors of the World" concept was created. Images in this campaign included young people of different races and sizes dressed in Benetton clothing all jumping around and having a good time. The advertisements were released in fourteen countries and "All the Colors of the World" was translated into the appropriate language.

In 1985, the recurring trademark, "United Colors of Benetton," was born. That year's campaign was comprised of young people holding their national flag while dressed in what appeared to be their national costumes but the models were actually wearing Benetton clothing. As the press release claimed:

The people photographed are all happy and smiling. The pictures are lived as an appeal for peace in the world. With this campaign Benetton makes a real quality leap in communication at the international level (Benetton Press Release, 1985-86).

The 1986 communications strategy was an extension of 1985 with the exception that this time the models were holding a three dimensional globe instead of a flag. In one ad that was coined "Arab and Jew", a Jewish boy appears on the left, clothed in a white shirt and a black jacket with traditional ringlets framing his face and sporting a streimel on his head. To the right of him, an Arab boy is wearing a kaftan-type black coat and has a customary kefiya wrapped around his head [Figure 1]. Toscani depicted these stereotypical images of both nationalities with their arms wrapped around each

others' shoulder while, in the middle, together they hold a globe.<sup>3</sup>

Shona McKay, in her article, "United Controversies of Benetton" states that in the first phase of the Benetton campaign, "Toscani...has created a world - make that a Utopia - where people of all races and all colors live in harmony and peace" (McKay, 1992: 18). Although the theme of multicultural diversity is very apparent in all of the ads during this period, we can see Toscani also uniting the world with the addition of the globe. The allusion of national conflict in the "Arab and Jew" image is at once an expression of global unity. Back and Quaade describe this phase of Benetton advertising as "the antithesis of conflict, the expression of unity and the nurturer of internationalism" (Back and Quaade, 1993: 68).

Although ads from 1984 to 1988 made the news now and again, it was the second phase of Toscani's advertising between 1989 and 1991 that began to receive major public scrutiny. In 1989, Oliviero Toscani launched a new campaign that was radically different than had been seen in the mid-80s. Still under the banner of "United Colors of Benetton," the company removed Benetton merchandise from its advertising and replaced it with a series of racial and cultural oppositions. "It was clear," said Toscani in 1990, "that the only way to make a worldwide campaign was to get away from the product" (McKay, 1992: 18).

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<sup>3</sup>The photograph originally presented the Jewish boy holding a tin with an American dollar peeping out of it but because of this image, Benetton was accused of anti-Americanism and criticised for stereotypically depicting Jewish people as usurers. The bank notes were immediately removed from the image and it was put back into circulation.

In 1989, Benetton publicity took on variety of forms. Some images presented black and white animals sitting side by side. In one of the images, a black sheep is depicted kissing a white wolf. Other, more controversial photographs included an extreme close up of two, denim clad, handcuffed arms - one white and one black. The ad that caused the biggest stir in that year's campaign however, was known as "Black Mamma" as identified by the ad agency dealing with Benetton. The image is a representation of breast-feeding and features the torso of a robust black woman sporting a crimson cable knit cardigan open to bare her breast. Her dark brown skin is contrasted against a pale pink infant that she holds to her bosom [Figure 2].

"Black Mamma" was deemed unsuitable for exposure in Britain and, after much public reaction, quickly pulled out of circulation in the United States. Benetton was accused of perpetuating the very racial stereotypes its philosophy claimed to subvert. If it was Toscani's intention to intimate that the woman was the child's mother, the message failed to communicate. Instead, the visual evidence suggests the contrary: a baby and her mammy. One of the many roles of the mammy during plantation slavery was that of a surrogate mother to the master and mistress's children, nursing them to her own breast until they were weaned. In many cases, this role was taken on at the expense of her having her own children. In his article, "The Distorted Colors of Benetton," William Eric Perkins comments: "Does Mr. Toscani realize that the ad draws on a particular reservoir of social knowledge and an archetype of black womanhood? I think not. Because if he and his creative department did realize that, they would have

surmised that this image represents a tradition that most black - and white - Americans would just as soon forget" (Perkins, 1992: 268). Nevertheless, the advertisement became the most awarded prize in Benetton's advertising history and was deemed worthy of the prestigious French *Grand Prix D'affichage*.

During this second phase between 1989 and 1991, Benetton's communications strategy was very much in the public eye and therefore continually being banned from certain magazines and even countries. In Canada, Québec was the only province to run the 1990 campaign image of an array of pastel colored condoms. And while all of the Canadian provinces ran the 1991 image of a bloody newborn baby still attached to its umbilical cord, it was banned in the United States [Figure 3]. Also in the same campaign year, the Italian public and church raised such an outcry over the image of the nun-kissing-priest that the company pulled it from circulation in that country.

Benetton's first not-so-pretty image was also created for the 1991 campaign.

Commenting on the Gulf War, the photograph was of a military graveyard depicting one Star of David amongst a pattern of crosses [Figure 4]. The message was that, "Human beings of different races and religions die for common ideals or opposing causes. Nobody wins a war." In this case, Benetton themselves pulled the ad from the U.S. market in anticipation of a backlash because of the Gulf War.<sup>4</sup>

While there continues to exist the signature Benetton appeal for multicultural harmony

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<sup>4</sup>Given that the war supposedly involved Muslims on both sides, this image has a starkly narrow viewpoint.

in this phase between 1989 and 1991, the images are also designed, according to its 1991 press releases, to inspire viewers to muse on such allegedly universal concepts as colorblind love, safe sex and the terrible consequences of war. In pursuing such an undertaking, however, it becomes necessary to ask whether the meanings and significances of these images can, in fact, be defined universally or whether they are fixed within particular cultural or historical formations. In one press release, Benetton defended itself regarding the mammy image by saying that "The true spirit of the photo, i.e., that equality goes beyond knee jerk reactions and conventional perceptions was, however, understood internationally" (Perkins, 1992: 269). But as Henry Giroux states in his article, "Benetton: Buying Social Change," the reading of any text cannot be understood independently of the historical and social experiences that construct how audiences interpret texts: "It is this notion of reading formation that is totally missing from Benetton's defense" (Giroux, 1993-94: 11).

The last phase in my discussion of Benetton's advertising is 1992, the most controversial campaign year in modern advertising history. Instead of shooting his work in a studio as he had done previously, Oliviero Toscani's work shifted to a form of photojournalism by using a series of newsphotos that had been previously published. In retaliation to earlier criticism, Luciano Benetton stated that, "this year we have chosen to use real photographs from real life to avoid being accused of speculation and of staging reality" (Back and Quaade, 1993: 75). The 1992 marketing strategy consisted of a series of highly charged, if not shocking, images: a car

bombing, a man dying of AIDS, Albanian refugees, an Indian couple waist deep in flood waters, a burning car, a Mafia hit victim with a relative's face reflected in a pool of blood and a bird covered in oil. All images carried, as always, the green "United Colors of Benetton" logo within the margins of the photographs.

In the 1992 press kit, Toscani reveals the technique used for his choice of photojournalistic images:

I leafed through newspapers and magazines from all over the world, examining thousands of photographs. Gradually I eliminated those pictures which, albeit significant, were too closely identified with a specific event or time or recognizable place...This filtering process has resulted in selecting seven photographs which, over and above their specific subjects and locations, express powerful human and universal themes. Placed in the context of Benetton advertising, they take on an added value, in my opinion, to present a worldwide audience the searing and contradictory elements of our existential experience (Benetton Press Release, 1992).

Benetton explains that the images serve as a vehicle for social change by calling attention to the real world. One of the ads in the campaign depicts a dying AIDS victim surrounded by his family. Titled "Family," the image, which was originally shot for *Life* magazine in 1990, is of the Christ-like figure of David Kirby, a 32 year old American AIDS campaigner and sufferer in the last hours of his life [Figure 5]. In a news conference announcing the 1992 campaign in New York City, Toscani proclaimed the image to be a "modern 'Pieta'."

The response to the 1992 photojournalism campaign was immediate. Some

condemned Benetton for its appropriation of serious issues to sell clothes while others praised it for incorporating urgent social concerns into advertizing. The AIDS image became the subject of heated debates amongst many groups in a number of different countries. It was banned by Advertising Standards Authority in the UK and in France, a court granted cumulative damages to an AIDS organization that charged Benetton with exploiting the disease. The money was awarded on the grounds that Benetton abused its freedom of expression in an ad showing a dying AIDS victim. In relation to the campaign, Fred Bacher writes: "What I found offensive about the ads is not their extreme violence; it's their trendy ambiguity. Benetton ads are not constructed to help their customers form ideas about social issues ... The image of the AIDS patient, stripped bare of his identity and with no accompanying text by the advertizing, does not inspire compassion toward the dying" (Bacher, 1992: 46). Henry Giroux goes further than this by arguing that by dehistoricizing and decontextualizing these photographs,

Benetton attempts to render ideology innocent by blurring the conditions of production, circulation, and commodification that present such photos as unproblematically real and true. By denying specificity, Benetton suppresses the history of these images, and, in doing so, limits the range of meanings that might be brought into play (Giroux, 1993-94: 21).

I disagree with Giroux since, in this phase, it is this very *lack* of specificity that allows the Benetton images to work. By intentionally stripping them of historical meaning and social context, Benetton instead widens the range of meaning by creating a universal this-could-be-anywhere/everywhere type of discourse. Five out of six images had to have appeal across the globe and, at the same time, had to be specific enough



to be relatable.<sup>5</sup> Thus, although images were supposedly eliminated that too closely identified with a "specific event or time or recognizable place...", France chose not to carry the ad depicting a ship filled with Albanian refugees due to the country's own immigration problems. And likewise in Los Angeles where the image of a firebombed car was scraped off its billboard after it was deemed inappropriate immediately following the L.A. riots.

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Within a decade, Benetton has successfully moulded its corporate image to establish its identity as what the company's communications director calls "a short hand for multiculturalism and a progressive world view." But Leslie White asks, in relation to the AIDS image that was banned almost everywhere: "Does [Luciano] Benetton worry that there will be nowhere left to post his messages of universal compassion?" Luciano Benetton responds "In some places, like America, we have no problems. It's not my fault if people in other countries don't like the ads or that we have become victims of censorship. We will not be withdrawing any part of the new campaign, but eventually we will be understood" (White, 1992: 6).

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<sup>5</sup>The image of the Mafia hit was intended only to be circulated within Italy.

## ***Blanc Fixe or the Inert Pigmentation of Colors***

*One world contains glimpses of others.*

*Ben Okri, The Famished Road*

Beginning in 1992, a small message appeared on many of the Benetton advertisements. The text was placed just above the United Colors of Benetton logo and read, "Our Spring/Summer [or Fall/Winter] edition of *Colors* is now available." The announcement referred to Benetton's new magazine, *Colors: A Magazine About the Rest of the World*. Produced since 1991, the biannual has just released its 11th edition. It is currently published in English paired with five other languages (i.e., English/French, English/Spanish, etc.) and is distributed in 80 countries. Primarily a visual magazine, it is aimed at an audience of "'flexible minds, young people between 14-20 or curious people at any age" (Heller, 1993: 265).

*Colors* began in the form of a newspaper but after many transitions, has settled into a magazine. It has also resolved itself as a special topics publication: instead of having multiple subjects as in earlier editions, the publication now devotes whole issues to themes such as racism, shopping, life on the street, sports and AIDS. The publication has been described as one that "crosses the line between forms of mass communication, provides commodity information (adverts) and news information ('the news'), but takes on the form of a newspaper with editorial and feature stories" (Back and Quaade, 1993: 75).

The original idea for *Colors* was Oliviero Toscani's. The primary reason for starting the magazine was that Toscani wanted a magazine that would build upon what he was already attempting to do with advertising: "something that defined and focused Benetton's benevolent, if critical world view" (Heller, 1993: 264). Graphic artist, Tibor Kalman, who was working with the research of the journalistic ads for the 1992 campaign, was hired to be Editor in Chief. In keeping with the Benetton "Diversity is good" corporate image, Kalman in turn hired correspondents from all over the globe to cover stories in an attempt to eschew the traditional focus on Euroamerican cultures. Topics discussed in earlier issues included issues such as North-South inequity, the environment and teen idols.

Tibor Kalman describes the editorial mission as providing an outline for "contemporary social anthropology that is relevant for people everywhere" (Heller, 1993: 264). I contend, in this section, that what makes *Colors* problematic is not only the magazine's attempt to speak about issues that are "relevant to people everywhere" but its attempt to speak *from* everywhere. As Kalman also states: "Our intention is to create the first truly international based *and positioned* magazine" (my italics) (Heller, 1993: 264). A brief article in a July 1992 edition of *Mediaweek* reported that *Colors* was closing up shop in its original location of New York and moving to Benetton's Rome headquarters. Kalman, who works out of Budapest, was quoted as saying: "We're trying to make a global magazine so it should move out of Greenwich Village....the magazine should have wheels. It should be nomadic" (Huhn, 1993: 2).

In other words, it is the intention of *Colors: A Magazine About the Rest of The World* to be everywhere at once. The result of this however, is that the "diversity is good" motto is unattainable since, if the magazine speaks from everywhere, there can be no distance between anything. This is not the simplistic "they become like us" narrative, but rather a problem of location. By collapsing the very notion of diversity onto itself, there is no "rest of the world" therefore everything is in danger of being the same.

The first issue of *Colors* in the Fall of 1991 has, on its cover, a version of the Benetton ad of the new born baby with her umbilical cord still attached. On the inside cover is a map of the world overlaid with the table of contents which is spread over both pages. Over the map are the following questions and answers: "What are you doing right now? (we are making a magazine about what is going on in the rest of the world). What time is it? (it's 7 p.m. in New York City)." Inside, the magazine is layered with images, quotes, proverbs and stories, sometimes all on the same page. The first edition covers subjects of curiosity such as food (what different cultures eat for breakfast); architecture (children from different countries draw their home) and television (13 countries that watch the American game show *Wheel of Fortune*).

The editorial, placed at the end of the publication, claims that the message of the magazine is that each culture is as important as the next: "We want to know what you're doing over there (wherever you are), and we're pretty sure you want to know what we're doing over here (wherever we are)." I think the message of *Colors* can be

successfully read insofar as equal time is given to different cultures. In the section called "Cultural Transvestites", Japanese rappers and Polish cowboys share the same space as American Sikhs and white Rastafarians. But the overriding assumption here is everybody does it - that *all* cultures, although diverse in their choice of cultural transcendence, style themselves after groups from another: "We dress like the people we see in the movies, music videos or on television. We catch a glimpse of life in some other place, one that seems infinitely more interesting than our place, and we imitate what we see" (*Colors...*, 1991: 7).

Some portions of the magazine are extremely witty and position themselves to reveal the likeness of things. A section called "Is it Really Real?" in the second issue of *Colors* takes a Baudrillardian approach by making a comparison between things that are supposed to be real such as Adidas running shoes, M & M's, Louis Vuitton luggage and human breasts placing them beside their so-called fake counterparts.<sup>6</sup> Just as Baudrillard claims that "the fake isn't fake anymore," *Colors* asserts that the real isn't real. The article explains that the reason for products such as Vuitton luggage cost so much more than other bags is because we pay for their feeling of prestige. But as *Colors* also explains:

This feeling is fake. The truth is it's possible to get the same feeling from a counterfeit, which means that in these cases, the fake products are as real as the real ones. Which means that the real products are... fake (*Colors...*, 1992: 18).

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<sup>6</sup>It is interesting to note that *Colors* also gives equal time to issues of sex and gender. In the breast comparison, both women's and men's breasts are depicted naturally and with silicone implants.

While these often humorous anecdotes are insightful and work well with products such as American candy, other more serious concerns that are treated in the same superficial manner are disconcerting. The first special topics issue, Issue #4, is devoted to the theme of racism. While the magazine concerns itself with racism in its many manifestations and how race affects our lives, for the most part, *Colors* alludes to race as merely physical characteristics. In one section called, "So what's the difference?" we are visually treated to a collection of colored ears. The same question, "so what's the difference?" is also asked in relation to noses, eyes, craniums and hair. The very last image is saved for blood which, of course, is always red. By placing the blood image as the last one and adding the text, "Blood is pretty universal stuff," we are led to believe that race is no more than shape, color and texture. Another section called "How to Change your Race," deals with the changes that plastic surgery can make to one's appearance. It reveals, for example, that tens of thousands of Japanese women have their eyes rounded each year and that it is popular for Europeans, both men and women alike, to bronze under ultraviolet tanning lights or receive collagen injections to make their lips fuller. The article points out, however, that the desire to look, say, more African cannot be equated with the desire to look more European:

Even if couture is sometimes inspired by third world styles, the rules about beauty and desirability are still made by first world media. The rules, in other words, are made by and for money, power, and more often than not, white skin.

Nevertheless, Tibor Kalman continues to be playful in his very next section where, with the help of computer imaging, he paints the Queen black, Spike Lee white, makes

the Pope Asian and titles the article "What if?"

The most unsettling issue of *Colors: A Magazine About the Rest of the World*, for me, was the second one. With each of the issues of the magazine a different size and shape, Issue #2 took the format of a folded newspaper making its contents appear to be more factual. Its cover was taken from the 1992 Benetton ad campaign and depicts the image of 40,000 Albanian refugees boarding a ship, evoking the desperation of refugees attempting to escape. The image is overlaid with the caption, "Immigration brings new blood, new food, new music, new words, new movies, new beliefs, new romantic possibilities and new excuses for parades..."(*Colors...*, 1992) [Figure 6]. In the centre of the table of contents page on the inside cover there are images that refer to what the reader will find further on. *Colors* calls this depiction "Our world map":

Here is the world as we imagine it. You'll notice that this world has only one continent, which is how it was when the Earth was young. Over time the land masses drifted apart. Now, it seems to us they're drifting together again.

In one section, titled "No Country," there are two subsections: "Seeking Countries," which contains stories of people, such as the Kurds, who have fled their country and are caught in the middle and "Escaping Countries" which is about people who have never settled in one place. In the centre fold of this section is a large close up image of two beautiful little boy refugees, clad in new jeans and t-shirts (are they wearing Benetton perhaps?) hugging and smiling [Figure 7]. A letter, written in a child's handwriting and placed in the foreground, explains that the boys snuck on a boat because they don't have any tickets or passports so they snuck into the magazine to

hide and they need a home. The note asks the reader to pin them up somewhere and send the image back to *Colors*. In the background, behind the boys is a Russian map of the world overlaid with a commentary about the predicament of refugees today.

The first sentence of the editorial section reads that this issue of *Colors* "is dedicated to the idea that people are not always where you expect them to be." The editorial explains that the whole human race is playing Global Musical Chairs. When the music begins, the players move around the world, when the music stops, some players, such as the Palestinians, are left standing. *Colors* however, depicts Global Musical Chairs as a reasonable game: "Players bring their cultures with them, wherever they go. They bring change. They bring diversity. They turn old countries into new countries."

For whatever truth is in the idea of Global Musical Chairs, the magazine goes too far by suggesting that the idea of the displacement of people is actually a good thing because we get to taste another type of food. As Edward Said explains in his essay "Reflections on Exile,"

[E]xile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible: at most the literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience at first hand; but to think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as 'good for us' (Said in Fergeson, Gever, Minha and West, 1990: 357-58).

By speaking of the plight of Kurdish or Palestinian people in such a superficial tone, *Colors* has taken the idea of sameness to the extreme. In the same editorial



commentary, *Colors* compares its own nomadic predicament to the situation of refugees: "It's also not easy being a magazine without a country."

Although *Colors* strives to be even handed with all cultures, the magazine takes pot shots against institutions such as the Pope. Despite the "diversity is good" motto, Tibor Kalman thinks that "it's completely fucked up for the Pope to sit around saying people should abstain from sex." But what of the billion Catholics in the world, many who follow the Pope? "Well, fuck them," says Kalman (Williams, 1994: 50). In spite, or maybe because of this Toscanesque attitude, *Colors: A Magazine About the Rest of the World* is soon expected to go quarterly with hopes for a circulation of ten million.

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Given Benetton's controversial history, are we really to believe that Benetton has surrendered to public pressure in the current conservative campaign as I described in my opening paragraph? Or more probable, is it simply changing gears? One venture Benetton is currently working on is to open a shop in war-torn Sarajevo; another is to open a shop in Milan which will be totally staffed by penniless North African immigrants. Both projects reveal that Benetton will continue to make challenging gestures towards and about the world while simultaneously selling lots of sweaters.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

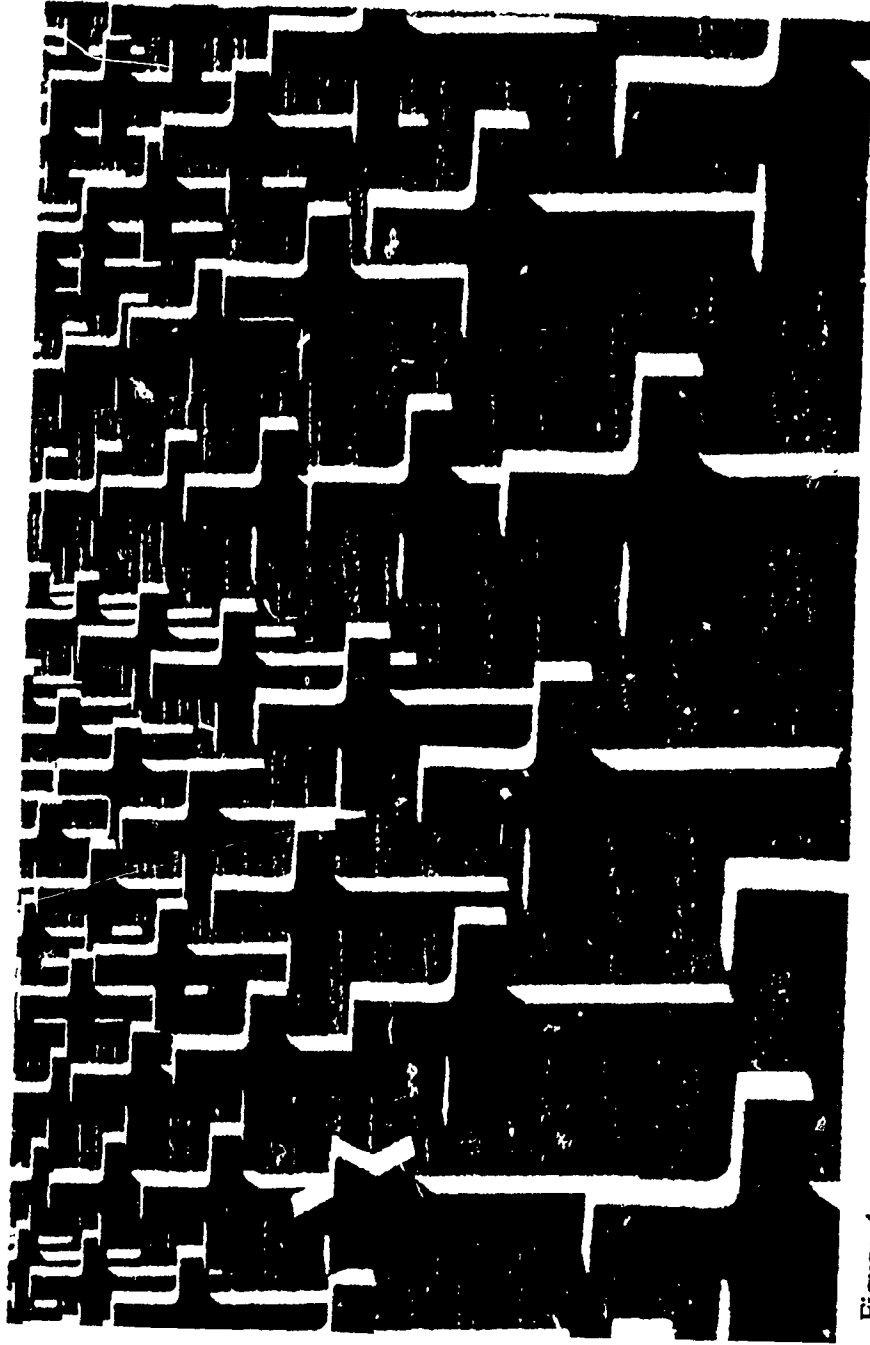


Figure 4



Figure 5

# COLORS

A magazine about the rest of the world, no. 2 spring summer 1982

new movies,  
nouveau  
bilities, nouveau  
excuses, pour parades  
pour des défilés  
MONDE FATIGUE.

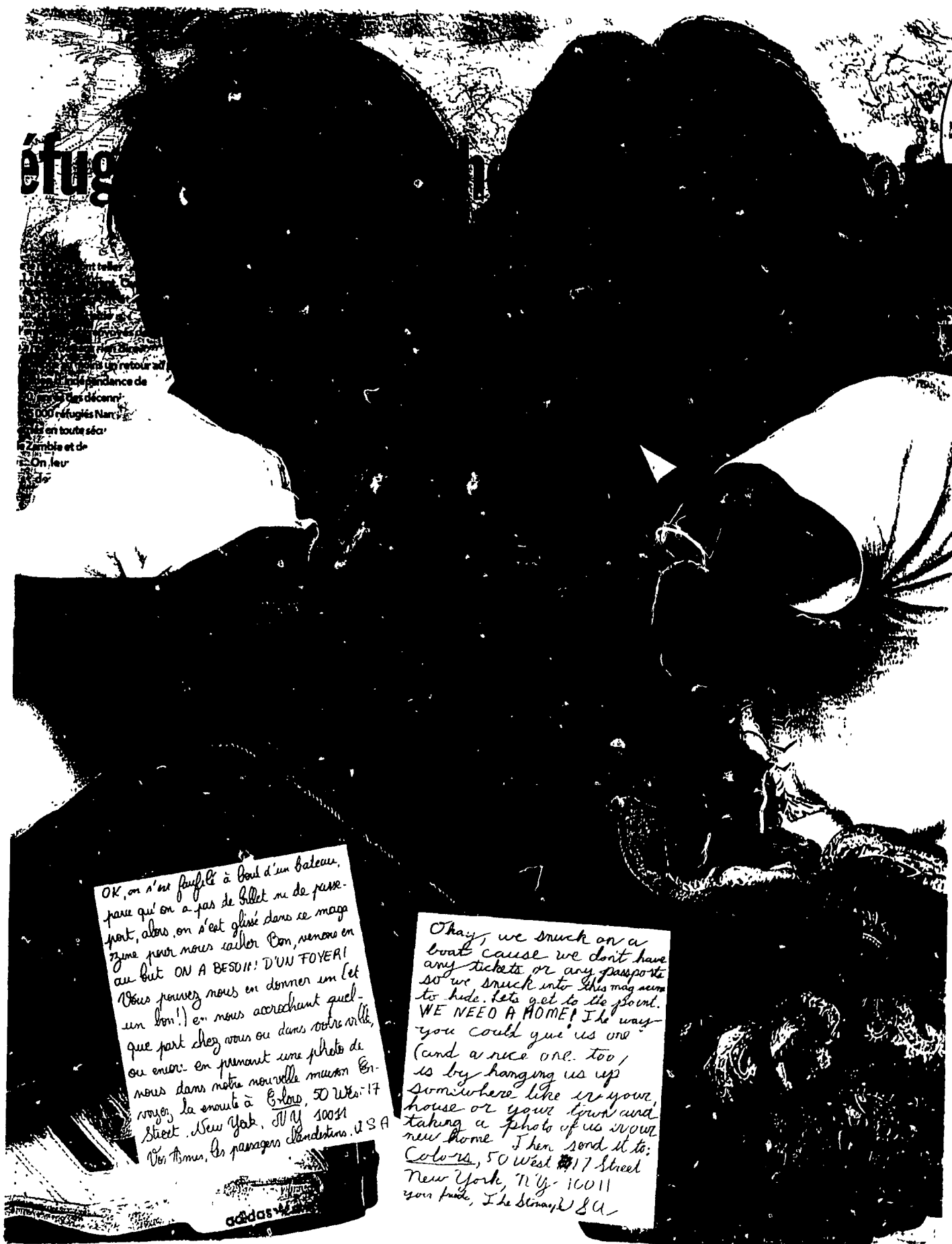
levision (and other Aphrodisiaques)  
Snacks (and other Fatigues)  
Fake fat (and other Miracles)  
Plus three (3!) Madonnas

Télévision (et autres Aphrodisiaques)  
En-cas (et autres Déchets)  
Faux gras (et autres Miracles)  
Et trois (3!) Madonnes

Moscou perd la tête...

and! the most beautiful chickens in the world  
et! les plus beaux poulets du monde

Figure 6



OK, on s'est faufilé à bord d'un bateau,  
parce qu'on a pas de billet ni de passe-  
port, alors on s'est glissé dans ce maga-  
zine pour nous cacher. Bon, venons en  
au but ON A BESOIN! D'UN FOYER!  
Vous pouvez nous en donner un (et  
un bon!) en nous accrochant quel-  
que part chez vous ou dans votre ville,  
ou encore en prenant une photo de  
nous dans notre nouvelle maison. En-  
voyez la photo à Color, 50 West 17  
Street, New York, N.Y. 10011  
Vos amis, les passagers clandestins, USA

Okay, we snuck on a  
boat cause we don't have  
any tickets or any passports  
so we snuck into this magazine  
to hide. Let's get to the point.  
WE NEED A HOME! The way  
you could give us one  
(and a nice one, too,  
is by hanging us up  
somewhere like in your  
house or your town and  
taking a photo of us in our  
new home. Then send it to:  
Color, 50 West 17 Street  
New York, N.Y. 10011  
your friends, The Stray, D & A

Figure 7



## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusion: Perception at a Distance**

Media theorist McKenzie Wark, in his book called *Virtual Geography*, explains that the familiar territory we live in has expanded. He calls the experience of living in this terrain "telethesia:" "...the terrain created by the television, the telephone, the telecommunications networks crisscrossing the globe. These 'vectors' produce a new kind of experience, the experience of telethesia - perception at a distance...it is a different kind of perception, of things not bounded by rules of proximity, of 'being there'" (Wark, 1994: vii).

This thesis, in a sense, has been about just that: the experience of representing the world not bounded by the rules of proximity, of "being there." At its outset, I contended that images of the world are so popular that they seem to have become the unofficial symbol for the end of the twentieth century. The common assumption in these representations however, is that "the world" is a single place, a unified experience without a perspective or point of view. My aim has been to problematize this assumption and to assert instead that "the world" is an ideologically imbued construction that is in need of careful consideration when being represented.

In this paper, I identified three distinct cultural sites that claim to represent the world - world maps, an art exhibition and a multinational clothing company. I described how each "world" is mediated - each with its own agenda, each with its own apparatus.

My second chapter presented an examination of cartography, the discipline which produces maps. I considered the positions of two controversial figures within the cartographic discipline who maintain that maps are *not* an objective form of reality. They contend instead that maps have a subjective point of view which requires selection and abstraction and that the denial of this principle hides the privilege of a particular position. I focussed my discussion on the kind of maps usually associated with representing the world - topographical maps most commonly hung on walls and found in atlases.

Chapter Three investigated the art exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* which took place in Paris in 1989. The show was the self proclaimed "first world-wide exhibition of contemporary art" and therefore claimed to represent the whole world on one site. In this chapter, I discussed the travel notes of Jean Hubert Martin, the show's curator, written while he was scouting for artists in Africa. Through these notes, I illustrated that the choice of non-western works in the exhibition was informed by the "tourist gaze", as defined by anthropologist Kenneth Little. This means that the work selected was not what was actually "out there" but what was already "here" in the western imaginary to begin with.

My last chapter focused on Benetton, the chain of clothing stores that began in Italy as a

small sweater company and is currently the largest consumer of virgin wool in the world. The chapter outlined the Benetton "world view" as articulated in both Benetton's controversial advertising and in its hip magazine, *Colors: A Magazine About the Rest of the World*. In this chapter I traced the shift in the company's corporate ideology that, in the 1980s, was based on the theme of diversity but by the 1990's had been replaced by notions of universality.

The underlying purpose of this thesis was to raise the question as to whether images of the world have an impact in the way we think about the world. My intention was not necessarily to answer the question but rather to bring to surface the multiple representations of "the world" that point to the notion of "the world" as a theoretical construct. If it is realized that all images of the world are *not* designed the same, it becomes easier to realize that these representation have consequences and effects.

*And looking back to those horizons, you see - of course - that they are not the same at all. A troubling difference emerges, one which is not the purely formal play of a system imposed, but of the order of the variation of different skies seen on different days in different lands.*

*Generalized space disintegrates, the line breaks up, the frames stand out, and the spaces between them point to an absent narrative of a lost itinerary - and what happened (to somebody) along the way.*

*What remains is a set of tracks. Not the single line of the traveller marking a progress on a map; but a double line, an exploration of reversibility, the trace of a movement on a strange, still space in which everybody looks at elsewhere, and somebody looked at here.*

*Meaghan Morris*

This has been my world.

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