RASSEGNE E RECENSIONI

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POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES: DOING RESEARCH IN WESTERN CANADA

As is well known, the degree in "Mediazione Linguistica e Culturale" at the Università Statale di Milano offers courses in postcolonial and cultural studies which explore a variety of issues about the politics and cultures of ex-European colonies and anglophone countries. Specifically, one of these courses on "Culture dei paesi di lingua inglese" concentrates on the issue of land by looking at "Mapping and Re-mapping the World. The Representation of Territory in Postcolonial Settler Colonies. Land Rights and Land Rites in Australia and Canada". To make the content of the course more appealing in terms of up-to-date and wide-ranging information, Claudia Gualtieri (who at present teaches the course) and Itala Vivan (who used to teach it) participated in the Faculty Enrichment Program and in the ICCS Summer Seminar offered by the Government of Canada through the Canadian Embassy in Rome.

The International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS) is a federation of associations in various countries whose mandate is to promote worldwide scholarly study, research, teaching, and publications about Canada in all disciplines. To pursue this objective, the ICCS, on behalf of the Foreign Affairs of Canada, administers the Faculty Enrichment Program (FEP) which is "designed to increase knowledge and understanding of Canada abroad", as is reported in the guidelines of the programme. In August 2005, Claudia Gualtieri was awarded the Faculty Enrichment Program scholarship to do research in Vancouver, British Columbia. On that occasion, it was possible to meet a number of scholars in various fields at the university of British Columbia (UBC): Professors Sherrill Grace and Richard Cavell in Canadian Studies; Professor Margery Fee in English Studies and Professor Bruce Miller in Anthropology. The research mainly addressed legal and cultural issues related to the First Nations. Bruce Miller was an excellent contact to explore more closely the cultures of the Coast Salish and Haida peoples in the area, and he also was the appropriate guide to the fascinating Museum of Anthropology at UBC. In addition, the local libraries – particularly the Koerner Library at UBC

and the Vancouver Public Library – offered a wide selection of books and visual materials on Canadian Studies and First Nations Studies. Films are indeed culturally relevant tools which are part of the programme offered at Mediazione. During this period of research, it was also interesting to visit where two important Canadian periodicals in the field of Cultural Studies are printed: *BC Studies. The British Columbian Quarterly*, and *Canadian Literature*. The former, in particular, offers a whole set on First Nations which tracks the stories of a number of issues (land rights, education, cultures, civil rights, access to resources, just to name a few) related to the indigenous peoples of Canada.

In partnership with a number of Canadian universities, the ICCS also organises annual five-day multidisciplinary, international summer seminars, offered both in Ottawa and in Western Canada, for scholars from all over the world. On 21-26 August 2005, the Western seminar was organised in partnership with the Centre for Canadian Studies at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia. Itala Vivan and Claudia Gualtieri were among the participants.

In the extraordinary setting of Vancouver, Linda Jones of the International Council for Canadian Studies put together a varied, though very well mixed group of scholars to attend the International Western Summer Seminar in Canadian Studies. The programme was cleverly elaborated by Karl Froschauer of Simon Fraser University with the help of Susan Penn. Interesting introductory lectures, by well-known scholars in the fields, to a wide range of Canadian and British Columbian issues, were balanced with roundtables, open debates, tours, and convivial events to allow the participants to exchange ideas about the different contexts in which they would apply their newly acquired competence.

The lectures were clustered around seven thematic areas: "Foreign and Immigrant Perceptions of Canada", "Immigrant Experiences in Canada", "Vancouver and Urban Experience", "Forestry and First Nations", "From English Canadian Philosophy, to Intercultural French Fiction, and the French Cohort Program", "Canadian Literature: Overview and Writing", and "Getting it printed: Editing and Publishing in Canada". They touched upon many important socio-economic and cultural aspects of Canadian life by also tracing the history of the country back in time, from colonial settlements to the constitution of the Confederation, from a search for identity to multiculturalism. Tours were organised so as to focus on architecture and urban development, economic activities, universities, fine arts and museums in Vancouver, and First Nations. The combination of lectures and tours was definitely interesting and enjoyable. It helped to focus on the

specificity of British Columbia, in general, and of Vancouver, in particular, in relation to French speaking Canada, to other areas of the country, and to the Confederation as a whole. It illuminated the complexity of the cultural and social aspects of the different communities in British Columbia and in the Vancouver area (immigrants, First Nations). It also addressed the question of ways in which different cultural identities may contribute to define Canadian identity according to the project of multiculturalism. In this process of identity construction, the land plays a fundamental role in a variety of approaches: in terms of legal rights to own and use the land, of ritual connections with the land, responsibility to protect the environment, and representing the landscape.

The landscape in Vancouver is overwhelming and it beautifully mingles with the architecture of the city. Located on the delta of the River Fraser – West the meandering waters of the Pacific Ocean, North the snowy mountains, parks and trees everywhere – Vancouver also has tall glass buildings downtown, and interesting architectonic solutions. Vancouver Public Library – suggestive of the Coliseum – the Law Courts, Vancouver Museum, and Canada Place which, in the shape of a sailing ship, extends into Burrard inlet, are worth a visit. While Gastown is more of a tourist attraction which reminds of the foundation of this part of the city, Chinatown is a vibrant area where one of the largest Chinese communities in Canada lives. Shops display a huge variety of dried food and the smell of fish is striking and intriguing.

Fish is undoubtedly a staple food in Vancouver (not only in the Chinese community), but salmon, although delicious, is not only food. Salmons represent both economic wealth and mythical figures, as they appear in many objects crafted by First Nations' artists. A visit to the Gulf of Georgia Cannery (National Historic site) was useful to understand the Fraser River fishery history, and the Capilano Salmon Hatchery was informative about projects to protect and increase the population of salmons. Also, in the spectacular Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, one learns – among many other things – that water, land, and sky are interconnected in the First Nations' vision of life. In Haida and Sto:lo Coast Salish mythology, for example, animals such as the beaver and the frog enjoy particular consideration as they can live both on land and in water. Because of its importance for survival, the landscape has always been regarded with special concern. It has also been a major provider for business and a source of artistic inspiration.

The paintings of the well-known Group of Seven, in the first decades of the twentieth century, and of Canadian painter Emily

Carr, for example, celebrate the trees, the sky, and the water in the Canadian landscape. Carr's Victorian family house is open to the public in Victoria on Vancouver Island, and the Vancouver Art Gallery holds a personal exhibition of her paintings. Her representation of trees – tall cedar, Douglas fir trees – with their tops like sea waves, is unmistakable. At the Heffel Gallery, a private gallery which holds auctions and sells "Group of Seven" pieces, it was possible to perceive how the representation of landscape is a common trait, albeit with very different artistic results, in Canadian and First Nations' works of art. At the Douglas Reynolds Gallery, which deals with Aboriginal art, introductory information was provided on Northwest coast art, from the past to contemporary productions. It helped to understand how aboriginal artists may have access to global art markets.

First Nations' artistic pieces displayed at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia deserve special mention. *Raven and the First Men* (1980), by Haida artist Bill Reid, is undoubtedly the most popular. The Museum was allowed permission by the Haida nation – which holds cultural property of the object – to tell the story of creation represented in the sculpture. Only one other story, which is carved on the entrance doors, can be told by museum guides to the visitors. This makes an important point on the rights owned by First Nations to leave some of their objects on display (while re-claiming others), and to grant permission to describe their use in everyday life. First Nations' perspective on conservation seems to be quite different from the one traditionally adopted in museums of anthropology. The former tends to preserve a living culture: "the cultural significance of a heritage object as inseparable from the preservation of traditions, oral history, community, and identity as First Nations; preservation is about people, and objects have their role in cultural preservation", as Miriam Clavir puts it in *Preserving What Is Valued (Museum, Conservation, and First Nations*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002, p. xvii). In contrast, the latter tends to be more interested in preserving and classifying physical objects without recreating the traditional, sacred, and cultural use within the different communities. From this conventional point of view, the cultural relevance of the objects is "interpreted through scholarship in related disciplines", in Clavir's words. The specificity of the family heritage, and of the conditions of production and use of objects, the respect for cultural protocols, the sacred related to objects, the rejection of the notion that what is old is more valuable than what is contemporary (just to mention a few areas of debate) underline the lineage and cultural quality of First Nations' viewpoints.

With reference to the long term exhibit of First Nations' objects, the policy adopted by the UBC Museum of Anthropology can be regarded as a search for common grounds between the traditional commitments of museums of anthropology and First Nations' demands and claims on their artefacts. As one reads in the Museum's website, the Museum openly declares its commitment to work "respectfully with the originating communities from whom the Museum's collections have originated." (www.moa.ca). This policy involves two major sites of contestation: conservation and repatriation. On conservation, "[t]he Museum's mandate is to maintain objects purchased or donated by the public in a facility accessible by the public, to further research, and education, and to offer assistance to originating communities regarding the preservation and display of collections in their possession". However trying to comply with this mandate, "[t]he Museum acknowledges that all First Nations' material is part of the intellectual and cultural heritage of the respective nation", according to Policy #128 on repatriation. While problems such as no clear evidence, for example, may complicate the repatriation process, still the Museums' stated policy is that of involving the communities or individuals in order to share "authority and responsibility for care and interpretation, replication or new creation of objects, and respectful storage and/or display of collections in accordance with the advice of originating peoples".

The MOA was established in 1947 and the building, designed by Canadian architect Arthur Ericson, opened in 1976. It is beautifully located in an area previously inhabited by the Musqueam nation of the Coast Salish communities. The design of the Great Hall was inspired by the post-and-beam architecture of the First Peoples of the Northwest coast of British Columbia. Outside the building, on the Pacific Ocean, a Haida house complex, constructed in 1962, includes houses, a large family home, and a mortuary house – with memorial and mortuary poles – and "The Respect to Bill Reid Pole" (2000) by the Hereditary Chief and Haida artist Jim Hart. The complex represents a nineteenth-century Haida village. On the path to the village, two houseboards carved in 1997 by Musqueam artist Susan Point present fights for power in Haida mythology. Raven, the trickster, is one of the characters on the boards, and he also guards the village from the top of a totem pole looking at the Ocean in the distance.

In front of the main entrance of the Museum, two poles welcome the visitors. One is an ancestral figure holding a fisher (an animal believed to have healing powers) carved by Susan Point in 1997. The other is a welcoming figure by Nuu-chah-nulth artist Joe David, carved in 1984, originally to protest logging on Meares Island. When

located outside villages, these figures may have outstretched arms (in sign of welcome), one arm held out and the other straight down (in sign of danger), or both arms straight down (alerting visitors not to enter the village). The entrance doors, carved by four master Gitxsan artists, represent a narrative of the first people of the Skeena River region in British Columbia.

Access to the Great Hall – which mainly features totem poles (or parts of them) – is through the Ramp which exhibits sculptures mainly grouped by general culture areas. Many of these sculptures were parts of cedar plank houses where First Nations' families lived. They represent ancestors and powerful beings related to the history of the families residing in the houses. Among the displayed objects, bedwood boxes (steamed and sealed only on one side) are interesting pieces which document cultural habits related to storing, cooking, and exchanging gifts. Pieces of totem poles of late nineteenth and early twentieth century are exhibited, which were removed from their original village sites in the Fifties. Looking at the patterns, one learns that ovoids – a form of split art in which the two halves are represented as flat to show the whole – are typical of the Haida. So are cylindrical poles, while totem poles with protruding beaks are Kwakwaka'wakw. In Haida split art, skeleton figures express the ideal status in Haida cosmology, hard and dry, they eschew death by water. Some of these figures are covered with copper, as it was done with the bones of dead people. Copper was used both for spiritual events and as a means of exchange. Before colonial contact it was a very valuable good for potlach.

This traditional ceremony, the potlach – performed to exchange gifts in order to achieve social recognition and acknowledgement of power and status in relation to particular events and situations in the family – was abolished by the Crown in 1884. This law was repealed in 1951. First Nations' societies are rigidly structured according to class hierarchy. Status is inherited but also demonstrated, gained, merited, and secured. The potlach is one of the ways in which this equilibrium is kept.

Carvings on the objects on display often represent animals and spirit beings. In First Nations' cosmology, the world of the spirits is amoral. Dangerous spirits may help people by telling them how to overcome some difficulties in life. And Dzunukwa – a spirit with protruding lips in sign of perennial hunger – captures children to eat them, but she is also very vain. If they succeed in running away and pass by a river or a pond, she will stop to look at her image in the water and they will be safe. If captured, Dzunukwa will bring wealth and power. She is represented in feast bowls for potlach and in

totem poles for these gifts she carries.

Animals are both species and spirit beings. Transitional animals – such as the frog and the beaver that can live in different worlds – are more appreciated as they may have air, water, and earth qualities. Like animals, people may have these qualities, too: ancestors, for example, are salmon-like people. A story of origins narrates that, at the beginning, animals and men could talk. Then there was a fight and they threw their powers at each other. After the fight was over, the landscape took form and remained unchanged since. People and animals could no longer talk, but the connection between earth and living beings is still active. Indigenous ways of talking about the landscape produce images which construct a cultural geography of the place. The evolving relationship of living and spirit beings, life and death, sky, water, and landscape must be respected and preserved. First Nations' legal claims on the land on which native title can be proved, are pinned down on this cultural value of space as well as on the rights to use it and to have access to its economic resources.

In the cosmology of First Nations of the Northwest coast of Canada, the world started *in medias res*: there was no creation, but a process. The key-figure in this process is the transformer, and transformation is the main theme. A memorial ceremony may be held in order to transform the dead into ancestor, and a potlach may follow so that somebody may substitute for the dead in different roles. It is a ritual of transformation, dry of tears. Mosquitoes are the spirits of the end of the universe: they can transform themselves from human to non-human and then back to human. Transformation masks are used for rituals, traditionally in long houses in winter, the ceremonial and theatrical season. A collection of transformation masks is displayed at MOA. Although they are arranged according to cultural origin and use, and accessible for research, much of their cultural value is difficult to detect out of context.

A context is partially recreated for Bill Reid's *Raven and the First Men*, on display in the Rotunda, by re-telling the story it represents. It is a moment in the ancestral past of the Haida people when Raven finds the first human beings in a clam shell on the beach. Raven is the trickster, he is wise and powerful though mischievous, and speaks with a double voice. After coaxing the men out of the shell, he then challenged them on facing the difficulties of life, and scared them back to their shelter.

If the First Nations' exhibition at MOA may be quite conventional in some sections, media devices, data books, maps, changing modules, boards, and guides are employed to help the visitors to gather information, and to recreate the cultural context of production and

use of displayed objects. The interactive feature of MOA is supported by the presence of artists in place and it is further enhanced by events in the theatre gallery, so that the Museum may be more appreciated as a place for performance than for contemplation. This characteristic of modern cultural museums is often associated with an attempt to combine different perspectives in order to modify the conventional approach and qualify the museum as cultural centre, heritage museum, and ecomuseum. The First Nations' exhibition at MOA certainly succeeds in alerting the visitors to the specificity and variety of indigenous cultures, and to the complications connected to the cultural property of objects. The visitors are left with a desire to know more about First Nations in British Columbia, and also to interrogate received notions of conservation, exhibition, and repatriation.

The fascinating and complex action of First Nations in Canada to promote the emergence of their cultural identities in the public sphere, and also to help to forge multicultural Canadian identity, would be worth a seminar on its own. Therefore, it is perhaps obvious to say that more on the topic would have been welcome. The ICCS seminar certainly succeeded in picturing the difficulty – if not impossibility – of constructing a unified image of "Canadian-ness". On the contrary, as Ian Angus (Professor in the Dept. of Humanities at Simon Fraser University) argued in his lecture "An Introduction to English Canadian Philosophy", the relationship between identity and diversity is what unites Canadians. Their multiculturalism is not aimed at finding a solution but at devising interim accommodations to a long rooted debate. If solution cannot be imported, Angus continued, the story of the debate can. For the British and French speaking peoples who came to Canada before Enlightenment and never experienced it, the key-theme is still a search for "reason". According to Angus, it might help the process of identity construction in the Canadian Confederation through constant negotiations among different cultural approaches. Ways in which international, national, and local identities are constructed, perceived, revised, and performed are a central concern for scholars in Cultural Studies (my field of work). The seminar kept this point in focus from a variety of perspectives.

The first lectures examined the population of Canada, in general, and of British Columbia, in particular. Jan Walls (Director of the David Lam Centre for International Communication at SFU) lectured on "Immigrant Perceptions of Multiculturalism in Canada". By looking at British Columbia Census Metropolitan Area and Census Agglomerations Population Estimates 2001-2004, at Ethnic Minority Survey 2001, at Ethnic Diversity Survey 2002, and at statistics on immi-

grant perceptions of multiculturalism in Canada, Walls illustrated how the sense of belonging to a specific Canadian identity becomes stronger in immigrants of second and third generations, while the sense of belonging to other ethnic or cultural groups weakens in comparison to first generation immigrants. Second generation immigrants perceive multiculturalism in Canada positively. This is explained by Walls focusing on the widespread concern for "commonality" as a way to connect differences for common purposes. Multiculturalism promotes acceptance, Walls argues, supports cultural heritage, and cultural difference, which most Canadians have in common, therefore it is a useful common ground on which to base a process of identity construction. In contrast with Wall's argument – which had, however, pointed out that "visible minorities" tend to report discrimination and unfair treatment more often than others – Yvonne Brown (Department of Education, University of British Columbia) explored "Black Immigrant Experience in Canada". She polemically criticised multiculturalism as a form of demagogy and supported the claim that Black people from Africa and the Caribbean and their communities are almost ignored in Canadian society.

With reference to racial discrimination, Lloyd Wong (Professor of Sociology at the University of Calgary) spoke about "Professional Immigrant Engineers and the Glass Ceiling". As Wong clarified by quoting the definition of the Glass Ceiling adopted by the U.S. Department of Labor in 1991, it is "the artificial barriers based on attitudinal and organisational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organisation into management level positions". Examining the implications of the U.S. Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1991-1995), the secondary data analysis of 2001 Census of Canada, the results of in-depth interviews and mail-out survey, Wong's finding were that there is a glass ceiling for immigrant Chinese engineers in Canada which prevents them from having their education and experience acknowledged when compared to non-immigrant engineers. This conclusion is in tune with the findings of the Ethnic Diversity Survey of 2002. Wong pointed out a number of fields in which discrimination may occur – such as language and culture – which may not be directly referred to "visible minorities". Still the problem needs to be considered when addressing issues of definition of identity and their social implications.

Along the same line, Don DeVoretz (Director of the Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis and Professor of Economics at SFU) presented a paper titled "The Immigrant Credential Crisis" which focused on the problem for immigrant professional workers to have their credentials accepted in Canada. To offer a dif-

ferent perspective, Karl Froschauer (Director of the Centre for Canadian Studies at SFU) spoke about "New Immigrant in the New Economy" focusing on the contribution of immigrants in helping to articulate a form of new economy in Canada. He examined how the growth of high technology production in the trans-Pacific area is also helping the development of ethnic/immigrant entrepreneurship in Vancouver's and Calgary's high tech sectors. In conclusion, this section of the seminar made a relevant point on the contribution of immigrants to Canadian economy, while underlining fractures in the working and social spheres.

The section on "Vancouver and Urban Experience" explored some of these fractures. The lectures were: "Work and Resistance in Vancouver", by Mark Leier (Professor of History and Director of the Centre for Labour Studies at SFU) and "The Regulation of Street Begging", by Nick Bromley (Professor of Geography at SFU). The first talk cleverly captivated the audience by tracing the history of trade unions in Vancouver since 1886. It examined the condition of exploitation of so-called unskilled workers and how they contributed to articulating resistance from within the unions. If labour history is quite new in Canada, in Leier's words, it is worth remembering – and playing, as he did – the song "Where the River Fraser Flows", written by Joe hill in Vancouver in 1912, which urges the workers to fight for their rights.

The following talk by Nick Bromley joined geography and law by examining the spatial configurations produced by law and the political geography of law as applied to the regulation of panhandling in Canadian cities. Bromley's relation was part of a wider project of research. He illustrated three court cases (Montreal 1991, Ontario Court of Justice 2001, and BC Supreme Court 2002) against the background of the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom. Notions as important as public space and subjectivity, freedom of expression, the purpose of a place appear to clash, when it comes to considering begging as a form of expression and a political statement by the poor. Bromley pointed to the need of rethinking the ideology behind the Safe Street Act – already approved in Ontario, British Columbia, and now being discussed in Winnipeg – which sets limits regarding appropriate time, places, and ways for panhandling.

In addition to their informative value, Leier's and Bromley's talks also exemplified how cross-disciplinary analyses are culturally relevant and useful. This inter-disciplinary approach was further enhanced in the session on "Forestry and First nations" which hosted Patricia Marchak's "Forestry in British Columbia" and Ken Coates's "Indigenous People, Aboriginal Rights, and Foresty". Marchak is Pro-

fessor Emeritus of Sociology at UBC and Coates is Professor of Political Science at the University of Saskatchewan. Starting with the notion of "Crown land", Marchak traced the history of lumber trading back to the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Exploring the economic relevance of lumber trading for the Canadian market, Marchak underlined problems of exploitation of the land, international competition, and loss of jobs in Canada. For the present, she advocates a less lucrative and more sustainable approach to lumber trading and forestry (the "green gold" of Canada), which also considers the preservation of the environment and the mindful use of its economic resources.

From a different, though combined, perspective Ken Coates looked at the conflict over forestry enacted by aboriginal people. According to Coates's presentation, the demands for the recognition of aboriginal rights over traditional territories and resources have been largely ignored by the Canadian government until 1960s. Negotiations over land claims started in the mid-seventies. In 1973, the Calder case (lost by the Nisga'a nation) helped to bring the debate in the foreground. In the Nineties, court cases gave control over settlement lands, resource rights and royalties, and, in some case, self-government and compensation. Coates took some examples: the Sparrow case (1990) which recognised the aboriginal right to fish for food and, more importantly, for ceremonial purposes; Degamuukw (1997) which defined the proof needed to determine occupancy and title, including oral testimony; Marshall (1999) which recognised that an eighteenth-century treaty granted the right to fish for commercial purposes; and Powley (2003) which extended to Métis the aboriginal right to hunt.

In this area of contestation, forestry has emerged as a major issue. Again, Coates referred to more recent court cases that show how legal and political conflicts are active in the provinces, while the position of the federal government is still uncertain. In the Thomas Peter Paul case (1997), the right to harvest commercially was negated. In 2005 Jeshua Bernards tried to apply the Marshall decision to the forests but was not able to prove aboriginal historical attachment to the area. And in the Roger Williams case (ongoing) the Xeni Gwet'in First Nation is trying to stop logging in the Brittany Triangle claiming aboriginal title to that land.

Future prospects, for Coates, are that aboriginal peoples will still face considerable resistance while struggling for their sustainable place in the resource industries of Canada. Despite pointing at contradictions in Canadian society – for example the fact that the more aboriginal peoples acquire official voice and political power, the less

public support is given to their causes – Coates is optimistic about the possibilities for aboriginal peoples to achieve a better position in Canadian society. If stereotypes of indigenous peoples in Canada are mainly negative and derogatory, according to Coates, an emerging view about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit is alert at improved education, economic engagements, political sophistication, and cultural and artistic renaissance in their societies. The creation of the Inuit Territory of Nunavut in 1999, for Coates, is a promising example of reconciliation which opens towards the erasure of ethnic divisions and towards a wider consideration of aboriginal rights on the land.

The focus of the ICCS seminar also included philosophy, Francophones, and literature, with a visit to Simon Fraser University Campus at Burnaby, scholarly guided by Len Evenden (Professor Emeritus of Geography) who lectured on "Vancouver and Burnaby". The section featured welcome and informative talks by Michael Stevenson (President of SFU), Warren Gill (Vice President of University Relations), Yolanda Grisè (Director of the Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs OFFA), and Claire Trepanier (Assistant Director of the Francophone and Francophile Affairs) who illustrated the French Cohort Program at SFU.

The writers invited to lecture presented their personal experience as artists in multicultural Canada. Emmanuel Leroy spoke of "Writing Inter-Cultural French Fiction in Vancouver" and Patrick Friesen lectured on "Poetry as Necessity". In addition, Bill New (Professor Emeritus of English at UBC) gave some introductions to Canadian literature by presenting recent developments in Canadian literary writing. New resumed existing stereotypes on Canadian literature – for example, the European fascination for the "wilderness" and the images of ice and snow conventionally associated to the writing of the North – and dismissed them alerting the audience against easy assumptions. First, from the historical perspective, Bill New argued that the origins of Canadian literature cannot be only searched for along the precolonial-colonial-Canadian identity line, because the uniformity of this approach leaves out important issues about difference and plurality (i.e. cultures, languages, places, ethnicities). Secondly, old-fashioned, regional geographical notions of distance – and the articulation of difference based on geopolitics – underestimate the local, and the influence of site and situations. Thirdly, what New calls the "sociocultural great apology", the celebratory, nationalistic, progressive version of Canadian history, obscures problems of self-determination in Canadian literary writing. However, as New pointed out, there is a list of familiar topic – "the things you'll find in Canadian culture" – which complicates a critical evaluation of Canadian literature. Ac-

cording to New, questions of agency, roles, authority, locality, and value should inspire a re-reading of Canadian literary writing. It would have been interesting, for specialists in literature, to consider more contemporary literary examples, such as the production of young African writers in Canada and of First Nations' artists, who were unfortunately left out.

The session "Editing and Publishing in Canada" hosted Iris Geva-May (Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* and Professor of Policy Studies at SFU) who lectured on "The Editing Experience" and Karl Siegler (Editor and Publisher of Talonbooks in Vancouver) who spoke about "The Publishing Experience". While examining a number of difficulties which editors and publishers may face in Canada, Siegler also pointed to the international problem of huge foreign presses which control the market worldwide. In Siegler's pessimistic view, small companies, such as Talonbooks, will soon disappear as bigger companies will take them over to recreate a sort of colonial order which will govern the readers' tastes, choices, and opinions.

The seminar lasted one week. By the end of it, much has been learned and much more has still to be. What is left is the intention to do so. From Vancouver, my foreign perception of Canada was that of a country trying with difficulty, though quite optimistically, to articulate its identity on diversity and transformation: a challenging process worth monitoring.