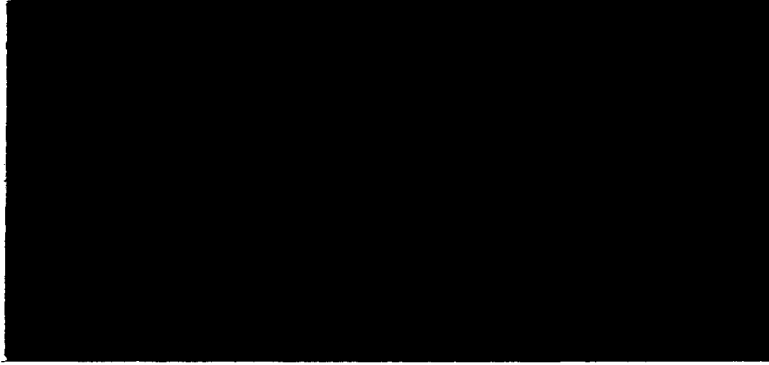




TRANSFORMATIONS  
*comparative study of social transformations*



CSST  
WORKING PAPERS  
The University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor

**"Solomon's Temple"**

**Michael Taussig**

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## Solomon's Temple

*Man no longer worships the gods on their heights.  
Solomon's temple has slid into a world of metafor  
where it harbors swallows nests and corpse-white  
lizards*

L. Aragon, *Paris Peasant*

*A whole mythology is deposited in our language.*

Wittgenstein<sup>1</sup>

Here is a picture of a modern country, a European  
Elsewhere in the Americas from where oil flows out, cars,  
ammo, canned food and videos flow in, and where a crucial  
quality of being is granted the state of the whole by virtue  
of death casting an aura of magic over the mountain at its  
center.

### Slide

Supervized by a spirit queen, often depicted in the  
center of the three potencias, the mountain concentrates  
spirits of the dead.

[2 Slides of the tres potencias, one in each  
projector]

Pilgrims go to the mountain from all parts of this country to feel its power, her power, and become possessed by

[2 Slides of pilgrims, one in ea projector]

spirits of the dead, notably the spirits of those whom, according to history, made this country by contesting Europe--first during the 16th century conquest, and later during the wars of Independence at the beginning of the 19th century. These wars involved enormous death and suffering, more than anywhere else on the continent where similar wars were being fought. The imaginative channelling of this founding violence is one of the great strokes of statecraft that this European Elsewhere has to teach outsiders such as myself.

1 slide of 1819 portrait of SB & America. Keep showing till para beginning with possession.

At the center of this craft stands the Liberator. When his portait was painted at the end of those wars so long ago the artist chose to pair him with America as woman. This prefigured today's spirit-queen. What sort of dream-like public sphere has she inhabited all this time so as to surface with such force the past few years? Is this a

dialectical-image where montage flips the unconscious force of narrative time on its head ?

**Quiballo shrine in the Other Projector**

And why is she now closer to her Indians and Africans than to her Liberator?

Here are some pictures of people being possessed by spirits on the spirit queen's mountain over the past ten years.

[4 Slides of peaceful possession, "beached whales," and then of wild ones with national colors]

Sometimes they are placed in a circle of candles and go into a light trance and that can be gentle and beautiful. Other times they become possessed by spirits known as Indians or Africans seen as quintessentially wild, speak funny, and skewer their cheeks and tongues and thighs with needles from which the national colors flow. Sometimes that can be light-hearted but more often it's belligerent and passionate. Very occasionally a person is possessed by the Liberator who led the army of Independence fighters, but he

is really too high a spirit to descend into any but the purest of bodies. When a person is possessed they become like the spirit possessing them. Then they have supernatural power--not just the power of the person whose spirit is possessing the, but something more powerful still. This power can be used to heal suffering and to exorcise spirits afflicting other people, for the country is riddled, so people tell me, with spirits of the dead looking for a body. Sometimes a person becomes possessed by three or four spirits in rapid succession.

Possession is called transportation and nearly always occurs in front of elaborate shrines called gateways (portales).

[6 slides of range of portales, making sure to include nat'l flags and SB. Start with Quiballo]

More often than not these shrines or gateways have the national flag or colors or an image of the Liberator of this country--side by side with one or the other of the three potencias.

The first time I visited the mountain in 1983 I was with my friend Rachel Moore. A spirit-healer, Ofelia Moscoso, took us with her client, Haydee, to what we thought was the top. It took the best part of a day.

[1 Slide of the boulders, trees and shrines going upstream]

Wherever nature made a significant gesture with a tree root or crevasse, there someone had completed the sign with a shrine. There we would stop and Ofelia proceeded to work.

#### 1 Slide of Ofelia working

It took us the best part of the day. At the top there was a boulder clasped by the roots of an immense tree. A ladder led to the top of the boulder on which stood a diminutive sheet of bent-over iron painted with national colors. Inside burnt a candle. A sign said this was the palace of the Liberator.

#### 1 Slide of SB's palace

Behind it a little waterfall spouted between two round stones. "Its the force of the Liberator," Ofelia Moscoso told me, "good for business, money, and things to do with government." She placed Haydee down and for the last time put her into trance, this time in a circle of colored candles and gunpowder which crackled then lifted off from

Haydee's dyed red hair into the branches above, filtering into the sky.

**1 Slide of Haydee at SB's waterfall]**

To become entranced by these shrines on the mountain is to complete a dream-like reality, the surreality of the magical interior of the state of the whole constituted by a sharp juxtaposition of images. From this juxtaposition seeps a sense of the infinite, the mystical foundation of authority. <sup>2</sup>

**[2 slides of the Portal del Indio Plumaraja. One in ea Projeter; shrine & Haydee in front of shrine]**

Take this shrine, for example, which I view as a diorama of the fantastic confluence of wildness and control, reason and violence, at the heart of the modern state--the US Plains Indian warrior above, the toy-theater of the state below (with the flag, the Liberator and the spirit queen) awaiting the arrival of its possessable public.

The art of ritual on the mountain is to siphon off this mystical power of the State and transpose it into other modalities, beginning with the human body.



If the economy is always the form of a circle of exchange, and the gift an interruption of that circle, then these shrines with their facilitation of spirit possession are both part of that circulation and a type of gift.

This figure of circle and gift is similar to the figure that explanation conducts.

According to Mauss the gift economy is based on the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to give back. But the gift is not only this circle. It is also its rupture. Derrida sees this rupture as the logical impossibility of the gift. Bataille saw it as testimony to the principle of unproductive expenditure and the need for excess, the need to squander. This is similar to the figure that explanation conducts.

This invites us to ponder why so many people say this mountain is dangerous.

Is it dangerous because, as everyone will tell you, it is haunted not only by spirits of the dead but also by real thieves, real murderers, and real rapists? Or should the cause and effect be reversed? Is there something about the

very sacredness of this mountain that creates these fears and attracts, even compels, such deeds?<sup>3</sup>

There is an immense tautology we should respect in all this concerning the danger of the sacred which obsessed Robertson-Smith, Durkheim, and Bataille, who emphasised (each in his own way) the immense ambivalencies of attraction and repulsion the sacred contains, hence the extraordinary zig-zagging repression entailed, no less than the ensuing fabulation. But as to why this mountain should figure so blatantly eerie and dangerous, that is not given in the circularity of the tautology of the sacred. The danger is the sign of the flowering of the negative in the movement of the circle of ambivalence, a moment of rupture, a holding pattern for the nether-world where extremity rules through death's magical endowment of given-Being.

[1 Slide of trance possession ]

Bataille quotes Hegel's phenomenology.

Spirit attains its truth only by finding itself in absolute dismemberment. It is not that prodigious power by being the Positive that turns away from

the Negative, as when we say of something: this is nothing, or this is false and, having thus disposed of it, passed from there to something else; no, Spirit is that power only to the degree in which it contemplates the Negative face to face and dwells with it. This prolonged sojourn is the magical force which transposes the negative into given-Being. <sup>4</sup>

Here we might pause to emphasise that while the mountain of the spirit queen is shrouded with an aura of the sinister, to the Liberator, her erstwhile companion, goes the honor of a pedestal in the center of every hamlet, village, town, and city, not to mention postage stamps and the name of the currency itself.

[7 Slides of SB, pedestal of 19th c., Jorge Osorio letter, Bolivar el multiple. Bolivar the revolutionary.

End with SB on his white horse and hold this image as you speak the next para..]

It's as if his pedestals so generously distributed across the land, rivet the Nation-State to the earth's very

core in a multitude of primitivistic encounters such that man's will and the narration of the nation blend in efflorescent mystique--as the painter Debora Arango brought out in a quite other variation in quite different circumstances in the adjoining republic in the 1940s.

[In the Other Projector: Debora Arango's La Republica--side by side with the SB white horse].

But to call the cult of the Liberator a *State* cult is to miss the point that such a cult is only successful to the extent that it grabs the imagination of *the People*, that antithesis which necessarily complements the State, and that while he is very much the official spirit of the state of the whole, the spirit queen is mistress of its nether-world, of its magic mount.

1 slide shrine SB & ML

What is immensely curious is that the Liberator's two bodies--the official and the unofficial, the Stately and the Popular, the real and the mystical, the corpse and the spirit--at some point in their circuit of exchange have to make contact with her nether world.

She has her mountain. He is mounted. The people often show the him mounted too. Here he is on the wall inside the

police station closest to the magic mountain. Next to the tv, the wall is given over to the Liberator absorbed by the energy of his deep chested steed accentuated by the clefts of testicular shadows.

[SB Chivacoa Police Station]

Who is in charge, the diminutive rider or the massive horse? The man seems to be sinking into the animal and brute instinct becomes enshrined. The crudity of the drawing seems deliberate. After all an official icon could have been used instead. The crudity suggests an attitude towards representation itself.

Perhaps this image gets us closer to understanding the danger of the mountain--whatever "understanding" is. Is it not a scary image? In part this could be because of its strategic incompleteness, for the painter, so the police say, has yet to complete the job as if, one day, the crudity will be absolved in a figure of sublime perfection. But this unfinishedness is in itself a sign of the diffuse never-endingness of ramifying mediation of the official in the unofficial--which is exactly where policing lies. (Was that why we called them "the fuzz" in Australia when I was a kid?)

But this very fuzziness is itself the outcome of the inviolable contradiction concerning the law and hence the State itself; namely that there can be no law without force and this force lies not external to the law but is intrinsic to it. Doubtless this forms the basis for a critique of modern liberal views of reason as much as law, insofar as such views hold to a view of pure reason. Equally pertinent here, given the phenomenon of spirit possession and the elaborate aesthetic character of the shrines that oversee such possession, is the invitation if not need to conceive of image as substance and meaning as force, as embodied impulse--no longer pure law but always this confluence of law and force. And if it is the function of this eruption of the sacred, the icon of the Liberator mounted on the wall of the police station, to bear witness to this confluence, we must also take account of a particularly scrotal primitivism and animal eroticism that seems so easily aroused by the confluence of violence and reason in Stately being itself.

This then is an image which renders the circulation of the image between the official and the unofficial, together with the rupture of the circle into an image. All this inside the police station closest to the magic mountain. A

"ghostly presence", a "kind of spectral mixture," is how Walter Benjamin refers to the police of the modern State on account of the fact the police to an uncanny degree mix the violence of ends with the violence of means, the violence founding law and the violence maintaining it. This gives to the police a strategic formlessness, "its nowhere tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states," as Benjamin puts it.<sup>5</sup> Derrida extends this, deconstructing Benjamin's distinction, reminding us of the necessary circulation between ends and means, between the violence that founds law and the violence that maintains it. All the exemplary figures of the violence of law, notes Derrida in a comment that could well caption the police station itself captioning the magic mountain, "are singular metonymies, namely figures without limit, unfettered possibilities of transposition and figures without figures."<sup>6</sup> In short, Stately ghosts and phantoms, albeit with a fleeting carnal potential.

### **The Children**

[8 Slides of SB done by Kids schools etc and then the Stadium incl the flag in the Arg popular book]

The circuit of forms binding the official to the unofficial is nowhere more uplifting than in its use of childishness and of the deliberate confusion entailed by an adult executed childish iconography of and for the State. For it is the imagination of childhood as well as death that allows the magic of the State to bloom.

### **The Magic Mirror**

Hence the very first words of the current school text book My History of My Country : Basic Education), published in in the capital city in 1986 read:

History is like a magic mirror in which we see reflected the face of our people in the past, the present, and the future, but if our vision lacks coherence, continuity, and the spirit of critical reflection, our image will appear distorted and we will not recognize ourselves in it.

We need to acquire consciousness of this collective face in our youth so it will always be with us, providing us with the opportunity to create and recreate our existence in the future.



Strengthening this sense of belonging to our history and to our country makes for men tied by their umbilical cords to the historic process that has formed us at all times. Fundamental to this is the school because it systematizes and facilitates situations which permit the child to acquire in explicit form the vision of the historical process and of the National Identity (Bravo Díaz, 1986:7).

Note here the use of magic in the opening concept that "History is like a magic mirror in which we see reflected the face of our people." It might be said that this is "merely" a figure of speech. But such a move overlooks that figuring is essential to the artwork by which the sense of the literal is created and its power to mould reality captured.

#### **Pilgrimage As Method**

In this opening statement to My History of My Country written for the schools of the State in what by definition must be "official voice" we encounter, so it seems to me, the imprint of the shrines or gateways that adorn the enchanted mountain of the nation's center and open into the

fabulous history of the Nation-State. Likewise, in those same gateways we discern the imprint of the official voice of the Nation-State. This imprinting of the one in the other opens up considerations of pilgrimage as method.

Pilgrimage is what the people do who go to the mountain and is analagous to translation--between home and shrine, between profane and sacred, and, not least, between official and unofficial voices. Pilgrimage provides a model of explanation-as-translation that we might find congenial too, not one claiming universal objectivity clinging to the metaphors of causation transcendent over the concrete particular, but instead a mode of activating activity which does not erase the image or the event or the object but maintains the translated within the translation, allowing us to witness the presence within the other, the imprint and the play between--as between official and unofficial voices, as between a school history textbook and magical gateways on a mountain, as between a totalized "people" and its image reflected in the (magic) mirror of historical construction of the Subject. To be a pilgrim in the sense I advocate is to travel a particular type of circuit between oppositions, awaiting the illumination that the gift provides in its rupture of the circuit, the rupture that, in the inordinateness of its expenditure, allows one to play with the play between the imprint and the body.

### Statecraft

On June 4th, 1987, there appeared in the daily newspaper of this European Elsewhere, El Universal, an article under the title, "President Baptizes Two Works On the Liberator," together with a photograph of the nation's President standing beneath a statue of the Liberator (identical, by the way, to the statue that stands by the side of the spirit queen at foot of the enchanted mountain). Somewhat like a priest, the President is baptizing two books, one by Gerhard Masur, the other by August Mijares, both reprinted jointly by the Office of the President of the Republic and the National Academy of History, the Mijares volume being printed in 100,000 copies that, according to the article, would be "massively distributed." The Head of State is reported as saying:

We want to take the Liberator to the depths of our people. We want to use the Liberator. And I feel confident he would feel good as our instrument of politics when he is being weakened by political forces [from other quarters].<sup>7</sup>

In action and thought the Liberator was a man who struggled to make our peoples a brotherhood.

In public he always stood for a Latin American and ecumenical vision. He was a universal man, an extraordinary man, and for this he lives on.

If the President himself is represented in the cupola of public space as baptising biographies of the Liberator and as feeling confident that the Liberator feels good, if Presidential discourse assumes the vital moody presence of this divine spirit, validating it as a force that not only lives in the present but to a crucial extent makes it, as well, then it requires little imagination to understand the "sister" Ofelia by the Liberator's Palace and waterfall saying in her work-a-day way that this very same spirit is good for business, money, and things of the government. She too is harvesting the abundant magic that flows from the the power of fiction that has embodied the story of a Nation-State in a dead man's wandering spirit. The President deftly follows the sister Ofelia in this, and she follows her President. He performs on behalf of the State, she on behalf of her sick client, all mobilized by a continuous circulation among a family strangely objectified signs--statues and portraits.

### Faith in Marble

The magic of the State owes much to pictorial and plastic representation--as in this paragraph describing the cult of the Liberator in 1955.

In the plazas there are busts and statues representing him. On days of unrest, on days of alarm, on days of great resolutions, on days of jubilation, the crowd gathers around his effigy, image of the father surrounded by the love and confidence of his offspring. The contemplation of his statue seems to elevate and dignify the thoughts of men ( Key-Ayala, 1955: 5-6).

Which brings to mind the following mid-19th century engraving, probably of French origin. <sup>8</sup>

[Slide of figures dancing around Bolivar  
on a pedestal]

In this European Elsewhere the "visual image has always created a great impact on popular sentiment, albeit with unexpected results." notes the prominent art historian born and bred in this European Elsewhere from whose book I take this image. But who's to say what's expected and

what's not?. Take the following statement from a 30 years old woman being interviewed in the capital city where she has her own spirit center and is explaining why the Liberator is asked to resolve issues of injustice and liberty

Because he was a man of struggle. He fought to the very end. Even in his death-bed he was a fighter. And he gave the idea to others so that they would fight with faith for liberty and justice. There was nothing hidden in him. I want him in marble even though it will cost me more. In marble you see him more clearly. I have faith in marble.<sup>9</sup>

So does the State. Take Carabobo, for instance.

### Carabobo

Even for a Nation full of statues of the liberator and other notable men of liberation, the monument at Carabobo--some 50 miles from the magic mountain of the spirit queen--is impressive.

Slide of Gomez

It was erected in 1921 by the most infamous of all the dictators who, after he died in 1934, came to be known as the tyrant.

5 Slides of Carabobo; go thru slowly,  
hold second one on the mt of the dead, and  
hold last one of the "endless plain."

High on horseback the Liberator stands on a mountain of dead surveying what is there claimed as the most decisive battlefield of the wars of independence. In 1930 the tyrant built an addition to commemorate the passing of 100 years since the death of the Liberator. Death-statuary in granite and marble weighs heavily on the extended plain covered with white concrete. "The larger and more frequent the heaps of dead which a survivor confronts, the stronger and more insistent becomes his need for them," writes Canetti.

Just like the death-addiction of the magic mountain, the monumental State complex at Carabobo derives its power from harnessing the unquiet souls of the dead. Despite the enormous differences, we can think of the enchanted mountain as being based on the Stately model and, with equal plausibility, we can assert that the mountain is the model on which Carabobo itself is based.

The sheer immensity declares that here in Carabobo nature is dominated by the vision and style of the State apparatus. The endless sterile surface over which one walks to the arch of triumph towering over the tomb to the unknown soldier allows of no disorder, no meandering along twisting pathways skirting unruly shrubs, convoluted roots, and boulders strewn higgeldy piggeldy by insistent streams. . Here there are no endless piles of plastic and garbage, wisps of toilet paper, fetid odors, and few butterflies. The whole point, one could say, of this Stately design is obsessional, as opposed to excremental, saving, as opposed to spending, the maintenance of taboo as opposed to its transgression, negation as opposed to the negation of the negation. The body is a critical index here. At Carabobo the point is to maintain the spectator's body parallel to the might of granite-in-death in a performance of rigidity-- while on the mountain the body is bared to the serenity no less than to the wildness of spirit expending itself.

[6 Slides contrasting the two sites, fairly rapid succession, ending with Indians going through each others legs. Hold this image]



Yes! this is a quite different bodily relation to the sacred than that demanded by Stately presence as at Carabobo (a word which means face of the fool).

Slide of Carabobo on OTHER projector so two projectors are working together

The passageway to the arch is lined by 16 black statues, eight a side, each on its white pedestal. There is one for every famous general of the wars of Independence. But there is one that is not a general, just the name-- "Pedro Camejo", and then underneath, "Negro Primero"--the same figure who appears in so many magic shrines on the enchanted mountain some 50 miles from his official presentation by the State on this battlefield.<sup>10</sup>

[Slides;

- (1) Pedro Primero at Carabobo
- (2) Pedro Primero folk statue
- (3) Las Tres Pots]

But while the soldiers in the brilliant red uniforms of the independence warriors tirelessly occupy themselves in

the exaction of prohibition, there on the magic mountain the pilgrims are able to further manipulate this magic of the State. There, also dressed for the main part in red, the color of Indians, of warring and of valor, they incorporate a version, a possibility embedded within what the State has created at Carabobo. And they go so far as to incorporate it into their entranced bodies. Thus they deal with the enemy, exorcise sorcery, poverty, envy and sickness and become Other in the great drama, tragic and absurd, of the Nation-State, its timeless truth, operatic and melodramatic, beautiful, powerful, and no less saintly than wicked.

But precisely through such incorporealization, through such magic-making and materializations, the pilgrims also fool the State. They fool with it. They make a fool of it. They make a fool of its art of self-fashioning. Their actions are excessive. They take metaphors too far and expose their underbelly of literality. Where a mere flick of a semiotic gesture was intended by the State, the rites of possession excavate the subterranean world of myth and magic on which that flick was created and which it was meant to unconsciously stimulate. These rites not merely imitate, they caricature. But doesn't a caricature capture the essence, making the copy magically powerful over the

original? And what could be more powerful and more fantasmic than the modern State?

### Secrets of State

Just a small encounter, outside of Moron heading west the day before Christmas 1987 along the coast in the white Ford Conquistador.

[Slide of beach]

It was the biggest car that Hertz had for hire. The wind was whistling in from the Caribbean, dull grey and choppy. The beach stretched on forever in shimmering heat waves fringed by palms wrestling with the wind which drove spume off the waves into dirty piles of foam, wobbling on the sand. It was desolate and forbidding. Nobody in sight. Every now and again a car appeared like a mirage through the heat to scream along the highway stretching into the distance along the edge of the sand. Between the beach and the highway, the country's ever-present asphalted testimony to modernity, lay broken down cement-block huts used as restaurants and bars by beach-goers to Coro from Moron, Puerto Cabello, and the capital city itself.

We stopped where a small, foxy, man with a red Firestone baseball cap was sitting and ordered some beer and fish which the black woman inside started to fry. He was in his sixties.

[Slide Coro Man]

"Where are you from?" he asked. We told him we'd been in the magic mountain (some two hours drive away) and his face clouded. "You shouldn't have taken your children there," he said. It was dangerous because there are a spirits who may steal them away, or else they may sicken and die. He shook his head at our disbelief.

"Where do you come from?" he asked again.

We kidded around with our accented Spanish, "From Colombia," we said, because indeed we spent a good part of our lives there and because it felt good to find a place that could, in the circumstances, only be confusing. Given the look on his face struggling between disbelief and diplomacy, we added, "From Australia and the US." His face lightened. "I don't like Colombians," he said. Just a little guy enjoying his chauvinism with a bunch of foreigners waiting for the woman to finish frying the fish. In my mind's eye I could see him Firestone cap and all at the magic mountain spreadeagled on a Venezuelan flag about

the size of a house becoming possessed by Bolivar or an Africano, surrounded by raving "indians" in red shorts and floppy stomachs hanging over their belts.

[ 2 Slides of big Venez flag and indio possession with flag]

"Why not?"

"Because when the war comes the Colombians living here will form a fifth column."

It was weird. Not if there is a war with Colombia, which is really the stuff of Stately discourse, newspaper headlines of saber-rattling frothing at the mouth State having a fit--No! This was altogether calm and beyond that, the definitive, omniscient, when there is a war with Colombia. He seemed like he knew something the rest of us didn't and this being in on the secret allowed him a measure of repose, a messenger from fate. And where did he get this "fifth column" stuff from?. First time I'd heard the phrase in years, maybe decades. It flung me back to revolutionary melodrama, witch-hunts, the enemy within. The fifth column indeed!.

It turned out that in the 1950s he'd been an intelligence operative serving in the President's newly

created national police, the Seguridad Nacional, the SN, to all accounts a nasty bunch.<sup>11</sup>

"What sort of things did you do as an intelligence operative?" we asked as the wind whistled and cars sporadically screamed along the highway, inches from our rickety table.

His answer was breath-taking, so simple, so unexpected. For a moment the piles of foam the wind had whipped off the waves onto the beach stopped wobbling. He worked as a taxi-driver in the capital, he said, listening to what his passengers said, taking note of their journeys, and urging them on in conversation so as to plumb their thoughts. We ate the fish, got back into our Conquistador, and Charles gunned it down the highway to Coro.

### Circulation

It's so true it's cliched--and isn't the cliché that very thing which circulates, sums up circulation, and gathers power from it?--that the first thing strangers do when they arrive in a new place is to ask the taxi driver for the inside story, what's really going on, the secrets that determine the shape of the national situation. It's as if the driver is credited with proximity to some not just hidden but mysterious core of information and feeling,

ranging from affairs of the heart to secrets of state. For the driver has been in so many places and carried so many different people. For a short time both stranger and driver will share the same, enclosed, moving, space, isolated yet part of the traffic circulating around them, winding their way through congestion, homes, parks, monuments, office buildings, shops, and warehouses. The stranger is a vessel to be filled and is paying for a service. The stranger is weak and ignorant in many ways, but the stranger has a certain aura too, and this is one reason why the taxi driver may talk--somewhat like an informant talking to an anthropologist. Also the stranger's very vulnerability may draw the driver closer. The stranger instinctively appreciates this and milks the driver for information and secret understandings of "the situation." "Is the president still popular? "What are people thinking?" And so forth. These large-scale issues become all the more impressive for being intertwined with the small-scale personal philosophies and speculation in the quiet fastness of the intimate strangeness that is the cab.

This is why the man with the Firestone cap, deftly turning the tables, was such a revelation. Inserted into "the popular" by the official, he uses popular custom and the dialectic subtlety of understandings on which it is based to circulate that understanding into military

intelligence. He takes advantage of those who would take advantage not so much of him personally, but of taxying through modernity with the brief flash of pseudo-contact and personalism in the anonymity of city life. The word taxi comes from taximeter, just as the word cab (as in taxi-cab) comes from the hansom cabs mounted with metering devices computing money in terms of distance travelled in Berlin, Paris, and London at the turn of the century. Yet precisely because this is a strictly financial and urban transaction, the driver and the stranger are bound by a personal and potentially mystical bond--a bond that is not the hang-over of tradition, but is manufactured by the modern itself. The man with the Firestone cap was a man whose time in history had come. His great importance lies in his evoking for us strangers the nature and some of the depths traversed of the circulation between the popular and the Stately, and second, through the surprise of the revelation, through the sudden reversal, he reminds us that circulation no less than revelation is bound to intermittence, transposition, and shock.

#### **The Mask**

Revelation implies de-masking, an Enlightenment reworking of medieval practice, and de-masking implies circulation; the mask gathers its tensed power from the public secret it fabricates, while de-masking gathers this power, circulating



the behind to the front. One thoughtful student of the modern state, the late Philip Abrams tells us that

[Slide]

The state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice as it is. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practise as it is. 12

Which is all very well, but what, then, is it that we think we see, seeing as how we are prevented from seeing? Beginning from a position of illusion, how would we ever be sure we saw the true behind behind the mask? And how is that what appears to be the mask--ie. "political practice"--is really the behind, while what is presumably the behind--ie. the state--turns out to be the mask itself? The confusing figure of the mask is helpful only so long as we recognize its capacity to confuse and take stock of the fact that what's important is not that it conceals truth but that it creates the fiction of a front and a behind, body and soul, and so forth. We might call this the "mask-effect" with its strange facility of seeming to make sense, for an instant, then losing its comprehensibility, only to regain

it, and thus maintain a wave-like or circular motion in which the component elements--reality and unreality, in front and behind, masking and demasking, our seeing and our not seeing--keep changing places. And while the the magic mountain provides the theater of this theater, what exists in States without a well polished "magic mirror" is not much more than the sense, however vague, of the necessity for smoke and mirrors and the vertiginous waves of impulses its social field of perception encompasses.

#### **Circuits of Exchange**

These impulses are like shocks that pass across the official to the unofficial spheres of society, and back again. As shocks they work alchemically, confounding the great binaries of matter and spirit, meaning and force, transmuting substance with image so as to form assemblages--such as those to be found as shrines (called gateways) on the magic mountain. The most pronounced of these assemblages of course is the ritual of possession itself, occurring in front of the shrine--or, to use more precise terminology, *transportation* in front of the spiritual gateway.

[Slide of possession in front of portal]

Here rite makes image and spirit equivalent, the rite fixing image into the human body through variegated image-impulsions in a series of shock-like contractions beginning in the legs and arms and moving to the center of the body and the head, especially the eyes and tongue.

There exist models a-plenty for thinking about this perplexing translation between force and sign, matter and spirit, and perhaps all religions can be thought of as attempts at harnessing the energy locked therein. Dada cinema presents a newer model, appropriate to the modernity of the magic mountain. One commentator tells us that cinema occasioned amongst Dadaists a model or metaphor for

[slide]

representing the relation of the body to social environment, or even for conceptualizing the artwork as event, rather than as an object, no longer as products but as circuits of exchange for different energies and intensities, for the different aggregate states matter can be subjected to between substance and sign through an act of transposition, assemblage, division, and intermittence. 13

**Keep this as slide on screen.**

### Official and Unofficial

This engaging attitude towards the back and forth transfer between impulse and image suggests the outlandish but real possibility for modern political theory that what underpins the legitimacy of the modern State is a vast movement of transposition back and forth between the official and the unofficial for which spirit possession is essential. (This is the gift that the European Elsewhere delivers European consciousness.) Involving alchemical mutations of force and meaning, impulse and image, metaphor and literality, this circulation between the official and the unofficial implicates language itself. Indeed, figuration presupposes circulation.

When for instance, the President of the republic invokes (as he has to) the spirit of the Liberator on public occasions--as will every schoolteacher and minor official across the land--we might, on reflection, want to understand this as a figurative, rhetorical, poetic, turn of speech. He doesn't really mean it, we might say. It's a (mere) "turn" of phrase, a poetic "flight" and therefore in some terribly real sense unreal. Yet to say that is to "fly in the face" (speaking of metaphor) of the make-believe required for the power of figuration--that the figure could in some significant sense be "real" and "concrete" or partakes at some crucial moment in its poetic making for the

blessed touch of the real, as for instance with incongruous blendings and assemblages, in themselves unlikely, but constituted by real possibilities and reaching out to larger, novel, truths--as in the case of the spiritual underpinning of the Nation-State, so notably, so remarkably, happens on the magic mountain where the spirits of the dead are literalized and where to be possessed by history is a fact of matter no less than a matter of fact. The great triumph of body-ritual as in spirit-possession is that it's own mode of figuration serves to "anchor" and to give the necessary sense of the concrete that figure and metaphor need--while simultaneously perturbing that sense with one of theater and make-believe. Thus empowered, rhetoric, especially official rhetoric, carries out its work--perhaps more effectively, certainly more magically. And by extracting from that rhetorical power of officialdom what I call the "magic of the state," the unofficial rites generate sacred power, thus completing the circuit of exchange. There is thus an enormously important division of semantic labor between the unofficial and the official; between those who take spirit and history into their bodies in sacred, wild, space, on the margins of society, and those who poeticise the Stately language at its center.

This is a theory I am putting forward about the social basis of figuration and hence of language itself, and it

and it is because of magical beliefs that society becomes activated."<sup>14</sup> This circuitry combines chance--a favored Surreal category--with shock--a favored category of Dada--reminiscent of Breton's criteria of the Surreal--"convulsive beauty will be veiled-erotic, fixed-explosive, magical-circumstantial, or it will not be." <sup>15</sup> For Mauss, "people's habits are continually disturbed by things which trouble the calm ordering of life; drought, wealth, illness, war, meteors, stones with special shapes, abnormal individuals, etc.. At each shock, at each perception of the unusual," he adds, "society hesitates, searches, waits." <sup>16</sup>

Let us emphasise therefore the point of view which understands disturbance and shock to be not merely causes but part of the character of what we might call magic--redolent with hesitation. Let us further emphasise how, in shock, time stands still and history, jack-knifing into the present, may play havoc with normally secure distinctions between belief and make-believe, the literal and the metaforic. Here in this space, the mystique of authority gives way to the authority of mystique.

[Slide of Gay Indio]

By going too far, the magic mountain extrudes the magic of stately metaphor and nationalized history and makes it

palpable. Its very excessiveness, its baroque and undying kitsch, its danger no less than its beauty and its disgust, capture in high focus the extraordinary quality of the magic that makes the magic mirror of history effective.

### Pilgrimage

But then what about the cinema of the cinema--the imagined world juxtaposed unreeling before your eyes right now by means of my talk and transparencies? For are not we, in the safe-house of our college hall watching them watching and becoming possessed, transformed by other worlds, into other worlds . . . first them, then us? Is not this--our presence, our witness--the strangest thing of all in this entire strangeness, or, if not that, at least the ingredient most crucial for strangeness to occur, and hence, what amounts to the same thing but in another lingo, are we not rendering the metaphoric carnal and the imagination material, are we not here and now in our very bodiedness an arc in the vast circuit of exchange for different intensities transmuting substance and sign through an act of transposition (with all its assembling, divisions, and intermittence)? And is this not the form of this transposing text?

This brings us back to pilgrimage as method moving between sacred and profane, not so much explaining as

should be noted that this is very much a class and race-ordained division of labor because it is, generally speaking, the poor, especially the urban poor, who fulfill this carnal function of supplying the Stately discourse with its concrete referents with virtually "pre-historic" or dream-images of Indians and blacks. What is more, this social mapping correlates with long-standing notions, in the West and in Latin America, at least, that men and the upper classes are given to "abstract" reason, while women and the poor are more "literal" minded and such notions opposing reason to sensuousness tend to be magnified by primitivism.

### Shock

Circuits of exchange between the official and the unofficial, between meaning and bodily impulsion, are far from smooth transfers of image impulsion. Instead they proceed through shocks--a trembling, shaking, spumatic economy of mouth frothing extruded eyeballing division of the body into disjointed, autonomous parts, assemblage, and intermittence. Magical tricks fascinated Dada filmmakers (as in entre'acte) and none other than Marcel Mauss introduces us to magic as a form of Dadesque circuitry animating society as a whole. He points to the circuitry and the transposition of sign into energy. "It is because society becomes activated," he writes, "that magic works,



absorbing the slow-release shock, figuring the figures in other rites oscillating in the blurred but bright light of transgression. For the task of much of cultural anthropology, no less than certain branches of historiography, has been and will increasingly continue to be, the storing in modernity of what are taken to be pre-modern practises such as spirit possession and magic, thereby providing, for good or for bad, the authoritative reservoir of estranging literalities on which so much of our contemporary language is based in its poetic conjuring of the back then and the over there for contemporary purpose if not profane illumination.

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1. Quoted in Rush Rhees, "Wittgenstein on Language and Ritual," pp. 69-107 Brian McGuiness (ed) Wittgenstein and His Times, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1982, p. 69

2. Derrida, see footnote 4.

3 This figure spreads its form through the history told me by an agricultural laborer living near the mountain. As most everyone knows, the owner of the sugarcane plantation at the base of the mountain has a contract with the spirit queen. In order ensure the success of his business he has to supply her with a number of dead workers per year. A few years back a man was employed to paint the lofty smokestack of the sugar mill towering over the surrounding fields. Day after day he painted his way upwards. Finally he reached the top when the unbelievable happened. He fell down into the chimney, all the way down into the furnace. It is the sudden free falling transposition of fate, no less than the grim excessiveness with which the spirit queen's gift is repaid, that pulls at the heart here; the tableau, fixed and frozen in the midst of flight, like a shrine.

4. Georges Bataille, "Hegel, Death, and Sacrifice," pp 9-28 in Yale French Studies, On Bataille , Number 78, 1990, p.14. Compare with a different rendering in English in J.B.Baillie's translation of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind, Harper Torchbook edn. p 93

5. Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," pp. 277-300 in Peter Demetz (ed) Reflections (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch), 1978, pp. 286, 287. The original German title "Zur Kritik der Gewalt," is significant because Gewalt can mean authority or violence.

6. Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," pp 919-1046 Cardozo Law Review, Vol 11, (July/August, 1990), numbers 5-6, p. 1009.

7./ Doubtlessly Freud's major theme of profound emotional ambivalence towards the father has an equally profound social structural and political role in the usage, conscious and unconscious, of Bolívar's image. I would assume that the love for him is accompanied by fear and hate, but that given the demands of the political culture of deep-seated nationalism to repress the latter feelings, they are projected, in typical paranoid fashion, onto an alleged national enemy. This enemy is most feared (and useful to the nationalist cause) when it is an enemy within the

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nation, analagous to the enemy of Bolívar within one's (albeit fissured, if not divided) self.

8. From Bolton.

9. Salas de Lecuna et al, 1987:110. This interview was recorded in the recent book Bolívar y la historia en la conciencia social by Yolanda Salas de Lecuna et al (published, be it noted, by the University of Simón Bolívar, Caracas, in conjunction with the bicentennial of the The Liberator's birth).

Here is another of what I take to be the endless examples of the importance of having the image. This is the grabado or miniature, typical in form, of a a Dr. Pablo, that I bought from a street vendor. Under the black and white faded photograph of Dr Pablo there is a prayer of several sentences asking God to grant Dr Pablo's spirit permission to intercede in the life of the petitioner. At the bottom in a smaller and different type is written "Pray with much devotion three Padre Nuestros for three days on risising and on going to sleep, always looking at the little sculpture (esculturita) of the Dr., being confident that your petition will be positively satisfied" (emphasis added).

10./ According to one of Salas de Lecuna et al's informants, the grave of El Negro Felipe is situated very close to the monument of the battle of Carabobo and people go to it to practise magic (Salas de Lecuna et al, 1987: 108). I have already noted how El Negro Felipe and El Negro Primero are confused.

11. According to Judith Ewell in her book on Pérez Jiménez this special corps of police spearheaded the dictator's repression and served even to spy on the army itself. Venezuelans concentrated their hatred and distrust of the regime on these police, and she mentions in addition to press censorship and control over labor unions, mysterious deaths and disappearances of persons opposed to the regime, which intensified fear of the SN. What this image of the dictatorship fails to capture, however, is how many Venezuelans (to use this grandiosely generous term) at least today look back at Perez Jimenez as the one good guy in politics in the past fifty years or so. They point to the public housing, the the Simon Bolivar Center in Caracas, the great hotels, the dredging of Lake Maracaibo for easier access to oil, the freeways--especially them--and of course that extraordinarily vulgar statue to Maria Lionza, no longer pensive and virginal, but naked and buxom astride a danta (a pig-shaped animal of the rain forest) placed on an obelisk in the center of a freeway running through downtown Caracas.

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12. Philip Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State."

13. Thomas Elsaesser, "Dada/Cinema?" pp. 13-27, in Rudolf E. Kuenzli (ed), Dada and Surrealist Film, (New York: Willis Locker and Owens) 1987, p 14.

14. Marcel Mauss, A General Theory of Magic, (New York: Norton) 1972, pp 133, 138

15. Andre Breton, Mad Love (translated by Mary Ann Caws) (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press) 1987, p 19

16. Mauss, *ibid.*, p. 139.

