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over plans for a garden of weeds and stones, the clubhouse
in a box, or a hundred schemes to house strays without homes.

Tonight, Halloween, you and I walk behind our daughters.
You tell me of your changed name
and news of your job at the packing plant.
Amazed, I learn how the machine you run
shrinks plastic over everything—pajamas, balls, mixing bowls.

You're treated well, you say, the boss lets you
talk while you work and go for coffee
on the clock. You leave the hissing machines—
I imagine you talking with friends
about clothes, food, the man who's better off

gone for good. But now you are glad to be out in the soft
Indian summer air while our kids, giddy with greed, dart
from porch to porch, swinging bags of candy
hard over their heads. I gaze at your heavy face
as we walk without talking among mothers in the dark.

Cynthia Crane

Re-Creating the Invisible City: A Situated Reading

...reading Calvino, I had the unnerving sense that I was also writing what he had written; thus, does his art prove his case as writer and reader become one, or One (The New York Review of Books, May 30, 1974).

For the contemporary modernist...self-consciousness is inescapable. Art itself is the theme, and ironic, self-aware surfaces are the method: so the writer takes no pains to conceal his jitters (Annie Dillard, Living by Fiction, 98).

The search for meaning in your dreams, symptoms, parapraxes and all the other revealing aspects of your behavior is recursive because the search for meaning is always being applied to a new text, and because the fruits of each search become part of the material to be searched anew on the next spiral (Donald Spence, "Narrative Recursion," 203).

Preface

This situated/situational essay is not actually an "essay" in the essay tradition; rather, it is a repressed, now confessed figment of Cynthia Crane's imagination who in actuality is not *she* but Italo Calvino who thinks *he* is *she*, and who is still creating this "essay" that represents the disrupted phallogocentric order in which he posits himself (as author) and his fiction (as homologous discourse) under the psychological delusion (psychosis) that he is a female (perhaps his mother) graduate student attempting to break out of this symbolic order to recapture the semiotic state (back to the Mother) where meaning is not fixed but abounds in a rapturous poetic play of unbounded signification.

Thus, Italo/Cynthia has created an addendum to the ongoing text, *Invisible Cities*, where a certain (although not immediately discernible) design connects seemingly

unconnected discrete events. By constructing this fiction, we are situated in analysis, or vice versa. Because this "essay" and the following fiction is an "open" as opposed to a "closed" text, all critics/readers belonging to various interpretive or non-interpretive communities (including those who splatter polysemantic French words and accent marks throughout their discourse) may enter into this nonlinear, narrative structure (metafiction) with the purpose of illuminating the "invisible" hidden in the "visible" and through "play of difference," reinscribe/reconstitute/reinstate the female subject/author/reader within a simulated frame of indeterminate meaning. When we read *Invisible Cities*, we produce another *Invisible Cities*.

Because it takes only one woman, not the usual two men, to narrate a story, a simulated Teresa De Lauretis has elected herself as the new explorer of *Invisible Cities*. She has chosen to remain outside the city walls in order to view and report how the newly visible female cities are faring in and out of the text. After usurping the two nauseating historical figures—Kubla Khan and Marco Polo—from Calvino's anterior text, De Lauretis narrates the cities in which woman has found her experience validated. She presents her vision, positing her influence (not by planting any seeds) into an ongoing feminist productivity.

De Lauretis, in her fictionalized, yet true, voice must first explain to the reader in a scholarly manner how, through deconstructive methods (and common sense), the "new and improved" *Invisible Cities* came to be constructed.

Because the cities in the original *Invisible Cities* were described by a youthful male explorer/hero (Marco) from his point-of-view, and were narrated to and listened to by an aging male conqueror/hero (Kubla), all of the cities necessarily projected a wholly male narratology and weltanschauung. This perception was especially evident in the narratives contained within *Cities and Desire*. Thus, the two men had to be ousted in order that a female view could be instated. Desire was a part of the three-fold male fantasy involving power, wealth, and sex, but inevitably these male desires were hollow and enslaving. Since Calvino based masculine values in fantasy and not reality, these cities of desire easily represented male phantasms. Because culture has always been male identified and cities are havens for culture, male desires incited the building of the cities. As Marco Polo said, cities are not the "work of the mind or chance" (36), but rather of dreams and desire.

The cities within *Cities and Desire* are particularly duplicitous and bivalent; for instance, man's desires are analogous to his fears. Often, man desires what in actuality can never exist, and ultimately when he pursues his desire and never acquires it, he is disappointed. Man's perspective is determined by what he wants to perceive: the Khan prefers to look through opaque glasses; consequently, he rarely sees truth in his cities.

In *Zobeide*, her exposure to the moon symbolically connects to the naked woman who runs through the streets under millions of men's gazes. Interestingly, male lust presupposes the building of *Zobeide*. Man's fantasy is to entrap and enslave his object of desire which is literally the woman of all men's fantasy. After an unsuccessful, individualized search for the city that harbors the evasive woman, the men from all nations who share and are frustrated by this dream gather together. They build a city that they believe will trap the woman at the point where she normally escapes in their collective dream.

From *Zobeide*, we see that dreams do not actualize into reality when falsely constructed or forced. *Zobeide* entraps and encloses, eventually restricting man's will. Because the woman, like the desire, is elusive, she is never captured.

As Marco Polo inferred, man's internalization of desire and fear produces a split image of woman as a perfected projection of his desires and as a diabolic projection of his sexual malevolences and fears. The sensual woman in *Zobeide* haunts the men; thus, they must capture and overpower her to release her control. Ignorantly, they wait a lifetime for a woman who does not exist in reality. Eventually, *Zobeide* loses her verisimilitude; the original desire that enabled her construction no longer sustains or validates her existence. *Zobeide* decays because man's desire to concretely envision, entrap, and conquer his fantasy only displays the "negative side" to desire's mirror which shatters the entire image (i.e. the city). It is hoped the negative (or destructive) side to desire will force man to reevaluate his dreams. But, because De Lauretis and other feminists do not think so optimistically ("Desire, like symbolization, is a property of men, property in both senses of the word: something men own, possess, and something that inheres in men, like a quality" [Alice Doesn't 20]), new cities, devoid of male gaze, have been created and added, one being Cynthia.

Cities and the Mind 1

The city of Cynthia, sometimes referred to as No Man's Land, is nestled deep within the womb of the earth. Inhabited only by feminists, male critics/readers/writers fear the swampy grounds of this city which is known to open up and swallow any such male person who dares to speak in monologistic tongues while treading across her topsoil. Although the women are joined together unrestrained with Ariadne's thread, an identity crisis has occurred in Cynthia despite extensive therapy. Cynthia has fragmented into definite feminist camps. This division is clearly marked within the city by distinctive, glaring signs that signify cultural, essentialist, post-structuralist, Marxist, liberal, and radical suburbs. It is easy to become confused, lose your way, and return to infantile "babble" when visiting Cynthia.

On the positive side, Cynthia re-creates herself at each full moon so that she never remains in stases—internally or externally. Her reputation as a fickle, vertiginous city remains intact.

Economically, Cynthia survives off the royalties obtained from the revered writings of deceased feminist theorists. Monies also pour in from the books and articles published by living, well-established feminist thinkers. That goddess, Helene Cixous, with her aural mother's milk provides a seemingly endless supply of white ink for Cynthia that keeps her running at the mouth, and expressing and reinventing herself in a state of perpetual "jouissance."

The infamous Kristeva also resides in Cynthia but after spending more than the allotted space of time away in the frenzied state of Abjection, she returned to Cynthia suffering from delusions, feeling condemned and persecuted. Her incurable object/phallic fixation combined with her evangelical tendencies to brainwash questioning and confused feminists with mesmeric preaching on her favorite topic, "The Law of The Father," drove her to stealing hubcaps. Recently, she met a timely and seemingly violent death outside the gates of Cynthia. Some say she tired of the label, "non-feminist," and of her theories being either exploited or misunderstood. Each woman residing deep within Cynthia repressed her thoughts, reverting to an anachronistic silence and an unvoiced *langue* in order not to point to/reveal a purported executioner. In closed off parts of Cynthia, it is whispered among a group of separatist feminists that the neighboring state, Chora, attempted to re-form Kristeva before she was driven into a self-imposed madness. It is rumored that Freud's Death Drive overpowered Kristeva, driving her to commit a phallic self-crucifixion fraught with meaning. She was found erected on a flagpole, no less.

Gilbert and Gubar (no, they are not twins) retain residency in Cynthia but are on leave to join the full-fledged Theory War. Their brawls on the critical page (particularly on the pages of *Critical Inquiry*), with noted Ivy League scholars (in particular, that mobbish man, Frank Lentricchia) have brought them notoriety as two powerful fighters sporting well-lubricated boxing gloves. Being an unbound, liberating, and free signified city, Cynthia necessarily, albeit reluctantly, lowered her ropes so that G & G could pursue their upward mobility into the conscious, real-world "Battle of the Sexes."

Under a revised charter, male figures hot on the literary burner have provisionally been admitted into Cynthia. Noted body and spirit parts of Frenchmen Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida (complete with leather jackets) have been appropriated by Cynthia despite their reputations as slippery anarchists, and their tendency to leave certain feminists without explanation.

De Lauretis has interrupted this narrative to inform the reader that she will be late for the viewing of Henry and June if she does not cease narrating Cynthia soon. She believes this cinematic "phantasy," overflowing with male gazes subordinating woman to a non-subjective role, will certainly incite her to write another scholarly blockbuster, Alice Doesn't...Reside in Invisible Cities Anymore.

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For myself, I am most thankful to Ronald Wallace for a single poem, and in particular the following four lines written "At Forty." They are among the most clearly stated, perceptive lines I have read in a long while:

Who'd have thought death was so easy?
This slow fall on the wind,
this stroll past custom's lax border,
the way things let go

If these lines appear overly simple, live a little longer—live till the pain and uncertainty of our curses and blessings finally mix with the hopeless humor of it all. If you can still smile after that, then you can live forever. You might even write poems about it.

—Alan Napier
Brimfield, Ohio

Contributors' Notes

Gregory L. Anderson has been published in *Rolling Stone*, *The Montana Review*, *Riverwind*, and other journals. He is currently completing work on a collection, *Boats That Are Not Steer'd*.

Laurie Blauner has published two collections of poetry with Owl Creek Press, and has had work in *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and other journals.

Pat Carr has published eight books, including *The Women in the Mirror*, which won the Iowa Short Fiction Award, and has published essays and fiction in *Modern Fiction Studies*, *The Southern Review*, *Yale Review*, and *Best American Short Stories*. Her latest novella, *Bluebirds*, will be published in a collection from Southern Methodist University Press next fall. She teaches creative writing and women's fiction at Western Kentucky University.

Ned Conдини's recent novel is *Eldorado*. He has had poems and stories in *The Mississippi Review*, *The Literary Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and other journals. He is completing a collection of poems, *I Hear Sounds Nobody Hears*.

Cynthia Crane is presently a doctoral student at The University of Cincinnati. She has had work in *Whiskey Island Magazine*, *Up Against the Wall*, *The California Quarterly*, and other journals.

Ales Debeljak has published four collections of poetry in Yugoslavia. Currently a doctoral candidate in Social Thought at Syracuse University, he has had poems in *Grand Street*, *The Literary Review*, *Pequod*, and other journals.

Lynne H. deCourcy's *The Time Change* is forthcoming from Ampersand Press. She is a 1991 NEA Fellow in poetry.

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