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Editorial: NAEA Travelogue-Dialogue

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Editorial

NAEA Travelogue-Dialogue

James Haywood Rolling, Jr.

Studies Editorial Assistant

Editor's Note: *Throughout my term as Senior Editor, not only have I had the assistance of a hard-working Editorial Board of reviewers, but also I have had the benefit of the expertise of James Rolling, Jr. as the Studies Editorial Assistant. At the recent NAEA convention we not only talked about our Studies editorial work, but also as James was preparing for his dissertation defense of his study of the construction of African-American identity,¹ our adviser-student conversations continued. It seems appropriate that James continues the dialogue in his words.—GS.*

4/2/03 – Wednesday, 1:38 p.m.

I had an impromptu conversation with a member of my dissertation committee this morning. We were discussing the topic of my disembarking this journey. This dissertation, I mean. I am reminded of the beginning of the story. I was on a certain track. I was to be inculcated into a way of thinking. I was to become an Architect, and then an Artist, capital "A." I was derailed. Or perhaps I jumped the tracks. I am traveling to the 2003 NAEA convention in Minneapolis and will continue to round out these thoughts there.

4/4/03 – Friday, 6:11 a.m.

I still don't know where I am. But I know who I am. I am a graduate student, an author, a believer. I work with other educators; I work collaboratively; I assist in the construction of life, hope, and identity. I am not the author of life (for I am but a servant), but I am the author of ideas. I am a mimic; I reconstitute ideas and redeem them for the value I have yet to gain. I am not a parrot or an ape, for in mimicry I make my own meanings, in mime I find the shape of my own identity. My identity is in the movement from mind to mind, just before reintegration, when I am scattered across all consciousness and possibility. Idea subverts ideology. I am more than I appear to be.

Ideology is the assignment of limitations; ideology plants the signs along the median strip leading to a series of exits, predetermined destinations. Ideology thus becomes curriculum, the trammeling of instinct, intuition, and desire. Ideology does not educate but rather indoctrinates; it allows me egress not when I desire, but when it relents. I was brainwashed once. Derailed. I once could not do a work of art unless it served as a stop on the journey. However, in my progress I have chosen to expand and contract. This is my process. I now know no certainty can be found in this body. I have chosen movement over journey. I have chosen not to stop, and not to be carried. Perhaps I merely jumped the tracks.

¹Rolling, James Haywood, Jr. (2003). *Un-Naming the Story: The Poststructuralist Repositioning of African-American Identity in Western Visual Culture*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Identity is reinterpretation; it is wandering; it is groping; it is an off-road adventure; it is art. I learned to play again (adulthood is the great assassin of adventure). I learned to watch the ants, like I used to when I was 5 and 6 years old, as they burrow in and out of the earth at the edges of the asphalt. Expanding in warm seasons. Contracting in winter and in death. Ants undermine the concrete. Like the rhizome, they make their connections beneath the surface of the seen and the apparent. They do not journey. They spread out. They cover. They undercut. They expand the territory of their influence, nearly invisible. And they thrive along the margins of all the journeying. Their growth is unpredictable.

4/5/03 – Saturday, 6:35 p.m.

Where am I now? I see possibilities. Minneapolis has warmed up. I am turning over the stone. What has weighed me down has been the mandate to please others—it has been my ideology—to satisfy my teachers, my father, my professors. The weight has crushed me and my ability to make art that isn't guided toward particular conclusions. I now see the spring. I look forward to the summer and all of its inaugurations and all of its lush, billowy movement.

4/6/03 – Sunday, 4:15 p.m.

Motion does not need to follow a rational trajectory. Emerging from the colony of identities that constitute each of us, motion can be composed of a series of encounters that disrupt and expand the field, composed of endless contacts, not a body in space, but a body as space, as society. An imaginary body expanding and contracting, distinguished not by organs of category and difference but in the form of a “body without organs,” as proposed by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Thus, I am a site for connections, not an occupant of sites. Not a prior construction. I am perpetually disoriented, like a child spinning purposefully on his heels. Dizzy, if you will, ‘reparameterizing’ the moments of each encounter, forming the basis for more. As I spin, I encounter myself in various states of vertigo. I construct the site of my own inquiry. I am not afraid to be lost. I am the beholder, and then I refocus. I spin again and find myself there in the center of a cascade of images. The cascade of my possible embodiments liberates me. I am as fluid as are our fictions.

4/7/03 – Monday, time unrecorded

This is a self-study. I believe I have resulted in a new form of validity. This is a validity that is unfounded and necessarily motile. This is a validity that focuses a moving target. This is a validity that subverts. I believe I am still in motion; a blur; a series of brushstrokes. Modernity says that “to see is to know,” that I have been there and I can prove it. Postmodernity says that “to know is to see,” that I have seen it and, hence, have been taken through it and am constituted by it. In the poststructuralist repositioning of my own identity, I argue that “to move is to see.”