'Whatever That Is': Hiromi Goto's Body Politic/s

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Reading the lines "I can never unzip my skin / and step into another[,] / I am happy with my colour until someone points / out it clashes with my costume" from Hiromi Goto's poem "The Body Politic," Roy Miki asks, "So was multiculturalism just a dress code?" Miki answers his own question in the negative, arguing that multiculturalism in Canada

> needs to be read as a contradictory zone of vested interests, made more so by the engineering role played by the federal administration. While its more benign public face has supported cultural "diversity" and "pluralism," the company it keeps with hierarchically structured relations of "difference" exposes a subtext of racialization. (211)

"The Body Politic" (reprinted in full at the end of this article) explores the commingled effects of racialization and sexualization — the imposition of racial and sexual identities that serve mainly to reinforce the dominant culture's belief in its own normality. As Lauren Berlant has pointed out in the American context, the current state of emergency results at least in part from the

> exhaustion of cultural struggle over the material and symbolic conditions of … citizenship [and] is a desired effect of conservative cultural politics, whose aim is to dilute the oppositional discourses of the historically stereotyped groups — people of color, women, gays, and lesbians. Against these groups are pitted the complaints not of stereotyped peoples burdened by a national history but icons who only recently have lost the protections of their national iconicity … white and male and heterosexual people of all classes who are said to sense that they have lost the respect of their culture, and with it the freedom to feel unmarked. (2)

By titling her poem "The Body Politic," Goto specifically locates it as both a poetical and a polemical intervention into the embodied effects of dis-

courses of racialization and sexualization, of their combination in orientalism, and of the hermeneutics of citizenship within the Canadian public sphere. The title recalls not only the history of metonymization of state and body, but also that of the (in)famous lesbian and gay newspaper, *The Body Politic*, published in Toronto but attracting a readership throughout North America for its often radical reporting on the state of sexuality and what has come to be called 'sexual citizenship' throughout Canada and, indeed, the rest of the world.[1] The title thus refers at once to the history of the construction of the nation state and of western theories of governance and democracy; to the delimitation of citizenship on the grounds of race (a particularly important issue within Asian Canadian communities because of the history of exclusion, internment, and denial of citizenship); to political interventions into the construction of deviance and normality and the regulation of sexual(ized) bodies within Canada; and to contemporary attempts to include or exclude queer Canadians from both legal and symbolic belonging within the nation.[2]

Citizenship in general — or one's location as belonging within, indeed as being, the body politic — is increasingly a site of what Berlant calls "traumatized identity." The right of access to discourses of "traumatized identity" is claimed by the supposedly dethroned, newly marked, and formerly iconic citizen. These citizens' traumas result not from a history of racialization and racial oppression or of sexualization, homophobia, and the oppressive regimentation of heteronormativity, but rather from the sense that, as former icons of normative citizenship, they "now have *identities*, when it used to be only other people who had them" (Berlant 2). Ironically, at a time when cultural as well as political life in the US is becoming notoriously more conservative, when half of all Americans claim to agree with the statement that "the father of the family must be the master in his own house" (Adams 22),[3] the defensiveness and reclamation of trauma by these formerly iconic citizens attempts to reassert their right to an uninterrogated identity with and within the body politic itself. While the discourse of trauma has not had quite the same cultural currency within Canada (indeed, it has been notable that American groups, such as Focus on the Family, have been careful, in their interventions in the Canadian same-sex marriage debate, to avoid certain types of discourse associated in the US with the reassertion of the right to iconic citizenship), the uninterrogated relationship

of the iconic citizen to the body politic underwrites multiculturalism as, according to Miki, the "fantasy that deflects the colonial history of white supremacist power" (211).

Both the racialized and the sexualized body exist within variably disjunctive relationships to the metonymic 'body' of the nation, i.e. the 'body politic,' which is also the body of the iconic citizen. Such a body politic is maintained through a series of discourses that regulate the visibility, legitimacy, legality, and 'normalcy' of the body, especially in terms of the place that any given body is able to maintain within both the public and private spheres of the nation. Moira Gatens argues in "Corporeal Representation in/and the Body Politic" that the Hobbesian 'artificial man' who is represented as and by the metaphor of the 'body politic' is an image of unity that effectively "restrict[s] our political vocabulary to one voice" and that further ensures that "only a body deemed capable of reason and sacrifice can be admitted into the body politic as an active member" (83). As a result, many bodies are effectively disenfranchised from the body politic: according to Gatens, "Slaves, foreigners, women, the conquered, children, the working classes, have all been excluded from political participation … by their bodily specificity" (83).

Questions of (political) representation as inclusion and textual/corporeal representation as visibility, however, while clearly related through the historical construction of the public sphere, are not themselves identical and do not function identically. As a result, some bodies not only have little viable presence in the public sphere, but are also relegated to the status of 'private' by discourses that are supported by the regulatory institutions of the state and the disciplinary powers of normativity. Other bodies, by contrast, while still excluded from representation within the body politic, are almost hypervisible — both a discursive and a 'real' visibility that follows from their inscription into the public sphere as a matter of public and national interest. Eleanor Ty refers to this as the 'politics of the visible' and argues that such a politics "deals with the effects of being legally, socially, and culturally marked as 'visible,' and, paradoxically, with the experience of being invisible in dominant culture and history" (12). Lee Edelman, in a now classic study of the paradoxes of being simultaneously invisible and hypervisible as a queer person within a heteronormative culture, also insists that 'homographesis,' or the textualizing of the gay body, is subject to the inevitable effects of

overlapping and contradictory discourses around identification, recognition, visibility, and belonging. Reading a 1964 *Life* magazine photo essay about gay men, Edelman notes that the article

> reproduces the culture's inconsistent assumptions about the identification and recognition of gay men. The preface to the article insists, after all, that the vast majority of homosexuals are 'nearly impossible to detect.' … But the captions to the photography that illustrates the piece … indicate a textual imperative to reassert the recognizability of homosexual men by focusing on the markers or 'signs' by which homosexuality can be discerned. (154)

Thus while the inscription of race onto the racialized body and of homosexuality or, more generally, of 'perversion' onto the sexualized body are not identical processes, particularly in terms of the production of invisibility, both are subject to specific forms of the "politics of the visible." Gay men and lesbians, presumed to be white and generally middle-class, are dangerous because of their ability to blend invisibly into the 'normal' and the familial, whereas the racialized become invisible through their discursive irrelevance in one context and hypervisible in another, as when a black Canadian man who is invisible as 'heroic' or even as 'handsome' becomes instantly recognizable when recontextualized as 'criminal.'[5] The paradoxes of identification and disidentification within the politics of the visible are not only true of racialized and sexualized bodies, but are also especially noticeable in the disjuncture between the pregnant (iconic) body and the queer body. The body of the pregnant — presumptively white heterosexual — woman is mapped via a cartography that delineates dense transfers of public interest, public sexuality, and public futures, all generally envisioned under the larger rubrics of citizenship and nationhood. As Homi Bhabha notes, the "people" of a nation are "the historical objects of a nationalist pedagogy" who demonstrate "the prodigious, living principle of … that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process" (297). The pregnant body is thus a public body precisely because it is the locus not of present but of future, presumptively iconic, citizens and nations. The ownership of national futurity by iconic citizens erases the possibility that racialized and sexualized bodies can themselves bear futurity. At best, such non-normative embodiment is a mark of dislocation from the reproduction of the nation; at worst, it becomes an obstacle to it — as has been clearly enunciated most

recently in reactionary attacks on same-sex marriage as incapable of (re)producing future iconic citizens and thus a national future for iconicity and an iconic future for the nation.[6]

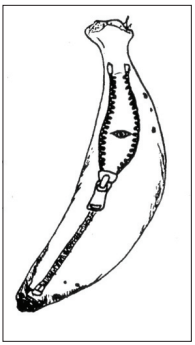

Fig. 1. Drawing of the banana from "The Body Politic"

In "The Body Politic," Goto explores the way in which her own body, which is both a racialized and a sexualized body, but also a particular body that cannot be entirely contained by its racialization or sexualization, is thus shaped by but also shapes culture. Immediately following the lines that Miki quotes, Goto adds, "I hold my culture in my hands and form it on my own, / so that no one else can shape the way / it lies upon my body." The accompanying drawing of a banana which is literally half unzipped but also equipped with a single cyclopean eye invokes not only discourses of racialization — particularly the sneer that anyone with 'yellow' skin but 'white' insides is merely a banana, lacking in racial and cultural authenticity — but also the possibilities inherent in both hybridity and monstrosity. Kim Toffoletti argues that the monster is typified by an ambiguity that "elicit[s] anxieties concerning the boundaries and borders of the body. Monsters simultaneously threaten and uphold the integrity of the human, serving as a deviant category or marginal extreme through which the limits of normal, natural, human identity are defined and secured." She adds that "the monster functions both as Other to the normalized self, and as a third state or hybrid entity that disrupts subject constitution understood in terms of hierarchical binary dualisms" (42).

The disruptive potential of monstrosity is implicit in Goto's invocation of the Cyclops-as-banana. It is also ironic, given the poem's focus on the eye as a marker of difference, a mark of being a/slant from the norm, of seeing sideways rather than straight (which is both a racial and a queer pun), since 'Cyclops' literally means "round eyes" — it comes from the Greek *kuklos* (circle) plus *ops* (eye). "Round eyes," in its turn, has come to be slang for whiteness, as in Ronald Levaco's 1995 film, *Round Eyes in the Middle Kingdom*.[7] Goto thus works a parodic reversal of the discourse that names the eye as marker of racial difference: "That which you carry with you at all times and / cannot be removed like a costume or eaten like a five course dinner. / The single fold in the eyelid that isn't there." In the effort to achieve 'normalcy,' the I/eye/目[8][me] of

the poem attacks the marks of its own monstrosity: "I try scraping the hue / off my skin / with an exacto knife. / I try sliding a razor blade / to slice folds into my eyelids. / It is painful, and now I am deformed / as well as / coloured." The poem thus works three sites of monstrosity against each other: the "slanted eyes" of the racially marked 'Asian' body, the "round eyes" of the iconic citizen who has projected his own cyclopean monstrosity onto the racialized 'other,' and the "deformed" eyes produced by the slicing of a fold into the eyelid. The latter is a procedure whose racialized assumptions are hidden under the bland surgical name of 'blepharoplasty' and under its production as simply another beautifying option offered to a willing public by plastic surgeons everywhere.[9] By reconstituting each of these as moments in which a monstrous I/eye is realized, Goto revalues the banana-as-cyclops; with or without surgery, the eye of the banana produces a different monstrosity which offers as-yet-unknown potentials for transformation and community. It is a monstrosity whose link to issues of subjectivity and visibility is exemplified not only by the English language pun "I/eye," but also by the English/Japanese pun "me/目[me]," in which the "self/eye" doublet of the first pun is repeated bilingually in the second.

The positive potential of monstrosity recurs throughout Goto's work, particularly in her second novel, *The Kappa Child* (2001), and her recent collection of short stories, not coincidentally entitled *Hopeful Monsters* (2004). In the title story, the protagonist, Hisa, gives birth to a much-wanted (but only partially — and thus not — iconic) baby, only to find the others in the birthing room reluctant to hand the child to her. Hisa's fear is that the baby's eyes are "too slanted," either because the baby looks too Japanese or because she has Down Syndrome, whereas the baby has actually been born with what the doctor calls a "caudal appendage" — a tail (146, 148). The doctor reassures Hisa and her husband Bobby that the tail is a minor anomaly that can be easily corrected. However, two things change Hisa's mind about the necessity that the tail be surgically removed. First, she discovers that she herself had been born with a tail; then she discovers that, despite the doctor's claim that the appendage is only skin and cartilage, it actually is capable of movement, wrapping itself around Hisa's wrist while the baby nurses. Hisa's first thoughts, on learning that she had been born deformed herself (a question of mutation that, in the context, cannot help but raise the spectre of radiation-induced mutations and the after-effects

of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) are that she wants her tail back, that she has "been an amputee her whole life, without knowing it," and that she "could never tell Bobby. … Bobby would never understand. Bobby liked Japanese girls. Yukatas and hot springs. Bobby didn't even like bananas" (160).[10]

When she realizes that she can't go through with the operation, Hisa's first instinct is to seek the only allies she can think of, the lesbian couple who were in her parenting classes. Unsurprisingly, Julia reacts badly to being told that she knows "what it's like not to be normal," but her partner, Maggie, is more sympathetic, agreeing to provide shelter for Hisa and the baby. Hisa sneaks out of the hospital and as she does so, she feels "A weight. A balance. A graceful length that slid through air, weaving a subtle pattern" (168). Creating wholeness and balance through the revaluation of monstrosity and abjection is a recurrent theme in Goto's work, which resists hegemonic discourses of sexual and bodily shame, racial and cultural 'difference' (read: inferiority), and the hierarchies of linguistic competence (English counts, Japanese does not). Moreover, Hisa's wholeness is specifically located in relation to the politics of gender and sexuality, as Goto's afterword links the baby's 'monstrous' tail to the treatment of intersex babies.[11] The epigraph from Stephen Jay Gould suggests that "radically beneficial adaptive traits" create "hopeful monsters" (135); as the mother of one such hopeful monster, Hisa disrupts the iconicity of white maternity and its stranglehold on the nation's future, repositioning her own body and her child as producers of an alternative futurity in which monstrosity can be revalued and iconicity refused — just as Hisa in the end refuses the normative orientalizing authority of her white husband, the man who likes "Japanese girls" so long as they're stereotypically 'authentic' and not "bananas" or, by implication, Canadian.

Mark Libin argues in his discussion of "The Body Politic," particularly the lines "Let's stand together, naked, / and see who blushes first," that the

> body of the narrator … challenges the white reader; the body exists as a corporeal objection to the disembodying stereotypes as well as a taunt against European culture's fear of the Other's body. … The narrator in this poem insists that the only strategy to counteract the inevitable status of otherness is to commandeer it, selfconsciously shaping the way difference is articulated, addressed, and displayed. (103)

For Libin, this is particularly clear in the way in which the poem, like the scene with Muriel's boyfriend Hank in Goto's first novel, *A Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994), attempts to resist orientalizing discourses of Asian sexuality.[12] Not only do the white Canadians the narrator encounters insist that, as a poet, she must write haiku, but they also "want to dress [her] up in / ke-mo-nees and garter belts. / They want to hear about / Zen and Buddhism and ritual / Hairy Carrie. / They want to squeal over tiny slices of raw fish / and finish off with exotic Oriental sex / whatever that is." Libin argues that "any connotations of sensuality arising from 'exotic Oriental sex' … are drained from the stanza by the narrator, who levels these images by cataloguing them with other disparate perceptions of the Orientalist: sexuality becomes conflated with sushi, Buddhism, and hara-kiri" (101).

In one sense then, Goto's cataloguing of the "disparate perceptions of the Orientalist" (which must surely be read, in some sense, as all Canadians for whom this catalogue invokes exoticism) creates a self-reflexive heterotopian space, not unlike Borges's infamous "Chinese Encyclopedia" quoted by Foucault in *The Order of Things*.[13] The conflation of logically disparate items that are only rendered syntactically significant through the processes of orientalism reveals the extent to which orientalism relies on rendering 'the Orient' not only as a "heterotopia of deviance" related to the psychiatric hospital, the prison, and the cemetery, but also to utopia itself as a place that is at once "absolutely real" and "absolutely unreal" ("Of Other" 24-25).[14] Patrick ffrench notes that Foucault's concept of heterotopia in "Of Other Spaces" resonates with Roland Barthes's "enjoyment of a perverse cataloguing and systematizing of everyday life, a different utopian domesticity which ruins the what *goes without saying* of the everyday stereotype, and imagines a different life" (295). In this sense, the "perverse cataloguing" of orientalist 'products' (they are all, after all, meant to be consumed) in Goto's "The Body Politic" becomes itself the heterotopian space of the mirror that shows the orientalist the extent to which his taxonomies, like those of Borges's Chinese encyclopedia, "lead to a kind of thought without space, to words and categories that lack all life and place, but are rooted in a ceremonial space, overburdened with complex figures, with tangled paths, strange places, secret passages, and unexpected communications" (Foucault, *Order* xix).

Thus the psychic space of orientalism as heterotopia is at once uto-

pian (and consoling) in its fantasy of unlimited gustatory, aesthetic, and sexual satisfactions (through the racialized production of exotic food, exotic art, and the exotically gendered body of 'the Oriental'), while at the same time functioning disturbingly to "desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source [,] … dissolve our myths and sterilize the very lyricism of our sentences" (*Order* xviii).[15] The orientalizing demand for haiku attempts to destroy "in advance" the possibility of a lyricism beyond the limitations of "ke-mo-nees" and "Hairy Carrie," rendering the poetics of "The Body Politic" polemical from the first instance of its writing. The injunction to write haiku thus functions ironically in opposition to Barthes's own complex attempt to imagine the East (and Japan, in particular), in Foucault's terms, as the 'other space,' a place free from western society's *doxa*.[16] Barthes saw the haiku as a "utopic recovery" of the everyday: not "the common, the stereotypical," but "the incidental detail of any day, articulated in its singularity and absolute difference, but not as exception to the rule or the commonplace" (ffrench 296). In writing her own insistence on singularity and difference, Goto creates her own resistant poetics which demands the creation of a space outside orientalizing, racializing, and sexualizing discourses, and thus takes advantage of the aporia between "the exotic charm of another system of thought" and its heterotopian and necessary demonstration of "the limitations of our own" (Foucault, *Order* xviii, xv). The poet re-appropriates her own hybrid, monstrous, and polemical lyricism though her refusal of culturally 'appropriate' bodies, racialized as (inauthentically) 'Japanese' and not as (even more inauthentically) 'Canadian,' of culturally 'appropriate' poetic forms, such as the haiku (and also of only orientally appropriate — since orientalism can scarcely distinguish Japanese from Arabic, much less Chinese — forms such as *gushi* or *jintishi* [17]), and of culturally 'appropriate' modes of thought that legislate "the stark impossibility of thinking *that*" (*Order* xv).

Language mediates what can and cannot be thought. Goto notes in "Translating the Self" that while "the act of translation is imposed upon my very existence" (111), language remains both a necessary barrier and a source of delightful possibilities: "I'm bemused and joyful that there are words and concepts that *refuse* to translate because they do not exist in the culture/language that seeks to translate it" (Interview). Goto's refusal to translate or even to transliterate some of the Japanese (both

romanized and not) in *Chorus of Mushrooms* has sparked intense interest in academic critics. Mark Libin argues that the reader's incomprehension frees him to "learn by exploring [his] inability, by suspending [his] limitations and by *beginning* to understand the Other" ("Lost" 137). In other words, the inability to comprehend forces the reader to confront the experience of incomprehension itself and to refuse his authoritative position as the audience for whom translation must occur, for whom comprehension is a right. Mari Sasano similarly focuses on Goto's insistence that translation in Canada proceeds from an imbalance of power, but adds that there "is no reason that someone who does not understand Japanese could not do some research and find out what these sections mean, as non-English speaking immigrants have had to do with English" (Sasano). Tseen Khoo moves beyond translation of phrases to analyze the ways in which Goto's "dismantling of who gets to tell the 'right' story also diffuses the burden of truth-telling and the educative potential of ethnic narratives" (108). Finally, Steve McCullough looks at the ways in which both the demand for translation and the refusal to understand fail the very trust the narrator asks for in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. Such failures are counterposed in the novel by moments of perfect, but inexplicable, communication between Murasaki, who speaks only English, and her obāchan, who refuses to speak anything but Japanese. Goto herself says, "I enact a daily translation of existence, translated again into writing. Culture always included" ("Translating" 113).

If the dominant culture demands certainty of comprehension while simultaneously insisting on the 'cultural authenticity' of otherness from those who are deemed inauthentically Canadian, Goto's "The Body Politic" both acknowledges and revalues the aspects of culture that become monstrous — and monstrously desirable, as bell hooks has argued in "Eating the Other" — in the face of such orientalizing discourse. Hara-kiri, Buddhism, sushi, slanted eyes, and Oriental sex are not coeval except in the hierarchy of orientalism. For Goto, sex, food, bodies, and language are inextricably linked through both pleasure and danger — the pleasures of their enactment and the dangers of their appropriation and inevitable (mis)translation. Against this, as McCullough notes, Goto opposes singularity or specificity — the specificity of that within a language that is untranslatable into another, the specificity of particular foods and gustatory pleasures, the specificity of

particular bodies and their desires (against the normative insistence on the fixity and absolute meaningfulness of 'sexual identity'), the specificity of particular stories, told by particular people at particular times and in particular ways.

In "The Body Politic" one of the moments of specificity is Goto's repeated rendering of the kanji 目[me], which is both the Chinese and Japanese 'ideogram' for 'eye.' "The Body Politic" is itself an impure, perhaps monstrous, form — a hybrid of English and Japanese, of word and image, of the concrete and the linguistic. Answering the demand for haiku, the poet stammers one out, starting over twice before producing the lines "When I speak English / I make up words I like more / Than the ones I learned," thus embedding an actual — and resistant — haiku within a poem that resists the requirement of haiku. By incorporating the kanji 目, however, Goto also references a long tradition of orientalist influences on traditions of poetry writing in English-speaking countries. The notion that the 'ideogram' somehow encapsulates the visual meaning of the word, so that an understanding of Japanese and Chinese characters can be grasped with little or no knowledge of either language, was brought into twentieth-century poetics by people like Ernest Fenollosa and Amy Lowell. Indeed, Fenollosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, which was edited and published by Ezra Pound, became one of the foundational documents of the Imagist movement. Thus the genealogy of Imagism and indeed of much visual poetry in English derives interculturally from the curious misunderstanding of Chinese produced by the combination of Pound's misinterpretation of Chinese art and Fenollosa's peculiar education in the language by a leading Japanese Sinologist. Goto, in a sense, re-appropriates this history. Her use of the character 目, which has gone unremarked by English-speaking critics of her work, ironically contradicts the orientalist's assertion of the comprehensibility of 'oriental' writing. As Yunte Huang argues, the "one thing an Imagist

Fig. 2. Photograph from "The Body Politic"

poem does … is to project an image of Asia by means of linguistic appropriation and reinvention" (62). Goto, however, re-appropriates and re-reinvents, insisting not on the generalizability and comprehensibility of 'foreign' cultures, but rather on the specifics of *this* use of a Japanese character, *this* resistant performance of haiku, *this* drawing of an eye, *this* photograph of the author with which the poem finishes.

The photograph of Goto is accompanied by the lines "My health, my body, my politic, / A slant, a skin, a slice of — / It's only that I want someone to know me by my name." Libin notes that the

> association between photograph and narrator is further strengthened by the word 'me' inscribed several times on the surface of the photograph with a stylus. This superimposed inscription refers back to the image of the narrator scraping her skin and slicing her eyelids with razor blades, but it may also signify an inversion of this image, since the incision of 'me' onto the photographic surface affirms identity, as opposed to the narrator's earlier impulse to efface her racialized self. … Goto concludes her poem by presenting a self-referential 'body' that directly faces the reader — a proximity enabling the reader to see himself or herself in the eyes of the narrator, as a friend. (104-05)

The photograph, however, is different both in placement and in kind from the other images, which include the concrete image of the slanted eye formed by the words

my vision i s o b l i q u e
y
e
is y
m
oblique,

the drawing of the eye looking straight ahead, the hand pointing, the placement of words and letters on the page, including the placement of the letter 'I' and of the character 目. Goto provides a visual hint to the kanji's meaning by drawing it over her own eye, but, despite Fenollosa and Pound, the clue is likely not enough to make the image comprehensible to the majority of readers. The problematics of translation are further illustrated by the reader's failure to recognize 目 as language, as a symbol that can be *read* (thus further ironizing the Fenollsa/Pound position on the legibility of 'ideograms'). The conjunction of visual

and linguistic games with the relationship between corporeality and subjectivity — and especially with the supposition that race and sexuality can clearly be *read* on the body, in acts of both homographesis and racialization — is, however, clearly expressed in the words and images to the right of the lines

> I dress with culture
> every single morning.
> I eat my culture for breakfast,
> and bag it for lunch and it simmers
> in a slow cooker while I'm out at work.
> I eat culture for dinner then I bathe in it
> and it's my sleeping partner at night.

While these lines invoke Barthes' *doxa* as the everyday stereotypical discourses that produce multiculturalism as a quaint but ineluctable spectacle of otherness, in the precisely heterotopian form of orientalism, the combination of words and images that accompany them locate them against the assertion of subjectivity:

M 

the distance from me

t

o

目

This vertical line thus indicates that the narrator's eye represents the distance between herself and her Japanese heritage, but also between the English word 'me' and the Japanese *me*[18] — between Canadian and Japanese subjectivities. It is overly simplistic to suggest that the 'eye' may be one, but the 'I' the other. Rather, diasporic subjectivity and embodiment are ambivalently constructed from both and at the same time interwoven in unstable and unavoidable ways. The culture the narrator eats, dresses, and bathes in is thus also the distance between her physical construction as the racialized body of the Oriental other and the monstrous but hopeful positioning of the hybrid self. This is the self that is forced to address the issue of colour because otherwise, "**It is produced for me in ways I find intolerable**." McCullough argues that the poem's "litany of false names and racist expectations" produces the same "double logic" that Jacques Derrida identifies "at work in the

relationship between naming, translating and knowing" when Derrida says that "I would say that this desire is at work in every proper name: translate me, don't translate me" (164). McCullough concludes that not only is Goto's freedom of speech inhibited by "abusive" demands on the language she shares with the orientalists, but also that access "to her name is thus rendered extremely problematic because of the exclusionary racist languages that cross the space of her experience and her speech" (164). Similarly, the gendering and sexualizing of the author's body is produced by assumptions that are barely supported by the photograph: Libin calls it "a photograph of a woman meant, presumably, to correspond to the narrator" ("Some" 104). Yet the photograph is more ambiguous than Libin's assertion suggests — gender and sexuality are read onto the photograph less surely but as inevitably as race. Goto's body politic is thus a body that is not only caught up in bodily politics, but also produced in these "exclusionary racist languages," as well as in gendered and sexualized language, as estranged from the 'body politic' of the nation state.[19] It is only in the hopeful monstrosity of hybrid particularity, which resists the generalizing, racializing, sexualizing discourses produced by those who wish to delimit, privilege, and protect their iconic citizenship that the body, the eye, can locate itself within what Giorgio Agamben calls "the antinomy of the universal and the particular" (8). This is the process of negotiation in the face of the paradox of being and being-called, of identity and identification, of visibility and invisibility, which inscribes 'I's, 'me's and ' s' [me's] over the author's smiling face, thus recalling Agamben's assertion that

> Whatever is the thing with *all its properties*, none of which, however, constitutes difference. In-difference with respect to properties is what individuates and disseminates singularities, makes them lovable (quodlibetable). Just as the right human word is neither the appropriation of what is common (language) nor the communication of what is proper, so too the human face is neither the individuation of a generic *facies* nor the universalization of singular traits: It is whatever face, in which what belongs to common nature and what is proper are absolutely indifferent. (19)

"It is only," as the narrator of "The Body Politic" says, "that I want someone to know me by my name." To know her name, Goto suggests, is a way of producing not monstrosity, but a whatever monster, a hybrid singularity, a syntax in which it is possible to think those things which

the dominant discourses of orientalism, racism, and heteronormativity attempt to make impossible to think. Foucault argues that it is imperative to "free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" (*Use of Pleasure* 9). In his reading of Barthes and Foucault, Patrick ffrench concludes by questioning whether "Barthes' *desire* for an everyday, domestic utopia and Foucault's heterotopias … finally resolve their internal differences in the figure of *singularity*?" (304). If, as ffrench suggests, the task is "to re-think the community of singularities, the everyday sociality of the singular," Goto's "The Body Politic" brings to that task a reminder that such communities of singularities are possible, that a new body politic can indeed be imagined and that thought can be freed to think differently — but only for and by those who are willing to become whatever monsters.

Notes

[1] *The Body Politic* was started in Toronto in 1971 and published its last issue in 1987. It was overtly political, activist, and frequently controversial, publishing work by people like Jane Rule, James Steakley (who wrote the first account in English of the treatment of homosexuals by the Third Reich), Gerald Hannon, and Michael Lynch (whose important early publications on the politics of AIDS are the subject of a recent book by Ann Silversides). It was also criticized by some for emphasizing gay male issues and perspectives over lesbian ones.

[2] The most salient recent issue is, of course, the debate over the legalization of same-sex marriage, but others include battles over the recognition of same-sex common law couples, the legalization of adoption by the non-biological parent, pension rights, and the very belated inclusion of sexual orientation as a prohibited ground for discrimination in the Charter.

[3] Environics polling shows that agreement with this statement in 2000 varied regionally from a low of 29% in New England to a high of 71% in the South. In Canada, the comparative figures are a low of 15% in Québec to a high of 21% in Alberta. In the US, the figure has been rising since the early 1990s, while in Canada it has been dropping over the same period (Adams 86-89).

[4] To take just two examples, televangelist Jimmy Swaggart said on his TV show in 2004 that "I've never seen a man in my life I wanted to marry. And I'm gonna be blunt and plain: if one ever looks at me like that, I'm gonna kill him and tell God he died." In 2002, Roy Moore, a former Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice, wrote a submission in a lesbian custody case stating that "The State carries the power of the sword, that is, the power to prohibit [homosexual] conduct with physical penalties, such as confinement and even execution. It must use that power to prevent the subversion of children toward this lifestyle" (qtd. in Moser). This sort of rhetoric has largely been avoided by anti-gay groups in Canada, although similar sentiments are sometimes implied.

[5] I have written about my personal experience with this particular form of the politics of the visible in "Alien Cryptographies: The View from Queer."

[6] In the US context, see the work of Lauren Berlant and also Lee Edelman's most recent book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Reading both the film *Philadelphia* and the right wing insistence on procreative heteronormativity through the lens of the Symbolic, Edelman argues that

> the occasion of a gay man's death gives the film the excuse to unleash once more the disciplinary image of the 'innocent' Child performing its mandatory cultural labor of social reproduction. We encounter this image on every side as the lives, the speech, and the freedoms of adults face constant threat of legal curtailment out of deference to imaginary Children whose futures, as if they were permitted to have them except as they consist in the prospect of passing them on to Children of their own, are construed as endangered by the social disease as which queer sexualities register. (19)

[7] The Chinese-born Levaco, of Russian Jewish parentage, returned to China in the 1990s to document the story of Israel Epstein, his father's best friend, who elected to stay in the newly formed People's Republic of China, eventually becoming a Chinese citizen and China's most important 'foreign' journalist.

[8] The Japanese character 目 (transliterated as 'me') means 'eye.' I discuss the way in which Goto uses this character in the poem, later in this essay.

[9] Commenting on the proliferation of blepharoplasty operations in the People's Republic of China, Chesney O'Donnell argues that, despite the global dominance of western ideals of beauty, eyelid surgery is still a question of free choice. This is clearly not Goto's position on the issue. According to Christina Valhouli, 167,000 blepharoplasties were performed in 1998 in the US alone, while in "Japan and Taiwan, stores sell tubes of eyelid glue and pre-cut tape that women use to create a fold" in the eyelid (Valhouli).

[10] The implication, of course, is that Bobby cannot like his own daughter, who is half Euro-Canadian, half Japanese-Canadian, unless she rejects the 'white' part of her heritage and thus the danger of becoming 'a banana.'

[11] Approximately 1.7% of live births are intersex, neither clearly male nor clearly female. Most of these 'anomalies' are 'corrected' through surgery and hormone treatment, often over many years. In the last decade, however, surgical intervention has increasingly come under attack, particularly by intersex people themselves.

[12] Teenaged Hank is already aware of the exotic and rewarding possibilities of "Oriental sex," to Muriel's complete bafflement (*Chorus* 122). In the passage immediately after this, the adult Muriel and her Japanese lover decide to have "Oriental sex." Neither has a clue what Oriental sex is, but decide to "make it up as [they] go along" (123). Note that this scene makes fun of the orientalizing discourse that underwrites David Henry Hwang's *M Butterfly* (and David Cronenberg's translation of Hwang's play into film), where the French diplomat Gallimard is so obsessed with the exoticism of sex with a Chinese diva that he bamboozles himself into believing his lover is a woman.

[13] In another sense, Goto's sensual linking in all of her work of sexual pleasures, gustatory pleasures, and the pleasures of language — including the pleasures of playing in-between languages — suggests that this catalogue of orientalist delights is not as de-eroticized as Libin believes.

[14] Foucault's concept of heterotopia has been taken up in several ways by critics, including its simplification into "a prophetic vision of society that allows for the presence of constant change and improvisation" (Reid-Pharr 348). As I understand it, Foucault's use of heterotopia, an idea he introduced in *The Order of Things* and wrote about again in "Of Other Spaces," offers heterotopias as both real and unreal spaces whose main function is to reveal the possibility of thinking thought itself differently and whose relationship to utopia is complex. Foucault offers the figure of the ship as "the heterotopia par excellence," since

"the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, is closed in on itself and at the same time given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel … goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens" ("Of Other Spaces" 27). The ship's heterotopian possibilities lie as much in what it offers to the imagination as in its effects on (historical) space; indeed, in its use as an engine of colonialism, the ship makes clear that the heterotopia can never be simply utopian.

[15] I do not mean here to suggest that heterotopia has only a destructive, not a deconstructive, potential. However, as Foucault argues, "heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" ("Of Other Spaces" 25). This seems appropriate as a description of the chasm between orientalizing constructions of Japanese Canadian life and poetry and Japanese Canadian perceptions of what orientalism does to their lives and poems. While orientalism may seem, in Foucault's terms, to afford the consolation of utopia to orientalists, for those whom orientalism seeks to consume, its "perverse cataloguing" invokes heterotopia's disturbing disruption of language's ability to hold things together.

[16] In *Figuring the East*, Marie-Paule Ha argues that Barthes's use of the East was less a return to orientalism than an attempt to escape orientalism's self-other dialectic.

[17] Gushi literally means 'old poems' and refers to a poetic form that was developed in China in the second century CE; jintishi refers to a stricter form of poetry that was formulated in the Tang dynasty.

[18] A further ambiguity exists in the distance between the character's transliteration as 'me' and its pronunciation, which is closer to 'may.' The pun on me/may is likely only apparent to bilingual readers.

[19] One of the points at which languages don't translate is gender. In spoken Chinese (Putonghua or Mandarin), for instance, there is no distinction between 'he' and 'she,' whereas in English the only available gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun ('they') is exorcised as bad grammar.

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Appendix

The Body Politic, reprinted by permission of Hiromi Goto

That which you carry with you at all times and
cannot be removed like a costume or eaten like a five course dinner.
The single fold in the eyelid that isn't there.

Seeing from slanted eyes rather than seeing with a slant,
though the latter is possible in conjunction with the former.
My slant is different from yours, don't you see?
Of course you do, you were the one who brought it up, after all.
Slant as opposed to straight, honesty
lying in the curve of an eye.
If I glance sideways, I see more
than you do looking straight ◁ ——————→ ahead.

my vision i s o b l i q u e
y
e
is y
m
oblique.

M 

I dress with culture
every single morning.
I eat my culture for breakfast,
and bag it for lunch and it simmers
in a slow cooker while I'm out at work.
I eat culture for dinner then I bathe in it
and it's my sleeping partner at night.

the distance from me

t

o

目

Some people are confused, perplexed,
downright angry with my culture fixation.
You only make it more obvious, by pointing
to ☞ it yourself, they say,
being so politically correct and all that.
"We're talking about art, here.
Leave your politics at home."

I try scraping the hue
off my skin
with an exacto knife.
I try sliding a razor blade
to slice folds into my eyelids.
It is painful, and now I am deformed
as well as

coloured.

A friend of mine asked me
if I always thought of myself
as a coloured person.
Is white a colour and do you
think of yourself as white? I asked.
Or do you just think of yourself as normal?

t
h
e

d
i
s
t
a
n
c
e

f
r
o
m

If I don't address my colour,
It is addressed for me in ways I find intolerable.

m
e

People want to dress me up in
ke-mo-nees and garter belts.
They want to hear about
Zen and Buddhism and ritual
Hairy Carrie.

t
o

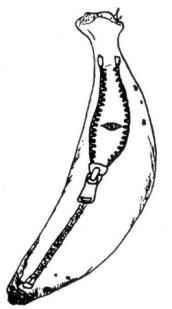
They want to squeal over tiny slices of raw fish
And finish off with exotic Oriental sex,
whatever that is.
I rather I wasn't dressed in your TV costume.
Let's stand together, naked,
and see who blushes first.

People ask me what I do
and I say, oh, I do a little writing.
Do you write poetry too? someone will ask,
and I say, yeah, a little bit.
OH! Please make up a haiku for us, we'd love to hear a haiku
from you.
Uh — I don't —
Oh, don't be shy! You Japanese are so clever with haiku!
Sure, why not.

When I was here the — uhhm
When I speak English
There is something I need to — uuuh, no,
When I speak English
I make up words I like more
Than the ones I learned!

Sure, I would love to talk
about the way the prairie curves into the mountains,
the feel of cool mud squeezing between toes and
the shriek of children catching frogs for the first time in their lives.
I would love to talk about the way
the moonlight looked on bare skin,.
the moisture of breath hanging in the air
above our faces, the sweet kiss lingering
in the fold of my elbow for days.
I could talk of new-born foals and singing birds and strangers
hugging strangers.
Sure, why not?

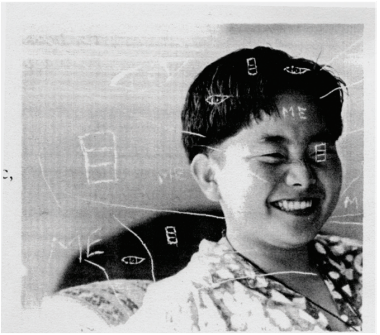
But choice is a position of privilege
That needs to be addressed.



I can never unzip my skin
and step into another.
I am happy with my colour until someone points
out it clashes with my costume.
I hold my culture in my hands and form it on my own,
so that no one else can shape the way
it lies upon my body.

I'm a happy person, mostly.
I smile a lot you know.

My health, my body, my politic,
A slant, a skin, a slice of —



It's only that I want someone to know me by my name.