

Lest we overlook the submissive qualities of Musgrave's heroine, we are reminded of them with her final choice in a mate, the imprisoned bank robber, Stephen Reid. Here, the relationship is determined in a very real way by the regulations of the penal system. With this last choice, then, Musgrave seems to relinquish her control completely. And, since Stephen Reid is the name of Musgrave's own husband, we might be tempted to confuse the character's situation with that of the author.

But if Musgrave buries her control in the article, she exercises her control by writing it. Musgrave's powerlessness is an illusion that fools us only if we ignore the distinction between author and character, the living self and the created subject. If we remember that distinction, however, we can strip away Musgrave's disguise. After all, what better way to deflate the men who have controlled her than by reducing their tyranny to concise prose? Or to categorize them according to date and place — "Ireland, 1972," "Panama, 1982?" The answer, of course, is Musgrave's writing about them in a women's fashion magazine (an irony that is lost within the context of *Great Musgrave*), a format that reinforces our sense of power imbalances of male-female relations. Woman's role in Musgrave's article, and on the glossy pages of the fashion magazine is limited to the ornamental. By writing the article, though, Musgrave makes these men her playthings. She tries them on as the fashion models do clothes. To be sure, the men in Musgrave's stories become objects, something she anticipates in the language of the article itself. "I went straight to the Lost Luggage counter, and stayed there," she writes. "His name was Ulysses."

Loss of identity, in other words, is a problem for the men in the story, not for Musgrave herself. In fact, it becomes clear that these men are not real people at all, but types. Take Hank, for instance. He's the all-American boy. "Hank was a Californian. His father gave him a sports car for failing Grade 12, and he went on to study football at college. His brothers were Marines and his sisters would be virgins until they married. He loved his mother as much as apple pie; his mother would *always* be a virgin."

But it is not just the names that are contrived, so too are the scenarios. "Ulysses" is the hero in a story about the encounter between two "searchers." "Adam" frustrates Musgrave with his roving eye. His previous wife, Eve, must have found this to be a problem as well. "Paddy" is the hero in a story about various kinds of madness; and surely we hear the faint reference to padded cells. (To have access to another level of the irony one must know the colloquialisms about having an "Irish paddy," or bad temper.) I could go on, but I think the point is clear: these men have power only in so far as Musgrave chooses to give them power. They are her fictional playthings.

The final irony, however, is that "getting" Musgrave's point is a dubious privilege. Once we realize that her voice is posed, and that she toys with the men who people her article, we must also realize that she is toying with us as well. In particular, we cannot ignore that these anecdotes are fictionalized enactments of the dreams upon which fashion magazines base their sales — dreams of glamour, wealth and romance. The article's byline is particularly telling: "Some were dangerous. None were ordinary. The men who loved Susan Musgrave in their fashion led to the one beyond anyone's reach but hers." As we read the article, though, we find that Musgrave pokes fun at these hollow aspirations. She tells us that a bank robber — in jail — is her dream man. Mythic characters — Ulysses, Adam, the all-American boy, and earl-to-be — all fall short of the mark. And the bank robber is surely symbolic of someone who aspired to a life of wealth and excitement but now, as a prisoner in the story, and as a writer in real life, he has inevitably lowered his standard of living and his financial expectations.

This article is a series of put-ons, in other words. First, Musgrave suggests that she will reveal her past life and loves; instead, she distorts them. Next, she describes herself as a victim of youth and idealism, dominated by the men in her life; but really she reduces them in print. Finally, she promises to write of adventure, glamour and romance, only to reject the values that make these things so attractive. What this article reveals to us are our own expectations as readers and as dreamers. Certainly, we do not get a clear and reliable portrait of Musgrave emerging from her work. She is hidden, after all, disguised by the past she created for herself and clothed in the garb of the fashion magazine female. Herein lies Musgrave's great escape. ♦

Nathalie Cooke has taught at the University of Guelph, and at the University of Toronto. She is co-editor of the revised Oxford Anthology of Canadian Literature (1990).

GREG M. NIELSEN

Adventure Culture: Notes on the Origin of the Social Imaginary

The Ideology of Adventure: Studies In Modern Consciousness 1100 – 1750

by Michael Nerlich
translated by Ruth Crowley
with a preface by
Wlad Godzich

Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987,
two volumes, 426 pp.

Studies in culture have witnessed steady growth over the last two decades. For many, the ways of investigating and writing about culture have changed. Semiotics, deconstruction and emerging feminist and ecologist critiques of science are pressing traditional disciplines to reconsider their axioms and rejuvenate their historical foundations. Still, even in the most innovative of the new approaches wherein the interdisciplinary purview is at its maximum, some of the older questions about the concept of culture return: questions of difference, of structure, of praxis and of universalism are certainly not new. We could argue that contemporary debates about the nature of culture follow a controversy already established in the classical sociologies of Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Simmel. Each of these theorists might argue that for a society to exist it must first have an imaginary representation of itself, a set of signs produced by actors and reproduced through institutions and the symbolic order that they provide. For a host of philosophical and political reasons, however, Marx differs from the others regarding the explanation of the transformation of the imaginary and the social. For Marx, the first critical sociologist, change is about praxis, about the overcoming of the constraints of the synchronic structure or layers of dom-

The integration of adventure ideology into bourgeois thought ultimately informs all social practice from primitive accumulation to the most ruthless and violent forms of imperialism.

ination; while for Simmel, Weber, and Durkheim (although for different reasons), change is about the rational management or objectification of the diachronic, or historical, order of difference. Structure, difference and praxis are each measured against the universal or the transcultural in order to come to terms with the transition from one social order to another. Michael Nerlich's controversial study on the images of adventure, written around 1968 and first published in East Berlin in 1977, is concerned with the ideological constitution of transition. But before we address his book directly, let's further consider the history of the social imaginary, the desires and images at work in-

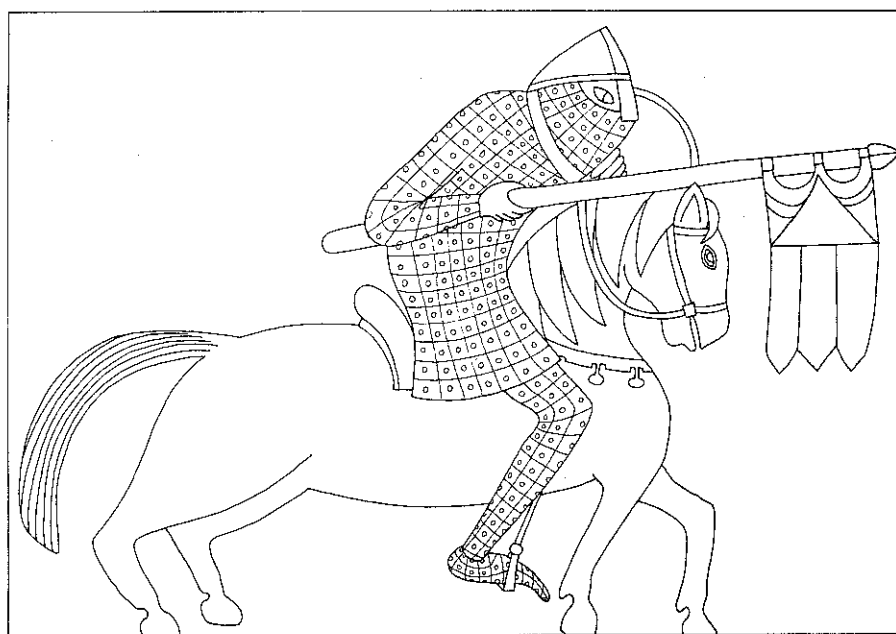
side of culture across time and space.

In an age when any object is potentially an art object (Warhol), when any sign can be appropriated (advertising) and when institutions like the family, the church and the state, along with art and literature, are undergoing transformations so fundamental in nature that the production of images (of themselves) is rumoured to be in a kind of ultramodern crisis, it would seem that now, more than ever, we need to question the genesis of our social imaginary. This question calls for a reflection on the potential dangers of transculturalism; that is, not that which is common to all cultures, but rather that which crosses cultures, that which strives

toward the universal through difference, and therefore challenges identity, negates power, and complicates tradition. There is no culture or language that is not already populated by a trace of some other foreign element. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that culture is a kind of open dialogue in which we are always anticipating the words and expressions of others, their evaluations, their judgments, their ownership claims. Anticipation of the word of others is as much about curiosity as it is about semiosis or language games. Is it not the paradox of curiosity that witnesses the birth of culture?

It seems reasonable to assume that a certain curiosity about the culture of others has always existed. Even in neolithic societies that were unfamiliar with such metaphysical notions as "humanity" (as Levi-Strauss points out, outside the tribe there are only savages), the possible exploration of the other's culture would have been a central narrative in the imaginary representation of one's own sense of place, of belonging, of being. In a continuous development from the most traditional to the ultramodern, travel still contains this element of evaluation and, as such, is always bound as much by its cognitive as by its affective accomplishments to a social imaginary and its construction of otherness. The question that this theoretical position suggests is: What has travel between cultures contributed to the shift in the social imaginary of societies as they develop? Moreover, what has the image of travel as adventure contributed to social change?

It would also seem safe to assume that the curiosity that accompanies travel manifests itself differently in traditional and ultramodern societies. The first women, children and men who walked across the top of the world experienced travel in the context of a purely mythical view of the world. Here, the strange is accounted for through symbolic laws and not through a polyvalent imaginary (Club Med?). To be sure, each culture deals with its own excess through ritual sacrifice or some form of carnival, but in the ultramodern excess becomes the norm. For traditional culture, symbols provide a complete fiction for interpreting that which is not known. Everything can be accounted for through a coherent and,



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as Jurgen Habermas points out, not necessarily irrational, order. Here, curiosity is communal as is the shamanism or magic that obscures the relation between signs and what they refer to. The question that the social sciences and humanities have been posing, at least since the Enlightenment, is how to account for the incredible set of processes that have accompanied the mutations of inquisitiveness, of curiosity, and the "spirit" of adventure that inform the shift to the cultural practices of modern life.

Nerlich challenges conventional views from both the left and the right concerning the genesis and development of cultural modernity. He pushes back the Eastern Bloc's official interpretation, which situates the origins of capitalist society in the industrial revolution of the 19th century. He goes much further back than Weber, Sombart, and other western scholars who would place the origins of capitalism in either the French Revolution or in the birth of Protestantism in the 17th century. Nerlich demonstrates that the practice of adventure is a much studied but widely misunderstood motor force driving the shift from traditional symbolic culture to modern sign-based culture. His project is ambitious. He seeks to situate the origins of modernity not so much by reducing it to social structure as by following through a meticulous critique of the evolution of what he calls, variously, "adventure desire," "adventure thought," "adventure mentality," and "adventure practice."

As Nerlich argues, from its very beginning, adventure ideology includes qualities, values, and activities that "transgress boundaries between social groups and classes." At the same time, what we might call "adventure culture," or the sum of all the different nuances he attributes to the term, is seen as a central legitimizing force in the process of modernity. For Nerlich, this legitimizing force affirms the acceptance of the unknown as a positive value, allows for the incorporation of economic and social chance, as well as the creation of order from disorder, and, ultimately, facilitates the reduction of risk and the minimization of chance for the purpose of gain. The integration of adventure ideology into bourgeois thought ultimately informs all social practice from primitive accumulation to the most ruthless and violent forms of imperialism. The curiosity of adventure carries with it a recognition of the other (language, race, ethos, sex). But in the same moment – and this is perhaps Nerlich's most impressive insight – in modernity one appropriates the other, whether by peaceful means or not, for one's own interest; the other is either destroyed or transformed into a business partner.

Nerlich locates the literary imaginary of adventure in 12th century France with the birth of the *chevalier* in the verse

romances of Chretien de Troyes and in the legend of King Arthur and his Round Table. Here, the meaning of adventure is strictly confined to the medieval context. In old French it signifies fate, chance, and above all, the surprising event "that the knight must seek out and endure ... indeed it is only in experiencing adventure that the (knightly) human being realizes himself in his true essence." In a phrase, Nerlich's book is about how this older sense of adventure as fate is transformed into the modern notion of adventure as adventure.

Nerlich traces this transition across literary, philosophical and historical documents over a period of more than six hundred years, tailing off with the split between the progressive ideology of adventure during the French Revolution and the aggressive English imperialist appropriation of the notion, finally showing how it appeared in Spain and Italy in a variety of representations.

Although Nerlich refuses a deeper existential critique of the medieval "man in the man," he does provide a rigorous explanation of the historical conditions that accompany shifts in the ideology of adventure across the epoch. Each shift is introduced with extensive but selective quotes from Marx and Engels which describe the social conditions of the representations under consideration.

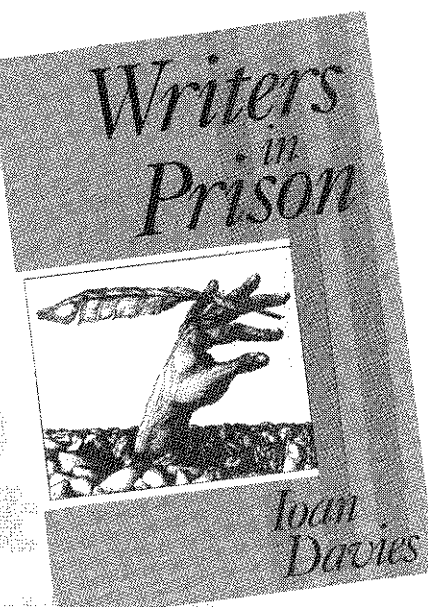
An initial glance at Nerlich's book leaves one disturbed by what would appear to be yet another vulgar literary sociology based in socialist realism and reflection theory. But further reading

reveals that a more traditional, though multi-layered, historical methodology is being employed: one that establishes the link between the literary and the social in a discursive and documentary framework rather than through correspondence, homology, negation, or deconstruction. We don't slide into an interpretive regression of the "hysterical male" in Lancelot's mirror stage, nor of the sign systems operating at a Round Table dinner party (an equally interesting thesis topic).

Instead, Nerlich develops a political economy of the rise of knighthood as a social class in the 9th century, of how a mode of production is reproduced within certain historical conditions, and of how, in the pre-capitalist mode, agents are already forced to seek out new territories in order to support their class base. His *sociocritique* combines the historian's fetish for argument, proof and refutation, and the literary hermeneut's passion for the recovery of meaning at the cost of abandoning objectivity. The result is a curious critique of texts. On the one hand, his investigation ranges from medieval philology and literature to selections from Rabelais, Shakespeare, and Defoe; while on the other hand, he provides a materialist critique of the ideology of adventure as it accompanies the development of capital. *The Ideology of Adventure* stands out as a landmark work of a master scholar, one that offers an original look at the sources of our social imaginary. ♦

Greg Nielsen teaches sociology at Glendon College.

Writers in Prison



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