

Notes from the Editor:
Politics, Ethics and Postcoloniality
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The Agony and Ecstasy of Steve Jobs is theatre artist Mike Daisey's new performance monologue. The title might seem to point to a biographical story about the charismatic CEO who has led Apple Corporation through difficult periods to become the darling of electronics. The launches of new MacBooks, iPads and iPhones draw long lines of eager customers on the streets and in the malls. Daisey, however, is much more interested in the global processes of production that computers, cellphones and all the other electronics so necessary to life in the twenty-first century require. His research for the piece was spent in Shenzhen, the southern Chinese city developed as a "special economic zone" when Deng Xiao Peng opened up the economy to profit-driven production. In particular, Daisey spent time interviewing workers at Foxconn, the Shenzhen factory where Apple's products are made, and which recently entered western consciousness through reports of several workers' suicides. Foxconn also makes components for Dell, Nokia, Hewlett-Packard, Sony Ericsson, Motorola and others (Pomfret), so that, while Daisey's focus is on Apple and Steve Jobs, what he has to say has implications for anyone who uses almost any electronic device. Those he interviewed told painful stories of despair and exhaustion born out of long shifts to meet ever-increasing deadlines, extraordinarily crowded living conditions, omnipresent surveillance and oppressive security. Daisey's performance art tells these stories alongside Steve Jobs' story. Normally separated, they are for him inextricably linked.

It might sound as if Daisey is militantly opposed to Apple and likely to call for a boycott of its products. Quite the contrary. He does not believe boycotts to be an effective strategy and he is a passionate fan of Apple's products. As he comments, "a large part of the arc of the show is my own journey as someone who loves technology very, very much. It's

been incredibly enlightening and painful to see the true circumstances in which things are made, and then understand that the objects are still as lovely as they are. But now I have to reckon with their actual cost” (qtd in Mack 39). Daisey’s remarks poignantly underline the Sartrean “bad faith” that everyone living in the west and many elsewhere negotiate—sometimes consciously, sadly often without thought—every day of their lives. The technologies that make possible research, scholarship, teaching and conferences all have their origins in labour conditions most of us would rather not contemplate.

Daisey challenges his audiences to recognize and reflect on their connections with unknown others. What is our relationship to those who worked a fourteen-hour shift to produce, at some time in that muscle-aching expanse of time, components of the computer or cellphone we use daily? Mediated by the abstract exchange of money or the even more abstract use of a plastic card, the link between a desired object purchased at the slick service desk of a retail outlet and the work that produced it attenuates into nothingness. And yet, what Daisey calls “their actual cost” is undeniable, even if it remains unseen.

In her recent book, *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth-Century Novels*, Shameem Black maps out an approach to novels which represent the lives of others within narratives that invite their readers to be “shared seekers in a mutual search for effective ways of considering the lives of others” (250). Black suggests that literature is an especially important site where it is possible to engage empathetically with the lives of others without necessarily imposing domination and control. “The purpose of such fiction,” she goes on to write, “is not to claim the objective accuracy of positivist portraits but to open paths for dialogue, debate, and meditation across socially defined borders” (251). This special issue of *ARIEL* attempts to continue crucial dialogues about representation in a globalized world. Articles explore questions about a range of politics and ethics inscribed within literature: Helon Habila’s telling of history; Zadie Smith’s reflections on aesthetics and ethics; William Saroyan and Ruskin Bond on nationality and nation; Maya Angelou’s stories of gender and race; Christina Stead’s reactions to the Depression; Shani Mootoo’s consideration of abjected bodies; Rattawut

Lapcharoensap's representations of *Shima*; the myriad forms of violence suffered by political prisoners; Catherine Owen's depiction of extinction. In all of these articles readers are challenged to enter into an engagement with otherness respectfully and constructively. At the same time, it is crucial to remember the weight of material conditions in the world of the twenty-first century, from the ferocious destructiveness of nature under the force of global warming to the persistent pressures of capital working its own transformations on human lives. James Pomfret reports that, as Chinese workers in the prosperous coastal industrial areas like Shenzhen agitate for better conditions, Foxconn, always in search of more compliant labour, is opening new plants in the interior provinces of Henan and Sichuan.

Works Cited

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- Pomfret, James. "Why the World's Workshop is on the Move." *Globe and Mail*. 27 Aug. 2010. B6. Print.