

Theatre of Agencies: The LGB Story

Ray LanGenBach

Not solitude and solidarity,
not solitude or solidarity,
but solitude-solidarity
will be the new adventure
chanted by new poets. (Leo Bronstein, 1953)

In the following pages I will present a reading of the intellectual lives of two cognitive scientists, a Singaporean-born, Chinese-American, Lan Gen-Bah (who in recent years has often presented herself simply by the initials LGB), and her mother, the late Chiang Mo-Jo. It is my hope that these personal topographies may reveal certain performative tendencies embedded in the 'cultures of science'. [1] The merging of biography (the writing or 'drawing' of a life) and scientific discourse (literally a discourse of 'knowledge', but contemporaneously viewed as a Foucaultian discourse of knowledge/power) brings into close proximity translocated dramatic narratives that we associate with literature or theatre, and the science fictions surrounding scientific method. LGB herself has suggested that when faced by our mortality or the mortality of others, our 'collective hysteria' motivates us to 'assign authenticity and "truth"' to narratives of knowledge/power, whether these narratives are scientific, historical or biographical (LGB, 2000:7). While the following biography of LGB may or may not be hysterical in this sense, it is decidedly 'paranoiac'. [2]

First, this 'story' is a reading of the life and work of a person who fits the mould of Lu Xun's evocation of the paranoid insomniac in his short fiction, 'Diary of a Madman'. Like Lu Xun's fictional character, LGB fitfully lies awake at night while others sleep and is forced, by virtue of her constitution, to 'read between the lines' of dominant discourses. Secondly, LGB is indeed haunted by clinically diagnosed episodes of paranoia, and her work, as we shall see, has sought to address those episodes as windows into a cognitive episteme. To borrow a term from LGB, the collision of science and personal narratives of lived biography is at the centre of the following 'theatre of agencies'.

Many of us, the writers and consumers of this publication, take inordinate pride in our ability to read between the lines, seeking the unmarked connections between disparate historical trends, data and phenomena. We methodically ferret out the unspoken links that fall outside the prevailing epistemes, in our efforts to produce a hyper-connected discursive environment. A paranoid consciousness does this also, but phobically (each revelation posing a threat to the coherency of the psyche), and the intellectual quest for hyper-connectivity takes on a decidedly passionate tone; survival is at stake.

In a nutshell, this essay will provide a paranoiac recuperation of science (knowledge/ power) in the manner we academics now take for granted ... precisely by looking between the lines for the connective tissue between events, paradigms, disciplines, and practices in the lives of two scientists. It will ask whether these 'medial connections', the sheer plethora and 'mediocrity' (from Latin, *mediocris*: *medius*, middle) of paranoid hyperconnectivity seen through the 'medium' of the anthropological gaze, are really the stuff of the lives of the subjects, or are reflective of the methods of analysis applied. As LGB herself put it in 1996 in an interview with Lee Weng Choy:

In what way is today's theory the language that speaks us? That lies for us, to us, about us? But we already knew this. So this is like the caution on the box of cigarettes; we all know it's redundant, but there's something reassuring about being warned that our pleasures are killing us. (LGB, cited in Lee, cited in Langenbach, 1998 [1996])

Family History: 1948-1958

Recently uncovered documents indicate that LGB was born in Singapore in 1948 at the Kandang Kerbau Hospital on Race Course Road. A Singapore birth certificate was found amongst her mother's possessions following her death in 2000. Yet LGB also held a USA Social Security number, indicating a US birth, presumably obtained through her father's position in the diplomatic service there between 1958 and 1964. For whatever reason, her parents chose not to reveal to LGB her Singaporean origins.[3] The question of national origins became further clouded during the period of the Cultural Revolution, when all of these documents were replaced by others indicating a Beijing birth for the then 18-year-old LGB. This was perhaps to protect her from the purges directed against those who had lived outside China or had taken on foreign mannerisms, attitudes or ideologies. Her parents may have wanted LGB to honestly believe in her Chinese origin so she could approach her peers with the naive confidence so necessary for survival at that time.

LGB's father, Lan Siang Guan, a trusted associate of both Liu Shiao-Ch'i and Lin Piao, before their political alienation during the period of the Cultural Revolution, was a diplomat of the P.R.C. in the Boston consulate from 1957 until 1962. There was always some question about his actual role there, but US observers note that his portfolio dealt with nuclear technology (United States Government Department of State De-Classified Files, 1957-1966). The supposition is supported by the fact of his close association with Lin Piao, who was instrumental in the development of Chinese nuclear capability. In fact, it may have been his association with Lin and the nuclear program that saved Siang Guan—if not his spouse—from the Cultural Revolution purges a few years later.

LGB's mother, Chiang 'Mo-Jo' (born Chiang Bah-Gen), one of China's first post-Freudian psychologists and a new-generation poet, came out of a Ming Dynasty

literati family with links to the social movements of pre-revolutionary China. Her maternal grandfather was an associate of the radical publisher and writer Lu Xun and had traveled throughout Europe, meeting artists, poets and political activists. He introduced Lu Xun to the work of certain social-realist artists on the left in Germany, notably Kathe Kollwitz and Franz Masereel, whose work Lu Xun subsequently published for Asian consumption.

As a university student in Beijing, Chiang had her education personally sponsored by Kuo Mo-Jo, the President of the National Academy of Sciences and, in appreciation of his patronage, symbolically took his personal name as her own. In the interests of the new nation, she focused her research on the newly amalgamated field of neurology, psychology, perception and cybernetic research, collectively referred to as Cognitive Science.

One could say that while the figure of LGB's father represented the pragmatics of the new nation, the People's Republic of China, the figure of her mother represented the humanist soul of Chinese modernity. Chiang sought to understand the genesis of will, intention, motivation and personal identity—those mental attributes so necessary to the formation of national identity and nation-building. Her research derived directly from Mao Zedong's theories of Sixiang Gounzuo: 'Thought Work', 'Inner Self-Cleansing', and 'Self-Criticism' that were being disseminated at this time. The French theorist of propaganda, Jacques Ellul, termed Mao's Sixiang Gounzuo the 'theory of the mould' (Ellul, 1965:309), basing his view on translated texts of Mao's address to the Chinese Communist Party's National Conference on Propaganda Work in 1957 (Mao, 1977: 134-154), and on analogies to French techniques of indoctrination deployed by the French themselves in colonial Algeria (Ellul, 1965:311n).

During this same period, Frantz (Omar) Fanon was formulating the impact of what he referred to as 'solidarity systems' on individual personality formation and the socio-genesis of mental disease, through his work as Chief of Service in the Psychiatry Department at the Blida-Joinville Hospital under the colonial French regime in Algeria from 1953 to 1955, and subsequently in Tunisia from 1957 to 1959. Building on Fanon's 'solidarity systems' and Jungian theories concerning the role played by a 'collective unconscious' in 'psyche consolidation', Chiang focused her attention on the possibility of 'de-centred cognitive systems'; that is, mental models that do not rely on the presence of a centralised ego. Addressing the sociology of Maoist 'thought-work' in communist cells, Chiang became interested in the synergistic behaviour of disparate cognitive agencies, in which one individual would be motivated to enter into a reflexive mode of thought through the external encouragement or pressure exerted by his or her comrades. She sought to prove that individual intention need not be cancelled-out by the solidarity system of Sixiang Gounzuo, as Ellul imagined it, but could actually be synergistically enhanced.[4]

Chiang Mo-Jo: 1958-1964

In 1958, LGB's father, Lan Siang Guan, was assigned to oversee a diplomatic mission in Boston and took up residence with his family in the 'Back Bay' area of the city. By 1961, Chiang had sought out the fledgling Artificial Intelligence community at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, across the Charles River from the Chinese Consulate. John McCarthy, a Dartmouth professor, had teamed up with Marvin Minsky, a mathematics researcher at Harvard, who had studied with John von Neumann and others at Princeton. They founded the MIT Artificial Intelligence Project in 1959.

Minsky was beginning to build his theory of the mind as a 'society' of many 'expert systems', all performing collaboratively to preserve the organism and to carry out higher cognitive functions (Minsky, 1986). This theory would be instrumental in the development of neural networks and the massively-parallel computer systems that are now used to design other complex cybernetic intelligences. This line of thought, albeit in its infancy when Chiang was in Cambridge, appeared to promise a de-centered human psyche that would not rely on a single central-processing unit, but would instead function as a distributed network of collectively organised 'agencies', each with a different task, but synergistically forming a collective (communitarian) identity. This model of 'mind' as the amalgamation of a complex group subjectivity can be characterised as a 'collective', and it was this implication of a 'socialist theory of mind' that attracted Chiang.

The Problem of Feedback in Social and Cybernetic Systems

In her clinical research Chiang noticed the tendency of cybernetic systems to devolve into viciously circular feedback in which the exponential increase of noise in the system curtails the coherent transmission of data. This reminded her of problems that appear in certain closed human organisations. She began to look carefully at the generation and reproduction of structural noise in social systems through the lens of Maoist 'self-criticism' groups. She concluded that under certain thresholds, feedback was productive ('enriching flow-through'), but over those thresholds, feedback interfered with normal systematic functioning and was destructive (Chiang, 1959:54; Chiang, 1960:235; Chiang, 1961:8; Goh K.S., 1978).

To better understand the dynamics of feedback and 'interference', Chiang looked to the developing field of holography in which productive interference is created with coherent light in the laboratory.[5] (Chiang, 1960) In human social systems, Chiang noticed that coherence, feedback and interference are part of a dynamic process that depends on the responses of cadres to the collective over issues of class and identitarian dynamics between 'members', and the relationship of self-critique to pressures to preserve group coherence (ideological alignment). The critical construction of 'agencies' (as Chiang came to refer to 'modalities of membership or alienation'), the logic of local social discourses, coercion toward conformity, threats of physical force, environmental contingencies, the presence of previous histories of interaction amongst the 'members', the criteria of

membership, and environment etc. all had to be considered in any analysis of a collective. 'Membership' itself is a function of information production within a productive bandwidth of interactive cognition. While agency requires some degree of reflexivity or feedback, when it approaches a state of vicious circularity the system tends to devolve or collapse from the sheer volume of reflexive information being channeled through it. So, Chiang felt that any notion of social agency actually requires feedback and interference,[6] but only under a given threshold.

Chiang worked with Minsky for only three years. There was mounting concern in the US State Department that Chiang and Lan's work could have serious security ramifications. Even though McCarthy hearings in the House Committee on Un-American Activities ended in 1954, there remained continued suspicion toward foreign intellectuals from communist countries in the USA, leading to an investigation into Chiang's research. The State Department was specifically concerned with her application—in line with Ellul's narrow analysis of Mao's Sixiang Gounzuo—to 'indoctrination' or what they crudely defined as 'brainwashing'. In their reports, the CIA Office of Counterintelligence concluded that Chiang had helped to develop the type of brainwashing later notoriously fictionalised in US propaganda films of the Korean War era, in particular the 1962 Hollywood film, *The Manchurian Candidate*, directed by John Frankenheimer. (United States Government Department of State De-Classified Files, 1957-1966 [7]) Lan and Chiang were repeatedly interrogated by US authorities, leading to their invoking of diplomatic immunity and a precipitous return to China in 1964 with the 16-year-old LGB in tow.

1964-1977: The Cultural Revolution

Within two years the Cultural Revolution broke out in China, just as LGB was making her transition from secondary school to university, and her school in Beijing played a central role in the student purges around the capital city. The Cultural Revolution had enormous impact on LGB and her parents. Chiang's theory of 'cognitive solidarity' was unconsciously deployed by the student cadres, and Chiang found herself brought before the student tribunals, leading to a mental breakdown (Holm, 1989; Zhao and Yu, 1984: 209 fn.; Zhong, 1980:301). The symptoms of paranoia from which she would never completely recover—and which, in recent years have resurfaced again in her daughter—began to manifest themselves at this time. The events proved to be a traumatic and defining event for LGB, as she witnessed her own mother dragged before a massive public tribunal to confess to 'bourgeois intellectual tendencies'. Ironically, Chiang was forcibly incarcerated in an asylum where she had previously carried out research, and she underwent a politically motivated regimen of psychiatric intervention. While Lan Sian Guan's links with the government preserved him from a similar fate, he was only able to intervene belatedly on his wife's behalf, which LGB thenceforth referred to as his 'betrayal'. By the end of the Cultural Revolution both of LGB's parents were emotionally broken by the ordeal. LGB felt profoundly

alienated from her society and her government, and disillusioned by all states that could turn against their most loyal engineers. Five years later she wrote:

I cannot understand how this government and our people, or for that matter, how the government and people of the United States during the Joseph McCarthy era, could so arbitrarily turn against their intellectuals. While threshold analysis in feedback systems or the study of strange attractors in dynamic systems may help to explain this sort of social phenomena, it does not excuse the acquiescence and active collaboration of individual members of the populace in such pogroms, nor does it dissipate the sense of tragedy and rage that such acts inspire. (LGB, 1994:340)

LGB's pain proved productive rather than disabling, at least for a while. Understanding that her mother was broken by the very techniques of cognitive control she herself had analysed and theorised, LGB became all the more determined to continue her mother's work, and to explore more deeply the connections between indoctrination, cognition and interpellation. She did this with an overriding desire to break the domination of the Party over psychiatry and cognitive science in China. Above all, LGB wanted to better understand her own indoctrination and how a given 'mass' of people can acquiesce to a singular vision or a monolithic belief system. It has been theorized by REXXALL that the experience provoked her to form an obsessive identification with her mother's condition and experience (REXXALL, 1990). In this reading, the later manifestations of her own paranoia formed merely one component of an encompassing psychic mimesis of her mother's subjective experience. Intermittently, during periods of emotional stress, Gen-Bah manifested her mother's identity and fears—her own psyche providing the 'stage' on which her mother's character was 'restored' and re-performed.

LGB set out to understand the nature of what she referred to as the 'totalised mind'. She recognized, in line with Deng Xiaoping's ideological turn toward mercantilism, that the age of totalitarian ideologies had largely been supplanted by the global totalisation of the spectacle economies of late-capitalism. LGB saw that information itself and the 'hyper-connectivity of learning systems' was now a crux issue in the new global information economy. Information technology was establishing the military and political foundations of an American 'new world order' and, while she did not wish to support American hegemony, she needed to access the information-stream there in order to advance her own theories. So, in 1977 she returned to MIT and the lab of the now older Minsky, intending to start again where her mother had left off. This was made possible by a special agreement between another US administration and the PRC government in 1977, under the direct patronage of Deng Xiaoping, who at this time was actively interested in rehabilitating Chiang's reputation.[8]

1977-1984: MIT

At MIT LGB focused her attention on a debate raging in cognitive science: whether the human brain functions through an underlying representational language or deep structural encoding, analogous to binary mathematics in digital cybernetic systems. This question fascinated LGB because the existence of universal encoding could perhaps provide an egalitarian base to all human cognition, and the issue of solidarity in China could then be shifted, from an over emphasis on the Party and its ideological desires to a larger notion of a human 'cognitive constitution'. Furthermore, such a condition could resolve the foreclosed universalisms of structuralism, and could address divergent post-structuralist critiques. In short, LGB (with some influence from Noam Chomsky's melding of linguistics and politics) was looking for a common cognitive ground for the species, an 'egalitarian cognitive membrane uniting humanity'. She later remarked:

Clearly I was looking for a paradox: a 'semiotic ground'—as oxymoronic as it sounds—that could be both arbitrary and structural; one that could not be exploited by a hegemonic power, could not be used to suppress or discriminate, and would not support reactionary essentialisms and eugenics.[9] A true modernist utopian, I was seeking the cognitive basis for a new 'commune humain'. (LGB, 1994:400)

We can speculate that LGB, always haunted by her father's 'betrayal' of her mother, was quixotically searching for a new cognitively-founded society, in which such betrayals would not have to occur.

To take one example from the period of her dalliance with various forms of cognitive universals, LGB proposed that what is popularly called 'consciousness' appears as a momentary and incessantly repeated meme that is continuously performed as a rapidly decaying mnemonic loop. It was an idea supported by the clinical studies of Eleanor Rosch and others on sequential parsing in the cerebral cortex and 'prototype' formation (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, E., 1991). They theorised that the periodicity of a percept's manifestation—recognition—decay in the cerebral cortex occurs in the temporal gap of <15-50 milleseconds>.

LGB saw links between Rosch's clinical studies and structuralist film theory, in particular Jean-Louis Baudry's essay, 'The Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus' (1974-5), that focused on the manner in which cinema 'produced subjectivity' ideologically through its representational effects. Two important such effects are the 'persistence of vision' and the 'phi-effect' ('phenomenon of apparent movement'), in which successive still-frames are read by the viewer as continuous movement. LGB thought that a notion of 'persistence through delay' [10] could account for 'the monovalence of temporal continuity [i.e. how we experience time as flowing in only one direction] and the appearance of

historical chronotypes [11] at the intersection of a priori structures and arbitrary cognitive agency' (LGB, 1994:212).

Proto-Ideology and the Mind

This problem of placing ideology in a cognitive economy remained one of the most stubborn dilemmas for LGB. She felt that Minsky did not adequately address the question of 'proto-ideological relations' and the 'directionality of dissemination' that would necessarily arise in any economy of agencies, whether at a social or synaptic level. 'What is it', she asked, 'that allows one 'expert system' to develop hegemony over others, until the mind is dominated by a 'singularity' (such as an obsessive fear or a particular 'intention')?' LGB felt that without a notion of 'polynemic propaganda' [12], current theories of intentionality and directionality in human cognitive systems could not be adequately accounted for.

LGB reasoned that if cognitive agencies processed information from raw signals, then the problematics and dynamics of ideology, belief, and propaganda must also find representation at a cognitive level. Suturing together a notion of intentionality from Eco's linguistics, Dawkins' theory of the 'meme', [13] and Schechner's 'restored behaviour', [14] she defined propaganda as 'an intentional dissemination of a meme involving two or more cognitive systems, or agencies'.

Propaganda is the reified (fetishised) re-performance of an interpellative moment, that is, the re-performance (or 'restoration') of the moment of an agent's autogenic recognition at a given degree of separation from power. Propaganda, then, is a repetition of autogenic recognition, the purpose of which is to reify or objectify identity, in such a way that a given 'identity' survives and continues to be propagated. (LGB, 1984:86)

LGB reasoned that if the problems of ideology were produced atomistically and in real time, as it were, through synaptic synergy, then the problematics of human discourses are not solely those of expression or communication between people. Rather, social discourse runs parallel to 'synaptic discourse'. To convince the 'Other at a synaptic level means the transmission and recognition of a given stimulus, a 'prototype' (Rosch), or an 'Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM)' (Lakoff) already present. In this reading, propaganda is not so much a means to indoctrinate or convince our fellow beings into adopting our beliefs, as it is the 'spectacularisation' of an encoding or patterning already stored or immanent in the brain—thereby finding its representations in ideology and identity.

Paranoiac Discourses and 'Hyper-Connectivity'

LGB was able to return to the problem of 'self-criticism' that had bedeviled her mother with these new theoretical insights. She saw self-criticism (*Sixiang Gounzuo*) as an interpellative device for instilling or empowering subjectivity that, when re-performed as a 'state practice' on a mass scale, resulted in uncontrollable feedback 'above the threshold', 'producing a state of collective

paranoia rather than conscientisation' (LGB, 2000:101). That is, when deployed as a means to maintain the status quo, as in China, or as a 'nationalist commodity' for the purpose of 'exculpating crimes committed', as in the United States, any form of self-critique was re-constituted as a sign swept up in a vortex of 'hyper-connectivity'.^[15] This was precisely the genesis of her mother's tragedy.

Beginning in the early 1980s, LGB was increasingly haunted by disturbing emotional episodes that appeared to be related to her youth, and to her mother's political purging and subsequent illness. Ever a believer in the power of the intellect to strategise and engineer the 'real', LGB believed that she could overcome these episodes through an analysis of them as an epistemic shift in cognition. She sought out theories of cognition that would help her reframe her fantasies as a form of performance—a 'theatre of agencies'. In 1981, LGB encountered the work of Kenneth M. Colby, author of *Artificial Paranoia* (1975), who had designed a computer program with an obsessive fear of the Mafia. But Colby's productive encoding of paranoia was hindered, LGB felt, by his limited knowledge of the subjective experience of paranoia. Colby ignored the 'hyper-connectivity' and group dynamics that LGB considered to be the defining characteristic of the condition. Colby's program, however, opened new avenues of inquiry for LGB, and led her to return to Lu Xun's fictions, 'Diary of a Madman' (1918), and 'Ah Q—The Real Story' (1921), and other modernist literatures to find templates for her analysis.

LGB subsequently theorised that, in modernity, the cultural reproduction of ideology, for example in works or art or literature, was 'fundamentally paranoiac' in that it presupposed a massively connected world that could no longer be understood or lived as a 'monovalent interval'. In LGB's assessment, the most coherent exemplar of this tendency in modern literature was to be found in Tolstoi's major novels.

It is the Tolstoian view of the world (rather than the perhaps more expected vision of Kafka, Poe or Dostoevsky or Lu Xun) that is quintessentially that of the paranoiac, because it is in his writings that we find the spatial extensions and hyper-connectivity of the paranoiac state most accurately described. In Tolstoi we find that fear is properly viewed as a surplus that restricts the 'ecstasy' and the productivity of the paranoiac's sensibility. In effect, fear is a control valve limiting the tendency of the human mind to model its internal structure on the infinitude of the world it perceives, by reductively constructing a bounded world, modeled on its own internal structures.

Tolstoi was remarkable for his ability to write without the constraints of inordinate fear and bi-polar swings of mood that dominated his personal life. He used his fear as a springboard to a rapturous vision of a massively connected world. (LGB, in interview with Langenbach, 3 May 2001)

For LGB, the fear experienced by the paranoiac is a 'realistic' response of an organism or cybernetic system to the possibility of dismemberment in a state of feedback above a destructive threshold. Politically, productive paranoiac discourses represent intuitions of diachronic and synchronic hyper-connectivity that can be truly mind-boggling in their scope. Such discourses are often considered to be threatening to status quo power relations, which leads governments to often rely on cleansed and monovalent histories and sciences to justify and legitimate their continued rule. This institutional fear factor may lead to the suppression of 'paranoiac polyvalence' in discourses of statehood. In an interview with the author in 2001, LGB stated:

Like the paranoiac, power-ensembles also tend to feel threatened by those subliminal messages found between the lines that non-paranoiaks simply never notice. These rhizomes of information lie between conventions and dogma, and make-up the anti-spectacle that conventions and dogmas are meant to dissimilate. It seems to me that in its most productive moments the modernist avant-garde constituted itself precisely through this sort of anti-spectacle.

So, disabling fear, resulting from the experience of 'paranoid polyvalence' was seen to be a fundamental problem shared by the modernist avant-garde and modernist power hegemonies; and it appeared to result from the limitations inherent in the 'feedback thresholds' of hyper-connective cognitive environments. Since 1997, purposely looking into areas of abject cultural production, LGB has hypothesised that paranoia could be productively addressed through the application of a post-Althusserian queer studies perspective of 'interpellation', expounded by such theorists as Judith Butler (1995, 1997), Allan Parker and Eve Sedgwick (1995). Their work opened interpellation to an embodied and sexualised rapture/rupture of subjectivity-subjection-subjugation. Interpellation in this context is the means by which agency autogenically identifies itself qua 'agent'. The moment of interpellation is quintessentially obscene, or, should we say, pornographic, in that what has hitherto been hidden from view is suddenly 'drawn out' and 'made 'graphic' in the public sphere' (Ibid.).

Re-Mapping Interpellation

Through 'queer theory', LGB became interested in identitarian eruptions of identity and began to study 'pornographic' stories about defining interpellative moments.[16] The gay coming-out story has become one such object of her analysis since 1999. In a recent volume of essays, *No Passing: Queering the Meme* (2002), LGB brings together many of the themes that characterise the last twenty years of her research, so I will quote at length:

Such stories of dramatic revelation involve an epiphany of 'obscene' self-recognition in which desire becomes the 'machine' that manufactures identity. The narrator [17] describes the sexual organ he is about to consume as 'standing hard and proud' (with resonances of militarist and

national ceremonies intact), while he himself takes a dialectical position in a drama of military or political defeat and submission, or of religious supplication: 'sinking to my knees'.

It is the moment of subjection/subjugation that gives rise also to the newly reflexive subject's paradoxically proud solidarity with a socially abject subculture. The sexual organ of the unnamed narrator-protagonist in this fiction is presumably also 'standing hard and proud' in the midst of the 'softness' of his submission to a previously denied or unrecognised object of desire. So, we have here a subject who 'discovers' himself as an agent in a hyper-connected economy of agents within the <15-50 millisecond> mnemonic gap, by observing the residual evidence of his own actions *ex post facto*.

If we accept the notion of Gestalt psychologist, Frederick (Fritz) Purlis, that 'embarrassment' is a revelation of 'secret joy', the story offers the narration of an autogenic revelation of rapture/rupture—a spontaneous self-recognition. It is here that the subjection inherent in a paranoid vision conflates with the rituals of interpellation, as in *Sixiang Goungzuo*.

Looking beyond this 'fiction' to the more inclusive cultural narratives at work, the issue is not whether there is a 'gay gene', nor whether an essential identity can be revealed through interpellative experience, because all such essentialist questions extend beyond the capability of our current scientific representations. We simply do not have sufficient genetic data on hand for such a determination to be sustainable at this time. It is in the vagaries and fictions of cultural representation—essentialism's collander—where our research must focus.

That is, we must ask whether there is a gay 'meme'. And if we posit its instantiation, we must then ask,

Is there a memetic motivation that we detect in the obscenity [18] of 'coming out' or in the recognition by the protagonist that he wants to imbibe the reproductive 'essence' that will have the magical effect of displacing (or doubling, i.e. propagating) his former identity with a new identity? (LGB, 2002:54)

When she re-read this text recently, LGB added,

How like the rapture of the cadre's sloughing off of a former ideological skin to show the 'real' identity of the individual revolutionary in solidarity beneath. This rupture of a performative encoding into daily life may lead us to a theory of cognitive performativity, that is, to the rapturous queering of the mind in a paranoid (hyper-connected) cognitive environment. (email communication, 19 March 2004)

This discussion is both revealing and troubling. While attempting to resolve theoretical problems that accompany the introduction of essentialist scientism into sociological analysis, LGB has problematically transferred onto Dawkin's 'meme' the burden of providing an explanation for both genetic predisposition and environmental influences. Could we not posit in any field this same sort of totalised spectral entity (the meme), upon which the burden of proof for any cognitive phenomena is then conveniently placed?

More valuable for this discussion is the opening of pornographic biography and fiction to cognitive, political and economic analysis, so that those 'covert' literatures of desire, usually (like propaganda) hidden in plain sight, may find their way also into the light of our analytical purview. The extended queering of Althusserian interpellation allows also for an approach to the issues of paranoia and solidarity that is both productive and elegant.

It is perhaps appropriate for this short profile of the work of LGB to be abruptly broken off, rather than neatly brought to a conclusion. We can tentatively say that the contribution of LGB and Chiang Mo-Jo's to the field of cognitive science lies in their consolidation of the cognitive and the ideological, the scientific and the poetic, the personal and political discourses of solitude/solidarity. LGB's theorisation of paranoia opens a way to reflect on these discursive amalgamations, nevertheless aware of the double indemnity in all 'fiction': representing massive connectivity on the one hand, and our prophylactic vertigo in the face of it on the other. In our efforts to interpret continuities *and* discontinuities, and to look between the lines for the connective tissue between events, phenomena, protocols, paradigms, disciplines, practices and cultures, we also find revealed our own theatre of self-recognition, self-criticism and self-revelation. Science and its method have today provided us a stage upon which the fictions of our collective and reflexive 'thought-work' can be performed as a 'theatre of agencies'.

Endnotes

[1] An earlier version of this article was written for a forum accompanying the exhibition, *Science Fictions* (2003), curated by Binghui Huangfu and Marian Pastor-Roces, at the Earl Lu Gallery of the Lasalle-SIA College of the Arts, Singapore, and appeared in the catalogue by that name (2004). It also reflects information from the video documentary, *The LGB Story: A Woman and Her Ideas*, Negotiated Settlements (1999).

[2] A paranoiac discourse is one that is massively connected to other disparate discourses including those that are unspoken, invisible, unwritten and unread. Hence, the hermeneutics of absence or the Hegelian 'negative ' (Hegel, 1952: §32) is important in its theorisation.

[3] Following their accession to power in 1959, the PAP government turned against the left, resulting in the arrest of many opposition politicians and intellectuals over the following decades, reaching a climax in 1987. This shift to the right in Singapore may have caused Chiang and Lan to forego pursuing Singapore citizenship for the young LGB.

[4] Chiang's research found this sort of synergy in cell groups, except in those where group intention was 'moulded' by the intrusion of an *idée fixe*. For a period of three or four years, the problem of the *idée fixe* in cognition itself became an *idée fixe* for Chiang, or, in her words, 'the destination of an obsessive return' (Chiang, 1999/1962:220). She suggested in her diaries from that period that the '*idée fixe*, which is generally stated as a singularity, tends to radically narrow the parameters of lateral thinking and problem-solving, producing a "fetishised" doubling of a centralized model of the ego, exterior to the body—as a kind of group *Doppelgänger*—thereby hindering the otherwise 'organic' development of any form of parallel cognition in a social group'. (Chiang, 1999/1962:224-36)

[5] In the creation of a hologram, a beam of 'coherent' light is split to produce two beams, one of which reflects off a given object. The two beams converge producing an 'interference pattern' on a light-sensitive plate that, when illuminated from the same position as the original laser, generates a 3-D image of the object. If coherence is maintained in the holographic sequence, interference produces enhanced information resolution. If coherence is lost, the information correspondingly degrades.

[6] It was through the study of interference patterns that Chiang arrived at the paradox that Althusserian 'interpellation' was indicative of this sort of productive interference and feedback. While the political aspect of Chiang's work on interpellation is certainly significant, it is a bit off-subject here, except in its implications for subject formation, which is considered at the end of this paper. For more on this see Chiang, 1999 (1962).

[7] These reports were declassified during the Clinton administration under the Freedom of Information Act, but, oddly, were re-classified by the George W. Bush administration (2002).

[8] State recuperation came too late for Chiang, who had committed suicide at home in 1976.

[9] LGB viewed most outcroppings of 'essentialism' or 'naturalisation' as 'ideological surplus', intended to describe the world in such a way as to support instrumentalist or pragmatic designs (LGB, 2000:345)

[10] Her wording of this theory suggests a reference to Duchamp's studies of randomness and delay in his 'standard stoppages' (1913-1914).

11 Bender and Wellbery describe 'chronotypes' as 'models or patterns' by which we continuously and repeatedly 'fabricate' or 'improvise' time at 'multiple individual, social, and cultural levels' from 'an already existing repertoire of cultural forms and natural phenomena'. In short, all templates of temporal phenomena are 'chronotypes'. The purpose of the term is to indicate that time is not only an observable phenomenon, but also a convention of representation (Bender and Wellbery, 1991:1-15)

[12] LGB refers here to Minsky's use of 'polyneme', that is, a mental agent that is engaged in the communication of long-term memory functions (the formation of what Minsky calls 'K-lines'), by sending simple signals to multiple agencies: 'It is merely a switch that turns on processes in other agencies, each of which has learned to respond in its own way.' Minsky gives the example of the word, 'apple' causing a polymenic response in the agencies that distinguish 'color' and 'shape' etc. (Minsky, 1985: 60 & 198).

[13] The term is taken from Richard Dawkin's *The Selfish Gene* (1976). The term 'meme', short for *mimene*, is derived from the root, *mimesis*, and refers to 'a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*' (Dawkins, 1976:192). Basically, a *meme* can be any cultural artifact, such as 'tunes, ideas, catch phrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches'.(Ibid., 192) In the manner that genes have 'biological advantages', *memes* have what could be called 'cultural advantages' and survive because of those advantages.

[14] LGB's proclivity for miscegenating concepts from widely divergent fields is one of the more fascinating aspects of her theorizing. She associates this tendency with her early studies in Beijing in constructivist film montage. In her notes she states, 'You could say that I am a filmmaker who captures with an empty camera.' (LGB, 2000:56)

[15] At MIT in the late 1970s, LGB found herself confronted by new socio-political conditions, and a corresponding change of emphasis in the American propaganda system. LGB noted that following the Vietnam War, U.S. propaganda began to mask policies with tropes of self-criticism, self-reflexivity and 'the confessional'. This was most disturbing, because it meant that, first, 'self-criticism' had been appropriated and commodified. It was now deployed in the service of the commodity spectacle. Even more problematically, the commodity fetishisation of self-criticism was capable of communicating *more effectively* than the political agency of *sixiang gounzuo*, whose dynamics it invoked.

America's public confession was made for export. Their confessional films became 'our' collective confession; their guilt was suddenly reconstituted as 'our' guilt, until, as we were told a few years ago, even their Independence Day was *our* Independence Day. Self-criticism was Ford-ised, automated, reified and re-packaged for global acceptance, not only by the government per se, but by a

corporate and cultural elite concerned with perpetuating American economic power.

[16] The term 'pornographic' derives from the late Greek *pornographos* 'writing about prostitutes', that is, writings that focus on the economies of sexual desire.

[17] In this extended essay (LGB, 2002:54), LGB offered the following example of this moment of interpellation in a fiction by the pseudonymous writer, 'The Savannah Kid':

'I don't know man, um, I'm not a queer', I said, as I was sinking to my knees in front of [...] his hard dick [...] standing proud. [...] Michael looked at me in the eyes and said, 'You really gonna do it?' I just nodded.

[....]

'Did he just swallow your load?' Michael said. I felt hot and must have been glowing with embarrassment at Michael's statement. I realised for the first time that I had just sucked off William with Jeff and Michael watching. I was now the school cock sucker.' ('The Savannah Kid', 9 January 2000)

[18] In this case, 'obscenity' refers to bringing the private or hidden object of desire into the public realm.

References

- Bender, J. and David E. Wellbery (eds). *Chronotypes: The Construction of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991)
- Bronstein, L. *Fragments of Life, Metaphysics and Art* (New York: Bond Wheelwright Co., 1953)
- Butler, J. 'Burning Acts: Injurious Speech', in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. A. Parker and E. K. Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995)
- . *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997)
- . *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- Chiang M.-J. Unpublished MS: research notes (1959) [Courtesy of

LGB]

- 'Coherence in Closed Systems: a holographic view of human society', unpublished paper, delivered at Conference on Systems and Cognition, Center for Cognitive Studies, Harvard University (1960)
- 'Threshold Analysis in "Limited Parameter" Social Systems', *Cognition Quarterly* 3.2 (1961)
- *Community Cognition: Reflections on 'Sixiang Gounzuo'* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1999 [1962])
- 'Patterns of Interpellation', ed. and trans. Ulyanov Kabakov *Soviet Studies in Social Cognition: A Source Book* (Moscow: Red Square Publishing, 1964)

Dawkins, R. *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: OUP, 1976)

Ellul, J. *Propaganda: the Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Knopf, 1965)

Goh Keng Swee. 'Economic Success through Cognitive Solidarity', *International Economics Review* 6.2 (1978)

Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: OUP, 1952 [1807])

Holm, David. 'Cognitive Solidarity against Itself: The Case of Chiang Mo-Jo', *Journal of Asian Studies* (1989)

Langenbach, Ray. 'The Performative Indoctrination Model (PIM)', in *3. Werkleitz Biennale: subfiction* (Vol. 2), ed. Thomas Munz (Werkleitz: Werkleitz Gesellschaft e.V., 1998)
(<http://www.werkleitz.de/sub-fiction/text/cat/langenbachE.html>)

Lan G.B. 'Propaganda and Cognitive Patterning', in Marcus Rexley (ed.) *Cognition and Its Discontents* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984)

LGB. *Notes 1* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990)

— *Notes 2* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994)

— *Notes 3* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000)

- . *No Passing: Queer Memes and Interpellated Selves* (Medford: Tufts University Press, 2002)
- Lu Xun. 'Diary of a Madman' and 'Ah Q—The Real Story', in *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990 [1918])
- Mao Zedong. *Five Essays on Philosophy* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1977)
- Minsky, M. 'A Framework for representing Knowledge', in *Mind Design II: Philosophy, Psychology, Artificial Intelligence*. ed. John Haugeland (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997 [1974])
- . *The Society of Mind* (London: Heinemann, 1986 [1985])
- National Reconnaissance Office, Office of the Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; Counterintelligence (1967), *United States Government Department of State: De-Classified Files 1957-1966*. Files # 1959/SD 51143; NRO 55P-40 n. iii; DDCI 1958 P24 5586; CI 10-40ap
- Parker, A. and E. K. Sedgwick. 'Introduction: Performativity and Performance', in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. A. Parker and E. K. Sedgwick. (New York: Routledge, 1995)
- Rexall, D. 'Electra's Disimulation: LGB and Chiang Mo-Jo: A Study in Mother-Daughter Transference', *Psychology & History* 12.3 (1990)
- Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, E. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science & Human Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. 1991)
- The Savannah Kid. 'Another Cocksucker in the Midst', (January 2000
<http://www.alt.sex.stories.gay.moderated>.
- Zhao Kunpo and Yu Jianping. *Zhongguo geming genjudi anli xuan (Famous Legal Cases from China's Revolutionary Base Areas)*(Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1984)
- Zhong Yuan Po. *Cognitive Solidarity in the Cultural Revolution* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980)