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## untitled 3 [speaking loudly, poem]

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I had problems even with my classes.

*But when you were offered the Fulbright you were given an opportunity to come to America. What did you expect to find when you got here?*

That essential myth of America which is a creation of central Europe.

When I came here, almost unconsciously the first great trip that we took was to California. It wasn't just to see San Francisco and Los Angeles, but to scout out every canyon and desert in between. We drove thousands of miles all-in-all. I had a sense that I needed to go as far west as I could. The end of the trip was a great disappointment; a very cold Pacific Ocean. I didn't make it to Hawaii.

*If your myth of the American continent was somehow diluted by your coming here, perhaps now you are reconsidering the myths about American freedoms and intellectual ideologies.*

I come from a skeptical culture, one with an active underground and totally censored — every word, every passage that you publish involves some dickering, a rough battle with the censors and your own self-censorship. In this post-modern western world of total eclecticism you can publish anything and yet sometimes you wonder if what you publish is significant or if it is just lost in a sea of countless other things that are going on. In my culture the unsaid occupies vast territories and sends, like Freud's subconscious, cryptic messages to the surface. Whatever is said is only the tip of the iceberg. Here somehow the iceberg is reversed — the bottom looms at the surface and the little tip is hidden deep in the sea. There is a problem in adjusting to a culture of many tendencies, over-rich and contradictory manifestations; the post-modernism that Leotard calls "the degree zero" of culture because the various trends somehow cancel each other.

*You just described what I have come to call the western "marshland" that has replaced Eliot's "wasteland" through the steadily increasing downpour of ideas generated by an atmosphere of self-fulfillment and self-contemplation. Everyone's answer is different and everyone has an answer. Sometimes I wonder if there is any reason to get mired in it.*

I argue with friends around here who sit back and wait for so-called "fads" to vanish. I've been telling them that they may

end up wasting their entire professional lives waiting for the fads to disappear. The "post-structuralist" fad, people like Barthes and Derrida and Heidegger have been with us for quite a while. You can't waste your life waiting for these people to disappear. I am satisfied to do my little work on the people I think are important in literature and in criticism hoping and, in fact, knowing that they will stay important.

*From a society of non-self-expression to a society of over-expression, here you find yourself. Culture shock notwithstanding, it seems as though you are on the fringe, sort of surveying the boundaries of your discipline.*

I think of myself in a double position; the typical position of the exile, *homo duplex*. I am the self-exile who did not defect but chose to stay on to transplant something, bring out something from my culture. What I am also doing is allowing my new culture to absorb me. Ideally, the exile should produce as much as possible in the interregnum because once

speaking loudly  
three in conversation

a child, a tree, a gold crayon.

— michael swanson

