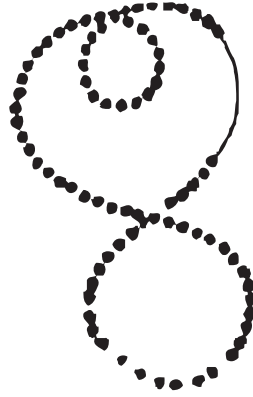


¹ Tout et rien en pelemele.

Wandering, straying and losing one's way in Territorium Tee
*On ordered delirium and organized trance*¹

Ann Demeester



i. Preamble: on the absence of the arbitrary

Tee – TEE – EE – E

E is the letter of light and its number is seventy, according to Pythagorean mysticism. Arthur Rimbaud associated vowels with colours, linking E with the colour white and “the glaciers insolence”. Ernst Jünger in ‘Lob der Vokale’ states that E has a shimmering quality, of vapours and tents.

This trail of associations comes from the curious patchwork book ‘Encyclopedia of Snow’, the debut novel by Sarah Emily Miano – pastry cook, tourist guide, bus driver and follower of the unsurpassed fiction writer W.G. Sebald. It is a well-known fact that the Inuit of West Greenland have some 50 words at their disposal to describe snow, hail and ice and their various manifestations. Their polysynthetic language furthermore allows them to express a large variety of concepts and nuances with a single word. Miano takes this as the starting point for an effervescent novel that brings together a wide range of descriptions, historical facts and straight fiction, all related to the phenomenon of snow. The author ‘analyses’ her subject by gathering relevant material from a wide range of sources – everything from poetry to science – and assembling it within a colourful montage. She favours an oblique approach, continuously circling around the material, accumulating stories rather than explaining the subject at hand.

² From ‘Volume A Rhoades Referenz’, edited by Eva Meyer-Hermann, Oktagon Verlag, Cologne, 1998.

³ From the magazine ‘la revue Le Philaou Thibaou’, July 1921.

This strategy is similar to that of the editors of ‘Volume A Rhoades Referenz’, an attempt by curator Eva-Meyer Hermann and her team to fathom the extremely complex, metaphorical work of Jason Rhoades. To this end, they have compiled a mass of philosophical concepts, everyday notions and images that play key roles in the thinking of the artist. The unravelling of Rhoades’ work into a selection of idiosyncratically formulated ideas and phrases does not, however, bring about enlightenment, but rather results in even more delicious confusion. The book is a cyclone of references and associations, in which the reader wanders about as if in a semiotic *snowstorm*. The rigid structure that the book follows – the alphabetical arrangement is strictly adhered to – belies its complete failure to actually shed light on its subject.

Picabia, Francis: Artist. Born Paris, 1879, died 1953. French painter and writer Picabia consistently and programmatically tried to evade **categorization**. In 1914 moves to New York where he works with Marcel Duchamp and other artists. In 1916 returns to Europe and, in 1920, joins the **Surrealists**. Beginning in the mid 1920s he again starts painting in a representational style, producing consciously banal images, and does not return to abstract painting until the 1940s. An enthusiastic car lover, Picabia owned a large collection of automobiles – the ‘160 cars of Picabia’ that find their way into Jason Rhoades’ CAR PROJECTS.³

Notre tête est ronde pour permettre à la pensée de changer de direction.
Francis Picabia, 1921³

2. “The Meaning of Everything”: On typology, classification and categorization

Dictionary, noun, a malevolent literary device for cramping the growth of language and making it hard and inelastic. The present dictionary however is one of the most useful works that its author, Dr. John Satan, has ever produced. It is designed to be a compendium of everything that is known up to the date of its completion, and will drive a screw, repair a red wagon or apply for a divorce. It is a good substitute for measles, and will make rats come out of their holes to die. It is a dead shot for worms and children cry for it.

Ambrose Pierce,
The enlarged Devil's
dictionary⁴

The Meaning of Everything: the inimitable title of a hefty volume in which author Simon Winchester traces the genesis of the Oxford English Dictionary. It could just as well be the masterful title of a voluminous tome subjecting the world as we know it to an ambitious analysis, down to the last detail. An exhaustive inventory of all available knowledge regarding each conceivable phenomenon, be it actual or intellectual. It is difficult to imagine such a monstrous encyclopaedia in this day and age. At the time of Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, however, the 'knowledge of the world' seemed manageable enough to be compiled within a single publication – albeit one that consisted of several volumes. Today, the 18th-century *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, which includes contributions by great thinkers such as Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Montesquieu, is chiefly appreciated as a product of Enlightenment thought and as an expression of the 'progressive' ideas that preceded the French Revolution.⁵

⁴ Ambrose Pierce, 'The enlarged Devil's dictionary', edited by E.J. Hopkins, The Penguin American Library, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1967, p. 4.

⁵ Attempts to set down 'universal knowledge' go back as far as Aristotle and Pliny the Elder. In the Middle Ages, this tradition was continued by Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologiae*, a curious mixture of fact and legend, and the 13th-century compendiums of Vincent de Beauvais, Roger Bacon and Brunetto Latini. The modern type of encyclopedia—with alphabetical arrangement and frequently with bibliographies—is usually said to have been established by John Harris in his *Lexicon technicum* (1704). From www.bartleby.com, the digital version of the Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition, 2004.

⁶ Oddly enough in our time Diderot is mainly viewed as an anti-establishment thinker who resisted the temptation of applying a logical system to the world, a result of his suspicion of "dogmatic systems, without a sense of the diversity and complexity of the world", see also 'Tegen de keer. Zijn waar je niet bent' in the magazine *Vrij Nederland*, 12 June 2004, p. 56.

⁷ Louise van Swaaïj and Jean Klare, 'ZakAtlas van de belevingswereld', Volcano Publishers, Almere, 2001.

⁸ See also the recent special issue of the *Archis* architectural magazine, 'Archis is atlas' (#2, 2004), which explores the human urge to map places, histories, interactions, landscapes, relationships, etc.

Few thinkers today would even consider attempting, like their predecessors the Encyclopédists, to bring together all (universal) knowledge within the covers of a printed encyclopaedia. Actually undertaking such a project would betray a striking degree of intellectual masochism, as well as a faulty sense of reality. Nonetheless, the almost compulsive human urge to 'map' reality is still going strong. In order to comprehend the things around us we 'order' and schematise them using a variety of classic grading and interpretational systems.⁶

Lexicons
Compendia
Dictionaries
Lists
Charts
Almanacs
Atlases
Statistics
Virtual Data Models
Datascapes
Diagrams
Digital Databases
etc...

Occasionally one comes across variants of these conventional formats, ranging from the playful 'life journey guide' written by Louise van Swaaïj and Jean Klare, which provides a survey of human thoughts and experiences,⁷ to the publication 'The New World', in which Rem Koolhaas and OMA document and analyse '30 spaces for the 21st century'.⁸

Like many people, I tend to employ similar organisational strategies when dealing with the work of an artist I admire. If this work furthermore presents a fusion of miscellaneous (visual and semantic) elements and registers, it becomes even more appealing to compile a kind of extended dictionary, describing the themes and issues that act as leitmotifs in the multifaceted oeuvre of the artist. To get a grip on it. It becomes particularly attractive when confronted with Jennifer Tee's kaleidoscopic work, in which references to Mongolian folklore, cream pies, Chinese prayer rituals and the religious practices of Brazilian Candomblé cultists are seemingly casually combined with references to the work of Roberto Burle Marx, Andre Cadere, Moholy-Nagy, Hélio Oiticica, Öyvind Fahlström, Hakim Bey, Douanier Rousseau, Grandville, André Breton and Walter Benjamin. Tee creates bifurcating constellations of meaning, conglomerates of colourful objects, drawings and video images that are linked together by a jumble of associations. These thematic connections exist primarily in Tee's own mind and are not provided with further information, unless in a form that is as rich, multifarious and charmingly cryptic as the work itself. A good example is the map of the Teean experience that designers Richard Niessen and Harmen Liemburg realized for Tee's solo exhibition 'In Air I Presume. The non-logical hunt for Toverknal' in Sittard's Museum Het Domein. More than just a depiction of the artist's mental world, this map works as a new expansion of Tee's ever-growing multiverse.

One could consider making a written equivalent of this 'map', a text that sheds light on the patterns of meaning that form the skeleton of Tee's work. Such a guide would allow the viewer to find his bearings in the Land of Tee, make his way through using a number of catchwords and central concepts. After all, to all appearances Tee's works seem to be written in a kind of code of which the cipher has been lost, a child's secret language which only it can understand. Each installation seems to offer a new stew of references, a curious medley of myth and magic. A tissue of facts embroidered with legend, of which it is almost impossible to untangle the logic.

In a manual like this, a number of alphabetically ordered catchwords and concepts – see the Rhoades Referenz – would help to unravel and decode the polymorphous reality of Tee's work, opening up her individual mythology⁹ for the reader's appreciation.

⁹ This phrase was first used by Harald Szeemann on the occasion of an exhibition by Etienne-Martin in Kunsthalle Bern (1963). It was 'officially presented' during Documenta 5 (1972) as a collective denomination for artistic expressions that went without a name in the early 70s because they did not fit within the present typology. Szeeman used the term to refer to "subjective communications of artistic lone wolves dealing with their existential experiences". In doing so, Szeeman indicated a loosely delineated mental space in which individual artists posit signs and signals that have meaning in their own world. According to Szeemann, Individual Mythologies are characterized by an antirationalistic attitude (a reaction to the theoretical and analytical operations of conceptual art) and confront the world at large with visual manifestations that function as a reality in itself. They merge the collective oral system of traditional myth with the strictly personal experience level of the individual. See Harald Kimpel in 'Dumonts Begrifflexicon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst', Dumont, Cologne, 2002, p. 120.

¹⁰ 'Art et Esthétique' is part of the Cahiers, the collection of notes penned by Valéry from 1894 until his death in 1945. The underlying quote is from the translation of 'Art et Esthétique', as included in the Dutch anthology 'De macht van de Afwezigheid' (translated by Maarten van Buuren, Historische Uitgeverij, Amsterdam 2004), which also comprises the translations of the 'Poétique' and 'Mémoire' sections of the Cahiers.

¹¹ Butterflies are difficult to catch, and those who finally manage to literally pin them down soon discover that these insects only appeal to one's imagination in glorious flight.

¹² See note 10

Each beautiful work of art is a closed object. Wordlessly radiant.
Paul Valéry¹⁰

Apart from the practical consideration that such a 'source book' would take months, perhaps even years to make, there are other, more 'ideological' reasons for refraining from such a project. After all, not being able to comprehend the whole, to fully grasp the meaning of the piece before you, is an essential element of the appreciation of Tee's work. As artist Steve McQueen put it during an improvised speech in the Amsterdam exhibition space De Appel, 'Art is like catching butterflies',¹¹ and this is especially true of Tee's work, which functions as a microcosm in which only her own laws apply. The work resists further semiotic vivisection. It is unsteady and temperamental, showing an extreme fluency in thinking (everything leads to something else) and a constant flux and reflux of volatile ideas. Like the artists that Harald Szeemann grouped together in Documenta 5 under the phrase 'Individuelle Mythologien' - people like Paul Thek, Michael Buthe, James Lee Byars and Joseph Beuys – Tee employs sign systems that are not based on agreements between the artist and the audience. She formulates an idiosyncratic visual language, whose lack of conventional legibility makes it only partially accessible for the viewer. This 'flawed' communication process conjures up a kind of Verratselung; the work becomes mysterious and to a degree indecipherable. After all, Tee is not so much concerned with representation as she is with presence.

Even if a work of art is radiant and wonderfully beautiful, it remains a wonder, something obscure. Something beautiful is always obscure. The wonderful as such is unexplainable.
Paul Valéry¹²

3. Les pétrifiantes coïncidences¹³

It may seem somewhat outdated to refer to a writer like Valéry, who states that beautiful works of art are as mysterious and rounded as a pebble, their essence impossible to reduce to common language. Within the context of Jennifer Tee's work, however, Valéry's thoughts are of particular relevance. If one wants to subject Tee's work to an intense scrutiny and simultaneously preserve the 'unspeakable' element that is contained within, one has to attempt a style of writing that is compatible with the basic premises of her work. Tee's work is difficult to capture in a 'normal', linear text. It is more easily evoked within a semi-absurd, associative, non-electronic, printed 'hypertext' that follows a 'prelogical' structure and bounds in every direction.

Therefore, the following text is the result of a contemporary variation on the Surrealist method of *cadavre-exquis*. The 'exquisite corpse' was one of the game strategies employed by Tangy, Miró, Man Ray and their associates to explore the 'mysticism of chance', resulting in a kind of collective collages of words and/or images. The participant wrote a sentence or drew an image on a piece of paper, folded it and handed it to the next player. This person, not having seen what was marked on the paper, added his own contribution. The end result was often a bizarre sketch of a hybrid creature or a nonsensical, vaguely poetic text along the lines of "Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau".¹⁴

¹³ The phrase that André Breton used to define the inexplicable workings of chance in his novel 'Nadja'.

¹⁴ "Dada & Surrealist Art," published by William S. Rubin, Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1968

¹⁵ In the artist's statement 'Take Care of the World', 1975

¹⁶ David Foster Wallace, A supposedly fun thing I'll never do again, Essays and Arguments, Little, Brown and Company, Boston—New York—London, 1997, p 146.

Art — Consider art as a way of experiencing a fusion of 'pleasure' and 'insight'. Reach this by impurity, or multiplicity of levels, rather than by reduction.
Öyvind Fahlström¹⁵

A few weeks ago, Jennifer Tee handed me an unusual package – a series of minute objects, a stack of xeroxed texts, some polychrome drawings and badly printed photographs, all tucked away in a textile folder with the legend 'Ordem e Progresso', the official motto of the Brazilian nation. It turned out to be a surprisingly consistent collection of text and images, which I have used as a starting point for the following text, a patchwork of thoughts, considerations and comments that range from well-founded to far-fetched. This text should in fact be considered infinite, without conclusion, with a start but no clear finish.

3. Trail of Trivia Tidbits, or a suc- cession of inter- esting banalities¹⁶

The first item I retrieve from Tee's 'goodie-box' is a tiny, fragile lilac coffin. It contains silver-coated bridal sweets and a collection of (geofictional) maps. The same coffin, embellished with a number of simple decorative elements in addition to the crucifix on its lid, can be seen on a picture of Tee's studio in 2001. Here it lies with other ritual objects and knickknacks on an improvised altar that seems to refer to Candomblé – a conglomerate of religious practices for which the artist has shown a marked interest. The African deities that are worshipped in this syncretic Brazilian cult are often linked to specific Catholic saints, and occasionally one comes across crucifixes in Candomblé temples. In Western iconography, the coffin, besides being an explicit reference to human mortality, also serves as a symbol of the cardinal virtue of Prudentia.¹⁷ In the Flemish region where I come from, bridal sweets – chocolate or almonds that have been coated with a layer of sugar icing – are given to the guests that come to see a mother and her newborn baby. It seems evident that this object refers to the primal counterparts of life and death, beginning and end, alpha and omega.

Inside the coffin I find - in addition to a Debordian psychogeographic diagram, a cut-out from an 'ordinary' map of Brazil and a lay-out of the village Kejara¹⁸ - Madeleine de Scudéry's 'Carte de Tendre'. In her novel *Clélie*, this 17th-century Parisian author describes the 'Land of Love', which takes on the form of the imaginary country of Tender. This 'Nation of Amor' is located on the shores of the Sea of Concern, and is crossed by the rivers Acknowledgement, Affection and Respect. Its cities and towns include places like Sweet Letters and Lasting Friendship, as well as less hospitable locales like Infidelity and Lake Indifference. The printer who first published Madame de Scudéry's work added a copper engraving to illustrate her description of Tendre, thus becoming the first to indulge in 'gallant geography'; the geographical representation of the world of love. An unusual successor to this map is the richly decorated 18th-century fantasy map of Love as a battlefield, drawn by the recognized cartographer Matthias Seuter from Augsburg, known from publications like *Accurata Utopiae Tabula Das is Der Neu-Entdecken Schalck-Welt, oder des so oft benannten, und doch nie erkannten, Schlaraffenlandes*, a depiction of the German conception of Cockaigne – the Land of Plenty – from around 1730.

Seutters' *Reich der Liebe* is a threatening place of conflicts and perils. The unwary traveller who dares to enter this land is soon immersed in the violent clashes between the men, who have entrenched themselves in a stronghold near the Frozen Sea, and the women who attack using languorous gazes and other temptations.¹⁹ No one leaves Seutter's Land of Love unaffected. One either falls prey to the rigours of carnality or becomes the victim of an *amour fou*, obsessive love.

¹⁷ Prudence (Lat. Prudentia), wisdom in the sense of 'common sense', is one of the four Cardinal Virtues, together with Justice, Fortitude and Temperance. Prudence is personified by a woman with a snake and a mirror. The snake derives from Matthew, 10:16, 'be ye therefore wise as serpents'. The mirror is an addition from the late Middle Ages, indicating that the person is able to see herself as she truly is. Prudence is also known to occasionally carry a compass (her meticulous judgement), a sieve, a book or a coffin. From James Hall, Hall's Iconografisch handboek: onderwerpen, symbolen en motieven in de beeldende kunst, Dutch translation by Theo Veenhof, Primavera Pers, Leiden, 1992, p 364

¹⁸ The results of a search for Kejara on Google are rather meagre: 1. The organic restaurant and cultural centre Kejara's Bridge in Michigan – the owners claim that the name derives from the Irish mythological figure Kejara, and 2. The Kejara system, a Malaysian system of penalty points for traffic offenders.

¹⁹ For a description refer to the exhibition Cartographical Curiosities, held in the Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, April-July 1998.

Obsessive Love is one of the countless themes touched on by Hakim Bey in the series of essays, analyses and textual musings that Jennifer Tee read and reread over the last few months. The poly-intellectual Bey – a kind of Rushdie on speed, a derailed academic and avant-garde poet-philosopher thrown in one – combines a thorough knowledge of Western literature and philosophy and Oriental systems of belief with a keen interest in subcultures, speculative physics, mythology, mysteries and magic. The topics dwelt on by this 'goofy Sufi' include the Evil Eye, the Situationists, John Henry Mackay's Individualist Anarchism, the cosmological theories of Charles Fourier, the beliefs of the Kurdish Yezidis or devil-worshippers, the texts of Homer, the similarities between Rumi and Dante and the modern-day application of the 19th-century system of Chinese Tongs or secret societies. In the aforementioned text, Bey analyses the phenomenon of 'romantic love' as it presents itself in the Islamic and Christian tradition. 'Romantic love' is based on unfulfilled desire, suppressed sensuality, on separation rather than union. Bey traces the development of the syndrome and its various manifestations back through the centuries (from Ibn Hazm to Goethe, Byron to Breton) and concludes: "I myself have been unable to sublimate desire in a context of 'hopeless obsession' without falling into misery; whereas happiness seems to rise from the 'giving up' of all false chivalry and self-denying dandyism in favor of more 'pagan' and 'convivial' modes of love. Still, it must be admitted that both 'separation' and 'union' are 'non-ordinary' states of consciousness. Intense obsessive longing constitutes a 'mystical' state, which only needs a trace of religion to crystallize as full-blown neoplatonic ecstasy."

The spiritual and mystical potential of obsessive desire is one of the inarticulate themes of André Breton's (autobiographic) novel *Nadja*, which is included on Tee's reading list. In this trilogy, Breton traces his 9-day affair with the enigmatic *Nadja*, as well as dwelling on his subsequent affair with Susanne Musard. After a chance encounter with the luscious *Nadja* – a capricious, attractive and eccentric woman with a lively imagination that roams through both the streets of modern-day Paris and the back alleys of her own mind – Breton falls deeply in love with her. Initially he is charmed by her spontaneity and unpredictability, her way of life which is marked by the fulfilment of sudden desires and responses to 'eventualities'. *Nadja* is la personne surrealiste par excellence; someone who "escapes the confines of reason" in order to gain access to a different reality. She encourages Breton to immerse himself in the peculiarities of their shared imagination. It doesn't take long however, before the author starts to question the authenticity of their relationship. Fascination is replaced by irritation. His beloved turns out to be singularly intangible and incomprehensible, "on me m'atteint pas", as she herself says; 'I am not within reach'. Breton eventually finds solace with the more 'attainable' Suzanne Musard.

Though it proves impossible for Breton to grasp the phenomenon that is *Nadja*, the reader of his novel remains even more dumbfounded. Although we are aware that the figure of *Nadja* is based on both a real and a fictional character, it seems as if she is nothing more than one of Breton's phantasms, a chimera. *Nadja* refuses to disclose her real name, calling herself "Nadja, because in Russian it is the beginning of the word hope and it is merely a beginning." She describes herself as a lost soul, a sphinx, a siren, a fairy. The information on her life is sparse – she has a daughter, struggles with her health and has dealt in narcotics for a while. We have to deduce most of what we know of her from Breton's observations: the things she says, the ten drawings she made which are included in the book, the strange photos of places, objects, paintings, people and sculptures that dot the text. Breton's agony of doubt is infectious - "Qui est la vraie *Nadja*?" For both author and reader, *Nadja* is "un cryptogramme à déchiffrer."

Thanks to its neutral connotations, Bey would be an ideal pseudonym, were it not for the illustrious figure of **Khalil Bey**. This was the name adopted by the flamboyant 19th-century Ottoman diplomat Halil Sherif Pacha, an Egyptian aristocrat turned world citizen who alternately resided in Cairo, Istanbul, St Petersburg, Athens, Vienna and Paris. Halil Bey was said to be rich, generous and extravagant, of small stature but elegantly attired. He had eye troubles and wore a beard. Bey inherited one of Napoleon's mistresses, Jeanne de la Tourbe, and his circle of friends included greats like Sainte-Beuve and Offenbach. He was particularly well-known as a collector of contemporary painting, which is why Western (art) historians like Roderick H. Davidson, Francis Haskell and Michèle Haddad have devoted several voluminous studies to him. But despite their efforts, they have not really succeeded in painting a sharp portrait of the mysterious Bey. Haddad even admits that he never really managed to get through to his subject, and that the man presented to the reader is, like Breton's Nadja, essentially a 'textual construction'.²⁰

The same seems to apply for **Hakim Bey**. Despite the fact that he is obviously not a fictional character, there is little known of the man behind the *nom de plume*, Peter Lamborn Wilson. This lack of biographical data can lead to all manner of speculation. The name 'Bey' is not a regular surname, but a title given in the Ottoman Empire until 1394. It was used among Turkish peoples to indicate the rulers of small tribal groups, the members of ruling families and important officials. Under the Ottoman Empire a bey was the governor of a province, and in Tunis after 1705 the title became hereditary for the country's sovereign. Later 'Bey' became a general title of respect in the Turkish, the common equivalent of the English 'Mr'.²⁰

Bey is accorded a place in Western art history because he is assumed to have commissioned Courbet's controversial canvas 'L'Origine du Monde' – which was in the private collection of Lacan for some time and since 1995 can be found in Paris' Musée d'Orsay. The ambassador's spectacular collection included a number of other masterpieces. For example, Bey acquired Ingres' 'Le Bain Turc' (1862) for his collection, as well as, two years later, Courbet's 'Les Dormeuses'. 'The Sleepers' can be considered a modern counterpart to Ingres' harem image, as the painting eliminates all typical 'oriental' paraphernalia, while preserving the lesbo-erotic undertones. According to tradition, Bey hung the two works side by side, underlining the contrasts between the two images. It seems as if in doing so Bey indirectly (and unconsciously) wanted to correct the image of the eastern female as established in the Western mind. As Courbet's painting shows, the sensual lethargy and languorous passivity traditionally associated with the 'Oriental Woman' (often brought in connection with passion, animalism and illiteracy), is not restricted to her alone.

²⁰ See <http://www.britannica.com/>

²¹ Michèle Haddad, 'Khalil-Bey: Essai sur l'Art', Editions de l'Amateurs, Paris, 2000, 185 p. and Enis Batur, 'LA POMME Une tentative de roman sur les techniques narratives', Actes Sud 2001.

²² Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts, 'Orientalism's interlocutors – painting, architecture and photography', Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2002, 226 p.

²³ Edward Said, Orientalism, Vintage Books, New York, 1994 (first edition 1979)

²⁴ Cok van der Voort, 'Marco Polo in drievoud', an essay published in Armada. Tijdschrift voor Wereldliteratuur, nr 143, 2000, p 65.

²⁵ According to cultural anthropologist and ethnographer Claude Lévi-Strauss, there is a remarkable parallel between the practices of the Caduveo and Lewis Carroll's fantasy world. These indigenous knights resembled the figures on Western playing cards, as can be gathered from their clothing. They had kings and queens, and, like the royalty in 'Alice in Wonderland', these took to playing with the severed heads brought back by the warriors from their campaigns. From Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Het Trieste der Tropen' (a Dutch translation of Tristes Tropiques, 1955), Sun, Amsterdam, 1985, p. 168.

In this respect Bey seems to act as one of the 'mediators' between East and West, as described by art historians Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts.²² They point out that the interdisciplinary field of postcolonial studies has seen a shift in recent years with respect to the study of the phenomenon of Orientalism. This term was introduced in the late '70s by the Palestinian thinker Edward Said, another of Tee's heroes.²³ In general, Said stated that the European image of the East was warped and coloured by the West's own preoccupations and preconceptions, fears and desires. The Orient, as portrayed in the work of 19th-century writers like Flaubert and painters like Ingres, is an artificial construction that does not correspond with any real situation at the time. It served as an instrument for political oppression in the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The 'Oriental' as type was a kind of projection of Western fantasies concerning the 'other': 'how much of any view of another people or country lies in the eye of the beholder?'²⁴ Beaulieu, Roberts cum suis have adjusted the classic Saidean model, pointing out that the stereotypical image of the Orient is a product of 'cross-cultural dialogue and exchange'. Even at the height of the European territorial imperialism, one could see 'counter-narratives' developing that provided room for the suppressed voice of the Oriental. Intermediaries like Bey played an important role in correcting the highly exoticised image of the East.

Nonetheless, **exoticism** remains a phenomenon that is not limited to a fascination for the 'strange' in the so-called East, which comprises a vast area stretching from North Africa to Japan, nor to a period such as the nineteenth century. We only have to think of the works brought together by the Brazilian businessman Ricardo Brennand, a passionate collector of the manuscripts, paintings and documents that survive from the stay of Dutch 17th-century writers and artists in the former Portuguese colony. These valuable items stem from the period between 1630 and 1654, when the 'Hollanders' occupied an area around the town of Recife. Recent studies show that painters like Post did not portray the Brazilian countryside as a luscious South American landscape but rather as a kind of variant of the Dutch polders. Apparently Post did not travel to South American to discover the 'other', but rather sought out the 'familiar' in the 'exotic', 'sameness' in 'difference'. Of a different order is the exoticism of Marco Polo. We need only consider his wonderful work The Description of the World, which the Venetian merchant dictated to his fellow prisoner Rustichello during a stay in prison in 1298. This written account of Polo's travels throughout the vast empire of the Mongol warlord and Chinese emperor Kublai Khan is a curious hybrid of *fairytale book* and *scientific treatise*. It combines Polo's own observations with descriptions that he took from existing merchant's books and traditions, leading some experts to believe Polo never actually set foot in China. In this case the whole journal would be the result of ambitious armchair travelling.²⁴

This *travelling in the imagination* is another activity that Jennifer Tee is more than familiar with. Like other artists that have a penchant for the 'wonders of the unknown world', incorporating elements from various cultures and traditions in their work, Tee sets a process of fictionalisation in motion. Facts and details from folklore and ethnography are channeled through the turbines of the artistic imagination and are coloured in and made unrecognisable in the process. Incompatible elements are moulded in a new form and system. When Tee processes references to the rituals of the cult of Candomblé, details of the Taoist liturgy and the practices of the Brazilian Caduveo people in her installations, mixing them with influences and elements from her own environment, she is basically creating another, parallel world that works according to its own laws. A world as imaginary as the lands described in the works of Lewis Carroll (Alice in Wonderland)²⁵, Samuel Butler (Erewhon) and Jonathan Swift (Gulliver's Travels). It comes as no surprise that the artist is also intrigued and inspired by the work of Grandville.

Hahbelle's balloon trip could well be the perfect metaphor for the eternal human desire to discover 'unknown worlds'. More than merely crossing a physical border, this desire involves the conquering of a reality that is both alien and transcendent, of discovering a situation whose secrets we have not yet delved, appropriated and distributed. It constitutes the adventure of the mind. From this viewpoint, any kind of 'exoticism' – essentially the longing for the 'other' and the 'elsewhere' – is at the same time a longing for our own 'inner jungle' - the element of the 'wild' and 'unknown' within ourselves that eludes definition - our dark instincts and secret yearnings.

Ignace Isidore Gérard was born 15 September 1803 in the French town of Nancy and died on 17 March 1847 in Vanves near Paris. Working under the pseudonym J.J. Grandville, Gérard was to become one of France's most celebrated caricaturists, his satirical drawings in great demand with a wide audience. In addition, Grandville illustrated Lafontaine's 'Fables' (1838), Swift's 'Voyages de Gulliver' (1838), Defoe's 'Aventures de Robinson Crusoe' (1840) and Chevalier's 'Don Quichotte de la manche' (1848). His most unusual book is without a doubt 'Un autre monde' (1844), which Tee used as the basis for her design for the 'chandelier piece' in São Paulo. Grandville wrote the text himself under the pen name of Taxile Delord and provided the curious drawings that illustrate the story. Delord alias Grandville alias Gérard describes an alienating 'futuristic' universe in which anthropomorphous animals and human machines have incredible adventures. One of the protagonists is the bizarre Hahbelle, who leaves the earth by means of a balloon and goes on to view it from a bird's-eye view: "muni de son album et de ses crayons, Hahbelle ouvrit un ballon de poche, l'insuffla, puis s'éleva dans l'espace bien au-dessus des considérations et des chemins humaines".

*Taken to a point in time
(someplace) | taken to a point
in space (sometime) | taken
to another point (somehow)*
Lawrence Weiner, 1991

²⁶ A term coined by Claude Lévi-Strauss. In Lévi-Strauss' estimation, so-called wild thinking – magic, bricolage (tinkering), myth - is not so much the antithesis of modern Western scientific thought, as it is a parallel phenomenon: both types of thinking translate sensory impressions into intellectual concepts, and both give meaning to their respective cultures. Science leads to the accumulation of knowledge and produces technological applications. The results of magic cannot be compared to this, but magic fulfils much the same role within a particular culture. As 'wild thinking' is so much more ancient than scientific rationality, it is viewed by Lévi-Strauss as a substratum of culture.

²⁷ From 'Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project' by Esther Leslie

In the bottom of Tee's package I find a fossil with a bright orange pumpkin attached to it. I have no idea where this prehistoric plant or animal is from, nor how old it is. It is a relict from a distant past, a souvenir of a lost world.

4. Epilogue: Wild thinking?²⁶

*The arcades (a form of consciousness and of architecture), Benjamin tells us, are fluid places and there things strike us 'like realities in a dream' always in flux, always remoulded in meaning, by what comes after, always delaying their full meaning. A dream logic is then the best we might expect from such a bundle of notes and fragments and quotes and images.*²⁷

We continue to expect that a text about an artist's work will clarify matters, offer an explanation. The underling text – an attempt at mosaic writing – does not follow that idea. The parts of the puzzle appear to fit, but do not result in a complete picture. At best, this text appears to have a 'dream logic' that takes the reader from A to B but never back again. This patchwork of references and associations is not intended to provide answers, only to call up additional questions. In the memory of greats like Maurice Blanchot - la réponse est le malheur de la question.

Amsterdam, July 2004

*The meaning must remain
indeterminate especially in
the face of journalistic de-
mands for elucidation*
Samuel Beckett²⁸

²⁸ Samuel Beckett as quoted in Katie Holten, 'Notional', published by Coracle for Butler Gallery, Kilkenny, 2004.