

Negotiations

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FROM THE EDITORS

The Department of English, University of North Bengal, is as old as the University itself. Established in 1962, the Department has brought out magazines and bulletins from time to time to showcase the works of its faculty, students and scholars. It has long felt the need for a peer-reviewed journal so as to be able to contribute substantially to global scholarship. Born of this resolve, *Negotiations: An International Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies* is devoted to literary and cultural studies international in scope and interdisciplinary in method. *Negotiations* encourages scholarly submissions on diverse fields of literature, theatre, performance art, cultural history, politics, film, and media. The journal will be published annually.

Etymologically, “negotiation” (Latin *negotiatio*nem) means “business” with a significant accent on “no-leisure” or “lack of leisure” and “bargain.” “Negotiation” in lived life means to bargain for an advantage, individual or collective, and also a loss born of certain modes of reification and “unhinging” which are clearly enriching. It aims more at an agonism whose ferment should touch all margins and centres, and be beneficial to all interactive communities. The negotiation the journal envisages looks to a collective, continuous engagement, and exchange (a non-aggressive argumentation) where there may not be a consensus, or the resolution of differences as such, but which ensures “pleasure” in the unstoppable pursuit of interlocking goals. *Negotiations*, therefore, sponsors “with-against” fashions of reading, envisages “punctuations” in thoughts and processes where if anything, as Derrida has noted, is “passed over in silence it is I.” The journal has been visualized as a forum for all communities cutting across nations, disciplines and institutions. The goal is to have a dialogue between seemingly incompatible bodies of knowledge and systems of practice and explore the points of intersection that demonstrate a mutual “profit” in an endless epistemic cross-communication. *Negotiations* aims to carve out more space for an inseparable circulation of literary and non-literary “texts,” create a network of “competing [literary-cultural] representations” (Greenblatt) and indulges in “the impossibility of [...] settling in a position” (Derrida). The “no leisure” or “un-leisure” in such intermittent “shuttling” between “positions” and “stations” will surely not be “fatiguing,” though; rather, as Jean-Luc Nancy observes, “there must be a dwelling [*demeure*]: sojourn, lateness, remaining, repose, and even reserve, delay.” This negotiation is expected to arrive at new destinations of newer dimensions, continually reinventing and expanding the areas of exchange and engagement. It combines vacationing with work, ushering a “play” in both; it is about vacationing out of a thought and paradigm into another.

Negotiations, thus, accommodates both leisure and un-leisure, marching through knots and paces with deliberation, initiation, communion, fragmentation, distraction and felicitation. *Negotiations*, in its inaugurality, activism and unfoldment, takes a close call on our institutional positions and positionalities and makes us rethink the space we choose to speak from – a democratic anarchism, productive, proliferating and protean.

The inaugural issue, which consists of solicited articles by eminent scholars from across the world, reflects, in a most fitting manner, the spirit of the journal. The essays published here cover a wide range of topics and issues, collapsing traditional borders and boundaries in terms of discipline, genre, and methodology: public pedagogy and the politics of humiliation; an ethics of literature that sees art as more than a mere description of possible lives; “influence” in terms of a transatlantic poetics; the linguistic dilemma that plays an important role in decolonization; and the construction of the “middle-worlder” subjectivity in transnational films. The current issue of the journal serves as a meeting ground for an enormous and scintillating array of ideas in multiple literary-cultural contexts.

We take this opportunity to put on record our sincerest thankfulness to the contributors and hope that the standard they have set for the journal will be maintained in the days to come. Our special thanks are also due to our department colleagues and to the University of North Bengal authorities for all kinds of support to the project.

Happy reading!

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March 2011

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DELEUZE, BADIOU, PROUST AND AN ETHICS OF LITERATURE

Claire Colebrook

This essay explores an ethics of literature: an ethics that aims to go beyond seeing art as merely the description of possible lives, or reading as a trial of self-knowledge and subjective constitution.¹ What if literature – far from being an arena of sympathy,² social reflection,³ or world-disclosure⁴ – were destructive of ethos and polity? Perhaps *reading* would then be neither communication nor comprehension (returning to the living origin of ethos and polity) but a confrontation with unreadability? If there are different styles of thinking – the thinking in concepts that takes place in philosophy, and the thinking in affects that takes place in art – then ethics, or the question of how we are to live, and what it is to live – will have to take account of the styles of thinking of which we are capable. It has

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- 1 In *Love's Knowledge* Martha Nussbaum has argued for a supplementation of philosophical approaches to ethics with a turn to literature. In addition to the more formal frameworks of philosophical theories of morality, literature supposedly allows us to explore non-cognitive or affective responses to other lives. In so doing we are not only engaged with others at the level of sympathy and pity, we can also become more aware of the ways in which certain emotional responses might work against what we know we ought to do. See Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. Other approaches to literature, not merely as a scene of ethical examples but as itself a mode of meta-ethical (or perhaps counter-moral) understanding, include J. Hillis Miller's *Ethics of Reading* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1987), where the very process of reading, as the actualisation of a text's potential sense, involves a decision and determination. The text itself is not ethical; nor does the journey of reading bring us to ethical understanding. On the contrary, reading is less oriented to disclosure than to a certain dead end of the decision. For Miller, it is because there is no guaranteed or necessary meaning of a text that reading is directly ethical; for every reader must freely take on the burden of a text's sense.
 - 2 Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
 - 3 Alasdair MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
 - 4 Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987).

become a commonplace in what was once known as continental philosophy or ‘theory’ that Kant’s distribution of the faculties needs to be accepted and refigured: ethics is not science (for it cannot proceed from some known object, such as human nature, precisely because the nature of the human is not what would allow for the formation of *moral* laws, or laws that one might imagine *as if* one were not merely a physical being reduced to the laws of material nature). Nor is ethics some mode of the aesthetic; it does not proceed from a pleasant feeling of the sympathetic harmony of one humanised nature or organic community. Ethics is also not pure reason, for while reason may offer some formal logic that enables us to think in an orderly and systemic manner, allowing us to experience the world as a causally structured and coherent whole, it cannot yield a law of duty – what *ought* to be the case if there were beings capable of thinking of themselves as self-causing. It is the aesthetic, however, or the feeling of ourselves as synthesising subjects, that leads the way to ethics. How might I act if I were to imagine myself as a being not of this world but as world-forming?

When Michel Foucault⁵ argues against an ethics of knowledge and criticises biopolitics, he takes up Kant’s critique of the illegitimate grounding of what we ought to be on some supposed knowable substance (human ‘life’). When Jacques Derrida asks that we consider concepts such as democracy, justice or friendship – ‘if there is such a thing’ – then he, too, detaches the thinking of ideas from experiential (determined) knowledge.⁶ How might one think in the absence of the determination of these ideas? Habermas regards his post-metaphysical discourse ethics as also proceeding from the detachment of ethics from knowledge. Whereas a certain generation of post-Nietzschean French thought proceeded to celebrate art or literature as a domain where reason was liberated from instrumental calculation, and therefore would open the way to a radical transvaluation of values, Habermas held on to the notion of art as an arena of reflection, enabling the expansion of an ethics of communicative reason.

Deleuze and Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?*, like Deleuze’s earlier book on Kant, also proceeds from Kant’s distinction of faculties or modes of thinking. Philosophy creates concepts. Art creates affects and percepts. Science creates functions. Whereas most post-Kantian theory accepts Kant’s distinction and problematic relation among powers, with literature perhaps

5 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972).

6 John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley and Michael J. Scanlon, *Questioning God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 30.

acting as general reflective exercise on the language, syntax, grammar or horizon through which (or against which) reason takes place, Deleuze and Guattari emphasise a destructive discordance. If philosophy is altered by events in art – rethinking time, for example, on the basis of the cinematic image – it nevertheless does so *philosophically*, by creating concepts. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari's distinction of art as the creation of affects and percepts at once reinforces and conflicts with two other Deleuzo-Guattarian notions: becoming (becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-imperceptible) and making language stutter.⁷ The latter notion would seem to repeat a rather tired modernist formalism: language becomes functional and efficient with everyday usage, while literary language draws attention once again to language's materiality – or its non-semantic force. But if 'stuttering' is related to becoming, and this in turn is related to affects and percepts, the sense changes: affects and percepts are not affections and perceptions but are the potentialities or 'pure predicates' *to be perceived*. Becoming-animal-woman-imperceptible is to encounter these potentialities in a manner that is not grounded in the harmonious cognizing faculty of man. Language stutters in its disturbance, not from within itself, but in its attempt to write again, as if life were no longer already humanised. The dehumanisation of art or literature may take two forms after Kant: the first is expansive and organicist, while the second is destructive and profoundly inhuman. The notion of art as an expression of man as a moral being has given way (in recent theories of literary Darwinism or even of 'life') to a notion of art as extension of technical capacities for survival. In this respect all art is animalistic, a way in which the organism adapts to, and varies, its milieu for the sake of its ongoing organic life. A second post-Kantian path is offered by the notion of art or literature as an autonomous, machinic, 'stuttering' technicity that operates with a force beyond 'the lived.' This is not a modernist ethics/aesthetic whereby the experience of language *as language* returns us to the opening of speech and the origin of sense; it is, rather, an aesthetic of forces that are disarticulated – *stuttering* – not yet organised into the syntheses and ends of bounded life. Such a force would be neither ethical (grounded in place or ethos) nor political (deriving from the praxis of a polity).

Autopoiesis

Ways of thinking about the self and its relation to literature have been

7 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia), 1994.

dominated by the concept of autopoiesis. As defined in recent philosophies of life, autopoiesis refers to any system that is self-maintaining and is often used to mark a distinction between the living and the non-living.⁸ Autopoiesis as a model for life is in turn tied to the concepts of homeostasis and dynamic systems. An autopoietic being does not exist in itself and then subsequently adopt some relation to the world. The living being's border, limit or membrane is crucial in defining just what accounts for its own particular and *meaningful* milieu. An organism does not just happen to be placed in an environment. Living beings define both themselves and their world according to possible interactions and life-serving capacities. Every organism therefore acts less like a self-sufficient mechanism, and more like a thermostat – altering its own relations to the world in order to maintain its own stable state. Thus it makes sense to see all life not in Cartesian terms, where bodies are material entities that contain minds, but in terms of dynamic systems. Every living being is defined by the relations it maintains in order to maintain its own identity; its world is always a meaningful world of possible interactions, and its movements and responses are always grounded in a body that is nothing other than an ongoing, dynamic and highly selective engagement with a milieu.

In addition to its widespread currency in contemporary theories of life, embodied cognition and systems theory, models of autopoiesis have always marked a narrative and literary conception of the self. In contemporary readings of Aristotle's *Ethics*, for example, the self is regarded as an essentially narrative phenomenon: oriented towards the sense of ongoing coherence and the fulfilment of its individuating potentiality, and defined by its readability and recognition by others (MacIntyre 1982). Selves are self-fashioning, self-bounding phenomena that are nevertheless oriented to a world that is always their own self-defining world. Thus it is possible to see the claims of contemporary organicism, which stress that a dynamic living being is an ongoing process of equilibrium-maintaining responses to a milieu that is defined by its relevance for that body's possible states, as maintaining a tradition of valorising bounded individual life. The lure of this image of a bounded organic whole that is at once self-sufficiently enclosed and yet also open to a world (that is always *its* world) is ultimately (if cryptically) theological. We may have abandoned the commitment to a freely creating God, whose created world is at once an expression of his

8 Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston: New Science Library, 1987). See also Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

divine goodness and yet who is also free *not* to be determined or delimited by any specified essence, but we nevertheless repeat and re-figure images of dynamically open yet complete production. Both the well-formed individual or the well-wrought work of art are models of a dynamism that is at once creative without its productivity being enslaved to an already determined model of production. The figure of life is, and always has been, theological in its management of the desire for a being that is fruitfully open and yet meaningfully self-enclosed: the God of theology is one way in which we can imaginatively reconcile a desire for *life* (production, creation, fruition, becoming) with a desire for being (for creativity is neither random nor fragmented but always expressive of a life that is nothing other than its own self-emanation in response to a milieu that is always its own.)

Theology, ethics and aesthetics have always presupposed normative images of individual life. The axiology determining proper and improper modes of life requires the presence of a border that allows for organisation: all relations among powers are structured according to a harmony of organs. The world that is seen by the perspectival eye, can be represented by the speaking voice and mastered by the enumerating hand of techne, a hand of articulating ‘digits.’ But this life of organised bodies (organicism) has its basis in a profound commitment to a life of autopoetic being in which being makes itself from itself: life is once *autos*, unfolding from its self or in a process of creative becoming, *and poeisis* or creative of itself as some structured whole. This valorisation of self-making life has several implications and inflections. First, in theology, God must at once be seen as distinct from the world of created beings – neither determined by any essence nor limited by anything other than his own free decisions – and yet not radically distinct from the world, for that would entail Manicheanism. God must be at once infinitely free and yet creative – with creation never being radically other nor reducible to divinity as such. Second: in ethics, from Aristotle to Kant, the individual must give a law to himself or define himself in order to be distinguished as human from merely natural beings. But individuated bodies must also relate their self-definition either to the recognition of others (Aristotle) or to an ideal of humanity that is irreducible to any single person (Kant). Finally, as expressed in organicist aesthetics, the work of art must be complete and self-enclosed, and yet dynamically creative. Each of its aspects is essential for and definitive of the whole, with the whole being less an imposed order than a consequence of an interacting and self-governing form.

If these notions of bounded, dynamic, expressive and yet responsive wholeness sound either too Romanticist or too theological to have any bearing on the present we should bear in mind that equilibrium,

autopoiesis, operative closure and *meaning* (in the sense of being related to a milieu that is always relevant for this specific body) are key concepts in contemporary accounts of life. Further, we can also note that dynamic yet bounded wholeness also defines the modernist work of art. New criticism's concept of the poem as a well-wrought urn specifies that the literary object is at once complete and distinct, and yet also blessed with a dynamism of form that will revive and renew an everyday use of language.⁹

The modernist demand that of the art work that should not circulate as a familiar commodity but ought to break with the expected dull round of production and enjoyment seems to signal a break with organicist aesthetics. There is no doubt a strand of modernism concerned with disarticulation and non-actualised potential that would work against Romantic definitions of the fragment: whereas the fragment intimates some lost whole from which the part has been detached, modernist destructiveness works against the implication of order. Modernism would take organicist notions of the creation of a whole from dynamic relations and stress a striving toward wholeness or order that remains essentially incomplete. It is possible to see the artwork in its organicist and autonomous definitions as bearing two contrasting tendencies: a high Romantic organicism (perhaps already overcome in Romanticism itself) in which the limits of the work open onto an absolute, which the work *as limited* already indicates;¹⁰ and a counter-organicist tendency in which the very presentation of a bounded body opens up the thought of an unbounded outside or radical exterior that is *not* defined by the relations of the presented whole. This would yield both two models of life and two models of reading. The first (normative) model of autopoietic life regards all life, properly speaking, as defined by a permeable border, such that there is at once an individualising distinction between inside and outside, while the necessary outside is known and realised only as it is *for* the body in question. A text or artwork would, accordingly, always be read and experienced from within some context, a context that is also always enlivened or reconfigured by the artwork.

The second model (offered by Deleuze and Guattari) is molecular, and considers life beyond its bordered and bounded forms, and considers individuation or the creation of difference beyond that of the individual. Here, there is no stable border between interior and exterior, and –

9 Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947).

10 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

following on from this – no definitive milieu. In the remainder of this essay I want to differentiate this second molecular aesthetics and ethics from a seemingly more organicist and more traditionally modernist aesthetic of defamiliarisation.

The post-Romantic modernist aesthetic and ethic of defamiliarisation can be tied to the form of vitalism that Deleuze and Guattari see as running from Kant to Claude Bernard: the world as we know it is the effect of an active power that is known only through its acts of synthesis, never as it is in itself. This vital, relating and effective power ‘acts but is not’:

Vitalism has always had two possible interpretations: that of an Idea that acts, but is not – that acts therefore only from the point of view of an external cerebral knowledge (from Kant to Claude Bernard); or that of a force that is but does not act – that is therefore a pure internal Awareness (from Leibniz to Ruyer). If the second interpretation seems to us imperative it is because the contraction that preserves is always in a state of detachment in relation to action or even to movement and appears as a pure contemplation without knowledge.¹¹

To consider artworks as properly enlivening in their power to take the fragments of everyday life that circulate mechanically and unthinkingly and then reinvest those elements with power through processes of recombination is to presuppose a life or potential fecundity from which matters have become detached, a life ultimately harmonious with an ‘external cerebral knowledge’, a *mindful* life. Aesthetic defamiliarisation is also a mode of revitalisation: the language that was once actively and freely created has now become so familiar that we no longer recall its original force and difference. The task of art would be to present language *as language* in all its difference, and thus to call to mind once again the creative and emanating power from which all seemingly natural and inevitable relations emerge. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari cite the modernist book as one way in which proliferating connections and relations might be regrounded on an actively synthesising whole, a ‘superior unity’ in which multiplicity becomes once again unified through streams of language:

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York Columbia, 1994), 213.

That is why the most resolutely fragmented work can also be presented as the Total Work or Magnum Opus. Most modern methods for making series proliferate or multiplicity grow are perfectly valid in one direction, for example, a linear direction, whereas a unity of totalization asserts itself even more firmly in another, circular or cyclic dimension¹²

Derrida made a similar point in his early book on Husserl: Joyce appears to create a high degree of incommensurable voice, and yet everything ultimately returns to the great notion of language, of a final emanation of the word.¹³

Another vitalism, another aesthetic and another ethics can be discerned in Deleuze and Guattari's second counter-tradition of vitalism that runs from Leibniz to Raymond Ruyer, and is passive. Far from activating the power from which relations must have emanated, and therefore quite distinct from a process of negating or destroying the familiar, this ethic and aesthetic is less a re-vivification of the self's own powers than a creation of a point of view beyond life as it is lived. Such a point of view or 'survey' would aim to express powers of difference *as such*, not as they have been lived, and not as they are constituted in relations and systems of life. Thus if we can think of organicism as a recognition that each part is what it is only in relation to a whole, with the whole – in turn – being more than the sum of its parts, then organicism would be a theory of life premised on intrinsic relations. That is, if any part or term of the whole were to be detached or placed into different relations then its identity would change, and if the whole were to lose any of its parts it too would no longer be what it is. Such an organicism is tied to an active vitalism that would provide a synthesising and unifying force of life that would infuse matter and grant each potential being its identity as part of a whole that could only be known in its act of generation.

On the other hand, if we consider Deleuze and Guattari's *passive* vitalism this would be tied to a commitment to the externality of relations: 'there are two very different types of relations: intrinsic relations of *couples* involving well-determined aggregates or elements (social classes, men and women, this or that particular person), and less localizable relations that are

12 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1987, 6.

13 Jacques Derrida. *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: an introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey (Nebraska: Bison Books, 1989), 2.

always external to themselves and instead concern flows flows and particles eluding those classes, sexes and persons.¹⁴

One simple and easy way of accounting for Deleuze's ethics is to see him indebted to a modernist aesthetic: as long as we approach the world through an already given language and in terms of habitual concepts we have failed to really think. Further, because habitual language maintains the form of the self through time, allowing us to experience the future in the light of the past, and the past from the sense of the present, then everyday functional and efficient language is also the death or loss of time. The work of art, in destroying everyday language and communication would reintroduce some chaos into the order through which we live the world and would, therefore, be an affirmation of life and an ethical imperative: 'How can a moment of the world be rendered durable or made to exist by itself? ... Through having reached the percept as 'the sacred source', though having seen Life in the living or the Living in the lived, the novelist or painter returns breathless and with bloodshot eyes'.¹⁵ One should live as an ongoing work of art, never submitting life to the rigidity of concepts, and always using language to destroy comprehension and communication. However, in both his book on Proust and in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze offers a far more complex ethics of modernism, in which the powers of art allow for a philosophy and ethics of time. In a gesture that goes well beyond modernism, art is not simply the destruction or rendering-affective of language but – as Deleuze insists in his book on Proust – a way of creating signs that are not those that give us a manageable and lived world.

That Proust can be read as an artist of *signs* has twofold significance: Deleuze regards the sign as a potential relation that may – in the case of language or worldly signs – tie a particular experienced predicate to an identifiable, repeatable and shared worldly denotation; but signs may also relate thought to what is not given (the signs of love, such as the face of the other whose desire I cannot know or sense):

Love's signs are not like signs of worldliness; they are not empty signs standing for thought and action. They are deceptive signs that can be addressed to us only by concealing what they express: the origin of unknown worlds, of unknown actions and thoughts that give them

14 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 196.

15 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 172.

a meaning. They do not express a superficial, nervous exaltation, but the suffering of a deeper exploration.¹⁶

Signs may also have nothing psychological about them, establishing relations among qualities – and we might see these sensuous signs as pre-personal, as the tastes or affects from which we are composed. The signs of art, though, are at the centre of Deleuze's ethics, for it is the work of art's capacity to present signs – to present everyday language, the lacunae and gaps of love, and the sensuous intensities – that brings us to a level of thinking which is truly ethical. For we are able, after journeying through these layers of signs, or all the ways in which relations are established, to think relationality as such: 'Now the world of art is the ultimate world of signs, and these signs, as though *dematerialized*, find their meaning in an ideal essence'.¹⁷ Ethics is, then, both tied to *ethos* or the sentiment or feeling that places us where we are, but also goes beyond character. For Deleuze, we are not subjects who, through time, establish relations and create our own selves. Rather, there are relations or the capacity for intensities to reverberate, and these intensities are the souls or contemplations from which we are composed. Deleuze offers, then, a contrast to the dominant model of narrative ethics, where selves and communities create themselves through time and deploy literature as both a reflection and mode of that creation. In so doing his ethics passes from happiness or the bounded and autopoetic model of a life well-lived, to the joy of a pure past or intensities that exceed the lived:

It may happen that a sensuous sign gives us a strange joy at the same time that it transmits a kind of imperative. Thus experienced, the quality no longer appears as a property of the object that now possesses it, but as the sign of an *altogether different* object that we must try to decipher, at the cost of an effort that always risks failure.¹⁸

These are true signs that immediately give us an extraordinary joy, signs that are fulfilled, affirmative, and

16 Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 9.

17 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 13.

18 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 11.

joyous. *But they are material signs.*¹⁹

Joy and Happiness

Aristotle had aligned ethics with happiness – or, if this is not an accurate translation of the term – with well-spiritedness. A self lives well, not if life is a series of punctuated moments, or a series of pleasures; on the contrary, *Eudaimonia* or living well is tied to a narrative life. Happiness is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and a virtue is an excellence or actualisation of the self, a bringing into being of those powers in the self that are definitive of oneself.²⁰ For Aristotle, then, it is because the potential to reason is the excellence uniquely attributed to human souls, and because a rational life is ordered in the manner of an ongoing narrative, that happiness will require a well-ordered life, a life in command of itself. If, in modernity, we no longer recognise the human as a potentiality for reason, where reason just is this power of intuiting what makes each being what it uniquely is, we might still say that happiness lies in the actualisation of one's specific potential. Ethics would still be a maximisation or bringing to fulfilment of one's powers, even if those powers were no longer determined as the (rational) capacity to intuit what makes each being the being that it essentially is.

Deleuze's ethics of joy might then be seen to continue – by way of Spinoza – a naturalist tradition of ethics, where living well is not only the affirmation of one's own powers, but also the expansive connection with, and enjoyment of the powers of beings other than one's own organic self. If, for Aristotle, the reason that is our proper potential is the capacity to intuit what each being *ought* to become (and therefore is grounded on recognising the actual form each potential should realise), for Deleuze (following Spinoza) reason is the capacity to intuit beings *sub specie aeternitatis*: not what they would be as they come into being in time, but the powers that might be realised differently for all time, and whose potentiality exceeds any single actualisation. This raises, I would argue, a problem of ethics and style, a problem that is answered by Deleuze's appeal to modernism. If happiness is the distinct potentiality of each being moving towards what it ought to be, then happiness is essentially *narrative*: in the beginning is a gap or absence which, through time, must arrive at an actuality that was prefigured in, but not fully present at, the origin. The content of the narrative would be the filling out of form, and we could imagine – as is the case with the history of the novel – the same form of individual

19 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 13.

20 Terence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

felicity and marriage being fulfilled through a variety of different and accidental narrative contents. In all cases, though, the happiness of this trajectory would be *energeia*: the end or fulfilment is not separable from the process of coming to fulfilment. The fortune or marriage that ends a novel has its sense only as the achievement of this act of narrative striving and becoming: at each point in the narrative the narrative form is being fulfilled. As narrative beings humans fulfil themselves in this passage of time, and do not go through time accidentally; their being is a being of temporal fulfilment. If, however, potentials or powers are fully real and are *not* determined by an actuality which they ought to fulfil then we need a literary form that is not the unfolding of what something is – such that content would be accidental – but a form in which each potential, each accidental occurrence, each affect and particular could present itself as a power in its own right. Liberated from the man of reason who passes through time only to recognise himself as a being who is the master of time, the self of pure potentialities would have to lose any sense of self which might determine potentialities as potential predicates of some substance. Thus, the time of such an ethics would be a non-narrative time, and the happiness, felicity or joy of this ethics would be achieved in a becoming-impersonal.

To a certain extent this liberation of literary form from any notion of man as the fulfilment of reason is identified by Alain Badiou in his reading of Beckett. Those seemingly particular and descriptive moments in Beckett – the character who loses a series of possessions – allow us to arrive at a point of the speaking self, where there is no longer one who speaks in the manner of some qualitatively robust subject who unfolds who he is through time, or who has a world that he might describe, define and master. Rather the emptiness and poverty of the self prepare us for a capture of an essential humanity, where we are nothing other than speech addressing the void. According to Alain Badiou, Beckett's work evidences a passage from misery to happiness. The early works concern a stripped down Cartesian figure of 'man' who faces the void. The self is isolated within a language that can only circle around itself, never refer to, represent or name a world. What is other than the self is given not in any qualitative specificity but as a grey indeterminacy. The paring away of the self reveals an essential misery.

In the later works, however, Badiou identifies an opening to happiness. The content used to figure this opening – the relation between man and woman – is formal. Sexual difference is a pure relation between a man who faces nothing, and woman who is this nothing. Woman opens the void to infinity. One no longer speaks in a miserable solipsistic Cartesian

theatre; the woman whom one addresses cannot be known and named, but one nevertheless establishes a relation to what cannot be given. The happiness of love is therefore not that of union and blissful return to a state beyond desire and striving, but a happiness in which the self is no longer a mere voice without relation to anything other than itself:

The ‘man’ desires the *nothing* of the Two, whilst the ‘woman’ – the wandering guardian and narrator of original unity, of the pure point of the encounter – desires *nothing but* the Two, that is, the infinite tenacity of a lasting Two.²¹

Happiness is indistinguishably ‘man’ and ‘woman’; it is, at one and the same time, a separating void and the conjunction that reveals this void. As happiness, as the outline of happiness, it is the nothing of the Two *and* the nothing but the Two. Such is its inseparable sexuation: immobility and wandering, imperative and story.²²

In his book on *Proust* Deleuze similarly advances to the joy and ethics of life and art through the figure of love. It is the signs of love that take us beyond worldly signs. We might therefore note that for Deleuze the ethics of fiction is *not* the opening of a shared world, the establishment of a horizon of sympathy and communication. Rather, it is just this world of an ongoing, shared and communicable time – the time of everyday language – that is shattered by love. Thus in *Proust* we are at once given Combray as it is commonly seen and described, its conventions and clichés; but within that propositional language of the world as it is known and lived, we are introduced to relations of love that disclose what is hidden, unfulfilled, devoid of production or sociality and frequently not brought to the level of the lived:

Love’s signs are not like signs of worldliness; they are not empty signs standing for thought and action. They are deceptive signs that can be addressed to us only by concealing what they express: the origin of unknown

21 Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, ed. Alberto Toscano and Nina Power (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2006), 6.

22 Badiou, *On Beckett*, 34.

worlds, of unknown actions and thoughts that give them a meaning. They do not express a superficial, nervous exaltation, but the suffering of a deeper exploration.²³

Such an ethics of fiction – where the everyday world of expectation, efficiency, communal agreement and propriety – would seem to reinforce an ethics of modernism reinforced elsewhere by Deleuze and Guattari, both explicitly in *What is Philosophy?* and implicitly in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari describe the artist who plunges into chaos in order to overcome the bourgeois clichés of opinion. Opinion is intrinsically bourgeois and essentially tied to taste: one passes directly from a certain affect, such as the strong smell of cheese, to the assumption of a common sense, where every man would find such cheese offensive.²⁴

It is not surprising that the brain, treated as a constituted object of science, can be an organ only of the formation and communication of opinion: this is because step-by-step connections and centred intergrations are still based on the limited model of recognition (gnosis and praxis: “this is a cube”; “this is a pencil”), and the biology of the brain is aligned on the same postulates as the most stubborn logic. ... If the mental objects of philosophy, art, and science (that is to say, vital ideas) have a place, it will be in the deepest of the synaptic fissures, in the hiatuses, intervals and meantimes of a nonobjectifiable brain, in a place where to go in search of them will be to create.²⁵

Opinion has its metaphysical condition in the assumption and constitution of one world that is the same through time, and the same for every other possible subject. Everyday time and life operates through extensive quantities. Each experience is the experience *of* some thing – some extended being which remains what it is through time – and such things can placed within the same time and space of other things, a quantitative time that is a series of nows, and a quantitative space that is a field of points. Indeed, one might argue that it is only possible to have lived experience through

23 Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 9.

24 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 174.

25 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 209.

extensive quantities and magnitudes: each sensible experience must have its location in time and space, and so be an extensive magnitude, and those forms of time and space are only achieved by carrying one moment over to the next, anticipating the future from the present, and retaining the past into the present – all as the time of this one life. By contrast the artist uses figures or lines to destroy these readymade figurations.

We might therefore read Deleuze as endorsing, following Badiou, a strictly formalist modernism where the aim of art is the destruction of sense, the tearing apart of relations, and the arrival at a moment of pure and non-semantic affect. This would seem to accord with the notions of literature as introducing a ‘stuttering’ into language: literature would be the affirmation of singularities – as though one might arrive at pure intensities, not intensities or qualities *of* some extended being, but quality as such liberated from its maintenance through time and across space. Literature ‘quantifies writing’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 4) by engaging with pure forces that are not yet synthesised into determined and extended substances:

This is, precisely, the task of all art and, from colors and sounds, both music and painting similarly extract new harmonies, new plastic or melodic landscapes, and new rhythmic characters that raise them to the heights of the earth’s song and the cry of humanity: that which constitutes tone, health, becoming, a visual and sonorous bloc. A monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly resumed struggle.²⁶ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 177).

When Deleuze refers to an ethics of *Amor Fati* we might then think of *love* of what is – not the mastery, maintenance and sense of what is.²⁷ Such an ethic would reinforce a modernism of shock and transgression, a destruction of cliché, sense and system and a celebration of abandonment, loss and death. Perhaps this would lead us also to Badiou’s post-Sartrean celebration of Beckett: it is only in the loss of all meaning, of all reference and all sense

26 Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 177.

27 Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (London: Continuum, 2004), 170-72.

of one as a self, that one can live that happy relation to an other who can never be given, only lived as absent.

The importance of Deleuze's Proust book is however, that it does not affirm a simply destructive or intensive modernism, and can therefore be contrasted with all the French celebrations of a Joycean linguistic formalism that would stop at the reintroduction of noise or intensity in an otherwise measured and meaningful language. If meaning is time – the capacity to intuit in this singular present a quality that could be repeated and represented beyond this present – then Deleuze's ethics of modernism is neither a destruction of meaning nor a destruction of time. Rather, art is the passage from a digital language of extensive magnitudes, where each experience is lived as already referred beyond itself to a shared time and space, and is already subjected to a repeatable and formal system, to analogical language. Art is not simply the destruction of order and system and a return to chaos. If it were then art would be the arrival at intensive magnitudes – pure affects or pulsations have no relation to anything other than themselves. The creation of figures or signs of love, and then the creation of sensuous signs, and finally the creation of signs of art is not simply the *loss* of time – the abandonment of all relations – but the regaining of time. Time is not system or measure – an extensive quantity where each moment is merely a point in which something happens – but time becomes intensive quantity. How does measure or quantity – a point of stability or reference – unfold from an intensity?

Deleuze's ethics of intensive quantities frees itself from the myth and economy of a destructive modernism. The everyday bourgeois narrative subject achieves his happiness by sacrificing pleasure here and now for the sake of some anticipated higher enjoyment. If human happiness is the recognition of oneself as a rational being – one capable of mastering his pleasure for a sense of who he is – then happiness also establishes a time of extended measure, each moment being part of an ongoing and economically mastered life. The modernist response to this life of measure and quantity for the sake of being oneself is the sacrifice and destruction of the self: a spending, squandering or waste that refuses to maintain itself or recognise itself: "The ethics of intensive quantities has only two principles: affirm even the lowest, do not explicate oneself (too much)."²⁸

Thus we might arrive at Badiou's Beckett, a reduction to a simple quantity – the two of love – who are not two of any kind, whose sexual difference is purely formal, and who do not maintain themselves through time but become nothing more than a relation to nothing: the immobile

28 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 244.

man who faces the void but encounters the mobile woman, and the woman who does not resist the duality. No longer a man who masters and measures his world in order to establish a lived time, love is an event that breaks with ongoing time and exposes humanity as pure plurality, not this or that determined being but a relation between one who demands speech (man) and a woman who will narrate.

Deleuze's ethics of intensive quantities is, I would argue, an attempt to think beyond the pure mathematical formality of relations between terms. Deleuze offers a more complex ethics of modernism that is neither purely formal, such that the work of art is always about nothing more than the tracing out of relations, nor purely affective, such that art goes beyond all cognition and becomes simply visceral. Instead, the work is bound up with an ethics of taste: what are the intensities or affects from which we are composed? What sensibilities have organised our thinking? What is the pure past – not the qualities as they were lived, but intensities that formed relations that then allowed for a self who could go on and live a life? How does a term, something that can be counted as one – as a quantity – emerge? At what point does an intensity or a potentiality to be perceived create a point of relation?:

Intensity is simultaneously the imperceptible and that which can only be sensed. How could it be sensed for itself, independently of the qualities which cover it and the extensity in which it is distributed?²⁹

This discernment or intuition of intensive quantities – or emergence of something that can be taken as ‘a’ quality – will be tied, crucially, to *taste*. In the Kantian distribution of reason, understanding and the imagination, it is taste that allows one to feel – but not know- that the relation between concept and intuition is harmonious: beauty is not a bodily particular pleasure, for beauty is just the feeling that what I experience as a felicitous coupling of form and content would also be felt by any subject whatever. Taste gives us the feeling of *sensus communis*, the feeling for the supersensible substrate of humanity, such that all subjects would feel pleasure in this relation between concept and intuition. For Deleuze, however, taste takes us back not to a supersensible humanity, but to the transcendental sensible from which we are composed. For Deleuze this is answered not in an art of figuration, which would use our already given units and

29 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 230.

measures, nor in pure abstraction – mere form – nor in colourism – pure affect. Analogical language is the production of terms or signs, the creation of relations:

Extensity can emerge from the depths only if depth is definable independent of extensity. The extensity whose genesis we are attempting to establish is extensive magnitude, the *extensum* or term of reference of all extension. The original depth, by contrast, is indeed space as a whole but space as an intensive quantity: the pure *spatium*.³⁰

In Proust we therefore move beyond the signs of love – the signs of a world that is not given, that is not laid out before me as so much shared and communicable information – to sensuous signs, or those affects that produce relations (the taste of Madeleine that produces a sense *that* something is being felt but not *what* is being felt):

An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory – this new sensation having had the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it *was* me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I sensed that it was connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature.³¹

But the novel as such, this work of art that gives these affects and resonances a form, allows us to think the pure past: the potential for an intensity to be grasped in its capacity to produce relations, to compose lines of time. This is time in its pure state: not a quantity of any determined form that allows us to establish a measure, nor a pure intensity without relation, but an intensity in its emergence as a quantity, as a potentiality for becoming. It

30 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 230.

31 Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised, D.J. Enright (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 31.

is love that will allow us to tie that suffering or relation of not-having to an other, but it is also love that will tie the narrator to what he will eventually see both in Swann and in a series of girls sacrificed to unrequited passion. Happiness is not the blissful union of love, but the enjoyment of sacrificing the prudence of ongoing time:

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.³²

32 Proust, 52.

**TRANSNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS IN ALEJANDRO
GONZÁLEZ IÑÁRRITU'S *BABEL***

Réka M. Cristian

The global village is a place of
very arduous interfaces and very abrasive situations.

Marshall McLuhan

September 11, 2001 initiated a global “crisis of trust”¹ that seems to pervade most contemporary narratives. In *The Khazar Tournament - Against Contemporary Relativism*, first published in 1997, Paul Cornea observed that one can effectively refute contemporary sophism only by going beyond a belief system of “faith” (religious, etc.) in order to adopt trust as an alternative to faith, which “separates” and “opposes”² us. In turn, trust—willingly or unwillingly—“brings us together” and “unites”³ people by finding, through various practices, the realm of collective humanity. However, the contemporary crisis of trust, which materialized predominantly in the war on terrorism, was reconfigured by diverse forms of post-9/11 rhetoric throughout the globe, with special regard to visual narratives produced in or outside the United States of America. This crisis has since had its visible or less observable symptoms in all areas of life, producing intriguing avatars in times that can be regarded as the “desperado age.”⁴

Apart from this crisis but nevertheless still related to this particular moment, contemporary theories and methods in American Studies tend to embrace—among many other approaches—comparative studies, critical internationalism, globality, cosmopolitanism, and Postcolonial Studies. As Barbara Brinson Curiel, David Kazanjian, Katherine Kinney, Steven Mailloux, Jay Mechling, John Carlos Rowe, George Sánchez, Shelley Streeby, and

1 Andrei Cornea, *Turnirul Khazar: Impotriva relativismului contemporan [The Khazar Tournament. Against Contemporary Relativism]* (Iasi: Polirom, 2003), 10.

2 Cornea, 10.

3 Cornea, 10.

4 Lidia Vianu, *The Desperado Age: British Literature at the Start of the New Millennium* (LiterNet Publishing House, 2006), retrieved from: <http://editura.liternet.ro/carte/179/Lidia-Vianu/The-Desperado-Age.html> (accessed 31 December, 2010).

Henry Yu argued in the “Introduction” to *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, this complex turn is concerned with “how one negotiates among local, national, and global perspectives, while remaining vigilantly self-critical about the epistemologically and historically deep ties that American Studies has had to U.S. imperialism.”⁵ A genuine internationalization of American Studies needs an increased involvement of transnational exchanges, which, in turn, favor the creation and use of “new paradigms of research”⁶ under the aegis of cosmopolitan discourses.

In the following, I propose to survey the ways trust works through the specter of various characters which challenge transnational negotiations in an inherently transnational medium: film. Alejandro González Iñárritu’s international co-production *Babel* (2006)⁷ is perhaps the best example of trust and its variant, the crisis of trust that appears in interpersonal relations in the contact zones of some specific parts of the world. As its title suggests, *Babel* alludes not only to the Biblical place where the confusion of languages took place (the Babylonian Babel, the Tower of Babel) but also to the very fact of language confusion and miscommunication (babel of voices) that it induced. The movie’s plot is shaped after this original confusion into a nonlinear narrative split into various scenes, eventually assembling a topography of miscommunications in a collage of identity mosaics that depict both the difficulty and the necessity of interaction⁸ and the ways in which people of diverse cultural backgrounds learn to relate to each other (“cultures) in critical contexts around the globe.

The incident in Morocco between locals and tourists triggers a series of events reaching the United States of America, Mexico and Japan, and becomes a perfect visual example that embodies a peculiar *butterfly-*

5 Barbara Brinson Curiel, David Kazanjian, Katherine Kinney, Steven Mailloux, Jay Mechling, John Carlos Rowe, George Sánchez, Shelly Streeby, Henry Yu, “Introduction” in *Post-Nationalist American Studies*, ed. John Carlos Rowe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 7.

6 Brinson Curiel et al., 7.

7 *Babel*, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, Screenplay: Guillermo Arriaga and Alejandro González Iñárritu, Cinematography: Rodrigo Prieto, Cast: Cate Blanchett, Brad Pitt, Adriana Barraza, Rinko Kikuchi, Gael García Bernal, Nathan Gamble, Elle Fanning, Kôji Yakusho, *et al*, Languages: English, Arabic, Berber, French, Spanish, Japanese, Distributor: Paramount Vantage, Runtime: 142 minutes, Year: 2006.

8 Terrence Rafferty, “Now Playing: Auteur vs. Auteur,” *The New York Times* 22 October 2006, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/22/movies/22raff.html?_r=4&oref=slogin (accessed 6 November, 2010).

effect process. The concept of the butterfly effect borrowed from the chaos theory, is a metaphor that describes the sensitive cause-effect dependence: any infinitesimal change can indirectly be related to a very remote object/being, for example, the flapping butterfly wings are able to ultimately cause significant changes (a hurricane, for example) on a large—even global—scale. *Babel* subscribes to this kind of butterfly-effect plot line transposed into a transnational medium which exhibits intricate international exchanges that activated from a local point spreads globally.

The butterfly-effect is a complex concept embodying the potential for static existence as well as the capacity for change. In his Metaphysics of Quality theory Robert Pirsig coined two similar notions: one as the old, complex “static pattern” and the other, the “Dynamic Quality,” “the source of all things, completely simple and always new.”⁹ “A home in suburban Short Hills, New Jersey, on an ordinary Wednesday afternoon is filled with static patterns,”¹⁰ writes the author of *Lila: An Inquiry Into Morals* and continues by enumerating the facts behind static situations and those leading to the Dynamic Quality. Pirsig observes that a “hurricane in Key Largo promises a Dynamic relief from static patterns,” while the “man who suffers a heart attack and is taken off the train at New Rochelle has had all his static patterns shattered.”¹¹ Because the man “can’t find them” he realizes that “in that moment only Dynamic Quality is available to him,” Pirsig continues, and emphasizes that the man “gazes at his own hand with a sense of wonder and delight”¹² because he has recognized the potential of change that the Dynamic Quality (i.e. the unpredicted, sudden change of his previous situation) holds in itself. While static patterns freeze the paradigms of structural systems (for example, the belief systems or trust), the Dynamic of Quality provides the “quality of freedom”¹³ that is endowed with an “increase in versatility”¹⁴ which produce, among other effects, miscommunication, crises of trust and even “desperado” scenes. González Iñárritu’s film is a visible metaphor of some obvious static patterns that appear in the four countries in which the film is set - Morocco, Japan,

9 Robert Pirsig, *Lila. An Inquiry Into Morals* (London: Corgi Books, [1991] 1992,) 57.

10 Pirsig, 58.

11 Pirsig, 58.

12 Pirsig, 58.

13 Pirsig, 59.

14 Pirsig, 72.

Mexico and the United States of America - and provides the picture for the Dynamic Quality materialized in transnational exchanges which occur after a specific butterfly-effect is set into motion.

This analysis of *Babel* will, in addition to the previous notions of trust, crisis, static pattern and Dynamic Quality, be also assisted by the concepts of Breyten Breytenbach's "Middle World" and John Ryder's interpretation of cosmopolitanism. The Middle World, according to Breytenbach, is not the Global Village but rather a symbolic space of encounter that is "equidistant from East and West, North and South;" appears equally "belonging and not belonging" but exists mostly off the Center, and is, above all and "by definition and vocation, peripheral,"¹⁵ in other words, marginal. This locus seems to be a subtle derivation from the geopolitical notions of the First, Second, and Third Worlds and might refer to some features of the Fourth World. This is a term with which Western thinking describes the status of peoples without states such as the Roma in Europe, Native Americans or the First Nations (sic!) in North America and aborigines in Australia, Tibetans in China (Tibet), and so on.¹⁶ Above the political connotation which connects it to the Fourth World, the Middle World has a complementary dimension that is "aware of the moral implication of the narrative"¹⁷ its inhabitants produce. These narratives are unconventional histories of the marginalized people, of the excluded, of the refugees and the exiles. "Because of their indefinable character," Maria Todorova writes in *Imagining the Balkans*, "persons or phenomena in transitional states, like marginal ones, are considered dangerous, both being in danger themselves," but also "emanating danger to others."¹⁸ This context of danger is intimately connected with the concept of the crisis of trust.

The residents of the Middle World are *Middle-Worlders*—people with a specific nomadic thinking who "promote diversity, sometimes by default."¹⁹ Despite the fact that they live in an "emerging archipelago of self-enforced freedom and unintentional estrangement partaking in equal

15 Breyten Breytenbach, *Notes from the Middle World: Essays* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009), 136.

16 Réka M. Cristian, and Dragon Zoltán, *Encounters of the Filmic Kind: Guidebook to Film Theories* (Szeged: JatePress, 2008), 107.

17 Breytenbach, 152.

18 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17.

19 Breytenbach, 139.

parts of love and death.”²⁰ Middle-Worlders pride themselves on having “a vivid consciousness of being the Other.”²¹ Sometimes, geographical coordinates locate the symbolic land itself because “wherever its citizens are, there the Middle World is”²². This sense of a specific place—or for that matter, occasional environment—changes and turns out to be a “potentially dangerous framework”²³ in which the Middle-Worlders interact and evolve into transgressive figures subject to special narrative dynamics. In the context of the current globalized world, Middle-Worlders become post-national figures depicted by specific images that appear with increasing frequency in written and visual narratives worldwide.

The characters in *Babel* communicate and miscommunicate. Finding themselves in a complex process of transnational negotiation the characters manage to (re)define themselves - and their culture - through strategies by which they respond to specific events. This transnational transaction has traits of what Randolph Bourne coined in his celebrated essay on the transnational character of the United States of America written almost a century ago, as “cosmopolitan enterprise.”²⁴ The Middle-Worlder shares many common traits with the cosmopolitan person but while the cosmopolitan individual is a player of the center, the Middle-Worlder remains a figure of the periphery. The cosmopolitan exhibits a kind of “internationalism, though it is more than that,” John Ryder claims. While internationalism mostly values “international interaction and cooperation” cosmopolitanism, in the sense of communication and negotiations, implies much more than the other concept because it “asks of us that we interact with others in ways that allow us to identify, and where necessary to create common interests that enable us to work together in their pursuit.”²⁵ Cosmopolitanism can thus be considered, on the one hand, a “guiding principle” and a “crucial component” of all transnational exchanges and, on the other hand, a way to understand each other and “ourselves in the current political and

20 Breytenbach, 136.

21 Breytenbach, 149.

22 Breytenbach, 147.

23 Breytenbach, 147.

24 Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America,” originally published in *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (July 1916), 86-97, retrieved from: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/rbannis1/AIH19th/Bourne.html> (accessed 31 January 2010).

25 John Ryder, ‘John Dewey, Democracy and a Cosmopolitan Ideal,’ in *Americana E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary* 3.2 (2007), retrieved from: <http://americanaejournal.hu/vol3no2/ryder> (accessed 10 November 2010).

international environment.”²⁶ A more concise definition of cosmopolitanism

includes the necessity for respect for other peoples, nations, histories and cultures; a desire to move beyond one’s own history and categories to attempt to understand others; a readiness to work collaboratively with others to advance shared interests and solve shared problems; a willingness at least and better an eagerness on the part of national governments, if we are to think about policy oriented cosmopolitanism, to suspend to some degree national interest as traditionally understood in favor of the promotion of common interests among nations, their governments, and their people.²⁷

The Middle-Worler is the term for the individual who constructs a specific identity between or among cultures in a specifically tense and sometimes adverse political climate; the cosmopolitan attitude shows the ideal conditions of relationships individuals make on the cross-cultural arena, while the concept of the transnational exchange encompasses the static pattern together with the Dynamic Quality set composed of the individual with its intricate net of geopolitical relationships.

Babel, the fractured narrative with rounded characters, shows similar traits to Richard Curtis’s movie *Love Actually*²⁸ but does more than presenting a rhizomatic narrative of transnationally interlocked parallel lives that do ultimate and intimately connect under the aegis of love (and trust); in terms of crisis critique *Babel* connotes more than for example, Emir Kusturica’s *Underground*,²⁹ which knits together war traumas, trust dilemmas and

26 Ryder, op. cit.

27 Ryder, op. cit.

28 *Love Actually*, Written and directed by Richard Curtis, Music: Craig Armstrong, Cinematography: Michael Coulter, Cast: Hugh Grant, Bill Nighy, Keira Knightley, Alan Rickman, Colin Firth, Rowan Atkinson, Emma Thompson, Martine McCutcheon, Laura Linney, Billy Bob Thornton, Liam Neeson, Martin Freeman, et al, Distributor: Universal Pictures, Runtime: 136 minutes, Language: English, Year: 2003.

29 *Underground (Once Upon a Time There was a Country)*, directed by Emir Kusturica, Writing credits: Emir Kusturica and Dušan Kovačević, Music: Goran Bregović, Cinematography: Vilko Filak, Cast: Miki Manjović, Mirjana Joković, Lazar Ristovski, Ernst Stötzner, Dragan Nikolić, Emir Kusturica, Srđan Todorović, Slavko Štimac, Distributed by: New Yorker Video, Runtime: 167 minutes, Language: Serbian, English, German, Year: 1995.

unregulated transnational relationships from within the Balkans through Europe; González Iñárritu's movie is a hyperlink film³⁰ that uproots crises of trust from specific regions or countries and places them in a set of synchronic structures with incalculable global potential. The movie is a flawless calibration of a five-day-four-story network set in different countries that are both external and internal sites of negotiations as what trust and the crisis of trust is concerned and assembled in "several apparently distinct stories that gradually reveal themselves as a single story."³¹

The narrative launchpad of González Iñárritu's story is a desert place in Morocco. Two shepherd boys, Yussef and Ahmed (Boubker Ait El Caid and Said Tarchini) receive a rifle from their father, Abdullah (Mustapha Rachidi), who bought the gun from his neighbor Hassan (Abdelkader Bara), in order to kill the jackals that regularly decimate his goat herd. Yussef and Ahmed are living their everyday battles with life in a remote Third World village, and—as prototypes of almost-nomad Middle-Worlders—they venture into deeds where their truths no longer fit, where any previous certainties dissipate and where they, eventually, get lost.³² The boys start competing with each other, play with the newly bought rifle and shoot at different static and moving targets around them. Unfortunately, unlike the surrounding desert, the nearby road in the valley is not devoid of traffic: a bus full of tourists arrives when Yussef fires the gun. A random bullet hits a young American passenger—Susan Jones (Cate Blanchett). This incident is the film's crucial event triggering the next episodes; in Pirsig's term, it is the visual point presenting the Dynamic Quality that sets in motion local adventures and then global incidents. Not fully aware of what has happened and also very scared of the consequences of their deeds, Yussef and Ahmed quickly run away and hide the rifle while the bus speeds up toward the nearest village, where Susan is immediately helped by a caring old medicine woman and then a veterinarian doctor, whose applies first aid stabilizes her condition.

Meanwhile, on the bus, an atmosphere of distrust toward local people (induced by 9/11 and its aftermath) pervades as tourists become

30 Roger Ebert, "Babel" (2006), *Chicago Sun Times*, 22 September 2007, retrieved from: <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070922/REVIEWS08/70922001/1023> (accessed 13 January 2010).

31 Terrence Rafferty, "Now Playing: Auteur vs. Auteur," *The New York Times* 22 October 2006, retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/22/movies/22raff.html?_r=4&oref=slogin (accessed 6 November 2010).

32 Breytenbach, 135.

increasingly agitated due to their fall into an “established script made of prejudice and misunderstanding.”³³ This behavior is sparked by the lingering ghost of terrorism, whereas in reality it was an accidental bullet that created the crisis of distrust. In the hands of Yussef, the rifle’s static value has turned into a flow of Dynamic Quality. Alienated from the commodities of their assumed safe culture and frightened by the possibility of another (presumed terrorist) attack, the rest of the tourists decide to take the bus and leave the village as soon as they can, selfishly abandoning their fellow travelers: the seriously injured Susan and her husband Richard Jones (Brad Pitt), who tries to call the American Embassy for further help. The tourists of *Babel* are in Thorstein B. Veblen’s formulation, only reminders of contemporary “conspicuous consumers”³⁴ and mostly media conditioned paranoids without genuine cosmopolitan features. Only Anwar (Mohamed Akhzam), the Moroccan tour guide, remains with the couple until their nightmare is solved. His attitude is a model of behavior. As a local Middle-Worlder, he has genuine traits of cosmopolitanism that help him to communicate and manage a problematic (internationally turned local) situation. He helps rebuild a sense of trust which was destroyed first by the gunshot and then by the fellow tourists who abandoned Susan and Richard. Despite the international turmoil upon implied political issues behind the accident that delay her transportation, Susan ultimately arrives at a hospital and recovers.

The accident, however, becomes news; the world acknowledges this event with a prompt presentation through the international mass media, which biased by the imminent stereotypes of the event (Morocco, local shooting, tourist bus, American woman), broadcasts it as an alleged terrorist attack. Moreover, the focus of the film turns toward on a Japanese newscaster, whose report shifts the focus of the narrative from Morocco to Japan, a seemingly random shift that nevertheless turns out to be significant in the course of further global investigations. According to this report,

Susan Jones, who was wounded in a terrorist attack in
Morocco, was discharged from a Casablanca hospital

³³ Roger Ebert, “Babel” (2006), *Chicago Sun Times* 22 September 2007, retrieved from: <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070922/REVIEWS08/70922001/1023> (accessed: 13 January 13 2010).

³⁴ Thorstein Bunde Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* [1899], e-book produced by David Reed and David Widger, Project Gutenberg, 2008, Chapter IV “Conspicuous Consumption,” retrieved from: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/833/833-h/833-h.htm> (accessed 28 December 2010).

this morning, local time. The American people finally have a happy ending, after five days of frantic phone calls and hand wringing.³⁵

The profile of the U.S. appears here both on the level of the individual and on the level of state ("American people," media, diplomacy) with special focus on the individual, who can and does genuinely transgress borders of many kinds and becomes the cosmopolitan agent of (more trustful) communication bridging over the sometimes too rigid burdens of the political reality. After the news is on the air, the government of the United States of America asks Moroccan officials to find the culprits. Following a short search on the basis of the sophisticated bullets and rifle they are quickly led to Hassan, who tells authorities that he sold the rifle to Abdullah. In the meantime, Abdullah's sons confess their deed and, in fear of retaliation, they all try to run away but it is too late. The police start shooting at them. Finally, Ahmed is injured and Yussef surrenders, confessing the entire story that remains labeled as previously reported news. However, the origin of the rifle still remains obscure.

The stop-start narrative amasses many flashbacks, including the background story of the American couple. Susan Jones is traveling with her husband in Morocco on an attempt to heal the loss of their child due to sudden infant death syndrome. Susan and Richard are examples of what Ryder calls "comfort" cosmopolitanists³⁶ due to their behavior and simply because that they can afford it, similar to Amelia Warren's (Catherine Zeta-Jones) globetrotter-stewardess character in Steven Spielberg's *The Terminal*.³⁷ They trust native people not only in moments of emergency but do interact and cooperate closely with Middle-Worlders despite any crisis of trust. The Jones have two children, Debbie (Elle Fanning) and Mike (Nathan Gamble), attended in their Californian home by a Mexican nanny, Amelia (Adriana Barazza), who is impatiently waiting to attend her son's wedding in Mexico. Because of Susan's accident, Amelia has to remain in San Diego. The telephone call she receives from Richard requesting her to stay longer with children produces the Dynamic Quality of the next

35 Ebert, op. cit.

36 Ryder, op. cit.

37 *The Terminal*, Directed by: Steven Speilberg, Writers and Screenplay: Andrew Niccol, Sacha Grevasi, Jeff Nathanson, Music: John Williams, Cinematography: Janusz Kamiński, Cast: Tom Hanks, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Stanley Tucci, Zoë Saldana, Kumar Pallana, Berry Shabaka Henley, Diego Luna, *et al*, Distributor: Dreamworks. Runtime: 128 minutes, Year: 2004.

narrative segment of the film. Unable to miss this important family event, she decides to take the children with her and elicits the help of her problematic nephew, Santiago (Gael García Bernal) to drive them across the border to the Mexican fiesta.

Miraculously, they cross the border without incident, enjoy the fiesta but then decide to return to the United States that night. Their Middle-Worlder status lasts only temporary; Mike is fearful of the trip. He feels, like Juan Rulfo's narrator of "Macario," that he is "passing through purgatory,"³⁸ a feeling common to many illegal border-zone trespassers. Young Mike suffers a personal crisis of trust because he has been told that "Mexico is dangerous," to which Santiago ironically replies in Spanish that "yes, it's full of Mexicans."³⁹ Nevertheless, this objectification of danger leads to still another crisis of trust but not on the part of the children or the accompanying 'dangerous' Mexicans but rather on the border crossing back to the United States. Here, an officer becomes suspicious of Santiago's behavior and quickly realizes that children are traveling without a letter of consent from the parents. Confused and scared as Youssef and Ahmed were Amelia decides on the spur of the moment to perform an illegal act - to cross the border in the Tijuana desert with the Jones children. After extensive wandering in the desert-like Middle-World nomads navigating the badlands—Amelia and her charges get lost in this symbolic no man's land. The next day, afraid of possible fatal consequences, Amelia leaves the children in a place she thinks they are safe and where she can easily find her way back. She leaves in search of help; however, the border patrol finds and arrests her. The Jones children arrive home safely but Amelia is deported to Mexico after 16 years of working illegally in the United States despite the fact that Richard and Susan press no charges against her.

The narrative montage of the film moves on to a Japanese section that holds the key of the entire narrative. In Japan local detectives investigate the source of the rifle used in the Moroccan 'attack' in and try to find transnational links with the event in North Africa. Chieko Wataya (Rinko Kikuchi), a deaf-mute teenage girl living in a modern Tokyo apartment with her father, Yasujiro Wataya (Kôji Yakusho), had a traumatic experience and remains emotionally unstable because she is unable to overcome the suicide of her mother. To attract attention, she is sexually provoking her dentist and young boys at a dancing club. Then she exposes herself naked to the detective who inquires about a specific gun. Still haunted by the

38 Juan Rulfo, "Macario." In *The Burning Plain and Other Stories*. Trans. George D. Schade. (Austin: U of Texas P, 2008), 8.

39 *Babel* (dir. Alejandro G. Iñárritu).

tragic end of her mother who had shot herself and perhaps to protect her father from any inconvenient situation, Chieko informs the detective that her mother jumped out of the window. This narrative detour encapsulates a Dynamic Quality, which is part of the strategy of her survival in a linguistic geography pertaining to the margins. Similar to Amelia's illegal border crossing (to get children safely back) and to Yussef hiding the gun after the accident, she misleads the police about the relationship between the weapon they search for and her family members. Feeling an outcast and being 'Othered' by her inability to communicate with both her father about their loss as well as with the detective whom she likes, Chieko starts to resemble a linguistic nomad, a Middle-Worlder, caught between her wish to communicate and her inability to do so.

Despite her confining use of sign language, Chieko is one of *Babel's* most articulate characters. She is "deaf," but "not blind." She shows a desperate wish "to utter that word or sentence" but is prevented "because of the language barrier," gender expectations, specific "cultural assumptions" and mostly by "the inability of others to comprehend" what she says or might be "actually saying."⁴⁰ Chieko sees and understands the world around her but the world seems to ignore her or, as in the case of her father, to miscommunicate with her emotional tension. She is a key character and the only 'thread' that can lead the police to the story of the rifle. The detective finally meets her father, Yasujiro who promptly clarifies the situation. The gun that produced such turmoil had once belonged to him but after a memorable hunting trip to Morocco he gave the rifle as a gift to his local guide, Hassan. The origin of the rifle is finally solved in Japan after many transnational twists and turns; the epic of anxiety comes to a satisfactory denouement. The butterfly-effect has reached its last location.

Babel tackles issues that cut across three continents, four countries, five languages (English, Arabic, Spanish, Japanese, and Japanese sign language), many nations (media) and even more people and focuses on the vulnerability of both foreigners as tourists and natives as locals in a global climate of susceptibility. The transnational negotiations of the film take place in specific contact zones between and among certain people; these are the limits of language and culture visualized in the movie as the Moroccan desert and the windows of the tourist bus, the Tijuana border crossing and the telephone interface, the family balcony/apartment in Tokyo and Chieko's secret notes, the screen on which media relates the events and many more. These unrelated loci are static premises that become activated

40 Ebert, op. cit.

by the emergence of a small incident (a gunshot, a phone call, etc.) which causes the flow of the Dynamic Quality to spread in the region and then on a wider level, reaching even globally remote areas. In the transnational encounters that are caused by this dynamic phenomenon, the characters of *Babel* face a series of attitudes which condition their negotiations: carelessness, paranoia, biases, stupidity, barriers of language, vulnerability and immigration issues, all placed amidst a crisis of trust on a global level. In these arduous and quite abrasive conditions “when any kind of contact is achieved, against the long odds of our essential separateness, it looks like a miracle.”⁴¹ González Iñárritu’s *Babel* maps some of these liaison miracles. It is a sensible commentary, a visual translation of the articulations among global, regional, national, and local forces, and also a cultural product reflecting intricate processes of negotiations between nations, groups of people, and individuals. In short, this movie reflects a post-nationalist tendency towards intradiegetic and extradiegetic issues alike which can be best described in terms of transnational discourse.

Cosmopolitan or Middle-Worlder, in the transnational negotiations this film depicts (and most probably in all such negotiations around the world) it is not the group, the organization, the denomination, company, party or the nation but the individual who can primarily overcome and is actually mastering the crises of trust on the global level throughout the complex web of inter-personal encounters across cultures that seem to ultimately count.

41 Rafferty, op. cit.

NEGOTIATIONS 1, MARCH 2011

**PUBLIC PEDAGOGY AND THE POLITICS OF HUMILIATION
NEOLIBERAL GENEROSITY AND THE ATTACK ON PUBLIC
EDUCATION**

Henry A. Giroux

The term ‘cruelty’ is chosen by convention to indicate those forms of extreme violence, whether intentional or systemic, physical or moral...that seem to be, as is said ‘worse than death’... the actual or virtual menace of cruelty represents for politics, and particularly for politics today...a crucial experiment in which the very possibility of politics is at stake.

Etienne Balibar¹

Under the regime of neoliberalism, a legacy of bad faith, culture of cruelty, and politics of humiliation has not only gained momentum in American society, it has been normalized. The recent tragic violence and mass killing committed by Jared Lee Loughner in Tucson, Arizona cannot be reduced to the mental instability of a young man out of touch with reality. Nor can such a horrendous act be reduced to a breakdown in civil discourse. Such rationales are too easy, and emulate what might be called a classic case of American denial. There is a deeper order of politics behind this murderous act, one that the American public is inclined to ignore. More specifically, the general responses to this violent act are symptomatic of a society that separates private injuries from public considerations, refusing to connect individual acts to broader social considerations. I want to suggest that underlying the Arizona shootings is a culture of cruelty that has become so widespread in American society that the violence it produces is largely taken for granted and often dismissed in terms that cut it off from any larger systemic forces at work in the society. The culture of cruelty is important for thinking through how entertainment and politics now converge in ways that fundamentally transform how we understand and imagine politics in the current historical moment—a moment when the central issue of getting by is no longer about working to get ahead but struggling

1. Etienne Balibar, *We, The People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 6.

simply to survive. And many groups, who are considered marginal because they are poor, unemployed, people of color, elderly, or young, have not just been excluded from “the American dream,” but have become utterly redundant and disposable, waste products of a society that no longer considers them of any value. How else to explain the zealousness in which social safety nets have been dismantled, the transition from welfare to workfare (offering little job training programs and no child care), and recent acrimony over health care reform’s public option? What accounts for the passage of laws that criminalize the behavior of the 1.2 million homeless in the United States, often defining sleeping, sitting, soliciting, lying down, or loitering in public places as a criminal offence rather than a behavior in need of compassionate good-will, and public assistance? Or for that matter, the expulsions, suspensions, segregation, class discrimination, and racism in the public schools as well as the more severe beatings, broken bones, and damaged lives endured by young people in the juvenile justice system? Within this politics, there is a ruthless and hidden dimension of cruelty, one in which the powers of life and death are largely determined by punishing apparatuses, such as the criminal justice system for poor people of color and/or a market forces that more and more decide who may live and who may die. But there is more. There is also the growing dominance of a right-wing media forged in a pedagogy of hate that has become a crucial element providing numerous platforms for a culture of cruelty. This form of cultural pedagogy is primarily characterized by more than a breach of civility. It also registers without apology and legitimates a hostility towards immigrants, a barely disguised racism, a disdain for the poor, and almost anyone supportive of the social contract and the welfare state. Citizens are all too often constructed through a language of contempt for all non-commercial public spheres and a chilling indifference to the plight of others that is expressed in vicious tirades against big government and health care reform. There is a growing element of scorn on the part of the American public for those human beings caught in the web of misfortune, human suffering, dependency, and deprivation.

When I refer to a culture of cruelty and a discourse of humiliation, I am talking about the institutionalization and widespread adoption of a set of values, policies, and symbolic practices that legitimate forms of organized violence against human beings considered disposable and which lead inexorably to unnecessary hardship, suffering, and despair. Such practices are increasingly accompanied by forms of humiliation in which the character, dignity, and bodies of targeted individuals and groups are under attack. Its extreme form is evident in state-sanctioned torture practices such as those promoted by the Bush administration in Iraq and in the images of

humiliation that emerged from the torture chambers of Abu Ghraib prison. The politics of humiliation also works through symbolic systems, diverse modes of address, and varied framing mechanisms in which the targeted subjects are represented in terms that demonize them, strip them of their humanity, and position them in ways that invite ridicule and sometimes violence. This is what the late Pierre Bourdieu called the symbolic dimension of power—that is the capacity of systems of meaning, signification, and diverse modes of communication to shield, strengthen, and normalize relations of domination through distortion, misrepresentation, and the use of totalizing narratives². The hidden order of such politics lies not just in its absences, but its appeal to common sense and its claim to being objective and apolitical. Culture in this sense becomes the site of the most powerful and persuasive forms of pedagogy precisely because it often denies its pedagogical function.

Such practices and the cultural politics that legitimize them are apparent in zero tolerance policies in schools which mindlessly punish poor white and students of color by criminalizing behavior as trivial as violating a dress code. Such students have been assaulted by the police, handcuffed and taken away in police cars, and in some cases imprisoned.³ The discourse of humiliation abounds in the public sphere of hate radio and Fox News, which provides a forum for a host of pundits who trade in insults against feminists, environmentalists, African-Americans, immigrants, progressive critics, liberal media, President Barack Obama, and anyone else who rejects the militant orthodox views of the new media extremists and religious fundamentalists. Policies that humiliate and punish are also visible in the growing expansion of the criminal justice system used regularly to deal with problems that would be better addressed through social reforms rather than punishment. Homeless people are now arrested for staying too long in public libraries, sleeping in public parks, and soliciting money on the streets of many urban centers. People who receive welfare benefits are increasingly harassed by government agencies. Debtors' prisons are making a comeback as millions of people are left with no recourse but to default on the myriad of bills that they cannot pay.⁴ The growing numbers of people who are jobless, homeless, and living beneath the poverty line

2. Loic Wacquant, "Symbolic Power in the Rule of the 'State Nobility,'" in Loic Wacquant, ed. *Pierre Bourdieu and Democratic Politics* (London: Polity, 2005), 134.

3. See Henry A. Giroux, "Schools and the Pedagogy of Punishment," *Truthout.org* 20 October 2009, <http://www.truth-out.org/10200910>.

4. Editorial, "The New Debtors' Prisons," *New York Times* 5 April 2009 : A24.

are treated by the government and dominant media merely as statistical fodder for determining the health of the GNP while their lived experience of hardship is rarely mentioned. Millions of people are denied health care, regardless of how ill they might be, because they cannot afford it. Rather than enact social protections such as adequate health care for everyone, the advocates of free-market capitalism enact social policies that leave millions of people uninsured and treated largely as simply disposable populations who should fend for themselves.

Echoes of such cruelty can be heard in the discourses and voices of right-wing and conservative politicians who want to abolish Medicare, Medicaid, and social security as government sponsored programs. We hear it in the words of anti-government libertarians who insist that all problems are self-made and claim that those who suffer from a variety of misfortunes whose causes are outside of their control are undeserving of government help and protections. In this neoliberal cutthroat scenario, one's fate becomes exclusively a matter of individual choice and hence "interpreted as another confirmation of the individuals' sole and inalienable responsibility for their individual plight."⁵ The arrogance of power, cruelty, and discourse of humiliation that frame this notion of hyper-individualism have become viral in a society that has learned to hate any vestige of the social contract. We hear it in the words of the "super-rich" such as Bill Gates who insists that pension payments should be reduced for retired teachers, a hypocritical and heartless demand coming from one of the world's richest people and, ironically, one of the world's best-known philanthropists.⁶ We see the politics of humiliation and cruelty at work in the efforts of politicians to slash food stamp benefits, openly deriding the poor while doing so. Within this discourse of neoliberal fundamentalism and adherence to free-market values, social protections and spending entitlements are viewed as forms of big government corruption that need to be abolished, giving credence to a notion of market freedom in which everyone is expendable or potentially disposable. In reality, the culture of cruelty and the politics of humiliation make it easier for people to turn away from the misfortunes of others and express indifference to the policies and practices of truly corrupt individuals and institutions of power that produce huge profits at the cost of massive suffering and social hardship.

Even more disturbing is that this growing culture of humiliation

5. Zygmunt Bauman, *The Art of Life* (London: Polity Press, 2008), 89-90.

6. John Fund, "Getting Schooled in Aspen," *Wall Street Journal* 13 July 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704288204575363100367240836.html>

works in tandem with a formative politics of dislocation and misrepresentation. One example can be seen in the efforts of Bill Gates (Microsoft), Philip Anshultz (Denver Oil), Jeff Skoll (Ebay), and other members of the corporate elite to use their power and money-soaked foundations to pour millions into a massive public pedagogy campaign that paints America's system of public education, teacher unions, and public school teachers in terms that are polarizing and demonizing.⁷ Humiliation in this case masquerading as generosity couples with an attempt to divert attention from the real problems and solutions needed to improve American public education.⁸ Real problems affecting schools such as rising poverty, homelessness, vanishing public services for the disadvantaged, widespread unemployment, massive inequality in wealth and income, overcrowded classrooms, and a bankrupt and iniquitous system of school financing disappear in the educational discourse of the "super-rich". Moreover, the policies promoted by such anti-public reformers are endlessly legitimated through a massive public relations campaign that is one-sided, politically reactionary, and sectarian in its attempts to disparage and drown out more critical and progressive voices. The foundation for this mode of soft domination can be seen in the ways in which the rich and elite institutions use the popular media to promote their ideologies, especially those that advance the impoverishment of public values, public spheres, and democratic public "life" Movies such as *Waiting for Superman*, *The Cartel*, and *The Lottery* function as huge propaganda machines parading as truth-telling art, produced and circulated within a cultural apparatus that takes its cues from the Disney empire's slick and powerful marketing

7. Amy Goodman, "Leading Education Scholar Diane Ravitch: No Child Left Behind Has Left US Schools with Legacy of 'Institutionalized Fraud,'" *Democracy Now!* 5 March 2010, <http://www.democracynow.org/2010/3/5/protests>

8. For a thoughtless and shameless celebration of the billionaires' club, see Diane Francis, "Waiting for Superman and Justice," *Financial Post* 26 September 2010, <http://opinion.financialpost.com/2010/09/26/waiting-for-superman-and-justice/>. For a rebuttal to this kind of nonsense, see Editors, "The Real Facts About Waiting for Superman," *FairTest.org* 30 September 2010, <http://www.fairtest.org/real-facts-about-waiting-superman>. See also Rich Ayers, "'Waiting for Superman': A Missed Opportunity for Education—What 'Superman' Got Wrong, Point by Point," *CommonDreams.org* 27 September 2010, <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2010/09/27-10>. For an excellent analysis of the impact of philanthropy on education, see Kenneth Saltman, *The Gift of Education: Public Education and Venture Philanthropy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). See also Kenneth Saltman, *Capitalizing on Disaster: Taking and Breaking Public Schools* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2007).

machine.⁹ Sprinkled with the pixie dust of urgency, a desperate call for reform, and alleged good will, the new market-driven cultural apparatus and public pedagogy of the educational anti-reformers bombard the American public with films and other media that denigrate public education while promoting the values of casino capitalism. And, yet, the American people largely endorse the “culture of philanthropy,” unlike the British who as Terry Eagleton points out “[N]o more want their children’s education to depend on billionaires than they want Prince Charles to hand out food parcels in Trafalgar Square to the deserving poor. Most British students believe that higher education should be a public responsibility and should come free.”¹⁰ This is precisely the position that the anti-public reformers want to eliminate from any discourse about public and higher education.

The discourse of these so-called educational reformers is simplistic and polarizing. It lacks any understanding of the real problems and strengths of public education and it trades in authoritarian tactics and a discourse of demonization and humiliation. For example, rather than educate the public, *Waiting for Superman* carpet bombs them with misrepresentations fueled by dubious assertions and denigrating images of public schools and teachers. Beneath its discourse of urgency, altruism, and political purity parading in a messianic language of educational reform and a politics of generosity are the same old and discredited neoliberal policies that cheerfully serve corporate interests: privatization; union busting; competition as the only mode of motivation; an obsession with measurement; a relentless attack on teacher autonomy; the weakening of tenure; stripping educational goals of public values; defining teacher quality in purely instrumental terms; an emphasis on authoritative modes of management; and a mindless obsession with notions of pedagogy that celebrate memorization and teaching to the test. High stakes accountability and punishing modes of leadership, regardless of the damage they wreak on students and teachers, are now the only game in town when it comes to educational reform—so much so that it is called revolutionary. At the same time, Gates and his billionaire friends gain huge tax write-offs from the money they invest in schools while at the same time reaping the rewards of controlling institutions funded by public tax revenues. Gates and his cronies use these tax deductions

9. The reactionary nature of the neoliberal and corporate ideologies driving this film and its view of educational reform is on full display in promotional book that accompanied its release, see Karl Weber, ed. *Waiting for ‘Superman’: How We Can Save America’s Failing Public Schools* (Philadelphia: Public Affairs, 2010).

10. Terry Eagleton, “What is the Worth of Social Democracy,” *Harper’s Magazine* (October 2010): 80.

to control public schools while the taxpaying public in this case loses valuable tax revenue and cedes control of publicly funded schools to the rich and powerful corporate moguls. This isn't philanthropic, it is morally and politically irresponsible because it represents a form of hostile generosity that serves to expand the power of the corporate rich over public schools while offering the illusion of enriching public life.¹¹ It gets worse. Many hedge fund operatives and banks invest in charter schools because they get windfall profits by "using a little-known federal tax break" called the New Markets Tax Credit "to finance new charter-school construction."¹² Once the buildings are finished, they are rented out to public school districts at exorbitant prices. For instance, one Albany "school's rent jumped from \$170,000 in 2008 to \$560,000 in" 2010.

Democratic goals and public values no longer have any merit in a reform movement in love with the logic of measurement, profit, and privatization. This is not a reform movement but an anti-reform movement that can only imagine schooling within what my colleague David L. Clark calls "an eternal present of consumption and subjection." It is a movement that appears to kill critical thought, the ability to think imaginatively, and any notion of pedagogy that takes matters of individual autonomy and social empowerment seriously. In the name of reform, we now face increasing numbers of schools that either bear a close resemblance to the old Ford factory production lines or are modeled after prisons. These are the new dead zones of education, increasingly inhabited by demoralized teachers and bored students and largely supported by the new educational reformers. Manufactured contempt for public schooling breeds more than misrepresentation and a politics of humiliation. It also covers up the real problems public schools face when locked into the ideology and practices of the anti-public reform movement. There is no mention of the cheating and corruption of school administrators, dumping of under performing students, deskilling of teachers, refusals to accept students for whom English is not their first language or who have learning disabilities, and other forms of violence that accompany such reforms now being undertaken with the blessing of the super-rich and corporate power brokers of casino capitalism. Charter schools have become the dressed-up symbols of the

11. This issue is taken up in great detail by Ibid., Saltman, *The Gift of Education*.

12. Juan Gonzalez, "Albany Charter Cash Cow: Big Banks Making a Bundle On New Construction as Schools Bear the Cost," *New York Daily News* 7 May 2010, http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/education/2010/05/07/2010-05-07_albany_charter_cash_cow_big_banks_making_a_bundle_on_new_construction_as_schools.html

new politics of disposability—presenting well-scrubbed uniformed children as symbols of order and middle-class values. In actuality, the anti-public reformers who embrace charter schools have little to say or do with the millions of children who are arguably the most disposable of all—kids with various learning and physical disabilities along with poor white, black, and brown kids who will never be counted as relevant in a system in which conformity and high test scores are the tickets to success. These kids are shunned by the army of privateers and pushed into schools that warehouse, punish, and use disciplinary methods rooted in the culture of prisons. At the same time, these reformers demonize public schools and public school teachers but are silent about the fact that some of the most extensive studies of charter schools have found that fewer than 17 percent of charter schools outperform traditional public schools.¹³

Excessive wealth and power do more than direct high-level educational policy in the United States, although their influence in that realm should not be underestimated;¹⁴ they also circulate and promote their ideologies and market-driven values almost completely free of a sustained critique across the dominant cultural and media landscapes of America. The educational force of the wider culture has now become the weapon of choice in promoting market-driven educational reforms and denigrating American public education and its struggling, hard-working teachers. This marketing machine explains the well-publicized and orchestrated hype over the movie *Waiting for Superman*, a bought-and-sold product that offers no critiques and lets the right-wing talking heads and hedge fund advocates provide most of the commentary. For example, not only are there endless numbers of newspaper editorials, television series, media advertisements, YouTube clips, and every other imaginable element of the new and old media promoting *Waiting for Superman*, but it is also being highlighted by NBC as part of its series “Education Nation,” sponsored no less by the for-profit University of Phoenix. What is incredible about this series is its claim to offer a balanced commentary on the state of education when in fact it is an unabashed advertisement for various versions of corporate educational reform. The enemies it targets are the system, teacher unions, tenure, and teachers whose students do not do well on high stakes assessment

13. See Trip Gabriel, “Despite Push, Success at Charter Schools is Mixed,” *New York Times* 1 May 2010): A1. See also the recent study put out by Stanford University.

14. See Henry A. Giroux, “Chartering Disaster: Why Duncan’s Corporate-Based Schools Can’t Deliver an Education That Matters,” *Truthout.org* 21 June 2010, <http://www.truth-out.org/chartering-disaster-why-duncans-corporate-based-schools-cant-deliver-education-that-matters60553>

tests. The film's misrepresentation breeds more than uniformed citizens; it also collaborates with the dominant media to promote a form of public pedagogy in which the school reform policies of the anti-public school advocates become the only game in town.

Examples of this massive form of corporate-sponsored pedagogy—of which *Waiting for Superman* is only one example—become almost omnipresent, moving in relay-like fashion through a corporate cultural apparatus that promotes an anti-public ideology with its denigration of public education and other institutions of the welfare state as if it were just a matter of common sense unworthy of debate, critical interrogation, or opposing arguments. How else to explain, for instance, the overwhelmingly positive reviews this deeply biased and conservative film has generated from the dominant liberal and corporate media? In part, this can be explained by the propaganda blitz engineered by the corporate backers of the film. We get a glimpse of the hermetic and sutured nature of this campaign from Dana Goldstein in her catalogue of the venues that have promoted the film. She writes:

‘Can One Little Movie Save America’s Schools?’ asked the cover of *New York* magazine. On September 20 *The Oprah Winfrey Show* featured the film’s director, Davis Guggenheim, of *An Inconvenient Truth*. Tom Friedman of the *New York Times* devoted a column to praising the film. *Time* published an education issue coinciding with the documentary’s release and is planning a conference built in part around the school reform strategies the film endorses. NBC, too, will host an education reform conference in late September, *Waiting for Superman* will be screened and debated there, and many of the reformers involved in its production will be there. Katie Couric of *CBS Evening News* has promised a series of segments based on the movie.¹⁵

In this case, the dominant media is providing the broader cultural landscape and mechanism through which such a film receives endless praise as one

15. Danna Goldstein, “‘Waiting for Superman’ Film Champions Charter Schools, but Hides that 80% of Them are No Better Than Public Education,” *AlterNet* 30 September 2010, <http://www.alternet.org/story/148353>. Ironically, this review says almost nothing about neoliberalism and the impact it has had on public schools and the anti-public education movement.

of the most significant commentaries on educational reform to come along in years. And yet the film is nothing more than an advertisement for charter schools, corporate values, market-driven reforms, a slash-and-burn mode of leadership that glorifies tough love policies which bear an eerie resemblance to the way boot camps are run in the military, and a polarizing piece of propaganda aimed at undermining public education while also demonizing and humiliating teachers. Exhibiting an unquestioned faith in market values and charter schools, it is in denial about both the public schools that work and the need to improve public schooling rather than turn it over to the advocates of free-market fundamentalism and a discredited casino capitalism. The success of this film ultimately speaks less to the persuasiveness of its arguments than it does to the way it is being bankrolled and promoted aggressively by hedge fund operatives looking for a quick profit. Diane Ravitch has aptly called this group—made up of the Gates, Broad, and Walton foundations and others who “are committed to charter schools and to evaluating teachers by test scores”—the “Billionaire Boys’ Club.”¹⁶

Within this pedagogical apparatus and marketing spectacle, high quality schooling for all students is now replaced by the closed and demeaning logic of the lottery, cloaked in the sanctimonious language and magical aura of “individual choice.” Life and its various facets such as schooling become within this panacea of choice a perpetual search for bargains and consumer goods rather than a search for justice. As morality is rendered painless and stripped of any social responsibility, the new anti-public reformers render poverty and inequality invisible as important factors in promoting school failure. At the same time, they argue with no irony intended that the absence of choice is the most profound cause of educational failure. Under such circumstances, equity is divorced from excellence just as the public good is replaced by individual choice and the private good.

It gets worse. There is no talk in this film or among these so-called billionaire educational reformers about the connection between democracy and schooling, learning and civic responsibility, the dignity of teacher labor, or the violence that is done to education when the only way we can talk about it is by using industrial metaphors. The repeated emphasis on education producing a product, as if it were designed simply to produce durable goods, does nothing more than justify its treatment as a machine to be repaired rather than a complex social institution made up of living,

16. Roger Bybee, “It’s the Poverty, Stupid,” *In These Times* 25 August 2010, http://www.inthesetimes.org/article/6326/its_the_poverty_stupid

breathing human beings. Schools in this stripped down discourse exist free of the relations of iniquitous funding systems, class and racial discrimination, poverty, massive joblessness, overcrowded classrooms, lack of classroom resources, rotting school buildings, lack of basic services for children in need, and so on. This absence is not a minor issue because without a larger understanding of the political, economic, and social forces that impinge on schools in different contexts it is impossible to understand why and how some schools fail and some children are underserved. Successful schools cannot function without public services that help children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds just as they cannot function adequately when a society refuses to pay teachers decent salaries, provide them with high-quality teacher education, and make financial and ideological investments in order to validate teaching as one of the most dignified and civically cherished professions in the country.

Moreover, there is little or no attempt on the part of the wealthy class of educational misinformers to analyze schooling as a place where students learn about the operations of power and what it means to take risks, engage in critical dialogue, embrace the important lessons that come with shared responsibilities, or learn the knowledge, skills, and values needed to be imaginative and critically responsible citizens. Instead, we are told—not surprisingly by the hedge fund reformers and billionaire gurus—that schooling is about the production of trained workers, memorization is more important than critical thinking, standardized testing is better than teaching students to be self-reflective, and learning how to read texts critically is not as important as memorizing discrete bodies of allegedly factual knowledge. Having their desires and skills shaped in such a way, students and teachers are reduced to a permanent underclass, denied the opportunities to develop a capacity and motivation to challenge the power and authority of a rich elite. Pedagogical practice in this neoliberal framework is cleansed of any emancipatory possibilities, divested of its capacity to teach students how to engage in thoughtful dialogue and exchange and use their imagination in the service of understanding the lives and experiences of individuals and groups different from themselves. In addition, all of this educational nonsense is reinforced daily with the silly, if not destructive, notion that wealth guarantees wisdom and that wealthy hedge fund types and the culture of finance offer both a good model for ethical behavior and airtight insights in how to organize schools. Under such circumstances, the corporate controlled media slavishly repeat and sanctify almost anything that is said by the rich and the famous, suggesting that what they have to say not only has merit but provides a valuable resource for guiding policy, especially educational policy. I was reminded of this recently when Bill

Gates appeared on NBC *Nightly News* and stated that any form of teaching and knowledge that cannot be measured is useless. And there was not a shred of criticism from TV host Brian Williams to indicate the reactionary implications of such a statement.

Within this anti-public educational discourse, with its relentless claim to political innocence, its celebration of individual choice and excessive competition, allegiance to corporate values, unflappable sense of certainty, and Wild West manner of governance, there is a mode of engagement and politics of representation that not only mimic an arrogant corporate-based world view but increasingly deploy a strategy of humiliation as a way to wage war against anything that promotes public values and the public good. What does it mean when NBC *News* presents a video clip without adding any of its own critical framework or commentary of Republican Governor Chris Christie hurling insults at members of the New Jersey Teachers' Union in this case about his plan to strip teachers of tenure and reduce them to the status of clerks with no job security and dismal working conditions, and then adding to his explanation the following insult: "Your performance was awful, you didn't do what we asked you to do, you didn't produce the product we wanted you to produce, but we don't look at that, all we look at is are you still breathing."¹⁷ Disregarding the foolish suggestion that the purpose of education is to produce is something akin to an industrial product; Christie's commentary is beyond demeaning and ignorant. It is symptomatic of a type of public bullying that has become a prominent feature in American society and takes its cue from a shift in the larger culture away from a discourse of social investment and compassion toward one of insults, disdain, unchecked individualism, and scorn for both public values and the institutions and people who work as public servants in them.

Unsurprisingly, Christie is a governor who not only wants to balance the New Jersey state budget on the backs of teachers but is also, as Les Leopold reports, "resolutely opposed to reinstituting the 'millionaires' tax"—even though the state's fiscal crisis is a direct consequence of what millionaires and billionaires did on Wall Street.¹⁸ Economic Darwinism with its ruthless survival-of-the-fittest ethic is more and more legitimated through an outright attack on teachers, public servants, and unions, and

17. Cited in Mike Spina, *Teachers Under Attack* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 38.

18. Les Leopold, "Hey Dad, Why Does This Country Protect Billionaires, and Not Teachers?" *AlterNet* (May 5, 2010), <http://www.alternet.org/module/printversion/146738>

legitimated by a mode of public pedagogy in which humiliation is used to wage war on one's opponents, preventing any attempt to create the conditions for thoughtful dialogue, exchange, and debate. Anger rather than understanding and thoughtful reflection is now the most celebrated feature of a society that scorns the connection between reason and freedom. The unmediated and evidence-free outburst now rules, and the more stupid and insulting it is, the more attention it gets as it circulates through a screen culture addicted to spectacular displays of indiscriminate ranting that can be packaged to improve viewer ratings.

Outrageous spectacles of cruelty and humiliation have become the weapon of choice among those elites and corporate moguls now waging war on the social state and vital public institutions and services.¹⁹ This is particularly true for the increasing assaults on public education by a diverse group of anti-public educational reformers, armed with their hedge fund connections and limitless trust funds. These corporate power brokers often couch the discourse of humiliation in terms less harsh than what we hear from right-wing politicians and hate-talk shock jocks. Their anti-public discourse with its polarizing enemy/friend divide and demonization of teachers and teacher unions reproduces among the general public a culture of silence and complicity. Under such circumstances debate, dialogue, and thoughtful exchange are largely absent while media spectacles substitute for the genuine public spheres that make such reasoned practices possible. The educational reformers claim to uphold important educational principles and yet behind their cocoon of privilege, wealth, and power is a pedagogical machine and cultural apparatus that shut down the very public spheres in which such principles become operative.

What has become increasingly clear is that teachers are the new scapegoats for the market-driven juggernaut that is sucking the blood out of democracy in the United States. The call for charter schools and vouchers and the appeal to individual choice emulate the language of the bankers who were responsible for the economic crisis of 2008 and the suffering and destruction that followed. The blatant ideological effects of this ethically sterile discourse have now taken on a more militant tone by flooding the media and other commercial spheres with a politics of humiliation that, to

19. I have taken up this issue in great detail in *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2008) and also in *Youth in a Suspect Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also Anthony DiMaggio, "Gutting Public Education: Neoliberalism and the Politics of Opportunity," *TruthOut.org* 25 June 25 2010, <http://www.truth-out.org/gutting-public-education-neoliberalism-and-politics-opportunism/60754>

paraphrase Michel Foucault, mimics war, annihilation, unconditional surrender, and full-fledged battles. Public schools and teachers are now the object of a sustained and aggressive attack against all things public in which they are put in the same disparaged league as advocates of health care reform. And what should be obvious is that they now occupy such a position not because they have failed to do their jobs well but because they work in the public sphere. Public schools, teachers, and unions have become objects of enormous scorn and targets of punishing policies. So-called reformers such as Michelle Rhee, who took over the District of Columbia public schools three years ago, have become iconic symbols for enacting educational policies based on a mix of market incentives such as paying students for good grades, merit pay for teachers, and firing teachers en masse who do not measure up to narrow and often discredited empirically based performance measures.²⁰ Reform in this case is driven by a slash-and-burn management system that relies more on punishment than critical analysis, teacher and student support, and social development. The hedge fund managers, billionaire industrialists, and corporate vultures backing such policies appear to view teachers, unions, and public schools as an unfortunate if not threatening remnant of the social state and days long past when social investments in the public good and young people actually mattered and public values were the defining feature of the educational system, however flawed. This hatred of public values, public services, public schools, and teachers is only intensified by a wider culture of cruelty that has gripped American society.

The growing culture of humiliation and cruelty in the United States suggests that anyone who does not believe in the pursuit of material self-interest, unbridled competition, and market-driven values is a proper candidate to be humiliated. If one makes even the slightest gesture of protest toward the dissociation of economics from ethics, the stripping from social relations, any vestige of public values, the undermining of important modes of solidarity, or the promotion of a market fundamentalism that views social responsibility as a weakness, they are fair game to be publically denigrated and insulted, or at least dismissed as irresponsible. Next to the ethos of a society now driven by the metaphors of war and survival-of-the-fittest, any critical reference by individuals or groups to the social problems affecting American society or concerns voiced about the need to reclaim civic courage and defend the institutions that deepen democratic public life invite scurrilous comments intended to

20. Tamar Lewin, "School Chief Dismisses 241 Teachers in Washington," *New York Times* 23 July 2010): A1.

embarrass and humiliate. When the disadvantaged make reference to their plight, they are viewed and labeled as human beings who lack dignity and are subject to insulting remarks, just as the social programs designed to alleviate such suffering become the objects of a discourse that both humiliates and punishes. Consider, for example, presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee referring to people with pre-existing health conditions as houses that have already burned down—a cruel and crude attempt to place himself in good stead with the health insurance industries. There is also the all-too-common example of Sharron Angle—former Republican candidate for the US Senate who claimed that insurance companies should abolish insurance coverage for autism, mocking the term as if it were some kind of reference for a joke told on Comedy Central.

When the 2010 Republican candidate for governor of New York Carl Paladino shamelessly stated “that space in prisons should be turned into work camps in which poor people would get ... classes in personal hygiene,” the dominant media ignored the underlying hatred for the poor such a statement expressed.²¹ When it was revealed in the press that Paladino had emailed his friends images and photos of “a group of black men trying to get out of the way of an airplane that is apparently moving across a field [with] the caption: ‘Run niggers, run,’” the American public barely blinked. In fact, Paladino’s poll ratings increased, furthering his quest to become the governor of New York.²² When Rush Limbaugh speaks to millions in terms that are racist, demeaning, and thoroughly uncivil, the media responds compliantly by treating such views as just another opinion among many. Humiliation as a mode of discourse and public intervention—enacted upon others with no apologies—has become so commonplace in American cultural politics that the only time we notice it is when it literally results in young people committing suicide, as in the recent tragic deaths of Seth Walsh and Tyler Clementi.²³

The politics of humiliation is fluid, mobile, and capacious as it increasingly spreads and infects almost every public and commercial sphere

21. Bob Herbert, “What Is Paladino About?” *New York Times* 27 September 2010: A29.

22. Ibid., A29.

23. See Lisa W. Foderaro, “Private Moment Made Public, and a Fatal Jump,” *New York Times* 29 September 2010: A1; Stacy Teicher Khadaroo, “Death of California Youth Puts Focus on Rise in Antigay Bullying,” *Truthout.org* 29 September 2010, <http://www.truth-out.org/death-california-youth-puts-focus-rise-antigay-bullying63697?print>

where ideas are produced and circulated. As an ideology, it is politically reactionary and morally despicable. As a strategy, it seeks to denigrate and silence others, often targeting those already disadvantaged, while promoting unthinking self-interest, arrogance, and certitude at the expense of critical thought, dialogue, and exchange. Unfortunately, America is now being shaped by an anti-educational reform movement that uses the politics of humiliation for creating stereotypes about public schooling, teachers, and marginalized youth. At the same time, the movement wins supporters from the dominant media and corporate elite by celebrating the very market-driven values that plunged America into a financial catastrophe. And yet, despite these grave circumstances, we seem to lack the critical language, civic courage, and public values to recognize that when a country institutionalizes a culture of cruelty that increasingly takes aim at public schools and their hard-working teachers, it is embarking on a form of self-sabotage and collective suicide whose victim will be not merely education, but democracy itself.

NEGOTIATIONS 1, MARCH 2011

BILINGUALISM OF THE OTHER: FROM ABROGATION TO (EX) APPROPRIATION

Silvia Nagy-Zekmi

“...je n’ai qu’une langue, et ce n’est pas la mienne”
Derrida

As discussions about agency in the representation of the postcolonial acquire more impetus, the linguistic dilemma becomes prominent in this debate. Decolonization – a continuous process of resistance with a noticeable heterogeneity of subject positions – emerges from the moment of colonization through multiple and simultaneous articulations of the post/colonial. However, it may not be appropriately evaluated, much less critiqued, if deliberations on agency (who speaks for whom?) are not addressed properly. Agency depends partly on the choice of language in postcolonial writing, and provides an important key to its effectiveness. This article is focused on the linguistic choices some postcolonial authors, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Ken Saro Wiwa on one hand, and Assia Djebar and Salman Rushdie on the other, made in their writing. Derrida takes up the “language question” in *Monolingualism of the Other*¹ by reflecting upon his own relationship to the French language and the dynamics of political and cultural inclusion and exclusion in colonial Algeria, its meaning and significance for an Algerian Jew. His reactions suggest that the voice of the other is crucial precisely because “language is for the other, coming from the other, the coming of the other” (68). To describe his situation Derrida resorts to Khatibi’s statement about “maternal dialect” which he, Derrida, lacks.

... if he [the Arab writer of French expression] does not

1 There are many possible readings of *Monolingualism of the Other* (Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or, The Prosthetic of Origin*. Transl. Patrick Mensah Stanford UP, 1998), for example, Barbara Vinken sees it as a “treatise on love, a text of desire” (Barbara Vinken, “The Love of the Letter. Derrida and His Only Lady.” *Cardozo Law Review*. 27, 2, 2005: 877–883), 878. The special issue of *Cardozo Law Review* where her article appeared was dedicated to Derrida’s work. I share some of Vinken’s ideas regarding *Monolingualism* as a text of desire, a longing for the unattainable oneness, never achieved due to the inherent alterity of language.

possess his maternal dialect insofar as it is not written, at least he “possesses” it as a “spoken” idiom, which is not the case of the Jew of Algeria, whose maternal dialect - being already the language of the other, of the non-Jewish French colonist- literally lacks the unity, the age, and the presumed proximity of a maternal dialect. Khatibi qtd. by Derrida (63).

However, Derrida is an atypical case. For many postcolonial writers who are bilingual as a consequence of colonization and colonial education, strategies of resistance are embedded in the choice of language as they choose between abrogation and appropriation of the language of the colonizer, the “acquired language” (*langue apprise*)² and their own, the “maternal dialect”, while at the same time they are also mindful of the access to publication and distribution of their work. This raises an ideological question about the readership at which the work is aimed and whose impact on the writing is obvious. Textual strategies do not encompass only representation, but also include considerations of access to a wider readership, the author’s ability to reach a European (?) public, either for “writing back to” or for ingratiating him/herself in a self-exoticizing gesture. The latter may ultimately result in the reduction of the author’s authenticity with the “home readership”. This was decidedly the case with Algerian writer, Aisha Lemsine’s work³ who tried to reconcile Maghrebi tradition and Western values by adopting the colonizer’s gaze in displaying a (duplicitous?) lack of familiarity with Algerian codes of behavior. Not surprisingly, her choice of language is French with a few expressions in Arabic, carefully explained in footnotes, which again, suggest the intended readership the author had in mind.

As Albert Memmi⁴, Frantz Fanon⁵, Aimé Césaire⁶ and others so eloquently stated in many instances that colonization had a de-humanizing effect on the colonized, it is logical to suppose that postcolonial writing will explore the criteria for humanity, in which language must be a key

2 Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Du bilinguisme* (Paris: Denoël, 1985) 10.

3 Aicha Lemsine, *La Chrysalide* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1976), and *Ciel de Porphyre* (Paris: Jean Claude Simoën, 1978).

4 Albert Memmi, *Portrait du Colonisé précédé de portrait du Colonisateur* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1957).

5 Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

6 Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialism* (Editions Prescence Africaine, 1955).

factor. While representation of the non-human subject operating in the realm of the fantastic propelled by a desire of becoming human through mimiquing humans (Frankeinstein, Coppelia), the dehumanized subject, the oppressed, the colonized is articulated through language, with all its internal contradictions embodies in Caliban's outburst: "the red plague rid you for learning me your language!"⁷. Clearly, in the colonial context, language is a tool of oppression and as such, also a source of dehumanization (ironically contradicting the generally accepted fact that it is language that makes us human). The colonized will never have the same ideological baggage to signify the language of the colonizer in spite of the colonizer's efforts to infuse the colonized with a hegemonic ideology through education⁸. "Nos ancêtres les gallois" (our ancestors, the Gauls) recited the school children in colonial Algeria. But even with near-perfect language skills and the cultural familiarity, the colonized may never be thought of as the same, s/he may only resort to imitation and mimicry⁹ to become "almost the same, but not quite" and will still remain a "subject of difference."¹⁰

The early models of postcolonial poetics of representation were advanced in the publication of three major works about the colonized and colonizer in the 50's, namely Octave Mannoni's *Prospero et Caliban. Psychologie de la colonisation*,¹¹ *Peau noire, masques blancs*¹² by Fanon, and Memmi's *Portrait du Colonisé précédé de portrait du Colonisateur*¹³. These groundbreaking works put forth the first thorough analysis of the psychology of colonization and its effects on both the colonized and the colonizer emphasizing the

7 Shakespeare, *The Tempest* Act I, Scene 2.

8 This brings to mind the wonderful diagram Stephen Slemon presented in "Scramble for Post-colonialism" (Bill Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995: 45-55) that stretched from the "Institutional regulators of the colonial education system" to the "semiotic field" of postcolonial textuality, 46.

9 The meaning of mimicry, coined by Bhabha, goes beyond the act of mimicking; "the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority." Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1994): 84.

10 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 126.

11 Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1990).

12 Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1952).

13 Albert Memmi, *Portrait du Colonisé précédé de portrait du Colonisateur* (Paris: Buchet/ Chastel, 1957).

antagonistic relationship between them, which is thematically present in post-colonial writing. The same binary opposition is stressed by Abdul JanMohamed thirty-some years later in what he calls a Manichean relationship between colonizer and colonized.¹⁴

The act of writing (back) is perceived in these models of postcolonial poetics (only) in terms of decolonization, because such poetics originated from the dialectic juxtaposition of the colonizer and colonized, thus its reactions to colonial discourse and values were characterized by opposition and by the subversion of the fundamental signifiers of the colonial enterprise, i.e. the ‘civilizing mission’. Many critics (Angel Rama¹⁵, Barbara Harlow¹⁶) commented on the colonial uses of writing as yet another tool for asserting authority. Harlow refers to Hugo Blanco, a Peruvian organizer who —seeking justice for landless Quechua peasants— lead a rebellion in the 1960’s. During the 25 years he was jailed he wrote *Land or death: the peasant struggle in Peru*¹⁷, in which he explains the way of paper is viewed by the mostly illiterate Indigenous population:

It is necessary to understand that for centuries the oppressors of the peasants made them regard paper as good. Paper became a fetish: Arrest orders are paper. By means of paper they crush the Indian in the courts. The peasant sees papers in the offices of the governor, the parish priest, the judge, the notary - wherever there is power; the landowner too keeps his accounts on paper. All the reckonings you have made, *all your logical arguments, they refute by showing you a paper*; the paper supersedes logic, it defeats it. ... (84 my emphasis).

The act of writing in itself is considered by many critics (Ashcroft¹⁸,

14 In *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983) JanMohamed addresses the questions surrounding the representation of both the colonizer and colonized in African colonial narrative by underlining the binary structure of the colonial ideology.

15 Angel Rama, *La ciudad letrada* (Hanover, NH: Ediciones del Norte, 1984).

16 Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

17 Hugo Blanco, *Land or Death. The Peasant Struggle in Peru* (New York: Pathfinder, 1972).

18 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

Boehmer¹⁹, Harlow) as an act of resistance that supposes the existence of a center and margin(s), the periphery from which one might write back. Thus contextualized, the language choice in early postcolonial writing—we might assume—oscillates between the two poles of cultural decolonization, reflected in the attitude of the authors vis-à-vis the colonial languages, namely that of abrogation or appropriation. Abrogation, in this context, is the rejection of normative forms of the colonizer's language as opposed to its non-standard and dialectal use in the colonies, and appropriation is the adaptation of the colonizer's language for postcolonial writing. Postcolonial authors are faced with the predicament to choose between abrogation and appropriation of the colonial language, in which – most likely— they have been educated. If this were the case, their ability to write in their native language is often hindered by the lack of formal education in it. Leila Abouzeid, a Moroccan journalist writing in French made an effort to learn formal Arabic (*fus'ha*) — in addition to the dialectal version, (*darija* دارجة) she grew up with— in which *The Year of the Elephant* and her other books were published. She made a conscious choice to write in Arabic, “for political as well as personal reasons”²⁰.

Referring to French debates about postcolonial writing, Alec Hargreaves recognizes that *francophonie* is a problematic term; yet he considers it as a possible uniting factor of diverse cultures²¹. It seems to be rather ironic that postcolonial existence (and aesthetic) should be defined by a uniting element imposed by colonization: the language, whose use itself is problematized by postcolonial authors, such as Édouard Glissant²², Derek Walcott²³ and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o²⁴. Some critics

19 Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

20 Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, “Introduction,” in *The Year of the Elephant*, by Leila Abouzeid (Austin TX: Texas University Press, 1989: xi–xvi.), xii.

21 Hargreaves, Alec G. *Post-Colonial Cultures in France* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1-3.

22 Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981).

23 The famous lines of “Far Cry from Africa” express this ambiguity: “I who have cursed / The drunken officer of British rule, how choose / Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?” Derek Walcott, “A Far Cry from Africa” ([PoemHunter.com http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-far-cry-from-africa/](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-far-cry-from-africa/)).

24 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature* (New York: Heineman, 1986).

(Ngũgĩ²⁵, Kamau Brathwaite²⁶) have stressed the need to recuperate pre-colonial languages and cultures, or – as the former is not really possible – to appropriate the languages of the colonizer while abrogating the elitist uses of it. Brathwaite participated in the debate regarding the conflict between Caliban and Prospero over language, and (thus) power, using this oft-referred trope for the relationship of colonial and post-colonial subjects to refute the Queen's English and assert his notion of “nation language” and to write in “Sycorax video style”²⁷. Another eloquent example for appropriation with a difference is found in Ken Saro Wiwa's novel, *Sozaboy*²⁸ [Soldier boy] in “rotten english” [sic] as opposed to “big big English” whose definition he gives as “tedious, erudite arguments or statements in standard English” (author's note, *Sozaboy*), and Ngũgĩ, who –after publishing his influential work, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*– decided to write in his native language, Gikuyu²⁹. “I believe that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples” (*Decolonizing...* 29). Later he reverted to English³⁰ because he recognized the importance of the influence he was able to emit reaching the English-speaking public. Syncretist critics argue, though, that because postcolonial authors

25 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, “Farewell to English,” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), 438–442.

26 Kamau Brathwaite, *Middle Passages*. (New York: New Directions, 1993).

27 xodus from the house of bond
–age into james bond in-bond shops &
rats & cats & garbridge
so chalkstick smiles. accepting another
black hostage
of verbs

[format sic] Kamau Brathwaite, *X/Self*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, on-line. http://www.octopusmagazine.com/issue05/recovery_project/mcsweeney_on_brathwaite.htm).

28 Ken Saro Wiwa, [1985] *Sozaboy* (New York: Longman, 1994).

29 Since turning to Gikuyu, Ngũgĩ has written *I Will Marry When I Want* (with Ngũgĩ wa Mirii), *Devil on the Cross*, and *Matagari*, among others.

30 Aside from *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ has written several works in English: *Weep Not, Child*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *The River Between*, and *Petals of Blood*, as well as a memoir, *Detained*, chronicling the time he spent detained by the Kenyan government.

appropriate the European novel form, a novel even in Quechua or Gikuyu is inevitably a cross-cultural hybrid, and decolonizing projects must recognize this. That is why some African authors (among them Gilbert Doho of Cameroon) opt for a performative genre, such as Theatre for Social Change³¹, with a strong element of improvisation. Ngũgĩ also used this form after his self-reported “epistemological break” with English, for he wished to address the local audience. The Kamiriithu theater project was admittedly born as a reaction to a question by a woman in Kamiriithu village: “We hear you have a lot of education and that you write books. Why don’t you and others of your kind give some of that education to the village?” (Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing...* 42). The oppositionality of the form — beyond the use of Gikuyu language— mattered even more, for meaning was conveyed almost as effectively as by language, by the non-verbal, performative aspect.

This treatment of the language (English in this case) by postcolonial authors is what I term “ex-appropriation” because it is appropriating *from* (ex) the language, while inserting another, different linguistic substratum. English is no longer owned by the British Empire; the ex-colonized are now co-owners and World Englishes (in plural) became an accepted fact³². Chantal Zabus suggests that Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*³³ had distinguished between *langue*, the idealized grammatical form, distinct from *parole*, that refers to real language interactions. Postcolonial critics argued that Saussurian linguistics has marginalized the social aspects of language by bracketing the *parole* and by concentrating on the *langue*. Ashcroft, for instance, proposes to redress this imbalance by reinstating the *parole*.³⁴ Zabus, in another informative article, speaks of “relexification” of one’s

31 As Gilbert Doho suggests, Theatre for Social Change is performed by “the prostitutes of Bamako, the street boys of Harare, the pygmies in the Central African rainforest, and the inhabitants of the remotest villages in Africa are all using performance to empower themselves.” Gilbert Doho, “Foreword.” Louise M. Bourgault. *Playing for Life Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS*. (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2003) viii.

32 World Englishes nowadays are an accepted fact. There is an organization (IAWE) and a journal with the same title available on-line: <http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=0883-2919>.

33 Ferdinand de Saussure, [1916] *Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Roy Harris (La Salle, IL: Open Court. 1983).

34 Chantal Zabus, “The Empire Writes Back to and from the centre,” Introductory Lecture. (University of Louvain. <http://www.limag.refer.org/Cours/Documents/PresAshcroftZabus.htm>)

mother tongue³⁵. As the contest is between the periphery and the center evolves, it does by the same token between language variants, or “the new englishes” (at the time) and a standard code. Discourse uttered in local English has thus been labeled a “counter-discourse” which entails writing back “with an accent,” such as Salman Rushdie’s writings, or Arundathi Roy’s. “The crucial function of language as a medium of power in postcolonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the center and replacing it in discourse fully adapted to the colonized place”³⁶.

But, of course, English is not the only “colonizing” language that has gone through transformation and recodification. Assia Djebar’s novels, where tensions between French and the Arabic subtext are not only manifest at the level of morphology or syntax, but also by what may or may not be said in either of these languages. Because of the sexually segregated nature of certain sectors of Arabo-Muslim societies, direct performative exchange (verbal or written) across genders is not viable in Arabic, but it is in French. This is a space provided by the colonial system of which Djebar makes use to create a plausible representation of postcolonial cultural hybridity. The love-letters in her *L’amour la fantasia*³⁷ are addressed to a particular subject, yet the love emanating from the letters in the first place is the love of the language (French and Arabic) and the love of the empowerment through writing. The same idea, language-as-desire is expressed in a powerful way in *Amour bilingue* by Abdelkebir Khatibi³⁸ who emphasizes the role of cultural translation manifest in the hybridity of postcolonial identity.

Another linguistic innovation—aiming at asserting and affirming the presence of colonized languages within the colonial language—was introduced by Peruvian novelist, José María Arguedas (1911-1969) in *Los ríos profundos*³⁹ (Deep Rivers), as well as his other narrative works. Arguedas was a native speaker of Quechua and an award-winning writer in Spanish. To contest the Tarzan-like speech patterns emitted by indigenous characters supposedly in their own native tongue in the novels by the (mostly

35 Chantal Zabus, “Relexification” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), 314-318, 314.

36 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back* (London: Routledge, 1989), 38.

37 Assia Djebar, *L’amour, la fantasia*. (Paris: Jean Claude Lattès, 1985).

38 Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Amour bilingue* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1983).

39 José María Arguedas, *Los ríos profundos* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1981). [English version: *Deep Rivers*, trans. Frances Horning Barraclough (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2002)].

monolingual) so-called *indigenista* authors⁴⁰ in Andean countries (Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador) during the early 20th century, Arguedas decided to transpose Quechua syntax into the Spanish language and thus make the reader aware of the linguistic heterogeneity at play in the text. This linguistic device was crucial to create an authentic diegetic milieu, but also to establish an authentic hybrid cultural space in which heterogeneity was counterbalancing the colonial supremacy of the Spanish language, whose imposition, after all, was not as complete as it has been wished, due to the resilience of many indigenous languages⁴¹.

Oppositional tendencies were eventually fading in the postcolonial scene because of their tendency to operate based on European models of Aristotelian mimesis (as opposed to more recent postcolonial textual strategies more akin to Bhabha's mimicry⁴²), and because the dichotomy lead to essentialist and homogenizing notions of colonizer and colonized alike. But the most important critique against advocates of oppositional theories revolves around the constant recreation of the dichotomy center/periphery where the main point of reference is ultimately tied to the hegemonic discourse they were trying to combat. Cuban novelist, Alejo Carpentier's contribution to what later became known (erroneously) as "realismo mágico" (magic realism) illustrates this point. In the prologue of *El reino de este mundo* (Kingdom of This World)⁴³ Carpentier speaks of "lo real maravilloso" (the marvellous real/ity) as the key to the authenticity of Latin American representations of the postcolonial, based on a collective belief system and embodied in the "other" perspective of the witness-protagonist, the ex-slave, Ti Noël, whose perception of the rebel slave, Mackandal's survival of his own execution (in punishment for his

40 *Indigenista* authors, such as Ciro Alegria (Peru), Jorge Icaza (Ecuador), Jesus Lara (Bolivia) to a lesser degree, in the first half of the 20th century were non-indigenous writers whose subjects were shaped by racial difference, whereas Arguedas envisioned a Peruvian "cosmic race" to use the expression of Mexican author, Jose Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cómica* ([1925] Mexico D.F., Espasa Calpe, S.A., 1948).

41 Campbell reports between 550 and 700 languages for the whole region in 1997. Lyle Campbell, *American Indian Languages: The Historical Linguistics of Native America*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

42 Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question" in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Padmini Mongia (New York: Arnold Books, 1997): 37–54.

43 Alejo Carpentier, "Prólogo." *El reino de este mundo*. (1949) on-line, [http://lahaine.org/amauta/b2-img/Carpentier%20\(El%20reino%20de%20este%20mundo\).pdf](http://lahaine.org/amauta/b2-img/Carpentier%20(El%20reino%20de%20este%20mundo).pdf)

unsuccessful rebellion) was mirrored in the hopeful, stubborn belief of the Afro-Caribbean slaves in Mackandal's survival, exemplifies this textual strategy. The problematic aspects of "othering" (the term coined by Spivak⁴⁴ and the notion serves as the cultural critique of alterity) are multiple. Discourses, where the Other is deliberately represented as such, are directed towards an imperial authority (the self) that negates their entire experience as humans by placing an impenetrable separation between the colonizer and the colonized whereby the "other" can be found only through gaps and absences. The need to uncover other sites, to find both a living presence and vital alternatives, emerged in the postmodern context with the dissolution of canonical borders allowing for the inclusion of voices that had been previously silenced. Cultural critic, Nancy Hartsock comments: "The point is to develop an account of the world which treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world . . . Other possibilities exist and must be (perhaps can only be) developed by hitherto marginalized voices"⁴⁵.

In her discussion of alterity, Spivak⁴⁶ suggests that the otherness is constructed through imperial discourse of power. Following Lacanian notions of the "*grand Autre*"⁴⁷, she also distinguishes between the other and the Other (although their definitions differ slightly). In the Lacanian notion the Other's gaze, sees himself being seen by that gaze and Spivak suggests that the Other and Self were created together in a reciprocal and somewhat circular relationship. In *The Post-Colonial Critic*, Spivak concludes: "Europe has consolidated itself as sovereign subject by defining its colonies as 'Others', even as it constituted them, for purposes of administration and expansion of markets into programmed near-images of that very sovereign self." (99).

Placing emphasis on this "sovereign self" Stuart Hall⁴⁸ distinguishes

44 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (London: Routledge, 1990).

45 Nancy Hartsock, "Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?" in *Feminism / Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York, Routledge, 1990: 32–44): 36.

46 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Who Claims Alterity?" in *Art in theory 1900–1990. An anthology of changing ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison y Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992): 1119–1124.

47 Jacques Lacan, *Cahiers de lectures freudiennes* (Paris: Lysimaque, 1996).

48 Discussing Caribbean identity formation Hall recognizes two processes that affect identity: 1. being (oneness), 2. becoming (discontinuity). He uses Derrida's concept of "différance" to support his postulate.

three kinds of “othering” in a somewhat more nuanced critique.

1. self-othering (where the other is constructed as different within Western categories of knowledge; and is subjected to this knowledge);
2. creolization or racial mixture, two oppositional “vectors” that operate simultaneously: that of similarity and continuity and that of difference and rupture;
3. otherness in metropolitan centers: that is, the difference is “inscribed” in cultural identity⁴⁹.

Around the early 90’s a transition took place in postcolonial studies. Theorists seemed to be distancing themselves from the binary mode and proposed concepts like “hybridity”, “métissage”, and “heterogeneity⁵⁰”, “third space” of enunciation (Bhabha⁵¹, Moreiras⁵²). These concepts emerged from a hybrid, ambivalent space of signifiers, denominated as “contact-zone” by Mary Louise Pratt,⁵³ “in-between-ness” by Renato Rosaldo⁵⁴, and “borderland” by Guillermo Gómez Peña⁵⁵. Not unlike Derrida, who expands the Saussurean sign with another (temporal) dimension, Homi Bhabha’s “third space”⁵⁶ is also added to the colonizer-colonized dichotomy by adding another sign, that of an in-between locus where new meaning can be produced, thus uniting the two discursive communities. From this

49 Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: a Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 392-401, 394-396.

50 Antonio Cornejo Polar. *Escribir en el aire ensayo sobre la heterogeneidad socio-cultural en las literaturas andinas*. (Lima: Latinoamericana Editores, 2003).

51 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1994).

52 Alberto Moreiras, *Tercer espacio: Literatura y duelo en América Latina*. (Santiago de Chile: LOM, 1999).

53 Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone” *Profession 91*, Modern Language Association, (1991), 33–40.

54 Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

55 Guillermo Gómez Peña, “Colonial Dreams/Postcolonial Nightmares,” in *The New World Border* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1996), 80-110.

56 Interview with Homi Bhabha, “The Third Space,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990): 207-222.

space alone hybrid meaning will emerge and unravel the cycle of binary opposites by circumventing their direct, mutual engagement. For example's sake I mention the Latin American precedents to notions of hybridity that may be traced back to Fernando de Ortiz's coining of 'transculturación' (transculturation),⁵⁷ one of the first attempts to go beyond the binary models in theorizing about the hegemonic imposition of and the resistance to "civilization" and "acculturation".⁵⁸ Transculturation is defined as pertaining to a cultural exchange that includes the elements of mutual influence and fluidity. Transculturation is explained by Alberto Moreiras⁵⁹ as a phenomenon that arises due to the coincidence of its conception with the emergence of the national–popular state in Latin America at the time. The exploration and evaluation of the concept of transculturation culminates in Angel Rama's work⁶⁰ about narrative transculturation that –according to the author—is based on this ambivalent space of enunciation that comes close to being Bhabha's "third space". The quest for an idea that expresses this in-between space of enunciation that would be able to circumvent the stalemate of binary oppositions would resurface in the concept of heterogeneity developed by Antonio Cornejo Polar⁶¹. Heterogeneity is embodied in the resistance to the homogenizing forces of colonialism, and to the equally Eurocentric ideologies of the nation-state.

Postcolonial societies inherit the trauma of colonialism that subjects people to a cultural displacement. Bhabha connects the idea of cultural displacement to the broader issue of cultural and national identity. Thus the nation becomes "a liminal signifying space that is internally marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense location of cultural difference"⁶². Bhabha's theory of postcolonial counter-hegemony with its revisionist strategy opens up new spaces of re-inscription and negotiation not only for resistance to present forms of imperialism, but it goes a long way

57 The term first appeared in Fernando de Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* ([1940] Madrid: Cátedra, 2002)

58 Acculturation was coined by Israel Zangwill in *The Melting-Pot. Drama in Four Acts* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908).

59 Alberto Moreiras, *Tercer espacio: Literatura y duelo en América Latina* (Santiago de Chile: LOM, 1999), 264-265.

60 Angel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*, (México, Siglo XXI, 1982).

61 Antonio Cornejo Polar, "Mestizaje, transculturación, heterogeneidad." (*Revista de Crítica Literaria*, XX, 40, 94), 368–371.

62 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 145-148.

toward interrogating and disintegrating any form of imperialism. However, Edward Said suggests that imperialism is “a word and an idea today is so controversial, so fraught with all sorts of questions, doubts, polemics and ideological premises as nearly to resist use altogether” (*Culture...* 3). Even if centuries of expansionary capitalism, (a form of imperialism) were accepted from a global perspective within which colonialism and postcolonialism are considered as phases, debates about postcolonialism and its historical context would still not be defunct. Postcolonial identity is to be included in the discussion of the “discourses of minorities” as it also contributes to the formation “the heterogeneous histories”. The fragmented or hybrid nature of the postcolonial subject demands its construction through subversion of the colonial discourse. These “deconstructive moves” within the texts are used to dismantle master narratives inspired by Eurocentric discourse and, at the same time, to challenge the logocentric categories upon which colonial discourses are based. The postcolonial subject that dwells in the (once) colonized space characterized by modernity is to be positioned on the very boundary of modernity, at the same time within and outside of the hegemonic culture. As Shaobo Xie points out,

“the hegemonic discourse of modernity tends to subjugate all its subjects to its historicist syntax of narrative, molding their consciousness, structuring their feelings and sensory data accordingly. However, the subject of cultural revision, postcolonial and counterhegemonic in nature, threatens to subvert the hierarchical syntax of modernity.”⁶³

This subversion is currently taking place through postcolonial and other cultural theories that succeeded in overcoming the binary opposites focusing on the hegemonic aspects of colonization and shifted the emphasis to the post-colonial, to the discursive articulations of the aftermath of colonization.

In her much quoted “Notes of the Post–Colonial” Ella Shohat asks: “When exactly the postcolonial begin?”⁶⁴ The historian, Arif Dirlik “misreading the question deliberately” gives an answer that enclose all the ironies surrounding the multifaceted and hybrid identities of postcolonial subjects: “When Third World intellectuals have arrived in First World

63 Shaobo Xie, “Rethinking the Problem of Post–Colonialism” *New Literary History* 28.1 (1997), 7–19, 18–19.

64 Ella Shohat, “Notes on the Post–Colonial,” *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Padmini Mongia. (New York: Arnold, 1997), 322–334, 323.

academe”⁶⁵. Thus the postcolonial angst is not embodied in questions regarding identity, but rather, it is placated by newfound power. This is echoed and expanded in Rosaura Sánchez’s question: can one “ever represent a counter-project while being funded, housed and incorporated within the system?” (qtd. in Katrak⁶⁶ 2). It is, therefore, the “system” that defines the choice of language in which either authors or critics write and the question is further complicated by continuing neo-colonial trends that interfere in postcolonial spaces as well as in colonizer countries. Thanks to the ever incessant waves of migration to colonizing host countries these became borderlands, contact zones and in-between spaces that “contaminate” the postcolonial language predicament. Derrida’s oxymoron of ex-appropriation in the context of the postcolonial global scene unfolding in the ex-metropolis acts in service of a paradigmatic shift, ultimately caused by the mass-migration and commodification-driven globalization.

On the other hand, in parts of the world that even though experienced colonization the term post-colonial may not be appropriate, unless we conceive of the postcolonial as a process, not unlike identity. Otherwise, how to place the label ‘post’ onto a state which is not yet fully present and linking it to something which has not fully disappeared, but in many ways this paradoxical in-between-ness is precisely what characterizes the postcolonial world that is neither post nor past.

65 Arif Dirlik, “The Post-Colonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism” (*Critical Inquiry* 20 Winter, 1994), 329-342.

66 Ketu H. Katrak, “Language and Geography: The Postcolonial Critic” *Black Studies* 9 (1992): 2-9.

NEGOTIATIONS 1, MARCH 2011

TRANSATLANTIC INFLUENCE: SOME PATTERNS IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY

Nick Selby

I

In talking about transatlantic influences in contemporary American poetry, this essay finds itself exploring a double-edged condition. As part of such a double-edged condition, the idea of influence is about power-relations (between texts, between poetics, between nations) and, in the ways that this essay is framing it, the idea of poetic influence across the Atlantic is about senses of possession: possession of, and by, something other. My title promises ‘some patterns in contemporary poetry’. But any patterns that emerge in this essay will be neither as orderly nor as clear-cut as this title might imply. What the essay is seeking to do is to trace some ideas and themes that might develop from a consideration of influence in terms of a transatlantic poetics: the essay’s first half examines the work of two British poets – Ric Caddel and Harriet Tarlo – whose work seems unthinkable without the influence of post-war American poetics upon it; and in its second half the essay thinks through three American poets – Robert Duncan, Michael Palmer and Susan Howe – whose work specifically engages the idea of influence in its debating of issues of the textual, the bodily and the poem’s culpability (and influence) within structures of political power.

The idea of influence might be seen to be marked in, I think, three ways in the work of these poets. First, is the idea of direct influence – where one poet acknowledges the influence of another poet upon her / him: an example of which might be Ezra Pound’s petulant acknowledgment of Whitman as a ‘pig-headed father’ (and which is the sort of agonistic view of influence espoused by Harold Bloom in his *The Anxiety of Influence*);¹ or, perhaps, in Michael Palmer’s interest in writing poetry out of his contact with and reading of other poets – Celan, Zanzotto, Dante, Robert Duncan (and many others). Though I’ll talk a little about this sort of influence, I’m more concerned to explore the idea of influence in a couple of other, less tangible, ways. Indeed, the sorts of influence I want to consider in this

1 Ezra Pound, ‘A Pact’ in *Personae: Collected Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), 98; and Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a Theory of Poetry* (New York: OUP, 1973).

essay are mostly patterned covertly, are poetically implicit – veiled perhaps – and are *experienced* at the level of poetic inter-relations, or textures. In fact, OED definitions of influence (as a noun) bear witness to this sort of sense, in describing influence as ‘the exercise of power or “virtue”; or of an occult force’; or as an action whose ‘operation is unseen or insensible (or perceptible only in its effects)’; or as the ability to produce ‘effects by insensible or invisible means ... not formally or overtly expressed’. So, to my second sense of how the idea of influence might be marked in the poets under examination: this can be seen in terms of how one poet’s attitude or methodology – a poetics, perhaps – results from the influence of another poetics upon it. This type of influence seems to me to be about – in Olson’s terms – the ‘stance toward reality’ adopted by a particular poet, or poetics.² It informs, that is, my sense of how the idea of a transatlantic poetics might constitute itself. And, finally, my third sense (a more tricky formulation) is the argument that influence is *properly* always already the poem’s domain, its mode of being. This is because – as this essay argues and exemplifies – any poem necessitates a consciousness of its own textuality, its texture and fabric (I’ll come back to this idea of fabric, specifically, towards the end of the essay in a discussion of Susan Howe), it recognises itself, inevitably, as woven from other poems and texts that influence it. The argument being made here is that the idea of influence becomes a metaphor for the very act of reading itself: to read is to give yourself over to influence, it is to be possessed in and by a text whilst claiming it as your own. The idea of influence, therefore, defines the terms of your position as an ethical subject.

Such a position – and thus the very idea of influence – is at the heart of the relationship between British and American poetics. We might see a convenient starting point for this process in Whitman and in initial English reactions to Whitman. Whilst Whitman’s deliberately provocative ‘Preface’ to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), declares his nationalist agenda as a deliberate writing *away* from Old World influences, ‘The Americans of all nations ... have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem’, such a declaration was met with derisive sneers by most of his English reviewers.³ ‘But what claim has this Walt Whitman to be considered a poet at all?’ asks one critic, before going on to describe him as a ‘Caliban throwing down his logs’

2 Charles Olson, ‘Projective Verse’ in *Collected Prose*, eds. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 246.

3 Walt Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Francis Murphy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 741.

and his poetry as merely the monstrous offspring of English poetical supremacy.⁴ From this encounter it is clear that the poetic relationship between Britain and America is profoundly engaged with – indeed helps to encode – debates about the formation of national and cultural identities. The idea of poetic influence, in other words, is a useful ideological index of the mutual fascination and mutual antagonism of Anglo-America's 'special relationship'. It plays out what Paul Giles has described as a series of 'double-edged discourses' that are 'liable to destabilize traditional hierarchies and power relations, thereby illuminating the epistemological boundaries of both national cultures'.⁵ In broad terms, a history of transatlantic poetic relations witnesses a marked, though gradual, power shift in the double-edged discourse of poetic influence. Initially American poetry was under the powerful sway of English poetic influence. But, since the early years of the Twentieth Century, English poetry's power of influence over American has steadily declined. Despite this broad pattern of declining English influence and increasing American, there remains a sense of cagey unease about the mutual influence and relationship between the two traditions. Effectively the relationship between both poetic traditions has always been one of destabilization in which each tradition feels itself ill-defined by – because it is always, to some extent, in comparison to – the other. In this context, then, the linking of nationhood with an idea of the greatest poem introduces into the Anglo-American compact precisely that 'element of strangeness' that constitutes, according to Giles, transatlantic cultural relations.⁶ It is for this reason (and so as to justify the choice of poets in this essay) that I want to argue that ideas of influence have, throughout the history of Anglo-American poetics, more frequently – certainly more visibly – been engaged at the margins of each poetic culture, at their respective epistemological boundaries. Indeed, it has been the avant-gardes in both traditions that have embraced, challenged and made specific use of each other in ways that have, ultimately, come to re-invigorate the whole tradition.

II

I want to start with two English poets – Ric Caddel and Harriet Tarlo – whose work is profoundly influenced by a tradition of English landscape poetry. However, in terms of the major poets and theories of poetics

4 Anon. review of *Leaves of Grass*, the *Critic* (London, 1 April, 1856).

5 Paul Giles, *Virtual Americas: Transnational Fictions and the Transatlantic Imaginary* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 5.

6 Giles, *Virtual Americas*, 5.

(which are American, avant-garde, and ‘post-modern’ in Charles Olson’s sense of the term) that have influenced them, their poetry represents a *writing away* from a native (pastoral) tradition of the English nature poem. Indeed, Caddel recognises such ‘*away-ness*’ as the condition of alienated consciousness from one’s immediate surroundings that permeates modern thought. He writes that ‘Nature poetry has always been about away’, and his own poetry looks away from its groundedness in the English landscape towards influences from America: Pound, Olson, Lorine Niedecker, for example.⁷ By looking at some brief examples from Caddel (his sequence, ‘Fantasia in the English Choral Tradition’ (1987)) and from Tarlo (her ‘Away’ and ‘Love/Land’ (2003)) I want to suggest that their writing away from the English poetic mainstream, and towards American influences, provides the poetic coordinates through which the process of cultural triangulation, which Paul Giles has argued is necessitated by the idea of a transatlantic poetics, can take place. For Caddel and Tarlo, that is, the idea of influence, as a writing away from home, becomes an ironic index of the attention their poetry gives to very English senses of place and of dwelling poetically. That a negotiation with real and poetic space is fundamental in Caddel’s poetry is clear from the opening lines of ‘Fantasia in the English Choral Tradition’. What we immediately encounter is Caddel’s careful tracking of the embeddedness of ‘the poetic’ within the moment-by-moment detailing of experience both in the world and in the poem.

signals:
pact or parts
corresponding
in January
bonfires smoke
down the river bank
a way off
moving (lunchtime)
out of the realm of
false, muddled argument
into that contact
with the world in which
(for which)
I live –

⁷ Richard Caddel, 'Secretaries of Nature: Towards a Theory of Modernist Ecology', in *Ezra Pound, Nature and Myth*, ed. William Pratt (New York: AMS Press, 2002), 139.

to point towards –
because there is no ‘away’
 to sling things to
and to live here
 is not to escape⁸

The delicate rhythms and musical cadences in this opening passage of the sequence present a poetic here-and-now that recalls the there-and-then of a lyric, pastoral tradition. These lines seem influenced equally by the real and poetic landscapes they survey: one the one hand, the drifting smoke of bonfires provides an image of flow and spread, the influx of one matter into another, that etymologically is at the heart of the idea of influence; one the other hand, these lines echo with the influence of Pound's *Pisan Cantos* and with Olson's open-field poetics. Such influences mean that what is set in place in these lines is not an escape, a drawing away from the world and into an idealized pastoral, but rather they signal a complexly engaged, or poetically entwined, sense of being in the world.

It is this sense, that one's being is inescapably and poetically entwined within one's influences, that underlies Caddel's assertion that 'there is no "away" / to sling things to'. His work asserts, that is, that all things are contingent, and that poetic experience is indispensable because it can trace the lines and details of such contingencies and influences. This might be seen further in the following passage which is clearly part of a keenly evoked experience (seeing a bird's fleeting tail feathers), and yet it also evokes a very English musical tradition ('A Lark Ascending' seems never far away, here) despite the fact that its open-field poetics has a distinctly American flavour, and that it recalls Ezra Pound, at Pisa, annotating the music of birds in Canto 79.

bird in flight
but held its point
you out there
 violin parts
 (tail feathers)
twine and cross over
 was it
chance brought us
silent, dark

⁸ Richard Caddel, *Magpie Words: Selected Poems, 1970-2000* (Sheffield: West House Books, 2002), 42.

and now with these
small voices
(elements)
accords⁹

The accord of small voices within the choral tradition that is evoked here, and elsewhere in the sequence, is vital. It delineates Caddel's generous reciprocity in which voices, violin parts and the visual scenery are elements that 'twine and cross over' in poetic space. And – crucially – this space is interpersonal. The exclamatory 'you out there' is a call of (and to) human relations and influences: counterpoised with the gesture of flinging things away at the sequence's opening, it calls the poet back to the experiential whilst – I think – avoiding a collapse into the all too easy self-assurance of a lyrical egotistical-sublime.

Caddel's call for a poetic accord that doesn't fling our attention away from the world is, however, not without irony, and it is this sense that I want to explore in relation to Tarlo's work. As with Caddel, the sense of place in Tarlo's poetry is complicated – ironized – by the fact that it has learned much about the poetics of place from 'away', from American poets such as Pound, Olson, William Carlos Williams, and most particularly, Niedecker. Her poem 'Away', clearly ecological in its concern not to waste – to throw away – old garments, hints at other – poetic – acts of recycling whereby earlier influences come to constitute the fabric of the current poem. Its attention upon the everyday, and the (literally) homespun, both recalls Niedecker's concern with the objects of women's everyday labour, and thematises, in its imagery of the poem as words woven from old words, both the idea of influence which underpins its poetics, and the 'radical philosophy of reciprocity' that Tarlo has described as operating in Niedecker's poetry:¹⁰

knit underpin
in that wool
imprint
 in-print
 knit thru

9 Caddel, *Magpie Words*, 43.

10 Harriet Tarlo, 'Lorine Niedecker On and Off the Margins: A Radical Poetics out of Objectivism', in *Kicking Daffodils: Twentieth-Century Women Poets*, ed. Vicki Bertram (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997), 204.

running machine
 turning our cloth
 viscose cotton polyester fleece
 silk turn words round
 each other and round
 other in argument – new clothes
 for old, when old
 would do
 as we only know know know
 they would¹¹

For Tarlo, then, the idea of influence signals, therefore, not a writing away from her text, but a recognition that poetic knowing – what ‘we only know know know’ in the act of reading a poem – binds together the present text with an earlier poem or poetics. As with Niedecker, the sort of gesture of openness, here, and its poetics of reciprocity, deliberately recalls Olson’s projective verse with its demand for a ‘new stance toward reality’ and its theorising of the poem as a flow of poetic, environmental and bodily energies.

However, precisely because Tarlo’s work acknowledges the influence of American poetics upon it, it is able to explore its position at – and between – the margins of both English and American poetic traditions. Throughout her sequence *Love/Land*, such an exploration is not without cost to the body and voice of her lyric self as it discovers the ruptured space between poem and land, self and expression that occurs through the desire of the poem to make discriminations, to divide into parts, to name.

compartments – separating

campanula flax mallow thrift	
internal division	cuts off
that long body	or this
how do we	
with what the world throws	
sometimes produce	
in to pressure	

11 Harriet Tarlo, *Poems 1990-2003* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2004), 56-7.

dry thrift vetch yellow thyme¹²

What we witness here is the process of the effacement of selfhood at the very margins of legibility, at the edge of one's ability to name (and thus experience) the landscape as it *is*, and not as we have been taught to read it. As a woman poet, Tarlo's is a voice almost erased from the poetic landscape that nevertheless looks to that landscape in order to develop a poetics of radical engagement. It seeks, that is, to read the influence of American poetics upon it as a double condition – both disabling *and* empowering. The sort of rupturing of poetic space this leads to is, at heart, a textual matter for Tarlo: repeatedly throughout her work the stumbling rhythms and broken off locutions are an index of the incommensurability of words and experience, though they also mark the stammering attempt of two poetic traditions to speak to one another.

At least in part, this would seem to be – as already hinted – a result of Tarlo's reading of American experimental poetry by women, most especially that of Lorine Niedecker whose poetics of porous landscapes, based in and of her life at Black Hawk Island, Wisconsin, traces the metaphorical margins between poem, water, land and twentieth century experience. Such porosity might be read as a metaphor for Tarlo's poetics of influence, the influx of one poetic tradition into another. If, then, the idea of influence for Tarlo involves an act of 'looking away', it also encodes a poetic means of properly engaging the world, of being responsive to 'what the world throws' at you.

Curiously, for both Caddel and Tarlo, it is postwar American poetry's resolute poetic attention to the things of the immediate environment (Pound at Pisa, Olson's Gloucester, Niedecker's Black Hawk Island) that provides them with a model for the ways in which a poem is both a structure of remembrance and a means articulating loss, the slipping away of the poetic subject within the space of the poem. And for another reason, Niedecker's influence on Caddel and Tarlo is profound. In her first collection, *New Goose* (1946), Niedecker's poetic sense of language is combined with a powerful feeling for the folk idioms of her local community. When read carefully (rather than dismissed as 'mere' folk poetry) the poems in this collection reveal a sharp political edge, and environmentally aware politics of place that I have implied we can witness throughout Caddel's and Tarlo's work. Niedecker's famous four-line poem about a 'little granite pail', for example, quietly gestures to the hardships of a life of labour through its imagery of distance and loss and its play of

12 Harriet Tarlo, *Love/Land* (Cambridge: Rem Press, 2003), n. p..

intimacy and distance between speaker and addressee:

Remember my little granite pail?
The handle of it was blue.
Think what's got away in my life –
Was enough to carry me thru.¹³

Niedecker skilfully brings together, here, the work of manual labour and the work of the poem through her minimalist evocation of a solid object, a ‘granite pail’. The poem’s poignancy is the fact that although the work of the poem and the work of a life are seen as interdependent they are also felt to be mutually exclusive. While the one carries the other, it also witnesses – necessitates, even – its slipping away.

And so, here, we return to the trope of things slipping away as necessary to our (poetic) engagement of the world. For both Caddel and Tarlo, the poet’s place is at the margins, at the thrown-away edges of our dwelling ‘in’ and ‘for’ the world, in the remaking of the poem. Ironically, it is the cultural displacements of their poetics, their refusal to be mainstream and their reliance upon the poetics of a different land, America, that allows their respective poetics to sound so powerfully across the space of an English poetic tradition.

III

I want to cross the Atlantic, now, to examine a little the work of three American poets that plays in and away from the influence of the ‘late’ modernism of Pound, Olson and open field poetics. Recalling my three initial categories for thinking about influence I’m also – in this transatlantic transition – shifting my focus a little from the idea of how one poetics bears the traces of influence of another towards a consideration of the idea of influence as the necessary condition of the poetic. This consideration, as I hinted earlier, seems also to be about the poem’s articulation of an ethical position, and I take it that this is something central to Caddel and Tarlo, but it is in the work of Robert Duncan, Michael Palmer and Susan Howe that I want to pursue a little further this association between an idea of influence and an idea of ethical and readerly responsibility.

In his introduction to Robert Duncan’s *Ground Work*, Michael Palmer notes of his late friend and mentor:

13 Lorine Niedecker, *Collected Works*, ed. Jenny Penberthy (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002), 96.

Duncan was prominent among a generation of poets who sought to recover poetry's exploratory capacity from the strictures of orthodox critical propriety. Perhaps no one among his peers committed himself more profoundly to the magical, Orphic dimension of the poetic voice, and to the dynamic tension between the flowing currents of a restlessly associative mind and the demands of construction.¹⁴

Here, Palmer characterises Duncan as radically exploratory, committed to poetry as a means of unfixing, and thereby questioning, established and settled ways of thinking about, and of reading, the world and its texts. His responsibility – as a poet – is to weave the influences upon his 'restlessly associative mind' into a text that 'sings' out from the dynamic tensions in which it is grounded. The demand of poetry, indeed the demand of an idea of influence – when read as that force of influx into the domain of the poem – seems to rest in Duncan's ability to be open to all sorts of influence, for it is that which lies at the heart of his ability to sing magically – like Orpheus – a song that might heal the world.

Some of this is evident in the poem 'A Song from the Structures of Rime Ringing as the Poet Paul Celan Sings' throughout which the circling interplay of 'something' and 'nothing' flowing throughout the poet's performance sounds a lyric voice that is neither Duncan's nor Celan's (though its rhythm provides a restless association between them), nor is it Pound's (though the wrecks and errors that lie across this broken poetic world resonate with the smashed poetic enterprise detailed by Pound in Canto 116). I quote just the first half of this poem:

Something has wreckt the world I am in
I think I have wreckt
the world I am in.
It is beautiful. From my wreckage
this world returns
to restore me, overcomes its identity in me.

Nothing has wreckt the world I am in.
It is nothing
in the world that has

14 Michael Palmer, introduction to *Ground Work*, by Robert Duncan (1988; rev. ed. New York: New Directions, 2006), xiv.

workt this
wreckage of me or my “world” I mean

the possibility of no thing so
being there.

It is totally untranslatable.¹⁵

If the domain of the poem is to heal – that is to ‘make whole’ again – then this is witnessed in the very tension that is here articulated between the poet’s broken vision of the world, and an openness to that world which is restorative: ‘From wreckage / this world returns / to restore me’. But such a poetic openness to the world’s influence, sings here of the ‘overcoming’ of identity, of a poetic writing away from oneself and into the mysterious condition of things. And it is ‘totally untranslatable’ not because it thus signals Whitman’s ‘barbaric yawp’ and so the opening call of a specifically American poetics (‘I too am untranslatable / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world’¹⁶), but because it demonstrates the poet’s necessary giving up of himself to the processes – let’s say, the influences – of the poetic.

This might help in an understanding of Duncan’s statement in *Bending the Bow* that ‘poetry / is a contagion’ with ‘the ear / catch[ing] rime like pangs of disease from the air’.¹⁷ For it is with the figuring of disease as a creeping influence upon his poetic work, upon his body, and upon the American body politic (it is important not to forget the Vietnam conflict as a profound influence on Duncan’s writing in this period), that the second part of Duncan’s *Ground Work*, the section entitled ‘In the Dark’, moves towards its conclusion. The poem ‘In Blood’s Domaine’ attests to that sense I noted earlier of influence as something that works through unseen, insensible or invisible means. Of course, this sense of influence as invasion and disease is linked etymologically to influenza, but here it is cancer that is invading Duncan’s body, and it is figured as a textual contagion:

there are
spirochete invasions that eat at the sublime envelope, not alien,
but familiars

15 Robert Duncan, *Ground Work*, 12.

16 Whitman, *Complete Poems*, 124.

17 Robert Duncan, *Bending the Bow* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 32.

Life in the dis-ease radiates invisibilities devour my star
 and Time restless crawls in on center upon center cells of lives
 within life conspire
 Hel shines in the very word *Health* as *Ill* in the Divine Will
 shines.¹⁸

Even at the level of the sounds that the poem makes here – the profusion of ‘il’ and ‘el’ sounds in this passage – we witness Duncan’s poetics of influence. In the flowing currents of his restlessly associative mind he is able to demonstrate the poetic process of influence through which one word is transformed by our reading of it against, and into, another word. The idea of influence for Duncan is, therefore, not a writing away from, but a poetic reaching towards, the wholeness that is (etymologically) embodied in the poem’s conception of ‘health’. It is in this sense that, for Duncan, the poem discovers influence as the exercising of an ‘occult force’.

For Michael Palmer the processes of poetic influence enact and thematise the working of cultural power in a global context. His book, *At Passages* (1995) is named after the open-ended, proliferating sequence of poems entitled ‘Passages’ that spreads across Duncan’s later collections and which Palmer was reading through as he was writing this book. The poems in this collection seek to investigate moments of transition, the passage of one thing into another, moments that might be thought of as being at the heart of any idea of influence. If, for Duncan’s poetry, influence spreads like a contagion into his very bodily passages, marking thus the passage of body and text into the dark, Palmer’s book sees the passage of one poem into another – into his own work – as constitutive. This is seen throughout *At Passages* in Palmer’s playful re-working of other poets – Dante, Zanzotti, Duncan, Celan, Rumi – and in his marking of the passage of their texts into the fabric of his own text. As Lauri Ramey has noted of Palmer’s work: ‘Using the words of others brings a multiplicity of perspectives into his poetry … [so as] to broaden and enrich the poems, to fill them with as much information as possible’.¹⁹ This, I want to suggest, has important ethical and political dimensions for him.

In the sequence ‘Seven Poems Within a Matrix of War’, from *At Passages*, and written during the first Gulf War – Desert Storm – in 1991,

18 Robert Duncan, *Ground Work*, 249.

19 Lauri Ramey, ‘Michael Palmer’ in volume 4 of *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poets and Poetry*, eds. Jeffrey Gray, James McCorkle and Mary Balkun (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2005), 1204.

Palmer attempts to trace the consequences of military invasion, and – as with Duncan's 'spirochete invasions' – discovers a figure for the ethical operation of the poem. In this sequence, the idea of influence seems figured as a sort of information overload that leads to senses of slipperiness and transformation such that the bodily and textual alterations that result from warfare become, ineluctably, the domain of the poetic. The poem entitled 'The Construction of the Museum' from this sequence seeks, therefore, a poetic language properly responsive to such alteration, to the ways in which influence is about change, to the ways in which a poem itself might handle its information (and somewhere at the back of this is a memory of Shelley's meditation on power and mutability in 'Ozymandias'):

In the sand we found a tablet

In the hole caused by bombs
which are smart we might find a hand

It is the writing hand
hand which dreams a hole

...

We never say the word desert
nor does the sand pass through the fingers

of this hand we forget
is ours

We might say, Memory has made its selection,
and think of the body now as an altered body²⁰

What this seems to call for is a poetics that is both responsive to the past, to the multiplicity of histories and voices that it sounds, and one that seeks to construct a poetics of responsibility from its broken locutions. Here, Palmer's stuttering sense of participation in the broken fabric of a poetics of influence becomes a measure of the honesty and difficulty of the poem's ethical and political position. Whilst recognizing the obfuscation of calling bombs 'smart', it also does not allow us the 'forget' our hand in the processes of war. Like sand passing – or not – through the fingers, what

20 Michael Palmer, *At Passages* (New York: New Directions, 1995), 18.

passes through the textual material of the poem – influences it – allows us to rethink the bodies, poetic and physical, that we occupy. By exploiting and exploring the play between selective memory – the cultural amnesias upon which political power operates in global contexts such as the Gulf War – and information overload – texts, histories and collateral damage – Palmer's poetry uncovers a place for the poetic. For it is in his poems' consciousness of the idea of influence that new acts of reading – signified in 'altered poetic bodies' – might be seen to emerge.

With this in mind I want to move on, now, to thinking about Susan Howe, another contemporary poet for whom an idea of influence is profoundly embedded in the body of her poetic texts, in their fabric and in the very sounds they make. For my final example, then, I want to look at Howe's collection *The Midnight* (2003), most especially its fascination with cloth, clothing and fabrics and how this allows the book to reflect upon the idea of poetic influence within a transatlantic context.

Cloth, clothing and weaving figure importantly throughout *The Midnight*: in its list of cloths and bedclothes, and the silent craft that made them: 'Alapeen, Paper, Patch Muslin / Calico Camlet Dimity Fustian / Serge linsey-wolsey';²¹ in the 'colony / of refugee weavers'²² from Ireland and the west of Scotland who emigrated to the New World at the same time as those itinerant preachers, dressed in their 'Presbyterian cloak[s]'²³ inspired America's first 'Great [religious] Awakening'; in the reference to Yeats' poem 'He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven' that Howe recalls her mother reciting to her as a girl;²⁴ in the various references to Malachy Postlewayt's definitions of different cloths (for example; 'Calamanco as a "woolen / stuff manufactured in Brabant / in Flanders" chequered in warp / wherein the warp is mixed with / silk or with goat's hair');²⁵ and in the 'source' for the 'Bed Hangings' sections, *Bed Hangings: A Treatise on Fabrics and Styles in the Curtaining of Beds, 1650-1850*, a book which Howe tells us she discovered in a giftshop in Hartford.²⁶ Howe's text, that is, is self-consciously interested in its own constitution as a text woven from its transatlantic sources and influences.

21 Susan Howe, *The Midnight* (New York: New Directions, 2003), 4.

22 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 102.

23 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 23.

24 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 74-5.

25 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 37.

26 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 43.

Indeed, one of the book's most important sources – the late C12th-early C13th debate poem *The Owl and the Nightingale* – is intricately associated with an examination of cloths and clothing. Serendipitously, one of the only two extant manuscripts containing this poem is the Cotton manuscript (Caligula A.ix) (held in the British Library). Already, then, the material – textual – fact of this poem is bound into, however playfully or accidentally, a web of allusions to cotton. In fact, it doesn't seem like stretching the point too far to suggest that Howe's text sounds delicately the profoundly interwoven histories of America and of the cotton trade. Supporting this contention is the fact that one of the sources for the medieval poem is an C11th Latin debate poem, *Conflictus Oris et Lini*, or the 'Debate between Wool and Linen'.²⁷ Interestingly Howe refers to this poem near the start of the section entitled 'Bed Hangings I' when she notes, 'Contest between two / singers *Conflictus oris / et lini*'²⁸, in terms that both indicate her awareness of a literary tradition of debates about the superiority of linen to wool and that see such debates as part of the fabric of a lyric tradition, a contest between singers.²⁹

Some measure of the conflicting historical voices that are raised – woven into the texture of Howe's bed-hangings – can be heard in those sections that directly allude to *The Owl and the Nightingale*. On facing pages – 30 & 31 – two blocks of text, each 9 lines long, seem dedicated respectively to the owl's song, and then to the nightingale's. As one might expect, the owl speaks wisely and well, and for the most part, clearly. The voice is mildly Latinate, perhaps a ready-made veil, hiding the power and privilege on which it so easily rests:

Evening for the Owl
spoke wisely and well
willing to suffer them
and come flying night
from the Carolingian
mid owl falcon fable
In their company saw
all things clearly wel

27 Henry B. Hinckley, 'The Date, Author, and Sources of *The Owl and the Nightingale*', *PMLA*, 44-2 (1929), 354-55.

28 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 6.

29 See Hinckley, 354.

Unfele I could not do³⁰

For the most part, this sounds conventional, it is woven from the familiar sounds of modern English, and with a feeling for assonance and alliteration. However, the final line acts like a strand of goat's hair in the warp of this voice. Both the sound and the look of the word 'Unfele' trips us up, makes us suddenly active as readers, aware of a textual history that sustains this passage. Perhaps the line suggests that once felt, this interruption in the poem's texture, cannot be eschewed: I can't 'unfeel' it now. Or, perhaps alerted by the spelling of 'wel' in the line above, we feel back towards Middle English, 'unfele' perhaps – in the Midlands dialect of the *Owl and the Nightingale* – a negative of 'felen', to conceal, or hide. Here, the text reveals the impossibility of final meaning by demonstrating that it is always already a tissue of itinerant texts, a contest of voices. Its poetics is therefore always sceptical.

This is even more apparent on the facing page, which we may take to be the nightingale's 'reply' to the clear speaking of the aristocratic owl. Immediately the difficulty of sounding this passage is apparent, yet it is clear that its concern is with unembellished speech, with a poetic attempt to 'still', or even 'distil', one bare word so as to speak against the owl's taunting of the songbird that, as Philomel, is the figure of lyric poetry:

Nihtegale to the taunt
Owl a preost be piping
Overgo al spoke iseon
sede warm inome nv
stille one bare worde
Go he started mid ivi
Grene al never ne nede
Song long ago al so
sumere chorless awey³¹

Jeffrey Jullich wonders if, in this passage 'we're facing "nonsense" words' here, and even speculates as to whether these odd spellings and apparent neologisms are 'un-English-like'.³² This is, I think, to miss the point

30 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 30.

31 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 31.

32 Jeffrey Jullich, 'Review of *Bed Hangings*', *Electronic Poetry Review*, # 2, accessed January 27, 2011, http://www.granarybooks.com/reviews/bed_hangings/electronic_poetry_review.html

completely. If, rather than ‘nonsense’ we begin to hear the sounds of medieval English poetry here (and I think we should), then we are engaging the whispered tissue of texts and sounds that are woven into our understanding of an English poetic tradition, the ‘Song long ago’ to which Howe’s poetics provides an answering ‘also’. The text, that is, engages us precisely because of, and through, its engagement with its own debt of influence, through its poetic patterning of transatlantic poetic relations.

This play of poetic answering is – of course – implicit in the debate tradition of this medieval poem, but I am suggesting that it is also implicit in any text’s act of absorbing and transforming another text, in the patterns of influence we witness at play in our reading of Howe’s poem. Indeed, this seems to me to be at the heart of the lyric force of *The Midnight* because of its ability to make explicit this process by and within Howe’s poetics of America. What I am arguing, here, is that the sense this engages of poetic sound as transformative, as tracing a history of linguistic, poetic and cultural change, helps define Howe’s poetics as one of exile. Voice, especially vowel sounds, defines Howe’s sense of how she might inhabit a personal history that is also interwoven into larger, national histories: of migration and cultural metamorphosis, the answering of Europe with America. And personal anecdote in *The Midnight* answers this lyric sense of voice as that which folds us into language, into history, when, as a child, Howe realises the distance and difference of herself and her sister Fanny from her family in Ireland: ‘Our voices are grotesquely shrill – the way we pronounce r’s and u’s, Amuuurrca, waaturrr. Our long nasal a’s: Baaaast-n, haarr-br, paaak, caa.’³³ Leavings, both poetic and migratory, come to be traced in such whispers of sound.

Indeed, because of the attention that it places upon the processes of textual production, of how the poem’s domain is always already a tissue of influences, the ways in which our leafing through of *The Midnight* might come to feel like a ‘tangible intangible murderously gentle exile’ become clearer.³⁴ The poetic trace of leaves, leafings-through and leavings that constitute Howe’s text also underscores her sense that exile is the primary condition of her poetics (of lyric). Exile, *The Midnight* asserts, is witness to the metamorphic, a sentence left unfinished that proceeds from a tissue of other texts and a poetics of interweaving. It issues from a sense of the textual that is sceptical (in that its poetics of deferral and attention to intertextual influences is not unrelated to philosophies of scepticism which contend that real knowledge is, finally, unobtainable) about origins and can

33 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 32.

34 Susan Howe, ‘Preface’ to *The Midnight*, n. p.

thus only mutely sing a native tongue. Howe exhibits this sort of scepticism in the *The Midnight's* description of her great-aunt Louie Bennett's copy of *The Irish Song Book with Original Irish Airs* (of 1895). She notes: 'How can the same volume contain so many different incompatible intrinsic relations? The Bennetts and Mannings are Irish and not Irish so we haven't the secret of our first ancestral parents. Names are only a map we use for navigating'.³⁵ Self-conscious, here, of her own book's procedure, Howe's mapping of her sense of exile from family (that is '*intrinsic*') relations, is instructive because it offers up a model of how her text works as a tissue of interwoven texts, of how it is intrinsically constituted from a notion of influence.

We may well recall, at this point, Julia Kristeva's contention that 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another'.³⁶ And Kristeva's notion of *intertextuality*, which arises from this observation, sees poetic language itself as always already 'at least double'.³⁷ Throughout *The Midnight*, Howe plays with this question of doubles, the 'double play of double meaning'³⁸ – poem / prose; text / image; tangible / intangible; noise / silence; asleep / awake; Europe / America – from which her text is composed (we may, in fact, even hear the sound of her mother's birthplace, Dublin, echoing through this play). Roland Barthes, too, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, similarly sees any text as generated from other texts. The terms he adopts are very suggestive in relation to Howe's text and its poetics of influence:

Text means *Tissue*; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue – this texture – the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web.³⁹

35 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 59.

36 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez; trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, & Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1980), 66.

37 Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 66.

38 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 170.

39 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 64.

Howe's text, however, rather than unmaking its subject in the way Barthes imagines here, seems more interested in the physical qualities – be they of voice or of paper, of book or of body – that are its constitutive tissue. For her, the 'quick rustling', as she calls it, of her poetic lines and pages is alive with the touch of the bodies, books and voices that her text weaves together.⁴⁰

Noticeably, the nightingale passage I quoted earlier, takes place 'mid ivi grene'. The Nightingale's transformative voice – a figure for the poetic – sounds, that is, amongst rustling leaves (of ivy, of pages) and therefore figures Howe's own textual process of lyric transformation. In the rustling of Howe's poetic leaves, *The Midnight* wryly describes itself as an 'Ovid cloth',⁴¹ and such a reference to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* indicates the extent to which any poetics of influence necessitates a consideration of the structures of poetic and cultural power that deliver a new text to us, in Michael Palmer's words, 'as an altered body'. It witnesses, that is, the transformative power of the transatlantic poetic imagination. For Howe this can be heard in the story of Daphne's metamorphosis (a story that, incidentally, fascinated Ezra Pound in his early years as he was setting out to establish his poetic reputation in London). Daphne's transformation into a laurel tree, whose leaves are used to crown poets, whispers, throughout Howe's sequence, of America and of its transformative promise of a new cultural text, a blank sheet. First we hear,

the merest decorative suggestion
in what appears to be sheer white
muslin a tree fair hunted Daphne⁴²

and then, later,

1775 landscape America
blindstitched to French
edge silk damask cover
... lonely ecstatic incessant
white on white coverlet⁴³

40 Susan Howe, 'Preface' to *The Midnight*, n. p.

41 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 27.

42 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 17.

43 Susan Howe, *The Midnight*, 101.

Howe's poetics is sceptical about such whiteness, sceptical about the significance of whiteness and cotton within the transatlantic imagination. Ultimately it is through such scepticism that we might hear another lesson about the idea of influence that emerges from a reading of these poets. A common strand that unites all of the poets I've discussed in this essay is, perhaps, the powerful (maybe even overbearing) influence upon them of Don Allen's groundbreaking anthology of 1960, *The New American Poetry*.⁴⁴ The most important voices in British and American experimental poetry have all acknowledged the crucial influence upon their poetic work and practices of Allen's anthology. This is, I take it, because of the anthology's bullish assertion that poetry matters precisely because of its testing – even disturbance – of the cultural *status quo*. Its own poetics, and the power of its influence, that is, lies in its act of destabilization, in its radical questioning of what *things* might constitute a poetic identity. Such destabilization characterizes transatlantic poetic relations and the cross-currents of influence from which they arise. Throughout its history, the negotiation of complex and difficult relationships and influences within Anglo-American poetics has provided a rich point of energetic and self-questioning poetic renewal in both English and American poetry. It has also helped shape those double-edged discourses that make up transatlantic cultural relations.

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44 Don Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).