The Shock of the Other: Situating Alterities

Editors Silke Horstkotte
Esther Peeren

THAMYRIS **INTERSECTING** PLACE, SEX AND RACE

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Intersecting: Place, Sex, and Race

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Mission Statement

Intersecting: Place, Sex, and Race

Intersecting is a new series of edited volumes with a critical, interdisciplinary focus.

Intersecting's mission is to rigorously bring into encounter the crucial insights of black and ethnic studies, gender studies, and queer studies, and facilitate dialogue and confrontations between them. *Intersecting* shares this focus with *Thamyris*, the socially committed international journal which was established by Jan Best en Nanny de Vries, in 1994, out of which *Intersecting* has evolved. The sharpness and urgency of these issues is our point of departure, and our title reflects our decision to work on the cutting edge.

We envision these confrontations and dialogues through three recurring categories: place, sex, and race. To us they are three of the most decisive categories that order society, locate power, and inflict pain and / or pleasure. Gender and class will necessarily figure prominently in our engagement with the above. *Race*, for we will keep analysing this ugly, much-debated concept, instead of turning to more civil concepts (ethnicity, culture) that do not address the full disgrace of racism. *Sex*, for sexuality has to be addressed as an always active social strategy of locating, controlling, and mobilizing people, and as an all-important, not necessarily obvious, cultural practice. And *place*, for we agree with other cultural analists that this is a most productive framework for the analysis of situated identities and acts that allow us to move beyond narrow identitarian theories.

The title of the new book series points at what we, its editors, want to do: *think together*. Our series will not satisfy itself with merely demonstrating the complexity of our times, or with analyzing the shaping factors of that complexity. We know how to theorize the intertwining of, for example, sexuality and race, but pushing these intersections one step further is what we aim for: How can this complexity be understood in practice? That is, in concrete forms of political agency, and the efforts of self-reflexive, contextualized interpretation. How can different socially and theoretically relevant issues be *thought together*? And: how can scholars (of different backgrounds) and activists think together, and realize productive alliances in a radical, transnational community?

We invite proposals for edited volumes that take the issues that *Intersecting* addresses seriously. These contributions should combine an activist-oriented perspective with intellectual rigor and theoritical insights, interdisciplinary and transnational perspectives. The editors seek cultural criticism that is daring, invigorating and self-reflexive; that shares our commitment to thinking together. Contact us at intersecting@let.leidenuniv.nl

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Introduction: The Shock of the Other

Esther Peeren and
Silke Horstkotte

I experience my own limitation through the encounter with the Other and . . . I must always learn to experience anew if I am ever to be in a position to surpass my limits.
(Hans-Georg Gadamer 285)

To worry or to smile, such is the choice when we are assailed by the strange; our decision depends on how familiar we are with our ghosts.
(Julia Kristeva 191)

There is nothing new in proclaiming alterity – otherness – an inalienable aspect of identity construction and assertion. As Kate Khatib notes in her contribution to this volume, "social, psychological, and philosophical theory have, time and again, pointed out the inextricable link between the formation of the self (the 'I') and the positing of the 'other' to a point where the formulation 'Identities and Alterities' could not possibly be otherwise. (Where one goes, there follows the other, *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseum*)." In their introduction to a special issue of the journal *Language & Communication* that thematizes alterity and difference in linguistic anthropology, Adi Hastings and Paul Manning similarly assert that "clearly, everyone *knows* that identity is always constructed in relation to alterity. After all, it takes two to differ" (293).

Yet, although acknowledging the dependency of identities on notions of alterity has indeed become a cliché, what has remained elusive is a situated, specific account of their intersection, the precise politics that arise at the points where the self's desire for unity and self-sameness is crossed by its inevitable, multiple, and various encounters with otherness. These encounters take place internally – within the self – as well as externally, and may involve either concrete other subjects or more general principles of otherness, configured in terms of class, gender, sex, race, nationality, ethnicity, and so on. In the words of Hastings and Manning, "identity performances are *relational*

with respect to different aspects of alterity" (293). This means that heterogeneity cannot be homogenized: as the word itself implies, alterity is never the same. The perspective on alterity we propose in this book is that the interruption of identity by alterity delivers a particular type of shock to the system, depending on its precise form and the extent of its difference – a shock that is radicalized under postmodernism, where stable ontologies and clear distinctions of belonging or difference are replaced by a multiplicity of possible worlds.

In this respect, it pays to remember that alterity is not a mere synonym of difference; what it signifies is otherness, a distinction or separation that can entail similarity as well as difference. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines otherness as "a thing other than the thing mentioned or the thinking subject," indicating that alterity comprises not only radical external difference, but everything that is in some way distinct from the subject, potentially including even certain parts of itself, such as the unconscious, disease, or the exteriorising physicality of bodily functions. Identity is not opposed to difference, but itself differential in nature. The other can be more like me than I expected or I can find myself to be other to myself. Each of these forms of alterity delivers its own shock, its own specific moment where identity is potentially rearranged in view of that which is not me. Alterity disrupts the illusion of self-sameness on the level of the subject's body, her psyche, and her language, dislodging the subject – both on an individual and a collective level – from an ontology of origins and essences. When Kaja Silverman describes the condition or quality of being 'other' as "identity-at-a-distance" (15), she calls attention to the disruption of essences at work in alterity. Alterity can thus be understood as the *represented* other, or projected identity. One way of inquiring into alterity is therefore through the questioning of forms of representation, be they political or aesthetic; in this volume, we have chosen to focus predominantly on the latter, while at the same time not denying the interplay of the two.

The papers in this volume were chosen from two panels – on intersubjectivity and postmodern identities – of the 2004 international workshop on Identities / Alterities hosted by the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis.[1] All are concerned with theorizing the intersection of identity and alterity, or what we have chosen to call the shock of the other, in terms of situated and specific representational politics of the body, the psyche and language. Body, psyche and language emerge as crucial sites of alterity, since they mark the locations where identity and alterity cross most conspicuously and where the borders between them are hardest to draw. The contributors explore ways to define, locate and negotiate alterity in a manner that does not do away with the other through negation or neutralization but that instead engages alterity as a reconfiguring of identities, keeping them open to change, to a becoming without horizon. Alterity is radically specified and differentiated: there is no singular alterity, but a plethora of forms of alterity, each of which interacts with identity in its own manner. Hence, the outcome of this exploration is not a relativist view, but a vision of identities as multi-faceted

constructions that are continually being transformed by the various specific others, or principles of otherness, with which they intersect and which must be actively engaged in order for the subject to function effectively in the social, political, and aesthetic realm.

In keeping with the mission statement of the *Thamyris / Intersecting* book series, the politics of bodily, psychic and linguistic alterity – the other body, the body as other, the shock or shame of discovering the other in the self, and the fragmentation or multiplicity of the self's discourses – will be conceived as crossed by vectors of sex, race and place. The politics of situation – of giving alterity a place and perceiving it in a contextualized, historicized and differentiated manner – are of particular relevance to our endeavour. We take up the notion of place as a productive framework for the analysis of situated identities and acts of identity negotiation and transformation that allow a move beyond narrow theories of identities based on the concept of self-sameness. Place, when considered in its specific interactions with intersubjectivity and alterity, allows for a conceptualising of identity as something that is situated and that marks a location of political agency, but that is at the same time never completely stable or identical to itself: identity has a place, but this place is always under contestation, never guaranteed. Places change and so do the identities associated with them. We therefore consider place not as a point of origin, unmediated presence or fixity, but as a way of situating identities – placing them in a social, historical, psychological and political context – on grounds that are never fully secure. Place, in this sense, is conceived as multiple, shifting, and invariably relational.

Far from representing a safe haven where otherness can be evaded, place becomes the site of the confrontation and negotiation with the other, the stake of the identity / alterity intersection. The interruption of identity by alterity prompts a taking place, a performative event where the self is forced to take a position in relation to otherness and its specific form. The self has to take a stand, claim a place, and re-assert an identity that can no longer remain the same. Alterity causes the ground to shift under the self's feet, and the papers in this volume, in different ways, examine the conditions under which such shifts occur as well as their results. At best, these shifts prompt a productive reformulation of identity and a generous, respectful relation to alterity. This effect, however, is by no means certain, for the shock of the other may also induce a negating reaction or a rigid entrenchment of the self. The most important questions the papers in this volume pose are: when and where does alterity take place (i.e. become an event), how do we position ourselves in relation to it, and how does it re-position us in relation to ourselves?

In relation to identity, alterity is most immediately situated on the plane of intersubjectivity. After postmodernism and its declaration of the "death of the subject," intersubjectivity can no longer unproblematically refer to two complete, unified subjects in consensual agreement, but has to be reformulated in relation to a situation where boundaries between subjects are blurred; where each subject is always already

other to itself; where many subjects live in displacement; and where an uncertain process of continuous confrontation, negotiation, and translation inheres between subjects and social groups divided from each other and from themselves in terms of place, time, race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, body, and voice. Intersubjectivity, moreover, is no longer only about relations between actual subjects, but about a general attitude towards alterity, towards principles of otherness, an attitude that presupposes a mode of negotiation, which, from a number of the papers collected here, emerges as a strategy of translation.

Translation appears as a way to mediate alterity, not only in the literal sense of translations between languages – in papers about literature and art from Quebec, Northern Ireland and Kashmir – but also in a more metaphorical sense: translating intersubjectivity into trans-subjectivity, translating the angel as familiar friend into the angel as radical other, translating the unified, homogeneous, closed body of classical philosophy into the excessive form of the grotesque, translating voice into body, translating the physical body into the virtual avatar, translating pornography and choreography in terms of psychic shock or trauma, translating memories between generations, and, finally, the translations that take place in the self when it is confronted with the (sexual or racial) otherness of particular artworks or performance pieces. Throughout, translation appears as an oscillatory process of transposition, a re-placing or displacing of alterity from outside to inside, from other to self and back again.

This volume takes its lead from the conference keynote lectures by Peter Hitchcock and Brian McHale. Hitchcock's paper provides a provocative theoretical perspective on intersubjectivity, reconceived through the concepts of becoming, matter, the specter, and the image. McHale explores the angel as the changing figure of the multiple worlds of postmodernism and beyond. Both papers question the politics involved in facing alterity, whether it takes the form of an angelic appearance, the Iraq war, or transnational capitalism. Between them, Hitchcock and McHale stage a meeting of the angel and the specter where these figures come to denote specific ways of negotiating the shock of the other: is alterity to be attended as a messianic message from another world, welcomed as a familiar friend, or exorcised as an unwanted ghost? Is it to be left undefined and without concrete features or should it be given form, made to matter as a material force? The angel and the specter prompt us to ask how to deal productively and responsibly with bodily, psychic and linguistic alterities that are both concrete and ephemeral, both particular and general, both inside and outside, both self and other, both one and two.

The first part of this volume deals with bodily alterity – other bodies and the otherness of our own bodies – which may appear as excessively material (the grotesque) or in the form of spectral appearances that appear to lack body altogether (angels, ghosts, avatars, disembodied voices). Spectrality, defined by Peggy Kamuf as "the dis-adjustment of identity" that perpetually haunts it (272), has, since the appearance

of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, become a prominent figuration of alterity. What remains problematic, however, is "the impossibility of effectivity to think ideality, and of spectrality to think materiality" (Debrix 18). By juxtaposing the spectral and the bodily, the virtual and the material, the papers in this section demonstrate how these concepts are not irreconcilable, but how each incorporates something of the other: the grotesque body's excessive materiality features a spectral fluidity and lack of borders, whereas the spectral can work on the body in a concrete manner, as a "situationist practice of effectivity," in the words of François Debrix (15). Matter and virtuality, then, should not be seen as binary opposites but as two aspects of alterity, expressing the paradoxical simultaneity of indeterminacy and specificity that makes alterity such a destabilizing and transformative force in relation to identity and subjectivity.

In "The Impossibly Intersubjective and the Logic of the Both," Peter Hitchcock asks how intersubjectivity is best represented now that it can no longer be predicated on a unified, universal, autonomous, intentional, and gender-neutral subject. He proposes a reformulation of intersubjectivity into a space of impossibility that is neither a mere play of signifiers, nor exclusively an aspect of actual interaction. Intersubjectivity, he posits, is not so much in-between subjects as it is across principles of subjectivity, which include notions of identity and alterity. Hitchcock theorizes the impossibly intersubjective through four interrelated concepts. The first is becoming in the Deleuzian sense, which breaks the unified subject up into molecules, introducing alterity into the basic components of the self. Second, there is matter, conceptualised as a performative process of materialization that is not in itself material but becomes so on the plane of intersubjectivity, which does not register or recognize bodies but materializes them in the tension between identity and alterity (identification and abjection).

Derrida's specter is the third aspect of the impossibly intersubjective. Against approaches that make the specter stand for everything (hence nothing at all), Hitchcock insists that "this symptom must be engaged and radically particularized rather than inflated." The specter must be situated, placed, and identified in its specific features and effects wherever it appears. This is not the same as exorcising the specter, something Derrida explicitly rejects and of which Kamuf remarks: "to have done with conjuration, to put an end once and for all to ghosts – all ghosts – is to put an end to the future, to bar it by and in a present entirely present to itself, without difference" (280). Finally, Hitchcock evokes the concept of image, which cannot secure a subject or an intersubjectivity, but situates the intersubjective as duration, as a trace in time and space. The intersubjective thus manifests as an impossible, inconsistent oscillation between identity and alterity, unity and fragmentation, self and other. Hitchcock's paper concludes by replacing inter-subjectivity with trans-subjectivity, indicating the way intersubjectivity simultaneously and impossibly contains a logic of substance (matter) and insubstantiality (specter, image) whose interrelationship is always still becoming.

Brian McHale's paper "What Was Postmodernism? or, the Last of the Angels" begins by questioning the temporality of the postmodern. McHale argues that, rather than viewing it as an age either of stasis or of acceleration, it should be conceived in terms of a multiple unevenness or non-synchronicity. We are postmodern in different manners and to different degrees. By arguing for the specificity and situatedness of distinct postmodernities, McHale encapsulates the argument of this volume that alterity and its negotiation are not universal but radically conditioned by specific circumstances. The figure of the angel serves to construct a particular "story" of postmodernity that brings out its non-synchronicity: where Hitchcock points out that the specter cannot be everything, McHale argues that one angel is not the next.

Between them, Hitchcock and McHale destabilize the opposition between angel and ghost as posited by Peter Fenves in his article "Marx, Mourning, Messianity." According to Fenves, the angel, going back to St. Thomas, stands for an irreducible individuality, exemplifying how "no two individuals can be exactly alike, differing only numerically" (255). Angels are unlike each other, distinguishable not just from each other, but also in themselves. They are non-identical and singular, unique and different – but at the same time, a promise that can never be attained in its 'pure' form. Ghosts or specters, on the other hand, are indistinguishable, identical members of a species. Through its endless return and repetition, the specter defies the notion of singularity (and thus, we might conclude, of a singular identity). A ghost is a ghost is a ghost: "their being, if they can be said to be at all, lies in being many, returning to one, returning as the same one, again and again. If each night a different ghost haunted a house, that house would not be haunted. So then: angels or ghosts" (Fenves 258). For Fenves, therefore, the two figures are mutually exclusive. The ghost signifies an unending, unresolved interaction with alterity (as in mourning), whereas the angel marks a finite confrontation with alterity, a resolution or, at least, an acceptance of indeterminacy (Derrida's messianic without the messiah). However, when angels proliferate, they come to form a species and when the specter is given a name, it is individualized: the ghost in *Hamlet* is not just any ghost, but the ghost of Hamlet's father and if it were not, it would not have haunted Hamlet so powerfully. The angel, McHale shows, does not always soothe the shock of the other and the specter, according to Hitchcock, can and should be particularized (not to say specified, which, like species and specter, ultimately derives from *specere*, "to look"). Kamuf, too, has argued that "the ghost is both specified, it is a some*one*, and at the same time of uncertain location and provenance. The violence this provokes would, so to speak, put the ghost in its place" (276). This putting in place, of both ghost and angel, is precisely what is at stake in this volume.

McHale distinguishes the period from 1994 to 2003 as the age of the angel in American popular culture – Fenves, incidentally, also notes that angels are literally everywhere (386 n.7), almost turning them into a species (of *Engelism*) himself – and

makes the angel a litmus-test for postmodernism and its wane. Of the two main traditions of the angel – the Christian one where the angel appears as a divine intermediary that is radically alien and the Swedenborgian one where angels are humans (posthumously) glorified into a higher spiritual state – it is the first that characterizes the postmodern angel in both popular culture and high art. According to McHale, the angel as not-us, as related to the alien and the medium of television (which is among the new media Derrida distinguishes as spectral) delivers an "ontological shock" to the self, revealing the existence of other worlds, other places, and other perspectives. The mode of alterity this type of angel represents is one of absolute difference and non-assimilability. In postmodernity, this shock is attended, expected and welcomed (like Derrida's *arrivant*). However, in McHale's view, the recent disappearance of the radically alien angel signals the rise of a different attitude towards radical alterity, a return to a binary, Manichean worldview inaugurated by reactions to the 9 / 11 attacks. It is not that the other has ceased to shock us, but that certain cultural and political forces conspire to no longer acknowledge and welcome this shock. Thus, alterity – even when it bears an angelic face – is not always met in the same way.

Sara Cohen Shabot's paper "The Grotesque: On 'Fleshing Out' the Subject" takes up the alterity of matter or substance discussed by Hitchcock, conceiving it in terms of the politics of the body and its boundaries. Shabot notes how the concept of the subject as identical to itself has been subjected to a postmodernist critique, which presents a subject that is above all embodied and historically, socially and culturally defined. She approaches this postmodern subject through the figuration of the grotesque, which she sees as an under-explored paradigm of intersubjectivity and alterity. The grotesque emphasizes elements opposed to "the logic of the same," which privileges the original, the essential, the true, above the copy, the excessive or the fake. As an ambiguous, differentiated figure of excess that defies clear definitions and borders, yet that is at the same time unmistakably flesh and blood, the grotesque grounds the subject in an ambivalent corporeality that prevents it from becoming neutral, de-sexualized or hyper-sexualized.

Whereas Shabot locates alterity in the flesh, Kate Khatib's "Auto-Identity: Avatar Identities in the Digital Age" expands on the discussion of spectrality by displacing alterity to the virtual realm of the computer game and the internet community. Khatib takes her cue from Levinas' conceptualisation of the relation between self and other as one of alterity and transcendence, connecting the I and the other but separating them at the same time. How, she asks, can we understand ourselves if we are always already beyond ourselves? This question becomes particularly pressing in the digital age, in relation to the spectral figure of the avatar. The avatar, a (sometimes graphical) icon or representation of a user in a shared virtual reality, is related to other self-created identities such as transgender politics, cross-dressing, and postcolonial attitudes. Unique to avatar identities, however, is the mystical connotation of a truly virtual

identity which hovers just outside of the physical body. Thus, avatars can be seen as a kind of transcendent, self-created alterity.

For Khatib, avatars offer new opportunities for self-identification, identity formation, and collective organization, with a greater level of control for the subject. This counters Kamuf's argument that

with the accelerated dislocation or spectralization of place through tele-technology, that which makes this technology increasingly less subject to the control of any centralized, which is to say localized, apparatus, what has been called self-determination, though no doubt always with nostalgia, will doubtless have to give up the ghost, in other words, invent a living-on in its new, ghostly simulacra. (274)

Khatib sees the avatar not as a "ghostly simulacrum," but as a possible site of agency, of the subject imagining and enacting itself "otherwise" through an alterity that is no longer completely divorced from the self, but also not fully equal to it (as is the case with Baudrillard's ultimate simulacrum, the cloned human being).[2] The otherwise allows us to explore our numerous possible selves by pitching our idealized selves against our physical self, playing the roles of I and other at the same time, through each other, transforming each other.

The final paper in the first section is Esther Peeren's "(Dis)embodied Voices: Vocal Alterity and the Cultural Addressee," which is concerned with alterity as mediated through intersubjectivity and, in particular, the voice. Like Khatib, Peeren locates a particular politics of alterity in the oscillation between the material and the virtual. Her paper approaches the issue of bodily alterity through a discussion of the voice and its gendered addressivity in the American television series *Sex and the City* and the 1994 Michael Apted film *Nell*. The audio-visual rendering of the female voice as voice-over or voice-off indicates that the disembodied voice places itself on the border between self and other. The voice's addressivity is divided into a material addressivity, aimed at the concrete listener, and a spectral addressivity whose destination remains implicit. Peeren theorizes the latter through Jean Laplanche's enigmatic addressee, Bakhtin's superaddressee and Voloshinov's potential addressee, marking a distance from all three by introducing the concept of the cultural addressee. The cultural addressee signifies the orientation of the utterance toward a potential understanding that functions as a precondition to its being spoken. It determines who speaks, who remains silent and who is heard. As such, it is indicative of how a particular social group deals with radical alterity or the shock of the other.

At issue in the second section is the shock of the other and how we deal with it on a psychological and affective level. As Julia Kristeva argues in *Strangers to Ourselves*, the encounter with alterity inevitably provokes a – more or less violent – reaction:

Strange indeed is the encounter with the other – whom we perceive by means of sight, hearing, smell, but do not 'frame' within our consciousness. The other leaves us separate, incoherent; even more so, he can make us feel that we are not in touch with our

own feelings, that we reject them or, on the contrary, that we refuse to judge them – we feel 'stupid' we have 'been had' [. . .] The uncanny strangeness allows for many variations: they all repeat the difficulty I have in situating myself with respect to the other and keep going over the course of identification-projection that lies at the foundation of my reaching autonomy. (187)

Again, like alterity itself, the reaction to alterity is not uniform: it has many varieties and it is invariably situated, dependent on our specific place in the world as well as on our particular fantasies and desires. The papers in this section explore some of the affects through which alterity is confronted on the psychic level: confusion, repetition, anger, shame.

Victoria Best presents a meditation on the intersection of bodily and psychic alterity through the image of the female genitals as a figure for the Lacanian concept of *extimité* in three novels. The fiction of Georges Bataille, Helène Cixous and Michel Houellebecq, each in its own way, explores the connections between the body, the erotic, desire, the vagina, the eye, the I, and the other. Best proposes that the figure of the erotic is always already premised on the dissolution and fragmentation of the individual; its own alterity or *extimité* to itself. *Extimité* refers to that which lies beyond the subject but which simultaneously appeals to her as always already internal: it designates a problematic confusion of the intimate and the exterior, a perpetual oscillation between habitual self-absence and an alarming encounter with the other. Although there can be no positive knowledge of the fundamental extimacy of the self, it may be glimpsed in moments of transition or unexpected otherness. Best argues that unleashed eroticism in art, in the form of explicit, disturbing descriptions of the vagina, forces the characters – and the reader – to negotiate a certain *degré zéro* of subjectivity, to explore a visceral response that defies all conventions and ethics, and ultimately to recognise the stranger of negativity within.

In "Choreographies of the Subject," Lucia Ruprecht addresses concepts of performance, performativity, and trauma in outlining identity as choreography through an interaction with Pina Bausch's experimental dance piece *Bluebeard – While Listening to a Taped Recording of Béla Bartók's 'Bluebeard's Castle'* (1977). Bausch exposes the dynamics of gendered identity formation through the repetition of norms and codes in a reiterative and citational practice that is mirrored in the choreography of her piece, and in the piece *as* choreography. According to Ruprecht, the logic of this artwork excludes difference within the process of repetition and thus forecloses agency based on intention and creative variation, placing the traumatic – as an irresolvable alterity *within* the subject – at the heart of the concept of identity. It does, however, suggest a notion of agency which is bound up with the possibility of narration by transposing compulsive patterns of behavior into movement, and therefore providing possibilities for the articulation of otherwise unspoken constraints. The traumatic response to the shock of the other is here, quite literally, moved on.

Kate MacNeill's contribution on "Art that Matters" focuses on conceptual art that interrupts the binary of self and other, once more providing a shock of alterity within. MacNeill's argument proceeds by way of a detailed semiotic examination of two artworks, by Karyn Lindner and Deborah Williams, both of which were altered and / or censored despite the fact that they lacked representations that could be considered obscene. MacNeill considers what might have happened in the viewing of the works to provoke these violent reactions. She suggests that the identity invoked in the two works is not that of a recognizable other but that of the viewer him or herself. It is this absence of the other or confusion between self and other that disrupts viewing conventions and provokes the affective response wherein lies the possibility of a politically strategic moment. Although the artworks acquired a fixed meaning after the alterations and censorship, in their original ambivalence they possessed a multiple agency exerted in the interaction with the viewer.

"Shame in Alterities," by Alexis Shotwell, conceptualises the affect of shame as a paradigmatic kind of discomfort, always intersubjective and always other, and asks how shame might affect the racial (re-)formation of identity. Shotwell examines the performance art of Adrian Piper as one that elicits racialized shame, which may ultimately work against racism by effecting shifts in the spectator / interlocutor on the level of racial identification. Piper's work articulates and deploys the affect of shame in at least three ways: her work confronts the viewer in a way that shames, it enacts shameful situations through their depiction, or it interpellates the viewer as the shaming agent. Each of these modes indicates a vector along which we might pursue an anti-racist, non-white-supremacist subjectivity through shame-induced re-identification, through an encounter with alterity that not only shocks us, but shames us. Shotwell argues that shame produces a moment of contradiction in the multiple selves that make up the subject, a confrontation between the self it has been and the various selves it wants to have been (analogous to the "otherwise" enacted by Khatib's avatar identities). In this way, Shotwell translates a negative affect into a hopeful one.

The third and final part of our book is concerned with translational practices negotiating the alterities that inhabit particular places, nations, regions, or localities. These practices range from the recuperation of an "erased" language and script, a transgenerational narrativity, and an intercultural re-translation, to nontranslation. Each of the four contributions in this section proposes a form of negotiation adjusted to the specific place and form of alterity in the particular cultural-historical, geographical and political situations of Kashmir, Germany, Northern Ireland and Quebec.

In "A Language of One's Own?," Ananya Kabir engages with concepts of space and translation through a case study of the linguistic situation in Indian-administered Kashmir, where language functions as an index of a community under erasure. She charts the attempts of Kashmiri artists to overcome the marginalization of their language, which, due to the way postcolonial India has mapped its federal units onto

linguistic groups, has become other to the Kashmiris themselves. Despite efforts to articulate "a language of one's own," the Kashmiri language remains deeply underrepresented, both in speaking and in writing, for reasons that have to do with affect, politics of multilingualism and politics of script. Configured as the long-neglected mother tongue, the Kashmiri language has become a trope of marginalisation, dispossession, trauma and shame among contemporary Kashmiri artists and writers. Significantly, as in Shotwell's paper, shame becomes a catalyst for attempts of expression and recovery – through practices of translation – in which the alterity of the Kashmiri language is thematized and partially mediated.

In her paper on the transgenerational mediation of identity and alterity, Silke Horstkotte examines a specific geographic space – Germany and its wartime history – and a complex process of translation, namely the translation of memory between different generations as it is configured in Marcel Beyer's *Spies* (2000) and Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* (2001). Ever since WW II, but especially since re-unification, what it means to be German has been a weighty and complex question that is even today far from resolved. Recent manifestations include discussions of whether the Germans were only perpetrators or also victims, and whether all Germans have to continue feeling guilty about the war, even those born long after the Holocaust. Both debates presuppose that individual identity is a result of collective concerns and that the relation between the individual and the collective is mediated by the family; in particular, by family memories. Horstkotte explores this hidden mediation through the figure of the transgenerational, which is a specific form of memory that intervenes between the personal and the collective. The transgenerational does not entail a transparent transmission of experience, but a precarious, evolving, unstable translation between personal and collective, past and present, identity and alterity.

Nicole Côté's paper examines the intersection between place, nationality, translation, and intersubjectivity – here, through the notions of the pathway, *l'étrangement*, and nontranslation in the work of the Quebec poet, essayist and translator Jacques Brault. Brault's work, which Côté relates to Jessica Benjamin's psychoanalytic theory of intersubjectivity, creates a mutual space in-between self and other, a nexus or liminal space that invalidates oppositions such as subject / object, self / other and individual / community. Significantly, Brault's message of openness to the other is also an ethics of the transmission of a work of art from one language to another. His notion of "nontranslation" proposes a mode of negotiation that rejects or reifies neither the dominant nor the dominated tongue, but works within them both. Nontranslations are translations that appear as variations on the theme, structure and music provided by the original text. The prefix "non" makes explicit the impossibility of a perfect transfer between original and translation. Instead, nontranslation mixes one's own writing with that of the other, thus revealing a porous (inter)subjectivity, a reversible and dynamic relationship with alterity. Nontranslation appears as a metaphor for the

unstable, provocative, shocking but also specific and situated relationship between identity and alterity, which opens the self up to potential change, to being otherwise.

Closing this section and the volume as a whole is Ingo Berensmeyer's contribution about mediating the alterity of Northern Ireland's complex postcolonial and postmodern situation through cultural comparisons in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Cathal Ò Searcaigh, and Paul Muldoon. Contemporary Irish poetry, Berensmeyer asserts, is symptomatic of a type of cultural process that can no longer be adequately described from within the paradigm of identity but which requires a different set of interpretive tools. Poetic texts are not simply cultural "objects" in an objectivist sense; instead, they perform acts of cultural analysis by using and modifying certain cultural practices, in this case those of recursive mapping (a culturally embedded, evolving cartography without fixed reference points), retranslation (a reconnection to history without reference to origins or essences), and glocalization (bringing together globalization and local transformations). These practices are alterity-based and presuppose an effort of translation that is transformative, that changes the way cultural space is mapped and performed. In his discussion of the three poets, Berensmeyer moves from the lingering nostalgia of Heany, via the utopian optimism of Ò Searcaigh, to the virtual space of cultural translatability erected by Muldoon, who represents the move by which strategies of identity give way to strategies of alterity. In this process, Berensmeyer explicitly invokes the methodology of cultural analysis as a practice where theory and object involve each other in a productive relationship of reciprocal intersubjectivity and where the object "from subject matter becomes subject, participating in the construction of theoretical views" (Bal 13). This practice formed the basis of the Identities / Alterities conference and, consequently, underlies all contributions to this volume.

Endnotes

1. Selected papers from the other two panels at the conference on "The Politics of Identity" and "Postcolonialism: Formation as Representation/ Representation as Formation" will appear in the companion volume to this book. This volume, edited by Anette Hoffmann and Saskia Lourens, will also be part of the Thamyris/Intersecting series.

2. See "Clone Story" in Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, where he describes cloning as a way "to deny all alterity, all alteration of the Same in order to aim solely for the perpetuation of an identity" (96).

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I. Bodily Alterities – Between Matter and Specter

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The Impossibly Intersubjective and the Logic of the Both

Peter Hitchcock

The truth of the intersubjective is impossibly mediated and, of course, is appropriately so in its incompleteness. There was a time when the intersubjective was simply predicated on a subject, a subject predisposed to reveal itself in all of its plenitude and existential charm. Its unquestionable thereness, its certitude in being, was axiomatic: all one had to do was array the components that affirmed it. But, although this subject continues to thrive in certain trajectories of thought and still constitutes a powerful affirmation of presence in everyday life (and why not, for it is reason's need that makes it so?) its aura is more shadow than assured, more spectral than specific to living in the flesh. The subject appears at its appointed time, overdetermined by exigencies not altogether commensurate with popular will, or desire or just the "I" that speaks it; appointed, then, not just by perception but by materialization or the matter of necessity. In general, that which facilitates communication needs intersubjectivity, and plenty of it – even basic greetings would become strenuous exercises in self-preservation if a common ground or norm were not available. Yet if the conceptual node of intersubjectivity is agonistically secure, its theoretical provenance is still more acutely contested, not least because of the fact that it simultaneously conjures philosophies of the subject and those that abjure its Cartesian ground for a space between that seems subjectless. The latter might seem to offer the prospect of a conversation without speakers; yet the point, or polity, lies elsewhere in location not locution and this is in part the space of impossibility in the intersubjective.

The "impossibly" in my title does not have "im" in parentheses, not because I disagree with Gayatri Spivak's strategic horning (in, for instance, *Death of a Discipline*), but because the word stages its own warring possibility – it already asks you to consider its contravention. And in truth Spivak often explores precisely this tension, as in her discussion of "planetarity" performed "through the transforming work of imagining the impossible other as that figured other imagines us" (98). This remains the

task in the critique of intersubjectivity. The other's impossibility now boldly marks the constitutive impossibility of the intersubjective itself, but as we draw this denial closer to the self the texture of the possible is intensified, as if smiling at the bar of abnegation. The danger is that the intersubjective strains to breaking under the weight of such proximity and its attendant responsibility. We ask that it should encompass the dealings of I and Other, however vexed, while yet removing all and everything that it connects as the tired conspiracy of centered subjectivity. There are obviously struggles worth continuing on the level of subjectivity (what would capitalism and imperialism be without it?) but there are elements of what I characterize as a philosophy of the both that struggle on to stasis as if opposition were foreclosed. The other occasion, as it were, for the impossibly intersubjective is this impossibility in theory, intimating that theory itself has quietly gone to the corner to cut its own throat. I am going to sketch four features that touch the impossibly intersubjective while offering a polemic on the logic of the both, yet this other occasion requires further, albeit brief comment.

In April 2003, the U.S. military claimed to have dug makeshift graves south of Baghdad to "mop up" the remains of the "degraded" Republican Guard (the thousands of civilian dead were largely spared this particular ignominy). Meanwhile, the *New York Times* (a paper that had ardently backed the invasion of Iraq) published "The Latest Theory Is That Theory Doesn't Matter," a report on a symposium sponsored by *Critical Inquiry* at the University of Chicago. The current essay is caught between these two truths, mediations on the matter of the real and what really matters. The organizers of the event had planned it well in advance of the onset of war (although not before the Bush administration itself had begun planning for war, in early 2001) but the *New York Times* fairly reveled in the opportunity to finger wag at the irrelevance and impotence of the theory set, especially its American constellation. Certainly, there was a degree of handwringing at the symposium but in the end this spoke more to the marginalization of the academic intelligentsia in American political life than it did to the matter of theory which, as Fredric Jameson pointed out in his introductory remarks, has yet to find a voice in which its politics are superceded by economics and the timbre of collective subjectivities. Jameson, after noting the impact of different theories, structuralist, poststructuralist, and political, called this the fourth moment of theory. I would call it the fourth form of theory and its moment is intersubjectivity, the chronotopic arena in which collectivities articulate if not pure economics then its agential substance, although how this is defined is the very crux because it is un-formed and the question of formation is not settled, willy nilly, by theoretical adjudication, or even by the New York Times.

The four features of this conceptual apparatus that I wish to matrix throw some light on the difference between the intersubjective as an interrogative and as an impossible space. Philosophy will see the impossible as constitutive of the ground for what

takes place in the space of the intersubjective, but if it exists as an immanent cause it is often too quickly deployed to exclude a possibility as cause outside immanence. Whenever the latter is posed it is mercilessly attacked as a baneful binary, as if the principle of outsidenessness, or exotopy, somehow put Descartes' Humpty Dumpty back together again. True, Enlightenment philosophy abounds, even in philosophical positions that must so ardently deny it, but that does not mean that a constitutive outside is merely consistent with nasty centered subjectivity and the privileging of that demon in the details, the European "I." Indeed, there may be some value now in asserting specific planes of *in*consistency, not least to challenge the *ratio* of the "petro-person" – she or he whose being in the world is rigorously composed of oil consumption and whose privilege is sutured by wars of scarcity. The logic of the both persists in any philosophical position that would collapse the grounds for intersubjectivity while holding to its presence as absence. The Other of the Other is not simply a philosophical sleight of subjection but a bar on the social: impossibility remains unless the space of difference reverts to this constitutive outside.

There are several keywords in play throughout this discussion. I offer four corners of contention, an unpronounced parallax that in its incommensurability places a premium not only on an ethics of recognition but also on a politics of intervention that may indeed sublate that ethics. The terms at issue are: becoming, matter, specter, and image. I will not emphasize their sequence but the oscillation between them. If we cannot purvey the whole truth of intersubjectivity we might at least refract its circulation, not to affirm its arrival at an interminable elsewhere, nor to condemn it to virtual verity; instead, our conceptual travel four times around the frame, as Derrida would once have put it, will presage something not altogether Derridean, the intersubjective as a real opposition, that which is distilled in the impossibility of I and Other in the maintenance of subjectivity. My aim here is not to produce a methodology as such but is to resist the posing of methodology as event, as the cynical reasoning of finesse, as the cool style of disinterest, as a racy now that is never. The problem with announcing that theory is over or that it has been appropriately posted (stamped by *Critical Inquiry* perhaps, or glibly confirmed by Terry Eagleton whose *After Theory* is as much about his exhaustion as it is theory's) is that this partakes of both realism and idealism. Intersubjectivity is too important to be left to presumption or inference; indeed, it may be too important to be called intersubjectivity. How can intersubjectivity best be represented? For one, it cannot be represented, paradoxically, by representation alone, but neither can we condemn it to the wily interactions of the signifier and the unconscious. If we insist on it being radically both then it is inconsequentially neither. Let us wrest it from the ether of the theorati while dialogizing its spectral hold on communicative action. At this level, intersubjectivity is not between subjects; it is across principles of subjectivity themselves.

Becoming

It is time to hail a ghost, whose trenchant thoughts on immanence and becoming go to the heart of the impossible as well as the ethereal. Deleuze must figure in the impossibly intersubjective because his philosophy countermands the sense of subjectivity as a construct of I and Other. Becoming is between subjects as a subject in process but does not refer to a subject *qua* subject. Recall that in his work with Guattari (principally *The Anti-Oedipus*) "becoming woman" was not about becoming an extant woman, it was not about a woman at all, but was about distinguishing the molar from the molecular: the former, "bad," concerns woman defined by form, by organs, by consummate subjecthood; the latter, "good," refers to particles of gender and sexuality, fragments in flux, affects not effects, an assemblage not a subject. The good Deleuzian, I would argue, must strategically disavow the invocation of woman in this formulation; it is a similar gesture to the little girl in *A Thousand Plateaus* that hamstrings a viable politics of either. The bad Deleuzian will wriggle mightily on this hook by suggesting, among other counter-intuitions, that criticism of the formulation is woefully binaristic and predicated on treasonable essentialism; besides, the term is not about politics or subjects or agency or whatever you think of as woman. There are very strong claims for Deleuzian feminism, particularly in short-circuiting the platitudes that often accompany discourses of desire and regimes of objecthood, but it is quite possible to put becoming to work without becoming an apologist for analogical sexism. Spivak once famously opined that the discourse of man is in the metaphor of woman and it takes an entertaining kind of gymnastics to extricate "becoming woman" from that realm. One truth of the intersubjective as becoming is that it may well be immaterial. There is little problem with this formulation literally or philosophically but in terms of Deleuzian critique it represents the restlessness of the positive. Žižek, Hegelian enough to recognize a certain Deleuzian discomfort with the dialectic, suggests in *Organs Without Bodies* that the concept of intersubjectivity here is caught between immaterial effect and productive structure. Multiplicities are immaterial effects of material causes and yet becoming differentiates itself into the spatio-temporal production of beings. Žižek goes as far as tickling Deleuze with a little touch of Hegelianism in the night but the point is that the bad Deleuzian often makes a virtue of such inconsistency (in this case, between *The Logic of Sense* and *The Anti-Oedipus*). This is part of what I mean by the logic of the both. Bereft of a theory of contradiction (social or otherwise) any shortcoming in becoming becomes its opposite or dissembles into assemblage giving something that provocatively challenges systematicity a kind of righteous systematicity all of its own. This is not quite the substance of Deleuze's position which figures into the plane of immanence degrees of power (hecceities) both affecting and affected according to intensity (this, by the way, does not exclude the logic of the both that is a major concern here but it does acknowledge the process that Žižek believes is denied). What Deleuze is after in becoming is a

process of thought that circumvents or otherwise avoids the pitfalls of the subject as a psychological or structural feature of the *personal*. Instead of essences of subjectivity, the Oedipal moment or the beating of the heart, *becoming* breaks up the living into pre-personal or molecular components. Similarly, affect in becoming is not a feeling or emotion reducible to an identity or a monadic consciousness; it is not an essence of identity in which "I feel" is the feeling of an "I." The tendency in cultural analysis is to deal with what culture represents or does not represent, and much of this features people interacting in some way as people, sometimes even as individuals but often in forms of socialization that we most readily attach to the term intersubjective. It is difficult to think this desire impersonally, affect pre-personally, and becoming as metaphorically molecular. It is unfair to say that becoming for critique best serves non-representational culture but I would not be the first to remark that the provocation in the concept is only matched by its relative absence from Deleuze's own cultural analysis, particularly in the stunning representational aesthetics of the cinema books. That is not my point, however. The question is whether one can shed the limitations of the subject of Enlightenment philosophy and its concomitant subject of subjection without rejecting rational interpretations of the intersubjective altogether? Žižek's criticism of Deleuze is that you can, but in the latter's case only by transcoding elements of the material, the rational, and the psychological into a discourse that subtends them. You can desire your cake and become it too.

Let us clarify the impossibly intersubjective in terms of becoming. The logic of the both wants to reject the philosophical features that ground the subject but finds that the act of rejection itself replays the logic of the rejected. In part this is because the intersubjective connotes a logic of Two, that which is between, the interstitial, the space of communication and rejection must acknowledge an Other to do its work. Naturally, the philosophical strategy that slips this noose is radically inclusive, it must absorb the Other to the condition of the One, but somehow preserve the Other of the Other as non-representable. It must permit the propositional faith in the intersubjective to persist while rendering its own philosophical belief as the lie to that persistence. This is not new in philosophy and I will not characterize it as such; what is interesting, however, is that some form of epistemological break is assumed when the logic of the both denies that very caesura. We have lost God and we have lost communism but they *sur-vivre* in becoming as particle emitting processes that are neither something nor someone but *affectively* everything and everyone. The intersubjective becomes impossible at the moment of causality: becoming is not cause or effect but again is radically both. Becoming comprises multiplicities that must acknowledge some causal mechanism (Deleuze notes that they are the incorporeal effects of corporeal causes); yet, as DeLanda among others has pointed out, Deleuze also asserts that although they differ from such causes as effects, multiplicities have a pure capacity to affect one another and these are termed "quasi-causes." Intersubjectivity is certainly

a space of oscillation but no concept in Deleuze oscillates as wildly as becoming when it comes to causality. Of course, we might leave the point of adjudication to another process, autopoesis, except that causality overreaches the claims of self-generating referentiality. Do we trust the critic to discern non-subjectively the difference of effect and cause and quasi-cause in any ongoing sense-event as multiply incorporeal?

Again, the good Deleuzian need not be overly troubled by any plane of inconsistency in consistency, for we are talking of philosophical monism and such criticism is likely the rational aura of fuddy-duddy dualists. Jameson has argued that this simply proves that Deleuze was a dualist and that it is the monists that have the explaining to do (those who have turned codes into axioms) but my rejoinder would be that it is symptomatic of the philosophy of the both that such claims do not cancel each other out. Nevertheless, I have always liked the sense of process in becoming which, like the vibrations in string theory, reveal a world alive to dynamism, if different forms of change. Once one has separated off the question of the subject from any specific human form then much of what is claimed holds for the processes so described. Clearly, however, the onus is on precise elaboration of the terms of the subject and subjecthood for it is this that renders intersubjectivity all but impossible in any conventional sense. As an abstract, immaterial, singular node, the subject in becoming is closer to the virtual than to flesh but I would quickly add that this does not mean it easily lends itself to a kind of virtual world critique, that the realists even more quickly understand as fiction. Such a world admits of substance and that is where the Deleuzian subject stops: where there is being there is no becoming. One must trace the intersubjective without it.

Matter

On the face of it, this might make *matter* a more congenial "substance" for the intersubjective. Whatever is denied in the subject *qua* subject may return in the complex manifestation of matter, the cake mix as it were. Yet, the logic of the both intercedes once more to render it a good deal more undecidable and certainly less "matter" of fact. If, as Deleuze and Guattari claim, "philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts" (1983: 2) then matter is central to its practice and one that ranges from arduous disputation in science to charged imaginaries in cultural discourse. If it does not secrete a stable form it is partly because its intrinsic mutability is redoubled by its prospect as a constitutive ground. And whether your point is string theory or that which pulls the puppet a ground is never an innocuous difference. The matter of intersubjectivity is the heart of the matter, but not one that can be finalized by appeals to a universal measure, for this too marks differences not just in degree but in kind. True, we can recall a time when nature itself gave matter its philosophical force and this persists in various forms of mechanistic thinking that externalizes matter from form. Several alternatives to this division have been theorized but I will limit myself to a couple that open up a significant provocation for rethinking intersubjectivity.

I have discussed Judith Butler's theorization of matter elsewhere (1999), but here I will add a coda of sorts. As you probably know, Butler appreciates well the processes involved in the intersubjective and argues that the subject itself is performative (that is, performativity is agency without a subject) and that matter itself materializes in the moment of performance. It is a highly-nuanced and largely persuasive critique that pulls so hard at the certitudes that gird constructionism that one sees rubble where rudimentary physics might have been. The crux of the matter is that matter itself is read as an effect of a process of materialization but the process itself is not material; or rather, it is not composed of the matter that it produces as its effect. Butler is absolutely right to assert the prescience of process in the appearance of matter but the process itself is not the matter and only a philosophy of the both can make it so. Nevertheless, her salient point is to unsettle the "epistemological certainties" associated with the materialization of the body in particular and at this level what is nature is clearly shown to be naturalized. Butler's approach is extremely important for how one theorizes intersubjectivity for a number of reasons. First, intersubjectivity does not exist to prove the matter of the subject but may well contain sedimentations, effects of power and discourse that would seem to legitimize such proof. The seeming here might be ascribed to materialization but it is a contradictory materiality composed of superstructural elements like ideology. In other words, to combine our lesson of becoming with matter, the compositional effects of intersubjectivity are affecting and refuse the split between mind and body, form and matter, especially as they inflect matters of gender and sexuality. If classical Western philosophy must actively forget the phallogocentric slide from matter to *mater* to matrix (womb), work like Butler's has defamiliarized this troubled axiology so that even the matrix of this critique is actively under erasure. The matrix I have invoked exists to doubt, similarly, the generative possibilities of the One through the invocation of a paradoxically unpronounced parallax whose procedure may be glimpsed in the discourse on image. Second, Butler's focus on the human body in matters of matter rather brilliantly forestalls the hypothesis that the intersubjective registers bodily communication, at least in a way that the human is normatively conceived. If the body is not premised on matter as an *a priori*, then however it appears in the intersubjective is not likely to confirm material parameters. A third point, however, arises from Pheng Cheah's analysis of matter for Butler, which is that even if Butler unhinges the matter of the body as an *a priori* she retains its anthropomorphic and anthropologistic referentiality and thus does not achieve escape velocity from the crepuscular clutches of Kantianism. One of the many advantages of Cheah's critique is that once the agency of bodies is problematized the field of the political in intersubjectivity is redrawn to include logics of process not altogether anthropologistic nor dependent on its fulcrum. While the constitution of matter remains problematic its existence as substrate or subindividual offers the prospect that what is contested in the intersubjective is less the grounds of the subjective but the matter that it negotiates. Now Cheah will push this matter towards

Derrida and the spectral, a revenant that I too will critique, but before considering this "radical contamination" (Cheah) I want to note the materialist challenge in intersubjectivity. Marx, unlike Derrida, does not offer a philosophical framework cognizant of where the points of consistency and inconsistency might meet. He is primarily interested in planes of materialism and those that understand the logic of economy and what changes it. As Etienne Balibar reminds us, there is no philosophy of Marx but is he at least dependable in his rendering of matter for materialism? He will use phrases like the "objective nature of circumstances" and "social being" to signify the thickening of matter in his critique and certain laws and theses are invoked to crystallize the issue. Whether or not these remain dependable is something Minerva might know but for intersubjectivity a somewhat surprising implication results. Instead of Habermas' public consensus as intersubjectivity we are left with the sense that intersubjectivity is subjectivity's doubt, the space less of human interaction *qua* human but the space rather of a discrepant collocation of structural relations in which matter "appears" insubstantial and amorphous. The Marxist matter of intersubjectivity is not, for instance, the commodities that grace exchange but what Marx calls the "ghostly objectivity" of that logic. He thus speaks of "congealed labor time" and "congealed quantities of homogenous human labor" (*Capital*, Part I). As Marx puts it in his Preface to the First Edition of *Capital*, microscopes and chemical reagents are of no assistance in the analysis of the value form, "the power of abstraction must replace both." This is intersubjective matter.

Specter

So then, to ghosts. One of the first English versions of the *Communist Manifesto* began "A frightful hobgoblin stalks Europe" and, while the French might have us believe today that ghoul is Mickey Mouse both fears rest on a similar fetish of the spirit. Whatever specter Marx and Engels once conjured, materialist ghosts have become something of a cottage industry with only the death of Castro required to complete its spectral pantheon. Marx himself had begun the ghost dance with the chilling imagery he used throughout his tale of Louis Napoleon. In the last decade, of course, Derrida has performed a mighty seance in which he plays Hamlet to Marx the father in a drama that continues to fascinate me and many others who wonder what is left to Marxism, what returns from its future, and what forsakes fathers in that endeavor? In many ways the specter is the perfect trope of the both for it permits the intimation of substance without ever becoming coterminous with the contaminated real. Marx in particular was drawn to the ghoul because, as we have noted, it gave abstraction a recognizable form and one that lurks in every claim to materiality. But if Marx wrote a key chapter of *Gespenstergeschichte* to gird the limits of a certain impossibility in his own philosophy, the abstention from interpretation, it has now in true dialectical style become a symptomatic abstention from praxis. There are many reasons for this and I will just mention three.

First, if at the end of Reagan's second term a leftist could argue that about half the world's population was following the socialist path, by the beginning of Clinton's neoliberalism that numbers game was up: the Soviet Union was gone, China had gone capitalist (in truth the tipping point for the PRC had come in the late seventies with the rise of Deng Xiaoping), and Cold War chess pieces had re-emerged as failed states or World Bank wards (and sometimes both). When capitalist chestbeaters like *Forbes* sent up communist sloganeering it was small wonder specters were so appealing to the Left. What was menace in the nineteenth century often seemed like spectral resignation at the end of the twentieth.

Second, the rhetoric of the ghost was apposite with boom times for the New Economy. Recall that in the nineties the cherished truths of capital accumulation were being challenged – price to earnings ratios could touch the sky, companies could hang together by the faintest hi-tech idea, debt was deliverance and stock prices raced ahead on the wings of immateriality and fictive capital (in the United States "Dow 35,000" was mentioned, and the NASDAQ itself sprinted past 5000). Suddenly, companies without a ghost of a chance were sporting twenty-something CEOs with Lamborghinis, a penchant for scooters and foozball tables as office furniture. In 1997-98 the East Asian economic meltdown and currency crisis was read as a regional dysfunction, as was the stagnation in the Japanese economy, and not as the sign of a supra-regional systemic problem with speculation, accounting corruption, and that bugbear of any serious capitalist, overproduction. With the internet hype in full swing companies poured billions into cable infrastructure. All the boom needed was bandwidth. Even the anointed "reality" shows suggested that the culture and economy had somehow escaped them. In 2000 the New Economy suddenly seemed reminiscent of its laggardly forebear. It was ghostly to ghastly as fast as you could say "selloff." The information economy had forgotten its second word. Even that immaterial regulator, Alan Greenspan, had once warned of irrational exuberance, the ecstasy of spirit, but Greenspan's phrase is like the New Economy, flush with the superfluous since exuberance is already an error of excess that stands beyond ratio and covers the excessive outburst that his expression confirms. As cultural critics looked on the spectacle of the boom could they not be forgiven for a little speculative frenzy all of their own, one in which troubling differences between subject and object could be resolved by a spectral dance? As Tim Brennan says of *Empire*, which is a crucial tome especially in the light before September 11th, 2001, the state is made a hovering ghost and labor labors under the shroud of immateriality. It is in the nature of abstraction to favor the specter as a trope but when it becomes all encompassing, when ether sublates the real, the logic of the both is at work and spectral force assumes no other.

Third, for theory spectrality is something of its own reward. On the one hand it is a healthy antidote to blinkered versions of positivism well noted by Huxley when he described it as Catholicism minus Christianity. On the other hand, it can lend to theory

a paradoxically unbound relationality. The intersubjective here is Promethean; he not just of the pecked liver but Percy Bysshe Shelley's hero and, of course, Mary Shelley's "scientist makes proto-cyborg" narrative. It stretches in all directions simultaneously and in labyrinthine and rhizomatic modes. It embraces beyond opposition, of I and Other without ever enveloping as an outside. In Derrida's deconstructive approach it offers the very possibility of reference to the other; it disjoins I and Other to understand the possibility of "ideality in the very event of presence, in the very presence of the present" (1994: 75). Both Marx and Derrida trope on the ghost as a sign of the material but Derrida also deploys it as a specific philosophical referent, as the engaging supplement that puts presence as well as time out of joint. Pheng Cheah has argued for nationalist memories as a kind of spectralization and there is much to recommend his position, especially given the careful philosophical lineage he sketches. Eventually, however, memory and nation dissolve into the ectoplasm of the spectral which emerges as the actual substance of substance and the insubstantial. Note the logic of the both in the following: "Spectrality allows something to act on and affect itself or another (and also to affect itself as an other) or to be acted on or affected by another (and also by itself as an other). It allows any action (transitive and intransitive) or occurrence – which it is to say, production and also creation in general – to take place." Just in case it is not the basis of everything quite yet, Cheah continues: "But it is also the inscription of *techne* within the living body: it opens up every proper organic body to the supplementation of artifice. We commonly understand culture as an alteration we introduce into nature through rational artifice. Spectralization is a form of inhuman culture, before culture *and* nature, that makes both possible" (2003: 388). In the boom everything was possible so why not this? The logic of the both is not a universal however; it is its dissimulated simulation so that even the impossible is saturated by its coded axiom: "The disruption of teleological time is, however, not an impasse that leads to nihilism or apolitical quietism. Since spectrality also sets teleological time in motion, it is not a matter of rejecting the hope that freedom can be actualized through cultural work but of understanding the conditions of the (im)possibility of incarnation" (Cheah 2003: 389). I have already noted that hauntology is important for materialist critique and more, but here it sounds as if incarnation is both a means and an end, both a disruption of teleology and what moves it, the cause and effect, the transitive and intransitive, the human and the inhuman, culture and nature, always the both. If Cheah does not espouse the non-organic omnivore of immanence he yet embraces the ghost as all consuming, finitude multiplied to the power of phantom. In Hardt and Negri's *Empire* the space of the intersubjective is not a space of change because the revolution has already happened; in *Spectral Nationality* the intersubjective, say of postcolonial nationalism, cannot die because it is always already dead. Yes, the process of the spectral actualizes, but the verb and the concept are tainted by the wisps of history which is why this symptom must be engaged and radically particularized rather than

inflated. Only then will we begin to fathom how the public sphere became so phantomatic and communicative action so fanciful.

Image

The logic of the both fails as a term to do justice to the topics of becoming, matter, and specter but it does indicate at least some of the conceptual prowess in their various combinations, in their chiasmatic reversals – specter becoming matter, matter becoming specter – which themselves sublate dialectics only to reanimate its founding contradictions. Interestingly, although not surprisingly, what confounds the grounds of I / Other as intersubjective is a concept that undoes the need for hypostatized language in interaction. In doing so, *image* informs becoming, matter and specter naturally without being reducible to them. It is the most revolutionary of subjects precisely because it cannot guarantee a subject in its process. Like becoming, the question of origin for image is moot, for imagination has no root except as the tautological referent for image. If my point about the intersubjective is that it is all that is now impossible in I and Other, in subject and object, in life and death, it is image that sutures this space of borderless lifeworlds. What if intersubjectivity was a mere vibration, the lilting tune of Bergson's *durée* as variations in time / space? Here the matter of intersubjectivity would be precisely this movement between fixed space and temporal dilation. Indeed, one could argue that intersubjectivity is nothing more than the sign of duration, that which marks matter in time by virtue of image. This is a scene of subject traces, ghostly because fleshless, becoming because process, matter because it is indeed an aggregate of images. In order for us to understand such principles of image Bergson asks us to take up the position of a viewer unaware of the disputes of philosophers – free your mind, as it were, and image will follow. If one actively forgets, the movement image and time image will come into view (in the same way that Žižek has to forget Bergson in order to write about Deleuze). Matter, as Bergson maintains, coincides with pure perception and the images of the latter are the stuff of intersubjectivity: "subject and object unite in an extended perception" (70). The extended perception is a logic of the both, a distillation of the intersubjective calibrated by time not space. The impossibility of the space of the intersubjective is here guaranteed by the aggregate of duration, by the Bergsonian belief that time is real. Bergson, of course, was a dualist and I do not mean to suggest that only monism is responsible for the both, a statement in which the logic cancels through the very contention. This presents a bit of a problem for Deleuze so in his work on Bergson he shows how Bergson's higher form of dualism had to go through some fairly rigorous monism to come up with *durée*. Just as movement is a translation in space so Deleuze's Bergson is a translation in time (let us say from the possibility of cinema to its late-twentieth-century plethora). The question is whether duration as process is contiguous with socialization as the process of the intersubjective? If the trope of the both depends

on metonymy, the finitude of infinite substitution, then it might be possible to read the social back into this plane so that at points in its image perception the intersubjective reemerges as that which remains, the trace that does not confirm these surreptitious flows, but substitutes by inconsistency. Image is ideal for eschewing synthesis while performing it: the logic of the both can be politicized by placing a premium on the synthetic, no folds without joins, no fabric without fabrication. If all that matters is image then we are still in need of a language that adequately communicates it. The pathos of image is not the matter of perception but the rather ordinary way that we speak it, as if snatching truth from its ardent impossibility.

It is relatively easy to sidestep the juggernaut of image if the trope of choice is metaphor, for metaphor is always already the delicious delight of multiplicity and in the realm of the comparable we must continue to nurture intersubjective exchange based on it. Image in Bergson is already a metaphor for the body, which might seem to trump his claims regarding matter as an aggregate of images until one understands the body as precisely this agglomeration. Yet this is not the lesson of image for the impossibly intersubjective, nor yet the way that it troubles the other terms of our imbroglio. When I use this term, "impossibly intersubjective," I do not mean that the logic of the both simply sets the arena of metaphor under erasure or resolutely denies the logic of intersubjective exchange, even when individual critics might well subscribe to this feat. What I am suggesting is that the softening of difference, a kind of declawed dialogism, obfuscates the productive logic that informs it so that image, that perceptive text, can be misperceived as alibi, as the other story of the ways in which people live now. Bakhtin has been dutifully harangued for not naming his sources (although we could hardly admire his plagiarism if he had); it is just so with the logic of the both which persists as a symptom of that which it would naturally deny, the general march of commodification. If in the eighteenth century it was idealism that froze the subject in reason, today it ossifies under the *commandement* of the commodity so that the intersubjective is creatively destroyed by the general rubric of everything in exchange, including theory. In the transcendental Kant made Being inaccessible in itself; today it is commodified materiality that secures our lack. And the both as an operative principle preserves the conditional in its repetition. All that is solid melts into air and the rights on the latter are traded.

Raymond Williams once put together a glossary for *Culture and Society* but in its own way it became an explanatory key for much of what we would now call British Cultural Studies. I am not going to translate the impasse on intersubjectivity back into the terms of that tome, *Keywords*, but the space between Williams' work and ours is instructive in a number of ways. For one, image has a fascinating etymology, one which contains the thrust of likeness in mimesis, the intimations of a phantom figure, and the heady potion of conception. One of the reasons for the problematic role of image in the impossibly intersubjective is that its development as a trope of the both has been remarkably consistent in its inconsistency. For the imaginary and the imagination

its hold on cultural critique is indisputable, but as Williams points out, its meaning for advertising and public relations is something else again: it describes that fractious space between the gravediggers south of Baghdad and a simultaneous symposium on theory, the democratic pieties that obfuscate the scramble for oil and the deer-like trance of theory that dutifully escapes the referent only to find itself before headlights and headlines where it does not *refer*. Again, one does not resolve this tension by collapsing it. There is a great value to immanence and part of it is there, in the constitutive tension of image for intersubjectivity, now text, now vision, now concept, now perception, now commodity, now intellection and, of course, now both but for obstinately concrete conditions of possibility. We can relativize these conditions into obscurity – it does, after all, offer an infinitely philosophical imperative – but theory also understands the constituents of its own eventness which, like the beginning of your final breath, is but a prelude to the lightness of your Being in the field of the Other.

It is a good place to conclude, Death, yet I want to suggest that the truth of the intersubjective is in distinguishing it and that perhaps the symptoms of its impossibility necessitate further interrogation. Williams himself was so vexed by the conceptual complexity of one word, culture, that he added it to a matrix of four others in his adult education classes: class, art, industry and democracy – a "kind of structure" he called it, upon which I have unceremoniously thrown my cloak (Thrown, *jacere*, the root of "ject" in subject). Let us say that part of what remains impossible in the intersubjective is that it is underthrown, *sub ject*, and what it labors under, apart from my questionable references to popular culture and political economy, is *inter* (from *interesse* [L] to be between and *interesse* [mL], a compensation for loss – which leads to interest, the compensation for losing sight of your money in a bank). The betweenness sustains our interest in the intersubjective but the trope of the both urges a reconfiguration, not to repeat the sublimation of all that we know as communication but to mark, in some small way, the logic of the principle in the spirit, specter, of its transgression. The logic of the both then, would not refer discreetly to the great wake of phenomenology, Husserl and Heidegger let us say, that feeds the disquiet of so much poststructuralism, but would nevertheless respect its deep impact on epistemological and ontological *pointure* (the "pricking" of the subject explored by Derrida). Rather than dismissing the oscillations of matter that matter, I believe these symptoms themselves proffer a kind of *trans-subjectivity* which concerns not the vast and variously provocative interplay of I / Other but the logic of substance in subjectivity itself. This, instead of just another metalanguage of defeat and quietude, is a sign of impossibility turned to the barbarism of now in Capital, Nation, and State, and remains a material injunction. Rather than giving up the ghost on transformation one might have to relinquish an allegiance to the both in achieving it.

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What Was Postmodernism? or, The Last of the Angels

Brian McHale

Periodizing

Nothing very problematic about the era of angels / in which we now live. (Pentti Saarikoksi, *The Dark One's Dances*, 1983)

This is hardly the first time that the question, "What was postmodernism?" has been posed in the title of a paper – or of a lecture, special issue, panel, conference, or what-have-you – and it is unlikely to be the last. Whenever it is posed, the question is apt to serve as the occasion either for celebration (probably premature) of postmodernism's demise, or for reflection on the problems and paradoxes of periodization that the term entails. The present paper belongs to this latter type of occasion.

So, too, does John Frow's essay, "What Was Postmodernism?" (1997), which I discovered only belatedly. For Frow, the question's past-tense form indicates, not that postmodernism is over and done with, but that it continues to obey the modernist logic of innovation and obsolescence. Postmodernism, in his view, is "precisely a moment of the modern" (36). The aesthetic of modernism is driven by the imperative to innovate, and every innovation is rendered obsolete by the next, so that modernism is constantly distancing itself from its own most recent manifestation, which, superceded, "slides into the past" (31). Eventually, this relentless logic of self-supercession requires that modernism itself become obsolete, necessitating a successor – a *post*modernism. Frow is even able to date the obsolescence of modernism, citing an essay by the Harvard comparatist Harry Levin, whose title Frow's own essay (and mine, too) evokes: "What Was Modernism?" (1960). Writing nearly forty years after modernism's high-water mark of 1922, Levin assumes that modernism is definitely a thing of the past. No longer "contemporary," it has by 1960 (if not considerably earlier) become a historical period.

If postmodernism is modernism's successor, made necessary by the logic of modernism itself, then how does it differentiate itself from its predecessor? Since modernism's determining feature, according to Frow, is its form of temporality – its ever-renewing newness and "nextness" – then postmodernism can only differentiate itself by adopting a *different* temporality from modernism's (36). One option might be to adopt a temporality of *stasis* in contradistinction to modernism's dynamism – either in the form of a neoclassicism (a version favored by Charles Jencks in his various accounts of postmodern architecture; see Jencks 1986), or in the form of apocalypse and the end of history (recurrent *topoi* of postmodernist theory and practice alike). Alternatively, postmodernism might attempt to outstrip modernism by adopting an even more frantic pace of innovation and obsolescence, speeding up the cycle until it approached the seasonal rhythm of fashion (Frow 38).

There is evidence of both of these temporalities in postmodernist practice. But there is also compelling evidence of a third alternative, that of multiple and uneven times, or non-synchronicity (Frow 9, 42). Despite being each other's contemporaries in the common-sense view, we are not all postmoderns; some of us are, but others of us are moderns or pre-moderns; perhaps some (or all?) of us are all three at once. Modernisms, postmodernisms, premodernisms, perhaps para-modernisms all co-exist. This approach sharply contradicts certain formidable theorists of postmodernism, including Harvey, Jencks, Lyotard, and especially Jameson, who seem to hold the view that postmodernism is a sort of blanket condition extending across cultural domains, affecting all genres and media, all disciplines of thought, all forms of practice and behavior in our time. Reading these theorists, one would think that everyone in the world had all joined hands and stepped across the same threshold all at the same time into postmodernity. But this is certainly not the case; even the European postmodernism of Baudrillard and Lyotard seems out of sync with the North American postmodernism of Jameson and others (Frow 29-30), and the further one ventures outside the Euro-American sphere, the less synchronized and "contemporary" the world seems.

The alternative view involves not across-the-board, blanket transformation, but uneven development. Just as the world's regions are in some respects out of sync with each other, so too are different cultural domains even within the same region. Not every domain "postmodernizes" itself, and even the ones that do, don't all do it at the same time or in the same way. Some fields postmodernize sooner, others later, after a lag, others not at all. There is no *a priori* reason to assume that "postmodernism" has the same import from one domain to the next, that it is one and the same everywhere. This is because cultural change, even if it is driven by the (presumably uniform) "cultural logic" of a historical moment (but this is debatable), is *also* driven by the internal dynamics of specific fields, differing from field to field. In some fields, postmodernisms emerge early and decisively, in the sense that the use of the term postmodernism in discussions of the field becomes more or less mandatory; architecture

and dance might be examples. A rule of thumb might be that fields where modernisms have been sharply-defined, conspicuous, aggressive and successful give rise to comparably well-defined *post*modernisms. In other fields, those with heterogeneous and contested modernisms, such as film, painting, or literature, the term "postmodernism" is correspondingly optional, dispensable, or problematic.

Characterizing postmodernism in terms of non-synchronicity and uneven development seems a satisfying solution, except for one difficulty: it implies that the modernism from which postmodernism distinguishes itself must have been "synchronous," integral, compact – which is manifestly not the case. This move turns out to be a version of a recurrent opening gambit of literary historiography, whereby one characterizes the preceding period as more stable and unified than it actually was, in order to set off by contrast the dynamism and diversity of the new period, where your story begins (see Perkins 36-37). In other words, the claim of non-synchronicity is not unique to postmodernism – or to modernism, for that matter – but belongs to literary-historical periodizing in general.

So the closer one scrutinizes postmodernism, the more it slips out of focus, losing its distinctiveness and dissolving into recurrent, general issues of periodizing. This is paradoxical, but perhaps paradox comes with the territory. Frow observes, maybe a little cynically, that it is a *topos* of postmodernism theory to call into question the reality of its own object – postmodernism – or at least to problematize it (17). *Mea culpa*: I have certainly been guilty of this (and not only in the present paper). Nevertheless, as skeptical as Frow is about postmodernism and its theory, he acknowledges that there must be something at stake here beyond theoretical fashion, if only because the term refuses to go away (23). At the very least, it "acts as a provocation to the forms of historical thinking . . . derived from modernism" (54).

In the spirit of postmodernism theory, I have sought here to problematize postmodernism itself, and the very process of periodizing that underwrites it. Having called into question our ability to tell a coherent story about the postmodern period, I want now to offer just such a story, on the understanding that it is necessarily provisional, suspect, in some sense fictional. (How postmodern of me!) This story allows me to trace a relatively smooth trajectory of postmodernism, from its onset through its peak moment to what may be its fade-out. It even has a hero, and that hero is the angel.[1]

Angels in America

The Book has its angel, its angels, & there are many. (Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris, *Poems for the Millennium*, vol. 1, 1995)

Once upon a time (a good way to start a story), back in the nineties, angels used to be everywhere – if not everywhere in the world, then at least everywhere in American popular culture. *Time* magazine ran a cover story on the ubiquity of angels on December 27,

1993. The *New York Times* published an editorial on Sunday, September 4, 1994, entitled "Angels Are Everywhere." On February 7, 1995, Judge Lance Ito, presiding over O.J. Simpson's intensively televised trial for murder, reprimanded prosecutor Marcia Clark for wearing the same angel pin as that worn by the relatives of the victim, Nicole Brown Simpson. Prosecutor Clark removed the pin, but she might have argued, with some justice, that *everybody* was wearing such pins nowadays. In a daily comic strip dated March 16, 1995, Calvin says to his tiger playmate, Hobbes, "I think angels are everywhere." Hobbes replies, "You do?" Calvin says, "They're on calendars, books, greeting cards . . . almost every product imaginable," and Hobbes, ever ready with an ironic last word, says, "What a spiritual age we live in." As if to confirm Hobbes' insight, Victoria's Secret in the summer of 1997 introduced a new line of "Angel" undergarments, and the winged runway model in skimpy lingerie remains a major marketing device for the company. What a spiritual age, indeed.

Survey the pop-culture mediascape of 2005, and the question arises, where have all the angels gone? They are still around of course – Victoria's Secret is an example – but they seem to have retreated from the forefront of popular consciousness and to have vacated the display-counters of the consumer marketplace that they used to dominate. It has been several years since Hollywood has ventured to release an angel film such as *Michael*, the John Travolta vehicle of Christmas 1996, or 1998's *City of Angels*, with Nicholas Cage and Meg Ryan. The once popular CBS television series *Touched by an Angel* went off the air in April, 2003, having debuted in 1994. We might regard those dates, 1994-2003, as a rough indication of the time-span of this latest upsurge of popular-culture fascination with angels.

An exception that proves the rule is the belated television success of Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America* in December 2003. Shown in two three-hour installments on HBO cable television, to great popular and critical acclaim, *Angels in America* earned its writer (Kushner), director (Mike Nichols) and cast (including Al Pacino and Meryl Streep) no fewer than eleven Emmy Awards. In many respects, however, *Angels in America* belongs to an earlier moment. Its events are set in the mid-eighties, when the era of angels in popular culture was just beginning. The play on which the television series is based actually premiered onstage in 1990, arriving on Broadway in 1993, when the explosive proliferation of angels in popular culture was fully underway. Examine the critical reception of the HBO film in 2003, and one finds a striking pattern: while everyone acknowledges the continuing relevance (unfortunately) of the plays' reflection on the AIDS epidemic, its angel material is regarded as dated, obsolete, a relic of a vanished era of popular taste ("*so* eighties").

Needless to say, the presence of angels in popular culture is hardly an innovation of the eighties or nineties. Angels are a perennial presence, though normally their distribution is limited to a few fairly restricted temporal and spatial zones: to the Christmas season, for instance, and to the vernacular sculptural tradition of cemetery

monuments and memorial statuary. Moreover, they are fully licensed by the angelology of the Catholic church to appear in everyday Catholic devotion (especially in their function as guardians), as they are by Mormonism, though their standing in mainstream American Protestantism has always been more doubtful and ambiguous. Hollywood has regularly revisited the angel formula, for instance in Ernst Lubitsch's *Heaven Can Wait* (1943) and Clarence Brown's *Angels in the Outfield* (1951) – both of them remade during the latest angel revival – and most memorably in Frank Capra's sentimental classic, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), a film associated with the Christmas season, like a number of other angel movies. Nevertheless, the angelic revival of the eighties and nineties differs both in conspicuousness and in sheer volume from these earlier cycles of popular-culture interest. In the nineties, angels spilled out of their restricted zones and colonized popular culture at large, to an unprecedented degree. My claim is that the presence of angels in the last decades of the twentieth century is something like a litmus-test of postmodernism. Where there are angels, there is postmodernism; when the angelic presence wanes, so does postmodernism.

So far I have been referring exclusively to angels in popular culture, but this is only half of the story, or less than half. Angels also abound at the other extreme of the cultural spectrum, in the sophisticated, limited-audience art of the late twentieth century – in poetry, "difficult" novels, art films, performance art, painting, and so on. Strikingly, they began to appear there even *earlier* than they did in popular culture, by at least a decade and a half. I first became aware of the new wave of angel imagery via a performance-art piece by the director and choreographer Ping Chong that I saw at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh in November 1986. Entitled *The Angels of Swedenborg*, it evoked the angelology of the eighteenth-century Swedish visionary Emanuel Swedenborg, whom we remember now mainly for having been William Blake's foil in the latter's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793). In fact, Ping Chong's piece was inspired not by Swedenborg directly, but by entries on Swedenborg's angels and devils in Jorge Luis Borges' *Book of Imaginary Beings* (1969). Ping Chong's angels, with their Borgesian genealogy, produced in me almost an audible "click," as many disparate experiences of contemporary art-works suddenly slotted together for me, and I recognized for the first time how many of the characteristic works of postmodernism featured angels.

The first wave of postmodernist high-art angels dates from the fifties and sixties, and includes the campy, semi-ironic angels of the Beat poets ("Are you my Angel?" Walt Whitman is made to ask the grocery boys in Allen Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California," 1955) and the esoteric angels of the San Francisco poets Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser (see Damon). Irony and iconoclasm characterize the angel imagery of the late sixties and seventies, as in Gabriel García Márquez's "Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" (1972) and the disoriented angels of Donald Barthelme's mock-essay "On Angels" (1970), who are "left . . . in a strange position" by the death of God.

This corrosively ironic strand in high-art angel fiction persists right down to the eighties and beyond, for instance in such novels as Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1978), Stanley Elkin's *The Living End* (1980), and Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), and in Steve Katz's short story "Mongolian Whiskey" (1984), where winged dogs guard the pearly gates of heaven. However, it is not irony but sublimity that characterizes the postmodernist representations of angels in major works such as Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), James Merrill's long poem *The Changing Light at Sandover* (1976-1982) Joseph McElroy's *Women and Men* (1987), Wim Wenders' and Peter Handke's film *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*, 1987), Harry Mulisch's *De ontdekking van de hemel* (*The Discovery of Heaven*, 1992) and Kushner's *Angels in America*.

Angels become a major motif of Laurie Anderson's music and performance art of the eighties, beginning with "Gravity's Angel" (1984), a song based on, and dedicated to, Thomas Pynchon (see McHale). Anderson contributed atmospheric music, under the title "Angel Fragments," to the soundtrack of Wenders' *Wings of Desire*, and produced a CD of songs entitled *Strange Angels* (1989) and an angel-filled touring show, *Empty Places* (1989-90). Angels also begin appearing in some of the most characteristic visual art of the eighties, including works by Keith Haring, Anselm Kiefer, Duane Michaels, and my favorite painter of that era, Robert Yarber. Examples include Yarber's mock-religious painting, *Announcement* (1992), and more subtly, *The Tender and the Damned* (1985), where a billowing nightgown gives the female suicide "wings," especially in her mirror reflection (see Figures 1 and 2).[2]

Yarber's *Announcement* reminds us, if we needed reminding, that angels are no more an innovation of postmodernist high art than they are of Nineties popular culture. Behind this painting stretches a millennium of Christian iconography in visual art, including not only Annunciations (of which Yarber's is a parodic version) but Nativities, Depositions from the Cross, Resurrections, Ascensions, Coronations of the Virgin, Christs in Glory, Last Judgments, and all the other religious themes that call for angelic actors and witnesses. The same is true, of course, of canonical literature, from Dante to Milton to Goethe and beyond. Canonical modernism, however, is relatively deprived of angels. Angels do figure in the work of a range of major modernist writers and artists, including Rilke, Rafael Alberti, Paul Klee, Walter Benjamin and Wallace Stevens, all analyzed by Massimo Cacciari in his masterful book, *The Necessary Angel*; and there are a few other modernist angelologists whom Cacciari overlooks, such as H.D. (*Tribute to the Angels*, 1945) and Wyndham Lewis (*The Human Age* trilogy, 1928, 1955, 1957). Nevertheless, major though these figures are, their use of angel imagery seems somehow "untimely," uncharacteristic of their own era and out of sync with their modernist contemporaries, by contrast with the centrality of postmodernist angels to *their* era. Somewhat marginal to modernism, angels are reclaimed for the center by a succeeding generation of postmodernists.[3]

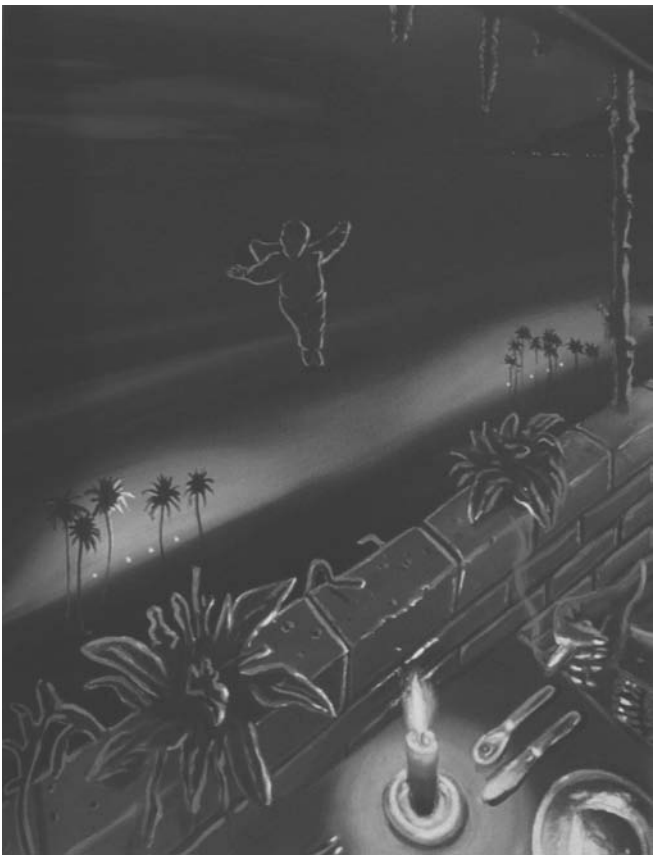

Figure 1 Robert Yarber, *Announcement*, ©1992. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

I remarked earlier that postmodernist angels appear earlier in fine art and sophisticated literature than they do in popular culture. From this one might assume that the angels of popular culture were an example of "trickle-down" cultural dissemination: that popular culture had taken its cue from high culture, and that the angels of the TV series *Touched by an Angel* and the Victoria's Secret marketing campaign ultimately derived from those of Pynchon, Merrill, Kushner and the others. While there have certainly been instances of such trickle-down dissemination of angel imagery, these are fewer than one might have expected. For instance, Wenders' *Wings of Desire* was remade a decade later in Hollywood as *City of Angels*, its setting transferred from Berlin to Los Angeles, with a cast of Hollywood stars and a sentimental ending in place of Wenders' and Handke's art-film inconclusiveness. But *City of Angels* is an

Figure 2 Robert Yarber, *The Tender and the Damned*, ©1985. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

exception. For the most part, I can trace no line of descent from the high-art postmodernist angels of the seventies and eighties to the popular-culture angels of the nineties. I'm forced to conclude that the angels of popular culture are not derived from postmodernist high art (or vice versa, for that matter), but that each emerged independently of the other.

This would be an unremarkable conclusion, except for one thing: whichever sphere they belong to, that of high culture or that of popular culture, all of these angels are of the same type, and this uniformity of type disturbs a pattern of differentiation maintained throughout the twentieth century. High-culture angels, throughout the century, generally continued to adhere to orthodox Christian angelology, which conceived of angels as beings of a different order from our own, radically alien, created separately at the beginning of the world, and serving the functions of divine intermediaries – messengers, guardians, psychopomps (see Danielou). Popular culture, however, beginning as early as the middle of the nineteenth century, has gravitated toward an alternative model of the angel, one originating with Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), whom I mentioned earlier in connection with Ping Chong's *Angels of Swedenborg*. In Swedenborg's visions of heaven, the angels are spirits of the human dead. In place of the angelic hierarchy of orthodox angelology (that of Pseudo-Dionysius or of Aquinas, for instance), Swedenborg substitutes levels of spiritual perfection which may be attained by spirits after death, a kind of spiritual career-ladder (see McDannell and Lang 181-227). In the course of the nineteenth century, Swedenborgian ideas about the afterlife were disseminated throughout American popular culture, and they have lingered on there long after Swedenborgianism itself has been eclipsed.

The angels of popular culture have generally been the angels of Swedenborg – posthumous human beings, not radically alien at all, but rather ourselves glorified, promoted to a higher spiritual status. This is the familiar angel of cartoons, jokes and other repositories of cliché – one of us who has died and gone to heaven, and whose angelic condition is indicated by the easily-recognizable paraphernalia of wings, halo, harp, and gown. However, the angels of nineties' popular culture are generally *not* of this type, and do *not* adhere to this pattern. Instead of being angels of Swedenborg, as one would expect, they are angels of the orthodox, high-culture type – not ourselves glorified, but radically *other*, radically *not-us*. They are messenger-angels and guardian angels, anything but the cozy, domestic, humanized angels of the Swedenborgian, popular-culture tradition. The fact that the angel of nineties' popular culture, breaking with precedent, belongs to the same type as the angel of postmodernist high art, though each appears to have emerged independently of the other, seems to me remarkable, and worth exploring further. It suggests to me that a single cultural logic must be responsible for the appearance of angels of a unified type – angels as others – across the multiple sites of postmodern culture.

Ontological Shock

I saw a famous angel on television; his garments glistened as if with light. He talked about the situation of angels now. (Donald Barthelme, "On Angels," 1970)

If postmodernist angels are of one unified type across the cultural spectrum from "high" to "low," what explains the affinity between this type of angel and postmodernism? We can approach this question by considering some of the angel's *other* affinities, for instance its affinity for television. The angel is televisual, a creature of television. We have already seen how eager commercial television has been to exploit the angel craze, from *Touched by an Angel* on CBS to *Angels in America* on HBO. Also symptomatic is the proliferation of angel-imagery in MTV videos of the eighties and nineties, including some of the most memorable of that era, such as R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion," and David Bowie's "Day In, Day Out." Moreover, the association of angels with the video medium is not limited to commercial TV's exploitation of angel imagery, but also finds corroboration in various high-art contexts. A representative example occurs at the end of Sally Potter's 1992 art-film *Orlando*, based on Virginia Woolf's novel, where the image of the angel (played by the gay pop-star Jimmy Sommerville) who serenades Orlando from a tree-top is captured by Orlando's daughter on videotape, and relayed to us as a video image – a music-video angel inset within an art-film context. Laurie Anderson similarly associates angels with television when, in her song "Strange Angels" (1989), she sings, "They say that heaven is like / TV: a perfect little world / That doesn't really need you. / And everything there is made of light," and then juxtaposes the chorus: "Strange angels. Singin just for me." Finally, Salman

Rushdie, in an interview from 1989 (before the *fatwah*), makes a similar juxtaposition. His interviewer remarks pertinently that "the late twentieth century [is] a world where TV is a medium as much as an angel is," and Rushdie responds, "the television in the corner is a kind of miraculous being, bringing a kind of revelation . . . television is what we now have for archangels" (Rushdie 18). It is surely no coincidence that angelhood and television are juxtaposed and equated in Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988), where one of the dual protagonists is transformed into the angel Gibreel, while his opposite number, having been transformed into a demon, becomes a TV addict.

If the angel has an affinity for video, it also has an affinity for another characteristic postmodern figure – the alien. All three converge in the David Bowie video I mentioned earlier, "Day In, Day Out," where angels are shown video-taping the everyday struggles of a young Chicano couple, while Bowie himself sings from the sidelines. The knowledgeable viewer will automatically make the connection between Bowie and the alien, for throughout the seventies Bowie was associated with the figure of the extraterrestrial, as reflected in various ways by his alter egos Major Tom, Ziggy Stardust, and above all *The Man Who Fell to Earth* in Nicholas Roeg's 1976 film by that title. The "man" of Roeg's film, played by Bowie, is a visitor from another star-system, but he behaves in many respects like the angel does in angel-narratives. A misfit among earthlings, he intervenes in the lives of various individuals; he is a kind of messenger, bearing disturbing knowledge; his coming threatens to disrupt the social order; and so on.

The modeling of aliens on angels is no innovation on Roeg's part, however (or on the part of Walter Tevis, who wrote the novel on which Roeg's film is based). On the contrary, the interchangeability of angels and aliens is a commonplace of the postmodern era (see Thompson 1991). Popular culture recognized the angelic dimension of alien encounters almost from the beginning, as reflected in Hollywood movies such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), Kubrick's and Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *E.T.* (1982), and even, in an undersea variation, James Cameron's and Gale Ann Hurd's *The Abyss* (1989). In 1996, John Travolta starred in two films, first in *Phenomenon*, as a man who has experienced an alien encounter, then as an archangel in *Michael* – variations on a theme, in effect. What remains subtextual in Hollywood films emerges explicitly in literary science-fictions such as C.S. Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), Doris Lessing's *Shikasta* (1979), Joanna Russ' novella "Souls" (1984), John Fowles' *A Maggot* (1985), and Pat Cadigan's short story "Angel" (1987). In all these texts, angelic apparitions are rationalized in terms of alien "close encounters" (or vice-versa, in Lewis' case, alien encounters in terms of angels). Angels *are* aliens; or at least, angels and aliens are functionally equivalent in popular culture.

Granted this functional equivalence, if we understood the significance of aliens, we would presumably gain some insight into the angel phenomenon as well. The controversial Harvard psychologist John E. Mack, reflecting on the testimonies of people

who claim to have been abducted by UFOs, observes that the abductees appear to have undergone an experience that he terms "ontological shock": the shock of recognizing that there are other worlds besides this one, other orders of being beyond our own (Mack 26, 44). The ontological shock of encountering the alien is duplicated in angelic encounters. One striking example is found in a remarkable short story by the American writer Harold Brodkey, entitled "Angel" (1985).

"Angel" purports to be a first-person report of the apparition of an angel to a few dozen assorted persons in Harvard Yard on October 25, 1951, "a little after 3 o'clock." In the course of his dogged, somewhat laborious reflection on the significance of his encounter, the narrator concludes that what the Angel means is absolute difference, irreducible "otherness." To encounter the Angel is to experience something belonging to another order of being, something not in any way assimilable to "us":

. . . I did not think It a policeman of any kind, or a messenger exactly, so much as a marker. I accepted it, my humiliation in relation to It . . . : I wasn't what It was . . . . It did not exemplify or ratify any human dream in the sense of what one dreams for oneself except in being not like us and closer to The Great Power or The Great Illumination (Brodkey 575-6; my ellipses).

He continues:

. . . I could not see myself in It or imagine It as related to me in any way but that of superior power or perhaps of Its Hiddenness as a Personal Reality on the other side of a metamorphosis that was not occurring at this instant, that was not bringing me any closer to the possible thing of It and me embracing each other at least partly by my will. Just as being a man had been hidden from me on the other side of the sharp ridge of puberty when I was still ten years old, so The Angel existed on the far side of a metamorphosis involving Beauty and Goodness, strength and knowledge, but that I would dream about, or edge close to in moments of grace . . . . (578)

Not a messenger exactly, the Angel is a *marker*: it does not so much bear a message from another world as *mark* or *stand for* the existence of another world, as a *part* stands for a *whole*. It functions, then, as a figure of ontological plurality – specifically a synecdochic figure, a synecdoche of the other world.

What we glimpse in Brodkey's story is the cultural logic of angels (and of aliens, too, for that matter). Angels figure what Jameson once called the "reality-pluralism" of postmodernism (Jameson 372); they signify the existence, or at least the possibility, of alternative subcultures, life-styles, values-systems, enclaves of meaning, psychological realities – of alternative "worlds," in an extended sense. Their function as figures of reality-pluralism also helps explain their affinity for television. For TV, in its own way, contributes to that experience of plurality of worlds that is the basis of postmodernism. TV opens a little window onto another reality, so that any space we share with a TV screen is already a multiple-world space. Moreover, commercial TV is, in its own structure, essentially *plural*, characterized by "flow" (see Williams), and that "flow"

projects worlds of radically different kinds, making different kinds of truth-claims, inhabited by beings of differing ontological status, governed by different sociological and psychological norms and even, in some cases, by different physical laws. TV's built-in ontological plurality can be artificially, willfully heightened by using the remote to skip from channel to channel, world to world – by channel-surfing, in other words. Channel-surfing is surfing among worlds.

Angels, aliens and television are all figures of ontological plurality – of the plurality of worlds. As such, they are figures of postmodernism – of high-art postmodernism throughout the period from the fifties on, but also, for a brief moment in the late eighties and early nineties, of popular postmodernism as well. This brief moment – the era of angels in popular culture – corresponded to the proliferation and flowering of various subcultural alternatives, including New Age spirituality, "independent" film, "indie" rock, hiphop culture, and the short-lived utopian phase of the Internet, before all these phenomena succumbed to market forces and were fully co-opted. In a sense, the angel of popular culture mirrors this short-lived plurality of culture, as it also mirrors, on a grander scale, the collapse of the dualistic world of Cold War ideology, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. At the end of the first part of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (which premiered in 1990), when the long-awaited Angel finally manifests Itself, It literally blasts through the ceiling of the room, scattering debris everywhere, administering a ferocious ontological shock. This image evokes, for me, the moment of ontological shock when sledge-hammers broke through the Berlin Wall, and dualism gave way, if only for a brief moment, to the possibility of plurality.

The Last of the Angels?

Angel, come back. Let us smell your heavenly smell again. (John Ashbery, "In the Time of Pussy Willows," 2002)

To repeat my basic contention: angels, at least angels of the alien type, function as a litmus-test of postmodernism. Where such alien angels abound, as they do increasingly in high art since the fifties and in popular culture in the eighties and nineties, then we are in the presence of postmodernism. When the population of angels begins to wane, or they lapse into relative inconspicuousness, as they have since 2001, then perhaps we are passing out of postmodernism into whatever comes after it. Were the untimely angels of HBO's *Angels in America* the last of the angels? Are we at the end of the era of angels?

Maybe we are. Maybe we are experiencing the waning of postmodern culture's openness to, perhaps of its *need* for, the kind of ontological shock that angels were the bearers of – the disruptive revelation of the plurality of worlds. If so, if ontological shock is waning, along with the angelic close encounters that delivered that shock, then what does that mean? Perhaps we have become acclimated to postmodern reality-pluralism, to the fact of plurality of worlds; perhaps we have learned to live with

that fact, and no longer need to be shocked into the recognition of it. On the other hand, it might be that the retreat of the angels from popular culture reflects the reinstatement of a dualistic world-view, dating from the events of September 11, 2001. In that case, the latest angel era in popular culture corresponds almost perfectly to that brief window between the end of one episode of manichaean Cold War politics in 1989, and the onset of a new manichaeanism in September 2001 – the so-called "clash of civilizations" so beloved of American political pundits. Perhaps we are retreating from plurality back into our separate reality-enclaves, our tribal sub-cultures, our little solipsisms; perhaps we no longer want to hear what the angels have come here to tell us.

It is more than a little arbitrary, I realize, to name a "last" postmodernist angel, since there will always be angels, however few and inconspicuous. If I did have to identify a "last" angel, however, it wouldn't be the one in HBO's *Angels in America*, but rather one in a Finnish film from 2002, Aki Kaurismäki's *The Man Without a Past*. Nominated for an Academy Award for the best foreign film of 2002, Kaurismäki's film lacks obvious angels – it has no winged beings – but that does not prevent it from evoking angels intertextually. Or, rather, it evokes one specific angel: the angel that the early-twentieth-century Finnish painter, Hugo Simberg, painted around 1903 and entitled *The Wounded Angel*.

In fact, Simberg painted his wounded angel twice, once on canvas (see Figure 3), then a year later as a fresco on the wall of St. John's Church, the Lutheran cathedral in the factory town of Tampere. The first version, which belongs to the collection of the Finnish National Gallery, is recognizably set in a public park in Helsinki, while the version in St. John's Church incorporates local Tampere factory architecture. This enigmatic image, a Finnish national icon, has attracted all kinds of interpretations over the years – as a figure of national consciousness, as a reflection of the painter's supposed sympathy with the industrial working-class, as related somehow to the painter's recovery from a life-threatening illness, and so on. (See Levanto.)

Like his other films, Kaurismäki's *The Man Without a Past* ironically reworks a familiar cinematic formula – in this case, the cliché of the amnesiac who, cut off from his own past by his memory loss, makes a new life for himself. An unnamed man arrives in Helsinki by train; evidently he has no place to stay, and so sleeps in the park, where he is attacked by thugs and terribly beaten. Declared dead by hospital staff, he nevertheless revives, and wanders out to the port, where, unconscious, he is discovered by a pair of young brothers who live nearby with their parents in an abandoned shipping container. It is in the scene of the nameless stranger's rescue that Kaurismäki evokes *The Wounded Angel*, in effect disassembling Simberg's familiar image and dispersing its various components around the scene.

He displaces the victim, with his conspicuous head-wound but lacking the original's wings, to the water's edge (see Figure 4); he gives the two boys a different burden to carry, a jerry-can of water rather than the wounded angel (see Figure 5). Nevertheless,

Figure 3 Hugo Simberg, *The Wounded Angel* (1903). Owner: Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Central Art Archives. Reproduced by permission of the Finnish National Gallery.

despite this disassemblage and dispersal of the image, it seems clear that it is Simberg's angel to which Kaurismäki alludes here; I presume this would be even clearer to a Finnish viewer.

Which makes the nameless man, the "man without a past," Kaurismäki's version of the angel: a stranger, a visitor from elsewhere, a non-person who, deprived of his past and his documents, runs afoul of corporate and state bureaucracies because he can produce no ID. The man without a past intervenes in the lives of the outcasts living on the margins of Finnish society, transforming various people with whom he comes in contact, both seriously and comically (he teaches a Salvation Army band to play rockabilly, for instance). This surely fits the profile of many of the angels who flit in and out of literary, cinematic and popular-culture works of the last decades of the twentieth century, but we would not be disposed to think of this angel *as* one except for the intertextual allusion to Simberg's iconic angel.

But what kind of angel *is* the "man without a past"? He is an everyday angel; one of us, not a being of a different order; not a visitor from another world, not an alien – not a man who has "fallen to earth." He delivers no ontological shock. If he is an angel at all, he is one who has faded into the light of common day. Here, then, is a shorthand

Figure 4 Aki Kaurismäki, *The Man Without a Past* (2002). Cropped film still.

Figure 5 Aki Kaurismäki, *The Man Without a Past* (2002). Cropped film still.

narrative of the era of angels – the story of postmodernism in a nutshell. Its trajectory stretches from, let's say, the mid-seventies to a few years after the turn of the millennium; from David Bowie to Aki Kaurismäki; from *The Man Who Fell to Earth* to *The Man Without a Past*.

Acknowledgements. I wish to thank all those who, generously sharing their angel-sightings with me over the years, have added to my repertoire of postmodernist angels, not least of all the participants in the ASCA "Identities and Alterities" conference. My benefactors are too many to be listed here, but I do want to mention four in particular. My special thanks go to Steve Kuusisto for loaning me Penttti Saarikoski's *Trilogy*; to Tyrus Miller for directing me to Massimo Cacciari's *The Necessary Angel*; to Clem Robyns for the gift of Harry Mulisch's *The Discovery of Heaven*; and to Pekka Tammi for introducing me to Simberg's *The Wounded Angel*.

Endnotes

1. This story is not the only one that could be told about the angel, needless to say, any more than it is the only one that could be told about postmodernism, and the angel is not the only hero whom one could identify. Indeed, alternative heroes were identified at the ACSA Conference: Peter Hitchcock, in his keynote address, mentioned the specter, the vampire, and the cyborg; Kate Khatib, in her paper in the "Postmodernism" workshop, proposed the online-gaming avatar. All these figures, while neither equivalent nor interchangeable, are certainly related, to each other and to the postmodernism in which they all participate.

2. Yarber's paintings of the eighties and early nineties abound with images of airborne people, ambiguously falling or flying. These figures, though human and rarely winged, are clearly related to angel imagery through the affiliated postmodernist motif of "lightness of being" – but analysis of this motif will have to wait for another occasion.

3. Characteristic, in this respect, is Benjamin's Angel of History, inspired by Klee's watercolor, *Angelus Novus*. Somewhat anomalous in its own era, Benjamin's Angel of History has become a touchstone of postmodernism. For instance, it supplies the title and epigraph for Carolyn Forché's book of political poetry, *The Angel of History* (1994); it appears in Laurie Anderson's "The Dream Before," from her CD *Strange Angels* (1989); and it animates Kushner's epic play, *Angels in America*.

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The Grotesque Body: Fleshing Out the Subject

Sara Cohen Shabot

Grotesque Ontology and Epistemology

Postmodern thought has carried out a deep critique of the concept of the subject and its identity as it appears in various classical and modern philosophical theories. The new subject that postmodernism tries to present emerges above all as a consequence of its being-with-others. Thus, intersubjectivity turns out to be one of the key concepts for comprehending identity. The postmodern subject must be understood as constantly re-emerging anew from its intersections with the outside world and its Other. No monolithic, closed, immutable Cartesian subjectivity is possible any longer. The postmodern subject is an embodied subject, but it is also historically, socially, and culturally defined. I will exemplify and explain this postmodern subject through the figuration of the grotesque. Looking at postmodern philosophy from the perspective of the grotesque, I will argue, enables a presentation of the subject as embodied, strongly rooted in concreteness, and inherently intertwined with the world and the other.

A grotesque philosophy should be understood, first of all, as a philosophy opposed to any system of ontological thought that configures reality as unchangeable, static, well-ordered and highly defined, or that calls for homogeneity. The ontology proposed by a grotesque philosophy presents, instead, a reality that embraces fluidity, change, heterogeneity and disorder: a distinctly postmodern picture of reality. To justify this claim, it is imperative to invoke the most important features of the grotesque. The grotesque has been described by its various theorists (Mikhail Bakhtin, Geoffrey G. Harpham, Wolfgang Kayser, Ewa Kuryluk, Philip Thomson, Wilson Yates)[1] as a concept originally referring to visual arts, which has come to address concrete subjects and their bodies. Grotesque bodies are hybrid bodies: mixtures of animals, objects, plants, and human beings. Hence, the grotesque has been recognized as a concept evoking monstrosity, irrational confusion, absurdity, and a deformed heterogeneity. Wilson Yates, for instance, provides the following definition of "Grotesque Art":

Grotesque Art can be defined as art whose form and subject matter appear to be a part of, while contradictory to, the natural, social, or personal worlds of which we are a part. Its images most often embody distortions, exaggeration, a fusion of incompatible parts *in such a fashion that it confronts us as strange and disordered, as a world turned upside down.* (2, emphasis added)

C. J. Jung describes the mythological-grotesque character of the *Trickster* in the same vein:

God, man and animal at once. *He is both sub-human and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is unconsciousness . . .* He is so unconscious of himself that his body is not a unity*, and his two hands fight each other. He takes his anus off and entrusts it with a special task. Even his sex is optional despite his phallic qualities: he can turn himself into a woman and bear children. From his penis he makes all kinds of useful plants. This is a reference to his original nature as a Creator, for the world is made from the body of a god.* (qtd. in Harpham, 53, emphasis added)

A further illustrative example of a grotesque body is found in a fragment of classic literature, where Ovid describes Scylla, who is poisoned by her enemy Circe:

> *There Scylla came; she waded into the water,*
> *Waist-deep, and suddenly saw her loins* disfigured
> *With* barking monsters*, and at first she could not*
> *Believe that these were parts of* her own body*.*
> *She tried to drive them off, the barking creatures,*
> *And* flees in panic, but what she runs away from
> She still takes with her*; feeling for her thighs,*
> *Her legs, her feet, she finds, in all these parts,*
> *The heads of dogs, jaws gaping wide, and hellish.*
> *She stands on dogs gone mad, and loins and belly*
> *Are circled by those monstrous forms.* (Ovid 340, emphasis added)

The grotesque subject, with its embodied, hybrid, and open subjectivity, is unrepresentable or unknowable by way of any system of knowledge or representation governed by rational principles that aims for a clear framing of its object of research. As a figure that exceeds all attempts at framing, the grotesque presents a clearly postmodern conceptualization of the embodied subject.

The Grotesque Subject and the Problem of Representation

I want to argue that the kind of ontological reality which derives from the grotesque figuration, and which is best expressed by the grotesque body (which constitutes the grotesque subject), evokes a problem of representation that characterizes the grotesque epistemology.

Grotesque bodies are opposed to the classical bodies represented, for instance, during the Renaissance. They are not clean, closed, well-defined, clear-cut, beautiful bodies striving for symmetry and order. Rather, the grotesque body is a body that defies clear definitions and borders and that occupies the middle ground between life and death, between subject and object, between one and many. This should be understood mainly as a consequence of the grotesque's ambiguous essence. The grotesque body is inherently ambiguous: it is not an isolated body, but at the same time it does not lose itself in the homogeneity of an undifferentiated wholeness. Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, describes this body as a *differentiated* body, which, at the same time, remains closely connected to the world and to its others:

The grotesque unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements. (26-7)

This *excessive* body, which constantly outgrows itself and escapes from its own skin, constitutes a body that cannot be framed. The excessive body cannot be absolutely contained, that is, it cannot be disconnected from the rest of the world or from its others. It finds itself in a constant and intensive intertwining and intermingling with its outside. For the grotesque body, its connection to the world is a condition of subjectivity: the embodied subject is, *in itself*, open, fragmented and connected to the world and to others:

the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking and defecation. This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body. (Bakhtin 26, emphasis added)

It is this figuration of the grotesque body, I contend, which helps to ground the subject in corporeality, gender (an ambiguous gender identity) and flesh, protecting it from becoming a neutral, de-sexualized (or hyper-sexualized) subject. Its grounding in fleshed specificity prevents the grotesque subject from altogether escaping embodied existence and corporeality. Such escapes appear in classic and modern – Cartesian, for instance – representations of the subject, and even in certain well-intentioned postmodern figurations, such as that of the cyborg.

I am referring here to particular science-fiction representations of the cyborg, which feature a desire to escape the fleshed-body in order to become a pure mind. This

abandonment of the altogether organic body, of the flesh-and-blood body with all its imperfections and vulnerabilities, frequently emerges in the popular imagery of the cyborg. In her article "The Pleasure of the Interface," Claudia Springer explains how the Cyberpunk genre often presents the pleasure of its characters as arising from this disappearance of the meat. Losing the meat, refuting flesh and blood, provides happiness, pleasure, and a sense of security. As an example, Springer describes how Topo, the protagonist of Scott Rockwell's comic book *Cyberpunk*, mentally enters a kind of cyberspace called the "Playing Field," where he feels greatly excited and almost totally happy, since this is a place where he can in fact *leave* his body, become *pure* consciousness, and renounce his *heavy* meat. In the "Playing Field," Topo can change at will: he can be whatever he wants to be, because time and space can be controlled by his own desires. There are no constraints in the "Playing Field": everything depends on how good your software is.

This abandonment of the flesh-and-blood body has been interpreted as resulting from anxieties regarding the vulnerability and fragility of the physical body and the maternal and organic processes related to it (Doane, Springer, Sofia). The *meaty* body is indeed a perishing body, a body that can be corrupted, may get sick, and will ultimately die. The extreme vulnerability bodies are faced with in our post-nuclear era, plagued by threats of massive annihilation, deathly diseases, and environmental disasters, occasions a desire to re-make a self capable of escaping the body and, with that, the threats of its destruction (Springer). Avoiding the maternal then means avoiding a self that is born out of an organic process and that, for this reason, is weak and perishable. The individual born out of the maternal is completely dependant on a temporary structure; it will degenerate and die. This is why the cyborg became a *meat-hater*, a technological-organic structure that fears and despises its organic core. To keep its promise of strength and immortality, the cyborg must rid itself of its meat and its maternal origin. Only then can it be safe from the terrible menaces of death and destruction in an era in which all organic life appears to be at stake.

The grotesque, in contrast, marks an emphatically embodied existence. Flesh is an essential feature of the grotesque subject and, as such, cannot be abandoned. The grotesque's specific kind of embodiment leads to an ontological picture of plurality within totality, an image of reality that calls attention to interconnectedness and unity (the grotesque subject as *open* to the world, as intertwined with it), but that at the same time keeps intact difference, heterogeneity and multiplicity (the grotesque subject as hybrid and plural, open to the world but still separate, never completely losing itself in the world). This ontological picture is essentially intersubjective.

The grotesque world constitutes, then, an ambiguous, mixed reality, which can easily trigger anxiety. It is a fragmentary, complex reality, plagued by multiple relationships to the self and the other, where clear hierarchical relations derived from well-defined binary oppositions are not viable. With this picture of the grotesque body and the grotesque world in mind, we can understand the grotesque ontology as one that

embraces change, fluidity and disorder. Such a picture of the world, I argue, results in an epistemology best characterized by its incapacity to represent and be represented through classic means of representation.

If "reality" is understood as fragmentary, non-homogeneous, hybrid, fluid and constantly changing, then it will be impossible to represent it (to know it) through tools belonging to systematic, logical, and discursive-rational thought. For how could we frame and capture a reality which is essentially contradictory, deformed, and delineated only by blurred, highly permeable boundaries? Such a reality cannot be represented or known through Identity Thought (which negates everything that exceeds the law of identity) or through any system, given that any system is, in principle, containing and thus immobilizing. Moreover, one of the dominant features of a rational system of thought is to clean the object of study of its excesses, that is, of anything it does not necessarily have to have or be. This is a major principle within philosophical thought, evident in, for example, Okham's Razor, which calls for an elimination of everything that is not absolutely necessary within a system.

The grotesque leads to representation and knowledge only by means of deformation, intersubjective hybridity, and excess. This kind of epistemology shows, paradoxically, the impossibility of representation or the impossibility of knowledge through an all-encompassing-system, a system that can absorb and contain all without leaving any residues, without polluting itself, so to speak, with any redundant excesses.

Ambiguity and Supplementary Representation

Another reason the grotesque ontology cannot be represented by means of a philosophical system is its essential ambiguity, its constant being in-between. Harpham points to this essential ambiguity of the grotesque when arguing for the grotesque's presence at the margins between metaphor and myth:

In a mythic narrative [. . .] the metaphoric is the literal, and nothing inhibits Actaeon from becoming a stag, Philomela a bird, Hyacinthus a flower, or Gerald Peter. Traversing categories, myth also ploughs the human into the natural: animals marry, stars form families, and water speaks. At the margin of figurative metaphor and literal myth lies the grotesque, both and neither, a mingling and a unity. (53, my emphasis)

This essential ambiguity prevents the grotesque from being explained through binary divisions, since the in-between is the middle-ground that cannot be contained by a concept and its opposite. From this perspective, the grotesque never really fits into a clear frame, not even into the one proposed by dialectics (which is always part of a binary logic).

The grotesque is best understood, then, as calling for an epistemology which searches for a supplementary representation of reality. A supplementary representation of reality points to a fragmentariness where parts are added on to each other, integrated into each other, without ever truly completing each other. In other words, there

is no original core or essence that is subsequently completed by marginal sub-parts: each and every fragment of the grotesque world is independent in the sense that it does not require completion. Each element is irreducible, because excess and residue are essential parts of the grotesque. If the excess cannot be cleaned off, there is no opportunity for abstraction, for the type of reductive thought where certain parts are contained by others that are seen as broader and more abstract. Particularity and concreteness cannot be erased, since these are precisely the elements that give meaning to the grotesque. The grotesque, then, cannot be summarized and reduced to its relevant elements and, therefore, these elements cannot be abolished one by the other. Each element is equally essential or equally marginal, and this is what does not allow the grotesque to define things: when accidents are not differentiated from essences, then definition – which functions as an essence / accident differentiation tool – cannot work. The grotesque subject, thus, cannot be fully identified or categorized (it is not a human, or a plant, or an animal, and it is neither male nor female, one or many). This impossibility of definition, of marking clear boundaries, is precisely what one of the first critics of the grotesque, the architect Vitruvius Pollio, found unbearable and condemnable about this form of art. In his book *De Architectura* from 27 B.C. he writes:

On the stucco are monsters rather than definite *representations taken from* definite *things [. . .] slender stalks with heads of men and animals attached to half of the body. Such things neither are, nor can be, nor have been [. . .] Yet, when people view these falsehoods, they approve rather than condemn.* (2, emphasis added)

The Intersubjectivity of the Grotesque

The grotesque, in sum, deals with *difference* in the sense of concreteness, specificity, particularity, and irreducibility to general principles. Moreover, the grotesque presents the possibility of creating a new epistemology, the uniqueness of which is reflected in its capacity for knowing reality on the one side as whole, interconnected, intertwined and total, and on the other as plural, heterogeneous, dynamic, fluid, and changing. The grotesque is able to portray reality as an intertwined, interconnected totality and, at the same time, as absolute difference. Even though the grotesque constantly plays with distortion and intermingling, it is never lost in total confusion, nor does it ever become homogeneous. Grotesque reality is always heterogeneous, always differentiated. George Santayana expresses this in his definition of the grotesque:

Until the new [grotesque] object impresses its form on our imagination, so that we can grasp its unity and proportion, it appears to us as a jumble and distortion of other forms. If this confusion is absolute, the object is simply null; it does not exist aesthetically, except by virtue of its materials. But if the confusion is not absolute, and we have an inkling of the unity and character in the midst of the strangeness of the form, then we have the grotesque. *It is the half-formed, the perplexed, and the suggestively monstrous.* (258, emphasis added)

Thus, the kind of intersubjectivity represented by the grotesque simultaneously emphasizes both interconnectedness and heterogeneity, both connection and difference, both identity and alterity. This kind of intersubjectivity also stands at the basis of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy of ambiguity, as developed in *The Phenomenology of Perception* and in his final unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty considered ambiguity the central element of a phenomenological and existentialist description of reality and of the relations of individual subjects to others and to the world. At the basis of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical project stands the idea that there are no clear-cut divisions between humans as embodied subjects and the rest of the world. Being intimately, *carnally* mingled and intertwined with the world constitutes the root of our ambiguous existence, determining our epistemological and ethical conditions. Our situation as embodied subjects connects us ineluctably with other subjects, objects, and the world as a whole:

Now why would this generality [Sentient and Sensible], which constitutes the unity of my body, not open it to other bodies? The handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching [. . .] Why would not the synergy exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each? *Their landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly: this is possible as we no longer make belongingness to one same "consciousness" the primordial definition of sensibility, and as soon as we rather understand it as the return of the visible upon itself,* a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient*. For, as overlapping and fission, identity and difference, it brings to birth a ray of natural light that illuminates* all flesh and not only my own. (Merleau-Ponty 142, emphasis added)

Thus, we are basically ambiguous: we are at the same time subjects and objects, "touching" and "touched," "sentient" and "sensible." We are *in* the world, but we are not the world: we are temporal, finite. We are *fleshed* subjects, who relate to the world, to objects and to other subjects by way of our embodied subjectivities, through our carnal eroticism and sexuality, through our ineludible fleshed existence. "Unlike pure consciousness," writes Monika Langer, paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty, "we '*blend*' with, and compose, a *common situation* – an intersubjectivity. Further, we feel the need for others' recognition" (101, emphasis added). Being flesh, then, is what allows us to be materially and concretely part of the world. Also, being flesh allows us to be open to others and to others' concrete, specific situations; we share our carnality and, consequently, we are able to share our condition of being alive and of being mortal. Had we been *pure consciousness*, with no body (a kind of Cartesian or Platonic ideal), we would be a totally different kind of being, a kind of god, who, among other things, would not have any need for ethics.

We are, as Merleau-Ponty states, ambiguous beings, hybrid creatures, both subject and object, inseparable from the different scenarios in which we act. We are also ambiguous in our ways of existing: our gender, our looks and our thoughts constitute

an ever-changing flux that can never be absolutely defined or contained by an abstract, purely conceptual, non-corporeal subjectivity. This is why any figuration that desires to present such an ambiguous being must try to avoid, above all, a return to forms of being that escape or deny the body and its imperfect features. I propose the grotesque body as a figuration that may represent such an embodied, ambiguous, hybrid, open and permanently changing subjectivity. The grotesque body aptly describes human subjectivity as not closed-off, as an open and connected-to-others intersubjectivity. Again, Bakhtin's comments on the grotesque body appear highly illustrative:

The grotesque unfinished *and* open *body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is* blended *with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements [. . .] Thus the artistic logic of the grotesque imaged ignores the closed, smooth and* impenetrable *surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths [. . .] [The grotesque is] the most vivid expression of* the body as not impenetrable but open. (26, 317, 339, emphasis added)

The creation of a grotesque philosophy would mean the creation of a philosophy of difference and intersubjectivity. The figuration of the grotesque subject emphasizes elements that are opposed to the logic of the same, to those forms of thought that privilege the original, the essential, and the authentic over the copy, the excessive and the fake. The grotesque has the power to portray reality as an intertwined, intersubjective totality and, at the same time, as absolute difference.

A grotesque thinking, as I would like to formulate it, uses multiple characteristics to present the subject as necessarily embodied, with a non-hierarchical, non-binary relation to the other. The subject's relation to the other is based on heterogeneity and difference, without clear boundaries between the essential and the marginal. Consequently, hierarchical relations, which usually precede domination relations, cannot be definitively established or imposed.

This grotesque thinking will be strongly opposed to any philosophy of the identical, to any philosophy which privileges presence, logos or being over non-identical, non-endurable phenomena. No unique criteria, no metaphysical logos will serve as the principle by which every difference or accidental presence will be measured and identified as either "normal" and "proper," or "abnormal" and "improper." The grotesque philosophy will be, above all, a philosophy of difference.

The figuration of the grotesque privileges embodiment over disembodied consciousness and excess and hybridity over clean, measured, well-equilibrated and perfectly defined spaces. It comprises singularity, heterogeneity *and* difference. The body and its excesses, I argue, form the predominant site of absolute difference. The body functions as the individuation principle, as the clearest principle of particularity and singularity. It is the body that constitutes us as singular beings and draws the limits within

the particular minds, which, according to the majority of classic and modern Western philosophers, are essentially the same for all individuals. Emphasizing embodied subjectivity means emphasizing the temporary, the accidental, the finite; it means a return to the historical, the contextual, and the cultural. Thus, such an embodied subjectivity appears as the paradigm of the anti-philosophical when the philosophical is understood as an attempt to represent the Same, i.e., the eternal, the universal, the general, the a-historical.

The excesses of the body (and excesses in general) also constitute an important way of representing difference. The excess is that which has to be cleansed or eliminated when we try to overcome difference. The need for erasing excess has been overwhelmingly present in philosophy. The grotesque is plagued with excess, and, consequently, plagued with a difference that is concrete and irreducible. Neither philosophy nor science can abstract, reduce or generalize excess, since it is by definition resistant to reduction.

There is no way to deal with difference, heterogeneity and otherness except by renouncing the aim of reaching an absolute, a-historical, universal, and abstract knowledge. Dealing with the particular, the irreducible, the accidental and the finite, as the grotesque does, means dealing with difference and accepting it. That which exceeds us, that which threatens our sameness, our "normality," our well-defined and protected presence in the world, constitutes the different. It is this alterity, this absolute otherness into which we are totally immersed and from which we obtain our existential meaning, that constitutes the main subject of postmodern thought, and it is precisely this image of *alterity within intersubjectivity* that I have tried to flesh out here through the figuration of the grotesque.

Endnotes

1. Mikhail Bakhtin refers in his work to Grotesque Realism, especially in the context of Medieval and Renaissance Carnival; Geoffrey Harpham, Ewa Kuryluk and Philip Thomson deal with the grotesque as a literary category, examining its different features; Wilson Yates explores the grotesque's religious implications and Wolfgang Kayser mainly deals with the fearful and uncanny aspects of the grotesque.

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Auto-Identities: Avatar Identities in the Digital Age

Kate Khatib

"Man is always beyond himself," the French philosopher Jean Wahl wrote in 1954, already considering the "other" and the "I" as fundamental parts of the self (Wahl 721). Emmanuel Levinas translates this relationship as it is outlined by his friend and turns it into one of alterity and transcendence, casting transcendence (the "going out from oneself") as a necessarily inter-subjective relationship between an "I" and its "other" who remain connected yet separate at the same time (see Hayat xii).[1] The work of these two philosophers, as that of so many others, points toward the enigmatic question that stands behind this paper: How can we understand ourselves, if we are already *beyond* ourselves?

Social, psychological, and philosophical theory have, time and again, pointed out the inextricable link between the formation of the self (the "I") and the positing of the "other" to a point where the formulation "Identities and Alterities" could not possibly be otherwise. (Where one goes, there follows the other, *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseum*.) It is, however, exactly with this "otherwise" that we must take issue, at a point in time and technology where the boundary of priority that lies between concepts of the self and concepts of the other is in danger of being rendered unusable, of the old dialectic becoming simply an avatar of itself.

The invocation of the figure of the avatar here is more than a leading rhetorical device; the concept is an important one for any attempt to discuss identity in the complex digital age. An avatar, apart from (but related to) its traditional mystical connotations, is usually defined as an incarnation or a manifestation of an object of worship or admiration. The term is most traditionally used as a designation in Hindu mysticism, most notably in the Indian religion of Vaishnism, in which the supreme being, Bhagavan, (or, in more common parlance, the god Vishnu) incarnates any number

of times, following the Indian doctrine of cycles. In more colloquial use, the term might also designate an enlightened individual, someone who has reached a state of awareness without limitations, and has returned to the created (profane) world, as well as an individual who acts as a human intermediary between God and mortals. In the digital world, however, an avatar is a (sometimes graphical, sometimes textual) icon or representation of a user within a shared virtual reality.[2] In other words, an avatar is a *digital you*. Of course, the theory of self-created identities, even those which have physical manifestations, is not a shockingly new subject of interest; the manifold literature on cross-dressing, on transgender politics, on gender studies, and even on postcolonial studies is filled with references to similar ideas involving the socio-personal construction of identities.[3] Yet unique to avatar identities is a straightforwardly mystical connotation of a truly virtual or other-worldly identity that hovers just outside the physical body, which we should not be too quick to ignore. Like Levinas' "I which exits the self," avatars can be seen as a type of transcendent alterity which is both created and controlled by the self.[4]

Online avatars are usually treated as virtual manifestations of physical bodies, thus reversing the traditional definition, in which the avatar takes on a physical form as the bodily incarnation of a spiritual ideal of affect. Rather unexpectedly, however, the traditional definition works here as well, and provides a perhaps more interesting and complex paradigm within which we can explore the ramifications of these strange apparitions of the physical, mental or emotional self. Rather than approaching our online avatars as purely virtual manifestations of physical subjects, it is my contention that we must approach these online identities in a more mystical sense – as manifestations of idealized visions of the self. In the Virtual Reality (VR) world, "selves" gain an unexpected degree of freedom, existing as whomever and whatever they wish to be. No longer tied to an identity bounded by geographical, social, or even physical, biographical limitations, online avatars are fantasies come to life, individual chances to step outside of one's usual self, to transcend the boundaries of one's own identity in something not unlike a religious experience.[5]

Before going too far, however, we should ask ourselves how or where these avatars stand in relation to the primary identities from which they originate. Are they actually our own alterities? Or is it the other way around: that by making manifest our idealized selves, we – that is, our primary referential selves – become our own "other"? If this secondary reversal implies a shifting of the primary referential self into a position of strangeness, of "otherness," then it also implies an opposite movement for the avatar, into the privileged position of familiarity, and, one might go so far as to argue, authenticity – which is a rather unexpected move. The very structure of these reversals implies a notion of *priority*, a balance of power which is destined to accompany the traditional self / other dialectic around which many, if not all, of our modern constructions of identity are based. VR's avatar identities imply a transgression of

the self which occurs even with the very possibility of creating one's own "other," or of recasting the self in such a way that our original identities take on an alter(nate) form, becoming foreign to themselves and at the same time remaining enmeshed with their idealized incarnations. This notion of priority as the boundary between the self and the other is not only blurred, it is, as will be discussed more fully in what follows, rendered completely unusable as a category of understanding for the self which is already beyond itself.

Becoming Absent: Chris Marker's *Level 5*

We might begin to conceptualize the world of virtual reality by thinking of an endless masked ball, like the one illustrated by the French documentarian and media artist Chris Marker in his 1997 video(game) film, *Level 5*. Marker's film revolves around an imaginary VR system, called OWL – for Optional World Link, a clever throwback to his earlier films like *Sans Soleil* or *The Owl's Legacy* – in which users wander through the ghostly channels of a primitive, graphical internet, a virtual version of the Benjaminian *passage*. OWL users take on the roles of their own avatars, wearing "masks" which they choose upon entering. Never one to use symbolism lightly, Marker explicitly calls attention to the veil of secrecy afforded by virtuality, by having Laura (Catherine Belkhodja), the film's main character, wear an actual mask as part of the process for entering the VR world; think of a primitive wooden mask that acts as a pair of VR goggles.[6] It is significant that the VR world of Marker's construction seems more like a ghostly *passage* than a virtual city. The film's story revolves around Laura's search for her recently deceased husband in the realms within the computer. Paradoxically, the very object of her search is something that cannot possibly be found; its purpose is to uncover someone who, in his absence, has ceased to exist as anything more than an idealized, fetishized version of himself. Laura, too, becomes more and more absent as she is drawn deeper into the world of OWL, until she *literally* disappears from the physical world altogether, leaving Chris (her fictitious correspondent who may or may not be Marker himself) with nothing more than a memory, a shadow of herself in the form of a glowing green computer screen. As Laura transverses the distance (death) which separates her from her husband, she separates herself from the actual world, becoming, in the end, pure *aura*, and nothing else.[7] Marker carefully crafts an exquisite tension between presence and absence, intercutting digitally mediated imagery of distant lands with Catherine Belkhodja's surprisingly intimate delivery of Laura's dialogue, an "oasis of immediacy" in an absent desert (Romney 1999).

Laura's story is organized around a half-written video game, a project her husband had undertaken before his death. The object of the game: to recreate the American invasion of Okinawa in 1945, just before the bombing of Hiroshima. Part historical document, part strategic planning manual, the game is yet another one of Marker's testaments to the "impermanence of things" in the so-called objective world (Marker,

Sans Soleil). In her earliest attempts to unlock the secret of the game, Laura tries to recreate the invasion and ensuing battle according to "history," placing the Allied and Japanese forces in their correct locations, and carrying out the attacks according to a simple geographical strategy. As this approach fails time and again, Laura searches through the channels of OWL for clues, digging deeper into the history of Okinawa and fighting to overcome the cultural amnesia of Japan (another common theme in Marker's work) until the secret objective of the game begins to become clear: to "write" a new outcome, an outcome which does not involve the mass suicides and brutal deaths of thousands of kamikaze pilots at their own hands, and of even more Okinawan civilians at the hands of their own loved ones.

Laura's virtual and historical search through OWL mirrors and metaphorizes her search for herself, for a new identity in the wake of her husband's death. As the historical story surrounding the events in Okinawa begins to crumble with each new atrocity uncovered (like so many other Marker films, *Level 5* is half fiction, and half investigative documentary), so too does Laura's presence – of both mind and body – in the physical world, until she becomes, finally, purely and transcendentally virtual.

Becoming Present: Dancing in Cyberspace

In *Level 5*, Laura's experience is one of becoming increasingly absent as she moves further and further into the realm of the virtual. As the real possibility to have an experience that is completely within the VR world grows, the individual relationship with the physical world necessarily changes, and the boundaries of priority between the real and unreal are shifted, and may perhaps disappear altogether. For most readers, conceiving of the experiences that individuals have in the VR world as having any real bearing on the actual world may prove difficult. Mikael Jakobsson intuitively suggests that, "[p]icturing someone sitting in front of a computer screen seems to signal distance and detachment" (65). But as recent research suggests, the experiences of online avatars in virtual realities serve as more than escapes from the everyday world.

Consider, for example, the following description of a woman's experience in Compuserve's WorldsAway, one of the older graphical chat programs:

I danced for my cyber-space husband, whom I had recently virtually eloped with, in-world. The dancing was a delightful and deeply moving experience. I danced with a silver teapot, with a chest, with my Asian female head and with my cyberhubby's frog head (with outstretched tongue and fly) on the back of my left hand . . . I danced in the silence. I danced for a long time. I was fully engaged in the floating of the dance and in the act of dancing in beauty for him.

The next morning, when I awoke in my primary referential context, I remembered the dancing, not only the image of the dancing but also the sensuality of the dancing. I had sensory-motor memory of the dance. I recalled the slight movement of the air on my

face as a I floated up and down, up and down. I remembered the funny feeling in my tummy from this movement . . . I remembered the silence and the way time was suspended. I remembered both the solitariness of my self expression, in this dance, as well as my deep emotional connection to my cyberhusband. And I remembered all of this in my physical waking world body. (qtd. in LeValley 34)

Rather than moving toward absence, or turning away from the physical world, the experience recounted in the passage above marks the entrance of the emotions and affects of the virtual world into the physical one: the avatar identity shares her experience with her physical counterpart. Whose sensory-motor memory is recalled here? The recollection as it is described is more than the memory of a particularly intense virtual encounter; it is a strangely *performative* event, not so much in the sense of an utterance which simultaneously performs an action, but in the sense of a virtual event which, in the course of its unfolding, performed an affective action (the feeling of physical sensations) in the physical world. The performativity of the virtual world is not entirely unlike that of language, and the similarities between a VR experience like the one described here – where the "in-world" emotion is so strong that a sensory-motor recollection invades the memory of the primary referential subject – and more traditional exercises in becoming *present* through a certain *absence* are not difficult to see. We might, for example, think of the "automatic" experiences described by the French and American surrealists, whose aim was to overcome the conscious experience of the everyday by casting off the confines of the self, and opening the psyche to an unmediated interaction with the sublime, or, in surrealist terms, the Marvelous. André Breton and his comrades believed that only through the practice of automatic activity (primarily writing exercises) could individuals come to truly know themselves, paradoxically by *overcoming* themselves, and achieving what Breton would eventually call a quasi-divine "state of grace" (Breton 9). It was, after all, that great surrealist anti-hero Arthur Rimbaud who wrote in 1871, *Je est un autre* – I is an other.[8]

Becoming Otherwise: Identities Beyond the Dialectic

Thus, we find ourselves back at the beginning, at the point of trying to understand the "I" that is already beyond itself. Virtual reality, and the paradoxically non-spatial geography that goes with it, offers new possibilities for self-identification and signals a move away from the image of identity creation with only minimal amounts of control, like the one signaled by Paul Gilroy in his appropriation of Karl Marx's famous historical dictum: "we make our own identities, but with inherited resources and not under the circumstances of our own choosing" (Gilroy 2000). Thus, it may be most prudent to begin to consider identity in light of the truly radical possibilities afforded to us by digital technology. An overt challenge to the categories of "self" and "other" is advanced in new digital cultures, and already present in the examples discussed earlier in this paper; with the boundaries blurred, it becomes increasingly difficult to speak about

the relationship between self and other. Instead, we seem to be speaking about something akin to a dialectic between self and *otherwise*.

What is at stake here is something different than "otherness," in the sense that we are now dealing with an alterity that is not entirely divorced from the originary self. While one might claim, as I have done, that these self-constructed avatar identities can take on the role of an imaginary other in certain situations, so much so, in fact, that the virtual manifestation replaces the actual one, it is equally true that avatar identities serve the purpose of materializing some part of the self, extending the primary referential identity in a fundamental way and giving us the chance to live the otherwise of our mental lives in a virtual realm over which we maintain control, in one way or another.[9]

The examples described in this paper are, of course, extreme ones, intended to dislodge a certain way of thinking about the concepts of "self" and "other." Graphical VR has, by now, failed to serve as the promising alternate universe it seemed to offer in the mid-nineties and speaking of it in 2004, the idea seems as antiquated as Marker's primitive vision of the internet in *Level 5*. The virtual world of the avatar is, perhaps, otherwise than everyday reality, but is not entirely other, not entirely different from the physical world we inhabit on a day-to-day basis. Cyberspace itself is bounded by the laws of mathematics and defined by the hardware and software that create it.[10] As the case of Okinawa in *Level 5* and the act of dancing in the cyberspace example illustrate, the virtual world often has real-world counterparts, because, in the final analysis, it is constrained by the limits of the human imagination from which it is born.

At the same time, we should not be too quick to discount the important and productive possibilities for new sorts of identification and identity formation that arise from these new technologies of otherness, which are used in a myriad of ways apart from the all-encompassing situations discussed here. The VR world need not involve a mask or a pair of goggles, and it need not involve a solitary individual; what is at stake is a new form of collectivity, perhaps best referred to as collective solipsism, which replaces the cult of the individual that has dogged the world of digital technology for so long. In its most practical application, this virtual collectivity takes the form of a group of physically unrelated individuals working together in a shared virtual space, like a virtually formed community whose members are both present and absent at once. Examples immediately come to mind of collaborative online organizing, which crosses the boundaries of physical geography and allows us to create multi-layered communities that are organized around a non-spatial form of dialogic communication. The success of projects such as the Independent Media Center (IMC)[11] and the Electronic Social Cultures exhibition (Esc),[12] both of which are organized around a shared, distributed network of participants in a range of geographical locations, indicate the wide range of fruitful possibilities for virtual worlds which can and do effect some change in the actual, physical world.

I have adopted the term "auto-identities" to signify these newly created forms of self formation, but the term may be understood in a variety of ways, just as the avatar itself plays different roles in the space between self and other. In one sense, auto-identity might be seen as something automatically assigned, based on a prioritized relationship with a defined exteriority (or alterity) in which the "I" is constrained by the conceptual selves and others that delineate its social and historical position. At the same time, however, in a far more optimistic sense, auto-identities may play a surreal, even mystical, role in identity formation, by allowing the exploration of the myriad possibilities of the self by positing its idealized versions against its originary identity, playing the roles of "I" and "otherwise" at the same time. Like the surrealist practice of automatism, the auto-identity asks us to envision a different sort of reality, and a different sort of identity, one that is not bounded by the binary opposition of self and other or actual and virtual.

Endnotes

1. Levinas deals with the relationship between identity and alterity in much of his work, but see specifically the essays "Philosophy and Transcendence" and "The Proximity of the Other" in *Alterity and Transcendence*. See also his discussion of the "de-nucleated" self in *Otherwise Than Being*.

2. The term is commonly used in MUD (Multi-User Dimension) interfaces and in computer role playing games. However, in the world of UNIX administration, the term is also used to identify the superuser account on a given machine, a quirk reportedly initiated by "a CMU hacker who found the terms 'root' and 'superuser' unimaginative, and thought 'avatar' might better impress people with the responsibility they were accepting." See the online "Jargon file" for more information <http://catb.org/esr/jargon/html/>.

3. Judith Butler's work on performativity and gender, especially in her introduction to *Bodies That Matter* (1993), is relevant here. Also see Shannon McRae, "Coming Apart at the Seams: Sex, Text and the Virtual Body" (1995) and Monique Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman" (1992). Numerous other valuable and relevant examples on identity construction can be found in recent studies on the effects of postcolonialism.

4. On the "I which exits the self," see Hayat (xiii).

5. For an excellent technical discussion of religion and the VR world, see Schroeder, et al., "The Sacred and the Virtual: Religion in Multi-User Virtual Reality" and Tatusko, "The Sacrament of Civilization." Of course, no discussion of religion and technology would be complete without a passing reference to Henri Bergson's enigmatic final chapter of *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, and Bergson's claim that the universe is "a machine for the making of gods" (317); the burden of responsibility Bergson places on mankind by arguing that "their future is in their own hands" (ibid.) provides an interesting comparison for the technologized, virtual manifestations of the self that we find in VR culture, whose originary selves maintain a degree of control over the conditions of existence of their virtual, idealized bodies. An in-depth discussion of the parallels is better left for a discussion centering specifically around the theological ramifications of the concept of the avatar identity, but it suffices to say that the pseudo-divine implications of virtual identities should not go unnoticed.

6. Marker seems only to want to impress upon his viewers the symbolism of Laura's willingness to mask herself, to give up her primary identity in favor of a new, secret one, because this process only takes place once, while Laura enters OWL multiple times.

7. On this, see, of course, the writings of Walter Benjamin on "aura" and distance in his famous "Work of Art" essay and in the "Little History of Photography." *Level 5* as a whole seems to channel a Benjaminian approach to the central auratic concepts of presence and death, although Marker makes no explicit references to Benjamin's work in any of his writings. See also Lev Manovich's insightful essays on Benjamin and Virilio: "Distance and Aura" (1996) and "Film/Telecommunication" (1996), both available online at <http://www.manovich.net/>.

8. The phrase "Je est en autre" appears in Rimbaud's *Lettres du Voyant*, in the second letter to Paul Demeny, written on May 15, 1871.

9. It may be interesting to note that in a small pilot study of individuals using Habitat, a popular groupware system, performed in 1992, researchers found that 50% of their participants thought of their avatar as a separate being, and 50% as a representation of themselves (LeValley 33).

10. See, for example, Tatusko's discussion of rationality and postmodernity in the digital world, in his essay "The Sacrament of Civilization: The Groundwork of a Philosophy of Technology for Theology."

11. The Independent Media Center movement (http://www.indymedia.org) had its beginnings during the protests against the World Trade

Organization in the American city of Seattle in 1999. Developed as an open-publishing experiment, the idea behind the IMC was to provide a non-mainstream space for individuals to report their news, and to write about issues not covered by the corporate media. What began as a series of websites and temporary physical headquarters thrown together for every major protest in 1999–2000 quickly grew into a global network of media activists and grassroots organizations, all working together under the same mass online identity. Individual IMCs have rapidly popped up in various points on the globe – from the Basque region to the Congo – oftentimes with no warning, and much to the surprise of the other, more established centers.

12. The Electronic Social Cultures project (http://www.centrea.org/ESC/Start.html) is a collaborative online exhibition organized around the idea of bringing artists together in a virtual space in which they can "explor[e] issues of change and transformation from the perspective of their own aesthetic cultural practice, in an effort to reach an understanding of their complex identities." The project self-consciously and explicitly addresses many of the questions raised in the present essay; see, for example, Sylvia Borda's text on Esc, available online at <http://www.centrea.org/ESC/Essays/SylviaB.html>.

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Vocal Alterities: Voice-Over, Voice-Off and the Cultural Addressee

Esther Peeren

The Limit of Dialogism

Mikhail Bakhtin distinguishes dialogism as a privileged form of intersubjectivity that institutes a productive relation with alterity. As a concept, dialogism refers, first of all, to the involuntary relations of responsiveness between utterances. In this guise, it was taken up by Julia Kristeva and developed into intertextuality.[1] But dialogism also appears as a strategy for establishing productive intersubjective relations between individuals, social groups, and cultures. The aim of dialogism in this sense is to produce what Bakhtin calls "active responsive understanding" (1986a: 69), founded on sustained difference and exteriority. Exceeding dialogue proper (as a back-and-forth discussion between two or more speakers) and opposing itself to dialectics (as a teleological move towards synthesis), dialogism denotes an active, answerable interaction with alterity that implies neither negation nor assimilation.

Less a figure of harmonious agreement than one of sustained difference, dialogism functions, in the words of Paul de Man, as "a principle of radical otherness" that aims to "sustain and think through the radical exteriority and heterogeneity of one voice with regard to any other" (109). Dialogism marks the preservation of vocal alterity, but such preservation implies an attitude of ethical responsibility that cannot be taken for granted. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler points to the cultural and historical specificity of the notion of dialogue and argues that "the power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need first to be interrogated" in order not to lapse into a Habermasian model that assumes equality and shared presuppositions and goals (20).

I want to theorize this intersection between dialogism and social power relations by combining Bakhtin's concept of the *superaddressee* and V.N. Voloshinov's related

notion of the *potential addressee* into an agency I will call the *cultural addressee*. This agency relates the voice and ear of the individual speaker / listener to the collective voice and ear of a particular community, circumscribing this community's attitude towards radical alterity. Tied to the voice or tongue (tongue-tied, as it were), the cultural addressee signifies the utterance's orientation towards a potential understanding that functions as a precondition for its being spoken and for its being heard. I will approach the cultural addressee through an examination of the audio-visual rendering of vocal alterity in two popular cultural objects. First, there is the use of voice-over in the American television series *Sex and the City*. The series revolves around the love-lives of four single women in Manhattan and each episode employs voice-over to have Carrie, its central protagonist, pose a question ostensibly part of a newspaper column she writes, but whose articulation and addressivity exceed Carrie and her readers. Second, there is Michael Apted's 1994 film *Nell*, which stars Jodie Foster as a so-called "wild woman" found in the woods speaking an "unknown" language. Foster's initial appearance as voice-off – an intra-diegetic voice without a visible speaker – emphasizes the threat her character's radical alterity poses to the town community. Both voice-over and voice-off prompt a splitting of the voice's addressivity into the embodied ear of the actual listener and an altogether less substantive auditory agency.

Voice-Over

In *Sex and the City*, when Carrie's voice-over formulates her episode-framing questions, she is usually alone in her apartment, writing on her laptop computer. No direct, personal addressee is available. Moreover, posing the questions in voice-over instantly detaches the words – spatially and temporally – from her enunciating presence. Carrie's voice-over cannot be straightforwardly categorized in film-theoretical terms. Unquestionably interpretative but at the same time closely linked to Carrie's body and thoughts, the voice-over impossibly appears as both interior monologue and commentary, destabilizing the distinction between intra-diegetic and extra-diegetic filmic space. It is, furthermore, both synchronous and asynchronous: although it speaks in the past tense, it synchronizes visually with the question as Carrie types it into her computer. Finally, Carrie's voice-over undermines the traditional gendering of the authoritative voice-over as male, non-embodied and non-diegeticized. Her relation of authorship to the newspaper column of which the question is part points to a possible recuperation of the female voice-over as diegeticized, embodied, and feminized, yet still authoritative.[2]

At the same time, the precarious positioning of Carrie's voice-over across different levels of enunciation emphasizes how even an authoritative voice-over only ever *poses* as the point of discursive origin: aligned with the cinematic apparatus, but never fully equal to it. Carrie's voice-over, which is both contained and containing, enunciated and enunciating, destabilizes the voice-over's claim to diegetic authority by pointing

to the inevitable alterity of the utterance to its speaker. This loss of authority extends to the question's addressee. In several episodes, after the voice-over poses the question, the camera pans out of Carrie's apartment window, moving upwards as it zooms out, as if taking the question to a higher level, to a more fundamental addressee than the readers of her column. Dislodged from mouth and ear, the question is deferred: but onto what?

The French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche has suggested that every intersubjective message invariably involves an enigmatic addressee, a future "nameless crowd, addressees of the message in a bottle" looming behind the personal addressee (224). In the *Sex and the City* episode "The Drought" Carrie asks: "How often is normal?" first addressing herself, then her girlfriends, then the whole of New York. Over a shot of a crowded street – a powerful visualization of Laplanche's nameless crowd – we hear Carrie's voice-over: "There are 1.3 million single men in New York. 1.8 million single women. And of these more than 3 million people, about 12 think they're having enough sex. How often is normal?" Here, the personal addressees are separated from the enigmatic addressee.

What Laplanche indicates, however, is that the relationship is one of simultaneity: the intersubjective message *at the same time* addresses the nameless crowd. In fact, the individual addressee functions almost as an excuse for addressing the enigmatic addressee, as an alibi for releasing a message in a bottle. Read this way, Carrie's original question as to whether she is having enough sex with her boyfriend is already a questioning of the crowd, of its collective normativity. Significantly, this crowd is not abstract or placed in an undefined future, but concrete, situated, and contemporary, invoking less the metaphor of a message in a bottle than that of an advertising billboard or, as the episode suggests, a computer screen.

At "How often is normal," the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of Carrie's computer screen, where we see the question appear letter by letter. The question's materialization on the shot-filling blue screen dissociates it from both author and concrete addressees. As writing, it evokes Derrida's notion of iterability, a structural potential for repetition with difference that enables the letter to break with "the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription" (1988: 9). As *digital* or *virtual* writing, it recalls the acceleration of iterability Derrida associates with the new techno-media, where present time is divided from itself, place is freed from territorial rootedness, and where the singular logic of the event becomes ever-more immediately intertwined with the repetitive logic of the machine (2002: 210). In other words, virtuality signals the accelerated, enhanced interference of alterity in identity, of absence in presence.

The close-up of the computer screen, with its unstable pixels, suggests that it is not Carrie who writes, but a more enigmatic author, visualized by the provocatively blinking cursor, which always seems on the brink of writing (or erasing) of its own accord.[3] And again, the same applies to the addressee. Reproducing digital text is

more straightforward than reproducing handwriting or typewriting, so that it can address itself again and again. Digital text renders tangible our lack of control over what we write and whom it addresses.[4]

As digital writing, Carrie's query transforms the temporality of Laplanche's enigmatic addressee. The computer, associated with e-mail and instant messaging, is an appropriate metaphor for the way our words address themselves not so much to a nameless future public, but to a nameless crowd that intervenes at or even before the moment of enunciation. Thus, whereas Laplanche conceptualizes the actual addressee as an alibi for the enigmatic addressee, who stands *behind* him in another, future time and place, "The Drought" suggests a reversal: Carrie can only address the individual addressee (her boyfriend, whom she does not dare ask whether they are having enough sex) *through* the implicit addressees of crowd and screen. The enigmatic address becomes the condition for the intersubjective address; it has to sanction the question before it can reach the other. As in Derrida's spectral hauntology, the absolute alterity of the specter has to be addressed *before* we can address concrete others: "Such an address is not only already possible, but [. . .] it will have at all time conditioned, as such, address in general" (1994: 12). The spectral address *precedes* the intersubjective address.

Yet Derrida's spectral addressee, as an ascetically messianic and featureless "alterity that cannot be anticipated" cannot be relied upon for a response (1994: 65). As with Laplanche's enigmatic addressee, the speaker is passive in relation to it. Neither Laplanche nor Derrida can account for the active urgency of Carrie's questions, which expect to be heard and answered in the present. Far from leaving a message in a bottle or attending an undefined entity with no guarantee of reply, her acute questioning of crowd and screen summons a more responsive and socially defined agency, which I will delineate in my combined reading of Bakhtin's superaddressee and Voloshinov's potential addressee.

From Superaddressee to Cultural Addressee

Bakhtin describes the superaddressee as follows:

In addition to this addressee (the second party), the author of the utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher superaddressee (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time (the loophole addressee). (1986b: 126)

The superaddressee assumes an active relation to the word, imparting an exotopic validation to the subject's speech no longer linked to individual others, but to a higher instance that stands above concrete intersubjectivity, making it possible.

My understanding of Bakhtin's superaddressee differs from that of other critics, who have argued that it signifies an ideal, abstract or transcendental instance of deferred understanding that is never concreticized. Craig Brandist views the superaddressee as

a godlike instance, an "eternally deferred supreme judge who views the social world from without" (171). Ken Hirschkop emphasizes its messianic dimension, defining the superaddressee as "the one who somehow, beyond our fate in actual history, redeems our words by understanding them correctly" (397). These interpretations are supported by Bakhtin's undeniable religiosity, but they bar the superaddressee from functioning as the addressee of Carrie's acute questionings of the distinct present of New York.

Bakhtin's sparse remarks do harbor an opening towards an interpretation of the superaddressee as a situated, socially specific agency. At one point, he presents it as taking on different names in different eras and cultures:

In various ages and with various understandings of the world, this superaddressee and his ideally true responsive understanding assume various ideological expressions (God, absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, science, and so forth). (1986b: 126)

This turns the superaddressee from a universal ideal into a socially, historically and ideologically variable construct, located *in* the social world rather than beyond it. The superaddressee, in outlining the norms of intelligibility, provides the utterance with a *defined* direction and although this direction may at times be expressed as God, it is not necessarily divine.[5] Unlike Laplanche's enigmatic addressee or Derrida's specter, the superaddressee does not remain indeterminate, but is required to be filled by the appropriate ideological expression before the subject can speak with the confidence that she will be heard and understood.[6]

Carrie's acute questioning of crowd and screen invokes not a maximally distant superaddressee, but an active force of linguistic regulation rooted in her community. Such a force is recognizable in a reading of Bakhtin that construes the superaddressee as the culturally shaped horizon of speech. But it is perhaps more immediately perceptible in V.N. Voloshinov's work.

In "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art," Voloshinov delineates two social aspects of the utterance's addressivity: the third participant and choral support. The third participant is defined as the personified object of the utterance, characterized as "nameless" and "verging on *apostrophe*" (103). When taken to its extreme, this third participant "becomes the source of a mythological image, the incantation, the prayer, as was the case in the earliest stages of culture" (103). Here, we encounter once more the featureless, messianic agency of address. However, the second social aspect of the utterance's addressivity ties it to a concrete community and its specific notion of intelligibility. Voloshinov uses the term choral support to denote the utterance's relation to "the assumed community of values belonging to the social milieu wherein the discourse figures" (103). If choral support is lacking, "the voice falters" and the utterance becomes unintelligible (103). Choral support, therefore, ties the utterance's addressivity to the discursive norms of a specific, situated community.

In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Voloshinov further argues that each utterance addresses itself to a presupposed potential addressee, who takes the form of "a normal representative of the social group to which the speaker belongs" (85). This addressee is emphatically not abstract or universal, because, according to Voloshinov, "even though we sometimes have pretensions to experiencing and saying things *urbi et orbi*, actually, of course, we envision this 'world at large' through the prism of the concrete social milieu surrounding us" (85). Each person has a more or less stable social audience that limits the scope of the potential addressee and makes it specific.

There is no ambiguity here: Voloshinov's potential addressee and choral support do not stand above the speech community, but constitute it, cementing it together. Members of a speech community do not imagine themselves understood by a transcendent entity, but by those around them: "I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong" (86). Accordingly, Carrie strives to shape her utterances to the norms of the Manhattan crowd in order to be understood by its individual members. Voloshinov, earlier and more unequivocally than Bakhtin, outlines the function of what I will call the cultural addressee as the conditional limit of meaningful speech, as that which gives us to be spoken and allows us to speak in our specific cultural contexts.

What Voloshinov does not adequately explain, however, is that the cultural addressee's guarantee of internal understanding is predicated on exclusion and coercion. The film *Nell*, through its use of voice-off, suggests that the realization of dialogism, of taking responsibility for radical alterity, depends not just on a basic ability or willingness to speak and listen, but on the particular vocal inclusions and exclusions structured by the cultural addressee, which circumscribe ability and willingness and, consequently, may close both mouth and ear to alterity.

Voice-Off

Sound without a visible on-screen source was originally theorized by Michel Chion as the *acousmêtre*. Voice-off relates specifically to the human voice divorced from a visibly speaking mouth. In contrast to voice-over, it speaks not *over* the image, but from its margins. Chion associates voice-off with (masculine) authority, panopticism and omniscience (24) and Kaja Silverman invests it with a "threat of absence" (48). Although its source is usually located, there is always a chance it will remain missing.

Voice-off approximates Derrida's specter as a present-absent trace of marginality, intangibility and lack of body. Like the voice-off, which we cannot answer because we do not know its origin, the specter is an all-seeing agency that does not allow us to return its look: "it is someone who watches me or concerns me without any possible reciprocity" (Derrida and Stiegler 121). Although Derrida considers the voice the only graspable element of the specter – "we must fall back on its voice. The one who says

'I am thy Father's spirit' can only be taken at his word" (1994: 7) – voice-off renders the voice itself spectral, to be heard but not to be touched (sensuous non-sensuous).

Significantly, Derrida's specter not only makes use of the visor effect – the ability to see without being seen – but also of an accompanying ability to speak and hear voices, to become a "spectral rumor" whose resonance invades everything (1994: 135). Voice-off is such a spectral rumor, an auditory (dis)incarnation whose embodiment paradoxically weakens its authority, like the specter which "disappears in its very embodiment" (Derrida 1994: 6). Both voice-off and specter threaten a proliferation of meaning, compelling a desire to pin down the errant voice / image to a living or dead body. This desire drives *Nell*'s narrative.

The film opens with a high-angle shot of a forest, over which we hear a mumbling or singing sound that may or may not be a human voice. Later, the process of embodying the sound is initiated through a series of extreme close-ups showing hands and fingers grooming an old woman. Associated with the fingers and the hands, the disembodied sound becomes a voice-off, manifestly human and female. Full embodiment occurs when the town doctor is taken to a forest cabin to find a dead old woman and her daughter Nell, the "wild woman" who owns the voice-off.

However, because of Nell's incongruous "wild" body and voice, the embodiment of the voice-off does not remove the threat of absence. Flesh and blood cannot exorcise Nell's radical alterity, suggesting that the recovery of the body does not always "tame" the "wild" voice, make materiality (into) matter, or conjure away the specter. If the voice remains incongruous *even* or *especially* in its body, any move toward an origin is foreclosed. The metaphor of the voice as having "body" is lost to the arbitrary contiguity of metonymy: the voice is linked to the body but the two do not fully explain each other.

The town community fears the indeterminacy of Nell's voice and body and seeks to control it by making Nell's voice *all* body, *all* form without content, invoking what Silverman sees as classical cinema's "identification of the female voice with an intractable materiality, and its consequent alienation from meaning" (61). Conceiving Nell's speech as a purely physical, instinctual expression of her body reduces voice to matter and restricts the "migratory potential" expressed by voice-off (Silverman 84). This strategy of containment signals the dependency of sustained alterity on the other's recognition of the utterance as an utterance. Nell (the product of a rape committed in the community) marks a radical alterity within the community's identity, but as long as her words are not received as signs they effectively mean nothing. Nell's voice is linked to her body, but it is not anchored in the communal body. It does not receive choral support. To keep the community safe, her utterances either have to be coded as meaningless or made to conform to the community's understanding of intelligibility, its cultural addressee. Either way, Nell's alterity is neutralized.

The community engages in a two-pronged strategy of, on the one hand, translating Nell's utterances into "proper" English, and, on the other, interpreting her speech – and

her deliberate silence when incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital – as sound / quietude instead of word / silence. The distinction is Bakhtin's:

Quietude and silence *(the absence of the word). The pause and the beginning of the word. The disturbance of quietude by sound is mechanical and physiological (as a condition of perception); the disturbance of silence by the word is personalistic and intelligible: it is an entirely different world.* (1986c: 133)

The voice-off in *Nell*'s opening scene places itself on the dividing line between sound and word, making it uncertain whether what is broken is quietude or silence. This ambiguity is maintained for most of the film, until we learn that she speaks not an "unknown" language, but merely a mangled form of English. Nell's oscillation between word and sound shows up the relativity of the distinction and identifies the border between silence / quietude and sound / word as a socio-cultural construct, collectively established and patrolled.

This compromises the political weight of silence. As Peter Hitchcock notes, "there is no single strategy for positioning oneself with respect to silence, partly because that place is beyond voluntarism and volition (formed therefore by more than this or that individual consciousness or praxis)" (97). Meaningful silence is not simply someone who does not speak, but someone who is *recognized* by others as withholding words rather than mere sounds.

By defining Nell's utterances as sounds rather than words, the community disavows her as a subject and assuages the dangerous implications of a form of speech that straddles both categories. This is why the embodiment of Nell's voice-off strengthened the threat of absence: coming from nowhere, the voice-off could be dismissed as mere sound. With the voice-off linked to Nell's lips, however, it becomes an unintelligible word far more threatening than an unintelligible sound. This threat prompts the community's effort to assimilate Nell and subject her to the shared cultural addressee, which intervenes not so much after words are spoken, but *before* anyone can speak, before sound becomes word and "it" becomes "I."

Nell's problem is not that she was ever without a cultural addressee, but that her particular expression of it was shared only with her mother and a twin sister who died as a child. Both are not only dead, but repudiated by the community's fantasy of Nell as a pre-subjective "wild child." Not recognized as members of Nell's first speech community, mother and sister appear as non-voices, non-specters, inaudible and visible only in the material form of death (as corpse and skeleton). Without them, Nell's cultural addressee loses its intersubjective dimension and can no longer guarantee subjectivity and understanding to her voice. In Voloshinov's terms, Nell is reduced to a pure "I-experience," a social rootlessness that "tends toward extermination" (1986: 88). In order to make sense of – and in – her new social surroundings, Nell has to re-model her voice to the image of the town's cultural addressee, to its "we-experience." This becomes particularly urgent when it becomes clear that this "we-experience"

has a low level of differentiation and is unwilling to incorporate her alien voice except on condition of its full assimilation.

Nell may be read as an allegory of immigration, where one community is left behind for another. The immigrant haunts her new community with her inalterable otherness, creating a fear in the face of which the community is required to take an ethical position. This position is only truly dialogic if the immigrant's otherness and the otherness of her cultural addressee are welcomed and respected without rejection and without turning the other into another self. Derrida writes:

One should not rush to make of the clandestine immigrant an illegal alien or, what always risks coming down to the same thing, to domesticate him. To neutralize him through naturalization. To assimilate him so as to stop frightening oneself (making oneself fear) with him. He is not part of the family, but one should not send him back, once again, him too, to the border. (1994: 174)

Nell's use of voice-off demonstrates the extent of the cultural addressee's normative power, which may preclude dialogic interaction with the radically other. Such interaction is possible only under a cultural addressee that values difference over sameness, outsideness over internalization, understanding over recognition, and transformation over assimilation. For dialogic interaction to occur, each party needs to take responsibility for understanding and respecting the other party's cultural addressee, without attempting to subsume it under its own. In Derrida's words, "respect for the alterity of the other dictates respect for the ghost" (2002: 123). We have to take responsibility for (our cultural definition of) absolute alterity before we can take responsibility for the alterity of specific others.

Endnotes

1. See Kristeva's "Word, Dialogue and Novel" and "The Bounded Text."

2. For film-theoretical accounts of the voice-over see Doane; Chion; Silverman.

3. George Landow calls the blinking cursor "a moving intrusive image of the reader's presence in the text" (44). I regard it more as a sign of the presence in the text of the computer as "a terrible and tireless writing machine that is now relayed, in this floating sea of characters, by the apparently liquid element of computer screens" (Derrida 2002b: 123). The cursor's oscillation between visibility and invisibility also evokes the Derridean specter as "a trace that marks the presence with its absence in advance" (2002a: 117).

4. On digital writing, see Landow; Bolter; Poster.

5. This is not to deny that God is the incarnation of the superaddressee privileged by Bakhtin. In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," he writes: "Outside God, outside the bounds of trust in absolute otherness, self-consciousness and self-utterance are impossible, and they are impossible not because they would be senseless practically, but because trust in God is an immanent constitutive moment of pure self-consciousness and self-expression" (144). See Hirschkop for a detailed discussion of Bakhtin's religiosity.

6. Its capacity to take different forms distinguishes the superaddressee from Habermas' conceptualization of the ideal speech situation, where communication is guaranteed by ethical rules presumed to be universal and by a bracketing of relations of domination. T. Gregory Garvey articulates the difference as follows: "The superaddressee marks a form of undistorted communication, but a form that is contextualized, rather than universalised, as it is in Habermas's model" (384).

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II. Psychic Alterities – Traumatic Encounters

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Eros and *Extimité*: Viewing the Pornographic Self in Bataille, Cixous and Houellebecq

Victoria Best

Unleashed Eroticism

"The fascination of pornography," according to Adam Phillips, "is that it is the genre in which life rarely imitates art" (27), a statement which asks us to consider how sexually explicit material which is intended to show us "everything" with shocking transparency, is in fact a form of representation emanating from, and organized by, our most profound fantasies. It is undoubtedly true that the twentieth century has seen the gradual legitimising of the pornographic imagination, and, most notably in France, works with significant erotic power have been regularly championed by mainstream academia. The texts I will be discussing here, Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil*,[1] Hélène Cixous's *Le Livre de Promethea*, and Michel Houellebecq's *Les particules élémentaire*s, have been important contributors to notable literary movements: Bataille's controversial text forming a part of the Surrealist revolution on its publication in 1928, Cixous's text celebrating the free, erotic play of *écriture feminine*, and Houellebecq's dark masterpiece offering a disturbing paradigm for the new wave of contemporary texts known as *la trash littérature*.

Given the correlation between these works and the cutting edge of avant-garde art, it is possible to understand that pornography, or perhaps to use John Hoyles' more provocative term, "unleashed eroticism" (55),[2] has a revolutionary value, despite the fact that in essence its content can be circumscribed by graphic and violent sexual activity alone. Hoyles proposes that erotic art "confronts the spectator with his secret fears, aggressions, wish-dreams, nightmares and unacknowledged desires, stirring up residues of the concentration camp guard, rapist, masochistic victim or brutal aggressor in all of us" (53).[3] Or, as Robert Short suggests when discussing the Surrealists, "eroticism [is] the dynamic behind the most intransigent expressions of human subjectivity", that is to say, "revolt, hysteria, perversion and crime" (160-1).

Unleashed eroticism in art forces us to negotiate a certain *degré zéro* of subjectivity, to explore a visceral response that defies all conventions and ethics, and ultimately to recognize the stranger of negativity within. Pornography reaches the parts that other literature cannot reach, and those parts are ones that we did not know that we had.

Encountering the Extimate Self

To conceptualize these parts that pornography invites us to explore, I would propose here a consideration of the Lacanian term of *extimité*. Lacan uses the term infrequently in seminar VII on the Ethics of Psychoanalysis, but the term has gained in usage subsequently through exploitation by Slavoj Žižek. Lacanian *extimité* designates a problematic confusion of what is intimate and what is exterior. Jacques-Alain Miller in his gloss explains that "the most intimate is at the same time the most hidden. Therefore, paradoxically, the most intimate is not a point of transparency but rather a point of opacity. . . . Extimacy says that the intimate is Other – like a foreign body, a parasite" (76). In Žižek's use of the term, however, extimacy becomes the very condition of subjectivity itself.

Working with the Lacanian understanding of the Real and the Symbolic, and rereading Descartes' *cogito*, Žižek identifies a necessary if traumatic passage for individual subjectivity from the unspeakable plenitude of the Real to the decentred but representable universe of the Symbolic. We have to "get rid" of the Real, clear it out of our systems, before we can effect a symbolic substitution. The subject is thus a "vanishing mediator," passing through the madness that is the evacuation of the Real, as a prerequisite for sane, culturally legible subjectivity.[4] As Tony Myers explains: "[t]he signifier which represents me is just that, a representation, but it is not actually me. However, if I am to be a subject at all, I cannot avoid this irretrievable loss, for it is only on account of this loss that I actually become *something* rather than *nothing*" (42). The subject, then, is a nostalgic subject, grieving for what has been lost and seeking reunification. It is also a split subject, a subject who is an object outside of itself. The subject thus maintains a relation of extimacy to itself, the core of its being opaque and other.

To live entirely in the Symbolic would, Žižek confirms, be impossible. If the symbolic network were to be neatly transferred onto the material world with no gaps and no misconceptions we would simply cease to exist. However traumatic the encounter with the Real, it is the moment when subjectivity can be felt and experienced, a moment of potential transient reconciliation with the extimate self. In Žižek's conception, it is not just that the subject must grapple with internal alterity, rather, the alterity *is* the subject. Žižek points out that "the subject is enthralled by the gaze that sees 'what is in himself more than himself'," and indicates that the analytic encounter is a fine example of the need for another to draw the contours of the subject's "externalized object in himself" (1994: 60). In the absence of analysis – noting that Žižek considers

Hannibal Lecter less cruel than the average Lacanian analyst after one's *Dasein* – significantly intimate encounters with others may deliver the shock of the Real. Given that our bodies are still incorporated into the Real, and that material or bodily *jouissance* is most resistant to Symbolic appropriation, the most likely realm in which to glimpse the extimate object is that of the erotic.

Indeed, fantasy and desire provide two dynamics in which Žižek locates the elusive Real of subjectivity. Both have a structural family resemblance in his conception. He proposes that: "desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed – and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire" (Žižek 1992: 6). Fantasy presupposes a position, a perspective, without which we would have no "frame" for reality, and the excessiveness of this position indicates the shadowy presence of subjectivity. It is what the subject who inhabits the fantasy cannot see; the extimate structure that grounds the experience. If fantasy is one way of looking awry in order to see clearly for Žižek, then desire, once constructed, is another. The "interested view" of fantasy is echoed in the "distorted" view of desire. The object *a*,

is always, by definition*, perceived in a distorted way, because outside this distortion, "in itself" it* does not exist*, since it is* nothing but *the embodiment, the materialization of this very distortion, of this surplus of confusion and perturbation introduced by desire into so-called "objective reality". The object a is "objectively" nothing, though, viewed from a certain perspective it assumes the shape of "something." . . . In the movement of desire, "something comes from nothing."* (Žižek 1992: 12)

Subjectivity lies in the magician's sleight of hand, in the moment of transformation of nothing into something. There can be no positive knowledge of the fundamental extimity of the self, just as there can be no direct apprehension of the eclipse of the sun. But viewings can be made of it when looking awry, in moments of metamorphosis, transition, and extreme or heightened emotion. The texts I will be analysing here are all works of "unleashed eroticism"; that is to say they all explore extreme erotic situations in graphic and often disturbing ways. As an attempt to stage *jouissance*, they patrol the furthest outreaches of the Symbolic, seeking a glimpse into the abyss of the Real. One such glimpse is the viewing of the female genitals, a viewing that is regularly framed in these texts as a significant encounter with the Real of the other that impacts profoundly on the self. I suggest that the textual representations of this viewing can be read as moments in which something is indeed made out of (the sight / site of) nothing, and thus the moment when the extimity of the self is caught on the internal circuitry of the text.

Georges Bataille: The Erotic as Frame for the Extimate Self

If we take Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil* as a starting point, we find a text dominated and organized by viewings of the female vulva. The sexual odyssey on which the narrator

embarks is provoked in the first instance by the sight of the young Simone's vagina being dipped in a saucer of milk: "Then I lay down at her feet without her stirring, and for the first time, I saw her 'pink and dark' flesh cooling in the white milk. We remained motionless, both of us equally overwhelmed" (1982: 10).[5] This moment of still and wordless contemplation will not be repeated until the very end of the narrative. From now on the frenetic pace of violent debauchery will never falter as the protagonists follow a path of escalating savagery in their search for erotic encounters.

As Roland Barthes points out in his essay "The Metaphor of the Eye," the sexual permutations are linked by repeated play with a metaphorical chain of objects, of which milk is joined by a syntactical relation to soft-boiled eggs, then to the testes of bulls and finally to eyeballs themselves. According to Barthes, "[t]he Eye's substitutes are *declined* in every sense of the term: recited like flexional forms of the one word; revealed like states of the one identity; offered like propositions none of which can hold more meaning than another" (120-1). For Barthes they produce a "perfectly spherical metaphor" (122), yet if we read these objects in their spatial relation to the woman's vagina, we see a gradual process of transformation and incorporation taking place. Initially Simone urinates on the eggs, then one is inserted into her vagina, then the glands of the bull go the same way, and, finally in possession of a human eyeball, Simone inserts that, too, in a scene that assumes the dimensions of a climactic act. Indeed the viewing of the vulva with which the novel ends its chain of extravagant sexual encounters is one in which the female genitalia assume an uncanny and surreal life: "in Simone's hairy vagina, I saw the wan blue eye of Marcelle, gazing at me through tears of urine. Streaks of come in the streaming hair helped give that dreamy vision a disastrous sadness" (1982: 67).[6] The vagina is degraded and its abject dimension emphasized, but it is also alive and watchful. Marcelle is the young innocent whose traumatized response to the debauchery she is caught up in adds piquancy to the protagonists search for *jouissance*. It is her suffering gaze that reproaches the narrator in a unique moment of *témoignage*; the narrator is caught up in erotic flight, powering forward the sexual scenarios without a second of self-reflexivity. Finally caught in a gaze that implicitly sees more than is articulated, the narrator now finds a resting point, and the text's imagery comes full circle, ending with a viewing that is structurally similar, but significantly different, to its point of origin.

For Barthes, the point of the eye is its interchangeability with the other eroticized objects of the text. Yet his argument is troubled by an odd suggestion when discussing the supposedly non-signifying idiom of the text; the phrase "putting out an eye" does not give much information, Barthes claims, since "what is one to do with an eye if not put it out?" (124). It seems counterintuitive to devalue the eyeball in this way, particularly when in the final image it clearly adds a symbolic punch to the function of the vulva. What better way to indicate an encounter with the Real than to project upon the female genitals a fantasized subjectivity? Yet the eccentric location of this particular

gaze offers what could arguably be a privileged extimate viewing of the text's narrator. And indeed, for our ex-centric narrator, such a viewing could well prove hypnotic.

Following Žižek, the structure of fantasy offers an extimate glimpse of the subject, and the viewing of the vulva in Bataille's text is regularly accompanied by excessive and poignant fantasies. The narrator talks of "the swampy regions of the cunt (nothing resembles them more than the days of flood and storm or even the suffocating gaseous eruptions of volcanoes, and they never turn active except, like storms or volcanoes, with something of catastrophe or disaster)" (1982: 22).[7] The lexicon used here uncannily mirrors Kant's vision of the sublime, or what Žižek calls "the relationship between wild, chaotic, untamed nature and the suprasensible Idea of Reason beyond all natural constraints." This Idea of Reason he links to radical evil, or what he terms "Evil as an ethical attitude" (Žižek 1994: 52).

To understand this we need to return to his analogy between Hannibal Lecter and the Lacanian psychoanalyst, which Žižek identifies equally as a relationship between unthinkable natural savagery and ethically evil Reason. Lecter's horrific crimes exert sublime fascination because they give us an inkling of the cruelty of the Lacanian analyst: "by bringing about *la traversée du fantasme* (the going-through of our fundamental fantasy) he literally 'steals the kernel of our being', the object *a*, the secret treasure . . . denouncing it as a mere semblance" (Žižek 1994: 52-3). Lecter's crimes can only suggest "a presentiment of the Idea of the analyst" (53).

I would like to argue here that the horrific image of the watching vagina is similarly sublime because it fascinates the narrator with a harbinger of *la traversée du fantasme*; the gaze threatens to illuminate and denounce the "kernel of the subject's being" – the extimate object. So what is framed in this viewing that stills and concludes the text? The answer lies in the text's refusal of its own completion. The chain of events ends, but further fantasies are proposed as the protagonists steal a boat and head abroad. Erotic fantasy is ever self-perpetuating in Bataille's fiction, generating, as Susan Sontag suggests, "a surplus atmosphere of excruciating restless sexual intensity" (111), which incites the participants to go further and further in their quest for – what? Simply for an end to the cycle. In Bataille's text the anguish of subjectivity and the unleashed power of the erotic take the subject to the precipice of an extimate viewing – an idea of the self finally exhausted by and exhausting its own fantasies.

Hélène Cixous: A Rose between Two Thorns

Le Livre de Promothea offers a marked contrast to the texts by Bataille and Houellebecq and I consider it here as a kind of stepping-stone between them. Whereas the male-authored texts in this analysis present their extraordinary fantasies in as realistic tones as possible, Cixous's text embraces a world of fantasy and linguistic subversion that offers a unique representation of female desire. Initially striking is the way that the narrative is shared between two viewpoints, "Je" and "H", and opens with

the transferral of textual responsibility to "Je" since, "[d]epuis une semaine H s'efforce en vain" (1983: 11). Yet the language produced is impossible to attribute to one or the other voice, for as Emma Wilson argues: "Their relation is at times tenuous, at times so intimate the reader becomes convinced that these are the two named identities of a single individual" (125). The text charts the (erotic) relation of "Je / H" to Promothea whose mythical being, part horse, part fantasy, one hundred percent "natural" woman is the origin and motivation of the narrative: "she is really the one who made the whole text already, the text from which I emerged just half an hour ago (my hair still clinging from the Atlantic and crystal flecks all over my body). Anybody who wants to know how this almost finished work tastes would only have to lick my shoulder" (1991: 5).[8]

The text then is always already a *corpus*, a body of work which itself troubles the boundaries between inside and outside, but which gives a fragile sense of enclosure to the fragmented polyphony that constitutes it. The eccentric structuring of this voice points, I suggest, to a text that is fascinated by the possibility of extimacy. If we recall Žižek's structuring of extimacy in the analytic encounter, he indicates that the position of the analyst ought to be behind the figure on the couch, thus locating in fantasy a third person opposite as witness, who would see the analyst as an extended shadow, or what is more in the analysand than himself. I would suggest that Cixous's text performs a similar manoeuvre, with the split narrative of "Je / H" providing always more of each other than can subjectively be seen, with Promethea as the absent, but always already present in fantasy, witness-cum-interlocutor.

The perpetual play over boundaries in this text, the repeated location of the narrators inside or conjoined to each other and to Promethea make this in fact a text whose perspective is consistently extimate. No identity is discrete here, and the extreme intimacy shared by its protagonists is ceaselessly put to work to reveal the identity-truth of woman as she is lost and refound in the state of desire. Of course there is a price to pay for the excessively extimate viewings taking place here, and this price is the profound disruption of the Symbolic that the text effects. Viewing the extimate (female) self comes at the price of textual chaos, with all rules of signification subverted, and all barriers of meaning transgressed. This is a text that is saturated by fantasy and thus at the mercy of its creative, destabilizing power.

It is interesting to find, then, in the text's one section of lovemaking, that the ongoing confusion of subject positions is briefly resolved into the simple relation of "je" and "tu." Equally the viewing of the female genitals arrests the play of boundary transgression, and hypnotises the focus of the narrative. "Your lips grow, your lips sweetly rise out of the light of the soul, your lips . . . I cannot not go in. But I don't go in, I don't go in, there is no door, there is no armour" (1991: 112-3).[9] The text hesitates but cannot resolve the dilemma, declaring: "How does one go about entering something wide open? You are impenetrable because of your nakedness" (1991: 114).[10]

In Bataille's text the sight of the female vulva stilled the text and threatened a *traversée du fantasme*; the sight of the self exhausting its own fantasies. In this text the contours of a similar danger are traced, in that the dissolution of boundaries that has been fantasized as the key to endless erotic pleasure has undermined its own strategy; constraint and limitation turn out to be essential to effect the act of dissolution into the other, or rather to effect a transgression into the other that would be significant, that would be something other than fantasy itself. In both these texts, the much-desired sight of the female vulva becomes the moment that threatens to destabilize the frame of fantasy and to show the empty, isolated nature of its protagonists that lies beyond.

Michel Houellebecq: Pornography and the Foreclosure of the Extimate Self

Seventy years after the appearance of Bataille's text, less than twenty after Cixous' *Le Livre de Promethea*, Michel Houellebecq's *Les particules élémentaires* represents the fantasies which sustained and propelled these earlier protagonists through the perspective of a sated, cynical and exhausted pornographic imagination. The texts by Bataille and Cixous were powered by a certain knowledge of their own dangerous erotic power. By the time of Houellebecq's fiction, the cultural climate had altered beyond recognition. John Phillips suggests that: "If pornography has become one of the most hotly debated academic subjects of the nineties, it is partly because it encompasses many different discourses – feminist discourses about the representation of women, Marxist discourses about cultural commodification, postmodern discourses about the identity of human culture and the human individual, and discourses about representation itself" (1). In other words, pornography had left the realm of unmediated, demonic intersubjective relations and had become entangled with the thought police, its taunting transgressions now a matter of academically significant coding and discourses; its dangers neutralised, like a good joke, by dissection and explanation.

Houellebecq's text neatly embodies this contemporary scene with its fundamentally confused staging of the tropes of erotica. In *Les particules élémentaires*, Bruno, the unstable and damaged sexual obsessive who controls half of the narrative viewpoint, surveys the state of eroticized relations with a jaundiced yet melancholically hopeful eye. Frequenting new age nudist camps and swingers nightclubs, he is at the forefront of the consumer revolution in porn, yet bitterly handicapped by his own insecurities, both mental and physical. This is again a text where the female genitals take on independent life, but only through the sheer quantity of them theoretically on offer. At the *Lieu de Changément*, the first nudist colony he frequents, Bruno describes how: "On the nearby lawn, naked women lay chatting, reading or simply taking the sun. Where should he sit? Towel in hand, he wandered erratically across the lawn, tottering between the vaginas – as it were" (2000b: 135).[11] But all this is farcically not for Bruno "he came to the conclusion that his cock was too small for the porn circuit"

(2000b: 118).[12] Quite unlike the triumphant narrator of Bataille's text, lost to himself in his quest for transgression, Bruno's own attempts at orgies end in dismal embarrassment: "In a matter of seconds he shuddered with a spasm of pleasure and came all over her face. 'I'm sorry,' he said, 'really sorry'" (2000b: 289).[13] Yet also unlike Bataille's narrator, Bruno's essential quest here is not to lose himself, but to find himself. The world of erotic relations has become not a domain of forbidden, demonic law-breaking, but an alienated norm, which hides as its own extimate self, the possibility of love. If the symbol of the vagina represents anything in this text, it represents this: "The universe was cold and sluggish. There was, however, one source of warmth – between a woman's thighs; but there seemed no way for him to reach it" (2000b: 70).[14]

It would, however, be a misjudgement to consider the female genitals as powerless within this text. Indeed the sight of the female vulva remains a radical catalyst. In a disturbing incident early in the text, Bruno creeps in on his mother, who is lying in bed with a lover. "I hesitated for a second or two and then I pulled a sheet off them. My mother moved and for a moment I thought she was going to open her eyes; her thighs parted slightly. I knelt down in front of her vagina. I brought my hand up close – a couple of inches away – but I didn't dare touch her" (2000b: 81).[15] The text falls unusually silent here: Bruno leaves and goes outside where he sadistically kills a stray cat in a sudden and unexplained act of violence. The sight of the maternal vulva undoubtedly works its primal black magic, but what is interesting is the text's failure to symbolise its effects. The text is littered with erotic incidents portrayed in an almost hyper-real form of representation with ironic nods towards clichéd cultural ideals, but it is entirely lacking in fantasy, the point where the real is transformed and possessed by subjectivity.

Žižek suggests that one of the characteristics of postmodernity is an overproximity to the Real. He identifies this trend particularly in postmodern art, where there is a tendency to "fill in the gaps," to make everything given, visible, unambiguous. Žižek proposes that: "By way of 'filling in the gaps' and 'telling it all', what we retreat from is the void as such, which, of course, is ultimately none other than the void of subjectivity" (2001: 148). In its lack of ambivalence and its hallucinatory hyperreality, postmodern art attempts to sooth anxieties surrounding our separation from the Real. Rather than allow subjective fantasy to formulate any number of possibilities, postmodern art makes everything visible, most notably acts of sex and violence. Yet *Les particules élémentaires*, as postmodern meta-art, presents a society suffering from the self-alienation imposed by the loss of private fantasy. The sexual economy of this text has ransacked the erotic imagination and repackaged the results as mass-market commodities. The notion of a reunion with the extimate self is bleakly abandoned here, and the void of subjectivity, ably represented by Bruno, perpetually threatens a descent into madness. Bruno ends his days in a mental institution, embracing insanity as a welcome source of contentment.

This is a text that bears witness to the death of the power of the erotic through its own degradation as common currency rather than its preservation in the private spaces of obscene fantasy. But we can nevertheless, I think, return productively to the rereading Žižek makes of the Kantian sublime. The frenetic, relentless and alienating staging of pornographic relations in this text again appeals to an Idea of Reason beyond all natural constraints; in this case, the market economy, which just like the Lacanian analyst, demands that we pay in order to offer up to the gods of commerce our *Dasein* on a plate. Such a society has clearly reached a point of no return, and we should not forget that this is ultimately a cautionary tale. The genre Susan Sontag most likens to pornography is science fiction, and indeed in *Les particules élémentaires* one genre merges into the next, as the astonishing epilogue to the text locates its origins in a distant future when genetic engineering has reached the point of replacing our obsolete Darwinian survivalist race.

I would like to suggest that we may again return to Žižek's understanding of the wound in the Real opened up by the Symbolic, the wound that splits the self and causes radical extimacy. According to Žižek (following Lacan) it is only the Symbolic itself which can reconstitute its own debt, and for an analogy of this he appeals to the current ecological crisis: "a return to any kind of natural balance is forever precluded; only technology and science themselves can get us out of the deadlock into which they brought us" (1994: 42). Similarly, the intersubjective crisis caused by the market intervention in intimate erotic relationships can only be cured by artificial means; the scientific creation of a master race at the expense of subjects of "monstrous egotism" who nevertheless "never quite abandoned a belief in love" (2000b: 379).[16] The dangers and the fascination of glimpsing the extimate self are once again framed by the hidden yet dominant fantasy of a text that has lost faith in the pornographic imagination. In this text, Eros has failed to open up an intersubjective route to the extimate self. Instead we view the extimate shadow of a culture, reduced *en masse* to what Martin Crowley calls "a sexual *lumpenproletariat*" (20). The split in the self can only be healed by the most radical of means; the loss of subjectivity altogether.

Endnotes

1. *Histoire de l'oeil* was originally published in 1928 under the pseudonym of Lord Auch by René Bonnel.

2. A term he borrows from Robert Short.

3. Hoyles is here paraphrasing Amos Vogel's reading of Otto Muehl's pornographic film, *Sodoma*.

4. Žižek's work regularly engages with his concept of subjectivity, but for a sustained analysis see *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. For the origins of the vanishing mediator see *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*.

5. "Alors je me couchai à ses pieds sans qu'elle bougeât et, pour la première fois, je vis sa chair 'rose et noire' qui se rafraîchissait dans le lait blanc. Nous restâmes longtemps sans bouger aussi bouleversés l'un que l'autre. . ." (1987: 14).

6. "Je vis exactément, dans le vagin vélu de Simone, l'oeil bleu pâle de *Marcelle* qui me regardait en pleurant des larmes d'urine. Des traînées de foutre dans le poil fumant achevaient de donner à cette vision lunaire un caractère de tristesse désastreuse" (1987: 69).

7. "les régions marécageuses du cul – auxquelles ne ressemblent que les jours de crue et d'orage ou encore les émanations suffocantes des volcans, et qui n'entrent en activité que, comme les orages ou les volcans, avec quelque chose de la catastrope ou du désastre" (1987: 26).

8. "c'est elle en réalité qui a déjà façonné tout le texte, dont je viens de sortir il y a une demi-heure (j'en ai encore les cheveux collants d'Atlantique et des taches de cristaux sur tout le corps. Qui veut connaître le goût de cet oeuvre presque achevée n'aurait qu'à me lécher l'épaule)" (1983: 11).

9. "Tes lèvres poussent, tes lèvres sortent doucement de la lumière d'âme, tes lèvres . . . Je ne peux pas ne pas entrer. Mais je n'entre pas, je n'entre pas, il n'y a pas de porte, il n'y a pas d'armure" (1983: 135).

10. "Comment faire pour entrer dans le grand ouvert? Tu es impénétrable à force de nudité" (1983: 136).

11. "[a]llongées sur la pelouse, des femmes nues bavardaient, lisaient ou prenaient simplement le soleil. Où allait-il se mettre? Sa serviette à la main, il entama un parcours érratique en travers de la pelouse; il titubait, en quelque sorte, entre les vagins" (2000a: 115).

12. "pour réellement parvenir à s'infiltrer dans le réseau porno, il avait une trop petite queue" (2000a: 101).

13. "En quelques secondes, pris par un soubresaut de plaisir incontrôllable, il éjacula sur son visage. Il se redressa vivement, la prit dans ses bras. 'Je suis désolé,dit-il. Désolé'" (2000a: 241).

14. "[l]'univers était lent et froid. Il y avait cependant une chose chaude, que les femmes avaient entre les jambs; mais cette chose, il n'y avait pas accès" (2000a: 61).

15. "J'ai hésité quelques secondes, puis j'ai tiré le drap. Ma mère a bougé, j'ai cru un instant que ses yeux allaient s'ouvrir: ses cuisses se sont légérement écartées. Je me suis agenouillé devant sa vulve. J'ai approché ma main à quelques centimetres, mais je n'ai pas osé la toucher" (2000a: 70).

16. "d'un égoisme illimité", who nevertheless "ne cessa jamais pourtant de croire à la bonté et à l'amour" (2000a: 316).

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Choreography and Trauma in Pina Bausch's *Bluebeard – While Listening to a Taped Recording of Béla Bartók's "Bluebeard's Castle"*

Lucia Ruprecht

I am interested in what moves people, rather than how they move.
(Pina Bausch)

Where is the stage, outside or within men and women?
(Béla Balázs, Prologue to *Bluebeard's Castle*)

Identity in Performance

The notion of identity inevitably invokes definitions of the self that rely on forms of sameness and continuity. According to the definition provided by the OED, the traditional understanding of identity implies

the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person . . . is itself and not something else; . . . the condition or fact of remaining the same person throughout the various phases of existence; continuity of the personality.[1]

Sameness in the shape of continuity and repetition is crucial for establishing a sense of security within the self. Consistent expressions of identity in speech and behavior allow for successful interaction with and differentiation from a necessary other and thus enable forms of knowledge and control. It is this alliance of identity, knowledge and control that my contribution tries to dismantle, and it does so by drawing attention to the ambivalence that lies at the heart of sameness. It addresses patterns of continuous repetitive behavior, or more precisely an excess of repetition and sameness, which cannot be successfully processed within the economy of the psyche. This excess is approached as the symptom of an underlying traumatic structure.

Its compulsiveness stands for a form of alterity *within* the self / same. The obsessive overstating of the same in compulsive repetitions points up an otherness that cannot be assimilated in any other way: it cannot be understood or worked through, but has to be performed over and over.

Taking my cues from Judith Butler's theory of performance and performativity, and Mieke Bal's recent realignment of the terms with theatrical production and aesthetic practice, I will engage with the performance of identity in an early piece by German choreographer Pina Bausch entitled *Bluebeard – While Listening to a Taped Recording of Béla Bartók's "Bluebeard's Castle"* (1977).[2] Bausch's piece exposes identity as a choreographic process based on the repetitive enactment of norms, codes and constraints. The specific edge of *Bluebeard* consists in its focus on the double-bind of these repetitions, which are shown to be at once stabilizing and destructive, self-constituting and self-annihilating. The logic of the piece excludes difference within the process of repetition. It thus forecloses any active form of change based on intention and creative variation, placing the traumatic at the centre of the concept of identity. Its unique means of representation in dance do, however, suggest a type of agency which arises from a-mimetic strategies of displacement and distortion that transpose compulsive patterns of speech and behavior into movement. The piece thus creates a physical symbolic order that provides opportunities for the articulation of otherwise "unspoken" afflictions in bodily performance.

Choreography

Choreography is the art of composing dance. It traditionally implies the creation of movement material which is learned by the interpreters; it is the "script" of the dance, prescribing how and where to move. This script is normally passed on to the dancers – or created in interaction with them – by means of a physical process of demonstrating sequences of movement, which are then copied and rehearsed. Yet for the audience, choreography does not become evident as such. It appears in the form of dance performances, of spectacles of movement that cannot be verified or recapitulated by checking a score. A dance performance, although a "thoughtful production of, say, a spectacle based on the memorization of a score by performers," shifts, as a theatrical event, towards the experience of "'the act itself,' in a unique present," thus becoming interchangeable with the notion of performativity – the "doing" – as it is defined in Austin's theory of speech acts (Bal 176–77). Dance thus attracts certain assumptions: lacking systematic documentation, it is perceived to be spontaneous or chaotic; being non-verbal or pre-verbal, it challenges the symbolic order of language; playful and evanescent, it seems to subvert or escape from power.

Butler's move towards the choreographic, that is, citationality, in the discussion of performativity criticizes the lure of non-prescribed enactments of gendered identity recalled in the disappearance of choreography (as score) behind dance (as performativity).

Instead she formulates a notion of agency that is based on Jacques Derrida's concept of reiteration. Derrida defines agency in terms of an unstable interaction between the recurrence of the conventional and the appearance of the new through variation and difference (Derrida 1988). He also engages with identity and gender in terms of dance in "Choreographies," an interview with Christie V. McDonald. In the interview, however, he deals with the notion of choreography in an emphatically non-choreographic way. In "Choreographies," dance figures as a showcase of the entirely incalculable. The interview investigates the difficulty of reconciling two different logics of thought: feminism as a political project in need of identities and essences that enable a liberating agency, and deconstruction as a denial of the possibility of such identities and essences. Derrida answers the question of how he would describe "a woman's place" by altogether questioning the need for a stable place. Throughout the interview, he avoids getting pinned down while elegantly unfolding the metaphorical realm of dance, which serves as the only positioning of woman within the non-position of constant movement: "The most innocent of dances would thwart the *assignation à résidence*, escape those residences under surveillance; the dance changes place and above all changes *places*" (28). The attention shifts from dance towards the dynamic of movement as such.

"Choreographies" uses the vocabulary of dance movement for reasons of style and strategy instead of making use of the specific potential of this vocabulary.[4] Dance as aesthetic practice distinguishes itself by its embeddedness in the possibilities and limitations of the physical on the one hand, and by its specific references to, or neglect of, representational traditions, codes and techniques of movement on the other. Physical movement is certainly not inherently subversive; it can be both rebellious and submissive, so that its specific characteristics are essential for detecting forms of agency. Dealing with the same contrast between "place / stillness" and "dance," Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play *A Doll's House* reads like a backdrop to the Derrida interview and it may also be taken as a cultural counterpart to *Bluebeard*. Derrida's reluctance towards any clear-cut topography of femininity that inevitably recalls woman's place as "in the home" or "in the kitchen" is prefigured by Ibsen. Yet the heroine Nora's Italian tarantella unfolds its complex emancipatory dynamic not because of the mere fact that it is a dance, but because of its powerful transgressions of the prescriptions of the dance she is expected to perform. Nora's tarantella is set up to be an entertaining spectacle for the guests at a ball, a diverting interlude devised and choreographed by her husband Helmer. However, during a practice session in the presence of her friends, Mrs. Linde and Rank, she turns her circumscribed task into a violent display of danced anger. The play gives very few specifications for the actual movements, yet their fierceness is reflected in the reactions of the onlookers:

RANK sits down at the piano and plays. *NORA* dances more and more wildly. *HELMER* stands by the stove giving her repeated directions as she dances; she does

not seem to hear them. Her hair comes undone and falls about her shoulders; she pays no attention and goes on dancing. *MRS. LINDE* enters.

MRS. LINDE standing as though spellbound in the doorway. *Ah. . .!*

[. . .]

HELMER. Stop, Rank! This is sheer madness. Stop, I say.

RANK stops playing and *NORA* comes to a sudden halt.

HELMER crosses to her. *I would never have believed it. You have forgotten everything I ever taught you.* (Ibsen 59)[5]

Nora's transgressive act works both within and outside the patriarchal economy, as a performance of resistance staged as an act of discipline and obedience. Ostensibly, she practices her tarantella to allure her husband and convince him that all his dance-masterly qualities are needed to tame her movements – not without reason, since she needs to divert his attention from the fateful letter that is waiting in the mailbox. Yet at the same time, the outrageous poses and jumps foreshadow Nora's final move of slamming the door when leaving her domestic life. It is her improvization that unfolds the double agency of this dance; notwithstanding our knowledge of Nora's desperate will to keep playing the patriarchal game at this stage, the sheer power of the physical characteristics of her dance points towards a spectacle of emancipation rather than a display of submissiveness. Here, the heroine's agency emerges from a dance that despite its conventional setting neither repeats given structures nor reacts to the coercive corrections of her husband. In Bausch's *Bluebeard*, in contrast, it is the compulsion to repeat as much as the inability to "shut doors" that accounts for the traumatic structure of the piece. As an early example of Bausch's dance theater, *Bluebeard* astounded the public with a new bodily language. While staging a tale about fatal patterns of repetition, this language overcomes the recurrence of the same in its specific aesthetic of transformation.

Trauma

Bluebeard – While Listening to a Taped Recording of Béla Bartók's "Bluebeard's Castle" obsessively repeats sequences of movement and music, creating an often hardly bearable theatrical effect that has become one of the signatures of Bausch's work. The piece provokes an analysis informed by the insights that have been made possible through the wide-ranging work on trauma over the last decade. If one sets out, with *Bluebeard*, from an understanding of identity as choreography, one quickly starts to see that this choreography is characterized not by limitless transgressions, which "carry, divide, multiply the body of each 'individual'," to quote Derrida, but by the finitude of bodily experience (Derrida and McDonald 40). It always involves "the acknowledgement of some point beyond which the dancer cannot go," whether this be the restrictions of physical capacity and of anatomy, or of prescribed, not least gendered

moves (Bordo 228). In *Bluebeard*, these prescriptions are compulsive; they represent the tyranny of that which moves people over how they move. They cast a dark light on the constitution and affirmation of identity through sameness by excessively overstating the latter, and turning it into a force that unsettles, rather than solidifies the psyche. The compulsive patterns of behavior follow a psychic regime beyond the intention, even beyond the consciousness of the subject. I would thus argue that they are a form of alterity within the self, and connect this form of alterity to trauma as it is defined by Freud – as a "foreign body" in the psyche (Freud 20).

Combining Freud's link between compulsive repetition and the death drive with trauma theory, Cathy Caruth relates the traumatic experience to a person's confrontation with, and miraculous survival of, the possibility of death. As Caruth has it, the traumatized consciousness, once faced with its own extinction, is unable to work through the experience by a process of mourning or conscious confrontation and analysis; it "can do nothing but repeat the destructive event over and over again" (1996: 63). This uncanny pathological repetition arises precisely from the impossibility of adequately representing the primal event, for it is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (1996: 4). The belated experience, however, never really reaches or works through "what actually happened"; it is primarily confronted in states that are beyond the critical consciousness. Trauma, for Caruth, is the paradox of addressing an event by not addressing it; it is at once the repeated suffering of its impact, and the "continual leaving of its site" (1995: 10). Her work concentrates on the ways in which figurative discourse overcomes the restrictions of more analytical approaches by perhaps not healing, but at least bearing witness to an unspeakable wound through the distortions, substitutions and displacements of narrative. Bausch's transformative physical "discourse" echoes this process in the medium of performance.

Repetition-compulsion, linked to traumatic experience but also extending to a more general view of the psyche, is a defining structure of Bausch's *Bluebeard*. Indeed, the choreography echoes Freud's attention towards "the everyday connectedness of things in daily experience, the ways in which our patterned, repetitive reactions to things or people . . . may never reach consciousness at all. The central issue is not so much a matter of having 'forgotten' an original event than of never really seeing what we commemorate in the patterns we repeat" (Antze and Lambek xxvi-xxvii). The specific agency of psychoanalytic therapy, as of a dance piece like *Bluebeard*, then, is not "to dig up 'repressed memories' but to uncover these patterns and the active part we play . . . in keeping them alive" (Antze and Lambek xxvi-xxvii). It is not for nothing that Bausch's work has been called "theatrical psychotherapy" (Mackrell 111).

The specific trauma of Bausch's *Bluebeard* may be its potential to recall the terrible slaughter of the wives that is at the heart of the fairy-tale; in Bartók's opera, which

exerts a direct influence on the dance piece, the slaughter is transformed into their immobilization as mannequins. Even more concretely traumatic is Bausch's rehearsal of the disastrously repetitive structures of identity, mirrored in the relationship between women and men. Since there is nothing else but the traumatic compulsion to repeat, the choreography of identity consists of coercive and destructive re-enactments of the same. Here, choreography is a useful term for indicating the contamination of performativity and performance with regard to the enactments that constitute identity. Bausch's repetitive piece, staging the production and reproduction of movement, makes the presence of a choreography behind the dance painfully clear. In *Bluebeard*, the constitution of identity through acts is a process which always relies on, or negotiates, a score.

Repetition and Interruption

Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle*, based on a libretto by Béla Balázs, is a symbolist, dramatically highly effective version of the well-known fairy-tale, concentrating entirely on the fatal opening of the seven doors. In contrast to the fairy-tale, however, the woman, here named Judith, opens them one by one in front of her hesitant husband, so that the opera becomes a repetitively structured dialogue between the two protagonists. The doors lead to a torture chamber, an armory, a treasury, a garden, a kingdom – all stained with blood – and a lake of tears. While in the fairy-tale, the last door opens onto the view of the corpses of Bluebeard's former wives, here they appear one after the other, pale, heavily adorned, from the last chamber. Bluebeard lays a beautiful cloak around Judith's shoulders, places a crown on her head, and hangs jewels round her neck whose weight almost crushes her. Her head drooping, Judith goes the way of the other women, entering the seventh chamber with the door closing after her. Bluebeard sings the last lines of the libretto: "Henceforth all shall be darkness" (Bartók 173). Judith's desire to open the doors is caught in a disastrous double-bind: she wants to enter the forbidden spaces to gain access to her beloved, yet introvert husband; this is reinforced by her desire to let light into the gloom of Bluebeard's castle, which indeed becomes brighter with every opening of a door, before falling back into darkness at the end. Yet these "acts of gaining knowledge" disclose the most disconcerting, frightful spectacle, indicating that Judith's love for her husband is inextricably linked to her own destruction.

Taking up some of the stage directions of the opera as well as its relentless playing-through of a situation which does not allow for escape, Bausch transforms the opera's symbolism into concrete action. Bluebeard's hesitation to hand over the keys to Judith, and his refusal to answer her questions, are transposed into a situation that structures the entire choreography: at the beginning, Bluebeard sits next to a tape recorder which he turns on and off throughout the piece, listening to endless repetitions of sequences of the opera that build up a disruptive backdrop of music for the

dance action. Often he seems hardly able to bear listening, and violently turns it off. This pattern is enhanced by his clapping, which signals the interruption and continuation of the movement on stage. Judith and Bluebeard are the central couple, multiplied by a number of female and male dancers who echo their constellation, and female dancers who represent Bluebeard's wives. There is little evolution in the choreography. Repetition and disruption are the two main characteristics of the performance: instead of being developed into something else or being brought to an end, sequences are endlessly interrupted and re-enacted, reaching the limit of the supportable for the audience.

The main action of the opera and of its adaptation – opening doors – may suggest that it is mainly concerned with gaining access to a secret, confronting the trauma of the murder, finding out the truth about the husband. However, there is no development, no opening possible through this entering; if there is such a thing as "the truth of the seventh door," this truth is the unavoidability of death. Both Bluebeard's attitude of not wanting to confront death and Judith's attempts at confrontation are lethal: after murdering his wife, the man sinks back into darkness. While also engaging with the metaphorical value of "opening doors", that is, the seeking of access, Bausch's choreography ingeniously uncovers the traumatic structure of this action. "Opening doors" becomes a compulsively repetitive, self-sufficient move that never reaches its goal and never leads to arrival. Instead it establishes a fatal circle of disruption and repetition that closes around the protagonists. That this theatrical uncovering of traumatic patterns and the active part we play in keeping them alive can lead not only the audience, but also the performers to their limits, becomes obvious in the account of one of the dancers. Jo Ann Endicott's report of the rehearsal situation in 1977 indicates an upsetting transference of the content of the piece to the process of its rehearsal – an intimate enmeshment of the performers' personalities and personal lives with their work for the theater which is, of course, another signature of Bausch's work. As Endicott remembers, alluding to the choreographer's rehearsal technique of posing questions which are answered in improvised sequences of movement by the dancers,

. . . for some reason Pina and many of us didn't get along at the beginning of the 1977 season. Bluebeard *was in the making. We improvised a lot during rehearsals, the "questions" started to appear. Given the nature of the piece, "questions" which obviously dealt with the relationship between men and women. Endless questions on men and women – the longer this went on, the more I shut myself off from it, and simply refused to react to some demands. I did like Bartók's opera very much, but I hated the constant repetitions of the tape and of the movements. Grotesque and disfigured. The same part over and over again. We had to laugh, scream, giggle, cough, sob. Run against the wall, fall off a chair; women, and especially Judith, were pushed away, pushed down, elbowed, again and again and again.* (Endicott 89, my translation)

Rather than focusing on a central traumatic event, then, *Bluebeard* concentrates on the traumatic nature of relationship patterns. These are transposed into movement. Here are three sequences which emerged from the strenuous rehearsal process, all repeated over and over:

Bluebeard sits on a chair next to the tape recorder. Judith approaches him, directs his finger so that he has to turn the music on. The music starts, Bluebeard gets up, throws Judith to the floor, throws himself onto her and moves with her across the floor, Judith on her back, carrying him along. Bluebeard leaves her alone, returns to his place next to the tape recorder, turns off the music. Judith remains on her back, her arms frozen in the grip of the embrace which is now empty. She gets up, approaches him and resumes the beginning of the sequence.

A group of women sits on the floor, legs slightly bent and spread apart. Shifting from one pelvic bone to the other, they waddle towards Bluebeard while keeping the position of their legs as it is. The voice of Judith sings: "open, open, open them for me!" and "give me your keys!"

A small plastic doll without arms is placed at the front of the stage, its back to the public. First Bluebeard positions himself in front of the doll, naked apart from shimmering underpants, enacting a number of overstated bodybuilding-poses with an expression of pride and satisfaction on his face. Then a woman lies down on her side in front of the doll in an equally overstated pose of erotic allure, hips curved, caressing her open lips in a gesture of theatrical exaggeration, fixing the doll with her eyes.

These are only some examples of endless variations on the uncertain border between violence and tenderness, the complicity of women and men in the destructiveness of their desire, their imprisonment in stereotypical codes that at once desperately provoke and unavoidably undermine any real response from the other. Identity is caught in "choreographic traps" (Mackrell 112) which are enacted by the dancing bodies on stage, leading up to Bausch's intriguing version of the final murder where Bluebeard first "executes" his wife in order to then "save her life." The final scene is the culmination of the main characteristic of the choreography, the tireless stepping back into the same patterns, since although these patterns are lethal, they are the only stabilizing frame available; stabilizing, that is, to the ironical point of paralysis: at the end, Bluebeard puts all the dresses of his former wives on Judith until she is so stable that she cannot move any more, throws himself onto the floor with her, catches her with the grasp of a lifeguard, and drags her along offstage. The choreography of identity is taken in its strictest sense, leaving no space for personal interpretation or improvization, thus excluding agency. It is not surprising that *Bluebeard* deliberately lacks any linear narrative, mirroring the inability of the protagonists to turn their automatisms into a meaningful plot. As the opera is dissected, plot is

replaced by fragmentation and repetition. With *Bluebeard*, Bausch abandoned narrative structure for the first time: there is no introduction, no conflict, no peripety, no solution, and least of all a catharsis, making it impossible to leave the theater feeling purged.

However, I would like to suggest that Bausch, although upsetting dancers and audience through the often brutal confrontation with unpleasant patterns, succeeds in engaging them through what I have called an aesthetic of transformation. Susan Kozel claims that there is an element of analogy in Bausch's language which is not based on "identical reproduction or simple imitation. There is always a moment of excess or a remainder in the mimetic process, something that makes the mimicry different from that which inspires it, and which transforms the associated social and aesthetic space." Kozel suggests that this remainder is "a moment of distortion, and that it contains the great hope for regeneration which emerges from the process" (101). Working with principles not unlike those that operate in a logic of dreams – including nightmares – Bausch's pieces blend the familiar and the unfamiliar by transforming the psychic into the physical, words into movement, everyday movement into dance sequences. Here, it is the figurative "discourse" of bodily performance that bears witness to the unspeakable. While a piece like *Bluebeard* relentlessly enacts "the absence of play and difference" as "another name for death" (Derrida 1995: 297), the forms of reiteration at work in its making and in its means of expression stand for the life-affirming agency of a tilted perspective on the world. And so the choreographer leads us back from how her dancers move to that which moves us.

Endnotes

1. Entry "Identity". 1. Nov. 2004 <http://dictionary.oed.com>.

2. See Butler (1990; 1993) and Bal.

3. Recent dance criticism questions the undifferentiated use of dance as a post-structuralist metaphor for unconstrained, subversive mobility by reclaiming a more elaborate vision of bodily movement. See Foster; Wolff; Nash.

4. For a more detailed account of the interview, see Ruprecht.

5. The scarcity of stage directions for the dance scene leave its realization to the director and actress, with the potential for striking results, as in a recent production of the play at the Schaubühne Berlin (directed by Thomas Ostermeier, Anne Tismer as Nora), with Nora giving a powerful Lara-Croft-style performance.

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Art That Matters: Identity Politics and the Event of Viewing

Kate MacNeill

Identity Art

A defining aspect of the so-called identity art of the 1980s was that it sought to represent an identifiable "other." Much of this art was based on a concept of the subject as discursively fixed and thereby capable of being represented. The artworks that I consider in this paper are more concerned with disrupting the binary of self and other. Premised on non-essentialized and non-unitary formulations of the subject, I suggest that this approach might offer a more strategic and effective form of political intervention.

The argument proceeds by way of a detailed examination of two artworks, *Illusion and Vulnerability* and *Down Faced Dog*, by Karyn Lindner and Deborah Williams respectively, both contemporary Melbourne artists. The two works were exhibited in public spaces in Melbourne's inner city. The sites created an unusual viewing experience, for the art appeared as an unexpected intrusion on the familiar landscape of the city. Both pieces engaged with the discourse of subjectivity. Lindner's consisted of a series of texts, one of which read "Why won't you admit your vulnerability?" Williams' depicted a dog with its ass to the viewer; accompanying the image were the words "Underneath I'm just a lovable girl." The works were censored despite the fact that they lacked representations that might be considered obscene.

The acts of censorship foreclosed any detailed examination of meaning or affect in relation to the images. The artists' rights of free expression were asserted, but little attention was given to exploring what might have happened in the viewing of the work to provoke these acts of censorship. In the discussion that follows I focus on this overlooked aspect. I approach the artworks as having variable meanings; meanings that are established in the traffic of ideas between artist, work and viewer. In addition,

I interrogate the artworks' extra-discursive or affective qualities. These became apparent through the anxiety experienced by some viewers.

The identity invoked by *Illusion and Vulnerability* and *Down Faced Dog* is not that of a recognizable other, but that of the viewer. It is this absence of the other, I suggest, which provokes the affective response wherein lies the possibility of a politically strategic moment. My examination traverses issues relating to the nature of, and resistance to, the symbolic network that regulates the operation of subjectivity. One of the goals of identity politics was to challenge the exclusion of a number of groups from the symbolic network. However, in many cases the resultant representation of alternative identities reinforced identity itself as fixed and the alternative identities as other. Using Judith Butler's theory of the discursive production of the subject outlined in *Bodies that Matter*, I suggest that the two works examined have intervened in this process of subject formation. I then conclude with a consideration of the political potential of the art object in the light of this analysis.

Feelings of Fragility

On October 2, 1996, Karyn Lindner installed *Illusion and Vulnerability* on hoardings surrounding a large construction site along St. Kilda Road, a major Melbourne thoroughfare. The work, in its original state, consisted of the following statements and questions in red Helvetica text painted directly onto the hoardings: "Why do you fear change?", "Why won't you admit your vulnerability?", "You know your superiority is an illusion" and "Why do you control?"

The installation was part of a public art project undertaken at the request of the builders of the construction – the City Link tunnel – in conjunction with the Victorian College of the Arts. Its display coincided with an open day which was to showcase a number of government projects. The planning minister, at the time Rob Maclellan, requested that the work be covered for the duration of the activities. This occurred with the agreement of the then premier, Jeff Kennett, who was also the minister for the arts. The Victorian College of the Arts complied and the work was covered with hessian.

As it turned out, the censored form lasted for less than a day, as the hessian was removed late on the Saturday night. The text then remained visible for a number of weeks. Much of the discussion around this incident, both at the time and subsequently, has focused on issues of censorship, the intervention of the government, and the apparent acquiescence of the college. There were few attempts to interrogate the work itself in its original form.

The act of censorship produced a situation in which the work's presumed meaning became fixed. It was understood widely as a political intervention, a statement in relation to a government and a premier whom many considered arrogant and some, dictatorial. These views found further expression when some weeks later a billboard by Barbara Kruger, coincidentally in Melbourne for the Melbourne International Festival

of the Arts, was amended in broad daylight. It had read, "Don't be a jerk," but after the intervention, for two brief hours, the text appeared as "Don't be a jeff," a direct reference to the role of the premier, Jeff Kennett, in the censoring of Lindner's project.

These subsequent events highlighted the way in which the actions *Illusion and Vulnerability* had provoked foreclosed the meaning of Lindner's work. Lindner came to refer to the installation by two names: *Illusion and Vulnerability I* and *II*, *I* being the version that was erected, the provocation she intended, and *II* the work it became once the censorship had occurred. For Lindner had not intended a direct attack on a political party or any particular individual and she declined invitations to respond to its concealment as an attack on her freedom of expression. Lindner had meant for the text "to express emotions and feelings of fragility, and to give them a valid space in the world" (qtd. in Blake). The college, in a rare defense of the artist's project, maintained that it was intended to provide passers-by with a moment of personal reflection (Green).

An (Un)Lovable Girl

Three years later, a less politicized, but no less public act of censorship occurred. Melbourne has a number of public art spaces; these include advertising display cases in five bus shelters around the metropolitan area. In September 1999, prints of a modified version of Deborah Williams' work *Down Faced Dog* were briefly installed in these shelters. The work was one of a series of diptychs called *Penthouse Pets* that had been shown in July of the same year at Westspace Gallery. The series consisted of etchings of dogs depicted in various poses: some lay on their backs, legs in the air, while others appeared to be asleep, and indifferent to the viewer. A screen-printed text drawn from advertising copy accompanied each image, examples being "Want a bit on the side?" and "At home anywhere in the world."

The particular work that Williams placed in the bus stops depicted a dog with its anus facing the viewer, its position reminiscent of the yoga pose that provided the title: *Down Faced Dog*. It was accompanied by the text: "Underneath I'm just a lovable girl." Less than a week after the prints were installed, the sponsor of the spaces, the advertising display company Adshel, ordered their removal.

A company spokesperson was reported as defending the removal of the images on the basis that complaints had been received from the public, that the work was deemed "offensive" and that the shelters containing them had been vandalized (qtd. in Protyniak). The vandalism was in the form of graffiti – in one of the shelters, an image of a penis had been sprayed onto the glass that enclosed the print. The spray painting of the images in these spaces is a common occurrence. Adshel continually cleans the glass – however, on this occasion it was decided that the work itself should be removed.

As with Lindner's work there was little public debate about the image itself, and the question of why it might be considered "offensive" was not raised in any media treatments. What coverage the events received related to the rights of the owner of

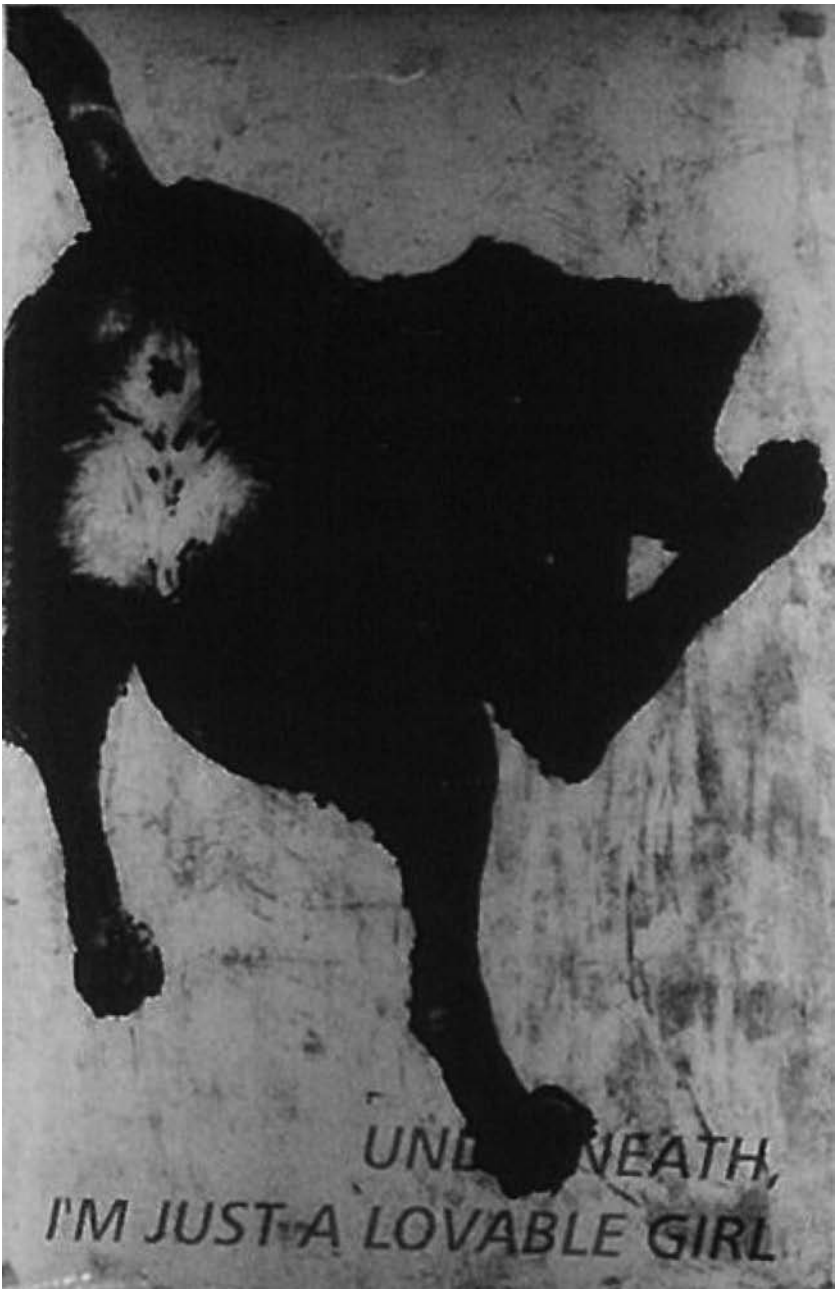

Figure 6 Deborah Williams, *Down Faced Dog* ©1999. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

the spaces, the Public Transport Corporation, to control the content of the images displayed in them, and the nature of the agreement between it and Adshel, the latter being responsible for their installation.

In what appeared to be an after-the-event ratification of Adshel's actions the Director of Legal and Strategy at the Public Transport Corporation formally requested of Adshel that the now-removed work not be reinstalled. The correspondence stated that "after reviewing the copy and the sexually explicit graffiti which it has generated, and in view of community complaints" the corporation supported the removal of the poster (Black).

This statement makes it difficult to determine whether the work itself was deemed offensive. In its original form it had prompted a specific reaction from one viewer, who had added the image of a penis. By virtue of this interaction between the image and a single viewer the work had changed – in this case visually and discursively. For it seems clear that the addition of the penis, the "sexually explicit graffiti" generated by the image, contributed to the Corporation's conclusion that it was offensive. The addition of the penis to *Down Faced Dog* foreclosed its meaning in much the same way as the intervention by the state government determined the meaning of *Illusion and Vulnerability*.

There are many ways of interpreting the events I have just described. As I have indicated, in each instance the debate at the time focused on the rights of the artists to free expression, their artistic intentions and the broader political implications of the acts of censorship. I do not seek to privilege these particular works or suggest they have a unique potency. However, the events as described suggest a degree of agency on the part of the works. Given the theme of identity encompassed by their content, this warrants closer examination, the result of which might contribute to an understanding of the potential of the art object within the broader field of identity politics and practice.

In the analysis that follows, I focus on the interaction that occurred between the works and the viewer. In examining the dynamics of this exchange I give particular attention to the subject position that is created in the moment of viewing. This leads me to reconsider the specific concept of subjectivity that is implied by these events and its potential for the politics of identity.

The Event of Viewing

The nature of the interaction between the work and the viewer when censorship occurs seems to share particular features with instances of iconoclasm. In circumstances where someone is driven to destroy a work of art, a profound interaction occurs between the image and the viewer. There have been few detailed examinations of cases of iconoclasm that have attempted to understand the nature of this interaction.

As conventionally understood, the act of the iconoclast arises from an over-identification with an image. David Freedberg has asserted that the large majority of cases of iconoclasm result from the confusion of representation and reality, a

collapse of signifier and signified and a desire to destroy that which the artwork represents. As he observed, all too often the iconoclast is dismissed as mad, a convenient explanation that denies the work itself any agency (Freedberg 421). The behavior of the iconoclast is deemed unworthy of examination, for to label them mad forecloses the possibility that there is anything to be learnt from these events. Freedberg argues that the apparent reluctance to undertake such inquiries stems from an awareness that we too may be susceptible to what appear as irrational behaviors (407). The censorial responses to *Down Faced Dog* and *Illusion and Vulnerability I*, while stopping short of their physical destruction, appear equally irrational. As is the case with iconoclasm, the more interesting question as to the nature of the exchange between the original work and the viewer, an exchange that for some viewers was certainly provocative, was overlooked entirely.

The term iconography has been used by Hal Foster in a colloquial sense to describe the tendency within identity art to make a direct connection between the work and a meaning located elsewhere (11). The conflation of signifier and signified may indeed have underpinned the conservative responses to the so-called culture wars in the United States which were, in part, fought over representational expressions of homosexual identity.[1] But in the case of the works I am examining no such link between signifier and signified exists. I suggest that it is precisely this aspect of the works that provides an insight into why some viewers found them so unsettling.

Alison Young has described the common reaction – a mixture of anger, anxiety and disgust – to works such as Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* as occasions of "aesthetic vertigo". The calls for censorship, and the physical attack on the work that occurred, were not based solely on any representational aspect but on the emotions and confusions that were generated in the viewer. Young attributed these affects to the knowledge that while the abject mix of urine and a crucifix has taken place, what viewers are faced with is a mere representation. This paradox she referred to as the duplicity of the image (Young 261).

The works that I described earlier are also duplicitous in that they defy the conventions of viewing. Rather than the confusion being between the representation, the real and the abject that Young identified, the works I have described produced confusion between the self and the other. The event of viewing is conventionally approached as the "I" of the viewer looking at the "you" of the work. Certainly this is the framework within which much identity art operates, and in so doing it presents the viewer with an other. The refusal of the works by Lindner and Williams to present a recognizable other left open the possibility that the identity in question was that of the viewer.

Mieke Bal has argued that the occasions on which the subject/object opposition is undermined, and the consequent tension between the location of the "I" and the "you", are circumstances in which meaning production takes place (43). It is useful then to consider in a more specific sense the viewer to whom I am referring. It is not

the viewer who saw the *Penthouse Pets* exhibition in the gallery but the viewer who saw the work in the ambiguous setting of an advertising space. Similarly the viewer of Lindner's work was not in a gallery but may perhaps have been passing by on a tram. In both cases the viewer might be considered as unprepared for the specific encounter that the art presented.

Expecting a woman, the viewer of Williams' work was confronted by a dog, disrupting the conventions of the advertiser's symbolic language. The viewer would be familiar with the caption "Underneath I'm just a lovable girl", and would be conditioned by its associations with advertising to view any accompanying image as one that both depicts and evokes desire. The drawing of the penis made this desire explicit and in so doing staged a moment of abjection – the unlovable, the zoophiliac. The work, through the fusion of representations of an animal and human sexuality, had entered taboo territory and perhaps its censorship was then inevitable. But, arguably, it was in its original form that the image was most potent, at the moment when it failed to present the anticipated "other" of the female.

Lindner's work aggressively challenged the viewer's sense of self with its direct questions, but provided no alternative subjectivity other than the disintegration of the self. The open-ended quality of the text was itself cause for concern, with newspaper reports quoting a spokesperson for Minister Maclellan as saying: "it is not art work – at this stage we are only seeing some questions" (qtd. in Trioli). This desire for answers suggests unease with an image that appears incomplete, uncontained. The openness of the work and the uncertainty as to its meaning gave rise to anxiety – and all too quickly the premier, or others on his behalf, rushed in to fill the gap.

I want to suggest that it was when *Illusion and Vulnerability* and *Down Faced Dog* were discursively most indeterminate that they were most powerful. The identity that was at stake at that moment was not an identity represented in the work, but that of the viewer. For at the moment of viewing it was their identity that was thrown into crisis, their sense of self that collapsed. Julia Kristeva's description of the moment of confronting the foreigner, a foreigner who disturbs the boundary between the self and other, seems particularly apt to describe this event. She wrote, "I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container" (Kristeva 187). The loss of boundaries that Kristeva described can be understood in two senses. The first relates to the discursive framework whereby we separate ourselves from, and define ourselves in relation to, the "other". For Kristeva the foreigner is not entirely other; rather, their uncanniness denies the difference necessary for such a categorization. The second loss of boundary is more corporeal. The modern body is one that is contained, whole and intact. The absence of the other leaves the body literally uncontained, its beginning and end undefined.

The artworks that I have discussed entered the affective realm: they impacted at the emotional and extra-discursive levels. The choice for the viewer was to yield to the experience or resist it by imposing a familiar discursive framework.

Art That Matters

My interest in these events is part of a broader concern with art that challenges notions of identity as being fixed or natural. For art to make a political intervention it must do more than represent an alternative concept of the subject – it must engage in the process of subject formation. The radical potential of the works I have discussed would appear to lie in their refusal to participate in Butler's process of subject formation through discursive iteration. When Butler wrote "there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body," she opened up the possibility that there may be references to impure or uncontained bodies that might interrupt this process (Butler 10). Rather than reinforcing a dominant construction of subjectivity, Williams' and Lindner's works would seem to challenge the discursive stability of the body, its boundaries and limitations. In so doing, they offer the possibility for the resignification of the self.

This is not to suggest that only the viewer is changed by the interaction: for the experiences of viewing that I have described appear to deny the possibility of any fixed meaning on the part of the images. By attaching two separate titles to her project, a before and after title, Lindner acknowledged that it became something other than what she had intended. It is perhaps more useful to think of their meanings as contingent, as coming into being on the occasion of an interaction with a viewer. In a very literal way, an iterative process of meaning construction has been enacted (Bal and Bryson 179). However, the term "meaning" no longer seems appropriate, given the fluidity of the works. As we have seen, once they were altered they acquired a fixed meaning; however, prior to that stage it may be more useful to think of them as having agency rather than meaning.

It is perhaps the inherent ambiguity of the works that enabled them to attain an agency beyond the artist's intention and the viewer's discursive framework. This ambiguity might also be useful in understanding the political potential not only of the images, but of the viewer.

The moment of viewing shares a number of characteristics with Alain Badiou's concept of the "event." While Badiou focuses on the socio-political "event," the interactions I have explored operate more on an individual level. Badiou contemplates the subject as multiple, differentiated only through the event. The event, for Badiou, "compels the subject to invent a new way of being and acting in the situation" (41-42). It is the nature of the event itself that imposes this requirement on the subject, for Badiou's event is an occurrence that sits outside anything that the subject is prepared for through its experience or knowledge.[2] In other words, the event stands outside existing discursive frameworks.

Badiou does not argue that the event comes with any certainty as to how the subject will react. In fact he uses this uncertainty as the basis for a discussion of ethics, situating ethics within the subject's response to the event. The ethical response, he

proposes, is to "keep going" with the experience of the event rather than to withdraw. There is much more that Badiou's analysis might offer, but for now I want only to suggest a parallel between the event on a socio-political level and the event on the individual level that occurred in the life of these artworks.

As we have seen, the potential of these two works was never fully explored and their censorship removed their potent ambiguity. However, some indication of what might otherwise have resulted is provided by the following responses. Chris McAuliffe had described *Penthouse Pets* as offering a moment of meditation. A traveler on a passing tram described Lindner's work as having "the potential to be a gift of self understanding" (Pulos). These responses suggest that the works had produced an experience of viewing in which both viewer and artwork might be changed by the interaction.

Conclusion

A shift in the theoretical and political terrain has forced a reconsideration of the strategies of identity politics. A tension has been identified between the critique of essentialist constructions of identity, and the ongoing desires of individuals and groups to attain an identity within the political field. This desire has led to the association of identity with representation; based on the belief that visibility will result in wider community recognition.

A consequence of this strategy is that identity continues to be produced by a form of signification that implies difference. Difference is portrayed within the existing discursive framework – one that does not equate visibility with political power. In fact, the act of making visible, of representing an identity, is incorporated within the existing discourse by the process of othering.

The works I have examined did not offer a representation of an other, yet they made an effective challenge to essentialized formulations of the self. They suggest that identity politics might best be served by acknowledging the subject as a fluid construction and attempting strategic interventions to ensure the continuance of this process. These works have demonstrated their ability to create an event that both invokes and disrupts the viewer's subjectivity and leaves the way open for the possibility that the viewer might keep going in the unfamiliar territory that the works have created.

Endnotes

1. Here I have in mind the explicit depictions of homosexuality in the work of Robert Mapplethorpe. The controversy surrounding these works is well documented, one useful compendium being Richard Bolton's *Culture Wars*.

2. Badiou's primary example of an event is the Russian Revolution. He also suggests that Paris, May 1968 may constitute an event: "it is an event – part of my subjectivation was forged in it, so I will remain faithful to it" (127).

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Shame in Alterities: Adrian Piper, Intersubjectivity, and the Racial Formation of Identity

Alexis Shotwell

Shifting Identities through Shame

There is a growing literature in racial justice circles calling for an attention to affect, and affect's role in creating positive antiracist cultures. Thinking about this literature brings to mind conceptual artist Adrian Piper's performance piece "*My Calling (Card) #1"* (1986-1990). This piece serves as a pre-printed, written intervention in racism manifest in social settings. It reads, in part,

Dear Friend, I am black. I am sure you did not realize this when you made / laughed at / agreed with that racist remark. . . . I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me. (Piper 1999: 135)

I am interested in this piece because it both highlights and creates gaps in the naturalized perception of race through shaming. It does this by re-identifying its interlocutor. *My Calling (Card) #1* is a discursive performance that makes an intercession in the nondiscursive – in the performative – through shame.[1] It deploys a call to a new identification in the process of identifying a particular act – laughter, agreement – as racist and thus shameworthy. Much of Piper's work on and around race similarly calls for a similar anti-racist re-identification, which shifts the grounds of identity.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's rich work on shame illuminates some of the dynamics of shame in Piper's work. Sedgwick reads queer performativity in particular, and identity formation in general, in relation to the affect of shame, arguing that shame expresses a failure of recognition, and, in that failure, a deep relationality. Shame marks a double movement toward "painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality" (36). Shame, Sedgwick argues, "floods into being as a moment, a disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication" (36). Such communication makes shame "integral to and residual in the processes by which identity itself is formed" (63) and thus a useful site for thinking about identity politics.

If Sedgwick is right to think that shame is a method of identification, can it also enable a kind of re-identification? Insofar as one feels shame, it seems that there is

a movement on the identificatory level – shame reveals something deep inside us. This pervading quality is one of the powers of affect. Because identity is fluid, the moment of shame cathects and reifies an already-present pattern that manifests as a solid identity. It may also be particularly able to reveal the fluidity of ostensibly solid identity formations. Because one has just been something one does not want to be, the possibilities and actualities of being otherwise are manifest and foreshadowed. Shame turns on an inter- and intra-subjective hinge, which is to say that I see myself in relation to others. I feel towards them – perhaps even when the feeling I manifest in relation to people who have shamed me or towards whom I feel shame is anger or resentment. Shame always relates to others – it marks one site in which we have been formed by the look and the presence of others. What might attending to shame as an always intersubjective, always other unease tell us about identity formation? What might a story of shame as identity constituting tell us about the racial formation of identity? Thinking about racialised shame can play a key role in two important projects: first, in thinking about identity, identity politics, and identity formation and, second, in working against racism.

Adrian Piper's performance, theory, and art objects stand as examples of how one might affect racialised internal conceptual frameworks.[2] I read the objects and performances she produces as aiming to effect deep identity shifts on the level of "race." Some of Piper's work articulates and deploys the affect of shame toward anti-racist ends. She moves toward these ends in at least three ways: her work confronts the viewer in a way that shames, it enacts shameful situations through their depiction, or it interpellates the viewer as the shaming agent. Each of these modes indicates a vector along which we might pursue an anti-racist subjectivity through shame-induced re-identification. I here take three groups of work as evocative and expressive of how Piper's work deploys shame. In each case, the affect of shame differently highlights identity formation and expression as deeply intersubjective.

Shaming Confrontation: *Calling (Card)*

My thinking about how the self is intimately connected to others begins at the site of the *Calling (Card).* This piece is an example of a performance shaming its viewer, who automatically becomes much more than a viewer. The calling card shifts the social space it enters by revealing the armature of that space – a social framework that is noticeable through being *other than* how the people involved had understood it.[3] This framework is made up of the relations that delineate it, and the selves formed and reformed in those relations. Piper says about this piece:

the situation is one in which I find myself in otherwise exclusively white company at a dinner or cocktail party, in which those present do not realize I am black. Thinking themselves in sympathetic company, they (or any one of them) proceed to make racist remarks. . . . (Piper 1996)

I am imagining, then, a scenario in which this card would be presented to someone we might call the "passive offender," a participant in the discussion who does not make a racist joke, but who laughs at it.[4] This person identifies as white, if she identifies racially; she considers herself non- or anti-racist, if she thinks about it at all; and perhaps she has been raised in an environment where explicit racism was relatively disallowed. This sort of offender would never intentionally offend or insult a person of color.

The passive offender functions within a framework of racial knowledge and classification, a network that stands as uninterrogated and unnoticed for her. This may be in part because she belongs to a racial grouping that allows her to naturalize the notion of whiteness in complex ways, many of them invisible to her. It is unlikely that she has thought about the racial identity of her fellow guests in any explicit way. This is partly because race is explicitly and persistently unconsidered by socially and racially dominant identities.[5] A white-classified subject's matrix of habit may never have been brought into "view." The experience of shame in this context is radical in that it can potentially bring into view a complex formation that the subject also disavows. The experience of being shamed – particularly in the active, agentful way Piper's presentation of the card enacts – in itself redelineates the identification of the white recipient of the card.

The identification and re-identification I read in this piece relies implicitly on the fact of one person's subjectivity bumping up against another person's. Because much of who we are proceeds through maintaining the armature of our selves uninterrogated, the framework with which we encounter the world is visible only when it conflicts with some other person's framework. Such disparities are visible in and make possible a shift of perception. Crucially, this shift may happen at the level of unconsidered identification. When Piper confronts racist behavior through shaming in this piece (here metonymic for a range of shaming and shamed situations), she makes visible a network of unspoken understandings in her listeners that had not necessarily been articulated; she highlights race as a social and systemic problem, not as a mere social gaff.

Enacting Shame

The moment of shame is one in which one is inescapably present in the site of one's self, one's body. Perhaps in virtue of this, it has a capacity to hold open, to not freeze, affective space. This capacity inheres in part in its unenunciated state, which can open up possibilities for experiencing the shaming situation, however briefly, without stabilizing it. Shame is an affect, with all the non-propositional content that this term evokes, and carries the potential to get at and under conceptual frameworks, to shift the terms on which life as usual proceeds. In other words, where people are avid practitioners of overt racism, *or* where they assert non-racist sensibility but persist in

enacting racist scripts, I have hope for the liberating possibilities of shifting their inarticulate frameworks through affect. Perhaps, in part, through shame.

The possibility of such shifting is invoked in Piper's work, from the explicit but unspoken series of *Catalysis* street performances, in which Piper made her body grotesque or socially unwieldy and explored spatial and embodied relationships between strangers, to the *Funk Lessons* series, in which Piper taught groups of people how to dance to funk music, to the disquieting drawings on newsprint of the *Vanilla Nightmares* series. These are all works in which shame is enacted in the process of experiencing the artwork, and which aim to spark an anti-racist re-identification.

Reading the *Catalysis* series as an enactment of shame is entirely dependent on projection and imagination; like much of Piper's work this series was a performance, and exists now only in memory and documentary traces. Reading these traces allows for a projection of what was at work in the pieces themselves, though only partially. That said, it seems that the series enacts the kind of shame one feels in response to someone else's abjection. The *Catalysis* series intentionally performs some of the social disease occasionally evoked in interactions with strangers – particularly strangers we read as unintelligible, dangerous, or demanding. In *Catalysis IV* Piper took a bus around Manhattan with a large towel protruding from her mouth, cheeks distended. In *Catalysis III* Piper soaked her clothes with paint and walked down the streets of New York, into Macy's, wearing a sign saying "Wet Paint" (Piper 1999: 128-29). In these performances, Piper references bodily norms of comportment by stepping outside them – by not taking up the social categories of either the "normal" or the "deviant." Instead, she occupies the liminal space of a shifting habitus, to use Pierre Bourdieu's term, delineated by an unlocalized but specific shame.[6] This is a shame felt internally but attached to the other – the site of the other's shame affecting us internally.

There is also a shame arising from within but attached to a felt conception of being seen as shameful by others. *Funk Lessons* is a piece in which Piper taught gallery visitors how to dance to funk music. Staged in the early 1980s, these pieces addressed people who did not usually dance to funk music and who were uncomfortable with it in various ways. Part of this discomfort consisted of a kind of shame attached to a variety of things: a racial / cultural shame manifest in a perception of the music itself as shameful; an anxiety around the corporeality of one's physical habitus – a worry that one is a bad dancer; or a feeling of the situation as contextually anxiety-provoking in ways that are also class and racially inflected. Most important for this discussion, however, is the sense in which this piece is racialised. Funk music, even at the time of these performances, was read and marked as black working-class music. Its legibility as such differed, we can assume, according to the venues that hosted the piece. Canadian and U.S. audiences likely reacted differently to it.[7] Dancing to music from outside the usually white middle class gallery population's milieu, in the gallery space, provides a kind of "habitus-bridge," a space of intervention in socially

implicated ways of being in one's body and in the world. Shame is enacted in these pieces as exorcism – dancing to funk music as a site of shame is confronted and transmuted through play and pleasure.

Piper argues that the drawings in her *Vanilla Nightmares* series (1986-1990) bring about conceptual change. They do this in that they bring "stereotypical nightmares to the surface of the page and of consciousness, cut them down to size, and depict them in explicit detail" (Piper 1996 v. I 252). The series is a commentary on and illustration of selected pages from the *New York Times* chosen for their "racially loaded content, their graphic imagery, their subliminal connotations, and the objective declarative voice in which they purport to speak" (252). The charcoal and oil crayon drawing Piper overlays on the newspaper page expresses what she calls the "subauthoritarian news that's not fit to print" (252). That news is "about the deep fears, anxieties, and fantasies about blacks that lurk beneath the surface of rational concept formation and language in racist consciousness: about blacks as [among other things] ridiculing, shaming, humiliating the victims of their rage; as laughing at their fear and confusion" (252).

Shame is recursively enacted in this series, spiraling from what one sees, rejects, or ignores. These drawings show up very differently in relation to the subject position of its viewer; white and black viewers have disparate "deep fears, anxieties, and fantasies about blacks" (Piper 1996 v. I 252). And this series is one in which a black / white binary in Piper's overall work becomes starkly visible; it is unclear how people otherwise or multiply situated on racial and ethnic lines are to read it. Again, Piper's intended audience for the series seems to be the predominately white gallery and museum crowd. Insofar as viewers identify with the white audience many of the figures in the drawings speak to, look at, or caress, the shame enacted might be a direct response to the speech, look, or caress depicted. But that response has at least two levels. Insofar as the viewer experiences first-order repulsion in response to the work, she may be reacting in stereotypically racist ways. She may also experience a second order sense of shame at her own response, perceiving it to be racist when she would disavow explicit racism in herself.

Several of the original newspaper texts are written over in German or English; some of them alter the text of the ad underlying Piper's drawing, incorporating it into the piece in communicative ways. *Vanilla Nightmares # 18* (1987) occupies an American Express ad with a crowd of black faces, eyes looking toward the viewer, some hands raised. The main original text "Membership has is Privileges" is highlighted, the parts of the faces that fall under it rubbed out to create a white space for the words. Subsidiary text is selectively highlighted in the same way; the original ad is impossible to completely decipher, and the newly-made text reads:

one of the privileges around the world you call home. It is the privilege of knowing you will be treated with respect even if you are a complete stranger in a strange land.

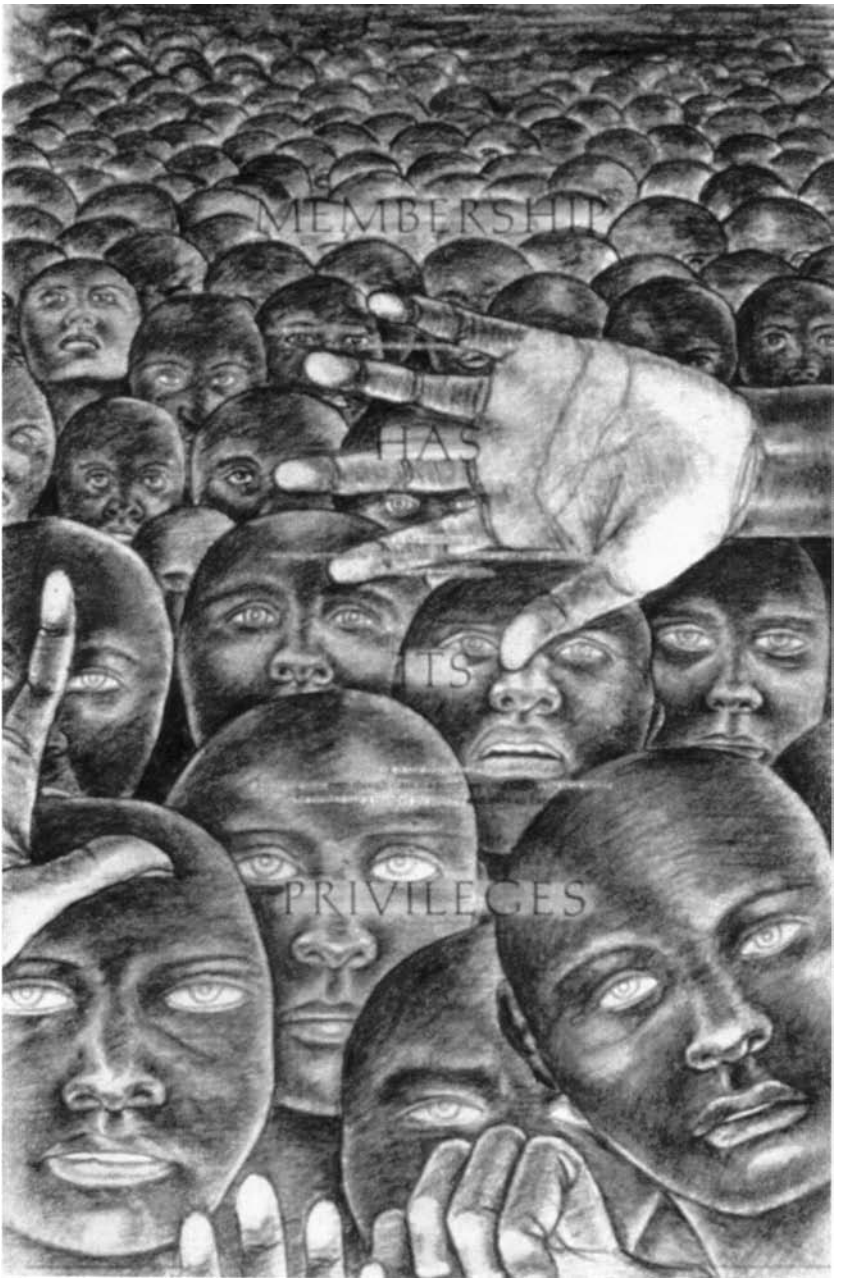

Figure 7 Adrian Piper, *Vanilla Nightmares #18* ©1987. Charcoal on newspaper, 22 & 3/16 × 13 & 11/16. Collection of the Williams College Museum of Art. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

It is the privilege of knowing you will never be treated like a number by anyone. (Piper 1996 v. I 235)

The piece attends to several layers of the original ad. It notices that only certain kinds of membership carry privilege, that many people are treated as complete strangers in what we might want to call their own land, that not everyone can call the world "home," that membership in some racialised groups has resulted in being "treated like a number" in more significant ways than perhaps American Express is thinking of, and that these histories and presents, among others, have had to be rubbed out in order to create the blank white space of the original page, on which floated the American Express slogan. Piper is restoring some of the cadence and the density, already present but invisible and unspoken, to the text.

The shame in this piece centers around racist narratives of faceless (or at least nameless) masses, numbered for convenience, occupying a strange land, through which the viewer travels with privilege and protection, American Express style. To the extent that the viewer experiences both a threat from the amassed faces and corollary shame at that sense of threat, the piece mobilizes the enactment of that shame toward an increased sense of the intersubjective. And the intersubjective is not always only interpersonal. The systems and structure calcified in the American Express card are also racist systems and structures; the individuals looking out of the altered ad at the viewer enact a shame that is agentful, distributed, and echoing beyond the individual level.

Becoming the One Who Shames

Shame manifests in a third mode in some of Piper's work. Some of her pieces interpellate their viewer as a shaming agent. Through combining directly addressed words and visuals of shameworthy situations, Piper positions her viewer as the other directing shame at the agents pictured. A good example of this mode is the *Land of the Free* series. One installation in this series pictures a young black man, eyes looking out of the image, head pinned to the ground by a (presumably white) police officer. A side panel holds the image of a lynched black man, hands bound. The overlaid text reads "Land of the Free Home of the Brave" (Piper 1999: 167).

The combination of text and image underline the scene as shameful, a meaning doubly signified through the deployment of U.S. narratives of the role of the state. Quoting the U.S. national anthem, picturing the nation's finest engaged in intensely repressive practices, the piece enmeshes the depiction of what actually was with an analysis of what the nation claims to be and with a call to manifest its claims. The viewer is then situated as part of a national polity containing multiple layers of hope, failure, and contradiction.

These layers are themselves sites of identification, dis-identification, and re-identification. As a motivator of racialised redefinition, it is important that shame is polymorphous in these respects. It attaches itself variously to the self and to things in

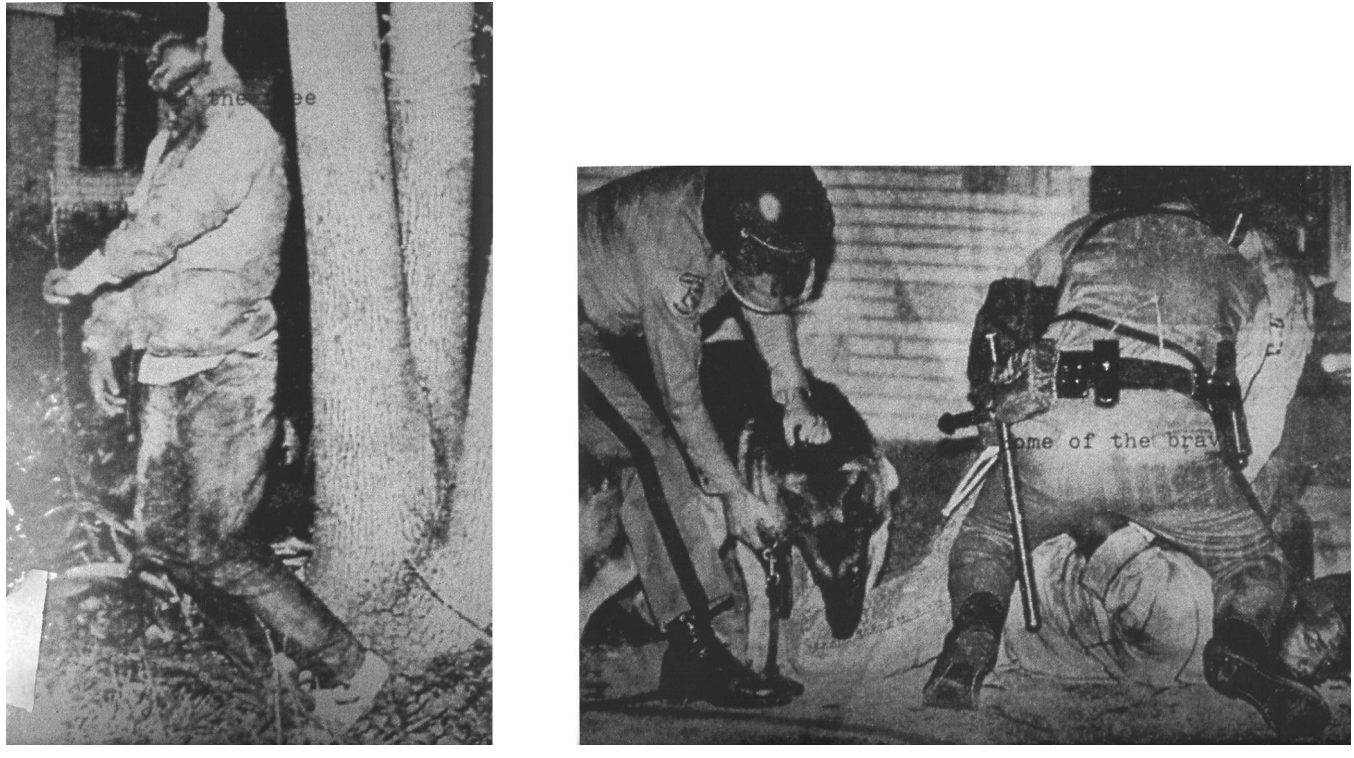

Figure 8 Adrian Piper, *Free* #2, 1989 ©. 2 black and white photographs, 48 × 30, 37 & 1/4 × 52 & 1/2. Collection of the artist. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

the world. One can feel shame for or towards oneself, on behalf of or towards someone else, and for something as broad as the actions of the nation one lives in. The shame one feels individually can have a similarly unsettled topography and a similarly protean relation of causes to effects – seemingly small events can produce pervasive shame. It may be difficult to delineate the bounds of shame; the effort to define what makes one feel shame may cause the feeling to expand and contract in ways that make it hard to "see" clearly.

Shame marks a non-essential relational self, one that by nature is malleable. While racist stances and acts are the stuff of racism they cannot imply finally fixed racist identities. Racist stances and acts indicate that one was racist, and they pattern the limits and possibilities for future actions. But the fact that racialised shame reveals something you are does not hold those patterns and possibilities constant. Rather, shame reveals something you "were then," perhaps "are now," but also a self you refuse to some degree in the very fact of feeling shamed. In other words, the experience of shame in the face of racism – one's own or other people's – discloses both present racism and also a potential for anti-racist praxis, embedded in the desire to deny the racist self. Shame is therefore a moment of contradiction in the multiple selves that make up our identities, a confrontation between the self one has been and the various selves one wants to have been. All of these selves are present and available for identification, manifesting at least the possibility for heterodox self-identification.

I want to conclude by attending, carefully and hesitantly, to the aspect of shame that is profoundly hopeful. Perhaps the most important aspect of shame for a liberatory project is the sense that insofar as white subjects feel shame in racist situations they manifest a self that has already shifted toward potentially less racist manifestations. The fact of feeling shame indicates a site of re-identification in process. When white people experience negative affect as shame in the face of racism, there is a possibility for choice: we can move away from the experience of shame in a direction that protects white primacy or we can move away from the experience of shame in a direction that emphasizes racism as intolerable**.** To be the sort of person who experiences negative affect around racism is already, it is true, to be the sort of person who may be prone to anti-racist re-identification. If shame is always about the other, the feeling of shame indicates a particular view of the other in question: that other is viewed as capable of shaming, hence of seeing and being seen as a person. So the experience of shame indicates an intersubjective relationship, where the actors involved are subjects in a strong sense, where they affect and morph one another, creating spaces for alterities that may suddenly redelineate the margins of the self. Shame's enactment of alterity, Piper's work tells us, signals a potentially radical ground for political transformation through intersubjective interaction.

Endnotes

1. The notion of a performative effect through performance is drawn from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Piper's work highlights the performative nature of racial formation as something that exists only in its enactment. An important aspect of Piper's work is the degree to which her performances denaturalize aspects of racial formation and whiteness, revealing them as performative.

2. Piper's work has, of course, changed dramatically over the three decades she has been an active conceptual artist. The works I consider here are those which take up the identification and transformation of racial formations most explicitly. It could be argued that Piper's artwork always takes up these issues, but in her early conceptual work and perhaps also in her recent *Color Wheel* series, racialization is involved in the work more implicitly. A more complete discussion of Piper's work than I can undertake here would include a discussion of how her theoretical stances, particularly those expressed in her philosophical writings on Kant, compared with her conceptual and actual art works.

3. I expand the term "armature" from its architectural and sculptural senses, where it signifies the usually hidden supporting form, often made out of wire or tubing and very crude, on top of which a building or sculpture is built.

4. I am following one of Piper's namings of this person's role in the scenario. I am not entirely sure that this is a useful framing; thinking of these roles as a simple binary along the lines of "passive" and "active" elides much of both the complexity and complicity of the "passive offender's" role, in particular.

5. I find Sue Campbell's discussion of dominant identities and calcified frameworks of racial expectation particularly helpful on this point.

6. Bourdieu defines the habitus as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (1990: 53). The habitus persists over time and can be deployed outside of the context of its production.

7. I speculate that in one performance in Nova Scotia the shame associated with learning the dance moves would have been less directly associated with its racial valence than the shame associated with a similar performance in California. Piper's comments about these performances give us little information about these differences, however.

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III. Negotiating Alterities – Spaces of Translation

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A Language of One's Own?: Linguistic Under-Representation in the Kashmir Valley

Ananya Kabir

O alibi of chronology, in which script
In your ledger will this narrative be lost?
(Agha Shahid Ali, "A History of Paisley")

In the Indian state (federal administrative unit) of Jammu and Kashmir (henceforth "Kashmir") and, specifically, in its symbolic heart, the Kashmir Valley, military instability resulting from territorial dispute since 1947 between India and Pakistan has been complicated, from 1989 onwards, by armed resistance to the Indian nation. The entire region now represents a long-term conflict zone marked by endemic violence and social fragmentation, with expected repercussions on Kashmiri collective subjectivity. I trace these repercussions through the ways in which the languages and literatures of Kashmir have been represented, both within Kashmir and within India in general. These structures of linguistic representation, or, as I argue, *under*-representation, reveal how the political conflict that has inevitably shaped the Kashmiri-speaking subject is accompanied by a more "private" conflict between different linguistic loyalties and loves. Kashmiri attempts to locate identity formation within a sense of a homogenous linguistic community are accordingly fraught with perceptions of alterity – of estrangement from Koshur, the indigenous language of the Kashmir Valley.

In his documentary, *Kun'ear* ("solitude"), on the current state of the Kashmiri language, Kashmiri filmmaker Abir Bazaz says: "I must speak for myself, in Kashmiri: that is *aazadi*" (Bazaz and Gaur).[1] This statement alerts us to the need to place the political and cultural complexities surrounding Koshur – as Kashmiri is known to its native speakers – squarely within the context of Kashmiri aspirations of *aazadi* ("freedom") and the massive psychic confusions that the non-attainment of those aspirations

has wreaked on Kashmiri speakers. Emblematic of those confusions is the word *aazadi* itself: a Persian loan-word into North Indian languages, available to bi- and multilingual Kashmiris today in two pronunciations, depending on whether they are speaking Urdu or Koshur. Semantically, too, *aazadi* fluctuates between meanings: the maximalist version of complete sovereignty from India and Pakistan, the attenuated desire for self-rule as in greater federal autonomy, or, at the very least, greater dignity within the Indian Union, or even an interiorization of sovereignty as democracy, and democracy as individual freedom.[2]

Notwithstanding these differences, *aazadi* fundamentally signals the yearning for a confident and well-defined Kashmiri identity, an identity grounded in history. To signal this identity – usually in the context of its perceived erosion due to political conflict – Kashmiris frequently use the term *kashmiriyat* ("kashmiri-ness"). *Kashmiriyat* is often seen as suspended within the current political conflict, with an almost messianic reliance on the concept of *aazadi* to ensure its rightful restoration: when Kashmiris will have obtained *aazadi*, *kashmiriyat* will have returned to them. Like *aazadi*, however, *kashmiriyat* is a varyingly understood word, one that almost everyone interested in contemporary Kashmir invokes whether to dismiss, deride, or reaffirm. In this nexus between two elusive concepts, *kashmiriyat* and *aazadi*, the history and current status of Koshur plays an important role that has nevertheless largely escaped the sustained notice of political scientists and historians. On the other hand, the political and historical contestations over Kashmir and Koshur rarely enter the only corner of academia where Koshur makes a frequent appearance: phonology, language classification and sociolinguistics.

Whether concerned overtly with language, politics, or history, therefore, scholarship on Kashmir leaves one with but the haziest of ideas that language has been at all implicated within Kashmiri identity politics. Neither has the otherwise hyperactive Indian media shone its spotlight on Koshur. These gaps are neither coincidences nor accidents. Rather, they are symptomatic of wider issues of representation, cultural capital and control. For when we turn to the imaginative expressions of Kashmiris themselves, it becomes clear that not just the language, but its entire historical and sociolinguistic hinterland, is intimately connected with what Mridu Rai, a recent historian of Kashmir, calls "a sense of a community-in-neglect" (185).[3] Rai's concern is with how physical sites and political spaces were used to formulate this sense within the Dogra princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, whose end in 1947 inaugurated the confusions over Kashmir's status in decolonised South Asia. My parallel concern lies in how language was, and continues to be, a similar site of forging the sense of "community-in-neglect."

Configured particularly as the long-neglected mother tongue, language has become a trope of marginalization, dispossession, trauma and shame among contemporary Kashmiri artists and writers. This trope must be understood alongside the relocation of the struggle for *aazadi* from the collective memory of the autocratic,

non-Koshur-speaking Dogra rule over the Valley (1846-1947) to the contemporary experience of the deeply unequal relationship between the central government in Delhi and the region of Kashmir. Here it is useful to remember that postcolonial India has mapped its federal units (states) onto linguistic groups. The relationship between the centre and the linguistically organised states offers a psychic model for the collective cultural bargaining between dominant and dominated groups, executed through pan-national cultural discourses (Kabir). This psycho-political map has been crucial in containing ethnic conflicts in most parts of India; however, from 1947 onwards, Jammu and Kashmir has been much less successful than other states in this regard.

The coincidence of linguistic and administrative boundaries, and the power sharing between center and states, generally ensures the vitality of the different regional languages within a pluralist federal democratic framework. The state executes its responsibility for linguistic jurisdiction within the parameters of a pan-Indian three-language formula, whereby English, Hindi (the official languages of India) and a third language (de facto the state-level "official" language) is compulsory at primary and secondary levels. However, Kashmiri seems to have slipped out of the three-language safety-net. Ostensibly, the political parameters dictating Kashmiri's teaching – and, ultimately, government patronage – echo those of the sixteen other regional languages, designated "literary" within the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. But, listening to what Kashmiris upholding different investments in and understandings of *aazadi* have to say about this inequality, one complaint emerges as a constant. Kashmiri is taught neither at primary nor at secondary schools in the Kashmir Valley, where it is the mother tongue of 97% of the population.[4]

In the Kashmir Valley, school students learn, and receive instruction in, Urdu, Hindi and English – anything but Kashmiri. Why? This question awaits adequate and impartial scholarly enquiry – especially as those working on the Kashmiri language often seem trapped by their own subject positions. An illuminating example is offered by sociolinguist Makhan Tickoo's examination of Kashmiri's status as "a majority language reduced to the level of a minority language" (30). Working from responses by Kashmiri teachers to questions about Kashmiri's pedagogic suitability, Tickoo exposes their internalised assumptions towards their mother tongue: Kashmiri has no "script of its own" (32), is a "mere dialect" (33), its vocabulary is a mélange of different source languages, it lacks proper grammar, it is wanting in scientific and technical vocabulary. Tickoo reads these pronouncements as evidence of a "colonised consciousness" (33) created by Kashmiri's long existence "in the shadow of larger languages" (36). Having historically been reduced to a "domestic vernacular" (32), "a transactional language" rather than a "true language of learning" (37), Kashmiri is now perceived by its own speakers as an unproductive language.

Tickoo attributes this perception to the privileging of English medium education in private schools. However, this shift in emphasis begs further questions. All Indians

emerging from private "English medium schools" (to use the common Indian term for schools that conduct their teaching in English) do not necessarily suffer from "a colonised linguistic consciousness;" why should Kashmiri speakers particularly succumb to this fate? Moreover, what about the impact of the other languages of prestige, politics and administration historically used by Kashmiris, namely, Sanskrit, Persian, and Urdu? Tickoo appears unwilling to unravel the full implications of these issues. Pertinent in this context is his silence regarding the sociolinguistic impact of the Kashmir conflict, even though the year his research was conducted, 1989-90, was precisely when the Valley exploded into armed resistance. This aporia highlights how academic, especially linguistic, analysis can furnish a retreat from violence, power struggles and historic contestations within which the researcher may see him / herself painfully implicated.

As Tickoo's name indicates, he belongs to the small, high-profile and empowered Pandit (Hindu) community within the predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley (4-5% of the population before their recent exodus), whose historical control of Kashmir's "linguistic capital" through proficiency in its high status languages is reflected in their contemporary command of Kashmiri linguistic scholarship. This class positioning helps explicate Tickoo's silences and compulsions. Firstly, as an elite Kashmiri, he is unavoidably implicated within a value-laden multilingualism, which, even as it seeks to save Kashmiri from subservience, literally cannot help but speak in higher-prestige languages. Secondly, Tickoo's insistence on his respondents' love for Kashmiri embodies an inescapable recognition of the affective register surrounding the mother tongue, a register that sociolinguistics probes but cannot ventriloquize because of the "academic distance" it must maintain. Thirdly, Tickoo's emphasis on Koshur having "no script of its own" – he begins his analysis with this point even while admitting it is not the primary problem – points to the ideological significance of controversies surrounding the most appropriate script for this language.

Affect, multilingualism and script: these three aspects haunt the collective psyche of contemporary Kashmiris, whether they write academic treatises on language, or whether they engage in more self-consciously "creative" work. As Bazaz declares in his film *Kun'ear*, "Kashmiri: the language my mother hoped I would never learn, but which I did, and from her." This statement powerfully suggests the contradictory affect of shame and love clinging to Koshur. These twin affects complicate elite fluency and discursive literacy in languages such as Urdu or English: as Neerja Mattoo explains in the preface to her translated anthology of Kashmiri short stories, "the desire to translate from Kashmiri into English was born to pay off a debt to two languages: to a mother tongue which remained unused except for commonplace communication, and to a foreign language in which I learnt to think and express myself" (2). The logic of cultural retrieval remains bound up with the burden of that affective charge while compensating for elite multilingualism. The ever-present sense of cultural loss

distilled out of these contradictions is often troped through discontinuities of script – as suggested by my epigraph, taken from Agha Shahid Ali, today the most internationally renowned of Kashmir's many contemporary poets (Ali 67-68).

That such laments are typically voiced in English suggests more than the clichéd breast-beating of a deracinated elite. Although the continuing "colonial consciousness" of its speakers certainly stems from Koshur's low cultural capital, itself derived from its long subordination to other high status languages (Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu, English), one wonders why Koshur's rich and long literary tradition has not triggered the necessary decolonization of the Kashmiri mind. After all, numerous Sufi poets, active in Kashmiri since the fourteenth century onwards, are intimately woven into the fabric of Kashmiri narratives of identity, and are well known throughout India as icons of *kashmiriyat*. Notwithstanding this high profile enjoyed by a certain kind of Kashmiri literature, it is important to note that Koshur has not been recognized as a "modern" literary language in India, *despite* the existence of an impressive corpus of twentieth-century Kashmiri poetry of a modernist and leftist temper. In the absence of discourses privileging such writing, Kashmiri's pre-modern poetic tradition has been reified into conceptions of a language with a rich but fossilized pre-modern literature. "Pre-modern" shades easily into perceptions – and self-perceptions – of the language's *non*-modernity, adding to the crisis of identity predicated on linguistic under-representation.

Thus Badrinath Raina, Kashmiri professor at Delhi University, asks: "*Kashmiriyat* on all levels: why did that not translate into an immediate deploying of the language in school?" He answers his own question: "After 1957, Sheikh Abdullah [Kashmir's most charismatic leader] introduced Kashmiri as a medium of instruction in schools. Sheikh Abdullah went behind bars in 1963, and so did the Kashmiri language; although Abdullah was eventually released, Kashmiri remains imprisoned." Poet Rahman Rahi echoes this sentiment: "After 1963, Indianization was imposed on Kashmir. The politicians say, send them [Kashmiris] money and all will be OK. But for their spiritual advancement, they need the Kashmiri language. [Instead of providing means to teach the language] they [Indians] say, 'we want the territory, we want the tourism.'"[5] These responses return linguistic under-representation to the (failed) power sharing between the hegemonic center and the state of Kashmir, the latter often seen as colluding with the central government against the interests of Kashmiris. However, one factor that these arguments gloss over is Kashmiri emotional investment in those high status languages to which Kashmiri has remained a "domestic vernacular."

Many a Kashmiri has lamented the status of Kashmiri to me in English, while speaking to their children in Urdu, and addressing their domestic help in Kashmiri. In the literary domain, more self-conscious choices have been made: several contemporary Kashmiri poets turned to Kashmiri only after initially writing in Urdu and, in some cases, in Persian and Hindi as well. These languages compete with Kashmiri on the

basis of affect as much as prestige. For educated Kashmiris today, what Rahi calls the "ehsaas ka dayra" ("the circle of affect", Bazaz and Gaur) but restricts to the mother tongue, undeniably overlaps with the affective orbit of Urdu. Bashir Manzar, a Kashmiri poet writing in Urdu, admits, "I myself don't know why I write in Urdu. I have tried umpteen times to write in Kashmiri, my mother tongue, but have failed. Maybe from a very young age I read a lot of Urdu poets and as Kashmiri was, and still is not, taught in schools, I couldn't go for it." However he did insist that "I love Urdu, but *not as much* as I love Kashmiri."[6] We note the affective orbit of Urdu pulling the writer out of the Valley – whether towards Pakistan, where it is the state language, or towards the Northern Indian plains, which are the language's original home.

It seems to me that this centrifugal, affective pull of Urdu is ultimately more traumatic for Kashmiri discourses of identity, crystallized as these are around assertions of alterity, than the imposition of Hindi through the collusion of state and central governments, or even the global prestige of English. Here, the issue of script emerges as another crucial complicating factor. Kashmiri officially shares with Urdu the Perso-Arabic script. Historically, however, other scripts have been used – an early Sanskritic script, Sharada; and subsequently, the Devanagari script (a later derivation), in which Hindi is also written. The state government's choice of Perso-Arabic over Devanagari inevitably has been viewed in the light of the "communalization of script" in North India: the increasing association of Perso-Arabic scripts with Islam, and of Sanskritic scripts with Hinduism. The splitting of a composite North Indian lingua franca into two mutually unreadable languages – Hindi (written in Devanagari) and Urdu (written in Perso-Arabic) is the best known casualty of this process; but at least that issue has been "settled" through Pakistan adopting Urdu as its state language and India fetishizing it as a relic of its Mughal past.

No such settlement has occurred with Kashmiri; in fact, the already traumatic associations of the divided script of Urdu / Hindi have obviously exacerbated the schism between Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims – note Tickoo's insistence (buttressed by his citation of another Pandit linguist, Braj Kachru) that the Perso-Arabic script is completely phonetically mismatched to Kashmiri. However, this schism was laid bare by the fear-induced migration of the Pandits from the Valley at the height of the political turmoil in the nineties; furthermore, despite some Kashmiri narratives of an ideally syncretistic past, it was probably already embedded within the class structures of the Valley. The continued battle over script may fit into the neat paradigms of Hindu-Muslim antagonism, but to a certain extent this reading is overdetermined; I consider it much more productive to read it as symptomatic of deeper levels of psychic splinterings – and tie it in, therefore, with the preoccupations with affect and multi / bilingualism that I identified earlier.

A succinct illustration of these processes is a poster by Inder Tikku alias Indersalim, a Kashmiri performance artist. The poster comprises a large double photograph of

himself as "Hindu" (identified by a caste mark) and "Muslim" (identified by a beard and cap) respectively. Inscribed under each photograph is the word "Indersalim," which Tikku calls his "conceptual name," and which is itself a hybrid comprised of "Hindu" and "Muslim" elements ("Inder" and "Salim" respectively). Each photograph bears the signature in the "appropriate" script: Perso-Arabic for the "Muslim" image and Devanagari for the "Hindu" one. This doubling proclaims the self-as-other while splitting the image – and psyche – in two near-identical halves. The repetition of the artist's name through different scripts underwrites, ironizes, and laments this simultaneous splitting/doubling. Within the gallery spaces it has been exhibited in,[7] the poster, typically arranged in repeating rows to cover the wall and the floor of its assigned space, relentlessly and endlessly reiterates this split without any hope of formal closure.

This is the very lament that is voiced in Agha Shahid Ali's question, cited in my epigraph, "In which script . . . will this narrative be lost?" Like the name "Indersalim," Ali's poem, "A History of Paisley" enacts the attempted retrieval of one such lost narrative. In this poem, the air of Kashmir that "chainstitched itself till the sky hung its bluest tapestry" and the Kashmiri "shawls bound for Egypt" are both united by the paisley shape, and both kinds of paisleys are united by the Hindu myth of Shiva and Parvati that Ali cites as an epigraph to the poem: "their footsteps formed the paisley when Parvati, angry after a quarrel, ran away from Shiva" (66). The poem thus sutures the paisley motif, ubiquitous on Kashmiri shawls, to the myth that attributes the paisley shape of the Jhelum River, flowing through the Valley, to the footprints of the Hindu goddess, Parvati, consort of Shiva. This suturing of myth, nature and traditional Kashmiri craft – weaving, embroidery – into a memorial for Kashmir, and for *kashmiriyat*, retrieves a "history of paisley" that is actually a counter-history to the limitations of narratives that are not preserved in language but splintered through multiple scripts and multiple linguistic legacies.

A similar turn to the affective dimension of script and multilingualism is seen in the work of Kashmiri Pandit sculptor Rajendar Tiku, which compulsively suggests rupturing and suturing through leather knots, thread, and nails. In his works, the vestigial, attenuated marks of a complex language crystallize in another ubiquitous element: indecipherable graffiti scratched on surfaces. In "Fragments of A White River," a long, low open chest contains slices of white marble interspersed with twigs that jut out as loops and pegs – a three-dimensional rendering of the same graffiti. Reflected in a mirror that forms the base of the chest, suggesting the white river of his childhood memory, the unreadable script embodies the unresolved dialectic between the forces of nostalgia, yearning, and memory, as well as guilt. For the sculptor estranged from the Kashmir Valley first by choice, and then out of necessity (having first left the Valley in order to teach in the city of Jammu, he found himself unable to return once the violence had begun), script becomes a visual trope for a loss of connectivity to

the Valley of his childhood and his roots, and to the production of an identity based on the alterity of those who originate from it and speak its language.

Paradoxically, though, it is linguistic loss as much as the hope of linguistic retrieval that configures attempts of contemporary Kashmiri writers and intellectuals to rebuild, through and within language, a more robust Kashmiri identity. A self-imposed shame of having neglected the mother tongue seems to have become an increasingly pressing burden as well as a necessity. The ever-present longing for the mother tongue, sharpened by the love for, and fluency in, other languages, such as Urdu, articulates, indeed, confirms, the community-in-neglect; especially when Kashmiri itself is not used. It is significant, therefore, that Kashmiri poets writing today in Urdu, Kashmiri and English repeatedly express their lack of political agency through images of stifling, silence, and suffocation. Thus the poet Naseem Shifai writes in Kashmiri:

> *Were someone to seize my neck*
> *I would bow my head*
> *Were someone to question me*
> *I would be unable to answer*
> *If any decision emerged in my mind*
> *I would hide it.*[8]

Likewise Bashir Manzar writes in Urdu:

> *That I told the truth was itself a big accusation*
> *But when I lied new accusations were found for me*

Elsewhere, he exhorts ironically,

> *Break the pen, spill the ink, burn the paper*
> *Lock your lips, be silent, people.*[9]

The simultaneous loss of language and loss of script suggested by these images are explicitly brought together in several poems by Agha Shahid Ali in his collection *The Country Without a Post Office*. To his reference to script in "A History of Paisley," we may add the "half-torn words" and the indecipherable "script of storms" in "A Footnote to History," and the "torn water" of the Hindu god Brahma's voice in "Son et Lumiere in The Shalimar Garden."

This recurrent poetic vocabulary suggests an infinite displacement of the primal loss of the mother tongue. The loss of the Kashmiri language is rarely mentioned directly, but is compulsively troped through references to images of destruction, loss,

illegibility, or through references to other languages altogether, as in Ali's fine "Ghazal," which asseverates:

> *The only language of loss left in the world is Arabic*
> *These words were said to me in a language not Arabic* (74)

However, the language that attests to linguistic loss can also become a site of other renewals, as Shifai puts it in the poem I quoted earlier:

> *In their jars are contained*
> *Wondrous water*
> *Come, you too drink this*
> *It is nectar*
> *Let no-one say to me*
> *Your throat is blue*

The writer takes on society's pain, transforming poison into nectar through the very organ of speech – the throat; at the same time, the image itself performs an act of cultural suturing by bringing the Hindu myth of Shiva Neelakantha (the Blue-Throated One) into the expressive space of a Kashmiri Muslim poet.

Can such nostalgia for pre-Islamic cultural layers effectively compensate for linguistic under-representation through high politics and dominant cultural discourses operative both without and within? Rajendar Tiku's piece "Legend Flowers" suggests that such nostalgia can be productive only when that which is enclosed is set free: here, golden flowers blossom out of branches covered in the sharada script, now used only for Pandit ritualistic purposes. In the expressive works of Kashmiris today, we see everywhere the traces of language in conflict: lost language, neglected language, dying language, but also, potentially, language transformed. For such a transformation to take place, though, Kashmiri speakers have to face squarely their own complex relationship to those issues of script, bilingualism and affect with which their desires for "a language of their own" and for *aazadi* remain complexly and confusedly intertwined. Only then can Agha Shahid Ali's hope emerge as truly prophetic:

"What is the blessed word? . . . One day the Kashmiris will pronounce that word truly for the first time" (17)

Endnotes

1. I am grateful to Abir Bazaz for making this documentary available to me; as indeed I am to all the artists, poets and writers cited in this article for their time and patience. I would also like to record my gratitude to the late Agha Shahid Ali's father, Agha Ashraf Ali, for his hospitality. Travel to Kashmir for fieldwork several times during 2003-04 was made possible by the generosity of the British Academy.

2. These shifting meanings are discernible in the responses of a wide range of Kashmiri youth available in the privately circulated report written for Oxfam (India) Trust by Gowhar Fazili, Idrees Kanth and Sarwar Kashani, *The Impact of Violence on the Student Community in Kashmir* (April 2003).

3. This excellent piece of research on the pre-1947 Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir is supplemented by another valuable work on pre-1947 Kashmiri history (Zutshi); for an up-to-date perspective on Kashmir from the standpoint of conflict resolution and political science, see Bose.

4. These and following observations are drawn from my fieldwork in Srinagar and Jammu during 2003-04.

5. Both quotes from Bazaz and Gaur, *Kun'ear*.

6. Private communication, October 2003.

7. For instance, at the SAHMAT show, December 2002-January 2003, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi.

8. The poem and its Hindi translation was made available to me through private communication, August 2003; the English translation is mine.

9. Bashir Manzar, *Dayre ka Safar*; translations made available through private communication, October 2003.

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Transgenerational Mediations of Identity in Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* and Marcel Beyer's *Spies*

Silke Horstkotte

The widespread and diverse concern with identity, which has recently spread from social and political sciences to the humanities, represents an important turn away from the exclusive focus on individual subjects to more collective matters. Unlike the subject, with its close ties to interiority, to cognition and the mind, and to philosophical investigations into the preconditions of self-knowledge, the concept of identity is premised on concrete, intersubjective interactions between the individual and the collective. The following contribution focuses on one particular type of interaction, namely on communications within the family. The family unit is fundamental in relating collective identities to more personal concerns and vice versa because the presence of several generations provides a historical background to the personal identity of individual family members. The family is also the arena in which individual and collective identities are shaped and constructed in concrete intersubjective interactions, in particular through the medium of family discussions. Finally, the family provides an important focus through which literary artifacts pursue questions of identity and alterity.

I shall investigate the function of family communication through a reading of two contemporary novels that deal with the troubled identity of young Germans: Marcel Beyer's *Spies* (2000) and Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* (2001). Ever since WW II, but especially since re-unification, what it means to be German has been a weighty and complex question, and one that is even today far from resolved. Its most recent manifestation is the discussion whether the role of Germans during WW II was only that of perpetrators, or if there were also German victims – because of the bombing raids on German cities, which killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, and because of the flight and deportation from the East. Closely related to this is the question whether Germans have to continue feeling guilty about the war – even those Germans

who were born long after the Holocaust. Both discussions are based on the assumptions that individual identity is a result of collective concerns and that the relation between the individual and the collective is mediated by the family, in particular by family memories. However, this relation is usually not made explicit. I want to consider this hidden mediation of identity through the figure of the transgenerational, which is a special form of memory that intervenes between the personal and the collective. I shall do so by discussing the relation between individual, family, and national identity as mediated through place and (translated) memory.

Transgenerational traumatization is a concept that has been extensively developed in reference to the children of Holocaust survivors (Alphen 1997; Epstein; Felman and Laub; Friedlander). However, some researchers have argued that the children and grandchildren of German war criminals can be thought of as being traumatized in a similar manner (Bar-On; Eckstaedt). This is a highly problematic argument since the psychoanalytic conception of transgenerational traumatization, understood as an unconscious process of transference, can easily be used for exculpatory purposes. I therefore do not conceptualize transgenerationality as a psychoanalytic phenomenon, but as a narrative process of memory which is played out in concrete family interactions and which is constitutive of identity. Transgenerational memory constitutes a process of translation: memories are not simply "transmitted" in a transparent manner, but have to be re-actualized by each new generation.

Memories are central to our conception of self and of identity (Schacter 93). However, narrative memory not only constitutes the core of personal identity, it also guarantees a continuous exchange between personal and collective identities and memories. According to Maurice Halbwachs' classical theory of memory, it is the individual who remembers, but that which can be remembered is determined by the social context (*cadres sociaux*). Thus, individual memory (and identity) are socially conditioned and are prone to active change and manipulation. As Jonathan Crewe has indicated, this makes "[the] subject of memory . . . definitively a social subject" (75). At the same time, the dialogic and narrative nature of collective memory makes it "more akin to a collective fiction than to a neurological imprint of events or experiences" (75).

This idea has been further developed by Jan Assmann through the concept of "communicative memory." Assmann distinguishes between a communicative memory, which by and large corresponds to Halbwachs' *mémoire collective*, and cultural memory, which constitutes a system of objectified culture as it is mirrored in texts, images, rituals, buildings and monuments. Communicative memory is related to specific collectives, for instance families, neighborhoods, political parties or clubs, but since each individual can be a member of multiple collectives, it can also participate in multiple identities and memories. Communicative memory reaches back about three or four generations (less than cultural memory) and is based on actual interactions between the members of a collective. Thus, the generational horizon travels with the

progress of the present point in time. Moreover, communicative memory is limited not only temporally, but also spatially: in a certain sense, it is local. Unlike cultural memory, it does not stretch beyond the geographical space inhabited by a particular family or other social group.

The concept of a dialogic exchange between individual and collective memory offers intriguing perspectives for the study of national identity discourses. In Germany, especially since re-unification, the problem of how to remember the national past in general, and Nazism in particular, has become a somewhat pressing concern, not least because the generation of Nazi perpetrators is fast dying out. Thus, younger generations of Germans have to work out which experiences from the Nazi era can and should be preserved as part of the cultural, social, and not least, familial memory. "Germany" emerges as a geographical space shared between generations, with memories needing to be placed in the present context by each new generation.

While official memory discourses in Germany are still dominated by an identification with the victims, literary texts about the "Third Reich" increasingly focus on the children and grandchildren of perpetrators. Thus, ever since the emergence of so-called "Väterliteratur" [literature about the fathers] of the 1970s and early 80s, literary artifacts have played an important role as media of transgenerational identity discourses. As Wolfgang Hardtwig has observed, fictional literature generally plays a key role for the mediation of recent historical experience, and one that crucially differs from that of historical research. In particular, it is the special attention paid to individual experience that distinguishes fictional from historiographic discourses. Because memory crucially shapes personal identity and because of the narrative nature of transgenerational memory, before all collective meaning, literary texts are especially apt at portraying memory and identity (116).

Marcel Beyer's *Spie*s and Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* are paradigmatic for the fictional treatment of transgenerational mediations of memory. Both novels deal with the question what it means to be the child or grandchild of a German soldier, a member of the Nazi party, of the Legion Condor or even of the Waffen-SS. In addition, both texts inquire how this special familial identity can be represented in literature, and thus be made relevant to collective matters. The novels of Beyer and Seiffert are revealing because they treat the figure of the transgenerational in a highly self-reflexive manner. A crucial aspect of this self-reflexivity is the subtext on media and mediation in both novels, with the narrative mediating between individual and collective or familial identity through the use of photographs – photos of their parents and grandparents which the protagonists look at, analyze, destroy and bury. In Beyer's novel in particular, photos serve as tools of a self-conscious narration that constantly exposes its own mediated and fictional status. At the same time, the photographs reflect on the role of the family album, and of the family in general, for identity processes inside and outside of fictional literature. Transgenerational memory serves as a process of

translation: narrativizing also means translating, particularly when it is an intermedial process involving photography and verbal text.

At the heart of Beyer's and Seiffert's novels is the question what exactly it is that is transmitted or translated in transgenerational interactions. As Ernst van Alphen argued in a recent paper, the knowledge that later generations have of a family's past is "the result of a process of constructing, of conveying, of combining historical knowledge and the memories of others. It is not indexical in nature, but rather the result of projecting historical, familial knowledge of a past one is disconnected from" (2004). The research project "Transmission of Historical Consciousness," directed by Harald Welzer, has revealed how communicative memory works in family communications. Through a series of individual and family interviews, which included three generations (Nazi perpetrators, children and grandchildren), Welzer arrives at a highly plausible model that differentiates between cognitive knowledge about history, as it is imposed through schools and media, and emotional ideas about the past. What is remarkable about such emotional ideas is that they can conserve ties to and fascinations with the Nazi past that are strangely unconnected to other forms of historical knowledge. Thus, knowledge about the Nazi past, as well as historical consciousness in general, derives from two sources: the knowledge-based "dictionary of the Nazi past" and a second reference system with a more emotional basis: the so-called "album," which is made up of concrete people (parents, grandparents and other relatives) as well as letters, photographs, and personal documents. Since the Holocaust is part of family history in Germany, dictionary and album stand side by side on the living room bookshelf, as it were, and family members are given the task of getting the contradictory contents of the two books to agree. This task is usually solved by assigning a role to the (grand-)parents that exempts them from the nasty and disagreeable things listed in the "dictionary," thus translating their behavior and histories into culturally acceptable terms. One important way in which this agreement can be reached is through family discussions, which have the hidden purpose of arriving at a historical narrative with which all family members can live (Welzer 9f). This intersubjectively constructed family narrative can differ significantly from the actual memories of the perpetrator generation; for instance, Welzer cites several examples of families where the grandchildren present their grandparents as committed resistance fighters, even if the grandfather is an incurable anti-Semite who freely admits to having taken part in mass shootings of Jews during the Holocaust.

However, it remains problematic that the study was designed in such a way that only families which had already discussed the Nazi past and the specific roles of the perpetrator generation could be interviewed. Thus, Welzer's model does not provide any insight into the dynamic of families whose treatment of the "Third Reich" is not based on open discussion, but on silence and repression. Since the families described in Beyer's and Seiffert's books belong in the latter category, I would like to complement

the model of narrative transmission with Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory." In Hirsch's formulation, postmemory refers to the special form of memory typical of the children of Holocaust survivors and constitutes the "response of the second generation to the trauma of the first" (2001: 8). The term postmemory is somewhat misleading since transgenerational transmissions do not represent a genuine form of memory but a highly constructive narrative of the past. Hirsch herself underscores this aspect when she explains that postmemory "characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation" (1997: 22). The translational aspect of transgenerational transmission can thus be brought forward as an element that Hirsch's term underplays: the way narratives about the past are not transferred between generations intact, but always in a transformed or translated manner.

What makes postmemory a useful concept for the analysis of Beyer's and Seiffert's texts is the fact the Hirsch does not conceptualize the dominating narratives as explicitly verbal. On the contrary: "narrative" in this context refers to an unspoken narrative framing that is at most hinted at in a hidden and surreptitious manner (Hirsch 1997: 21-40). The ambivalence of a memory of which the central contents are known, but have never been explicitly verbalized, is typical not only for the secondary memory of the children of survivors, but also for the children and grandchildren of the perpetrator generation as they are depicted in Seiffert's and Beyer's texts.

Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* consist of three formally unconnected novellas dealing with three generations of young Germans who do not seem to be related to each other. It describes their attempts to work through experiences and memories (their own and others') of WW II. Point of departure and model of these stories are photographs. The first story, "Helmut," follows a young photographer through 1930s and 40s Berlin. Helmut was born with a crippled arm, making him something of an outsider. From this marginal position, he tries to capture the spirit of the times through his photographs – a self-appointed task at which he fails spectacularly: Helmut is unable to capture on film the only real Nazi atrocity he witnesses, a deportation of a group of gypsies (39-41). This episode illustrates that even direct, personal memory is already the result of a translation. Here, the experience needs to be translated into a photographic image to be successful (to prove that the deportation really "took place").

While Helmut is already not a direct participant in Nazi crimes, the relation of personal to familial and national identity becomes even more complex in the second story, "Lore." The protagonist is a young girl, the daughter of Nazi criminals, who at the end of the war is forced to flee from Bavaria to her Hamburg grandmother together with her younger brothers and sisters. Like Helmut's, Lore's identity is mediated through photographs. Lore's family album contains more than harmless family snapshots, since the photos also document that her parents were Nazis. While the Allied Forces

invade the village, Lore's mother is busy burning the most incriminating photos (75f). Nevertheless, both parents are arrested. Later, Lore buries the remaining photos showing her father in uniform, even though she does not yet fully understand what is dangerous about the photos (140). The realization what the photos "mean" comes only when Lore sees a photo of someone wearing the same uniform as "Vati" in a newspaper next to photos of mounds of dead Jews (203). Lore now has to reconcile two conflicting sets of memories: her personal childhood memories, and the official memory discourse erected through the Holocaust photos, which are also shown in public places as part of the re-education campaign of the Allied Forces. Because these photos challenge everything Lore knows about her parents, it is much easier for her to deny their evidence and to accept the conspiracy theory she has picked up from a grown-up conversation: the photos are fakes intended to discredit the vanquished Germans (175f). It therefore appears that translation is resisted: no mediation occurs between Lore's personal memories of her parents and the incriminating photographs.

A similar identity conflict is played out in the third novella, "Micha," which features the attempts of Micha, a member of the grandchildren generation, to reconcile his familial identity with the Holocaust photos in history books. Micha looks at these photos in the context of a research into putative war crimes of his grandfather, which are part of his search for his familial and personal identity. The question whether his grandfather was a war criminal is immediately relevant for Micha's personal identity because it forms the basis for both his relation to his family, and the relation to his unborn child. Throughout the novella, Micha is busy situating himself within a family network. The novella starts off with one such construction:

This is Michael. His Oma's name is Kaethe, and she was married to Askan. Oma Kaethe. Opa Askan . . . Just lately, Michael has taken to mapping his family. In queues, on trains, in idle moments, he will lay them out in his head; layers of time and geography; a more-or-less neat web of dates and connections to work over, to fill out the corners of the day. (221)

The spatial element of the family tree is intimately connected to the way photo albums arrange photos and subjects in space, and with the way photographs and family resemblances "place" subjects in a family – an aspect that came up in "Lore" and that I will take up again in my analysis of Beyer's *Spies*.

Through a coincidence, Micha has discovered that his beloved "Opa" was a member of the Waffen-SS, and that he was stationed in Belarus – in a region, that is, which marked a new dimension in the war of annihilation against the Jews. Where Lore tried to deny and repress her parents' guilt, Micha chooses a different strategy: he sets out on a quest for circumstantial evidence proving or disproving that his grandfather took part in mass shootings of Jews. Finally, he even travels to Belarus. Indeed, he manages to find a Byelorussian witness who participated in the shootings. The old man recognizes a photo of Micha's granddad: "He was here. Summer, autumn 1943"

(362). Yet he cannot confirm Opa's participation in the shootings because he didn't actually see him shoot anyone.

In contrast to Welzer's study, where the participating families agreed to talk about their role in the Third Reich, Micha's research into the family past encounters a wall of silence and repression. Even though some other relatives admit that they have also been searching for proof of the grandfather's war crimes, nobody really wants to talk about the possibility that Opa may have killed Jews. This ambiguity of knowing and not wanting to know, of veiled suggestions and silence, closely corresponds to the model of postmemory with its ambiguity of connection and distance. Moreover, Micha's story illustrates that remembering and forgetting do not have to be polar opposites, but can be mutually dependent. David William Cohen has called this ambiguity of remembering and forgetting a "topography of 'forgetting' . . . in which knowledge is always and everywhere present, even where partial and conflictual, but almost never spoken" (ibid.). This kind of knowledge, Cohen observes, "on the one hand, 'does not exist' and, on the other, has the power to harm, even kill. Remembering and forgetting . . . are not opposed and reciprocal programs; they are deeply intertwined" (ibid.). Here, the ambivalence of absence and presence implied by postmemory is conceived of in spatial terms.

Indeed, it is almost as though Micha's knowledge about the past is ingrained both in the geographical setting of Belarus, and in the imagined topography of the family tree. A similar state of knowing and not-knowing at the same time characterizes Micha's parents' attitude towards the Nazi past – Micha's father speaks of "this possibility" when he refers to the fact that Opa may well have been a war criminal (318). However, the submerged and implicit nature of this kind of knowledge makes it inaccessible to following generations and thus effectively robs Micha of the possibility of situating his identity in relation to his grandfather and the whole family.

The negative consequences of the topography of forgetting are even more radical in Marcel Beyer's *Spies*. Beyer foregrounds the imaginative component of postmemory, about which Marianne Hirsch has remarked: "Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (1997: 22). Like Micha in *The Dark Room*, the four young protagonists in *Spies* try to uncover a hidden family past with the help of photographs. This attempt centers on their grandfather, who may have been a member of the Legion Condor – the German troupes illegally fighting on the side of General Franco in the Spanish civil war. However, the family secrets cannot be fully lifted, especially as the children in *Spies* – unlike Micha in *The Dark Room* – do not approach their parents or grandparents for information. Instead, their espionage into the past becomes increasingly inseparable from imaginative storytelling and -inventing.

The very first words of the first person narrator establish spying and espionage as the leitmotif of the novel: "Sometimes I stand for a while spying though the peephole

in the hall" (1). Not only is this stance characteristic of the voyeuristic perspective of the narrator, it also indicates a fundamental truth about narrative: the narrator is someone who meddles in other people's stories, making them his own. Furthermore, the title refers to the four protagonists who – starting from a family album they have stumbled across – spy into their grandparents' past.

With its strong focus on spying as an activity of looking, *Spies* designates (family) identity as a construction that is not only narrative in nature, but also involves the other senses. The family emerges as a network of looking in which the gaze of the others (the other cousins) reinforces or challenges the individual's sense of identity. Looking and the network of looking become an exercise in the spatial ordering that situates identities in a geographical location. Not coincidentally, family resemblances in *Spies* are mainly based on similarities of the *eyes* – most obviously, in the motive of the Italian eyes: "We all have the same eyes. . . . The three of them and I all have those Italian eyes, they come from my mother and their father, who are siblings" (12). The ambivalence of identity and alterity that is expressed here is characteristic of the way in which Beyer follows the negotiation of personal identity within a family network. In this series of exchanges, photographs play a central part.

Hirsch has identified the double network of looks circulating in and around family photographs, famously described by Roland Barthes, as part of a hegemonial construction of family identity, the "familial gaze" (1997: 10). In addition to the constitutive function of photographs for family *rituals* described by Susan Sontag, the second key function of photographs therefore consists in situating the individual within a family identity constituted through looks. This is the main purpose of the protagonists' interaction with the family album in *Spies*. The photos in this album, mostly from the grandparent generation, are integrated into a double network of looking. On the one hand, the situation of taking the photographs is already described as an exchange of looks. On the other hand, the multiperspectival structure of looking and being looked at is repeated in the process of looking at the photographs. The narrator reflects: "In every picture, our grandmother knows she's being looked at. Not only by the photographer, but by other people, too – later, when they look at the photo. People our grandmother has never seen. Like us" (30). Since the invisible photographer also embodies the perspective of later spectators, these become implicated in the photograph. Thus, the children can identify with their grandfather, whom they take to be the photographer (27). However, this identification with the photographer remains ambivalent, for in a later passage, the narrator remarks: "That's not the way we look at things, we don't look with those eyes" (28). The narrator's perusal of the photographs is therefore characterized by the same ambivalence of "deep personal connection" and "generational distance" which is typical for all secondary processes of postmemory.

Harald Welzer has described visual media as "interpretaments" which document how the past really was and which therefore make up a standardized field of associations

for the Nazi past (105ff). However, the memory discourse of photography is heavily reliant upon verbal frames since an isolated family photo does not "mean" anything as long as the viewer does not know who the depicted people are or when the photo was taken. Moreover, the invisible, narrated photos in Beyer's and Seiffert's texts are hybrids of the two sign systems image and text. But even real photos are always looked at within a narrative framework that is erected through the grouping in family albums or through captions. Hence, even visible photographs are fragments of a narrative coherence and rely on verbal supplementation or completion. Family photos and albums function like the *imagines agentes* of ancient rhetoric: they are only the memorial sign for certain contents, which have to be verbalized and thus cannot be expressed solely through the images. Such a narrative framing is missing in *Spies*, because the family memory has gaps here. At the same time, photographs function within a spatial framework: we look at photos from a specific place, and the photograph is an object in space, not just in time. Hence the need to burn or bury the offensive photograph. In *The Dark Room* at least, photographs do not always have to be narrativized to have a meaning; sometimes it is their mere existence (their being *there*) that makes them meaningful.

In *Spies*, on the other hand, the description of photographs emerges as the structural principle of the novel, which invents family history on the basis of the photographic album. More radically than "Micha" in *The Dark Room*, however, *Spies* depicts a situation in which the grandchildren do not have access to a narrative of family identity with which they could frame the photos, and which could be the basis of their own personal identity. Instead, their identity dissolves into a multiplicity of possible stories. It therefore remains uncertain whether the children's grandfather really fought in the Spanish civil war, and whether their grandmother was an Italian opera singer, or whether these are stories the children have simply made up to fit the photos in the family album. Indeed, the photos themselves may be inventions of the children, for the narrator's descriptions of them frequently include sequences of movements which are impossible to capture in photography. Thus, the children make the photographs come alive in a series of translations which are no longer based on memory or historical knowledge, but on imagination. In *Spies*, translation is almost excessive: all that is left at the end are translations; nothing remains fixed.

Because of the secondary and ambivalent nature of transgenerational memory processes, the fictionalization of memory is an integral part of postmemory (Hirsch 1999: 8). In the books of Beyer and Seiffert, the figure of the transgenerational opens up a projectional space that is characterized less by documentary factuality than by imaginative approaches and, in *Spies*, by a progressive fictionalization of the past on which the novel reflects in a self-conscious manner.

Both books mediate the family history of young Germans in the shape of an ambivalent postmemory. Personal identity is shown to be predicated on a familial past with

which each generation has to come to terms anew. This process has both narrative and more affective properties, which are based on looking. In *Spies*, it is particularly the lack of a narrative framework that causes problems for the young protagonists' identity process. With the progressive dissolution of the family album in a series of possible stories, the identity of the protagonists becomes shifty as well. The memorial space of postmemory becomes indistinguishable from imaginative and aesthetic processes of storytelling and invention. In *The Dark Room*, although the narration is more conventional, the lack of narrative contexts also leads to gaps in the family album which the grandchildren cannot fill. Thus, the figure of the transgenerational creates an identity pattern which is both dialogic and deeply precarious. Through the inclusion in a narrative model of memory, identity gains a temporal dimension, based on the dialogical nature of individual and collective identities, and of identities and alterities. At the same time, identity is shown to be rooted in space – not only due to the close links between family identity and specific geographical spaces, but also because narrative itself is spatial, particularly when it occurs by means of photography. In this respect, the two novels contribute to a conceptualization of identity which is both narrative and at the same transcends the narrative paradigm.

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The Braultian Path to the Other: Estrangement and Nontranslation

Nicole Côté

A Vignette of Brault's Leitmotifs

Jacques Brault is a Quebec author born in 1933; his body of work, covering a variety of literary genres – essays, poetry and literary translation – has been awarded a number of distinguished prizes, including three Governor-General Awards, the most prestigious cultural awards in Canada. Brault's work is relevant to the problem of intersubjectivity in that his writing is constantly redefined by openly engaging in a dialogue with the other, a practice which shifts the boundaries of the genres in which he works. Brault's originality also lies in his positioning at the threshold between self and other, between genres, between original text and translation.

In my discussion of Brault's poetics of liminality, I will focus on three notions dear to Brault: that of the *pathway*, where occurs the meeting between self and other; that of the *estrangement*, whereby the self must first become alienated to itself, that is, other, in order to continue on the pathway to a renewed self, and that of the *(non)translation*, a practice in which the two former notions meet to redefine translation at the threshold between self and other.

The Other on the Pathway

Brault's entire body of work, which spans from the 1960s to the present, is spurred by the tension resulting from writing between two poles: that of the transitivity towards the other, to which his vocative texts point, and that of the usual intransitivity of literature. "But how is one *not* to write to someone?" (Melançon 202), asks Brault, commenting on the inevitability of the vocative aspect of his work. The need for the other subject is made blatant in the form and content of Brault's texts: formally, by the frequent usage of second person pronouns (*nous*, *tu*) – amongst various other

"enunciative strategies (play on pronouns, dialogues, exclamations, interrogations)" (Melançon 202) – as well as by the omnipresent, although diffuse, intertextuality. Nevertheless, a very tangible tension remains between transitivity and intransitivity, for Brault's texts emphasize intransitivity in the very midst of their vocative style.

His texts' oscillation between transitivity and intransitivity reflects the tension between the self and the other, which spurs all of his work and makes it so unmistakable. Brault's texts reveal a thought where the self, through the mediation of the other, is freed from the tyranny of the I "to summarize and open all other pronouns," as Gilles Marcotte appealingly puts it (247).

I would like to concentrate on this tension between the dual aspect of Brault's texts by using Jessica Benjamin's work on intersubjectivity, as Brault's writings point to the discovery of a liminal space "in which it is possible for either subject to recognize the difference of the other" (Benjamin 1998: xii). This liminal space is considered by Benjamin as a threshold, a third space belonging neither to the self nor to the other. What is specific to Brault is that the liminal space he envisions takes the shape of a "path" (or "way", for lack of a better translation of "chemin" in English), a *moving* space where the self meets the other, because the self and the other do not have fixed identities but are always on the move. The usual translation would be *road*. But a road is usually well-traveled and leads somewhere. A path is not so clearly delineated, and perhaps less predictable. The Oxford English Dictionary defines path as "the course or direction in which a person or thing is moving," putting the emphasis not on the pathway but on the highly individual course of a person, which corresponds to Brault's idea of a *chemin.*

In an interview, Brault himself illustrates this conception of the self as progressing with the other: "I am so little interested in myself. One could say *I forget myself on the way*. What rallies me is that there dwells within me the face of the other" (Melançon 206, emphasis added).[1] The intermingling of the concepts of the pathway and the other are particularly relevant in that, according to Alain Massé, for Brault, "the threats encountered by the subject on his path are petrification and disintegration, both resulting from an absence of opening to the other," and that "this Other is not a threat but a foundation" (i; vi, my translation). This indicates how redemptive the figure of the other is in Brault's work. Frédérique Bernier maintains that Brault's essays, which he himself calls *accompaniments*, bring the reader to discover the "paradoxical and demanding laws of hospitality, which shatter the notions of origin and textual ownership" (23, my translation). We will later see how this particular positioning leads to nontranslation.

The necessary course towards the other can be found not only in Brault's essays, where he addresses the reader like a confidant, but also in his poetry, which is frankly dialogic in its tension towards the other.[2] "I looked for you, knowing that I am nothing / nobody without you / and that you don't exist without my gestures" (Brault 1975a: 40). For Brault, the other, infinitely desirable, remains other while nonetheless sharing

a moving space with the self, as is obvious from these early verses: "Your moving mouth / when all is lost / then some darkness / to the light of // gestures / now mute // And you fully / returned at last / to secrecy"(1973: 16, my translation).[3]

"L'étrangement"

The pathway would moreover be associated with "the process which Brault calls *l'étrangement*, which is the transformation of the self by the other" (Massé i). In a page of *l'en dessous l'admirable* – a small collection of poetry with prose on the left page and poems on the right – the narrator explores the process of recognizing the other as another subject, a process that starts with estrangement and ends with the confrontation of the repudiated other:

Some sounds born in secret happened to me one night, in a muddle, fragments of a shipwrecked world, almost lost with all hands. I was quietly going to leave myself, lie down, and sleep, a deadly sleep. But they distracted me from it. Shimmering silhouettes in a corner of the room, at the edge of darkness, they were mute. They gave me shifty looks. Without moving. Silence was heavy. I did not ask anything. What's the use. This would last. And the old neurosis's choice now was to heal on the spot, or to turn demented. Let's follow them, these mute ectoplasms, since they signal to me for the last time. Let's go there, and if I don't dry up on the spot, it is that the bare truth is more unfathomable than I thought.[4]

In this fragment, the strangers, the repudiated others, are threatening the already brittle, self-enclosed, suicidal self. Benjamin explains this kind of confrontation in similar terms:

Whether we will or not, the world exposes us to the different others who, not only in their mere existence as separate beings reflect our lack of control, but who also threaten to evoke in us what we have repudiated in order to protect the self. [. . .] What we cannot bear to own, we can only repudiate. (1998: 94)

But the seemingly abject beings represented by Brault also beckon the self to face them. The confrontation feels like a dangerous bet (destruction of / by the other is always a possibility), but the recognition of / by the other is at the same time desperately needed. Here, the others appear as a path to redemption. They literally beckon the narrator to follow them into the unpredictable. Brault's texts clearly show a striving for "an ideal of an inclusive self that is the condition of multiplicity, difference and incomplete knowledge of the other" (Benjamin 1998: 104). Benjamin explains that the *inclusive self* is a self that can sustain tension and contradiction, that can "hold this demand for inclusion, and yet would not require a hold in identity, which is necessarily created through exclusion" (1998: 104).

Brault's particular notion of "étrangement" is akin to the notion of the *inclusive, nonidentical self* that Benjamin defines. She suggests that the *nonidentical self* "is reciprocally constituted in relation to the other, depending on the other's recognition,

which it cannot have without being negated, acted on by the other, in a way that changes the self, making it nonidentical" (1998: 79).[5] I would argue that Brault's "étrangement", a transformation of the self by the other within oneself, shows the evolution of the self from a first stage, where the self incorporates the other through idealization / repudiation, towards a second stage, where the self, following the symbolic destruction and survival of the other, recognizes the other as external to the self, a recognition necessary to the self's growth. In the fragment of Brault's poetry quoted above, the reader can imagine a more inclusive self will result, when the repudiated part of the self, symbolically destroyed through the dangerous encounter, is later recognized by the self as part of it.[6]

Benjamin's notion of an inclusive self in turn sheds light on Brault's aesthetic and ethical project, explicitly endorsed by him as early as the seventies: "Ill at ease with my language as one is uncomfortable with one's body, I finally realized that in practice, the most vital relationship with oneself comes through the mediation of the others" (qtd. in Simon 1999: 62).

A Pathway to Nontranslation: Sketching a Context for Brault's Poetics

Brault's pathway to translation can be traced back to a claustrophobic Quebec society under the iron rule of Duplessis (prime minister from 1936-39 and 1944-59), and a then repressive Catholic church.[7] Feeling that he has no real language of his own but a debased one, Brault plans to become a writer and hoards words to counter that "poverty" of language inherited from a French people colonized and surrounded by English. As a graduate student in the late fifties, he leaves for Europe (Paris and Poitiers) to study the late medieval emergence of the vernacular Latin languages in order to better understand the roots of his own transplanted North American French and to valorize it as his own vernacular.

Back in Québec and teaching Medieval literature at the Université de Montréal, he recounts, in his poetry of the mid-sixties, the humiliation of his people in striking images: "We the only niggers with handsome white assurance . . . we the necktied savages . . . we dwell in our body as in a hotel."[8] It is at this time that Brault, who feels his originally painfully pauper self mirroring that of his nation, learns that the passage through languages makes possible a double encounter: that of the repudiated other of his own culture, and that of the foreigner.

In the mid-seventies, Brault publishes *Poèmes des quatre côtés*, a collection of *nontranslations* of poems by four North American authors (Margaret Atwood, e.e. cummings, John Haines and Gwendolyn MacEwen) allied to a quite original reflexion on nontranslation. Brault's gesture, in the seventies, of learning about the dominant anglo-culture is a way not of reversing but of undoing the old dichotomy of dominant / dominated. It seems to me highly unusual in Quebec's then very nationalistic context.[9] His customary inclusiveness, I suggest, is what allowed Brault to immerse himself in

English-Canadian literature without feeling the threat of being engulfed by it, as most Quebec artists felt at the time. Brault is one of the few Quebec writers who in the nationalist period of the late sixties and seventies regularly contributed to *Ellipse*, a bilingual literary journal that specializes in the publication of Canadian poets from English and French Canada. He thus fostered a better understanding between the two solitudes without promoting the hegemony of the English-speaking culture in Canada. Translation was to play a key role in this understanding, as he wrote in 1975:

We [the Quebeckers] neither like to translate nor like to be translated. We are not always nor quite wrong. The keys of translation belong to the powerful nations. There might not be a world language, but there are colonizing languages. We feel it heavily, every day. But this ordeal should have whetted our appetite for creation. To nontranslate is neither to take something away from someone, nor to let it be taken from us, it is to compose, to bargain, to negotiate. (1975b: 16, my translation)

(Non)translation as intertextuality and threshold between self and other

As we have seen, *Poèmes des quatre côtés* inaugurates Brault's nontranslations. Brault removes the titles of the poems written by the four well-known poets and identifies their names only in a counter-note at the end of the book, as an afterthought. The poems themselves undergo in the nontranslation what Brault calls a drift (*dérive*) of meaning, sound and rhythm. By making almost impossible the search for the origins of the translated texts, Brault not only calls into question the superiority of the original over the "copy," but also stresses the responsibility of the translator as a creator. Most importantly, he blurs the boundaries of the signatures, and thus of authorship and of identity. Frédérique Bernier argues that Brault's treatment of proper names opens "all sorts of identificatory vertigos – estrangements – and reveals an understanding of the literary responsibility as well as a desire to erase the writing subject" (Bernier 21, my translation). To Brault, the signature is only one of the manifestations of the author, the text itself bearing more responsibility than the signature, taking into consideration that meaning is never completed, but always deferred. His position could be explained by Derrida's notion of "the enigmatic originality of every paraph. In order for the tethering to the source to occur, what must be retained is the absolute singularity of the signature-event and a signature-form: the pure reproducibility of a pure event" (1993: 20), the event here being the text.

In his inspiring paper entitled "Poésie de novembre," Gilles Marcotte recalls the essential link between writing and nontranslating with Brault: "Not only in *Poèmes des Quatre Côtés* but in all his work, Jacques Brault is always nontranslating, that is, mixing his own writing with that of the other" (247, my translation). According to Marcotte, Brault would like to create with his writing – be it nontranslation, poetry, prose, or essay – "a space to which all would have access, where his own privilege of poet could be shared by all: 'You millions of myself'" (245). Marcotte also notes that Brault's

profuse yet unassuming intertextuality reveals a porous I: "The borrowings without quotation marks are, properly speaking, shocking, but the scandal is meant: they attest that the poem signed by Brault is made possible only through the assistance of other poems, that his poetry becomes personal insofar as it welcomes foreign voices" (244). This technique, one can see, is not proper to Brault's nontranslation, but points to the importance of intersubjectivity in Brault's work. Nontranslation, within the vocative work of Brault, is only one of the writing practices he adopts where the fertilization by the other plays a primary role.

Among some writers of Brault's generation – I think particularly of Hubert Aquin (1929-1977) – fiction and poetry seem both eroded and magnified by intertextuality, as if the author were acutely aware as much of a threatening aphasia as of the boundless possibilities of a work so infused with other literatures that, containing virtually all works of art, it would erase the despicable (enclosed) self. I would also argue that the process of Brault's nontranslation is akin to intertextuality in that if translation sets the meaning adrift, the original text still resonates through it; each translation, then, becomes the locus of an intersubjective encounter of fleeting meanings and forms.[10]

In his reading of the works he chooses to nontranslate, Brault does not proceed otherwise than in his critical writings, which, according to Michel Lemaire, affirm "the necessity of a solidarity with the work, a solidarity which exists because of feelings, over and above knowledge. Objectivity is not rejected but considered as a first step to clear the ground" (223). Brault presents the work of the critic as that of a musical interpreter: "I interpret the text, I play it on me, in me, but for a third party (unique, numerous)" (1995: 69). We can safely assume that the same goes for his nontranslation. It is precisely because of his view of literary translation as interpretation that Brault adds the prefix *non* to his translations, to make blatant the impossibility of an equivalence, of a perfect transfer between original and translation. Brault's nontranslations are to me highly metaphorical of his encounter with the other in that for him, nontranslation is not so much a decentering as a dynamic relationship with the other: "To remain silent. So that a relationship between heterogeneous lives can first be established" (1975b: 15).[11]

The recurrence of the threshold image in Brault's reflection on translation is revealing in that it represents not only the "liminal space between silence and word, between the far and the close" (1994: 60), as Sherry Simon states, but also the liminal space between the self and the other, which constitutes the space of translation, the scene of an opening to the other. To Brault, this relationship between two subjects, just as Benjamin argues, is transforming: "I learn my strangeness. By transmutation from one night into another, I let myself be translated, deported in a text I thought I carried in me . . . . My signature eludes me – I nontranslate" (1975b: 68).[12] One can find the same theme of estrangement running through Brault's reflection on translation, as the other's text in his community's language provides an ideal opportunity for

transformation: that is, either for integrating the otherness of the external other or for the exploration of the other (heretofore unrecognized) within the self.

Brault's search for a third space between the original and the accomplished, thus finite, translation, creates a locus which contains all potentialities. I would argue that this space mirrors the relationship between the self and the other considered as a subject: a space is opened, replete with possibilities, which eventually changes both the self and the other, and yet leaves the other a stranger still to be discovered. Although, as Sherry Simon says, "Brault's concept of nontranslation is explicitly situated in the confrontation between the power of the English language and culture in North America and the fragility of Quebec francophone culture" (1999: 62), and so can be considered as much an opening to the other culture as an affirmation of his own, the relationships it instills between two texts remains a wonderful metaphor of the relationship between the self and the other subject which leaves both changed. As Brault says: "Nontranslation . . . signals the incompletion of the text and presents itself as incomplete. Presence of an absence, the nontranslating idiom expresses less than it impresses a starting impulse towards an unflagging renunciation" (1975b: 52, my translation).

Thus, Brault's poetics meet his ethics by his valorization of in-betweenness, allowing what Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi call "a reevaluation of the creative potentialities of the liminal space" (18). This in-betweenness supports Benjamin's concept of a third space created by the encounter between the self and the other as subjects. Brault's entire body of work is a very good example of this necessity to recognize the other as a subject, to make the world not only a better, but also a more exciting place to live.

Endnotes

1. My translation of "Je m'intéresse si peu à moi-même. On pourrait dire que je m'oublie en chemin. Ce qui me monopolise, c'est qu'il y a en moi le visage de l'autre."

2. Despite Bakhtin's assumption that poetry could not be dialogic. In "Discourse in the Novel" he alludes to the monologism of poetry: "In the majority of poetic genres, the unity of the language system and the unity (and uniqueness) of the poet's individuality as reflected in his language and speech, which is directly realized in this unity, *are indispensable prerequisites of poetic style*" (264, emphasis added). Brault shows with his highly unusual evocative poetry that this genre can also be dialogic.

3. My translation of "Ta bouche remuante/ quand tout est foutu/puis un peu de noirceur/à la clarté des gestes/se taisant//et toi tout entière/enfin remise //au secret" (1973: 16).

4. My translation of "Quelques sons nés au secret m'arrivèrent, un soir, en désordre, débris d'un monde naufragé, presque perdu corps et biens. J'allais tout doucement me quitter, m'étendre; et dormir, mortellement. Mais ils m'en ont distrait. Silhouettes moirées au fond de la pièce, à la lisière de la pénombre, ils ne parlaient pas. Ils me regardaient par en dessous. Sans bouger. Le silence pesait. Je n'ai rien demandé; à quoi bon. Cela durerait. Et la vieille névrose n'a pas le choix maintenant: ou guérir sur l'heure, ou tourner carrément à la démence. Suivons-les donc, ces protoplasmes de mutisme, puisqu'ils me font le dernier signe. Allons là-bas, et si je ne sèche pas sur place, c'est que la vérité sans masque est plus incroyable que je ne croyais" (Brault 1975a: 10).

5. The notions of the inclusive self and of the non-identical self are very close in that they both require a hold on identity to allow changes to happen as a result of the interaction of the self with the other.

6. Benjamin contends that "only the externality of the other that survives destruction allows a representation of the other as simultaneously outside of control and non threatening." (1998: 96).

7. Although Duplessis was trying to defend French Quebec interests and culture amidst the Anglo cultures of the rest of Canada and the United States, his own view of its people and culture, conservative from the start, became more stagnant as time went by. Stifling all opposition, Duplessis literally prevented Quebec from entering a modern era until his death, in 1959.

8. "Nous les seuls nègres aux certitudes blanches [. . .] nous les sauvages cravatés [. . .] nous sommes dans notre corps comme dans un hôtel" (Brault 1998: 71).

9. It shares, here again, characteristics with Benjamin's intersubjective stance. As Benjamin states: "The capacity to tolerate conflict, and indeed the capacity to split the ego and take antithetical positions may, in certain conditions, be potentially creative" (1998: 64).

10. Derrida warns of a meaning that is never just within the text, however polysemic, but belongs also to the reader, a position with which Brault would agree with: "The semantic horizon that habitually governs the notion of communication is exceeded or split by the intervention of writing, that is, by a dissemination irreducible to polysemy. Writing is read; it is not the site, 'in the last instance,' of a hermeneutic deciphering, the decoding of a meaning or truth" (Derrida 1993: 20-21.).

11. My translation of "Se taire. Que d'abord s'établisse le rapport entre des existences hétérogènes."

12. My translation of "J'apprends mon étrangeté. Par transmutation d'une nuit en une autre nuit, je me laisse traduire, déporter dans un texte que je croyais emporter en moi. Maintenant je parle pour ne pas parler; ma signature m'échappe – je nontraduis."

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Mapping Cultural Space in Contemporary Northern Irish Poetry

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In recent years, the problems of the theoretical paradigm of identity and its historical sediments in cultural self-descriptions have increasingly received attention, first in a poststructuralist and postmodernist and then in a postcolonial perspective. Contemporary Irish poetry is symptomatic of a type of cultural process that can no longer be adequately described from within the paradigm of identity; it requires a different set of interpretive tools. But instead of arguing for a mere exchange of theoretical buzzwords, I propose that it is the poems themselves, rather than the cultural theorist, that can provide us with such a different set of tools. Poetic texts are not simply cultural "objects" as material givens in a positivist sense. They have an operative dimension that needs to be accessed in every new reading encounter. Thus the poems themselves can be said to perform acts of cultural analysis by using and modifying existing discursive procedures. Rather than contain and mediate a hypostatized sense of cultural identity, they complicate existing sociocultural interpretations of cultural space by revealing the constructedness (but also the constructiveness) of such interpretations and by emphasizing the differential rather than the identity-based aspects of cultural constructions. The question I pursue in this essay is this: how can a selective reading of contemporary Irish poetry help us renegotiate the complex relations between literary textuality and the problematic duality of cultural identity / alterity constructions?

In the highly differentiated sociological theory of Niklas Luhmann, the notoriously polysemic concept of culture is historicized and defined as a social form of self-description (of and in a society), a self-description that uses cultural memory (which involves operations of both remembrance and forgetting) to define the possibilities of a culture to observe itself and its differences from other cultures or previous

configurations of itself (Luhmann; Fuchs 115-37). In this perspective, culture is envisaged less as a symbol system than as a recursive mode of operating with, and reflecting upon, the possibilities and limits of communication and symbol-processing. Culture is not only "a manner of sharing a peculiar . . . space at a particular time" (Schama xi), it is a manner of generating a dense and dynamic map of the space in which it locates itself (cf. Bhabha), a map without which any idea of territoriality would be inconceivable.

The paradigm of recursive mapping has the advantage of not being based on any substantialist concept of culture. Instead, it promises a method of observing culture as embedded in communicative, informational processes that are concerned with the difference between identity and alterity. In cultural anthropology, recursion has become a paradigm of interpretation, for example in the work of Clifford Geertz and André Leroi-Gourhan (Iser 87-99). Recursivity without fixed reference points generates "thick descriptions" (Ryle 465-96) and guarantees the perpetuation of cultural communication. It ensures rich and unpredictable possibilities for intercultural exchange and hybridization: the mutual irritation, enrichment and renewal of cultures (see Budick and Iser; Berensmeyer). In comparison with static concepts like "pluralism" or "hybridity," such a dynamic model appears to harbor greater explanatory potential. As Richard Kirkland argues, "hybridity can be read as a form of containment that can allow the play of the heterogeneous while containing it within certain, largely unexamined, methodologies" (1999: 211). This problem cannot be solved without an operational description of (inter-)cultural dynamics and their "tangled hierarchies" (Hofstadter 709-10). No supreme vantage point is available that would allow the critic to observe, criticize or conceptualize such dynamic processes directly and without friction, interference, or paradox. An intercultural discourse needs to form its own multiple reference points and its own rules of operation in order to map a reality that is yet unrepresented and unknown.

Literary texts are paradigmatic media in which the cultural circulation and interpretation of symbolic descriptions, of different cultural maps and mappings, is negotiated. Not only can literary texts present or illustrate problems of cultural identity; they can also transpose and analyze discursive processes in a different symbolic register. In Ireland, poetry and drama have historically functioned as the most successful media in this respect. Traditionally, poetry has been credited with the capability of negotiating between the *space* of culture and the *place* of the poet. The eighteenth century did so in terms of "common sense," the Romantics and their Victorian followers in terms of a conflation between subject and object. Although this status erodes during the nineteenth century, the privileged relation of poet and community has survived in residual forms and in certain societies – Ireland being one of them.[1] Paradoxically, this idea is linked to claims of the autonomy of art that frees the work

of art from any immediate social functions. The poet has a special status, distinct from that of the dramatist or novelist. He or she commands a special degree of attention and authority, no matter whether s / he claims or refuses such authority for him- or herself. This is where the notion of autonomy clashes with the notion of communal significance.

In a postcolonial society, this problem is made even more complex by highly differentiated partialities in various directions. The romantic nimbus of poetry – to represent the universal within the individual – has become questionable in a more skeptical present. In postcolonial societies it is preposterous. But the notion of complete autonomy or disembedding from social contexts can prove to be no less unsatisfactory. What remains is the permanent insecurity of a possible self-understanding that needs to be permanently renegotiated, to rework and indeed reinvent traditional concepts of self, home, origin, and history. "Identity," too, has become such an uncertain concept that can be employed to describe the problematic relationship of the poet to his / her origins and cultural environment. Which strategies does poetry use to make a distinction between self and other, inside and outside? And what is the place of the poets, what is the observer position they assume? For whom do they think they are speaking?

In the twentieth century, no poetic genre is more capable of demonstrating the problems of identity politics and the possibilities for spaces of cultural translation than texts that work with the metaphoric potential of maps and mapping. In literary criticism, accordingly, metaphors of mapping are rampant but their metaphorological significance is rarely explored or transformed into analytic results (cf. Conboy). By its very nature, cartography is a discipline of translation: from territory to map, from nature to culture, from one sign system into another. But it is also a discipline of disciplining: it transforms the raw, the unmarked and unspecified into the ordered, cultivated, and pacified. Furthermore, acts of translational remapping can occlude anterior forms of order and sense-making. Such an act of de- and re-territorialization can be observed in the Ordnance Survey of Ireland (1824-41), a project that replaced Irish place names with English translations or Anglicized variants. Cartographers can control not only the past but also the future because they define the territory, draw boundaries, impose names, and thereby determine how the land will be perceived by future generations. The position they assume is that of the ruler whose gaze, by "surveying" the land, determines the images of reality. In literary efforts of decolonization, such images and names need to be retranslated in order to escape their colonial connotations. But, paradoxically, they have to perform an act of translation from English into (a different kind of) English if they wish to address a mass audience. My first example of this linguistic and cultural translation in contemporary Northern Irish poetry will be Seamus Heaney.

Charting Deep Space: Heaney

From its beginnings, Seamus Heaney's poetry has been propelled by an archaeological desire of retranslating, reconcretizing, re-mapping "lost" configurations of an original identity. In Heaney's poem "Anahorish," for example, the place name of the title, an originally Irish name (*anach úir uisce*) that has become unintelligible after the Ordnance Survey, is retranslated in the poem into modern English as "place of clear water." The translation returns an original concreteness and graphic vividness to the name, where the name "Anahorish" itself has lost its original referentiality (Heaney 1998: 47). Intriguingly, the poem as a verbal act brings forth an overlapping of map and territory. In Heaney's work, language can be "ploughed" like a field; language and land are brought together in a metaphoric, if not metaphysical, unity: "Vowels ploughed into other, opened ground, / Each verse returning like the plough turned round" (1998: 157, ll. 13-14). Even in the early poem "Digging" (1966), the equivalence between spade and pen is a striking media-technological motif that prepares the more explicit linkage between literature and archaeology in the later "bog poems." Heaney's preoccupation with origins and narratives of origin is evident, even if the origin must remain elusive and ultimately unattainable. The searching movement of his texts is directed, as in the poem "Bogland," toward the interior and the inferior, toward the "bottomless centre" of a reality whose ontological status is not, and probably cannot, be questioned any further:

> *We have no prairies*
> *To slice a big sun at evening –*
> *Everywhere the eye concedes to*
> *Encroaching horizon,*
> *Is wooed into the cyclops' eye*
> *Of a tarn. Our unfenced country*
> *Is bog that keeps crusting*
> *Between the sights of the sun.*
> *[…]*
> *Our pioneers keep striking*
> *Inwards and downwards,*
> *Every layer they strip*
> *Seems camped on before.*
> *[…]*
> *The wet centre is bottomless.* (Heaney 1998: 41)

The comparison with America (prairies, pioneers) has a purely negative function. America, as Ireland's other, is marked by its absence. The emphasis on the huge extension of the North American landscape and on the frontier myth is geared toward what is lacking in Ireland – spatial width, surface extension – and thus accentuates

the orientation of this poem toward depth: toward the depth of space and of historical strata. Space and history form a unity that is made to appear indissoluble.

For Heaney, language is a medium of *religio* or re-connection to cultural origins, a medium of reassurance that helps anchor the individual within a community, however problematic this process of anchoring may have become in a time of heterogeneous and differing communal narratives. Of course Heaney is aware of the fact that modernity no longer offers the possibility of a stable anchoring in an ethos or a narrative based on myth. Heaney's literary archaeology of myth, with its emphasis on images of stratification and lamination, loss and (ineluctably partial) recovery, far transcends any simple mythopoeic and / or political suggestions for identification. Especially in his more recent poems, Heaney develops various techniques of distancing, reflecting and relativizing the process of myth formation in "responsible" ways (cf. Hühn 255-57; Heaney 1995: 191-93). But only very rarely does he relinquish his claim to a representative speaker position that aims to speak on behalf of subject and community simultaneously. His desire for such communion remains strong, even if it leads to an inescapable dilemma as soon as his language is forced to define this community. Whether language can be the right medium for establishing such a link between individual, society, and nature, as is sometimes envisioned in Heaney's poetry, is a question that remains unanswered.

Conflation: Ó Searcaigh

In Heaney's imaginary cartography, there is no place for transatlantic fantasy. This is different in the poetry of Cathal Ó Searcaigh (b. 1956). In his poem "Do Jack Kerouac" ("To Jack Kerouac"), written in the Irish language, Ó Searcaigh imagines, presents, and celebrates a conflation of different cultural spaces. This conflation is a result of imagination triggered by reading, an effect of globalization through the import of American urban counterculture into rural Donegal. Rereading the texts of Jack Kerouac (author of the fifties classic *On the Road*), Ó Searcaigh's speaker remembers the effect that these texts had on him when he first encountered them in the early seventies. Remembering the exalted state of his earlier self in terms of Californian slang ("Hey man you gotta stay high"), the speaker also records a sense of dislocation that is ultimately more comic, even rather ridiculous and pointless, than it is truly exhilarating:

> *I didn't see Mín a'Leagha or Fána Bhuí then, but the plains of Nebraska and the grassy Lands of Iowa*
> *And when the blues came it wasn't the Bealtaine Road that beckoned but a highway stretching across America.*
> *"Hey man you gotta stay high," I'd say to my friend as we freaked through California's Cill Ulta into Frisco's Falcarragh.* (Ó Searcaigh 193)[2]

The original Irish accentuates the mutual conflation of cultural spaces in its very language, inserting American slang into Irish syntax and morphology: "na bliúanna" (the blues), "ag *freak*áil" (freaking). This insertion is without any critical overtones of colonialism; rather, it is a gesture of defiance and emancipation. Even the meter is an American import, the line length evoking not only Kerouac's "spontaneous prose" but also Walt Whitman – *the* poet of limitless space and expansive individualism. Reading Kerouac generates a lived heterotopia, a different experience of space. Otherness is mapped onto the visible topography of the cultural homeland, generating an emancipatory, libertarian space of non-identity by connecting the ineluctable "squareness" of rural Donegal to the dynamic, mobile sensibility of American Beat counterculture.

The point of orientation for this heterotopia is not the archeological past buried in the landscape; it is the future of a lifestyle that transcends all notions of landscape as a fixed and final point of orientation. Instead of place, it promises a spatiality of endless time: "And then, goddamit Jack, we'll both be hiking across eternity" (Ó Searcaigh 195).[3] It is this other space (Kerouac's America of endless highways and motorized travel as a suggestion of individual liberation; ultimately a vision of death) that is invested with a quality of "homeliness" by the poem's speaker. Importing imaginary images into the reality of rural Donegal leads to an altered perception of this reality. The poem is overtly utopian: it evokes a space that does not exist. Yet its intention is not utopian in a Yeatsian or Heaneyesque fashion. It does not harbor nostalgia for an essence of Irishness, nor does it aim at a universally valid statement about Irish reality. If it is, after all, less than a great poem, this may be because it does not even aspire to an overt statement, let alone a solution, of the contradictions and conflicts between space and place on which it is constructed. It is, in Schiller's sense, naive (Schiller 1993). Is there, in contemporary Irish poetry, a third possibility apart from sentimental nostalgia and naive utopianism?

Transcultural Cross-Mapping: Muldoon

In contrast to both Heaney's "work on myth" (cf. Blumenberg) and Ó Searcaigh's countercultural naïveté, the work of Paul Muldoon, though often equally cartographic and full of a sense of space as well as place (even to the point of pastoralism) no longer allows itself to be pressed into a mythopoeic or allegorical schema. Muldoon's poetry, it seems, is *multi-discursive* and *transcultural*. It responds to what one might call, very broadly and generally, a dynamics of "glocalization" characterized by a mutual crisscrossing or interlacing of global and local transformations. I shall argue that the poetry of Paul Muldoon transcends the boundaries of identity-based cultural constructions by reflecting on the unavailability of any foundations of identity construction that are not in some way hybrid, unstable or multivalent. My concept of the transcultural in Muldoon's poetics is thus not geared toward the trans- in "transcendence" but toward the trans- in "translation," exploring a dimension that is not located beyond but within

and among cultural differences and cultural processes of mediation and negotiation. Unceasing translation is understood as a response, perhaps the only viable response, to situations and experiences of untranslatability and radical otherness that might otherwise erupt into violent conflict. Furthermore, there is awareness in Muldoon's poetry of the image-like (and imaginary) quality of spaces as well as the spatiality of images in a contemporary media-technological setting:

> *Only a few weeks ago, the sonogram of Jean's womb*
> *resembled nothing so much*
> *as a satellite-map of Ireland:*
>
> *now the image*
> *is so well-defined we can make out not only a hand*
> *but a thumb:*
>
> *on the road to Spiddal, a woman hitching a ride;*
> *a gladiator in his net, passing judgement on the crowd.* (342)

In this poem "about" contemporary prenatal diagnostics, the first instance of transitional and translational cross-mapping or cross-fading is when the ultrasound image of the baby in her mother's womb resembles "nothing so much / as" a satellite image of Ireland – note the line break that emphasizes the nothingness of the ensuing comparison. We might expect some link to an interpretation of the particular position of the speaker with respect to the curious resemblance generated by two types of modern imaging technologies – an affirmation, perhaps, of the centering pull of "mother Ireland" within, despite a diasporic non-locality. Readers might even expect a profound evocation of an "Irish" identity in the allegorical equation of mapping and maternity.[4] But that is not what we are given. Instead of developing the image into a mythopoeic allegory, the resemblance triggers a series of *alternative* possibilities that branch off into different directions, into associations that are anything but "well-defined," at least in their relation to Ireland. The first one still contains a reference to Ireland-as-place: Spiddal is a town on the West coast near Galway. The gladiator then takes us to ancient Rome, or perhaps to its reflections in popular culture. It is an image that can trigger rich associations, but that is complex, ambiguous and unspecific, a cliché – in fact, the reversal of a cliché – from the visual storehouse of globalized culture. It is not used in the way that a classical reference used to be used, in a modernist context: to make a certain point, to establish a certain contrast or resemblance between antiquity and modernity. Here the gladiator is one image association among many and not a stable or central conceit – rather fitting in a poem that appears, in the final analysis, to be about the *instability of images*, about the way images have of fading one into the

other – especially those fleeting images from the ever-expanding cinematic and digital archive of the present.

The technologically produced sonogram turns the womb into a literal kind of "Third Space" (Bhabha 36) for the trying out of different possibilities, different viewpoints and renderings of reality. It thus becomes a metaphor of the poetic process itself. "The Sonogram" is a poem *about* rather than *of* analogy as a poetic technique. It records how an allegoric impulse is transformed and deflated into irony. It does not describe a fixed topography but generates a new kind of virtual space. By working through a series of transitions, the poem performs an act of cultural analysis. Rather than containing and mediating a hypostatized sense of cultural identity (even in the form of "hybridity"), it complicates any pre-fabricated interpretation by revealing the constructedness and the potentials for difference inherent in cultural phenomena.

The implicit poetics of "The Sonogram" may be called transcultural insofar as it is based on a fluid texture of observations and meaning effects that need to be constantly reimagined, renegotiated and renarrated. Such instability in Muldoon's poems foregrounds the arbitrariness of language and the unreliability of memory. It forbids any pretensions to a representative speaker position and discredits the role of the poet as someone who could speak on behalf of a community. This position necessarily entails poetic consequences because it determines the poet's (in)capability of grounding poetry on a tradition. As in Muldoon's "fuzzy" or almost-rhymes (much-image, ride-crowd, womb-thumb, etc.; see Osborn), there is no precise match between image and object. As in poetic imagism, there is evocation instead of description, image-enrichment rather than narrative explication.

The space that the poet inhabits, literally as well as mentally, is thus no longer a definite place. In Northern Ireland, the relation of poetic place to cultural space is a political as well as an aesthetic problem, and it also involves questions of subjectivity, language and gender. In Muldoon's poetry – for instance, in poems like "The Mudroom" from the volume *Hay* – strategies of place and of positioning the self in space give way to a tactical, non-homogeneous use of cultural space. Strategies of identity give way to tactics of alterity.[5] What emerges from these poems is a space (and a time) of cultural translatability, of sudden connections and separations, radically new insights and reappraisals of lost continuities. These poems are meta-poetic insofar as they include a perspective on the impossibility of an observer-poet assuming a transcendental standpoint toward objects as well as toward him- or herself: s / he is always involved. This situation can be seen as characteristic of a contemporary cultural theory that no longer understands its objects and methods as somehow given but as a semantic texture of observations, meanings and symbolic acts that are in continual need of renegotiation. Poems like Muldoon's could be seen to *imply* such a theory. They perform and analyze "culture" as an interspace in which continual

translations and transvaluations of cultural meaning occur: as a vortex that produces a hybridization of already hybrid elements. If culture is seen as the semantic space in which these drifting boundary lines are drawn and redrawn, observed and processed, mapped and re-mapped, literary texts emerge as special media of cultural observation and negotiation. Thus a poetics constructed on the concept of difference (specifically, constructed on the difference between ascriptions of identity and alterity) can provide, perhaps unexpectedly, *analytic* approaches for rethinking the relation between culture, media, and cultural analysis.

Endnotes

1. Richard Kirkland has outlined what he calls a "paradigm" for the functioning of poetry in contemporary Northern Ireland. Among the six features he lists as characterizing this paradigm are: 1) "a reading of the poet as rooted to a physical location and community," 2) "a sense of the poet as exemplifying the values of that community," and 3) "an insistence that the poet can mediate the truths already inherent in the community to the community" (1996: 153).

2. The original reads: "Ní Mín 'A Leagha ná Fána Bhuí a bhí á fheiceáil agam an t-am adaí ach Machairí Nebraska agus táilte féaraigh Iowa. / Agus nuair a thagadh na bliúanna orm ní bealach na Bealtaine a bhí romham amach ach mórbhealach de chuid Mheiriceá. / 'Hey man you gotta stay high' adéarfainn le mo chara agus muid ag *freak*áil trí Chailifornia Chill Ulta isteach go Frisco an Fhálcharraigh."

3. "Is ansin, *goddamit* a Jack, beidh muid beirt ag síobshiúl sa tSíoraíocht" (194).

4. For reasons of space, I cannot go into the gender problematic and the history of this topical association.

5. On the distinction between strategies and tactics, see de Certeau 34-39. According to de Certeau, strategic rationalization presupposes "a *place* that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats . . . can be managed" (36) – a Cartesian subject position – whereas a tactic is "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" and of power, "an art of the weak" (37) that has to make do with a given set of momentary possibilities.

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