Migratory Settings

Editors Murat Aydemir
Alex Rotas

THAMYRIS **INTERSECTING** PLACE, SEX AND RACE

Nº 19 [2008]

Migratory Settings

Thamyris/
Intersecting: Place, Sex, and Race

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Colophon

Design
Mart. Warmerdam, Haarlem, The Netherlands
www.warmerdamdesign.nl

Printing
The paper on which this book is printed meets the requirements of “ISO 9706:1994, Information and documentation – Paper for documents – Requirements for permanence”.

ISSN: 1381-1312
ISBN: 978-90-420-2425-0

© Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam – New York, NY 2008
Printed in The Netherlands

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Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 7–32

Introduction: Migratory Settings

Murat Aydemir and
Alex Rotas

A clunky and oxymoronic phrase, our title for this volume, ‘migratory settings,’ raises more questions than it answers, which is precisely why we chose it. ‘Migratory’ indexes migration, the movement of people from one place on the planet to another, people who do not immediately, or ever, return to the place where they previously lived, whether because they choose not to, because they are prevented or unable to do so, or because of complex mixtures of both. ‘Setting’ denotes emplacement, the manner or framework in which something, especially a jewel, play, or narrative, is mounted or set into place. Hence, ‘migratory’ alludes to movement, ‘settings’ to emplacement; the former indicates the ‘real’ political, social, and economic world, the latter an assembled scenery: fictional, staged, imagined, perceived, or aesthetic in some other way. How then can ‘settings’ and ‘migratory’ be relevantly combined and productively inform one another?

In what follows, we outline our understanding of the migratory—including its relationship to current contested alternatives such as ‘migrancy’ and ‘nomadology’—as well as setting. Our combined titular phrase, we propose, invites a shift in perspective from migration as movement from place to place to migration as installing movement *within* place. Migration not only takes place between places, but also has its effects on place, in place. In brief, we suggest a view on migration in which place is neither reified nor transcended, but ‘thickened’ as it becomes the setting of the variegated memories, imaginations, dreams, fantasies, nightmares, anticipations, and idealizations that experiences of migration, of both migrants and native inhabitants, bring into contact with each other. Migration makes place overdetermined, turning it into the mise-en-scène of different histories.

This density of place may be called ‘aesthetic’ in two ways. First, it is ‘created,’ produced, although by no singular author; it is not elementary. And second, the details of place that processes of migration make emphatic and layered only achieve meaning—and hence reality—through the sensate and affective body of a beholder, a beholder who is 'moved in place,' as it were. Through migration, place does not become less 'topical,' but, to adapt a term coined by Joan Ockman in her review of Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1964), 'heterotopical' (3). In addition, we will specify the present volume's indebtedness to what Mieke Bal has called 'migratory aesthetics,' a phrase suggesting the mutual implication of the aesthetic dimension of practices of migration and the migratory dimension of aesthetic processes. Finally, we offer a brief overview of the contributions that make up this book, which will introduce us to the migratory settings of a fictional exhibition; a staged political wedding; a walking tour in a museum; African appropriations of Shakespeare and Sophocles; Gollwitz, Germany; Calais, France; the body after a heart transplant; refugees' family portraiture; a garden in Vermont; and the womb.

Migratory ...

Migration is routinely alleged as a defining characteristic of our time. This should not be taken to imply, though it often is, that substantially more people migrate now than ever before, a line of thinking that seems myopic and is open to historical qualification. Nor should it be understood to suggest that all people are 'migrants,' or that migration has become a flattened and universally shared condition. If the word appears to characterize our time qualitatively, then that is not so much because it directly refers to the globe or describes a general condition, but rather because it presently resonates with larger concerns, developments, and happenings. It should, therefore, be possible to allow migration, extending to the 'migratory,' to signify, to matter, beyond specific historical experiences while at the same time refusing to universalize it. Between these two poles—the range of 'more or less': *more* than particular, yet *less* than general—the migratory may serve as a useful conceptual focus for critical work, intimating the larger, implicit, and sometimes unpredictable consequences and implications of ongoing processes of migration.

A sure sign of the wider resonances of migration are its relations to a series of concepts of importance in the contemporary humanities, such as travel, exile, diaspora, dissemination, hybridity, nomadism, and transnationalism. In that crowded neighborhood, migration is one of the less assuming residents, everyday, social, and material in comparison with the conceptual and aesthetic flights of fancy that the other terms have provoked. At the same time, its presence in the neighborhood is elemental: without migration as background or key, the other concepts would make little sense. The various terms entertain intricate relationships of influence, implication, and contestation with each other. Particularly, diaspora and nomadism have been taken to task for their heady celebration and generalization of the modes of existence that formed their ground, and with which the concepts maintained little or no relation.[1] Yet, neither is it productive to resist and condemn any form of conceptualization that is not immediately reducible to the description of a specific historical experience.

Hence, we take migratory as a ‘traveling concept’ that suggests an epistemological trajectory, or set of trajectories, rather than the exhaustive coverage of a phenomenon or the representation of a class of objects (Bal, *Concepts*). Migratory suggests a route rather than describing a field or domain; its thrust is heuristic rather than referential. An adjective, the word qualifies and restricts a specific way of looking at objects and phenomena, the relevance of which for issues of migration may—or indeed may not—be readily apparent.

As indicated, one trajectory the term traces entails the movement back and forth between migration as the experience of specific people and the resonance of that experience in a specific time and place, marked by particular political and economic developments. The word’s wider significance is semiotically enabled by the vacillation between its referential, metaphorical, and conceptual usages. Referentially, migration names something that happens in the world, unevenly and unequally. As metaphor, it transports selective aspects of that phenomenon to other domains to which it does not, by definition, literally apply in order to inflect specific aspects of those domains.[2] Or rather, metaphor enables a way of perceiving those domains in terms of a figuration that is not indigenous to them. The partial *similarities* between phenomena that metaphors propose only make sense to the extent that these phenomena are not the *same*. One does not call a lion a lion metaphorically; Achilles can be a lion because he is *not*. Similarly, migratory does not so much describe migrants’ lives and experiences, but hints at the relevance and significance of these for formations and processes that may well, at first sight, seem untouched by migration.

In its capacity as concept, finally, migratory abstracts from the literal and figurative meanings of the word, while yet remaining connected to and decisively informed by both. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari suggest that concepts have “irregular contours” (*Philosophy* 23). Hence, concepts are not effective to the extent that they ‘apply,’ fit their object like snug labels, but to the extent that they do not, causing friction. A concept exceeds, but does not transcend, the phenomenon and the metaphor that it comprises. Migration and the migratory stretch in relation to each other, and it is heuristically crucial that they be allowed to do so, but they cannot be severed.

It is neither easy nor important to decide what ‘came first’ in this respect, phenomenon, metaphor, or concept. Neither is it obvious that the phenomenon is more ‘real,’ and hence more epistemologically and politically compelling, because it would be more material or experiential. Metaphors and concepts are material, too: they do not come out of the blue, and they condense and suggest concrete ways of sensing, imagining, thinking, and acting that matter in the world. The facile distinctions between the real thing, fancy metaphor, and rarefied speculative thought should be resisted; they are all of this world. What matters is not the conceptual or material hierarchy between terms or between different usages of terms, but the stretch or path, both connecting and differentiating, between the one and the other. Most 'buzzwords' in the humanities travel or stretch in one or more of these ways; that is how they become such dense areas of investment and contestation. We do not propose to police or clean up the fuzzy usages of the migratory, thus risking to decide precipitously what migration means or should mean for the cultural disciplines. Defining the term too precisely would ironically prevent our coming to terms with what it gestures at, the unexpected resonances it may yield.

Migrancy and Nomadology

Our understanding of the migratory may be clarified further in dialogue with related but different terms, such as 'migrancy' and 'nomadology.' As argued, a clear symptom of the intense yet unresolved relevance of migration for the contemporary humanities are the manifold, associated, and contested attempts at its theoretical articulation. Both migrancy and nomadology have become the stake of polemical debates, which revolve around the efficacy and very admissibility of the conceptualization of migrants and migration, their 'translation' into theory, as it were. Since the migratory takes up and contributes to those debates, this section of our preface offers our readings of the arguments *contra* two other prevalent conceptualizations of the non-sedentary.

In "Unsettled Settlers" (2007), Graham Huggan polemicizes against what he terms the "new migrant aesthetic," an aesthetic he loosely associates with poststructuralism, postmodernism, as well as postcolonialism. At its worst "a kind of sophistry," this aesthetic works to obscure the specifics of historical experience and the power relations under which it is forged (140). In this respect, Homi Bhabha serves as a "particular culprit"—read: the usual suspect—for his alleged conflation of cosmopolitanism and migration (132). Especially in books by Iain Chambers (*Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, 1994) and Paul Carter (*Living in a New Country*, 1992), the term 'migrancy'—"a cultural studies neologism I have been unable to trace in any dictionary," Huggan observes (134)—carries out the metaphorical transport of migration to an abundant range of metaphysical and physical displacements, interruptions, and slippages.

For Huggan, this metaphorization is tantamount to the aestheticization of migration, with the aesthetic amounting to little more in his vocabulary than the figurative, utopian, metropolitan, and fictional; in other words, as all things 'fancy' in comparison with the elementary historical reality that migrants supposedly inhabit. Huggan easily admits to his irritation at the "relentless modishness" of Chambers' writing, in particular "its aura of street-smart intellectualism and sophisticated worldly savoir-faire" (133). The crude materialism in Huggan's polemic condemns migrants' life to an irreducible reality, a reality only secured by virtue of their oppression, and enjoins scholars to describe that reality faithfully, that is to say, directly and literally. However, Huggan's argument depends on his conflation of migration as word, metaphor, and concept. In effect, he resists the migration or transport of migration to migrancy, the stretch or extension in meaning from a ‘regular,’ referential word to the metaphoric and conceptual neologism one cannot (yet) find in dictionaries. This becomes most clear when he observes that “the aestheticized theory of migrant meaning traps migrants themselves in a semantic loop” (137). It only does so if one insists that migrancy fully and directly applies to migrants. But it does not, just as the metaphor of the lion does not apply to the lion. As a result, Huggan forecloses the opportunity to trace migration’s wider resonance, the occasion to explore if, how, and to what extent it matters elsewhere.

Huggan claims to depart from “a dialectical understanding of migration as both adaptable conceptual tool and ongoing sociohistorical process” (130). That dialectic, however, allows for little agency on the part of the process that is passively rendered intelligible by the instrumental concept. Current conceptualizations of migration can be seen to register its worldly effects in their frantic attempts, for better and for worse, to relate to it cognitively and affectively. Huggan seems eager to protect historical experiences of migration from their unwarranted theorization and aestheticization. Yet, he never questions the stilted arrangement that this obligation implies, casting migration as the passive and inarticulate object of knowledge for which cultural theory should actively, responsibly, account or speak. A genuinely dialectical view on the matter, however, should include a view on migration as a form of thinking in the world that only belatedly affects and influences theory. Concepts both actively attempt to account for and passively register the pressures of the objects they manifest; dialectically, phenomenon and concept share epistemological agency.

Nevertheless, Huggan’s essay contains several productive suggestions for our purposes, even though these seem only tangentially related to its main polemical thrust. At the end of his article, he proposes that “the metaphorization of migration…also draws attention to what we might call the metaphoricity of life itself”—which presumably includes the life of migrants as well as the ‘life’ of migration in culture and history (140). This one-off suggestion, not taken up at length, crucially resituates the metaphorization and aestheticization of experience—something Huggan earlier decried as the avoidable intellectual failures of poststructuralism and postcolonialism—at the heart of life itself, which hence can no longer be elementary for anyone. Reflection and experience are both metaphorical to some extent, especially in relation to each other. And, finally, Huggan contextualizes the currency of the concept of migrancy in that he relegates it to a particular setting, Australia, allowing him to point out that, even in a country where everybody is a migrant, “some … are more migrant than others” (138). Though it can only heuristically ‘apply’ beyond its literal counterpart of migration, migrancy can yet never be fully generalized. As the title of Huggan’s article suggests, ‘unsettling’ and ‘settling’ go together.

A similar conflation of phenomenon, metaphor, and concept afflicts the controversy that surrounds Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of the ‘nomad,’ developed in their “1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine,” part of *A Thousand*

Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1987 [1980]). Christopher Miller's trenchant critique is a case in point. Deleuze and Guattari offer what Miller describes as a " 'happy' nomadology" that promises the escape of thought from 'sedentary' metaphysics and the territorial state power that forms its setting ("Predicament" 30). Their philosophical conceptualization of the nomad is speculative and "free," Miller explains, since it is unbound by the "ethical burden of representing real, actual nomads" in the manner that anthropology is (11). To Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy should be non-representational: it should not attempt to reflect passively the world in thought. However, Miller goes on, their philosophy of the nomad in fact depends on an entire catalogue of incomplete, dubious, and staunchly colonialist anthropological writings, mainly submerged in the footnotes that do, in fact, claim to represent accurately the life and character of nomads. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari arrogate an "ethnographic authority" to themselves while, at the same, time their non-representational philosophy absolves them from the obligation to refer to and speak for real nomads truthfully (20, 11). Consequently, their nomadology reverts to a "violently representational colonial ethnography" (13). Ultimately, nomadology offers just another faulty representation of the life of nomads. In this sense, Miller resists the stretch in meaning from nomad to nomadology in a similar vein as Huggan's condemnation of the extension of migration to migrancy.

Miller explicitly situates his reading of the "Treatise on Nomadology" within the context of American cultural studies, identity politics, and the call to move 'beyond' identity altogether (7). In that particular frame, his argument may serve as a welcome reminder that one of the conceptual figurations of that 'beyond' has its colonialist, primitivist, and orientalist precedents. However, that context also centers his analysis more on identity than the essay warrants to begin with. For Deleuze and Guattari, the nomad is not so much a postidentitarian category as 'he' is a personalization of the effect of clearing space: 'nomad' names the erasure of an existing political, geometric, and cultural ordering of space, either for better or for worse. "[A]mbulant fire" specifies that effect of spatial erasure as well as the nomad does ("Treatise" 430). Though Deleuze and Guattari's writing is characteristically exuberant, it is far from given that nomadic space clearing is necessarily a good thing, something Miller's description of the essay as "happy-talk revolution" suggests (23). "[N]ew nomadism accompanies a worldwide war machine," Deleuze and Guattari write, "whose organization exceeds the State apparatuses and passes into energy, military-industrial, and multinational complexes" (427). The figure of the nomad does not convey "an irresistible revolutionary calling," they add, but changes meaning "drastically" with respect to concrete interactions and conditions (427).

While the text is indeed littered with orientalist references to roving bands, Genghis Khan, Arab tribes, a Japanese fighter, and so on, these add up to a picture of the life of nomads that is so kitschy and wide-eyed, that not many people will read the essay—*including* its self-parodically learned posturing with ethnographic sources—as a convincing piece of anthropological work. Deleuze and Guattari are ethnographers to the extent that Indiana Jones is: they play the stereotypical ethnographer. As they readily admit, their nomadology threatens at any time to lapse into "a phantasy that reactives…all the folklores, yoga, Zen, and karate" (418). Hence, it takes considerable effort to read the "Treatise on Nomadology" as promising the happy and earnest identity beyond identity that would warrant the uncharitable debunking that Miller carries out.

According to Paul Patton, the nomad is not a metaphor for Deleuze and Guattari, since that would imply the reliance of the notion upon "a comparison with real nomadic peoples" (37). Instead, the nomad is fundamentally and exclusively defined by his relation to space (39). However, it makes as little sense to sever all connections between nomadology and nomads as it does to reduce the former to the latter. Deleuze and Guattari's writing is influenced by existing historiography and anthropology on nomads, the exoticist imagination of these disciplines included; that Miller has made perfectly clear. Patton follows Deleuze and Guattari in their rejection of metaphorical concepts because, to them, metaphor implies comparison, hence resemblance, hence representation, hence identity, and hence participates in a sedentary form of thinking that is ultimately beholden to the territorial power of the state.

However, a migratory understanding of metaphor as the selective displacement or transport of one or more aspects from the domain of one term to another does not yield the same problem. To compare two terms does not imply they are the same or share a deep identity. One does not quite require a nomadology to establish that nomads are nomads. However, what Deleuze and Guattari's metaphorical conceptualization of the nomad is able to suggest is that capital, the military, and corporations, for instance, act as nomads insofar as they vacate the spaces that form the territories of states, erasing their markings, voiding established territory. To the extent that they do so, nomads are what they are—though they may, of course, subsequently or simultaneously have territorial ambitions of their own, imposing new orderings on the spaces they have vacated. These contemporary nomadic formations are vital to the sedentary state while, at the same time, standing askew in relation to it. This "tension-limit," in fact, characterizes the state ("Treatise" 401). The point of Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology is not that we should all become nomads, but that state and nomads are incompatible and yet mutually dependent.

Miller's reduction of nomadology to a (defective) description of nomads cannot appreciate how Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization implicates the modern state. Precisely there, however, they decisively modify the hackneyed view of the nomad that Miller claims they merely rehash. The conventional and evolutionistic perspective ordains that the state has surpassed and sublated nomadic tribalism in modern history. For Deleuze and Guattari, however, state and nomads are coexisting and contemporaneous. Nomadism does not precede the sedentary state; the state has always already existed: "[t]he more discoveries archeologists make, the more empires they uncover,” they write (397). Simultaneously, the sedentary state can only exist as such in relation to a nomadic outside upon which it depends; no state can be self-sufficient within its territorial boundaries. The nomadic exterior both exceeds the state (in the shape of multinationals, industrial complexes, religious movements, and so on) and fractures it (in the shape of minorities and other group-bound identities). Indeed, the state only exists to the extent that its power is capable of “internalizing, or appropriating locally” elements from those two sides of its constitutive exterior (397). The sedentary state is so jealous of nomads because it is made up of them. State and nomads are at once incompatible and interdependent.

Migrants are not nomads. Nomads clear space without subsequently occupying it; they only arrive somewhere in order to leave again. In contrast, migrants move “principally” from one place to another, “even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized” (419). They move in order to stay. Other mobile characters in the essay seasonally rotate between farmlands or follow other natural resources (452). Travelers may well combine various aspects of the above; migrants and nomads, for one, form “common aggregates” (419). These conceptual distinctions matter insofar as they allow Deleuze and Guattari to isolate the specifically nomadic threat to the state, which neither issues from *another* territory nor from a claim on *its* territory, temporary or permanent, but from the active *indifference* to territoriality that circumscribes the state from the ‘without’ that forms its ‘within.’ The state cannot address this threat by establishing and policing discrete borders. That notwithstanding, the jealous state to some extent fears in all non-sedentary characters the nomad who negates its constituting principle of territoriality. Though Deleuze and Guattari draw sharp conceptual boundaries—between state and nomads, between nomads and migrants—they simultaneously show how fully implicated in each other their categories are; their logic is as sharp as their analyses are fuzzy. Nomadology suggests that migration pinpoints as well as burdens, needles, the migratory aspect or ground of the state; hence, the lasting difficulty of states to deal with the migrants they paradoxically both beckon and reject.

Deleuze and Guattari’s nomads cannot be entirely divorced from the history and anthropology of real-life nomads. Miller responds by reducing the former to the latter. It seems he does so less to save the nomads from philosophical misrepresentation than to protect philosophy from the nomads and what they represent. Consider the following, remarkably emphatic, statement:

> *Deleuze and Guattari’s concept* could *remain pure,* prescriptive, *and* virtual *if they completely stayed away from actuality—if they left out the whole dimension represented by the [anthropological] footnotes; if they remained pure philosophers. But they wanted to have it both ways: to propose a “pure idea” of nomads mixed with “actual” information. The descriptive aspects of the project continually lead them into the realm of the actual, where the purity is quickly lost. Readers have to decide which is more important, a pure concept of actuality. (“Predicament” 25; emphasis in text)*

The crime apparent is that they have muddled the boundary between abstract, conceptual philosophy and concrete, descriptive anthropology or historiography. According to Miller, philosophers should stay away completely from actuality—a disciplinary obligation that assumes that that is possible to start with. Huggan's resistance to the metaphorical and conceptual stretch from migration to migrancy, tracing migration's wider resonances, coincided with an espoused dialectics that reserved epistemological privilege for theoretical reflection, while migration remained in place as its socio-material object. Miller's polemic against the extension of nomads to nomadology is accompanied by the call for a 'pure' philosophy that is abstract and should remain "simply…transcendental" ("We" 132). The stake of the argument, it would seem, is not so much to protect real-life nomads from unwarranted or irresponsible metaphorization, conceptualization, and aestheticization. Rather, it is to protect thought from the real, philosophy from its outside, "where the purity is quickly lost."[3] In both cases, thought should reflect (upon) migration without migrating itself, reflect (upon) change without changing itself. Contemplating its mobile object, the subject of thought remains in place: indeed, sedentary. In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology, the interiority that this defensive stance cherishes cannot but be connected with the power and territory of the state: "The State gives thought a form of interiority, and thought gives that interiority a form of universality" ("Treatise" 414).

The notion of the migratory that we propose, stretching between or traveling back and forth between phenomenon, metaphor, and concept, inflects not only *what* we think about, redistributing the field of legitimate objects of humanistic or cultural study, but also the *ways* in which we think about, as well as *with*, them. Felicitously, 'ways' can suggest 'modalities' as well as 'paths.' The heuristic trajectories of the migratory are selective and partial, hence essentially contestable; yet, they are potentially informative and compelling. In any case, these routes do not submit to the unfeasible epistemological alternative that Miller's argument enforces: *either* to claim the full representation or coverage of a worldly phenomenon or field, *or* resign to the extreme world-wariness of 'pure' philosophy; in other words, either to own or to forsake the object, either to colonize or to transcend the world. The very fact that Huggan's and Miller's opposition to the conceptual stretches in meaning from migration to migrancy and from nomads to nomadology coincides with the renewed regulation of the borders between dialectical thinking and its object, between different disciplines (philosophy and anthropology), and most of all between concept and world is significant. The coincidence intimates the pressing relevance of migration 'beyond' itself that is in need of conceptual analysis. Concept and actuality are connected by migratory paths; they cannot be divorced from each other; neither can they be reduced to each other. To appropriate Miller's harsh stipulation: "readers" should above all *not* "decide which is more important, a pure concept or actuality." Migratory, we propose, indicates precisely the stretch, expandable but finally unbreakable, between the two.

… Settings

The second word of our title, ‘settings,’ suggests the emplacement of the migratory, its mise-en-scène—something that may well be considered contradictory in light of our emphasis on heuristic pathways above. In this section, we offer several suggestions as to why the effects and implications of migration may be productively appreciated through the dense sceneries it stages over time.

To begin, a reinforced connection between migration and emplacement counters the modern history that has turned the West into the subject of time, and the rest of the world into an object of timeless space. Johannes Fabian has called this mode of thinking, in *Time and the Other* (1983), the “denial of coevalness.” For as long as the others of the West remained generally out of sight—except, that is, for their anthropological exhibition in museum set-ups that erased all temporality[4]—that denial could be easily maintained. Because of contemporary migration, however, Westerners and non-Westerners increasingly share the same metropolitan spaces. To the extent that the ideology of modernity is still predominant, migrants inhabit those spaces in an ephemeral, ghostly way: representatives of a premodern time before Time, they do not quite partake of the modern and metropolitan here and now. Arguably, this ideologically induced gap is far harder to negotiate than linguistic and cultural barriers. The word ‘settings’ suggests a spatial simultaneity that is shared, to some extent, by migrants and natives, non-Europeans and Europeans, as well as by increasing numbers of often stigmatized Europeans from the former communist countries. Of course, that simultaneity of place, of being in the same place at the same time, is severely modulated by segregation, exclusion, and culturally diverse experiences of temporality and spatiality. Nevertheless, at least migration has reshaped the colonial relations between center and margin, between the modern now and the archaic past, resituating these together in a shared environment where they find themselves in greater proximity to each other than before within the wider frame of the ‘globalizing’ world. Rather than the spatiotemporal distribution of modernity that elevated the West to historic time and condemned the rest to anthropological space, migratory settings allow for heterogeneous temporalities that, nevertheless, share the same stage.[5]

Additionally, our proposal to emplace and trace the migratory in specific settings skirts a debatable habit of contemporary cultural theory: the tendency to associate migration with placelessness, the assumption that migration supersedes specificities of place. In this respect, Tim Creswell faults what he terms a ‘nomadic metaphysics’ for repeating the same romanticizing and universalizing tendencies of the ‘sedentary metaphysics’ that it overturned (18). In the corner of the committed sedentarists, according to Creswell, we find Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and geographers such as Yu-Fi Tuan and Edward Relph; the competing and presently triumphant camp of nomadists consists of Paul Virilio, James Clifford, Marc Augé, and, inevitably, Deleuze and Guattari. For the former, Creswell implies, place is everything; for the latter, nothing. Consequently, neither is able to analyze place as a specific strategy of localization (19). Creswell therefore proposes an alternative conceptualization of place, which follows up on Edward Soja's so-called 'trialectics.' Soja criticized the trenchant oppositions through which space is charted (such as objective-subjective, material-mental, real-imaginary), and introduced the notion of 'thirdspace,' which he described as "a margin or edge where ties can be severed and also where new ties can be forged." (Soja qtd. in Creswell, 21) Space can be thought of or imagined as separated into neatly opposing realms; yet, it can only be lived, practiced, at their margins or edges. In the frame of Soja's thirdspace, and with reference to Judith Butler's understanding of performativity, Creswell describes place as "a reiterative social practice," a practice that constantly reproduces and transforms place (25).

For Creswell, place provides a preordered, yet not fully predetermined, ground for agency: "an unstable stage for performance" (25). That stage, as well as its mise-en-scène and props, to extend Creswell's theatrical metaphor, as well as the stories that characters perform on it, cannot be separated from each other. For place only exists *as* a particular configuration of "things, thoughts, and memories," Arturo Escobar suggests (Escobar qtd. in Creswell, 25). The place does not precede the play, the stage does not precede the performance, but is in fact produced by it. Assembled things, thoughts, and memories—as well as imaginations, dreams, gestures, styles, fantasies, nightmares, anticipations, and idealizations, one might add—do not *fill* an existing place, but enact and reenact place. When migrants arrive on the scene, they do not merely append their props to a place that otherwise remains the same. On the contrary, their things, thoughts, and memories, one might say, 'take place': they occur as events that reproduce place and produce it differently. In that way, Creswell's unstable stage for performance becomes a migratory setting.

Creswell's performative understanding of place as reiterative social practice briefly takes us back to J.L. Austin's influential argument that signs do not describe, but "do things" in and to the world. Jonathan Culler has followed the journey of Austin's ideas from analytical philosophy to literary criticism, deconstruction, and finally to gender and queer theory. The theory of the performative has ended up in a place different than it started but, Culler suggests, "to make your fortune, as the genre of the picaresque has long shown us, you have to leave home and, often, travel a long way …" (504). While Culler playfully casts Austin in the role of the adventurous hero who makes his fortune in strange and foreign lands, Mireille Rosello, in *France and the Maghreb: Performative Encounters* (2005), stresses a different view of his legacy. "If Austin's parameters had not been rewritten and modified to the extent that the intellectual heritage is a complex web of arguments and counterarguments," she writes, "it would probably not be interesting to invoke him here." (3) For Rosello, the 'fortune' of the performative does not so much accrue to Austin's name and his original formulation as so much accumulating wealth, but transpires as a series of chance encounters in different contexts. Each of these encounters transforms the theory as much as extends it. Once the performative reaches new ground, it plays out differently.

In a critical history in which the exception proved the rule many times over—performative rather than constative, non-serious rather than serious, quoted rather than original—and in which nevertheless, Rosello writes, "Austin's very first example of performative statements—the 'I do … uttered in the course of the wedding ceremony between a man and woman'…—forever imposed its exemplary power … whose social, religious, and (hetero)sexual premises and consequences are later on ignored," Rosello's migration of the performative to the shifting context of the 'encounter' between the Maghreb and France prompts the exemplarity of another example: not the felicitous marriage but the infelicitous divorce (Austin 5; Rosselo 2). "Consider 'I divorce you,' " Austin proposes as the example of a performative that 'misfires,' "said to a wife by her husband in a Christian country, and both being Christians rather than Mohammedans" (27). In this case, the performative fails to take place because of the cultural setting where it is uttered. The counterexample makes clear that the happiness of the performative is entirely dependent on the general acceptance of a particular procedure and its agreed-upon formula within a sharply demarcated context. Hence, it does not unproblematically extend to the intricate settings of transcultural interaction. For Rosello, the counterexample is therefore more appropriate than the example: "The supposedly problematic situation will be the norm rather than the exception, which makes the so-called norm hypothetical and unpredictable" (3).

In an ironic twist, the wedding example turns out to be less securely culturally grounded than even Rosello allows for. Austin's editors add the following note to the "I do": "Austin realized that the expression 'I do' is not used in the marriage ceremony too late to correct his mistake. We have let it remain in the text as it is philosophically unimportant that it is a mistake" (5, n. 2). But it is not so much a philosophically unimportant mistake as it is a philosophically important symptom of the inevitable interference between contexts. "I do" is the American formula; the Church of England uses "with this ring I thee wed." Only when grounded in a cultural context that is impossibly homogeneous, the performative works smoothly. Suggestively, however, Austin's exemplary case cannot avoid cultural confusion, proving Rosello right that the standard is in fact fully speculative and tenuous.[6] Migratory settings, to recuperate our argument so far, insists on a present simultaneity that is shared by migrants and non-migrants; it stresses the 'heterotopicality' of migration and the migratory rather than a fleeting placelessness; and it makes clear that identification and signification performatively take place in places that are, to various degrees, subject to transcultural interference and interaction, so that the scenarios at play are always potentially overdetermined. But our title phrase strikes us as felicitous for several more reasons.

Above, Culler's invocation of the adventurous journey of Austin's performative draws on the epistemological privilege of an appealing and age-old trope: that of the journey. John Durham Peters has argued that postmodern discourses on nomadism and diaspora partly repeat Christian and romantic figurations of exile, pilgrimage, and quest. In "Remaining Where You Are: Kincaid and Glissant on Space and Knowledge" (2002), Isabel Hoving criticizes the currency of the trope of travel and especially its generalization in postcolonial philosophy. As an alternative, she suggests an "approach to postcoloniality in which the central image is not travel, not migration, but the transnationality of specific places" (135). In Hoving's analysis, Edouard Glissant's Martinique and Jamaica Kincaid's Vermont garden, places shot-through with the influences of other places, serve as the exemplary settings for an epistemology of 'lingering' and 'dwelling.' "Knowledge doesn't only spring from travel," Hoving argues, "but equally from remaining where you are, and from there, deepening and broadening the analysis." (125) Hoving's proposal displaces the conventional, exoticist distribution of knowledge and space. Travel may bring new insights, but just as well confirm what we think we know. Lingering somewhere may install a deadening familiarity, or incite new knowledge. A lot may be familiar to unknown places, and alien to the ones we (assume we) know. Even the most familiar settings may become—indeed may have been all along—migratory.

We have primarily opted for 'settings' in our title rather than for alternatives such as 'places,' 'sites,' or 'locations' to reference Creswell's understanding of place as "an unstable stage for performance." But the term also has the advantage of discounting the idea, in accordance with Hoving's argument, that one's place of habitation is or potentially can be fully known empirically and experientially. Since all places are intricately shot-through with other places, other histories, and other imaginations, and continue to be affected by those, familiarity and knowingness are often little more than selectively maintained attachments. 'Setting' inflects place with an otherworldliness and fictionality that prevents it from epistemological mastery, and thus maintains its epistemological draw indefinitely. In Hoving's understanding, the material thickness and opaqueness of Glissant's Martinique and Kincaid's garden resist comprehension while ceaselessly provoking new insights (135).[7]

Additionally, setting suggests a perspective in which we relate to space as 'characters,' who take part in specific environments that are not entirely of their own design. We are *of* particular places rather than their unequivocal owners or spokespersons. To adapt a famous statement by Jacques Derrida: we may only ever really 'have' one place, while that place is nevertheless never fully 'ours.'[8]

In these two ways, 'settings' problematizes the belief that the experiential familiarity with particular places or positions validates particular knowledges as a matter of course. In this regard, Caren Kaplan instructively discusses the different deployments of the politics of place developed in feminist scholarship and activism: Adrienne Rich's 'politics of location,' urging North-American (white, middle-class) feminism to recognize it was speaking and acting from a particular, hence restricted and biased, place (164); a strategy to ground the difference of women's lives while avoiding determinism as well as relativism (151); and finally, under the heading of the 'standpoint epistemology' associated with the work of Nancy Hartsock, what Kaplan describes as a "reactionary identity politics" that equates personal experience in abeyance of the norm with a fully generalizable truth (25, 173). In contrast with the latter strand, Caplan advocates a perspective in which the relationship between place- or position-bound experience and knowledge is recognized to be fraught with history, contingency, and contestation (167). 'Settings' prevents the reification of place as much as its transcendence; one cannot easily speak of a 'setting' with assured epistemological authority.

Furthermore, migratory settings crucially indicate the spatial simultaneity of the histories and futures that various groups of natives and immigrants remember, project, and imagine. The prior anticipations of the new place of living by migrants, as well as their retrospective memories of the old place, become active parts of the new environment that they share with other inhabitants. As Ernst van Alphen argues, the memories that immigrants bring with them not only reflect the homeland, but are also inflected by the priorities and circumstances of the new country of habitation. Hence, these memories are, in fact, "acts of imagining" that produce cultural identifications that cannot be reduced to either place (57). At the same time, these actively imagined and reimagined memories become part of the place where they take place, enhancing and transforming it. Because of the far-reaching effects of migration and global media, Van Alphen argues, cultures can now no longer be neatly mapped onto places (54). If geographical place and cultural environment fully overlap, they can form a stable ground for identity. When they do not, however, they require an active and imaginative identification that connects the two. Hence, place must be invested with affect and significance by us, something that does not make place imaginary or irrelevant, but all the more crucial as an aspect of identification (56). Yet, rather than referential ground, place becomes performative stage.

Finally, the word 'setting' signals what we believe to be a fundamental aspect of the aesthetic of the human: the dialectical relationship between setting and character, or between background and portrait. Realistic credibility or *vraisemblance*, both within and beyond art, crucially depends upon the maintenance of a measured relation between character and setting, between portrait and background. Within that relationship, the particularities of place should inform and substantiate the portrayal of character; yet, simultaneously, a character must 'stand out' against that setting or background to move into focus. A character entirely autonomous of a particular spatial frame becomes vacant; a character fully submerged into context disappears from sight as human. Because the figuration of migrants by definition includes more than one setting or background, their individuality and even humanity stands at risk to become blurry or fade away. Culturalism can be seen as the tendency to make the figuration of migrants realistically intelligible by reifying the cultural setting or background of the place where they used to live: we make sense of immigrants by staging them in their earlier setting, seeing them against their earlier background, more often than not shaped by racist and exoticist stereotypes. Assimilationism, in contrast, enforces the exclusivity of the new spatial and cultural frame. Migratory settings attempts to recognize anew the figuration of the human against plural and superimposed backgrounds, allowing for migratory effects of character.

For these connotations and usages, we have baptized the present volume 'migratory settings.' Extending from migration, migratory traces the 'life' of migration in culture. At the same time, the migratory is intimately tethered to particular settings. The oxymoronic tension between the two terms in our title prevents the transcendence as well as reification of either. Movement does not lead to placelessness, but to the intensification and overdetermination of place, its 'heterotopicality.' Place does not unequivocally authenticate or validate knowledge but, shot-through with the transnational and the transcultural, exceeds it ceaselessly. As movement and place cross, settings thick with variegated memories, anticipations, fantasies, idealizations, and nightmares emerge.

Migratory Aesthetics

This volume emerged out of a project that was initiated by Mieke Bal, entitled 'Migratory Aesthetics.' Dedicated to the mutual implication of the aesthetic dimension of practices of migration and the migratory dimension of aesthetic processes, Migratory Aesthetics included two workshop sessions in January of 2005 and 2006, co-organized by the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), based at the University of Amsterdam, and CentreCATH, the Center for Cultural Analysis, Theory, and History (University of Leeds), directed by Griselda Pollock. Pollock also curated an art exhibition at the University Gallery in Leeds (January 11–March 15, 2006), which included work by Martine Attille, Sutapa Biswas, Lubaina Himid, Isaac Julien, Fanozi 'Chickenman' Mhkize, Ingrid Pollard, and others. Selected contributions to the 2005 workshop were bundled in *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics*, edited by Catherine Lord and Sam Durrant, published in the Thamyris/Intersecting book series at Rodopi. The present volume collects articles that are based on presentations initially delivered at the 2006 workshop.

Bal's understanding of the relationship between the migratory and the aesthetic may perhaps be best introduced through the video installation she has made, together with the visual artist Shahram Entekhabi, entitled *Glub (Hearts*) (2004). *Glub* is the transcription in Latin script of an Arabic word. It means 'kernels,' 'hearts,' ‘pits,’ or ‘seeds,’ and connotes the everyday habit, widespread in the Near and Middle East as well as North Africa, of shelling and consuming roasted and salted sunflower, pumpkin, and other seeds. However, the main setting of Bal and Entekhabi’s work on the phenomenon is Berlin, Germany, current capital and a European cultural center. Hence, *Glub* takes the translation of a detail, minute but pervasive, of the everyday aesthetic of another place to a Western context as its subject matter. As a result, the Western metropolis becomes a migratory setting, where different aesthetics of the everyday overlap and combine.

The work comprises a thirty-minute art film and a video installation of eight monitors. The film presents casual interviews with anonymous passers-by, shopkeepers, clients, curators, artists, writers, and academics, all ‘talking heads’ reflecting on the seeds and the habit. The interviews are combined with images of seed-eating *flâneurs* strolling through urban streets. At times, it is difficult to ascertain exactly where those streets are located: some look like Berlin, others like the Middle East. In the video installation that accompanies the film, eight monitors show various people who consume the seeds, or at least attempt to do so, without speaking. The soundtrack only offers loud crackling and munching sounds. When putting on the earphones attached to each monitor, however, visitors overhear off-camera voices that recount food-related memories and stories in a variety of languages. Most faces of the non-speaking but noisy seed eaters on the monitors belong to ethnicities other than those one would readily associate with the habit. Some are at ease, others seem awkwardly self-conscious, their eyes staring, their foreheads sweating, their mouths and lips struggling to handle the seeds and their shells.

The precise counterparts to the main film’s talking heads, the monitors display ‘*listening* heads,’ people trying to listen in a language different than their own, enacting a receptive semiotic habit that is alien to them, yet desirable; as if to listen in this way, while eating the seeds, even awkwardly, enables the subjects to ‘get’ the recounted memories and stories far better. Caught between the talking and the listening heads, between the expressive and the receptive faces, visitors must negotiate between two ways of responding: either just to see and hear about a habit that is probably unfamiliar to them, or to see and hear about a habit that is unfamiliar *while* simultaneously adopting an unfamiliar way of looking and listening. To facilitate that latter response, the installation provides baskets with ample supplies of *glub*. The alternative the work offers its visitors, then, is to look at and listen *to* the talking heads, or to look and listen *with* the listening heads. For English speakers, the former attitude has the distinct advantage of linguistic transparency: the film offers English subtitles. But subtitles are not available to the visitors who adopt the latter possibility and join the munching listeners. Nevertheless, seed by seed, bit by bit, those visitors may eventually learn more about the significance of seed eating, gradually getting ‘the hang of it, that feeling,’ as one of the interviewees describes the affect that accompanies the practice. Struggling to 'get the hang of it': the expression beautifully captures the aesthetic effect the work strives for: the sensate perception, appreciation, and active relation to the unassuming migrants' habit as situated in a European capital.

In "Food, Form, and Visibility: *Glub* and the Aesthetics of Everyday Life" (2005), Bal explains that the work grew out of an inchoate sense that some inner city streets of Berlin seemed to her simultaneously more dirty and lively. That impression subsequently found its image in the shells of seeds lining those streets, indexing the presence of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa. The elementary visibility of the practice and the litter it produces should not be taken for granted. Indeed, having no doubt already seen the practice of eating *glub* in Berlin, where he lives, and long before that in his native Iran, Entekhabi only noticed, actually perceived, it on holiday in Turkey ("Food" 58). Hence, it took a long series of casual perceptions in Iran, Berlin, and Turkey for the habit of seed eating to emerge as a significant speck of culture in the artist's eye, for his perception to be kindled to make out its relevance as part of the everyday aesthetic of his hometown. Bal turns this unpredictable, elusive shuttle between amorphous sense and meaningful image into the stake of her understanding of the aesthetic as it has emerged from her and Entekhabi's work on *Glub*.

Bal takes the building blocks for that aesthetic from variegated sources. Briefly, the philosopher Alan Singer proposes to conceive of the aesthetic as an attitude, a practice rather than a collection of objects, in which translatability and mutual recognition are important aspects. Psychoanalytical writer Kaja Silverman contributes the thought that to perceive something means to "embed an image within a constant shifting matrix of unconscious memories, which can render a culturally insignificant object libidinally resonant, or a culturally significant object worthless" (qtd. in "Food" 55). From art historians Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves Alain-Bois, Bal takes the idea, introduced by Georges Bataille, of a formlessness that resists recognition and, hence, meaning. From these sources, Bal assembles a political aesthetic that neither accepts the visibility of forms that are inevitably informed by ethnicizing and exoticizing stereotypes, nor submits to the invisibility of all that falls outside of sedimented cultural codes, but that "enables us to learn to see what, by lack of recognizable form, seems invisible" ("Food" 56). This migratory aesthetic persuades one to notice with different eyes what has been seen before. From mere waste product or trace of the exotic, the empty shells lining the streets of Berlin reappear as an aesthetically resonant aspect of the imaginary of the modern Western metropolis. *Glub* practices, actively *does*, migratory aesthetics by inviting its visitors to re-appreciate the scattered shells as a formless image that yet deserves recognition, perhaps libidinal or affective cathexis.

'Getting the hang of it' also forges a new recognition of the streets that host the habit. *Glub* pictures Berlin as a series of streets where people are walking, standing, crouching, and sitting while eating the seeds. As indicated above, these streets are not all immediately recognizable as Berlin's. Depending on one's familiarity with the city, some streets will be more easily identifiable than others. Yet, by and large the film suspends the instant recognizability of its setting, dislocating its viewers' sense of place. Only as one reaches the end credits does it become clear that not all the streets featured in the film are, in fact, located in the German city. The credits express gratitude to the inhabitants of Datca, Dortmund, Hagen, Istanbul, Moscow, Paris, Raffah, and Toronto for their hospitality. Even that belated information, however, does not disclose exactly which pictured street is located in what city.

Throughout, the film omits topographical information. There are no on-screen captions that supply place names. The soundtrack refuses to suggest *couleur locale* by offering the usual stereotypical melodies to signal location: say, *Schlager* music when we find ourselves in Berlin, and oriental tunes when we move to Istanbul. Neither does the film indicate place by bathing Western cities in harsh and grey, and Eastern ones in soft and yellow, light. *Glub* purposefully foregoes established cinematic and television conventions that work to convey location. Precisely by circumventing these conventions, however, the film re-inquires into the visibility of the inner-city streets of the West. Centering on Berlin, the documentary imagines a continuous 'cityscape' that runs from Toronto to Raffah. Through migrants' establishments, practices, sounds, and gestures, the urban streets of the West have acquired a new life and a changed appearance. The film's imagery of street life calls on its viewers to picture Berlin anew rather than to recognize a familiar form, the conventional urban aesthetic of the West.[9]

In this volume, Bal's contribution further specifies her understanding of migratory aesthetics in relation to the medium of video. In "Heterochronotopia," Bal discusses an exhibition of video installations that includes works by Ros Theuws, Mona Hatoum, Chantal Akerman, William Kentridge, Gary Ward, Jesus Segura, Gonzalo Ballester, Liza Johnson, Wojtek Doroszuk, Celio Brage, and others. That exhibition has, in fact, never occurred, but serves as the necessary fiction that allows the works to relate to each other spatially. The hypothetical proximity of the video installations triggers intimacies among them, the figures and settings in them, and between these and the visitor who virtually moves among them. In effect, the exhibition becomes a video installation of its own, which sets the stage for its own changeability, as the virtual visitor moves from work to work by different routes. Some of the works that Bal includes in her imaginary exhibition are 'about' migration thematically; others are not, but offer videographic experiments with motion in time and space; while yet others combine both of those aspects. The propinquity of the works produces the inevitable interlacing of these perspectives, the theme of migration and the experimental aesthetics of video, so that the one may turn out to be 'about' the other, as well as vice versa. As a result, migration and videography combine to make three, to adapt a phrase by Bal: a migratory aesthetics of movement emerges. Bal's fictional exhibition of video installations, each of them offering its own carefully framed and paced spatio-temporal experience, which yet cannot but inflect one another, and which may combine unexpectedly to move, to affect, the viewer, offers a beautifully compelling image of what a migratory setting may be and do.

Migratory Settings

We open our volume with Bal's fictional exhibition of video installations, through which she elaborates her critical appropriation of Michael Bachtin's concept of 'chronotope' as '*hetero*chronotope' in order to account for the migratory in culture.[10] The exhibition serves as the model for a conceptualization of place as quasi-theatrical setting, in which different forms of timing and spacing intimately inflect one another. Bal's essay sets the stage for two other contributions that explore place-bound condensations of other times and places.

In "Let's Fall in Love: Staging a Political Marriage," Maaike Bleeker discusses a series of works by the Israeli artist duo Gil and Moti, who live and work in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Their explicit performances of their life, marriage, and joint affair with an Arab man, Bleeker shows, both reveal and offset the performative maintenance of the realities we share. In *The Wedding Project,* the artists staged their marriage and subsequent honeymoon in the central space of the Rotterdam town hall. As a result, that culturally and politically central place became 'thickened' with different times and places. The current mayor of Rotterdam presided over the ceremony; the wedding pictures showed the wedded husbands in the presence of the celebrities immortalized in wax in Amsterdam's Madame Tussaud's; Gil and Moti's subsequent occupancy of their wedding bed in the town hall made reference to John Lennon and Yoko Ono's famous 'bed-in' in the Amsterdam Hilton Hotel in 1969; and the neo-classical statue of a young, semi-nude man in the hall, commemorating Dutch resistance during the Second World War, became improbably erotically charged in proximity to the wedding bed, and moreover intimated the often neglected continuity between that history and the current state of the Middle East. The instantaneous performative effect of the marriage vow occludes a historicity that in advance makes some marriages spontaneous and romantic, and others deliberate and political, hence less than true.

Murat Aydemir analyzes the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium, a museum that claims to represent the history and present of Central Africa, while simultaneously embodying in its mise-en-scène the attitudes of nineteenth-century Belgian colonialism. Its exhibition consistently shows African 'characters' as put-into-place, as reduced to background, biotope, or tribal niche. In sharp contrast, the historical Belgian colonists, explorers, travelers, and scientists are all shown as standing out against, or acting independently from, their cultural habitat. Ostensibly, contemporary museum visitors share the latter relation to space. However, close attention to the subtle yet decisive discipline of the walking tour, the manner in which the place times and paces the impressions of its visitors, suggests that the museum ultimately stages and shapes a Western, contemporary, and colonial subject ("Staging Colonialism: The Mise-en-Scène of the Africa Museum in Tervuren, Belgium").

The second part of our volume is dedicated to African translations or, more precisely, 'transcontextualizations' of literary texts or genres the West has canonized. Paulina Aroch discusses the translation and appropriation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596–98) that Julius Nyerere, first president of independent Tanzania, published under the title of *The Capitalists of Venice* in 1969. In particular, Aroch traces how specific clichés in the earlier play, centering on the opposition between the rural and the urban, translate differently to their new setting in the later play. Viewed as cultural 'shortcuts,' clichés trigger ambiguous effects of estrangement and identification when they are relocated, Aroch argues, and may thus offer possibilities for critical recycling ("Migratory Clichés: Recognizing Nyerere's *The Capitalists of Venice* [1969]). In "Antigone on the African Stage: 'Wherever the Call for Freedom is Heard!' " Astrid van Weyenberg argues that the adaptations of Sophocles' *Antigone* by African playwrights Athol Fugard and Fémi Òsófisan should not be viewed so much as tragic acts of mimicry of the colonial masters' cultural capital, but rather as active expropriations establishing that the figure of Antigone no longer belongs to the West, and never belonged to West to begin with. Finally, in this section, Sarah De Mul details how, in Dorris Lessing's *African Laughter* of 1992, the autobiographical narrator, Marxist, feminist, and Western, makes way for the voices and sounds that comprise the African everyday.

Referencing Jacques Derrida's condensation of hospitality and hostility, part three addresses three 'hostipitable' places: Gollwitz, Calais, and Tahiti. Annette Seidel Arpaci recounts events that took place in the German village of Gollwitz. In 1997, its inhabitants threatened to torch the lord's manor [*Herrenhaus*] of the village if it were to house some sixty Jewish immigrants from the former USSR as planned. The protest was quickly joined by local politicians, and turned out to be effective. In 2003, the same mansion was officially designated a German-Jewish meeting place, offering temporary hospitality to Shoah survivors and students from Israel and the U.S. Against the background of the Gollwitz story, suggesting the spatial simultaneity of practices of hostility and hospitality, Arpaci subsequently discusses the ambiguous implications of the contemporary Jewish-German writer Maxim Biller's defiant self-identification as foreigner and Creole: in his words, "a disturbingly unshaven, smolder-eyed Tonio-Kröger-face" standing out in a pale and blond crowd. Arpaci reads the terms of Biller's self-creolization in dialogue with Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger* of 1903.

In "The Visuality of the Other," Sudeep Dasgupta discusses Marc Isaacs' documentary *Calais: The Last Border* (2003). Revolving around the disbanded Sangatte refugee camp in Calais, the film draws intricate lines of connection and disconnection between the evicted refugees from the South, immigrants from the U.K., British visitors who visit the town to buy cheap liquor and alcohol, and regular tourists. The film not only problematizes the distinction between illegal and legal travel, Dasgupta claims, but also between seemingly racist and liberal reactions to the presence of the refugees and 'illegal aliens.' The essay finally enjoins the documentary in a dialogic set up between Derrida's fraught ethical relation to the other, in which her or his visibility is tantamount to her or his conditional identification, and Jacques Rancière's political aesthetic, which aims to redistribute the relationship between what is and is not perceivable in a given sociocultural context. Wim Staat's "The Other's Intrusion" draws on Derrida, Levinas, and Heidegger in a reading of Claire Denis' *L'Intrus* (2004), a film inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy's 2000 book of the same title. The film follows the slow but steady self-alienation of Louis Trebor after undergoing a heart transplant, made possible by a new organ of unclear origin. Confronting or hallucinating the alterity of mountain smugglers, Eastern-European organ suppliers, and a wild woman roving in the woods, the protagonist gradually comes face to face with his own alterity, particularly with respect to his relationship to his son. His feverish dreams cutting from place to place, and from reality to imagination, Trebor finally retires to the Polynesian island of Tahiti, which he has visited before in his youth. However, Trebor does not refind himself, but suffers continuing sleeplessness and nightmares; this journey offers no recuperation of selfhood.

The final section of our volume is titled "Reframing the Migratory." Alex Rotas argues that photographer Phil Collins' *delivery* series complicates common assumptions about refugees who have fled from Eastern to Western Europe, couched as they are in the terms of oppositions between traditional and modern, extended and nuclear family, individualism and formality, as well as in a 'biblical' imagination of expulsion, flight, and exile. Collins took family portraits of refugee families from Kosovo who have relocated in the U.K., and included these pictures in photographs of the family members they have left behind in Kosovo. The resulting family portraits combine, and split apart on, two divergent imaginations of what families are, while simultaneously attesting to, as well as bridging, the gap in space and time that keeps the two parts of the family, or the two families, apart ("Looking Again at Rupture: Crossing Borders, Family Pictures"). In her contribution, titled "A Place of Her Own," Maria Boletsi compares and contrasts Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988) and *My Garden (Book)* (2000). Having migrated from Antigua, the subject of the earlier book, Kincaid struggles with the migratory again in her garden in Vermont, which does not offer retreat, oblivion, or paradisal bliss, but instead an unwieldy but informative indeterminacy. Kincaid's garden is simultaneously a material place and the imaginary setting of writing.

Our volume concludes with Griselda Pollock's "Beyond Words." Pollock discusses three video works by women artists that aesthetically register and reflect on migration: Tracy Moffat's *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989), Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988), and Martina Attille's *Dreaming Rivers* (1988). The works are all set in particularly emphatic settings: a lurid film set that represents a lonely shack in the Australian outback (Moffat); a Middle-Eastern bathroom that moves beyond the orientalist imagination to accommodate a mother-daughter intimacy that, after the daughter's emigration, has been replaced by the letters that, visible over the images of the bathroom, partially screen it from sight (Hatoum); a room cluttered with clothes, mementoes, religious icons, photographs, herbs, jars, and bowls, where an older woman lies dead (Attille). In addition, the three works that Pollock analyzes all restrict or defamiliarize language, while their soundtracks stress a rhythmic amalgam of silences, songs, voices, and indeterminate sounds. Drawing on work by Julia Kristeva, Christopher Bollas, and Bracha Ettinger, Pollock argues that the videos resonate 'beyond words' with the infant's prenatal becoming and being-transformed by the sonorous envelope of the maternal body. That original 'migratory setting,' Pollock concludes, has instilled us with a desire for what she terms 'co-affection,' which works of arts may touch or mobilize.

Notes

1. For a considered discussion of what Rogers Brubaker has called the "'diaspora' diaspora," see Baronian, Besser, and Jansen.

2. Margaroni and Yiannopolou systematically relate metaphoricity to what they describe as the "postmodern politics of mobility" (9). Addressing current disaffection with 'postmodern' word play, they argue that metaphor is part and parcel of a politics in which the production and displacement of meaning are at stake (10). They take metaphor as a movement of decontextualizing and recontextualizing that installs transport within meaning, and that can elucidate the "co-implication of the social and the discursive, language and power" (11). Bal's *Metaphoring* argues for a view of metaphor in which meaning is transported from the particular to the particular rather than from the particular to the abstract or general.

3. A more reasoned and relevant critique is offered by Caren Kaplan. Kaplan argues that Euro-American postructuralist and postmodern critics have privileged the aspect of deterritorialization in Deleuze and Guattari's work, while all but ignoring its simultaneity with reterritorialization; examples include work by Dominique Grisoni, Rosi Braidotti, and Teshome Gabriel (91). Kaplan accounts for the currency of the figure of the nomad on the basis of what she describes as a "close fit" between mythologized aspects of migration, such as independence, and modernist idealizations of solitary locations far removed from industrial and metropolitan sites (90); hence, postmodernism reiterates modernism in this respect. She analyzes a similar tendency in Deleuze and Guattari's own texts: their work is both enabled and restricted by "a deeply modernist strain" that surfaces precisely where they claim to make radical breaks with modernity (67).

4. For a case study, see Aydemir, in this volume.

5. For examples of such heterogeneous temporalities, see Rotas (54–56).

6. For more on the performance and performativity of the wedding, see Maaike Bleeker's contribution to this volume, titled "Let's Fall in Love: Staging a Political Marriage."

7. On Kincaid *My Garden (Book),* see also Maria Boletsi's article in the present volume.

8. Derrida explains, in a discussion with Paul Patton: "In this short book, *Monolingualism of the Other*, when I say that I speak only one language, I have only one language, and that this language is not mine—which is a contradiction in terms—on the one hand, I describe a very specific colonial context in which I was born, with a number of very singular features. I won't recall these here, but this is common to people like me, in my generation, at a very specific moment in Algeria, in a colonial Algeria, a Jewish community and so on. I won't describe this. But, on the other hand, I had the feeling that this singular structure was exemplary, universal, in the sense that everyone in any context, colonial in this sense or colonial in another sense, could say the same thing. I have only one language, a mother tongue as they say, a mother language, and the language is something one cannot appropriate, it is never mine. A language is structurally the language of the Other. Even if you were not born, like me, in a Jewish community and brought up in French schools, colonised on the one hand and on the side of the colonisers on the other hand ... even if you're not in that situation, if you were born French, in France, with a French family for generations, nevertheless, the language you speak would not be yours. That is the structure of the language." (unpaginated)

9. For an extensive discussion of Bal and Entekhabi's work, see Aydemir.

10. Imaginary at the time of writing the article, the exhibition has since become reality under the title *2 move: migration + video*, on show in Murcia, Spain (March–May 2007) and Enkhuizen, The Netherlands (September 2007–January 2008).

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‘Heterochronotopical’ Stagings

Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 35–56

Heterochronotopia

Mieke Bal

In the early 1990s, I first read a passage, barely more than a sentence, from science fiction writer Samuel R. Delany's autobiography *The Motion of Light in Water,* quoted in an article by historian Joan W. Scott. In this seminal article, Scott persuasively argued for the need to historicize the category of experience. Reading Delany's excerpt, I had the heady sensation of seeing a video—an experimental one to boot, in a Derek Jarman-like blue, within a double frame (wall to wall, the frame of his vision) of double movement (of light on water, of bodies). Standing on the threshold of a "gym-sized room," dimly lit by blue bulbs, Delany saw "an undulating mass of naked male bodies, spread wall to wall" (Delany 173; quoted in Scott 22). From Scott's quotation, I went to Delany's book and found many passages that have this effect.

Delany's literary prose and its descriptive style flickers with points of light, experiments with color, surface and skin, and makes ordinary movements beautiful and strange. The libidinal saturation, he says, "was not only kinesthetic but visible" (173). The combination of kinesthetic and visible: is this not a definition of the moving image? And, given the intimate, unprepared, informal, and improvised nature of Delany's look, specifically, of video as today's medium? While steeped in narrative, the story recedes into the background, leaving a strong, physical sensation of image in movement luring me into corners of life I had never seen or been. The passage remains in my mind as a prophetic memory, of the kind that science fiction writing according to Delany would make possible. The passage suggests that experience, in addition to having to be historicized, needs to be kinetico-visualized, in other words, turned into a video. In retrospect, it prepared me for seeing in videos movements, traces, made out of light not as records, but as creations of hitherto unseen and invisible things-as-(to be)-experienced. For this reason, I have chosen video as the field of inquiry for this article.

I propose to consider video as a migratory medium and the migratory in culture as videographic in terms of a double work with movement. This implicates space—the settings, always double or multiple, where the scenes of video are set as well as where the movements of the migratory take place. It also, inevitably, implicates time, for as we have learned from the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, place and time cannot be severed even in thought. The term he uses for this bond between space and time is 'chronotope.' My argument specifies this term, for the migratory and the videographic, as 'heterochronotope.' I present my case for such a concept through a small number of video works.[1]

To make my point that 'the migratory' is a useful concept distinct from 'migration,' I have selected a work of video art that is not at all 'about' migration, namely Dutch artist Roos Theuws' experimental video work *Gaussian Blur*. Rather than thematically centering on the social phenomenon of migration, the starting point is a 'Delanyan' video. At the other end of the spectrum—from 'about' video to 'about' migration, I place Mona Hatoum's 1988 video *Measures of Distance*, a work that, equally experimental as a video, does have migration at its heart. Several other works will extend the validity of my claim and demonstrate the great range of aesthetic and philosophical possibilities this idea can expose. I will briefly compare Hatoum's work with Chantal Akerman's early work *News from Home* (1976) and, in the course of the argument, invoke William Kentridge's *Shadow Procession* and *Felix in Exile*, Gary Ward's installation of *8till8* and *Kofi Cleaning*, Jesus Segura's video installation *I Can Be You,* Gonzalo Ballester's 2003 video *Mimoune,* Liza Johnson's *South of Ten,* Wojtek Doroszuk's *Lunch* [1], and *Dalice* by Celio Braga. Coming from different parts of the world, these works have ended up here because they each contribute a specific aspect to the concept of heterochronotopia.

In this article, then, I seek to set up a conversation between a theme or motive and a theoretical reflection. The two aspects, however, are merged so that the theme is theorized and the theory embodied. Many publications about video art follow the traditional art-historical format of the chronology of pioneers and influences. Starting with the emergence of video art in the 1960s, they tell the story of an art form and a medium. Well-known, useful overviews of this kind can be considered a background for this reflection (e.g. Rush, *Video*; *Media*). I do not aim to rewrite that story. Instead, 'video' is considered a practice, and so is migration. The collective publication edited by Janine Marchessault, devoted to video and identity, comes closer to my goal, but remains too thematic for my specific purposes.[2]

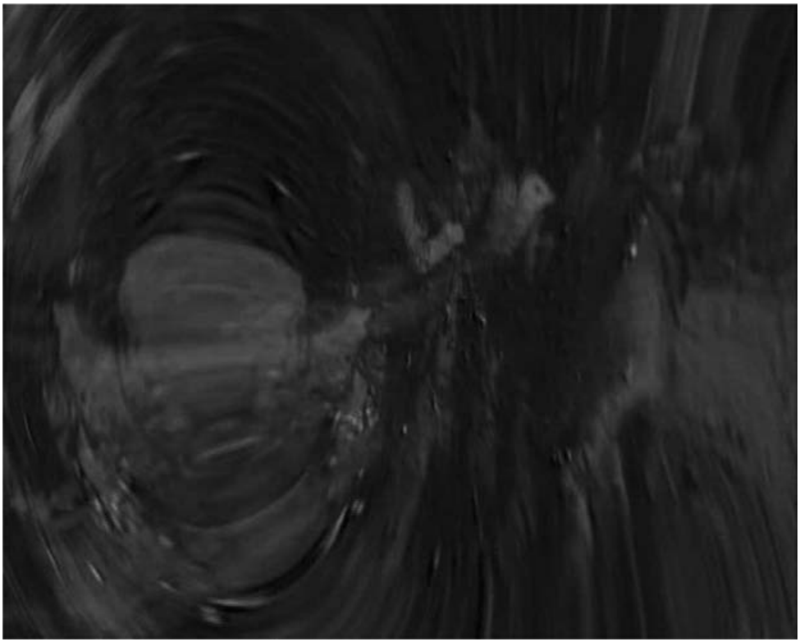
Here, I try to make more than juxtapositions of that mystifying conjunction 'and,' and thus overcome the limitations of the thematic approach. Instead, the specific angle of my problematic, the way video can help articulate migratory culture and vice versa, compels a theoretical framework within which the individual works make sense and to which, conversely, each of them contributes. From the dual starting point of Delany's writing and Theuws's light-writing or visual writing in her videographic experiment, I will limit myself to one aspect of many that the 'conversation' between video and migratory culture presents.

Abstraction and its Shadows

Flashes of light, undulating like water or in water, are the 'substance' of Theuws' *Gaussian Blur*. Just as in Delany's prose, Theuws's video flickers with points of light, sometimes looking like blisters on the video's skin. Layers of peaceful, pastoral images and of violent storms threatening the peacefulness of the landscape simultaneously stream through the frame, hesitating between still images reminiscent of impressionist painting, and exceedingly slowed-down moving images of real people and animals. This work tells us what Delany also told us, that there are things to see that are difficult, demanding, that do not surrender to the lazy eye but ask us to engage, body and soul, with the surface of light and only then offer much-coveted access. A kind of timelessness infuses the undeniable but exceedingly slowed-down movement. While viewers are physically aware of the external temporality of their bodies—an awareness increased by the points of light that prick us with a very different pace—another temporality reaches out, interferes with ordinary haste, and insinuates slowness into the sensation of looking. This work helps me to argue that 'migratory' is not a theme but an aesthetic, as well as that 'video' is eminently suitable to give shape to such an aesthetic.

The first and most general feature video and migration share is, of course, movement. Movement, the essential property of video as a medium, is however denaturalized in the works in which I am interested. This de-naturalizing process, performed in different ways and with different thematic emphases in all the works I will discuss, is due to the superposition of the two terms this volume brings together, aesthetics and the migratory. I interpret these terms as follows. Aesthetics refers to an experience of sensate binding, a connectivity based on the senses; migratory refers to the traces, equally sensate, of the movements of migration that characterize contemporary culture.

Since superposition is the aesthetic principle of this video, I begin with *Gaussian Blur,* without doubt among the most 'difficult' of contemporary video works, and the least thematically related to migration of my small selection. On one level, Theuws' work is simply a beautiful depiction of figurative tableaux, almost but unsettlingly not quite still: children, a horse, grass, trees. But due to her layered, experimental editing, the video work is clearly 'abstract.' Although, I hasten to add, that depends on how we define abstraction. Instead of a resistance to form, hence, the opposite of figuration, abstraction, here, is the opening up, even within traditional forms, of the potential for new, not-yet invented forms.[3]



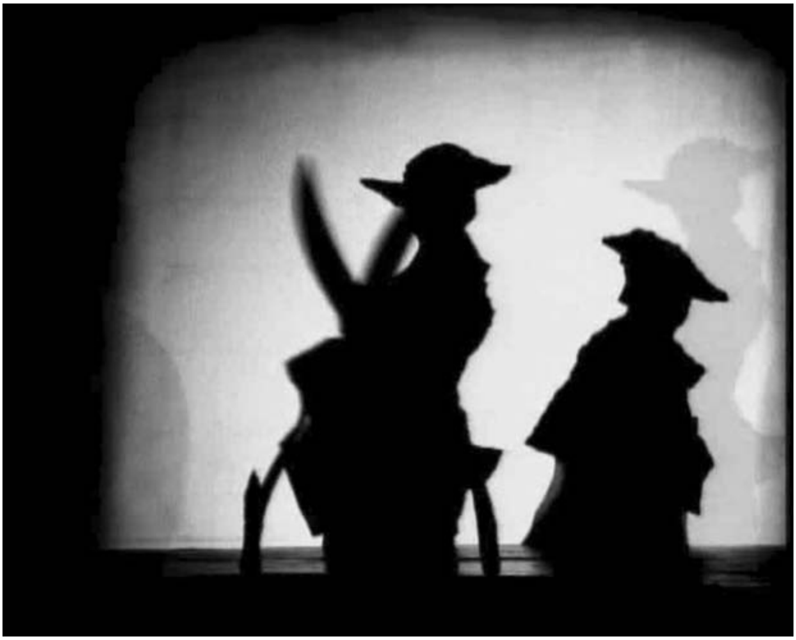
Roos Theuws, *Gaussian Blur* (2005–6). Single-channel video installation displayed on monitor. DVD, color, no sound, 14’01”. Courtesy of the artist.

The prominent tool to open form up to the as-yet unformed is surface. The blistered skin of the video not only makes the images less readable. It also makes them more rich in forms, each layer offering its own, not quite visible but most surely there, ready for the viewer willing to abandon perceptive mastery. What Theuws’s video and Delany’s prose have in common is that they open the door to a mode of looking that I like to see as both ‘abstract’ and ‘political’ in four ways.[4]

This mode of looking, I contend, is characteristic of video as a medium; at least, this is what the works I have selected convey. Theuws’s work explores a fourfold abstraction and thereby writes, by means of light, the heart of the project of bringing the movement of video to bear upon the movement of migration. This work solicits a way of looking because it is, first, abstract in the sense of showing glimpses of possible new forms in terms of a splitting or doubling of time, through a “technics of time” (Carter) that over-layers fast (flickering) and slow (dreamy). Temporalities merge that are ordinarily distinct. Second, by means of iconographic references but, much more importantly, by mood and lighting, *Gaussian Blur* invokes and, thus, reactivates cultural memories of exciting aesthetic moments, as well as of moments of threatening or actualized natural disasters. Memory, and the veil of forgetting that inevitably obscures or contradicts it, is another key to migratory experience and its traces in the aesthetics of the migratory world. Third, like Delany's descriptions, this work solicits an abandoning of visual control that gives access to what might be termed unconscious, or perhaps a social, physical, unconsciousness of the visible. What we cannot see, through the images we do see, is what matters most, what teases us to make new forms. And fourth, the work engages the act of viewing on a sensual, tactile level that offers the possibility of an intimacy hitherto deemed impossible, indiscreet, even voyeuristic, on the basis of a mutuality and bodily engagement that does not yet exist, but comes into being at the moment of looking.

The first form of abstraction I have mentioned above emerges from the experimentation with temporality that video as a medium allows. The second comes from the uncontrollable figurations, the sensation of inadequacy of our routine templates and narrative fillers. The third is best characterized as an entirely new, sensate production of surface as skin. That the flickers of light seem blisters is no coincidence. They hurt; they touch us; they make contact. This is how the third abstraction merges into the fourth. The light flickers are the skin of the visible, kinetic world. These four aspects I consider characteristic of video as a specific aesthetic.

So far, the element 'aesthetics.' The other term of the project 'migratory aesthetics' from which this volume emerged—and the other movement—concerns migration.



William Kentridge, *Shadow Procession* (1999). 35 mm film transferred to DVD. b&w, sound, 7'. Courtesy of the artist.

Migration is movement of people. For those who perceive these movements, the people called migrants constitute, so to say, a moving image. Like video, they form images that move, and that move us emotionally. This brings me to a second work I consider emblematic of migratory video, South-African artist William Kentridge's *Shadow Procession*. In this work, we see an endless stream of shadow figures, walking and walking, some of them carrying household furniture on their backs, a stream that presents precisely such an image of migration, of people on the move. Using the technique of puppet theater, the work shows movement relentlessly. Here, realistic representation is again cast aside in favor of a mode of presentation that leaves to the viewer the option to flesh out in what mood to watch these rows of displaced people, figures with their burdens, their stacks, including a miner dangling from the gallows, and workmen carrying entire neighborhoods and city-scapes.

Kentridge's shadow procession resonates with another work, this time an installation, also based on the idea of a shadow procession. Spanish artist Jesus Segura's video installation *I Can Be You* shows a denaturalized movement of people. This work consists of two huge screens, installed at a sharp angle, on which the same image is projected in opposite directions: one forward, one backward. The shadowy figures on New York's Park Avenue, moving in this direction on one side, in that direction on the other side of the installation, back and forth, all slow and semi-transparent, demonstrate two aspects of the movement of people. On one hand, 'I' can indeed be 'you,' as in the linguistic exchange that produces subjectivity. This happens here literally, since the opposed directions of the two screens give the viewer the option to join one stream or the other, walking forward or backward from the corner. On the other hand, each shadow overlays more substantial figures, as if clinging like a parasite to our illusory autonomy, only to undermine it. These shadows are ghosts indeed.

The mixed societies that have emerged as the result of migration have benefited enormously from the arrival of people from many different cultures. Cities have become more heterogeneous ('colorful'), music and cinema have been enriched ("accented cinema"; Naficy), and philosophy gratefully uses the potential offered by thinking along the lines of—and through metaphors relating to—migrancy (Deleuze). On the receiving end of the migratory culture of today, then, we embrace the enrichment that newcomers bring.

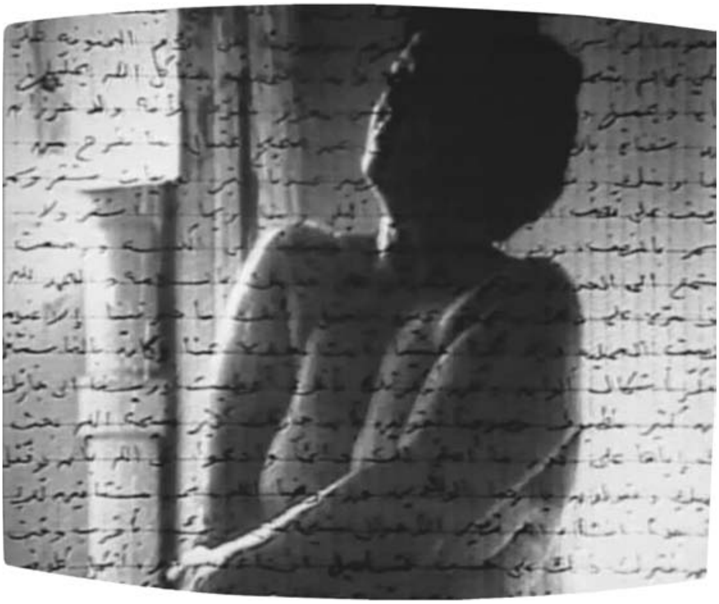
Meanwhile, migrants also change, so that their double relationship to host and home country produces an aesthetic in and of itself which, in turn, further contributes to changes in the host countries and their cultural expressions. I am interested in the aesthetics (plural) that emerge from this situation, not, or not necessarily or exclusively, in the theme of migration itself. Some works I consider 'migratory' in this aesthetic sense are 'about' migration, treat it as an urgent topic for reflection. Others bring the same sense of urgency to the exploration of the medium of video. Together, in any exhibition that aims to be an installation, they would speak to each other. This is how an exhibition or an installation is a stage. This theatrical aspect of video works together can, of course, hardly be conveyed in an article. I am trying, nevertheless, to select and describe works 'as if' they were set together in an exhibition space, or on a theatrical stage. This fiction is necessary to grasp the sense in which video's migratory aesthetics contribute to our understanding of migratory culture, and vice versa.

Epistolary Theater as Heterotopia

A video exhibition, then, sets the stage for its own changeability. Another way of saying this is that such an exhibition is closer to theater than to art exhibitions. There is never one place; each work, as well as the combinations of work, offers more than one setting. Video is heterotopic. Delany writes on the installation aspect of video:

> *Two characteristics that video shares with much contemporary art, especially installation art, are a lack of permanence—the 'timelessness' that for so long had seemed essential to 'serious' art—and movement—that motion in excess of the contained cycles and oscillations of the mobile, the sweep of movement and image that film, video, and certain large-scale mechanisms alone can provide. (London 11)*

In the context of my analysis, these two features merge. It is the movement that makes the images impermanent, again in the double sense of moving along the frame, or screen, and of displaying the movement resulting from the migratory aspect of culture.



Mona Hatoum, *Measures of Distance* (1988). Single-channel video. U-matic transferred to Betacam to DVD, color, sound, 15'. Collection Zuiderzeemuseum, Enkhuizen, The Netherlands.

Everything changes constantly, the look of space as well as the look of the collectivity that constitutes the population of cities, sports events, restaurants, and streets.

The bi-directional movement of migration is aesthetically elaborated in Mona Hatoum's pioneering 1988 work *Measures of Distance.* The work is constructed from a series of grainy stills shot in extreme close-ups of Hatoum's mother in the shower of the family home in Beirut. The images are overlaid with a mesh of Arabic writing, like a curtain or a veil, which represents her mother's letters from Beirut to her in London. On the soundtrack, we hear an animated conversation between Hatoum and her mother, overlaid with Hatoum's voice reading a translation of the letters into English. Similar to Roos Theuws' *Gaussian Blur*, but with a different thrust and effect, this work's poetic strategy of superimposition proposes a novel way of looking that is no longer linear, narrative, and clear. It enhances intimacy, and brings us closer to foreignness without either erasing difference or foregrounding it as exotic. I consider this work a crucial intervention in the flourishing artistic production of video in the 1980s. It elaborates on video's potential as outlined above in ways that integrates the double movement of migration: from 'home' to the faraway place where the daughter ended up, in the mother's letters to her; in the memories of the daughter, presented through the voice, the lettering, the body in the shower. Such works, like the letters on which they are modeled, attempt to achieve the impossible: to bring together what politics has separated. And since they bring together the two radically severed dwellings of mother and daughter, they stage that impossibility. Thus they, and Hatoum's work in particular, are emblematic of the topic of this volume: migratory settings. Such settings are theatrical; yet, no actual theater stage can accommodate them.

Hatoum was not the first to structure her work around letters from home. To cite just one example, Chantal Akerman's early work *News from Home* (1976) offers the clear, structuralist contrast between monotonously read letters from her mother, and images, just as monotonous in composition, color, and light, of the city of New York where the daughter has found temporary refuge. Hatoum's work is especially relevant here because it has had such a significant effect on the migratory art as well as the video art of the 1990s and beyond.

The epistolary nature elaborated with great complexity and poetry in Hatoum's work has become a topos in migratory video (Nafici). Spanish artist Gonzalo Ballester's 2003 video *Mimoune* turns this topos around and reduces it to its essentials. In a move that turns metaphor and poetry into a literalized concretization, the artist makes a video postcard or letter and, like a postman, takes it from the migrant to his family in Morocco, and brings their greeting back to him. But this simple epistolary act of mercy is not as simple as that. When we realize that the artist filmed the act on different levels, what seemed an urgent form of simplicity becomes more complex. After a shot of the sea in the wake of a boat, a key image in the visualization of migration, and a view of the houses on the Moroccan countryside, the character of

Mimoune sits down in front of the camera when conveying his greetings. Then the family greets him back, also in front of the camera. Like Akerman's mother, but unlike Hatoum's, the parties have very little to say to each other. The point, clearly, is not what they say but that they speak and see each other. The act of sending videos back and forth is less the medium than the message itself. Thus, the reduction of Hatoum's pioneering epistolary aesthetic becomes thickened again with layers of 'video-agency.'

Ballester's work, like Hatoum's, demonstrates that the aesthetic dimension of the social phenomenon of the movement of people moves in two directions: the influence of newcomers to the host countries' culture; and the influence of host countries on the subjective relationships, primarily entertained through migrants' memories of their homeland, whether they have personal memories of that homeland or not; whether this homeland is imaginary or the product of 'post-memory.'[5] The aesthetics of the 'look' of public space is confronted head-on in Ursula Biemann's video essay *Remote Sensing*. Spiraling down from an orbital view captured by image satellites, this video-essay takes an earthly perspective on cross-border circuits, where women have emerged as key actors. *Remote Sensing* traces the routes of women in the sex industry, traveling across the globe in search of work, as well as their reasons for doing so. This global vision must be confronted with its counterpart, the look and feel of provisional living quarters.

These can be messy and cramped, too small to achieve a sense of home. Israeli artist Keren Cytter's *Atmosphere* comes to mind. It tells the story of two good friends, Julia and Gayatri, who share an apartment in Amsterdam. After sleeping with the man Julia loves, Gayatri decides to leave the country and return to India, her homeland. This video combines different sequences that mix fiction with documentary. Or, on the contrary, almost transparent when the home no longer offers shelter, as in American artist Liza Johnson's haunting evocation of New Orleans after Katrina, on which more follows (*South of Ten*).[6]

As the sense of estrangement between Mimoune and his family intimates, the relationship to the homeland is equally fraught with ambivalence. In the conversations mothers of migrants have with a close relative about the absent child, anger and a feeling of having sacrificed the best of their lives transpire through the conventional discourse of acceptance. This becomes painfully clear in my own video installation *Nothing is Missing*. Here, too, a stage is set. The installation in a generic petty-bourgeois living room suggests an intimacy with the mothers of migrants speaking in the videos. At the same time, both the generic character of the space and the combination in it of women from different countries and cultures makes such intimacy a fictional one. The room becomes a stage. The emotions, feelings, and relationships that result from the post-migration situation, in turn, also affect the countries of residence, where they circulate among migrants and their interlocutors, like ghosts—embodied in the shadow figures that populate Segura's *I Can be You* and that echo, in a different aesthetic, Kentridge's shadow puppets.

Jesús Segura, *I Can Be You* (2003). Two-channel video installation on rear projection screens. DVD, color, sound, 7’ (looped). Courtesy of the artist.

In my view, it is necessary and desirable to acknowledge, even celebrate, the cultural benefits of migration for the so-called host societies, so as to strike a more positive note than the usual, an attention in which the absorption of the memories of the countries and communities of departure is fully integrated. The works here are seldom primarily either narrative or representational. Representation tends to suffer from the contamination of its two primary meanings: the semiotic one, where representation is a form of depiction; and the political one, where one (elected) person represents a constituency. The artists whose work I briefly present here did not seek to depict others, with all the risks of stereotyping, voyeurism, and misrepresentation; nor did they pretend to ‘speak for’ others. Whether or not the artists are, or consider themselves to be, migrants in one sense or another, their works are all characterized by a reluctance toward both these aesthetic and ethical traps.

Video and migration, then, are considered here through the conceptual metaphor of movement in the double sense—but a movement that cannot be considered routine, ‘natural,’ or realist. Instead, my ambition is to articulate the intersections between these two clusters of meanings and effects of movement. On one hand, the moving image with its video-specific effects; on the other, the moving people with the moving—including, emotionally—images they generate.

Movement is always a struggle with the frame that captures the image or, in a different sense, that frames the newcomer as 'different.' For me, Delany is less the science fiction writer than the person who understands what makes video important. "Video puts a particular spin on the perennial question of framing the image," Delany wrote in an introduction to the catalogue of an important exhibition of video installations at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (London 10). He proceeds to sum up the history of the metaphor of the window on the world in amazingly succinct, yet profoundly fitting terms:

> *For most viewers, a human body visible through the video 'window' gives one the sense of looking in. … This is especially true if the body is nude. Conversely, when we see an animal through the video window, we sense that we are looking out (London 10–11).*

This looking in, looking out is the basic activity these works challenge, superimpose on one another, inflect in many different ways and experiment with, in order to make concrete and often literal use of the double movement of video and migration.

Liza Johnson's *South of Ten,* briefly mentioned above, seems devoted to this dynamic. South of Interstate Highway 10 in Mississippi, a girl bolts out of a makeshift tent city on a bicycle. A man finds a trombone and tries to put it together. A worker watches the ocean from under a moving house, while its owner gazes at the view from her shifting living room. In ten very short stories in *South of Ten*, residents of the destroyed Mississippi Gulf Coast act out atmospheric scenes of everyday life and the relentlessness of labor in their extreme landscape after Hurricane Katrina.

Her images are framed, by a black frame that is the video's window, then by the composition that, like Akerman's *News* before it, flaunts the framing aspect of every single image, as if to foreground how the inhabitants who became migrants overnight in their own city had been framed. Sometimes, the camera looks in, sometimes it looks out. Sometimes it does both at the same time, when the frame is a porch and the shot captures a figure going from one end of it to the other. Looking out through a semi-opaque skin, as in Theuws's video—is that possible? Looking in on the solitude of a single body writhing on the floor of a small room—is that ethical? Johnson's video thus asks the question of migratory settings; of heterotopia.

On the Move: Heterochrony

But video and the movement that characterizes it cannot be reduced to space only. If we continue the analogy with theater, there too the play is subjected to time. And the temporality on the stage is different from that of the audience. In this sense, video is also the medium of time: of time contrived, manipulated, and offered in different, multi-layered ways. Migration is also inscribed in time. Although there has never been a world without migration, suddenly it seems as though the whole world is on the move, but not as in mass tourism. In contrast to these freely undertaken trips with a return ticket, the movement is relentlessly urgent and goes in one direction only, as in Kentridge's *Shadow Procession*. Migration is also the experience of time: as multiple, heterogeneous. The time of haste and waiting, the time of movement and stagnation; the time of memory and of an unsettling present. The phenomenon I call multi-temporality; the experience of it, heterochrony.[7]

Heterochrony is an important point of intersection between the videographic and the migratory, and both can be associated with the stage. The superpositions, tensions, and incongruous encounters of different temporalities alert us to the simple but oft-forgotten fact that time is not an objective phenomenon. Although our lives are regulated by a relentless clock and the fixed schedules it prescribes, obviously someone who is bored experiences time differently from the hard worker who never quite manages to do what needs doing. Some people are always in haste; others not. People in situations of migrancy are often torn between haste and standstill. This simple experiential discrepancy is compounded by political and economic temporal multiplicities in the postcolonial era.

Imagine the everyday life of someone who is waiting for legal residency, or for much-needed employment permits, or for news from a faraway family. At the same time, the clock is ticking. That person needs to earn money to support his family 'back home' and thus justify the tearing apart of his family, his life. In such situations, the hectic rhythm of social and economic life, always too fast, contrasts sharply with the time of waiting, always too slow. Although temporal discrepancies and disturbed rhythms occur in all human lives, it is easy to realize that multi-temporality is specifically tangible in the life of someone who is permanently on the move, as the saying goes.

Time, in all its internal differentiation, is usually, sometimes forcefully, subjected to one of its aspects only, that of chronology. This linear logic has a profound sensate effect on everyone, and more strongly so on those whose relationship to the local chrono-logic is oblique. "What is chronology but timing," writes Jalal Toufic in a remarkable essay on the vampire as a model for film,

> *… so that events that belong to the past should not arrive too late, that is in the future, and events that should occur in the present would not occur too early, in the past, or too late, in the future (31).*

Thus conceived, chronology is a stricture that looms over events and thus colors the experience of time with a dark shadow of inadequacy.

Heterochrony is more than subjective experience, however. It contributes to the temporal texture of our cultural world and, thus, our understanding and experiencing it is a political necessity. In this respect, it contributes to the migratory setting. This texture is multi-temporal. Theuws' *Gaussian Blur* captures the profound and physical sensation of a multi-temporality that entails the experience of heterochrony in its bare essence. There is a relentlessness about the slowness, an insistence on the ongoing quality of time, precisely due to the almost unbearably slow pace. The storm-riddled tree branches become more threatening as a result; the human figures, the horse, detach themselves through this slow movement from the still impressionist idyll. They move infinitely slowly, yet infinitely faster than their painted counterparts, the visual memory that infuses them. Meanwhile, the flickering of points of light keeps us aware of the fleeting fastness of time ‘outside’ these slow movements. The time of the surface is disjunctive from the time of the images it covers.

Video and migratory life have, thus, a complex and confusing, challenging multi-temporality in common. This is one of the many points of intersection between the two cultural phenomena we seek to connect. Video is, arguably, eminently suitable to understand what this means, to feel it in our own bodies. Through this medium, we can grasp, perceive, and experience traces of the lives of those who live among us, but of whom we know so little. Allow me to give a few, very different examples of the ways this temporal complexity plays itself out in the video works I consider here.

Ballester’s *Mimoune* is based on a very simple fact. It is a ‘postcard,’ made video, with a second card sent in response. As in all epistolary traffic, a time gap occurs between sending and delivery. This gap is constitutive of writing, with all its political and juridical consequences.[8] At the same time, it is a profoundly personal experience. This makes it so poignant, for the viewer, to see the senders and receivers alternating more rapidly than reality would allow. We see Mimoune sitting down and saying hello, then immediately we see his wife, children, and other relatives watching and reciprocating the greeting. It all looks so simple, so normal; yet, it is impossible. This is the fiction of the migratory setting. Time, here, also lies at the heart of fiction, the fiction that is truer than truth. The simple aesthetic that this work mobilizes makes that fictionality look deceptively real. The look of the images recalls home video; the surface sometimes evokes an uncertainty of looking: its possible inappropriateness, yet its necessity. We see people who long to be together, yet seem to have little to say; a heart full, probably, but not enough time to say it. Groping for words to say, they slow down the event of speaking. Pressured to speak, however, they also speak before they find the words. Time, we learn, can lie.

In other video works, too, double or multiple temporalities are the motor of a heterochronous viewing experience. While Ballester overlays time frames separated by migration, to then close the gaps between them, using video editing as his tool, the Irish artist Gary Ward gives shape to heterochrony as a sense of stagnation through circularity. Both the circularity of time and the loop that is constitutive of exhibitionary video are the principles of his installation. This work is so significant here because it is all about setting. The two pieces joined are each organized as experiences of space. Together, they constitute a secondary, fictional space. Standing in the corner formed by the two works disposed at an angle, the viewer is caught, or simply set in-between two opposed relationships to space, one almost claustrophobic, the other almost agoraphobic. Heterochrony adds layers to this experience, first of all through circularity. Circularity is embodied in the loop. In Ward's double reflection, installed at a 90° angle, *8Till8* and *Kofi Cleaning*, time is presented as circular. The loop is essential to this work. One wing of the installation is a self-portrait, the other an allo-portrait: a portrait where self meets other.[9]

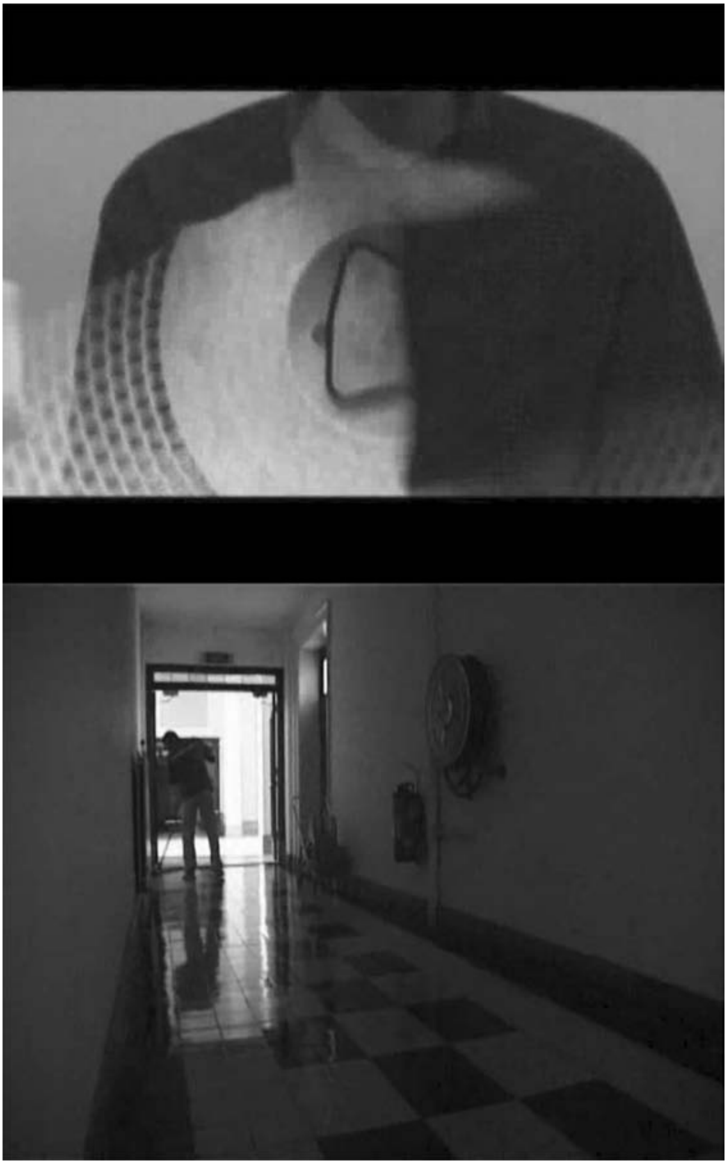
In the self-portrait *8Till8*, the spinning of the washing machine in the eye of which the artist sees himself distorted, proclaims the circularity in which people can be caught. The machine is the maddening clock that turns and does not let go of the subject caught in its wheels. Ward's face is distorted and mangled by the turns. A voice speaks of climbing mountains in search of confidence and security ("you trust the rope"). Then, when the viewer looks to the other screen, in *Kofi Cleaning* that circularity becomes one of labor. Slowly moving around the wet mop that cleans the floor, Kofi is both invisible and indispensable if the wheels of life in the building are to continue turning. The pace of each of the two loops is different, as though they were slightly out of sync. At the same time—and this phrase is to be taken seriously here!—these two portraits need and sustain each other. Together, they explore what Attridge terms 'otherness.' Writing about J.M. Coetzee's controversial, often unsettling explorations of ethical relationships to otherness, he writes:

> *Coetzee's works both stage, and are, irruptions of otherness into our familiar worlds, and they pose the question: what is our responsibility toward the other? (xii)*

This irruption is visible both within *8Till8* and in that self-reflexive work's encounter with *Kofi Cleaning* which, exhibited at a 90° angle from it, literally touches it. Hence, there are three, not two time frames, each with a different rhythm: the self-portrait with the wildly turning door of the launderette; the mop of the slowly cleaning Kofi, turning around in circles as does his life; and the time of the two videos joined, out of sync, yet embracing each other in a silent dance. In Ward's loops, the migratory erupts to stipulate that one plus one makes three.

In Kentridge's *Shadow Procession*, the temporalities are merged, first by the haunting music, then by the relentlessly ongoing procession. The rhythm of the figures' movements is unreal in its regularity. This is yet another way of foregrounding and denaturalizing time. Implicit in this heterochrony is the double historical reference to two distinct, early forms of political art: Brecht's anti-empathic theater, and Goya's ambivalently dark, yet often comical drawings. Depicting horror, the awkward poses of his figures recognizable in Kentridge's work produce an openness and ambivalence of mood that 'democratizes' affect. The artist defined political art in terms congenial to many of the works here, but exemplified by his own:

> *I am interested in political art, that is to say an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain endings. An art (and a politics) in which optimism is kept in check and nihilism at bay.*[10]



Gary Ward. *8till8*. Mini DV transferred to DVD. Color, sound, 5’27”. Courtesy of the artist (*top*).
Gary Ward. *Kofi Cleaning*. Mini DV transferred to DVD. Color, Sound, 6’36”. Courtesy of the artist (*bottom*).

The theater as play(ful) and as public ritual, and the still image as record, merge in this work.[11]

In a different mode, the Polish artist Wojtek Doroszuk conflates time and space and thus de-naturalizes the common conflation of *timespace* or *chronotope*. Sitting and eating together, in the same place at the same moment, the young people who inhabit *Lunch [1]*, sharing a lunch in a restaurant in Istanbul, split up and become separated when the frame, arbitrarily, splits and multiplies. When it returns to 'normal,' to a single frame, it is as though time slows down. This device, like Ballester's, is a beautifully *simple* method of making time strange, as though both artists were seeking to do with the medium what Kentridge does with the style of his images: to make simplicity the tool to articulate complex thought.

Belated, yet moving still; memorializing whom we cannot know; activism after the fact. The paradoxes of these artists' work raise the concept of what can be called the setting of time—or time as setting—in exemplary fashion. Time made so dense, contradictory, and un-linear first sharpens, then overcomes the opposition between 'still' and 'moving' images. Hatoum leads the way here. Theuws's work also exemplifies this overcoming. The importance resides in the affective impact of the resulting slowdown. For, through this, it also overcomes the gap between an object and its affective charge, in other words, between the object perceived at a distance and the viewer whose act of viewing affects her. That is *Gaussian Blur*'s proposal for an aesthetic. Among the consequences of this paradoxical 'state' is a complex relationship, not only with representation and figuration, the work with the human form, but also with another aspect of 'human nature,' the one of existing in time. The different aspects of temporality are an important site where the aesthetic and the migratory intersect: heterogeneous time, slowdown, the past cut off from the present, and the need for active acts of looking in actuality, as Attridge would have it, "in the event."

Intimate Strangers: Installation as Heterochronotopia

In addition to the attempt to articulate intricate relationships between video as a medium of movement *with* time, and migration as a social phenomenon of movement *through* time, this article is also a fictitious collective installation; a work as a whole that brings artworks together in one space, which have never before been installed together. If one imagines these works in combination, something else emerges as an effect, one that constitutes the utopian aspect of the concept of heterochronotopia. I am referring to the intimacy that their proximity triggers: between the works and the figures in them, and between those and the visitors. This effect stands for the potential to enhance intimacy among people in migratory cultures. Let me allege one rather extreme example.

Dalice by Brazilian artist Celio Braga is a portrait. A beautiful portrait of a middle-aged woman. A close-up against a white background that leaves no opportunity for distraction. Just a face. The portrait, classically believed to be the genre that requires our presupposition of the reality of the sitter and his or her identity to the image. Gadamer called that relation of image to reality the 'occasion.'[12] And to be sure, the woman we see does exist in reality. There are two of these portraits, two identical videos positioned opposite each other, so that the viewer must stand between them. Stand, not sit. One wonders why this video is presented as an installation, rather than as a simple one-screen film. The reason, I contend, is heterochronotopic desire.

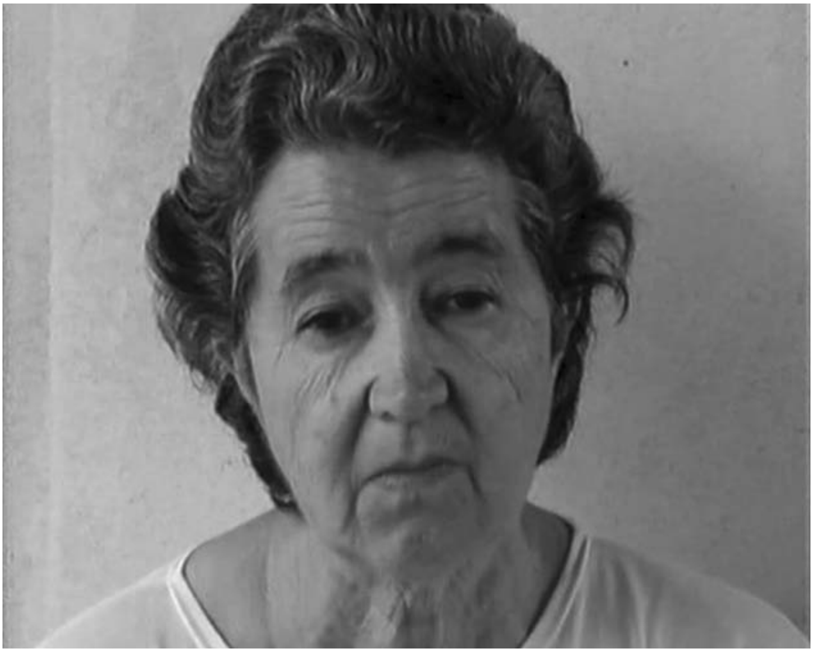
The installed videos produce an architecture of a qualified, in a sense disenchanted, intimacy that enables an ethical engagement with the migratory 'otherness within' contemporary culture. This argument will move through three theoretical motives that converge in the *face*: the architecture or, in terms of theatricality, setting of the installation works and, by extension, the exhibition (here, imaginary) as a whole; the inevitable mirroring that insinuates itself when one moves through a space with multiple video screens; and the specific sense of space that emerges from the combination of these motives.

With a hand-held camera, Celio Braga has filmed his mother's face, in her own home. He filmed her during the long minutes he observed her inward-turned grief, her loneliness while engrossed in the task of absorbing the horror of her daughter's death. This moment of mourning was, we could say with Gadamer, the 'occasion.' The son witnesses his mother's grief, is grieving himself, we can assume; and yet, all he can do is film that silent face, himself invisible. The hand holding the camera is visually holding his mother.

Of this portrait itself, it can be said that it is gripping, moving, and utterly simple. The woman is impressive, beautiful, but clearly neither shot nor shown for those features. The only barely visible feature that distinguishes it from countless other portraits is the slight movement, inevitable in hand-held camerawork. This movement, once the viewer is standing there, concentrating on that face because there is nothing else to see, becomes an instance of foreshortened temporality: one can focus on the movement precisely because it is so hard to see: it is slight, slow, and a-centered. While facing itself, looking someone in the face, is centralizing, the movement in this video is visible exactly at the edges of the face.

As installation, *Dalice* raises many questions: of the portrait, medium, the face, and the possibility of empathy, of intimacy. It raises these with some urgency, because the bare facts alone would easily bring up an unease related to voyeurism. The portrait made by a camera is undeniably 'occasioned,' but how important for this work is that sense of documentary that this concept implies? The actuality of the occasion could barely be more convincing, dramatic: a mother grieving, one week after. But strangely, there seems to be a tension between these two factors of reality. The portrait is less a portrait of this woman, Dalice, than of the emotion that weighs her down. The near-stillness of the image asks what a video portrait is, as distinct from a photograph.

The slight movement of the face that seems to be the only difference between these two mediums of portraiture—eyes blinking, turning upward—has a companion in the slight movement of the image caused by the hand that holds the camera.



Célio Braga. *Dalice* (2005–6). Two-channel video installation: two identical videos displayed on two monitors facing each other. Mini DV transferred to VHS to DVD, color, no sound, 4'3" (looped). Courtesy of the artist.

That hand, through the medium reduced to its essentials, caresses the face-as-image. When the face moves on its own, the image presenting the face moves. Small, barely visible, secondary movement produces this double movement and, through it, powerfully states the poetics of video in intimacy. It asks if it is possible to read the face, to see grief. It asks if it is possible to empathize with an unknown woman across the gap, first, of her aloneness; second, of her son's absence due to his migration, conflated here with death; and, third, across the gap of our belatedness, our incapability to make contact. Can we *see* that this face is one of mourning, or do we need to have this intimate knowledge?

Facing, taken "at face value" (Lakoff & Scherr) is three things, or acts, at once. Literally, facing is the act of looking someone else in the face. It is also, coming to terms with something that is difficult to live down, by looking *it* in the face, instead of denying or repressing it. Thirdly, it is making contact, placing the emphasis on the second person, and acknowledging the need of that contact in order, simply, to be able to sustain human existence. Looking someone in the face, the first aspect, can be seen as a thematic undertow of the exhibition I imagine here, made explicit in several works. This is an aspect that hovers between ontology and epistemology. Can we see faces, can we look someone in the face? The second aspect, coming to terms, harbors a socio-political agenda of migratory culture; it makes us aware how often we fail to do this: facing what people go through, their losses and sacrifices. This question is of a political and ethical order. Its counterpart and supplement is the veiled face that refuses to be seen, considering the act of facing always inappropriate and misfired. Instead of a thematic presence of this theme as, for example, in certain works by Shirin Neshat, here it is present in the political aesthetic of Hatoum's work. The third aspect, making contact, the simple 'let's face it' transmutes into a challenge: can we really face it/her, make that contact that is so badly needed? This is the question of aesthetic as the experience of binding.

This is where, for *Dalice*, the installation aspect comes in. The viewer is forced to stand between the two monitors. Only then can she face Dalice in the first sense, and witness how she faces her loss. But while facing the woman is enforced on those who wish to see this work, so is turning one's back to her. It is impossible to face her without, uncomfortably, also realizing that she is behind you, looking at the back turned to her, as though sending you away from the intimacy of her home. This double position is doubly moving, then, in the emotional sense of the affect of viewing. It is important to realize that at no time is the viewer trapped. The distance is enough to look away and walk away. But once you decide, freely, to look Dalice in the face, you have to face that you must by necessity also turn your back on her.

The silence of the work adds to this double affect. Especially since we can imagine the background noise of other works to be as audible as street noise would be once the door of the house is closed. The small space is both inside and outside. The viewer-visitor is both admitted as a guest and not asked to stay. Dalice invites you in and sends you away; she invites the intimacy of the encounter and stipulates the ineluctable strangeness that remains. Due to this installation, distinct from a single-screen showing, the woman figure is empowered, the face given agency, and the viewer's voyeurism held at bay.

Two philosophers have discussed the face in terms congenial to this work. One is Emmanuel Levinas, who complements Heidegger's so-called 'ethics of care.' The latter's notion is more spatially oriented in its insistence of reaching out and embracing. Levinas turns this into a presentist temporality of the face-to-face encounter.[13] This encounter is temporally specific, not only because it takes place (to use a spatial phrase), but also because it transforms the self in stipulating the limitations of the individual's freedom. The other is Gilles Deleuze, who considers the close-up not exactly *of* the face but *as* the face a tool to stop time and extend duration. The triple function of the face, for Deleuze—individuating, socializing, and communicating—is destroyed in the same move.[14]

When no viewer is present, the two faces of Dalice face each other, as though consoling the woman in her loneliness by offering, at least, her own mirror image. When the viewer stands between the two monitors, however, the question of the readability of the face emerges with irresistible force. What we see, in the end, is nothing but skin. A skin, a surface that both suggests and hides the emotional depth of the woman's grief that, at this moment, makes up the entirety of her existence. A skin that is emphatically present, in the extremely fine grain the loving camera has captured. The skin that bears its age and displays it, as a testimony of time.

Skin and the surface that stands in for it, covers it, and mirrors it, all at once, then presents the viewers of these works with an alternative to the social ills of a culture obsessed with a national and racial homogeneity that has never existed. It does this critical work by means of a variety of aesthetics, that is, by means of offers of connection differently 'phrased,' of binding through the senses. The surface that, on one hand, shows, and on the other, withholds, is the interface that characterizes video as a medium, now mingled with 'migratoriness.'

Finally, the mirror experience of seeing the other (face) as self, or the self as other, is also indispensable for acquiring a sense of space that is not distant and colonizing, but based on the possibility of proximity, and on the implication of the self in the space which, like a skin, we share. One of the reasons the skin and its representative in the medium of video, the surface, have the task to protect and hide, as well as attract and open up, is that it positions the body in space. And this is, of course, what inviting people to watch videos installed together, emphatically implies. But the spatial positioning of the human figure through skin is very different from other possible positionings. Skin-in-space precludes distancing, turning one's back, and indifference. The close-up gives the figures in these works, temporarily and precariously, the proximity they have lost. In addition to being heterotopic and heterochronic, then, video can add yet another layer of setting: a comforting but not indiscrete proximity.

Notes

1. Bakhtin's concept of chronotope and especially its use in contemporary cultural analysis is best approached through Peeren's study on the subject.

2. 'And' has been discussed with great intelligence by Felman long ago, à propos of literature 'and' psychoanalysis, a critique of 'and' that has often been a guideline for me.

3. Ernst van Alphen ("Dispersal"), based on Deleuze & Guattari. See also John Rahjman.

4. I put these two terms in quotation marks, not to disavow them but because they are both used in a less-than-common sense.

5. The term 'postmemory' has been proposed by Marianne Hirsch (esp. 8–9). Ernst van Alphen contests the appropriateness of the element 'memory,' in this term ("Second-Generation").

6. On the genre of the video essay, see Biemann.

7. For an excellent discussion of the political importance of time, see Casarino.

8. The plot of the biblical Book of Esther is largely based on this motive. See Bal, "Lots." The temporal discrepancies of writing are, of course, most forcefully explained by Derrida.

9. I have used the term allo-portrait with a slightly different inflection elsewhere ("Allo-Portraits").

10. Quoted in Benezra (15).

11. Adorno would agree with this (240–58). The term 'public ritual' in the context of *Shadow Procession* comes from Sitas), an essay devoted to this work. On theatricality as a contemporary form of authenticity, see Bal, *Concepts*, chapter 5.

12. Gadamer (127–29) as quoted in Brilliant (8). For a radical critique of this conventional view of portraiture, see Van Alphen ("Dispersal").

13. Heidegger (235–44); Levinas.

14. Deleuze (90). Deleuze's view of the face as doing, not expressing, is discussed in Rushton. See also Toufic (41). On the Deleuzian close-up, Hansen and Maratti.

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Let’s Fall in Love: Staging a Political Marriage

Maaike Bleeker

Laylah the Creature Beyond Dreams, video still, 2004.

A video. Three young men are having dinner in front of a small wooden cabin in the forest. It could be a home video about enjoying a day off in the Dutch countryside. The men are Gil and Moti, two Israeli artists living and working in Rotterdam, and their lover Oliver, from Lebanon. The video was shot during Oliver’s first visit to the Netherlands.

It is a personal souvenir, a token of a special moment in their private lives. At the same time, it is a work of art that may be read as a (slightly ironic) response to ex-Documenta-curator Catherine David's project *Contemporary Arab Representations*, an event that took place next door to Gil & Moti's home in Rotterdam in 2002.

The video is part of an art project, in which Gil and Moti put their personal life, and love, on stage in an attempt to engage with human relationships as they take shape in a much larger cultural frame. With the staging of their personal lives, they invite us to look at "all the world" as a stage. Their aim is not so much to show "all the world" as "merely" theatre but rather to highlight the ways in which human relationships are mediated by culture and history; how culturally and historically specific norms and values 'migrate' between public and private, between real and imaginary places; and how such processes involve repetition as well as transformation. They show these processes to be performative in the sense that Judith Butler defines it, as discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names.

In response to what she terms a voluntarist interpretation of her argument in *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler is eager to point out the importance of the distinction between performativity and performance (Osborne and Segal). Performance, she argues, presumes a pre-existing subject, whereas performativity contests the very notion of the subject. Performativity describes the moment at which discourse becomes productive in a specific way: the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed. Performativity, therefore, describes an aspect of discourse of which we subjects are the products rather than the instigators.

With their work, Gil & Moti engage the performative effects of discourse. Staging is their means of calling attention to the processes of reiteration and resignification that are part of the ways in which human relationships are lived. In this sense, their work confirms Butler's argument on the performative power of discourse as something beyond our (subjective) control. Yet, at the same time, their staging points to the subjectivity that is involved in a different way. Whereas Butler focuses on the ways in which identity materializes as the effect of discourse or, more precisely, as the effect of the ways in which present acts reiterate absent discursive formations, Gil & Moti's focus is on the nature of the relationships that are involved in specific instances of discourse producing what it names: relationships between people, between them and their audiences, and between performative acts and the subject of vision that is implied within the address presented by such acts. They use staging as a means to expose how the recognition of the significance of performative acts depends upon point of view, how point of view involves a particular place (in time and space)—while the characteristics that define a given point of place may also migrate from one place to another.

In what follows, I engage with Gil & Moti's staging of performative acts through Kaja Silverman's "ethics of the field of vision" in her *The Threshold of the Visible World* (1996). I show how Gil & Moti's explicitly staged performative acts call attention to the way present acts reiterate absent discursive formations and, also, how their particular way of staging these instances of reiteration demonstrates the potential of theatre and theatricality as what I term a 'critical vision machine.'[1] The practice of organizing things to be seen by an audience, theatre explicitly engages with the relationship between what is performed and the point of view from which the performance is seen. At the same time, this staged nature is often reason for concern and suspicion. Ever since Plato, theatre and theatricality are associated with make-believe, exaggeration, and falsity. Gil & Moti's work suggests that the suspicion of theatre and theatricality might actually be caused by a certain unease with the ways in which these invite us to recognize that the performative installment of ontological effects requires a subjective point of view. A recognition of the difference that point of view makes is all the more important in today's globalized world, where processes of migration have opened up formerly closed communities and, more and more, people find themselves in situations in which they do not automatically share the points of view that are implied within discursive acts. In this situation, peaceful coexistence may depend upon our ability to reconsider our relationship to what is discursively installed as ontological. Gil & Moti invite such a reconsideration, proposing political marriage as an alternative approach to both love and truth.

Let's Fall in Love

The video, again. Gil, Moti, and Oliver are having dinner in a rural setting, a utopian and pastoral scene reminiscent of Arcadia or the Garden of Eden. These are visions of nature that, in the Western collective imagination, traditionally stand for wholeness and peace, a place before (or beyond) the human conflicts that separate us from each other in the real world. What we see is indeed utopian, for the fact that these three men are lovers refutes one of the most enduring violent conflicts of our time. The idyllic countryside of Holland serves as a free zone, a third space for a gathering that could not have taken place in either of the lovers' native countries. Israeli Jews Gil & Moti are no more welcome in Lebanon than Arab Oliver is in Israel, and neither Israeli nor Lebanese society are likely to welcome either the open gayness of the men or, still less, their sexual threesome.

The video dates from 2004. Two years earlier, Gil & Moti had declared:

In October 2002, we (Gil & Moti) have decided to execute a contemporary form of political marriage by falling in love with an Arab guy. The idea originates from the common belief that love can overcome all obstacles.

Is it possible to *decide* to fall in love? Isn't falling in love by definition something that happens to a person, rather than something one can willfully choose to do? Isn't this unintentional character of love—the fact that love happens to us in ways that are beyond our control—one of its ineluctable characteristics? Precisely this uncontrollable aspect, we tend to believe, decides love's truth and authenticity.

With their decision to fall in love, Gil & Moti question common assumptions about the nature of love. Instead of waiting for love to happen to them, they set out to make it happen, and they do so by means of strategies aiming at what Silverman has termed 'the active gift of love' (*Threshold*). Love, Silverman states, is the result of psychological processes that are largely unconscious and, therefore, difficult to consciously control, let alone influence. In that sense, one could indeed say that love largely happens to us. It is nonetheless possible, she argues, to consciously interfere with these unconscious processes. And, in this respect, Silverman claims, works of art hold a privileged position. They have the power to intervene at the level of the unconscious while, at the same time, allowing for conscious reworkings of these interventions.

The starting point for the ability to love, according to Silverman, is idealization. Without idealization, life would be unbearable. Idealization, however, is shaped by the cultural norms and values that we internalize from early childhood on. These norms and values are part of our culturally specific ways of looking at the world, and it is within that framework that love 'happens.' To look, argues Silverman, "is to embed an image within a constantly shifting matrix of unconscious memories" (*Threshold* 3). Looking depends on the subject's ability to 'embed' what he or she sees within this matrix of images housed within the self, with this matrix of images functioning as a visual unconscious: 'through' these images new perceptions become conscious. Through this matrix of images, culturally specific preferences and dislikes are reproduced. Functioning predominantly at an unconscious level, these mechanisms of visual perception tend to be conservative. Nevertheless, they may also be put to culturally transformative uses.

A crucial question therefore, in today's globalized world, is how to redirect the 'look of love' in such a way that it might include the cultural other. This, says Silverman, can be achieved by consciously and explicitly idealizing the other, according to the norms and values of the dominant gaze. That is, it can be done by means of strategies of representation that show the other according to the parameters of ideality that are at work in the dominant look while, at the same time, understanding that this ideality must be "marked as a garment rather than the body itself" (*Threshold* 103). For, as Silverman puts it:

> *The ethical becomes operative not at the moment when unconscious desires and phobias assume possession of our look, but in a subsequent moment, when we take stock of what we have just 'seen' and attempt—with an inevitably limited self-knowledge—to look again, differently. Once again, then, the moment of conscious agency is written under the sign of* Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action. (*Threshold *173)*

Silverman set out to develop a psychoanalytical theory of love. She ends up with a theory of visuality or, as she puts it, "an ethics of the field of vision, and a psychoanalytical politics of visual representation" (*Threshold* 2). This ethics of vision explains love in the context of the relationship between someone seeing and someone or something being seen, a relationship that is mediated in complex ways by the representations that surround us. A politics of visual representation, Silverman's theory argues for the active use of representations to reconfigure the relationship between seer and seen and, thereby, to bring to the fore 'the active gift of love.'

It is within this framework that Gil and Moti's work can be positioned. Their work stages the relationship between the one seeing and what is seen in ways that invite a reconsideration of the apparently self-evident visions that are presented to us by works of art, popular culture, and the performances that make up our daily life. The explicit staging of their art provides the key to understanding their project. This staging confronts the audience with the expectations, desires, and propositions that guide and underpin their culturally specific modes of looking. With the conscious decision to fall in love with their cultural and political other, they question the ways in which these expectations, desires, and presuppositions dictate how love 'happens' to us. They also draw attention to the way in which the very notion of love as true and authentic makes truth and love conflate to the point that love becomes the promise of a truth that inevitably lies somewhere 'beyond our power to control.'

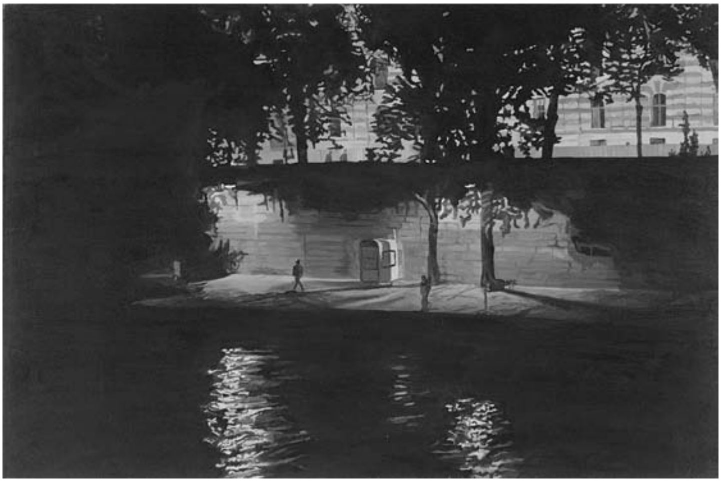
Living Sculptures

Gil & Moti's decision to fall in love is part of an art project that encompasses their entire lives. In this project, life and art converge to the point that their life together is their performance and their performance is their life. From their always carefully styled appearance as near, but not quite twins, to their home in an art gallery, to their wedding as public performance, their whole life is staged. Like their (art) historical predecessors Gilbert & George, they consequently use the double name Gil & Moti as their signature. Like Gilbert & George, they turn themselves into 'living sculptures.' Where else do living sculptures live but in an art gallery? In 1999, Gil & Moti moved into a gallery space in the center of Rotterdam, right next to the well-known Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art. They sleep in a glass cubicle, like Snow White in her crystal casket. Their personal belongings are exhibited in glass cabinets. Living as they do in a gallery, their 'home' is transformed every now and then by visiting artists who exhibit their work there, and who are granted complete freedom to 're-do' the space to meet the needs of their work, with the only provision that Gil & Moti can continue to live there.

In *The Homegallery*, personal life and belongings turn into art exhibits, and art objects become household items. With this explicitly theatrical staging of their personal life, Gil & Moti create a firm distance from ordinary life. This artistic frame does not, however, put them on a pedestal, as is the case with Gilbert & George, whose artistic strategies tend to create an atmosphere of napproachability. Gil & Moti's more cartoonesque aesthetics garner the opposite effect. They reach out, inviting the public at large into their world. Not only their art world friends and audiences are welcome, but also their neighbors, the local shopkeepers, and the children playing in the streets. In many of their projects, audience members are invited to become participants rather than spectators, to the point of them, too, becoming living sculptures, like the artists themselves.

Gil & Moti's life-performance invites their audiences to reconsider the reality, not only of the artists' actions, but also of the performances that make up each witness' own daily life. In their ongoing presentation, they expose reality to be what Silverman elsewhere has termed the 'dominant fiction' (*Subjectivity*). The 'fiction' in this phrase foregrounds the fictional character of what normally passes for reality, while the 'dominant' points to the fact that there is more than one fiction possible, and that these different possibilities do not have equal access to achievement of the status of 'reality.' Calling reality a fiction undermines ontological claims of truth, allowing for change and cultural difference. Understanding reality as a fiction also draws attention to reality as a story that is told from a specific point of view.

Take, for example, their installation *Fresh Feelings & Boyzone Pavilion* (2000). This work consisted of a construction reminiscent of an eighteenth-century gallery (*Boyzone Pavilion*), as well as an open space filled with pieces of furniture, wooden panels, clothes, and pages from sketchbooks (*Fresh Feelings*). In the *Boyzone Pavilion*, a series of paintings hanging all around the 'gallery' space offered a view as if through museum walls of the outside world. This supposed outside world consisted of a cemetery surrounding the pavilion. It also included a series of paintings hanging above the cemetery images, depicting nighttime scenes from the neighborhoods of various prestigious European museums such as the Louvre, the British Museum, and the Boymans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam.



Boyzone Pavilion, Detail, oil on canvas, 2000, photo: Ilya Rabinovich.

The installation brings to mind Alberti's idea of the picture frame as a *finestra aperta*, a window opening to the world. Alberti introduced the metaphor of the *finestra aperta* in his treatise *Della Pittura* (1453), in which he describes Filippo Brunelleschi's discovery of perspective as a technique to create images that show the world as though seen through a window opening onto to the world behind the picture frame. For Alberti, the *finestra aperta* contains an argument about perspective as a way of constructing the image of the world as it is: that is, as an 'objective' vision independent of any particular observer; independent from any particular place from which this vision appears in the way that it does. Gil & Moti's installation, however, is precisely about the subjectivity of point of view and about how that point of view predetermines from where the world 'as it is' can be seen. As it turns out, the cemetery and the places that are depicted on the night paintings are, in fact, gay cruising areas. In order to recognize these places as such, special local knowledge is required. What particular world these window paintings open onto will depend, then, on the knowledge and experience of the viewer, which makes point of view something that profoundly influences the viewer's perception of what is there to be seen.

As indicated, *Boyzone Pavilion* stages a view from inside the art gallery toward the 'outside' world. The *Fresh Feeling* part of the installation invites a move in the opposite direction. Wandering between wooden panels, pieces of old furniture, sketchbook pages, and embroidered t-shirts, all strewn in seeming disorder, the viewer is offered a glimpse into the private world of a young adult. This glimpse has to be actively constituted from the various references that can be gleaned from this apparent disorder as meaningful codes and icons of popular culture. Remarks, both visual and written, are based on childhood diaries, and are scrawled on teenage images as portraits of Leonardo di Caprio and Brooke Shields, as well as on advertisements and cartoons. At first, the childish imagery seems to confirm dominant notions of adolescent identity as produced in and through mass culture. But a closer look reveals another story, told through the careful reframing of well-known popular icons. Mickey Mouse, Bart Simpson, and Bert and Ernie are all depicted from behind, with specific focus on their backsides. The young man in the Coca-Cola advertisement presents an image of ecstasy, his eyes closed while he is sucking on an unidentified object. Brooke Shields becomes a role model for gay identity. Mass media imagery is presented here so as to denaturalize the point of view that is normally implied by these images, questioning their seemingly self-evident characteristics and, hence, bringing into question the point of view of the visitor as well. What exactly, one might be led to ask, is the relationship between Bert and Ernie anyway?

The *Fresh Feelings & Boyzone Pavilion* installation plays with the supposed oppositions between private and public, showing them to be entwined rather than separate entities. The installation reveals that what appears as 'inside' and as 'outside,' as 'reality' or 'fiction,' as 'private' or 'public,' is actually nothing more than the result

Fresh Feelings, installation view, mixed media, TENT., Rotterdam, 2000, photo: Ilya Rabinovich.

Fresh Feelings & Boyzone Pavilion, installation view, mixed media, TENT, Rotterdam, 2000, photo: Ilya Rabinovich.

of the way images are presented. Furthermore, the installation makes one keenly aware of how this process of framing is related to subjectivity: not only of who is seen, but also of the one who is seeing and the point of view implied that is already within what is seen.

How to Do Things with Marriage

In *The Wedding Project*, Gil & Moti staged their own wedding as a public performance. They even managed to cast the actual mayor of Rotterdam in the role of the civil servant yielding the power to join man and man in matrimony. They staged the event on the balcony of the Rotterdam Town Hall, a place usually reserved for honoring the national football team or other heroes from the world of sports. On this occasion, however, everybody was invited to join a party of a different kind.

Marriage is the moment *par excellence* where performance and reality converge. A wedding is a carefully staged performance, the reality status of which depends upon a strict repetition of inherited rules and norms. Not merely legal requirements are responsible for the staged character of the occasion, as many people go to considerable effort to stage their weddings in order to be able to live the event as their own particular fiction, demanding both considerable preparation as well as stylized and strictly choreographed behavior from all participants. All of this makes the wedding an excellent topic for Gil & Moti's larger project of exploring the ways in which performativity produces reality and how this happens through reiterating discursive practices.

The spoken 'I do' by which bride and groom in the Anglo-American wedding ceremony undertake to wed one another can be seen in terms of the conflation between saying and doing: saying things becomes doing things with words. For J.L. Austin (1975), who originally proposed the notion of the performative, 'I do' constitutes the example *par excellence* of the performative utterance. As many critics of Austin's notion of performativity have pointed out, the force of words does not stem from the free choice of the individuals who use them. The 'I do' gains its force because it cites and so reproduces an entire genre of performance. For this reason, Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick compare marriage to a kind of fourth wall or invisible proscenium arch. The arch moves through the world, demanding the continual reorientation of the surroundings by shifting the relationship between visibility and spectatorship, between the tacit and the explicit, between the possibility and the impossibility of a given person articulating a given enunciatory position. In their critique, Parker and Sedgwick draw attention to the fact that the meaning of the wedding performance depends upon the citation, not simply of the words themselves, but also of the entire regime of heterosexual socialization. A wedding thus becomes the interplay between a specific text, individual performers, and the web of practices that constitute a specific performance as a meaningful citation. In their comparison of marriage to an invisible proscenium arch, they also draw attention to the fact that the ceremony deploys the text—and much else besides—as part of an elaborate reiteration of a specific vision of social order. This vision is at stake in Gil & Moti's *The Wedding Project*.

Gil & Moti did not deny what Parker and Sedgwick describe as the 'regime of heterosexual socialization.' Rather, they demonstrated its principle; their explicit retheatricalization of the marriage institution worked to denaturalize that regime, including the vision of the social order implied by it. They showed marriage for what it truly is: a highly theatrical performance that nonetheless has real consequences for the main participants. They also drew attention to the fact that the consequences of the marriage ritual depend upon a particular vision of reality, while different visions imply a different point of view. Thus, in the Netherlands, Gil & Moti are lawfully wedded though, in many other countries, their marriage is a fiction. In the Netherlands, the reality status of their marriage was briefly contested: a conservative Christian party officially protested against the presence of *The Wedding Project* in the Town Hall. The equality of heterosexual and homosexual marriage in Dutch law is far from real in many people's eyes and, for some, still remains a fiction.

The Gil & Moti Wedding Project, performance view, Stadhuis Rotterdam, 2001, photo: Neta Yarkoni.

In Bed with Gil & Moti

During the week following the wedding, Gil & Moti positioned themselves in the central hallway of the Town Hall in a big bed that was surrounded by the paintings and installations that had served earlier as the scenery of the wedding. Gil & Moti's bed installation, which included themselves as living sculptures within it, was again reminiscent of a famous historical predecessor: that of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's 'bed-in' in the Amsterdam Hilton Hotel in 1969. As was the case with John & Yoko, the aim of Gil & Moti's playful performative reiteration of this model was to create real-world change. Gil & Moti's variation on the historical theme testified to a self-reflexive awareness of the relationship between their action and that of their historical predecessors, as well as of the historical distance separating them. Whereas John & Yoko directed their performance toward the world press and, via the press, to the world's political leaders, Gil & Moti, constantly striving for a direct interaction with their audiences, addressed their performance to the individuals living and working around them. In this process, paintings and installations—for example, the so-called *Wedding Paintings* that were created for this installation—function as 'pre-texts.' They serve as starting points for interactions and the exchange of ideas. These paintings show Gil & Moti in the company of a selection of cultural icons such as Princess Di, the Dutch Royal family, and famous Dutch football players. The paintings position Gil & Moti as fellow celebrities sharing the same stage, while simultaneously—through the very fact of their existence—presenting a reflection on the very concept of the staging of stardom. The specific stars shown here are all also on display in Madame Tussaud's waxworks museum in Amsterdam.

Like John & Yoko, Gil & Moti operated from a bed. They built their bed around a statue representing a naked young man. This statue stands in the central hallway of the Rotterdam Town Hall and is a memorial to those who fell in the Second World War. Gil & Moti's bed-sculpture instantly transforms the naked young man from the self-evident representation of courage, strength, and national pride into an ambiguous appearance that is marked by complex presuppositions about gender and sexuality. In the installation, the nakedness of the statue, now divorced from its framing as a monument, erases its meaning as a representation of idealized heroism. Its new position in the middle of Gil & Moti's wedding bed contests and questions the self-evidence of a naked young man, in neo-classical style, as the representation of Dutch pride with regard to the nation's role in the war. Furthermore, their restaging of this statue as part of their bed-in, invites reflection on the often forgotten relationship between the Second World War and the current situation in Gil & Moti's country of origin, Israel, as well as on the struggle of the Dutch with their relationship to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The statue carries the inscription "Stronger through Struggle" (in Dutch: *Sterker door strijd*), a well-known saying by former Queen Wilhelmina. In Gil & Moti's bed-installation, the phrase is repeated in embroidery on the sheets of the bed. Wilhelmina's saying, referring to the way in which the experience of W.W. II has (supposedly) strengthened the Dutch nation, is given an uncanny twist when reiterated on the bed sheets of this Israeli couple. Furthermore, the transformation of Wilhelmina's quote from the memorial to the bed sheets may be understood to symbolize the shift from the macro-political aspirations of the performance by John & Yoko toward the

The Gil & Moti Honeymoon, installation and performance view, Stadhuis Rotterdam, 2001, photo: Shay Porat.

micro-political approach of Gil & Moti in their reiteration of John & Yoko's historical example. This micro-political approach proceeds through exposing the implications and presuppositions of the biases implied within conceptions and perceptions of the 'real' world.

Letters to Laylah

With their decision to fall in love with an Arab man, Gil & Moti returned to the marriage theme, this time stretching the traditional practice of marriage further to include a third person. This person is not just any third person, however, but their political other. The search for their significant other was carried out through gay dating sites on the internet, and, in spring 2003, they found their lover in the person of Oliver from Lebanon.

Gil & Moti's decision recalls the old tradition of settling political conflicts through the arranged weddings of representatives of opposing parties, using marriage as the way to forge connections between different peoples or nations. The artists thus engage with a situation in which the personal and the public converge: their political marriage does not so much confirm the conventional institution of marriage, as play with it, denaturalize it, and subvert it from within, complicating the positions assumed within it. Again, Gil & Moti's approach is micro-political: their political marriage does not intervene at the level of world politics. Instead, they use their personal involvement as a starting point for a playful exploration of the complicated relationship between personal emotions, preferences, and desires, and the larger political, historical, social, and cultural determinations that make up the dominant fiction. In this case, they engage with Israeli aversions to Arabs as dirty, noisy, rich, violent, primitive, lazy, and thieving, as well as with their powerful fear of the alleged sexual prowess of Arab men. Although they explicitly situate their project within the conflict between Jews and Arabs in Israel, their projects about their Arab lover suggest a power of expression beyond this particular context. For example, the features applied to the Arab other of Israel's dominant fiction are those that have generally migrated from and to other targets of bigotry in other circumstances and cultures. The sexual stereotype in particular has also been used against American blacks by whites, against Europeans in China and Japan, against European Jews by gentiles, and so on.

In another project, *Letters to Laylah*, Gil & Moti play with, and interrogate, these aversions further. The letters in question are addressed to their imaginary lover, Laylah. For example, they write,

Good Morning Laylah

Last night we thought about you and reached a conclusion with which we are happy and content. If you'd agree to shave your moustache, pluck your eyebrows, clean the yellow dirt on your teeth, shower more often, wear some perfume and deodorant and especially clip your nails or at the very least clean the black underneath, then it would be a perfect falling in love, sort of boundless. Then we'd be willing to give you everything.

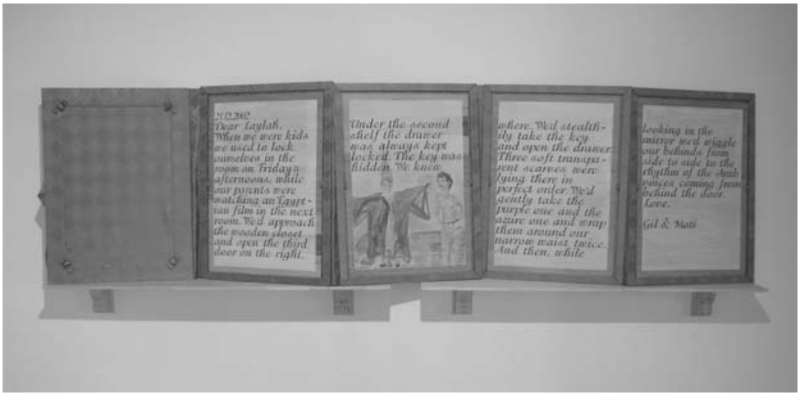
Truly yours. Gil & Moti

Acknowledging the impossibility of avoiding or undoing the cultural mediations at work in the ways in which we see the other, Gil & Moti settle for the opposite approach, setting out to expose and reflect the phobias and desires that assume possession of our always-mediated way of looking. In doing so, they invite the conscious reworking of what seems to be a feat of 'just looking' at what is 'there to be seen.' Sometimes, they do so by making explicit the presuppositions and projections that are at work in their ways of seeing the other, as in the example above. Sometimes they do so by further complicating the twisted combination of aversion and sexualization at work in those ways of seeing, as in this other letter: "In our love, equality is required, so that if you'd like to fuck us up our ass you'd be able to since we love to fuck and assume you do too." Sometimes their letters to Laylah describe events from their childhood, bringing attention to the way in which the combination of the aversion and the sexualization of the Arab other is transmitted from parents to children, as well as by all kinds of media:

Dear Laylah

When we were kids we used to lock ourselves in the room on Friday afternoons while our parents were watching an Egyptian film in the next room. We'd approach the wooden *closet (uncle's craftsmanship) and open the third door on the right. Under the second shelf, the drawer was always kept locked. The key was hidden. We knew where. We'd stealthily take the key and open the drawer. Three soft transparent scarves were lying there in perfect order. We'd gently take the purple one and the azure one and wrap them around our narrow waist twice. And then, while looking in the mirror we'd wiggle our behinds from side to side to the rhythm of the Arab voices coming from behind the door.*

Love. Gil & Moti

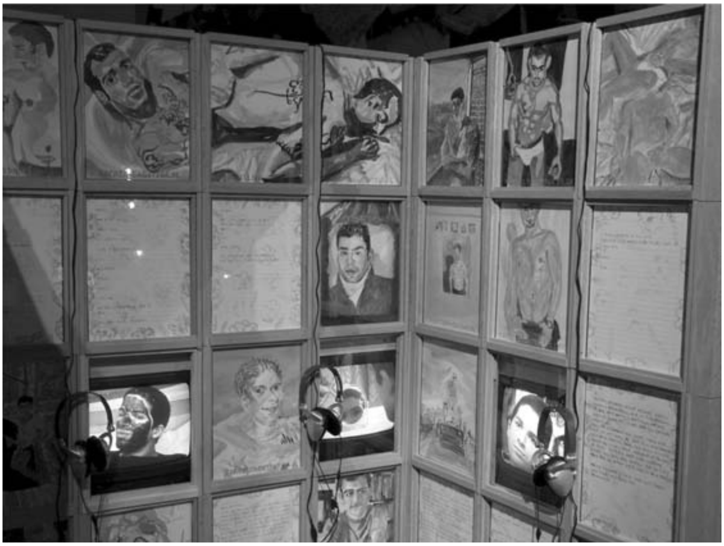

Dear Laylah,
When we were kids we used to lock ourselves in the room on Fridays afternoons, while our parents were watching an Egyptian film in the next room. We'd approach the wooden closet and open the third door on the right.
Under the second shelf the drawer was always kept locked. The key was hidden. We knew
where. We'd stealthily take the key and open the drawer. Three soft transparent scarves were lying there in perfect order. We'd gently take the purple one and the azure one and wrap them around our narrow waist twice. And then, while
looking in the mirror we'd wiggle our behinds from side to side to the rhythm of the Arab voices coming from behind the door.
Love,
Gil & Moti

Letter to Laylah- 25.12.2002, aquarel on wood and fabric, 2002–04, photo: Madeleine Heijmans.

Caught Wanting

The letters to Laylah are written to focus on the point of view implied in the descriptions, fantasies, and memories of the cultural other. As a result, they are not so much about that other as they are about the person doing the seeing or fantasizing. The letters expose various aspects of this subjective perspective, bringing into focus what Peter de Bolla has termed the 'social thickness of the visual.' This 'social thickness of the visual' is again the subject of an installation entitled *The Dating Project* (an ongoing project that started in 2003), which was conceived as a counterpart to *Letters to Laylah*.

The Dating Project consists of a wall made of simple, stackable picture frames. Each frame contains a watercolor portrait of a man. At the bottom of each painting, an email address is punched through the paper. Peeping through these holes, the audience can observe Gil & Moti at work behind the wall, busily writing emails and painting more portraits. They are painting these portraits based on profile descriptions and pictures found on gay dating sites on the internet. All the men are Arabs. After painting the portraits, they scan the images and send them to the email addresses provided by the potential dates, along with a message explaining who they, Gil & Moti, are. They also ask questions, such as whether or not the recipient likes his portrait. Doing this placed them in touch with many different men, one of whom, Oliver from Lebanon, eventually took up the role of Laylah, Gil & Moti's lover.



Dating Gil & Moti, detail, mixed media, 2003–07, photo: Gil & Moti.

The original watercolors punched through with the email addresses are used to construct an installation that might be read as an inverse of Marcel Duchamp's famous *Etant Donnés* (ca. 1946–66, Philadelphia Museum of Art). Duchamp's installation reads as a commentary on the subjective perspective that is involved in the artistic representations of naked female flesh covering the walls of many art museums. The installation consists of a life-sized diorama behind a large wooden door with holes bored in it, through which the viewer is invited to peep. Through these holes, the viewer sees a brick wall with another hole in it. Behind this hole lies a female body with spread legs.

Duchamp's installation exposes the viewer as a voyeur caught wanting, at the keyhole, gazing at the ultimate object of heterosexual male desire. In *The Dating Project*, on the other hand, it is not the viewer, but Gil & Moti who are to be caught wanting. Peeping through the little holes in the paintings, the audience can see them busy surfing the net and making images of the mostly naked bodies of their imaginary objects of homosexual desire. In Duchamp's installation, the female body is reduced to being the passive object of the invisible viewer, who looks at her from behind the door. She lies there as though unaware of being seen, apparently existing independently from the desires that have molded her into the image she is. Gil & Moti's *Dating Project*, however, points to vision as taking place somewhere in-between. In their installation, the paintings act as a screen mediating the relationship between the artists, their possible lovers, and possible viewers. The paintings are visual fantasies fuelled by the profile descriptions and pictures that were provided by the men depicted. That is, they are fuelled by descriptions and pictures that, in turn, are intended to play into the desires and presuppositions of an absent imaginary viewer. This viewer is someone who, in the installation, can be seen as present through or behind the images. In between seeing and being seen, vision appears as a contested field.

Dating Gil & Moti, installation and performance view, MUMOK, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2004, photo: MUMOK.

The Look of Love

Silverman's theory of love is utopian. One cannot learn to love, she asserts, according to programmed instructions. However, by actively investing 'others' with attraction, we might be able to interfere with these largely unconscious processes of attraction and identification. In the long run, then, such acts may cause gradual changes in the parameters according to which these seemingly automatic processes take place—and, as a result, we could begin to fall in love differently.

With their decision to fall in love, Gil & Moti set out to make one such change in a project that, too, is utopian. At the same time, it is very much situated in the here and now, causing a kind of short-circuit between ideality and reality, a forced marriage indeed. Gil & Moti began writing letters to their lover even before they knew him. Like princes in a fairy tale, they were sure their significant other existed somewhere 'out there,' and that it was just a matter of finding him. Cowboys of their own time, they surfed the Internet until they found their lover in the person of Oliver. Oliver then took up the role of their imaginary lover Laylah. In doing so, he became one of them, literally, in the sense that part of his role was to wear the same clothes as Gil & Moti and, indeed, to look like them. Literally idealized by the artists, Gil & Moti thus (re)created him according to their own parameters and after their own image. Apart from his appearance, this idealization manifested itself in the many beautiful and very explicitly idealized portraits they painted of him, and the emails and SMS messages they sent him, in which they address him according to all the conventions of true romantic love.[2] In addition to the artistic ways in which they gave him prominence in their ongoing life-performance, Gil & Moti actively gave Oliver (or is it Laylah?) all their love. They took the ultimate personal consequences of their decision to devote themselves to him. At the same time, the theatrical ways in which they made love happen leaves space for reflection on the tension between visions of utopia and daily life, a tension already present in the double identity of their lover Oliver/Laylah.

After several months of living together, Oliver left. Gil & Moti worked through their experiences in a video-installation that was combined with live-performances, entitled *Laylah, the Creature Beyond Dreams* (first presented at the Kunsthalle, Vienna, November 11, 2004). This installation started where the *Letters to Laylah* and *The Dating Project* ended, telling the story of how they met and fell in love with Oliver, and also of how their romance ended. It is a story of longing, loss and mourning but, most of all, it is a story about love. More than the highly theatrical love story itself, this conscious reworking of their own ways of looking and loving, is what turns their project into an ‘active gift of love,’ one that invites the audience to take part in it as well.

Gil & Moti issue an invitation to ‘make the ethical operative,’ not only with regard to who can appear as the object of the ‘look of love,’ but also with regard to the conflation of love and truth that situates both beyond our powers of control. Silverman’s psychoanalytical account facilitates an understanding of how, to a certain extent, love is indeed something that happens to us beyond the bounds of our will to resist or influence. But, importantly, her theory disconnects this moment when love happens from any notion of ‘truth’ as something that lies beyond or before the realms of human subjectivity. Perhaps we may not be in control of who will attract our ‘look of love’; however, this does not mean that love happens to us in ways that exceed the limits of our subjective perspective. On the contrary, if love happens to us, this is usually precisely *because* what we see corresponds to the personal desires, phobias, and anxieties of our ever subjective world-view while, at the same time, the myth of love as truth depends upon the invisibility of this connection. This is the truth of love happening to us as though ‘beyond our power to control’: as long as we do not take control, it will continue to happen in more or less the same way, thus reiterating culturally and historically specific preferences, desires and dislikes.

Seen in this way, Silverman's analysis of love illustrates the paradox of the type of truth that is involved in fundamentalism, based as it is upon the recognition of an absolute truth, beyond and before subjective point of view. The truth of fundamentalism requires conviction whereas, at the same time, conviction involves the belief that the fundamental truths of which one is convinced are somehow independent from one's conviction. Such a recognition of truth as beyond our power to control is precisely what produces one's own convictions as fundamental and justifies acting according to them as well as taking action against those who do not share them. At this point, Silverman's ethics of vision points to the importance of taking into account one's own subjective point of view as always already involved in how both love and truth 'happen.'

Dear Laylah. We already like the smell of the bonfire, the black coffee, the pita bread, the falafel, the Kaffia and the cactus fruit and we are just about to love you too. Warm big hugs. Gil & Moti.

Notes

1. For the potential of theatre and theatricality as ‘critical vision machine,’ see my “Theatricality and the Search for an Ethics of Vision” and “Theatre of/or Truth.”

2. Gil & Moti made watercolors of many of these messages, combining them with images after Baz Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge*. That highly theatrical feature film has many storylines but is, as the main character states at the end, first and foremost a story about love.

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Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 77–98

Staging Colonialism: The Mise-En-Scène of the Africa Museum in Tervuren, Belgium

Murat Aydemir

Now what's going to happen to us without the barbarians?
These people were a kind of solution.
—Constantine Cavafy, "Waiting for the Barbarians" (1904)

Barely halfway through my tour through the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren, Belgium, I get tired, extraordinarily tired. A strange fatigue takes hold of my limbs, eyes, and mind. The prospect of having to peruse another series of rooms makes my head spin. Perhaps I am simply uninterested in what the museum's exhibits have to offer. But probably not, since some of the individual objects on display do trigger my curiosity and wonder. Hence, I start speculating that the way I feel is, in fact, an inchoate, subconscious response—initially only expressed as a mixture of fatigue, boredom, and irritation—with the specific way in which the museum has organized and subdivided the space at its discretion, and has set out a marked itinerary through its various exhibits for visitors to follow. What seems to bother me is not so much what I get to see as the walk I must walk, the trajectory I must trace. I do not want to take another step.

Tervuren's RMCA is a colonial museum in a world split between postcolonialism and neo-colonialism. At first sight, its stuffed animals, curiosa, pompous busts, yellowed maps, jars with snakes submerged in alcohol, and rows of exotic objects make a charmingly silly and quaint impression—what *The Museum Key: A Visitor's Guide to the RMCA* (2003) innocuously refers to as its " 'Tin Tin in the Congo' quality" (80). It takes a while for that first impression to evolve into something more sinister and nauseating. Much of that cumulative effect has to do with the path laid out through the museum's spaces: the steps it assigns, the junctures it forges, and the distinctions it makes. While the animals, curiosa, busts, maps, snakes, and objects are all recognizable relics from a bygone era, the categories and classifications that inform the walking tour are far from relegated to the past. Indeed, each visit to the museum bodily actualizes them, reaffirms their awkward contemporaneity.

In what follows, I analyze some of the implications and effects of the RMCA's walking tour, mainly focusing on what I will mark out as three decisive 'stages.' I use that word to bring up three of its connotations, which become closely interrelated in the visitor's tour through the museum. To begin, 'stages' can refer to the consecutive steps of the visitor's trajectory through the museum, walking from room to room. In addition, the term points to the developmental phases belonging to the evolutionism that underlies much of the museum's spatial organization, in which the distinctions and continuities between animals and humans, as well as between Western humans and African humans, are central and deeply problematic. Finally, the word can be taken to suggest the museum's carefully orchestrated and imaginary spectacles, theatrical showpieces, that manipulate and seduce their viewers as much as they inform. During a tour, the visitor moves from stage to stage in these three meanings.

No footlights or curtains signal the elaborate theatricality of the place. Yet, the Africa that the museum contains and represents is, to a large extent, a Belgian production, a set designed, peopled with actors, and filled with storylines that were once directed with national interests in mind. Much like the Orient according to Edward Said, Africa serves here as a "theatrical stage affixed to Europe" (63). Moreover, the RMCA's outdated, quaint impression suggests a second layer of theatricality. In a nominally postcolonial present, Tervuren offers a mise-en-scène that conserves the ideological attitudes of nineteenth-century Belgian colonialism. In this sense, the institution has become a musealization of itself, a museum of a museum. Hence, Turvuren acts as a 'setting' for the aesthetics of both another place and another time, a place 'thick' with the imagination of an 'elsewhere' and a 'once.' This double theatricality inflects the museum's contemporary status. Tervuren has maintained its scientific mission in the present: its 'contents' purport to offer trustworthy knowledge of Central Africa. At the same time, however, the mise-en-scène in which those contents are displayed is generally recognized as colonialistic, and, hence, faulty or at least colored by ideology. My point is that the two aspects, contents and mise-en-scène, finally cannot be separated and, indeed, inflect each other at every turn. As a result, the place ends up representing colonialism as *present*, as both existent and contemporary.

A crucial aspect of the mise-en-scène of Tervuren is that it unremittingly binds African subjects to places that are drained of time and history. In the fictional Africa that the RMCA stages, character and setting are nearly one: African characters are tethered to or submerged into their environment, biotope, background, or tribal niche. This treatment stands in sharp contrast to the figuration of the historic Belgian colonists, explorers, travelers, and scientists, who all operate independently of their respective settings. People who visit the museum today ostensibly share that condition: they arrive, appreciate the museum's elaborate staging of Africans in their natural habitat, to then leave. As the setting of the aesthetics of another place and another time, the RMCA inevitably promises its visitors a relationship to *its* spatial organization that seems less than deterministic, a relationship that can be critical, nostalgic, or recuperative.

However, through the subtle discipline of the 'walking tour,' the path laid out through the museum's exhibition rooms, the contemporary visitor is as spatially constrained and conditioned, put in place, as the people who form the exhibition's 'objects.' Ultimately, then, Tervuren's mise-en-scène can be taken to frame a contemporary, colonial, and *Western* subject; its setting becomes *that* subject's 'set-up' or trap. To the extent that the current RMCA marginally allows for a perspective that shifts attention from the African 'other' as situated in an atemporal habitat to a Western self as situated in a colonialistic present, the museum becomes a 'migratory setting,' in which 'other' and 'self' switch places. I begin by inquiring into the history and semiotic of the walking tour.

The Walking Tour

> *The working man or agricultural labourer who spends his holiday in a walk through any well-arranged Museum cannot fail to come away with a deeply-rooted and reverential sense of the extent of knowledge possessed by his fellow-men. It is not the objects themselves that he sees there, and wonders at, that cause this impression, so much as the order and evident science which he cannot but recognize in the manner in which they are grouped and arranged. (Greenwood qtd. in Bennett, "Culture" 385)*

In "Useful Culture" (1999), Tony Bennett argues that the proliferation of museums and exhibitions in the nineteenth century served the governmental aim of enforcing "the transformation of popular morals and manners" (368). As the quote above by museum reformer of the day Thomas Greenwood from his *Museums and Art Galleries* (1888) makes clear, this transformation should follow less from the exposure of the general public to intrinsically worthy or fascinating objects, but rather from the knowledgeable order in which these were organized and displayed by the museum curators. First and foremost, the hapless visitor should come away with a sense of respect for the scientific order of things, as well as for his scientific fellow men who possessed and imposed that order. Hence, the museum tour was explicitly devised as a disciplining exercise in morals and manners, which was meant to substitute for alternative and less edifying holiday pastimes, in which the laborer or farmer might well indulge: recreations involving "intoxicants or vicious excitement of one description or another," as Greenwood specifies (qtd. in Bennett, "Culture" 358).

Another piece by Bennett, entitled "The Exhibitionary Complex" (1999), puts his remarks on the museal walking tour in the larger historical context of what he calls the ‘exhibitionary complex,’ which boomed from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. During this period, museums and exhibitions were no longer restricted to a select audience made up of scientists and connoisseurs, but were progressively more opened up to the general public, facilitated by broader opening hours and reduced admittance fees (343–4). The new, extended public was to receive what Bennett describes as “object lessons in power,” a power which manifested itself in its ability “to organize and co-ordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the people in relation to that order” (339). That order of things was largely delivered by the new scientific disciplines that accompanied and fuelled the exhibitionary complex, such as history, art history, archaeology, geology, biology, and anthropology.

The primary ideological ratio of the exhibitionary complex, according to Bennett, was the ‘nationing’ of the socially heterogeneous populations of nation-states (“Complex” 349). All classes, now including farmers and laborers, were given the opportunity to identify with the power and knowledge that ordered the exhibition spaces and displays. Thus, the complex organized the public “into a unity, representationally effacing divisions within the body politic in constructing a ‘we’ ” (“Complex” 352). That unified ‘we’ required a ‘they’ to identify against, an ‘other’ assuring the coherence and superiority of the ‘we’ visiting the museums.

By and large, that other was produced by anthropology, which put on display ‘primitive’ peoples as living examples of earlier or arrested stages in the evolution that had brought Western culture to prominence. As a result, Bennett concludes, “ ‘primitive peoples’ dropped out of history altogether in order to occupy a twilight zone between nature and culture” (“Complex” 350). Indeed, they only ‘survived’ as examples of the transition, the “missing link,” between nature and culture, between animals and humans (“Complex” 351). To put it bluntly, the job of ‘nationing’ the lower classes, their taking part in a Western, national, and modern ‘we,’ was partially accomplished by the exhibitionary complex’s invitation for them to feel at least superior to the primitives.

Bennett’s emphasis on the national uses of museums and exhibitions becomes poignant in the case of the RMCA’s relation to the nascent Belgian nation state. Belgium only became an independent nation in 1830; the RMCA was established as late as 1910. “Since Belgium was a very young nation-state at the time,” Jean Muteba Rahier argues in “The Ghost of Leopold II” (2003), “the project of … a colonial museum was intended also to ‘educate’ the Belgian public as to who they really were in contradistinction to the uncivilized Congolese ‘tribes’ ” (61). This education, Muteba Rahier goes on, greatly facilitated the erasure of internal divisions in the Belgian populace and especially of the trenchant conflicts between Flemings and Walloons, who could now feel as one vis-à-vis the colonized other (75). That is to say, the Belgians could only become a qualified national ‘we’ thanks to the counter-example—‘who we are not’—that institutions such as the RMCA offered up to their visitors. In this regard, it is supremely ironic that the museum's one and only reference to the history of the Congolese *before* the Belgians arrived in Central Africa should mention the Old Kingdom of Congo of the fourteenth century, which brought together various tribes into a centralized state with one capital and a joint king—a feat Belgium struggles with to this day.

In *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (1996), Mieke Bal proposes a mode of semiotic analysis suitable to the exhibitions that are part of Bennett's history. Bal views exposition, the subjective agency that organizes an exhibition, as a specific form of discursive behavior, involving "the posture or gesture of exposing" (2). In this gesture, a first person or 'I' points at the objects put on display, inviting a second person or 'you,' the visitor, to "Look!" This invitation comes with authority: the first person assumes the required power and knowledge to make people watch, and implicitly to assure them that what they get to see conforms to the truth: "Look! That's how it really is." In Bennett's terms, the 'I' and the 'you' become a unified 'we,' who share knowledge about the objects on display, which index the people who made and used them. Therefore, those people form the excluded third person or 'they' who cannot take part in the conversation (4).

The authority of the expository first person is buttressed by the material and tangible presence of the objects, persuading the second person, Bal continues, "that what you see must be real, true, present, or otherwise reliable. After all, it is visible, you see it there, before you" (5). However, the seemingly innocent invitation to look at the exhibited objects also implies the transmission of a series of statements about the objects, which motivate their selection, juxtaposition, and signification. Thus, the things themselves effectively recede before the statements made about them and the order imposed on them. "The thing on display," Bal writes, "comes to stand for something else, the statement about it. It comes to *mean*." (4) In this way, the viewer is framed, set-up, to see the objects in a particular, pre-ordained manner. As Greenwood frankly admitted, it is not so much "the objects themselves that [the visitor] sees there, and wonders at … as the order and evident science … in the manner in which they are grouped and arranged." That notwithstanding, the viewers' invited close attention to the material things on display might easily convince them that the impressions they comes away with on the walking tour are 'told' by the objects themselves, thus forgetting about or ignoring the first person expository agent, who makes the viewers watch in the first place, who guides visitors through the museum on their tour, and who attaches definite meanings to what they get to see.[1]

The expository agent of the RMCA is split. To this day, the main exhibition of the museum remains staunchly colonial and racist in its implications. A monument celebrating Leopold's Congo was erected in the museum gardens as late as 1997.[2] Then again, the most recent visitor's guide (2003) on sale at the entrance takes care to historicize some of the exhibitions and point out their ideological attitudes. Moreover, the entrance hall is the starting point of an alternative, supplementary walking tour, marked out in red displays, that also works to historicize and to criticize elements of the main exposition. A comprehensive renovation of the museum is underway, and is projected to finish by 2010. Hence, visiting the museum now offers the choice opportunity to experience both the full effect of the main exhibition and to reflect critically on its message. In Bal's terms, the main expository agent tells the viewer: "Look! That's how the primitives are." The second, supplementary agent adds: "Look! That's how we used to display the 'primitives.' "

The balance struck by the museum's two stances, the one colonial, the other self-reflexive, is hard to ascertain. Visitors may simply not buy the guide, and skip or overlook the supplementary tour in the main exhibition's margin. The guide and the alternative tour may also well function as a tokenistic gesture, supplying the required excuse to keep the permanent exhibition intact for the moment. I do not wish to settle the matter precipitously, but my nagging sense is that the museum's current level of self-criticism—certainly too little, too late—so far merely serves as a convenient way to offer the visitor some temporal distance from the main exhibit, so that it can then be consumed *nostalgically*: "Look! That's how we used to display the 'primitives' (but wasn't that a lot of fun!)." Viewers initially put off by the exhibition may be sufficiently reassured by the marginal critical commentary to go on and enjoy the show.

Consequently, the viewer can continue to indulge, in the words of historian Adam Hochschild, in "an Africa composed entirely of exotic costumes and pounding drums" (qtd. in Muteba Rahier 59), savor the museum's "Tin Tin in the Congo" attractions, get excited about the legendary meeting of Stanley and Livingstone in darkest Africa—while the genocidal horrors of Belgian colonialism are safely kept at bay. Astonishingly, both the visitor's guide and the supplementary tour (let alone the main exhibition) still fail to mention *that* particular history in any detail.[3] In the meantime, the appeal to nostalgia guarantees the museum's continuing viability as a tourist attraction, and also precludes the consideration of colonialism's continued power in the present.

For, as Bennett argued, the imperialistic exhibitionary complex of which the RMCA is part established the epistemological order of things (and people) that carved up the knowable into distinct disciplines and their respective objects, which have largely remained commonplace to today. Hence, the critical 'asides' offered by the visitor's guide and the supplementary tour matter less than the disciplinary order that organizes the exhibition's main rooms. With historical, artistic, archaeological, geological, biological, and ethnographical exhibits and rooms within the museum's walls, the decisive issue in the RMCA's effect on the viewer centers on the questions as to what and who end up in which rooms, as well as how the walking tour marks out transitions, distinctions, and continuities between them.

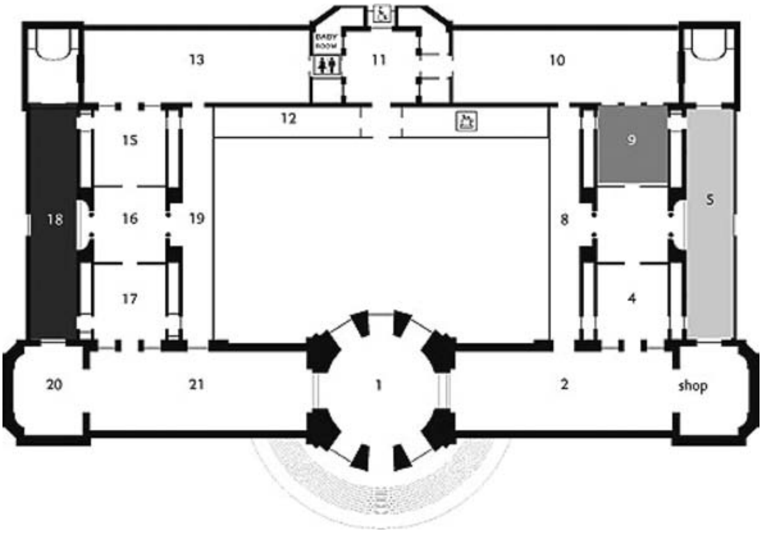

Figure 1. Floorplan of the Africa Museum in Tervuren, Belgium. Available at http://www.africamuseum.be/museum/permanent. Some of the stages of the walking tour can be traced online.

Stage One: Nature and Culture

With their carefully laid out plots, lanes, stairways, ornaments, vistas, and hedges, the extensive gardens that surround the museum create the impression of a natural world brought under complete geometric and aesthetic control; here, nature is designed, ordered, rationalized, tamed, and cultured. Therefore, the gardens stand in direct contradistinction to the African nature, the nature of Africa and the Africans, supposedly 'wild' and 'savage.' In this way, the gardens set the stage for the main message that the museum will convey. The monumental, pillared facade of the museum building similarly promises the containment and regulation of a nature that, without it, would merely be chaotic and primal.

From the gardens, the first stage of my walking tour takes us into the main entrance hall (room 1, see figure 1), which continues the grand theme of 'culturing' and cultivating the nature of Africa, Africa as nature. The tour then proceeds directly to the small and unused entrance hall at the back of the museum (room 11), where the flipside, the bad conscience, as it were, of that self-proclaimed colonial mission will partially emerge.

The main entrance hall is dominated by a series of allegorical statues that stand in elevated niches. Three of them are entitled *Belgium Offers Civilization to Congo*, *Belgium Offers Wealth to Congo*, and *Belgium Offers Her Support to Congo*. All three consist of one fully clothed adult figure with two naked or semi-clad children, or child-like figures.

The first of these are all recognizably African; the others, chubby, angelic figures, are iconographically identifiable as *putti*. A mature Belgium hands over the *putti*, symbolizing civilization, wealth, and support respectively, to the African 'children,' who rejoice in the gift. The child-like and nude appearance of the *putti* fits the iconographic convention. But the same does not quite apply to the African figures, so that their child-like postures and lack of dress becomes not so much iconographical and symbolic, but rather 'realistic' or 'historical.' Hence, the depiction of the Africans as near-naked children suggests their naturalness and innocence, their pre-cultural existence, which they can only overcome by accepting Belgium's gifts. Belgium's colonial pedagogy allows the 'natural' child-beings to mature into civilization.

Placed at ground level directly under the elevated sculptures are four more statues that represent Africans in their supposedly natural state. They are entitled *The Artist*, *The Fire Maker*, *The Idol Maker*, and *The Chief of the Tribe*. In relation to the figures above, they establish a consistent series of oppositions. The former are up high, the latter are down below. The allegorical statues are golden, shiny, and smooth; the African sculptures are black, and have a matte and textured finish.[4] The figures representing Belgium stand upright, the African ones are sitting down, crouching, or huddled. The Belgians grant their symbolic gifts, the Africans are busy with manual labor, such as fire making or woodwork. While the sculptures above appear to soar over the viewer, the bases of the sculptures below are much broader than the human figures they support, so that these seem tethered to the earth, grounded. Moreover, because the bases and the human figures on them share the same color and texture, a continuity is established between the figures and the ground or 'earth' on which they sit; hence, the Africans do not 'stand out' against the material, natural environment of which they are part.

Two of the African statues depict artistic activities. *The Idol Maker* sculpts a piece of wood, *The Artist* draws the outline of a fish in the sand or mud. Their presence in a hall filled with artworks, which serves as the entrance to a museum filled with African art, inevitably gives them a meta-artistic force. The sculptures could possibly be perceived as signaling the artistic creativity of African people, perhaps rivaling that of the artists who created them (Arsène Matton and Herbert Ward). But the placement of the paired sculptures in the hall and the series of oppositions they invoke carry a corresponding semiotic opposition that once more relegates the African figures to the bottom of the hierarchy of values.

For, the semiotic mode of the elevated statues is symbolic and allegorical: their signification, Belgium bringing the gifts of civilization to Congo, overrules what they represent literally (an adult figure with two children). In contrast, the African sculptures, including the ones that depict artists at work, merely signify concretely and literally: they represent what they represent. Consequently, the fish that *The Artist* draws is just a fish: it does not signify on a higher level. Even if it did, the fish merely allegorically signals the natives' readiness for Christian conversion. Additionally, the identification of the wood sculptor as an idol maker unfavorably contrasts his superstitious idolatry or fetishism with the Christianity embodied by the priest-like Belgian figures. Therefore, the African artists in the entrance hall convey a strong warning to the visitor not to mistake the artworks and artifacts on display in the ethnographic rooms of the museum as genuinely aesthetic accomplishments, as similar in status to Western art.

The fourth statue elevated in a niche also depicts one adult figure with two children. It is called *Slavery*. In sharp contrast to the benevolent gestures of the other allegorical figures, this one clutches a naked African girl at his side, while trampling underfoot the body of a dead child. The figure's dress, facial features, dagger, and turban readily identify him as 'Arab.' One of the self-legitimizing myths of Belgian colonialism is that the Belgians 'liberated' the Congolese from Arab slave traders; a display case in another room still details "The Campaign against the Arab Slave Trade." Hence, the only reference to exploitation and violence in the main hall is ethnicized as Arabic.

The contrasts between *Slavery* and the other sculptures must bring home the message that Belgian colonialism is giving and civilizing, whereas Arabic colonialism only robs and destroys. At the same time, however, the *similarities* between the four allegorical statues carry a productively unsettling effect. The sinister and cruel sculpture starts to contaminate subtly the gestures of the other figures toward 'their' children. For, whether violated by the Arabs or granted the gift of civilization by the Belgians, helpless 'children' is what they remain. When skeptically read as a displaced Belgian colonist dressed up in ethnic drag, *Slavery* thus insinuates that the gifts of support, wealth, and civilization come attached with genocidal violence and exploitation.

Directly across the inner courtyard from the main entrance hall is the small entrance hall (room 11, see figure 1), which is no longer in use. It contains two statues left over from the Colonial Exhibition of 1897, which preceded the establishment of the RMCA. The exhibition included Congolese people living around a pond on the museum's estate. The remaining life-size sculptures are adorned with original items of dress and artifacts to enhance their realism. One of them is entitled, *Vua-Batetela Defending A Woman Against an Arabic Slave Trader*. The distress evident in the female figure, lying on the ground, does not interfere with the generous display of her naked body. Once again, colonial violence is displaced onto the Arab rival of—or stand-in for—the Belgian imperialist. At the same time, the statue makes abundantly clear the salacious and pornographic dimension of the colonial project. The Vua-Batetela may be able to defend the woman against the slave trader—but not against the gaze of the visitors, who thus inevitably become complicitous with colonialism's sexual politics.

The small entrance hall also contains two statues of male African figures. The one strikes an aggressive pose: his head is jutted forward, one fist is clenched, the other holds a knife. The other is depicted as cowering and vulnerable. His head is bowed, his knees are close together, and he hugs himself for comfort. The extreme contrast between the two sculptures invokes the gruesome alternative of the colonial view of

African men: *either* savage and aggressive *or* humiliated and meek. In this way, the two sculptures can be taken to give the lie to the theme of colonial cultivation of nature and natural people, alternatively figured as garden architecture, benevolent pedagogy, gift-giving, and the liberation from the Arabs, which organizes the gardens and the main hall of the museum. For, together, the two sculptures expose that the preferred manner to make savage Africa meek is the infliction of violence, a violence from which the cowering man still reels. Cultivating and civilizing turn out to be nothing more than 'taming' by violence.

If taken aback by the violence and sensationalism of the sculptures in this back room, the visitor is now welcome to retreat into the museum café, the entrance to which is framed by the aggressive and the cowering African men. With its reed furniture, lush plants, exotic music, meals, and ornaments, the café serves up a completely kitsch-ified Africa that can now only taste sour. Frankly, the effect is devastating. Hence, the small entrance hall with its cheap kitsch, violence, pornography, and sensationalism, functions as the underbelly, the flip side, the vulgar counterpart, of the grand aspirations of the main hall.

Stage Two: Ethnography, Art, and History

The second stage of my walking tour consists of the three rooms forming the first leg of the official itinerary that the museum has laid out through its collections. It proceeds from ethnography (room 2, see figure 1) to art (room 4) and history (room 8). While the effect of my first stage largely depended on the contrast, establishing similarities and differences, between the large entrance hall and the small entrance hall at the back of the museum that forms its vulgar counterpart, this second stage works on the basis of sequential *succession*. Walking from room to room, the visitor must switch gears between three different disciplines: ethnography, art history, and history. Hence, the thresholds, the transitions, *between* the rooms acquire acute significance. How does the museum tour help the visitor to step over the boundaries that separate and connect the different rooms?

Room two displays a collection of masks, instruments, weapons, household goods, and the like, made and used by the peoples of the Congo. However, it is next to impossible to actually *see* those objects. All you observe is what Greenwood called the well arranged "order and evident science" of things, which Bennett saw as conducive to the "object lesson in power" that the exhibitionary complex promotes. The orderly classification of the displayed objects effectively overrules the visibility and tangibility of the things themselves, which recede in the background as little more than examples or specimens illustrating the authoritative science of the display. Notably, the room shares this strong emphasis on classification with the other rooms of the museum that exhibit plants, minerals, and animals.

The ethnographic order of the room is achieved through two operations. The first is ethnicization. The objects belonging to the manifold peoples of Central Africa, Mongo, Tetela, Zande, Mangbetu, Lengola, Lega, Kwango, Kuba, and others, are deposited in separate display cases; each ethnos has its own little exhibit. As the first station of the supplementary, self-critical tour notes, the exhibition represents the peoples of Congo as though they were isolated groups, “as if they had no influence on each other and no history before [nor *after*, M.A.] colonization.” The text goes on to warn that this type of ethnographic representation is not merely practical or epistemological, but corresponds to the historical colonial policy of dividing up conquered lands on the basis of imposed ethnic groupings and concomitant territories. The text fails to mention that it is precisely this colonial policy that is deemed responsible for much of contemporary Africa’s supposedly ‘ethnic’ warfare and genocide, notably in once Belgium-ruled Rwanda.[5] The colonial fracturing of African populations and the furthering of ethnic divisions—divide and conquer—makes victims to this day. Hence, the room and the order of things that it exhibits in fact form a scientific/political machine for engendering ‘ethnic’ antagonism.

The second operation that underlies the organization of the room entails the complete removal of temporality. The series of display cases, each exhibiting one ethnic group, freeze the people who made and used them in time. This is done in a number of ways. First, the text labels supply no dates for the objects, neither of their making, nor of their acquisition. Thus, visitors receive no indication as to whether the objects are still in use today, or belong to a way of life centuries in the past. Second, the language of the labels is predominantly in the present tense. Typically, the labels first describe the objects, then give some indication of their usage, both in the present tense. A representative example:

> *This small woven basket (*Tshokwe*) is adorned with two little calabashes with feathers, indicating its belonging to a circumcised member of the* mukanda-*initiation. It contains the few personal belongings the boy takes with him during his isolation in the broesse-camp. (my translation)*

Now, does this *mukanda*-initiation still take place in present-day Central Africa, or is it a thing of the past? Third, some of the display cases offer photographs of Africans handling similar objects as the exhibited ones. The pictures emphasize the contrast between modern and primitive technology, and once more affirm that African realities are unchanged and unchangeable, untouched by history. In that way, moreover, the ethnographic room completely erases the history of colonization; apparently, the Congolese enjoyed the same way of life before, during, and after their colonization.

The effect of the ethnographic removal of temporality and history only fully emerges when one enters the historical room. To get there, the visitor must first walk through room four, which is filled with a stunning collection of African artworks. However, the lowly position of the statues of the African artists in the large entrance hall has already, preemptively, discredited the artistic accomplishments of Africa as idolatrous and naive. In accordance with that judgment, the exhibition in the art room *extends* the ethnographical mode of display of the previous room. Like the objects on display there, the works of art are divided by ethnos and region, supplied with descriptions in the present tense, and accompanied by photographs of people handling similar artifacts (small statues, masks, costumes, etc.).

Hence, the first leg of the walking tour negotiates the threshold or transition between the ethnography room (2, see figure 1) and the art room (4) by making the two continuous to each other, by erasing the difference between the two. As a result, the beautifully crafted, humorous, and impressive artworks on display in room four are accorded the same status as the household tools and agricultural devices of room two. To point out the obvious, this is tantamount to putting, say, a Michelangelo and a potato peeler in the same exhibition, and insist that they are roughly the same thing. A text card motivates the policy as follows: "Seldom or never objects were designed as pure works of art. First and foremost, the objects were always given a definite significance and were designated for a specific function" (my translation). Surely, it should be self-evident that the fact that the aesthetic philosophy insisting on pure art without function developed in the West does not imply that there exists no conceptual difference between an ornate piece of African sculpture and a plough. Moreover, Western works of art from the Christian tradition and, therefore, designed with ritual significance and function in mind, are routinely included in exhibitions based on the aesthetic principles that postdate them by centuries.

If the museum tour skips or erases the transition between rooms two and four, ethnography and African art, by assuming a continuity between the two, the second threshold insists on a complete and sudden break. The next room (8, see figure 1) presents a 'great men' history of colonial exploration and administration: pioneers, scientists, and administrators immortalized in pompous busts, statues, paintings, and souvenirs. Apparently, Congolese history only starts when the Belgians arrive. Ethnography is black, history is white. Stepping over the threshold between the previous two rooms and this one implies stepping into Time. The static, timeless order of ethnic groups, their territories, and their things is taken over by the march of history (though it was actually colonialism that politically and epistemologically produced and maintained that order to begin with). While the ethnographic room and the art room both stress eternally unchanging and collective ways of doing things, the history exhibit emphasizes individuals forging events, making discoveries and decisions, thus forcing the course of history. As Ruth B. Phillips points out,

> *When a museum assigns certain objects to the domain of 'History,' it identifies the objects' makers as participants in a dynamic, progressive, temporal process; its assignment of other objects to 'Ethnology' or 'Folk Culture' invests them with notions of the traditional, the timeless, and the technologically retrograde. (7)*

Thus, the placement of the historical exhibition after the ethnographic room in the walking tour suggests that Belgian colonialism supplanted the traditional with the progressive, the timeless with the dynamic, and the retrograde with the modern. Yet, one of the objects in the room wonderfully undercuts the pathos of that grand ambition: a board game. Its cover yells: “New and Instructive Game: Stanley’s March across the Dark Continent!” The game not only speaks volumes about the popular resonance of the colonial project, but also suggests that that is what it was: a game, played out with Africa serving as its ‘board.’

The historical exhibit has another surprise in store. The corner of the room displays more African works of art. They are shown in this room rather than in the room that exhibits all the other works of art in an ethnographic fashion, because they clearly register the history of colonialism. Hence, they could not have been placed in the former room without disturbing the atemporal, ethnic, and spatial order of things that reigns there. The display cases show pieces of sculpture representing Western people and objects. A text card explains:

> *This is how the African saw the white man …*
>
> *The arrival of the white man in autochthonous Central Africa was an event that triggered amazement, sometimes discontent, but in all cases extensive curiosity. The African artist has registered the unusual aspects of the white appearance in work that runs from simple imitation or simple reproduction to complete appropriation or insertion in his own vision. … All the usual materials are used. With the Lubaki, we notice for the first time—in the twenties—the use of the tools the whites imported for the art of drawing. (my translation)*

The few drawings on display, one of a horse, the other of a dinner party, look like children’s drawings. And that is precisely their point. For, what this part of the history exhibit suggests is that Africans only became genuine, if beginning, artists when they first encountered white people.

The card describes the arrival of the colonists as an (historical, watershed) ‘event,’ which primarily served to trigger the passion necessary for artistic innovation: curiosity. This curiosity then centers on what is “unusual” to the appearance of the whites. The sentence that follows gives a condensed and doubly tautological account of Western-style art-historical development: “from simple imitation or simple reproduction to complete appropriation or insertion in [the artist’s] own vision.” That accelerated improvement follows up on the event described before, the curiosity it provoked, and the uncommon sight it took as its object. Apparently, then, nothing happened, no unusual sights appeared, no curiosity was triggered and, hence, no real development occurred in the world of African artists *before* the Belgians came to Congo. The last sentence finds evidence of the ultimate goal of the Africans’ rapid artistic development brought on by their encounter with Westerners: their conversion to a Western genre of art making, drawing with paint on paper. Thus, the text suggests that the works in the African art room, no matter how accomplished and sophisticated, are ultimately artistically inferior to the few Western-style drawings from the twenties that look like they have been made by children.

Sandwiched uneasily between ethnography and history, the sheer existence of African art remains a thorny conceptual problem. This problem was partially addressed, partially compounded by a temporary exhibition on display at the museum when I visited it in July 2004. *Sensitivity and Force* shows *mankishi*-statuettes by the Songye accompanied by photographs of them taken by artist Hughes Dubois. The same kind of sculptures is also included in the art room of the permanent exhibition, where they are displayed ethnographically. But in the temporary exposition, they are shown aesthetically. Placed in plexiglas cases stressing their pricelessness, the *mankishi* are exquisitely lit by boutique-style lighting, each statue basking in its own pool of light. Hence, the RMCA simultaneously stages two completely different ways of looking at the same objects: one inviting viewers to see them as specimens of ethnic, ritual, and non-artistic behavior, the other making visitors look at them as fully aesthetic works of art in their own right, each to be contemplated individually.[6]

In one corner of the exposition, audio of drums and voices indexes the ritual function of the sculptures, but without *reducing* them to that function. The combined effect recalls the famous 1988 *Art/artifact*-exhibition mounted by the Center for African Art in New York. The exhibition purposefully displayed similar works of African art in a variety of frames: as in the traditional art museum, the contemporary gallery, the ethnographic diorama, and the cabinet of curiosities.[7] Walking back and forth between the ethnographic art room and the rooms dedicated to *Sensitivity and Force* makes one acutely aware of how much the different manners of display determine the visitor's reception of the objects.

Hughes Dubois' photographs of the statues continue, increase, and literalize the individualizing tendency of their aestheticizing display. His pictures are instantly recognizable as belonging to the contemporary genre of stylish black and white portraiture, focusing on the facial features and expressions of the sculptures. I found myself returning over and again to Dubois' portraits of statues. It took me a while to realize that the portrait photographs of 'African faces' work to reflect on, and substitute for, the near total absence of individualizing representations of Africans in the RMCA's main exhibition. To the extent that African faces are displayed at all, they are largely sentimentalized, reduced to an ethnic type, represented as an anonymous group or crowd, or submerged into the background; no African human figure is given a name. Hence, Dubois' portraiture of statues becomes a ghostly supplement for the uncanny absence of individual African faces in a museum dedicated to Central Africa.

However, there is a nagging problem with *Sensitivity and Force* that I find difficult to ignore. Bit by bit, the accomplishments of the Western artist, Hughes Dubois, starts to overrule the creativity of the African sculptors who made the statues. Indeed, Dubois' pictures come to motivate the aesthetic display of the statues, as though only he could notice a beauty to them that would otherwise be negligible.

A text posted on a wall notes that the photographers of artifacts and artworks working for museum catalogues normally stay in the background. But not Dubois:

By seeing, looking, and observing, Hughes Dubois has developed a special relationship with certain sculptures, the lines and volumes of which he has captured perfectly. He decided to represent this dialogue by means of an art he masters completely: photography.

Seeing, looking, *and* observing? Wow! The triple emphasis on the sensibility of Dubois' eye accounts for the formal beauty of the pieces, their "lines and volumes." Next, the artistic genius and control of the master photographer are pointed out: "captured perfectly," "masters completely." What this text accomplishes, then, is the becoming-artist of the catalogue photographer Dubois, and not the recognition of the artistry of the sculptures. Visitors are to look at them through Dubois' eyes. Hence, their aesthetic effect resides not so much in the objects themselves, nor in their aestheticizing display, but rather in Dubois' individual gaze. Thus, the statues do not quite 'speak' for themselves (the Flemish title of the exposition translates as "Talking Images"); instead, the Western master photographer speaks for them. What the text terms a "dialogue," boils down to an act of ventriloquism. For, without Dubois' pictures, would the museum have bothered to display an aesthetic exhibition of the Songye sculptures at all?

Stage Three: Stuffed Animals, Archaeology, and Ethnography

The history rooms lead to the back wing of the building, which contains the museum's vegetal and animal collections (rooms 10 and 13, see figure 1). The official walking tour concludes in the second large ethnography room at the other side of the building (room 21). My stage three will concentrate on how the tour negotiates this transition from nature to culture, the threshold between animals and humans. The RMCA has African animals and humans in the same collection, a feat unthinkable in the case of museums devoted to Western national cultures. To put it bluntly, the exotic people are in the front wing, and the exotic animals in the back wing of the museum. Joining back and front, animal and human life, is a narrow corridor room that accommodates an exposition on archaeology and human evolution, the development of humans from animals (room 19). From the zoology room (13), the visitor walks through evolution, as it were, to arrive in the second ethnographic exhibition (21).

Similar to stage two, visitors must switch gears between three disciplines: zoology, archaeology, and ethnography. However, whereas stage two established clear distinctions and continuities between ethnography, art history, and history—with African art sitting awkwardly somewhere in the middle—the effect of stage three largely depends on *absorption*, which brings about a lack of distinction between the three rooms. Each room carries over into the next, or refers back to the previous one. Consequently, ethnography is absorbed into archaeology, and archaeology, in turn, is absorbed into zoology. What this accomplishes is a sliding scale effect between African animals and humans, which conforms to the designated place of 'primitive' people in Bennett's exhibitionary complex as the "twilight zone" between culture and nature, the "missing link" between humans and animals. In accordance with that place, the series of rooms suggest an uncanny theme: extinction.

Room thirteen is abundantly filled with stuffed mammals, exhibited in display cases and dioramas. The room is updated to reflect current ecological concerns about the extinction of animal species. *The Museum Key* notes that the collection includes "sometimes threatened or even extinct species whose DNA is preserved in this way" (57). Ironically, the *Key* also points out that the animals on display represent only a tiny fraction of the total collection, boasting that the museum has 10,000,000 animals in storeage—which, of course, in itself might have had something to do with the extinction of some species, not to mention the larger colonialist penchant for comprehensive collecting and the exploitation of natural resources, such as ivory (81).

This room gives access to room nineteen, which thus follows it (the visitor can also opt to skip this room, instead moving from the mammals to rooms exhibiting birds, insects, and reptiles). The long and narrow archaeological room traces human evolution, starting with a board schematizing ape species, which serves as the link between the previous room and this one, between zoology and archaeology. Subsequently, the exhibition lays out the stages in the evolution of mankind, including references to extinct branches of hominids. The exhibition culminates in three displays about the Early, Middle, and Late Stone Age. Moving along, you enter into the second large ethnographic room (twenty-one), similar to the first one. But, when you retrace your steps for a moment, you quickly realize that the archaeology exhibit on the evolution of the human species in room nineteen is *already* 'ethnographical.' Indeed, the ethnography room is folded back into, implicated in, the archaeology room.

This effect is achieved in two ways. Right in the middle of the archaeology room stands a replica of an oven, illustrating the practice of iron smelting in Rwanda. This smelting technique, a text card explains, has existed over 2,000 years, but has recently disappeared to make way for modern industry. Obviously, the time scale of the oven and the practice to which it refers is completely off in relation to the evolutionary time scale that organizes this room. Thus, its inclusion in the exposition at this point can only insinuate that African humans belong to an earlier stage of human development, preceding the birth of 'Western' *homo sapiens* proper. Furthermore, the archaeological display cases also contain ethnographic objects, sometimes accompanied by photographs showing African subjects handling tools similar to the archaeological ones. Hence, comparatively recent artifacts as well as human beings living at least recently enough to be able to be photographed are inserted into an exhibition that plays out on a time scale that is vast and distant.

A small caption on one of the cases explains the policy as follows:

For the sake of comparison with prehistoric tools, some display cases show ethnographic objects (indicated with a blue disc). These are of varying age and come from *different regions. The goal of these comparisons is to suggest specific manners of usage and attachment. Of course, the comparisons are simple hypotheses. (my translation)*

Of course, the "simple" hypothetical approximation of comparatively recent ethnographic objects to archaeological objects from the deep past can only take place on the unstated assumption that African people are primitive, evolutionarily backward, living in the past while living in the present, like ghosts. We moved on, they stayed behind. Notably, there is no station of the supplementary, self-critical tour to comment on the insidious message of this room.

If the archaeology room is already partially ethnographical, the ethnography room that follows (room 21, see figure 1) becomes partially archaeological: the many objects on display inevitably become evidence of arrested development, of an earlier evolutionary stage of mankind. The temporal suspension of African lives that the archaeology room accomplishes, translates into the tightly constrained spatial order of the ethnography room. The exhibit here is organized by themes, such as initiation, magic, music, transport, fishery, war, woodwork, and so on. The displays follow the standard ethnographic manner of exposition encountered before. The objects remain undated. The language of the text cards, supplying descriptions and indications of usage, are in the present tense. Photographs of African subjects using similar objects are included. Unlike the room with the stuffed mammals, there is no indication updating the room with present day concerns.

The room is dominated by a giant replica of an elephant, which links this room with the room filled with stuffed mammals (room 13). The elephant bridges the archaeology room (19) to connect the ethnography room (21) in which it stands with the mammals room (13). Because of its central position and sad gaze, the elephant evokes a strange sense of humanity. This makes it mirror the figure that occupies the centre of the other ethnographic room (2), which similarly combines human and animal features. The lurid *Leopard Man* or *Aniota* shows a human figure decked out in leopard skin, ready to charge at his sleeping victim. His fists wear claw-like devices, in order to make the wounds he is about to inflict look like the result of a feline attack. The stick he carries is used to leave a semblance of the trail of a large cat on the ground. I interpret *The Leopard Man* and the sad elephant, both centrally present in the two ethnographical rooms, as *shifter* figures. Partly human, partly animal, they serve to collapse further the distinction between African humans and animals.

Finally, a connected room (20) has three large dioramas showing the different natural environments of the Congo: forest, northern and southern savannah. If the history and the archaeology rooms predominantly work to transfix African lives in time, a time before Time, the combination of the dioramas and the ethnographic objects in the connected rooms now transfix the Congolese in place. By and large, the Western figures on display in the museum stand out against their environment or background; African human figures, if present at all, are framed by, defined by, or submerged into their natural habitats. In these rooms, the viewer is led to imagine the human beings whom the ethnographic objects on display index as though living *inside* the natural habitats represented by the dioramas. And that anchored placement establishes a sharp contrast with the exploring and traveling nature of the Belgians. As a caption in one of the history rooms explains: “Over the ages, people from our parts have been active overseas as merchants, soldiers, missionaries, scientists, colonists.” Hence, not only does the RMCA ethnographically represent Africans as frozen in time, but also as frozen in space, as put in their place, both literally and figuratively.

The references to the extinction of animal and hominid species in both the zoological and the archaeological rooms, in combination with the suspended and constrained spatio-temporal order of the ethnography room, suggests that the people whose goods, tools, and artifacts the latter room exhibits are, in fact, the only surviving traces of an endangered species suffering a similar fate: if not actually dead, then at least bound to disappear shortly. The denial of living historicity and temporality that the two ethnographic rooms of the museum accomplish becomes historical through (neo)colonial and genocidal politics. Or, rather, the Africans indexed by the exhibitions are not so much dead, they have never been quite alive in the present to begin with. The fact that millions of inhabitants of the Congo died during Belgian rule only confirms the evolutionary extinction that was necessary and inevitable to begin with.

Critical anthropologist Johannes Fabian has written extensively about what he calls, in “Culture, Time, and the Object of Anthropology” (1985), the “denial of coevalness” (14).[8] According to Fabian, this denial involves a series of conceptual and rhetorical devices serving to erase the contemporary existence of African people, an existence in the present they would share with the ethnographers who study them and the Western audiences receiving the results of that production of knowledge. Hence, anthropology has conceived of its object as either dead or dying (10). As Adolf Bastian, one of the historical founders of the discipline, phrased it: “At the very instance they become known to us they are doomed” (qtd. in Fabian 10). The anthropological denial of coevalness follows the historical tendency to regard African societies as belonging to a lost past as soon as Western explorers make contact with them, the irrevocable loss of their existence in its (romanticized, sentimentalized) pure, original, and undisturbed state (11). The remnants of the cultures that Belgian imperialism destroyed are lovingly preserved and classified by Belgian ethnographers. The belief that contact with Europeans would inevitably lead to the decline and disappearance of ‘primitive’ cultures Fabian terms “axiomatic”: they would prove unable to survive their encounter with historical Time as a matter of course (11).

In the RMCA, the relegation of African lives to a lost and distant past is primarily achieved by the archaeology room, which ‘ethnographizes’ earlier human evolutionary stages. Working in tandem with such a placement in the past, Fabian argues, is the ethnographic tendency to reduce time to space, either real or classificatory (14).

This job is mainly accomplished by the two large ethnographical rooms of the museum, which emplace African lives in ethnic categories and in territorial and biotopical environments. In these ways, the epistemological order of things that the RMCA embodies, predicated on the ethnographical denial of coevalness that Fabian alleges, continues to legitimize the genocide that took place in the Congo. The untold deaths merely confirm the ‘unliving’ presence of the inhabitants of Central Africa. Viewed in this light, the RMCA becomes a tomb, a giant, monumental gravesite, haunted by the ghosts of colonialism: already dead when they were alive, still alive now that they are dead.

Ghostly Encounter

The architectural and epistemological order that the RMCA imposes on the ‘wild’ nature of Africa places the animals of the continent in the back wing of the building, its people in the front wing. Both wings are organized on the basis of taxonomic principles—species, ethnicities, themes, territories, and biotopes—which all occlude temporality and historicity. Between the two wings, two shuttles or corridors work to *temporize* the distinction between animals and humans. The archaeology room (19, see figure 1) on the left side of the building deals with progressive human evolution; the history room on the right side (8) memorializes Belgian colonial history. Between the two, African history is eclipsed.

The former room tells how humans evolved from animals, while suggesting that Africans are stuck in evolution, hence not quite as human as Europeans, comparatively closer to animals. The latter suggests that human history only happened to Africa when the Belgians arrived, turning African sub-humans into full humans through the processes of colonization. Belgian history, then, did what evolution failed to achieve: the becoming-human of the Africans. Belgian history makes up, makes good, for a faulty or slow evolution. Those who could not keep up with the new pace set by the imperialistic time that the Belgians imposed on the Congo become historical refuse, either dead or dying, reverting to the semi-animal state in which evolution had left them behind.

The quaint, outdated feel of the RMCA accommodates a nostalgic recuperation and appreciation of a past long gone and, hence, easily believed to be innocent. But the victims of the colonial order of things that the museum embodies are still awaiting justice in the present, now. Furthermore, the legacies of the colonial past as well as contemporary neo-colonialist influences make their victims even today. Hence, the museum becomes, oxymoronically, a ghost of the present. In its current incarnation, perched between outdatedness and anticipation, Tervuren’s mise-en-scène combines a distanced perspective on the colonial past that vacillates between critique and nostalgia, while it simultaneously situates its visitors intimately in the colonial present. At each turn of the walking tour, those visitors fail to meet the people who are the museum’s scientific objects: imprisoned in displays that deny them temporality and, hence, life, they simultaneously haunt the building as ephemerally as they do insistently.

Notes

1. Bal's book also contains a detailed analysis of the walking tour of the American Museum of Natural History in New York ("Telling, Showing, Showing Off," 13–56), which I have taken as a model for my analysis of the RMCA.

2. For an illuminating account of the museum's internal politics, see Muteba Rahier, 75–80.

3. On the history connecting Belgium and Congo, *The Museum Key* has only this to offer: "Most of the key objects in this guide come from Central Africa, and more specifically from Congo. The reason for this geographical restriction is simple: the Museum has unsurpassed reference collections for that area. Moreover, Central Africa, and Congo in particular, are closely associated with Belgium's history, with the Museum's identity, and with the historical background of the collections" (5). Following the publication of Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold Ghost* (1999), in which the number of deadly casualties of Belgium rule in the Congo is estimated at ten million, the current director of the RMCA, Guide Gryseels, has initiated a historical review of the period and started a process of renovation. The main change so far seems to entail the refurbishment of one of the museum's rooms to include limited representations of Belgian colonialism. For a full account of the projected renovations, see Gryseels *et al*. Rather than offering sustained self-criticism, the article promises a more "modern" and dynamic" museum dedicated to "dialogue and transparency" (637). Since the authors offer very few specific indications of how these goals will be achieved, their argument seems little more than a public relations exercise. For an account of the colonization of Congo in relation to Belgian collective memory and national identity, see Van Den Braembussche 43–46.

4. Muteba Rahier discusses the one exception in the hall: the golden and elevated statue of a semi-naked woman carrying exotic fruits, titled *Fertile Africa*. She interprets the sculpture as symbolically evoking "the fecundity of African lands that are awaiting the conquest and penetration of white, European men," and juxtaposes it with a quote from a colonial guide book warning against the immoderate "sexuality of the native," which is said to threaten to "impregnate bit by bit the white man" (60).

5. As Mahmood Mamdani explains in "A Brief History of Genocide" (2001), "Sooner or later, every colonial power discovered that this racial dichotomy [between colonizer and colonized] tended to foster racial solidarity among colonial subjects. So the colonial powers dismantled the single legal universe of direct rule, employing instead a system of indirect rule. … Each ethnic group was now said to have its own set of customary laws, to be enforced by its own 'native authority'—its chief—in its own 'home area.' In this way, the aggregate category 'native' was legally abolished, and different kinds of natives were created. The political aim was to fracture the native population into ethnic groups. With each group governed through its own 'customary law,' a plural legal order produced plural political identities; these identities were said to stem from tribes, cultures, and traditions that predated the colonial encounter" (35).

6. James Clifford's definitive "On Collecting Art and Culture" (1988) historically traces and analyzes the 'art-culture system' that classifies exotic objects as *either* (collective, traditional) artifacts *or* (original, singular) works of art since the turn of the twentieth-century (*Predicament* 215–251, 222). The system programs the beholder's appropriate response to the objects it classifies, saying in effect: "Do not encounter these objects except as *curiosities* to giggle at, *art* to be admired, or *evidence* to be understood scientifically" (217). Clifford also suggests that the orderly principles of classification and exhibition are meant to protect against, and to legitimize, our own possessive, obsessive, perverse, and fetishistic attraction to alluring objects, urging us to return to them "as fetishes—not specimens of a deviant or exotic 'fetishism' but *our own* fetishes" (219–220,

229). Indeed, the African idols and fetishes on display in the RMCA are *our* fetishes of ‘Africa,’ which itself becomes reified as an exotic object as the fetish-objects shown obfuscate the historical conditions of their appropriation and classification.

[7] For an account, see curator Ellen Vogel’s “Always True to the Object, In Our Fashion” (Karp and Lavine 191–204).

[8] See also Fabian’s groundbreaking *Time and the Other* (1983).

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African Translations and Transcontextualizations

Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 101–118

Migratory Clichés: Recognizing Nyerere's *The Capitalists of Venice*

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Mabepari wa Venisi [*The Capitalists of Venice*] is a Swahili translation of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. It was translated in 1969 by Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first independent president. In this article, I explore *Mabepari wa Venisi* as a literary piece in its own right: as a text written in a different language, in a different historical and cultural context, and from a new site of authority. Although I view it as a work of literature, my focus will not be on *Mabepari*'s inner rhetorical textures, but on what may be called its 'trans-contextualization,' and on the ways in which this trans-contextualization is exploited by a literary device that I term 'migratory clichés.' The migratory clichés I explore in *Mabepari* are all situated in the rural-urban opposition, the tribe-nation opposition, and the orality-writing opposition. Hence, each cliché addresses the question of the cultural other. Because of this, I shall explore how 'the other' is constructed from the site of East Africa, a place that is usually essentialized in Western criticism as that of 'the postcolonial other,' yet rarely considered a site of enunciation itself.[1]

Mabepari's site of enunciation is embodied by the person of Julius Nyerere, the author of the translation. As argued by Michel Foucault, the author is not a person, but a "rational entity" that is "assigned a 'realistic' dimension" by conflating the writer (a social agent) and the "author-function" (the articulating principle of a text) into a single figure (124). Thus, the author is construed in reception. This construction is an imaginary—though naturalized—site of coherence, in which we situate the 'sense' that a text makes for us. I argue that Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's most popular president and writer of *Mabepari*, was a person of great authority in whom mechanisms parallel to those of the author figure in the West have found a focus of convergence. I explore the forms in which the author, a function of discourse, was pertinent for *Mabepari*'s production of a coherent discourse of its own.

Focusing on how *Mabepari* produces a sense of its own by exploiting something other than the manifest or constative level of the play's discourse, I depart from a performative understanding of language. This performative dimension of language has traditionally been a central concern of 'literature proper' in Swahili culture. While *Mabepari* is usually regarded by modernist Western critics as a 'mere' translation, in East Africa it is part of the Swahili literary canon. Addressing these tensions between modernist and Tanzanian understandings of 'literature proper,' in the first section of this paper I frame the translation in its context of reception. In the second, I elaborate on the notion of 'migratory clichés.' In the subsequent sections, I discuss *Mabepari*. I analyze the effects of identification that are produced by *Mabepari*'s migratory clichés as well as the effects of estrangement that they entail and, finally, the effects that are produced by the superimposition of both.

Locating *Mabepari wa Venisi*

Julius Nyerere, whose mother tongue was Zanaki, and who learned Swahili only as a third language, translated, published, and promoted the staging of *Mabepari* during his presidency, as part of his *Ujamaa* project. *Ujamaa*, which came to be known in the West as 'African Socialism,' refers to Nyerere's political ideology as well as the concrete policies he implemented. *Ujamaa* was effectively a translation of Marxism to the Tanzanian context and a critique of it from a postcolonial perspective. One of the central questions addressed was how to turn the territory within Tanzanian boundaries into an actual nation, into what Benedict Anderson has called an 'imagined community.'[2] This question was so important that it names Nyerere's whole ideology: *Ujamaa* translates literally as 'familyhood.' The key factor in Nyerere's effort to construct a sense of national community was language. He placed enormous energy into the promotion and institutionalization of Swahili as a shared language across the country.

Nyerere's government created Swahili research institutes and promoted Swahili writers, particularly playwrights. Nyerere himself began a series of Shakespearean translations. Besides *The Merchant of Venice*, he translated *Julius Caesar* (*Juliasi Kaizari*, 1963), setting up a tradition which has been followed until today, as his scholarly successors at the National Institute for Kiswahili Research continue to translate other works by the Elizabethan playwright.[3] Nyerere's effort to institutionalize Swahili as the common ground for academic and artistic practices is significant when related to the fact that, during this period, Tanzania was continuously rated by the UN as one of the poorest countries in the world.

Nyerere did not conceive of cultural and political imperialism as separate. While the British had imposed their language and customs, the Germans—who held Tanzanian territory before World War I—had not imposed their language in Tanzania, on the grounds that it was too complicated for the natives to understand. Similar conceptions persist to the present day. Because of its historical provenance and because of its phonetic and grammatical properties, Swahili is a Bantu language. Most African languages are of Bantu origin, and only African languages are Bantu. But, since Swahili existed in written form long before European colonization, the popular belief at the time was that Swahili was of Arabic origin. Even in recent scholarship, as shown by historiographer Marina Tolmacheva, Arabic influence on Swahili language and literature is still highly overestimated (223). African languages were, and still are, commonly believed to be 'primitive' and incompatible with writing, let alone with Shakespeare. British Swahili scholar John Allen describes the prejudiced incredulity his compatriots showed when asking him about Nyerere's translations ("Shakespeare" 213).

Nyerere's translations not only dealt with the subtleties of English literature, but also with those of oral traditions. The awareness of the site of reception that the text presents necessarily implies a heightened awareness of the indivisibility between the aesthetic, political, and philosophical effect of the spoken word, as conceptualized within an African pre-colonial inheritance. Moreover, in Swahili culture, literary merit and political leadership were conceived as mutually constitutive qualities.[4] Nyerere's popularity is closely associated with his great talent as an orator.

Mabepari also involved dealing with the subtleties of Swahili language and the great weight of the Swahili literary tradition. Swahili classical literature had fixed conventions to the degree that "the scansion of almost every word in Swahili poetry was fixed and *for each author* the number of syllables in each word was invariable" (Allen, "Note" 55; emphasis in text). Alamin Mazrui notes that Nyerere's translations introduced blank verse into the language, "a form of versification that was hitherto alien to the poetic universe of Swahili," in which "meter and rhyme where considered foundational to the … poetic canon." Since Nyerere introduced blank verse into Swahili literature, "an entire school of poets has emerged, in both Tanzania and Kenya, which has broken away from rhyme" (71).

Thus, in Tanzania, Nyerere's Shakespearean translations have been instituted as literature in their own right. Even in neighboring Kenya, Nyerere's translations hold a place in syllabi of Swahili literature nationwide, and are assumed to be properly literary pieces by both local anthologists and the general public (67–68). John Allen, who belonged to a conservative school of literary appreciation, took up the task of a formal analysis of Nyerere's use of the Swahili language for literary purposes. From a modernist understanding of literature, Allen implicitly argued for Nyerere's admittance into the literary canon, even to the point of comparing him with Chaucer ("Note" 54).

More explicitly, and from a different and contemporary understanding of the literary, Mazrui has also argued that the translations should be viewed as Swahili literature in their own right. Taking theories of linguistic relativism as his starting point, Mazrui argues for the relevance of undoing the opposition between original and translation with respect to East African literature. He suggests that the absorptive capacity of

Swahili language has played a crucial role in the construction of its culture and literature and that, consequently, translation should be admitted into its canon.

In response to Mazrui, Alwi Shatry argues that the 'literary class' that Mazrui represents is composed of a political and economic elite, who speak Swahili only as a second or third language, and know little of its traditions. Shatry argues that the emphasis Mazrui places on literature as textuality is insufficient. This position, argues Shatry, dismisses the fact that translations awaken a sense of otherness that cannot be overcome:

> *Translations cannot conceivably and entirely subvert that sense of otherness by the simple process of trans-textualizing. An appreciation of translations as* literature *would presumably include a faithful transposition of the basic components that created the original: text, meaning and especially the context (74; emphasis in text).*

The discussion between Mazrui and Shatry forms the starting point for my own focus on migratory clichés. While concurring with Mazrui that a destabilization of the original/translation opposition is required for East African literature, I also see Shatry's point that the sense of otherness that is embodied by a translation cannot be fully overcome. Because otherness provoked by *Mabepari*, as translation, is unsurpassable by definition, my question is: how can it be dealt with productively? Migratory clichés, as formal devices that produce meaning by structuring the audience's relationship to otherness, will allow me to answer this question. I also address Shatry's argument that 'trans-textualization' is not enough, that 'trans-*con*textualization' is also required for resignification to take place. The concept of migratory clichés will allow me to explore how *Mabepari*'s meaning-making mechanisms exceed the inner rhetoric of the Swahili version, leading me to focus on how external referents are mobilized to achieve resignification.

Migratory Clichés

The term 'cliché,' now used to denote a stereotypical expression, initially referred to the carved-out surface from which copies were made in printing. Thus, the cliché was, to the receptor, a pseudo-original, since she could only deduce it from a printed copy. The metaphorical usage of the term benefits, first, from the visual qualities of the printing surface. Thus, in opposition to 'common place,' a term that refers to the banality of an *idea*, 'cliché' denotes a worn-out *image* (Imbs 913). Second, the metaphorical usage of the term benefits from the inaccessibility of the pseudo-original, which can only be envisaged through a reproduction. It is always already mediated. Third, the metaphorical usage of 'cliché' benefits from the notion of mass production, as the cliché is mechanically replicated.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first appearance of this metaphorical usage of "cliché" in Anglophone texts dates back to 1892. It is significant that this usage historically coincides with the emergence of modernist art. As claimed by

Nicholas Bagnall, in Western canonical art of previous periods, clichés were highly valued. Writers exploited the possibilities clichés offered for intertextual evocation, irony, and rhythmic usages (11–27). But modernism, in its concern for originality, reduced the cliché to the sphere of kitsch. Anton Zijderveld states that "when clichés rule the sphere of art … we speak of kitsch," because its products are "easy to consume and easy to digest." Given that "aesthetic renewal and originality are not its aim, and it is not founded on any sophisticated ideas or theories," kitsch art is "unproblematic," "avoids any form of cognition or reflection," and "wants to touch the consumer emotionally only" (98). This notion of clichés is based on the opposition between emotional proximity and rational distance. I return to this opposition below. Before doing so, I propose to explore in what ways clichés may have latent possibilities for critical usage. Particularly, I will investigate how these possibilities become crucial when clichés undergo transcultural migration.

Stereotyped forms of expression, clichés suggest where and how particular meanings are established within a culture. Thus, clichés may be understood as biased condensations of knowledge, silent referents in the construction of discourse, readily assumed categories in the construction of everyday life. The bias here is not to the detriment of knowledge, but constitutive of it. Thus, the first analytical possibility the cliché offers is an account of how a particular image is fused with a particular knowledge, across generations, in a given cultural context.

While clichés thrive on the receptor's familiarity with the image and on the receptor's cultural presuppositions, clichés may be creatively exploited to produce not only identification, but also estrangement. As indicated by Zijderveld, that was in fact the declared attempt of the use of clichés by Brechtean theatre and Dadaist art (99–100). But the usage of clichés in Elizabethan drama is not a case in which estrangement is sought. Instead, Shakespeare employs clichés in *The Merchant* as contextual shortcuts, which automatically bring forth a series of meanings and associations that, without being entirely present, may be immediately discharged by what *is* present. Once having established these immediate associations between the context of reception and the clichés of the play, he sets them in interaction. Although clichés are in themselves, and by definition, relatively static, their initial semantic charge becomes unsettled and modified as they interact with and against each other.

The semantic charge of cliché characters and sceneries that are set in dynamic interaction is all the more relevant to *Mabepari*, where clichés loiter not only in their original context, but travel intercontextual paths. Since clichés are culturally embedded, the distance to the original context brings about estrangement. But simultaneously, the cliché characters and sceneries also establish relatively fixed associations that are in line with the cultural experience of the context of reception. As a form of shorthand for their new context, migratory clichés awaken in the audience the immediate identification of elements in the fiction with corresponding elements in their own cultural experience. As differed links to the original context, migratory clichés clash with local conventions and expectations and, thus, establish a critical distance.

Because identification and estrangement are triggered synchronically and, because they are triggered by the same cliché character or cliché scenery, the processes of identification and estrangement in migratory clichés function in a constant and mutually constitutive tension. When the tension between these superimposed processes is resolved by the receptor, some form of recognition is attained. I define 'recognition' here as the resolution of the opposition between identification and estrangement, the dialectic synthesis achieved in and by the receptor.

The process of recognition implies a constant sway between an 'outsider' and an 'insider' appreciation of a given cliché. This is to say, the receptor is taken to appreciate the cliché as it is played out in his own culture, *and* as it is played out in the other culture. In anthropology, the methodological questions brought forth by the place anthropologists hold in relation to the culture they are studying are discussed under the headings of *etic* and *emic*. For anthropologist Marvin Harris, the etic and the emic are clear-cut categories, the emic comprising the insider's perception of events and the etic being the rendering of events as objectively perceived by an outsider. Linguist Kenneth Pike, however, defines the etic not as objective *per se,* but as an external point of view *relative to* the particular emic system under consideration. My own use of both terms follows Pike's interpretation.

In what follows, I explore how migratory clichés appeal to the audience's emic position of reception; then I explore how they appeal to the receptor's etic position. The fact that they appeal to both shows a relational understanding of the emic and etic points of view. While identification and estrangement hold an analogous dialectic to that held between the emic and the etic, the former only refer to the *effects* that are produced, while the emic and the etic refer to cultural sites of enunciation and reception. Thus, they allow me to name the specific geo-historical sites that are involved in the sense of cultural otherness mobilized by *Mabepari*.

Familiarity Effects

In a sense, Nyerere's translation is faithful to the original to the degree that even the character's names and place names are the same as those found in Shakespeare. The names are adjusted only insofar as necessary for them to be pronounced fluently according to the rules of Swahili phonetics. These phonetic adaptations facilitate an immediacy of articulation between the story and its context of reception. Allowing for the easy relationship between the referents on the fictional plane and the context in which they are enacted, this modification approximates elements in the fiction to their new cultural framework. A new set of associations between text and context are thus facilitated from the start. This simple move is a key displacement for identification to operate in the case of the play's clichés which, for that reason, I call 'migratory.'

The migratory clichés that I explore in this section are: the city of Venisi, the countryside residence of Belimonti, the play's female protagonist, Poshia, and the legal written document. The last of these appears in the play in the form of a written contract between two parties, but also in the form of a letter written by a wise judge. This cluster of clichés in *Mabepari wa Venisi* revolves around the central opposition of the urban versus the rural. In each of these settings, variegated contracts take place. In the rural area of Belimonti, the contract at stake is a verbal oath. Poshia promises her dying father to take as a husband whomever who, out of three caskets, chooses the one that contains her portrait. The agreement that takes place in the city of Venisi between Antonio and Shailoki is written down and signed before legal authorities. Antonio is a rich man, but his wealth is presently at sea. So, he seeks Shailoki, a professional moneylender, to obtain a loan. But Antonio, given his habit of lending people money without asking for interest, has long inspired Shailoki's hatred. Thus, Shailoki draws up a contract that promises him a pound of Antonio's flesh were he unable to pay back on time. Antonio thoughtlessly accepts.

Paradoxically, the unreasonable agreement and Antonio's rash promise take place in a solemn, executive atmosphere that gives the impression of rationality. This effect is attained by the characters' use of objectivist rhetoric in the context of the city. Venisi language is distinguished by its use of legal jargon and a matter-of-fact tone, by references to institutional procedures and written law. This rhetoric is accompanied by the presence of the social agents and institutions that legitimize it. The contract's completion is mediated by a notary, a court of justice, political authorities, and the written word. The city, the place for business transactions and legal litigation, is set in contrast to Belimonti, the place for wooing, love scenes, marriages, and the happy ending of the play. In opposition to Venisi language, at Belimonti the presence of Launseloti the clown places the emphasis on wit, riddles, *double entendres*, and the exploitation of subtexts. As Poshia struggles with the dilemma of respecting her father's word and the risk it implies of losing her beloved Bassianio, Belimonti conversations are full of language that alludes to ancestral oral traditions. Proverbs, common sense, and commonplace sayings are the frequent means by which Nerissa, Poshia's maid, gives her lady comfort. Moreover, while men dominate the urban scene, 'women's talk' prevails at Belimonti.[5]

At Belimonti, despite the fairytale-like device of the casket by means of which Poshia's husband is to be chosen, the suitors that partake in the trial invariably get what they deserve. Their characters and pretensions determine their choice. So, Bassanio's true love and unconceited character guarantee his success. In spite of the fanciful atmosphere, the Belimonti agreement ensures a just and adequate outcome for Poshia. Her father's contrivance, though apparently a matter of lucky guesses, is actually a rational trial. In opposition to Antonio's rash promise in the urban context, later to be enforced by the authority of the written law, the imperative that Poshia keep her word is not a technicality, but a filial duty to be fulfilled, a way of honoring (the word of) her ancestor(s).

While in Belimonti keeping one's word means keeping true, in Venisi keeping one's word is inherently deceitful. A basic incongruence exists between the written discourse, established as the bond between Antonio and Shailoki, and what is morally correct. The reason why this lack of congruence persists is that ideological and economic interests oblige the court to stick to the letter. Even though they realize that fulfillment of the contract is not morally correct, they cannot ignore the fact that Shailoki represents the 'foreign' commercial elite on which Venisi's splendor rests. In the city, righteousness and the legal discourse that is supposed to be legitimized by it suffer a basic displacement.[6]

Tanzanian cultural experience offers a series of dialogical counterpoints that make Venisi and Belimonti functional clichés in their contemporary context. In Africa, the urban was associated with colonial exploitation. The colonial economy caused a disarticulation between the forms of production and ways of life in urban and rural areas. As argued by political economist Claude Ake, urban enclaves were "alienated, hostile and incomprehensible to their environment"; "these centers were a piece of Europe in Africa" (44). Dar es Salaam, the main Tanzanian city and seaport, was the nodule articulating colony and metropolis. Even before European colonialism, the city had been exploited as a nucleus of foreign-profited commerce by the sultanate of Oman. The Arab urban enclaves and the association of their power with the written word of the Koran preceded the European legitimization of cultural supremacy through the written text.

Ujamaa exploited the cliché of the opposition between the urban and rural. Taking into account Tanzania's neocolonial economy, Nyerere proposed that Tanzania should attain development on the basis of the country's greatest riches: land and the agricultural workforce, as opposed to industry and foreign investment. The concrete policies that were involved included the resettling of the population in small rural villages with communitarian production systems and the decentralization of the urban-centered economy. These villages were designed according to the ideal prototype of precolonial rural societies. As Abdul Babu points out, these societies were conceived, in romanticized terms, as niches of brotherhood and mutual respect, based on the right to work and an equal share of the gains of production (55). Thus, the foundations of African Socialism, economic as well as moral, were held up by a bucolic ideal.

These cultural experiences can be mobilized as immediate associations when clichés are in action. Belimonti activates the cliché of rural space as symbolizing ancestry, oral culture, and moral and discursive coherence. Venisi activates the cliché of the urban space as suggesting foreignness, written culture, moral and discursive incoherence. However, the rural and urban clichés in *Mabepari* do not remain static: Belimonti and Venisi migrate into each other. Not only as clichés setting off each other, but also because of the displacement of characters who, themselves functioning as clichés, allow for more asymmetrical relationships to evolve.

One central infringement of the rural into the urban arrives in the shape of the Venisi journey that is carried out by Poshia, the character most closely associated with the rural landscape. At Belimonti, Poshia plays the role of a beautiful aristocratic heiress, investing her time and energy in love and courtship. In Venisi, she appears dressed-up as a man, in complete control of the situation at court, where the Shailoki-Antonio trial is being held; admired for her authority, wit and intelligence. She acts as the depositary and executioner of law and rationality. In this way, the city and its legal institutions, associated with masculine rationality, are subverted by their rural and feminine counterpart, personified by a disguised Poshia.

It has been postulated by Jacques Derrida, among others that, in *The Merchant*, Portia's performance violently enforces (rather than subverts) the existing regime of power, because she employs the rhetoric and authority of Christianity at the court of law to subjugate Shylock, the Jew. Derrida's analysis is centered on Portia's usage of the word 'mercy.' Technically speaking, the same interpretation can be alleged when reading *Mabepari*. However, taking into account *Mabepari*'s site of rearticulation, new elements are set into play. Nyerere, the social agent bringing about this rearticulation, was a convinced Christian—in the sense of 'devout' as well as 'converted.' Hence, the translation of *The Merchant* does not take a critical distance toward the association between 'mercy' and the Christian/ethnic exertion of power that is posed by the original. What it *does* do is relativize the antagonism between Shailoki and the Venetians, so that both appear to belong to the same site of power. The racial tension in the play that has received the greatest attention in the West (Christians versus Jew) appears to be of lesser grievance to the translator than what takes place elsewhere in the text. While in *The Merchant* the triple association of the word 'fair' with blondness, justice, and beauty is constantly exploited, *Mabepari* shows a persistent undoing of these equivalences.[7] Nyerere's degree of interference at the anecdotic and discursive levels of the play reaches its highest peak when he deals with comic effects at the expense of racial denigration. The translator goes so far as leaving out a whole episode in which secondary characters are making fun of each other by means of racist comments concerning Africans.[8]

Hence, the translator actively intervenes only when and where racist material is not problematized. In *The Merchant*, the audience is given the racist view of Shylock from the outside, but they are also given the insider's view, as exemplified by Shylock's renowned monologue in his self-defense. Even if lacking proportionality, the audience is presented with both an outsider's and insider's view of the matter, and so Nyerere leaves this material intact. However, the taken-for-granted-ness of the associations established by common language usages such as 'fair,' does not allow the audience to establish critical distance. Similarly, the use of racist material for comic purposes tempts the audience to identify exclusively with the racist position. In these cases, the translator intervenes.

I digressed from my discussion of Poshia to argue that, in *Mabepari*, she could be taken as subverting, rather than reinforcing the *status quo* (as proposed by Derrida in the case of *The Merchant*). I now return to her, the rural beauty who, disguised as a man, seeks to enter the court where the Antonio-Shailoki trial is held. The only reason Poshia can gain access to the court is because of a letter handed to the clerk and read aloud by him upon her entrance. The letter, supposedly written by a wise judge, indicates that his (male) assistant (that is, Poshia) will deliver his verdict. During her performance, Poshia calls the court's attention to the word-for-word phrasing of the bond and of Venisi's laws, legitimizing her discourse by recourse to the written text at its most literal level. Her argument for saving Antonio is based on taking legalist discourse to its ultimate consequences, to the point that it proves itself absurd. Poshia concludes that Shailoki is entitled to the pound of flesh. However, she argues, the contract does not mention any blood. So, were Shailoki to spill a drop of Antonio's blood in the process, he would be severely judged, as stated in the city's laws.[9]

In *Mabepari*, strict rationality, despotically dictated by the written word, is exposed by Poshia's actions in all its absurdity when taken literally and independently of the sociocultural context that actualizes its meaning. This foreign-associated, text-legitimized law, which may only be challenged from spatial and gendered margins, is proven to be obtuse and shortsighted in its circular logic. The letter, a written text of (faked) male authority and authorship, is paradoxically that which sets the stage for a rural-feminine subalternity to enter the urban-masculine space. The urban-masculine site of power exerts its rule by means of the written word. Discourse being its site of hegemony, authority can only be subverted by a strategic performance of it. Poshia's subversive practice can only be articulated in the language of authority itself. Translating *The Merchant*, Nyerere—much like Poshia—at once cites and converts English, the language of colonial authority, into Swahili, known as the language of African Socialism. Similar to Poshia's strategy, in Nyerere's translation, the quotation of hegemonic discourse is strict and to the letter, while the performative effect of translation displaces the dominant discourse, making a subversive use of its power. However, this parallelism between Nyerere and Poshia may only appear evident from an emic position of reception.

This is because, at the Swahili coast, 'woman' was conventionally used as a metaphor for issues of (male) political subordination. The use of the metaphor itself provided security by working as a cover-up story, shielding the speaker from accusation and reprimand through ambiguity. This accustomed form of undercover intelligence played a central role in one of the major literary pieces of the area, a poem entitled *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona* [*The Poem of Madame Kupona*]. An oral classic, the poem is widely known on the Swahili coast. The poem is at odds with the epic and religious contents that are customary in classic Swahili poetry. It narrates the instructions a mother leaves for her daughter on her deathbed, regarding what is expected of her as a woman and how to deal with her husband. But, as is carefully analyzed by Ann Biersteker, the poem offers a second reading in which the husband stands for legal authority and the instructions indicate how to manipulate this authority from a subaltern position.

Besides the parallelism between *Mwana Kupona* and the instructions left to Poshia by her dying father, the poem is indicative of a cultural usage of the feminine as metaphoric of the subaltern. It constitutes a cultural given that is triggered in Poshia. The cultural presupposition at stake from an emic reading of *Mabepari* is as follows: the feminine-masculine relationship in the fiction may be understood as a metaphor for subaltern-authority relationships in the public realm of politics. This is not just a possibility, but also a conventional and valued literary practice in Swahili culture. For this reason, I have proposed that Nyerere's conversion of the language of colonial authority into Swahili resonates with Poshia's conversion of legalist rhetoric into an instrument of subversion. But this resonance is only possible if the receptor shares the cultural codes allowing him to access the *double entendre*. For the Nyerere-Poshia parallel to be achieved, and to be imagined as a deliberate subtext, the receptor must be an insider. But, while the receptor's sense of proximity and familiarity is thus exploited, an effect of estrangement simultaneously takes place.

Estrangement Effects

Starting with the play's title, Nyerere seeks to establish a critical distance between the audience and what is represented in the fiction. Because of a ten-century-long culture of commerce in the area, Swahili language offers a wide range of synonyms for the word 'merchant.' Nyerere disregards all and translates "the merchant" as *mabepari*. While *bepari* means 'capitalist,' the *ma-* prefix converts the noun into a plural. Hence, *Mabepari wa Venisi* literally means "The Capitalists of Venice." When situating the play in the socioeconomic and ideological framework that formed its context of birth, this title achieves an immediate distancing effect. Nyerere is placing the receptor in an etic position in relation to the text as the translation of a situated original. It distinguishes a geographically, socially, and ideologically situated 'them' at a distance from the audience.

This distance is enhanced by the fact that the cover illustration of the edition that Neyerere approved portrays Shailoki. Hence, it is Shailoki, the immoral, greedy character, who serves as the cliché to illustrate "The Capitalists of Venice." Additionally, Faisal Devji has pointed out that Shailoki is not so much to be taken as a Jew, but rather as representative of the Indian commercial bourgeoisie of East Africa, whose class interests were opposite to those that Nyerere's socialism advanced. He rests his case, first, upon the fact that *mabepari* can also be taken to mean 'shopkeeper,' the traditional occupation of Indian migrants in the area. Second, his assertion relies on a visual analysis of the illustrations of the published translation (182). Concurring with Devji, I believe that the point must be taken further. While Nyerere's translation opens Shailoki's ethnic identity to ambiguity, Shailoki's Jewish identity persists as well. The effect is that, while Shailoki's specific ethnic identity is blurred, the fact of discrimination based on racial difference persists. Thus, the emphasis is shifted from a particular ethnic identity to the fact of racial discrimination as such. In addition, while Shailoki calls forth two ethnic referents, Indian and Jew, their shared class identity is stressed, because of the similar positions they hold in their respective contexts.

So, while class and racial difference are both exposed, only a particular class, and not a particular ethnic group, is targeted. *Mabepari* equates Shailoki with the capitalist class in other ways as well. When Shakespeare's Shylock talks of his Jewish countrymen, he refers to them as his "tribe." But Shailoki uses the term *taifa* [nation]. There is an equivalent for 'tribe' in Swahili: *kabila*. It is distinct from the notion of *taifa* that is chosen for Shailoki, but Nyerere disregards it.[10] The choice of *taifa* relocates Shailoki, stereotypical figure of capitalist immorality, from a position of ethnic subalternity, in which he would belong to a 'tribe,' to one of equivalence with the other capitalists of Venice, that is, Europeans defining themselves as 'nations.' With this further step, Shailoki's ethnic identity is destabilized once more, as he can also be taken to represent the Europeans, the ethnic group most closely associated with capitalism in postcolonial Tanzania.

If taken independently, the series of equations—capitalism equals European equals recipient of racial hatred—embodied in Shailoki finds its explanation when we consider the translator as author, that is, when we conflate the articulating principle of the text and the social agent of the translation, as Foucault specified. A central concern for Nyerere, as expressed in his *Ujamaa* manifesto and in his concrete policies, was reactionary racism. At a time of great resentment toward Europeans, and despite finding serious opposition from within, Nyerere fought for equal rights for Tanzanian-born ethnic Europeans. His central concern was to avoid racial criteria, whatever their purpose or direction, to be instituted in national laws and procedures. Furthermore, Nyerere's belief in humanist ideals, which he found expressed in Shakespeare's work, exceeded the sphere of his translations. Devji and Ali Mazrui both claim that much of Nyerere's political discourse is filled with allusions and even direct quotes from Shakespeare (Devji 183; Ali A. Mazrui 113).

However, Shailoki's European identity cannot be taken in isolation. The crucial effect of migratory clichés is recognition, achieved through the dialectics of identification and estrangement which are, in turn, brought about by the superimposition of contextual referents. In the case of Shailoki, each separate ethnic referent deploys the racial discrimination taking place as motivated by different reasons, as occurring in different circumstances, and as carried out by different social actors. If the receptors justify their racial practices in a particular set of circumstances, while being critical of the other forms of racism, the superimposition of both confronts them with the continuities between their own form of racism and that of others, thus turning a critical look upon what they identify with.

As I have argued above, the clichés of the play become naturalized in their context of reception. However, they are still staged in a fiction that takes place in the original sociohistorical setting. Thus, Venice becomes Venisi; it does not become Dar es Salaam.[11] Although Dar es Salaam may function as an immediate reference for an audience trying to make sense of the urban theme at stake; still, the audience is simultaneously made aware that the city of the fiction is not the Tanzanian city-port, but the Italian one. Hence, an effect of estrangement is also reached by the clash that is produced by the superimposed images.

In Shakespeare's play, Venice forms the archetype of the nascent bourgeois city-port, and exemplifies the splendors attained by mercantilism. As is indicated by the English title, mercantilism is the central contextual referent in the fiction. The plot is triggered by a feature characteristic to mercantilism: the birth of credit-systems and their relation to the increased geographical and socioeconomic mobility of population. But Venice's accumulation of wealth is only possible at the expense of exploitation elsewhere. The richness brought to the port across the seas is established by incipient European colonialism and global capitalism. In this sense, Venice represents the nascent economic and ideological core of both. So, when Dar es Salaam is implicated as an image that is attached to Venisi, it instantly clashes, and functions not only as referent, but also as dialogical counterpoint. At the other end of the seas, at the other end of the colonial enterprise, at the other end of capitalist exploitation, and at the other end of the historical episode, Dar es Salaam's relation to Venice cannot be a simple matter of identification. Estrangement is maximized by the superimposition that results from the use of Venisi as migratory cliché.

Another migratory cliché provoking estrangement is the figure of Launseloti, the clown in *Mabepari*. On one hand, Launseloti resonates with the figure of the traditional African bard of pre-colonial societies, who exploited the literary possibilities of language while recounting historical episodes and bringing news from neighboring villages. Initially, this resonance awakens the contrasting associations of the opposition between the urban and the rural. In his rural environment, and because of his virtuous display of oral wit, Launseloti may solicit empathy. However, something else jumps out. As the cliché evokes a local referent, this referent, in turn, contrasts to the fictional figure that provoked it. Compared to the traditional bard, Launseloti causes estrangement, since his entertainment function is not associated with an informative one, as would be more familiar. To transmit news to the community is not his purpose. He is just a clown employed for the entertainment of a European aristocracy.

This superimposition leads the audience to recognize a similar, yet crucially different performative tradition. Staged theatre was introduced in Tanzania for the consumption of the non-European masses only in the *Ujamaa* period. Hence, the audience is confronted in Launseloti with a figure who, from the emic point of view, is more akin to 'theatre' than the event through which they are watching him on stage. This effect is heightened by the fact that Launseloti recites riddles in rhymed verse, the conventional form of speech in Tanzanian theatrical practices. When identifying him as the traditional African bard, the audience seeks out the intricate social allusions that are characteristic of him. But Launseloti makes none. Nevertheless, precisely because of this fact, he *is* one. In the estrangement provoked by the silenced Launseloti, the audience is confronted with the difference between two forms of 'theatre.' In the Tanzanian postcolonial context, Launseloti produces a meta-theatrical effect: he is the play within the play. In Launseloti, as migratory cliché, the audience is led to an estrangement of their own place and time; of the performance of which they are themselves part.

Recognizing *Mabepari wa Venisi*

Mabepari produces a coherent discourse that significantly diverges from that of *The Merchant*. This discourse occurs at the point of encounter between text and receptor. Although, strictly speaking, my own encounter with the text is all I can account for, I have tried to focus on the meaning produced in the relationship between *Mabepari* and its Tanzanian site of trans-contextualization. Given the fact that the meaning produced by this relationship is not a result of the constative statements of the play, but of forms of rearticulation that effectively comment on the constative discourse, it may be described as meta-discursive. The play not only comments on the original (con)text, but also on its own nature as a translation. In the parallelism between Nyerere and Poshia, *Mabepari* comments on itself as a translation of dominant (written) discourse; in Launseloti, it comments on itself as a translation of theatrical form; and in Shailoki's ethnic indeterminacy, it comments on itself as a trans-contextualization.

The original (con)text is a vital referent, without which meaning could not be produced. It is vital, but still just a referent. However central, the original referent is primary material, but not the articulating principle of *Mabepari*'s production of the meaning I have proposed. Shakespeare's original remains as the articulating principle of the meaning produced only at the constative level of discourse. While *The Merchant* is the central intertextual referent, Nyerere is the central extratextual one.

Strictly speaking, it is correct to say that I have assigned Nyerere an agency that has moved beyond his role as extratextual referent. I have conflated Nyerere, the social agent, with the articulating principle of the play itself; and, through my framing of context, claimed that Nyerere was constructed as author of *Mabepari* in a reception that exceeded my own. However, it is crucial to take into account that Nyerere, the author of the nation, preexisted Nyerere, the author of *Mabepari*. By describing Nyerere as the author of the nation, I do not mean to state that, through his agency, the nation was built, but quite the opposite. I refer to Nyerere as the author of the nation in the Foucauldian sense of 'author'; Nyerere as the receptacle of the idea of the nation.

Nyerere, who was in office for more than twenty years, from independence until his resignation, was the imaginary articulating principle of the imagined community. With a historical experience in which all forms of political organization had always cohered around people, rather than institutions, the metaphor of *Ujamaa* [familyhood] implicitly casted Nyerere as the head of the nation-wide family. The nation, as a "rational entity," was "assigned a 'realistic' dimension" in the person of Julius Nyerere (Foucault 124). Thus, the meaning produced by *Mabepari* is not so much the result of the continuities between the meaning it garners and the social agent who wrote it in Swahili, as it is a result of the infiltration of the author-effect that is produced by Nyerere, as the articulating principle of the nation, into *Mabepari*. Hence, it would also be accurate to say that Nyerere, the author of the nation, was a central extratextual *referent* throughout. In its ultimate migratory cliché, *Mabepari wa Venisi* rebels against the claim of authorship through its characteristic mechanism of multiplication and superimposition. To Shakespeare the playwright and Nyerere the translator, Nyerere the president is added, and these three contending referents lead the receptors into recognizing that the referent they 'authorize' is, in fact, a choice, a construct of reception.

Though important referents, *The Merchant* and the president coexist with other forms of extratextual articulation. The other referents invoked belong to both endogenous and European historical experience, and also to Indian and Arab cultures in contact. These referents appear in the form of specific class, race and/or gender stereotypes; historically and symbolically charged geo-cultural spaces; and discursive and performative practices that are culture- and class-specific. Migratory clichés structure these contending referents into their formal mechanisms of meaning making. A singular image is loaded with two or more—culturally shaped and historically consolidated—semantic charges. Their superimposition, in converging identification and estrangement into interdependent processes, allows for recognition to take place.

Based on the interplay between the emic and the etic, recognition is the mechanism that best allows for an understanding of the ways in which *Mabepari* relates to its own situatedness: producing otherness as a by-product of identity, but also producing identity as a by-product of otherness. Thus, otherness is not posed as an essential quality, but understood as a relative function. In *re*-cognition, the process of knowing again, that is, the cognitive process of re-apprehending the familiar from a perspective refracted by otherness, estrangement is an integral part of identification. Migratory clichés allow for a return to the familiar that is always already mediated by the unfamiliar; a return to affect which is always already mediated by cognition.

Notes

1. I use the term 'postcolonial' in the triple sense given to it by Mbembe: to refer to a particular historical period, to refer to the symbolic identity associated with this historical context and, finally, to name the specific regime of violence deployed in this contextual framework (102–103).

2. Colonial powers drew African state boundaries according to their own interests. The territories did not take into account the economic, political, or linguistic ties of its inhabitants. Borders cut across ethno-linguistic groups, and many countries were left with hundreds of different groups within their frontiers. Therefore, independent African states had to continue to rely on colonial languages in order to survive as nations. However, Tanzania had the great advantage of Swahili, a Bantu language that had functioned for centuries as a *lingua franca* in the area. Nyerere consolidated and exploited this advantage.

3. Actually, in 1963 Nyerere published his translation of *Julius Caesar* under the same Anglophone title. Not until 1969 did he publish a revised edition under the name *Juliasi Kaizari*. To avoid digressions, I speak of both simply as *Juliasi Kaizari*.

4. On the role of the spoken word in African pre-colonial societies and its religious, political and aesthetic import, see Bâ. On the associations between literary merit and political leadership in Swahili culture, see Saavedra (29–30).

5. Nyerere 1–16, 37–40, 45–57, 63–77, 82–88; see also Shakespeare 388–393, 399–405, 407–411, 412, 415.

6. Nyerere 30–35, 37–40, 45–55, 57, 63–67, 76–78, 85; see also Shakespeare 396–405, 407–414.

7. Shakespeare 389, 392, 393, 402, 403, 406; see also Nyerere 6, 15, 17, 49, 50, 51, 58.

8. Shakespeare 406; see also Nyerere 61.

9. Nyerere: 67–74; see also Shakespeare 408–411.

10. Nyerere: 12, 57; see also Shakespeare: 391, 405. As *kabila* does not have the pejorative connotation that 'tribe' does in Western cultures, Nyerere's avoidance of the term cannot be attributed to this fact.

11. The same arguments hold regarding the phonetic adaptations of the names of the play's characters.

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Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 119–138

Antigone on the African Stage: “Wherever the Call for Freedom is Heard!”

Astrid Van Weyenberg

Rejoice with us
Rejoice heartily with us
The tyrant
Who gives wicked orders
We have conquered him!
Oh yes, we have beaten him.
We have seen his back!
Fémi Òsófisan, *Tègònni*

The popularity of Sophocles’ *Antigone* in Western literature, art, and thought has been discussed at length, most famously by George Steiner who classifies it as “one of the most enduring and canonic acts in the history of our philosophic, literary, political consciousness” (preface). However, *Antigone*’s popularity is no longer restricted to the West. The tragedy is particularly striking on the African stage, where different playwrights have adapted the text to a variety of settings.[1] This paper will discuss two of these plays: Athol Fugard’s *The Island* (1973) and Fémi Òsófisan’s *Tègònni: An African Antigone* (1994). After examining Antigone’s representative value within her new surroundings and the (meta)theatrical aesthetics that characterize her cultural migration, my final focus will be on the political implications of Antigone’s translocation for her status as a Western canonical figure.

Antigone’s Migration

Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. explains that Sophocles’ *Antigone* “can be adapted into any situation in which a group is oppressed, or in which, in the aftermath of struggle, the forces of community and social order come into conflict with the forces of personal liberty" (*Athenian* 170–71). Athol Fugard's *The Island* and Fémi Òsófisan's *Tègònni: An African Antigone* both fit this description. Fugard's play is about two prisoners of apartheid, who are locked away on Robben Island and together try to maintain their humanity in the face of continuous physical and mental cruelty. Òsófisan's play is set in Nigeria under British colonial rule, while also referring to the military dictatorships that have held Nigeria in its grip almost incessantly since its independence from Britain in 1960.[2] Both playwrights dramatize moments of severe oppression, and both employ *Antigone* as a representative of the struggle against this oppression. Their motivations for migrating Antigone to Africa are primarily political.

The Island premiered on July 2, 1973, in a small Cape Town club. It was the result of a collaborative project by playwright Athol Fugard (of white English and Afrikaner descent) and two young amateur black actors, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, undertaken in a time when apartheid's segregation laws forbade such collaboration between whites and blacks. As precautions against government intervention, the performance lacked a script and was presented under an alternative title, *Die Hodoshe Span* ('The Hodoshe work- team'), chosen because the intended "The Island" would have referred to Robben Island too explicitly. Those familiar with its connotation nonetheless recognized the implicit reference to Robben Island, as 'Hodoshe' (Xhosa for 'carrion fly') was the nickname of an infamous prison warden there (Fugard xxix).

Surprisingly, the South African authorities allowed Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona to take the production to London only five months after its premiere, which suggests that neither the powerful anti-apartheid message it promoted, nor the effect it could have on international opinion was fully recognized. Whereas the Cape Town performance was closely supervised by the police, concealed its criticism of apartheid and reached only a limited audience, the London performance was accompanied by playbills with details about apartheid and loudly called for the release of South Africa's political prisoners. Only after its production abroad did it become possible to perform the play more publicly in South Africa and to have it transformed into a written text under the name *The Island* (Blumberg and Walder 105–6).

The Island is one of Fugard's five Township Plays, which were produced between 1958 and 1973, and reveal, as Dennis Walder states, a "uniquely fruitful and influential instance of creative interaction between urban black modes of expression and 'outside' or Western cultural modes; an interaction which took place despite the divisive pressures of the apartheid state" (Fugard xi).[3] Though the play demonstrates Fugard's acknowledgement of the existence and suffering of those who were excluded from the dominant discourses, political dramatist Robert Kavanagh Mshengu finds fault with him for not using traditional African forms. He considers this to be not a mere "tragic result" of the South African situation, but evidence of a conscious lack of involvement with the struggle of the oppressed majority. In his opinion, "Kani and Ntshona's real knowledge and masterful depiction of the life of black people in the Eastern Cape is weakened by their acceptance of Fugard's interpretation of it" ("Art" 176).

Fugard has never concealed his discomfort with his position as a member of the dominant minority, writing about a silenced majority; yet, as Walder states, it cannot be disputed that his township encounters have taken him beyond his own position (Fugard xvi). Furthermore, it is important to consider that the workshop collaborations grew out of improvised acting exercises based on the personal experiences of the actors and their township communities, so that Fugard did not write a script for the actors to act out but, conscious of the fact that they provided him with a knowledge that was inaccessible to him, let their improvisations determine the eventual script instead.[4]

On the other hand, Mshengu's observation that Fugard makes no mention of Fanon, Cabral, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Achebe, or Ngugi, while repeatedly referring to Camus, Sartre, Beckett, Brecht, and Grotowski, is accurate for European modes and concepts indeed dominate in Fugard's work ("Art" 175). In *The Island,* too, they are the primary formal means through which the experience of the two prisoners is conveyed on the stage.[5] A discussion of the various Western traditions that influenced *The Island* is best pursued elsewhere, but to gain a better understanding of the Antigone performance embedded in it, it is helpful to consider Fugard's admiration for Albert Camus, and especially his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1942). Camus views Sisyphus as the absurd hero who, in his torment, is superior to his fate, because he "knows the whole extent of his wretched condition." The "lucidity that was to constitute his torture," he argues, "at the same time crowns his victory" (90).[6]

In *The Island*, the Sisyphean theme finds a clear echo in the opening mime, showing the interminable labor that the two prisoners are forced to carry out. Lasting for no less than ten silent minutes—which on stage is excruciatingly long—the audience witnesses how the prisoners fill a wheelbarrow with sand, push it across the stage and empty it again. Their hardship is conveyed most powerfully not in their dialogues, but when speech remains unarticulated, as in this opening mime. Their suffering belies narration. It can only be shown. It can only be performed. But, as I shall argue below, performance offers more than a way of expression, as it is through performance—a performance of a particular scene from *Antigone*—that the prisoners are led to a lucidity that is similar to that of Camus' Sisyphus, one that exceeds the existential and becomes powerfully political.

Fugard's decision to draw on *Antigone* developed from two performances that had charged the text with great political relevance within the apartheid context and, in turn, made it an ideal text to draw on in a play intended to critique apartheid. In 1965, he had been preparing a performance of *Antigone* with his Serpent Players, an acting company consisting of black actors from the township of New Brighton, near Port Elizabeth. The police had been harassing them throughout the rehearsal period, culminating in the arrest of Norman Ntshinga, who was to play the character of Antigone's betrothed and Creon's son Haemon. The performance went on without Ntshinga and is explicitly mentioned in *The Island*:

JOHN: …Jesus, Winston! June 1965.

WINSTON: What?

JOHN: This, man. *Antigone.* In New Brighton. St. Stephen's Hall. (202)

Ntshinga was not the first Serpent Player to be sentenced to Robben Island. As Fugard states, "our young theatre group had in fact become the Antigone of New Brighton. It was speaking out against and defying the edicts of apartheid Creon" (McDonald 133). A few years later, when Fugard heard about a short two-man version of *Antigone*, performed from memory at a prison concert, this provided him with the plot of *The Island*, in which a prison performance of a scene from *Antigone* is included as a play-within-a-play.

Like Fugard, Nigerian playwright Fémi Òsófisan draws on *Antigone* against a background of political oppression. His *Tègònni: an African Antigone* was first produced in 1994 at Emory University in Atlanta (Georgia, USA), where Òsófisan was visiting during one of the most chaotic periods in Nigerian history, following the military junta's violent intervention and annulment of the presidential elections of 1993. The idea to draw on *Antigone* came to Òsófisan as he traveled to Lagos airport to fly to Atlanta, driving past "burning houses, mounted placards, and screaming police and military vehicles." He continues:

> *I remembered the story of the British colonisation of Nigeria and the defeat of my ancestors. And I remembered the valiant story of Antigone. The two events—one from history, the other from myth—would help me add my voice to the millions of other small voices in Africa, all shouting unheard and pleading to be set free—voices that are waiting desperately for help from friends in the free world. (10)*

Not only does Òsófisan appeal to the West for help, but also he holds it responsible for supporting the military dictatorship to safeguard its economic interests (10).

Òsófisan's address to the West does not mean that he absolves Nigerians from responsibility for their country's crisis. At the heart of the Nigerian predicament, he diagnoses a distorted consciousness that shows itself in "collective amnesia and inertia, in cowardice, and in inordinate horror of insurrection" ("Revolution" 15–16). This distorted consciousness, largely a distorted *historical* consciousness, disables change, which Òsófisan sets out to heal from within. His theatrical practice is therefore characterized by a critical reevaluation of the past as a prerequisite for sociopolitical change in the present.[7]

Accordingly, *Tègònni* is not situated in contemporary Nigeria, but at the end of the nineteenth century, at the height of colonial expansion. By enacting a moment of sociopolitical change set within this past, performance becomes a way to transform history into an active site where a new (historical) consciousness may start to take shape. As Òsófisan explains in his article “Theatre and the Rites of Post-Negritude Remembering”:

> *by continuously juxtaposing scenes from myth and history; from the present and the past; and from the play's present, and the real present, … the audience is made aware all the time of the options available, and those chosen. … The intention is to turn the stage into a problematic space of ideological conflict, through which the audience can see itself mirrored and, possibly, energized in its struggle with history. (9)*

Performance, to draw on Wendy Brown, thus literally “opens the stage for battling with the past over possibilities for the future” (151).

Òsófisan also explores different ideological positions and socio-political problems by borrowing from, and challenging, antecedent texts, both from the Western and the Nigerian theatre traditions.[8] He gives these reworkings local and political relevance. The first is achieved by drawing heavily on myths, rituals, songs, proverbs, and parables taken from the Yoruba tradition in which he was brought up; the latter by subjecting traditional elements to constant reevaluation, releasing them from their possible repressive weight to grant them contemporary sociopolitical relevance.[9] Tradition is not treated as something that is grounded outside of history or that has no political viability but, instead, as something that has a place within the (political) present; a place, however, in need of continuous reconsideration. This dynamic of ongoing reevaluation plays an essential part in the process of migrating elements—whether they be historical, traditional, or literary—to new destinations. Only in this way can they acquire true relevance within their new contemporary surroundings. Only in this way does their migration become meaningful to begin with.

Migration and Representation

Both Fugard and Òsófisan emphasize the political potential of Sophocles' *Antigone*, but within the respective contexts of apartheid South Africa and post-colonial Nigeria this potential can only come to fruition through a serious reevaluation of the original text. For both playwrights, their point of departure involves the representative status of the play's two main protagonists, Antigone and Creon.

The question Sophocles poses is whose claim is more ‘just’: that of Antigone, who stays true to the laws of the gods and her private morality, or Creon, who insists on the superiority of the laws of the state and public morality instead. Suzanne Said explains that, in fifth-century B.C. Athens, such on-stage negotiation between conflicting interests and ideologies had an important didactic function, since it represented the dialectic of the political process of the young democracy of Athens and instructed the art of debate to audience members (Boedeker and Raaflaub 282). In Fugard's and Òsófisan's adaptations, both written within contexts of oppression that forbid such debate, the confrontation between Antigone and Creon acquires a different relevance, and comes to represent the opposition between oppressor and oppressed. Within this larger field of injustice, the Sophoclean complexity of the conflict is reduced, and the ethical question of justification is rendered irrelevant.

Fugard's understanding of Antigone in *The Island* is best formulated by the words of his character John, who explains to his fellow prisoner Winston that "[t]his *Antigone* is just right for us." Using courtroom rhetoric, John describes Antigone as "the accused" who "buried Polynices." She is "[t]he traitor! The one who I said was on *our* side. Right?" and who "in the play pleads Guilty" though "between me and you, in this cell, we know she's Not Guilty" (199–201). Fugard's Creon represents apartheid authority and so, the prisoner John, playing Creon in the play-within-the-play, speaks lines that unmistakably refer to those prisoners of apartheid who were sentenced without trial. He proclaims that it is "needless now to call the state witnesses who would testify beyond reasonable doubt that the accused is guilty" and orders to take Antigone "straight to the Island! There wall her up in a cell for life, with enough food to acquit ourselves of the taint of her blood" (226–27). Antigone, in turn, becomes the symbol of the struggle against the ideology that this apartheid-Creon embodies.

Writing about *The Island*, Fugard draws a parallel between the prison performance of *Antigone* that had formed the main inspiration for the play, and Jean Anouilh's famous version of *Antigone*, staged in Paris during the Nazi occupation, where "the front row of German army officers had thought they were enjoying French culture," while "behind them Parisians received a political message of hope and defiance. So, too, on Robben Island the South African warders sat in front of the audience of prisoners" (McDonald 134). Within the context of apartheid South Africa, it is indeed likely that those supporting apartheid identified most with the authorial figure of Creon and interpreted a cross-dressed black man in the role of Antigone as a sign of humiliation, emasculation, and surrendered identity. Oppressed South Africans, on the other hand, probably shared Nelson Mandela's feeling that "[i]t was Antigone who symbolised our struggle; she was, in her own way, a freedom fighter, for she defied the law on the grounds that it was unjust" (441–42).[10] They would take home a very different message.

By presenting the prison-performance of *Antigone* as a play-within-a-play in *The Island*, Fugard leaves no doubt about with whom the audience should sympathize. In their assigned roles of fellow-prisoners and spectators of the trial scene, they are also directed to identify with Antigone in their other roles: as members of the audience and as members of (South African) society. Like a Chinese box, the Antigone-Creon opposition presented in the play-within-the-play acquires significance at other levels as well: it becomes representative of the opposition between the prisoners and their prison warder Hodoshe on the level of the play proper, and of that between oppressed South Africans and apartheid authority on the level of South African reality.

In contrast to Fugard, Fémi Òsófisan structures his entire play along the lines of *Antigone*. The "valiant story of Antigone" is transformed into that of Tègònni, princess of the imaginary Yoruba town of Oke-Osun (10). Like Fugard, Òsófisan departs from Sophocles' ambiguous character-presentation. Creon becomes the British colonial Governor Carter Ross, the undisguised representative of brutal colonial oppression. Longing for the time when "you knew you were right, because you believed in the Cross and in the Empire," the Governor loudly proclaims that it is because of people like him that civilization acquires its destiny, thus personifying the historicist view that legitimized European colonialism in the first place (131–32).[11]

But the Governor represents more than brutal colonial force and also refers to the military dictatorships that have held Nigeria in its grip for so many decades. Similarly, Tègònni is more than the unambiguous symbol of resistance against colonial oppression, as she also becomes the agent of social and emancipatory change in a repressive postcolonial society. Rather than propagating a return to an idealized pre-colonial past, Òsófisan paints an unromantic picture of a society that not only needs to break free from colonial oppression, but also from the repressive forces of tradition. Tradition, like history, becomes something to be battled with, and Tègònni and her sisters and friends take on this battle.[12] Whereas in Sophocles there is no definite answer to the question as to whether Antigone's act of defying Creon is motivated by the desire for social change or whether it primarily stems from individual knowledge and interest, Òsófisan's play leaves no such ambiguity. His Tègònni succeeds in unifying a group of women as her private act of defiance acquires collective relevance and turns into a struggle for freedom and societal change.

In a way, the stark contrast between Tègònni and the Governor challenges Òsófisan's intention of eliciting his audience's active and critical engagement, since it permits the escape into a Manichean opposition of colonizer versus colonized, which reinforces, rather than heals, the distorted consciousness Òsófisan wishes to correct. However, this opposition is complicated by the romantic relationship between Tègònni and the colonial officer Allan Jones, a relationship that is more prominent and developed than that between Antigone and Haemon in Sophocles. Importantly, the audience learns that it was Jones who protected Tègònni when she set up a bronze casting workshop—a trade that was not allowed to women—and was taken for a witch by her own people. This means that, to a great extent, Jones (the colonizer) facilitated Tègònni's (the colonized) emancipation in Oke-Osun's male-dominated society.

The union between colonizer and colonized and white and black symbolizes a transgressive moment in history that the Governor, as the representative of Empire, is not comfortable with. "You thought you were being a fucking hero, didn't you!" he shouts at Jones, "You'll marry a nigger woman, and show us all! Teach us a lesson perhaps about the equality of races! Rebuild the world with your penis!" (120–21). But most people of Oke-Osun disapprove of the marriage as well, and Òsófisan invites his audience to contemplate why Tègònni's sisters wholeheartedly encourage it. Their support partly depends on political considerations: "Just think of what the town as a whole will gain by having a whiteman as our in-law, rather than our antagonist! We will be feared and respected by all our neighbours" (22). Through this remark, Òsófisan forces his audience to recognize that the opposition between oppressor and oppressed can never be neatly drawn and that resistance, no matter how committed it may be, is always to some extent informed by complicity. He shows that, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains, power and resistance are never simply repressive and liberating, but mutually dependent mechanisms in a complex field of forces.[13]

It is clear, then, that although Òsófisan reduces the complexity of the Sophoclean conflict, he achieves complexity in other ways that better suit the political context of postcolonial Nigeria. Cultural migration involves adapting elements in a way that grants them contemporary meaning and relevance within their new surroundings. Importantly, Òsófisan complicates the opposition oppressor-oppressed, and has it refer not only to the colonial context, but also to contemporary political power structures. In Fugard's play, a protest play set in the present of apartheid, the opposition oppressor-oppressed retains its Manichean character. Its complexity derives mainly from a transformation of Sophocles' *discourse on* into a *performance of* the political and the ethical, as I will attempt to show in the next section. Performance becomes more than representation, a way to elicit the involvement of the audience and create change.

Performing Antigone

In *The Island,* Fugard focuses on the performance of *Antigone*'s trial scene, which he freely adapts and incorporates as a play-within-a-play. Òsófisan takes a different approach in *Tègònni* and places Antigone on stage to interact with her African twin sister. By metatheatrically bringing her on stage, both playwrights explicitly call attention to Antigone's migration.[14] For postcolonial playwrights, meta-theatre holds great political potential, because it offers ways to renegotiate and reconstruct, rather than merely replay, past and present, while also exposing the provisionality of representation (Gilbert and Tompkins 23). Generally, meta-theatre provides playwrights with methods to draw on elements from other cultures, other traditions, other historical moments, and other theatrical texts in overt and self-reflexive ways. Focusing specifically on African theatre, Brian Crow explains that the reason for African dramatists to use metatheatrical devices is to "celebrate the capacity of theatre and the theatrical to function as modes of survival, resistance, and even, in their more optimistic moments, change in contemporary African societies" (134). Fugard's *The Island*, with its main focus on performance as the primary means of survival, resistance, and change, serves as a good case in point.

In *The Island*, through performance, by acting out a film scene, composing fictitious news broadcasts, and making imaginary phone calls, the prisoners retain their humanity. Though these instances of play-acting offer ways to hold on to normality and provide momentary distraction and even joy, Winston and John cannot prevent reality from reasserting itself. Yet, through their most significant performance, the rehearsal and staging of "The Trial and Punishment of Antigone," they succeed in retrieving a sense of agency, transforming act into action.

Incorporating *Antigone*'s trial scene as a play-within-a-play, Fugard metatheatrically foregrounds the relationship between the real and the fictive. He underlines the power of performance by creating an intentional slippage between the three-level division of reality, stage, and stage-on-stage, and by suggesting that the action in the play-within-the-play and in the play proper can seep through to and affect reality. Fugard not only makes the border between reality and stage explicit, but also explicitly crosses it by having the actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona use their own first names in their roles of the two prisoners and by including a series of addresses to imprisoned fellow Serpent Players from real life. The actors are not merely *acting out*, but they are also *experiencing* prison life on Robben Island: they are, as Wetmore argues, "playing themselves, both in a cell on the island, but also in the larger prison of the nation in which their identities are just as constructed as those of the characters they are playing" (*Athenian* 197).[15]

As the dissolution of the boundary between actor and character inevitably affects the boundary between stage and the (South African) world outside, the audience is subjected to a similar experience. Its members are no longer solely the audience to *The Island*, but also become witnesses to the play-within-the-play, which is why the character John introduces the performance of *Antigone* by including the audience in his address: "Captain Prinsloo, Hodoshe, Warders…and Gentlemen!" (223).[16] In this way, the viewers' authoritarian gaze, surveilling the stage in ways analogous to Hodoshe's gaze of the prison, is subverted, and the audience members are placed in the position of fellow prisoners. They become participants in the performance, enacting what Mieke Bal has characterized as the "inarticulate act of looking" and respond to the "perlocutionary address of the work, which reaches out, over time, from the past of the work's making into the present of viewing" (186). Rather than observing an *account* of suffering, the audience is involved in an *experience* of suffering.

In accordance with this identification across the reality-fiction divide, Haike Frank points out that using role-play to present the conflicts of the apartheid era is especially effective in initiating the audience's self-reflexivity, because apartheid's ideology was based on a racial role definition of whites as masters and blacks as servants to begin with (50–52). The fact that Fugard had to present Kani and Ntshona as his driver and gardener, assigning them roles that would fit the role definition of apartheid so that he would be allowed to work with them for the play, painfully illustrates this.[17] According to Frank, role-play on stage confronts audience members with their knowledges and experiences of role-play off stage, which makes them especially susceptible to recognizing the potential of role-play in relation to change.

Òsófisan draws on role-play with a similar purpose. In the scene from *Tègònni* that best illustrates this, the character Antigone orders her retinue to change roles and play members of the Hausa constabulary, the army that the British raised to colonize West Africa. Experiencing that playing soldiers is “no fun at all” because all they do is carry corpses, build execution platforms, and terrorize people, the actors soon ask Antigone for different parts, after which she promises them a scene in which they can change roles again (28–30). Antigone then takes on the role of theatre director and imposes roles on her attendants that they do not want to perform, roles that refer to colonial times, but that will also be familiar to Nigerian viewers still experiencing military control in their daily lives. This scene not only shows the audience how different ideological positions are projected by individuals, but also presents them with the possibility of changing reality and, as in *The Island*, of changing their own *roles* within this reality (Dunton 69–74). When chosen rather than imposed, some roles can offer political potential. What testifies to this better than Winston’s performance of the role of Antigone in *The Island*?

In his role of Antigone, Winston performs a double act of cultural travesty, crossing boundaries of both gender and race. Spectators who are familiar with Antigone are invited to rethink their conventional ideas about her physical and representational status. To spectators lacking any prior knowledge of Antigone, she is primarily presented, through John’s introduction to Winston, as a relevant symbol, though the sight of a blond wig on a black man will nonetheless make them aware of Antigone’s Western origin. Despite these connotations of femininity and cultural background, Winston’s cross-dressing act underscores the constructed and possibly also constructive nature of role definition on stage and, as the boundary between stage and reality is metatheatrically crossed, off stage as well.[18]

In *The Island*, the protagonists make the conscious choice to perform *Antigone*, and to perform it on their conditions. They do so as they realize the political potential it offers them, a potential best illustrated by contrasting two passages from the play. The first is from the beginning, when John appeals to Winston not to be “Hard-Arsed! You! When Hodoshe [the prison warder] opens that door tomorrow say ‘*Ja, Baas*’ the right way. I don’t want to be back on that bloody beach tomorrow just because you feel like being difficult” (204). In the second passage, Winston, in the role of Antigone, addresses apartheid-Creon: “[y]ou are only a man, Creon” and “your threat is nothing to me” (226). In his role as a prisoner, Winston must remain silent but, in his role of Antigone, he is at least able to talk back and declare his defiance.

Initially, however, Winston rejects the part of *Antigone*, afraid that his appearance on stage with fake breasts and a wig will evoke laughter from his fellow prisoners.

John tries to persuade him that “sure they’ll laugh…’Nyah, nyah!’” but eventually “they’ll stop laughing, and that will be the time when Antigone hits them with her words” (209). Winston protests, “Fuck legends. Me? I live my life here! I know why I’m here and it’s history, not legends.” To Winston, history is not something that can be battled with, as Òsófisan’s theatre instructs, but something that weighs him down and from under the weight of which he cannot struggle free (209–10).

Finally, Winston comes to terms with his fate and speaks “*Nyana we Sizwe*!” (221). This phrase, which translates into “Son of the Land,” is a Xhosa term of praise for heroes and a rallying cry that became an important slogan in the black South African struggle (Fugard 235; Raji 141). Winston then collects his props. Realizing the political potential of playing Antigone, his struggle of rejection and identification with her part has come to an end. Of course, Winston’s performance of Antigone would be of relative consequence if it remained limited to the play-within-the-play but, in the moments that follow, his prison-reality merges with Antigone’s story when Antigone/Winston explicitly refers to Hodoshe in her declaration to Creon: “If I had let my mother’s son, a Son of the Land, lie there as food for the carrion fly, Hodoshe, my soul would never have known peace” (226). By incorporating the translation of “Nyana we Sizwe” in Antigone’s declaration to Creon, Fugard merges aesthetically and culturally divided terrains and reinforces the bearing that Greek mythology and tragedy, and South African reality can have on one another.

After “*tearing off his wig and confronting the audience as Winston, not Antigone*,” Winston delivers his final words, an abridged version of Antigone’s final speech in Sophocles: “Time waits no longer. I go now to my living death, because I honoured those things to which honour belongs” (227). The play-within-the-play now coincides with the play proper, but also with reality outside. Winston breaks role with Antigone not to distance himself from her, but because his experience is identical to hers, because as a symbol she has become his. Through his act, he has acquired a lucidity similar to that of Camus’ Sisyphus: with a renewed understanding of the “whole extent of his wretched condition” he has become “superior to his fate.”

While John and Winston’s performance may be liberating on an existential level, it does not offer them a way out of prison. Even if they were to be released, it would only be to return to the prison of apartheid South Africa. Perhaps for this reason, South African novelist André Brink wonders whether “the disguise of the political statement through play acting may not be seen as a withdrawal into the comparative safety of aesthetics,” and whether one can “ever act oneself out of a given situation, or only ever more and more deeply and fatally into it?” (444). This is a crucial question to ask but, as Brink concludes as well, the ending of *The Island* is ultimately not defeatist, for the act of performing provides more than distraction and leads the prisoners to a renewed affirmation of their defiance of apartheid.

John and Winston not only engage in an act of performance, but also of performativity. Judith Butler defines performativity as a model for social processes in which set norms are reiterated for the purpose of resisting and possibly subverting them (*Bodies* 2). Performativity, then, is a possible strategy to contend with (or even take advantage of) the complicity of resistance with power. In a later study that specifically focuses on Antigone, Butler explains that Antigone can only perform her defiance of Creon by simultaneously refusing *and* assimilating his authority; her claim can only be made within the language of the power she opposes. This does not make her defiance futile, because confounding rhetorically the distinction between two opposing principles means "bringing into crisis the stability of the conceptual distinction between them," and this, in turn, facilitates resistance (*Claim* 6–12).

In Fugard's *The Island,* the distinction between the two opposing forces is confounded metatheatrically rather than rhetorically. The norms at stake, imposed by apartheid ideology, are reiterated through John and Winston's performance of the trial scene of *Antigone*. It seems warranted to assume that, because of this ostensible reiteration of apartheid ideology on the level of the play-within-the-play, the authorities failed to recognize *The Island*'s subversive aspect and allowed it to be performed in the first place. However, by crossing the boundaries between the play-within-the-play, the play itself, and reality, Fugard subverts the norms that the trial scene conveys. In this way, apartheid ideology is rejected not only through its reiteration, but also through its on-stage transformation into the ideology that opposes it. In other words, through metatheatrical devices, Fugard not only destabilizes the distinction between the two conflicting parties, but also he succeeds in destabilizing the opposed principle. The effect is a powerful message of resistance.

Òsófisan also draws on *Antigone* with sociopolitical change in mind, but he engages with *Antigone* differently. Antigone's presence does not remain hidden behind the mask of Tègònni, as Òsófisan metatheatrically brings her on stage as a character as well. In contrast to *The Island,* she arrives on stage uninvited and her introduction of herself is telling:

ANTIGONE: I heard you were acting my story. And I was so excited I decided to come and participate.

YEMISI: Your story! Sorry, you're mistaken. This is the story of Tègònni, our sister. Funny, the names sound almost the same, but—

ANTIGONE: Tègònni! Where's she?

YEMISI: Back in the compound there. Preparing for her wedding.

ANTIGONE: And for her death?

FADERERA: What kind of thought is that, stranger—?

ANTIGONE: Antigone.

YEMISI: Yes, Antigone, whatever your name is! Have you come to curse our sister?

ANTIGONE: No, oh, no. Please don't misunderstand me. I know what I'm saying. I've travelled the same route before.

(…)

ANTIGONE: Antigone belongs to several incarnations.

KUNBI: But you…you're black!

ANTIGONE: *(laughs).* And so? What colour is mythology?

ANTIGONE'S CREW: We're metaphors. We always come in the colour and shape of your imagination. (25–27)

It is not Antigone the heroine from Greek tragedy who comes on stage then, but Antigone the metaphor, unbound by time, place, or race, willing to travel to any society in need of revolutionary change. For, as Antigone proclaims:

> *Many tyrants will still arise, furious to inscribe their nightmares and their horrors on the patient face of history. But again and again, as many times as such abortions creep up, as many times will others come up who will challenge them and chase them away into oblivion. Ozymandias will rise again! But so will Antigone! Wherever the call for freedom is heard! (127–28)*[19]

In the scene that follows, Antigone and Tègònni together recite this poem, while linking hands like true revolutionary twin sisters. The image demonstrates that mythological relevance transgresses temporal and spatial barriers, and emphasizes that Tègònni does not just exist by virtue of Antigone. As in *The Island*, the historicist view of “first in the West, and then elsewhere” is emphatically rejected (Chakrabarty 6). But does this also imply that Fugard's and Òsófisan's engagement with *Antigone* should be considered as a way of ‘writing back’ to the Western canon? Should their choice to relocate Antigone in African contexts ultimately be understood as part of a counter-hegemonic strategy?

Beyond Antigone?

It may seem remarkable that African playwrights should turn to texts that represent the classical Western canon and, in that sense, epitomize imperial Europe. After all, Greek tragedy originally came to colonized areas through forcibly imposed Western educational systems. In their seminal study on postcolonial drama, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins clarify that the enduring legacy of colonialist education explains the "prominent endeavour among colonised writers/artists" to "rework the European 'classics' in order to invest them with more local relevance and to divest them of their assumed authority/authenticity" (16). The question remains whether, in addition to intertextual works, the plays are also relevant examples of "canonical counter-discourse," discourse through which writers develop a counter text that, by "preserve[ing] many of the identifying signifiers of the original while altering, often allegorically, its structures of power" seeks to "destabilise the power structures of the originary text rather than simply to acknowledge its influence" (Gilbert and Tompkins 16).[20]

After first making this important distinction between works that are solely intertextual and works that are also counter-discursive, Gilbert and Tompkins state the following:

> *Sophocles'* Antigone *has … received considerable counter-discursive attention because it disputes the state's definition of justice and champions a figure who is imprisoned for maintaining her sense of moral and legal principle. The differences between two systems of justice and the triumph of the stronger power of the weaker can easily be articulated in a colonial context. (41)*

They seem to suggest, then, that articulating the power relations of Sophocles' original into a colonial context *equals* giving this text counter-discursive attention whereas, according to their own definition, a counter-discursive text not only articulates, but also purposefully destabilizes such power structures. Gilbert and Tompkins continue by posing *The Island* as an example of counter-discursive attention to Sophocles' *Antigone* but, in the subsequent discussion of the play, they again only demonstrate how it articulates, reworks, but not how it counters the power structures of the text it draws on.

Though Fugard and Òsófisan adapt *Antigone*'s power structures, they do not set out to counter them.[21] Their sympathy lies with Antigone. Even if we interpret Sophocles' original to stand for colonial hegemony, *within* this text the character of Antigone, in her defiance of authority, is herself the personification of counter-hegemonic action against Creon's rule. The most important reasons for not categorizing *The Island* and *Tègònni* as "counter-discursive" come from the plays themselves. Significantly, to begin, in *The Island*, when John encourages Winston to identify with Antigone, he does not claim that she *should* be theirs, not even that she is theirs, *too*, but simply that, as a symbol of resistance against oppression, she *is* theirs, which suggests that Fugard engages with Sophocles' classic not to counter it, but to adopt the figure of Antigone as a political symbol. In Òsófisan, secondly, she is presented as a metaphor that belongs to several incarnations, a source of inspiration for the struggle against oppression, which can be conjured up "whenever the call for freedom is heard" (128). Neither Fugard nor Òsófisan, then, seem especially interested in Antigone's cultural origin or her status as a Western canonical figure.

Their main concern is with her political potential in the present, so that it is ultimately not Antigone's foreignness, but her *at-homeness* that is stressed. In migrating a story from Greek mythology to African settings, they emphasize the power of mythological relevance to transgress cultural boundaries.

In *The Island*, Antigone comes on stage because the prisoners *choose* to perform her. In *Tègònni,* her appearance seems more ambiguous. If Tègònni indeed does not exist by virtue of Antigone, how then are we to understand the fact that Antigone metatheatrically insists on the necessity for her story to play out exactly as it did before; for instance, hinting at Tègònni's approaching death in the first of the two passages quoted above? Antigone's question of whether Tègònni is preparing for her death is clearly rhetorical, and leaves little room to answer in the negative. And what are we to make of the fact that Antigone not only comes on stage uninvited, but also takes on the role of theatre director, involved with the execution of Tègònni's story? A story, moreover, which in the first passage quoted above, she possessively refers to as *hers*: "I heard you were acting *my* story" (25, emphasis added).

In a sense, and this holds true for both Òsófisan and Fugard, the very emphasis on Antigone as *theirs*, as representing *their* struggle, embeds the dominance of Antigone's conventional representational status as a white Western woman. The plays themselves demonstrate this: in the white wig on Winston's head as he performs his role of Antigone; in Kunbi's exclamation of surprise at seeing an Antigone who is black. Antigone's origin seems unavoidable and, in this relation between adaptation and original, a certain inevitable ambiguity resides. By bringing Antigone on stage, Fugard and Òsófisan present the illusion that Antigone is 'really' there, while simultaneously metatheatrically stressing the distance between Sophocles' original and its African reworkings. Antigone cannot migrate without doubling herself.

However, this doubling should not simply be understood as the tragic and inescapable consequence of cultural migration from the dominant Western canon to a postcolonial context. In fact, as a strategy, it offers enormous political potential, because it makes it possible to claim cultural specificity *and* universality at the same time. Presenting their Antigones as particular variations on a universal concept, Fugard and Òsófisan effectively demand shared ownership: Antigone no longer belongs to Europe exclusively. By doubling Antigone, they push the limits of the universal, destabilizing the Eurocentrism that has traditionally defined and inhabited it. In considering Fugard's and Òsófisan's adaptations of *Antigone* as counter-discursive texts, it is important to emphasize that it is ultimately this Eurocentrism, rather than the canon itself, at which counter-discursive attention is directed. In conclusion, however, I would like to emphasize once more that, for both Fugard and Òsófisan, Antigone's cultural and historical origin is not the main concern. It is not *her* past that they are primarily interested in, but the political potential she has to offer for *their* future.

Notes

1. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *Odale's Choice* (1967); Athol Fugard, *The Island* (1973); Femi Osofisan, *Tègònni: an African Antigone* (1994); Sylvain Bemba, *Black Wedding Candles for Blessed Antigone* (1990, originally published in French in 1988 under the title *Noces Posthumes de Santigone*). Though Brathwaite is originally Barbadian, his *Odale's Choice* is set in Africa and was first produced in the newly independent Ghana (Gilbert and Tompkins 42–43). For a discussion on *Antigone* in West Africa, see James Gibbs (2004).

2. The five township plays are *No-Good Friday* (1958), *Nongogo* (1959), *The Coat* (1967), *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973). See Dennis Walder's introduction to the collected Township Plays (Fugard).

3. After *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo*, Fugard was no longer allowed to enter the townships (Wertheim 79).

4. For discussions on the influence of Brecht's epic theatre, Beckett's absurd theatre and Grotowski's poor theatre, see, for instance, Errol Durbach (1996) and W. B. Worthen (1984).

5. The original essay was published as *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942).

6. The first performance of *Tègònni* in Nigeria was at the Arts Theatre of the University of Ibadan in November 1998, directed by Òsófisan himself. Since then, the play has been performed in Nigeria a number of times (Òsófisan, May 2006, personal correspondence).

7. Within a context of oppression, this calls for a special strategy, which Òsófisan describes as "surreptitious insurrection": a way for the "dissenting artist" to "triumph through the gift of metaphor and magic, parody and parable, masking and mimicry"; a "covert and metaphoric system of manoeuvring" with which the terror of the state can be confronted and demystified. Performance, then, becomes such a "surreptitious" strategy by which to circumvent repression, but also actively attack it ("Revolution" 11).

8. In this way, he engages with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in his *Oriki the Grasshopper* (1981), with Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* in his *No More the Wasted Breed* (1982), with J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's *The Raft* in his *Another Raft* (1988), with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in his *Wèsóò Hamlet!* (2003), and with Euripides' *Trojan Women* in his *Women of Owu* (2004).

9. The Yoruba are a West African people living chiefly in southwest Nigeria. An example of the way in which Òsófisan deals with traditional elements in *Tègònni* is the inclusion of the Yoruba parable of the Tiger and the Frog, teaching a moral that, in the context of contemporary Nigeria, acquires great political bearing: "the one who was swallowed gained a throne, while the one who usurped power fell to disgrace" (100).

10. Nelson Mandela played the part of Creon in an *Antigone* production during his time on Robben Island.

11. Dipesh Chakrabarty explains that, since historicism "posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance (at least in institutional development) that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West," it was essential to the construction of colonial otherness, while it also legitimized the idea of civilization in the colonies (7).

12. With regard to Òsófisan's larger oeuvre, this is not surprising because, in contrast to the tendency in Nigerian theatre to portray women as underdogs, almost all of Òsófisan's plays portray women as agents of social reconstruction. In his view, the empowerment of women is crucial to the prospective program of liberation and modernization and, accordingly, many of his female characters are determined to struggle collectively to transform their society (Onwueme 25).

13. See Spivak's review of Michel Foucault's analysis of 'pouvoir/savour' in "More on Power/Knowledge" (1993).

14. The word ‘metatheatre’ encompasses all forms of theatrical self-reference, all ways in which plays call attention to their own theatricality, such as story-telling, the play-within-the-play and role-play. Metatheatre not only features in Fugard’s and Òsófisan’s reworkings of *Antigone*, but is characteristic of their entire oeuvres. Though many critics analyze this in Brechtian terms, it is important to realize that, despite Brecht’s significant influence on both Fugard’s and Òsófisan’s dramaturgies, metatheatrical techniques are equally characteristic of indigenous African performance practices (Richards 72).

15. Worthy of note are two comments by reviewers of the 2002 London performance by Kani and Ntshona: Hilary Burns wrote that their “identification with the characters and situation is mesmerising”; Philip Fisher that “the movements and lines are deeply ingrained in the psyches of the actors, who have been playing these parts since 1973.”

16. The name Prinsloo refers to the infamous Captain Hendrik Prinsloo, commander of the Northern Transvaal Security Branch, a branch of the South African police during apartheid.

17. Another telling example comes from a performance of Fugard’s play *No Good Friday* before an all-white audience in 1958. Fugard was supposed to perform the role of the white priest, but he was not allowed on the same stage with the black actors. Presented with this dilemma, he decided not to cancel the performance, but to give his part to a black actor. The result was a strange reversal of the more familiar image of the ‘black minstrel’ (the white performer in black make-up), presenting a black performer with his face painted white (Walder 416).

18. A similar message is conveyed in the prologue to *Tègònni*, in which the director complains that he needs white actors for the roles of the British colonial officers. One of his black actors responds that all it requires is a little make-up and some imagination, because “all is illusion here, and everyone in the audience has come to play his or her own part in a dream.” Significantly, this prologue is suggested only when the cast is mono-ethnic in composition, and should be omitted when the cast is racially mixed (13–14).

19. Ozymandias is the name the Greeks gave to Ramses II, the Egyptian pharaoh from whom Moses and the Israelites fled during the Exodus. It is also the title of a poem on dictatorship and the fall of empires by the English romantic poet Percy Byssche Shelley (Raji 148).

20. The term ‘canonical counter-discourse’ was coined by Helen Tiffin (22).

21. Òsófisan’s *Tègònni* was published after Gilbert and Tompkin’s book was published and is not included in their study.

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Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 139–156

Zimbabwe and the Politics of the Everyday in Doris Lessing's *African Laughter*

Sarah De Mul

Doris Lessing's *African Laughter* (1992) is the account of four journeys to Zimbabwe. It presents transitions in everyday Zimbabwean life, which are mostly voiced by individual person's recollections and observations. The autobiographical traveling protagonist, Doris Lessing, was born of British parents, spent her childhood on a large farm in Southern Rhodesia (colonial Zimbabwe), and first came to England in 1949. Declared a prohibited immigrant by the colony's white government, Lessing was forbidden to return to Southern Rhodesia because of her anti-colonial ideas. Since the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, she has been allowed entrance again. *African Laughter* recounts Doris Lessing's four journeys to the country, in 1982, 1988, 1989, and 1992. In what follows, I will examine *African Laughter*'s representation of the quotidian Zimbabwean space in transition. My focus will be on the aesthetic and political reimagination of Zimbabwe, and on how this representation is intricately connected with the migratory narratorial voice of the travel narrative.

My close reading will employ an aesthetic device that I name 'acoustic bricolage,' which is used to represent the Zimbabwean everyday in the book. Deploying a number of narrative strategies—such as a fractioned visual aesthetics, the use of direct speech, and the obfuscation of the primary narrator's voice—*African Laughter* creates the impression that a multitude of coexisting individual voices are rendered in a microscopic and fragmentary way. In the genre of travel narrative, such a representation is unconventional, and stands in stark contrast to the predigested and authoritative forms by means of which particularly male Western travel writers offer their encounters with others and otherness to the readers. One reason why this is so is because acoustic bricolage circumvents the often-assumed mimetic analogy in Western travel writing between realist language and the mapping of the non-Western people and places visited. Acoustic bricolage estranges the readers and prevents them from fully understanding and domesticating the Zimbabwean everyday into clear-cut meanings.

Nevertheless, the particular status of the autobiographical narrative voice in the book requires closer attention in relation to the aesthetic of acoustic bricolage. Readers of travel writing are generically concerned with an account of the traveler's experience of the journey. Consequently, autobiographical narrators exert their influence on the descriptions of non-Western peoples and places that are represented. In particular, I consider the ways in which the narrator's voice is characterized by multiple dimensions—Marxist, feminist, and Western—which stand in continuous conflict with each other. In considering the ambivalences that mark the primary narrative voice, I discuss how Zimbabwe, as a site of migration, is not only aesthetically reimagined, but also manipulated for political purposes. *African Laughter* does not so much inform the reader about transitions in Zimbabwean everyday life; rather, it strategically constructs this temporality of the everyday for the purpose of the narrator's anti-colonial politics 'from below.'

The Everyday in Women's Travel Writing

Before embarking upon my analysis of Lessing's book, I will outline some insights from theoretical discussions on the notion of the everyday, particularly with regard to women's travel writing, which form the framework for my discussion of *African Laughter*'s representation of Zimbabwe.

In the wake of Edward Said's seminal 1978 work *Orientalism*, various studies on travel writing have addressed the fact that, from the first stages of colonialism, European explorers, adventurers, and merchants have used travel writing as an effective tool for mapping and disciplining newly-discovered territories, as well as for legitimizing colonial activities for the Western audiences at home. Travel writing has been seen as an ideological discourse that reproduces the Western domination of the rest of the world. Describing non-Western people and places, the genre has taken the West as its implicit point of reference; the West is seldom described, assumed as standard or norm. Positing the dichotomy between the Occident and the Orient in a seemingly neutral, objective manner, Orientalist discourses simultaneously mystify the Western point of view of the non-Western 'Other.'[1]

With respect to the approach to travel writing as a colonial and Orientalist discourse, it is important to consider recent theorizations of the everyday. As Rita Felski argues, the everyday harbors habits, routines, inchoate impulses, drudgery, and unconscious desires (610). Everyday life is characterized by circadian rhythms and forms of repetition that have changed little over the centuries. At the same time, the disruptive potential of the everyday lies in its unruly temporality in that it forms the antithesis of knowledge, reason, and control. Thus, the quotidian is relevant for analysis since it, at least theoretically, subverts the authoritative mapping of non-Western spaces and people, which have marked the travel genre.

Strikingly, the notion of the everyday played a crucial role in the theoretical debates about the question of whether women's travel accounts differ fundamentally from those written by men, and whether travel writing is inherently gendered. These debates can be seen in the broader context of a feminist intellectual agenda, which has prioritized the task of revising male-authored (literary) history since the 1970s. Several scholars have positively requalified private practices, personal concerns, and the everyday, in order to balance what appeared to be a masculine preoccupation with public matters in narratives of travel (see Robinson, Lawrence, Jedamski, Morgan, Rose, and Smith). Thus, feminist scholars have challenged the limits of masculine ethnographic knowledge by drawing attention to a female-connoted perception of the everyday.

For example, Jane Robinson's *Wayward Women* (1990) and Karen Lawrence's *Penelope's Voyages* (1994) argue that female travelers have access to aspects of daily life in non-Western cultures that are inaccessible to their male counterparts. They explain that travel texts about Turkish women in the bathhouse that were written by males included the fantasmatic eroticization of those places, which were inaccessible to them. However, travel narratives by women, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu or Lucie Duff Gordon, contest these representations since they write in a down-to-earth manner about the daily lives of Turkish women, suggesting the normality of women's customs and practices. Hence, women's travel accounts, as they believe, are fundamentally different from those written by men: they challenge the exoticization of the Orient that characterize texts by male travelers.

Characteristic of the feminist recuperation of the everyday is that it aims at recovering female travel writers who were effaced from the history of travel, while simultaneously revaluing the self-definitions of female travel writers. Studies in this vein balance a critique of patriarchal culture with a search for female self-expression (Mills, *Discourses* 31–41; Holland & Huggan 113; Bassnett 227). Based on a female style of writing, mode of perception, or notion of geography, they distinguish women's travel writings from those written by men. In the process, however, they often adopt 'woman' as a unitary category, and risk making undifferentiated assumptions about the everyday in women's travel writing. In addition, this approach risks confining women's texts to the service of an emancipatory politics. Finally, it has failed to account for the complex entanglements and complicities of Western women's travel writings in the exercise of control over the people and places visited.

Recently, the issue of women's travel writing has been made more complex by postcolonial perspectives, which raise questions about the ambivalent role and status of white women travelers in the age of imperialism. Feminist postcolonial scholarship, such as Sara Mills's *Discourses of Difference* (1991) and Inderpal Grewal in

Home and Harem (1996), have addressed gender as always intersecting with other factors—class, ethnicity, and the like—that codetermine the ideological positions from which women travelers observe life in foreign lands. This intersectional notion of gender considers a status such as gender as necessarily always experienced in conjunction with other social statuses, such as race and social class. The intersections of these shape each other to the extent that no single one can be adequately explained in isolation from the others (see Crenshaw, Anthias & Yuval-Davis, Gilmore, Phoenix & Pattynama).

In *Discourses of Difference*, for example, Sara Mills has argued that Western women could not wholeheartedly adopt the Western, male-connoted, and imperialist voice, which was dominant in travel writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather, Victorian women's travel narratives, such as those by Mary Kingsley and Alexandra David-Neel, are ambivalent textual sites, where the imperialist voice alternates with a stress on the personal involvement of the female narrator. Subsequently, Mills' analyses of women's travel writing as a cultural production that is shaped by discourses of femininity, class, race, and a range of other cultural codes, which all work to make the figure of the traveler legible to readers. Particularly fruitful for my analysis is that Mills argues that Victorian women's travel writing offers narrative possibilities for female self-expression while, at the same time, arguing that this can hardly be separated from the imperial context, which provides the conditions that make its articulation possible (see also Mills, "Gender" and "Feminist"). In Mills' view, women's travel narratives open up possibilities for female expression that are often denied to women travelers at home. Yet, they are *also* complicit in the reproduction of Orientalist myths and stereotypes.

Since the position of the autobiographical narrator in *African Laughter* cannot be viewed apart from the Rhodesian context in which her childhood took place, class and ethnicity are important factors to consider in the implications of the narrative voice. Additionally, since Lessing's interest in the revolutionary potential of the everyday can also be accounted for by her anti-colonial communist politics, *African Laughter*'s representation of Zimbabwe stands at the crossroad between female self-expression and Marxism. The communist concern with the everyday has been made visible in the attempts to write 'history from below' by Edward P. Thompson and philosophers such as Henri Lefebre.

A similar involvement in communist activities in Southern Rhodesia and in London in accordance with an interest in the everyday has been well documented in Doris Lessing's two-volumed autobiography *Under my skin* (1994) and *Walking in the Shade* (1997). A concern with the everyday also characterized Lessing's novel *The Golden Notebook* (1962). In this novel, Lessing thematizes the downfall of communism by focusing on its effects on the daily minds and lives of communist party members in Britain. By the same token, *African Laughter* registers political changes in Zimbabwe, such as the new black government under President Mugabe, insofar as it affects the daily lives of Zimbabweans. Doing so, *African Laughter* is concerned with recovering the voices of ordinary Zimbabweans, especially black Zimbabweans. People's lived experiences and their stories are considered the most fruitful sources of ethnographic knowledge. This challenges the idea that politics is played out only in the public domain.

However, if the everyday is the antithesis of control and mapping, as alleged above, it is crucial to consider the extent to which the messiness and atemporality of the everyday can be preserved in *African Laughter.* In representing ordinary people's accounts of their daily lives in the private sphere, Lessing describes the Zimbabwean everyday in an experimental form, characterized by non-linearity, fragmentation, and multiple narrators conveying colloquial discourses in direct speech. Yet, considering the fact that the narrator's voice pursues a distinct Marxist political project, it is necessary to reflect on the progressive temporality that is inherent to this political project in relation to the representation of everyday life in Zimbabwe.

The Ineffable Zimbabwean Everyday

African Laughter consists of four chapters, each chapter narrating one journey. Since the book narrates several journeys, it does not describe a singular journey, but several experiences of the same space. This structure challenges the traditional travel plot, an account of a singular, chronological journey across a time span from arrival to departure (Borm 17). Moreover, the journeys described in the four chapters lack a linear and chronological structure. Although three out of four chapters begin with a description of the traveler's flight with Air Zimbabwe and her arrival, the subsequent travels through Zimbabwe are all narrated in fragments. These fragments are typographically delineated by blank spaces and titles in bold. The titles introduce referential information: places ("Talk on the Verandahs," "in the offices," or "The Mashopi Hotel"), topics ("Aids," "Corruption," or "Witchcraft"), or kinds of people ("Garfield Todd," "The Travelling Classes," "The Farmers in the Mountains," "Aid Workers Talk"). Sometimes they convey a more enigmatic, literary message: "Over the Rainbow," "Fat Cat Admonished," "Passionate Protagonists"). The spaces and titles are para-textual features that combine to suggest that *African Laughter* has its own fractured aesthetic. It suggests that the fragments are compiled as a 'bricolage,' characterized by non-linearity, diversity, and simultaneity.[2]

In these entrees, daily practices, particular situations, and conversations are offered. The style of direct and indirect speech prevails over panoramic, descriptive, and observatory scenes. The emphasis on colloquial language in *African Laughter,* conveyed in both direct and indirect speech, cannot be overestimated. Direct and indirect speech is commonly known to create an effect of immediacy and vivacity. It is a form of narration that 'shows,' rather than 'recounts' (Boven & Dorleijn 249). In travel writing, direct and indirect speech are often used to mimic and instantiate the colloquial immediacy of the cross-cultural encounters the traveler experiences. In *African Laughter*, however, the use of direct and indirect speech is exploited for a different end, namely the reinforcement of the representation of the Zimbabwean everyday as a factitious compilation of voices; one I would like to call an 'acoustic bricolage.'

Conventionally, travel writing is guided by an autobiographical I-narrator, who presents his or her perspective on the experiences and encounters taking place. In *African Laughter*, by contrast, more often than not the autobiographical narrator/traveling protagonist remains concealed. The systematic and overt focus is not on the traveler's physical journey and experiences. Rather, the narrator moves from foreground to background—from dominance to reticence, as it were—and back again. This slipping in and out of focus of the protagonist is reinforced by the typographical composition of the narrative fragments, enveloped as they are by blank spaces and headed by titles in bold. Rather than being a continuous, seamless journey, the itinerary is continually interrupted so that the reader's flow, too, becomes broken and non-sequential. Blank spaces in-between the fragments halt the order of the interrelated events, while titles, emphasized in bold, introduce new and unrelated pieces of information, forcing the reader to readjust attention. With each new fragment, readers are encouraged to complicate what they have read previously, forced to construe a new sense of coherence among the apparently arbitrarily ordered fragments.

Rendering people's opinions and conversation in direct and indirect speech, the form of acoustic bricolage includes divergent versions of the colonial and postcolonial past, narrated by individuals who recount their daily lives. As a result, history's intentions come to be presented as the intentions of many subjects; and no certainty is claimed about what those intentions might be. At first sight, there is no omniscient voice that speaks with more authority than the others. All voices are, in the words of one of the characters, "nothing but a straw blown in the winds of history" (379). Since the Zimbabwean everyday is represented as a plurality of voices and details, the human attempt to understand the past, present, or future proves elusive. From this point of view, the aesthetic of the acoustic bricolage suggests a model of history that ultimately rests on the random or ineffable nature of everyday life.

Tensions between Narrators

Sometimes, however, there are overt descriptions of Doris Lessing as the protagonist traveling through Zimbabwe. The explicit representations of the traveling protagonist cannot but make their impact on the fragments in which her experience seems to slip out of focus. As Jan Borm notes, "the reader [of travel writing] will presume that the author is *predominantly* concerned with the account of a journey he or she actually made" (Borm 17; emphasis added). The I-narrator retrospectively narrates the trajectory of the traveling protagonist, mapped out by means of the first person pronoun, the simple past tense, and modifiers of space or time. Although retrospective and traveling narrator focalize alternately, the retrospective I embeds the experiencing narrator at the time of travel. For instance, typical sentences such as "When I returned to the country where I had lived for twenty-five years …" (11), or "It took me two hours to drive that short distance from Harare to Marondera …" (28), follow the conventions of narratorial authority in travel writing. Borm's assumption of the reader's concern with the autobiographical journey is crucial for evaluating the effects of acoustic bricolage in which, as I have argued above, the narrator often seems to disappear.

When the I-narrator is reticent and moves into the background, the impression is created that the primary voice is delegated to various characters, whose voices speak directly to the reader. For instance, in the fragment entitled "So what should be done?" the I-narrator and the traveling protagonist both seem effaced to allow the three characters to speak for themselves:

> ***Marxist student:*** *The Bourgeois Revolution has failed. Now we must have a Revolution of the Proletariat.*
>
> ***Black farmer:*** *Transport, it's all transport. If only Comrade Mugabe would organize transport…*
>
> ***White man (born in the country, plans to stay in it, on innumerable boards, committees, charitable governing bodies):*** *First you take the brakes off investment. But that won't change anything until something else happens. … training, training, training … it's training that we need, TRAINING. (416–417)*

This triple character-bound focus suggests something of the contradictory views of Zimbabweans in 1989 with regard to the question of how the country could be pulled out of its deadlock. Alternative visions are presented in a similar manner, first by the subject of utterance, then with colloquially expressed speech. This formal similarity suggests that all three viewpoints are equally valid: they seem neutral and nuanced depiction of Zimbabweans' opinions about possible solutions. At first glance, their opinions seem unmediated by value-laden statements or overt comments. It seems that the traveling narrator has temporarily left the stage.

Nevertheless, the traveling protagonist remains present. The title of the fragment, "So what should be done?", followed by the temporary focus on the white man and his bracketed description—"(born in the country, plans to stay in it, on innumerable boards, committees, charitable governing bodies)"—suggests Lessing's presence and marks her intervention. Although the three opinions expressed are articulated in a streamlined, if not caricatured, manner, one may assume they were expressed during one or several encounters with a fourth character, the traveler, who interviewed them about what should be done. In instances such as these, the narration of the traveler's journey retreats to the background, and the second-level narrators who are embedded in that narrative are given priority. Taken together, the collection of secondary voices creates the impression of an acoustic bricolage of everyday opinions and viewpoints. Yet, though faded away, the primary narrator remains hierarchically superior and exerts more control over the narrative. Despite Lessing's apparent reticence in the text, the reader is tempted to read the traveling protagonist's presence into the various bits and pieces of speech. In this way, acoustic bricolage is characterized by a tension that exists between the primary narrator and the embedded narrators.

In other fragments, traces of the frame of the protagonist's travel narration are virtually absent. This happens when specific scenes and dialogues are registered in a putatively neutral voice, for instance in the fragments "Zimbabwe" (191), "Witchcraft" (214–215), and "Over the Rainbow" (229–230). "Zimbabwe" appears as a short fragment in the chapter that is entitled, "Next Time 1989." It is introduced as follows: "A scene guaranteed to appeal to connoisseurs of political irony…" The scene, in which Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo visit Garfield Todd who is in hospital, is narrated neutrally, without explicit mediation. Although the irony was, of course, already noted and cannot be ignored, it remains unclear who rendered the comment. The piece ends with a comment in direct speech, saying that the two men together visiting Todd, is "the best of Zimbabwe" (191). Albeit in direct speech, the comment lacks the inquit-formula, which one would normally expect. The lack of the inquit-formula formally depersonalizes the comment, whereas the use of direct speech presupposes a subject of utterance.

Fragments such as "Zimbabwe" raise questions about the precise nature of the communication that take place: who speaks, and to whom? The utterance "A scene guaranteed to appeal to connoisseurs of political irony…" is neutrally conveyed; and yet, it is addressed to those readers who may identify as connoisseurs of political irony. One could argue that the statement about the possible appeal of the scene for political connoisseurs might be ascribed to the primary narrator, if we take into account that the retrospective I-narrator is also the narrative authority of some of the preceding and following fragments. However, it remains unclear in what context the narrated scene should be placed, even though the anonymous utterance in direct speech at the end of the fragment hints at the fact that a conversation has taken place. If the fragment is considered an extract from a conversation, the identities of the speaker and the addressee remain evasive. Hence, this seems to be a form of communication between a speaker with an anonymous subjectivity and an addressee who is a silent witness. Although the autobiographical narrator has faded away, we already know it is Doris Lessing. Thus, particularly in the instances where the communicative situation seems elusive or unclear, the primary narrator exerts her influence and can never be assumed to have entirely left. Since only snatches of conversations are expressed, it is as though someone walks through a crowd and picks up bits and pieces of dialogues.

These narrative techniques, the fractured para-textual structure, the compilation of the speech of many characters, and the reticence of the I-narrator to narrate her own perceptions, together create Zimbabwe as a patchwork of voices on everyday topics, ranging from eating habits and transport to political figures and farming techniques. Consequently, reading *African Laughter* is like traveling through Zimbabwe with a continuously regulated hearing aid. The result is an acoustic bricolage, composed of intensified, yet unrelated, sound bites of Zimbabwe. Assembling a coherent 'overview' of the quotidian Zimbabwe, remains difficult. The Zimbabwean everyday is registered in rich aural particularities.

As the emphasis on direct speech indicates, it is not only the act of eye-witnessing that produces ethnographic information of Zimbabwe. In *African Laughter,* the primacy of the eye is downplayed for the sake of the aural. The fact that the traveling protagonist often retreats to the background creates the impression that she is a silent witness. When she moves to the forefront, she predominantly talks. The book thus replaces the figure of the eyewitness, conventionally associated with travel writing, with the one of the listener. The bricolage of everyday voices mimics the registration of a tangle of speech that reaches the ear. Rather than looking, listening seems a sensuous perception that takes place habitually and spontaneously, often happening without conscious awareness or assent. Rita Felski, theorist of the everyday, describes the perception of everyday life as "a habitual, distracted mode of perception … of mundane events that unfold imperceptibly just below our field of vision" (608). Daily life, its habits and routines, are part of what we are not fully conscious of, and thus unfurls nearly outside the more rational practice of viewing. Since the controlling eye is relinquished in *African Laughter*, the reader is encouraged to take up a similar distracted and semi-conscious reading mode with respect to the unfolding quotidian events and the conversations that are recounted.

It might be argued that the formal structure of the bricolage of everyday voices is an experimental technique that, in fact, overcomes the very everydayness, or taken-for-grantedness, of the Zimbabwean everyday. Especially in light of the 'realist' conventions of travel writing, the form of bricolage confuses. Therefore, it might be said that bricolage effectively distances the reader from the prosaic, from the everyday. It makes everyday life strange. This argument, however, ignores the fact that, as a colonial discourse, travel writing enters into a realist pact with the reader, even when it pivots on the unfamiliar, the strange, the Other. The question of whether realism is up to the task of expressing what is other is usually not raised. To Said and the scholars in his wake, the seemingly 'truthful' and 'realist' nature of travel writing's representations of non-Western others conceals that it commits, in fact, a form of epistemic violence. Upholding an illusion of the Other, travel writing, in fact, familiarizes the Other for its Western audience. Hence, it could also be argued that the bricolage in *African Laughter* is an aesthetic act of further distancing the Zimbabwean everyday, which is already unfamiliar to its Western audience. It estranges the readers and prevents them from domesticating the Zimbawean everyday. In this process, the often-assumed mimetic analogy between realist language and the experience of the Zimbabwean everyday is avoided. The acoustic bricolage of the Zimbabwean everyday deprives the reader of descriptions about how the Other ‘really’ is.

African Laughter’s indefinable representation of Zimbabwe seems to link up with feminist geographer Gillian Rose’s argument that the notion that space is knowable, mappable, and describable and, consequently, controllable, is fundamentally a patriarchal concept. The book’s microscopic focalization stands in stark contrast to the surveillance and control that are exercised in travel texts by colonial travelers. Rose argues that, regardless of how diverse a group they are, women generally engage with the world in a less controlling, more flexible, and varied way, an engagement that challenges masculine ways of knowing space. The feminine approach to the world challenges the rigid boundaries between the private and the public sphere. In Rose’s geography, the everyday is thus valued as an end in itself, rather than as an inferior realm that serves the public sphere. As Susan Bassnett aptly contends: “For feminists, an alternative mapping consists of tracing patterns from the most banal and trivial everyday events so as to create a completely different set of identifiable structures outside patriarchal control” (230). Similarly, in its slipperiness, atemporality, and unrepresentability lies a good deal of the power of the acoustic bricolage that conveys everyday life in Zimbabwe. What remains to be accounted for, however, are some of the ideological underpinnings of the narrator’s voice in her rendering of the Zimbabwean everyday.

“Nothing but a Straw Blown in the Winds of History”

As indicated above, the genre’s autobiographical journey structure is upheld in *African Laughter*, despite the fact that the narrator and protagonist frequently hide in the background. When her own journey is at the forefront, Lessing is described in conversation with the people she encounters. In fragments where Lessing is presented, she often acts as “an interpretative focalizer” (Bal 152). The conversations are focalized by her and, doing so, the emphasis is on the traveler’s thoughts and visions of what other individuals are saying. In those instances, the traveler’s focalization heavily determines the reader’s interpretation of the conversations.

This insertion of the figure of the interpreting traveler, as characterized by a distinct social make up (female, white, British, middle class, anti-colonial), raises the question of the ways in which representations of everyday cross-cultural conversations may be ideologically charged. Lessing portrays herself as an anti-colonial British woman with an imperial background. Her experiences of Southern Rhodesia were situated, to paraphrase the literary scholar Louise Yelin, at “the margins of empire” (1998). Recollected after her return home, the traveler’s identity is filled with tensions and ambivalences. Her whiteness prevented her from identifying unproblematically with the black anti-colonial struggle. Her gender and political points of view distanced her from identifying with colonial culture. As her gender, racial, and political affiliations continuously clash with one another, the traveler’s geographies of belonging are always already displaced. Her alliances and identifications are shattered between the past and the present, and between Britain and the former colony of Southern Rhodesia. With regard to the subjectivity of colonial settlers, Alan Lawson argued that they are "always separated from where one lives by virtue of one's origins and from one's origins by virtue of where one lives" (49). Similarly, Lessing's return portrays her as displaced, both as a Western female subject in the colonies, and as a female subject in the West with an imperial past in the colonies.

Even though Lessing has a number of selves to draw on, to a certain extent her experiences are unified into a general 'anti-colonial Marxist politics.' However, this politics by no means implies a fixity of subject position that the phrase might suggest. The traveler's subject position is continuously constructed and reconstructed during her journey as she, time and again, positions herself vis-à-vis the people she encounters and perceives. More often than not, connotative phrases that mark the traveler's subjective interpretation are in evidence.

Talking to white settlers on "a Commercial Farm," she describes their speech as "babyish querulous grumbling" (183). In this instance, the anti-colonial attitudes of the traveler inflect the speech of the white settlers. As made evident by her connotative phrases, the traveler criticizes the colonial continuities in everyday life after independence. This implies, however, that she resurrects the everyday for progressive ends. Her overt anti-colonial condemnation of the white farmer's customs and opinions reveals that the traveler's depiction of the Zimbwean everyday is based on a notion of 'progress.' As historian Christopher Lash rightly observed, progress is the "ideological twin" of nostalgia (82). It insists that improvement can come through human effort, even in the face of discouraging events. While nostalgia degrades the present by representing the past in an idealized manner, progress, by contrast, makes the future into an idealized site of immediacy and presence, and denounces the present (23).

Remembering her imperial childhood, the narrating traveler remembers black people predominantly as colonized victims from an outsider's point of view. As a result, the transition of black Zimbabwe from the colonial past to the postcolonial present is often *a priori* represented by her as a form of progress. On a visit to a "Communal Area," a poor living area for blacks in 1988, Lessing states that these areas might be dreadful places, but that the 'Reserves' in Southern Rhodesia were much worse. She adds, "here is a transformation that can be valued and understood only by people who know what it was all once like"(167). One could wonder whether the Western traveler, raised among the white settlers, really knows how "it was all once like" for the black Africans inhabiting the Reserves. Seeing the colonized blacks from the outside, as victims of racial segregation, Lessing tends to interpret any change from this white-dominated hierarchy as a positive one.

In "Next Time 1989," Lessing finds herself in the company of a group of black young social workers, called the 'Book Team,' at a train station on their way to

Matabele land. Having difficulties with buying tickets, they discuss the inefficiency of the contemporary train transport system. The situation makes the colonial railway system in Southern Rhodesia spring to Lessing's mind. Subsequently, she tells the group about her memories:

> *And there we are on the platform which I swear has not changed by so much as a nut or a bolt. … The long platform seethes with people. Then the train consisted of half a mile or so of coaches, most of them with a few white faces at the windows, then, further along, a couple of coaches with brown faces-Indians and 'Coloureds'—a forced conjunction of people guaranteed to cause resentment to both, which it did for all the time of White Supremacy. Finally came a couple of coaches where all the blacks were squashed. This arrangement meant that most of the platform used to be sparsely occupied by whites. I amuse the Team by a description of those times. They find the past improbable, and laugh at it. (245)*

In contrast to the younger black social workers, who only consider its present condition, Lessing compares the Zimbabwean railway system to the Rhodesian railway. The platform is described by her as a transient site, in which the present and crowded platform is juxtaposed with the colonial platform, sparsely populated by whites. The Rhodesian railway, as the traveler criticizes, was spatially organized according to a strict racial hierarchy. The unequal relations between black and white are underlined by the contrast between "most of the coaches," within them "a few white faces at the window," and "a couple of coaches," "where all the blacks were squashed." The middle category, consisting of Indians and "Coloureds," is criticized for being "a forced conjunction" as well as for causing "resentment."

Set against the background of general discontent about the mismanagement of the Zimbabwean railway, the narrator's memories of the colonial past make for a powerful insertion. The traveler's vision suggests that, although the post-independence Zimbabwean railway may have its flaws, it has managed to shake off the segregational structure that ruled the Rhodesian railway system. Considering the black colonial everyday in terms of victimization and oppression, this fragment again illustrates that Lessing has a stubborn belief in progressive temporality—often despite the visual or aural evidence she records. The social workers' complaints as well as their impatience with what they see as a badly managed public institution serves to underline the future-oriented commitment of the Zimbabweans towards the state of their country in 1988. But it also reveals that a progressive notion of temporality is inherent in Lessing's anti-colonial politics. Paradoxically, while rendering Zimbabwean life in all its particularities, the traveler's political support of black emancipation channels her representation of Zimbabwe into a progressive notion of the everyday, which denounces the colonial white-dominated past and idealizes the postcolonial and independent present.

In the paradigmatic article entitled "Under Western Eyes" (1997), feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticizes Western feminist writings about Third World (women) because of the “authorizing signature” that endorses ethnocentric universalism (273). Her critique serves well to scrutinize the recuperation of the Zimbabwean everyday, as it is pursued in *African Laughter*. Attributed with epistemological and ontological authority, the I-narrator is the only recurring subject in the travel narrative, who has a clearly defined subjectivity and personal history. Despite the fact that the form of acoustic bricolage presents manifold opinions and subjects who recount their life experiences, the autobiographical voice of the I-narrator is generically assigned the authority to create a definite temporality for the Zimbabwean transitions of everyday life that are depicted. In Mohanty’s terms, in many Western feminist writings, “Western feminists alone become the true ‘subjects’ of … counterhistory.” Third World women, by contrast, never rise above the debilitating generality of their “object status” (271).

This is particularly indicated by the traveler’s celebratory, and yet ahistorical, representation of black Zimbabweans. During her encounter with a black hitchhiker called Gore, Lessing praises his exuberant laugh, considering it as representative of what she terms ‘the African Laughter,’ a universal, atemporal category of Africans: “He shook with laughter, the marvellous African laughter born somewhere in the gut, seizing the whole body with good-humoured philosophy” (80). “African Laughter” is of course also the title of the travelogue. The phrase suggests a ‘biologization’ of the African ‘race.’ Optimism and cheerfulness are presented as typical of African culture, and connected to the physical gesture of laughing. Consequently, it is suggested that the “good-humouredness” of the “African” philosophy is an innate biological feature that is shared by all Africans. In *My father’s House* (1992), Ghanian-British theorist of race Kwame Antony Appiah explains this process as follows:

> *Where race works—in places where ‘gross differences’ of morphology are correlated with ‘subtle differences’ of temperament, belief, and intention—it works as an attempt at metonym for culture, and it does so only at the price of biologizing what* is *culture, ideology. (45)*

In his review of Lessing’s *African Laughter*, titled “The Art of Sympathy,” Appiah rightly criticizes Lessing’s “silence about the interior lives of black Zimbabweans” (“Art” 34). Indeed, the interior lives of black Zimbabweans are muted to make room for a celebratory, biologized notion of African identity.

The book’s Marxist politics of the everyday clings to the fantasy that a decisive struggle would at last establish absolute justice and contentment. Paradoxically, that notion of a decisive struggle runs counter to the unruly temporality of the everyday. The Marxist revolution implies the transformation of “the temporality of everyday perception, unsettling sluggish and habit-bound modes of thought, through the revelatory force of the new” (Felski 610). Hence, in contrast to *African Laughter*’s general form of acoustic bricolage, the traveling narrator’s anti-colonial story fails to preserve the messiness and multiplicity of the everyday, as it puts Zimbabwe on a course of progress. In this manner, the traveler’s representations of everyday life serve the progressive ends of her Marxist politics. At the same time, a multitude of Zimbabwean voices are rendered; yet, ultimately, they never rise above their object status.

In the past decade, a large number of memoirs and return travel narratives have been published by ex-Rhodesian male writers, such as Chris Cocks's *Fireforce* (2006), Dan Wylie's *Dead Leaves* (2002), and Peter Stiff's *See You in November* (2002). Assessing the political transitions from colonial to postcolonial Zimbabwe, these books reify male-connoted nostalgic memories of white Rhodesia, focusing on themes such as the Selous Scouts and the epic and heroic hardships of Rhodesian soldiers during the independence war. It is striking, by contrast, that the recuperation of the imperial everyday is visible not only in Lessing's *African Laughter,* but also in memoirs and return travel narratives written by other white ex-Rhodesian female writers, such as Alexandra Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat*(2004) and Lauren St John's *Rainbow's End* (2007).

Considering that its disruptive potential lies in its messiness, its unruly temporality, and its resistance to reason and control, the recuperation of the imperial everyday cannot *a priori* be considered as subversive. *African Laughter*'s experimental form, which I have named 'acoustic bricolage,' suggests simultaneity, diversity, and fragmentation. The narrative form is characterized by a number of para-textual features and narrative techniques, such as the deployment of direct speech, the prioritization of second-level narrators, and the downplaying of the primary narrative voice. Therefore, the device of acoustic bricolage suggests that everyday history cannot be captured by an orderly temporal narrative, and amounts to little more than the personal opinions and experiences of manifold subjects who are "nothing but a straw in the winds of history." Yet, although the traveling narrator continuously slips out of focus, the fact that she is the only recurring narrative voice that can be identified and accorded a personal history is crucial in the book's representation of the Zimbabwean everyday. The emerging narrative is characterized by an anti-colonial style of authority, which renders the Zimbabwean everyday in terms of a history of progress.

Representing the Zimbabwean everyday in transition, *African Laughter*'s political potential primarily resides in the epistemological and aesthetic move away from notions of mimesis, realism, and truthfulness, which the genre of travel writing induces. Conventionally, these notions are crucial for travel writing's expression of ethnographic knowledge; the reader of travel writing is conventionally encouraged to be primarily concerned with the traveler's autobiographical journey. However, despite its attempt to depart from mimesis, the anti-colonial I-narrator's account included in *African Laughter* is ultimately assigned a more authoritative status than the other African voices that are expressed. As a result, not so much the African peoples, but rather the Western female traveler becomes the subject of the anti-colonial history of the Zimbabwean everyday.

Marked by political, social, and economic crises, the current situation in Zimbabwe has changed dramatically since Lessing's return travels. In 2003, Lessing published “The Jewel of Africa” in the *New York Review of Books*, which charged President Mugabe in the name of “the poor blacks who will yet again watch their land being taken from them …” (8). In much the same way as *African Laughter,* the article includes representations of black Africans, their history, and the African natural world, which are all weighed by the future-oriented and anti-colonial message the author tries to convey. As I have tried to show, Lessing cannot entirely avoid regressing to the cooptation of black peoples and African space for the articulation of her anti-colonial female Western self-expression, at the same time as *African Laughter* describes Zimbawean everyday life in transition in its rich particularities. This suggests that the book politically and aesthetically manages to reimagine the Zimbabwean everyday as a ‘migratory setting.’ Yet, in its description of the movements and transitions that take place, its narratorial voice draws on a Western future-oriented rhetoric of temporality in order to authorize its own project.

Notes

1. In the wake of Michel Foucault's work, Said adopted the notion of 'discourse' in order to understand "the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—even to produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3).

2. The notion of 'bricolage' was introduced in the social sciences by Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* of 1966. As an aesthetic technique, it is used in literary criticism to understand the practice of using bits and pieces of older artifacts to produce a new work of art. It has also been characterized as a postmodern aesthetic, since the deliberate plucking of elements out of their original contexts and bringing them together arbitrarily often serves the blurring of traditional distinctions between the old and the new as well as between high and low art. Dick Hebdige has used the notion to explain how subculture style operates: "The bricoleur re-locates the significant object in a different position within that discourse, using the same overall repertoire of signs, or [places] that object within a different total ensemble …" (104)

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Gollwitz, Calais, Tahiti: ‘Hostipitable’ Places

Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 159–180

Better Germans? ‘Hostipitality’ and Strategic Creolization in Maxim Biller’s Writings

Annette Seidel Arpaci

Maxim Biller was born in 1960 in Prague, and came with his family to Germany in 1970. Over the past twenty years, he has written columns in magazines and published numerous essay collections, short stories, plays, two novels, and a music CD. For several years now, Biller has been considered a literary *enfant terrible* in Germany. This article offers a discussion of the specific ways in which Biller positions himself as Jew and *Ausländer* (“foreigner”), as well as of the ways in which he deploys ‘creolizing’ (self)images.[1] Discussing prevalent notions of hosts, guests, and of difference, I critically relate these (self)representations to Jacques Derrida’s rereadings of Kant’s concepts of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘hospitality,’ as well as to the former’s creation of the new term ‘hostipitality,’ in which hospitality and hostility are condensed. My treatment of these concepts includes a critique of the celebration of difference and diversity, and aims to question particularly the currency of those notions in the context of Germany’s history and present.

First, I discuss the usefulness of a concept like ‘hostipitality’ in the context of merely one of countless examples of utter non-hospitality in reunified Germany. The example I have chosen takes place in the village of Gollwitz. Then, I examine Biller’s literary contestations of a return to Kant’s hospitality and discuss the strategy of creolization that he develops in his writing. To that end, I read Biller together with Thomas Mann’s *Tonio Kröger*, and vice versa, and investigate the implications of Biller’s strategy of creolizing of both himself and other others in contemporary Germany. I argue that Biller’s project is situated in-between, on one hand, a sarcastic and self-critical cultural resistance to ‘othering,’ and, on the other, a literary and literal search for ‘better Germans,’ thus pointing out the insolvable contradictions within current attempts to aesthetically and politically imagine a different Germany.

With Kant and Derrida in Gollwitz

I want to begin with a case of hostipitality "being put into practice" (Derrida 5). In 1997, inhabitants of the formerly East German village of Gollwitz (Brandenburg) threatened to follow the example of another formerly East German town, Dolgenbrodt, and hire someone to carry out an arson attack, if the politicians responsible failed to withdraw their plan to settle sixty Jewish immigrants from the former USSR in the so-called *Herrenhaus* [lord's manor] of their village. The threat was to destroy the very option of housing the immigrants. Together with the inhabitants, representatives on the local council demanded that the regional government change its decision.

Herrenhaus is a highly charged name for a place that belongs to a reluctant host, who is master [*Herr*] of his house [*Haus*] and refuses entry to a guest. Although the *Herrenhaus* of this scenario suggests a patriarchal context, one cannot help thinking as well of the connotation of *Herrenmensch* or 'Superman,' literally 'Master-Human.' The threshold of the *Herrenhaus* is not to be crossed by the other; indeed, the *Herr* would rather burn down his own house. In this scenario, guests are at best permitted temporary access through the *Dienstboteneingang* [servants' entrance]. From the name of the building and its central and representative position in the village, moreover, it can be concluded that it must have been the house of the 'owner' of the village or, at least, of its inhabitants' labor forces [*Gutsherr*].[2]

The intention to settle Jews from the former USSR in this building must have been a provocation to the already unwilling hosts, grounded in a rejection and resentment of strangers in general and, in particular, those who were identified as former victors (the Soviet Union) and/or as the descendants of those who survived the Holocaust. In addition, this constellation is likely to have corresponded with anti-Semitic constructions of 'Jewish power.'[3] Thus, to house immigrant Jews in the place of the lord of the manor symbolically invests them with the power of the lord. The social-democratic minister-president of Brandenburg, Manfred Stolpe, joined the call for a withdrawal of the settlement plans, and the villagers of Gollwitz finally succeeded in their demand. Shortly after the decision was made by the regional government, a protest organized largely by migrant groups took place in the village on the remembrance day of the November pogrom of 1938. The protesters were videotaped and insulted by the village's inhabitants: large crowds that faced a police cordon around the rally.[4]

One frequently used insult directed at the protesters during the day was the term *Polacken*, a derogative term for people from Poland. This word becomes particularly interesting in the context of a many-layered transmission of images. It expresses the regionally different collective memory of the history of exclusion and persecution of others since, in Western parts of Germany, the equivalent insult may have been *Kanaken*. In a September 1997 newspaper article, an interesting overlap between histories and exclusions emerges. For example, out of several people interviewed in the village, a woman is quoted as saying that she was totally opposed to housing “these Russians” in the *Schloß* [manor or castle]. She also stated that her husband was planning to buy a gun. After other and similar remarks, the reporter describes the woman as “hesitantly” admitting that, “certainly,” she had been “once a refugee herself,” in 1945. The woman went on to say, “here they insulted us as *Polacken*, that was very hard,” but this was over now, and “the Jews” had better go to Israel, “where they came from.”[5]

Nonetheless, in the summer of 2001, the village of Gollwitz had received a *deutsch-jüdische Begegnungsstätte* [German-Jewish meeting-place], which was housed in the building called the *Herrenhaus*. According to minister-president Stolpe, the place was to provide a “possibility for day-to-day encounters,” and should be thought of as a “retrieval of Gollwitz’s honor.”[6] Invited guests to the *Herrenhaus* would include survivors of the Shoah and pupils, and students from Israel and the United States. The aim was to meet local youths for seminars and visit memorial sites. A website that has since been established for the meeting place includes, for example, a welcome address by the president of the German Parliament Wolfgang Thierse and a bilingual text by the Foundation Schloss Gollwitz. The climate that gave rise to the events of 1997, however, is not mentioned. Instead, Thierse states, “Let us work together to ensure that antipathy does not develop and that Jews and non-Jews live together side by side in Germany.” That, however, seems to have been precisely the problem because, in 1997, even a basic ‘side by side’ was summarily refused.

As unwelcoming as is the language of the people in the village of Gollwitz, there is also another idiom at work here: the invitation to the strangers who are supposed to pass through, as opposed to the strangers who stay. The website promotes a foundation for the Gollwitz *Herrenhaus* and addresses its public in both German and English. The reason for the bilinguality of the website becomes apparent at the end of the text, when the foundation expresses its wish for “there to be a large number of both private donors and businesses in Germany, the UK and USA prepared to make generous contributions.” Funds are needed for the restoration of the manor, and yet the lists of countries of those invited—why precisely those three countries?—and of the countries asked to donate are nearly identical. Israelis form the exception and are not envisioned as donors. This begs the question as to why the prospective guests will have to make generous contributions *before* they can enjoy their temporary visit. The simultaneity between the demand for financing of the *Herrenhaus* and the hosting of meetings between Jews and non-Jews contains an echo of those cases in which returning property to their former Jewish owners has been, and still is refused. If considered, for instance, in relation to Germany’s ongoing policy of denying demands for restitution, the fruitfulness of encounters that originate in a desire to rebuild what is perceived as ‘honor’ appears doubtful. The *Begegnungsstätte* keeps the emptiness of the *Herrenhaus* in suspension, and invests the villagers as hosts with the power of the lord. The satisfying by-product of establishing this meeting place is that the historical vacuum, which draws attention to National-Socialism and the communist period, can be filled, and the *Begegnungsstätte* can cancel out the memory of a half-century of communist ownership of the manor of the village.

Hence, this episode in Gollwitz history can be read, on one hand, as analogous to what Jacques Derrida terms 'hostipitality': hospitality is understood here as inconceivable without hostility, and vice versa. On the other hand, it is not readily obvious as to why Derrida would consider hospitality a self-contradictory, impossible, and yet nevertheless useful concept. The concept, Derrida writes, has to "protect itself from itself, auto-immunize itself in some way, which is to say, deconstruct itself—precisely in being put into practice" (5). The local rejection concerned the strangers who stay; the manor is intended for hosting strangers from outside, but not in order to live 'side by side.' Thus, as Derrida notes, "the stranger can pass through, but cannot stay. He is not given the rights of a resident" (16). Derrida continues this line of thought as follows:

> *In order for there to be a right of residence, there must be an agreement between states. Everything—and this is what cosmopolitanism means—is subject to an inter-state conditionality. Hence there is no hospitality for people who are not citizens (16).*

Derrida refers here to the enormous problem of "millions of people who were no longer even exiles or émigrés but displaced persons" without having any "political guarantee of a citizenship" (16). He rightly connects the right to residence to the role of states, apparent today, for instance, in laws restricting the right to asylum.

However, the connection, strikes me as problematic in a context such as Gollwitz. The immigrant Jews' right of residence was based precisely on an agreement between states, as the German government explicitly agreed to offer hospitality. Derrida argues,

> *This is the challenge today, too: a hospitality which would be more than cosmopolitical, which would go beyond strictly cosmopolitical conditions, those which imply state authority and state legislation (16).*

If the challenge is to go beyond cosmopolitanism (as I think it is), the question arises as to how that move can be envisioned if an *inner*-state conditionality is characterized by citizens who make the hospitality that the state authorizes, fail.

The terminology in the German language and context shows the paradox immanent in what Derrida described as "deconstruction by itself": the host is not only the *Gastgeber* [literally, guest-giver] but also the *Gastwirt* [guest-host] and *Wirt*.[7] Associated words are *Wirtsvolk* [literally, host-people] and *Wirtskörper* [host-body], both biologistic and racialized notions connected to the image of parasites, draining an organic body of its life and resources. Within this idiomatic context, the relations between human beings are already perceived as intertwined with forces of illness, war, and annihilation, against which adequate 'defense forces' [*Abwehrkräfte*] have to be mobilized. The National-Socialist German imagination, in a mutual relation with 'race anthropology,' was precisely rooted in the construction of an alleged *Wirtsvolk* and a parasitical 'Jew.' Kant's erstwhile notion of *Wirtbarkeit* is nowadays more likely to be called *Gastfreundschaft* [literally, guest-friendship], which is telling in that the term is disconnected from the root of *Wirt* or 'host.' On the contrary, the focus of this form of hospitality lies with the guests and friendliness towards them. Nevertheless, the division between a 'we' and others remains required even when hostipitality is conceived and lived in a putatively positive evaluation.

Under "strictly cosmopolitan conditions" (Derrida), West Germany used the term *Gastarbeiter* [guest-workers] after 1945 in an attempt to avoid former terminology such as *Fremdarbeiter*. That word would have been associated too closely with National-Socialism, war, and forced labor.[8] The publicized attitude toward the new labor migrants corresponded with the imagination of a Kantian and cosmopolitan relation between host and guest: the host has the right to define who is eligible to be a guest, where and how the guest will be housed, how long the visit is supposed to last, and also what kind of guest behavior is appropriate. I do not, of course, wish to imply that Kant's concept of race and the colonial and National-Socialist concepts of race are the same, or even that they are linked in an inevitable historical chain. However, Kant's *Weltbürgertum* [cosmopolitanism] has turned out to be an exclusionary category, and to speak of hospitality after the Holocaust also seems problematic, to say the least. With this questioning of the possibility of hospitality in mind, I now turn to the (self)positioning and strategic creolizations in texts written by Maxim Biller.

Creolizing Self as/and Other

In an essay entitled "Wir sind zwei Volk! Über stolze Gen-Deutsche und die Frage, warum unser Land jetzt eine Ausländerpartei braucht" [We Are Two People! About Proud Gene-Germans and the Question Why Our Country Now Needs a Foreigner Party], which appeared in the magazine *max* in August 2001, Biller writes, following some polemical comments on Germans traveling abroad:

> *It gets more difficult, when Germans roam through Germany with the gaze of ethnic cleansers. They roam and feel, they feel and roam, and if finally they—no matter whether National Socialist, CDU secretary-general or SPD chancellor—discover somewhere within the reassuring pale, blonde Hans-Hansen-crowd a disturbingly unshaven, smolder-eyed Tonio-Kröger-face, they cry out in fright and uncertainty: "I am proud to be a German!" And they think at the same time: but you are a foreigner, not more and much less! … [T]his way or another every smaller and bigger German fit of chauvinism starts, [and this would not have been newsworthy at all] if the news were not that Germany is no longer a country of the Germans, of genuine Germans. It is a country where an unbelievable seven million* Ausländer *live, temporarily, for almost always, or until eternity, and then there are here also those who were once* Ausländer *and still are in some way, but additionally possess German passports; and that those who are half*

> *German and half something should be real Realgermans can nobody tell me, neither they themselves nor the complex-laden race-watchers with* Leitkult-*guarantee. By adding all those who are related and close to this whole Creole-melange as wives and husbands, as mothers, fathers and lovers, one finally understands, that for a long time one-fifth, if not a quarter of the population in this country feels, thinks, is, and sympathizes with, non-German.*[9]

Biller here counters polemically the imposition of being defined by the host through his defiant self-positioning. With the "Creole-melange," he introduces a new kind of (self)image for those at the ethnicized margins.

The first obvious context we encounter consists of the opposition between mixture and purity. One aspect of the meaning of *Creole* concerns language, more precisely a language that is marked by colonial power relations as well as by mingling, resulting in the creation of something new. If we consider Biller's remark on the "one-fifth, if not a quarter of the population in this country," the question arises, how are we to understand their alleged feeling, thinking, being, and sympathizing with, (the) non-German? And, conversely, how does one feel, think, be, and sympathize with, (the) German?

Biller's notion of a Germany that is no longer the country of "genuine Germans" implies that there actually *has been* a time when there were only 'genuine' Germans in the country. What is more, already in the title of the essay, he introduces the term 'gene-Germans.' Hence, he constructs a physical distinctiveness for the other or foreigner, often equated in his work with the figure of the Jew. In the fragment above, the role of the other is given to Tonio Kröger in opposition to the "reassuring pale, blonde Hans-Hansen-crowd." In this respect, Biller's terminology is oddly reminiscent of the vocabulary of 'race science.'[10] However, in the context of the horror of envisioning a country of 'genuine' Germans—however imaginary—the sarcastic mirroring of German self-images in Biller's texts becomes clear. His perception of a Germany, which is *no longer* the country of the 'genuine Germans,' must be read against the background of Nazi-Germany's determination for racial purity, as well as within the context of Biller's mocking of his imposed self-definition. Consequently, he writes, in *Deutschbuch*,

> *Hallo, Mister Hitler, do you hear me? Everything was in vain, your always somewhat too overexcited speeches, your dilettante war, your stupid Holocaust. Germany is as un-German, as it had never been even before your times, because millions of* Ausländer *turned it within a few lousy decades into a mere smelly bazaar, into a loud, chaotic, savage* Judenschule *[literally, Jews' school; derogatory for synagogue or, in Yiddish,* shul*]. ("Verpisst!" 86)*

Biller affirms this role to such an extent that his 'un-German Germany' comes to stand as a form of belated victory over Nazi-Germany. This obligation lies not solely with the Jews, but with every *Ausländer*, an understanding that corresponds with his recurring conflation of all forms of ethnic and cultural alterity.

Rereading *Tonio Kröger* with Biller in Today's Germany

Biller's "reassuring pale, blonde Hans Hansen crowd" is based on a character in Thomas Mann's novel *Tonio Kröger*, whose eponymous protagonist is introduced in Biller's "Wir sind Zwei Volk" as "smolder-eyed Tonio Kröger"; hence, as an exoticized threat in the midst of the self-secure blondeness of the German national imagination. Thomas Mann called his novel *Tonio Kröger*, published in 1903, "mein eigentliches" [my authentic one]. Accordingly, Elizabeth Wilkinson, editor of the 1945 English translation, assumes "that it must carry within itself not only its author's past and present, but the germ of his whole future too" (*Tonio* xxv). Wilkinson obviously refers to Thomas Mann's own familial background, as she notes earlier:

> *On his father's side he springs from a line of successful Lübeck merchants who had borne public office with dignity and responsibility. … But his father, … had so far broken with the family tradition as to marry a wife of exotic origin, born in Rio de Janeiro, the daughter of a German planter and a Portuguese-Creole (*Tonio *xi).*

I surmise that Wilkinson also refers to the prominent place of homoerotic desire in Mann's writing, in particular the "authentic" *Tonio Kröger*, in which the protagonist names his first love of his school years as having been Hans Hansen. To demonstrate the extent of autobiographical content in *Tonio Kröger,* Anthony Heilbut replaces Thomas with Tonio in his biography of Mann (160–67).

In the novel, Mann narrates the story of Tonio Kröger, son of consul Kröger and Consuelo, referred to throughout only by her first name and described as Tonio's "beautiful dark-haired mother." Exoticizing terminology appears frequently in references to Tonio's mother. Mann lets us know that "Tonio loved his dark, fiery mother, who played the piano and the mandolin so enchantingly." Indeed, Consuelo was "in every way so unlike the other ladies of the city, his father having in days gone by fetched her up as his bride-to-be from somewhere right at the bottom of the map" (*Stories* 140). Like Mann himself, Tonio Kröger grows up in the 'Hansestadt' Lübeck in the north of Germany, and he leads us on a journey through Tonio's life from childhood through to his thirties.

During his school years, Tonio adores everything about Hans Hansen, everything that he himself supposedly *is not*, *and cannot* be: Hans is indeed every bit the "pale, blonde Hans Hansen." In stark contrast, Tonio is depicted as being torn between "his mother's blood" and his father's "genetic make-up" (*Stories* 140). Heilbut comments:

> *Tonio Kröger's name bespeaks his mixed origins, as do his swarthy complexion and Mediterranean features. … His appearance is exotic, but he considers the conventionally Aryan features of Hans Hansen 'extraordinarily good looking' (61).*

Consequently, in Heilbut's reading, Tonio's attraction to Hans amounts to "desire crossed with social envy" (161).

Biller, however, redistributes the exoticized attraction at stake: now, it is Tonio who "stands out from the 'Hans-Hansen-crowd" in a desirable manner. Hans is even further away from being an individual as he becomes simply the name patron of the "pale crowd." Biller attempts the inversion of exoticization, and to assess it in the sense of a doubled positive. Unfortunately, this move does not make the essentialized exoticism disappear. For, Biller's Tonio is still worryingly "smolder-eyed" and, of course, "unshaven"; that is to say, he retains a stereotypical passion and sensuality. Nevertheless, he certainly has much more self-esteem now, and seems to be less torn in his innermost feelings.

Despite the so-called 'mixed origins' of Tonio Kröger and Thomas Mann, it is somewhat astonishing that Biller has chosen the writer Mann and his autobiographical alter-ego Kröger to represent creolization. The reason for this is that neither Tonio's nor Thomas' language is at all marked by difference or newness. On the contrary, their language is perfectly pure. Not surprisingly, as we will see later with respect to the role of the 'Creole-melange' for Germany, Biller notes in his essay "The Reluctant German":

> *I know every pub in Hamburg, Munich, Berlin, Cologne and Frankfurt which has any claim to being halfway* avant-garde *during the past fifteen years. I studied at a German university and wrote my thesis on none other than Thomas Mann and sometimes when I'm feeling exuberant or totally dejected, I automatically remind myself that I speak better German than most Germans ("German" 6).*[11]

Mann's Tonio Kröger derives pleasure from the same source that prepares his insecurity and self-hatred: his passion for literature and language. This passion, not a specifically marked language, sets him apart from Hans Hansen, of whose friendship he is never fully sure. Tonio feels a longing for Hans, an envious desire for the way in which Hans lives in this world: blue-eyed and enthusiastic about horse riding, swimming, and sailing. Tonio's dream is "If I could be like you" (*Tonio* 9). He painfully admires and longs to be both like and be with Hans, as much as he is later in love with the equally blonde Ingeborg. At the same time, however, he realizes that he ultimately does not want to be "like them." Instead, he tries on several occasions to involve Hans and Ingeborg in his world filled with literature.

When shifting the question of Tonio's seemingly unmarked language to the actual contents of his language, his many conversations with non-Creoles or what Biller calls 'gene-Germans,' another picture emerges. From this perspective, Tonio's language is marked by an intellectual otherness: he is isolated because of his love for literature and poetry, and he despises the common talk about sports among his peers. As Wilkinson notes in her introduction, despite Hans' half-hearted promises and affected interest in Tonio's love for literature and writing, "Tonio has nothing but scorn for the *dilettanti*, those spare-time artists, who make the mistake of thinking they can pluck 'one leaf, one single little leaf' from the laurel-tree of art without paying for it with life itself" (*Tonio* 15).

Similarly, Biller writes that he had finally come to realize

> *that the Germans bore no resemblance to the image of them evoked by the Romantics, the Wagnerians, Thomas Mann, Sieburg and Fest, Augstein and Kiefer and*

> *Johannes Gross throughout the past two hundred years: Forget the passion, forget the congeniality. In reality they struggle through lives feeling nothing, meeting their fate as if performing a military exercise … No, I surmised, I have never wanted to become like this and hopefully never will … For the people in this country are bound by one striking characteristic: their total lack of historical consciousness. This is common to each and every one, and probably explains my finding them so cold, so superficial and so shallow … The people sitting opposite me in the restaurants, bars and living rooms are entirely one-dimensional beings, whose conversations focus only on the present (“German”* 13–14*).*

However, Mann’s Hans and Ingeborg in *Tonio Kröger* suggest that there is no such thing as a “total lack of historical consciousness”; instead, a deep satisfaction with one’s own position in the world that is based on a strong belief in historical continuities. Biller notes, “the magic word here is identity, national identity, something this country has a lot of problems with” (“German” 14).

These continuities are constructed through a reaffirmed narrative shared by a family and a nation. David Lowenthal writes:

> *Heritage is not a testable or even plausible version of our past; it is a* declaration of faith *in that past. Loyalty and bonding demand uncritical endorsement and preclude dissent. … Prejudiced pride in the past is not the sorry upshot of heritage but its essential aim. Heritage attests our identity and affirms our worth (“Fabricating Heritage,” unpaginated).*

In Mann’s novel, the fathers of Tonio and Hans are “great merchants, who occupied public offices and were powerful in town.” Tonio’s father is consul Kröger, whose ancestors already lived for a long time in an immense, old house: “the grandest in the whole town.” Likewise, the Hansen family “had for many generations owned the big timber yard down by the river” (Mann, *Stories* 138). Therefore, it is not “his father’s line” that makes Tonio different. Just as with Hans, this heritage would serve, as Lowenthal puts it, to attest to Tonio’s identity and affirm his value. With Tonio, it is his mother’s background, entwined with his intellectual interest, that makes him ‘other.’ Although Tonio’s father and his ancestors are said to have lived for a long time in Lübeck, Tonio himself has no ties with relatives and the family after he has left for the South.

His depiction is that of a socially rootless youth and, later on, a likewise rootless adult. In contrast to this social rootlessness, Mann placed his protagonist Tonio in a strong relationship with the landscape of Northern Germany. This simultaneous construction of rootedness and ambivalence reflects the relations of Tonio, on one hand, to nature and, on the other, to the people around him. The happiness Tonio feels when he walks along the shore of the Baltic Sea, together with his emotional attachment to the old walnut tree in front of the family’s home, builds a considerable contrast to his life as an outsider among the people in Lübeck. And yet, it is implied that the ones whom Tonio admires most, Hans and Ingeborg, have themselves no such ties to nature and landscape. The pragmatic worldview of Hans seems to limit his ties with nature to relations of power, thus of possession: his favorite activities of horseback riding, swimming, and sailing all share the element of a desire to master and defeat nature.

Jewishness and Migratory Positionality After the Holocaust

Biller's insight that the Germans bore little resemblance to an image of them evoked by the Romantics, the Wagnerians, and also by Thomas Mann himself, begs the question of why Biller chose Mann's Tonio Kröger as the antagonist of Germanness, the image of a 'fiery Creole.' I suggest that this is precisely because Tonio is depicted as bearing all those attributes that Mann himself summarized as "perhaps most famous characteristic of the Germans, the one described by the almost untranslatable term *Innerlichkeit* [interiority] in his speech "Germany and the Germans" given at the Library of Congress in Washington in June 1945 (*Deutschland* 30). As we have seen, Biller regards contemporary Germans as wholly one-dimensional beings. He goes on: "Never have I heard my German friends relate something of their family or their roots or describe the tragedies and comedies which make their family so unique and special" ("German" 14).

Behind these comments stands a rhetorical question: how should, to use Biller's own terminology, 'gene-Germans' of approximately his age "describe the tragedies and comedies which make their family so unique and special"? For the majority of them, there is nothing unique and special about their families, and yet, everything is unique and special in one specific respect: for, what did their parents or grandparents do during the years of National-Socialism? Were they bystanders or perpetrators? What were the family tales they grew up with? There may be only a marginal minority likely to have grown up in a similar way to what the beginning of "The Reluctant German" describes as follows:

> *I was ten at that time, sprawled out beside my Armenian grandfather on his bed, eating thick slices of bread covered lavishly with chocolate spread, and drinking my grandfather's lovingly prepared hot cocoa, stirred endlessly to make it taste as sweet and as succulent as paradise—or so it seems today. Balancing the mug and sandwich in either hand, I lay there next to my grandfather, staring at the television, captivated by the Soviet war film, which was so much more exciting than any live ice-hockey match. And I can still recall my sense of relief when the Red Army finally defeated the Nazis, whose boundless malice had conferred upon them an aura of such utter invincibility ("German" 1).*

The sweetness Biller associates with the Red Army contrasts with the imagination of 'the Russians' in 'German-German' families and literature. When Biller writes about "their total lack of historical consciousness," he points to the break, the utter difference, between the *then* of Thomas Mann/Tonio Kröger and the *now* of Biller's "smolder-eyed" Tonio.

Biller writes in Germany after Auschwitz. What he describes as historical consciousness, or lack thereof, does not have much in common with the historical consciousness and the stories of Thomas Mann's protagonists, set in a context of bourgeois *Deutschtum* and colonial history. The *Geschichtslosigkeit* [literally, historylessness], as perceived in the present, is its opposite: a historical consciousness that is diametrically opposed to Biller's own. In the meantime, it is a consciousness that is even able to inscribe a new national identity out of the perpetrated crimes. Thus, Biller undermines the challenge to established racial boundaries that Mann's Tonio came to represent during the Wilhelminian period. Mann's Tonio Kröger was probably a representative of the *Kreolenmelange*, a boundary-crosser, a not-quite-foreigner, who therefore challenged an easy division into 'us' and 'them.' Biller's Tonio seems to emphasize the impossibility of this challenge after the Holocaust. Hence, Biller's present Tonio as a 'fiery Creole,' but at the same time as ever an *Ausländer*.

Not only does Mann refer to *Tonio Kröger* as "my authentic one," but it seems that Biller also identifies closely with the protagonist, making him stand as other in the midst of the "Hans-Hansen-crowd." Just as Mann's Tonio Kröger looks *into* a window pretending to look outside, only to encounter himself, Biller asks:

> *Why,* Adonai, *am I different? Because I don't want to become a German? I, the alien, look into the mirror but see only myself. Then I look at the Germans to try and understand. And what I see is not some abstract, long since historicised relic from the Nazi era, but people of today, people with whom I live and work. … I have indulged in the luxury of a generalisation and am overcome with nausea ("German" 3).*

Nausea is the emotion Biller names as a result of the callousness he encounters in Germany, and this is connected to the non-existing lack of historical consciousness indicated above. Biller explicitly positions himself as Jewish here, and includes the word *Adonai* for 'God,' emphasized by italics, and hence rendered visibly different in the English translation. The word 'Adonai' would not normally be used outside prayers, in everyday conversations among Jews in Germany. The insertion of a Hebrew word is a literal mirroring of the image of Jews as *Ausländer* in Germany. In this sense, Biller implicitly answers his own question by including the word.

Mann's Tonio Kröger, too, struggles with a construction of otherness that transfixes his position. More than once, Tonio reminds himself that, after all, "I am not a gypsy in a green wagon." He does not quite succeed in convincing himself of that. As much as these utterances betray Tonio's perceptions of so-called gypsies, they also show a connection to movement. Mann has Tonio draw on the duality between a motion and settlement. In order to claim his tenuous place, Tonio restricts other others to their respective places, which necessarily must be even more insecure than the one he imagines for himself. Nevertheless, as Heilbut observes—and here I identify another link between Biller and Mann—“Gypsies, Hungarians, prostitutes, homosexuals, vagrants, and exiles—in many cultures, these appellations are coterminous: any reader of Mann knows that these men are his brothers” (Heilbut 161).[12] In effect, Biller says, I *am* a gypsy in a green wagon, and I am everyone else who has been assigned a pariah status.

In his writings, Biller constructs an image of the *Ausländer* that he deconstructs as he appropriates it. Yet, neither Tonio Kröger nor Mann, who described himself as “racially mixed,” were in fact *Ausländer.* They were both German citizens, at least until Mann took up U.S. citizenship. Hence, Biller severs the label and the factuality of citizenship, so that finally, his *Ausländer* turn out to be creoles. Biller also includes Jews living in Germany in his categorization of *Ausländer,* so that they, too, are part of the ‘Creole-melange.’ Biller’s accurate decoding of German strategies of othering, including its internalized version, notwithstanding, his conflation of various identifications under one heading at times threatens to erase specific differences.

Much of Biller’s writing evolves from and around, in his own words, a “standing on the margin.” He sarcastically proposes that “the condition of Jewish literature” is at its best in Germany, as becomes apparent in his essay “Goodbye Columbus”:

> *Jews who write live everywhere in the world after all, in Russia, in France, in Argentina, but where are the Jewish writers?…*
>
> *Where else but in Germany, precisely there where, by rights, they should not exist at all—had it been up to the Nazis, or most of the Jews in the world today, who seem to think a Jew in Germany is as much out of place as a rabbi in a whore house—pardon me, I mean, a parson, of course.*
>
> *Logically, the first and the most cogent reason for living and writing as a Jew in Germany is the fact that one shouldn’t be allowed to live and write as a Jew in Germany (unpaginated).*[13]

Biller’s understanding of writing from the margins is that of provocation. The expectations and pressures from outside as well as inside appear as the motivation for his writing. His distinction between “Jews who write” and “Jewish writers” is, of course, double-edged: it is, on one hand, precisely what is desired by mainstream society in Germany, that Jews who write ought to be Jewish, hence not German, writers.

Yet, on the other hand, Biller himself formulates this desire from the other side, as it were, and turns it into his personal memorial quest. Being a Jewish writer rather than a Jew who writes stems from an acknowledgement that there is no self-evident place for his writing in Germany, and from a sense of memory and place:

> *And it was then that a book by an American Jew named Philip Roth first fell into my hands. … and when I finished it I finally came to understand that everyone must write about that which is closest to his heart … That’s how I found my way to the Jews in my writing … I too wanted to write about my life exactly as I pleased, angry and loving, hateful and humble. I no longer wanted to be the perennial prisoner of the*

> *pseudo-moralistic quarantine which—in post-war Germany—was created, by perpetrators and victims acting in concert—the weirdest alliance imaginable. But of course, I got things mixed up. It didn't occur to me that I mistakenly projected a normalcy for myself akin to that which Philip Roth was more or less born into—a son of immigrants like me—but one whose life was not shaped (as he well knew) by the constantly echoing roar of stories about atrocity and war—as was that of every other young German Jew ("Goodbye" unpaginated).*

Biller notes that, while Roth was "able, quite automatically, to move ever deeper into American society, I had to distance myself (quite as automatically) further and further from German society" (unpaginated). He closes the essay with another generalizing comment about American Jewish writers; namely that they had "to pay for the freedom to inquire, authentically and honestly, into the state of our being with either creeping, muffling cultural assimilation or literary corrosion" (unpaginated).

On the basis of the statements above, Biller's self-positioning as an absolute other, as the quintessential Creole, becomes clearer as it forms the ground that allows him to live and work in Germany to begin with. At the same time, it is the justification for enacting the role of a provocateur of memory through writing. These combined strategies enable the writer to set himself apart as well from American Jews who write, who, according to Biller, have given in to assimilation.[14] Biller insists that he himself and other Jewish writers in Germany have to write from a position at the margins, and proclaims that "only he who doesn't stand at the center may speak to it" ("Goodbye" unpaginated).

His distancing from American Jewish writers finally leads him to suggest that, precisely because of the rupture of the Holocaust and its aftermath, Germany is now the country with the strongest tensions that are necessary for the creative and painful work of writing:

> *the openness and obsessiveness with which we, in contrast to them, can and must speak directly and insistently ('in your face') about Jews and Jewishness, about the German past and the Jewish present, constantly provides us with new ideas and plots. It also suggests that the incredibly creative process engendered by the isolation of Jews from Germans will continue for a while. What this means is that there is a country on this earth in which, for a long time to come, a unique and autonomous Jewish literature will exist ("Goodbye" unpaginated).*

In "Wir sind zwei Volk," Biller presents Mann's Tonio Kröger as exemplary for someone who defiantly refuses the center. Kröger struggles with his desire to be a writer and with his place in the world. In the novel, it turns out that, despite his German citizenship, Kröger has lost his material passport. In Biller's appropriation of the literary character, Tonio is "a foreigner, and much less" ("Wir"). Therefore, Biller's *Ausländer* are not necessarily devoid of citizenship. Biller repeatedly insists on being a foreigner, a 'German Creole,' though he tells us: "I arrived in Germany from Prague age ten. Twelve years later I handed in my Russian passport and took on German citizenship and completed my schooling in this country" ("German" 6).

At this point, Lynn Rapaport's account of the relationship of Jews in Germany to nationality and citizenship is relevant. With regard to the passport as a symbol for (non)identification, Rapaport remarks:

> *[T]he same cultural referents can be used contextually, sometimes to express ethnic differences, and sometimes to express ethnic commonalities. The passport is one such referent amenable to manipulation depending on the situation. Jews who have German passports define the significance of the passport differently from Jews who do not have German passports. Both groups, however, use the passport as a symbol of distance from membership within German society. … As a successful businessman states: "I don't want to belong to them. So why should I say that I'm German? I mean, I think when I say I have a German passport it's clear" (152–53).*

Rapaport quotes many similar responses. They are not very different from those one can get from other others in Germany today. The reaction of the businessman presents a common, even literally uniform response of many people from minorities in Germany. This constitutes a striking difference to the British context, for example, where, as I came to realize, the answer "I have a German passport" to the question "Are you German?" is received with perplexity. Rapaport concludes that "while most Jews acknowledge membership in Germany in their legal relationship to the country as a nation-state, they separate themselves from membership in Germany when it is understood as a body of people" (153). Hence, the body of people, still the basis of nationality, is disconnected here from the state as a legal entity of citizens.

The Search for 'the Better Germans'

Why has Biller chosen Tonio Kröger to signify the other in "Wir sind zwei Volk"? Since the essay ends with the demand for the founding of a party of and for *Ausländer,* it may seem astonishing that Biller would rely on a literary character that is not so much a foreigner as he is a 'stranger within.' Would Thomas Mann ever have positioned himself as Creole or German Creole? In his 1945 Washington speech, Mann argues that, as he was born in Germany, his place was in fact there, admitting to surprise about his fate of being in America, speaking to Americans, and having become an American citizen. "[A]s things are today," he continues, "my kind of Germanness [*meine Art von Deutschtum*]" is best situated in "the "hospitable cosmopolis, the racial and national universe that is called America" (*Deutschland* 8–9).[15]

Biller's words at the conclusion of his essay are illuminating:

> *Brief biographical epilogue: Who might not have understood yet, of course I am one of these German Creoles myself. I have an Armenian grandfather, my Jewish parents come from Russia, we have lived in Prague, we speak Russian and Czech with each other, and if German friends are present—they are some of our best ones—even German ("Wir").*

The idea of creolization becomes clearer in the image he creates of himself in the essay “Land der Verklemmten” [Country of the Inhibited]:

> *I myself am naturally not at all inhibited. My savage father comes from Moscow, my unrestrained mother from Baku, the many black hairs on my chest grow faster and more impetuous than the city boundaries of Tel Aviv, and if someone is unknown to me and happens to sit next to me at ‘Schumann’s,’ I keep on and on at him, without asking a lot, so long until we are either friends or enemies—what’s wrong with that [was soll’s]? (“Land” 34)*

And elsewhere, in the essay “Verpißt euch!” [Piss off], Biller writes about being “one of those Türken-Tschuschen-Neger” in the “alleged immigration state Germany” (“Verpißt euch!” 87).

These self-representations can be read, on one hand, as a vehement self-ethnicization or, on the other, as a polemic or ironic ‘talking back’ with a liberating potential for the racialized and marginalized subject, or even as ambivalent combinations of the former and the latter. We can understand Biller’s self-positioning as irony together with Homi Bhabha, who notes in his foreword to *Modernity, Culture and ‘the Jew’:*

> *Self-irony as a minority gesture does not consist in ‘balancing’ the extrinsic and intrinsic view in some proposed zero-sum game of cultural equity played out between universalism and relativism; nor does it lie in the binary confrontation of cultural insiders and outsiders—Self and Other—each straining to achieve a more holistic or authentic identity at the expense of the other. Through the very performance of the self-critical joke-work there* emerges *a structure of identification—what Freud calls ‘the subjective determination of the joke-work’—that provides a way for minority communities to confront and regulate the abuse that comes from ‘outside’ or the criticisms that emerge inwardly, from within the community itself (xv).*

In order to counter prevalent phrases such as *Jüdische Mitbürger* and *Ausländische Mitbürger* [Jewish fellow-citizens and foreign fellow-citizens], often used with a patronizing “our” before them, Biller introduces his defiant *Kreolen*. He uses racializing and derogatory terminology and turns it ‘upside down.’

However, Biller’s simultaneous blackening, whitening, and creolizing of himself and others at times risks slipping into a now normalizing position of a ‘hybrid’ identity. Nonetheless, despite his promoting of *Kreolen* as counter-image to German and other exclusive identities, Biller does not ignore specific cultural and historical experiences. His protagonists may be ‘torn’ in a Krögeresque way between various cultural aspects, and they may carry the burden of historic traumata, but they do not exist in a space devoid of history and consciousness, and they are never *only* victims. He insists on the connection between Germany’s murderous past and the national ideology of the present. He captures precisely the ‘us’ and ‘them’ antagonism that underpins German society to this day.[16]

This has been an aspect of Biller's work that has resulted in sharp critique. Jürgen Roth, for instance, writes in *konkret Literatur:*

> *Maxim Biller ethnicizes unscrupulously and without pause …, and he doesn't shy away from the sentimental kitsch [*Gemütskitsch*] that is compatible with soap operas [*feuilletonkompatibel*]. … What is Biller? (30)*

Roth further suggests that Biller is "offensively vain" and "bare of any self-irony," as well as a "hot-air merchant of convictions [*Gesinnungsschaumschläger*]," to arrive at the following conclusion: "Maxim Biller suffers from Germany. This makes him a genuinely German author" (30–31). Roth suggests that Biller is much more respected in Germany than he may think, and that this respect is connected to his "obsessive preoccupation with the local 'Ethnie' " (30). To conclude, Roth brings up the issue of masochism when he argues that Germany was, for Biller as for his readers, an affair of the heart and, hence, his audience was calling out to him, groaning "Give it to us, Maxim"! (30)

Roth's stern criticism overlooks the self-irony in Biller's writing. His "self-critical (joke-)work," to borrow Bhabha's phrase, is the work of (re)writing everyday experience of hospitality by inserting a few sharp words or by slightly shifting their uses. Precisely because some of his exaggerations seem so out of place, they are able to indicate the implicit normalization of their function. Hence, the threading of the fine line between a racializing normality and its mirroring in an often bitter but also hilarious irony, allows Biller to transform otherwise offensive terms. Though he seems to remain stuck within a racial frame, as his continued categorizations of purity and mixture suggest, precisely that frame allows him to continue excavating the foundations of racist stereotypes in Germany, and simultaneously attack the recent ideological notion of 'celebrating difference,' the new chic attitude of global marketing strategies.

With respect to Biller's view of the non-identity of Germans with the image of them created by the Romantics and others, the following question arises: does Biller's Tonio Kröger appear as the antagonist of Germanness as the creole mixed up with the "Hans-Hansen-crowd" precisely *because* Mann gave his Kröger all the attributes he had summarized as the 'interiority' [*Innerlichkeit*] that he viewed as truly German? In other words, does Tonio stick out because he is more German than the Germans? Since the 'gene-Germans' do not resemble the image of Germans, Biller makes the reader wonder whether the creoles may be the real Germans, Germans with the proper sense of interiority. Thus, Biller's strategy is reminiscent of the construct of the 'Other Germany' that many intellectuals were eager to uphold during National-Socialism.

In his latest writings, Biller subscribes to this notion of 'the better Germans.' Simultaneously, he takes up another concept that is similar to, but not the same as, the 'Creole-melange.' The criteria remain the same, but Biller seems to have refined his project to specify a *third* category in Germany. He refers to ‘gene-Germans’ as “the first Ethnie,” to the *Ausländer* as the second one, while the “third Ethnie” includes “the children and grandchildren of Ausländer,” who come to represent a new hope and are closest to the author’s heart (“Ethnie” 267–68).[17] The category is expandable and, according to the author, “sometimes they also have a German father or a German mother but that does not make them more German either” (267). He continues:

> *The children of the third Ethnie cannot be bothered with tradition. It’s true, they do their parents the favor and feign interest in the old customs and memories, but this is mere politeness. … They have long since their own experiences, and actually it is always just the one experience: as a non-German, to be more German than one wants to admit to oneself—and despite that not to belong to the Germans. This connects them. This makes them feel and think similarly, and this makes their language fresh and emotional. … It is the energy of those, who stand at the margins and either try to get to the centre of society, or, on the contrary, proclaim the margin as centre. … Yes, and it once has been just the same in Germany, before the war. Then, the children of the ghetto-Jews were the third Ethnie, and there hardly was a more exciting country in the world (268).*

One might want to agree, if not for the pitfalls: Biller connects ethnicity and creativity in the past and the present, which is bound to produce exoticism and to erase other otherings, based on gender, sexuality, and bodily abilities.

Furthermore, Biller risks the reification of the “ghetto-Jews” of the past and the immigrants’ children of today as artists:

> *We have to understand our own characteristics [*Eigenart*] at last. We have to talk about that, we have to make it an issue in our films and books. … Because we are, what Americans, Israelis and Brazilians already are since generations. We are the life, the chaos, the future. We are Germany’s last chance (268).*

These lines point back to Biller’s nostalgic idealization of the time “before the war,” begging the question of whether the “ghetto-Jews” were making Germany so exciting at the time because they (all?) wrote books or were in some form engaged in cultural production. Biller’s use of the phrase “before the war” rather than the more appropriate “before the Holocaust” or “before emigration” makes it easier to weave this thread between the minority cultures then and now that are alleged to serve as a “creative pool” for Germany, to add color to the pale crowd.

One may understand this perspective in light of another author, Esther Dischereit, who writes critically: “German culture, in other words, is *there* to begin with, Jewishness is added” (270).[18] We could read the task Biller sets out for the third Ethnie along this line: they are supposed to be lively, full of energy, and enrich Germany, so that it may finally become a more cosmopolitan country. This brings us back to Biller’s earlier (sarcastic?) claim that the *Kreolen-Melange* would simply like to be proud of Germany. A Germany enriched by the energy of the ‘third Ethnie’ would probably qualify for that. Where does this leave the individuals who may not necessarily desire a career as the real *Realgermans*, but rather insist on the fact that Germany is and always has been their country also? Where does this leave all those who have no residence papers for that career, and how would the third Ethnie make a difference to those who are, in the midst of policies that enshrine a cosmopolitan hospitality, being deported or beaten to death by their equally but differently proud hosts?

Notes

1. The term *Ausländer* resists translation. 'Foreigners' does not express all connotations of the term. Bammer notes that "*Auslände* literally means 'foreigner,' 'noncitizen,' someone coming from the 'outside.' Connotatively, however, in German usage, it is racially marked, typically used to refer to people living in Germany whose racial and ethnic characteristics are 'not German,' regardless of where they were born and grew up and even of whether they are actually German." (Bammer in Barkan and Shelton 27. Bammer refers here to Peck). I would emphasize that the term 'Ausländer' can stand in Germany, if used more ambiguously, for Jews as well, for instance in regularly occurring references to Jews as 'Israeli citizens.' Burkhard Schröder discusses the notion and concept of *Ausländer* and all it entails, such as *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* [foreigner-hostility] and *Ausländerfreundlichkeit* [foreigner-friendliness], plainly and pointedly in his book *Nazis sind Pop* ('Nazis are Pop'): "In Germany, there allegedly exists a peculiar state of feelings, a hostility [Feind*seligkeit*] directed against people who have a different passport to that of the majority. … Grammatically janus-headed—who is 'hostile'? Foreigners? A synonym—hostility [Feind*schaft*]—cannot be used—could it also be 'foreigner-hostility' [*Ausländerfeindschaft*]? The term 'Ausländerfeindlichkeit' cannot be translated into any other language in the world. Those hoping too quickly to have found the word in 'xenophobia' are mistaken: the 'hostility toward strangers' [*Fremden*feindlichkeit] means something entirely different. The 'stranger' is always a fictional construct that had to be pre-defined in the collective discourse. 'Inlanders' can be made into strangers, too. People who do not possess a German passport—'Ausländer' in the literal sense of the word, such as Icelandians, Norwegians, Danes—are neither harassed nor beaten up in Germany. This, however, happens to Afrogermans who have never had any passport other than a German one" (17).

2. Indeed, this fact becomes clear in newspaper articles and on the website (www.stiftunggollwitz.de): the *Herrenhaus* is also referred to as *Schloß* [castle] and in English translations as 'Manor House,' where the nobility had lived until seventy years ago, when it became a field hospital. In 1945, the building was used to provide housing for Germans fleeing westward from the Red Army.
See von Bullion.

3. The phantasma of a Jewish power or conspiracy is worthy of note in relation to the *Herrenhaus*. Victor Klemperer remarked in 1946 in *LTI*, "If you want to accuse an Aryan of the worst thing imaginable you call him a slave of the Jews." (Klemperer 179.) The German term *Judenknecht* [Jews' slave] has outlived National Socialism, just like many of the terms collected and discussed by Klemperer.

4. See *Berliner Morgenpost*, 10 Nov. 1997; *Märkische Allgemeine*, 10 Nov. 1997; *die tageszeitung,* 27/28 Sept. 1997. Interesting in this context is the shifting of blame after the protest onto the then chairman of the Central Council for Jews, Ignatz Bubis. The major of Gollwitz demanded an apology from Bubis for the alleged "campaign of hatred" against Gollwitz. See 'Unterrichtsbausteine gegen antijüdische Ressentiments in der Schule' (a paper with suggestions for lessons 'against anti-Jewish resentments at school').

5. von Bullion, "Die sollen nach Israel" (6). Most perplexing is the fact that von Bullion frequently uses the *term jüdische Aussiedler* in the text. In one sentence, she even writes about "jüdische Aussiedler …, sogenannte Kontingentflüchtlinge" [Jewish 'Aussiedler' …, so-called contingent refugees]. *Kontingentflüchtlinge* is the official term used after 1989 for Jews from the former USSR, who applied to settle in Germany. However, von Bullion conflates two groups who migrated to Germany under completely different conditions. *Aussiedler* is the term used in West Germany for immigrant 'Germans' from Eastern European countries. *Aussiedler* had to prove that they were 'German' (for instance, by providing Nazi-documents such as membership in the Waffen-SS), and could then immigrate easily to West Germany. Thus, either the journalist consciously

makes an effort at this point to undermine the German laws based on blood and genealogy, or she is unaware of the implications of her terminological construction. This would be conceivable if she was writing from an Eastern German background because the whole concept of *Aussiedler* was a cold war invention of West Germany and not just non-existent in communist countries, but in fact directed against those countries' integrity as states.

6. Quoted from "Gollwitz erhält deutsch-jüdische Begegnungsstätte," (ap) *Newsletter* (27 Aug. 2001). Available at www.juden.de.

7. Derrida highlights this paradox, when he writes that "a certain injustice, and even a certain perjury, begins right away, from the very threshold of the right to hospitality. This collusion between the violence of power or the force of law (*Gewalt*) on one side, and hospitality on the other, seems to depend, in an absolutely radical way, on hospitality being inscribed in the form of a right … But since this right, whether private or familial, can only be exercised and guaranteed by the mediation of a public right or State right, the perversion is unleashed from the inside. For the State cannot guarantee or claim to guarantee the private domain (for it is a domain), other than by controlling it and trying to penetrate it to be sure of it" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 55).

8. Mark Terkessidis points out that all the trains bringing those 'guestworkers' who, after tests had been carried out in their home countries by German officials were found to be healthy and useful, arrived at Munich's central train station on platform 11. The people from Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Turkey were then brought to a refurbished underground war bunker which could be entered directly from platform 11. Terkessidis notes that it was feared that German passengers would otherwise be reminded of forced laborers and therefore could get the impression of impending war and of 'slave trade.' (Terkessidis 18–19).

9. If we turn to a dictionary for a definition of 'creole,' we learn the following: "Creole, strictly, applied in the former Spanish, French and Portuguese colonies of America, Africa and the W Indies to natives of pure European blood (as opposed to immigrants born in Europe or to coloured natives); a native, but not aboriginal or indigenous; loosely, a native of mixed blood, esp. A West Indian of mixed Spanish or French and Negro blood; applied to the native French or Spanish settlers in Louisiana (US); a colonial patois (French, Spanish, etc.), creolization: the development of a pidgin into a creole (Fr *Créole*, from Sp *criollo*, dimin of *criado* (nursling), from *criar*, literally to create, hence to bring up, nurse, from L *creāre*)" (Chambers Dictionary 384).
All translations of Biller's as well as other authors' texts are my own unless otherwise noted.

10. I borrow this phrase from Rita Bashaw (246).

11. "The Reluctant German" is an unpublished translation of the essay 'Deutscher wider Willen,' in *Deutschbuch*, 113–33, here 119. I would like to thank Traudel Jansen at Kiepenheuer & Witsch publishers in Cologne for supplying me with translations of Maxim Biller's writings, as most of these essays and short stories have not been published in English.

12. In any case, Heilbut's term 'brothers' is rather telling, if we consider that among people working in the sex trade, it is certainly 'sisters' who make up the majority.

13. "Goodbye Columbus: *Standing on the Margin*, or: On the Condition of Jewish Literature" is an unpublished translation by Silvia Tennenbaum. The German original is published as 'Goodbye, Columbus,' in *Deutschbuch*, 89–93. This essay takes its title of course from Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus*.

14. Interestingly enough, Biller has been called "A German Philip Roth." This comparison by Michael Wise from the *Jerusalem Post* can be found on the back cover of Biller's *Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin.* Tellingly, another minority writer has also been likened to an American Jewish author: Zafer Şenocak's publishers advertise their author on the sleeve of one

of his books by quoting Hans-Dieter Grünefeld, who called Şenocak the “Berliner Woody Allen.” (Şenocak, *Die Prärie.*)

15. Later, in the wake of the repressions during the McCarthy era, Mann aired his disappointment and partly revised his views on the United States.

16. Oguntoye speaks about her surprise and joy, when a woman at a flower shop, after the typical, somewhat astonished, remark “You speak German very well,” reacted to Oguntoye’s “I grew up here” with a friendly “A German girl!” Oguntoye’s retelling of this particular situation reflects gratefulness simply about the woman’s *not* questioning Oguntoye’s right to a place within society. This gratefulness highlights Oguntoye’s expectation to be confronted with the existing mainstream assumption of the simultaneity of citizenship and ethnicity. This assumption denies the very existence of Black and other Germans; hence the surprise and relief following the woman’s reaction on Oguntoye’s part.

17. This essay, originally one of Biller’s columns in the *FAZ Sonntagszeitung*, is now to be found in a volume on Fatih Akin’s 2004 film *Gegen die Wand* (released in British cinemas as *Head On*). Akin’s movie was awarded the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2004. Thereafter it was celebrated as well as accompanied by speculation whether it was actually a German or Turkish film, and on how the director, Akin, would define himself.

18. My brackets. In the German original: “Die deutsche Kultur also *ist*—das Jüdische käme hinzu.” (Dischereit 20)

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Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 181–194

The Visuality of the Other: the Place of the Migrant between Derrida's Ethics and Rancière's Aesthetics in *Calais: the Last Border*

Sudeep Dasgupta

The relationship between migrancy and human subjectivity remains a fraught one, particularly in contemporary theorizations of globalization. At one extreme, this relation installs a privileged subject of resistance through theorizations of hybridity and liminality. Here, the image of the migrant underlines the importance of mixture, catachresis, and impurity as a necessary critique of racist and exclusivist notions of identity. However, in other circumstances, which become increasingly visible in political discourse, the position of the migrant is one of painful indeterminacy, of a desire for the very stability secured by citizenship. Within this fraught field of multiple theorizations and subjective desires, much attention has been paid recently to the question of ethics, in particular the possibility of establishing an ethical relationship with the Other.

In this essay, I discuss the relationship between migrancy and visuality. I address this relationship through a close reading of Marc Isaacs' documentary film *Calais: The Last Border*. By looking at how the film actively produces Calais as the place of the migrant, I emphasize the disjunctive and conjunctive work that words and images perform. The productive doing and undoing of the relationship between word and image reconfigures the place of the migrant, and indeed of Calais. In addition, my analysis of the film will be brought into relation with two influential theoretical formulations of the bond between ethics and aesthetics. The specific place of visuality within the relationship between ethics and the Other will be at stake here. Critiquing one influential argument of the place of ethics in the relationship between migrancy and visuality, the one proposed by Jacques Derrida in *Of Hospitality*, *The Politics of Friendship*, and other works, I argue that a reformulation of aesthetics along the lines of Jacques Rancière's provides a more productive and politically revealing understanding of the stakes that are involved. The shift in focus from ethics to aesthetics that I argue for does not imply giving up ethical questions; rather, it redistributes the relationship between ethics and aesthetics by foregrounding the productive power of visuality as practice.

The Other between Word and Image

Marc Isaacs' *Calais: The Last Border*, produced in 2003, is the product of the filmmaker's desire to make a film about the people interred in the Sangatte refugee camp in Calais. By the time Isaacs made it to the city, however, the camp had already been dissolved after much rancor between the French and British governments, with the latter viewing the camp as a jumping-off point for Dover. The earlier focus on the internment camp transitioned into the broader issue of the emplacement of differentiated forms of migration. The film shows a number of people, whose status is increasingly brought into question by the relations the film sets up between them. Are they inhabitants or visitors in transit? Refugees or unwanted illegals?

Ijaz is a refugee from Kabul, whose desire to enter Britain is interrupted by his internment in Calais. The film also focuses on Tulia, for whom Calais is not a place of transit, either for the UK (her 'homeland') or for the continent: it is her home; she and her husband Les are willing residents. Steve, also an Englishman and a fellow resident of Calais, has set up home here with his young French partner and their child, and runs a bar in the city, though his hopes for financial success do not match the social comfort the couple have found in comparison to their experiences in narrow-minded England. For Steve, Calais is a home that has not welcomed him from England as he hoped it might. Peter, the Jamaican man caught between deportation and arrival in a home that has just debarred him—only two days before, Jamaicans did not require visas to enter the UK—and a group of 'unwanted' migrants who hang out on a bench by a roadside petrol station together form the fourth focus of the film. The film also includes regular British bus visitors to Calais, there to shop for cheap alcohol and cigarettes. They provide the sharpest perspective on the migrants of Calais, given their position as successful travelers, armed with the right papers, able to cross the border at will.

The relationship between the individuals in the film, and the relationship between words and images, constructs a multi-dimensional picture of the migrant, which includes different histories and motivation for migration as well settlement. They also establish changing intersubjective relations between the filmmaker, the individual on-screen, and the audience, and hence disturb a sharp distinction between us and them, society and its others. The singular Other is pluralized, so that different histories may be connected to each other without being collapsed into a singular figuration. As a result, the issues the subjects of the film struggle with become understandable to us in the audience in their plurality.

Both the content and practice of the film are marked by a process of displacement. Once example: Isaacs follows Tulia, her husband Les, and their son to an ophthalmologist, where the son is examined. Off-camera, Isaacs asks Tulia, “Do you want lots of money?” Prior to this, the film has been following Tulia as she tries to make a living through many schemes, including acting as a go-between for British visitors to Calais, who look for cheap and fast medical care across the border. “Oh, it’s rather nice to have … the problem is when you haven’t got it … when you have it you are independent,” she answers, with the nervous laugh that accompanies each moment in the film when Isaacs asks her about her financial situation. When Les breaks in to reveal that the family has not had a holiday in thirteen years, closing with “… been a bit much,” his understated emphasis is immediately countered by an affectionate riposte from Tulia, addressing him with a vigorous nodding of her head: “But we try to make our *life* a holiday.” Referring to the sea-front apartment they share, she goes on, “We pretend we’re on holiday … it’s only the palm trees missing,” again with an embarrassed laugh that is yet tinged with bravado.

The next shot is of the grey, stormy coast, the wind buffeting the boom of the camera as it records the ‘holiday’ scene she imagines. However, it is now Ijaz, not Tulia, who enters the frame. The spatial shift to the sea translates the make-believe holiday space of the coast as verbalized in the waiting room. But this visualization turns the meaning of the words around. For Ijaz, the sea is not an object of contemplation, but a barrier he wishes he could cross. “I would like to find a little boat I could drive myself,” he tells Isaacs, after the latter has been trying to make conversation about the cliffs that are barely visible on the other side of the water. “Very dangerous,” murmurs the filmmaker, to which Ijaz replies, “Yes, it is very dangerous, but what can I do? I want to go to England … maybe too much danger for my life but … .” The segment ends mid-sentence.

The transfer from the words spoken in the waiting room to the image of the sea is a translation at the level of cinematic form. Yet, at the level of meaning, the imagery does not match the words. For Tulia, the sea is a make-believe element of the game of making life a holiday, her attempt to cheer up her silent, unhappy husband. This bravado, which recurs throughout the film, and works to underline the precariousness of her situation, is matched by the avowed desperation of Ijaz when word does become image. For him, the sea can never be a holiday, make-believe or not; rather, it is an obstacle, which he dreams he can cross with a “little boat” in his desperation to get to the “only one place in the world I can be given a safe life, I think. Its name is England.” From the entrance to the Chunnel to shots of the sea, the points of departure and arrival of Calais cut through the individual segments of the film. Or rather, these shots cut and join, cutting the previous segments and joining them to the next. Visualizations of points of transfer, accompanied by silence, background noise, and jerky sounds of an accordion, they often reconfigure one person’s loss as the other’s hoped for gain, and yet another’s escape. The escape, arrival, and loss are often different: the homes conjured up in speech are alternately Kabul, Calais, England, and Maidstone, depending on who is talking.

The specificity of each person's situation develops in the film through the changing relationship between Isaacs and those he is filming. The filmmaker's growing attachment to Ijaz culminates in a painful hug that moves off-screen, as Isaacs, camera in hand, clasps Ijaz—whose conviviality at the start of the film has turned to despair and tears—for the last time. In a light-hearted episode earlier in the film, Ijaz, along with his 'neighbors' are trying on different winter caps at a charity. He keeps asking for Isaacs' reaction to every hat he puts onto his head, and he replies jokingly that each one is either "too tight" or "too loose." These episodes between Isaacs and Ijaz, as well as with Tulia and Steve, are marked by a repartee that is always contradictory: banter in a charity shop, cautious questioning of a desperate seventy-something business-woman, inquiries to an English exile who puts on a brave face as his bar stays empty. The spatial boundaries of Calais, with its shared entry and exit points of sea, tunnel, and highway, encompass not just Ijaz, the refugee Isaacs wanted to film as part of the Sangatte media furore, but also Steve, fleeing an England where he cannot get the financial credit to start a business, nor live openly with his French girlfriend Kathy, as well as Tulia.

In Tulia's case, the changing relationship between her, Isaacs, and the audience is more dramatic. Her first appearance occurs when she and Les visit Steve, whose bar, *The Zoo*, is failing to attract the English customers who come to Calais to buy cheap alcohol. As Tulia offers her marketing skills to Steve, primarily through internet advertising, the first thing that struck me when I saw the film at home on video, was her appearance. Her dyed-black coiffure tops a heavily painted face with thick lipstick and painted eyes. Her large body is hidden by a flowing and brilliantly printed dress. When I saw the documentary again at a film festival screening in Amsterdam, the audience broke into sniggers and laughs at the first sight of her, which was repeated nearly every time she reappeared. Gradually, however, and with increasing embarrassment as the film progressed, all the audience laughter disappeared. Not, I suspect, because the viewers had by now become familiar with her dramatic appearance, but because of the connection that had gradually emerged between her story, that of Ijaz, Steve, and Peter.

Midway through the film, in a conversation with Isaacs, Tulia notes that "the white cliffs of Dover brings back good memories, but also sad memories." The contradiction marks an important transition in Tulia's. She recounts being interred at age nine in a camp in Spain during the Second World War, as well her escape and attempt to find the mother from whom she had been separated. She is caught again, and never finds her mother. By now, the laughter , both hers and ours, has gone. The camera suddenly cuts to seagulls wheeling over the grey beach at Calais as Ijaz stands on the sand, not speaking. Isaacs asks Ijaz what his mother looks like, and whether he has a photograph of her. But he has lost his mother in Kabul, and her image, the only photograph he had of her, on his way to Calais. The earlier contradiction between speech and image in the transition from Tulia to Ijaz is now an overlap, a jump cut that is not quite a jump in terms of content, merely in space and time. Unlike the word 'beach,' which was accompanied by a visual reference that belied its holiday connotation, the word 'mother' now brings up no image for either Tulia, Isaacs, Ijaz, or us. Tulia's appearance, provoking laughter earlier on, is now received with an uncomfortable silence marked by sadness and embarrassment.

In these two fragments, we see a continuous reconfiguring of Calais as space. Its borders are drawn and redrawn through the same points (the beach, the tunnel, the street, the home), each of which are rendered in speech, in imagery, or both. The meaning of these shared points changes depending on the perspective of those who are speaking, as well as on the filmmaker's interventions in threading often incommensurable images together with spoken words. The lines drawn across these contradictory but simultaneous points entangle us as viewers, setting up a relationship between us and the people on the screen. In what follows, I will attempt to elaborate on this relationship in terms of Derrida's work on hostility and hospitality, and the question of ethics as the question of, from, and to the foreigner.[1]

A Visual Ethics of Entanglement

What ethical relationship between host and migrant, self and other, does the film present as it plots the place of the migrant? None of the film's subjects are hosts; all of them, including the filmmaker, are foreigners on French soil in one way or the other. In this sense, the film does not put the host into question but questions all of us, as foreigners. This is not to imply that France and England go scot-free. For, the nation-state is the structuring absent presence that pervades every space and every situation in which the subjects are caught: Ijaz, thrown out on the street after the closing of Sangatte; Tulia and Les, waiting for the bailiffs to claim their house at the end of the film; Steve, whose bar will be taken over by the bank; Peter and the other foreigners, all denied access to Britain. Paradoxically, the ethical responsibility of the state remains invisible while the ethical relationships of the people on screen are made visible to us, the viewers.

In the last scene, where we say goodbye to Ijaz, Isaacs notes: "You seem very sad today." "Yes sir, it's a refugee's life," Ijaz replies. "Maybe we will not see each other again?" asks Isaacs. "I am going to try … but security …" murmurs Ijaz. "Maybe we should say goodbye. Take care," we hear Isaacs' voice off-screen. "Thank you. Please pray for me, because I don't have anyone," says Ijaz, who now appears very close on-screen and disappears to the left as the two men hug. The film makes explicit the frustrating connection that Isaacs establishes with Ijaz. In practical terms, Isaacs fails to do anything to get Ijaz across the water. Nevertheless, the shot of the hug once more places the viewer in the position of the filmmaker, as we momentarily share his line of vision. This co-presence of ethical involvement and frustration pervades the film. It is ethical to the extent that the film sets up no objective and distanced relationship between Ijaz and Isaacs. We never hear Isaacs asking Ijaz to talk about his past (details of a rocket attack in Kabul appear in the subtitles); it is the present, the situation that Ijaz is in now, that the film registers in the constant interaction between the filmmaker and his protagonist.

In Tulia and Les' case, in a closing interview at their home, dialogue and camera movement establish a relationship between filmmaker, audience, and protagonists that is, at the same time, disturbing, respectful, and engaged. As Tulia and Les have been declared bankrupt and await the bailiffs, Isaacs asks them, "So what's going to happen if you don't pay this bank loan?" Tulia responds, "The banks have all the cards, we have none … let's put it another way … Don't want to end up another refugee … had that once in my life," followed by the familiar embarrassed laugh. When asked what she would do, for the first time in the film, she explicitly defers to Les, to whom the camera now turns. He says, "The last thing we would do … an overdose." Isaacs' voice cuts in: "Oh, come on! Be serious. No … you wouldn't do that. You can't do that." Once again, his own engagement with their situation, as well as ours through him, is made explicit. Her voice breaking, Tulia says, "The days of fighting back are over …" Rather than zoom in on her crying face, the camera quickly turns to the parrot in its cage, which has suddenly started whispering something unintelligible. "You can do it … you're too much of a fighter," Isaacs encourages her. "No, it's not that, Marc," replies Tulia—the first time we hear the filmmaker's first name.

Les' reference to suicide, and the explicit connection of the couple's situation to that of refugees, pitch Isaacs and his viewers over the threshold from the bravado of the surviving Tulia into her despair in the face of the failure of her attempts to keep her head above water. Despite her best efforts, the demand of solvency of the state now threatens her with homelessness. Again, Isaacs' repeated attempts to bolster her, and to remind her of what a 'fighter' she is, mark Isaacs' unwillingness to see the couple go over the edge. This metaphorical unwillingness becomes literal as the camera refuses to focus on Tulia's face. Like Ijaz, whose face disappears off-screen when he hugs Isaacs, Tulia also disappears off-screen, but now not so much because of the physical proximity of a hug, but through the deliberate swerving of the camera to the talking yet incomprehensible parrot.

Despite the hopeless situations of the people the film records, it also imparts them with a sense of dignity. In even the most desperate situations, humor is in evidence. In the last attempt to forge an ethical relationship beyond the calculating logic of the political state, Ernesta is trying to take a bus back to Lithuania, her attempt at entering England having failed. Peter, the Jamaican who hangs out at the bench by the petrol station, together with the rest of the foreigners, asks her, "You think I could get a wife in Lithuania? Take her back to Jamaica … to the sunshine." Ernesta replies, "My dream … to go back home," her voice breaking, as she fights back tears with a smile on her face. "Okay, okay … all right man … don't worry man … I give you my address, you write to me in Jamaica?" asks Peter, calming her down and changing the subject. A Polish bus arrives, but Ernesta does not have enough money to buy a ticket. Her frustration is evident. Unable to speak Polish to the driver, she keeps asking "How much? How much money?" in English. A woman passenger translates for her, and then pays the twenty euros that Ernesta needs. The generosity of the woman is the only ethical act, without demand, which has a concrete result, that the film documents. Yet, the money is given to her for her journey back to Lithuania, and not for the home in England, where Ernesta wanted to go. Also, the presence of the camera is very much part of the situation, and perhaps of its resolution, too. For, Ernesta turns to the camera with a tearful smile, repeating "Thank you," before she pushes her small bag into the cargo-load.

In these three situations, the ethical relationships set up through the intervention of the film as it constructs lines of connection between the participants, both off and on-screen, involves either mediation (Ernesta), awkward evasion and direct involvement (Tulia and Les), and helpless affection (Ijaz). All are private acts of hospitality in the face of an unseen hostility. In the numerous snatches of conversation Isaacs has with the English visitors to Calais, we do occasionally see and hear vitriolic hostility. A man at the fish and chips bus shop comments off-camera: "It's terrible … they are just taking over the country." His wife comments that she knows all about it. "They are living in luxury," she complains, as the man parodies an Indian accent and says with much head nodding, "It's a very good idea I am having … we British must stick together," and they laugh. She goes on, "Nobody thinks there must be another Holocaust … but there has to be a cut-off point." The words stand in stark contrast to the encounters we have seen in the film, and stand out precisely because they have derisory and hate-fuelled undertones. What is obvious from the accents and the buses that bring the English to Calais is that the speakers are of working-class origin, often from the Midlands. Without their words becoming any less objectionable, what frequently emerges from the populist xenophobia they espouse is that they are repeating the phraseology of the media (I do not mean just the tabloid press like *The Sun*) and the state.

The question of class and the articulation of a state-centered xenophobia combined with economic deprivation, as well as its displacement on the 'immigrant question'—these factors preclude us, as viewers, from making clear-cut separations between them, the racists, and us, the ethically motivated and interested viewers. In a discussion between the public and Isaacs after a screening in Amsterdam in 2004 and, in my own private conversations with Isaacs, he underlined that all the people he met from the buses were working-class, only in Calais to buy cheap alcohol, and that they were hardly representatives of an elite section of English society. My point is simply that to direct criticism at the English shoppers is to be not merely shortsighted, but also politically dangerous. Without ignoring their xenophobia and rhetorically qualified repudiation of genocide, these remarks need to be related to the absent presence of an unjust state, whose laws are coded through the language of race and class, as well as the role of the press in perpetuating xenophobia. Through its audio-visual aspects, as well through the relationships it sets up between the subjects on-screen, the filmmaker and the viewers, the film productively presents different forms of ethical relationality with differentiated others.

Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Place of Visuality

In *Of Hospitality,* Derrida convincingly argues that the Other, when made subject to the Law, is required to state his truth and identity to provide the information that establishes his status in relation to the host whom the law protects. Derrida distinguishes between Law, the inscription of ethics in the realm of the state, and Justice, acknowledging a thoroughly open and risky relationship between self and what he terms the 'Absolute Other' (*Gift of Death* passim). The translation between the Other as subject of Law and the Absolute Other as the non-Subject of Justice sets in motion a violence that is visited on the foreigner [*étranger/xenos*]. This violence transforms the possibility of an ethical relationship to the migrant into a discourse of hospitality that is inscribed in the restricting Law of the state. Through this inscription, the migrant is converted into a constrained Other, rather than Absolute Other.

Extending Derrida's argument, Mireille Rosello argues that the violent act of turning the Absolute Other into the subject of the Law (rather than Justice) is exacerbated when the migrant is figured in social discourse as a 'guest.' Translating migrant into guest, she asserts, the status of the migrant is made fully dependant on the generosity of the host. This spurious transition erases the legally founded rights that accrue to the immigrant and figures the relationship between citizen and immigrant as one of generosity on the former's part toward the *arrivée*. This sets into motion a series of legally binding restrictions on the migrant subject who, in Derrida's reading of Socrates, becomes "not a being" (*Of Hospitality* 7). Countering first of all the translation of Justice into Law, Absolute Other into Other, and then the secondary forms of translation that disable a truly ethical relationship to the Other, Derrida develops the possibility of a non-appropriative and non-violent relationship to the Other. This analysis is grounded on a particular understanding of the place of visuality in Derrida's work.

The "photology" he develops in *The Gift of Death* (100) broaches the relationship between visuality and an ethical relation to the Other. What is the role of visuality in thinking of the migrant as Other? Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence has relevance here. He has insistently stressed that the gap between Justice and the Law, Absolute Other and Other, is founded on the impossibility of a full knowledge of the Other. The epistemology of sight, the theory of knowledge that privileges vision, is one of the ways in which the violence of the Law converts the possibility of an ethical relationship with the Absolute Other into a confining control *over* the Other by the State. Seeing the Other, and assigning him a ‘proper’ place in the confines of a host-guest relationship, Derrida argues, undermines the possibility of a non-violent and non-appropriative relationship. This violence is partly predicated on the propriety that is involved in emplacing the Other in its proper place. For, what role is there for the self-definition of the Other, apart from the protocols of categorization that exist within the geopolitics of migration? How may the privileging of sight—from the X-rayed bones of underage immigrants to electronic ID cards—sequestrate the multiple identifications of the migrant? The making present of the Other through sight, through what Martin Jay calls ‘phallagocularcentrism’ (493), thus becomes the target of Derrida’s deconstructive critique.

To counteract the imprisoning truth of the Other through vision, Derrida develops a deconstructive argument in *The Gift of Death*, in which sight is not altogether annulled from the relationship between self and other, while its potential for establishing knowledge is yet undermined. This occurs through a topology of inside and outside, in which the potential of the seeing subject is subverted by another set of ‘eyes’ *within* the subject (host). With clear affinities to a psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious that undermines the pretension of the knowing subject, Derrida suggests that the location of sight in the relation between self and other must be displaced: from the eyes of the self who views the Other to the eyes *within* the subject, which the subject cannot see or know. The eye of the I is located inside the I, Derrida argues, yet unbeknownst to the I. The specular relationship between the subject and other is thus thwarted from becoming a violent, inhospitable, and hostile one, as the eye within the self sees what the self can neither see nor control. Hence, the self is undermined in its attempt to transfix the Other, to see it, know it. This thwarting is ethical for Derrida, because it prevents any transfixing of the Other in a specular theory of knowledge.

For Derrida, to make the Other the object of the eye is precisely to identify and objectify him, to calculate his value within the regime of the Law.[2] The analysis of *Calais* that I have proposed above critically responds to Derrida’s suspicion of vision by foregrounding the productivity of visuality as the practice of thinking the relation to the Other. Derrida’s suspicion of vision can be productively compared and contrasted with the place of the aesthetic in Jacques Rancière’s theorization of the demarcation between self and other. If, to Derrida, visuality establishes a troublesome, if not violent, relationship to the Other, then how can Rancière’s notion of an ‘aesthetic regime’ develop an argument where visuality may become part and parcel of broader reconfiguration of the senses, including vision, as well as of community? For Rancière, the aesthetic regime is both artistic and political: it establishes a particular relationship between art as doing and making, and the locations of belonging and non-belonging in which groups are emplaced within a political community. In his recent work on the relationship between aesthetics and politics, Rancière argues that, by granting legitimacy to forms of life and to subjects hitherto considered not worthy of artistic attention, the aesthetic regime of art makes unauthorized connections, violates existing boundaries, and questions the legitimacy of a prior "partition [*partage*] of the sensible" (*Politics of Aesthetics* 32). "[T]he aesthetic regime of the arts," he observes, ultimately "frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter and genres" (23). The aesthetic regime "shifts the focus from great names and events to the life of the anonymous … it finds symptoms of an epoch, a society, or a civilization in the minute details of everyday life" (33).

For Rancière, aesthetics is understood as aesthetic practices, as "forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they 'do' and 'make' from the standpoint of what is common [*partage*] to the community" (13). Under the aesthetic regime, visuality becomes one of the fields within which "artistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility"(13). Film-making, as artistic practice, can hence be seen as an aesthetics of making visible and audible the world of those who do not warrant priority in regimes of art other than the aesthetic regime, because of the "minute details of [their] everyday life," and their lowly status in social and artistic hierarchies (33). By redrawing relationships between individuals and groups set up as others, and by employing forms of visibility that produce these relationships, *Calais*, as I have tried to demonstrate, becomes an instance of the ways in which Rancière's aesthetics underlines the transformative power of vision within the relationship between self and other, unlike the ethical turn along the lines of Derrida's argument, which tends to denigrate vision. This redistribution of the sensible is political to the extent that it questions established notions of, Ranciére writes, "who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time" (13).

The experience of watching *Calais* is one of witnessing, as well as of actively relating to, a specific redistribution of space and time, in which a particular visible figuration of migrancy is allowed to emerge. Unlike Derrida's limiting of visuality to a violent and non-ethical relation to the Other, the film produces forms of visibility that generate a differentiated figuration of the migrant in relation to others within a replotted social space. Through the everyday, though not ordinary, details of the people living in Calais, the symptoms of a social order that constructs a violent and 'proper' distribution of spaces—nation-state, border, camp—are given visibility. The film's disjunctive threading of dialogue and imagery, both specific to the medium, has a political stake in that it disturbs the meaning of the designation 'migrant' by both pluralizing the term across different individuals, and by establishing relationships between them and us through its configuring of space and time into alternative constellations.

In *Cause of the Other*, Rancière analyzes how politics, visuality, and the other were articulated and rearticulated in the relationship between Algeria and France after October 17th, 1961. The invisible bodies of those who were murdered by the French state made visible, and then 'dis-articulated,' the relationship between French citizens and the state that claimed to represent them. The field of the visible was repartitioned after those events, and the borders demarcating the difference between France and Algeria were redrawn through the bodies of those who disappeared into the zone of the invisible and the news blackout. Bodies, visuality, and borders combine and recombine to question the space of the political or, to be more precise, the spatial ordering of political subjects.

At the moment when the end of the 'myths' of class struggle and other such *grand récits* have been announced, and when the visibility of a gap within society has supposedly been erased, Rancière observes "the abrupt reappearance in the real of an otherness" and a "fixation on a radical otherness, an object of absolute, prepolitical hate" (*Disagreement* 119). By purporting to act in the interests of justice or peace, the state separates the good from the bad foreigner, and "subsumes in a conceptual unity" the "heterogeneous cases of the other's unacceptability" (120). *Calais* questions the contemporary form of European 'community,' and produces forms of visibility that interrupt the falsely unified and simplified figure of otherness that shores it up. The aesthetics of film-making and film viewing can thus enable a disturbance in the demarcation of space between us and them, making visible the heterogeneity "that constitutes the untraceable object 'immigrant' "(121). If the political space of our supposedly post-political society depends on the radical otherness of the faceless Other, then what aesthetic and political practices might help us to seek out, as Rancière writes, "a moment when the ethical aporia of the relationship between 'mine' and the other [is] transformed into the political subjectivation of an inclusive relationship with alterity" (*Disagreement* 28)?

Calais, as I have argued above, produces just such an inclusive relationship between Self and Other, through its plotting of the place of the migrant in a shifting manner through the resources of film-making. In the same manner as the missing bodies of October 17th, 1961 redrew the borders of the relationship between French citizens and the state, *Calais*, in a completely different situation, redraws the meaning of the word 'border' as well as the relationship between 'mine' and Other through the connections that the film makes visible and audible. By forging connections through the concrete sensuality of the film, an embodiment of thought as relational analysis and speculative critique takes place that hinges on the disjunctive relations between specific words and images. Words that lack an image, like 'mother'; words that link images with opposite connotations, like 'escape'; and words that have no present referent, like 'home'—all make possible a politics of intersection, of connections and disconnections. Is it possible to imagine a close relationship between one specific situation, Tulia tottering on the brink of economic collapse, and another, Ijaz' arrested desire between the highway and the sea?

Rancière argues that the consensual forms of democracy in our post-political age, itself an ideological term, construes an Absolute Other that erases specificity. *Calais*, it seems to me, not only gives a particular specificity to the Absolute Other (I refer here to Derrida's term), but by linking, through difference, and by making relations between numerous others in the space of the border, suggests the thinking of a politics of 'being-together' rather than the aporetic ethics of the unnamable Other. Concretely 'dis-articulating,' as Rancière theorizes, the existing political partitioning of social space, Isaacs' documentary makes visible what waiting-in-the-border means. It does not deny difference, since all subjects of the film experience the waiting-in-the-border differently; yet, it establishes an embodiment of their being-together in the space of the border. The place of the border, then, becomes the space for a repartitioning of the xenophobic discourse that sharply distinguishes between self and other by establishing a 'being-together' during the process of waiting within it.

The productive power of visuality as political rearticulation of the subject's relation to the (national or supra-national) state reorients the discussion of ethics. If the ethical is what bears an uneasy and often distanced relation to the force of the Law of the state, the aesthetic makes visible another plotting of the border between those secured the rights of domicile, in their contingency, and those left, like garbage, along the highways and bus stations of the boundaries of the state. By forging that connection, *Calais* necessarily situates those viewing the film in a different position: no longer as the paranoid subject who gazes at Calais as Sangatte, as camp, as the inevitable place of the Other, but as a 'migratory setting' articulating a relational, shifting, and inclusive relation between numerous Others. Like Rancière, the aesthetics of the film eschews the either-or division between visibility and invisibility. It suggests visuality as the possibly productive dimension of a broader domain, where the distribution of the sensible links the question of ethics to politics. Aesthetics becomes the mode through which the ethics and politics of hospitality are rendered sensible across the violence of translation.[3] In the counter-intuitive experience of viewing the linkages made by the film, within the plotted and replotted space of Calais, the question of the Other is not the question of absolute ethical alterity, but of an inclusive political articulation.

Notes

1. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*.

2. Politics and the police "demand the blessing of visibility and daylight" (Derrida, *Hospitality* 57). This invasion of the private space of the home and its secrets (ethical acts outside the bounds of laws) become the warrant for the claim that visibility itself becomes the ontological condition of possibility for the unethical treatment of the Other.

3. The distance between Derrida's wariness of visuality in relation to the question of the Other and Rancière's valuation of the power of visuality to disrupt the hegemonic ordering of the space of the political is evident here. For a book-length discussion of the productive power of visuality, see Rancière's *Film Fables*.

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Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 195–208

The Other's Intrusion: Claire Denis' *L'intrus*

Wim Staat

Picture an elderly white man in a Polynesian beach cabin. The movie camera registers palm trees, clear blue water, and sandy beaches. These seem the conditions of luxurious retirement. In this film, however, exotic surroundings do not provide the protagonist with the comforts of a tourist resort. In fact, the man would likely consider himself less a tourist than a traveler. His wanderings are purposeful; the stakes are high. He may consider himself a soul searcher, attempting to migrate from the familiarity of his home toward a landscape in which a new identity can be imagined. He may want to invest in dreams of a new life. But there will be no payoff. Picture no romantic reward. He will be shown destitute, unable to author his own life. His dreams will be nightmares, his imagined migrations haunted by sleeplessness. In the real places of his travels, our protagonist will be confined to his bed. Is this a migratory setting? This essay will argue that the bed is indeed a real place of imaginative migration. I claim that the imagined identity of the protagonist is real and inescapable for him. Yet, the protagonist will not be the originating subject of his own imaginings.

L'intrus is a 2004 film by French director Claire Denis.[1] *L'intrus* is also a small book by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, published in 2000. The book was the inspiration for the film, and was credited as such in the end titles. In interviews and Q and A sessions after screenings, Denis has avoided going into much detail about how close (or not) the film is to the book. I focus on the film; yet, I will also read some of Nancy's passages closely. My reading of Nancy's text, however, serves the purpose of coming to grips with the aesthetics of the film. In any case, both film and book are about an older man who suffers from a heart condition serious enough to necessitate a heart transplant: *l'intrus* [*the intruder*]. The new heart warrants a second lease on life, yet causes problems of its own. The book is more elaborate concerning the medication required to undermine the powers of the body's immune system, otherwise able to reject the new heart. In the film, the probability of corporeal rejection enters into the plot fairly late. Moreover, the film does not address the cancer that is caused by the incapacitation of the immune system.

Both film and book, however, explore the metaphorical qualities of the heart transplant that intrudes upon what once was one and whole. The intruder is personified and made into a foreigner, although the film is more explicit at times in making the intruder a migrant, who crosses borders. Occasionally, in the darkness of the mountain landscape, people with suitcases cross the protagonist's path. Gradually, though, it will be the protagonist himself for whom the heart transplant will imply a change of identity, making *him* the stranger in this film. Even though the book is often philosophically more abstract in comparison with the particularity of *this* specific actor in *these* specific settings, as required by the film medium, in one sense the book is more factual and personal than the film: the book is about the heart transplant that the author Jean-Luc Nancy endured nearly ten years before writing about it. The film, on the other hand, is a work of fiction, and Denis has never made it a secret that she is less interested in the philosophical implications of a heart transplant than in the narrative possibilities that Nancy's book has to offer.[2] But, then again, Nancy's text is not a philosophical treatise either; it is a personal, sometimes poetic account of suffering.

Real Dreams

Even before the first titles, Denis' film begins with a warning by Yekaterina Golubeva's character: "your worst enemies are hidden inside, in the shadow, in your heart." This voice-over seems addressed to the film's protagonist, Louis Trebor (Michel Subor), a man in his sixties who undergoes a heart transplant. Denis does not ease any process of viewer identification with the main character; remarkably, Trebor is presented as a somewhat unsympathetic loner. Moreover, Louis' motivations are seldom articulated. The viewer is often at a loss in the attempt to construct a story out of the plot. Many questions remain unanswered, the significance of many scenes ambiguous. What is clear, is that Louis lives in a mountainous area of France, close to the Swiss border, and that he appears to be a man of nature, hiking and biking the hills, often accompanied by his two white huskies. Heart problems become apparent during a mountain lake swim. Recuperating on the lakeshore, Louis learns that he is being watched, a recurring theme throughout the film. Louis is estranged from his son Sidney (Grégoire Colin), who lives in a nearby town with his wife and two small children. Louis' lover, the town's pharmacist, pays him an occasional visit. Louis' neighbor, quite a distance away from his mountain house, is a dog breeder (Béatrice Dalle). For the depiction of Louis' home, the film is set in the French-Swiss Jura border region. Away from home, settings include Geneva, Pusan (Korea), and Polynesia.

Golubeva's character is one of two particularly elusive characters in the film, the other being 'la sauvageonne' ['the wilderness child'; also, 'natural stock plant or tree used as a base for grafting'], played by Lolita Chammah. Golubeva is 'the young Russian woman,' who functions as an intermediary between Louis and a group of illegal Eastern European organ suppliers. When Louis pays her off in a Genevan hotel room, he tells her that he wants a young male heart. Their dialogue is brief and to the point; nevertheless, it is the most extensive conversation the two will have, even though the young Russian woman is the only character, besides Louis, who is present in all settings of the film.

Other than in the Genevan hotel room, she is a haunting omnipresence for Louis, a harrowing angel of doom visiting him in his dreams and wanderings. She is often present as a silent observer of Louis' actions, as in the scene that lets the viewer know Louis' name. On the street, so-called 'nature man' Louis is spotted by who appear to be his son and his son's wife. The couple is in the company of their two small children, Louis' grandchildren. He pays casual attention to the baby and asks, apparently just to make conversation: "and this, this is a girl?" The baby's mother informs Louis that this baby actually is a boy and was, in fact, named after him: Louis. Louis' embarrassment is shown in point-of-view shots from the perspective of Golubeva's character in a side-street bar.

Through her, it is as though we are spying on him; and with her, we find out about the character traits Louis has to pay for later in the film. In these early scenes, then, before introducing us to the dubious affairs surrounding the transplant, Denis does not allow us to sympathize with Louis. She avoids presenting him as a convivial family man, and ensures that we observe his behavior more than empathize with his feelings. In Denis' own words: "Really, I think Trebor is not a pleasant guy and this is important, not to feel compassion for him" (Denis in Smith, unpaginated).

Louis Trebor is a character we recognize by observing his demeanor. And yet, we appear to have access to his innermost feelings. The film has been characterized as being told in a dreamlike fashion,[3] and Denis explains that she "wanted each image to convey a sense that it was generated by [Louis'] mind" (Smith, unpaginated). We, as viewers, do not live through what Louis experiences by identifying ourselves with him; rather, precisely by keeping our observer's point of view, we penetrate his thoughts and dreams.[4]

Two dream sequences stand out. The young Russian woman is present in both. What we could provisionally call the second dream sequence, roughly forty-six minutes into the film, is inserted between the payoff hotel in Geneva and another hotel room, likely situated in Pusan. Louis' wake-up bed is located in a different hotel, on a different continent, which means that the screen time of the dream sequences hides a time jump in the story. Moreover, when Louis wakes up, he has a different heart. What we do not actually see, therefore, is Louis actively traveling to Asia, and preparing himself to receive his new heart. Nor do we see the surgeon actually performing the transplantation.

Remarkably, the last activity shown before Louis wakes up in Pusan, is what he does before going back to his hotel in Geneva: the purchase of an expensive timepiece from a white-gloved jeweler. The newly acquired watch, however, is not shown to measure accurately the time it requires to undergo the 'change of heart.' What time does it take to go to sleep in Geneva and wake up in Pusan? What time does it take to have a dream in-between? Concretely, a heart-change operation has a specific duration; a change of heart as indicative of a change of mind or, more to the point, a change of identity, cannot be measured in the same way.

The dream sequence: a body in a snow-covered landscape is dragged through snow and ice by two fierce horsemen, strapped with ropes to its ankles, dangerously close to being ripped apart by the galloping horses. One can recognize the foothills in the French-Swiss Jura border region, but no building, no marker in the landscape confirms this identification. Instead, the sound of galloping horses before we can see them, the editing, the indistinct landscape, the postponement of showing that the horses actually are dragging something, all conspire to cause a loss of orientation. Recognition, eventually, comes from a familiar face. One of the horsemen proves to be the young Russian woman, Golubeva. She dismounts and checks the dragged body, releasing the ankles. Only then we recognize the body: it is Louis. "I've already paid," he says in Russian, to which the Golubeva character responds: "you can never pay enough."

This dream sequence actually is the second one in the film. It entails an overstimulation of the senses: blinding light, disorienting sounds, and sensorial overload. It comprises an intense metaphorical portrayal of the experience of intrusion that is inherent in a surgical operation. Nancy describes it as *béance*: "It is not that they opened me wide [*béant*] in order to change my heart. It is rather that this gaping open [*béance*] cannot be closed … I am closed open. There is in fact an opening through which passes a stream of unremitting strangeness" (Nancy 10).[5] Entering the twilight realm of the donor trade apparently results in corporeal payback. We do not see Louis being opened wide by surgical instruments; the scene in the film marks, but does not show the time involved in the surgical operation. Only after this sequence, Louis is scarred on his chest. Hence, corresponding to Nancy's quoted description of being closed open, the film does not show the operation itself; it shows Louis' *béance*, his personal vulnerability to the stranger's intrusion.

This sequence has in common with the first dream sequence that we are not entirely certain about Louis being asleep when having the dream. Could he be dreaming while being awake? Is, perhaps, the camera penetrating the realm of Louis' mindscapes and establishing for us what Louis is facing? In the first dream sequence (twenty-two minutes into the film), Louis is presented to us as markedly awake. At home in his mountain cabin, Louis gets out of the bed at night to take his medication.

Louis' dogs are uneasy. Louis' lover, left behind in bed, also wakes up. Something or someone has disturbed the peace: a young woman, *la sauvageonne*, the wild one, recognizable as the woman whom Louis observed through his binoculars during the afternoon. Is she an intruder now, trespassing into Louis' home?

A brief sequence of tightly edited shots, mostly low-key, blue-lit close-ups, lasting only eight seconds in total, cues us toward believing that we have just witnessed Louis violently stabbing and killing *la sauvageonne*. Among the close ups are a light-reflecting blade, only a few frames long, and a longer extreme close-up of a bewildered Louis staring frantically into the lens. Our suspicions are confirmed by a longer sequence after we have seen a few shots of the Golubeva character watching Louis from outside his home. Next we see Louis cleaning his bloody hands and knife. Only after this cleansing Louis returns to bed, to go to sleep beside his lover. As in a Kuleshov montage experiment, we wonder: is there an expression on the lover's face; is she stupefied?[6] Was this a dream, or did it really happen?

It has been suggested that Jean-Luc Nancy's new heart belonged to a young woman. Nancy ponders the possibility briefly (8, 12) and, in a footnote, refers to Sylvie Blocher's drawing "Jean-Luc with a Woman's Heart." In the film, Louis explicitly wishes to exclude the possibility of a woman's heart, but this is *after* the nightmarish murder scene. Hence, Louis' demand appears to be the denial of what may, in fact, be a real possibility: a young woman, *la sauvageonne*, may have died for Louis to live. Even before the actual surgery, presumably in Asia, the graft donor seems present in Louis' dreams. The forewarning in the second dream that Louis will never have paid enough may well refer to Louis' experience of taking the life of the young woman, his implication in the inescapability of her death. The young woman intruding into the familiarity of Louis' home, getting killed by him, would then be a necessary aspect of his acknowledgment that, without her heart, he would have died. The burial scene that follows, in which a priest announces a second death in fire and sulfuric vapors for the unfaithful, liars, and murderers, seems directed at Louis. He will receive what is coming to him, even though there was no alternative for what he has done.

Louis has failed to comply with the norms of moral correctness, which prescribe, as Nancy writes, "that one receives the stranger by effacing his strangeness at the threshold" (2). Nancy is interested here in the paradoxical effect of welcoming the stranger, for Louis *la sauvageonne*. If he were to have welcomed the stranger into the intimacy of his home, *la sauvegeonne* would have ceased being a stranger. Once she crossed the threshold, she would have lost her strangeness and become a guest, not a stranger. Later in the film, though not necessarily later in the story, we see *la sauvageonne* breaking into Louis' home. Presenting her intrusion as burglary keeps her presence in his home strange, for now. Nevertheless, Louis must allow her heart to intrude into his body, so that the strangeness of her heart is changed into what is most familiar for him. And yet, his literal incorporation of her does not make *la sauvageonne* disappear without a trace. Within Louis' limited hospitality, her effacement will not be complete. In the film, for Louis it is impossible, as described by Nancy, "to exclude all intrusion in the coming of the stranger, the foreign" (1).

Hospitality and Hostility

In other words, Louis does not naturalize the intrusion that grants him life. Instead, he responds to the intruder's foreignness without taking her foreignness away. In his nightmarish recollections of her, there is no warm welcome: his response means violence. These haunting dreams form Louis' understanding of what Jacques Derrida, in "Hostipitality," calls the "law of hospitality which violently imposes a contradiction on the very concept of hospitality in fixing a limit to it" (4). Hostility is incorporated into hospitality. Louis confronts the inevitability of allowing the intrusion of the other to continue to be intrusive, which implies letting her disturbing entrance remain a persistent "perturbation of [his] intimacy" (Nancy 2). Her death is felt as his infinite responsibility, for which he can never pay enough. This is how the physical pain of *béance* is complicated by guilt. It is how Louis' *béance* is deepened.

In the words of Emmanual Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, "Death, source of all myths, is present only in the Other, and only in [her] does it summon me urgently to my final essence, to my responsibility" (179). Levinas argues that the vulnerability of the other, presented to us by the destituteness and nudity of the other's face, ethically cannot be affected by murder, because "murder still aims at a sensible datum" (198). The other, Levinas continues,

> *opposes to me not a greater force, an energy assessable …, not some superlative of power, but precisely the infinity of his transcendence. This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial expression, is the first word: 'you shall not commit murder.' (*Totality and Infinity *199)*

The confrontation with his own mortality that is evoked by Louis' imminent heart failure, is rendered secondary to his responsibility for the death of *la sauvageonne*.

In the film, the face of *la sauvageonne* cannot be effaced. Louis' nightmares are primordial. He dreams the answer to the key question with which Theodore de Boer summarizes Levinas' controversial position within the tradition of phenomenology: "Is man primarily present to himself … or is he face to face with the other from the very beginning … and only in the second place (by abstraction) a self-consciousness?" (92). Louis is summoned before he is able to confirm his self-sameness. By being the host to the intruder in this way, that is, by being unable, willingly or not, to prevent the other from intruding, "nothing other than ipseity itself" is at stake, Derrida writes (15). Indeed, the identity of the self [*ipse*] is second to the haunting face of the other.

De Boer explains that this is Levinas' way to convince us of the reality of the external world. First, Levinas reminds us, as De Boer writes, that "since Descartes, philosophy has been haunted by the idea that the world is a dream and that one's fellow men are a mirage" (99). Levinas takes the recurrence of the dream seriously, not to exorcize its haunting, but to acknowledge from the resisting recurrence of skepticism that, given time, the thinking subject cannot sustain his *ipse* in and through his hold over the existence of the exterior world. Instead, "the only resistance firm enough to convince us of real exteriority is the face of the other" (De Boer 99). To this exteriority, self-consciousness is secondary. This exteriority cannot be killed.

In *L'intrus*, Louis does not die either, although he does become a stranger himself. In the book, this becoming-strange of the self to itself is related to the immuno-depressive medication that is required to estrange Nancy's own body from himself, incapacitating his immune system which would otherwise reject the graft. The book appears to become more corporeally intimate as a result of the intrusion into the recipient's body. Significantly, it abstracts from the young woman intruder who may have been the donor. In the concluding paragraph, Nancy writes: "The *intrus* is no other than me, my self; none other than man himself" (13). Is this an expression of solitude? Is it the reaffirmation of the self-same and the exclusion of the intrusiveness of the other? Would there be a similar abstraction in the film?

Louis the stranger is literally made into a foreigner: after Pusan, Louis travels to Tahiti. By presenting Louis as a traveling foreigner, the film does not abstract from the theme of (de)familiarization. For Nancy, his intrusive heart failure brought him back to what is most familiar to him: "A strangeness reveals itself 'at the heart' of what is most familiar … But now [the heart] falters, and this very strangeness refers me back to myself: 'I' am, because I am ill" (4).[7] In contrast, for Louis in the film, not his heart but the faltering familiarity with his son brings him back to himself. In the film, moreover, the question of the donor and the inescapability of her death persist precisely as intrusions into intimate familiarity. After undergoing the transplant, Louis feels urged to reacquaint himself with what seems to be another son, the one he never met. Traveling back to an island near Tahiti, Louis revives his old friendship with a local man, called Henri. But Louis is no longer traveling toward the newness of his heart; he is now ostensibly looking for his son. Has he become the sole intruder into the Polynesian island, or would he still allow the intrusion of the other into him? In other words, is Louis still gaping open, or has he fled from *béance*?

Bedside Travels

Reminiscing about his seamanship, going to back to the colonial infrastructure of ports and tenders, Louis will spend most of his time in Polynesia in bed. By now, the bed has become a clearly recognizable motif in the film. One of *L'intrus'* most memorable, though odd, shots is of Henri and Louis wading through Polynesian shoals carrying a large-sized mattress across the bay toward Louis' dilapidated beachside cabin.

Carrying Louis' mattress. Screenshot from *L'Intrus*, dir. Claire Denis. Ognon Pictures, 2005.

There is a strangeness and absurdity about this mattress that lingers. It recalls the many beds that have already been featured in the film. Two of these beds have served as the initial stages of the dream sequences in the first half of the film, and they have raised questions about the nature of the dreams. Was Louis really sleeping, or were these sequences indicative of his waking mental state? Would it matter if there were no difference between sleeping and waking? Here, on his Polynesian island, in his cabin from the sixties, lying in his bed, Louis reminisces about the times he was on the island in the past. For Louis' flashbacks, Denis remarkably uses old footage of the adventure film *Le Reflux* (1962, dir. Paul Gégauff), starring the same, though young and hardly recognizable, Michel Subor aboard a small coaster tending the shores of the Polynesian islands. But the images are inconclusive. They do not document Louis' settlement on the island; there is no proof that Louis' son is real.

In another dream-like sequence, Denis presents us with point-of-view shots from Louis, once again lying on his Polynesian cabin bed. These shots show the early morning hours of those who cannot fall asleep, the projections of an insomniac. The killed donor and the abandoned son both belong to the strange realm of sleepless intrusion.[8] In this realm, Louis is forced by the unremitting strangeness of his heart to admit that he needs both the death of his donor and now also the recognition of his son in order to survive. In this adventure, Louis has changed into a stranger, even to himself.

There is no subject left who can rightfully claim an identity for himself, because, as Nancy explains: "One emerges from this adventure lost. One no longer knows or recognizes oneself" (11). The 'I' is emptied out because, Nancy continues, "very quickly, one is no more than a slackening, floating strangeness" (11). The intrusion has had a self-estranging effect: "the most absolutely proper 'I' withdraws to an infinite distance … slipping into the morphinic unconsciousness of suffering and fear" (12). On his many beds in this film, Louis lacks the agency to be a protagonist. What haunts him is a dreamt killing; the affirmation he strives for, he cannot accomplish alone. In fact, he has to face a loss of identity that is inherent in his adventure, alone and away from home. Nancy despairs: "the multiple stranger who intrudes upon my life … is none other than death" (7). According to Nancy, identity for the one who has to endure intrusion is related to death, which is what happens to Louis as he is faced with the infinite responsibility for the death of *la sauvageonne*.

The floating strangeness of insomnia that confines Louis to his bed may be compared with Nancy's sedation by morphine. Perhaps paradoxically, Levinas would characterize Louis' insomnia as 'vigilance.' However, Nancy and Levinas do not really describe opposed states of being. For, Levinas makes clear that vigilance does not belong to an active protagonist. The vigilance of insomnia is anonymous, since Levinas would agree with Nancy that the proper 'I' has withdrawn. In *Existence and Existents* (*De l'existence à l'existant*, 1947), Levinas writes: "the vigilance of insomnia which keeps our eyes open has no subject. It is the very return of presence into the void left by absence" (65). This presence, we have learned from Nancy and Denis, is *l'intrus*. The grafted heart violently intrudes as "an irremissible existence" (Levinas, *Existence* 63), as "unremitting strangeness" (Nancy 10). However, other than for Nancy, death in the film does not belong to the protagonist. We have to acknowledge that Louis' own mortality has been made secondary to his responsibility for the death of *la sauvageonne*, the one who haunts Louis from a real exteriority. Levinas, as we have read, refers to the transcendence of this exteriority as the infinity stronger than murder. The face of *la sauvageonne* is this exteriority. Louis' insomnia confirms that the haunting dreams do not belong to the realm of the unreal. Louis is in a state of vigilance. He is awake when she haunts him.

We should observe also that Levinas' phenomenology of insomnia is intended as an alternative to Heidegger's analysis of being toward death (*Sein zum Tode*).[9] In Levinas' interpretation of Heidegger's authentic being toward death, authenticity away from everydayness is a lonely experience, because it is the result of a confrontation with one's own death, a death no other can die. An ecstatic anxiety, not an everyday fear, is what belongs to authentic being toward death. Louis' insomnia, however, following Levinas, points in a different direction: "While anxiety, in Heidegger, brings about 'being toward death,' grasped and somehow understood, the horror of the night 'with no exits' which 'does not answer' is an irremissable existence" (Levinas, *Existence* 63). The irremissable existence of the intruder in Louis' does not let him understand what death would mean for himself, but it does keep him awake; he is "the object rather than the subject of an anonymous thought" (Levinas, *Existence* 66). Rather than the anxiety of authentic being toward death, Levinas writes, “there is horror of immortality, perpetuity of the drama existence, necessity of forever taking on its burden” (*Existence* 63).

Denis makes Louis suffer the burden of not dying while being responsible for the death of the other. She lets him live, but without relief. Louis’ attempt to flee from what keeps him gapingly open, toward recognition from his estranged son, cannot but fail. Despite the welcoming gesture of the Polynesians, who are even willing to stage a performance in which one of them takes on the role of the missing son, Louis is unable to accept the gift. He has to accept that the estranged son can be no one else than Sidney (Grégoire Colin), whom we have already met in the early scenes of the film. Yet, the son does not reconfirm the self-sameness of Louis. For, Louis’ son is, in fact, dead. Identifying his son’s body in a Polynesian morgue, identifying also an enormous, fresh scar, still gaping open, on his son’s chest, is as close to a recognition that Louis can come. Louis and his son are strangers to each other.

Now we understand why Denis has presented us with an unsympathetic protagonist. Unlike the protagonist of Nancy’s book, Louis the stranger does not run the risk of being identified as a defamiliarized representative of our own self-doubts. Louis does not become a stranger to himself, and nor do we, by way of character identification, become strangers to ourselves. Louis always remains a third person, not only for us, but also in the company of those close to him. The other for Louis is near, he can recognize the other’s face, but he will never believe that she (*la sauvageonne*) or he (his son) are his alter egos. To be sure, Louis’ unsympathetic strangeness is reinforced by the intrusion of the heart transplant, which forces him to travel. However, for Louis there is no homecoming, no recuperation of a reified self-consciousness after having risked his identity abroad.

Nancy comes to understand that there is no self to be gained from the ordeal of coming face to face with oneself. There is no self-assurance in the ordeal. Nonetheless, there seems to exist an attainable self at the horizon of the continuous defamiliarizing of the self by the self: “The *intrus* is no other than me, my self …. No other than the one, the same, always identical to itself and yet that is never done with altering itself” (13). The unremitting strangeness that Louis embodies, however, even when incorporating the intrusion, never arrives at such a first person self-confirmation and, from there, never becomes a ‘we.’ Our character identification never becomes a self-identification: we identify Louis, but we don’t identify *with* him. He remains irremissibly strange.

Having returned North while accompanying the coffin, Louis on a improvised bed will be kept awake by the unremitting strangeness of the relation to his son.[10] So, the disturbance of Louis’ everyday life by the intruder comes from an outside realm that keeps transcending Louis’ existence. Yet, the transcendental in *L’intrus* is not the one of a privileged knowledge of a higher moral order that is warranted by reason (deontology). Nor does the intruder suggest an attainable self in the long run of self-questioning experience (teleology). As in the French title of Levinas' *De l'existence à l'existant*, which expresses a movement *contra* Heidegger away from abstraction (*Sein*) and toward concreteness (*Seiendes*), Louis' existence is always moved by concrete corporeal existents. That notwithstanding, he does not move toward a horizon that is shared by his alter egos. Hence, it is not the horizon of the future that transcends the here and now of Louis' existence.

For Louis, the intrusion of the other is a vertical transcendence. This is what breaches Louis' habitual ipseity, and this explains why the intrusion of the other can indeed be characterized, in Levinas' terms, both by proximity (the nudity of the face is immediate, and differs radically from the horizontal transcendence toward the attainable selves of the future) and by height (vertical infinity). In the wake of his son, Louis does travel back toward a future at home in the Northern hemisphere. Yet, Louis must acknowledge that he cannot be in control of it: "the future … comes to me across an absolute interval whose other shore the Other—though he be my son—is alone capable of marking, and of connecting with the past" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 283).

Notes

1. In a lecture on the occasion of the Denis retrospective of the Amsterdam Filmmuseum (October-November 2005), Patricia Pisters insightfully characterized Denis' oeuvre as a range of films involving a pendulum swinging between the alfa of vitalism and the omega of the death drive—the metaphor is actually inspired by the funerary words of the priest in *L'intrus*. According to Pisters, films like *Nénette et Boni* (1996), *Beau travail* (1999) and *Vendredi soir* (2002) belong to the 'alfa films'; *J'ai pas sommeil* (1994), *Trouble Every Day* (2001) and *L'intrus* (2004) are omega films. The pendulum swings, Pisters insists, not only between films but also within every film.

2. Denis has given many interviews. Characteristically, Denis claims: "My films are not highly intellectual, and *L'intrus* is like a boat lost in the ocean drifting" (Smith, unpaginated).

3. In his interview with Denis about *L'intrus*, Damon Smith asked: "What inspired you to tell this story in a dreamlike fashion?" Denis replied that the metaphysical aspect of the heart transplant theme urged her to present the film as being "more than any realistic story" (unpaginated).

4. Walter Benjamin famously compares the camera to a surgeon's knife, penetrating deeply into reality's web (223). In another metaphor, he sees film as capable of breaking through the confinement of our everyday "prison world." Benjamin emphasizes film's capacity to "burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second" (236).

5. Peggy Kamuf explores the etymology of *béant/béance*. She points out that *ouvert/ouverture* would be the more common French expression although, in that case, the etymological link would be lost with *bâiller* which means to gape open, as in a piece of clothing, as well as in to yawn (mouth), gaping for lack of sleep (41). In the film there is a connection between sleeping, dreaming, and gaping open. I will elaborate on that below.

6. The cinematic Kuleshov experiment (1918) was named after filmmaker Lev Kuleshov (1899–1970), who edited an apparently emotionless face together with different shots (a plate of soup, a coffin) to demonstrate that viewers would attribute a different significance to the same facial expression according to different montage sequences.

7. R. Emmet Sweeney comments on Denis' version of *L'intrus* by calling attention to the transgression of everydayness inherent in heart failure: "A failure in the fabric of our everyday existence makes the banal visible to us" (unpaginated).

8. Denis has related insomnia to real or imagined killing before in *J'ai pas sommeil* (1994), also known as *I Can't Sleep.* Patricia Pisters explains that, not unlike Louis in *L'intrus*, "the characters [of *I Can't Sleep*] become insomniacs—and therefore their normal sensory-motor functions also become distorted; sleeping awake, the characters become seers, hearers, and wanderers and therefore open up to the notion of time" (Pisters 83). For Pisters, the insomniacs are wakeful but not active. In their wanderings, the elderly victims of the serial killer in *I Can't Sleep*, do see and hear, but they remain vulnerable even if awake. This opens them up—is it a gaping openness?—for intrusion. Pisters presents *I Can't Sleep* as a prime example of the transition from the action-image to the time-image as theorized by Gilles Deleuze, and emphasizes that the insomniacs no longer actively perform their subjective identity, but almost passively endure the experience of time.

9. Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*'s existential *Sein zum Tode* can be found in section 50 of *Being and Time* (in the Macquarrie/Robinson translation, 293–296).

10. R. Emmet Sweeney puts it as follows: "The death that haunts him never arrives, but is deflected onto the one he loves—another dream-image perhaps, but the weight of the body seems all too real, and the casket is concrete and banal" (unpaginated).

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Reframing the Migratory

Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 211–228

Looking Again at Rupture: Crossing Borders, Family Pictures

Alex Rotas

'Rupture' is a central metaphor in the articulation of the lived experience of migration, one that a number of visual artists have attempted to represent. In this article, I explore the problematic of that representation by examining two very different art works: Iraqi artist Naman Hadi's *Le Déraciné* [*The Uprooted*] (figure 1) and British artist Phil Collins' *delivery* series (figures 2, 3, 4 and 5). Both of these interventions engage with important issues related to exile, but the divergent manner in which they do so means that they also appeal to different audiences. In what follows, I investigate how and why this might be the case.

Hadi, living in exile in Paris, presents an insider's view of the affective experience that follows the drama of rupture in a painting, the primary effect of which on the viewer is a sensory one. Collins, in his photographic observations, requires of the viewer a more cognitive engagement, suggesting that this rupture is a process that continues with unfolding repercussions on family life. Hadi's monumental oil painting expresses a single subjectivity, and is clearly anchored in a nineteenth century tradition, while Collins' family photographs draw on more postmodern sensibilities that encourage them to be viewed as ambivalent texts open to multiple, even discrepant, readings.

Migration is an event that causes family members to become separated from one another, and communities, homes, and material possessions to be lost to those who leave, just as those individuals too are lost, in varying degrees, to those who stay behind. Hadi dramatically and unambiguously represents this rupture as a moment in which the individual is literally torn from the soil that succors him.

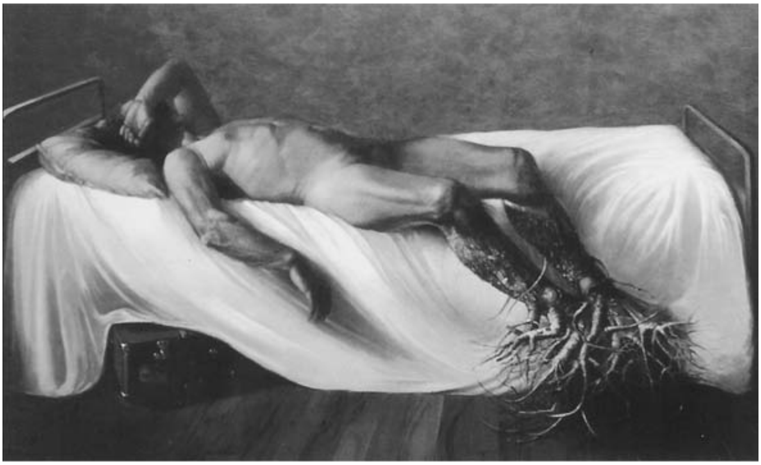

Figure 1. Naman Hadi, *Le Déraciné* [*Uprooted*], Oil on Canvas. 1984. 130 × 195 cm. Artist's collection. Photo: Atelier 80.

An event that creates a 'before' and 'after,' rupture has undertones that draw on the physical and biological world—such as volcanic eruptions, for example, or ruptures of a medical nature—which suggest situations that lie beyond the possibility of individual attempts at resistance. Moments of rupture are also the points around which "acts of memory" proliferate, since they signal the loss of something that, from then on, can only be perceived as an absence (Bardenstein 148).

As Mieke Bal *et al* demonstrate in their book of the same title, "acts of memory" are indeed willful (and often painful) *acts*, implying agency. These take place in the present in an attempt to fashion a narrative from events that were overwhelming, traumatic, and uncontrollable in the past. Once fashioned, the narrative can then be communicated to others; it is only in the act of communication or testimony (implying the presence of a listening other) that healing can begin to take place (Bal vii–xii).[1] But if rupture is an event the consequences of which are defined by absence—the missing homeland, the lost family, community, history, language, and culture—its visual representation in a still image will be no easy task. How, after all, does one visually represent a lack, something that is no longer there?

If, moreover, the rupture created by migration inevitably signals loss, is loss *all* that it signals? How certain can the observer (or indeed the participant) ever be of its outcomes? The sociologist Nirmal Puwar observes that most people's lives are characterized more by a "muddled mixture" of tragedy and joy than by exclusive manifestations of either one or the other, and that migrants' lives are no exception. Speaking about migrants in the U.K., she suggests that there are unspoken conventions, or genres of listening, available in the public domain that restrict the ways in which their stories may be heard. Two narratives dominate, she maintains, and these are narratives of victimhood and celebration. Immigrants may be seen in terms of their passivity and the tragedy and suffering they have endured before, during, and after their flight for a new life, or alternatively celebrated as plucky survivors, exemplars of human resilience, and the victory of triumph-over-disaster. How can these dominant narratives be bypassed in representation so that not only absence (a lack, a negative) is evinced, but also multi-layered and less polarized outcomes are revealed?

In the pages that follow, I consider how Hadi and Collins have used different media and strategies to interrogate the notion of rupture, and to represent what is lost—as well as hinting, in Collins' case, at what also might be gained in the process. Hadi's idealized individual portrait is also, he believes, a collective self-portrait of people who, like him, have been forced to leave their homeland, while Collins' photographic series consists of family pictures. The two works are differently situated in terms of medium, genre, and the related sociocultural discourses within which they may be read as texts, as well as the positionality of the artist.

It should come as no surprise, then, to find that these particular, different works meet with different levels of enthusiasm and recognition, depending on the audience: each requires different viewing strategies, knowledges—even experiences—on the part of the observer. Nonetheless, the extent of the dramatically different responses I have had when showing images of these works to different constituencies and in different contexts has taken me by surprise. The theme of migration and rupture can, it seems, migrate across and rupture aesthetic conventions as well. Equally, the notion of what is and what is not 'art' also moves between different communities, tracing in the process a migratory aesthetic of its own. In this essay, I interrogate this aesthetic within the context of my broader discussion of the two artists' works.

Naman Hadi, *Le Déraciné*

Hadi references the natural world in his human figure whose feet have become the roots of an uprooted tree. The image's emotional effect derives from its apparent, though beguiling, simplicity: the rupture caused by forced displacement to human lives relies on another metaphor, the roots that supposedly link us to the community and land of our birth. This metaphor, as Carol Bardenstein demonstrates in her analysis of the tree in Palestinian and Israeli culture (and hence, collective memory), carries particular currency in the Middle East. For Palestinians, exemplars of the exilic and the homeless, the tree serves as signifier of their ancient attachment to the land. Bardenstein quotes the first and title poem of Munib Makhoul's collection, *We Are Planted in the Ground*:

> *My roots strike deeply, and penetrate, penetrate*
> *Far into the depths of eternity*
> *Together with the oak tree, I was born long ago,*
> *In the land of Galilee.*[2] *(154)*

Olive trees are also not ‘just’ trees; their longevity provides them with the ability to stand in as proxy Palestinian witnesses to the tragedy that has befallen the country and its people. The extensive uprooting of actual trees in contemporary Israeli geopolitics is seen as mirroring the overall attempt to uproot and expel Palestinians (156). (For Israelis, conversely, Bardenstein argues that the planting of trees in territories they come to possess is seen in the equally charged context of reclaiming and reestablishing their long-absent bond with the Holy Land [157]).

Hadi’s figure in *Uprooted* draws on and develops this keenly felt metaphor of the putative human links to the soil. Supine and anguished now that he has been wrenched from the earth that once succored him, the figure’s emotional pain is thereby given a physical—and hence, visual—dimension. Just as an uprooted tree is a dead (or dying) tree, Hadi implies that the individual, exiled from the homeland that once allowed him to flourish, exists now in a state of ‘living death.’ This living death is not one of passivity, however, where he wanes gradually and physically fades away. The figure’s pain is urgent and vital, his physical strength conveying a congruence with the depth of emotional desolation the viewer senses he is so actively living through.

Such a perspective, however, which normalizes the experience of exile as one endured by the tormented (male) individual, can also be seen as reductive and limiting, casting the displaced individual unambiguously as victim. It reifies, moreover, the notion of suffering, making this the defining feature, the signifier, of the experience itself. In so doing, it erases the multiple and often conflicting experiences that constitute daily reality for displaced individuals as they do for most human subjects. The vision of enforced migration that Hadi’s painting may be taken to articulate implies a fixity of subject position that is at odds with current and fluid notions of subjectivity, in which the self is seen less as an entity, and more as something continually in the process of construction through the narratives that we employ to make sense of our lives (Crossley 9). Hadi’s image, then, is susceptible to rather easy dismissal by critics from a cultural studies or art world constituency. When I have shown it to friends and colleagues from just such a background, it has usually aroused little interest.

However, individuals who have themselves been through the experience of involuntary displacement that Hadi depicts, respond quite differently when they are shown the image, as do academics from a different background. I have shown a picture of this work, along with many other images, at several conferences now, and I can attest to its popularity. It is always this image that I receive emails about and requests that I should please, at my earliest convenience, forward a copy. These have been conferences drawing from a social science rather than an art world constituency, where issues concerning human displacement and refugees have formed the core subject matter, and where *Uprooted* seems to provide a dramatic visual representation of much that is being discussed. In particular, too, the enthusiastic (and emotional) response of an audience made up largely of Palestinian academics at a conference in Ramallah in early 2005 made it clear that they identified strongly with the central idea it portrays.[3]

Uprooted attracts and engages its audience in a number of ways. It is a work of considerable craftsmanship: remarkably well painted—sumptuous in places, it awards the viewer considerable sensual pleasure. It is a male nude, (homo)erotically charged through the combination of the figure's muscularity and languor. It has, moreover, a political dimension. The foregrounded arm references Jacque-Louis David's *Death of Marat* (1793), a clearly deliberate ploy on Hadi's part that injects nobility to the suffering endured by the archetypal, disempowered figure lying on the bed. The heroic martyrdom with which David saw Marat imbued now becomes transferred, through association, to Hadi's figure.

The enthusiasm shown for this image, particularly among those who themselves have felt forced to leave the countries of their birth, suggests considerable identification with the sentiments that are conveyed in the work. The notion of identity as being essentially linked to the land where one is born continues to resonate. "The concept was born from the personal suffering of exile," Hadi says:

In some ways it is a self-portrait. However, the reactions of many people who have undergone the same experience and who recognize themselves in the painting lends the artwork the dimension of a 'collective self-portrait' (Hadi qtd. in Faraj, 100).

Recognizing oneself in the work, actions, or fate of another person is, in itself, a redemptive act. Emotional suffering, such as that implied by Hadi's anguished individual, is inward looking: it is a process defined by the loneliness of the sufferer.

However, the knowledge that the memory of suffering is not confined to the individual psyche, as Bal observes, but is part of the broader culture in which that individual lives, offers enormous solace, and marks the beginning of a sense of integration and healing (x). That the narrative represented in Hadi's image can be claimed by others demonstrates its potency as a communicative tool, reaching outward in an act of testimony. For those who recognize themselves in Hadi's figure, not only their often inchoate experience is given form, but also it is communicated to others who become implicated in their fate now as witnesses. In his moving presentation of ill people as wounded storytellers, Arthur Franks describes the narratives individuals devise in order to reconfigure their victimhood into acts of agency or, as he puts it, to "transform fate into experience" (xi). In the testimonial narrative, he asserts, the presence of the witness who receives the story is paramount. "The communicative body," Franks goes on, "calls others into a dyadic relationship. The communicative body needs the other in order to communicate" (143–44).

In her lucid and carefully argued book *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art*, Jill Bennett maintains that there is a certain hubris to the implication in work such as *Uprooted* that art can represent, and hence salvage, damaged experience, thus offering redemption. She argues that, when art purports to represent a particular sort of trauma (or even more, when it is about a particular traumatic event), it lays claim to an experience to which someone claims ownership, inviting viewers to partake of this experience in some way. Such an act involves colonizing the experience, Bennett asserts (3). She agrees, nonetheless, that art can operate as a "politics of testimony" despite its inability to ever capture and transmit real experience. Such a politics, she argues, "requires of art *not* a faithful translation of testimony; rather, it calls upon art to exploit its own unique capacities to contribute actively to this politics" (3).

The 'unique capacities' of *Uprooted* as a work of art will nonetheless be perceived differently depending on who is looking at the work. For an audience unschooled in art history or contemporary ideas of visual culture, the work is mimetic and skilful. As a highly rendered painting, it opens a window to a particular world of experience, triggering an immediate, powerfully induced—if also powerfully sentimental—affective response in the viewer. In this way, the work fits traditional notions of what art 'is,' operating in a manner reminiscent of artworks of the late nineteenth century. Absent in Hadi's painting are any of the signs of the irony and self-reflexivity that have come to be associated with art interventions of what may loosely be described as the postmodern period. His message is clear, accessible, and unequivocal: being uprooted from home is a viscerally painful experience. It is to the representation of these deep feelings of pain that the artist has turned his skills and his energy, creating a visual metaphor in a realist style of almost life-sized proportions. Through his preoccupation with communicating the implicit suffering of the exiled individual, Hadi grapples with the problem of visually representing the absence and the lack that, for him, characterize the experience of exile, abstractions that he has made tangible through invoking the visually representable metaphor of roots.

Uprooted demonstrably offers considerable solace to those who recognize themselves in the affective domain it describes. The specificities of each individual's experiences belie a theme common to all, and it is this common theme that Hadi's archetype represents so successfully. It is not so much that the viewer's sympathy is aroused for his particular protagonist, crippled both literally and metaphorically by the torn roots that replace his feet: for all that this is an individual portrait, the face is hidden, giving the figure an 'everyman' quality. What Hadi does is to conceive an imaginary world in which a particular and specific sort of pain is palpably transmitted to the viewer. The affective power of the image has a force of its own; this is what allows it to engage the attention of its audience.

The temptation to dismiss his work as naive, as I have heard it described by those from a different constituency, then, may be missing the point. An art world audience may conclude that *Uprooted* offers narrow readings, but it seems to be precisely in its lack of ambiguity that its redemptive qualities lie. Translating the pain of rupture via dramatic visual symbolism into the affective domain, and implying that this pain represents a key theme in the experience of forced migration clearly offers not only affirmation to those who have been through the experience themselves, but also, through the recognition of its very commonality, solace.

The lack of ambiguity in the work itself does not close down the possibility that it might allow, even encourage, viewers to make their own readings of the work-as-text for themselves. The artist's intentions may have been relatively clear-cut, but different viewers can, and will, respond in their own individually nuanced ways. I have already mentioned the attraction this work seems to inspire among individuals from refugee populations as well as its appeal among academics who are not used to thinking visually, but who are involved with documenting the social and political forces behind the rupture that underlies forced migration. For them also, the image's power seems to lie precisely in its affective prescience, in that it describes an emotional arena that underpins their remit, while at the same time lying beyond its boundaries. Viewers from another constituency may, for example, draw attention to the work's perceived homoerotic qualities, or claim that it arouses in them their nurturing instincts to comfort and to protect the anguished figure.

For viewers with a background in the arts, however, the obviousness of the visual metaphor in *Uprooted* removes some of the viewing pleasure they have come to associate with looking at artwork. Indeed, the expectation of being challenged to exercise their cultural competence has come to be a major strand in the enjoyment many such viewers feel when considering contemporary artistic interventions. Hadi's uprooted figure, his suitcase visible beneath the bed, demands little effort in order to work out what it is 'about' and, for those for whom such effort is an integral part of the pleasure of the gaze, it provides little reward. It is hardly surprising that it will fail to engage the attention of this particular audience. An audience coming from the art world will be more drawn to interpreting visual interventions that put them to work, engaging—in terms of the present discussion—with issues of migration in the more ambiguous manner that the photographs making up Phil Collins' *delivery* demand.[4]

Phil Collins, *Delivery*

In his *delivery* project (figures 2–5), Phil Collins creates a visual, if indirect, document of the rupture experienced by a Kosovan family who had, some years earlier, fled to the U.K. as asylum seekers (figures 2 and 3). Photographing them in London, he then travels across the borders that they could not pass through themselves to deliver the images to the maternal and paternal families left behind. Here, he photographs these family groups clasping or gathered around the U.K. images, returning to the U.K. with the new photos (figures 4 and 5). The moment, or site, of rupture is not shown, but the viewer is left with little doubt that what they are seeing is the absence, or the loss that is its consequence. Collins manages to leave, however, the degree to which this 'loss' can be perceived entirely in tragic terms for viewers to determine for themselves. The presence of the 'photos within the photos' ensures, moreover, that viewers are left with little doubt that they must draw on their cultural competence to consider codes of photography in their interpretation of the images.

In other words, *delivery* operates as an artwork in a different manner than *Uprooted*, a point of some significance to critics such as Bennett whose interest is less in the 'aboutness' of art than with its processes.[5] Although his photographs are of real individuals, Collins limits the amount of information he documents about each family, resisting the temptation to invite the viewer to develop a sentimentalized empathy with and for the specific people he portrays. Instead, viewers move, via a sensory appreciation of the images, to a cognitive consideration of the broader politics traced by the images. I mean 'traced' in the sense of *hinted at*: neither didactic nor communicative, Collins' work is open-ended and ambiguous. Far from conveying a single emotion, it carries the suggestion that the act of migration may set in motion a range of possible emotional outcomes, both for the individuals who actually migrate and for the family members who are left behind. As to whether or not this rupture from family, community, and homeland has, on balance, led to a greater suffering or joy for all caught up in it, viewers are left to make up their own minds.

The fact that Collins' deliberately posed photographs draw attention to the act of representation itself, reminds viewers, too, of the inequality between whomever does the representing and those who are represented. Collins clearly positions himself as the observer/ethnographer in this way, separating and distancing himself on one side of the lens from the family members on the other. In so doing, he reveals that it is his

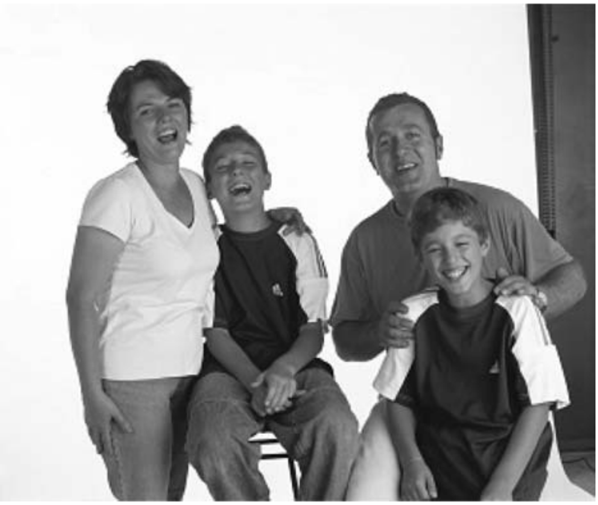

Figure 2. Phil Collins, i only want you to love me (shkodras), Colour photograph, 2003. 20 × 25 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

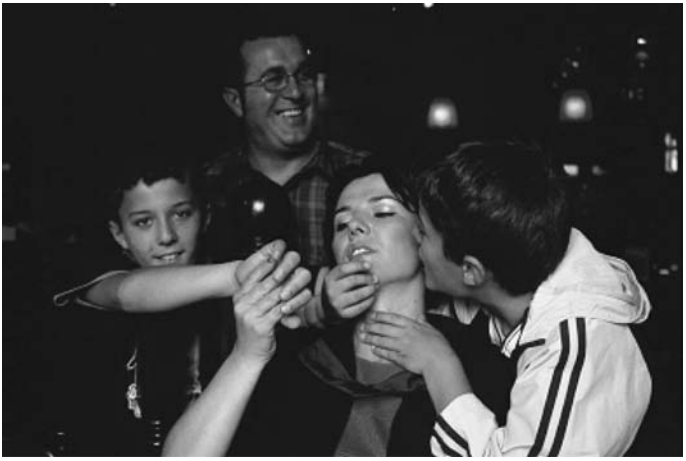

Figure 3. Phil Collins, *i only want you to love me (bujar & megi),* Colour photograph, 2003. 18 × 25 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

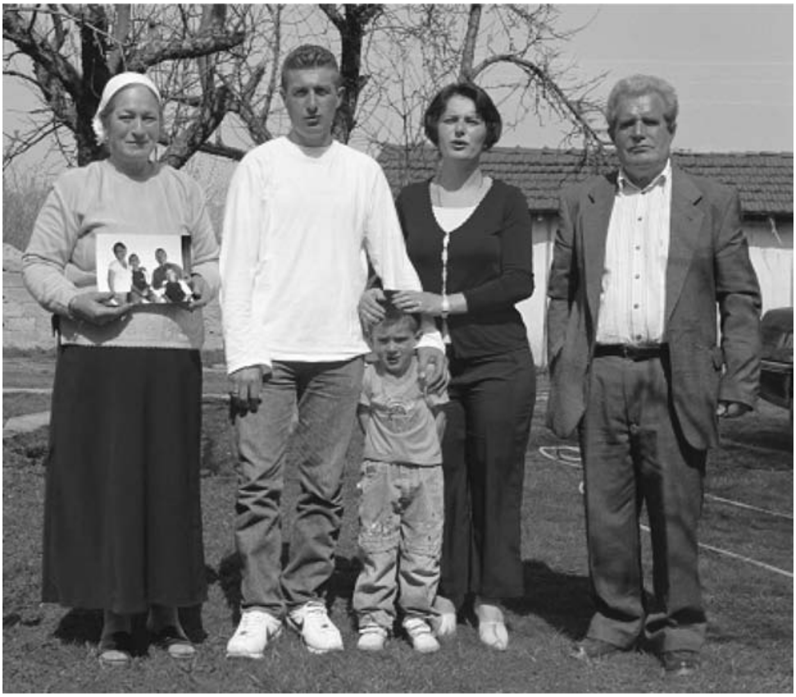

Figure 4. Phil Collins, *i only want you to love me (delivery)* #1, Lightjet print on Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 2004. 120 × 140 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

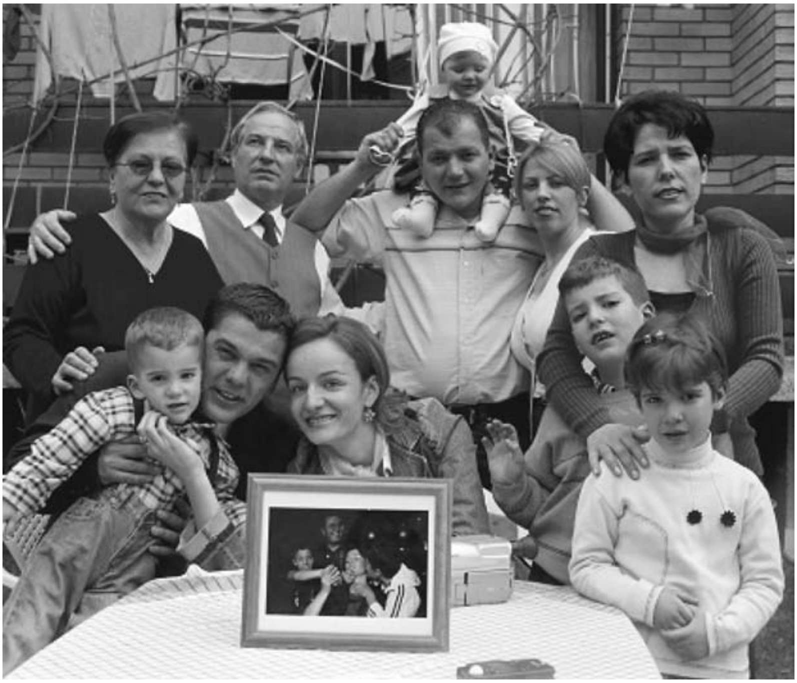

Figure 5. Phil Collins, *i only want you to love me (delivery) #2*, Lightjet print on Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 2004. 120 × 140 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

own way of seeing that potentially has the power to define the lives of the subjects he documents, implying there may be myriad other perspectives. He thus encourages viewers to rethink their own initial impressions and to take a second look.

At first glance, Collins' images too may seem to fall into the trope of tragic rupture, with family members divided and homes lost, but closer examination reveals a more ambiguous picture. Indeed 'looking again' is a good metaphor, as Puwar suggests, for the consideration of migrants' lives in general. There may be a dominant reading to most representations of their lives, but look again and you will often find they can be read differently, she argues, and in ways that may have important implications for the agency of the social actors portrayed, as well as issuing a challenge to observers to reexamine their viewpoint.

The conceit of Collins' project is deliberate. The accident of his birth that privileges him with a British passport currently enables him to cross borders with ease (not, of course, that one should assume this will always be the case), 'reuniting' families who have not seen each other for six years or more, by means of the photographs that he—but not they—can deliver. The resulting family portraits form arresting images and illustrate some of the ways that abstract notions of 'ethnic conflict' translate into actual repercussions on real families' lives.

Collins is a knowing observer of how other peoples' misfortunes are manipulated in media representations for mass consumption. He shows his distaste for the way that the media exploits subjects for the sake of a good story by deliberately drawing attention to his role as photographer. As Alex Farquharson points out, "instead of trying to negate the ideological perspectives through which events are framed, [Collins] amplifies them to the point where his involvement with these images becomes their structuring principle and raison d'etre." Far from pretending that his subjects are not aware of his presence and that he has caught them 'off-guard' (hence, suggesting that the photograph is a transparent image of the reality that any passer-by would have seen), he deliberately highlights the inevitably constructed nature of his images.

The Kosovan families in figures 4 and 5 fill the frame, reminding the viewer of its role in cutting off what remains unseen beyond its limits from what is visible within them. Collins knows that he shows partial truths and that the full story is always beyond reach, with what is not shown possibly being as significant as what is now in sight. By posing his subjects to the extent that the viewer feels his directorial presence in both worlds into which the families are now divided, Collins' highlights both the absurd poignancy of the situation (the fact that he is able to travel between them in order to create what should be a single family portrait but is, of necessity, two) as well as the potentially exploitative nature of his project.

That he has traveled to family homes in Kosovo, however, with pictures taken in London, demonstrates a level of mutual intimacy and trust between Collins and the extended family that he photographs. The implication is that this is a project knowingly shared between them, rather than a one-way investment or beneficiary, as Siniša Mitrović observes (unpaginated). Collins may be acting as a messenger between each half of the divided family, but he is clearly dependent on the goodwill of his sitters, as Mitrović argues, to allow their pictures to be taken for the sake of his 'art.' And, while the families in Kosovo may receive of pictures of their now distant relatives, they are reminded in the process of the fact that it is he, and not they, who can cross the international borders between them. The posed nature of the resulting images underlines the contrived nature of the project, signaling the presence of the photographer and his ultimate role in the creation of the final images. In this way, Collins acknowledges the contingency of his work and its inability to act as an objective document.

His visual documents are, in short, self-located texts that reflect his own positionality in the same way as Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' (111) and James Clifford's 'situated analysis' (*Routes* 11). Haraway demonstrates that, even in so-called objective scientific experiments, results are marked by the subject positions (including, importantly, the gender) of the researchers and that, as a consequence, they are partial, contingent, and political. Clifford similarly emphasizes the inevitable contingency and partiality of any ethnographic endeavor, and the need therefore for ethnographers to attempt to be accountable for their findings by signaling their presence in any narratives they create, explicitly locating themselves in time and space.

Collins' deliberately posed family portraits may leave him outside the picture frame, but the viewer is reminded that he is 'there' as an almost palpable, if invisible and separate, presence. Drawing attention to his role as creator of the images demonstrates his awareness that the way he has decided to assemble the group and frame the shots, together with the editing and selection of the individual pictures he has chosen from the many he must have taken, reveal as much, if not more, about himself as about those he purports to document. Photojournalism may seem to tell the 'truth,' but Collins underlines its artifice: like any other cultural observation, it forms what Clifford describes as a "constructed domain of truth, [a] serious fiction" ("Introduction" 7). The *delivery* project may, at first glance, appear to constitute a cultural observation but, for any cultural observation to take place, there must be observers looking through their own prisms (cultural, historical, gendered, class-based, personal, and so on) to view the world: observers are as socially and culturally embedded as the subjects they observe, and can never fully be in control of the systems of power and history that work through them (Clifford, "Introduction" 7).

Collins' family groups are posed differently in the U.K. and in Kosovo. The images of the U.K. families (figures 2 and 3), studiedly 'having fun,' could be any white, Western family, comfortably conforming to a contemporary idiom of informal portraiture. The shop windows of high street photographers in the U.K. contain many images that are similar in style to the studio shot shown in figure 2. The Kosovan pictures show a more formal and symmetrical approach, one perhaps somewhat old-fashioned to the Western eye, the family members in figure 4 standing stiffly to attention, the warm family group in figure 5 holding their pose carefully for the photograph. They smile-for-the-camera, rather than laugh at some shared (figure 2) or private, off-camera (figure 3) joke. Their relative self-consciousness may suggest that they are somewhat less at ease in front of the lens than their British-based kin, less familiar with the workings of photography, and less adroit at manipulating it for their own ends.

Equally, the difference may simply reflect different cultural expectations from the medium itself. In 1936, Walter Benjamin argued that the camera never offers a mimetic representation of what it captures through its lens, and that it opens up structural formations of the subjects it records that are entirely different from those perceived by the naked eye (230). No photograph is, or can be, a transparent document; each is a construction that can be taken apart and analyzed. As text, it can be read differently and variously in terms of its personal, performative, political, social, economic, and historical meanings (Hirsch 135; Berger 63).

What the viewer cannot know, and is therefore left wondering, is the degree to which the families themselves adopted these poses, or whether it was Collins who deliberately directed them to behave in this way. If he did, what was his motivation? Was he drawing attention to popular notions of 'Western' versus 'traditional' life, the former relaxed, having-a-laugh, and 'cool,' the latter old-fashioned, rigid, less trendy? Was he parodying the propensity for media photographers to shoot pictures that conform to their own preconceptions, knowing that their editors will be looking for predictable images (Wright 3)? Was his aim to highlight the pathos of the ruptured families, now separated not only physically, but culturally, too? If, on the other hand, he asked his subjects to pose in the manner that seemed most natural to them and simply snapped them when they did so, the results reveal the different ways in which the two halves of the ruptured family are now socially embedded. Either way, the boundaries between 'us' (Western viewers in the gallery space) and 'them' (Balkan refugees) fall away in the London photographs, breaking down the social and cultural distance between us. This makes it impossible for any of us to deny our humanity we hold in common and exposes, too, the implicit vulnerability we all share to experience the same fate ourselves.

The contrived nature of the images is apparent, in short, but Collins provides no explanations regarding the extent of his role in their composition.[6] The work remains open-ended as a result, allowing us, as viewers, not only to speculate on the negotiations that the artist and participants might have entered into with each other, but also to reflect on the range of different possible responses of our own that ensue as a result. At the same time, we become aware of our feelings of discomfort at being implicated in this choreographed exploitation of other people's sorrows (Farquharson).[7]

When we allow ourselves to 'look again,' it becomes apparent, too, that Collins' pictures, for all their apparent choreography into oppositions of 'here' and 'there,' nonetheless highlight the individuality of the family members he portrays. In this way, he distances his project from the objectifying imagery so often employed in the photojournalistic reporting of refugee issues, where the victimhood of the individuals is emphasized above all else. Terence Wright and others have demonstrated the tendency to universalize refugees, in textual and visual representation in the media, so that they become a 'type' (8).[8] In the process, the historical and political factors that lie behind their particular situations are erased. In fact, Wright goes so far as to label the genre of visual reportage of refugees as 'biblical,' with predominating images of flight reminiscent of the expulsion from Eden and the Promised Land, as well as of mother-and-child ('Holy Mother'). Such images, unlike Collins', reify the boundaries between Western viewers and refugees, making it easier to avoid the commonalities between us and the possibility that, in a destabilized world, becoming a refugee is something that could indeed befall any one of us.

The fact that Collins' subjects have clearly participated in his project means that their agency as human subjects is not in question. The images may reveal loss and rupture, but they also speak of recovery, reflecting the ambiguities inherent in terms like 'victims' or 'survivors.' New family members in Kosovo are presented to the camera, hands encircle and proudly clasp partners and children, heads are held high. For all the apparent hilarity and partying of the family members in London, the fact remains that it is only their photograph and not they themselves who can be reunited with the extended family group in Kosovo, a reality that introduces a sense of latent grief to the pictures' dynamics. Mothers holding images of their children up to the camera usually mean lost children ('the missing' in 1970s Argentina and in Chile come to mind, for example). By association, then, the joyful London images, too, become underlain with the same sense of trauma, for all the lack of its explicit and visible articulation.

The images Collins presents, in short, contain precisely the "muddled mixture" of tragedy and joy that Puwar proposes constitute people's lives, whether or not they are migrants. Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who demonstrated that hearing finishes the act of speaking (292), Puwar argues that the dominant narratives of victimhood or resilience that frame the ways in which migrants tend to be viewed limit and contain their real-life stories. These narratives only allow certain stories to be truly heard, erasing significant aspects of their lives from view, and suppressing a more realistic picture from emerging. In his study of 'Vietnam vets,' Peter Ehrenhaus also demonstrates how dominant cultural narratives can provide reassuring closure to the majority population, but operate as strategies of containment to those they purport to represent (77–96). Veterans were rendered harmless, he argues, by being cast in terms of metaphors of psychological dysfunction, and they were thus effectively silenced as potential voices of political opposition. The cultural narratives in which they have been described may seem poignantly intimate but, in fact, he asserts, these narratives are superficial and voyeuristic, preventing individual veterans from any real expression of personal insight or knowledge, still less political agency, stemming from their experiences (93–94).

The individual family members in Collins' photographs are also potential sources of legitimate knowledge, in this instance about issues pertaining to the process of claiming refugee status in the U.K., for example, or the particular nature of the war in Kosovo. This is knowledge that could challenge national discourses such as those that describe asylum seekers as being primarily motivated to sponge off a bountiful British benefits system, or that explain the war in Kosovo as being exclusively a matter of localized, Balkan politics. Casting them in terms of narratives of suffering or their personal redemption (Puwar's 'tragic victims' or 'plucky survivors'), however, subverts such challenges, reducing the actors to stereotyped caricatures, leaving these narratives themselves untouched in the process.

By revealing them in *delivery* as individuals whose lives embrace both joys and sorrows, Collins preempts such closure, inviting the viewer to be curious about the actual stories the different family members might be able to share. At first glance, his images suggest a Western/traditional narrative binary, contrasting the extended family in Kosovo with the supposedly modern, fun-loving nuclear unit in the U.K. The implication is clear: migration enforces modernization, with a change of culture bringing with it a new format for family life. However, closer consideration reveals that his participants' lives cannot be so simplistically assessed; ultimately, there is no telling whether the lives of those who left or those who stayed came out best.

The "complex entanglement" (Papastergiadis) of both sets of family members Collins documents also demonstrates Avtar Brah's thesis that 'diaspora space' is occupied not only by those who have left, but also by those who have stayed behind (181). For Brah, to think of a diaspora as being constituted only by migrants is less than half the story. Once people migrate, a shared and negotiated space of interaction opens up between them, their families, and others (locals and other immigrant groups) who occupy it. Diaspora space, she argues, is a site of creolization, "where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed" (208). The families in Kosovo may be differently implicated in the repercussions of their relatives' departure to those who physically made the journey, but they are implicated nonetheless. They all, as Brah suggests, become players in a global diaspora.

Inhabitants of diaspora space also inevitably find themselves renegotiating notions of 'home,' which no longer can remain unproblematically identified as the opposite of 'away,' given, as Sara Ahmed observes, the former's association with notions of familiarity and the latter's with those of strangeness (88). There is always strangeness and movement within the home itself, Ahmed asserts, given that 'home' inevitably involves encounters between those who stay, those who arrive, and those who leave. Not only do those who have left bring the strangeness of 'away' into the home when they return, but their presence in an 'elsewhere' also injects feelings of proximity into that same 'away' for those who have been left behind. Thus, 'home' ceases to be (if indeed it ever was) a safe and stable place, with fixed boundaries, becoming, as Ahmed argues, a contingent space of inhabitance. By the same token, 'away' is no longer a place occupied solely by strangers.

Conclusion

Naman Hadi and Phil Collins both seek to represent visually, in still images, the absence, or lack, that is the consequence of the rupture at the core of involuntary migration. I have argued that these two art works demonstrate how the themes of migration and rupture themselves migrate and rupture across and through aesthetic borders, with the notion of what works as 'art' moving through different constituencies in a migratory trajectory of its own. *Uprooted* and *delivery* are viewed, and judged, quite differently depending on their audiences.

Artists, art critics, and others interested primarily in a contemporary visual aesthetic, form one audience. However, as artworks that draw on specific traumatic experiences and events, other viewers, who may be less well informed about issues in contemporary art, may share an interest in these events. Their reasons for wanting to turn their gaze to these works will be different to those of someone from an arts-based constituency. The same work can stimulate a different response, with something that seems to provoke little interest for viewers from a specialized, arts-informed background, providing considerable viewing pleasure, indeed solace, for others. It is difficult, if not pointless, then, to limit and proscribe the function of art in terms of whether it should be redemptive, therapeutic, or pleasurable, as Ernst van Alphen has argued in another context (qtd. in Bennett, 4). I would also suggest, by the same token, that the values of any one viewing group should not be privileged over those of any other. Critically analyzing how these differences occur is another story, however, and a task that has been central to my efforts throughout the preceding pages.

Suffering is a theme that runs through both artists' work, dominating Hadi's anguished figure and weaving its way, as a more ambiguous thread, through Collins' photographic series. While wishing neither to reify the notion of suffering nor to claim that it is an attribute that characterizes all migrants all of the time, I have yet to meet an individual who has been through involuntary displacement from his or her country of birth without experiencing some element of emotional pain. And yet, when we 'look again' at either the apparently joyful or the apparently sad individuals represented in Collins' images, we may decide that all is not so clear-cut as it initially appears to be, and that both suffering and indeed joy are multi-faceted emotions. Finally, there is the question of agency. Being forced to migrate implies a lack of agency, but Collins' photographs hint at the complex and active negotiations that continually take place between those who occupy diasporic space as they reshape their identities. And, as far as Hadi is concerned, as an artist exiled from his native Iraq to France, the creative act is, of course, an assertive, powerful, and defiant act of agency in itself.

Notes

1. See also Frank 55–56, Sturken 235.

2. Makhoul, Munib, “al-Munzari’un” (We are planted in the ground). In *al-Munzari’un*. Acre: Matba’at dar al-qabas al-arabi, 1980. 17. Thanks to Ihab Saloul for this connection.

3. *Gender, Displacement, Memory and Agency*, Great Eastern Hotel, Ramallah, March 5–7, 2005.

4. With thanks to my friends and colleagues Dr. Jo Dahn and Dr. Sue Tate for their helpful insights on this section.

5. The ‘aboutness’ of art is a term used by Dominick LaCapra in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (40); qtd. in Bennett, 9.

6. I contacted Phil Collins to see if he would shed any light on this issue and, understandably, his reply was somewhat inconclusive: “Well, I set up a studio for a short time in Brighton where people could come and have their pictures taken, and use how they liked. But with a few friends I just spent a lot of time hanging out and taking photos, so the original photo wasn’t ‘posed’ … .” Personal e-mail, November 21, 2005.

7. In 1999, Collins made a video entitled *how to make a refugee* which, as Farquharson points out, bears witness to the process through which the media, rather than warlords, do the ‘making’ referred to in the title. The video documents photographers asking a 15-year old Kosovan boy to remove his shirt so that they can film the bullet wound around his navel, a “callous process” that is part of the media reproduction of representations of refugees for popular consumption.

8. See also L. Malkki, referenced by Wright.

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A Place of Her Own: Negotiating Boundaries in Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* and *My Garden (Book)*

Maria Boletsi

No lawn is an island, at least in America. Starting at my front stoop, this scruffy green carpet tumbles down a hill and leaps across a one-lane road into my neighbor's yard. From there it skips over some wooded patches and stone walls before finding its way across a dozen other unfenced properties that lead down into the Housatonic Valley, there to begin its march south toward the metropolitan area. Once below Danbury, the lawn—now purged of weeds and meticulously coiffed—races up and down the suburban lanes, heedless of property lines. It then heads west, crossing the New York border; moving now at a more stately pace, it strolls beneath the maples of Larchmont, unfurls across a dozen golf courses, and wraps itself around the pale blue pools of Scarsdale before pressing on toward the Hudson. New Jersey next is covered … But neither obdurate soil nor climate will impede the lawn's march to the Pacific: it vaults the Rockies and, abetted by a monumental irrigation network, proceeds to green great stretches of western desert (Pollan 65).

The image of a never-ending American lawn, as sketched by Michael Pollan, spreading across U.S. cities and states without having to stumble on fences, hedges, or walls, pulls us along in a journey that defies artificial borders, uniting people and places in a celebration of a borderless view of the world. The violent and arbitrary borders imposed by civilization succumb to the unstoppable force of nature (with some assistance from garden designers, lawnmowers, pesticides, and herbicides, so that it does not get too wild), which connects everybody's yard with the American frontier. Ultimately, the American lawn emerges as a democratic, egalitarian concept, "implying that there is no reason to hide behind hedge or fence since we all occupy the same middle class" (Pollan 71). It sounds ideal.

Almost. In fact, the borderless image of American lawn conceals an array of violent exclusions, which are at work, cutting and reaping, as the endless green carpet is being mowed each day. In order to sustain the uniformity and harmony of the landscape, Pollan tells us later, people are not allowed to deviate from the norm and allow their lawns to grow more than a few inches. Acts of negligence or civil disobedience that blemish the paradisal harmony of the suburban vista and break consensus carry a high price (literally): people are dragged to court and forced to pay huge fines for refusing to mow their lawns. As far as nature is concerned, the lawn is in fact a violent, authoritarian construct, creating a totalitarian landscape, "subdued, homogenized, dominated utterly" (Pollan 74). The grass is violently mowed over and again, prevented from showing signs of change, development, or self-determination. The image of the American lawn seems to hold a paradox: in renouncing boundaries, it becomes more violent and intrusive.

The approach to borders that is implied in the image of infinite American lawn subscribes to the contemporary commonplace ideal of a globalized world without boundaries. Boundaries are, more often than not, perceived as anonymous and immobile, given entities that supersede the individual. They are often treated merely as obstacles that could and should be eradicated. However, this vision is both utopian and deceptive As the example of Pollan's lawn indicates, proclaiming the disappearance of boundaries may bypass the unequal power relations that are at play, not only in the construction of boundaries, but also in their destruction. The contemporary notion of a borderless, globalized world only functions as such for a small, privileged fraction of the world's population, simultaneously imposing more borders, exclusions, and limitations upon others.

A unilaterally dismissive vision of boundaries also becomes blind to their crucial functions as determining factors in the shaping of cultural spaces and the formation of identity. Boundaries are not violent by definition, but function in that way when they are treated as dividing lines with an unchanging status. However, since boundaries are constructions rather than essences or givens, they have a contingent, even arbitrary nature making them subject to contestation, and even radical change. Contrary to essentialist approaches treating them as dividing lines and thus fostering an oppositional relation between the two sides of the line, boundaries can also be examined as spaces with specific *functions*. This performative approach to boundaries is taken up by Inge Boer in *Uncertain Territories* (2006). Boer propagates an alternative vision of boundaries as rhetorical or cultural *spaces*, where "opposition yields to negotiation," and where "the multifaceted reality of intercultural relations takes on more prominence than the mere demarcation of a binary opposition would allow" (3). Boundaries can thus be viewed as uncertain and therefore productive spaces, in which contrasting visions meet, and where fertile ground is created for acts of negotiation and contestation.

In what follows, I read two autobiographical works by the Caribbean migrant writer Jamaica Kincaid: *A Small Place* (1988) and *My Garden (Book)* (2000). My focus is on

Kincaid's struggle with boundaries, which, as I will attempt to show, leads to a shift in her writing. Her vision in *A Small Place* is determined by the painful awareness of the violence of boundaries and the oppositions they engender, while she simultaneously employs those oppositions and suggests their inevitability. In *My Garden (Book)*, in which the narrator thinks through the trope of 'the garden' and the habits of thought and practice that it fosters, boundaries become sites of inclusion and negotiation. In Kincaid's garden, boundaries and divisions do not disappear, but melt from thin lines into broader spaces that are open to negotiation with alterity. The garden functions as a real site where the narrator strives to accommodate the experience of migration, as well as an imaginary, fictional site, in which this migratory experience is performed through a practice of writing *as* gardening.

Boundaries in *A Small Place*: A Love-Hate Relationship

In her books, Kincaid seeks out a narrative space that is able to encompass her cultural, ethnic, historical, and gendered specificity. Her life as a writer starts after she leaves the Caribbean island of Antigua, where she grew up, to emigrate to the United States, where she has lived ever since. Although all of Kincaid's books are inextricably linked to her experiences, the books that I discuss here, both labeled as 'non-fiction' by the publisher, are two of her most explicitly autobiographical works.[1] *A Small Place* is the short and angry account of an Antiguan migrant woman revisiting her island, describing the distressing situation she faces in relation to Western tourists, the former British colonialists, Western neocolonialists, as well as the Antiguans themselves. In *My Garden (Book)*, the author recounts the observations and experiences of her favorite activity, gardening, while working on her own garden at her house in Vermont.

Kincaid's writing is marked by the painful awareness of the constructedness and artificiality of boundaries and the unequal power relations that run through them, imposing confinement and exploitation on some people, while functioning as liberating forces for others. The author's life, as enacted through her writing, is characterized by her transgression of the boundary between her island, Antigua, and the West. This boundary, crossed by migration, is the main reason for the author's fractured identity and the constant conflict between the past and the present in her work. The aporia of belonging/not-belonging, so characteristic for migrants, dominates her writing, and accounts for the obsessive reappearance of the same themes: her relation toward Antigua and its people; her relation to her new country of settlement, the U.S.; the relation of the U.S. (and the West in general) to her island, especially within the context of globalization. The originality of each book does not lie so much in the novelty of the material, but in Kincaid's attitudinal shifts toward it and the different angles from which she deals with it. These shifts are unmistakable signs of constant processes of conflict and negotiation.

However, the step from the awareness of the divisive function of boundaries as we see it in *A Small Place*, to a perception of boundaries as spaces of negotiation, to which she comes closer in *My Garden (Book)*, is neither self-evident nor easy. Attaining a productive vision of boundaries to negotiate one's own past, present, and identity, is a difficult task, especially when the violent side of boundaries has marked a person's everyday life and existence. The ongoing process of this struggle to create one's own place in the world not *despite*, but *through* and *with* boundaries, is what I wish to bring out in my reading of Kincaid.

In *A Small Place*, the narrating voice belongs to an ex-Antiguan who has emigrated to the U.S. and is revisiting her island. Her narrative could be described as an alternative tourist guide to the island of Antigua, exposing the ugly side of globalization and the effects of colonialism and neocolonialism on the island. It comprises four parts, of which the first three stage a series of indictments: against Western tourists and the neocolonial practices of the West on Antigua (first part); against British colonialism, whose destructive effect is still tangible in the present of the island (second part); and against the Antiguans themselves and government corruption in Antigua (third part). The final part presents a lyrical description of Antigua's overwhelming beauty.

The book starts by informing the reader: "If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see." Even though the addition "as a tourist" already suggests that the tourist gaze is a specific kind of gaze through which reality is filtered, the first lines could still be plausible as the typical beginning of a travel narrative or a tourist guide to an exotic place. Soon, however, the expectations that this beginning evokes are shattered. In contrast to typical travel narratives, in which the narrators often place themselves in the same group as the reader and appeal to experiences to which these readers can relate, the narrator here seeks disidentification with her readers, their estrangement from commonly lived experiences. Her narrative is an alternative guided tour, juxtaposing the tourist's stereotypical vision of Antigua with that of the narrator, presented as the reality behind the cheerful curtains of the tourist industry. Soon one realizes that the repeated use of the word 'tourist' comes with negative connotations, which strip the word of its supposed innocence.

But who is this tourist? The tourist she has in mind, whom she repeatedly addresses with the pronoun 'you' and thus identifies with the reader, is a "North American or European—to be frank, white" (4), implicitly male and educated ("You have brought your own books with you and among them is one of those new books about economic history … ," 9). He views Antigua and its people in terms of his own needs, desires, and standards, projections of his own worldview.[2] With his narcissistic gaze, impervious to the other and unwilling to exceed his own boundaries in order to make contact, he ends up watching a reflection of himself everywhere: "You see yourself taking a walk on that beach, you see yourself meeting new people …. You see yourself eating some delicious, locally grown food. You see yourself, you see yourself … " (13). The narrator constantly anticipates this tourist's reactions: "This may frighten you (you are on holiday; you are a tourist); this might excite you (you are on holiday; you are a tourist)" (6). After nearly every example of frivolous or provocative behavior, the phrase "you are a tourist" is reiterated as a "drumbeat of indictment" rather than an excuse (Simmons 470). In this way, the tourist, who dehumanizes the natives by reducing them to stereotypical vacation scenery, is reduced to a stereotype himself: "You are a tourist" (Simmons 471).[3]

The narrator undermines the search for, and expectation of, authenticity that accompanies tourism and travel in two ways. First, by way of repetition and presupposition: by repeating phrases (such as "you are a tourist") and by predicting the tourist's every move and reaction, the narrator turns the tourist into a predictable member of a horde, dismisses his individuality, and shatters the illusion of the authenticity of his experience. The second way in which authenticity is exposed as fiction lies in the narrator's juxtaposition of the 'real' picture of the island with the romanticized façade built by tourist guides. Behind the hospital building, she sees the terrible, almost non-existent health system; behind the old library building, the decaying interest in education; behind the beauty of the sea and the sun, the long periods of drought that the population must suffer; behind the luxurious hotels and restaurants, the ecological destruction. When traveling, the tourist tries to translate the new and unknown into terms of the known and familiar, following the stereotypical images and descriptions that are offered to him in travel guides. Contaminating the stereotypical images in the tourist's mind with an unfamiliar, confrontational, and certainly less touristically appealing version of Antigua, the narrator sabotages this process of cultural translation and disrupts the framework within which the tourist's experience operates.

The tourist in *A Small Place* is transformed into "an ugly human being" (14), because he turns out to be complicit with the neocolonial practices of the West at the expense of Antigua and its population: "Every native would like to find a way out … But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere. And they are too poor to escape the reality of their lives." (18). The narrator makes the tourist's ventures seem less innocent, because she links his travels with the stagnation and immobility of the local people.

In foregrounding these interrelated inequalities, Kincaid implicitly addresses questions concerning the construction of boundaries: who draws boundaries, who crosses them and who cannot, who suffers, and who profits from them. In a globalized world, the groups that are in charge of time-space compression and hold the power over mobility and communication are, in many ways, responsible for the spatial imprisonment of other groups, that are unable to transgress boundaries and benefit from the new conditions of mobility (Massey 151).[4] The Antiguans belong to the latter groups, to those that suffer the consequences of the mobility that is orchestrated by the West.

The realization that Antigua is but a chessboard for neocolonial powers makes the narrator too angry to celebrate mobility and the alleged liberating potential of the dissolution of boundaries within our cosmopolitan world. She prefers to construe borders in order to distinguish friends from foes, choosing an inside-outside dialectic to articulate her views. Although her acts of addressing the reader seem to prepare the ground for an interactive exchange, the narrator is not really interested in broadening boundary lines so as to create a communicative space for herself, the reader/tourist, and the Antiguans. The objective of her direct address is to alienate the reader from his safe and distant position, making him aware of his complicity in neocolonial practices.

Kincaid's polyphonic narratorial voice, which deploys the discourses of the Western tourist, the colonist, and the ex-colonized, conveys the conflicting discourses that intersect on Antigua. Yet, the 'I' in the book longs for a fixed position. In the positions she assumes, she follows an exclusionary strategy, enhanced by her use of an oppositional 'I'-'you' dialectic. As Isabel Hoving argues, although the 'I' and the 'you' do not have consistent characteristics and are placed within different historical and political frameworks at different moments throughout the book, "the pronouns bind them to their fixed positions as opponents" (228). In Kincaid's narrative, boundaries are sharp dividing lines. For this reason, every encounter with the other side is interpreted in terms of conflict. The narrator presupposes an enemy camp and builds a wall between that camp and her own position. Her anger is directed against this 'other,' which she differentiates from her own stance, hence avoiding ever being the object of accusation. Thus, when she addresses and accuses the tourist, she is emphatically not a tourist herself; in the first part, the 'I' is clearly one of the Antiguans. When she turns against the English colonialists, she places herself again with the Antiguans and with the colonized in general: "But what I see is the millions of people, *of whom I am just one,* made orphans" (31, my emphasis).

However, when she finally turns against the Antiguans, she switches from the position of the oppressed insider to that of the privileged outsider. She considers herself capable of understanding and reflecting on the situation of the island and its people, a situation that the Antiguans themselves cannot grasp, because they have succumbed to a destiny from which she has escaped. Consequently, the previous 'we' is now divided into 'I' and 'them.' [5] This skillful evasion of self-reflection continues throughout the book. When she writes about the 'ignorant' and 'foolish' young Antiguan generation, she belongs to the camp of the older generation. When she addresses the corrupt rich Antiguans, she is with the 'good poor Antiguans.'

The narrator's belonging and not-belonging to these different groups underscores her fractured identity. The trauma of colonialism and migration has implanted in her the dream of a state of wholeness, a dream which appears in many of Kincaid's works.[6] Here, that dream is suggested in the final part of the book, where the narrator offers a lyrical hymn to the beauty of Antigua. This beauty encompasses everyone and everything on the island and is so overwhelming, that the narrator finds it almost unreal, dreamlike. But even this alluring, idealized image of Antigua cannot escape from the violence of boundary lines, because the narrator realizes that it is based on an exclusion of the outside world. Eventually, this Antigua becomes suffocating, restricting, and solipsistic, because it makes one lose perspective of what lies outside the borders of this small and beautiful world, and obstructs the knowledge of the interconnectedness of every small place with the rest of the world: "It is as if, then, the beauty … were a prison, and as if everything and everybody inside it were locked in and everything and everybody that is not inside it were locked out." (79) This statement, following the idealized description of the island, undermines the very image of unity and harmony that the narrator has just built up, and underscores the deceptive nature of the island's beauty. At the same time, the self-cancellation of the perfect image the narrator has just sketched, plays out the impossibility of a formerly colonized migrant subject with a coherent voice, the torment of being caught up in one's own contradictions.

As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has observed, Kincaid's narrative manages to "question the indulgences of contemporary diasporism," by performing its inability to inhabit postcolonial hybridity.[7] This inability is reflected in the narrator's shifting positions and her failure to commit to any of them. Doing so, the narrator undermines naively idealized and celebratory theorizations of the diasporic individual. Her lack of connection or commitment also points to the inadequacy of any established discourse (colonial, postcolonial or anti-colonial) to accommodate the complexities of her identity and voice.[8] As Isabel Hoving argues, on a discursive level the narrator "always keeps a certain distance to the words she utters" (234).

One way in which Kincaid maintains this distance is her use of what Homi Bhabha has called 'colonial mimicry.' This is a strategy of employing colonial discourse in a way that this discourse produces "its slippage, its excess, its difference," resulting in the disavowal of its authority (*Location* 122–23). For instance, the British vocabulary of good manners is subversively employed by the narrator. As Hoving observes, the manner of speech that the narrator ascribes to the Antiguans imitates the English 'discourse of decency': words such as "small-minded," "un-Christian-like" (29), "badly behaved" (30) are employed to disqualify the behavior of the colonizers, while the colonized are "better behaved," "full of grace," and "superior" (Kincaid 30; Hoving 233). The neocolonialists do not escape her subversive discourse either. Talking about an exclusive club of North Americans living in Antigua, the English discourse of hospitality takes a subversive turn: "There they were, strangers in someone else's home, and then they refused to talk to their hosts or have anything human, anything intimate, to do with them" (27).

In *A Small Place*, whether she talks about the neocolonial present or the colonial past, whether she addresses the tourist, the British, or the Antiguans, the main feature of the narrator's voice is anger. Watching diverse discourses and power strands intersect at the small island of Antigua, she reads these intersections in terms of conflicts—not as happy or potentially constructive encounters. She is too angry to leave the past behind:

> *But nothing can erase my rage—not an apology, not a large sum of money, not the death of the criminal—for this wrong can never be made right, and only the impossible can make me still: can a way be found to make what happened not have happened? (32)*

Although this last question torments her, she does not try to solve it here. She is busier reversing hierarchies than aiming at a negotiation between conflicting parties. Admittedly, she shifts positions, a strategy that contradicts and thus undermines her own voice. However, in every position and discourse she assumes there are always two clearly opposed sides. In the short closing part of her book, Kincaid writes in parentheses:

> *(there is no dawn in Antigua: one minute, you are in the complete darkness of night; the next minute, the sun is overhead and it stays there until it sets with an explosion of reds on the horizon, and then the darkness of night comes again, and it is as if the open lid of a box you are inside suddenly snaps into place) (78).*

This shift from darkness to light is immediate, without transition. I see this image as a visual metaphor for her own voice and objective in the book: to juxtapose a radically opposite view with the official Western version of history, and to express that in an explosive way, just like the explosion of the Antiguan sunrise. No golden middles are good enough: she wants to shock, even if she disturbs, even if she exaggerates, and even if her arguments are sometimes flirting with the irrational, or are formulated with childish bluntness, which, for instance, drives her to declare that "all masters of every stripe are rubbish, and all slaves of every stripe are noble and exalted" (80).

Nevertheless, the adoption of these oppositions throughout the book, sometimes pushed to the extreme, does not mean that the narrator endorses them as fundamental categories. Often the extreme positions she takes up are rhetorical strategies, meant to expose the absurdity inherent in distinctions. Her shifting of roles demonstrates the arbitrariness of labels, which may be useful for structuring an argument, but are unable to encapsulate a human being. Her use of stereotypes, such as that of the Western tourist, is meant to cause readers irritation and protest, and eventually make them question their legitimacy. But the narrator does not simply *choose* to apply these labels. She has been shaped by the binary oppositions of the authoritative discourse of colonialism and its continuation in neocolonial practices. The narrator is self-contradictory and unreliable, because she is herself the function of an equally unreliable discourse, and is limited by the hegemonies against which she tries to express herself. A product of this discourse, she cannot merely choose to discard it. Instead, she tries to undermine it from the inside, either by distorting it, demystifying it, or by exposing it as paradoxical and absurd.

In the final lines of the book, the narrator announces a unification of the enemy camps, masters and slaves, under the commonly shared umbrella of "human beings":

> *once you cease to be a master, once you throw off your master's yoke, you are no longer human rubbish, you are just a human being, and all the things that adds up to. So, too, with the slaves. Once they are no longer slaves, once they are free, they are no longer noble and exalted; they are just human beings (81).*

At first glance, this statement seems enigmatic in relation to the rest of her narrative. Is she imagining a space where opposites merge and people can discard the burden of names—as though names do not determine or touch the essence of their being—and be left in the bare skin of an unmarked humanity? Is she expressing a dream of unity in the knowledge of its utopian character? Is she performing another ironic and subversive move?

According to Hoving, despite the soothing tone of this statement, the 'sting' lies in the structure of the address: as the narrator deconstructs the master-slave dichotomy, she still clings to the 'they'/'you' opposition, thereby fixing the protagonists in their positions (235). The content of her argument is undermined by the performativity of the sentence and its syntax. I would argue that this contradiction between content and syntax—what we may respectively call the constative and performative aspects of this sentence—does not necessarily point to an unreliable or hypocritical narrative voice.[9] Rather, it can be read as a sign of the narrator's internal struggle, which consists in her wish to overcome oppositional discourse, and her inability to perform this move in practice, since she, too, is part of this discourse. Although she cannot escape from the violence of boundaries, she points out that these labels are not essential, and therefore subject to change. An alternative becomes thus possible to envision.

The final lines could therefore be taken as a programmatic statement, a promise to carry on this confrontation of self and other elsewhere, in her books to follow, where she will start negotiating opposites rather than sustaining them. In this book, Kincaid's view of boundaries as dividing lines does not yet allow for a productive encounter between the two sides. Yet, the closing of *A Small Place* offers an implicit promise in that direction.

The Boundaries that Grow in Kincaid's Garden

> *For if lawn mowing feels like copying the same sentence over and over, gardening is like writing out new ones, an infinitely variable process of invention and discovery. Gardens also teach the necessary if un-American lesson that nature and culture can be compromised, that there might be some middle ground between the lawn and the forest—between those who would complete the conquest of the planet in the name of progress, and those who believe it's time we abdicated our rule and left the earth in the care of its more innocent species. The garden suggests there might be a place where we can meet nature halfway (Pollan 77).*

In *My Garden (Book)*, written twelve years later, Kincaid takes a further step toward the direction that appears as a promise in *A Small Place*. In this book, we get a glimpse of Kincaid's actual life in Vermont. There is no visit or return to her island and, hence, the narrator explicitly speaks from her position as an Antiguan migrant woman living in the United States. Despite its privileges, this is a position purchased with guilt, the guilt of the successful economic migrant, which Spivak has called "the unease of diaspora" (348). The narrator experiences this new position as the crossing of a boundary: "And I thought that I had crossed a line; but at whose expense? I cannot begin to look, because what if it is someone I know? … I have joined the conquering class: who else could afford this garden—a garden in which I grow things that it would be much cheaper to buy at the store?" (92). She is deeply engaged in a Western lifestyle, a fact that becomes evident from her central activity in the book, gardening, which she identifies as a typically Western habit with strong connections with slavery and colonialism.[10]

However, the narrator in *My Garden (Book)* is not afraid to bring together the two worlds, Antigua and the West. The place of this encounter is her garden in Vermont. The garden also functions as a metaphor for this encounter, signifying the transfer and hosting of her island and of her past to her new home in the West: "it dawned on me that the garden I was making (and am still making and will always be making) resembled a map of the Caribbean and the sea that surrounds it" (xiv). The garden becomes "an exercise in memory, a way of remembering my own immediate past, a way of getting to a past that is my own (the Caribbean Sea) and the past as it is indirectly related to me (the conquest of Mexico and its surroundings)" (xiv). The unconscious mapping of her garden into the shape of Antigua corresponds to the migrant subject's need to accommodate her memories of the past, both personal and collective, in the present, as well as to deal with the enduring conflict between Antigua and her new home. The garden not only fosters a dynamic between past and present, but also, as a site of growth and development par excellence, it combines the past (the seeds and roots) with the present (the everyday care of the gardener) in order to anticipate the future. Similarly, the working through of historical and personal memory in the garden proceeds with an eye on the future: "Memory is a gardener's real palette; memory as it summons up the past, memory as it shapes the present, memory as it dictates the future" (168).

Not only does Kincaid use the garden as an abstract metaphor or as excuse for talking about something else. As the following statement suggests, gardening is not just a rhetorical trope, employed to enrich her writing with botanical imagery. Rather, gardening receives attention in its own right, by being compared to writing, not the other way around: "Gardening is like writing, I suppose; you don't really know what you're doing, but you don't really want to know" (Kincaid in Balutanski 790). Nor do the respective activities of writing and gardening correspond to the mind/body split, which would sustain the hierarchical relationship between the two, subordinating the latter to the former.

One could argue that a reversal of the hierarchy takes place, as we can see in the title of *My Garden (Book),* which places the practice of writing in the shadow of gardening, putting 'the book' in parenthesis. Kincaid's gardening activities are passionately recorded in detail, in a way that demonstrates the intimate intertwining of manual work and writing as creative activities, serving similar or complementary functions. The title, even if placing 'book' in parenthesis, is indicative of this interrelation: comprising both words, 'garden' and 'book,' it announces Kincaid's double move of creating a lived, practiced, changing space (the garden) within writing, thus transforming the practice of writing (and reading) into a never-ending, negotiable, and physically arduous performance. The garden and the written page merge into a lived, concrete, and yet unfixed and productive space, akin to what Edward Soja has described as a 'Thirdspace': a third element added to the binary between physical and mental space, a "lived space as a strategic location from which to encompass, understand, and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously" (68). Gardener and writer work together to denaturalize both gardening and writing, turning them into inclusive and interconnected spaces, and investing them with new, foreign meanings and roles.

To some extent, the narrating voice in *My Garden (Book)* is still recognizable as the same voice in *A Small Place*. "For some people a fixed state of irritation is oxygen," she admits (84). When writing about the English, or about the concealed racism of certain Americans in the place where she lives, her tone betrays the grudges she still holds.[11] There is a constant juxtaposition of 'the place I live' with 'the place I am from,' in which the differences between the two worlds are sometimes sketched in starkly oppositional terms, underscoring the divisive force of the boundary between them. "My feet are (so to speak) in two worlds," she remarks, and she suffers from the consequences of this divisiveness: "To me, the world is cracked, unwhole, not pure, accidental" (92). The oscillation between the past and the present, Antigua and the West, the official history of colonialism and the stories of the colonized, blurs her sense of belonging and self-awareness. The experience of colonialism and migration has left her unable to situate herself with respect to history as well as geography: "[W]hat should I do, how should I feel, where should I place myself?" (114).

In an attempt to situate herself in history and 'plant' the past in her present, thus creating a fertile space for it, Kincaid sets out to reread past narratives. She rereads the Western tradition of gardening through the history of colonial occupation, thus taking away the 'innocent' beauty of Western gardens. Her critical eye reaches as far as the garden of all gardens, the garden of Eden, which the narrator believes was created by God (for her, a big 'He') with a rigidity that allowed for no freedom, and established the conditions for "deep social injustice" (172–73). In its prescriptive, authoritative nature, the discourse of Western Christianity is not far from colonial discourse.

Exposing the *naturalized* beauty of paradise, she asserts that paradise—and, one could argue, every Western paradise, including Antigua as holiday resort—is designed to look as though it has "fallen out of thin air" (115): "Nothing about it suggests the messy life of the builder, the carpenter, the quarrels with the contractor, the people who are late with the delivery of materials … all the *troublesome details* have been vanquished, overcome" (116, my emphasis).

The narrator frequently reinserts in Western narratives of gardening, botany, colonialism, and exploration those foreign, destabilizing elements, which she calls "troublesome details," or "asterisks," added "at the end of the official story making my own addition" (123). In this way, she reacts against the construction of the colonized land as empty, which is how the colonized space often appeared in the colonizers' eyes. Rereading an account of the Dutch East India Company in an encyclopedia, she cannot help remarking that "[i]t never mentions the people who lived in the area of the Dutch trading factories, places like Ceylon, Java, the Cape of Good Hope, are emptied of their people as the landscape itself was emptied of the things they were familiar with" (124). Kincaid describes here the "colonizer's comfortable assumption of emptiness, not recognizing [what Soja has termed] Thirdspace, the lived practice of space and place" (Boer, *Uncertain Territories* 126). The narrator is determined to 'contaminate' this purported emptiness. As she re-embeds Western texts in her own narrative, she radically reclaims as *lived space* what, in Western eyes, was perceived as a space devoid of people.

Kincaid performs what could be described as a 'palimpsestic rereading' of narratives of colonial conquest, as well as of books on the history of plants, which, she argues, is not detached from colonial history. As Boer demonstrates, it is not in the object itself, but in the act of *rereading* that palimpsestic traces emerge (*Disorienting Vision* 19). Kincaid's palimpsestic rereading of past texts lies in the uncovering of stereotypes regarding the (non)representation of the colonized other and the perception of the conquered lands as empty. Furthermore, it lies in her critical interventions in the narratives of Western conquest, which she denaturalizes by adding elements of her own (and her people's) version of history.[12] In that way, her rereading embraces history and the present, by questioning history from a viewpoint in the present (Boer *Disorienting Vision,* 195), thus creating "a space of intervention in the here and now" (Bhabha, *Location* 10).

The narrator strives for proximity and the understanding of things that seem incompatible to her; yet, without glossing over the conflictual aspects or complexity of their interrelations. Her reading of past and recent accounts of famous botanists is partly an attempt to link their stories to hers. While she retains her own difference, she simultaneously repositions herself in the context of their work, so that she can grasp their frame of thinking, share their thrills, and join their circle. Writing about George Clifford, for instance, a merchant banker and botanist, she enters his narrative by trying to transfer herself to the time and place of his writing: "What could it possibly mean to be a merchant banker in the eighteenth century?" (123).

She often talks about these books in terms of a lover's discourse, declaring, for instance, that she is having "a minor infatuation" with the Shepherd's Green Seeds catalogue, or that she is "completely immersed" in Gertrude Jekyll's writings (65). In one of her interviews in *Callaloo*, Kincaid confesses that she has named several of her plants and trees after Western canonical writers, with many of whom she enjoys a love-hate relationship. She even seeks direct confrontation in her garden with the writers who inspire hatred in her or, to her, represent things she hates. Having named one of her tree peonies "Ezra Pound," she admits in the same interview: "I debated whether I should have a fascist and an anti-semite in my garden" (Kincaid in Balutanski 797). As a gardener and writer, she is formed as much by relationships of hatred as those of love, and feels compelled to give both a place in her garden, despite bitterly regretting it at times. This is particularly the case with Ezra Pound: "I do have him growing in my garden! Aaaaaaaaaagh!" (Kincaid in Balutanski 800).

By engaging in dialogue with these writers, she provides 'hospitality' for narratives that belong to the 'other side.' Needless to say, she refuses to play the perfect hostess, flattering her guests. Undertaking an act of hospitality, the host welcomes the other together with the challenge of her or his difference—an act which always entails a certain risk, since there is no guarantee regarding the outcome of the encounter.[13] Things might be said that please neither the host nor the guest. The encounters that take place when spaces are formed out of boundary lines, as is the case here, should not be idealized, as "they are not likely to be peaceful" (Boer, *Uncertain Territories* 52). But it is only in such uncertain spaces of negotiation, where contestation becomes possible, that "newness can occur" and, I would add, productive criticism can be performed (Boer, *Uncertain Territories* 52).

Kincaid is not interested in simply 'writing back' at Western narratives. In *My Garden (Book)*, she appears willing to lead the conflicts that emerge from her reading of the past toward a process of negotiation, through which she tries to reach an understanding of both sides involved. She created her garden with the same intention: "[F]or I had (have) come to see that a garden, to make a garden, is partly an attempt to do that, to bring in from the wild as many things as can be appreciated, as many things as it is possible for a gardener to give meaning to, as many things as it is possible for the gardener to understand" (175). Contrary to her strategy in *A Small Place*, involving the use of colonial *mimicry*, here she undertakes the difficult task of cultural *translation*. Kincaid's rereading of authors of the Western tradition, as well as her rereading of the Western garden in general, can be seen as a creative act of translation, through which the Western garden is reshaped into something new that bears her own signature: a lived and unpredictable space, which carries historical and personal memory, and becomes a site of resistance.

According to Bhabha, cultural translation does not function simply as a bridge between already-given cultures, but becomes an activity of cultural creation, which brings into being the realities which it links.[14] Kincaid's translation is not an act of mediation between the Western culture and the culture of the colonized, but rather a creative act, shaping a new hybrid space, in which a negotiation takes place between different texts and traditions. In order to do that, she develops what Bhabha calls an “interstitial intimacy” with authors of the Western tradition: an intimacy that questions the binary oppositions through which spheres of experience are often spatially opposed, and links these spheres “through an ‘in-between’ temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history” (*Location* 19). The garden becomes the real and symbolic site of this ‘in-between’ temporality, functioning as a space of translation, where past and present, West and Antigua, the local and the global, home and the world, are reconfigured and made new, as a result of their encounter. “For the fact is that the world cannot be left out of the garden,” the narrator remarks (59).

Kincaid’s act of translation does not wish to reinforce the authoritative force of the tradition with which she engages, but displaces that tradition, inserting her own subversive additions (her “asterisks”) and introducing foreignness into Western texts. As Bhabha argues, translation can imitate an original in such a way that the priority of the original is questioned by the very fact that it can be copied, transformed, simulated (“Space” 210). The original is thus never finished or complete in itself, but always open to translation, so that “it can never be said to have a totalized prior moment of being or meaning—an essence” (“Space” 210). I would argue that this openness not only applies to the original, but also extends to the translation itself. Kincaid’s attempted cultural translation is never fully successful or finished, as it always stumbles upon resistant elements, which do not lend themselves to translation and project an irreducible difference.

Similarly, the garden-space, as the symbolic site of this translation, is never perfect and finite. The plants in Kincaid’s garden form a celebration of colors, shapes, and smells from all over the world. In its overwhelming diversity, however, her garden is far from an unproblematic collection of elements. It is by no means a jubilant ‘United Colors of Benetton’ type of garden. Rather, it is a hybrid construction that is marked by cultural difference, indeterminacy, and challenge. The compulsive habit of the English to adjust every garden and every place, including Antigua, to their own standards, hold no sway in Kincaid’s garden. Her garden is full of conflicts and contradictions, unpredictable elements, and stubborn irregularities, such as the daring Wisteria, which insists on blooming out of season (3–4). It is not perfect, fixed, or ordered; it constantly surprises her, either by failing or by superseding her expectations.

Nevertheless, it gives one the joy of always trying to improve it. “I shall never have the garden I have in my mind,” she observes, “but that for me is the joy of it; certain things can never be realized and so all the more reason to attempt them. A garden, no matter how good it is, must never completely satisfy” (169). Kincaid’s garden anticipates a future that is never fully predictable or fully realized, since there are no guarantees of the final outcome: the shapes the plants will take, their size, which flowers will eventually bloom, and which will not, cannot be known in advance. What is more, the garden is always in a process of motion and growth, even when it seems inactive (for, even in winter there are trees and plants that grow and bloom). Due to these imperfections, surprises, failures, and unpredictabilities, the garden "opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, *Location* 5).

Kincaid's garden does not function as a pathway to oblivion, or as a means of retreating from the troubles of the world, which is how the trope of the garden often functions in the Western literary tradition.[15] Neither the garden itself nor her writing about the garden are able to offer closure to the issues that come up in the author's works. Her garden (book) leaves the reader with an unsatisfied feeling, like an open wound or unresolved conflict. At the same time, it points toward the future, a future that becomes, as Bhabha phrases it, "an open question, instead of being specified by the fixity of the past" (*Location* 314).

Walking on Boundaries

Kincaid's complex position of enunciation makes her writing an act of walking on boundaries. Circumventing them is not an option for her. Through her struggle with boundaries in her writing, her perception of their function shifts: from the divisive violence of boundaries as she perceives them in *A Small Place*, to the experience of boundaries as productive spaces, open for negotiation with otherness in *My Garden (Book).* In *A Small Place*, she walks on a balancing rope, leaning, tipping, and falling from one side to the other, without finding her place in either. As her vision expands and becomes more inclusive, she allows what were once boundary lines to grow into spaces, and creates new ground on which, as it were, she can place her feet. The boundary space that the narrator of *My Garden (Book)* produces is not established at the cost of erasing memories, or of committing herself to either side of the line. It is created by allowing for a confrontation and negotiation of the past with the present, and by learning to live with difference. While the space she opens in *My Garden (Book)* is by no means safe and devoid of conflicts, it is nonetheless a place that she, to some extent, can claim as her own.

Kincaid's struggle points to the fact that the achievement of a view of boundaries as functional spaces is not a simple theoretical tool that can be effortlessly endorsed. For the ruptured migrant subject, forced to face boundaries and their divisive consequences, approaching boundaries as spaces of negotiation is a process of negotiation in itself. It is also a struggle that never ends, and has to be fought over and again. For that very reason, however, it becomes all the more significant when such a broadening of boundary lines takes place, enabling critical engagement with both sides of the line. Kincaid's preoccupation with gardening in *My Garden (Book)*, with all of its metaphorical resonances, becomes a performative demonstration of this process as a constant and toilsome activity, which, just like the garden, requires continuous work to be sustained.

The practice of gardening, as undertaken by Kincaid, becomes an intimate engagement with place, focusing on its particularities. Unlike the lawn in Pollan's story, the garden turns space into place, and allows the gardener to play out her anger, conflicts, curiosity, frustration, fascination, creativity, and difference, all of which flourish when boundaries become fertile zones. This potential of gardening similarly leads Pollan to consider the garden as an alternative to the lawn:

> *Gardening, I had by now come to appreciate, is a painstaking exploration of place; everything that happens in my garden—the thriving and dying of particular plants, the maraudings of various insects and other pests—teaches me to know this patch of land more intimately, its geology and microclimate, the particular ecology of its local weeds and animals and insects. My garden prospers to the extent I grasp these particularities and adapt to them. Lawns work on the opposite principle. They depend for their success on the overcoming of local conditions (Pollan 73).*

The boundaries that grow in Kincaid's garden do not succumb to the oppressive borderlessness of suburban uniformity. They create trouble in paradise. The final lines of *My Garden (Book)* confirm the narrator's compulsive tendency to expose the exclusionary and irritating side of perfect, harmonious spaces, to intrude and disturb, to plant boundaries and stage conflicts, not in order to shut herself off, but as a way of building bridges and coming closer to others: "Eden is like that, so rich in comfort, it tempts me to cause discomfort; I am in a state of constant discomfort and I like this state so much I would like to share it" (177).

Like her garden, Kincaid's writing deliberately avoids harmony and order, and takes place on a moving ground: it changes positions, it oscillates, it stutters, it disturbs, it is marked by confusion, indecisiveness, and resistance to closure; it shakes with anger, irritation, and excitement. Reflecting Kincaid's migratory experience, it never stands still. Writing *as* gardening ultimately becomes the uncertain site, where the migrant subject struggles to chart her real and imaginary never-ending journeys.

Notes

1. These two books, together with *My Brother* (1998), are Kincaid's most explicitly autobiographical works. Kincaid's following statement in an interview is characteristic of the conflation of her life experiences and her writings: "For me, writing isn't a way of being public or private; it's just a way of being. The process is always full of pain, but I like that. It's a reality, and I just accept it as something not to be avoided. This is the life I have. This is the life I write about" (Interview by Marilyn Snell for *Motherjones* magazine).

2. I deliberately employ the pronoun 'he' when referring to the reader or tourist in this book, following the narrator's presupposition of this persona as male.

3. Simmons offers a detailed account of the way Kincaid constructs the narcissistic portrait of the Western white male tourist and turns him into a stereotype rather than letting him dehumanize Antigua and its people (470–71).

4. The term 'time-space compression' was used by geographer David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, to refer to processes and technologies that accelerate time and eliminate spatial barriers and distances. These processes have made the modern world a smaller place, connecting different markets in order to create a world market with global producers and consumers. Capitalist modernization, according to Harvey, is "very much about speed-up and acceleration in the pace of economic processes and, hence, social life" (230).

5. On the use of pronouns, the inconsistency of the 'I' and the 'you,' and the different frameworks in which these pronouns function in *A Small Place,* see Hoving 228–30.

6. This longing for unity or wholeness is most explicitly thematized in *At the Bottom of the River* (1979), Kincaid's first book, and in *Mr. Potter* (2002), although these two books, separated by more than two decades, deal with this theme in quite different ways.

7. Gayatri Spivak makes this observation in her discussion of Kincaid's *Lucy* (345).

8. In her analysis of Kincaid's *Lucy*, Spivak deduces the narrator's "withdrawal from affected connectedness" (339) from her dominant use of *parataxis* (the placing together of phrases or sentences with minimal use of subordination). Parataxis is deployed in *A Small Place* as well, although here it is somewhat less dominant than in *Lucy*.

9. I use the terms 'constative' and 'performative' in the way they are used in J.L. Austin's speech act theory, developed in *How to Do Things with Words*. Constative refers to the aspect of an utterance that states or asserts something, which can be true or false. Performative refers to the aspect of an utterance that does what it says.

10. The slaves had to work in the plantations or to make gardens for the colonizers. The narrator points out that, even nowadays for the people of Antigua, gardening is often seen as a superfluous, futile activity.

11. Derisive remarks such as the following appear in places throughout the book: "Almost as if ashamed of the revulsion and hostility they have for foreign people, the English make up for it by loving and embracing foreign plants wholesale" (76).

12. According to Boer, a palimpsestic interpretation "uncovers both the reading of stereotypical notion *and* of critical assessments of them" (*Disorienting Vision* 19).

13. See also Derek Attridge's discussion of the act of opening oneself to the other and its implications (27–9). For Attridge, this act always involves a risk ("Since by definition there can be no certainty in opening oneself to the other,

every such opening is a gamble"), one worth taking (27).

14. Bhabha's views on cultural translation as presented in Simon 472.

15. In Voltaire's novella *Candide* (1759), for instance, at the end of the novel, Candide and his companions find in the garden a place where they can be isolated from the rest of the world. The garden marks the end of the character's adventures and trials, a place were he can find peace and happiness.

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Thamyris/Intersecting No. 19 (2008) 247–270

Beyond Words: The Acoustics of Movement, Memory, and Loss in Three Video Works by Martina Attille, Mona Hatoum, and Tracey Moffatt, ca. 1989

Griselda Pollock

Around 1988–89, a cluster of art works on film and video appeared that, in retrospect, offer themselves for analysis under the rubric 'migratory settings.' In its own singular fashion, each work addresses the double movement of actual relocation as the result of migration, forced or chosen, and the selection of a time-based aesthetic medium. The works all restage moments of reflection, critical, affective, and interrogative, on the significance for the enunciating subject of both migration and its setting into audio-visual form. The works in question were made by three women from diverse cultural spaces and histories: Aboriginal-Australian; exiled Palestinian living in Britain; and African-Caribbean living in Britain.

Furthermore, in the three films I consider here, the artists attend specifically to relations between mothers and daughters that open up themes of connectivity and separation, identification and distanciation, in time and space. The freighted bonds between women of two generations in these works are inflected by dispossession and mourning, as well as by the aesthetic processes of their *re*-setting in a time-based audio-visual medium, the moving image. The familial-subjective and the historical-political are interlaced as a mirror, in which to see their intimacy and their transformative interaction. Film and video work to represent and restage aspects of migratory subjectivities. Here, the notion of migration may involve movement through time on one hand but, on the other, also the violence of cultural rupture and spatial disorientation, to which aesthetic activity bears witness.

In these works, poetic as well as striking in their visuality, sound functions as the decisive dimension of the exploration of migratory subjectivities and their settings. Beyond migration as experience or history, 'migratory,' adjectivally suggests that experience can travel, and that difference can be registered as the movements of modes of living that resonate in varied spaces. My contribution explores the specifically acoustic dimension of the geographical dislocation and psychological separation of the migratory, and plots the role of sound in the challenge that is posed in audio-visual art by the subjectivities that are reshaped by migration, with their deep sense of loss and estrangement, to existing modes of narration, imagination, and memorialization. Three art works created by Tracey Moffatt (b.1960), Mona Hatoum (b. 1952) and Martina Attille (b. 1959) make possible, I argue, what can be called a 'holding together' of postcolonial feminist visualities and auralities, with questions of migratory aesthetics in a complex set of sense-based strategies. Time-based practices of montaged and sequential film or video work, these films simultaneously create a resonant acoustic atmosphere that sustains these movements precisely through the weaving of the audio and visual in ways that go beyond words.

Why did this seeming coincidental cluster of works of shared projects emerge at this date? Why do they share such a specific exploration of the acoustic as the means to aesthetically examine the migratory in relation to the maternal, as well as vice-versa? Why was it necessary to stage various aspects of historical traumas through an exploration of the daughter's relation to the mother? Does the focus on sound in this domain concern language as the site of lost translations? Or does sound unconsciously suggest a deeper relation to primary child-mother relations that move beneath the formal and symbolic structures of language? Have these women, each of them dealing with a migratory or postcolonial trauma, found in their feminist rewriting of film and video a medium that enables the political to be experienced and transformed by means of the aesthetic—the latter marking the intersection of subjectivities and affectivities that are subjacent to language without ever escaping or even aiming to resist its necessity? It is the tension between the finely structured artworks and what that structuring allows to occur that I wish to explore by attending closely to the acoustic dimension of these three films.

The absence of linguistic communication is the hallmark of Tracey Moffatt's *Nightcries* (1989). In Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988), the competing sound of spoken Arabic, the sight of its script, and the careful tones of a spoken English translation of that writing all work with the epistolatory as a genre between speech, writing, and the body. Martina Attille's *Dreaming Rivers* (1988) uses Creole song that is sung by disembodied voices, so that vocalized music marks not only the ruptured geographical spaces of African-Caribbean migrant subjectivity, but also the historical relation of generations of women to these alterior places. Translation, or its failure, at the level of articulated language therefore seems a factor in all three works, while sounds, voices, songs, and silence function as a transport for a deeper pathos with which each film is charged in different ways.

Some Theoretical Wandering/Wondering

Sound has been much less theorized and analyzed in cultural theory than the visual image, the gaze, and its related spectatorships. This has perhaps been overdetermined by the relative lack of attention to sound or the voice in psychoanalysis itself, a powerful resource in cultural theory. The significance of sound for both subjectivity and the aesthetic at the intersection with audio-visual media might be plotted through a range of theoretical resources in psychoanalysis. I can only introduce a few of these here—signposted by work by Julia Kristeva, Christopher Bollas, and Bracha Ettinger—as provisional paths toward my three films as cases of acoustic memory in migratory settings.

To begin, sound may concern the sub- or preverbal; the 'semiotic,' in Julia Kristeva's terms. The semiotic is not so much associated with the mother as 'object' for the emerging subject, but rather with the mother as a transitional, pre-symbolic space or environment. The invocation of the musicality of song—or, in the case of one of the video pieces, at least for the non-Arabic speaking subject, the sounds of someone speaking without semantic effect—makes us aware of something at play beneath the logical and symbolic purpose of language as signification: meaning by means of signs. Beyond words, there is sound, and sound is subjectively charged once it is what psychoanalysis specifies as 'the voice.' The voice is not someone's specific voice or anyone speaking. Just as the gaze is not about organ-based vision, but concerns the subject and its desire in the scopic field (the eye becoming an erotic zone rather than a mechanism for perception), so, too, the voice identifies something other than hearing by means of the ear. It might come close to what Bracha Ettinger theorizes as 'resonance,' a term to which I will return shortly ("Resonance").

In Kristeva's early thought, the semiotic suggests a spatializing and rhythmic dimension within the initial transactions between baby and the maternal other: at the same time a locus or environment and that which punctuates this space, initiating necessary gaps as well as seams of continuity that the patterns of formal language will later fracture and connect. To distinguish the semiotic dimension from signification proper, Julia Kristeva specifies a separate signifying process—she names it 'signifiance'—to enable us to recognize that there are, at least, two modalities constantly at work in the making of meaning: the semiotic and the symbolic. The former, though always already embedded within the symbolic dimension, is nonetheless open to the formative processes of subjective becoming, while the latter, the symbolic, is identified with the ordering and unity of communicative language. A poem, for instance, opens itself up to the drag of kinetic rhythm, while a law report struggles to be rigorously symbolic and communicate its meanings with a minimum of baggage or color. Kristeva writes:

These two processes are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative,

> *metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved; in other words, so-called "natural" language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic. On the other hand, there are nonverbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example). But, as we shall see, this exclusivity is relative, precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process, which is constitutive of the subject. Because the subject is always* both *semiotic* and *symbolic, no signifying process he produces can be "exclusively" semiotic or "exclusively" symbolic, and is instead marked by an indebtedness to both. (*Revolution *24)*

Subjectivity is enthralled to this dialectic. The importance of Kristeva's thinking lies first in stressing signification as process rather than structure; then, in identifying this dialectic; and finally, in establishing that, because of the process and/as dialectic, linguistics is opened up to philosophy and history: the speaking subject is always divided (between conscious and unconscious levels) (*Reader* 28). The semiotic, then, is a privileged aspect of that which opens signification to the intersubjective field, and hence to an aesthetic dimension of subjectivity and signification that is open to change, that is 'migratory' itself. As Kristeva specifies:

> *The point is not to replace the semiotics of the signifying systems by considerations on the biological code appropriate to the nature of those employing them—a tautological exercise, after all, since the biological code has been modeled on the language system. It is rather to postulate the* heterogeneity *of biological operations in respect of signifying operations, and to study the dialectics of the former (that is, in fact, that, though invariably subject to the signifying and/or social codes, they infringe on the code in the direction of allowing the subject to get pleasure from it, renew it, even endanger it; where, that is, the processes are not blocked by him in repression of "mental illness.") (*Reader *30)*

Practices that Kristeva identifies as 'aesthetic,' such as dance, music, poetry, and the visual arts, operate with a special hospitality to the semiotic pole of the signifying process. They open their portals to the semiotic's conditions of emergence in the pre- and nonverbal intensities of the drive-riven corporality of the infant, emerging as a subject through the 'holding space' that Kristeva designates as 'chora'.

Kristeva borrows the concept from Plato; it is, she writes, "the essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases." In addition, "the *chora* as rupture and articulations (rhythms) precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality" (*Revolution* 25–26). "Neither model nor copy," Kristeva argues, "the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous to vocal or kinetic rhythm" (*Revolution* 25–26). She draws here on the Kleinian expansion of the Freudian theory of the drives to ascribe semiotic potentiality to the "pre-Oedipal energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother" (*Revolution* 27).

Were we to investigate the three artworks in question through a Kristevan lens, we would hence be looking *beyond* the use of symbolic languages and their translations, and the indication of loss within the fields of historical and generational meaning. Instead, we would look *toward* the ways in which the films in their duration, montage, rupture, and articulations—hence in their rhythms—may work to predispose the viewer to intuit again an unrepresentable and pre-Oedipal mobility together with the holding space that once oriented the body to the mother, while neither the body nor the mother were separate objects of knowledge, representation, or even fantasy for the infant at that early stage. The imprint of our becoming that remains with us as the semiotic dimension of the signifying process may be set in aesthetic practice through the invocations of rhythm and environment.

Beyond this Kristevan possibility, the works under discussion invite us to take recourse to Christopher Bollas' idea of a specific aesthetic of infant being. Bollas accounts for our adult engagement with what he calls the 'aesthetic' as follows:

> *We know that because of the considerable prematurity of human birth the infant depends on the mother for survival. By serving as a supplementary ego or a facilitating environment she both sustains the baby's life and transmits to the infant, through her own particular* idiom of mothering an aesthetic of being *that becomes a feature of the infant's self. The mother's way of holding the infant, of responding to his gestures, of selecting objects, and of perceiving the infant's internal needs, constitutes her contribution to the infant-mother culture. In a private discourse that can only be developed by mother and child, the language of this relation is the idiom of gesture, gaze and inter-subjective utterance. (13; emphasis added)*

Physical holding, visual embrace, and vocalization forge connections that link the infant to its 'm/Other,' and bring about transformations in its inner world long before any kind of formal psychic apparatus or organized means of communication exists. The baby's inner world can still be 'moved' at this point, and its states, altered by the envelope of voiced sounds, participate in this aesthetic culture of mother-infant contact. In pursuing the insights that follow from this proposition, Bollas suggests that, before the mother is personalized for the infant as a whole object, she functions as a region or source of transformation (28). The mother is not a subjective object; rather, she functions as a subjectivizing environment that "transforms the subject's internal and external world" (28).

Thus, the mother is a transformational object. Bollas argues that we continually search for this nonverbal experience of the "metamorphosis of the self" in adult life:

> *The mother's idiom of care and the infant's experience of this handling is one of the first if not the earliest human aesthetic. It is the most profound occasion when the nature of the self is formed and transformed by the environment. The uncanny pleasure of being held by a poem, a composition, a painting, for that matter, any object, rests on those moments, when the infant's internal world is partly given form by the mother since he cannot shape them or link them together without her coverage. (33)*

Bollas views the mother not as an object to be recalled or refigured, but as the external source of the process of nonverbal, though not soundless, transformation that is internalized in time: what he calls a “metamorphosis of the self,” effected in later life by our relation to aesthetic forms and processes, which may ‘hold’ and ‘move’ us in a similar fashion.

Thus, we are invited to think along two lines of enquiry with respect to the ‘aesthetic of being’ that I am construing here. The first concerns the artist’s search, through aesthetic practice, for contact with this ‘movement’ within and of the self through what Bollas terms the “shadow of the object,” the traces on the emergent ego of the pressures of the transformational maternal object. The second line turns attention to the viewer, who encounters an artwork that has the capacity to restage an experience of the transformation of an inner world. These effects, both for the artist and for the viewer, might depend, in terms of the signifying process at work, on heightening semiotic, that is, non-verbal and non-syntactical elements without, of course, eliminating the syntactic and semantic shell in which these must dialectically be housed. These semiotic elements are already removed from the primary aesthetic of the transformation of the infant. Yet, these long embedded effects can still imprint upon adult artists or viewers a trace of that profound ‘unthought’ feeling, which have been part of the earliest drawing of the shape of the emerging ego-self.

Like Kristeva, Bollas analyzes the most archaic of infant-other interactions, locating in these some of the specific aesthetic effects—aesthetic in the sense of transforming and moving through the senses—that our adult selves seek again through aesthetic practices. Kristeva and Bollas invite us to attend psychoanalytically to an aesthetic dimension, a dialectic of formal and affective elements, that is situated beyond words, beyond the symbolic, beyond language. That dimension may well also be operative for bringing about the strong affects that are generated by the three works at stake here.

Finally, the works at stake here may also be available for analysis through what Bracha Ettinger has described as ‘matrixial resonance’ (“Resonance”). In her distinctive contribution to post-Lacanian feminist psychoanalytical theory and practice, Ettinger invites us to extend our theories of subjectivity beyond the Freudian and Lacanian models that initiate subjectivity only after birth, and that theorize that subjectivity as inevitably marked by a cumulating series of separations, all culminating in the castration that both severs and forms the subject through its access to language. Instead, Ettinger proposes a concurrent passage that acknowledges the effect of the prenatal and prematernal connection, so that, from the very earliest intimations, we must think of one dimension of subjectivity as ‘subjectivity as encounter.’ The distinctive legacy of our form of becoming is that, long before the separation model kicks in, the becoming human subject is a partner in a *severality*—of at least two, and possibly, through the fantasies of the pre-maternal partner of her own matrixial encounters, more than two (*The Matrixial Borderspace* and “Femininity: Aporia or Sexual Difference”).

Sharing an interest with Kristeva and Bollas in the archaic formation of subjectivity as well as its intimacy with the aesthetic as affectivity and transformation, Ettinger traverses the limit imposed by classical psychoanalysis, birth, to suggest that the later stages of prenatality already involve the participating subject (the becoming mother) and the presubject (the becoming infant) in what one might call an ‘aesthetics of co-emergence and co-affection,’ which leaves traces in both psyches, one of which is still to be formed. Ettinger is not alone in this (see Freud, Irigaray, and Meltzer). These traces, like Bollas’ aesthetics of transformation, can be animated and mobilized again in psychological and aesthetic life in situations of co-affecting encounter. The trace that the coincidence of prenatality and prematernity leave jointly, but differently, on and in the two partners in this severality from-the-beginning is what Ettinger calls ‘co-habit(u)ation,’ a term that catches visually the double meaning of *accommodation* as ‘adjustment’ or ‘tuning in’ as well as ‘habitation’ or ‘shared space’ (“Wit[h]ness-Thing”). Thinking through the transsubjective capacities that are traced by the primary encounter-event of our simultaneous becoming and being-transformed by the unknown other, Ettinger writes of the relations between an I and a non-I, the latter referring to an unknown and unknowable other whose co-emergence nonetheless affects and transforms the I. These partners-in-difference add to our resources for the analysis of the psychic work that art does, beyond words, that is reducible neither to Kristeva’s pre-Oedipal chora nor to Bollas’ idea of the wordless infant being moved by the tending of its post-natal mother (*Matrixial Borderspace*).

We have been accustomed by psychoanalysis to imagine the emergence of subjectivity through various scenes—Freud’s primal scene or the effect of the sight of anatomical sexual difference, for example—a and through the work of the gaze: Lacan’s mirror phase and his later theory of the gaze as *objet a*. Only recently have we begun to think about psychoanalysis in relation to sound.[1] Ettinger has made a significant intervention in the psychoanalysis of vision with her proposition of the matrixial gaze, which shifts Lacan’s concept of the gaze as *objet a* to a matrixial sphere that brings to the fore the sexual difference of the feminine subject in relation to which a prenatal and prematernal severality is shaped (*Gaze* and “Gaze-and-touching”). However, Lacan, also already identified an invocatory drive, and suggested the voice, too, as an *objet a* (Dolar). Ettinger explains Lacan’s *objet a* as follows:

The objet a *is the part-object and the archaic Other/mother, linked to pre-Oedipal impulses,* forever unattainable*, whose lacking being is created during the primal split of the subject, when language blurs its archaic modes of experience, and discourse, introducing the laws and order of language, nestles in their place and constitutes them as forever unattainable. The* objet a *resides on the borderlines of the corporeal, sensory and perceptual zones, but it eludes them all, itself being a psychic entity produced*

> *and lost according to the lanes carved by libidinal energy invested in the drives. It is a borderline mental inscription of the residues of separation from the partial object. According to Lacan's late theory of fantasy, subjectivity is not only the effect of the passage between signifiers of language but also the effect of basic separations which instigate the subject to desire unconsciously both the lost part-object—the lost archaic Other (mother)—and the unreachable symbolic Other. Thus, subjectivity is fatally intermingled with "holes" in the Real, in the Imaginary and in the Symbolic, with psychic objects as lacks. (*Matrixial Gaze *1)*

Shifting theoretical ground from the absolute force of the signifier to exclude the real from any form of subjective knowledge or affect, Lacan's move of introducing the concept of the *objet a* allowed into his theory of subjectivity something from that hitherto excluded real. The *objet a* is a paradoxical psychic object, or rather, an inscription like a scar on the psyche, a trace that marks inside the psyche the loss of a dimension of the connective condition of the infant to its originary Other—the m/Other.

Only when severed from the acoustic envelopment by and with the m/Other, does the/her voice become determined as a locus of desire, a potential for libidinal investment that will fuel a desire for an acoustic element in intersubjective relations. Ettinger calls upon the semantic potency of specific forms of verbs to shift the phallic legend of desire that is predicated on Lacan's vision of a castrated subject, scarred and adrift in loss. She proposes a 'matrixial gaze' as *objet a,* which invests our relations to the gaze with something less terrorizing than Lacan's, because, in the matrixial dimension, nothing is absolutely lost, since nothing was never fantasized as being absolutely present to begin with. Instead, Ettinger writes of a psyche that works through attunement, through fading in and fading out, and through transformation in a shared transsubjective borderspace. Taking this into the arena of the acoustic, Ettinger proposes the concept of 'resonance' in a Derridian move to capture a continuous process, at once outside yet 'resonating' physically and psychologically inside the being who longs for that which is never quite 'lost' to begin with.

These ways of theorizing the legacies of our archaic formation as subjects in relation to the psychically charged potentials of sound and voice, from Kristeva to Bollas and Ettinger, invite us to pay special attention to maternal-infant relations. Ettinger is not so much concerned with maternal-infant relations per se as she is with the preexisting encounter between an I and non-I that is predicated on the intimacy with an unknown other that defines the feminine. For her, postnatal feminine subjectivity not only negotiates a phallic ordering of sexual difference that visits lack upon the girl child. It is also able to draw upon, or alternatively may sense more acutely, the potentiality of a particularly intimate relation to matrixial severality, since, as a feminine subject, she not only carries its trace, but may also activate its fantasy-material in childbearing or other symbolic relations that restage such transsubjective encounters 'in the feminine.'

I now want now to reflect on the three films, experienced on video (Mulvey), to see what they reveal to us, viewed again from a point almost twenty years later, of the intimacy between a geographically expanded and culturally challenged feminist aesthetics that responds to the inevitable 'postcolonialization' of difference, and the evolution of the terms of representation of gendered as well as diasporic subjectivities. How do psychoanalytically inflected theorizations of subjectivity, pivoting on the construction and play of sexual difference provide us with tools to read aesthetic negotiations of historically specific articulations of geographical and cultural dislocation, marked by a politically generated and racially wounding trauma? In all three cases I will consider, these questions are articulated through the restaging of personal relations between daughters and mothers. They figure narratively the psychic spaces associated with a semiotic, choric, and matrixially resonant relationality. At the same time, they necessarily allow for the shadow of the paternal, the law, or Other as structuring presences, which are, however, not invested with the affective ambivalence that seeps through in relations with the maternal.

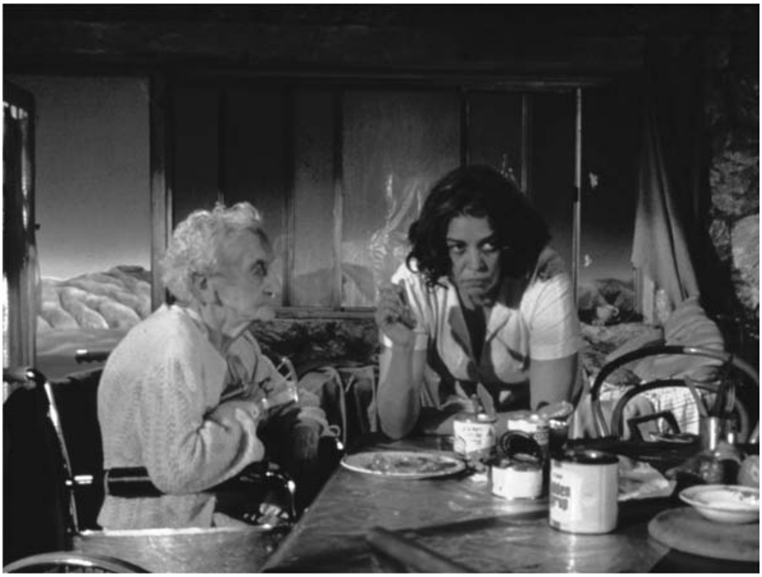
The works trace the relations of genesis and separation that form the mark of postcolonial histories imaginatively experienced as the repetitions of the formative space of the ensemble made up of mother and child. However we choose to theorize this, we are forged as subjects in whom an archaic aesthetics of being operates—an aesthetics of being moved and transformed with and by an unknown other—in a pre-linguistic and non-verbal intensity of affective motions that are traumatic and unthought to the extent that they occur before a fully cognizant psychic apparatus exists, which allows for fantasy, memory, and knowledge. Is sound then a privileged, or just recently explored, passageway to processes of subjectivization that are even more archaic than the visual, while yet remaining closely linked to the most symbolic of articulations, to language, and hence to sociality? Can I pose a historical and political relation between the dialectics of sound and subjectivity and the dialectics of migration, made poignant subjectively and culturally, at the point where living social subjects 'in the feminine' feel compelled to 'figure' something unfinished, or something still binding, in the relation to the mother as both woman-subject-other, and as what Ettinger indicates by the term 'm/Other,' the presubjective Other of matrixial severality and encounter?

The weight of these theoretical 'wonderings' might prejudge the interpretation of the works in question. But I have not introduced these three theorists to use their ideas as a template for the films under analysis. Rather, psychoanalytical theory is invited to alert us to the intensities and complexities at work in our subjectivities. Thus, when we approach specific aesthetic practices as texts we wish to read, responding to their provocation to bring forth a reading, we aim to consider the *work* that the artworks are doing at an appropriate depth. Close textual engagement with the specifics of the three works will refute an attempt at their reduction to the most arduous theoretical formulations. My opening discussion only serves to lay out a range of processes, levels, and potentialities that the economy of each completed art work will weave, strategically and unconsciously, into the fabric of a singular enunciation that provokes cultural recognition while never considering these theoretical problematics at all. Instead, the film or video texts work their materials into unique aesthetic configurations. As journeys through the psychic spaces that provide affective 'resonance' as well as unique emplotments that become holding spaces—patterned, like Kristeva's chora, with a rhythm of sound and image, word and silence—these films can, in the double space of formative and performative subjectivity as well as of a situated exile or displacement from a home that is identified with the mother, begin to make visible and audible what we are calling here 'migratory settings.'

Tracey Moffatt: A Piercing Cry

Tracey Moffatt's seventeen-minute, 35 mm film *Night Cries: a Rural Tragedy* (1989, with Marcia Langton, Agnes Hardwick and Jimmy Little) uses no dialogue. That does not make it a silent or a 'mute' film. The absence of dialogue forces the viewer into an intensified acoustic attention as well as into a hyper-charged visual scrutiny of the scenario that unfolds before her in the controlled time of the cinematic. At the same time, the lacking dialogue between the only two characters we see on the screen actively signifies the failure of communication between the protagonists, who are framed, nonetheless, into the intimacy of daily life. Defamiliarized by being filmed on an artificially created studio set, in intense and searing color, the visual scene is freighted with references to both modernist and contemporary Aboriginal and European Australian painting, struggling to find in both traditions the means to catch this unique and anciently populated landscape. For the one people, it was an ancient homeland; for the other, a desolate and challenging wilderness. But sound preempts the intensely colored sets. The opening credits over darkness introduce us to harsh animal sounds and those of a train chugging ever closer; its whistle, promising movement, escape, and a destination other than the present, merges into a metallic screech that, reaching a crescendo, can also be heard as a distorted human cry that brings onto the screen the fractured lettering of the title: *Night Cries*. Cries are visceral emanations of the body, physically painful to produce. Who cries in the night? Cries are also primary invocations, releases of inner pain from one subject that yet imply that someone is calling in desperation to another. Who is crying for whom? (Kristeva, "Place")

Silence follows, and then the melodious singing voice of an Australian Aboriginal gospel singer, Jimmy Little, smartly dressed in a western suit and tie, tells us musically that, were we to have any troubles, we can use the Royal Telephone to Jesus to alleviate them. Representing accommodation to Christian evangelization, this jolly sound of religious comfort, connecting modern telecommunications with the ancient concept of a single deity, serves as a counterpoint to the deep tragedy that the film stages economically in its harshly-lit and colored tableaux: the endless days of two women living in a shack in the emptiness of the Australian outback. Painfully ironic, this song's happy confidence contrasts with the desolate sound track that follows, which consists of howling desert wind, far-off animal cries, and the grating sounds of daily movements, such as preparing food and going to the outside toilet built of corrugated and squeaking metal, each sound magnified by impenetrable silence. The scene is a stage-set that places a run-down cabin in the midst of a lurid Australian landscape heavy with art historical references to the European imaginings of this symbolized space, to which both occupants of the cabin are now foreign. This is the prison house-home of two women, where an Aboriginal 'daughter' cares for her elderly white 'mother.'



Tracey Moffatt, Still from *Night Cries.* 1989. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Melbourne

Moffatt's film creates a personal yet politically focused testimony of the recently acknowledged Australian cultural policy of the forced Europeanization of the indigenous peoples that was indirectly taken up in the last film by Charles Chauvel, titled *Jedda,* made in 1953. In that film, a newly-orphaned Aboriginal child is adopted by the white farming family as part of the colonial vision of 'rescuing and civilizing her.' Education in white ways prepares her, however, only for a higher level of domestic servitude rather than for the self-realization or freedom by which the Europeans define their superiority in contrast to the indigenous people who work their farms. Jedda (Nagaria Kunoth), once grown-up, is torn between the assimilated farm manager assigned to her as a ‘proper’ husband, and a passing renegade man of her own people, Marbuck, who kidnaps her, and takes her back to his own territory from whence the couple are driven for having broken a marriage taboo. Pursued by the adoptive father and proposed fiancé, Marbuck goes insane and the film ends tragically for the couple. In its overall tone, the film nonetheless seems to condemn the action of the white ‘mother’ of adopting the Aboriginal child as an ill-considered attempt to force the Aboriginal peoples into class and gender moulds that are shaped by an active European racism.

Forty years on, Moffatt’s film re-imagines the legacy of the policy: the white mother is now aged, arthritic, wheelchair bound, and dependent for every intimacy of nourishment and toilet on the middle-aged Aboriginal woman, who is tied lovelessly to her service. The ‘daughter’ dreams of travel and escape from her tireless round of drudgery. Her boredom is pierced only by the surfacing of anxious memories of childhood fears and remembered moments of maternal comfort that were once found by the relocated child in the arms of the younger version of the aged woman for whom she must now care.

There is one scene of telling tenderness, in which a Caravaggist-like composition, lit with warm reds against a deep, dark background, places the daughter at the mother’s feet, which she tenderly bathes. They begin to hum together a line or two from “Onward Christian Soldiers,” re-invoking the trope signaled by Jimmy Little at the beginning of the film. The lapping of the water and the reversal of the gesture triggers a memory. An inserted scene in black and white opens. A little girl and her two brothers are at the sea coast, on a rocky escarpment from which the white mother dives into the sea, leaving the boys to tease the little girl by throwing long strips of seaweed at her that cling around her neck like strangling serpents. Feeling the desolation of abandonment against the crashing sea and harsh rocks, the child is shown, yet not heard, crying alone as a metallic rasp rises into a crescendo of anxiety, an impression made more violent by the repeated cutting between images of the child’s weeping face and the violence of the sea behind her. Jimmy Little’s image is intercut but is also silent, failing to provide a communicational channel. Suddenly silence, and the same Caravaggist warmly lit Pietà reappears. This time, it is the younger white mother comforting her little ‘daughter’ in a moment of maternal tenderness, wrapping her in towels before a flickering fire.

As this image fades, the sound of an artificial respirator plays on the sound track. An empty shot of the toilet hut appears against the landscape that is made lurid by a stripe of red. A shot follows from inside a now empty cabin, where all signs of habitation have disappeared. Then, the camera, focusing on the distant mountains as seen through the cabin’s windows, descends slowly over the balustrade of the window to reveal the porch bathed in the chill blue of night. Laid out on her back is the old lady. She appears to be dead. Curled up in a fetal position beside her, with only her face warmed by an inner light, is ‘the daughter.’ The respirator continues, but the sound track is now, at last, punctured by the visceral heaving sobs of a distressed and desolate baby.

In a touch of brilliance that makes the film so profound, the baby's cry seems to be emanating from the heaving chest of the middle-aged woman, who weeps—I am tempted to say—for everything that is lost with the death of this absent old lady, whose face she covers tenderly with her handkerchief. Having previously observed in fierce and unloving gestures her active hatred of the old woman and of the situation that binds them to each other, the viewer is catapulted by this reversal onto a deeper level, one that consists of the involuntary emotion that is the thread that binds the child to its carer, a neediness suddenly exposed in a death that is at once a release from servitude and, yet, a second and final abandonment, a permanent exile from the link with any mother. The baby's pure sound of distress is a signifier without a signified: it is the body's cry, the condition and state of an archè-grief that has no subject, just a vocalized affect wracking a tiny helpless body, which can no longer be contained, heard, transposed, resonated. It tears into the visual scene as the sound of a fear and a loneliness beyond words that 'tells' us that the nature of this death as well as of the abduction from her culture must be grasped as the deepest of woundings. The sound calls out, hopelessly, to the very maternal response that death, even in old age, of the ragged remains of an ambivalent mother-figure, who has screened the missing mother from whom the child was initially torn, has foreclosed. All severality seems breached, and the baby's heaving sobs punctuate as the sound of that catastrophic abyss of human loneliness.

The representational economy of the film, using a repertoire of visual quotations that are animated by the iconicity of the sound track, attends to the politics of the everyday, the very everydayness of the enactment of the legacy of the politics of the Australian Europeanization program, which Tracey Moffatt knew intimately. But it also reshapes this history through a specific aesthetic, placing us, the viewers in the present, in the presence of something suffered and performed that permeates every moment. In seventeen minutes, the agony of a life-sentence is produced, centering on the mutilated subjectivity of the trapped daughter. Yet, the final cry of the baby, seemingly the 'voice' of the grown woman, the stripping of history back to the psychological desolation of the lost infant who is her psychic core, changes the register against which what has been shown now starts to resonate.

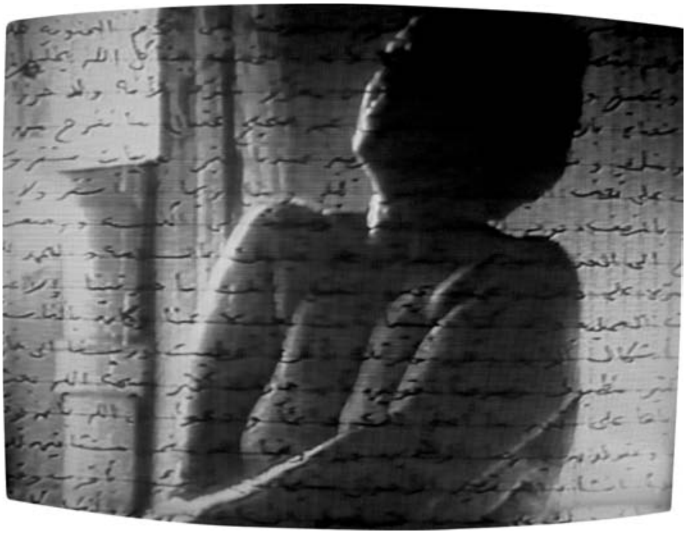
My suggestion is that this shift pierces the distance that a simply political critique of the policy of removing Aboriginal children from their own mothers would create as an intellectual form of knowledge, in which the experience of the daughter remains ultimately incommunicable to her perpetrators. But the sound of the baby, mourning wordlessly its irremediable and confused loss of the m/Other, plaits together her original mother, the space of and link with a culture, a peoplehood, a land, a history, an identity; the mother who loved and comforted her when distressed; the mother she now lies beside as a wretched old corpse; her own place and her non-belonging; and her beginning as well as the politics of the imposed, cultural rupture. Through watching these formally constructed tableaux, we come to grasp something of this complexity, witnessing and listening, hearing something that could not have been be grasped through political denunciation alone. For love and hate are mixed here. They cohabit in ways that the sudden shift to the preverbal intensities of an archaic field of infant-maternal relations alone can make us feel in their impossible complexity. These transformative affects can pierce the armor of political understanding to undo the barrier of difference, without allowing the fact of historico-political difference to disappear from critical view on the other side of this shockingly impossible, disturbing regression to a sound that rends the sound track, and that defies the visual-vocal matching that secures the conventional reality-effect of cinema (Chion).

Mona Hatoum: A Measured Loss

Let me now move to a shower scene. I do not mean Hitchcock's famous encoding of naked feminine vulnerability and masculine sadistic voyeurism that culminated in a hysterical act of surrogate matricide in *Psycho* (1962). Rather, my second case-study is a work of video art by the contemporary Palestinian artist, born in Beirut, and working in London, Mona Hatoum (b. 1952). Initially conceived as a performance work, *Measures of Distance* was remade as a sixteen-minute video in 1988. It is composed of several sound tracks and layers of imagery that together convey the pain of separation and the longing caused by a double exile, as well as an affirmation of intimacy as situated within a culturally specific feminine subjectivity and sexuality.

Across what at first is only a densely pixilated field infused with intense colors that form indecipherable shapes, lies a superimposed grid, a blow-up of first lined, then transparent writing paper covered with handwritten Arabic script. On the sound track, as though coming from an interior, there is the continuous sound of women's voices, chatting in Arabic and occasionally laughing. Two forms of intimacy are layered onto each other here. One involves the physical proximity of the home; the other is mediated by language and by a script that has had to travel great distances to deliver its charged text to a dear one no longer at home. The letter's existence is predicated on the physical distance that forms a counterpoint to the space of togetherness that is remembered by the tape recording and the photography, indexing a moment of sharing of space. From time to time, this ambient sound is overlaid by the carefully modulated tones of a woman speaking Arabic-inflected English. She reads the loving letters addressed to an absent daughter by her mother. The speaking woman is the artist Hatoum, working in London and making the video in Vancouver. Her mother lives in and writes from her home as a Palestinian exile in Beirut, which the British passport- bearing daughter revisited during the mid-1980s.

The slowly changing video image comprises photographs that are screened on a grainy surface, suffused with color that only slowly renders an image that, with some surprise, we recognize as that of a mature woman, taking a shower. Through the compilation of sound, letter, and image we come to read the body as that of the mother whose letters form a screen before it, and whose thoughts and feelings are enunciated by the translating voice of her now distant daughter. In an interview in 1996, Hatoum commented on the relation of this project to the recurrent anxiety expressed in feminist art theory about the representation of the naked female body, given the risks of misappropriation by the pornographic, voyeuristic, or colonial gaze that underpins Western visual culture (Doane).



Mona Hatoum, Still from *Measures of Distance*. 1988. Reproduced courtesy of the artist.

As Hatoum explains,

Well, in early feminism the attitude was that any way of representing a woman's body is exploitative and objectifying. This question had to be reassessed later on because women vacated the frame and became invisible in a sense. When I made Measures of Distance*, the video with my mother, I was criticized by some feminists for using the naked female body. I was accused of being exploitative and fragmenting the body as they do in pornography. I felt this was a very narrow-minded and literal interpretation of feminist theory. I saw my work as the celebration of the beauty of the opulent body of the aging woman who resembles the Venus of Willendorf—not exactly the standard we see in the media. And if you take the work as a whole, it builds up a wonderful, complete image of that woman's personality, needs, emotions, longings, beliefs and puts her very much in a social context. (*Mona Hatoum *141)*

About five minutes into the video, the voice-over tells us of the father's shock, during one of the daughter's rare visits to Beirut, at finding his wife and daughter in the shower, together and naked. His distress was compounded by the fact that his daughter was taking photographs of her mother. This exchange of looks, recorded in the images on which the video piece is based, and commented upon in the exchange of letters that recall that rare moment of mother-daughter intimacy, captures a radical shift, a reorientation between the looker and the looked-at. That reorientation overturns the hierarchical and gendered asymmetry of knowing subject versus known object that have been encoded into Western art as both the elevated artistic nude and the base nudie pic.[2]

In the scene, the mature woman's body, naked in the shower, only seems to become a sexual object within the politics of vision of the father. He claims this woman's naked body as his alone to see, one that should not be seen by any eyes but his, and thus should not be enjoyed—the verb in both French and English has sexual meanings and connotations of property—by anyone save him. The 'crime' of the exposure of the mother's naked body does not lie in *her* pleasure in *her* sexuality, including the histories of the body, its generativity and age-related transformations. The affront arises from the sexual possessiveness of a masculine viewing eye, from the fact that, in fantasy, the eye becomes an eroticized organ, and sight a pathway of not merely desire, but also of mastery, framed by a politics of veiling and exposure (Ettinger, *Gaze*).

Measures of Distance is exemplary of the aesthetic and feminist project to challenge the legacy of what the feminist theorist Jacqueline Rose named 'sexuality in the field of vision,' which attempts to represent the female body as the site of her own proceedings, the sign of inscriptions on a cultural text 'in, of, and from the feminine' (Pollock, "Inscriptions"). Hatoum's work contrasts the conventional sexualization of the feminine body with the inscription on the screen of affective relations, spoken and written, between a Palestinian-in-exile mother and her artist daughter in secondary exile from her mother's home, working in Europe/Canada; we encounter their feminine sexualities 'in the buff,' as it were. During these snatched moments of togetherness, mediated by image and recalled in words, the mother and daughter begin to talk, and the daughter to make images that support and refract their generationally, and now also culturally, fissured conversation about shared but different female bodies, pleasures, anxieties. Their words concern their own, generationally diverse and culturally located experiences of sexuality, motherhood, and a non-sexual yet almost erotic woman-to-woman intimacy. Criss-crossing the space that divides mother and daughter are the words written by the mother, translating love and affection, longing and lack, as well as the acoustic echo of their repetition in the body of the daughter as she reads them. The viewer is both offered and screened-off from the moment of recorded and remembered proximity of the two grown women, who have found a new intimacy in making an art work together.

In traditional Western painting and its modern and popular pornographic sister arts, this intimacy would typically be refracted through the voyeuristic Orientalist fantasy of the harem, where women sensuously prepare themselves and await the summons of the master-lord (Said). In radical dissidence from that regime of viewing relations, Hatoum's work allows speaking and self-reflecting female-embodied subjects a guarded but luxuriant visibility that is nonetheless screened by a writing that is the site of subjective inhabitation of the corporeal. Meanwhile, the video format frames the shifting and shadowed image of the mature body together with female voices in the sonorous space of the mother-daughter relation, strained by the historical predicament of the exiled Palestinian people that has created multiple levels of dislocation and, hence, of longing. It offers, therefore, as radical a gesture with regard to the historical staging of feminine sexuality, generation, and cultural identity as have any of the historical feminine nudes at the traumatic beginning of modernism, such as Manet's *Olympia* (1863–5, Paris, Musèe d'Orsay). Through the slowly revealed relation to the body of the mother, the sonorous tracking of the difference between the ongoing chorale of conversation and the isolated and well-articulated rereading of the mother's written words by the daughter, Anglophone but accented, the video registers an aesthetic of suffering 'in the feminine.' In the space between the ordinary and the imagined, it suggests what I want to call the 'sonorous aesthetics of the migratory' that catches the space and the sound of loss and longing—as well as an undiluted joy in the rapport between the two women in an instant of 'home-coming.'

Martina Atille: Echoes in the Mind

Loss and mourning through an imaginative historical retrospect at a life are at the core of Martina Attille's *Dreaming Rivers* (1988, 16 mm, 30 minutes), which opens with the sound of an older woman's singing. The voice sings a French Creole song about the loss of a sweetheart who has left. The song needs subtitles for the English speaker to understand; this is the transcription:

The boat in the harbor
Took my sweetheart away
My sweetheart you left me here
Alas, alas what am I to do?

The poignant lament of the woman, not left behind by a lover who abandons her, but by the sweetheart who was forced to become a migrant worker, sets the scene for an exploration of a Black feminine subjectivity in a history that already has its own, feminized, aesthetic modality for dealing with loss, registered in this poignant lament by women of the islands. Throughout the film, the question as to why this woman from 'there' came and died 'here' is answered: she loved him. This inscribes the passion of desire into the history of economic migration from the Caribbean to England during the twentieth century. Three children stand before the body of their dead mother as the bewildered monuments of their parents' interwoven histories of love, dreams, necessity, and dislocation.

As the subtitles of the song fade to black, the sound of waves follows, that iconic signifier of the passage that brought Africans to the Caribbean, and centuries later brought them to inhospitable, war-ravaged, and racist Britain. An image of a black woman dressed in white fills the screen; she is lying down. We are seeing her from above. She is laid out beneath what appears to be an impossible viewing position. Who is looking? Who is she, whom we thus see, laid-out yet with her eyes open?

Voices are heard that comment on the way the woman's hair is styled—apparently not the way she preferred—and ask: "Why did you come here, Mum?" Another fade to black shifts the point of view, and the viewer is now aligned with the woman laid out on the bed, looking up at three faces looking down on the woman who is alive, yet laid out as if already dead. She responds to what her children say; however, their speech and her response are in different temporal or subjective zones. She is the object of their reflections; she is also the shared subject of their varied memories. She, too, will be her own subject of reminiscence as the film opens the space between living and dying, memory and remembrance, a space revealed to be the very condition of the migratory generations that this mother-children scenario explores. Surrounding the mother in scenes when, rising from her bier, she revisits her own history through the mementoes, photographs, and pieces of clothing in her room, is a chorus of older women from the islands, singing occasionally, but mostly commenting in a Creole French that remains untranslated. The space between here and there is also between then and now, between generations who have a memory of the home elsewhere and those for whom intimacy becomes a matter of heritage, history, and a potentially mobilizable aesthetics. The son speaks of the "too many secrets in our West Indian heritage"; his older sister, born there, reminds him "of too much pain." Trauma is thus the condition of the unsaid that these mourning children come to glean and process.

The film brings together the three children of their Caribbean mother, Miss T., affectionally referred to as Miss Titi, who gather around her deathbed to share their memories of their mother and their migrations at different ages (two are born in Britain, one remembers the island). Voices and stillness are punctuated by the memories of the dead woman herself, which are enacted voicelessly through gesture and backed-up by the singing of *her* 'mothers.' A poignant reflection on migration, memory, and history, the movement of the film's affective structure weaves together a past and present that are indexed by sound, by accent, by musicality. The film is structured around the mother's body, around her hair—done up in the plaiting that was her favored mode, itself an idiom of the countryside at home—her clothes, her room, its mementoes, religious icons, and around what can be described as an ‘aesthetic of memory’ that is figured through photographs, jars of ointments, herbs, bowls, and other rituals of the self.

What is singular about Attille’s film is the contrapositioning of the children’s variegated memories of their mother and the mother’s own exploration of her memories of love, place, and loss at the moment of her passing. The son is ashamed of his mother’s home, of all the “things” in it that index precisely its migratory aesthetics. The older sister retorts: “what is left is like her memoirs, history, her autobiography.” Yet, her history is recounted by the voices of other women watching her from the space of home, using the voices of the elders that suggest the inclusion of another, African-Caribbean aesthetic. A tender scene is set in Miss Titi’s room, when the dominant chilly blue color for once yields to the warmth of bodily tones. It inscribes the mother’s momentary pleasure in being together with the children’s father, dancing in a circling proximity, as a longed for and always too brief surrender to the love articulated in the film by the interspersed voices of the other women.

This marks a break in the film. The elder daughter comments: “England had begun to lose its milk and honey appeal.” A disenchantment of climate, both meteorological and ideological, sets in. England is signified acoustically by a thundering storm on the sound track. The rest of the film registers the physical pain of the cold and the psychic pain of abandonment and loss. As the children gently lead the woman back to the bed, laying her out under silken sheets and embroidered covers, she turns to her son, saying: “I want to go home.” These scenes are inter-cut with images of the woman moving through her room in a flurry of anxiety, moving in distress through her own memory-space. It concludes with a transition that returns to the white bridal-shroudal robe of the opening scene—yet now the woman does not lie still. She moves; her robes move. There is only music and song and the phrases of the older women, the voices of the Caribbean mothers, talking of the never counted, the never finished, the never forgotten.

Bath of Sounds

The three films I have discussed are all set in the ordinariness of everyday spaces; two are marked by mourning for the mother; and all address a trauma of movement and separation. They interweave encounters with death with moments of subjective loss through an aesthetic of sound: wordless in Tracey Moffat’s work, moving between vocalization and writing in Mona Hatoum’s, and finally incarnating in Martina Attille’s subtle use of two notes on a pipe that punctuate the film, disorienting the viewer, and allowing the spoken words to circle around the silent heart of the piece: Miss Titi, the mourned mother, herself a palimpsest of a distant home that was already migratory. At the outset of this article, I posed an impossible question: why did these three films emerge around 1988–89?

All we can really do, I believe, is note the event of their convergence as evidence of a pressure that resulted in the three films being made independently around similar themes. We can see their convergence in the significant intersection between an emerging postcolonial aesthetics and a practice of independent feminist filmmaking that had started to make use of accessible technologies of film and video for art making and distribution. In addition, I want to suggest that the present of this writing marks a new moment for reading these works, not simply as recovered historical artifacts from the 1980s. In this moment of the exploration of migrant settings, their sonorous passages reemerge as imaginative inscriptions that, in effect, anticipated our current interest in a specifically *aesthetic* processing of the historical, cultural, territorial, and affective conditions of migratory subjectivities. A contemporary retrospective look cannot only reinvigorate these important works in a larger setting, but receive them again with the hospitality of a cultural analysis that is now theoretically catching up with what was planted into culture by these works some time ago.

I have tried to add to the engagement of postcolonial subjectivities and the political histories of migration that these films evidently warrant my own interest in the 'sounds of subjectivity,' theorized through variegated strands of psychoanalytical thinking. I have wanted to suggest that the audio-visualities of film and video open up a possible setting for migrant stories of separation, loss, love, and memory, accommodating a sensuous environment for the transmission of affects and meanings. Sound—not just voice or music—can be thought of as a more primary zone of intersubjective contact and mutual affect than vision. In *The Skin Ego*, Didieu Anzieu refers to a 'sound-envelope' and a 'sound- mirror,' suggesting as well that the baby is enveloped in a 'word-bath.' "The self forms as a sound envelope through the experience of a bath of sounds (concomitant with the experience of nursing)," he writes (166). Anzieu places sound in a fundamental relation to the earliest exchanges between adult and child:

> *Parallel with the establishment of boundaries and limits of the Self as a two-dimensional interface analytically dependent on tactile sensations, there forms, through the introjection of a universe of sound (and also of taste and smell), a Self as a pre-individual psychical cavity possessing a rudimentary unity and identity. The auditory sensations produced when sounds are made are associated with respiratory sensations which give the Self a sense of being a volume which empties and re-fills itself, and prepares that Self for its structuring in relation to a third dimension of space (orientation and distance) and to the temporal dimension. (157)*

Building on these insights, Bracha Ettinger has added the idea of a prenatal 'resonance' that not only envelops the becoming infant, as I have discussed above, but also installs the foundation of a reciprocity that she names 'borderlinking':

> *Unconscious "musicality" and knowledge by resonance are already prenatal and they are sense-giving by means of the matrixial apparatus. The originary matrixial borderspace is a resonance chamber. It is via such an archaic resonance cavity that the transmissive space works, in the here and now of the analytic hour. Not in order to regress to pre-history but in order to borderlink to another in transferential space and to turn an encounter*

> *into a subjectivizing and creative event. The maternal cavity does not stand for emptiness and silence—except at its most pathological edge—but for emissions, transmissions and receptions, a space where sounds reverberate, are echoed and transferred, and vibrations manifest the continuity of a caring outside, inside. ("Resonance" 13)*

Ettinger is not alone here. In "The Sonorous Bath," Edith Lecourt remarks that "[t]he sonorous bath and the sonorous cavity allow aspects of the foetal experience of the uterine cavity to be revivified, figured and represented." (214). Ettinger, however, makes a significant addition. To her, the originary moment is not just a retrospective fantasy figured by postnatal developments; it has acted as a subjectivizing dimension in itself. It has created not only the pathways that may be activated again in later transferences and, it must be added, in aesthetic experiences, but also leads us to seek out actively experiences of 'borderlinking' with the other who is unknown, and yet holds the capacity to co-affect and co-emerge with an I that is always becoming in trans- and intersubjective relations. Thus, the sonorous pathway is not just a condition in which the self/ego is shaped in postnatal space and relationality. It creates strings that long to resonate, not desiring an object to satisfy a lack, but yearning for an encounter.

In my encounter with the three art works that speak of experiences that are not my own, I record here, in my writing, not only their cultural significance as compelling works of creative thought. I also receive their transmissions affectively. What I have wanted to draw out from those is the subjectivizing dimension of sonority, which creates the emotional resonance of the works as historical statements of migratory subjectivity in a postcolonial moment. Beyond that manifest content, however, sonority in each of these three films also appears to function as the field of possibility for their 'saying' of the unsaid, as well as of the unsayable that is at once the trauma of loss—of homeland, mother country, mother tongue, mother's body, mother—and, at the same time, of the *jouissance* [ecstasy] of transsubjective transmissibility: a potential for an encounter with open borders that produces a creative event. Were the works in question only freighted with the trauma of loss, they would not be either art or work; they would not *work*, in the Freudian sense of *Trauerarbeit*, the work of mourning, or *Traumarbeit*, dream-work.

It seems to me that, in Ettinger's double move of pinpointing an originary dimension of subjectivity in an encounter that lays down the strings of yearning for being touched and transformed by the unknown other, as well as her recognition of the animation of that primordial possibility in key situations such as analytical transference and the aesthetic encounter (both making or viewing), we can locate the *work*, the poeisis of creative transformation that is brought about by the works of art I have discussed. I find these works charged with a 'beauty' that rests on neither image nor objecthood, but on their finely calibrated affective charge—a charge that swims through their sonorities and musicalities that are at once the figurative supports for stories about mothers, and the very substance of what matrixial severality might be: a resonance.

Clearly, my reading is situated. Alerted to these works by my own preoccupations with maternal loss and with the lost moment at which feminist discourse was able to research the significance of the m/Other for feminine subjectivities, I write of works the motivations and resources of which are neither mine to imagine nor mine to disown, because of my already active place within them as the bearer of white histories of the colonial, migration, and displacement. Yet, in the expanded international and postcolonial plots of feminist thinking, there is space for theoretical translations that enlarge cultural spaces by attentive readings of historically situated aesthetic invocations of the pulses of desire and loss. That space is formed by the holding together of what one might call a politics of migratory settings—of what divides us and forces recognition of specificity and difference—and of what Ettinger's concept of resonance can perform. We long for connection, we long to be moved, and we have the capacity to be hospitable to the other whom we do not know at the level of the 'content' of our various histories. That is not because we are all human subjects, though we are. Rather, the openness to the work that is done by and in and through the work of art is a result of the specific desire to be co-affected. Beyond the words that speak a text of historical and political difference, sonorities such as those that form the aesthetic force of these three films call out to the desire to share, and thus do the work that will enable us to hear their particular orchestration of certain, always migratory, sounds of subjectivity.

Notes

1. CentreCATH organized a research theme year on Aurality, Musicality and Textuality in 2002–03 and, during that time, we ran two seminars on Psychoanalysis and Sound, having identified a limited psychoanalytical bibliography on this topic across classic Freudian, Lacanian and post-Lacanian studies. The archive of texts and special presentations will appear in Pollock and Chare.

2. I am not qualifying this as Western alone as there is a strong tradition of representation of the sexual female nude in ancient Middle-Eastern culture. See Bahrani.

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