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On the Mediterranean's Shores

Derridean Hyperbolic Hospitality and Its Limits

Sophia Jahadhmy
Cornell University

The Mediterranean Sea has always been a site of crossings, encounters and becomings. Since the early 2010s, however, migrants coming primarily from Africa and West Asia now cross the water knowing that they are voyaging between life and death, and increasingly, they see that they test the limits of the hospitality that those on the northern shores of the Mediterranean are willing to extend. The Mediterranean becomes what Édouard Glissant refers to as a "matrix" of migrant precarity, particularly as European governments abdicate any responsibility for those boats that capsize on the high seas.[1] After their perilous journey across the Mediterranean, migrants are unsure as to whether Europeans will grant them a hospitable reception, or, for that matter, allow them to remain. In a world where "millions and millions of living beings—human or not—who are denied not only their basic 'human rights,' which date back two centuries and are constantly being refined, but first of all the right to a life worthy of being lived," questions of migration and hospitality, particularly through an engagement with the work of Jacques Derrida, become more urgent than ever.[2]

The influx of migrants not only in the Mediterranean, but globally, challenges us to consider what happens when the Other enters, and what kind of hospitality such an entry provokes. This essay proposes Derridean hyperbolic hospitality as a means through which to extend welcome to and live with the Other. Through hyperbolic hospitality, the host can never be hospitable *enough*. That is, an ethic of hyperbolic hospitality is impossible and ungraspable, yet we reach for it, blindly.[3] The question of hospitality becomes one wherein the host must allow the guest (the Other) to learn to live, not from nor through the host, but because of the hospitable welcome the host provides.[4] To learn not only to live, but to live well, is a right, Derrida insists, and it is one which only an unconditional hospitality can provide. *Is hyperbolic hospitality tenable?*

Many media outlets and activists criticize xenophobic trends in Europe wherein governments disregard the human rights of migrants by perpetuating dehumanizing rhetoric, refusing asylum or abdicating their responsibility to save and welcome precarious populations from outside. Derrida charges that waves of xenophobia marked by a refusal of responsibility and hospitality to the Other signify a global problem that plagues European countries in particular, although there are very few, if any, spaces anywhere that extend unconditional hospitality to all populations seeking refuge. He argues that "there is no country or nation-state in the world today, especially in the rich, capitalist countries, where [there is not] this policy of border closings, this putting-into-hibernation of the principles of asylum, of hospitality to the foreigner."[5] Derrida charges that imperial logics foreground European conceptualizations of hospitality as conditional, and underpin immigration policies that prioritize the "best interests" of the host rather than the well-being of the incoming guest.

In recent years, however, Lampedusa, the largest island in Italy's Pelagie archipelago, has become a primary site through which migrants cross from the Mediterranean's southern shores into Europe. A seemingly idyllic coastal enclave that has, for centuries, been at the crossroads between the southern and northern Mediterranean shores, residents and the government of Lampedusa now question whether they can or will extend hospitality to North African migrants, in particular, who search for more opportunities both on the island and in mainland Europe. Media outlets and activists increasingly applaud Lampedusa residents and government officials for their "level of humanity which cannot be found elsewhere," in stark contrast to other European states and the mainland of its own country, Italy, whose current leader, Giorgia Meloni, won the Prime Minister position on and continues to perpetuate an anti-migrant campaign.[6] In contrast to their mainland European counterparts, Mayor of Lampedusa, Filippo Mannino, insists that the people of Lampedusa "will not look the other way" as migrants reach their shores in search of a better life.[7] Mannino accepted the Golden San Michele Prize on behalf of the community of Lampedusa in October 2023 for "welcoming and sheltering migrants." Those in Lampedusa will welcome migrants to the island, which Mayor of Castiglion Fiorentino, Mario Agnelli, refers to as a "paradise on earth."[8] Despite limited resources and space, the Lampedusa government and residents display levels of hospitality to migrants is unlike any other European coastal space, showing a willingness to exceed their own resources and capabilities to welcome and provide a site of refuge.

In this context, Lampedusa represents a space of hope, welcoming and hospitality for migrants crossing the Mediterranean. At the same time, however, residents have begun to challenge the sort of hospitality and welcoming practices the island extends due to the perceived strain on public resources and lack of adequate government support for coordinating and

assisting the high volume of arriving migrants. In September 2023, the island's residents organized a protest against the arrival of migrants and the Lampedusa government's openness to accepting them, arguing that the island "cannot carry the weight of the world."[9] The residents of Lampedusa voice two concerns: that migrants come to the island in the first place and that, when they do indeed arrive, they want to remain. Instead, Lampedusa residents hope to either curb migration to the small island before they must extend gestures of hospitality, or to act as a conveyor belt that transfers migrants to other spaces in Europe. In other words, residents want to keep migrants from coming at all or, if such a prohibition fails, they hope to forcibly transfer migrants to other European countries because they "won't let their island become the migrants' new home."[10] Lampedusa residents no longer want to "learn to live with" the Other and foster communal integration with migrants—they refuse to do so. In alignment with this wave of hostility toward migrants, Lampedusa's government blocked a shipment of tents,[11] revealing a new strategy to make Lampedusa inhospitable for long-term settlement—*you may enter*, these gestures suggest, *but you may never stay*. Lampedusa residents pursue a logic that cohabitation with the Other is untenable; their protests insist that residents can only live in the absence of the Other, thus insisting, in a rejection of hospitality, that the community can only provide for those deemed fellow citizens.

Despite opposing the influx of migrants, Lampedusa residents also challenge border militarization measures that attempt to curb migration. This resistance to militarized bordering measures is not necessarily a gesture of hospitality, however. As residents of the island declare that they "will not let Lampedusa become Alcatraz," they point out that "recent restrictions to the movement of non-European migrants have…proven unsuccessful in curbing 'unwanted' migration flows."[12] Instead of feeling compelled to militarize its borders further, Lampedusans seek to curb migration before it begins, before the Other even reaches their shores.[13] These calls are, therefore, neither pacifist nor humanist; on the contrary, they embody a preventative and immunitary logic: When faced with the Other, there will, inevitably, be militarization; thus, the Other should not come to "their" shores the first place. Such calls reveal the public revocation of hospitality and its prospect before it can be offered (or denied) to the Other—the a priori insistence on a refusal of hospitality in the hopes of dissuading migrants from entering, while revealing that the people to whom residents feel most responsible are themselves and their fellow citizens. The persistent locking down of borders to immunize the European Self against the Other shows that "at a time when we claim to be lifting internal borders, we proceed to bolt the external borders of the European Union tightly."[14]

Derrida proposes that "borders are no longer places of passage; they are places of interdiction, thresholds one regrets having crossed, boundaries back toward which one urgently escorts, threatening figures of ostracism, of

expulsion, of banishment, of persecution."[15] Derrida thinks the threshold throughout his oeuvre as a liminal space in which one makes a turn toward a new place, imaginary or community, while simultaneously turning away from that with which one identified previously. As Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani write, in the oceanic landscape in particular, "the line of the border has become [an] elastic"[16] threshold wherein demarcations of sovereignty are porous. Conceptualizing the ocean-as-threshold is central to the project of "bring[ing] the sea to bear witness to how it has been made to kill" migrants.[17] The idea of porous borders-as-thresholds is particularly important when looking to island spaces such as Lampedusa, where borders and bounds of responsibility, belonging and hospitality extend or are revoked in ways that mirror the waves—ethereal, ever-changing, sometimes placid and inviting, and in other moments violent and threatening. Like the ocean, the border becomes an ever-shifting threshold and frontier for entry; states take advantage of the watery nature of jurisdiction in the high seas to abdicate responsibility and imagine hospitality as conditional.

Heller and Pezzani recall how, "until recently, most Mediterranean states had refrained from extending exclusive claims beyond their territorial waters, for fear of getting entangled in thorny legal conflicts and of reducing the navigational advantages guaranteed by the high seas."[18] However, recent "accelerated juridicalization" of the Mediterranean's high seas, largely in response to the influx of migrants crossing the waters, has led to "overlaps, conflicts of delimitation, and differing interpretations that have been the byproduct of the recent carving up of the sea" [19]—in other words, the Mediterranean now displays a patchwork of "elastic sovereignties" and jurisdictions. Heller and Pezzani charge that these overlapping zones of jurisdiction "ha[ve] become an integral part of the capacity of states and other actors to apply rights and abide by obligations at sea selectively according to their interests, expanding and retracting their jurisdictional claims at will."[20] This process of picking and choosing when to comply with and act on their jurisdiction enables states to "intercept migrants or to evade the obligation to rescue people in distress."[21] The ever-shifting maritime border (which we can read as an elastic Derridean threshold) thus becomes a space where hospitality can be extended or revoked, and where the migrant, as they cross the seas, has no guarantee of safety, hospitable reception or the right to live.

An engagement with migration to Lampedusa via the Mediterranean "sea[,] where borders can be neither traced nor held and where freedom reigns absolute,"[22] requires that we delve into the ways in which the ocean itself becomes a space of opportunity, death and dehumanization, as Glissant shows. In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant conceptualizes the ocean, the ship and the condition of dis-location in relation to the Middle Passage across the Atlantic. Glissant understands that "exile can be borne, even when it comes as a bolt from the blue"[23] through "the belly of the boat," which is "a womb, a womb abyss."[24] The abyss reflects and projects both a (social, political,

spiritual, and many times physical/literal) death, but also a birth. The abyss is a site of infinite births, becomings and metamorphoses. At the same time, it becomes the space where anonymity, disappearance, commodification and namelessness haunt. These contradictions of being born into a precarious abyssal being that is denied subjectivity, embodies the hauntings of the belly of the ship-turned-womb abyss. The ship becomes a "womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under sentence of death."[25] For Glissant, the identity of the enslaved person is unmade and remade in the belly of the slave ship as it crosses the Atlantic. The boat and the "depths of the sea" together are the sites of becoming for what he refers to as the "transplanted population."[26] The hostility of the Atlantic and the enslavers aboard the ship make the ocean and the boat spaces of the becoming dehumanized, of the becoming Other of the enslaved subject. Or, rather, the boat and ocean are twin sites wherein the enslaved subject sees the consequences of becoming or being Other(ed) in a world that is inhospitable to those who diverge from the European Self. The boat becomes the place where individuals are transmuted into commodified labor, where the human is dehumanized and where the Black subject becomes capital—and, as Rinaldo Walcott writes, "blackness itself is birthed in salt water—the Atlantic Ocean as a first instance—and then later becomes a kind of saline embodiment of early modern new life forms or Black selves."[27] The ocean and the boat become hauntings as they transport the migrant to a place that "no ancestor will haunt" in a new and hostile land.[28]

Glissant reveals the importance of looking to the ocean as a unit of analysis because it is, as Isabel Hofmeyr explains when referring to the Indian Ocean, a "connective tissue"[29]—a space of becoming and a site of birth, death and "melancholic" crossings.[30] Heeding Derrida, it may be exactly because the Mediterranean is a "connective tissue" that it provokes such hostility from European governments. The Mediterranean produces a "geography of proximity" amongst Europe, North Africa and West Asia—these migrants are not from a distant elsewhere, per se, but rather from "'close to the close,' that unbearable orb of intimacy that melts into hate."[31] Roberto Esposito, another Mediterranean thinker, agrees, provoking that the originary violence of communities, which serves to construct and fortify boundaries between communal Self and Other, is born "not because of the differences between [people]" but "because they aren't different enough, which is to say they kill each other because of the excessive equality between them."[32] Derrida and Esposito read hate or rejection as being born of proximity to the Other, constructed by xenophobic understandings that the Self may only exist in relation to an abject Other—one born of the Mediterranean's connective prowess.

Although a context distinct from the Mediterranean, Glissant's conceptualization of the slave ship and the Atlantic Ocean as active catalysts, spaces of encounter, and of death and becoming, are particularly salient when

conceptualizing contemporary migration. The Mediterranean, too, becomes a space of killing, of death—of dying and death, although it is distinct from the Middle Passage in large part because Mediterranean migrants are not part of a larger system of trans-oceanic enslavement. In stark contrast to Derrida's experience of the crossing Mediterranean as a young Algerian with French citizenship studying in the Metropole, where the sea became a site of opportunity (and estrangement), contemporary migrants traveling from North Africa to Europe's southern shores today do not find a hospitable welcome or access to social mobility and inclusion (however strained Derrida's relationship to colonial France may have been). Derrida's Mediterranean crossing was defined not by Blackness but by his Judeo-Franco-Maghrebian identity (which has its own set of subjectivities) and the possession of a French passport, which he inherited due to the 1870 Décret Crémieux—although it was a precarious citizenship, being revoked and re-granted during and post-Vichy regime. Derrida found refuge in a France that extended hospitality to him, because, despite being from what Chelsea Shields refers to as "offshore"[33] France, he was a French citizen. North African migrants today, on the other hand, are often marked by Arabness, Blackness and Islam, and do not possess a European passport. These migrants, unlike those transported during the Middle Passage, are often not kidnapped, but rather flee their homes due to the conditions created by hyper-capitalism, imperialism, neocolonialism, coercive global flows of capital, and a resulting failure of the postcolonial state, all of which render their own governments unable to secure their citizens' well-being. Although distinct from trans-Atlantic enslavement, contemporary North African migrants, like those enslaved Africans about whom Glissant writes, experience the dangers of oceanic crossings and the processes of becoming-nameless, becoming-Other, and becoming-haunted by the ocean and the boat-turned-womb abyss.

Contemporary migrants who cross the Mediterranean confront the abdication of responsibility by those European coastal states that take advantage of the sea as a space of watery jurisdiction. Like the Africans who were killed through being thrown off or jumping overboard during the horrors of Middle Passage, the deaths of migrants today "have rarely been established with precision and the responsibility for them has seldom been determined."[34] As we write of the Middle Passage, we can now think about the Mediterranean Passage—these clandestine crossings and "the desire to go undetected [are] always weighed against the risk of dying unnoticed at sea."[35] And, because African migrant deaths go unnoticed and their bodies remain unnamed, "many more lives have been lost without being recorded other than the haunting absence experienced by their families."[36] Heller and Pezzani trace "*the conditions* in which the sea becomes a liquid trap" and an indifferent or "unwilling killer."[37] We can read Glissant in the context of the Mediterranean to see how it becomes what Sam Okoth Opondo and Michael J. Shapiro refer to as the "precarity, disposability, and the thresholds of

detectability characteristic of today's migratory condition," all of which are defined by an abdication of national and international responsibility.[38]

Heller and Pezzani provide a salient means through which to conceptualize the Mediterranean as a space of precarity and death for African migrants that cross. They point to a paradox in the governing and oversight of the Mediterranean: European governments persistently abdicate responsibility for migrant lives due to liquid and ethereal zones of jurisdiction, while simultaneously hyper-militarizing the high seas and policing migrant bodies. Through a strategic use of the Mediterranean, Heller and Pezzani argue, coastal governments can "[kill] without touching" migrants through the "policing of illegalized migrants at sea."[39] This condition of precarity and death-via-abandonment:

> [H]as become an integral part of the capacity of states and other actors to apply rights and abide by obligations at sea selectively according to their interests, expanding and retracting their jurisdictional claims at will—for example to intercept migrants or to evade the obligation to rescue people in distress.[40]

The Mediterranean—hyper-militarized and policed, yet abandoned as states, whether in a calculated manner or not, neglect their responsibility to protect human life—becomes a contested site of migrant precarity. Indeed, as Heller and Pezzani show, "crossings and deaths were occurring in a space populated by a large number of Western states' military ships and patrol aircrafts, and there were strong indications that military forces were failing in their obligation to rescue migrants" in cases such as the left-to-die boat wherein at least 63 migrants died.[41] Although European coastal states heavily police the bodies that cross the Mediterranean, they refuse any responsibility or hospitality—and indeed refuse the right to life of the migrants—and play a key role in making the Mediterranean a deadly space. The sea becomes the site wherein migrants learn that European hospitality relies not only on the ability to extend welcome and care, but also hostility and negligence, strategic or otherwise—or, as Derrida refers to it, "hostipitality."[42] Because "migrants do not only die at sea but through a strategic use of the sea," they experience as they cross it the ways in which European states will take advantage of the sea's watery lines of sovereignty to abdicate any responsibility to protect the lives and livelihoods of those "Others" who are not citizens of their nation-states, who are not profit-engineering migrants or who are marked by difference.[43]

Through an engagement with Glissant's understanding of the ocean and the boat as haunting spaces of becoming, but also the beginning of Relation, we can conceptualize Derridean hospitality otherwise. Born of radical alterity on the Mediterranean, migrant otherness may be the very condition that allows Derridean hyperbolic hospitality to manifest itself. Hyperbolic hospitality challenges a world governed by the conditional law of hospitality

in which oceans become spaces wherein states may abdicate responsibility, all of which we can ground in Derrida's deconstruction of hyperbolic ethics. When referring to hyperbolic ethics as it relates to forgiveness in *Perjury and Pardon, Volume I*, Derrida explains how "hyperbolical ethics [...] would precisely command, on the contrary, that forgiveness be granted where it is neither requested nor deserved, and even for the worst radical evil, forgiveness acquiring its *sense* and possibility as forgiveness only where it is called on to do the im-possible and to forgive the un-forgivable."[44] This sort of hyperbolic ethic, as it relates to forgiveness, insists on forgiving the unforgivable, for doing the impossible. Understanding the hyperbolic as a commitment to the unconditional and impossible, a hyperbolic hospitality, then, would require the host to accept anyone, regardless of the risk, and do the impossible: permit the stranger to pass the threshold, to live with the Self within their borders and to allow them to remain entirely Other—in dong so, hyperbolic hospitality "re-think[s] what is meant by the possibility of the im-possible or the im-possibility of the possible."[45] Derrida reveals the contradiction that "unconditional hospitality [...] should offer the right of refuge to all immigrants and newcomers. But on the other hand, hospitality must be conditional: there has to be some limitation on rights of residence."[46] Hyperbolic hospitality insists that the conditional is untenable, and that an unconditional hospitality grounded in hyperbolic ethics is necessary, regardless of the risks. Conceptualizing hyperbolic hospitality, "unconditional hospitality threatens a society that…fragment[s] responsibility," such as those on the Mediterranean's northern shores whose negligence leads to the abdication of the responsibility to migrants' rights to life and living. In its challenge to the abjuration of responsibility to migrant life, this unconditional and hyperbolic ethic of hospitality opens possibilities for a different relationship between Self and Other.[47]

Derrida critiques a hospitality grounded in the power to accept or refuse migrants whose states/hosts deem them either appealing and useful, or unassimilable and undesirable. He attributes this "hostipitality"—a mediation between the host's right to hostility and hospitality, which are never too distant from each other—to a European imperial logic that understands hospitality as both a right to welcome, but also to bar, the Other. In "Derelictions of the Right to Justice," Derrida speaks specifically to the conditions of the *sans-papiers* in France and the "crime of hospitality [délit d'hospitalité]."[48] Derrida maintains that "there is a word for 'sans-papiers' in each national state culture. In the United States, for example, one uses the term *undocumented* and one organizes and hunts for *illegal immigrants*."[49] He traces the construction of the "good" versus "bad" foreigner to 1938, when France had "a formal intention to punish severely, henceforth, any foreigner who will have shown himself unworthy [*indigne*] of our hospitality [....] unworthy [*indigne*] of living on our soil.'"[50] In his articulation of the French—grounded in broader European imperial and capitalist logics—construction of an ideal immigrant juxtaposed against a migrant "undeserving" of entry into the

nation-state and national community, Derrida deconstructs the ways in which some bodies become marked as undignified, and indeed unworthy or undeserving of hospitality and entry into Europe. The consequence of such logics is the further dehumanization of the migrant, and European self-immunization under the guise of "national interests."[51] Although Derrida speaks to the experience of the *sans-papiers* specifically, he reveals how "the symptom is universal and it is European, first of all," wherein migrant precarity is defined by being granted entry only when useful (usually economically) to the nation-state. Xenophobic exclusion and hospitality, then, for Derrida, are always precariously balanced and dialectically intertwined.

Derrida focuses primarily on the *sans-papiers* in his understanding of the European frontier, rising xenophobia and the importance of decriminalizing hospitality in France; yet we can also read him in Lampedusa and other spaces where "the return of nationalisms and fundamentalism [are] in their most bloody manifestation."[52] Lampedusa is a space of immense migration and is notorious, like France, for its gestures of hospitality—which turn, quite quickly, into waves of hostility when resources and space are scarce. Like many of the *sans-papiers*, the migrants who travel to Lampedusa brave the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean and find, on the northern shores of the sea, logics (if not laws) that understand hospitality-as-a-crime (which leads to militarized borders), hospitality as the means through which to refuse entry (legal or non-legal) and the tightening of what it means to belong to a national community, have dignity and be a beneficiary of the rights and responsibilities the state provides. Whether in France or Lampedusa, hospitality becomes something that can be extended or revoked at the will of the "master"/host, who always ensures that the migrant—forever marked as foreign—knows who has the power at the threshold of entry.[53] And, the responsibility always falls on behalf of this marked migrant to conform, assimilate and work in the interests of the state that accepts them, lest they show any trace of difference or foreignness (which is always inevitable) and prove themselves to be "unworthy" or too "unassimilable" to remain in the community to which they migrated. The same imperial logics of conditional hospitality thus underpin both the case of the *sans-papiers* that Derrida critiques and that of other contemporary migrants in Lampedusa and elsewhere on the Mediterranean's northern shores.

Indeed, there is an underbelly to Lampedusa's hospitality toward migrants—the utopian "paradise on earth" very quickly becomes dystopic— one which challenges the current structures of hospitality and renders them unsustainable. Beneath the awards, the public gestures of hospitality and the many concrete ways in which Lampedusa has supported migrants better than their European counterparts (all of which we must acknowledge), some residents also seek to refuse entry and the right to remain. In this sense, the residents of Lampedusa, amid their historical role as dispensers of hos(ti)pitality, "no longer know or no longer want to distinguish between, the

definition of hearth [*un chez-soi*] and hatred or fear of the foreigner—and who no longer know that the heart [*le chez-soi*] of a home, a culture, a society also presupposes a hospitable opening."[54] Derrida critiques the ways in which xenophobia and nationalism (or national fraternity) are linked, instead insisting that the home (or homeland) can only be conceptualized through an extension of hospitality—an allowance of the Other to pass through the threshold and into the community of the host. In this sense, he constructs the communal Self as necessarily being defined by a relation (thinking with Glissant) with the Other, rather than as a relation in opposition to the Other.[55]

The power infused into the welcoming extended to migrants and asylum seekers embodies Derrida's critique of hospitality in *Of Hospitality* and *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. Derrida reveals the hospitality-hostility paradigm and its limits, the power written into gestures of welcoming and the disconnect between the law and an unconditional ethic of hospitality. The ways in which hostility and hospitality are intimately intertwined dwells within what Derrida would refer to as "the culture of the home." Derrida explores the home as a place

> where it is precisely the patron of the house – he who receives, who is master in his house, in his household, in his state, in his nation, in his city, in his town, who remains master in his house – who defines the conditions of hospitality or welcome; where consequently there can be no unconditional welcome, no unconditional passage through the door.[56]

Derrida writes that the law of hospitality is a "self-contradictory concept and experience which can only self-destruct."[57] The conditionality of the law of hospitality, the requirement of "being-oneself in one's own home," creates a space where the concept of hospitality "needs to protect itself from itself, auto-immunize itself in some way, which is to say, deconstruct itself – precisely – in being put into practice."[58] Likewise, the idea that the host carries out gestures of welcoming only in their language is central to Derrida's understanding of the law of hospitality. The home is where the host welcomes the Other in their "home" language and requires that the Other assimilate themselves and conform to the culture and language of the space into which they are being welcomed. The host holds the power in the host/guest relationship—they have the power to welcome, unconditionally, and in their language. This also means, however, that the host has the power to expel. This is the power that haunts Derridean "hostipitality": any gesture of hospitality is always haunted by the possibility of hostility.

In his conceptualization of "hostipitality," Derrida turns to Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* by re-reading Kant's concept of hospitality to make the distinction between hospitality as "right" and as "ethic." Derrida insists that an ethic of "absolute hospitality should break with the law of hospitality as right or duty," which is the proposal Kant puts forward.[59] In contrast to Kantian conceptualizations of hospitality as right, Derrida understands

"ethics [a]s so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality." [60] He insists that "hospitality is culture itself,"[61] which places hospitality at the center of communal identity, self-conceptualization and collective ethics. When Derrida makes hospitality synonymous with culture, he infuses hospitality into the very being, logics and everyday practices of the communities and individuals that extend (or refuse) hospitality and welcome to the Other. Conceptualizing hospitality and culture together means that hospitality is "not simply one ethic amongst others,"[62] but rather reflects the being, selfhood, principles, and consciousness of a community, individual or state.

The resistance to the unconditional hospitality, which we see in many European spaces, including, though to a far lesser extent, in Lampedusa (which we can also understand, conversely, as a place of migrant refuge), configures hospitality as an obligation that is always concerned with the well-being of the "master" or the host, as Derrida writes. No matter how hospitable a host may seem, conventional ethics of hospitality permit that the host need not be concerned primarily with the well-being or the life of the guest; in doing so, hosts reveal themselves to have a vested interest in maintaining the unequal power dynamic of the extant host-guest paradigm that Derrida explains. These conceptualizations of welcoming and the power of the host fundamentally oppose Derrida's proposal of the potential for unconditional hospitality as an ethic, which is why he insists that "this Law of hospitality must continue to be thought" and re-thought.[63]

Hyperbolic hospitality is conceptually a product of deconstruction, because Derrida takes the concept of hospitality to "the limit when he works over a concept up to the point of its turning back toward the enigma that bears it."[64] Derrida reveals the "furthest edge of the concept of hospitality"—thus exposing that hospitality has limits as it works within the violent nation-state framework and host-guest paradigm.[65] A hospitality that requires passports, legal immigration documents and screenings before an offer of welcome is extended is conditional in its scrupulous suspicion, screening and surveillance of all who pass through a community's borders. Conditional hospitality is bound by rigid conceptualizations of Self and Other—integral to the experience of a nation-state community with rigid borders—and insistences on the right to visit but never the right to remain. The power of the host, and the ways in which the guest must always necessarily accede to the host's commands and demands—and in their language—reveal the insufficiencies and unsustainability of our current practices of hospitality.

Hyperbolic hospitality, on the other hand, is an unconditional ethic that upends hierarchical dynamics of hospitality and challenges any idea that the threshold/border necessarily belongs to the host (or anyone) in the first place. Hyperbolic hospitality exceeds the current legal order and requires that the guest and host accept each other as they are, learning to live with their mutual otherness, which allows for a more egalitarian encounter between the two—

it insists that hospitality is an equal and reciprocal engagement between host and guest. In its reconfiguration of sovereignty over gestures of welcoming and its refusal of the host's absolute power, hyperbolic hospitality is "the question that comes to us from the other, the foreigner"—that is, it is a gesture and a question that comes "from the place of the other."[66] The foreigner/migrant *is* the question of hospitality, thus forcing the Self, the host, or the "master of the house" to confront that from which they cannot look away—the question of foreignness and ethics itself. By positioning the question of hospitality as arriving from the foreigner or migrant, hyperbolic hospitality takes the power away from the "master" or "host" by insisting that hospitality is a reciprocal process by which the host and the guest (or the Self and the Other) engage in welcoming practices of give and take grounded in mutual obligation. Derrida provokes that hospitality "originally belong[s] to neither host nor guest, but to the gesture by which one of them welcomes the other—even and above all if he is himself without a dwelling from which this welcome could be conceived."[67] Hyperbolic hospitality may be (or seem) impossible, but it is the hyperbolic gesture—the giving without anything to give, understanding that both the host and the guest are responsible for, if necessary, giving up everything known—that defines Derrida's proposal for a hyperbolic ethics of hospitality and calls us to think hospitality anew.

This offer, this pact, this agreement of hyperbolic hospitality must extend to any Other. It must be made available to anyone and everyone—which is always impossible—or hyperbolic hospitality will not be worthy of its name.

Derrida criticizes the ways in which capitalist nation-states only accept migrants who provide them with economic benefit and only allow them to remain so long as they continue to fuel the economy of the host. Hyperbolic hospitality, on the other hand, does not require the "stranger" or migrant to provide or produce; it is an ethic that allows the Other to live, regardless of productivity. Derrida insists that in this unconditional hospitality, there is "the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names."[68] The only required reciprocity between Self and Other in a world defined by hyperbolic hospitality is the allowance of both to remain and continue to live as they are. As such, cohabitation would require a break from any (economic, political, social, linguistic, cultural, and so on) expectation— the hyperbolic means one must take a chance on the possibility that the Other will neither produce, contribute nor change, but that they still deserve to live well and safely. Hyperbolic hospitality thus destroys any attempt at linking capitalist impulses with hospitality and the link between citizenship, birth and belonging by insisting that the "right [to live be] granted to the foreigner as such."[69]

In contrast to the ways in which nation-states and national communities extend hospitality, which is always intimately related to the possibility of

hostility, hyperbolic hospitality requires a willingness of the host to give itself over to the guest without the promise that the Other will transcend their foreignness. It an immense risk to offer everything to the unknown Other and take a chance on such a hospitality. Like a Derridean gift, [70] once unconditional hospitality is extended, it cannot be revoked—the Other must necessarily take on some power the host previously possessed. In doing so, hyperbolic hospitality threatens a world wherein the nation-state, and particularly the European nation-state, has absolute power over those migrants who reach their shores. Thinking with Derrida means hyperbolic hospitality can be conceptualized as containing within it two suppositions: that one does not refuse and attempt to curb any entry, nor aim to make temporary the settlement of the Other in a space—in other words, one extends an "unquestioning welcome."[71] Once entrance and settlement are permitted and granted, the Other may remain Other, forever. There can be no attempt at or requirement of assimilation if hospitality is to be hyperbolic. Regardless of whether they will be assimilable citizens in the eyes of the nation-state, hyperbolic hospitality allows for an unconditional and unrestricted right to residence and the right to live as full community members. As such, the guest becomes part of the communal self—in spite of and because of their otherness—and may thereby take on the role of host (or perhaps dissolve the idea of "host" and "guest" in the first place).

Hyperbolic hospitality allows the Other—once integrated into the community—to live as such, without any attempt at transcending difference or assimilating them into the national Self. In many ways, this conceptualization of hyperbolic hospitality refracts Derrida's deconstruction of justice and Glissant's writing of Relation—both of which these thinkers conceptualize as a process by which the Other may remain Other, despite continued encounters with the Self. In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant describes Relation as a phenomenon wherein the "thought of self and thought of other here become obsolete in their duality. Every Other is a citizen and no longer a barbarian. What is here is open, as much as this there."[72] In other words, through Relation, and the opacity that enables it, there is no attempt to transcend difference, to require absolute transparency or to mold the Other in the image of the Self.[73] Hyperbolic hospitality is thus a process by which encounter is perpetual without any attempt to conceal or transcend real or seeming alterity; in this sense, "the foreigner [may remain] a foreigner."[74] According to this ethic, assimilation is no longer the norm nor the ideal; every community that extends hospitality unconditionally must be willing to live (and live well) with difference. Hyperbolic hospitality is a process that produces a new form of cohabitation that allows for every member of the community to have equal rights and responsibilities to each other, despite their otherness. Otherness becomes neither the basis for exclusion nor of abjection.

In Derrida's thought, hyperbolic hospitality must necessarily exceed our current institutions—national and international. As Derrida deconstructs cosmopolitanism—a concept intimately related to hospitality—he engages Hannah Arendt's writings on birth, naturalization and citizenship. Following Arendt, Derrida wonders: "[H]ow can the right to asylum be redefined and developed without repatriation and without naturalisation?"[75] He insists that there is no "hope for cities exercising hospitality if we recognize with Arendt, as I feel we must, that nowadays international law is limited by treaties between sovereign states, and that not even a 'government of the world' would be capable of sorting things out."[76] Derrida understands current institutions, configurations of sovereignty and international law to be incapable of producing the modes of cohabitation and gestures of hospitality required to live with the Other. Therefore, he urges that we "make an audacious call for a genuine innovation in the history of the right of asylum or the duty to hospitality," thereby demanding that societies open themselves to the possibility of a hyperbolic ethic of hospitality grounded in values of radical solidarity and absolute welcoming, regardless of the risks.[77]

Unconditional hospitality seems unsustainable—if not impossible— because it is a hospitality of the not-yet, a hospitality-to-come (*l'avenir*[78]). It challenges the ways in which we organize institutions and conceptualizations of Self and Other. In the Mediterranean, a hospitality of the not-yet world requires an understanding that, though on an ethereal plane, coastal states have a responsibility to the lives of the migrants who cross the water. This responsibility cannot manifest in increased militarization or policing but must rather ground itself in a commitment to the universal right to live. Likewise, on land, Derrida does "not [imagine…] the European Community as it now exists or is taking shape in its current (neoliberal) majority, virtually threatened by so many internal wars…but of a Europe to come, a Europe trying to find itself."[79] This is a necessary responsibility, Derrida charges, if we are to conceptualize the possibility of hyperbolic hospitality and living (well) with the Other. We must create new ways to relate to each other and the Other to remake the political sphere into one less insistent on rigidity, difference and exclusive responsibility to those we perceive as the "same as us." This radical and new form of politics and solidarity accords with Derrida's conceptualization of justice, which he articulates as "heterogeneous to the law to which it is yet so close, from which in truth it is indissociable"[80]— hyperbolic hospitality cannot be translated into legal language and thus must necessarily exceed national boundaries and international institutions that seek to militarize borders and construct obligations to and rights for citizenry as exclusive. To create a world of hyperbolic hospitality is to refute the carceral logic of the "rights" of nation-states and individuals that Kant crafted in his theorization of hospitality and instead embrace a new means through which to relate to the Other.[81]

In some ways, the practices which we see in Lampedusa outside of the protests begin to represent a sort of Europe-to-come, as the residents and government welcome and extend gestures of hospitality not present in most European border regions, despite limited resources and space. Yet, they also remind us of the limits of hospitality through institutions that seek to police migrants, militarize borders and ensure first and foremost the security of its citizenry. In other words, although Lampedusa represents a picture of a hospitality that exceeds that of mainland European states it remains conditional.

Derrida calls for the creation of a new politics, grounded in a hyperbolic ethic of hospitality. By refusing institutions and current configurations of sovereignty and the nation-state, Derrida shows how "the fight must be global, European, national, and local at the same time" in order to construct an ethic of hyperbolic hospitality.[82] By tying hospitality to ethics and justice, Derrida insists that we reconceptualize hospitality and difference in order to craft a world that is "both thoughtful and generous."[83] In this new world, there may be "a politics that will clear the current laws of their shame and infamy—a politics of the foreigner, a right of foreigners that will not be a dereliction of justice," which again takes on a Glissantian overtone in its insistence on relating to the Self and Other otherwise.[84] It is only through this hyperbolic hospitality, one which radically shifts the ways in which Self and Other are conceived and welcomed, that "we can finally live, speak, and breathe," and "be able to discover a taste for living in a culture, a language, and a country" in which hospitality, justice and a hyperbolic ethic may be achieved.[85] Because hyperbolic ethics are always reaching for the impossible, the question remains whether hyperbolic hospitality is in the realm of the plausible.

What would a hyperbolic hospitality look like in the Mediterranean, and Lampedusa in particular? What would it mean for this island in the northern Mediterranean to accept, a priori, all migrants who seek either to pass through or remain there, for good? Living within and through a hyperbolic ethic of hospitality, there would be no attempt to transcend difference, but rather an openness to live with the Other, and live well, regardless of the risk. Is it tenable, in Lampedusa and other spaces wherein hospitality is tested to its limit today, to engage a hyperbolic ethic of hospitality? Is it possible not only to welcome, but to (learn to) live well with the Other? These are the possibilities hyperbolic hospitality provides.

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[1] In cases such as the "left-to-die boat" in 2011. See: Heller, Charles & Lorenzo Pezzani, "The Leftto-die Boat." *Forensic Architecture.* November 4, 2012: https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-left-to-die-boat.

[2] Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: An Interview with Jean Birnbaum,* Jean Birnbaum (ed) (New York, NY: Melville House, 2007), 25.

[3] In *Monolingualism of the Other*, Derrida articulates how "the one who is writing, always by hand, even when using machines, holds out his hand like a blind man seeking to touch the one whom he could thank for the gift of a language, for the very words in which he declares himself ready to give thanks. And to beg for mercy as well" (64). Like the gift of language, the gift of hyperbolic hospitality is something for which the guest and the host must reach, blindly, with the faith—or hope—that they may be able to create unconditional spaces of cohabitation defined by gestures of hospitality and integration that allow the Self and Other to live as such, together. See: Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

[4] In *Specters of Marx,* Derrida insists that "to live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death'" (*Specters of Marx*, xvii). In other words, the goal is not to learn to live (from the Other), for that is impossible. Derrida argues that "living, like dying, is not something one learns. All one can really do is see it coming. Together. To try to learn from one another to live, in a shared anxiety and a difficult freedom, where each expects him or herself to die: a passing out of life, farewell [salut] in the night" (*Learning to Live Finally* 14). We learn to live through an encounter with the Other. As this relates to hospitality, therefore, a crucial objective is not to learn directly from the host or the guest, but rather to be given the security or the space to learn to live for/as oneself, if that is even possible—to be given the space to learn to live (well). It is an impossibility that hospitality attempts to make possible—it is the opportunity that hyperbolic hospitality provides. See: Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York, NY: Routledge 2006), xvii.

[5] Jacques Derrida & Rottenberg, Elizabeth, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 140.

[6] ANSA, "Lampedusa Mayor Collects Award for Welcoming Migrants," *Info Migrants*, October 31, 2023, https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/52935/lampedusa-mayor-collects-award-for-welcoming migrants; Julia Dumont, "Two years of anti-immigrant policy in Giorgia Meloni's Italy," *Info Migrants*, October 24, 2024, https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/60758/two-years-of-antiimmigrant-policy-in-giorgia-melonis-italy; Laura Dubois and Amy Kazmin, "Meloni hits out at EU top court after migration ruling," *Financial Times*, August 1, 2025, https://www.ft.com/content/13f81ef5-767f-4e99-a1dc-46207dcd3423.

[7] Already, with this invocation of "paradise," we should read the search for a sort of utopian imaginary or narrative that Lampedusa has become a utopia wherein migrants and citizens alike can live in peace and share in community. Yet, Derrida would remind us that "the madness of political utopia [has] done enough harm in the twentieth century for us to beware of it in future!" (*Of Hospitality*, 70). Likewise, we must always keep in mind that the line between utopia and dystopia is never far off and we should be wary of such invocations. Written into the utopian is the insistence on erasing or denying that which does not fit the narrative which, in the case of migration to Lampedusa, includes the very real ways in which migrants are left to die (left-to-die) in the Mediterranean and on its shores.

[8] ANSA, "Lampedusa Mayor Collects Award for Welcoming Migrants."

[9] Ruth Sherlock, "On Lampedusa, there's sympathy for migrants — as long as they don't stay," *NPR*, September 28, 2023. https://www.npr.org/2023/09/28/1201785102/lampedusa-italy-migrant-crisis-meloni.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Charles Heller & Lorenzo Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography: Investigating the Deaths of Migrants at the EU's Maritime Frontier," In Nicholas De Genova, *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering* (Durham: Duke University Press 2017), 100.

[13] Sherlock, "On Lampedusa, there's sympathy for migrants — as long as they don't stay."

[14] Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London, UK: Routledge, 2001), 13.

[15] Derrida, *Negotiations*, 134.

[16] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 101.

[17] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 90.

[18] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 95.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 91.

[23] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 5.

[24] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 6.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, J. Michael Dash (trans.) (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 14.

[27] Rinaldo Walcott, "The Black Aquatic," *Liquid Blackness* (2021): 63-72, 65.

[28] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 7.

[29] See: Isabel Hofmeyr "The Complicating Sea: The Indian Ocean as Method." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East.* 1 December 2012, 584–590.

[30] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 6.

[31] Jacques Derrida & Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 4.

[32] Roberto Esposito, *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012), 124.

[33] See: Chelsea Schields, *Offshore Attachments: Oil and Intimacy in the Caribbean* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2023).

[34] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 89.

[35] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 101.

[36] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 89.

[37] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 104.

[38] Sam Okoth Opondo and Michael J. Shapiro, *Passages: On Geo-Analysis and the Aesthetics of Precarity*, art by Barbara Benish and Enrique Martinez Leal (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2024), 125.

[39] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 104, 96.

[40] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 96.

[41] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 89.

[42] Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," Barry Stocker and Forbes Morlock (trans.), *Angelaki* 5, 3 (2000): 3-18.

[43] Heller & Pezzani, "Forensic Oceanography," 90.

[44] Jacques Derrida, *Perjury and Pardon, Volume I* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 14.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness,* x.

[47] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 64.

[48] Derrida, *Negotiations*, 133.

[49] Derrida, *Negotiations*, 140.

[50] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 138.

[51] Derrida, *Negotiations*, 137

[52] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 60.

[53] Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 17.

[54] Derrida, *Negotiations*, 134.

[55] See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, England: Verso Books, 2016).

[56] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 4.

[57] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 5.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25.

[60] Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 17.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Derrida, *Of Hospitality,* 60.

[64] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 8.

[65] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 46.

[66] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 68.

[67] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 62.

[68] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25.

[69] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 21.

[70] Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, David Wills (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[71] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 29.

[72] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.

[73] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 193.

[74] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 23.

[75] Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 7.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 4.

[78] See: *Derrida*, directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman (2002; New York: Zeitgeist Films).

[79] Derrida, *Learning to Live, Finally*, 41.

[80] Derrida, *Negotiations*, 24.

[81] Derrida writes the lineage of carcerality and policing of the private sphere to Kant's refusal of the right to lie and eradication of any form of privacy. In doing so, he reimagines the connection between the nation-state, the breaching of the private sphere and hospitality to read hospitality and Kant otherwise. See: Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 69.

[82] Derrida, *Negotiations*, 142.

[83] Derrida, *Negotiations*, 144.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

'Gave Me Back No Words'
Celan, Derrida, and a Poetic Relationship to Language

Yichu Wang
Cornell University

Celan and Language that Passes Through

In 1958, Paul Celan gave a short speech now known as the Bremen Lecture in which the Romanian poet casts his relationship with language in a particular non-proprietary light that this essay will reflect on with the help of Jacques Derrida.

Celan's speech, which was delivered upon the conferral of a literature prize hosted by the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, opens with an expression of thanks and follows the route of language, as it were, through "Denken" and "Danken" ("thinking and thanking in our language are words from one and the same source") to "[enter] the semantic field of 'recollect,' 'bear in mind,' 'remembrance,' 'devotion.'"[1] It is in this spirit of reflecting on what one has received both past and present that Celan introduces himself to his host city as coming from an unfamiliar landscape formerly of the Hapsburg monarchy—a landscape that was already linked with Bremen, Celan reminds his audience, through language and writing: in one direction, Martin Buber's German translation of Hasidic tales, and in the other, publications such as those of the Bremen press through which "Bremen took shape for me."[2] However, for now the nearness of reading, writing and publishing serves to mediate a sense of "the unreachable" that Bremen still has "the ring of."[3] Vienna, briefly meditated on next, is "reachable, if distant enough, what has to be reached,"[4] but judging from Celan's encounters with post-Anschluss racial laws that prevented him from studying in Vienna and with the city's broken Jewish communities post-WWII, what is "too-attaining"[5] can in reality betray the attachment of imagined identifications. As Celan puts it allusively in the speech: "You know how it went then, for years, with this reachability."[6]

What Celan proposes in the wake of relinquishing places of belonging is language as "this one thing" that is reachable and un-lost amidst all the losses. Famously, however,

But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through its frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech. It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; yet it passed through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again, "enriched" by all this.[7]

The availability of language does not mean that it is claimed easily or that it is open to being claimed in any simple, possessive sense. Here, as in the rest of the speech, Celan does not name the Holocaust although the context would have been clear to his audiences. There is also no explicit naming of the German language — the language Celan chose to work in — but its implication is present in this image of a decidedly alienating experience of language felt as wordlessness or silence. Silence is not nothing, being a strained one that can turn murderous and loud as language ("Sprache") suffers its own self-alienation in speech ("Rede")[8] and becomes a differentiating instrument of death and silencing rather than a condition for relationality. However, Celan also appears to evoke a mode of operation more inherent to language through the idea of wordless passage. His description — the way that "it passes through this happening," which also recalls passage as migration and survival under Nazi persecution — imagines a language that *persists* in some form or shape through a period in which it is repressed and also unable to give an answer, a word. Celan specifies later that "a poem is not timeless," blocking the interpretation that poetry remains because it transcends what words fail to convey; rather, its claim to infinity lies in "[seeking] to reach through time."[9] What is this reaching, or what is it that persists and passes through? But even before that question, this language "gave back no words." To whom? To terrorizing speech that silences even in the act of demanding an answer? To a speaker to whom no words return (the "*her*" of "gab keine Worte *her*" to the "*hin*" of language's "ging *hin*durch"; *hin und her* meaning back and forth as a phrase)?[10] Or perhaps to an Other who may be waiting? Why is a word awaited? Why does it seem incomplete to consider passage as just a form of witnessing what cannot be shared?

This essay takes up the provocations that "giving back no words" provides for thinking about non-proprietary relations to language as something available or "reachable," but is not appropriable. The survival of Celan's language runs counter to the common expectation that language make available the means by which to "give back a word," to make sense, make livable or lived, or make replies when addressed — in other words, to be in possession of names, stories, and more. If language failed in this respect during the Holocaust, Celan's speech prompts a rethinking of what language is, what need for language led Celan to describe himself as one who "thus most uncannily in the open, goes with his very being to language, stricken by and seeking reality,"[11] and finally what kinds of poetic theory it allows us to imagine apart from the assertion of reality in the expressive voice of a subject or perhaps even the world-making of beings transcending themselves within

a larger unfolding. For instance, when Celan states that he writes poetry "to orient myself," the emphasis falls not on establishing location but on sustaining a continual motion—a desire for certain possibilities—because writing is "event, movement, a being underway, it was an attempt to gain direction;" the meaning of this direction, he observes, "involves the question of the clockhand's direction" and points poetry "[toward] something standing open, occupiable, perhaps toward an addressable Thou, toward an addressable reality."[12]

All this will come under a new light as we turn to Derrida for ways to think the urgency of writing for the sake of "an addressable reality." The next section offers a reading mainly of two texts where Derrida discusses Celan's work, extracting from them a view of language whose temporal passage enables a gathering of self and other, wherein we have to revalue proprietary relations to the idiom and make room instead for thinking forms of writing that mark difference and relation. The third and final section returns for a brief reconsideration of Celan's Bremen Lecture. Celan holds an influential role in Derrida's thinking and has himself theorized language in different forms of writing, but due to the limited scope allowed this essay, the two are juxtaposed not so much to identify definitely shared currents of thought as to explore what cross-pollinations this provokes for understanding the hospitality language can offer us and what we can offer through language.

Derrida on Celan: the Marking and Giving of Language

Derrida often describes the scene between Celan and language (German) as one where the poetic event is a strenuously executed marking of language. In an interview titled "Language Is Never Owned," Derrida speaks of Celan's work as

> a singular signature that would be a counter-signature to the German language and, at the same time, something that happens to the German language—that comes to pass in both senses of the term: something that approaches the language, that reaches it, without appropriating it, without surrendering to it, without delivering itself to it; but also something that enables poetic writing to occur, that is to say, to be an event that marks language.[13]

Reaching and marking without appropriating or surrendering: this double "passing" that doubles as a (counter)signature is what Derrida sees Celan trying to accomplish. Relatedly, in a long essay titled "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," Derrida states that "[wherever] a signature has cut into an idiom, leaving in language the trace of an incision, the memory of an incision at once unique and iterable, cryptic and readable, there is date."[14] This section explores how the idea of Celan's marking of language unfolds through such concepts as the date, the incision, and the signature.

Derrida argues in his essay that a date operates by inscribing the promise of a return in future iterations such as anniversaries and commemorations; this raises, however, the issue of the date's paradoxical readability wherein "it is necessary that [. . .] the unrepeatable divide itself in repeating itself, and in the same stroke encipher or encrypt itself."[15] A date that puts a readable signature on an event risks effacing itself or the intact presence of meaning of the unrepeatable singularity it dates, although importantly, Derrida emphasizes that this "is not the simple effacement of the date in a generality, but its effacement in front of another date [. . .] which is strangely allied in the secret of an encounter, a chance secret, with the same date."[16] It is possible therefore that what the passing mark or "the memory of an incision" registers is the memory of precisely this act of self-division in expropriating but also transcribing oneself forward into the company of wholly others to whom one speaks at the cost of alienation from oneself: "speaking to the other of the other," as it were.[17] In this sense the expropriation may also have the potential to be reproduced in those who come upon the date since the date's self-division also turns, in a fundamental sense, into a condition of possibility for contact: cipher though it may have become the date is a mark of proffered alliance—Derrida calls it at one point "the traces of the other *as I*" (original italics)[18]—and it extends a peculiar space in which different times gather.

In fact, the non-appropriative date in Derrida's Celan can also figure as a border or a cut that marks *a difference in between* in such a manner that it hinges on the specificities of the bordering selves without attempting to own them or even encompass them in understanding. In "Shibboleth," Derrida arrives at this mark by contemplating the untranslatability of language that derives not so much from idiomatic content as from the singularity of gathered differences—by "the cut of a non-signifying difference in the body of the mark."[19] This multiplicity within language exists among languages as well and Derrida's example is the cut between idioms that form arbitrary but specific borders, such as around "shibboleth," a word that also has a history, however, of functioning as a password that arbitrates access to entry, membership and even life on account of having different pronunciations in different tongues. Derrida warns that the cut *in the body* of such non-signifying difference can help essentialize the idioms that produce it and constitute "a discriminatory limit, the grillwork of policing, of normalization, and of methodical subjugation."[20] The requirement for the ability to inhabit an idiom, however, can reflect no particular singular identity to be inhabited. Instead, through the figure of the shibboleth, Derrida seems to envision an alternative space not for occupying but for gathering, a mode of language to which uniqueness more truly belongs and which indeed offers a lens to understand poetry; he writes, for instance, that "the uniqueness of the poem, in other words, yet another date and *shibboleth*, forges and seals, in a single idiom, *in eins*, the poetic event, a multiplicity of languages and of equally singular dates" (original italics).[21] A shibboleth is both heterogeneous and yet singular; like the date, it recalls "this alliance between the date and itself *as*

other" (original italics)[22] which Derrida associates with the imagery of rings in Celan's poetry. Constituted by differences in the same where difference is not subsumed or claimed, the unique mark therefore allows the apposition of selves and others for which it serves the oxymoronic role of a non-invasive border.

We can now better appreciate the self-division and self-expropriation of the date: it creates chance gatherings as it propels itself through time, making room for encountering other dates through a certain non-inhabitation of meaning. What the date or the shibboleth inscribes must remain other or non-signifying, but this negativity asks us to consider if the value of writing the mark lies in the singular event of the gathering itself, in the sealing-together of the many dates enabled by the non-identity in the date's self-relation. All of this is perhaps also a way of invoking Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other* to revisit its provocation that a language of the other is in a sense the only language available, and its value is decidedly not based on a relationship of belonging and ownership:

> This appeal to come [*appel a venir*] gathers language together in advance. It welcomes it, collects it, not in its identity or its unity, not even in its ipseity, but in the uniqueness or singularity of a gathering together of its difference to itself [. . .]. It is not possible to speak outside this promise that gives *a* language, the uniqueness of the idiom, but only by promising to give it. (original italics)[23]

While it has been implied already that language as such works as a self-transcribing date, a question that might nonetheless be carried forward from this train of thought is what a poetic language looks like that bears the mark of a date, an alienation, an incision that gathers. Perhaps a cryptic language in which "there is nothing but *shibboleth*" (original italics)[24]—nothing but openings, thresholds and invitations? And what precisely happens to German, the language that Derrida calls Celan's language in the sense not of ownership but of a chosen "bodily struggle"[25] in which it is the aim of Celan's poetry to leave a mark on that particular idiom? The first question can be hard to answer concretely within the scope of this essay, but it might be possible to go further with Derrida's description of Celan's "signature" as something that reaches the idiom without appropriating or surrendering. The problem of idiomaticity is in a sense exemplary for thinking about the promise of a language in the disorderly gathering of difference as opposed to the presence of articulated meaning.

In the interview, Derrida observes that the task of poets is to teach a much needed political lesson in response to the contemporary dilemma of how to "be in favor of the greatest idiomaticity [. . .] while resisting nationalist ideology;"[26] what they teach, he declares, is the matter not "of cultivating a given idiom but of producing an idiom."[27] In the arguments traced in the essay "Shibboleth," to give an idiom involves a self-alienation that creates

openings for gatherings and encounters *in eins*; on the other hand, the idea of "cultivating" idiomaticity is misguided not only because language is multiple and migratory,[28] but also since any singularity it enjoys would be impure on account of being already constituted by alterity. Within this frame, Derrida's particular representation of Celan's "signature that would be a counter-signature to the German language"[29]—to which Celan is committed without assuming a possessive gesture—serves to illustrate the importance of idiomaticity both as an inherited specificity to be respected and as something of value created by a non-appropriative and even life-preserving unsettling of that specificity. Figuratively speaking, if a signature created in an idiom represents a claim or right of belonging, the concept of counter-signature would seem to signify a betrayal of that idiom—and the *latter's* betrayal of proprietary or nationalist claims—precisely because in its commitment it repeats the unrepeatable. Derrida comments that Celan's poetry "passes on the inheritance of the German language;"[30] this remark, however, should be read in the light of a later one suggesting that "the poet is someone permanently engaged with a dying language that he resuscitates, not by giving back to it a triumphant line, but by sometimes bringing it back, like a revenant or phantom."[31] Derrida's invocation of revenants here recalls the way a date transcribes itself as a cipher toward other dates. Again, the date effaces itself not in a generality but for the sake of the wholly other. In rather abstract terms at least, the overall implication seems to be that Celan's counter-signature does something similar for the German language, setting it in motion so that it is deracinated from nationalist ideology but resuscitated in its idiomaticity in a new sense. This motion is internal as well—an internal differentiation and non-identity—for Derrida also describes Celan as engaging in "a translating interpretation" within the German language itself.[32]

From what Derrida tells us, Celan's relationship with language thus consists in a giving of language that makes possible the encounter and gathering of selves and others in a single, marked and heterogenous space, which in this case is the space of poetry. Might this provide an angle for reading the Bremen Lecture too—for how language persists even when it "passes through" without giving back a word? Given that the giving of language entails an embrace of literature's exemplary temporality of impure presence,[33] it would be worthy of further thinking to ask in what ways language might remain—might pass through—not despite but thanks to a certain state of negativity, a relation in which the structure of giving plays a central role. Much resonance can be found, for instance, in the aforementioned promise of a language that is given by promising to give, or an adjacent statement in *Monolingualism* where Derrida writes that "but there is not a language. Not a given one. It does not exist. [. . .] Like a charge [*enjoignante*], it remains to be given, it remains only on this condition: by still remaining to be given."[34]

On Not Giving Back Words

In "Shibboleth," Derrida brings up another scene of "passing" when he makes the appeal of "[letting] the word pass and [assign] us, if not to the one, at least to the same?"[35] In assigning self and other to the same if not the one, this word operates as a date, the marking Derrida sees "coming to pass" in Celan's German poetry. As a way of returning to the initial questions about the Bremen Lecture, we can ask how this "letting passing" relates to the "passing through" of Celan's language that is alienated and alienating and that persists as the only not-lost thing.

Derrida's "word" appears in the context of his consideration of Jewishness as the non-possession of essence, of circumcision, and of the Jew's "unpronounceable" proper name.[36] What this word is seems ambiguous ("shibboleth"? you? the word for God? an indefinite word to be filled in?), but its ambiguity is arguably attuned to the layered negativity that draws attention to it as something of a non-word. To begin with, a word can assume unpronounceability in order to guard and even to destroy when, inscribed/circumcised with a differentiating value, it is given out embodying the authority to include and exclude. For instance, a non-word can include those who do not speak its name because they participate in a shared covenant, while in another scenario, it can exclude those who fail its test of pronunciation, like the Ephraimites and the word "shibboleth." On another level, however, Derrida's concluding remarks evoke a different kind of unpronounceable inscription/circumcision that fends against such exclusionary and proprietary tendencies through an authoritative intercession or "a *writing of Nothing*" (original italics).[37] Here the act of inscription/circumcision remains necessary because it marks and prepares the word or signature that must be given or promised to the other so "that he may partake of it and enter, or leave, that he may pass through the doorway, across the line, the border, the threshold."[38] Because the writing is "nothing," however, authority becomes "objectless"[39] and is forced to negate its claims to knowledge and power; consequently, the scene itself changes: "one should not cut in, but on the contrary allow the word passage."[40]

As a difference without a nameable, pronounceable and discriminatory difference, this "writing of nothing" can function as a radical variation on the singular mark that Derrida figures as "the cut of a non-signifying difference in the body of the mark."[41] When afforded the ritual of authorial inscription/circumcision, Derrida's unpronounceable "word" can go out into the world and serve as a gathering place of multiplicities or ports of entries and crossings; but although the word is passing back and forth and participating in the multiplicity taken into itself, as an idiom it is not that which can be possessed, having no essence or name to be spoken. If "passage" refers to a word transcribing itself as an Other so that there continues to be

encounter and being-together, Derrida's elaborations on circumcision emphasize this passage's need for a process of the same order as the self-alienating date or cut, which is what makes possible specific non-proprietary forms of signature in writing.

This returns us to the Bremen Lecture where language "[passed] through and could come to light again, 'enriched' by all this."[42] Perhaps the fact that this language "gave back no words for that which happened"[43] does not have to lead to a total image of absence where the only valuable writing or voicing is naming. Perhaps as language "reaches through time,"[44] "that which happened" is carried forward in the "enrichment" that, like a date, may on the one hand seem to forget—by not naming—its singularity, but on the other enable future gatherings in which the past is brought back as "a phantom or revenant,"[45] the other as the I. In a similar vein, language may also prove to encompass unexpected hospitalities beyond those promised but also gatekept by proprietors of language who bind presence and meaning to the borders of particular words.

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1 Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trs. John Felstiner (New York: Norton, 2001), 395.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 "Origin," 16. "Too-attaining" is the translation for "what has to be reached" ("das zu Erreichende") in Robert Kelly's version of the Bremen Lecture.

6 Ibid., 395.

7 Ibid.

8 Original German.

9 *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 396.

10 Original German.

11 *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 396.

12 Ibid.

13 "Language Is Never Owned," 99.

14 "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," 48.

15 Ibid., 15.

16 Ibid., 9.

17 Ibid., 10.

18 Ibid., 7.

19 Ibid., 30.

20 Ibid., 30. This essentializing differentiation brings to mind the "deathbringing speech" in Celan's Bremen Lecture.

21 Ibid., 29.

22 Ibid., 19.

23 *Monolingualism*, 67-68.

24 "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," 33.

25 "Language Is Never Owned," 99.

26 Ibid., 102.

27 Ibid., 103.

28 Derrida writes: "Multiplicity and migration of languages, certainly, and within language. Your country, it says, migrates all over, like language. The country itself migrates and transports its borders." ("Shibboleth," 27)

[29] "Language Is Never Owned," 99.

[30] Ibid., 100.

[31] Ibid., 106.

[32] Ibid., 100.

[33] See Pheng Cheah's *What is a World* p.184-186 for Cheah's understanding of the Derridean temporality in which the "constitution of presence through the relation to a radical alterity" makes possible "the gift of time through which we are given any determinable reality."

[34] *Monolingualism*, 67.

[35] "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," 51. The entire passage reads: "Witness to the universal as absolute singularity, as the other and in the name of the other, of the stranger, of you toward whom I must take a step that, without bringing me nearer to you, without exchanging me for you, without being assured a passage, lets the word pass and assigns us, if not to the one, at least to the same. We were already assigned to it, dwelling under the same tradewind. Let the word pass through the barbed-wire border, through, this time, the grid of language or thanks to it. The passage of the other, toward the other—respect of the same, of a same that respects the otherness of the other."

[36] Ibid., 50.

[37] Ibid., 61.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 61-62.

[41] Ibid., 30.

[42] *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 395.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 396.

[45] "Language Is Never Owned," 106.

'Of These One and All I Weave the Song of Myself'

Walt Whitman's Lyric Subject in Édouard Glissant's
Poetics of Relation

Sanghoon Oh

Cornell University

> I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
> I loafe and invite my soul,
> I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.
>
> – Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself", 1892

> Differences: singularities.
> Transparency-Opacity….
> Totality: Relation….
> Thought of the Other: -the Other of thought.
> Assimilations—distancings that determine….
> Creolizations, errantry.
> In this litany commas (,) indicate relation, dashes (-) opposition, and colons (:) consecution.
>
> – Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

Poetics of Relation presents a powerful account of Relation. "Relation is an open totality evolving upon itself" whose elements "don't blend" nor "lose themselves" in relation[1]; instead, "each element can keep its… essential quality, even as it accustoms itself to the essential qualities and differences of others."[2] In its most absolute formulation, Relation enables "a relational practice affirming the multiplicity and diversity of components".[3] The subject of relation "is not: (of) Being, but: —(of) beings"[4]; there is no "Non-Being…

except outside of Relation", for Relation facilitates the existence of all beings through the relation with the self, as it is through Relation that beings come into being[5]. Insofar as Relation is total, it is the primordial condition of beings in the world to come into being. However, Relation exceeds the bounds of traditional Western metaphysics by facilitating a connection not only with the thought of the other, a constitutive object of the mind that reaffirms the self, but the other of Thought. It is Relation that enables the haunting connection to the other of Thought, an Other with such alterity that it lacks representation in Thought, which exerts an ethereal pressure to cause one to "have to act… [and] change [one's] thought, without renouncing its contribution."[6] Relation remains as a set of relations that is total, constitutive, mutualist, mutable, and autotelic.

And yet, given the totality of Relation, there appears to be a seemingly aporetic double movement between the opacity of its constituents and self-consciousness. On the one hand, relation is the site of opacity, where the "complex mix" of its constituent elements highlights the extent of one another's differences: each element defines themselves by the "the mutual mutations generated by this interplay of relations."[7] This mode of Relation, creolization, enables the creation of an intermixture greater than the sum of its parts and does not efface or diminish its constituent components; "creolization diffracts" and entails "always being open, that is, perhaps, never becoming fixed except according to systems of variables that we have to imagine as much as define. Creolization carries along then into the adventure of multilingualism and into the incredible explosion of cultures. But the explosion of cultures does not mean they are scattered or mutually diluted. It is the violent sign of their consentual [sic], not imposed, sharing."[8] The result is a set of relations that is totalizing but non-totalitarian, a rhizomatic network of multiple origins in contrast to the singular root, ever expanding and mutating in its scope[9]. Moreover, it is through this "chaotic network of Relation", a "conscious and contradictory experience of contact among cultures", that the self emerges[10]. *E pluribus unum:* a self whose existence is contingent on their set of relations. The question of 'what' one's essence is becomes a question of 'how' to maintain the relation that constitutes the self and other, as "[t]o himself the subject is a thick cloud of knowledge. That is why Relation also dismantles the thought of non-Being"[11], for there is no thing outside of Relation. Through the totality of Relation, thinking of all becomes one (Relation); at the same time, "thinking about One is not thinking about all "[12]. *Poetics of Relation* famously poses a powerful injunction to the reader: "Why wouldn't I accept the other's opacity?"[13]. Why must we reduce the other to a kind of knowledge than to let the Other, and by extension, our selves and our relation to them, be?

On the other hand, relation enables the realization of similarity and difference that gives rise to the transparency of self-consciousness. Relation is the precondition for the immanence of self-consciousness, as the comparisons

between self and Other that highlights one another's similarities and differences become the very site of producing the difference of self and other: comparisons facilitate the moment of self-consciousness, when the self has "come out of itself" to differentiate itself from others in the world[14]. This 'transcendental' return into one's self, or the coming into one's own by self-realization, reaffirms the order of things, but the continued centrality of the self in opposition to the Other presents a totalitarian set of relations, especially in the way the self subjugates the Other. Even if there is no thing outside Relation, it does not entail those in relation are or ought to be instrumentalized for the self's use. It is this impetus to gain mastery over Relation, by reducing the multifaceted and multiple Other(s) of relation as an object to the self's subject, thereby reinforcing the primacy of the self over the Other, that Glissant condemns as the tenet of Western expansionism and colonialism: for it is impetus to "understand" the Other that reduces the Other and renders them 'transparent' to the subject by measuring a "solidity with the ideal scale providing [the subject] with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments"[15]. Contrast this with Relation, which makes place for the other of Thought and allows for "Beings [to] remain" with the absence of the claim of Being. And yet, given the totality of Relation and our mutable standing as beings-in-time and beings-in-relation, are we not doomed to coming into self-consciousness via reflection, superseding and rendering transparent ourselves and others in the process? Can we help ourselves from forming our place in the world as Dasein and assimilating others into ourselves as part of the process, particularly when we comport ourselves in our mode of being in the world?

Given Glissant's Counter-Enlightenment project, there exists this apparent antinomy between self-consciousness and opacity: how does one attain self-consciousness without breaking one's fidelity to one's own opacity and the opacity of others? How does one stay ignorant from reflecting on the changes to one's self when one is thrust into an old unknowing world with a face towards the past? How does one refuse and refute the call to 'know thyself'?

Surprisingly, Glissant provides an innovative answer to this problem of ontology in his passing reference to Walt Whitman, a poet engaged in "a total poetics of relation", and Whitman's unique formulation of a lyric subject[16] in his poem "Song of Myself". As this paper will explore, the apparent disjunctions between self-consciousness and the opacity of self and Other under the totality (but not totalization) of Relation find themselves in harmony once we read *Poetics of Relations* not as a collection of essays, but as an anthology of prose poetry. When read through the lens of traditional Western metaphysics, any relationship between self and Other produces a certain level of transparency through their interactions, resulting either in the assimilation of the Other as part of the self or an endless deferral of engagement with the Other to preserve the latter's opacity and diversity.

However, Relation can be total without totalizing under a poetic lens, as the lyric subject, with its transtemporal structure and its porosity the presence of the Other (including the other of the reader), facilitates a more responsible mode of being necessary for the actualization of Relation. The unique properties of the lyric subject enables modes of relation impossible under traditional Western metaphysics, like relations with non-entities and relations with entities beyond one's own time, as its openness to the world makes enables the lyric subject to host all traces of the past, present and future. Through the construction of Glissant's self-subject in *Poetics of Relation* and its relation to the Other within himself – his past and future 'selves' – Glissant demonstrates how Relation to selves of different temporal moments enables and occludes the lyric subject.

The Double(d) Edge(s) to Relation - Totality and Totalization

Under the purview of traditional Western metaphysics, the totality of Relation produces two parallel and interrelated problems: a tension between opacity (of self and other) with the transparency of self-consciousness and the slip from totality to totalitarianism by virtue of self-actualization facilitated by self-consciousness. Glissant claims that "[t]he totality within which Relativity is exerted and to which it is applied, through the workings of the mind, is not totalitarian, therefore: not imposed a priori, not fixed as an absolute" [17], as the chaotic possibility of relation allows for chiastic and errant manifestations of relation. But it seems equally possible that the self is made all the more secure and rooted through its relations with Others, as the perturbance of Relation pushes beings to "form around an idea of power – the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root – rather than around a fundamental relationship with the Other"[18]. How does Glissant maintain this tension, this relation between the paradoxical positions of opacity and transparency, totality and totalitarianism, without ceding to one position over another?

One consequence of the totality of Relation is that Relation is unilateral and non-consensual – one is thrown into the network of relations under Relation by virtue of being in the world. There is no non-being but outside of Relation – all beings, known and unknown, thoughts of Other and other of Thought, have their fates intertwined *a priori* in the fabric of Relations. But if one comes into being through this relation with others, any self-knowledge comes with a certain amount of knowledge of others, or at the very least, of what the Other is not. Glissant would counter that being in the world does not come at the cost of others: "Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components. For the time being, perhaps, give up this old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures"[19]. But it is undeniable that a certain breach in opacity is necessary for the self and the Other to be in relation with one another. The "violent sign of their

consensual sharing" à la creolization, or the common wealth of heritage (language, culture, history) between formerly subjected nations, is only possible because of their shared history as subjects of common imperialist organizations such as the Commonwealth[20]. The grafting of cultures on and with one another enables the heterogeneous mixture so long as one culture does not totalize the other, as "the genesis of a particular culture could be grasped and its specificity approached without having to be defined". And yet, it seems all too easy for one to "misjudge the intensity of the particularity of a culture… [and] deny the particular value of any culture" in these imperialist organizations with their projects of producing a "universality of an All", resulting in a "Relation [that] has in its principle in itself (it would be the universal in-itself and only that)" or a relation that turns inwards and provides "one another with mutual reference and consequently leading not to totality but to the totalitarian" [21]. Historically, the latter is far more likely than the former, as the totalitarian set of relations produces a clarity of self and Other through a strict dichotomy of self and Other, metropole and colony, centre and periphery, citizen and barbarian.

This line between totality and totalitarianism can be seen in the example of the plantation. "The Plantation is one of the focal points for the development of present-day modes of Relation"[22]. Despite "the plantation's will to [isolation and] autarky… [the Plantations] paradoxically, have all the symptoms of extroversion. They are dependent, by nature, on someplace elsewhere. In their practice of importing and exporting, the established politics is not decided from within."[23] The plantation, with its horrors, forced the convergence and entanglement of cultures and intensified "historical *marronage* … over time to exert a creative *marronage,* whose numerous forms of expression began to form the basis for a continuity. Which made it no longer possible to consider these literatures as exotic appendages of a French, Spanish, or English literary corpus; rather, they entered suddenly, with the force of a tradition that they built themselves, into the relation of cultures"[24]. "African languages became deterritorialized, thus contributing to creolization in the West"[25], but through the survival of the enslaved, new cultures and expressions formed through Relation to mutate both the colony and the metropole:

> Negro spirituals and blues, persisting in towns and growing cities; jazz, *biguines,* and calypsos, bursting into barrios and shantytowns; salsas and reggaes, assembled everything blunt and direct, painfully stifled, and patiently differed into this varied speech. This was the cry of the Plantation, transfigured into the speech of the world. [26]

And yet, despite the plantation being a site of generation, the plantation was equally the site of death. New cultures came into being at the expense of other cultures, resulting in the proliferation of Western metaphysics and modes of being. The proliferation of Western thought also meant that "[t]he conquered or visited peoples are thus forced into a long and painful quest after an

identity whose first task will be opposition to the denaturing process introduced by the conqueror." [27] But given that all beings exist in Relation, one can never return to the prelapsarian world before the introduction of European thought. Glissant warns against such a project, as "the deconstruction of any ideal relation one might claim to define in this interaction [of cultures makes possible the re-emergence of] ghouls of totalitarian thinking". At the same time, Glissant points to the need to see "the position of each part within this whole: that is, the acknowledged validity of each specific Plantation yet at the same time the urgent need to understand the hidden order of the whole-so as to wander there without becoming lost[28]. But in this pursuit of self-knowledge about our place in the world, we lapse once more into the possibility of committing the same "projects of transmutation ... [that] have resulted from the worst pretensions and the greatest magnanimities on the part of the West" in its pursuit of "understanding" [29].Thus, we find ourselves again at the same impasse between opacity and self-consciousness, as the transparency of the self risks rendering 'transparent' the opacity of the Other.

From the purview of traditional Western metaphysics, Glissant is faced contradictory choice of pursuing the impossible ascetic denial of becoming or breaking fidelity to opacity and assimilating the Other as part of the self, both of which result in a totalitarian relationship between self and Other. Relation is to enable the "complex mix' of its heterogenous elements without homogenizing its components: "Diversity, the quantifiable totality of every possible difference … must be safeguarded from assimilations, from fashions passively accepted as the norm, and from standardized customs."[30]. Guaranteeing the continuity of self and other in the process of intermixture in the model of self and Other of traditional Western metaphysics is only possible by reifying the Other as the other of thought and the self as a static entity. It is only by staking the relations between self and other in place that the self and Other remain distinct from one another:

> As far as my identity is concerned, I will take care of it myself. That is, I shall not allow it to become cornered in any essence; I shall also pay attention to not mixing it into any amalgam. Rather, it does not disturb me to accept that there are places where my identity is obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes me does not mean I relinquish it. [31]

But such a mode of preserving diversity and opacity comes from the denial of Relation, as the prospect of the self remaining static under Relation runs counter to the process of creolization. The ensuing diversity safeguarded from one form of assimilation (the totalization of Other by the self) results in a different form of assimilation with the tokenistic standardization of diversity, as the potential of self and Other are circumscribed in their interactions. Glissant assures us that the opacity within the self in Relation is not a sign of relinquishing the self, but from the logic of traditional Western metaphysics, the loss of self is the very sign that the categories of self and Other erode one

another through their interactions. Alternatively, one could maintain ignorance of the presence of the Other and the self's relation to the Other. Glissant declares "it is not necessary for me to grasp [the Other]. It is not necessary to try to become the other (to become other) nor to "make" him in my image" while still feeling in "solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does" [32]. To have a grasp of the Other would be the reduction of the Other to the thought of the Other, and such "projects of transmutation ... have resulted from the worst pretensions and the greatest magnanimities on the part of the West"[33]. And yet, the self makes use of the Other in its mode of being in the world by casting the Other as an object for the various modes of being it undertakes. In both cases, the totality Relation runs aground by creating an absolute set of relations that renders the relation between self and other totalitarian "on the basis of a nonprime element (violence, for example, or race) whose definition is overdetermined but knowledge of which, nonetheless, has limits."[34] But given that there can be no "relation-open-among elements the knowledge of which has boundaries" [35], both of these approaches are unfaithful to the totality of Relation.

This problem of the totality of Relation remains under the purview of Western metaphysics, a problem that Glissant acknowledges fully:

> totality, already in its very concept, is in danger of immobility. Relation is open totality; totality would be relation at rest. Totality is virtual. Actually, only rest could, in itself, be legitimately or totally virtual. For movement is precisely that which realizes itself absolutely. Relation is movement.[36]

Under Relation, one must be total but not totalizing, producing a self that is both distinct from Others without rendering the self and the Other static. But the forced contact between self and Others that enables Relation is also what makes possible the totalization and assimilation of others. Self-knowledge comes with knowledge of others; for one never comes into one's own alone. One must walk the fine line of both being in the world and not becoming the world, something that the self under traditional Western metaphysics is unable to facilitate.

Whitman's Lyric Self

What appears contradictory and aporetic from the view of traditional Western metaphysics resolves itself once we read *Poetics of Relation* poetically with the introduction of the lyric subject in place of the metaphysical subject. There is good reason to think Glissant is engaged with a poetics of Relation and not a metaphysics of Relation, even as there are metaphysical implications from this poesis of self. First, the subject of Relation "is not: (of) Being, but: —(of) beings," as Relation mediates beings in the world without a need for taxonomy or genealogy. The need to make others transparent in relation to

one's self, to assimilate the other and render them transparent, is what Glissant finds troubling with the epistemological foundations of Western metaphysics that assimilates all through their maxims of "I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh."[37] Second, the limits of the Western metaphysical subject that troubles the totality of relation are less prominent with the lyric subject. As this section will show, it is the lyric subject, with its unique ontology, that is better qualified to facilitate Relation by rendering obsolete "the thought of self and thought of other"[38] and producing an openness that renders one "incapable of projecting from on to the other"[39], including relations with Others impossible under the axioms of traditional Western metaphysics.

The lyric subject is one that both generalizes and individuates as the site of cleaving (together and apart) the self and Other. The openness of the "I" in the lyric subject invites the reader to identify with the speaker at the same time the excesses in the formal structure of the lyric resists the speaker's identification[40]: the lyric subject "expresses the feelings and thoughts of a single speaker (not necessarily the poet herself) in a personal and subjective fashion" [41]. Ultimately, in a lyric, the otherness of the "I" melds with the reader as the gives voice to the words on the page[42]. As the event of the "I" works to conjoin the reader to the text, the union between the reader and the text in the event of the "I" produces the tertiary subject of the lyric subject:

> The lyric poem, where the poet is presumably speaking to himself or to no one in particular, depends, in fact, on being heard by a "you" as an "I" speaking…. The lyric "I" must also always be a "you," if it is to mean— if it is to spell out the condition for meaning. For the lyric "I" is not prior to its words, and its words have nothing to do with "self-expression." The referent of the lyric poem is not a preexisting individual entity we can see or imagine but an "I" that must be heard as choosing words, intending sounds to make sense and troping the gap between sensation and cognition. The poem does not express some prior intention or meaning; it is an act of intending to mean.[43]

The result is the lyric subject: a limping, lagging movement of constant negotiation and negation between the reader and the text.

In Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"[44], Whitman develops a lyric subject that plays with the construction and slippages of its own morphology, mythology, and ontology. In his survey of Whitmanian scholarship, Howard J. Waskow notes the central question regarding the ontology of Whitman's lyric self, which scholars categorize as dialectical or organicist[45]. Whitman's lyric subject is particularly notable because it "occupies the hazy ground between the two worlds, the area where [dialectics and organicism] intersect. Even as he assumes the existence of 'Me' and 'Not-Me', he is concerned about 'fusing' them; and even as he argues the oneness of 'object gross' and 'the unseen soul,' he is aware that his argument is paradoxical."[46] Whitman's lyric

self embodies the paradoxical position of traditional Western metaphysics by having both dialectical and organicist elements, as the self becomes in unison with the Other in ways that both diminishes and reinforces the self. For Whitman does not qualify how the self and Other came into a relationship with one another or the nature of their relationship, instead revelling in the self that contains multitudes (of self and Other) through the iconic line: "Do I contradict myself?/ Very well then I contradict myself,/ (I am large, I contain multitudes.)"[47]

It is this self-awareness of the 'multitudes' of 'selves' within the lyric self of the poet-speaker in "Song of Myself" that reveals the limits of the self and the opacities in the Other(s) within. As Whitman's poet-speaker posits:

> There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but I know it is in me.
>
> Wrench'd and sweaty—calm and cool then my body becomes,
> I sleep—I sleep long.
>
> I do not know it—it is without name—it is a word unsaid,
> It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.
>
> Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
> To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.
>
> Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters.
>
> Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
> It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is Happiness. [48]

Such lines are not the mere acknowledgement of the lyric subject as a host to the reader nor the synthesis between the reader and the text[49], but an acknowledgement of how all subjects are always host to others in the world in order to attain their individual subjectivity – even the lyric subject exists in relation to the other of Thought, as the subject only exists vis-à-vis the presence of the Other. The poet-speaker acknowledges that there is an ineffable, opaque Other within the self at the same time the self's relation to the Other constitutes a "form, union, plan" that is "eternal life" and "happiness". All the while the poet-speaker is unable to name and define what this Other is due to its opacity, the poet-speaker nevertheless respects and carries the Other within their being while acknowledging the relation to it is the foundation of the self. Whitman – as poet-speaker and lyric subject – readily admits that "these are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me,/ If they are not yours as much as mine they are nothing, or next to nothing,"[50] but the presence of these thoughts nonetheless exert a force in the formation of himself. It is the repetition of

these thoughts in their present particular permutations makes these ideas their own.

While the subject of traditional Western metaphysics faces a crisis of self with the introduction of the other, the lyric subject invites the presence of an Other through its porous structure. The lyric subject is always open to co-habitation by an alien reader to facilitate the experience of the poem without the experience of the poet-speaker and the experience of the reader becoming one or the other. Given this openness to the world, the relation between the lyric self and its opacities regarding the other of Thought means the lyric subject is ever-expansive, always open to becoming a host to others brought into itself. But given that the self arises from this kind of open relation to any possible reader, every attempt at pinning the self down puts another entity in relation to the lyric subject[51]: "facts are useful, and yet they are not my dwelling, /I but enter by them to an area of my dwelling."[52] The lyric self is elastic – it expands and contracts with what is necessary in the moment to encompass all, including facts from mariners, lexicographers, and geologists[53]. Throughout the poem, Whitman identifies with all manner of people as part of himself, including "the duck-shooter," "the quadroon girl," "the machinist," "the Wolverine," the baptized child, "the peddler," "the opium-eater," and "the prostitutes". It is from this encyclopedic catalogue of the world that enables Whitman's lyric subject to "be of these more or less I am, and of these one and all I weave the song of myself."[54]. The lyric subject of "Song of Myself" is "of one phase and of all phases./ Partaker of influx and efflux I, extoller of hate and conciliation,/ Extoller of amies and those that sleep in each others' arms."[55] As the poet-speaker develops throughout the poem, the subject of the poem ends up containing the world such that "One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself"[56]. Then, and only then, can the lyric subject speak for the "many long dumb voices,/Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,/ Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs…" and the "forbidden voices,/ Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,/ Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur'd."[57] It is this weave, or rather, a focus on "the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components" [58] that enables the lyric subject to be; it takes the world to be oneself at the same time one reconstitutes the world by being the site of gathering[59]. Such is how the poet-speaker see themselves "none more and not one a barley-corn less,/ And the good or bad I say of myself I say of them."[60]

The Ghost(s) of the Other

The transtemporal potential of the lyric subject brings into light the capacity of Relation with non-entities and entities of differing temporal moments. Under the logic of traditional Western metaphysics, beings can only interact with entities of the same temporal intervals[61]. In contrast, insofar as

creolization enables the relationality of relationships to and with all, with an openness to the totality of the world, there is "no longer need to add: relation between what and what? This is why the French word Relation, which functions somewhat like an intransitive verb, could not correspond, for example, to the English term relationship"[62]. The syntax of the English noun "relationship" pre-inscribes a subject-object relation between the independent subject of the sentence with its modifiers as its dependent properties, whereas the intransitive verb of "Relation" does not specify the kind(s) of relationship it facilitates to other parts of the sentence. "But because what [Relation] relates, in reality, proceeds from no absolute, it proves to be the totality of relatives, put in touch and told." [63] There is nothing that precludes Relation from facilitating a relation between entities of differing temporal moments; on the contrary, the radical experience of the alterity of the other of Thought already present and structuring one's thinking is most evident when considering the inheritance of history. For the dead do not stay dead – they are reborn anew in their afterlife through their traces in the present to haunt the living.

Given the totality of relation, there is "Non-Being… except outside of Relation" and "Non-Being does not precede Relation"; however, for traditional 'non-Beings' to exist in relation to beings, they must exist as qua-beings to the self. This spectral, always-already presence of the Other is what Derrida brings to light with the hauntology of *Spectres of Marx*, specifically with the possibility of the Other-as-spectre, or an Other that is out of joint with the subject's present. As Derrida explains, this seemingly impossible and temporally disconcerted relation to others must *a priori* have been the case to enable ontology as such: "To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept… beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration."[64] What appears to appear and disappear (like spectres) are that which must always already have been present, and yet they appear out of joint on the part of the subject relating to these non-entities; non-entities are "something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge."[65]

Indeed, the fact that non-entities were *a priori* present are the very condition for animating the subject as such. The relation to ghostly non-entities is what animates the subject into being as such through a "specular circle: one chases after in order to chase away, one pursues, sets off in pursuit of someone to make him flee, but one makes him flee, distances him, expulses him so as to go after him again and remain in pursuit."[66] The attempt to

exorcise the ghost animates the subject is the very condition of their haunting, with "those who inspire fear frighten themselves … [and] conjure the very specter they represent. The conjuration is in mourning for *itself* and turns its own force against itself."[67] This attempt at exorcism cleaves (together and apart) the dead from the subject: "The living ego is auto-immune, which is what they do not want to know. To protect its life, to constitute itself as unique living ego… it must therefore take the immune defenses apparently meant for the non-ego, the enemy, the opposite, the adversary and direct them at once *for itself and against itself*."[68] At the same time, the attempt to individuate and otherize the ghost cleaves the dead manifold, as "the experience, the apprehension of the ghost is turned into *frequency*" and a subsequent chain of ghosts[69]. The dead multiply when out of sight (but not out of mind) until the bodiless body of the spirit of all spirits possesses the material for the subject to feel "sensuous non-sensuous, sensuously supersensible."[70] We are haunted by the dead (in its multiplicities) even before we are aware that the dead already haunt us.

Likewise, in his attempt to gather all, Whitman's lyric subject also ends up inheriting the past. Through its relations, the lyric subject becomes all, including all that came before it: "Distant and dead resuscitate, / They show as the dial or move as the hands of me, I am the clock myself."[71] The poet-speaker is able to conjure the distant and the dead in such a mystical manner, not just because the poet-speaker is already in relation with the distant and the dead but also because the speak-poet is attuned to the trace of the distant and the dead. Despite their apparent absence, the poet-speaker is conscious of how these other of Thought (non-beings under traditional Wester metaphysics) nonetheless create the condition of the lyric-self's being. For even before the presence of the lyric self, the past was always already animating the spirit of the poet-speaker:

Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,
My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited it with care.

All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,
Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul. [72]

And yet, the presence of the self effaces both the conditions and the presence of others that enabled the self to spring forth. Moreover, the relation that produces a self is not always a true union, instead producing a "flight of the imagination" that "breaks through all distinctions"[73]. Given the centrality of the self, every other of Thought rendered legible by the poet-speaker is made

into the thought of Other, as new invocations and introductions to the lyric subject are reincorporated as part of the lyric subject. Interestingly, Whitman acknowledges this transition from other of Thought to thought of Other as a violent transcription whenever the lyric subject shows the presence of the other of Thought within itself. While the poet-speaker identifies as "the poet of the body" and "the poet of the Soul,/ the pleasures of heaven are with [them] and the pains of hell are with [them],/ the first [they] grant and increase upon [themselves], the latter [they] translate into a new tongue."[74] The poet-speaker makes clear that this marriage of heaven and hell, body and soul, is only possible by gathering and enframing [*Gestell*] the world within the fourfold of the speaker. At the same time, the act of gathering produces a mutation of some kind, as the granting and increasing of pleasure and translation of pain into "a new tongue" entails a simulation of the original experience. Integrating all elements within the self makes the lyric subject "of one phase and of all phases"; at the same time, the lyric subject is "not the poet of goodness only, [they] do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also." [75] This acknowledgement of the intrinsic violence of the lyric subject as a being in Relation with others is what is so unique about Whitman's lyric subject[76]: unlike the typical lyric subject who assumes "that the self is so healthy and whole that it can exchange identities endlessly, without injuring itself or the process", Whitman's lyric subject appears to understand the intrinsic violence of relating, of grafting one's self to another and vice versa through relation. The poet-speaker reproduces the moment of impression:

> Before the "pains of hell" can be "translated into a new tongue," they must be confronted in all their original hellishness… The self is born anew… to insist upon private identity is to define "the Me myself" as Everyone one is. Body and soul are reconciled, their unity dependent upon the separate function for each; ideal self and actual self are reconciled.[77]

The interplay between self and other that puts the self in relation to the other is not only a procession, but a progression, as the relation "moves towards the One. Like the realm of the One, the interplay allows for now gradations. The interplay, however, goes beyond the cosmic democracy; it insists not only upon equality but upon no distinctions for all."[78] It is through Relation that the lyric subject *is* all that they are in relation with: "All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,/ I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there." [79]. The self gathers, enframes[*Gestell*], and becomes all regardless of the Other's consent to enable the self to stand in for the Other. At the same time, this process of gathering and hosting the world in the self also individuates the self *as* self – the self comes to focus as the centre that all others (including the Other) center themselves, eliding both the presence and dependence on the centre has to the other and its peripheries for its own position and relation to the world.

If the lyric subject undergirds Relation, then the self in a poetics of Relation enables a poesis of the self that is totalizing (and perhaps even violent) but not totalitarian. The stability and mutability of the self is what becomes possible through the fashioning of the lyric self as the poetic self becomes an acknowledgement of itself as the site of gathering for the self to come into the world. As Whitman's lyric subject shows, the lyric subject does not give total access to itself – opacities arise from the way it resists the interpretation by the reader and the way it relates to the world of the poem. At the same time, the question of what is and is not, or the question of being and non-being, dissipates as all beings come into existence in and through the relation to the subject. Through the lyric subject, the self becomes the host to all beings, as the self exists vis-à-vis relation to other beings external and internal to itself. The sum product of this intersubjective grafting between the self and Other is the constitution of the self, one that is host to the thought of the Other and the other of Thought. From this poesis, insofar as the subject exists, the self and Other are already in Relation.

Glissant as a Lyric Subject

> No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less

> – John Donne, Meditation XVII

Should one read the self in *Poetics of Relation* as a lyric subject, then who/what is the Other that constitutes the self? An index of this idea of the lyric subject could be gleaned at the end of the book, when Glissant pulls back the curtain to unveil the Other(s) that have enabled the presence of the self in the book:

> Is it not one of the conditions of writing today that it conceive of itself as preceded by a pretext of discourse? In any case, this is what usually happens: I accept invitations to expose my points of view publicly whenever the proposed conference fits in with my (nonprojectile) project. And sometimes the suggested theme will have a ripple effect, set rootlets, or swerve in some new direction.

> The public lecture functions as a sort of first draft to the written text resulting from it. But this presentation will have determined, meanwhile, the lineages of the text and oriented its economy. The practice of writing then will tighten, or draw out, what the lecture brought to light. Preliminary written texts sometimes function in this process as approaches that foretell and really provoke orality.

> These two practices contribute to a phenomenon that is no longer certifiably either "pure" writing or transcribed orality. The consequence of this is that, with each edition of such a text, if there happen to be any,

the temptation arises (by recalling these relayed techniques) to change - to perfect - the letter of it, over and over again. What is related thus varies (at the same time that the substance of Relation moves) toward a perfectibility of expression that does not arrive at an absolute. To what extremities can this go? What is the limit? No doubt to the point where voice begins to fail and the hand stops. [80]

Like a magician revealing the 'trick' to their performance at a final curtain call, Glissant reveals in the endnotes that there was no singular self present throughout the book. Instead, the book itself was a site that gathered a bricolage of various different selves at different moments and contexts, an assemblage of multiplicities to enable a new mode of being. The autopoiesis of the work, or rather, the phenomenology of Glissant, only comes into itself through a poetic relation to the differing selves at different points in time brought together in a porous configuration by the book. Like the Whitman's lyric subject, the self of Glissant in *Poetics of Relations* is porous and open to alterities – it is large and contains multitudes. What contradictions appear appears by necessity, as readers experience Glissant's thoughts at different moments and places in his life. But it is the contradiction, conflict, and mutation of these thoughts that makes Glissant present. The Other that enables the other of Thought in *Poetics of Relation* then is the past selves of Glissant (at Louvain, Berkeley, Martinique, Lousiana, etc…), each of whom overlaps in the space of the text as 'Glissant'[81].

It is through the relation of selves in *Poetics of Relation* that the Glissant of the book appears as host to the past Glissant(s). The construction of the lyric subject produces the self, but a self that both exceeds and recedes its limits in its relationship to the world. The poetic self becomes a site of experience, a fourfold, which gathers past and future selves in Relation. The chain of spectres is the spectres of what one was, is, and becomes – the self itself is out of joint. Such is how:

"Beings remain, as long as Being dissipates.

Relation scatters from Being, asserts the subject.

To himself the subject is a thick cloud of knowledge. That is why Relation also dismantles the thought of non-Being.

That is why it is not: (of) Being, but: — (of) beings.

Non-Being could not be except outside Relation.

Non-Being does not precede Relation, which is not expressed on the basis of any break.

The nonbeing of Relation would be its impossible completion.[82]

Or, as Whitman's lyric subject explains of the seemingly impossible relations that the poet-speaker is attuned to:

> What do you think has become of the young and old men?
> And what do you think has become of the women and children?
>
> They are alive and well somewhere,
> The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
> And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,
> And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.
>
> All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
> And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier…
>
> I am not an earth nor an adjunct of an earth,
> I am the mate and companion of people, all just as immortal and fathomless as myself,
> (They do not know how immortal, but I know.) [83]

Those that the poet-speaker meets, "the young and old men" and "the women and children", are rendered immortal, both by virtue of having an independent existence outside of the lyric subject and from the lasting impression they made on the lyric subject. But with the presence of the reader in the lyric subject, these relations are rendered further immortal with the mark they leave on the reader. The openness of the lyric subject becomes a way of revealing the self as Being in the being-becoming relation: the self is chimeric, always susceptible to change depending on its contexts and its relations. At the same time, the lyric subject produces an endless métissage of creolization as the self is put into an endless set of Relation with the world, always being open to new forms of relation regardless of its own temporality. The limit of the lyric subject exists only when there is an end in engagement, "where voice begins to fail and the hand stops."[84]. In transplanting the lyric subject from its original form of the poem to the form of the anthology, Glissant reveals how the construction of the lyric subject is always at play with the formation of the self. The self was always intersubjective, facilitated by the relation to the Other by way of others and other selves past and future. Such is the generative poiesis of self possible via a poetics of Relation.

From this view, the numerous and contradictory Glissants that we initially began this paper with are united once more in a weave. The self is never "cornered in any essence" and never "mixed into any amalgam" because the self only exists as an amalgamation of different beings past, present, and future. Being escapes the interdiction of totalitarian thought, wherein "either the other is assimilated, or else it is annihilated", and instead Being allows for every other being to become a citizen equal to the subject without subjecting "the other to the transparency experienced by oneself."[85] While expanding the independent conception of the self to others would force a totalitarian subjugation of the other as a subject, the lyric sense of self,

insofar as it is already a product of a relation with the Other, is able to become a subject only because the Other was always-already a citizen equal to oneself. All the while the lyric self acknowledges that the Other remains other – just because one is host to others does not entail that one is Other nor that one owns Other. Instead, the Other constitutes the self without becoming subject to the self. From this view, it becomes obvious that Glissant would find "places where [his] identity is obscure to [him]", for it is through his relation to others, the other of Thought, that he comes to find himself and his own thoughts, always effected by the Other in ways that the self could never comprehend. Moreover, "the fact that it amazes [Glissant] does not mean [he will] relinquish" his identity, for he is who he is insofar as he is the subject of these relations as its product, its common denominator and as an object of Relation that he relates to. One becomes oneself as the site of convergence for the world, where and when one becomes the focal point that brings the world into being.

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1 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* trans. Wing Betsy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 192.

2 Édouard Glissant and Manthia Diawara, "Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara," trans. Christopher Winks, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 28, no. 1 (2011): 15.

3 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 214.

4 Ibid, 187.

5 Ibid, 187.

6 Ibid, 154.

7 Ibid, 89.

8 Ibid, 34.

9 Ibid, 171.

10 Ibid, 144.

11 Ibid, 180.

12 Ibid, 49.

13 Glissant and Diawara, "Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara," 15.

14 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: OUP, 1979), 111.

15 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 189-90.

16 Other synonyms of this idea of the lyric subject include, but are not limited to: 'poetic subject', 'lyric I', 'poet-speaker', 'poetic subject'. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to this idea as the lyric subject for two reasons: first, to highlight the continued existence of the Other in subject formation; and, expanding on the former point, highlighting how even the lyric subject is dependent on the continued existence of an Other to itself.

17 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 134.

18 Ibid, 14.

19 Ibid, 190.

20 Ibid, 34.

21 Ibid, 171.

22 Ibid, 65.

23 Ibid, 67.

24 Ibid, 71.

25 Ibid, 5.

26 Ibid, 73.

27 Ibid, 17.

28 Ibid, 131.

29 Glissant and Diawara, "Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Manthia Diawara," 191.

30 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 30.

31 Ibid, 192.

32 Ibid, 193.

33 Ibid, 193.

34 Ibid, 171.

35 Ibid, 171.

36 Ibid, 171.

37 Ibid, 190.

38 Ibid, 189–90.

39 Ibid, 189–90.

40 For a discussion on how the lyric subject came to dominate poetic subject in other poetic forms, see Virginia Jackson, "Lyric," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton University Press, 2017), https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780190681173.001.0001/acref-9780190681173-e-0666. For a discussion on how ideas from the lyric subject (with its construction of subject) came to influence notions of the self in post-structural debates, see Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 690-91.

41 J. A Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 5th ed. (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication, 2013), 412, https://resolver.ebscohost.com/Redirect/PRL?EPPackageLocationID=2106155.1755544.21608746&epcustomerid=s9001366.

42 Jonathan D. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 2, 14, 94-95, 97, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1006650; William Waters, "Address," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton University Press, 2017), https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780190681173.001.0001/acref-9780190681173-e-0009; Mutlu Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (Princeton, UNITED STATES: Princeton University Press, 2006), 2, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cornell/detail.action?docID=457754.

43 Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 5–6.

44 While there are multiple versions of "Song of Myself", which express the lyric subject slightly differently (see footnote three for a brief discussion on how different editions of the poem highlight the mutability of porosity of the lyric subject and footnote four for a discussion on the effect of paratextual elements on Whitman's lyric subject) I have chosen to use a single edition of the poem. Unless otherwise stated, all references in this paper to "Song of Myself" reference the 1892 edition.

45 Howard J Waskow, *Whitman Explorations in Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 9.

46 Waskow, 15.

47 Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself: Origin, Growth, Meaning*, ed. James E. Miller, jr. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1964), ll. 1324-1326.

[48] Ibid, ll. 1309–1318.

[49] Such metafictional elements are present within the text itself from the various self-conscious references Whitman has. Lines like "I know perfectly well my own egotism" Ibid, l. 1083. and "Eleves, I salute you! come forward!/Continue your annotations, continue your questionings." Ibid, l. 1083. makes clear that Whitman (as author) knows his position and performance of the writing has a part to play in the construction of the lyric subject.

[50] Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ll. 355–356.

[51] The ephemerality and mutability of the lyric subject from its dependence on others becomes all the more prominent when considering the publication history of "Song of Myself". Originally published untitled in the original publication of Leaves of Grass in 1855 (Trimble 25), the poem was later titled "Song of myself" in subsequent publications (see W. H Trimble, *Walt Whitman and Leaves of Grass: An Introduction* ([Folcroft, Pa.]: Folcroft Press, 1970), 25.). The multiple editions of this work highlights how the lyric subject accumulates and expands ad infinitum as the past selves become other to itself – Whitman goes from being a "kosmos" specific to America to an universal one the first (1855) and last (1892) edition of Song of Myself (see Whitman, *Song of Myself*, l. 499.), just as the specificity of the grass he venerates once specifically "for the illiterate" and "for the judges of the supreme court" to become an universal grass for all (see Ibid, ll. 354–360.).

[52] Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ll. 490–492.

[53] Ibid, ll. 481–489.

[54] Ibid, ll. 305–329.

[55] Ibid, ll. 458–460.

[56] Ibid, l. 416.

[57] Ibid, ll. 508–518.

[58] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.

[59] It should also be worth noting the way these constructions of the lyric subject comes to haunt its creators – in this mode of self-creation, the art ends up constituting the artist. Quite comically, some of the first reviews of *Leaves of Grass* were written by Whitman himself: while other reviewers thought that his diction "often renders an otherwise striking passage altogether laughable" (Charles Norton, "[Charles Eliot Norton]. 'Whitman's Leaves of Grass.' Putnam's Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Science, and Art 6 (September 1855), 321-3.," The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive, September 1855, https://whitmanarchive.org/archive1/works/leaves/1855/reviews/putnam.html.) that say him as an "arrogant young man who proclaims himself the Poet of the Time" and "roots like a pig among a rotten garbage of licentious thought" ("New York Daily Times (13 November 1856), 2.," The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive, November 13, 1856, https://whitmanarchive.org/archive1/works/leaves/1856/reviews/nytimes.html.), Whitman used his journalist connections to produce a series of anonymous self-reviews that proclaimed that the publication of *Leaves of Grass* brought with it "an American bard at last!" (Walt Whitman, "[Walt Whitman]."Walt Whitman and His Poems." United States Review 5 (September 1855), 205-12.," The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive, September 1855, https://whitmanarchive.org/archive1/works/leaves/1855/reviews/usreview.html.) with a style that is more subtler than that of Homer, Shakespeare and Tennyson (Walt Whitman, "[Walt Whitman]. 'An English and American Poet' [Review of Alfred Tennyson, Maud, and Other Poems and Leaves of Grass]. American Phrenological Journal 22, No. 4 (October 1855), 90-1.," The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive, October 1855, https://whitmanarchive.org/archive1/works/leaves/1855/reviews/phren.html.). The ensuing

fracas of Whitman's authorship of these reviews of high praise only added to the notoriety and image of Whitman as a poet (see M. Jimmie Killingsworth, "Self-Reviews of the 1855 Leaves, Whitman's Anonymous," The Walt Whitman Hypertext Archive, 1998, https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/encyclopedia/entry_651.html.).

60 Whitman, *Song of Myself*, l. 401.

61 See, for example, the discussion surrounding the nonidentity problem in Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* and James Woodward's 1986 essay "The Non-Identity Problem".

62 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 27.

63 Ibid, 27.

64 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Repr, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2011), 202.

65 Ibid, 5.

66 Ibid, 175.

67 Ibid, 145.

68 Ibid, 177.

69 Ibid, 133.

70 Ibid, 189.

71 Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ll. 856–857.

72 Ibid, ll. 1162–1169.

73 Waskow, *Whitman Explorations in Form*, 30.

74 Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ll. 422–424.

75 Ibid, l. 463.

76 Ohers have noted the intrinsic violence in the dialectic formation of the self, particularly a Hegelian formulation. Not only has Whitman directly the ideas for his poems to Hegel (Marks 105-106), but scholars have also noted the embodiment of Hegelian dialectics in Whitman's' writings. See Alfred H. Marks, "Whitman's Triadic Imagery," *American Literature* 23, no. 1 (1951): 105–6, 109, https://doi.org/10.2307/2921434.

77 Waskow, *Whitman Explorations in Form*, 180–81.

78 Waskow, 40.

79 Whitman, *Song of Myself*, ll. 831–832.

80 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 225.

81 Ibid, 226.

82 Ibid, 186–87.

83 Whitman, *Song of Myself*, 123–30.

84 Glissant, Poetics of Relation, 225.

85 Ibid, 49.

Short Performances of Syntax

Return and Impossibility in Glissant's Creolization

Roshon S. Nandra

Cornell University

> Are we not returning here, in the unforeseeable meanders of Relation, to this abyssal word?
>
> —Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

> A question of repetition: a specter is always a *revenant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*.
>
> —Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*

Introduction: The Impossible Path of Speech and Language

Whence does the speaking subject of language return? Return is the mark and trajectory of filiation. It transitively entails a prior departure and a place from which one had left—derivatively, on terms not of their own. The detour of language—its *rupta via*, its broken way—is inaugurated by an impossibility inherited in a primordial scene of usurpation. Dispossession here retroactively marks an originary scene of possession: The subject is inducted into a circuit of language that is not their own while a "*prior-to-the-first* language"[1] is postulated in the moment that it is dispossessed. Hence the desire to invent a "*pre-originary*"[2] language is set into motion—to unite with the One that came before separation, before which one was separated, but one which could only be regarded as such after separation. The One—the impossibility—now remains to be fashioned, re-fashioned, or re-invented through another's language, through the language of the Other. We are presented here with a knot of speech and language toward which Jacques Derrida attunes our attention—namely, the predicament of calling upon *a* language (the detour) to speak about *the* language (the impossibility) insofar as the latter "does not exist" and given "the absence of all metalanguage."[3]

The former is a detour insofar as it can only inadequately translate the latter, for the latter is always subject to misrecognition in that it always remains to be given.[4] Yet it is this impossibility and absolute resistance to translation that makes everything translatable. Derrida concludes this discussion concisely: "translation is another name for the impossible."[5] While the mother tongue [*la langue maternelle*] does not exist as such, it is not absent but in fact resides over all language and translation. It is thus the condition of possibility for conceiving of any notion of multilingualism. Though this language can only fail to be recognized as such in its absolute resistance to being understood or grasped through the Lacanian Symbolic (the register of order, language, and law), this *prior-to-the-first* language vies to be heard from within its detours.

What Derrida calls the "impossible path,"[6] allowing him to leave familiar roads, allowing him the slip, and allowing him escape to the unknown, is what both renders return and annuls its possibility. The subject only returns within the domain of the circuits of language, but each detour—the subject's ventures down the impossible path—is an unnamed signatory of return wherein the subject marks sites within language anew. If language "is not at one with itself" it is because there is a gap "inside it"[7] from which the speaking subject departs from themselves to elsewheres that accompany disruptive returns. The moment in which impossibility comes to fore and is subject to misrecognition in speech's disruptive, perlocutionary return and effects—the "button tie [*point de capiton*]"[8] in language's circuitous system—is the Real performance of language to engender or reveal meanings carried within its system. Is every return then also the rehearsal of return's very impossibility—a place to which one can no longer return the same? What does the gap within monolanguage imply for the (in)stability of circuitous illustrations of language? To what forms of speech does this give rise?

In roving the routes of Glissant's creolization, this essay describes the ways in which return and the impossibility of return render the *short circuits* of language—that is, what enables the currents of language to flow, for linguistic encounters and culture contact to re-produce, reorganize, and create sites within it, and for the system of language to potentially combust. This is what Glissant might refer to as the "accident" of the virus within the computer system: "the virus would manifest the fractal nature of the system; it would be the sign of the intrusion of Chaos, the irremediable indicator, that is, of the asynchronous nature of the system."[9] The virus is the "sign" or "indicator" of an already asynchronous system—a system not at one with itself. It is at once a part of the computer system as well as what can potentially shut it down. Toward its generative capacity, it is in the affordances of the virus from which the "accidents" natural to poetics emerge.[10] Analogously, it is in this way that the short circuit betrays its circuitry while at the same time performing and actualizing its circuitous potential which gives rise to the re-production of its system in creative ways. The circuitry—which we can simply denote as the circuit's syntax—is the material order or path necessarily circumvented and

re-produced for the short to elicit recursive inscriptions of meaning within the system of language.[11]

What if instead of where there would be a point of return, or symbolic designation, for this current to rejoin its circuit there is alternatively another short, opening upon other detours, or venturing and relinking instead through a series of errant flows? It is in this way that a series of short circuits reflects the linguistic routes of creolization. In describing the contexts of return in relation to the people of Martinique, Glissant states the following: "the community has tried to exorcise the impossibility of return by which I call the practice of diversion."[12] But Derrida reminds us that to exorcise also means to conjure: "to attempt both to destroy and to disavow a malignant, demonized, diabolized force, most often an evil doing spirit, a specter, a ghost who comes back or who still risks coming back *post mortem*."[13] It is only insofar as this ghost was at some point declared dead that it becomes a specter that haunts and risks coming back. This exorcism therefore dredges up and is beholden to what it conjures; it is in this way that ghost "chases" or "hunts" or the attempts to evoke the appearance of the ghostly figure are attempts to reach them "and thus keep them close at hand."[14] As such, to exorcise the impossibility of return is, in a paradoxical performance, to "wage war,…the restless dream, of an execution" in a conjuring which catches up with what it attempts to dispel. What returns is the very impossibility of return. With creolization, current returns only to diverge, deviate, flow in an errant movement to elsewheres in which abyssal origin is found everywhere and nowhere at all. However, insofar as Glissant emphasizes that "the Creole language has another, internal obligation: to renew itself is ever instance on the basis of a series of forgettings,"[15] return to abyssal origin is not itself without a form of seriality, even if this form is of a "hidden order."[16] This circuitry as syntax remains hidden from our sight and is only illuminated in the linguistic spark(le) of the short circuit, a diffraction and refraction of light subject to apprehension by "flash agents,"[17] which its syntax necessarily induces as its legibility escapes.

Derrida and Glissant share the linguistic gestures that belong to the impossible returns and detours of language, even as their circumventions of language unfold in ways that resist absolutely the collapsibility of their speech into one another. Of course, for a relation to absolutely resist collapsibility into constituent components is also what allows for it to remain subject to misrecognition. To accept this misrecognition—the impasse of language—is to find oneself in the dismissed cartographies of speech, the lack of symbolic coordination of which it appears that anything could be said for the subject to say it all. It is clear, however, that not just anything is said, but rather that what is said belongs to what Derrida recalls as "the compulsive impulse to anamnesis"—one whose ostensibly disordered emergences coincide with "[t]he break of tradition, uprooting, the inaccessibility of histories, amnesia, indecipherability, and so on"[18] or a "series of forgettings."[19] For these

forgettings to be in series they must be serial in that they are renewed towards subsequent forgettings in ways that do not escape repetition but that trouble its apprehension, its symbolic designations. As such, anamnesis can inversely belong to a potent form of reminiscence that rehearses a recollection of not what is forgotten, but of forgetting itself. Such impulses of a return to forget unsettle a "genealogical drive"[20] where the subject claims to know their place, affording Derrida and Glissant the capacity to (ap)pose serious questions to reconsider the problematic of filiation and language, to reframe and trouble conceptualizing the inheritance of a circuit of language that "is not at one with itself"[21] and what it evens means to inherit or return in language more generally. In this vein, Derrida and Glissant allow us to engage the short circuits of language, to interpret its detours, its deviations, and its syntactical mirages that give rise to its spark(le) of intelligibility and the inadequate attempts to surmise its syntax's ordered forgettings.

In what ways is the speaking subject of language beholden to syntax? In what ways does the speaking subject of creolization give rise to a poetics in its creative re-productions of/within this order?

Children's Games: Is Odd or Even the Question?

Jacques Lacan insists that insofar as"[c]ybernetics is a science of syntax,…it is in a good position to help us perceive that the exact sciences do nothing other than tie the real to a syntax."[22] However, before making his way to the workings and alternations of the cybernetic machine, Lacan describes the contours it structures which pertain to a drive that Sigmund Freud does not situate in life: The human being does not come (back) to "find death along any old road," rather, the rhythms of the subject and the routed curves that it takes towards death are already mapped.[23] Through this, Lacan traces the alternating currents of life and death within the realm of thermodynamics:

> There is an essential link which must be made right away—when you draw a rabbit out of a hat, it's because you put it there in the first place. Physicists have a name for this formulation, they call it the first law of thermodynamics, the law of the conservation of energy—if there's something at the end, just as much had to be there at the beginning.[24]

The human subject heads towards where they were but could not remain in a destiny prophesized by the primordial symbol of their history. They are left to assume a history in the shadows of death—inasmuch as "the symbol first manifests as the killing of the thing"[25]—a death from which the subject was introduced to the serial games of speech (*Fort! Da!*). It is in the symbol's killing-of-the-thing that commences the haunting consecution of the Thing over the subject. In calling upon Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Lacan suggests that "everything is always there, all of history is always actually present."[26] We inherit it and are placed within the circuit of its discourse, in

which we are a link—a circuitry in whose configuration the short circuit was inscribed from the outset. And as we know through Derrida, "[i]nheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task."[27] It sets its path before us, making it ours to follow by enclosing us within it. It summons us through a call elicited from a spectral repetition situated in a future anterior of the present and is issued by the revenant who "*begins by coming back*" inasmuch as it was already there.[28]

The question of chance undoubtedly bears its weight within the realm of cybernetics. By stumbling upon the work of Edgar Allan Poe, Lacan reveals through the game of even and odd that once symbolic succession (which he exemplifies through detailing variations in the possible sequences of pluses and minuses) is underway "what comes out can no longer be just anything."[29] The plus-and-minus series, and the field for all possible strategic variations of the game, are governed by laws of succession and beholden to an order in which "the symbol already plays and produces by itself, its necessities, its structures, its organi[z]ations."[30] The symbol gives rise to its own order in its successive presences and absences. In other words, the cybernetic machine "looks after itself."[31] Moreover, while human subjects are caught up in this game, they do not foment it: "[H]e takes his place in it, and plays the role of the little *pluses* and *minuses* in it. He is himself an element in this chain which, as soon as it is unwound, organi[z]es itself in accordance with laws. Hence the subject is always on several levels, caught up in crisscrossing networks."[32] These networks are transversal; they systematically incise and bind subjects to one another, extending within, through, and beyond them to connect with other networks and link with other elements in the chain of discourse.

The alternations that enclose the human subject's intersubjective fate take place in a children's game—*Fort! Da!*—wherein the child "destroys the object that causes it to appear and disappear by *bringing about* its absence and presence in advance."[33] This *there* (*Da*), "that is, when it is there without being there,"[34] a promise to be there again, even if it does not exist, if it had not existed, or if it has yet to exist, precipitates a compulsion to repeat and carries a spectral anteriority that discloses a singularity: "that every other is altogether other."[35] It is in this way that the subject finds themself in a discourse not of their own, nor "the discourse of the abstract other, of the other in the dyad, of my correspondent,…it is *the discourse of the circuit* in which [they are] integrated"[36]—it is the discourse of the Other. If we take this "terrifying children's game, unforgettable overthere," as "interminable,"[37] as inescapable, can there be a form of speech whose syntax does not belong to the repetitious order ushered in by this children's game? Does the short circuit, as embedded within this historical circuitry, spring off or toward or against this filiation?

Glissant attends to the mechanism of the computer. He distinguishes between poetry and the computer because of the "binary character of the latter."[38] More specifically, while "[b]inarity is not a simple one-two rhythm,…neither is it a poetic mode" insofar as "accident that is not the result

of chance is natural to poems, whereas it is the consummate vice (the 'virus') of any self-enclosed system such as the computer."[39] We might conceptualize the computer system in this self-enclosed fashion because it functions in a "yes/no/yes"[40] form similar to the binary alternations we gleaned from the children's games. However, if this virus is the vice of a computer system, it is still nonetheless produced by its very binary interplay. This virus, the "accident" of poetics to which any self-enclosed computer system would disavow, sparks something that the system could not create or perform itself—that is, without the virus. Through emphasizing the short circuit's inside-out, outside-in relationship with its circuitry, we can surmise that the virus to which Glissant refers was produced in the very affordances of the computational syntax. Does this virus not relate to the computer in the same way that the short circuit does with its circuitry? I use the short-circuit model to illuminate notions of return and impossibility (as well as the circuitous affordances and occlusions of illumination itself)—that is, to question how the current returns from the short circuit, how it affects or takes part in the system that was a condition for its possibility, and thus how the current in its encounters with others returns anew to mark and re-produce the circuits of language. But, as Glissant notes, return itself is *compromised* in creolization,[41] especially in considering the return of the very impossibility of return—a return at the mouth of the abyss against the context of the violent conditions of genocide and enslavement from which it emerged.

In "The Open Boat" section of *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant attends to the violent terms from which abyssal beginnings arise. The traumatic losses and separations of the Middle Passage demand questions for the watchwords of filiation; Glissant asks the following: "Is this boat sailing into eternity toward the edges of a nonworld that no ancestor will haunt?"[42] Ocean currents hold within them a movement wherein return is rendered impossible; deracination, uprootedness, and the impossibility of return issue a severed filiation. In the wake, that is, in the haunting and irreducible presence of this trauma and irretrievable loss which lies in the belly of modernity,[43] the subjects partake in a movement of subject formation that Glissant—borrowing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—calls rhizomatic, moving against rooted notions of a fixed subjectivity. Let us not forget that while the rhizome moves against rooted and fixed forms of subjectivity it too is striated; more specifically, return to abyssal origins does not escape ordered recurrence, even if this takes the form of an ordered disorder affixed to the unknown.

The becoming of the Caribbean subject for Glissant is indelibly linked to the horrors of the unknown:

> What is terrifying partakes of the abyss, three times linked to the unknown. First, the time you fell into the belly of the boat. For, in your poetic vision, a boat has no belly; a boat does not swallow up, does not devour; a boat is steered by open skies. Yet, the belly of this boat dissolves you, precipitates you into a nonworld from which you cry out. This boat

is a womb, a womb abyss. It generates the clamor of your protests; it also produces all the coming unanimity. Although you are alone in this suffering, you share in the unknown with others whom you have yet to know. This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you. This boat: pregnant with as many dead as living under the sentence of death.[44]

The matrixial space of the abyss births the subject into the unknown. The subjects cannot draw on the loss of their filial chains. In considering a sinthomatic re-invention in place of the failure of the phallic economy (or lack in the Symbolic) and situated with respect to the Real, we can consider Bracha Ettinger's notions of the "potentialities *beyond-the-phallus*" where "*eluding the phallus does not necessarily mean a complete detachability from subjectivity, but rather the creation of a site within it.*"[45] While the subjects escape *phallacious* apprehension of the Symbolic in their subject formation, they re-produce or create sites of subjectivity in its place. In this (non)sense, the creative productions of short circuiting perhaps arise from encounters within the matrixial borderspace linked to the m/Other—a performance of the short that is rendered in the abyssal beginnings within which creolizations emerge, reorganize, and renew. Moreover, this abyss, working off the edges of the unintelligible "nonworld," effaces the origin of loss, meaning that "The Open Boat" itself is not the sole "origin" per se, but rather whenever and wherever there is the spoken act of creolization there is a return of the impossibility of return which takes its creative impulse from detours to elsewheres.

Glissant's figuration of the message leaves the irreducibility of impasse (or connection through impasse) and the conditions of translation intact: "speaking one's language and opening up to the language of the other no longer form the basis for an alternative. 'I speak to you in your language voice, and it is in my language use that I understand you.'"[46] A message is delivered from and returned to Glissant: He receives his own message in an inverted form. The joining points of the short circuits within their series of beginnings then work off impasse—each subject returning to themself from an-other as another beginning at the abyss issued in their conjoinment.

Filial dis-locations are the vestiges left in the wake of these conjoinments, only to return, but within a chaotic order and/of disorder that escapes scientific grasps of language. What (dis)order can we then attribute to the serial re-production of these meanings/meetings, these dis-regarded itineraries, to what eludes legible localizability in the symbol's phallic designations?

The Hidden Order: Chaos and Creolization

Glissant opens the question of order as it pertains to the potential and potentialities of the irreducible confluence of languages: "Is there a hidden order to contact among languages?"[47] For Glissant, this "hidden order"

belongs to *chaos-monde* whose "Chaos is not chaotic" per se. He describes Chaos as order and disorder which "has no language but gives rise to quantifiable myriads of them." In this sense, while identifiable patterns emerge from *chaos-monde*, the inconclusive nature of these patterns, elements, and expressions (as extensions of *chaos-monde*) persists. Due to their nonlinear processes, chaotic networks do not settle into predictable patterns. It is not a mechanism from which one can arrest its process as such, for "it has no keys." To mistake that one possesses the keys, or that one has the assurance of certainty that they do not need such keys,[48] to expose or reveal this hidden order is the attempt to wrest or estrange oneself from the Chaos of which they are a part—a resistance indicative of attempting to swim against the currents as one fails to get to the bottom of them.

In what ways does creolization relate to chaotic linguistic and cultural contact, and in what ways does it enable its irreducible currents to flow through speech? Glissant avers that creolization is characterized as "a language whose lexicon and syntax belong to two heterogeneous linguistic masses."[49] However, instead of holding these differentiated linguistic masses as such, what affordances might be garnered by reframing creolization as instead reflective of a series of the short circuits of language that belong to and re-produce what may be singularly referred to and opaquely rendered as syntax? How might this prevent us from apprehending the irreducibility of creolization's emergence and bifurcating its composition to instead allow us to question the individuated and component-based visage that we claim to witness? In Glissant's words, might this help us to "focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components"?[50] The chaotic expression of creolization is most descriptively pronounced in the impasse of the linguistic encounter, in the enunciation of its very speech. Glissant specifies that "[i]n expanse/extension the forms of *chaos-monde* (the immeasurable intermixing of cultures) are unforeseeable and foretellable." The impasse of speech in creolization gives rise to its unforeseeable detours and its creative reorganizations of language. The series of short circuits of language relink in unpredictable ways, or more generatively put: creolization gives irreducible expression to and respects the opacity of *chaos-monde*. Its chaotic syntax is both expressed and concealed in language's circuitous spark. In returning to the virus, Glissant claims that it is in this way that the "accident" of the virus is already a (fractal) part of the nature of the computer system[51]; the short circuit is the "fractal" and necessary component of the circuitry embedded in its very nature. Importantly, Glissant continues, if "the virus would manifest the fractal nature of the system it would be the *sign* of the intrusion of Chaos, the irremediable *indicator*, that is, of the asynchronous nature of the system."[52] The virus then is the "sign" or "indicator" of an already chaotic order of which it performs, re-presents, re-produces. What then leads to the spectacle upon which the radiant spark(le) of the short circuit becomes apprehended by an expeditious grasp towards knowability? What forgetting and non-sense makes this (im)possible?

Forgetting is an escape down the "impossible path" but not in any ordinary way nor for any insignificant circumvention. Through Deleuze and Guattari's first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *Anti-Oedipus*, we might consider the ways in which creolization actualizes "forces that escape coding, scramble the codes, and flee in all directions."[53] Where there would be a filial designation located within the register of the Symbolic, there is a hole—a short circuit in place of the hole—escaping the normative codes of discourse but not without its effect on them. The impossibility of return affords creolization to take another detour in its splitting off in perceptibly unpredictable directions, extending and exteriorizing its motions (off the surface). I write "perceptibly" to specify that the vast creative expanse of creolization does not extend just anywhere and in any which way, for it too is beholden to an order that structures its series of "forgettings" and its "impossibilities"[54]; however, this order and its linguistic expressions cannot be placed in familiar ways and as such is necessarily subject to symbolic misrecognition. Forgetting, as belonging to a series, comes up when one least expects it or more specifically when one could not expect it; this is how creolization reinvigorates its opaque syntax, its hidden order. It then renews itself towards subsequent forgettings in a repetition of anamnesis via the path of detour and the unwitting practice of diversion. But instead of this compulsion to repeat corresponding to the unleashing of the "genealogical drive" and a strict filial designation, it refracts its errant trajectories upon other ventures, opened within and against the abyss.

It is important to remember that this abyss is not without site, as it opens movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization through which decoding performs its escapes and gives rise to other sights. Indeed, the sites/sights of Relation are made possible by inexistences and impossibilities that shape their detours. The *minus one* for Lacan represents the signifier most purely as an absence or for its inability to be complete and adequately accounted for while standing within the battery of signifiers: "a signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier," and thus it "can only be a line that is drawn from its circle without being counted in it."[55] The symbolic illuminations of the circuit of discourse are rendered from the offscreen work of the *minus ones*, its electrons, that give the s(cr)een its glimmer of intelligibility, its patina of meaning. This comes at an expense: the electrons give way to entropy, E, allowing for the possibility of them to release photons. The series of short circuits illuminates the surface while an irreducible opacity (of the *minus ones*) of the syntax makes this spectacle possible. The rendering of opacity is not only an incidental quality of these short circuits but rather is necessarily embedded in its elemental basis, *mors tua vita mea*: it resists absolute entropy, that is, the death of the symbolic universe. It makes something seen and unseen in a creative production at the ultimate risk of death (which I note with respect to Glissant's claims regarding the fragility of creolization).[56] This is why in place of falling short of the hole of the Symbolic, the short circuit, in an aesthetic production of *chaos-monde*,

"embraces all the elements and forms of expression of this totality…: it is totality's act and its fluidity, totality's reflection and agent in motion."[57] Its respective detours thus do not detach from subjectivity and are not disconnected from the Symbolic, but rather, are productive encounters created in a movement towards the short circuit in place of what it lacks—a forgetting which folds back on an impossibility of return, creating an array of optical phenomena in its spark-inducing creases.

Syntactical Mirages: Diffraction and the "Radiant Sparkle"

To set the scene, or the screen, of visibility is not an act that happens on top of what is apparent or "present," but it is what happens behind the scenes that we do not see that allows there to be a "'reality' (to which 'actuality' refers),"[58] that is, the very apparentness of presence, its staging. Derrida's concept, "artifactuality," indicates that "actuality is *made*," and while "it is important to know what it is made of,…it is just as important to know that it is made."[59] Moreover, actuality "is not given, but actively produced, sifted, contained, and performatively interpreted by many hierarchizing and selective procedures—*false* or *artificial* procedures that are always in the service of forces and interests of which their 'subjects' and agents…are never sufficiently aware."[60] It is the working fact that there is a concealment of the behind-the-scene that one's attention is drawn to an elsewhere, to what we may call "reality," in which we confine ourselves in the walls of our own tower without view of what made this construction possible. If a novelty is struck by what is present-at-hand then it gives rise to the predicament of one's enthralment by the scene of what was already there. It is the drawing of the subject's attention towards the notion that there is an order hidden from sight in which one already plays a part, in which one is (re-en)acting, and of which any "method acting" is a neurotic preoccupation.

The spark(le) of the linguistic contact (and / through impasse) of the short circuit gives rise to apprehension of the visible and intelligible. It is this that sets out the path of the "flash agents": Glissant describes that "[t]hey send consciousness hurtling into the sudden certainty that is in possession of the obvious keys of interaction or, usually, into the assurance that it does not need such keys."[61] As such, the short circuit at once sets the trap for the violence of flash agents in its setting-of-the-stage and renders opaque the order beneath the flash. The flash agents do not need keys because they attempt to conceal or they fail to acknowledge such an order to which they are beholden (if their attention is even drawn to such an order)—they imposture as its exception. This is why any production of "newness" of creolization should not be disconnected from the hidden order through which it produces and of which it reproduces. Any production of newness must be considered as both being opened by and opening a space within the order that was already there. It is inscribed in a series of short circuits that both is the path and marks the path

of the circuitry. Concealing this already thereness, flash agents are caught up in the diffractory light of the spark, its "linguistic sparkle,"[62] iteratively deferring recognition of this hidden order of syntax—forever a sight-to-come, a syntactical order awaiting discovery in the *phallacious* apprehensions of science.

This diffraction of the short circuit also gives rise to a refraction circulating among the flash agents, what we might refer to as a *syntactical mirage*. The mirage is an optical illusion caused by atmospheric conditions, especially within the context of heat-generated refractions and distortions of light. The heat emanations of the spark, of the dense quantities of current flowing through the short circuit, produce distortions that can cause one to question the conditions of actuality or dismiss these conditions in favor of assuming a certainty against them or can even cause one to faint. The syntax of the current of *minus ones* offers light, but its mirages can also stun, disorient, or deceptively reshape in ways that conceal its own opaque movement. The *minus ones* produce the spark(le) of visibility subject to the apprehension of flash agents and those who take a certain path towards the towers of science.

Is this a flash in which Glissant himself is not stunned? Is Glissant not enamoured of the spectacle of the short circuits? If we assume that the series of short circuits is creolization, from which he posits the syntax of two (or multiple) languages, Glissant thus holds them (the differentiated languages) both in an attempted suspension of current in which the "I" forms around the ocular in a resistance to its flows. The fragmented and fragmenting "I" forms in the subject's illusory prospect that one can swim against currents in the circuits of discourse. Moving against this resistance, moments of escape are rendered most fragile and bare through the short circuit that is already inscribed in a circuitry. Glissant describes his fear that creolization would be a language "missing from the radiant sparkle…of the *chaos-monde*"[63]—but it is in this miss from which this essay has emphasized that creolization is rendered opaque, distancing (or more accurately, escaping) from the violence of knowability by putting itself on its very line. The Other is not a mere contributor to the current but is what (re)sets its very flow—resistance is *understandable*, but perhaps that is the problem. It is in the resistance produced in response to the short circuit's changes to the flows of current in which divisions upon return can be made or staged. When resistance is at its lowest (or what we can even assume is asymptotically approaching zero) current flows unimpeded (or what we can assume asymptotically approaches infinity) through the short circuit.[64] What *minus ones* then give rise to the resistance in which the "I" of Glissant forms? What conditions his sights / sites? What other absences are the conditions for his visage? And what only refractory light can we shed upon them, or are they better left in the opaque elsewheres to which his currents trend?

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1 Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other: or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 61 (italics in original).

2 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 64 (italics in original).

3 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 63, 66, & 69 (italics in original); Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., [1966] 2006), 691.

4 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 67.

5 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 57.

6 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 66.

7 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 65.

8 Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject," 681.

9 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, [1990] 2010), 139.

10 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 82.

11 By recursion, or history as recursion, or "recursive analytics," through Ann Laura Stoler's invocation of Michel Foucault, I refer to the ways in which historically contingent qualities fold back onto themselves. Rather than in its mathematical formulation of recursion as a process of "repeating items in a self-similar way," Foucault emphasizes that such histories are less marked by a sameness of repetition than through "processes of partial inscriptions, modified displacements, and amplified recuperations"; see Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 26-27.

12 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, [1989] 1999), 18.

13 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York, NY: Routledge, [1993] 1994), 59.

14 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 175.

15 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 69.

16 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 118.

17 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 166.

18 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 59-60.

19 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 139.

20 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 60.

21 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 65.

22 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., [1978] 1991), 305.

23 Lacan, *Book II*, 80-81.

24 Lacan, *Book II*, 81.

25 Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., [1966] 2006), 263.

26 Lacan, *Book II*, 71.

27 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 67 (italics in original).

28 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11 (italics in original).

29 Lacan, *Book II*, 193.

30 Lacan, *Book II*, 193.

31 Lacan, *Book II*, 81.

32 Lacan, *Book II*, 192-193 (italics in original).

33 Lacan, "The Function and Field," 262 (italics in original).

34 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 124.

35 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 217.

36 Lacan, *Book II*, 89 (italics added).

37 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, 73.

38 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 82.

39 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 82.

40 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 82.

41 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 118.

42 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 7.

43 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 74.

44 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 8.

45 Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 56 (italics in original).

46 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 107.

47 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 99.

48 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 118.

49 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 118.

50 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 190.

⁵¹ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 139.

⁵² Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 139 (italics added).

⁵³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hutley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, [1972] 1983), xxi.

⁵⁴ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 69; Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 18.

⁵⁷ Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject," 693-694.

⁵⁶ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 93.

⁵⁷ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 94.

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality," in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 86.

⁵⁹ Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality," 86 (italics in original).

⁶⁰ Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality," 86 (italics in original).

⁶¹ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 166.

⁶² Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 98.

⁶³ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 98.

⁶⁴ This can be attributed to the simple formula of "V=IR," where "V" is voltage, "I" is current, and "R" is resistance.

Thinking the Impossible Survivance and Arrivance of the 'Speaking Commodity'

Conjuring the Specters of Chris Hani, Slavery, and Blackness in Derrida's *Specters of Marx*

Alexander van Biema

Cornell University

> I don't expect to live long. As we move closer to elections, covert operations will be stepped up. They will get me sooner or later.[1]

> – Chris Hani, "Comrade Chris Hani Speaks"

> In the name of the Enlightenment and Reason, you [Hegel] then rise up to condemn any *obscurity* in the presentation of the general concept: "Negroid form" equals obscurantism plus occultism, mystery plus mysticism and mystification. Blackness is never far from the obscure and the occult. Spiritualism is but a spiritism. But, on the other hand, "Negroid form" might signal the enslavement of these pseudo-concepts that have no autonomy. For they are working merely as *objects* in the service of men, *for* men.[2]

> But in saying "if commodities could speak" (*Könnten die Waren sprechen*), Marx implies that they cannot speak. He makes them speak (like the economist he is accusing) but in order to make them say, paradoxically, that inasmuch as they are exchange-values, they speak, and that they speak or maintain a commerce among themselves only insofar as they speak. That to them, in any case, one can at least lend speech. To speak, to adopt or borrow speech, and to be exchange-value is here the same thing.[3]

> – Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

To begin to think the thought of Jacques Derrida as in/of Africa and the African(a) diaspora demands an attentiveness to the impossible survivance and arrivance of enslaved Africans ("speaking commodities"[4]) in the

Americas. The invocation of the concept of survivance is meant to signify and articulate the feel of being natally interdicted from the capacity to claim coherent space-time coordinates because of trans-Atlantic slavery and its afterlives.[5] For this reason, the (dis)avowal of survivance can never be complete because it resists completion (in linear space-time). It is from within our *common incompleteness*[6] that survivance becomes think-able, feel-able and say-able. This is to say, the question of survivance is a fundamentally *ante*-national and *anti*-national[7] quest(ion) that enables us to ask the always un-asked question: how do you survive survival? And, resonantly, does the arrivant sur-vive (non-)arrival (arrivance) and survivance?[8]

To think with and through these questions, let us begin with Peggy Kamuf's generative mistranslation of the French noun *nègre* (and *à l'état nègre*) as "Negroid" or "Negroid form" and once as "blackness"[9] in Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (1994). Importantly, in the original French edition of *Spectres de Marx* (Galilée, 1993), published a year prior to its English translation by Kamuf, footnote 7 for the fifth and final chapter titled "Apparition of the Inapparent: The phenomenological 'conjuring trick'"[10] states: "Quand *L'Idéologie allemande* rappelle l'origine hégélienne de la philosophie de l'histoire de Stirner, elle insiste sur une autre thématique du nègre, celle pour laquelle « La négritude (*die Negerhaftigkeit*), c'est " l'enfant ". » (p. 194 et suiv.)."[11] In the footnote, Derrida translates the German "*die Negerhaftigkeit*" as "négritude,"[12] which is immensely significant for numerous reasons, but perhaps most importantly is that Derrida is subtly making a reference to the literary-philosophical Négritude movement of the French Caribbean and Francophone Africa. This is to say, Kamuf's curious choice, which is far from apolitical, to translate *nègre* as "Negroid" negates the complexity that the imperialist, racial-colonial word/concept *nègre* is held by and holds (in abeyance).

In *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (2003), Brent Hayes Edwards' explicates the multilingual, trans-imperial genealogy and "paleonomy"[13] of the word "*nègre*":

Because [Jack Forbes's] *Africans and Native Americans* is structured around multilinguistic etymological studies of the use of various racial terms (*negro, mulat(t)o, mestizo, pardo, loro, moor,* and *mustee*), the work is especially instructive about the historical relationship between *Negro* and *nègre*. In French, the first translations of African narratives of the early Spanish and Portuguese explorers and slave traders in the mid-sixteenth century almost exclusively used *noir* for the Spanish or Portuguese *negro* (meaning "black," the color), which was read as representing solely a color description. Only in the late 1500s and early 1600s did there begin to develop an understanding of *negro* that considered the term to represent a particular people and to mark their "difference." Other linguists including Simone Delesalle and Lucette Valensi have charted

the way the word *nègre* came to be used in French to represent that specific alterity. As the French entered the slave trade (the Code Noir, the legal basis of the trade in France, was established in 1685), there developed an association between *nègre* and *esclave* ("slave") as synonyms, cemented in early dictionaries including Savary's *Dictionnaire universel de commerce* (1723), the work that single-handedly defined the French conception of Africans as a "race of slaves" in a phrasing copied in almost all the dictionaries of the next two hundred years.[14]

The anti-black racism that infuses, and is inadvertently theorized within, the work of G.W.F. Hegel, Max Stirner, and parts of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' corpus is well-known and need not be recited here.[15] Derrida's meticulous attention to the ethical-political and aesthetic stakes of translation demand that we ask about the elision of the German idiomatic equivalents (i.e. *negere*, *neger*, *negerrasse*) of the French term *nègre*; Derrida compels us to inquire about the absence of the German in Hayes Edwards' genealogy of the necessarily unsettled and unsettling term *nègre* cited above. In *Specters of Marx*, the ineradicable traces of the entangled histories of German imperialism[16] concatenate around the racist term *nègre* and its German cognate *negere*, the revolutionary figure of Martin Thembisile (Chris) Hani, and the speculative Marxist discourse of the "commodity that can speak"[17] (in *The German Ideology* and *Capital*, Volume I).

Of the many spectral and ghostly intertexts that *Specters of Marx* inhabits and is in turn inhabited by, arguably the most important, for the specific purposes of this essay, is Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology* (1932). Apart from *The German Ideology*, there is a "shadow archive"[18] composed of Chris Hani's speeches, writings, and interviews, who was assassinated 12 days prior to Derrida's lecture, which permeates *Specters of Marx*.

To conjure the specter is to release an ungovernable proliferation of questions, which calls us to think anew Derrida's decision to dedicate *Specters of Marx* to the then-recently assassinated black South African communist party leader, and pivotal actor within the armed wing of the ANC, *Umkhonto weSizwe* (Spear of the Nation)[19] or MK, Chris Hani.[20] The dedication to Hani manifests as an epitaphic and epigraphic exergue that is in but not of *Specters of Marx*.[21] Apart from this singular citation of the proper name of Chris Hani, the innumerable hauntological ghosts, specters and spirits that inhabit and in turn are inhabited by Hani, and manifest through the invocation of his name, are constitutively absent within the body proper of the text. Etymologically, exergue signifies that which is (or comes from) outside of the/a work.[22] It is an inscription — or, after Akira Mizuta Lippit (2005), an *ex-scription*[23] — that is neither completely in nor of the interior(ity) or exterior(ity) of the work. This is to say, Chris Hani comes to name and violently stand-in for a constitutively improper, fungible, fugitive in-/ex- scription that *de*-scribes itself (that is, it is under erasure) while becoming the shadow of the work *Specters of Marx*. While emerging from a different historical context and social

text, I am reminded here of Sojourner Truth's analysis of photography as a form of "selling the shadow to support the substance". Truth decided to sell her paradoxically fungible photographic visage (or "shadow") to support the "substance" of the abolition of slavery (in fact, the quote "selling the shadow to support the substance" was inscribed on each of the photographs she sold). While the referent of photography is not present in Derrida's dedication to Hani, there is a sense in which the constitutive fungibility that Derrida's *exordium* imputes onto Hani results in Derrida "selling the shadow [Hani] to support the substance" of the work (*Specters*). In other words, Derrida can be said to deploy the (im)proper name of Chris Hani only to have the name pre-figuratively undermine the work of *Specters* without ever fully announcing itself in the spectral body (proper) of *Specters*. Neither fully a legible, discrete beginning nor end, Hani (pre-)occupies the non-place of the dedicatory interregnum in *Specters*. To illustrate this let us look to the third paragraph of the Dedication wherein Chris Hani is named, "and yet" he is simultaneously unnamed in that he first must become (in the first sentence of the Dedication) "*One name for another, a part for the whole: the historic violence of Apartheid can always be treated as a metonymy*"[24] (emphasis in original). Here Derrida troubles the unruly line between the metonymic fungibility[25] of Black life, flesh, and historicity. This metonymic fungibility and supplementarity is constitutive of the labor (and "work of mourning") Chris Hani's (im)proper name is conscripted to perform in and for *Specters* both in death and life or, as Derrida (2020) elaborates elsewhere, life-death[26]:

> But one should never speak of the assassination of a man as a figure, not even an exemplary figure in the logic of an emblem, a rhetoric of the flag or of martyrdom. A man's life, as unique as his death, will always be more than a paradigm and something other than a symbol. And this is precisely what a proper name should always name.

> And yet. And yet, keeping this in mind and having recourse to a common noun, I recall that it is a communist as such, a communist as communist, whom a Polish emigrant and his accomplices, all the assassins of Chris Hani, put to death a few days ago, April 10th. (emphasis in original).

What is the afterlife of this violent interchangeability of the "exemplary"[27] Black South African "*communist as communist*" figure, emblem, proper name, paradigm, symbol, singularity, and cipher that is Chris Hani in *Specters*? How are Chris Hani's words and actions ambivalently and contradictorily employed as an intertext in *Specters* that is conscripted, interpolated, and abducted by Derrida? Here, the point is *not* to get lost in an indictment of the uses and abuses of Chris Hani and apartheid in *Specters* (and, one might add, throughout Derrida's oeuvre). Rather, labor is needed to reread the contradictions immanent within the affective intensity of Derrida's gesture of solidarity. In doing so, we begin to understand how aware Derrida is of the incalculable risks that attend and subtend his desire and request to speak with and for, be spoken to by, and be (dis)possessed by the ghost, specter, and

spirit of Chris Hani: "*Allow me to salute the memory of Chris Hani and to dedicate this lecture to him.*"[28]

To whom and to what is Derrida's "*Allow me…*" addressed? In the immediate, yet never not out-of-joint, present of the plenary address where *Specters of Marx* was initially given, the audience and co-participants of the conference "Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective," given at University of California, Riverside on April 22-23, 1993, are the recipients of Derrida's request in the form of his "Dedication" prior to the beginning of his lecture.[29] However, we must remember that for Derrida every address (of which making a *salute* is a form) creates the addressee.[30] In "salut[ing] the memory of Chris Hani," Derrida is thus always already saluting the memories (and histories) of numerous others and other Others (such as the innumerable peoples subject to the absolute viciousness and brutality of apartheid, colonialism, empire, capitalism, etc.), whose being-present precedes and exceeds the establishment of (a/their) presence. These interminable salutations (*adieu*) perpetually mark and re-mark a shuttling between arriving without arrival and departing without departure. It is impossible to disentangle the history and afterlife of (settler) colonialism in South Africa, the trans-Atlantic and trans-Indian Ocean slave trades, African chattel slavery, and the "commodity that can speak" from the (im)proper name of Chris Hani. Derrida fails to know this to be true, but nonetheless this failure of knowing/knowledge makes it possible for us to think how Derrida's (un)knowing is reliant on the avowal of an always provisional capacity to access and articulate these histories and memories of struggle vis-à-vis what is for Derrida the more (philosophically) familiar terrain of Marx, Hegel, Stirner, Shakespeare and Martin Heidegger (among others). This is to say, if Derrida wants to salute Chris Hani he must simultaneously consent to salute what Fred Moten terms the "history of blackness."[31] Where Marx and Engels, according to Derrida, are only able to think the possibility of "*commerce between commodities*"[32] via ventriloquizing and theatricalizing[33] registers, Derrida picks up on the incipient critique of the sovereign subject (and its co-constitutive metaphysics of presence) that underlies *The German Ideology* and any Marxist project worthy of the name. This is to say that while the dedicatory exergue to Chris Hani that precedes the (formal) beginning or *exordium*[34] of *Specters* is ostensibly interred in the placeless place of the preface, Hani returns as a revenant in Derrida's convoking and discursive linking of the *nègre* and the "commodity that can speak".[35]

The inauguration of the imperial, racial-colonial nomenclature that transits between *nègre* (French), *Negerhaftigkeit* or "Negro-ness" (German), *zwarte* (Dutch), "Negro", "Negroid form", and blackness is inseparable from the commodity-form.[36] Derrida demonstrates that the always disfigured figure of "the obscure 'Negroid'" or, as it's rendered in the French edition of *Spectres*, "l'obscure, la « nègre »"[37], in *The German Ideology* (and Volume I of *Capital*[38]) is "not even a concept"[39]. In doing so, Derrida reveals how the

conceptual integrity and collective coherence of the commodity-form[40], commodification, and the subject/object binary distinction itself are all dependent on the displacement, *dissed place[41]*, exorcism, *and* extraction of the insurgency that is blackness:

There is in sum, no doubt, but a single ghost, a ghost of ghosts, and it is but a concept, *not even a concept*, the obscure "Negroid" [*la nègre*] presentation of a larger concept, more *englobing* than all the others, indeed it is but a name, a metonymy that lends itself to any and all substitutions (the part for the whole that it then exceeds, the effect for the cause of which it is in turn the cause, and so forth). Nominalism, conceptualism, realism: all of that is routed by the Thing or the Athing called ghost. The taxonomic order becomes too easy, at once arbitrary and impossible…[42] [emphasis added].

The "englobing" globality or *mondialisation* of *la nègre*, Derrida writes, "lends itself to any and all substitutions (the part for the whole that it then exceeds, the effect for the case of which it is in turn the cause, and so forth)." Let us recall here Edwards' genealogical and etymological tracing of *nègre* cited in the beginning of this paper. As noted earlier, the multiplicity of polysemous valences that the word, concept, and figure of the *nègre* holds, signifies, and generates is obscured by Peggy Kamuf's decision to translate "l'obscure, la nègre" into English as "the obscure Negroid". One of the earliest usages of the term "negroid" is in an English translation of Arthur de Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (*Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*) (1853).[43] In *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, "variété mélanienne" (melanian variety) and *nègre* are the terms Gobineau uses to categorize the "black" within his proto-eugenic, racial typology.[44] The Greek etymology of the suffix *-oid* (from *oeidēs*) in "Negroid" signifies resemblance, as in the form or likeness of the "Negro" or the "Black" (which is a tautology *par excellence*).

While it is highly likely Derrida would have been familiar with Gobineau's[45] *Essai* (though I have yet to find evidence of this) given its notoriety within the discourse of scientific racism in Francophone and Anglophone letters, we might say that Peggy Kamuf's decision to translate *nègre* as "Negroid" conflates these distinct but interconnected genealogies of gendered, imperial-colonial-racial-capitalist, hierarchical taxonomies and typologies of difference. According to Derrida, "The taxonomic order becomes too easy, at once arbitrary and impossible."[46] Could we read this as an anticipatory meta-commentary on the ease with which Kamuf translates *nègre* into a terminal assemblage of "Negroid" (eight usages), "Negro" (one usage), and "Blackness" (one usage) in *Specters*? When translation encounters blackness ("…the Thing or the Athing called ghost…"[47]), terminological precision seemingly becomes an unnecessary appendage and prosthetic that is marked as dispensable. If Derrida can be said to be avoiding uttering the proper name Chris Hani in the body of the text of *Specters*, the ghosted void of the spectral figure and name Chris Hani reappears in a sublated[48] form in

Derrida's deconstruction of the fungible exemplarity of the speaking commodity-*cum*-nègre.

If we attend to the "the contradictions that render humanism untenable,"[49] as Derrida calls on us to do, then the centuries-long procession of specters, spirits and ghosts of premature death that haunt black life can be conjured without being immediately conjured away. Chris Hani knew he would become part of this procession before the advent of the event of his assassination. In South African historian Dr. Luli Callinicos' interview with Hani cited in the epigraph, which occurred ten days prior to Hani's murder, Hani already knew that death, as it were, was around the corner. More than clairvoyance or prophecy, Hani was an astute reader and student of history who listened to the pulse of the movement and trembling of revolution:

> Now I had seen the lot of black workers, extreme forms of exploitation. Slave wages, no trade union rights, and for me the appeal of socialism was extremely great. Where it was said that workers create wealth but in the final analysis they get nothing. They get peanuts in order to survive and continue working for the capitalists. So it was that simple approach, that simple understanding, which was a product of my own observation in addition to theory. *I didn't get involved with the workers' struggle out of theory alone*. It was a combination of theory and my own class background. I never faltered in my belief in socialism despite all the problems currently. For me that belief is strong because that is still the life of the majority of the people with whom I share a common background[50] [emphasis added].

The revolutionary activity of the Black worker and "workers' struggle", for Hani, is itself "theory" but under another name and form that is obscured by the dominant understanding of theory as mere abstraction. Hani's faith in socialism derives from *theoria in the flesh*[51] — where *theoria* is a centrifugal journey of problematization without guarantees.[52] While we should be careful not to suggest that Derrida conflates the speaking commodity-*cum*-nègre with Hani, the dialects internal to the dialectical, non-didactic lessons that Derrida is addressed and (dis)possessed by, come to him, and thus to us, by way of the impossible survivance and arrivance of the ghosts, specters, and spirits of Chris Hani and the speaking commodity-*cum*-nègre. While Derrida does not himself demand that (Western) Marxism make itself accountable to, and know itself to be intimately addressed by and implicated in, the murder of Chris Hani, he allows us to make this demand on his behalf and in his name. The dominant terms of order renders the appearance of the (enslaved) Black worker licit and legible on the condition that the Black worker disappear as a Subject and reappear instead as the illicit, illegible, criminalized objecthood of the speaking commodity.[53] Derrida invites us to take seriously how the ghostly objecthood of the *nègre*-cum-speaking commodity is precisely what makes blackness a "properly revolutionary" dis(sed)position that is always already[54] a being-towards-*defending the dead*[55]:

> This anxiety in the face of the ghost is properly revolutionary. If death weighs on the living brain of the living, and still more on the brains of revolutionaries, it must then have some spectral density. To weigh (*Jasten*) is also to charge, tax, impose, in debt, accuse, assign, enjoin. And the more life there is, the graver the specter of the other becomes, the heavier its imposition. And the more the living have to answer for it. *To answer for the dead, to respond to the dead.*[56]

Whither the "spectral density" of the *black* (South African) specters, spirits, and ghosts of Marx? While Derrida does not claim Chris Hani as one of the innumerable Black (South African) specters, spirits, and ghosts of Marx who 'we' must "answer for", Derrida enables us to claim Chris Hani in this way. Hani's death must, to quote Derrida's paraphrasing of the famous opening line of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), "weig[h] on the living brain of the living, and still more on the brains of revolutionaries."[57] In the service of the concomitant necessity and impossibility of such a weighing and witnessing of the incalculable, immeasurable *visitations* of the "specter of the other", let us listen to the end of Chris Hani's speech given at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESIA) on December, 20th-21st of 1991:

> …this is a period where all of us must exercise the maximum degree of responsibility. It is not helpful for any of us to raise the *spectre* of civil war. Anyone with knowledge of what has happened in Angola and Mozambique must know that words like "civil war" should not be lightly bandied about. Let us rather redouble our efforts to bury any possibility of such a fate enveloping us [emphasis added].[58]

In a settler colony, is the "*spectre* of civil war" not always-already present, at-hand, and handy (as it were)? Hani implicitly recognizes that this "spectre of civil war" cannot ever be entirely 'buried' and conjured away in a white settler colony such as South Africa where Black people are the majority and the ruling elite is composed of a white settler minority. And yet, Hani knows that "…words like 'civil war' should not be lightly bandied about." One of the many ghostly seeds planted by the "spectre of civil war," which Hani undoubtedly knows, is the heightened (settler) paranoia that attends the ever-present "…colonial threat to drive the settlers into the sea…"[59] It is with this in mind that when Hani says "…this is a period where all of us must exercise the maximum degree of responsibility," we can hear an echo reverberate that comes to us by way of the conclusion of Hani's article titled "The Wankie Campaign", published in the "Souvenir Edition: 25th Anniversary of MK" of *Dawn: Journal of Umkhonto we Sizwe* (the primary journal of the armed wing of the ANC) in 1986. Hani writes:

> It was important for us to rough it and to participate in creating favourable conditions for ourselves. This is what a revolutionary is and that is what revolutions are about. Namely a movement participating and

creating conditions for itself. You never wait because no favourable conditions can come on their own without the participation of the subjective factor and the subjective factor in this case was our movement and its army, MK.[60]

For the occupied, the enslaved, the dispossessed, engaging in revolutionary armed struggle is of absolute necessity in attaining the capacity to "…participate in creating favourable conditions for ourselves" precisely because "…no favourable conditions can come on their own without the participation of the subjective factor…" Chris Hani knows that the creation of "favourable conditions" for revolution is what facilitates collective survivance and arrivance. Survivance and arrivance are premised on the love of, yearning for, and the wisdom of the un-intelligible that only revolution can bring forth in its totality; however, the question of whether what the revolution births, and provides a berth for, will save or enslave, poison or heal can never be known in advance — in many ways, Hani's assassination is an embodiment of this pharmakon.[61] In this sense, the absolute arrivant can only ever lay claim to arrivance and survivance with an unconditional promise that they avow the pharmakon that is its simultaneous conditions of possibility and impossibility.

When survivance *and* arrivance are understood as a pharmakon, one can attend to how the blurring of the giving and taking of life haunts the human and more-than-human life (*la nègre-cum-speaking commodity*) that was "never meant to survive"[62] and "never meant to appear"[63]. To be displaced and out of place is to be made to carry and be carried by a *dissed* place (after M. NourbeSe Philip). The inherently spectral survivance and arrivance of Chris Hani, blackness, and the speaking commodity-*cum*-nègre is a pharmakon: it makes the attempt to mediate the ghosts, specters and spirits of the past, that is not and never will be past, both possible and impossible. To say this is to acknowledge that Hani receives and is given the dedication from Derrida, but he is not the prophet of revolution that Marx or Derrida had in mind; rather, Hani is an afterthought for Derrida, which is worth considering. More than being simply worthy of consideration, the simultaneous foregrounding and backgrounding of Hani in *Specters* creates the insurgent ground and line from which we can unconditionally receive, tend to, and care for the histories held within the ghostly visitations of Chris Hani, blackness, and the speaking commodity-*cum*-nègre.

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[1] Luli Callinicos, "Comrade Chris Hani Speaks": Interview, *SA Labour Bulletin*, Volume 17, No. 2, p.15.

[2] Jacques Derrida, trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Specters of Marx* (Routledge, 2006), p. 172.

[3] Ibid., p. 197.

[4] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 5-6. Of the scant scholarship that exists on the problem for thought (after Nahum Chandler) that the "commodity that can speak" produces in the context of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, Andrés Fabián Henao Castro's *The Militant Intellect: Critical Theory's Conceptual Personae* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022) is perhaps one of the only scholars to have taken up this question (at least within the context of the Anglophone academy) in Chapter 4 of his aforementioned book titled "The Deconstructive Militant: *Jacques Derrida's Specter*" (pp. 96-113).

[5] I am drawing here from Jamaican historian Orlando Patterson's influential monograph *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Harvard University Press, 1982) where Patterson identifies "natal alienation" as one of the three elements ("general dishonor" and "total powerlessness" being the other two) constitutive of the historically (*not* ontologically) determined concept of "social death". Black Studies scholar Frank Wilderson has ontologized Patterson's initially historically contingent formulation of "social death" with the trans-historical and ahistorical equation of Blackness and "social death" (or, in Wilderson's words, the condition of the Slave and "slaveness"). While I disagree on many fronts with Frank Wilderson, the notion that (European) Humanism is unable to "imagine" that there is a structurally imposed incapacity of Black folks in the Americas (and the planet writ large) to claim cartographic coherence (and thereby discrete "temporal" and "spatial" coordinates), that Wilderson identifies and elaborates, is a generative formulation (even in its many limitations): "It [Humanism] cannot imagine an object who has been positioned by gratuitous violence and who has no cartographic and temporal capacities to lose—a sentient being for whom recognition and incorporation is impossible" (pp. 54-55). See *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, 2010).

[6] Fred Moten & Stefano Harney, *All Incomplete* (Minor Compositions, 2021), p. 24. Additionally, see Cedric J. Robinson, *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership* (University of North Carolina Press, 2016), pp. 196-197.

[7] The notion of the *ante-* and *anti-* national comes from Fred Moten. See Fred Moten, "Licia's Lectures on Nothing". *Current Musicology*, no. 102, Apr. 2018, doi:10.7916/cm.v0i102.5371.

[8] These two questions are a remixing and paraphrasing of a question from Samson Okoth Opondo's *tour de force* book titled *Diplomatic Para-Citations: Genre, Foreign Bodies, and the Ethics of Co-Habitation* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), p. 431.

[9] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, pp. 171-173.

[10] Ibid., p. 172.

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Galileҽe, 1993), p. 219. Kamuf's translation of the footnote reads as follows: "When *The German Ideology* recalls the Hegelian origin of Stirner's philosophy of history, it insists on another thematics of the Negro, the one for which " 'The *Negroid character* [*die Negerhaftigkeit*] represents *antiquity*, dependence on *things*' (*child*)," pp. 163 ff" (*Specters of Marx*, p. 238).

[12] The implications of this invocation of *négritude* are many, and it enables us to speculate the extent to which Derrida was aware of the work that in Martinique *and* Paris, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, along with Senghor, and others, were engaged in around surrealism and Négritude.

[13] Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, p. 25.

[14] Ibid., p. 26.

[15] See Rei Terada, *Metaracial: Hegel, Antiblackness, and Political Identity* (University of Chicago Press, 2023). Additionally, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

[16] On the German empire in the Pacific Islands, see Peter J. Hempenstall, *Pacific Islanders Under German Rule: A Study in the Meaning of Colonial Resistance* (ANU Press, 2016). For the history of German imperialism/colonialism in Southern/Western Africa (as well as its historically intimate ties with both the Third Reich and the Shoah), see Klaus Bachmann, *Genocidal Empires: German Colonialism in Africa and the Third Reich* (Peter Lang, 2018).

[17] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, pp. 197-199.

[18] Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 25.

[19] On the history of MK, armed struggle in Southern Africa, the Black Consciousness Movement, and the Azanian Black Radical Tradition, see Toivo Tukongeni Paul Wilson Asheeke's groundbreaking monograph titled *Arming Black Consciousness: The Azanian Black Nationalist Tradition and South Africa's Armed Struggle* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

[20] I am inspired here by a brief meditation from Kaushik Sunder Rajan on *Specters'* dedication to Chris Hani and his characterization of this dedication as a "whisper" (p. 170). See the Conclusion (titled "Toward a Diasporic Anthropology") to Kaushik Sunder Rajan's *Multisituated: Ethnography as Diasporic Praxis* (Duke University Press, 2021), pp. 169-171.

[21] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, pp. XIV-XV.

[22] See Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Ex-Cinema: From a Theory of Experimental Film and Video* (University of California Press, 2012).

[23] See Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

[24] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. XIV.

[25] On the concept of "fungibility" in relation to enslaved Africans in the Americas, see Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

[26] Jacques Derrida, et al. *Life Death* (University of Chicago Press, 2020). Additionally, in a resonant but *not* equivalent context, the argument I am proposing here around the uses and abuses of the proper names "Chris Hani" and "Apartheid" in *Specters* is haunted by Berry Daina Ramey's profound book titled *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved from Womb to Grave in the Building of a Nation* (Random House, 2018).

[27] On the question of South Africa and its exemplarity (with Chris Hani an "exemplary example" of this) in Derrida's corpus, see Jan Steyn, "Setting, an Example: Derrida's *South Africa (and Ours)*" in *Derrida and Africa: Jacques Derrida As a Figure for African Thought* (Lexington Books, 2020), pp. 47-64.

[28] Jcques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. XV.

[29] Ibid., xii.

[30] Jacques Derrida, trans. David Wood, et al., *On the Name* (Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 37-38.

[31] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, p. 1.

[32] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 208.

[33] Ibid., p. 189.

[34] Ibid., pp. xvi-xx.

[35] The background of this convoking and discursive linking is a racialized-gendered, sexualized, classed Negro -philic and -phobic discourse well-established and sedimented in the 19th century by Marx and Engels, Hegel, and Stirner (along with a plethora of others). For an exploration of these questions in the context of the discourse on the fetish, fetishization, and the "fetishization of commodities", see J. Lorand Matory, *The Fetish Revisited: Marx, Freud, and the Gods Black People Make* (Duke University Press, 2018).

[36] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 195.

[37] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Galileᵒe, 1993), p. 220.

[38] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 6.

[39] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 173.

[40] See R. A. Judy, "The Unfungible Flow of Liquid Blackness." *liquid blackness* 1 April 2021; 5 (1): 27-36. doi: https://doi.org/10.1215/26923874-8932565.

[41] M. NourbeSe Philip, 'Dis Place—The Space Between' in *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays* (Toronto: The Mercury Press, 1997), p. 77.

[42] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 173.

[43] On the history of the English translation of Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* in the U.S. context, see Michelle M. Wright, "Nigger Peasants from France: Missing Translations of American Anxieties on Race and the Nation." *Callaloo*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1999, pp. 831–52.

[44] Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Librairie De Firmin Didot Freres [Paris], 1853), pp. 35 & 195.

[45] Another European theorist of race, racialization, and racial difference is the 19th century French Orientalist Ernest Renan who Derrida was aware of and whose writings on language and the nation Derrida cites in "White Mythology" (1974) and elsewhere. See Jacques Derrida, trans. F. C. T. Moore, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy." N*ew Literary History*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1974, p. 12.

[46] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 173.

[47] Ibid., p. 173.

[48] We should, of course, think here of Hegel's concept of the *aufhebung*.

[49] Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, p. 181.

[50] Luli Callinicos, "Interview with Comrade Chris Hani" (23 and 31 March, 1993), transcribed by Sheila Weinberg, p. 4.

[51] On the black and women of color feminist concept of "*theory* in the flesh", see Barbara Christian's now classic article titled "The Race for Theory." *Cultural Critique*, no. 6, 1987, pp. 51-63.

[52] On *theoria* and the "embassy of theory", see Costas M. Constantinou, *On the Way to Diplomacy* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[53] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, pp. 8, 18, and 71.

[54] On the concept of the "always already", see: Louis Althusser, "Ideology and ideological state apparatuses." In L. Althusser (Ed.), *Lenin and philosophy and other essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

[55] The refrain "defend the dead" is a citation from M. NourbeSe Philip's profound poem *Zong!*. See M. NourbeSe Philip and Setaey Adamu Boateng, *Zong!* (Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 25.

[56] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, pp. 135-136.

[57] Karl Marx, trans. Daniel De Leon, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: Labor News, 1951), p. 15.

[58] See CODESA: First Plenary Session: Direct Transcription & Relevant Documents: 20 & 21 December 1991. South Africa, SEEMAC Transcriptions, 1991., p. 102.

[59] Sharad Chari, *Gramsci at Sea* (University of Minnesota Press, 2023), p. 1.

[60] Chris Hani, "The Wankie Campaign," *Dawn: Journal of Umkhonto we Sizwe*, souvenir issue (1986): p. 37.

[61] On the concept of the "pharmakon", see the section entitled "Plato's Pharmacy" in Jacques Derrida's *Dissemination* (1981). See Jacques Derrida, trans. Barbara Johnson, *Dissemination* (University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[62] Audre Lorde, *Poetry Foundation*, "A Litany for Survival" (1978). https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/147275/a-litany-for-survival. Accessed Nov. 17, 2023.

[63] Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* (NYU Press, 2019), p. 3.

Ellipses, of Derrida and Glissant

Xinyu H. Zhang
Cornell University

[D&G: the acronym of endearment for a philosophical couple, not Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and Félix Guattari (1930–1992) this time, but Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) and Édouard Glissant (1928–2011).]

How to contain, to simultaneously host and hold (*con-tinere*) two thinkers––two irreducible figures of thought––with their two unexchangeable physical bodies? What will emerge out of it, and what will have *already* emerged out of it, by virtue of this sheer juxtaposition of the two, a parataxis itself initiated by a certain historical contingency, namely their contemporality or contemporariness, their having-found-themselves-together as mortal beings within discretely concrete time and space that is nevertheless structurally, experientially, and therefore *differently* shared, in which their paths overlay, intersect, reflect, emulate, traverse, subtend each other, sometimes confessedly so, yet more often unacknowledged:[1] The "Long Twentieth Century," the *longue durée* of colonialism, capitalism, and geopolitics; Algeria, Martinique, France, a concurrent Africa(n past) of which they were both dispossessed; an ever-globalizing earth, an unprecedentedly planetarized world? But, moreover, how do we think their contemporaneity––biographical, factual––when each of them is so remarkably a thinker of dis-continuity and dis-location, of anachrony and dis-placement, of the impossibility as well as undesirability of "identity," of being self-identical?

Would we harness and obtain a certain *binocular* vision, whereby the two I-s /"eyes" synergically focalize upon a sole "object" and dialectically bring into relief a more stereoscopic world-reality, the synthetized unity of which is unachievable through the mere accumulation of monocular perceptions, which amounts, in this case, to the reading of only one thinker? Or does the very fact that there are two thinkers, two oeuvres and perspectives, induce a *parallax* view––not so much non-dialecticizable as irreducibly non-metabolizable––a "constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible"? For, as Slavoj Žižek writes, "The parallax is not symmetrical, composed of two incompatible perspectives on the same X: there is an irreducible asymmetry between the

two perspectives, a minimal reflexive twist. We do not have two perspectives, we have a perspective and what eludes it, and the other perspective fills in this void of what we could not see from the first perspective."[2] Instead of each complementing the other, each *is* the truth of the other precisely by dint of each exceeding and eluding the other. The differentiality between the two perspectives, therefore, is not to be ascribed to any conciliatory relativism, but an absolute rift (or, as Žižek calls it throughout, a "shift," which perhaps has a somewhat witty connotation as in "work shift," a certain philosophical opportunism [today *this* thinker, tomorrow *another*], yet drawing attention to an *interregnum* in-between the "shift") within the very "object" thus observed; more importantly, a rift ("void") within each perspective itself that remains incomplete in its own singularity: a dazzling "blind spot" at the heart of each, which each over-turns into the other's blinding brilliance.

The vector, or spatial directionality, of the parallactic reading, then, is necessarily that of "twisting," or obliqueness, and it is precisely due to the irreducibility––the spatial duality and temporal simultaneity––of the two foci that they cannot be "held together" in whatsoever straight-forward, head-on, or directly confrontational manner. Therefore, to justly and philosophically couple D&G, and to indicate the *relation* between the two "incommensurable" parallactic perspectives, I would like to propose a third figure, a figure of irreducible duality: *l'ellipse*, both a geometrical ellipse and a rhetorical ellipsis. Of course, this is already a "Derridean" figure,[3] and it may seem that Glissant has been cast into the shadow of Derrida from the very start and thus given lie to the initial insistence on their irreducible duality; for, as Derrida often reminds us, an ellipse/ellipsis can indeed morph into an eclipse. Yet to couple Derrida and Glissant through the figure of ellipse does not simply mean that we distribute and delegate Derrida and Glissant, symmetrically, to the two foci of a single ellipse, but also that there are, indeed, already *two* distinct ellipses (Derrida's and Glissant's respective non-identity and differentiality that constitutes them-selves) that cannot be telescoped into the selfsame one, as a third ellipse will always have had manifested itself: the *relation*, as ellipsis between ellipses, between D&G.

To uphold the shape of thinking in this way, as well as the philosophical and figural relevance and vitality of the concept of duality––irreducible to that of dualism or binarism––is also to insist upon the irreducible dual sources of *experience*, which Derrida has designated as "artifactuality," "actuvirtuality" and "virtuactuality,"[4] or, what may be parallelly termed *systempiricity*: the very simultaneity of systematicity and empiricity, commonality and singularity––perhaps yet another elliptical parallax. Somewhat counterintuitively, what is meant by "system" does *not* need to designate an engulfing mesh that paralyzes the volatility of empirical foison, but can name an intuited "coordinate plane" of totality always already imminently called into being by the very *complex* existence of actualities and empiricities. The repudiation of the conceptuality of system may as well attest to a phobia

about the always already effervescent interrelations, the celebrated Glissantian notion of *Relation*: in his words, "It's not the system that needs to be criticized: it's the fact that the system is systematic. That is what needs to be criticized. One can have non-systematic systems. […] So it is not the notion of system that needs to be criticized, it's the idea that the system forces you to move along a single route, to progress along a single route, forces you into linearities that no longer correspond to the present situation of the world and its chaotic organization." [5] Conversely, the empiricities and actualities, "however singular, irreducible, stubborn, painful, or tragic [they] may be,"[6] are not spontaneously or autonomously self-realized as such; there remains a degree to which they are *made* empirical, as "empirical" is itself a name for a modality of appearance, a form of coherence. To realize this is to undo not only the alleged "passivity" of the empirical as something docilely dictated by the transcendental, but its apparent positivist "autonomy" in the name of which it often assumes the onto-ideological role of an intractable resistance against systematization. In Jean-Luc Nancy's terms, the "irrepressible empiricity" of experience ("Here's what happened, it's happened to us") is neither pure, self-contained, nor self-identical; rather, it is historically contaminated, for a *sense* of "History," however shattered, persists: "Instead it is a question here of putting together what befalls us, in the non-purity of the event and the accident, the historical passage in which all sense of History is changed: wars and genocides, collapses of representation, the erosion of politics by global technology, the drifting of 'unchained peninsulas'."[7] The "will to system," then, subsists *not* in the mechanistic concatenation of discrete singularities, but in the will to touch the *limits* of experience and its possibilities, the immediacy of which is mediated through a relation to itself which also fractures it: "The limit of what, in order to be itself and to be present to itself, does not come back to itself. The circle which at once doses itself off and fails to do so: an ellipsis" ("ES" 95). In a more figurative language, let us say that the systematicity of systempiricity does not coordinate singularities by pinning them down or mapping them out as if on a grid; rather, it indexes the *trembling* contour of the empirical, its historicity as a kind of "aura": the ellipsis opened up at the very heart of everyday experience, the *espacement* or the opening of a space that is *proto*-collective and therefore cannot be purely privatized.

The necessity of such a concept (systempiricity) becomes evident in a discussion such as ours, for here we are not simply addressing the underdocumented empirical interactions between two thinkers (which is itself a formidable biographical, or intellectual historical, task), but also, synecdochically or rather elliptically, larger issues pressingly inscribed in the works of D&G, such as the sense of "common" (as much a question of being and ethics as of organization), the historical and contemporary conditions and possibilities of knowledge and philosophizing, the practice of writing, reading, and their socio-political *exigency*, as well as the finitude, if not mortality, of thinking and thinker. In other words, as will be seen, we will be

focusing on a moment of theoretical correspondence, if not appropriation (that is, Derrida's citation or application of Glissant). What happens when one thinker glimpses in another something that echoes their own, *more or less* the "same," ex-propriating the latter towards somewhere beyond its determinate locality? Is this a moment of universalization or specification, systematization or singularization, a *shared* origin or dissemination? Indeed, we have already been formulating some surreptitious Kantian questions, precisely around the unclosable ellipsis between the transcendental and empirical deduction, asking how the sense of *knowing* is to be transformed when there is no guaranteed "proofs from experience," or when, in the stead of a correlative origin, we discern rather an "ellipsis or eclipse of the origin," which makes "the condition of possibility of the origin itself" nevertheless thinkable ("ES" 91):

> Among the many concepts […] that constitute the very mixed fabric of human cognition, there are some that are also destined for pure use *a priori* (completely independently of all experience), and these always require a deduction of their entitlement, since proofs from experience are not sufficient for the lawfulness of such a use, and yet one must know how these concepts can be related to objects that they do not derive from any experience. I therefore call the explanation of the way in which concepts can relate to objects *a priori* their **transcendental deduction**, and distinguish this from the **empirical deduction**, which shows how a concept is acquired through experience and reflection on it, and therefore concerns not the lawfulness but the fact from which the possession has arisen.[8]

Let us then turn directly to an episode in Kant that treats such duality as a *problem*, an episode, interestingly, in which Kant introduces the conception of ellipse as one example, which allegorically stages the *tension* between the literal/empirical irregularity and its "solution" (which is figural/systemic, as we will see). This will help us address the knowledge-inducing confrontation between the couple of Derrida and Glissant, who form an elliptical relation precisely in relation to the question of *empiricity*––something amorphous, still quivering like an enigma.

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, having established the sequentiality from "senses" to "understanding" to "reason," "beyond which there is nothing higher to be found in us to work on the matter of intuition and bring it under the highest unity of thinking" (*CPR* 387), Kant reverse-engineers the working of reason, whose systematizing functionality will have facilitated the understanding of *what cannot be directly or empirically experienced* as such through the operation of "regulative principles," "through which reason, as far as it can, extends systematic unity over all experience" (*CPR* 611). I am referring to the "Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic," in which Kant discusses the "hypothetical" use of reason, which, unlike its "apodictic" use, is not *constitutive*, that is, not based upon an already-certain "universal";

instead, it pre-supposes the universal-to-come *as a guiding problem*, like a sign-post that directs both toward and beyond the (mere) empirical probings and verifications, towards a certain principality, or "maxims of reason": "I call all subjective principles that are taken not from the constitution of the object but from the interest of reason in regard to a certain possible perfection of the cognition of this object, **maxims** of reason" (*CPR* 603, emphasis original). It is therefore "regulative, bringing unity into particular cognitions as far as possible and thereby, **approximating** the rule to universality" (*CPR* 592, emphasis original). The "rule" thus approximated is not guaranteed, though; *it might not exist at all*: "One asserts not that [it] must in fact be found, but rather that one must seek it for the benefit of reason, namely for setting up certain principles for the many rules with which experience may furnish us, and that where it can be done, one must in such a way bring systematic unity into cognition" (*CPR* 594).

What is at stakes for Kant is, as usual, the possibility of knowledge, which must abide by the "benefit" or the "interest" of reason, whose working always *pre-supposes* a systemic unity. Yet Kant is acutely aware of the tension between the one and the many, simplicity and extension, the necessity and illusionality of positing such a unity of the manifold. He insists that even though this presupposition appears retroactive, metaleptic, economic, and self-justifying, it issues from objectivity and conformity with nature: "such a selfish aim [the former] can easily be distinguished from the idea, in accordance with which everyone presupposes that this unity of reason conforms to nature itself; and here reason does not beg but commands, though without being able to determine the bounds of this unity" (*CPR* 595). It is not that "sameness" is the *telos* of knowledge, but that it is a necessary and transcendental condition, a "field" (without being a completely "solid" ground) for the possibility of knowledge and experience, whose manifoldness and differences are prepared by the *idea* rather than *factuality* of "sameness": "sameness of kind is necessarily presupposed in the manifold of a possible experience (even though we cannot determine its degree *a priori*), because without it no empirical concepts [with which the understanding deals] and hence no experience would be possible" (*CPR* 596); "Reason thus prepares the *field* for the understanding […]" (*CPR* 598, emphasis XZ).

We have already sensed how Kant proceeds not dogmatically but *figuratively*. The regulative use of reason, which allows us to "go much further than experience can reach" with the help of an "idea" (*CPR* 601), is operative not so much through deduction as figural "imagination," insofar as it is not grounded in literality, but in a certain animating suspension or groundlessness. Kant proffers a mini-example of this: how the *figure* of ellipse (a literal ellipse, though) is necessitated and inaugurated to understand how the deviant movement of a celestial body, whose *empirically* irreducible differentiality (testifying to the "manifoldness" of experiential materials) from a "circle," is nonetheless systematizable:

Hence if, e.g., the course of the planets is given to us as circular through a (still not fully corrected) experience, and we find variations, then we *suppose* these variations to consist in an orbit that can deviate from the circle through each of an infinity of intermediate degrees [*Zwischengrade*, in-between degrees] according to constant laws; i.e., we suppose that the movements of the planets that are not a circle will *more or less approximate* to its properties, and then we come upon the ellipse. (*CPR* 600–601, emphasis XZ)[9]

This example of the simultaneous deviation and derivation of an ellipse from a circle (and later, of parabola from ellipse, of hyperbola from parabola, etc.) seems to suggest that knowledge of things not empirically *present* (as directly given in intuition) yet empirically *manifested* ("we find," *finden*)––things with a kind of *weak facticity*––is possible and attainable. The methodical cognition of such things consists in an accruing concatenation of figures and figurations rather than mere reduction, abstraction, or transgression. Thus, reason supplements the irregularity of experience with a systematicity that *prolongs* the task of understanding by introducing a kind of continual plasticity. Empirical variations and differences are grasped not through an arbitrary leap or a simple claim of discontinuity, but through a modulated, gradual chain of figural deformations (circle→ellipse→hyperbola→parabola).

What is interesting here is how the ellipse, while indeed literal, becomes figural in the "business of the understanding." This is important because we tend to think of Kantian reason as subsumptive (continuity in a bad sense, engulfing differences). Indeed, this recursive and accumulative deduction of one figure out of another, making use of regulative principles that *suspend* each's singularity by assuming them "under a [*single*] principle of unity," is also named by Kant as a series of "conquests" [*Eroberungen*], a word with obvious politico-military connotations. The rhythmical cognition of celestial figures successively following each other is suddenly aggravated into *space warfare*: "from there we extend our conquests, seeking to explain all variations and apparent deviations from those rules on the basis of the same principle; finally we even add on more than experience can ever confirm […], [uniting] in their course the most remote parts of a world system, which for us is unbounded yet connected through one and the same moving force" (*CPR* 601). Here, we discern an irony in Kant's text: there seems to be a certain coloniality *inherent* in reasoning, which would open experientiality up to infinite speculative projections *ad absurdum*, a process in which the very singularity of the empirical is worn away. Thus, in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's compact mention of the ellipse-episode, reason is unable to access singularity: "It is more like grasping the narrative lineaments of the figure—in this case describing stage practice—and seeing its instantiation in work as theater. […] Circle after circle, perhaps the origin of geometry, ellipses, parabolas, asymptotes, this last giving a model of reason always operating by

approximation. And never access to a singularity. […] Such a reading of a figure will not yield the singularity of the event."[10]

Singularity, not approximated but really "captured"–– and yet Kant has said that the emphasis on singularity and differences may have already been motivated by the systematizing work of reason: "That there are absorbent earths of different species (chalky earths and muriatic earths) needed for its discovery a foregoing rule of reason that made it a task for the understanding to seek for varieties, by presupposing nature to be so abundant that it presumes them" (*CPR* 598). This, again, brings us to the figural use of reason as preparing a ground on which something can *appear*; the question that troubles the critical mind is: is such an appearance and visibility a ruse or a reality? In Kant, the differentiation of one figure from another is as much a *real* deviation (diversions and variations [*Verschiedenheiten*] *do* exist) as a work of "guessing" (*raten*, as Kant writes[11]) and co-implication (*CPR* 601):

> this continuity of forms is a mere idea, for which a corresponding object can by no means be displayed in experience, **not only** because the species in nature are really partitioned […] and if the graduated progress in their affinity were continuous, they would also have to contain a true infinity of intermediate members between any two given species, which is impossible; **but also** because we could make no determinate empirical use at all of this law, since through it there is indicated not the least mark of that affinity, or how and how far we are to seek the degrees of its variety; rather, we are given nothing more than a general indication that we are to seek for it. (*CPR* 600)

All in all, what is given is nothing but a feeble trace, an *allgemeine Anzeige*–– an *indication* not only of the impossibility (and absurdity) of any self-contained system, but also that the knower and the to-be-known, shorn of the assurance of the *real existence* of any "systematic unity," are nevertheless joined, or held in common (*allgemeine*), somewhere still-to-be-found, directed towards it by no pre-determined direction, inviting us to re-examine and re-imagine the notions of systematicity and empiricity altogether.

I am suggesting that we read Kant's mention of the ellipse miniaturely, in its trembling duality between the statuses of reality and hypothesis, distinguished here by "nothing" (the literal *is* already figural: the ellipse *is* an ellipse, yet already not one, thus being rhetorically elliptical): what if the ellipse does not merely defer singularity, but in fact structures its irruption as a generative (dis)figuration? That is, what if the ellipse manifests a kind of singularity not as a given moment, but as a relational event, as spacing, deviation, trembling? Kant's own gesture, i.e. deriving the ellipse not from the manifold of sense, but from the *figural exigency* of systematizing experience in order to initiate the possibility of knowing, suggests as much. The ellipse becomes less a failure of singularity and more a condition of appearance**.** The ellipse here, as in one of Derrida's earliest iterations of the

figure, originates in an initiatory or primal scene of suppositional differentiation, the ellipse being a figure of originary dispersion and differentiality––not an origin, but what redoubles it, "takes its place": "Once the center or the origin have begun by repeating themselves, by redoubling themselves, the double did not only add itself to the simple. It divided it and supplemented it. There was immediately a double origin plus its repetition. Three is the first figure of repetition. The last too, for the abyss of representation always remains dominated by its rhythm, infinitely."[12]

Proof and "guess-work," the two incommensurable foci of reasoning, bifurcating there where the unknown undeniably marks itself at the heart of the known, in which the empiricity of the "ellipse," manifestable by inference rather than reference, cannot be called merely speculative because it has already *indicated* an alteration of the spatio-structural imagination of the circle, which, as Kant reminds us, is itself unexamined ("still not fully corrected"). Thus, the ellipse mutates into a figure whose empiricity is ever-absent and always to come, as a figure of the ever-absenting yet ever-presenting *empiricity-to-come*.

We detour here back to D&G, availing ourselves of the (literal) figure of ellipse––which we retraced as *indicating* a structure of empiricity-to-come or systempiricity––to name the relation between the two thinkers: a relation remaining elliptical, oblique, non-frontal, speculative, yet-to-be-fleshed-out and yet-to-come, with no proof, syncopated by many ellipses, both rhetorical and experiential, both virtual and actual, both systematic and empirical––a relation of the "internally differential errance from circular perfection that remains obscure to classical perspective, recessed from view, as a result."[13] We will heed the systempiricity (neither purely empirico-biographical nor system-conceptual) thus obliquely "recessed from view" yet already com-plicating Derrida and Glissant *somewhere*, however unacknowledged and inappreciable. That is, the systempiricity of their dual *bodies*, constituting the dual foci around which we will revolve: their individual physical bodies, each singular and finite, each a mortal among other mortals; their bodies of work, the oeuvres and archives, both originating in French, yet circulating through all the languages of the world. Along the way, we will also be attentive to the very act of reading and writing, for we do not simply read the figure of ellipse/ellipsis, but ask how that figure complicates the sense in which an event is readable/unreadable, the division between which always inscribes a rhetorico-political exigency––or rather, anxiety.

An excerpt from Édouard Glissant's 1981 thesis *Le Discours antillais* opens Jacques Derrida's 1996 book *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* as its first epigraph. The passage is taken from the section "Langage et identité," which belongs to the recurring series "Repères," rhythmically interspersed between chapters as "stenographic" notes to be elaborated upon, while providing a contextual reality-check for the surrounding analysis. "Langage et identité" addresses specifically the problematic of language acquisition in the colonial

educational system: "Il est des vérités qu'il faut élucider quand on examine les problèmes de langage chez les jeunes Martiniquais scolarisés"; after this sentence, Derrida begins to quote Glissant's endemic "vérités":

> Le « manque » n'est pas dans la méconnaissance d'une langue (le français), mais dans la non-maîtrise d'un langage approprié (en créole ou en français). L'intervention autoritaire et prestigieuse de la langue française ne fait que renforcer les processus du manque.
>
> La revendication de ce langage approprié passe donc par une révision critique de la langue française […]
>
> Cette révision pourrait participer de ce qu'on appellerait un anti-humanisme, dans la mesure où le domesticage par la langue française s'exerce à travers une mécanique de l'« humanisme ».[14]

A series of silent excision, marked and unmarked, has taken place here in the epigraph, the unpaged beginning, *the beginning of the beginning* (that of Derrida's text, which began as a talk he delivered in 1992 at a colloquium hosted by Glissant at the Louisiana State University, probably their first encounter worthy of the name), beginning or "origin" redoubled. Let us note, then, the ellipsis in the middle passage:

Glissant	Glissant quoted by Derrida
La revendication de ce langage approprié passe donc par une révision critique de *l'emploi* de la langue française *en Martinique*	La revendication de ce langage approprié passe donc par une révision critique de la langue française […]

With an ellipsis, Derrida removes "*en Martinique*" (in Martinique); without any ellipsis, he elides altogether "*l'emploi*" (the "employment and use" of the French language, but also the "job and work" of it in Martinique: a forced appropriation, a language around which is the double genitive of "revendication"––an enforcement assuming and appropriating us, taking us towards itself and asserting *its* ownership of us, but also *to* which *we*, too, stake a claim and air our demands *of* appropriation). Not only *an* ellipsis, but a *doubled* ellipsis, *an ellipsis of the ellipsis*, is structuring this rare moment of frontal encounter between Derrida and Glissant––the elision revolving precisely around the empiricity of that which articulates (joins and joints) them systematically: not only the French language and the general structure of language as such, but a *colonially* controlled calculation and appropriation of that language and that structure: Derrida's Algeria, Glissant's Martinique.[15]

How to read and regard this *mise-en-abîme* ellipsis between the two foci of the ellipse, of D&G? Why does Derrida "dis-possess" Glissant's text of all its empirical determinations? One can tender here only several permissible

(and, why not, impermissible) readings, shuttling between *guess-work and proof.*

(1) One can read the ellipsis from the perspective of the rhetorico-spatio-temporal economy of publishing, writing, and argumentation (Kant has already mentioned the "economic" "interest" of reason). In order to make a *point*, Derrida has to prune the *lines* from Glissant, so as to re-concentrate them in alignment with a *new focus*, to simultaneously de-focalize and re-focalize, therefore redoubling the focus, necessitated by the expropriation and prosthetic grafting taking place here. It is, then, a play or dramaturgy of presence, or rather *presenting*: "dividing presence, eliding it and making it plural" ("ES" 94); an apparatus of appearance (making something present) in which the spatial logic *is* also a temporal logic.

Thus, the *rhythm* or speed of writing and analysis, specified by the singular occasion, is also decisive. At least two possibilities emerge here: *on one hand*, the preterition may be strategic on Derrida's part with regard to an economy and calculation of intention, attention, and memory, so that what has been elided and excluded *returns* with greater force when *re*-introduced. *On the other*, what is dis-regarded and eclipsed here is something to which Derrida does *not* have the time and space to return, the lack of which is attributable either to his intentionality, or the innate difficulty, immensity and irreducible singularity of that which is being evoked; in other words, it must be glided over and deferred for now. (This is a gesture Derrida tends to make in his talks, interviews, and writings, ever-increasingly publicized, attuned to new *rhythms* of techno-tele-communication: "Permit me an ellipsis here since I do not have much more time or space." "I gave up answering such an enormous question a while ago, but I'll try an elliptic answer, because it's impossible for me to say something short and clear."[16]) Derrida, thus deprived of the time and space *for* specification, deprives Glissant *of* Martinique's ineffable presence, specificity and locality. But "deprivation" falls short in describing what takes place here; if an ellipsis marks an alteration, it alters as much as it is altered: it not only cuts and deprives, but also prolongs and pluralizes. In Derrida's act of truncating and vacating, he can thus also *capitalize* [*capitaliser*] (one of his favorite words) on lack and loss, as another (surplus) time and space is simultaneously generated, and the blank or lack is seminal and generative: an emptied blank, a structural clearing for the empiricity-to-come, to be later filled with *his own* irreducible empirical specificity, his being the "most Franco-Maghrebian in the world," the singularity of which constitutes an exemplarity attesting just as well as Glissant's Martinique to the structuration of language and culture, namely the originary non-appropriation, shared, *however unevenly and asymmetrically*, by *both* the colonized *and* colonizer, the black *and* white:

> On the part of one who speaks or writes the aforementioned language, this experience of monolingual solipsism is never one of belonging, property, power of mastery, pure "ipseity" (hospitality or hostility) of

whichever kind. Though the "non-mastery … of an appropriated language" of which Glissant speaks qualifies, above all [*en premier lieu*], more literally and more sensitively, some situations [*des situations*] of "colonial" alienation or historical servitude, this definition, so long as it is imprinted with the requisite inflections, <u>also</u> carries well beyond these determinate conditions. It <u>also</u> holds for what would be called the language of the master, the *hospes*, or the colonist.[17]

Here, Derrida leaps "beyond … determinate conditions" imposed by the a priori asymmetrical framing of "colonization" (note the quotation marks around "colonial"), moving towards *the other colonization* that cannot be silenced or bracketed, coupling "colonization" and colonization with the dual occurrences of "also." The locality from which Glissant speaks is undoubtedly a *premier lieu*, primary and primarily exemplary, marked by brutal and poignant embodiment and literalization of the structural impossibility of auto-appropriation, perversely manifested and enacted by the system of colonial violence, both in Martinique, Algeria, and the metropolis of France.[18] Derrida concedes *adverbially*, in other words attitudinally and principally, the specificity of *this* colonial violence when he writes Glissant's analysis of Martinique "qualifies, above all, *more literally and more sensitively*" the case of linguistic-*qua*-existential "non-mastery." Yet, the partitive article in the plural *des* he employs (to bring back the elision of *l'emploi*) here to speak of *the* situation in Martinique folds it again back into the generalizability immanent to *each* self-contained example.

The very indefiniteness associated with *des* may thus divulge (1) a tautological bad faith or the commonplace of "bad" history (colonialism is colonialism insofar as it is colonialism, operative everywhere the *same* way), (2) the double bind of theorization and aporia of exemplarity (not that the Martinique situation is *not* singular, but its singularity is not an end-in-itself, for it is already structured by an iterability and generalizability, already inscribed into a systematicity overdetermined "elsewhere"), and (3) the possibility that the singularity of Martinique is kept intact in its entirety, in all aspects and all manners impracticable to enumerate and tabulate *here and now*; it is therefore foreshadowed and compressed to such a degree that only a climactic future unveiling will match its intensity; but this would then present a formidable task for *another* work altogether. The vacated Martinique can thus further figure, to use Rei Terada's terms (which have been elliptically guiding our reading of ellipse here), "the far end of the ellipse, where we cannot tell what happens" ("SoF" 244), as the actuvirtuality of what is deferred to, and constitutive of, *the other focus* remains indeterminate. As Nancy suggests, ellipsis may indeed inscribe not only a loss, but an irreversible *loss of loss* yielding no longer any plenitude correlative of loss-*qua*-opening: "It indicates that something else is subject to ellipsis, something we cannot and must not know. It lets us know that we are really and truly missing something" ("ES" 105).

A pair of parallactic or antinomic reading can be gleaned from here: Ellipsis is absolutely irresponsible and deprives the elided of its return. –– Ellipsis is the only responsible way in which one can do justice to that which is impossible to appear *here*, where its singularity, in being eclipsed, is resolutely *affirmed*. In his own (often elliptical, one is tempted to say even un-systematic, only to release the already-implied systempiricity) references to the figure of ellipse/ellipsis in other's texts, Derrida shows full awareness of this rhetorical economy.[19] However, this rhetorical economy of writing is gauged only within an economy of *reading*: the undecidability about ellipsis' being (ir)responsible is encased in a "criterion" (a system) up against which ellipsis is to be read and valorized as a *response* to some exigency of reading, or in other words, to a certain *pre*-established and already *pre*ferred reading, which only feigns the legitimacy of a "zero-degree" reason in and of itself.

Here I would like to detour once more, this time through Jacques Rancière's reading of Louis Althusser's ellipses, so as to return, as promised, to the rhetorico-political exigency/anxiety inhering in the division and decision between readability and unreadability, responsibility and irresponsibility––informing perhaps as much Derrida's reading of Glissant as my own of Derrida. So far we have been suggesting that ellipsis figures the modulation of the readability and unreadability of the given, a *valve* of appearance or appearing as it were (its being here or there, implicit or overt, invisible or visible etc.). The eclipsed question for Rancière, however, is no longer, as for Nancy, how a text is legible (makes "sense") only insofar as it has already read or repeated itself, withdrawing from, in order to return to, itself: "in order to be itself and to be present to itself," it "does not come back to itself" but rather moves circularly in which the circle "at once closes itself off and fails to do so," forming an ellipsis "like a mouth around its paired foci" from which a laughter bursts out: a laughter over the enjoyment of the self-differential body ("ES" 95, 96). Rancière discerns––"to dis-cern, strictly, means to see between [to glimpse, *entre*voir], it is barely to see, or to guess, in an ellipsis of the eye" ("ES" 107)––another eclipsed question, shifting the presence or coming-into-presence of a text into the other *socius*, no longer the single contingency of self-relation but the *double* contingency of reading: what is the relation (the [dis]continuity) between what *is* in the text and what *appears* from the text, between the text and the reading of it? In other words, what makes a text a priori legible or illegible, a foundational anxiety also tackled in the Kantian episode we read above?

For Althusser, per Rancière, the self-differentiality of the text *produces* (etymologically "*pro-ducere*, to lead forward, to make obvious what is latent"): it generates a response to one question, yet, in answering that question, it produces the answer to an-other question heterogenous to the initial field of legibility, visibility, or *respons*ibility: "It cannot see this answer since it answers a question that it did not ask [a question "it did not know it was answering"], that the very structure of the field forbids it from posing to

itself." [20] Althusser's typographical figure for these already-answered yet still-missing questions is "two parentheses enclosing a blank," and later, "dotted lines" or "ellipses" ("A" 133). For Rancière, the ellipsis constitutes now a site of knowledge production condensing a social *drama*, a structure of address, a pedagogical practice, as well as a "dramaturgy unique to the philosophical text": reading, a seemingly mute act, is seen to be structured as a dialogue, a complex relation between questions and answers, as "the relationship of the *seen* and of the *not-seen* must be specified as the relationship of an *answer* to a *non-question* […]" [21] ("A" 141, 133, emphasis original). The blanks opened by the ellipsis, wherein visibility is suspended, demarcate the place of the invisibles only *too visibly*; ellipsis summons their absence into a state of presence, demanding the formulation of "right" questions and answers. The distinctions between "absence" and "presence" thus lose their conceptual force, as we consistently confront nothing "but inclusion," perpetually creating and presupposing *community*. What is presumed, then, is an *omni*-presence that allows each text to be recognized as "a structure of knowledge," whereas knowledge is guaranteed by "the textual continuum, composed of answers and questions that are not matched, are still waiting to be matched" ("A" 136, 135).

In Rancière's reading, ellipsis feigns a non-relation, the presenting of which *as non-relation* has already marked it *as a relation*; better yet, by carving out a blank space, ellipsis precisely feigns a *relation*: "Always it poses relation as including non-relation and excluding the void" ("A" 142). The responsibility of *productive* reading––to restore the "right" questions (still missing) to the "right" answers (already found and offered)––is to induce a performative act, wherein one claims the restoration of an allegedly inherent legibility to the initial text, which is, in fact, *founded* by the new reading itself. In other words, it establishes its own legibility by purportedly discovering it within another text; its act of founding pretends to be an act of rediscovery, masking a claim of continuity in the guise of discontinuity. What is at stake is a peculiar readability-*qua*-reversibility, which doubles as a psycho-rhetorical mechanism of projective identification, whereby self-differentiality becomes indiscernible except as relational differentiality. Relationality or sociality veils an overwhelming solitude, if not sovereignty, and the pluralization of focus functions as both an acknowledgement of differentiality and a repudiation of it, since pluralization can indeed mask a form of polarization, akin to a psychotic split, all in an effort to conjure up "the proof, by evasion itself, that the exit is indeed at the end" ("A" 143). In the field of reading, Derrida has also discerned "a juridicosymbolic violence, a performative violence at the very heart of interpretative reading," inciting "temptations of deconstruction" vis-à-vis sociopolitical exigencies:

> Only the "to-come" [*avenir*] will produce the intelligibility or the interpretability of this law [*loi*]. […] the order of intelligibility depends in its turn on the established order which it serves to interpret. This

readability will then be as little neutral as it is nonviolent. A "successful" revolution, the "successful" foundation of a state (in somewhat the same sense that one speaks of a "felicitous performative speech act") will produce after the fact [*après coup*] what it was destined *in advance* to produce, namely, proper interpretative models to read in return, to give sense, necessity and above all legitimacy to the violence that has produced, among others, the interpretative model in question, that is, the discourse of its self-legitimation.[22]

What would a reading of ellipsis, an elliptical reading, be, when each act of reading or interpretation necessarily proceeds elliptically, (at)tempting to legitimate itself by differing from and deferring itself to a "to-come"? What leap was Derrida making when he eclipsed "Martinique," jumping from "colonization" to colonization, as though Glissant held the "right" answer to the "wrong" question, thus necessitating a re-marking of the latter's text? Was the ellipsis, as well as the quotation marks, delineating the place in which something is "suspended and at the same time placed in the space of its knowledge: a common space, even exemplarily common," a place of "an answer without a question, awaiting the identification of its question" ("A" 144), the *right* question that Derrida, driven by a particular *passion* for writing and reading, will ask and demand in its absence? And what if, as we have been suggesting, ellipsis is "as little neutral as it is nonviolent"?

(2) Yet the rhetorical economy of ellipse also eclipses and shrouds the other economy, bordering on, indeed, *the other of economy*. As Terada reminds us, Derrida often links the rhetorical ellipsis to the necessity of an autoimmune silence and reticence: "something, for Derrida, is preserved or kept safe autoimmunely by this objective reticence of terms he wants to call 'irreducible.' […] The language of irreducibility promotes preservation, even to the end of time: its tropes are figures of residue, excess, and rebound, on one hand, and ellipse, elusion, and secret, on the other. […] reticence, secrecy, and denegation respond to the fear of reduction" ("SoF" 244, 243). This is what Terada calls, after Derrida himself, his irreducible "scruples." Once more, Derrida is not unaware of the ambivalence of this rhetorical economy *and* its other, for he has avowed himself precisely (but this punctuating cadence of "precisely" is precisely the mark of calculation?) with a figure of *alteration* (a self-divided and -dividing ellipse): "the economy *or* the discretion of the ellipse with which one credits a writing."[23] Economy, *or* discretion, *or* scruples, is what prompts Derrida to employ (always strategically, therefore economically, against *another* economy) the ellipsis in the epigraph, concerning the singularity and specificity of Martinique and the employment/employing of the French language *there*, on the other shore, at the far end, of which he will speak only obliquely, of which he avoids speaking, which he prefers to let be, which also means that he, abiding by the "non-mastery" of the language of the other, refuses to reduce it to knowability, transparency, and "mastery" (all in all, so much can and has

been said, especially in Glissant's works, about *this* that Derrida remains respectful and *therefore* reticent).24 But obliqueness still remains in *relation* to a certain economy: "a strategy that is still crude, obliged to ward off what is most urgent, a geometric calculus for diverting as quickly as possible both the frontal approach and the straight line: presumed to be the shortest path from one point to another."25

Here is yet another parallax: ellipse is the figure of obliqueness and deacceleration, but it traces also the "shortest path" and a subtending, accelerating movement of traversal, oriented towards the *other* end, *the end of the Other* (the double genitive once again at work); it is *both* the preservation and guardianship of singularity and its imminence, *and* the reservation and capitalization of the latter's availability and activatability, always kept on the edge––at the *risk* of falling off the edge, the edge marking not simply a limit but a beginning, catastrophic: "the reserve of what is thus held in reserve, with difficulty [*à peine*; hardly, to pain], and with great difficulty, contained by the floodgate, a precarious floodgate that allows one to apprehend the catastrophe. The worst can happen at every turn" (*M* 47–48/80). Thus, ellipse conveys both a promise and a threat, inscribed by and inscribing the "horizonality" of horizon, that which is itself not a finite horizon yet, but that possibilizes the latter. Indeed, ellipse is constitutively a horizontal yet rhizomatic figure, elongating itself *before* acquiring depth—though not into an abyssal void:

> As soon as I speak, before even formulating a promise, an expectation, or
> a desire *as such*, and when I still do not know what will happen to me or
> what awaits me at the end of a sentence, neither *who* nor *what* awaits
> whom or what, I am within this promise or this threat [*menace*]––which,
> from then on [*dès lors*], gathers [*rassemble*] the language [*la langue*]
> together […] thus gathered together in its very dissemination. (*M* 21–
> 22/42–43, emphasis original)

At the far end of the ellipse, where the language is assembled and reassembled, from and towards which the language rebounds, there exists not yet a determinate horizon. Language *re*-bounds (on itself, on us); it is the experience of limits, the passion of limits: "To appeal to the limit is not to set out to conquer a territory. It is not to lay claim to boundaries or borders […] to demand the limit as such is to demand what cannot be appropriated. It is to demand nothing, an infinite exposition which takes place at the limit, the abandonment to this space without space that is the limit itself" ("ES" 95). The retreating and disseminating traces of this horizonless horizon, spaceless space, limitless limit, *from then on*, *from there*, vector and orient me, employing the double revendication of which we spoke earlier.

If, with the ellipsis, Derrida veils Glissant's Martinique (appearing at the *end* of the sentence) and immerses its singularity (*ce* <u>langage</u> *approprié*) in the irreducibility and indivisibility of *the* French language itself (*la* <u>langue</u>

française), has he not also de-specified French, in emphasizing its being-language-ness, its being *one* language––even though there is no such thing, if only because it has always been self-divided into *langage* and *langue*[26]––amongst all the languages in the world, here (where? US? France? Algeria?) as well as there (Martinique?), *everywhere*? For the reticence about Martinique *here*, in the epigraph exemplifying "une révision critique de la langue française," also subtly obscures the reticence about *all the other languages in the world* that Derrida nevertheless addresses: the second epigraph from Abdelkebir Khatibi, juxtaposed with Glissant, is about language as such: "Là, une naissance à la *langue* […]." What gathers Derrida's language here, *from then on*, that is to say from the pluralized beginnings of beginning (the epigraphs), is the ellipsis at the heart of the empirical as its systempiricity––each beginning a "random" point of entrée, resulting precisely from, or constituting, a decision that can never self-justify: "the randomness of place and moment, the simple facticity of discerning. The *incipit* gives the origin and the principle of the system in the register of the empirical" ("ES" 108, emphasis original).[27] Thus, between here and there, between *langage* and *langue*, between Martinique and the world, between French and language-as-such, is this irreducible and undecidable––therefore infinitely complex, inextricable, unsimplifiable, and *generative*––duality, this infinite nearness or distance that must be preserved and reserved, for "justice" rather than justification.

Perhaps this is the reason why Derrida proffers ellipse/ellipsis as the figure for the experience of democracy at the opening of *Voyous*. "Between the 'minus one' and the 'more than one,' democracy perhaps has an essential affinity with this turn or trope that we call the ellipsis. The elliptical sending would arrive by e-mail, and we would read: 'The democracy to come: it is necessary that it give the time there is not.'"[28] Here––because we find ourselves *here* empirically "in the mortality of a day, in the undeniable finitude of the ephemeral" (Ibid.)––is bound to the traces of what is *not* here yet surrounding here, the "lack" of "minus-one," minus-here; but precisely because of that, "more than one" focus (the focus "there is not") is given, transcribing the singular self-relation of *here* as the duality between *here* and *not-there*: "ici et non là, là et non ici" (*M* 47/80). Ellipse: a spacing, then, infinitely generating and creating more spaces and *turns*, rendering the empirical reality *hospitable*, carving room for unsolicited and uninvited guests-to-come, who will host *us*.

Ici et non là, là et non ici. Will we have thus folded what is *there* back into its not-being-here, and consequently, into being-here? Yet the there, insofar as it is this horizonality without horizon, directionality without direction, parallel to that rigorous, severe, and desert-like [*désertique sévérité*] messianicity "shorn of everything" prior to all messianisms (*M* 68/128), is not just *there*; it is contaminated and effectuated by another reversibility (*dès lors*), no longer the one guaranteeing self-relation and self-legibility, but a

transformability. As Julia Ng writes, each act of meaning-making relies on a certain reversibility: the ability to circularly relate to itself. However, by thus claiming self-identity as the source of meaning, it simultaneously disrupts the spatiotemporal hierarchy between the "original" and the "secondary," the initiatory party seeking for relating and "the related." This reversibility-*qua*-legibility introduces then "a structural indeterminacy of the text, an 'undecidability' that haunts all forms of founding and conserving meaning" ("UR" 12). Reversibility therefore needs to appear *as* irreversibility in order to regulate the hierarchy of appearance in favor of a sovereignty before oneself: a reversal of reversal, then, which entails the reinforcing of "presence *as* presence—lending the sort of reversibility found within it […] a peculiar quality of conservation, of irreversibility" ("UR" 29, emphasis original), paradoxically tying the possibility of self-identity to that of self-differentiality while sustaining the semblance of reversibility between the two. However, another reversibility is also at play, in which one party and its counterpart, initially engaged in a mutually incongruent or heterogenous relation on one register, suddenly becomes coupled in a reversibility; this connection has already been established and realized *elsewhere*, on another register, in another place, even though the perceptibility and experientiality of this "elsewhere" are deemed illegible by the former register, which is alleged to be the sole parameter of and for reality. "At minimum," then, the establishment of a different order of reality or totality by separating it into two regions––two foci, namely, the legible and illegible––also "renders an illegibility newly legible *as* an illegible source" ("UR" 33, emphasis original).[29]

The ellipsis of D&G around "Martinique," therefore, also marks the effect of this *other* reversibility, whereby the there––deemed somehow illegible, distant, phantasmatical, barely perceptible according to the "context" onto which it is grafted here––is inscribed and initiated into another sense of a *duality* of there and here, one no longer based upon the calculus of presence and absence, nearness and distance, part and whole, means and ends, even particularity and universality, *even though that language remains*; it inhabits instead the "tasteless" if not "unthinkable" site of the nonuniversal, "the nonparticular and the antisingular," which *cannot* maintain its purity and *cannot not* become appropriated by "the universal"[30]:

> – […] We are there [*Nous y sommes*].

> – Do you mean we belong among them [*Nous en sommes*]?

> – Who, upon reading and understanding us properly, here [*ici*] …

> – Here?

> – … or there [*ou là*], will dare to have someone believe the opposite? Who would dare claim to prove it? Being here [*Que nous soyons ici*: That we are here] in an element of which the spectral phantasmaticity *cannot, under any circumstances, be reduced* does not imply that political and

historical terror is alleviated on that account, quite the contrary. For there are situations, experiences, and subjects who are, precisely, in a *situation* (but what does *situating* mean in this case?) to testify exemplarily to them. *This exemplarity is no longer reducible to that of an example in a series.* Rather, it would be the exemplarity––remarkable and remarking––that allows one to read in a more dazzling, intense, or even *traumatic* manner the truth of a universal necessity. […] It is reality itself […]. (*M* 25–26/48–49, emphasis on "[ir]reducibilities" mine, otherwise original)

Yes, yes. The politico-historico-colonial terror or trauma is *not* one example among many; its singularity––the singularities of life––resists mere substitution, which would be a poignant and *literal* mistake: traffic(k)ing humans as text within the general economics of metaphorics, abstracting and reducing the existential to *nothing but* the symbolic. Yet, the very appearance of irreversibility and irreplaceability projected by these various forms of institutionalized violence is *also* the means through which they justify, legitimize, and consecrate themselves, closing off the transformability and plasticity inhering in each reversal-*qua*-traversal in the name of a spatiotemporal irreversibility that asserts historicity as an unilinear catastrophe: by adopting the violence that seemingly destroys and violates laws and claiming, in turn, the irrefutable exigency for restoration, they mimetically duplicate the "law-positing violence in respect to violence that asserts and conserves itself in the guise of law" ("UR" 31), passing violence off––legitimizing its own historicity as the only source of historicity––as the sole parameters of and for justice. Indeed, it is through bringing out this "universal," paradigmatic, originary relation between the unfounded foundation of law and violence, that Derrida arrives at *an-other* undecidability, totally other to the horizon of law, namely: justice, impossible. *From then on*, one begins to ask, "at minimum": whence "the reliance of conservativism on violence that asserts and perpetuates itself in the moral sphere and in the guise of law," "the inseparability of the conservation of legal violence from its appearance as irreplaceable and irreversible"? ("UR" 33)

Thus, the "there" ("Martinique") *is* already "here" ("Algeria"); their unsubstitutability is reversible on *another* register––that of "systempiricity," irreducible to the (ir)reducibility of singular empiricities. The ellipse of "there" testifies not to a post-racial, or even post-colonial reality, but "la réalité même," reality itself: not a transcendental purity, but an *empiricity-to-come*. The excess of the empirical is no longer to be projected as the *excess of the political* (both in the sense of a hindrance to constructing political unity, and the lack of necessity for political organization due to self-sufficiency of empirical succulences); the singular empiricities––abounding, unbounded–– will continue to evade, elude, appropriate, and be bestowed with different names, names that seek to provide a measure, a *demand*, for totality.[31] "La réalité même," then, is not somewhere abstractly outside *this* world, but definitely outside the order of coloniality and colonialism that strives to

totalize itself into the sole parameter, the sole determinate horizon, for and of reality. The lesson of deconstruction consists not, or not only, in the dazzlement of the kind of fetishistic (dis)avowal, at best neutralizing, at worst apologetic, such as "All culture is originarily colonial" (*M* 39/68),[32] but rather, as in many of Derrida's later works (on monolingualism, hospitality, forgiveness, etc.), how that "universal" and paradigmatic structure already calls for, implies, and actualizes its inverted antinomy, equally phantasmatic, which means equally *real*: *No culture is originarily colonial*. What renders such a reversal possible is, therefore, neither culture, nor coloniality, but a systempirical *something* which "does not do nothing," despite (because of) the imminence of its empiricity-to-come; there, not here, yet not fictive at all, already empirically at work in *everything* (suggesting that we may need to reconceptualize empiricity altogether).[33]

Is Derrida's *desert* the figure for this somewhere else, arid, barren, un-conditioned, yet a "structural opening," an enigmatic *as-such* perhaps misleadingly termed "universal," non-assimilable to anything yet giving rise to everything, and "reversible," in the sense that it *can* be glimpsed from *everything*, however obliquely? (For Rancière, Althusser's "madness" stems from the fear of the desert, "fear of speaking in the wilderness, the fear of the letter without addressee" ["A" 145]. Althusser *must* ensure an addressee in the text––and who else but the text "itself"? The ellipsis then becomes a spectral playmate, or a toy, conjured up to alleviate the solitude of writing.)

"A Judeo-Franco-Maghrebian genealogy does not clarify everything, far from it. But could I explain anything without it, ever? No, nothing, […] of what isolates me in a kind of almost involuntary retreat, a desert that I sometimes have the illusion of 'cultivating' by myself, of surveying *like* a desert […] what little taste, but also what 'ethics,' what 'politics'!" (*M* 71–72/133, emphasis original)

[…]

Perhaps, to cite (Derrida's citation of Glissant, my own citations of Kant, etc.) is to be entangled in a kind of systempiricity: not merely to resort to the legitimacy and authority of the other's words as an "origin," nor merely to discover oneself in the other (the inability to recognize, as we have mentioned, self-differentiality except as relational differentiality). To cite is to introduce an ellipse, elliptical, with all its ambiguity.

Nothing takes place in the ellipsis. Everything takes place in the ellipsis. In vacating and withholding Glissant's "Martinique" *from* and *at* the far end of the ellipse/ellipsis, Derrida exerts his discretion by way of obscuring and (fore)shadowing, soliciting a careful reading that is at best vigilant, at worst trivial, if not boring (as the one practiced *here*). Which is the case, and what

takes place within the ellipsis, we cannot pre-emptively, nor even retrospectively, say. Or know. Who can speak in and for the ellipse? No one is forbidden from appropriating it. Before itself, the ellipse is already other to itself, figuring not so much sovereignty as an a priori disenfranchisement. Yet, undecidability endures; the untold, the unknown, *is* not fictive: "If it occurs at all, it happens out of sight, at the far end of the ellipse, where we can't see and don't know; it occurs, if at all, in the ellipsis of the sentence, something untold. […] Only experience can answer that question, and we are not standing at the end of time—a perspective to which any claim of reducibility or *irreducibility* must leap" ("SoF" 256, 253, emphasis original).

What if one wishes to give an *account* of and a *reason* to the ellipsis, employing not only proving and analyzing of a logocentric kind, but also narrating and storytelling (*relating*), either to legitimate or denounce the ellipsis? Making the two shores of the marine ellipsis perfectly converge on a ground, a landmass, filling in the ellipse only to make it collapse, in the hope of ending the infinite speculation around what appears to be merely a textual accident—a contingency for which no reasoning will suffice, and no proof and evidence can saturate, a contingency remaining, insatiable? Yet, "Si la clôture n'est pas la fin, nous avons beau protester ou déconstruire":[34] Not only "If closure is not end, we protest or deconstruct in vain," but also: we may *as well* protest or deconstruct, we *nevertheless* protest or deconstruct, we protest or deconstruct *despite everything*, regardless of failure or success. Yes, yes. This essay has been imbued with the spirit of that simultaneous resoluteness and surrender.

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1 Transcriptions of two dialogues exist: "Fragments d'une discussion," transcribed by F. Gaillard and S. Regazzoni, *Annali della Fondazione Europea del Designo (Fondation Adami)* 2 (2006): 105–112; "Dialogue entre Édouard Glissant et Jacques Derrida, Le 6 novembre 1993 à Strasbourg (Parlement international des écrivains)," edouardglissant.world/lieux/jacques-derrida-edouard-glissant/ (accessed Dec 4, 2023).

2 Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2006), 4, 29.

3 The figure of ellipse/ellipsis has been fleshed out in two elegiac articles from 2007, in which the authors mourn and inherit Derrida's irreducible legacy: Rei Terada, "Scruples, or, Faith in Derrida," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 2 (2007): 237–264; Victor Li, "Elliptical Interruptions: Or, Why Derrida Prefers *Mondialisation* to Globalization," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 7, no. 2 (2007): 141–154. I also followed the elliptical map bequeathed by the late Lauren Berlant, who assembled a small archive of ellipsis (Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jacques Rancière) and promised their own study of that figure, which would foreground "the internal activity of the scene of animated suspension" rather than the "circular temporalities in the relation of *x* metaphysical concept to its supplement." See "Starved," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2007): 443n16.

4 "The Deconstruction of Actuality," in *Negotiations, Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 86.

5 Glissant, "Rethinking Utopian," in *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, trans. Celia Britton (Liverpool University Press, [1996] 2020), 111. Alexandre Leupin has illuminated the "non-systematic system" or the impulse for systematization in Glissant, see *Édouard Glissant, Philosopher: Heraclitus and Hegel in the Whole-World*, trans. Andrew Brown (Albany: SUNY Press, [2016] 2021).

6 Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality," 86.

7 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Elliptical Sense," trans. Jonathan Derbyshire, in *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 108. Abbreviated "ES."

8 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 220. Abbreviated *CPR*. Michel Foucault's famous admonition concerning the aporetic "strange empirico-transcendental doublet" called "Man" "in the analytic of finitude" historicizes the tension between the transcendental and empirical (rewriting Kant's "transcendental illusion" as an empirico-anthropological illusion) and may offer a powerful critique of the colonial appropriation of that tension—which no critique, however, will definitively *close off*. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, [1966] 2002), 347–358.

9 For the German, see *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1956), 619–620.

10 "Learning from de Man: Looking Back," *boundary 2*, no. 3 (2005): 22.

11 "The comets show an even greater variety in their paths, since (as far as observation reaches) they do not ever return in a circle; *yet we guess at a parabolic course for them*, since it is still akin to the ellipse and, if the major axis of the latter is very long, it cannot be distinguished from it in all our observations." (*CPR* 601)

12 "Ellipsis," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 295, 299; "L'ellipse," in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967). Many words weaving the

poeticity that flares up in this early Derrida's text can be retrospectively and anachronistically termed "Glissantian"—yet, shouldn't this indicate, much more than something like their "intertextuality," the systempiricity of the French language shared and divided between them? "The joyous wandering [*errance*] of the *graphein* then became wandering without return [*sans retour*]. The opening into the text was adventure, expenditure without reserve" (294); "The labyrinth, here is an abyss [*abîme*]: we plunge into [*s'enfonce dans*] the horizontality of a pure surface, which itself represents itself from detour to detour [*de détour en détour*]." (298)

[13] Terada, "Scruples, or, Faith in Derrida," 247. Abbreviated "SoF."

[14] Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard [1981] 1997), 575, quoted in Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), unpaged.

[15] As Glissant's text proceeds (beyond the point at which Derrida ceases to quote), the anti-humanism (pertaining to the "L'élève martiniquais," but also "comme tout élève partout ailleurs"), which disrobes the quotation-mark of that colonially imposed "humanism," belying it, is not the scientific anti-humanism of the Althusserian moment in French intellectual history; rather, it is manifested as a Fanonian, visceral, proto-political spontaneity, whereby the Martinican student splits off from the French language, neurotically repressing and sectorizing it, deeming it irrelevant. This resistant, experiential anti-humanist non-synthesis is thus only partially revolutionary, because it cannot function except by repressing *another* anti-humanism: the constitutive *socius* between language and the human, from which the unexamined specificity (auto-affectivity) of the human is suspended (a task Derrida embarks upon in *Monolinguisme*); hence the necessity to critically *passe par*—"pass through," with all its Hegelian and dialectical implications—the French language, rather than simply circumventing it (Ibid., 575–576):

> L'élève martiniquais, comme tout élève partout ailleurs, pratique de manière spontanée un tel anti-humanisme, avec l'inconvénient de le subir sans l'élucider, et le désavantage irrémédiable de le greffer sur une irresponsabilité qui sectorise la connaissance (« qu'est-ce que tout cela peut bien avoir à faire avec nous ? »).

> Par là le jeune Martiniquais renonce à un pouvoir de synthèse dont l'absence n'est pas compensée par une explosion de spécificités. La pensée est figée en lieux communs réducteurs et en facilités complaisantes, qui n'en laissent pas moins vive la pulsion de résistance, dès lors névrosée. Mais cette pulsion est elle-même une « tendance libératrice », marginalisée.

[16] Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, [1986] 1989), 229; *Ethics, Institutions, and the Right to Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Peter Pericles Trifonas (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 34.

[17] Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 22–23; *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*, 44. Abbreviated *M*.

[18] We need yet to examine to what extent colonialism is a project of literalization, the barring of metaphoricity or displacement of actualization, germinal to the obstinate literality of the stifled cry of empirical defiance.

[19] E.g.: "Economy dictated by publishing exigencies" in "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone [1996]," trans. Samuel Weber, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 76; "A marvel of elliptical simplification, not to say distressing simple-mindedness, the more so when one knows that this economy conceals enormous exegetic problems, hermeneutic debates still open despite the libraries and the institutions growing rich by them by the day" in "Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German [1989]," trans. Moshe Ron, in *Acts of Religion*, 165.

20 "Althusser, Don Quixote, and the Stage of the Text," in *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1998] 2004), 132. Abbreviated "A."

21 For Rancière, famously, this is the Althusserian pedagogical drama perpetuating inequality in the very name of an attainable equality, in which the dotted lines mark "the presence of the teacher in his absence" and the parentheses "appropriate the absence produced by suppressed dotted lines. [...] Their curve outlines the chalice of actual absence that gives the text its invisible quality, transforms the missing word into a missing concept, that is to say transforms, by means of lack, the word into concept." (134)

22 Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority' [1990, 1994]," trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Acts of Religion*, 271, 270, emphasis original. I am indebted to Julia Ng's inspiring reading of this convoluted essay as well as the thematization of reversibility in Derrida's oeuvre (to which I will return): "Undecidability and Reversibility," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 21, vol. 1 (2021): 11–35. Abbreviated "UR."

23 Derrida, "Passions: 'An Oblique Offering' [1992]," trans. David Wood, in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 11, emphasis XZ.

24 Terada, "SoF," 259: "Although Derrida radicalizes the secret so that it is what cannot be told, it may be more important that there are things that Derrida does not wish to say."

25 Derrida, "Passions," 14.

26 Glissant, *Le Discours antillais*, 401: "(J'appelle langage une pratique commune, pour une collectivité donnée, de confiance ou de méfiance vis-à-vis de la langue ou des langues qu'elle utilise.)"

27 Gratitude to Grant Farred for this "point of entrée" (a vivid term of his, with all its gastronomic implications) as well as for his telepathic reading of my essay, attentive to the many ellipses here and there. I also thank Roshon S. Nandhra for his comments, and Joséphine Haillot for training me in reading the succulences of French.

28 Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [2003] 2005), 1.

29 Perhaps this offers a new reading of our watchword (in Grant Farred's classroom) "there is no constitutive outside," in that an outside, however illegible and impermissible, is opened up for us precisely by its exclusion and exile from our *horizon*. It is important not to confuse this "outside" (although the *risk* persists) with an intact comfort zone, often mobilized as a governing idea and idealization; instead, it persists as *an-other source* of struggle and thinking, consistently reminding us that the current order is *not* a total order and cannot be totalized into the sole source of our reality principle. What needs to be hammered home each time is that the phantasmaticity—that is, the reality—of "an-other source" is *not fictive*: "As long as this reticent moment veils the action of the two, an action that might otherwise seem to lose one in the other or each in the other, we cannot conclude that the terms of the opposition are fictive." (Terada, "SoF" 256)

30 This triple negation affirms the fourth corner of the Greimas square, schematized by Fredric Jameson in "An American Utopia," in *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 12.

31 Here, let me gesture towards the ongoing debates on Glissant's *Kehre* from politics (*Le discours antillais*) to the aesthetic (*Poétique de la Relation*). I would register these as dialectics between the prescriptive and the descriptive, or more generally, between the figural and the literal (which is another concern of my essay). The contrast between Peter Hallward and Nick Nesbitt (influenced by the militancy of Alain Badiou) and John E. Drabinski (more attentive to the self-realized literality and materiality of the Caribbean, e.g. its "geography") is exemplary. At this stage, I suggest that these debates have given rise to a valuable "third" site for political thought,

even as the contrasting parties seem to be interlocked within a dialectical impasse: the phase Glissant theorized as the resistant "non-synthesis" (Cf. n15 above). I would also suggest the necessity of supplementing Glissant with Marx, and of attending to the always-missing copula between politics and aesthetics, namely, economics, capital (as well as gender, in which regard Max Hantel has offered a powerful critique) in the tirades around Relation's politicality. Indeed, around Marx, another ellipsis between Derrida and Glissant may be staged, at the moment when Derrida evokes Glissantian terms (transparency, opacity, relation) to analyze the spectrality of commodity and reason in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, [1993] 1994), 154.

[32] This sentence leads Rey Chow—who underscores how Derrida, in being *too much* attuned to the temporalization of the to-come, foregrounds what is "not yet fully knowable" and thus risks completely burying historical inequities—to wonder whether, in making such an *equalizing* move, Derrida is implying something even more unsettling if not unacceptable: that the very justice-oriented project of redressing, of "egalitarianism as such should simply be abandoned, that even if it may seem to be a form of utopianism, it is a bad form—an oppressive sameness, intrinsic to all human culture, from which we should strive to be free?" "Derrida's Legacy of the Monolingual," in *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2014), 29, 32. Sympathetic to Chow's formidable reading, I read the radical "sameness" nevertheless differently, as something reinstated *elsewhere* than in the innate coloniality of (human) culture, or to be more precise, in the *aporia* of justice. Again, one must not deem a priori that this counterintuitive, perhaps even unimaginable, aporia is fictive.

[33] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 97.

[34] Derrida, "L'ellipse," 429; "Ellipsis," 294.

Open Boat Blues

Glissant and Caribbean Diaspora

Jay Rajiva
University of Saskatchewan

> where　　s the pin /　　t pot of ale sin /　　g for me an aria
>
> M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*

How does the musical genre of the blues complicate diaspora narratives that inadvertently privilege Eurocentric aesthetic models of diasporic experience? How might we find formal evidence of the blues in Martinican poet-philosopher Edouard Glissant's work on migration? And in what ways does Glissant lend a Caribbean inflection to this blues-based diasporic thinking? In what follows, I attempt to "creolize" diaspora theory by reading Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* through the lens of blues music. Reframing Glissant as a blues thinker is not evidence that he is teaching readers a "blues lesson," the term Daniel Barlow uses to describe literary moments when characters explicitly connect the blues to their own diasporic experience.[1] Nor do I intend to link Glissant to one specific blues artist. Rather, this essay suggests that Glissant gives us a literary rendering of blues aesthetics, by which the experience of diasporic movement to and from the Caribbean can become recognizable, legible, and finally, *listenable*.

Scholars in diaspora studies have acknowledged the need to expand their theoretical approaches to account for cultural differences in the experience of migration. Since William Safran's now-classic work on homeland and return, concepts such as voluntary dispersal,[2] convivial culture,[3] transnational diaspora,[4] and diaspora space[5] have enlarged how scholars conceive of the relationship between migration and culture. However, while diasporic theory emphasizes multiplicity, its unconscious reliance on Eurocentric aesthetic models presents a problem when analyzing literary representations of postcolonial diaspora. This limitation shapes how diasporic experiences of arrival, return, "settling" in a host country, and forced displacement can be understood. This issue is particularly acute in representations of Caribbean migration, given its well-documented historical, cultural, and aesthetic hybridity.

If the Middle Passage marks Caribbean experience by difference and loss, it also gives rise to an allusive, anti-essentialist ontology in which experience is by definition indirect. Instead, this abyssal experience "emerges not as a clean break between past and present but as a spatial continuum between Africa and the Americas, the ship's deck and the hold, the Great House and the slave quarters, the town and the outlying regions."[6] As liminal event and space, it has compelled responses from Caribbean writers across different generations:

> Essentialism—the Middle Passage as defined by British imperial historians and writers like Naipaul ("nothing was created in the West Indies"), digging a chasm between Africa and the Americas; the racial essentialism of negritudinists such as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sedar Senghor; the construction of a monolithic Africa outside of history by Afrocentrists from Marcus Garvey to Molefi Kete Asante—must defer to hybrid theoretical perspectives. Edouard Glissant sets his dynamic notion of antillanite, a system of multiple interrelated cultures, against the sterility of negritude; Paul Gilroy examines the discourse of the Atlantic world, touching the Americas, Great Britain, and Africa, thus challenging the one-sidedness of Afrocentric discourse.[7]

Visibility, attachment, contiguity, intersection, distance: all gain new valences in the Caribbean, where the archipelagic geography itself puts the referential idioms of diaspora studies under erasure. In other words, a series of Caribbean nations, some separated by bodies of water, others sharing land mass on a given island expanse, might be in a position to trouble the conceptual integrity of the intersection, on the one hand, and the visibility of measuring diasporic experience, on the other. This troubling of monolithic geography, culture, and experience compels us to attend to Caribbean diaspora in its specificity.

Avtar Brah correctly takes issue with the field's tendency to place undue emphasis on mobility, leading to the view "that roots are foregrounded at the expense of roots."[8] Brah's riposte, that "diasporas are simultaneously about 'space' and 'place,'" that juxtaposes "genealogies of dispersal with those of 'staying put,'"[9] which underscore difference as a key component of diaspora space. For Brah, diasporic difference emerges along four axes: social relations, emphasizing structural forms of oppression; subjectivity, which takes a linguistic and deconstructionist approach to experience as "fragmented and continuously in process"; identity, which like subjectivity is "always in process"; and experience, which Brah frames as a "cultural construction [as well as] the site of subject formation."[10] These axes, far from being discrete categories, draw our attention to what she refers to as "modalities of asymmetrical power,"[11] which share similar features with intersectionality and which likewise must be articulated as such, one through the other. "What are the pains and pleasures of a specific cluster of diasporicity?" Brah asks, "What type of social and cultural life does a diasporic group create within the

historical circumstances it faces?"[12] Under what conditions do the "intimacies of everyday life — kinship bonds, friendships, relations of conviviality, neighbourliness, collegiality, inter-connections of love" take shape within "homes" that are frequently marked by a lack of safety?[13] Brah's thought relies on a fundamentally Foucauldian notion of power relations in diaspora, wherein the "dispersal of bodies, cultures, imaginaries — is inscribed by the multiple modalities of power constituted in the play of different markers of communication."[14]

Disposing of the sum of Brah's excellent framework, though, still leaves a remainder, something uncaught by a quantifiable and empirical focus on social relations, subjectivity, identity, and experience. Culture might be folded into social relation, or as identity, but leaves a "submarine" trace[15] of something uncaught in historical and empirical frames of reference. Diaspora studies, we might thus say, tends to privilege the visible, relying on positivist markers of experience when theorizing the experiences of migration and movement. Against this tendency, I read Glissant's recourse to diversion, in part through the interpretive work of John E. Drabinski, as evidence of his preoccupation with thresholds as a form of experience that transcends and complicates the visible. Subsequently, I establish a conceptual linkage between diversion and detour, in Glissant's terms, and the blues technique of worrying the line — lyrical repetition with frequently subtle and incremental difference — in the larger cultural frame of blues-oriented aesthetics, drawing on the work of Amiri Baraka and Daniel Barlow. Finally, I offer a reading of Glissant's "destructuring" impulse as evidence of what I call his "open boat blues," a sustained aesthetic commitment to repetition and indirection that surfaces in his thought on errantry and rerouted movement as a blue "cry." To conceptualize Glissant as a blues thinker is to extend the blues beyond essentialist cultural categories, demonstrating its potency as a narrative frame for migration and movement. In so doing, I position Glissant's open boat blues as a uniquely Caribbean inflection of what it means to move in and through diasporic spaces.

Against the Direct Statement

Circumspection connotes secrecy, the need to preserve something through indirect means, which frequently requires *diversion*, sleight of hand, a turning of the eye toward what is more obviously "in view." But the act of diversion, Glissant reminds us, is impossible "when a nation is already formed": that is, when "internal or class conflicts" have reached some kind of resolution, however imperfect, in both national structure and public life. To divert, in a specifically Martinican context, is neither "self-inflicted blindness nor a conscious strategy of flight in the face of reality."[16] It is rather, he suggests, a strategy of resistance:

Diversion is the ultimate resort of a population whose domination by an Other is concealed: it must then search *elsewhere* for the principle of domination, which is not evident in the country itself: because the system of domination (which is not only exploitation, which is not only misery, which is not only underdevelopment, but actually the complete eradication of an economic entity) is not directly tangible. Diversion is the parallel displacement of this strategy.[17]

Witness the double reproduction of diasporic melancholia: an *elsewhere* in both geography and lived experience, infused with the elsewhere of power dispersal, something not "directly tangible," which thus demands a similarly indirect response, a "parallel displacement." Oppression and its response refuse clear visibility. This refusal spills over into language, directing our attention to its subversive origins in the experience of the enslaved subject, who turns reduction "to a childish babble" into something "systematic" to confound the enslaver. Creole, here, contains and reproduces "the derisive nature of its formation."[18] In a framework of visibility, Creole syntax appears to be naive but is not, Glissant argues, since the diversion of its apparently simplistic syntax is analogous to African American responses to enslavement and later segregation, "lisping, slurring, jibberish": in other words, camouflage.[19] And of course, the very point of camouflage is to blend in, conceal oneself as a threat, and get around the demands of a hostile environment in which "speech was forbidden" and the enslaved were forced to disguise "the word under the provocative intensity of the scream."[20] More broadly, the archipelago refutes clear visibility; distances are not easily measurable at ground level; and the water itself is an indelible reminder of the dangers of movement, of enslavement and forced migration, all of which "draws upon the interconnected topographies and colonial geographies of the Caribbean, in which the islands are not viewed in isolation but are understood as physical and cultural spaces that are inherently interactive and responsive to one another."[21]

Reading Glissant's *La Cohée du Lamentin,* John E. Drabinski observes a similar refutation of the visible in the triple movement from shoreline to Plantation to City, a movement marked by betweenness, and irregularity, ending in what Glissant calls "urban diffraction."[22] Drabinski modulates Glissant's phrase into a diffraction of light, "which modifies light in contact with the borders and surfaces (not interiors) of opaque bodies," then uses it to describe creolization as a mode of passage that defies "conventional models of transition." This is a modulation worth dwelling on. It alerts us to the surface orientation of Glissant's intellectual thought, an orientation that is of course not superficial but profoundly immersed in a radical critique of the surface-depth paradigms that dominate so much western thought. Anxiety over what lies "beneath the surface" is a colonial anxiety, no doubt, and one Glissant rehearses precisely in order to foreground the epistemology, the western thought that makes every object a thing of depth to be broken down,

surveyed, assessed, and ultimately controlled. Surface impressions in colonial discourse are skin deep, are therefore not to be trusted. If the very word, transition, "*promises* (even if it cannot realize) the realization of what is prior in what is later," its successor or replacement, creolization, encapsulate "the logic of thinking the past and present, the ruin, really, in an interval to the future."[23]

Glissant's "resistance to visibility" puts the Caribbean at the centre of experience, "keeps creolization and Relation in motion."[24] It becomes uniquely Caribbean when considering *la pensée archipelagique* that shapes Glissant's articulation of movement and migration, most notably in opacity, the gathering together, Drabinski suggests, of "ethics, epistemology, [and] ontology in one and the same event." For Drabinski, opacity obtains in four ways. First, in what he consistently refers to as shoreline thinking, or "an original opacity that gives the future after arrival and out of catastrophic loss." Second, in an anticolonial and "revolutionary" mode "outside the limits of the colonial gaze."[25] Third, in the creolization of language. And fourth, as the "constituting condition" of Relation, Glissant's master concept of continuous transformation. In this fourth valence, opacity resists "the close of knowledge," generates "a new imaginary space," and with it a corresponding "surprise of interruption."[26] Drabinski rightly sees opacity as a guard against the possible reduction of knowledge, both the index and the mode of a different type of knowing that holds the Other in continuous non-understanding.

One is struck by the parallels between Drabinski's elucidation of Glissantian opacity and Brah's articulation of diasporic axes of power. In this parallel, we can sense a common concern with dispersed experience, the basic condition of migration, or what Brah refers to as diaspora space, "the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes."[27] Brah argues that various forms of apparently competing theory, such as border theory, postcolonial theory, and diaspora theory, actually comprise "a point of confluence and intersectionality where insights emerging from these fields inhere in the production of analytic frames capable of addressing multiple, intersecting axes of differentiation."[28] Drabinski, in his turn, challenges readers "to think outside the binary of the legible and illegible — to think, perhaps, of meaning as simultaneously declarative and precarious."[29] In this vein, he characterizes both Glissant and Fanon as "*threshold* thinkers" — that is, figures who think "both *of* and *at* the interval of the movement of memory and history into the future."[30]

These thresholds, surely, are also the analytic and experiential fabric of migration. One finds the abyssal past alive in the moment of movement, even as one simultaneously thinks through what it would mean to incorporate that past into a concrete and lived future, to lift memory out of "the privacy of life's pleasures and pains."[31] In this move, opacity is retained. The visible is

refused, again and always, in favor of what Seanna Sumalee Oakley refers to as "the syntax of iteration."[32] The "vernacular cultural forms" must be continually re-imagined and re-interpreted, producing the "shadows, concealments, and resistance" that give rise to "the life of the rhizomatic subject and abyssal aesthetics."[33] The Caribbean thinker, post-Glissant, becomes entangled "in vernacular space," creolized space, contiguous with the "thinking in fragments" that constitutes *la pensée archipelagique*.[34] This thinking takes the ambiguity of the shoreline as its base metaphor and structuring aesthetic, which is also the ambiguity of migrant movement. What is a shoreline but a threshold in concrete form?

For the Listenable

Consider the blues at this shoreline, what it teaches about how to reckon with migration as a threshold experience. Writing of Caryl Phillips's relationship to the work of James Baldwin, Gerald David Naughton observes the author's turn toward "Baldwin's cityscapes," which offered for Phillips the "locus of cultural relevance ... during the racially contested 1970s and '80s in Britain."[35] Phillips, a Kittian-British writer, found more resonance in the "urban experience" narrativized by Black American authors such as Baldwin and Angela Davis than in Caribbean writers of his generation. Naughton provides a conceptual linkage between the Caribbean and the U.S., discussing Amiri Baraka's thoughts on jazz in *Blues People*: specifically, the "deeply and wildly exciting" freedom Baraka identifies that allowed Black jazz musicians to access artistic experiences that would otherwise be obscured by "overused Western musical concepts."[36] This freedom is made possible by blues aesthetics:

> Thus, repetition itself becomes an art form—one which enables movement between and beyond registers ("stress and pitch"), sequence ("word order"), and language ("wordless blues cries"). It becomes an art form within an art form. It can take place within genre ("blues"), within the song, within performance, even within the repeated line itself. Moreover, as Baldwin's idea of literature's "rootedness" in music suggests, tropes, refrains, and influences are frequently transmitted between artistic modes.[37]

Naughton directs us to consider nested art forms: repetition within the blues but also on its own terms. This is an illuminating method of thinking about and through literature's relationship to blues. Changes to words, lines, and meanings are performed at the micro-level without adding up to an orderly, rational picture. Transmission happens "between" modes, suggesting a type of interaction that exceeds western narrative and artistic registers. It is, Naughton avers, evidence of "[t]he process of tropological revision" so central to understanding Black art, where "motifs of repetition and revision or refrain, far from [reinforcing] author, authority, or canon ... actually form the

basis for fluidity and creativity."[38] As Barlow notes, "repetition with difference—known vernacularly as 'worrying the line' [generates] resolution in the often-rhymed third line," an integral aspect of blues form that "allows the singer to express a problem or sentiment, restate it with variations of emotion in a different formulation, and finally develop, explain, extend, or resolve the original problem or sentiment."[39] In other words, while blues repetition occasions a dynamic sense of experience, not a static one, accessing this experiences requires looking beyond its apparent formal simplicity.

The blues begin, Amiri Baraka observes, as songs sung by enslaved peoples on plantations in the U.S. and the Caribbean: lyrics sung in snatches and bursts, "shouts" and "field hollers [that] were little more than highly rhythmical lyrics." The aesthetic and musical contours of the blues, for Baraka, constitute "the closest imitation of the human voice of any music."[40] Blues originates in experiences of extreme collective trauma, of course: the Middle Passage and enslavement afterward, antebellum Jim Crow racism, and the unofficial plantation economy that persisted well after the "formal" end of enslavement. Enslaved people, Glissant reminds us, made music in and around the conditions of their enslavement, shaping timbre, pitch, and lyric to a strategic awareness of the possible. These are moves configured as instances "of survival" in a situation where "discontinuously organized" speech was "the only form possible for slaves."[41] Glissant sees this development in part as an "obligation to get around the rule of silence," to speak indirectly, at angles, trailing off, leaving parts of sentences unfinished, proceeding to apparently disparate topics or narrative strands. There is no fixed synthesis, only a series of necessary "forgettings" that, in the topos of the Caribbean, never appear "linguistically as an edict or a relay, on the basis of which some literary progression might be detected, with another text coming along to perfect the former."[42] This lack of a fixed linguistic origin provides the fulcrum for the apparent simplicity and hidden depth of blues as a musical genre, a cultural touchstone, and a vehicle for Black lived experience.

However, an over-reverence for strict genre convention risks obscuring how blues aesthetics appear in less traditional surroundings. As Barlow points out, "conventions such as the twelve bar pattern, the I-IV-V chord progression, and the AAB lyrical formula provide less a strict set of limitations, but instead a working basis for creative expression."[43] Arguing that these conventions serve as the bedrock for both songwriting and improvised live playing, Barlow mentions techniques such as worrying the line and vamping, "the use of an introductory phrase that can be repeated indefinitely until a soloist enters."[44] These and other blues techniques add up to what Barlow refers to as "participatory musicality: the work of a narrative's diegetic or narratorial devices to involve and implicate the listener (i.e. the reader)."[45] Implication only happens when we use the form to trouble the content, forcing us to consider what types of experience we are best suited to

listen to. Barlow draws our attention to the narrative valence of blues lyrics within the larger "project of recovering African and African-derived discursive practices." Through the framework of Black feminism, Angela Davis trenchantly suggests that artists such as Bessie Smith and Zora Neale Hurston "were probing the heart of the problem of forging an African-American aesthetic."[46] Circumlocution is a defining characteristic of blues operating in an African narrative tradition, which refuses "linearity" and "conformity to culturally established refinement"[47] as well as "socially conditioned notions of discursive 'exactitude.'"[48] Fundamentally, we must understand blues as much through performance and aesthetics as through genre.

This attention to indirection as a blues aesthetic is, I would argue, evidence of a wider cross-cultural and perhaps Black Atlantic focus in Glissant's work. In *Caribbean Discourse*, he notes that African drums are orchestral, in contrast to the "tiny voice" of Caribbean drumming.[49] We can discern a type of melancholia in this description of Caribbean rhythm cut off from a larger unity, one "structured around trace and archipelago," formed irrevocably from an "abyssal beginning" in which experience is fundamentally understood as "composite" and transitional. The collapse of the Plantation economy nonetheless makes a haunted beginning, fashioned "out of the pain of history and the vicissitudes of survival."[50] It is aporetic in the sense that seeking to "flatten time," to make out of the conditions of enslavement a "here without relation to an elsewhere," gives us a permanent sense of having emerged into an "ecstatic, looping, and fractal" form of time[51] from "one of the bellies of the world."[52]

Looping brings us back to the blues. The return to the belly of the Plantation is simultaneously impossible and yet signed by the wreckage of Caribbean origin, a return to the cries and shouts of enslaved people, coming back to what escapes positivist transcription. Glissant reminds us that "meaning and pitch went together for the uprooted individual, in the unrelenting silence of the world of slavery."[53] Pitch, here, can signal general tone but also the pitch of a voice or an instrument. The migrant, generations removed from the enslaved, nonetheless still emerges to this fractal sense of Caribbean time: blues time, time of melancholic pain, which we find stylized in Glissant's fractal return to the archipelagic sense of loss and complicated beginnings. How can we reckon with the weight of history in words, when the separation of oral and written forms of communication is one of the hallmarks of plantation violence? Glissant unearths a paradox here:

> The written requires nonmovement: the body does not move with the flow of what is said. The body must remain still; therefore the hand wielding the pen (or using the typewriter) does not reflect the movement of the body, but is linked to (an appendage of) the page.[54]

Stylizing blues in writing: a paradox that asks "nonmovement" of the writer. At an embodied level, the body's motion is not replicated in acts of writing, making the hand merely an "appendage" of the page, much like "the Caribbean is the outgrowth of America ... [t]he part that breaks free of the continent and yet is linked to the whole."[55] We can understand this hand-page relationship as a vector of the Caribbean's relationship to America, but also as a productive lacuna, the crucible out of which Glissant, I suggest, aestheticizes the early blues in his writing: fundamentally vexed motion, reflective of the "composite beginning"[56] of the Plantation. The move to written culture involves the surrender of bodily autonomy to the "immobility where writing takes shape," a task he sees as fraught or even impossible for "[t]he creature deprived of his body." One must "possess" one's own body to write, which amounts to an echo or replay of the violence of enslavement: "He keeps moving; it can only scream. In this silent world, voice and body pursue desperately an impossible fulfilment."[57]

Open Boat Blues

For Drabinski, Glissant's subject is an "abyssal" subject, defined aesthetically by a break in both "narration and unification at its root."[58] Beginnings are haunted, because fundamentally broken; to begin is to double back on the concept of beginning, producing an ontological aporia. The subject is not broken, but emerging from beginnings that are split. This abyssal subject defies any "regulative idea of transparency," leading to an aesthetics that mounts "a defense of the elusive utterance, its opacity and murky depth, and thus a return to the life of contradiction."[59]

The elusive quality here is a phenomenological relay to blues experience, to blues aesthetics. Glissant begins with a fractured beginning, not just one that splits, but that assimilates the cry of the early blues, its tension against both the conditions of suffering that produce its pathos and its willingness to sit against the supple edge of that pain in aesthetic registers. Tensions, in a literary sense, offer contradictory forms of movement in various registers, but without resolution. This unresolved tension is the substance of blues cries, so apposite to Glissant's analysis of the origins of the speech of enslaved people. Oakley suggests that Glissant's "rhetorical commonplaces are radically implicated by the material world, and vice versa, and we must learn how to think them together," suggesting that "le cri du monde ('the cry of the world')" evokes both spirituals and blues cries in African-American cultural context.[60] Drabinski argues that Glissant uses "the term *common place*" to widen "the space of aesthetic production," noting that Glissant's "aesthetic object is a common place in which contradiction does not dissolve the notion of commun, but rather constitutes it as *lieu*."[61] Common place is common to all in community, held in the seams of contradiction, which for Drabinski makes possible a certain type of "aesthetic production." Drabinski is careful

to distinguish this production from ontology, arguing that "the structure of an aesthetics is indispensable for the life of Relation."[62] This type of production, within a creolized space, gives us Caribbean experience as blues experience, partaking of blues as "an art, a philosophy, and a way of life – a complex music which defies academic or artistic analysis, but at the same time demands attention."[63]

Relation, I suggest, can be read as indirect repetition so characteristic of the blues aesthetic, particularly in its dedication to repetitions and tensions with "resolution" that leave the fundamental property of poignancy unresolved. One does not stop singing the blues, having sung it. In Muddy Waters's "How Long Can A Fool Go Wrong," the speaker asks: "How long can a bell ring? / Just as long as it knows its tone."[64] Playfulness mixes with pain here, since blues struggle will continue as long as a bell "knows its tone," which is to say, indefinitely. In "No Escape From The Blues," the speaker situates his blues cry within the structural frame of poverty: "You know I had to go downtown / And pawn my last suit / You know I was born to lose / For me there ain't no escape from the blues."[65] The sparse lyric of Waters's "Bus Driver" allows the song's musical structure to vamp at different points, providing the listening space for instrumental solos that riff on the playful theme of fraught movement:

> My baby run off with a bus driver / And you know that don't seem right / My baby run off with a bus driver / And you know that don't seem right / He used to give her rides in the daytime / Now she gives him rides at night.[66]

"Bus Driver" plays in 12/8, a combination time signature in which three eighth-note beats occur for every one beat over four bars, a swinging, simmering rhythm that makes the song's tempo (100 bpm) seem slower than it actually is. Over this time signature, Waters and his band "ride" through the changes, which follow a standard I-IV-V blues progression in E7 that moves between the fourth degree of the E scale (A7) and the root, jumping up to the fifth degree (B7) for the resolution back to the "home" chord of E7; it then repeats this movement in miniature for the blues "turnaround" that ends each section. Return to "home" is both present (in the resolution) and deferred (in the apparent circularity of the progression), both concepts productively blurred by repetition. The emphasis on the verb *run off* evokes Nathaniel Mackey's call to recuperate the verb as an indication of Black creativity against the noun, which by contrast "means, on the aesthetic level, a less dynamic, less improvisatory, less blues-inflected music and, on the political level, a containment of black mobility, a containment of the economic and social advances that might accrue to black artistic innovation."[67]

Correspondingly, Glissant revisits the haunted site of origin, not worrying the line in strictly formal terms, but limning that experience nonetheless, modulating its registers, sometimes vamping, always with a

clear and creative purpose. The blues cry is indirect, riven by tension, the need to articulate pain in the context of plantation life, where the pain of the enslaved is subordinate to the brutal conditions of the overseer. More: it is also a cry of movement made opaque, across the Atlantic and into Brathwaite's submarine universe of experience. The open boat itself, the magisterial image in the opening chapter of *Poetics of Relation*, signs a foundational blues experience treated as such in the warp and weft of Glissant's prose. He begins by identifying "[t]he first dark shadow ... cast by being wrenched from" the homeland, but identifies it as "nothing yet" in the face of the conditions of enslavement:

> Imagine two hundred human beings crammed into a space barely capable of containing a third of them. Imagine vomit, naked flesh, swarming lice, the dead slumped, the dying crouched. Imagine, if you can, the swirling red of mounting to the deck, the ramp they climbed, the black sun on the horizon, vertigo, this dizzying sky plastered to the waves. Over the course of more than two centuries, twenty, thirty million people deported. Worn down, in a debasement more eternal than apocalypse. But that is nothing yet.[68]

Three *refrains* of the call to imagine appear here in the opening pages of "The Open Boat," containing anaphora that could conceivably also fit the bars of a "standard" I-IV-V blues progression: repetitions with difference that dramatize the agony of enslavement. Think of "imagine" landing each time on chords in a blues sequence, with listeners exhorted to examine their own imaginative capacity, the conditional "if you can" signalling the difficulty of the endeavour. Every evocation sutures the body to the conditions of the boat, yokes perception to the horizon of what is visible to the enslaved. This is blues intimacy. Circumscribed experience originates in pain, in collective suffering, the abyssal beginning of being wrenched away from homeland into enslavement. Passage through and under the water evokes submarine terror.

However, out of this history, Glissant constructs recognition through the second-person address (you or *tu*). *You* fell into an abyss, three times, he observes, "into the belly of the boat ... [t]he depths of the sea ... [and] a reverse image of all that had been left behind ... in the blue savannas of memory or imagination."[69] That readers enter the experience of enslavement through the "blue savannas" of memory is surely not accidental. The colour blue, in some sense, signals the inchoate dimension of blues experience. What is literally blue may be the reflection of that colour in water. But what becomes lodged in memory, as perpetually vexed movement, is the "third metamorphosis" or "reverse image" of what the enslaved are forced to abandon in the Middle Passage. "What kind of river," Glissant asks us to consider, "has no middle? Is there nothing but straight ahead? Is this boat sailing into eternity toward the edges of a nonworld that no ancestor will haunt?"[70] We are lodged in a blues rhythm, the cries of questions coming alive, shouted aloud in song. As is characteristic of the blues form, there are no straightforward answers,

though the questions are not purely rhetorical. But it would be a mistake to assume any kind of "authentic" rawness here. These are vocal stylizations of the moment at which the subject of the blues both articulates the traumatic dimension of their experience and indicates a humanity, a subjectivity, that is excessive to that experience. The ambivalence of this moment evokes Albert Murray's characterization of Black aesthetics, in which "both agony and ecstasy are matters of stylization."[71]

Trauma circumscribes but does not define, not wholly. In fact, the very futurity of Glissant's questions-as-cries opens up the space of lyricism to orality, giving us, in blues terms, "a liberated narrative modality that allows for more affective rhetorical address, transtemporal chronologies, and generally less rigid adherence to chronological linearity." Barlow asks us to differentiate disorder from a certain type of aesthetic coherence, noting that "blues lyrics are not necessarily fragmented, but *circumlocutious*; not disjointed, but *associative*; not illogical, but *implicative*."[72] In singing the blues from the vantage-point of the enslaved, Glissant calls upon us to project our listening ears into the imaginative space of the Middle Passage, while at the same time drawing our attention to the limits of imagination.

The second-person mode, then, operates as a stylistic form of Barlow's implicative reading of blues lyricism. The "you" here constitutes a direct reader address, asking us to listen by associating these lyric images to the Caribbean experience of movement. Savanna, the land-sea, the "vieil Océan" (old Ocean) that becomes the object of a desperate greeting: in these images, we can see the unique topography of the Caribbean, archipelago's contours shaping the literal horizon, "new shores" appearing as sites at which Glissant's enslaved subjects "hook" their "tar-streaked wounds," their "reddened mouths and stifled outcries."[73] Yet Glissant renders these experiences with intimacy: the subjects are *we* and *you*, not disembodied or abstract, involving the reader in Barlow's participatory musicality. The addresses are broken up through deliberate use of space: no fewer than seven line breaks separate paragraphs in the opening three pages of *Poetics of Relation*, seven line breaks separating nine paragraphs, forming archipelagic sections out of small units of prose. Readers must skip over the horizon of text, retaining each time a modulated sense of who they / you are. Per the form of blues lyrics, the return has the appearance of circularity, returning to the chorus after worrying the line "to more effectively implore the listener; the dramatization of the singer's experience makes that experience important, noteworthy, even palpable."[74] Glissant's abyss returns to us in strategic variations, "three times linked to the unknown."[75] An abyss composed first of the terror of the boat, second the terror of the "depths of the sea," third and last in the "reverse image" of everything forcibly abandoned in the voyage[76] — each time an abyss returned to listeners slightly changed. These repetitions dramatize the blues qualities of Glissant's prose, while also foregrounding the inter-implication of Caribbean topography in the blues experience.

African-American blues are not simply transposed here without formal variation. In these three abysses, we can see movement through specific Caribbean sites, "between the Gold Coast and the Leeward Islands," evoking the "green splendor of the seas—whether in melancholic transatlantic crossings or glorious regattas or traditional races of *yoles* and *gommiers*,"[77] movement producing melancholy and indirection.

These are open boat blues in origin, colour, and relational intensity, partially tethered to the African continent. Variations of these images appear in "The Open Boat," returning with slight differences to the site of this tripartite abyss, "furrowed with fugitive memories."[78] Fugitivity connotes enslavement, of course, the flight from enslaving chains, yet it never stops being the shore of the archipelago, where movement is checked over a series of marine horizons. But migration, worrying the line, was always submarine. And so, the multidimensional abyss is the constituent theme of the open boat, whose very contradiction — an open vehicle carrying those suffering the most extreme form of closed experience, enslavement — becomes the progression, the chord changes, the occasion for stylizing art. The sections break but do not sever. The experience of enslavement does not remain the entire story. It is a blues made by those "who have been to the abyss" and who thus "do not brag of being chosen,"[79] part of a project that extends the "critique of plantation power ... into the broader project of recuperating diasporic heritage and diasporic community consciousness."[80] At this point, form and function are irrevocably signed to listeners, as we make sense of a blues lyric in literary form.

Errantry and Blues Poetics

I turn now toward the blues in Glissant's conception of errantry. Here, Glissant reroutes precision through a different kind of exactitude, a rhetorical and poetic echo of the various forms of movement he identifies in "Errantry, Exile." The nomadism he discusses contains two figurations of movement: the circle and the arrow, the former marked by a kind of desperate and perpetual motion constrained by privation, the latter obviously violent, obsessed with conquest. Against these figurations Glissant positions errantry, which is structurally and ontologically open, neither closed circle nor linear arrow. It is, in fact, a spiral, marked in its turn by circumlocution, a return without closed borders, outward movement that refuses conquest. This "dialectics of rerouting" is, in Glissant's own words, a "reconstituted echo or spiral retelling" of the work he begins in *Poetic Intention* and *Caribbean Discourse*. Yet these seeming repetitions contain differences that become crucial to understanding the complexity of his thought on migration. Where the earlier works are focused on epic literature, *Poetics of Relation* takes contemporary experience as its focal point, in order to posit the need for "the rhizome of a

multiple relationship with the Other" that relies on "a modern form of the sacred." [81]

A rhizome of the multiple opposes a "duality of self-perception," in which one is either "citizen or foreigner" and movement operates through the same binaries Glissant is intent on challenging, where "one is either visitor or visited; one goes or stays; one conquers or is conquered." Neither is the bare recognition of difference enough to avoid these reductions in experience, since, as Glissant notes, such a recognition affords room for the subject to disavow the plenitude of that difference, to treat difference as a lesser canvas on which the travelling subject creates a type of western history.[82] Dialectics of rerouting, by contrast, are "driven by the thought of errantry," which "silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national entities that yesterday were still triumphant and, at the same time, from difficult, uncertain births of new forms of identity that call to us."[83]

I suggest that such a silent destructuring partakes of the blues aesthetic in its potential for transmitting meanings that operate below the threshold of western cognition, which is based so heavily on the surface-depth ontology I earlier discussed. Silence creates the condition of errantry, or a kind of migration that "gives-on-and-with the negation of every pole and every metropolis."[84] It draws on the indirection of the speech of the enslaved, which forms the origin of the blues. Totality cannot be grasped or precisely defined. This modulation constitutes what I have been calling Glissant's open boat blues: the heightening of indirection and circumlocution to extreme degrees, a blues poetics. Hyper-secrecy, on the one hand, and hyper-indirection on the other, but each subtended by a blues notion of stylizing the expression of migration and movement. Albert Murray helps us understand this process of stylizing in Black art:

> When Ellington creates blues-extension concertos in which the solo instrument states, asserts, alleges, quests, requests, or only implies, while the trumpets in the background sometimes mock and sometimes concur as the "woodwinds" moan or groan in the agony and ecstasy of sensual ambivalence and the trombones chant concurrence or signify misgivings and even suspicions (which are as likely to be bawdy as plaintive) with the rhythm section attesting and affirming, he is quite obviously engaged in a process of transforming the raw experience of American Negroes into what Malraux calls style. He is also stylizing his sense of the actual texture of all human existence not only in the United States or even the contemporary world at large, but also in all places throughout the ages.[85]

Can the "agony and ecstasy of sensual ambivalence" find its analog on the page, as Glissant writes? My argument is that it can and does. More: that Glissant is a blues thinker in his stylizing of Caribbean experiences of errantry (movement in totality, which he sees as the basis for meaningful and ethical contemporary movement).

Examining Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, Andrew Scheiber argues that the novel repurposes "black vernacular processes, symbolized through the blues, and the capacity of 'blues people' to rediscover their own internalized rhythm of personality in the face of the distressing currents of historical change." The novel's "dialogic potentialities," he suggests, forms a crucial component of how we can read *Jazz* "both as a backward glance at African-American memory and as a projection into the future."[86] Any consideration of temporality, then, must adhere to the "black aesthetic and spiritual principles" Morrison deploys in *Jazz*. Correspondingly, Laura T. Smith suggests that the "interplay between text and performance, textuality and embodiment" constitutes the core of jazz poetics, which straddles "the fertile edge between 'orality' and 'literacy.'"[87] Attention to what Murray calls "reciprocal voicing" allows us to foreground "formal poetic strategies" that otherwise tend to be neglected.[88] In other words, reading Black literature primarily for its thematic foci risks overlooking the rich and urgently significant poetics that shape Black art in a cross-Atlantic and cross-cultural sense.

These considerations of dialogic potential, voicing, and repetition with difference find complex and generative life in Glissant's thought on diasporic movement. Beginning "Errantry, Exile," he observes that the common factor underlying errantry and exile is that in both instances roots are lacking," followed by a quiet exhortation to "begin with that." But story gives way to story, since discussing roots naturally leads Glissant to a brief, oblique examination of Deleuze and Guattari's famous concept of the rhizome. We focus on multiple forms of the past, first the far notional past of the West, indicated by errantry, and then the recent critical and academic past in which Deleuze and Guattari are located. However, this touch, as with Scheiber's conception of Morrison, must always hold the future in its projective grasp, as Glissant briefly mentions the rhizome, "an enmeshed root system," before noting that "[r]hizomatic thought is the principle behind" Relation, "in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other." Projective thinking, dialogic thinking too: Glissant works through the base concept of errantry in and against modern post-structuralist philosophy, while situating that same philosophy within a certain Kantian western tradition in order to demonstrate the indebtedness of Deleuze and Guattari to "a settled way of life," a kind of enmeshment that stops their rhizome concept from being truly subversive.[89]

In this work, Glissant guards against a certain type of overdetermination whereby preoccupation with challenging a certain world order puts one at risk of "revert[ing] to the ideological claims presumably challenged by this thought."[90] Nomadism itself, per Glissant, is not enough, since such movement historically has always been constrained by "contingencies that are restrictive":[91] exhaustion of a territory's resources, in the case of circular nomadism, and destruction of what lies in one's path, in the case of the

"arrowlike" nomadism of the Huns. Furthermore, the true violence of rooted identity, he suggests, only comes into being "when communities attempt to legitimate their right to possession of a territory through myth or the revealed word."[92] Limning this notional past, Glissant nonetheless continues to advance time forward into the present in which he writes, tying subsequent establishments of conquest and rootedness to the "empire builders" that precede the formation of western nations.

Even the work of Rimbaud, whose approach engages Glissant's thought elsewhere, "is not yet a thorough, thick (opaque) experience of the world" despite its "passionate desire to go against a root."[93] The word "yet" bears a substantial load. Glissant talks through the larval Relation he sees in Rimbaud's work as he continues to build up the edifice of Relation through indirection and example. One might say he is engaged in tracing the contours of Relation against the very hierarchical frame his concept is meant to oppose, asking us to identify the common thread of errantry and exile, a missing root, which becomes the basis for continued "improvisation," repetition with difference, throughout the chapter.[94] Errantry appears as the condition out of which we can find an idea of totality in movement that resists totalitarianism, but fitfully within conventional heuristics, as Glissant returns, again and again, to the condition of abyssal beginning that provides the haunting fulcrum for Caribbean experience. Describing circular nomadism in circular terms, he modulates both the structure and thematic content of the term into the contemporary moment, yet always calling back to the past. In blues terms, Glissant's worrying the line expands outward into worrying paragraph, page, and chapter.

Movement is blues: the uncertainty of destination, the yearning toward the past, in conditions that always some form of privation on the one in motion. Glissant begins with the missing root, touches on its relationship to the rhizome of Deleuze and Guattari, then quickly moves to a consideration of the nomad's experience. First, the circular nomadism of subsistence, then the violence of conquest (the arrow), then the fixing of centre-periphery in the West.[95] But this passage is itself also a movement, not a closed composition, but open in a blues sense, amounting almost to a fragment of "stifled" speech. In discussing Rimbaud, Glissant observes that "[t] the call of Relation is heard, but it is not yet a fully present experience." A section break follows, after which he takes up the thread of errantry in the "great founding books of communities, the Old Testament, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Chansons de Geste*, the Islandic Sagas, the *Aeneid*, or the African epics," characterizing them all as "books about exile and often about errantry." We return to this notion, at once new and ancient, then, in a spiral rhetorical movement, almost in half-time feel in musical terms, wherein the apparent tempo of the composition slows by virtue of a change in rhythmic emphasis. Speed, in other words, appears to have changed but has not. Here, we witness a deconstruction of the epic, observing that these works contain "the germ of the exact opposite of what

they so loudly proclaim."[96] Narrative epic suspense, in which the community faces a threat occasioned by or at least read through errantry, actually reinforces the very "temptation" each work apparently surmounts:

The Greek victory in the Iliad depends on trickery; Ulysses returns from his Odyssey and is recognized only by his dog; the Old Testament David bears the stain of adultery and murder; the Chanson de Roland is the chronicle of a defeat; the characters in the Sagas are branded by an unstemmable fate, and so forth. These books are the beginning of something entirely different from massive, dogmatic, and totalitarian certainty (despite the religious uses to which they will be put). These are books of errantry, going beyond the pursuits and triumphs of rootedness required by the evolution of history.[97]

To this lineage, add Glissant's blues. The open boat, on its voyage of errantry, could well be the jail in Bessie Smith's "Jail-House Blues," the site of both the articulation of blues suffering, the *duende* or "trouble in the voice,"[98] on the one hand, and the joyous tension-and-release of blues aesthetics, on the other. Such an ambivalence demonstrates how the blues is capable of framing "seemingly antagonistic relationships as noncontradictory oppositions."[99] It contains the literal reality of circularity and closed spaces, recalling the structural conditions of the prison in the enslaved ship, but also bodies forth a cry that exceeds parameters of enslavement. "Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone," Glissant reminds us.[100] He does not abandon community here, in this tensive manipulation of an image that is both concrete and metaphor. The collective experience is unmistakably signed, similar to how the speaker in Smith's song directly questions the blues, movement indicated by the phrase, "Well, I just come here to have a few words with you."[101] Smith's blues cry, like Glissant's open boat, produces action, choice, and audience that the song's speaker, in solitary confinement, literally does not have. Blues circularity produces aesthetic freedom but does not veer into utopia or unearned pleasure, because pleasure was always circumscribed by structural injustice.

Vamping the Conclusion

I have argued in this essay that Glissant worries the line not as a rhetorical flourish, nor even in a mode that overtly acknowledges blues experience in thematic terms, but as a *condition* of Caribbean experience. Where African diaspora artists create "cascading stories whose historical, thematic, and geopolitical separations can be tracked and bridged by spinning music, in its literal, nominal, and discursive senses,"[102] Glissant's musicality can be found, I have suggested, in his fundamentally blues-oriented rhetorical structures, the sense in which his master-concept, Relation, circles back and plaintively repeats the "cry of poetry" that is also a blues cry, embellishing the call to respect the other's opacity: a call made in motion, to movement and through its generative possibilities, appearing through blues indirection.

Reading Glissant through the blues gives us the complexity of Caribbean diasporic movement that is textural and musical as well as experiential, a necessary corrective to diaspora studies, where blues scholarship is still generally limited to cultural accounts of blues artists interacting with literary figures and presumed to have little if any impact on regions outside the African-American South. But to engage in this tacit segregation of Black aesthetics is also to ignore the long, rich history of blues cross-pollination in the Caribbean, its common lineage with African American experience in the American South. This lineage takes specific shape in Glissant's work through indirection, detour, and diversion, within which lie a rich aesthetic for considering migration of all kinds: forced, halted, or voluntary. The blues, in other words, thinks movement within structures of meaning that forever seek to limit its range of movement. It is at once a musical genre, a historical and cultural phenomenon, and a literary aesthetic that should be more widely applied to Caribbean literatures of diaspora. Doing this work would move us closer to an aesthetics of Caribbean blues, a poetics of migration built on "realizing what any raw material of any experience must undergo in order to become art."[103]

1 Daniel Barlow, "Blues Narrative Form, African American Fiction, and the African Diaspora," *Narrative* 24, no. 2 (2016), 147.

2 Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Taylor & Francis, 2022).

3 Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (Psychology Press, 2004).

4 Bill Ashcroft, "Globalization, Transnation and Utopia," in *Locating Transnational Ideals*, ed. Walter Goebel, and Saskia Schabio (Routledge, 2010).

5 Avtar Brah, "Multiple Axes of Power: Articulations of Diaspora and Intersectionality," in *The Routledge Diaspora Studies Reader*, ed. Kalus Stierstorfer, and Janet Wilson (Routledge, 2018).

6 Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Carl Pedersen, "The Middle Passage Between History and Fiction," in *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage*, ed. Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Carl Pedersen (Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

7 Ibid., 9.

8 Brah, "Axes," 164.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 167-168.

11 Ibid., 170.

12 Ibid., 172.

13 Ibid., 164.

14 Ibid., 171.

15 Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "Caribbean Man in Space and Time," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 66 (2021), 90.

16 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (University of Virginia Press, 1999), 19.

17 Ibid., 20.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 21.

20 Ibid., 123-124.

21 Alexandra Campbell, "Atlantic Exchanges: The Poetics of Dispersal and Disposal in Scottish and Caribbean Seas," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 55, no. 2 (2019), 197.

22 qtd. in John E. Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage: Philosophy, Beginning, Abyss* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 82.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 13.

25 Ibid., 16.

26 Ibid., 17.

27 Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (Psychology Press, 1996), 178.

28 Ibid., 206.

29 Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage,* 20.

30 Ibid., 207-208.

31 Ibid., 208.

32 Seanna Sumalee Oakley, *Common Places: The Poetics of African Atlantic Postromantics* (Rodopi, 2011), 43.

33 Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage,* 208.

34 Ibid., 209-210.

35 Gerald David Naughton, "'The Whole Root is Somewhere in the Music': Jazz, Soul, and Literary Influence in James Baldwin and Caryl Phillips," *ariel: a review of international english literature* 44, no. 2-3 (2013), 116.

36 qtd. In Ibid., 121.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 120.

39 Barlow, 137.

40 Amiri Baraka, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (William Morrow & Company, 1963), 35.

41 Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* trans. Betsy Wing (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 68.

42 Ibid., 69.

43 Barlow, 137.

44 Ibid., 144.

45 Ibid., 146.

46 Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holliday* (Vintage, 1999), 155. Davis's work, of course, has had a tremendous and salutary critical impact, though her focus, by her own admission, is largely on social issues, rather than on blues music itself, which is a substantially different direction from the one I am pursuing here.

47 Barlow, 140.

48 Borneman, qtd. in Baraka, *Blues People,* 31.

49 Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse,* 112-113.

50 Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage,* 91.

51 Ibid., 91-92.

52 Glissant qtd. in Ibid., 92.

53 Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse,* 123.

54 Ibid., 122.

55 Ibid., 117.

56 Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage,* 93.

[57] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse,* 123.

[58] Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage,* 139.

[59] Ibid., 139-140.

[60] Oakley, *Common Places,* 45.

[61] Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage,* 140.

[62] Ibid., 141.

[63] Ruth Banes, "Relentlessly Writing the Weary Song: Blues Legacies in Literature," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 21, no. 1 (1990), 59-60.

[64] Muddy Waters, Johnny Winter, and James Cotton, "How Long Can a Fool Go Wrong," (2007), 1-2.

[65] Muddy Waters, "No Escape From the Blues," (2002), 3-6.

[66] Muddy Waters, "Bus Driver," (1977), 1-6.

[67] Nathaniel Mackey, "Other: From Noun to Verb," *Representations* 39, no. Summer (1992), 52.

[68] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* 7.

[69] Ibid., 6-7.

[70] Ibid., 7.

[71] Albert Murray, *The Hero and the Blues* (New York: Vintage, 2012), 6.

[72] Barlow, 139.

[73] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* 7.

[74] Barlow, 143.

[75] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* 6.

[76] Ibid., 6-7.

[77] Ibid., 6.

[78] Ibid., 7.

[79] Ibid., 8.

[80] Barlow, 147.

[81] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* 16.

[82] Ibid., 17.

[83] Ibid., 17-18.

[84] Ibid., 19.

[85] Murray, *The Hero and the Blues*, 7.

[86] Andrew Joseph Scheiber, "Jazz and the Future Blues: Toni Morrison's Urban Folk Zone," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 2 (2006), 492.

[87] Edwards qtd. in Laura T Smith, "Textuality in a Jazz Aesthetic: Textual Rituals for Transformation in Sharon Bridgforth's Love Conjure/blues," *MELUS* 46, no. 2 (2021), 174.

[88] qtd. in Ibid., 174.

[89] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 11.

[90] Ibid., 11-12.

[91] Ibid., 12.

[92] Ibid., 13.

[93] Ibid., 15.

[94] Ibid., 11.

[95] Ibid., 14.

[96] Ibid., 15.

[97] Ibid., 15-16.

[98] Nathaniel Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews (Contemporary North American Poetry)* (University of Iowa Press, 2018), 3.

[99] Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, xv.

[100] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 9.

[101] Bessie Smith, "Jail-House Blues," (1991), 13.

[102] Christopher N Okonkwo, "Migration Blues in Jazz Styling: Spinning Them Overlooked Jazz and Blues Numbers in Brian Chikwava's Fiction," *Research in African Literatures* 47, no. 4 (2016), 155.

[103] Murray, *The Hero and the Blues*, 8.

Turn by Turn

Im-possibility and Democracy 'to Come' in Derrida's *Rogues*

Sujitha Parshi
DePaul University

> Of democracy there could only be but a trace.[1]

It seemed as if the time for Derrida's reflections on sovereignty, democracy and the morality behind the belief that "force 'trumps' law"[2] especially as it unfolded in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* had come and passed. Delivered as two lectures in the summer of 2002, in the interval between the aftermath of 9/11 and the impending invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies in 2003, *Rogues* claims for its theme, as Derrida announces in the first lecture, "democracy *in* America, or, more precisely, democracy *and* America […]."[3] And yet, almost twenty-three years after its publication, this critical text that contains Derrida's most intricate analysis of the enigmatic phrase 'democracy to come' has taken on a new significance. Pretexted on wars, refugee and border crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, terror attacks and the forceful return of the so-called "Rogue States," democracies around the world, including most recently democracy in America, have experienced a resurgence of what Derrida in the preface of *Rogues* calls the "old-new enigma" of sovereignty.[4] Furthermore, the transformation of the space of democracy itself – the public sphere – by intensifying globalization and new technologies has brought the very question of democracy back to the forefront of political and philosophical discourse.[5]

Within this context, a reflection on the many turns and crises of democracy today benefits from a closer look at Derrida's exigent critique and affirmation of the concept of democracy in *Rogues*.[6] Yet, the pivotal syntagma 'la démocratie à venir' remains one of the most enigmatic notions of Derrida's *Rogues*. In fact, by way of what is purported to be an "elliptical sending"[7] [*l'envoi elliptique*], Derrida's first lecture entitled "The Reason of the Strongest" in *Rogues* opens with the perplexing declaration: "*The democracy to come: it is necessary that it give the time there is not*."[8] In what follows, this utterance that receives its sending in the introductory remarks of the lecture will make

elliptical turns around several problematics such as autoimmunity, reason, freedom, autonomy, right and justice before returning, in the final section of the first lecture, back to the sender to have its last send-off (*renvoi*). For a pair of lectures that claims in its preface to take the "old-new enigma" of sovereignty as its principle guiding thread,[9] this peculiar strategy of beginning with the partly imperative, partly descriptive declaration "*La démocratie à venir: il faut que ça donne le temps qu'il n'y a pas*"[10] seems at first glance an odd choice. For how is this syntagma 'democracy to come' to be understood, a phrase which, in a declaration that acts as a quasi-independent sentence, has no active verb to clarify its meaning? Why is it necessary for it to give the time that is lacking, and what is this time that is lacking? Yet, as the lecture unfolds in the first part of *Rogues*, the role of Derrida's declaration as an envoy that carries an enigmatic message on democracy, that leaves traces of its meaning along its many elliptical turns becomes evident in the course of its reception – its reading.

Rogues does not constitute the first instance of Derrida's use of the notion of a 'democracy to come.' As Derrida notes within *Rogues* itself, in earlier texts such as *Right to Philosophy I*, "Sauf le nom," *The Other Heading, Spectres of Marx,* and *Politics of Friendship,* democracy to come is already treated in its structural affinity to equally enigmatic notions such as the secret, justice and the promise. *Rogues*, however, arguably does contain the most comprehensive examination of this peculiar concept of a democracy to come. But what does 'democracy to come' signify according to Derrida, and what is the peculiar lacking time that it must give? To whom or to what must it give time? This paper parses Derrida's thinking of the democracy to come by analysing the declaration "*the democracy to come: it is necessary that it give the time there is not*" at the heart of Derrida's *Rogues*. Rather than merely constituting an allusion to a future instantiation of an already pre-determined political regime called democracy, or to the future determination of a yet-undetermined democratic political constitution, this paper argues that for Derrida the democracy to come highlights and raises the stakes of the essential undecidability at the very heart of democracy. This undecidability of the democratic, although it brings attention to the aporetic experience of thinking, of conceptualizing, of identifying democracy, does not consequently lead to an incapacitation of all action. Rather, as this paper seeks to show, Derrida's treatment of democracy via the syntagma 'democracy to come' articulates a genuine theory of possible political critique.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section reconstructs Derrida's distinction between the circularity of sovereignty and the wheel that constitutes the democratic. The second section then examines Derrida's analysis of the autoimmunity of the concept of democracy. In the third and central section, I unfold the enigmatic expression 'democracy to come' alongside Derrida's puzzling utterance that this democracy to come must give the lacking time. In addition to summarizing the main points of this essay, the

concluding section will touch upon the continued relevance of Derrida's deconstruction of democracy in *Rogues* for thinking political responsibility today.

Between the Sovereign Circle and the Free Wheel of Democracy

Derrida's meditation on democracy in "The Reason of the Strongest" opens with the avowal of an inescapable aporia. On the one hand, Derrida acknowledges that the strange expression 'la démocratie à venir' that embellished the 2002 conference at Cerisy-la-Salle is one that turned and returned in his discourse over a decade, hinting therefore at a pre-comprehension at work behind the chosen theme. On the other hand, Derrida confesses that in the decade of his use of the syntagma, he ultimately seems to have been expressing the suspicion that, despite being heirs of the Greek word 'democracy' "addressed to us for centuries […] we ourselves do not know the meaning of this legacy, the mission, the emission, or commission of this word […]."[11] Derrida thus likens the task that the preliminary question of the democracy to come enjoins him to perform – i.e., to speak of the democracy to come – to a torturous wheel that turned and returned Derrida to the expression 'democracy to come' not only in preparation for the *décade* of the conference, but over the past *décennie* of his life. Furthermore, insofar as this question of the democracy to come is in fact a double question, a "question […] at the same time and/or by turns historical and conceptual or semantic,"[12] this wheel, Derrida admits, turns out to also be a quartering wheel, pulling him in two seemingly opposite directions.

Indeed, Derrida's reflections on democracy in *Rogues* will consist, sometimes *at once* and at others *by turns (tour à tour)*, of an examination of the concept of democracy in the history of philosophy, starting with Plato and Aristotle, as well as a semantic analysis of the always differing and deferred meaning of democracy itself in this history. On the basis of this double reflection, one also finds interspersed in these analyses lucid assessments of contemporary political events and discourse in their use and abuse of the concept of democracy. The distinguishing feature of *Rogues* remains, however, Derrida's intricate engagement with his perplexing expression 'democracy to come.' By inserting a 'to come' to democracy, Derrida constructs a concept that accounts for the absolute openness to its own transformation – the absolute historicity – distinctive of democracy. Hence, what start out as merely autobiographical notes on Derrida's part – about the aporia of having to determine a concept without knowing its meaning to the fullest extent in advance, the torturous experience of a wheel that turns and returns to, from and even around its sender, even the quartering of a body in opposite directions – turn out to be constitutive of the concept of democracy itself. In fact, Derrida doubts that any thinking or speaking of democracy "was ever possible […] before the rotation of some *wheel*."[13]

But what does Derrida see in the wheel and what does democracy have to do with the figure and motion of one? In the first section of "Reason of the Strongest" entitled 'The Free Wheel,' Derrida compares the figure of the wheel to the enigmatic notion of sovereignty. Beside the circular and spherical form of a geometrical and ultimately mechanical object, the wheel, Derrida argues, stands for a figure of a rotary motion of some self, some *autos*, an *ipse* that sends itself off towards itself, that turns and returns to a self in a circular motion. Insofar as this motion typifies autonomy, the giving of law to oneself in whose very movement a self is constituted as a gathering of the self-same, the wheel symbolizes sovereignty. Moreover, sovereignty for its part has historically been associated with ipseity. And in turn, this capacity of an *ipse* to give itself the law is linked to power, possibility, a force (*kratos*) that asserts itself in its return to self. Sovereignty, then, names the consolidation of the power of decision, the power of determination by a sovereign, indivisible self that stands outside of both time and language. For both time and language involve difference, a nexus of differential relations within which the finite time of history or of meaning is constituted. Hence, inasmuch as a sovereign self seeks to exclude any reference to an outside, to an *other*, the circular figure of a sovereign remains principally ahistorical and silent. Thus, like the figure of an indivisible, indestructible God, sovereignty in general remains impervious to critique, it's legitimacy never being open for questioning.

Building on this analysis of sovereignty, in 'The Free Wheel,' Derrida then proceeds to present the following reading of the traditional notion of democracy:

> [D]emocracy would be precisely this, a force (*kratos*), a force in the form of a sovereign authority […] and thus the power and ipseity of the people (*dēmos*). This sovereignty is a circularity, indeed a sphericity […] This circular or spherical rotation, the turn of the re-turn upon the self, can take either the alternating forms of the *by turns*, the *in turn*, the *each in turn* […] or else the form of an identity between the origin and the conclusion, the cause and the end or aim, the driving [*motrice*] cause and the final cause.[14]

Based on his examination of Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Derrida notes in the subsequent paragraphs that such absolute, indivisible sovereignty without faction that Tocqueville so admired in American society in 1831, did in fact hearken back to Aristotle's and even Plato's conception of a sovereign, indivisible, self-same first principle. However, unlike Tocqueville's ascription of a God-like status to democratic society, inasmuch as democracy consists of multiplicity, faction and division, Aristotle and Plato oppose democracy to their sovereign, indivisible, ultimately simple principles.

While acknowledging this meaning of democracy as a force or power *of* the people, *from* and *for* the people, and its affinity with the principle of

sovereignty, Derrida nevertheless wonders whether there isn't another truth of the democratic: "the truth of the other, heterogeneity, the heteronomic and the dissymmetric, disseminal multiplicity, the anonymous 'anyone,' the 'no matter who,' the indeterminate 'each one.'"[15] Indeed, in the analysis of democracy in the subsequent chapters of *Rogues*, this *other* truth of democracy will take center stage in a discussion where a democratic polity, especially in its Greek form, is associated with freedom (*eleutheria*) and equality. Turning to Plato's and Aristotle's treatments of the common opinion (*doxa*) that a democratic constitution – be it in an individual or a city – fosters freedom of choice, freedom to decide and pursue one's desires, Derrida notes that this freedom of self-determination is also impossible to think without the power of ipseity, without a sovereign 'I can' already implied within it. However, Greek *doxa*, which Plato and Aristotle appeal to in their treatments of democracy, also perceived such democratic freedoms to be vulnerable to misuse, engendering especially in the youth licentiousness and a certain disregard and disrespect for the law. What is in fact recognized as a privilege of the democratic polity is thus found to host the seeds of its own perversion within itself.

Democratic freedom is, therefore, susceptible to turning into license (*exousia*). Hence, to counter this tendency of democratic regimes to promote lawlessness, and to guarantee justice in the wider populace, the democratic principle must further be infused with the notion of equality. Since absolute freedom in a democracy must be prevented from creating a condition of absolute injustice and impunity among individuals in the polity – each wishing not to be governed by anybody else – it is the democratic rule of equality that assures freedom to an individual to the finite extent possible. As Derrida expands in his reading of Aristotle's *Politics* in *Rogues*, the aporia of the democratic is tempered by the circular principle of *in turn* and *by turns*: freedom and equality are assured in a democratic polity insofar as each individual, equal to another *in number*, governs and is governed alternatingly.[16] Thus, Derrida writes, "[T]he absolute freedom of a finite being (and it is of just such a finitude that we are speaking here) can be equitably shared only in the space-time of a 'by turns' and thus only in a double *circulation* […]."[17]

Autoimmunity and The Concept of Democracy

What do these two 'truths,' these two historical determinations of the democratic tell us about the *concept* of democracy? If the first meaning of democracy is constituted by possibility and freedom – i.e., the right to self-determination characteristic of sovereignty – Derrida notes that this power of sovereign decision-making is itself based on a prior, more original "freedom of play, an opening of indetermination and indecidability *in the very concept* of democracy, in the interpretation of the democratic."[18] That is, if democracy

grants the sovereign right and freedom to determine oneself one way or another, the condition of possibility of a democratic constitution to grant such a right and freedom in the first place is a more originary indetermination, a space of play in the *concept* of the democratic itself, a space which enables this free play of determinations. For if the capacity for free, autonomous decision-making proper to sovereignty were based on any other pre-determined concept or principle, then such sovereignty could neither be considered absolute nor autonomous inasmuch as its law would be derived from a principle other than itself. Hence, the semantic indetermination or "free wheel" that keeps the concept of democracy always open to reinterpretation is responsible for turning the history of democracy.[19] This freedom is not to be conflated with particular freedoms granted to the citizens of a democracy. Rather, it is a freedom operative in the very concept of democracy. The freedom in the concept, Derrida insists, which "takes into account, as the empty opening of a *future of the very concept* and thus of the language of democracy, an *essential historicity of democracy*,"[20] makes democracy the only regime open to its continual self-critique.[21]

Therefore, the life of democracy presupposes what Derrida in the third section of "Reason of the Strongest" calls "a certain suicide of democracy."[22] This suicidal tendency of democracy – what Derrida will subsequently name in *Rogues* as "autoimmune suicide" [23] [24] in reference to the logic of autoimmunity at work in the concept of democracy – involves a suspension, a deferral, a "sending off" (*renvoi*) of democracy not only to immunize a democracy against an imminent, external aggressor. But also, to defer democracy in order to save, preserve, keep open the space and time for a democracy *to come*, for future democracies to come. And Derrida will see this suspension at play in the case of the Algerian military coup of 1992. But this formalization of democracy as autoimmune – i.e., either deferring the other in preserving itself, or deferring itself in preserving itself – is an odd characterization. For, to take Derrida's examples from *Rogues*, what is democratic about turning people away at voting booths, in rejecting the results of a democratic election, in exiling dissenting voices within a democracy? Even if such undemocratic measures are sought in the name of a democracy *to come*, how can such a force be deemed as *more* democratic than the democratic process itself? On the other hand, if an undemocratic, even anti-democratic alternative is chosen through a democratic process, how can a measure to set aside the results of such a democratic process – an undemocratic measure in itself but nevertheless acting in the interest of democracy – be declared *less* democratic than a democratic force vying for an undemocratic alternative?

Owing to the autoimmune logic being inscribed onto the very concept of democracy, such a *double bind* or undecidability, Derrida insists, makes any attempt at objectively proving a choice to be *more* or *less* democratic always unsatisfactory. In fact, the very condition of possibility of democracy rests in

this difference of forces, this limiting and threatening itself *at once* and/or *by turns*, this "murder and suicide"[25] of the democratic. Democracy is therefore never a simple, indivisible, selfsame force. If there is to be the space-time for a self that calls itself a democracy at all, it must necessarily not be one with itself. Put differently, in order for a democracy to exist, be it a present, past, or even future democracy, to be intelligible, legible *as* democratic, it must necessarily stand in relation to the non-democratic. Only so long as a unitary meaning, idea, even 'truth' is elusive – only insofar as the meaning or truth of democracy defers itself, differs from itself, remains incomplete – can there be time and space for any particular democracy as such. Democratic sending off (*renvoi*) is therefore, Derrida concludes in the third section of "Reason of the Strongest," related to *différance*: "Democracy is […] what it is only by spacing itself beyond being and even beyond ontological difference […]."[26]

Giving the Time There *Is* Not: Derrida's Democracy to Come

Derrida's analytical exploration of the inherited concept of "democracy"[27] thus far revealed that a concept, a meaning, an idea of democracy there *is* not. "Of democracy," Derrida writes, "there could only be but a trace."[28] It is on the basis of this thought – that there can only be a *trace* of democracy, according to which, to borrow Derrida's expression from *Spectres of Marx*, democracy is originarily always *out of joint* – that Derrida promises to reread the expression that turned and returned in the past decade of his life, namely 'democracy to come.' Yet, if one is to engage with the question of what 'democracy to come' signifies, one must also simultaneously clarify what it does not. Early on in "The Reason of the Strongest," Derrida admits that the "to-come of democracy is also, although without presence, the hic et nunc of urgency, of the injunction as absolute urgency. Even when democracy makes one wait or makes one wait for it."[29] In fact, Derrida argues, democracy to come oscillates between the two, i.e., between an imperative urgency, an enjoinder to do something on the one hand – to calculate, to determine the essentially incalculable, essentially indeterminable inheritance of democracy – and a passive waiting, an exposure and openness to the messianic coming of the meaning and truth of democracy on the other.

Derrida unfolds the *double bind*, the aporetic structure of the expression 'democracy to come' by developing what he already albeit fragmentarily alluded to in earlier works such as *Force of Law, The Other Heading, Spectres of Marx*. To treat the different inflections of democracy to come as promise, as justice, as secret, among others, within the various contexts of Derrida's earlier texts is beyond the scope of this essay. However, given Derrida's attempt in *Rogues* to develop the operation of this notion in greater detail, the treatment of democracy to come in "The Reason of the Strongest" can indeed help shed light on what remained only briefly indicated in his earlier texts. Hence, in the section entitled 'The Last of the Rogue States,' Derrida develops

the thought of the democracy to come around five foci. In this section of the paper, I unfold the basic thought behind Derrida's strange syntagma 'democracy to come' as he explains it through the five foci.

Firstly, democracy to come is not a regulative ideal, in the Kantian sense or otherwise, that designates a possibility which an 'I' or a self can actualize for the sake of a teleological end. Rather, democracy to come, Derrida explains, belongs to the realm of the "im-possible" – of what Derrida calls with recourse to Plato's discussion of the democratic *by turns* in the philosophical class in the *Republic* "the order of the possible, of the nonimpossible […] not negatively impossible."[30] But how is this *im-possibility* to be understood? This order of the "nonimpossible" – which is not an *impossible impossibility* nor a possibility that is within the power of any sovereign self – is that of an unforeseeable, incalculable event. It is impossible for me, for any *I*, to will, to predict, to calculate or bring about this event that can only come from the *other*, by the decision of the other even in me. It comes by the decision, the law of the other in me. However, this *im-possibility* of sovereign decision does not consequently imply that this event is impossible, even inaccessible as such to me, remaining a pure, *sovereign* actuality that is absolutely intangible in its timelessness.

The "im-possible," Derrida explains, rather precedes me, "announces itself […] seizes me *here and now* in a nonvirtualizable way, in actuality and not potentiality."[31] It comes, Derrida continues, in the form of an injunction that I do not see coming but that concerns me. It affects me – this *other* that I can neither see nor fore-see – it concerns me. It does not let me send it off, put it off for later: "It is what is most undeniably *real*."[32] However, there is no recognizable *being* there that is doing the enjoining. In fact, the syntagma 'democracy to come,' as Derrida points out several times in *Rogues*, remains without presence. It remains a phrase without a verb, a phrase that neither modifies the ontological status of a being that *is*, nor *is* itself a selfsame *being* that I can isolate, recognize in its identity, that will turn or return in its selfsameness in the future. It is another instance of the "thingless thing" ("chose sans chose")[33] – as Derrida puts it in his final *The Beast and the Sovereign* seminar – the phantasm, the ghost that anticipates another thinking of the event. What does this other thinking of the event, as Derrida writes in *Rogues*, one that is unforeseeable, "without horizon, un-masterable by any ipseity […] which is marked in a 'to-come' that, beyond the future […], names the coming of *who* comes or of *what* comes to pass […]"[34] make happen?

This coming of the ghost, the *im*-possible event of democracy enjoins me to think, to decide, to do something, to determine, to fore-see in the *here and now* what I cannot yet determine, what remains indiscernable, undecidable, namely, this enigmatic inheritance which does not present itself that we call 'democracy.' The inheritance of democracy, whose heirs we are, goes ahead of us, precedes us and enjoins us. Insofar as this inheritance gives itself to us, sends itself out of itself on a mission to preserve itself, and insofar as we

receive this inheritance, carrying its message as delegates of what is assigned to us, bequeathed to us, we ourselves are nothing but this inheritance that remains yet to come. Hence, we find ourselves already caught up in the turn and return of the emission back to itself, we ourselves being nothing but the emissaries of this inheritance in whose orbit we find ourselves thrown. The inheritance, therefore, befalls us, *happens* to us. We find ourselves the heirs of a tradition, an inheritance that we do not choose. In the context of *Rogues*, it is of the Greco-European tradition in whose history and language we speak, of the inheritance of the *something* called "democracy," from within which we already speak, in the name of which we are enjoined to speak, by which we are given and deprived of the time to speak. This structure of the inheritance as that which constitutes us, limits us, limits what we see and say about it, yet, which gives us a certain freedom to determine it each time anew, each time otherwise, is why Derrida, in the opening sections of *Rogues* speaks in a quasi-autobiographical manner of himself, the "I," being "tortured on the wheel, since it too takes the form of a machine in the form of a circle, indeed a hermeneutic circle. Tied to the machine, bound hand and foot, I would turn, exposed to a round of blows. Quartered."[35]

Therefore, any thinking, questioning or *doing* of democracy begins from this aporetic place without space, time without time – the *spacing* – that constitutes the inheritance of democracy. There is no time for democracy without the initial sending (*envoi*) that turns and returns to itself, but that can paradoxically never return to some originary self. For there is no originary self of democracy, no selfsame of democracy outside of this spacing that constitutes its openness. If there is to be a finite time for democracy – and insofar as iterations of regimes that call themselves democracies do appear, do exist, there must be a finitude of time and space within which they appear, within which we encounter them, understand them – it can only be as long as democracy *defers* itself, *differs* from itself, in order to give the time there is not. Hence, an originary default must constitute democracy. "*La démocratie à venir: il faut que ça donne le temps qu'il n'y a pas.*"[36] In returning to this utterance that opened *Rogues* in the final section of "The Reason of the Strongest," Derrida points out that in the "*il faut*" – it is necessary – we need to hear at once default, a failing, a weakness: "'time is needed [*il faut le temps*]'; 'it is necessary, for democracy, that it give the time there is not.'"[37]

What are the implications of this aporetic *double bind* that constitutes the inheritance of democracy, brought out by Derrida's utterance 'democracy to come,' for a political or philosophical thinking of democracy? If the imperative injunction that the "*to come*" and the "*il faut*" communicate is indeed of such aporetic nature – enjoining one to *do* something that is structurally impossible, i.e., decide, speak of, determine a democracy that remains unforeseeable, incalculable, undecidable, a concept that calls for yet resists calculation, determination, decision – what is to be done? The one truth of the democratic – the incalculability, the unpredictability – suggests that one

can only passively await, receive, be exposed to what arrives, the event of democracy that has already come or could very well *not* come. The other truth, however, calls for one to try and calculate, in the name of this event, who or what may arrive, but has not yet arrived, or what has already arrived, but whose meaning remains a secret. Is it possible to reconcile these two truths of the democratic injunction?

Derrida returns to the thinking of "by turns" central to *Rogues* to argue precisely for this possibility. Derrida writes "[T]he *to* of the 'to come' wavers between imperative injunction (call or performative) and the patient *perhaps* of messianicity (nonperformative exposure to what comes, to what can always not come or has already come)."[38] The two approaches can either alternate – i.e., happen *tour à tour*, turn by turn – or at the same time. For insofar as the one approach haunts the other, insofar as one is parasitic on the other, always recalling and differing itself from the other even in its absence, to have one is to have the other at the same time. However, the undecidability that is brought about by the oscillation of democracy to come between its two possibilities is not an absolute limitation. Rather, Derrida concludes, this undecidability is exemplary of the democratic freedom to decide – the freedom to either performatively *make happen* or passively *let happen* – that is afforded by the very concept of democracy. But how might these possibilities concretely come about? Derrida briefly provides certain indications of these possibilities.

Firstly, Derrida admits that the expression 'la democratie à venir' is indeed a call for "a militant and interminable political critique."[39] Any political regime that stakes its claim to democracy must be examined, critiqued, exposed to the inadequacy of that which calls itself a democracy – a democracy, which will always be built on the exclusion of the other, be it other nations, other peoples, other non-human beings, or even the unborn and *no longer living* – to what democracy *is* – precisely something that *is* never there, never fully present, existing in its being. Moreover, beside the active moment of critique, one must also highlight that, structurally, democracy is the only system that enables a critique even of its own self, that takes its own historicity into account. The other thinking of the event that is not dependent upon the mastery of a sovereign *ipse*, discussed earlier in this section, demands a rethinking of hospitality to *who* or *what* arrives beyond the limits of hospitality based upon nation-state sovereignty. And it is only democracy that opens up the space for such re-interpretations. Subsequently, Derrida suggests a reworking of nation-state sovereignty and a "creation of an international juridico-political space [...]"[40] that constantly rethinks the sharing of powers.

The "living being, the cadaver, and the ghost"[41]:
Democracy at its Limits

Who constitutes a democratic polity? Throughout "The Reason of the Strongest" Derrida repeatedly raises the question of the limits of one of the truths of democracy, namely "the anonymous 'anyone,' the 'no matter who,' the indeterminate 'each one'"[42] that is appealed to by the democratic principle. Indeed, democracy is the only constitution that proclaims such a radical hospitality, radical equality with regard to the power to decide. However, as Derrida notes in his elucidation of the phrase 'democracy to come,' despite this radicality, democratic polities within which a people count towards the "anyone" and "no matter who" have historically been built on exclusion. Be it citizens of other nation-states, resident aliens, stateless people, children, prisoners, etc., that are excluded from the electoral process, even within a democratic nation-state the refusal of the right to decide to certain groups has been inherent to democracy. This exclusion is, in fact, attributable to a structural constraint of democracy itself. For, as Derrida wrote in the earlier sections of *Rogues*, democracy is subject to an autoimmune logic: "democracy protects itself and maintains itself precisely by limiting and threatening itself."[43] Consequently, democracy will always oscillate between being more or less democratic, based upon an exclusion of one or the other group.

Nevertheless, democracy remains the only system that is open to its own transformation. Each time, one is impelled, enjoined, given the freedom to determine, decide, choose a form of the democratic that differs from itself, that refers itself back to itself and to its other – to its essential self that is nothing but this spacing *as* radical indetermination. Capitalizing on this essential undecidability, on the indetermination that constitutes the democratic, as expanded in the preceding section of this paper, Derrida's democracy to come calls for an inexhaustible self-critique – a political critique – of democracy *in the name of* democracy. This would involve rethinking the conventional model of extending ethical and political right, even hospitality based on the principle of indivisible and absolute sovereignty. This would call for a critique of ethical and political rhetoric that excludes, denigrates, dispossesses, deprives both groups of not only human but also non-human beings in the name of sovereignty, capacity, of democracy. Moreover, Derrida writes, paraphrasing Jean Paulhan:

> [to] think democracy is to think the "first to happen by" [*le premier venu*]: anyone, no matter who, at the permeable limit between "who" and "what," the living being, the cadaver, and the ghost. The first to happen by: is that not the best way to translate "the first to come"?) The "to come" not only points to the promise but suggests that democracy will never exist […] because it will always remain aporetic in its structure (force *without* force, incalculable singularity *and* calculable equality […]

heteronomy *and* autonomy […], an empty name, a despairing messianicity or a messianicity in despair, and so on).[44]

Does this extract from *Rogues* simply indicate that Derrida, as he does indeed point out in several of his other works like the *Hospitality* seminars and even in *Rogues* itself, is calling for an inclusion of the excluded, for extending the concept of democracy – the "anyone" and "each one" – to "the dead, to animals, to trees and rocks"?[45] While not dismissing the thought entirely, Derrida is rather calling into question the limit between the living and non-living in general. In fact, Derrida repeatedly points to a reevaluation of life, turning and circling around "another thought of life, of what is living in life"[46] as what is at stake in his rethinking of democracy.

This other thinking of life[47] would not only call into question the legitimacy of thinking life as sovereign, indivisible, always existent and present to itself, life as opposed to the non-living or the dead. Rather, insofar as this other thinking of life reveals the inherent *hetero*-affection of life – the originary co-constitution of life and death, of the self and the other, the living and the *not yet* and *no longer* living – this *other* logic that Derrida in *Rogues*, as well as in earlier and later texts appeals to in terms of the logic of the ghost, of autoimmunity or the logic of the phantasm, radically reinscribes the question of responsibility into the very concept of democracy itself. For if "each one" and "anyone" is structurally never a simple self, being constituted *as* a self only in and through the inheritance, by the law and memory of the other *in me*, then any power and right entrusted to the "one," the "self" must take into account its constitutive heterogeneity. But would this mean trying to extend the right to vote to the other, be it living or nonliving? On the contrary, what makes Derrida's treatment of democracy to come so potent in its ethico-political potential is the responsibility and accountability it calls for even in the mere establishing and extending of democratic freedoms to a traditionally determined people of a democracy.

What then would this look like? In contrast to the tendency of a majority of democracies today towards a short-sighted politics, of democracies that focus on the *here and now* in the literal sense of the purely present, democratic responsibility reconfigured according to the *other* logic of life would call, on the one hand, for respect and a critical inheritance of the tradition, of the revenant and the *no longer* living. For, the *here and now* is what it is only by virtue of the fact that it is the differential trace of both the past that is inherited – the memory of a promise – and the future as that which is pregnant in this memory. We ourselves are the legacy, the heirs, of this past that comes to us, determines us, from the future, *as* the future that is open to us in accordance with this past trace. This does not mean a passive inheritance and reverence for the past – be it for a past determination or iteration of the democratic – but a *critical* inheritance, precisely in the spirit of democracy as interminable self-critique. On the other hand, the *other* logic of life would necessitate a responsible consideration of the interests of the future. As those whose

inheritance we ourselves are, decisions must be made in the name of the future, of the *not-yet* living, a future that will inherit its own past, but also its future from us *as* memory, *as* history. After all, doesn't the democratic promise consist precisely in preserving and maintaining itself as this historicity, as this openness to the future? So that democracy may not be sent off, exiled, set aside once and for all, even if it were at the ballot box, even as it were in the democratic choice of an anti-democrat. But rather, for it to turn – around itself, around its others – and return eternally as the only system that rigorously safeguards the possibility of its own perfectibility.[48]

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[1] Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 39.

[2] Ibid., xi.

[3] Ibid., 14.

[4] Ibid., xii.

[5] An earlier volume dedicated to interpretations of the theme of 'Derrida and Democracy' can be found in the special edition of *Diacritics* from 2008 edited by Jonathan Culler and Phillip Lewis, which includes a range of reflections on literature and democracy, America and democracy, autoimmunity and democracy in relation to Derrida's thinking of democracy. See *Diacritics* 38, no. 1-2, (2008).

[6] While interest in Derrida's *Rogues* has waxed and waned in the intervening twenty-three years since its publication, the treatment of Derrida's notion 'democracy to come' has remained consistent. Most recently, in "Jacques Derrida and the Life-Death of Democracy," Michael Naas demonstrates how Derrida's use of the vocabulary of life-death and autoimmunity to discuss democracy is not merely a metaphorical transplant in political discourse. Rather, by tracing Derrida's notion of "another thinking of life," Naas shows how Derrida takes recourse to the discourse of 'autoimmunity' to point to a more fundamental, structural law preceding the very individuation of the living from the non-living or the dead. In this essay, Naas also masterfully brings Derrida's thought to life by putting it in dialogue with contemporary events. See Naas, "Jacques Derrida and the Life-Death of Democracy," *Research in Phenomenology* 55, no. 2 (2025): 174-188. Another recent work on this topic is Annabel Herzog's contribution to the special issue of *Angelaki* published on the 20th anniversary of Derrida's death. In the article "Derrida's 'Very Idea of Democracy'," Herzog argues that Derrida's 'democracy to come' articulates the antinomic yet conceptually necessary relation between sovereignty and ethics. By focusing on the three autoimmunities of democracy, Herzog seeks to demonstrate that Derrida's deconstruction of democracy is involved in an "ethicization of democracy activated by the concept of sovereignty, and a deconstruction of sovereignty via ethics." (60) Whereas my paper touches upon the ethical dimension of Derrida's 'democracy to come' as well, its focus largely rests on the structural logic behind Derrida's capitalization of the moment of critique in the very concept of democracy. Cf. Herzog, "Derrida's "Very Idea of Democracy'," *Angelaki* 29 (2024): 59-70.

[7] *Rogues*, 1.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Cf., *Rogues*, xii.

[10] *Voyous: Deux Essais sur la Raison* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003), 19.

[11] *Rogues*, 9.

[12] Ibid., 8.

[13] Ibid., 10.

[14] Ibid., 13.

[15] Ibid., 14.

[16] Cf. *Rogues*., 23-26.

17 Ibid., 24.

18 Ibid., 25.

19 Derrida also notes that this free wheel is conditioned by a history of freedom, although he does not delve into this history in *Rogues*. This opens up the question whether, to unfold the force of the entire analysis of democracy and the free wheel in *Rogues*, it isn't all the more necessary to examine the history and the concept of freedom, inasmuch as the former is the condition of possibility of the free wheel's turning.

20 *Rogues*, 25.

21 In his conceptually rich 2002 essay "Derrida's Democracy to Come," Matthias Fritsch highlights the *futural* inheritance of democracy that Derrida's positing of a 'to come' to democracy emphasizes. Fritsch also provides a critical analysis of the normative content of Derrida's notion of democracy to come as well as its limits. In my essay, I highlight the double character of inheritance – both *of* and *from* the future, as well as the past – operative in Derrida's use of democracy to come. While Fritsch's extensive examination of the normative aspect of Derrida's treatment of democracy to come deserves a deeper engagement than this article can provide, and has received the same in the decades after its publication, my article has a humbler goal. With this paper, I aim to return to Derrida's provocative and increasingly relevant discussion of democracy to first explicate the sense behind Derrida's programmatic sentence "*the democracy to come: it is necessary that it give the time there is not*," (*Rogues*, 1) a perplexing sentence which has hitherto received little consideration in works that attend to Derrida's 'democracy to come.' Secondly, I seek to show how this utterance not only draws attention to the aporetic nature of choice, action and decision in a democracy, but most importantly *situates* the possibility of action. See Matthias Fritsch, "Derrida's Democracy to Come," *Constellations* 9, no. 4 (2002): 574-597. See also Fritsch's article "Taking Turns: Democracy to Come and Intergenerational Justice," *Derrida Today* 4, no. 2 (2011): 148-172.

22 *Rogues*, 33.

23 Ibid.

24 Cf. Michael Naas' 2006 paper "'One nation…indivisible': Jacques Derrida on the Autoimmunity of Democracy and the Sovereignty of God" for an expansive treatment of the problematic of sovereignty and autoimmunity in Derrida's works from around the time of *Rogues*. In: *Research in Phenomenology* 36, no. 1 (2006): 15-44.

25 *Rogues*, 34.

26 Ibid., 38.

27 In a few of its kind monograph on the normativity of the notions of inheritance and democracy in Derrida's thought, Samir Haddad's *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy* highlights the centrality of inheritance in Derrida's political philosophy in general and Derrida's treatment of democracy in particular. See Samir Haddad, *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

28 *Rogues*, 39.

29 Ibid., 29.

30 Ibid., 77.

31 Ibid., 84.

32 Ibid.

[33] Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 185-186; *Séminaire La Bête et le souverain Volume II (2002-2003)* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2010), 263.

[34] *Rogues*, 87.

[35] Ibid., 9.

[36] *Voyous*, 19.

[37] *Rogues*, 109.

[38] Ibid., 91.

[39] Ibid., 86.

[40] Ibid., 87.

[41] Ibid., 86.

[42] Ibid., 14.

[43] Ibid., 36.

[44] Ibid., 86.

[45] Ibid., 54.

[46] Ibid., 5.

[47] Cf. Michael Naas, "Jacques Derrida and the Life-Death of Democracy."

[48] A special thanks to Michael Naas for his thoughtful insights and editorial help with an early draft of this article.

Revisiting *La production de l'espace*

Lefebvre's Engagement with Late Marx

Xabier Gangoiti

University of Deusto, Bilbao, Basque Country

Introduction

While the relationship between Marx and Lefebvre is generally recognised, it has not been sufficiently researched hitherto. His Lefebvre's engagement with Marx's Critique of Political Economy (CPE), with a few exceptions[1], has received little attention within academia. Yet a wide range of supposed aspects of Lefebvre's Marxism have been broadly highlighted; Rob Shields[2] identified him as close to the "Latin American Left," Andy Merrifield[3] as "bond[ing] with [Rosa] Luxembourg" in contrast with Lenin, while others have focussed upon his "anarchistic qualities."[4] The lack of focus on his relationship with the CPE is especially striking given that Lefebvre developed his theory about space amid fierce debates around the intellectual development of Marx in France – primarily initiated by Althusser's *Pour Marx* [5] –, as well as Frankfurt School-influenced perspectives on the CPE[6] inspired by the second German edition and translation into several languages of the *Grundrisse* in the 1950s. Underlining the relevance of Marx's political-economic critique, Lefebvre wrote in *La production de l'espace*:

> No sooner is Marx pronounced dead than Marxism experiences a resurgence. On reinspection, the classical texts emerge as far richer than had been supposed. (…) Some, such as the Grundrisse not many years ago have successfully revived a seemingly exhausted line of thought[7].

In this piece I propose a new reading of *La production de l'espace*, deeply intertwined with the so-called problem between the historical and the logical method – a distinction originally made by Engels[8] to distinguish the two ways of presentation in Marx's CPE. *La production de l'espace* is not only one of the most known and remarkable works written by Lefebvre: it is also one of the least comprehensively studied and properly understood. Nevertheless, one can find there prominent insights that shed light on the role of spatial analysis in the CPE from within the very Marxist theoretical corpus. A new reading of the book would not only be of interest to Marxian scholars interested in the

CPE, but also to geographers, sociologists, etc. concerned about establishing rigorous and scientific grounds for spatial analysis.

I argue that Lefebvre attempted, through his work on the urban question, a novel response both to the inherent tensions in Marx's mature work and to the changes in modern capitalism. The very structure of *La production de l'espace*, the Marx-inspired concepts developed in there and the development of the presentation reveal a profound concern with the theoretical foundations of the CPE.

First, I offer a review of the influence of the book in Anglophone scholarship. This choice is not to suggest that Anglophone urban studies are superior to others; rather, it stems from the fact that Lefebvre is seen as a major influence in the so-called *spatial turn* in social sciences, which was mainly theorised by North American scholars at the end of the twentieth century[9]. An exhaustive, all-embracing review of it would take much longer than an article, so the discussion is limited to authors who have arguably produced an influential work informed by Lefebvre. The next section deals with the aim of *La production de l'espace* and with Lefebvre's method. Fourth and fifth sections present the positive outcomes of Lefebvre's research, showing their coherent relationship with the book's method. The conclusion emphasises the scarce focus on the relationship between *La production de l'espace* and the widely discussed aspects of Marx's CPE.

The Influence of *La production de l'espace* in Anglophone Scholarship

La production de l'espace became known to the English-speaking public once its translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith was published in 1991.[10] Before that time, only a few prominent Anglophone scholars had drawn attention to Lefebvre's work. Perry Anderson considered him as the "oldest living survivor of the Western Marxist tradition" that had continued to "produce imperturbable and original work on subjects typically ignored by much of the Left."[11] Frederic Jameson, who described him as "probably the greatest modern French Marxist philosopher,"[12] was also visibly influenced by Lefebvre in developing his work on the cultural turn. He indeed showed in *Postmodernism*[13] an unusual knowledge of Lefebvre's multifaceted work, at a time when he was largely ignored within Anglophone scholarship. Kristin Ross's study on the Paris Commune and social space also owes much to Lefebvre. She acknowledged that her own theory was developed "through my work on a project about Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre."[14] She interviewed Lefebvre in 1983, bringing his thoughts on the Situationists to Anglophone readers.[15] David Harvey initially developed his own Marxist insights on the spatial logics of capitalism without knowing Lefebvre. But, as soon as he discovered some of his writings, he acknowledged how "confident" he felt "in appealing (…) to Lefebvre's work."[16] Harvey's attempt

to consider space in Marxian political economic analysis somehow parallels some of Lefebvre's own aims. In that sense, his appropriation and further development of some *Lefebvrean* concepts, such as the "second circuit [of capital]",[17] are essential to understand his prolific theoretical production. However, while more or less influenced by Lefebvre, neither of these authors directly discussed *La production de l'espace* as such.

In the field of geography, Edward Soja[18] was one of the first Anglophone scholars in popularising Lefebvre's spatial work. He even attempted to defend Lefebvre[19] from the critical observations David Harvey had made in the epilogue of *Social Justice and the City*.[20] However, Soja later acknowledged the difficulties he encountered when reading *La production de l'espace*. It gave him the impression of having an "anarchic style and structure," as "Lefebvre seemed not to be following his own plan, flying off in lateral directions and posing very different arguments from those presented earlier."[21] He eventually concluded that the work did not have an ordinary or linear structure, but was rather written "as a musical composition, with a multiplicity of instruments" that "could be read as a polyphonic fugue that assertively introduced its keynote themes early on and then changed them intentionally in contrapuntal variations that took radically different forms and harmonies."[22]

As the first Anglophone scholar who wrote a whole monograph on Lefebvre, the work of Rob Shields[23] undeniably played a crucial role in translating such a multifaceted and extremely long work into English readers. He did a great job in analysing all aspects of Lefebvre's complex work, bringing attention to often underestimated aspects such as his early surrealist period in the group *Philosophies* or his writings on fascism. Yet Shields' comments on Lefebvre's method and dialectics are obscure and sometimes confusing. The reader is continually reminded that Lefebvre's method was a dialectical one, through abstract phrases that present *dialectics* as a magic wand – such as "[t]he dialectic is the centripetal core [of his method]"[24] –, which indeed remembers the style of the dogmatic Marxism Lefebvre actually criticised. In fact, what *dialectics* actually mean is not concretely explained in his book. The reader rather finds common-place arguments such as "a logic and methodology that is a universally useful approach,"[25] according to which "[neither knowledge nor practical experience] could be privileged over the other."[26] The complexity of Hegelian dialectics is similarly simplified in an already very familiar style: "[b]y comparing different theses or propositions, one spontaneously seeks a better and higher unity."[27] Indeed, it bears a stark similarity with a classic exposition of Marxist orthodoxy: "When the third term, negation of the negation, is achieved, the solution appears, for, at that moment, the reason for the contradiction is eliminated: obsolete."[28]

Shields' somehow flawed account on dialectics led him to a sharp, sometimes brute criticism of *La production de l'espace*. While he recognises some important aspects, such as the twofold meaning of *production* in

Lefebvre's theory, as well as the influence of Marx's account of the commodity-form, Shields argued that the spatial history in *La production de l'espace* is "a stereotypical, linear, Eurocentric modelling of historical progress."[29] He also pointed out that Lefebvre's presentation "is anti-dialectical, suggests that time is the ultimate ordering system of space, and directs attention away from struggles in everyday life to grand themes in the economic and political structure of a time," concluding that "much of the 485 pages of *Production de l'espace* is thus a failure in Lefebvre's own terms."[30] In other words: only because Lefebvre argued that more developed societies correspond to spaces which are more socially produced and detached from nature (i.e., just because Lefebvre draws a coherent relationship between time and space), Shields concludes his theory is another sort of historical teleology. But how is Lefebvre's spatial history to be "stereotypical, linear" considering the large number of praises he gives to many pre-capitalist spatial practices, spaces of representations and representations of space?

In fact, Lefebvre's method characterises for showing the paradoxes of geohistorical progress, arguing that higher levels of spatial unity were achieved under less developed forms of societies. The opposition between *oeuvre* and *product* is present all the time in *La Production de l'espace*, with a certain level of nostalgia included. See, for example, his comments on Venice as "just as unique and unified as a painting or a sculpture" with an "architectural and monumental unity which extends from each palazzo to the city as a whole,"[31] or his passionate comments on the "miracle" of Ancient Greek space and its "simple idea of unity"[32], as opposed to contemporary abstract space.

Lefebvre's view therefore parallels Marx's, which was also far from being stereotypical and linear and consequently wrote about the prolific art production in Ancient Greece: "In the case of the arts, it is well known that certain periods of their flowering are out of all proportion to the general development of society."[33]

In the twenty first century, Łukasz Stanek has produced a very rigorous approach to the spatial theory of Lefebvre, with a particular focus on architecture. He has also the merit of discovering and editing a work by Lefebvre, written at the same time as *La production de l'espace*, that remained unpublished long after his death.[34] Despite his focus on architecture and urban planning, Stanek attempts to cross boundaries in order to understand the thought of an author as complex and multifaceted as Lefebvre. In the light of the popularisation of the concept of "production of space," he warns that "it becomes increasingly necessary to oppose its banalization by revealing the philosophical sources of this concept."[35]

He interestingly calls the attention to a fundamental concept in Lefebvre's work, often ignored by the Anglophone scholarship: that of "concrete abstraction," which is frequently used in *La production de l'espace*.

This is constantly referred to in many other writings to denote a wide range of things, from money, commodities or language[36] to space[37] or the State.[38] The idea of an abstraction being concrete is inspired, at least partly, by Marx's analysis of the commodity and abstract labour, which "achieves practical truth as an abstraction" [39] in capitalist societies. Insofar as commodities are exchanged according to the abstract labour socially necessary to produce them, and as commodity-exchange forms the "*nexus rerum*"[40] of capitalist societies, their common attribute – abstract labour – is not just an abstraction made in thought, but one that "govern[s] social relations."[41]

Conceptualising space as a concrete abstraction, Stanek asserts that "the lived practices of those inhabiting this space are themselves abstract."[42] He correctly points to the Cartesian system of representation as something becoming practically true, for pre-abstract space "characterized by blurred borders, and qualitatively defined by identity, natural peculiarities, topography, authority, religion, tradition, and history" is now homogenised under "three coordinates of the analytic geometry."[43]

Stuart Elden is arguably the Anglophone scholar who has developed the most rigorous yet cautious reading of Henri Lefebvre, due to a careful study of his main theoretical sources – identified as Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger.[44] Elden was among the first in calling attention to the gaps in the 1980/90s reception of Lefebvre, critically stating that popularisations of his work such as Soja's "does Lefebvre a great disservice."[45] His reading of *La production de l'espace* is incredibly well-informed as regards to Lefebvre's philosophical sources. Unlike other accounts of the book, he also noticed the twofold objective of Lefebvre's work: "an assertion of the importance of space in tandem with that of time; and an analysis of the spaces of the modern age."[46] Furthermore, against the predominant current depicting a Lefebvre closer to the early Marx, he highlighted the relevance of *late* Marxian concepts for Lefebvre, such as "the mode of production" which "is essential to his analysis."[47]

Lefebvre's Spatial Project, Marx's Critique of Political Economy

Not only was Lefebvre influenced by Marx *in general*; he discussed the ambivalences of Marx's various research plans, the different positive outcomes they produced, and drew on a particular interpretation of Marx's methods to develop his own research method and presentation of the spatial *problematic*. Whereas his engagement with the early writings of Marx is undeniable – he indeed argued, *contra* Althusser, for an integral interpretation of Marx's intellectual trajectory, as one determined by *political* breaks instead of by *epistemological* ones[48], and furthermore, edited Marx's 1844 manuscripts in French language[49] –, his discussion of Marx's late work can shed further light on his spatial writings.

This is not to merely reduce *La production de l'espace* to a critique of the political economy of space. The aim of the book is indeed wider than that. He regarded the political economy of space as an aspect of the theory of the production of space: "The reason why such a political economy will not be further elaborated upon here is that it is an offshoot of a more powerful theory: the theory of the production of space."[50] His engagement with other authors like Nietzsche or Heidegger is remarkable, as shown by Elden,[51] and in fact Lefebvre does not develop his discussion on space in a literary style akin to Marx's, devoting many paragraphs to cultural, architectonical and even psychoanalytical topics. However, I argue that whereas his work cannot be reduced to the critique of a political economy of space in a strictly Marxian sense, at the same time it cannot be understood without it. Moreover, the very plan of the book, its structure and positive findings bear clear similarities with the CPE: "Our present analysis will not attain its full meaning until political economy has been reinstated as the way to understand productive activity."[52]

La production de l'espace can be regarded as the culmination of Lefebvre's long studies on space.[53] It is preceded by some important works initiated around 1967, such as *Le droit a la ville,*[54] *La revolution urbaine,*[55] *Espace et politique*[56] or the less known but still crucial *La pensée marxiste et la ville*[57] – which simultaneously follow his writings on rural questions.[58] It is important to note that Lefebvre used to coin many terms that he would discard very soon. For example, the concept of an *urban society* tending to replace industrial society appears continually in *Le droit a la ville* and *La revolution urbaine*, whereas it disappears in subsequent writings without clear explanation. However, already in *Espace et politique* the same idea is present with different words: "the contradictions of space encompass, bring [contradictions and conflicts in space] to a higher level"[59], advancing the similar notion of "a transitional period between the mode of production of things in space and the mode of production of space."[60] Something similar occurs with his formulation of *right to the city*, which in *La production de l'espace* appears slightly changed as *right to difference*. This lack of textual continuity and explicit self-clarification undeniably makes Lefebvre's work harder to follow.

Lefebvre wrote amid a sharply divided theoretical background that, according to him, had only produced "fragments and cross-sections of space."[61] He consequently aimed his project at developing a "unitary theory."[62] He also begins with a basic theoretical assumption, which is demonstrated alongside the work: "that (social) space is a (social) product."[63] This has a twofold implication for theory: if space is not only an object, but a moving, dynamic subject, then the task of theory does not only consist in describing things, but also in comprehending transformative, productive action. The very title of the book refers to a productive activity, rather than to an object of contemplation. Lefebvre consequently underlined the problems inherent in such a twofold methodological assumption:

> Theory reproduces the generative process - by means of a concatenation of concepts, to be sure, but in a very strong sense of the word: from within, not just from without (descriptively), and globally - that is, moving continually back and forth between past and present.[64]

This is key to understanding the kernel of Lefebvre's methodology: he aimed to analyse the specific type of space in each mode of production (a method he refers to as *synchronic* or *regressive*), as well as the productive, transformative and mediative role played by space in the transition from one mode of production to another (a method he refers to as *diachronic* or *progressive*). Hence his labelling of his method as "regressive-progressive."[65] This theoretical concern about the role played by space in historical transitions can be seen in previous works such as *Le droit a la ville*, where he laments that the transition to capitalism has been "well studied by historians, except for what relates to the city and the 'urban system'."[66]

Echoing Marx's idea of the most historically developed societies as containing the keys for the understanding of the previous ones,[67] Lefebvre asks: "how could we come to understand a genesis, the genesis of the present, along with the preconditions and processes involved, other than by starting from that present, working our way back to the past and then retracing our steps?"[68] The importance of such a methodological assumption was also highlighted in *La pensée marxiste et la ville*: "we cannot invoke historical evolution to critically understand and appreciate the current form of society, bourgeois society. (…) History cannot replace political economy and the critique of political economy!"[69]

The combination of the progressive and regressive method applied to space was seen by Lefebvre as his particular contribution to Marxist theory. Shortly before, he had criticised Althusser's structuralism on the basis that it did not aim at updating the CPE to the capitalist societies of the second half of the twentieth century, but rather at a merely textual – and thus scholastic – reading of Marx's *Capital*.[70] Lefebvre believed, on the one hand, that the concepts developed by Marx in his CPE are highly important, but need to be rethought in the light of the leading role played by urbanisation and space in contemporary capitalism – which is a type of capitalism where "the [industrial] problematic is displaced and becomes that of urban development."[71] He consequently suggested that the categories of the CPE still have full normative meaning and sense, whenever its object is updated (i.e., when they take modern capitalism into account):

> The scientific and technological changes of the modern world have now made a reconsideration of Marxist thought inevitable. The thesis presented here might be summarized as follows. Each of the concepts of Marxism may be taken up once more, and carried to a higher level, without any significant moment of the theory as a whole being lost. On the other hand, if they are considered in the setting of Marx's exposition,

these concepts and their theoretical articulation no longer have an object.[72]

On the other hand, he correctly saw a tension within Marx's own work and methodology: between the historical and logical modes of presentation in his economic works. Just in the conclusion of the first chapter of *La production de l'espace*, Lefebvre dealt straightforwardly with this problematic. He was concerned about Marx's partial abandonment of the historical exposition of the capitalist mode of production in *Capital*, to which he turned back when he needs to explain, in the eighth part of his seminal work,[73] the real, practical agency that enabled such a mode of production – the primitive accumulation that historically led to the preponderance of capital over other modes of production in England:

> witness the fact that the exposition in *Capital* by no means follows exactly the method set forth in the *Grundrisse*; Marx's great doctrinal dissertation starts off from a form, that of exchange value, and not from the concepts brought to the fore in the earlier work, namely production and labour. On the other hand, the approach adumbrated in the *Grundrisse* is taken up again apropos of the accumulation of capital: in England, studying the most advanced form of capitalism in order to understand the system in other countries and the process of its actual growth, Marx cleaved firmly to his initial methodological precepts.[74]

In a way, Lefebvre does not reject *Capital* at all, but seems to regret Marx's richer comments in the *Grundrisse* about the differences between the various modes of production. According to him, "[In the *Grundrisse*] one preoccupation is dominant, one that never disappeared but was subsequently attenuated: an emphasis on differences."[75]

It therefore comes by no surprise that in *La production de l'espace* Lefebvre regrets the partial abandonment in *Capital* of a method that emphasises historical differences:

> Whereas *Capital* stresses a homogenizing rationality founded on the quasi-'pure' form, that of (exchange) value, the *Grundrisse* insists at all levels on difference. Not that the *Grundrisse* leaves form out of the picture; rather, it goes from one content to the next and generates forms on the basis of these contents. Less rigour, less emphasis on logical consistency, and hence a less elaborate formalization or axiomatization - all leave the door open to more concrete themes, especially in connection with the (dialectical) relations between town and country, between natural reality and social reality. *Grundrisse* Marx takes all the historical mediations into consideration, including the village community, the family, and so on[76].

I argue that Lefebvre, concerned about the tensions within Marx's intertwined methods, aimed to provide a novel solution to their sometimes problematic entanglement in *La production de l'espace*: he combined here the progressive

and the regressive types of presentation, focussing on space as an active process through which the transition between different modes of production can be explained (progressive), while the categorical apparatus illuminating that theoretical journey is one taken from the most developed society (regressive); the concept of the production of space, which only emerges in advanced capitalism.

Research Outcomes of *La production de l'espace*: The Regressive

La production de l'espace, despite its complexity and intermittent lack of order, cannot be seen as a mere methodological dissertation. Lefebvre's methodological comments are fundamental but would lack full meaning without their subsequent application to his research on space. While the book is sometimes difficult to follow, and an important level of "meandering style"[77] is fairly attributable to Lefebvre, developing a more comprehensive reading is possible if his theoretical sources are seriously taken into account. According to the methodological observations made in the previous section, I propose a new understanding of its content and structure. After presenting the plan of the work in the initial chapter, Lefebvre discusses, in the second chapter (*Social Space*) the concept of *the production of space* as a historically determined one, dating his theoretical emergence back to the work of the Bauhaus in the 1920s. It is, therefore, a product of a certain stage of development: mature capitalism. According to Lefebvre, the Bauhaus understood things in space not as isolated, but as relational; moreover, space is created by human activity in a unitary sense. A historical achievement of the Bauhaus was that of binding architecture to capitalist productive activity: "all thinking about space and time was bound up with social practice more precisely, with industrial practice."[78]

To take a concept from the most advanced theoretical current is a further Marxian influence on Lefebvre. The former took political economists – in contrast with vulgar economists, which "deals with appearances only"[79] – not to draw an external critique, but rather to critically develop their own concepts in order to show their inconsistencies and gaps, as well as their scientific – albeit ultimately limited – operationality. As Marx warned in a letter to Engels,

> it is one thing for a critique to take a science to the point at which it admits of a dialectical presentation, and quite another to apply an abstract, ready-made system of logic to vague presentiments of just such a system.[80]

In that sense, Stanek[81] has drawn a useful comparison between the emergence of a consciousness of labour, as seen in Adam Smith's work, and the emergence of the concept of space production, as seen in the Bauhaus, both reflecting the self-understanding that capitalist society generates about itself.

In the subsequent chapter (*Spatial Architectonics*), Lefebvre criticises the notions about space held by some great philosophers, and examines the idea of space as an extension of the body. The presentation might seem to get slightly more complex here, as Lefebvre also deals with some of his contemporary currents – mainly psychoanalysis and linguistics –, but he is overall attempting to theorise his notion of *production of space* through a critique of the history of spatial thinking.

But perhaps surprisingly, in the next three and final chapters before the conclusions, Lefebvre drastically changes its exposition and turns from what seems a complex discussion of different theories to a history of space. Why such an abrupt change, with no apparent or explicit reason? And furthermore, why is his spatial history linear, beginning with Ancient Greece and ending with contemporary capitalism, if he had previously advocated for a regressive method that understands the past from the present, and not the other way around? The answer to these questions reveals the secrets of the obscureness of the book's structure, as well as the purposes motivating its writing.

The apparent inconsistency of the book's structure with his initial comments on the importance of understanding the present from the present itself can be understood as this: Lefebvre provides, after the initial chapter, a discussion of the very notion of the *production of space*, as a developed concept that can only arise when productive activity is sufficiently developed: in mature capitalism. Even though this concept arises only at a specific historical moment, it provides the means to understanding earlier spatial relationships; this is why it is discussed at the outset of the work. Because Lefebvre aims to show the differences in space throughout societies and historical transitions, he can now begin his historical explanation, given that the concept of the *production of space* – a concept arising in advanced capitalist societies, but analytically operational for previous societies – has been theoretically developed. The virtue of this spatial history is that it further develops the very concept of the *production of space*, deploying its historicity, showing space as an active subject in historical transformation. In fact, this whole idea is advanced by Lefebvre himself in the initial chapter:

> A new concept, that of the production of space, appears at the start; it must 'operate' or 'work' in such a way as to shed light on processes from which it cannot separate itself because it is a product of them. (…) Ultimately, once it has illuminated and thereby validated its own coming-into-being, the production of space (as theoretical concept and practical reality in indissoluble conjunction) will become clear, and our demonstration will be over.[82]

Interestingly, this aspect of *La production de l'espace* bears further parallelisms with *Capital*'s structure and reveals a resemblance between their methodological concerns. Lefebvre, whether consciously or not, discovered and consequently put into practice an aspect of Marx's exposition, one that

the Frankfurt School enunciated around the same time and that later became widely accepted in Marxist scholarship: the fact that Marx only begins his historical explanation once the scientific concepts have been logically developed. In other words: the argument of *Capital* proceeds from the most "elementary and simple"[83] economic forms to progressively more complex ones. However, the transitions from one to another are logically, and not historically explained. It is only in *The So-Called Primitive Accumulation* (ultimate section of the first volume of *Capital*) when Marx explained the process by which capitalism practically came into being in England, perhaps to avoid the impression of an "idealist manner of presentation, which makes it seem as if it were a matter of conceptual determinations and of the dialectic of these concepts",[84] and ultimately underscoring the importance of productive activity. As the CPE scholar Alfred Schmidt put it:

> Marx would not have been successful in unfolding the content of the historical presuppositions of capital's emergence had he not first grasped the essence of capital theoretically (…). [T]he mature Marx placed the history of capital on scientific foundations by proceeding on an abstract-theoretical rather than a historiographic level.[85]

Is not precisely this methodological step the one Lefebvre is applying, as he first discusses the concept of the production of space, and then follows with his spatial history? But there is a further novelty in Lefebvre's regressive-progressive approach. The originality of his exposition is that transitions between societies are explained as mediated in virtue of space; this is perhaps what Lefebvre meant when he somehow obscurely enunciated that "the subject of history is unquestionably the city."[86]

Research Outcomes of *La production de l'espace*: The Progressive

The first of these three chapters (*From Absolute Space to Abstract Space*) comprises the development of what Lefebvre called *absolute space*, as characteristic of ancient civilizations and feudalism, and describes the emergence of *abstract space*, as characteristic of commodity production.

Absolute space arises in the origins of civilization, as a human *break* with nature which nevertheless encompasses it: while being a purely human creation, absolute space was understood as having natural properties. It reflected the human view of nature, as it "appears as transcendent, as sacred (i.e. inhabited by divine forces), as magical and cosmic. (…) [I]t continues to be perceived as part of nature."[87] This coincides with the emergence of the distinction between town and country. Lefebvre, who regarded logics as indispensable – though eventually insufficient in themselves – to understand spatial relations, identifies the Greek city-states as a *centre*, whose form "seems to gather in everything which surrounds it [rural space]."[88] It is interesting to note that he also attributed the same form of centrality to

chronologically posterior spaces: the feudal market, the capitalist city centre, the Paris Commune[89]… for there are certain formal determinations common to different spaces. Space, as a relational reality, comprises this formal relationship between centre and periphery, which is historically expressed in a way or another depending on the mode of production. Whereas the ancient *agora* brought Greek citizens together as a fundamental unity for the *polis*, the capitalist city centre concentrates the means of production and consumption, political buildings and centres of decision, etc. However, *centrality* as a form remains there, albeit transformed, which accounts for the spatial continuities and discontinuities analysed by Lefebvre. Moreover, the spatial form is crucial to understand the transitions from one space to another, and fundamental for the class struggle.

From Greece, Lefebvre shifts to Ancient Rome. Whereas both can be considered as pertaining to a similar historic mode of production, and although they were broadly characterised by the same type of space, Lefebvre warns about the dangers of subsuming Ancient Greece and Rome under the same label. He was rather concerned about highlighting the differences between them:

> The claim made on the basis of this fact alone by a self-proclaimedly Marxist philosophy of history which posits a specific 'mode of production' founded on slavery succeeds only, however, in rendering unintelligible the realities of that city state, of Athens or Rome, of the Logos/Cosmos, and of Roman Law.[90]

Roman space, mirroring the development of private property and law, harbingers the emergence of "a space with a great future in Western Europe"[91]. This is seen by Lefebvre not as intrinsically bad; quite the opposite, Roman's relationship with space "put an end to the mere contemplation of nature, of the Cosmos or of the world, and pointed the way towards the mastery which transforms instead of simply interpreting."[92]

Lefebvre does not explain in detail the fall of the Western Roman Empire. He does, though briefly, attribute it to transformations in space; in particular to the decadence of the Roman cities, which unlike modern capitalist cities had its "basis in the earth, in landownership."[93] This particular relation between town and country under Antiquity is ultimately seen as the reason for its collapse. Marx had also expressed in very similar terms, when he wrote that "the history of classical antiquity is the history of cities, but of cities founded on landed property and on agriculture,"[94] in contrast with modern capitalism which is "already moving on its own foundation"[95] and implies "the urbanization of the countryside, not ruralization of the city as in antiquity."[96]

Lefebvre ironically notes that, according to most historians, in the twelfth century "history suddenly resumed after a long interruption."[97] The transformations occurred after this century announced a new type of space

through the emergence of medieval cities, which had a novel kind of centrality: the marketplace. Whereas "antiquity looked upon trade and tradespeople as external to the city (…), [t]he medieval revolution brought commerce inside the town."[98] Lefebvre points out that the centre-periphery relation – i.e., "[t]he form of social space"[99] – in medieval towns is different to that in Ancient cities. Unlike the Agora, the marketplace was "opened up on every side onto the surrounding territory",[100] so as to allow the circulation of commodities. Therefore, it "was by definition a space of exchange and communications, and therefore of networks."[101] In sum, the space emerged in medieval cities laid the groundwork for abstract, capitalist space. But this was not yet abstract space, nor modern capitalism, as "[r]eligious space did not disappear with the advent of commercial space."[102]

Lefebvre's hypothesis of the transitory role played by space is clearly highlighted at this respect: "[t]he historical mediation between medieval (or feudal) space and the capitalist space which was to result from accumulation was located in urban space."[103] Whereas a wide range of demographic, institutional, political and even psychological factors such as "dynastic interests, ideologies, the ambitions of the mighty, the formation of nation states, demographic pressures, and so on" have been used to explain the transition to capitalism, Lefebvre asks why nobody has attempted to explain this history by means of spatial analysis: "Inasmuch as space is the locus of all such chronologies, might it not constitute a principle of explanation at least as acceptable as any other?"[104]

The Renaissance cities provided a new rationality, based on exchange and calculation, to administer space, thus substituting the power of feudal landlords. But the true space of accumulation in Western Europe only emerged through "the establishment of the world market, and the conquest and plunder of the oceans and continents by Europeans."[105] This spatial transition coincides with a historical period when, according to Marx, for the first time, the historically created factor rules over nature "capital rules, the social, historically created element [is predominant]."[106] Space ceased to be absolute, as no longer needed to mirror an external reality – nature: "[i]nstead, it assumed its own identity, and began to represent itself graphically."[107]

Lefebvre does not discuss the industrialisation process in detail here, perhaps because he had expounded on it in previous works such as *Le droit à la ville* or *La Pensée marxiste et la ville*. He would nevertheless discuss in the subsequent chapter the characteristics of *abstract space*, as completely developed in twentieth century capitalism. Instead, he concludes the chapter with a discussion of violence and the State, as further generators of the new, capitalist space.

In the fifth chapter, *Contradictory Space*, Lefebvre deals with contemporary capitalist space. There we find the most insightful comments on *abstract space*. This is paralleled with the commodity, as it represents a

generality – that of exchangeability – where the abstract (*product*) predominates over the concrete (*oeuvre*). The predominance of exchange value over use value in space resonates with Marx's[108] claim of capital tending to overcome all natural barriers. *Abstract space*, in sum, is the space "where the tendency to homogenization exercises its pressure and its repression with the means at its disposal: a semantic void abolishes former meanings."[109] But *abstract space* cannot be entirely homogeneous; just like commodities always bear a concrete, use-value, abstract space is ultimately dependent on a material, concrete location. Take, for example, natural resources and its influence on space: whereas cities' location have traditionally depended on natural features, human mastery over nature has enabled a relative independence from it, which nevertheless seems to be absolute. Urbanisation provides a clear example of society becoming more and more independent from its natural origins, laying its own grounds, rhythms and space. This is achieved "by means of urbanization, (…) in accordance with the law of the reproducible and the repetitive, by abolishing spatial and temporal differences, by destroying nature and nature's time."[110] Yet such a savage tendency toward decoupling from place or natural determinations display its limits at some point, as the climate emergency clearly manifests: Lefebvre related the dominance of such real abstractions with the existential threat faced by the Earth. "The finiteness of nature and of the Earth thus has the power to challenge blind (ideological) belief in the infinite power of abstraction."[111]

The eventual dependency of *abstract space* to natural resources and concrete location is just one of the multiple ways of exemplifying the impossibility of a completely homogeneous space. In a similar fashion, Lefebvre also mentions the materiality of infrastructure and networks, the necessary localisation of consumption, or the very dependency of abstract space to an element which does not have a capitalist origin itself: the city. From here, Lefebvre jumps to the penultimate chapter, *From the Contradictions of Space to Differential Space*, where he analyses these concrete, qualitative aspects of *abstract space* – which he calls *differences* – as possibilities of its overcoming. In other words, what Lefebvre is attempting here – and what can be regarded as one of his primary contributions to Marxist theory – is to develop an insight of a socialist type of transformation that takes space into consideration.

The theoretical lessons of *Capital* are displayed at this point again; Lefebvre claims that everyday life and space can be explained through the contradictions between exchange value and use value, which famously lie at the heart of the beginning of *Capital*, are developed through the rest of Marx's presentation and, according to the CPE scholar Roman Rosdolsky,[112] allow a comprehension of the rest of the work. Paradoxically, the modern production of space, which on the one hand enables a widening of *abstract space*, entails on the other hand a reaffirmation of use-value: "[T]he qualitative successfully

resists resorption by the quantitative - just as use resists resorption by value."[113] Perhaps surprisingly, Lefebvre is referring to the increasing importance of tourism and leisure in contemporary capitalism, as "the body regains a certain right to use" prioritising qualitative characteristics of space: "sun, snow, sea."[114] Translated into geoeconomics terms, this accounts for the late twentieth century division of labour in Europe, with northern productive regions and southern touristic places.

However, Lefebvre is not ingenuously placing leisure as inherently revolutionary; he is rather very aware that leisure "is as alienated and alienating as labour; as much an agent of co-optation as it is itself co-opted; and both an assimilative and an assimilated part of the 'system'."[115] Conversely, leisure is "no more than a virtuality," but one that tends to "behave as a differential field" through the recognition of the body, therefore "breaking out of the temporal and spatial shell developed in response to labour."[116] In sum, leisure demonstrates that other spaces than that of productive growth are possible, yet it remains an integral part of contemporary capitalism.

Lefebvre thought the quantitative growth of the productive forces had reached a limit, so it had to survive through the production of space. He saw in the capitalist production of space a condition of possibility for a "conscious production of space";[117] socialism was no longer to be understood as "production of things in space," but as conscious production of space, which "implies a shift from domination to appropriation, and the primacy of use over exchange (the withering-away of exchange value)."[118] His work is thus not only a critique of capitalist space, but also a critique of orthodox, productivist Marxism, and implies a novel assessment of the revolutionary process that takes space into consideration.

Right to difference is the umbrella under which Lefebvre labelled his general amendment to the classic type of socialist transformation – as he similarly did with his *right to the city*.[119] The fact that *abstract space* tending toward homogenisation actually produces *difference* parallels, according to Lefebvre, the development of science, music, poetry or philosophy: in all these, "repetition (iteration, recurrence) generates difference,"[120] an argument he had presented in a book written almost three decades before.[121] In that sense, "[a]bstract space (…) makes the relationship between repetition and difference a more antagonistic one."[122] If erasing all differences is a tendency towards an impossible goal, then social transformation is possible. Lefebvre believed the richness of urban life, "the simultaneity of "everything" that is susceptible of coming together"[123] not only was indestructible, but also to play an important role in subverting *abstract space*. He consequently coined the term *right to difference*, to express the need of liberating from a space based upon repetitions, homogeneity and abstractions. With his emphasis on spatial differences to overcome the capitalist mode of production and its space, he therefore culminated roughly a decade of theorising about the city and the

urban experience, as "place of desire, permanent disequilibrium, seat of the dissolution of normalities and constraints, the moment of play and of the unpredictable" which "persists and even intensifies"[124] despite the efforts of the State to "devalorize, degrade, destroy, urban life."[125]

In the final chapter, *Openings and Conclusions*, Lefebvre not only provided a synthesis of the whole work, but also an extension of the emancipatory proposals of the previous section, as well as a reassertion of the method used throughout the book. Furthermore, he enunciates the purpose of the book is the one underlined in this piece: theorising transitions, the role played by space in them, particularly in "a conflict-laden transition from one mode of production (that of things) to another (that of space),"[126] which is the topic of the previous two chapters. He therefore wrote: "The transition here considered is characterized first of all by its contradictions: (..) between abstract and differential space."[127]

Lefebvre concluded the work reminding the reader about the emancipatory purposes motivating its writing. The book "has been informed from beginning to end by a project (…) of a different society."[128] Moreover, in a fashion very characteristic of him to keep a distance from dogmatic Marxism, Lefebvre warns that he is not suggesting a closed plan nor a system, but rather "an orientation."[129]

Conclusion

The structure of *La production de l'espace* has a very specific order, widely underestimated by scholarship, but deeply entrenched in Lefebvre's compromise to keep up with Marx's CPE – and consequently, with his emancipatory goals.

Lefebvre's work is extraordinarily broad and multifaceted. Much of it remains untranslated into English, though some great efforts have been done in the past two decades.[130] As a consequence, its reception has necessarily been slow, and should proceed carefully so as to avoid drawing vague conclusions. The debates it generated are undeniably interesting and useful, as well as the empirical research it has inspired.[131] In general, Lefebvre somehow determined the so-called *spatial turn* in social sciences and the shape it took. However, there are evident gaps in the reception by the academia, though more rigorous approaches have been developed in the twenty first century.

Further discussion and real interest in the spatial writings of Lefebvre like *La production de l'espace* would help spatial social sciences in becoming more rigorous and well founded, especially given the strong empiricist tradition of fields like geography, for instance. In a way, Lefebvre comes from a critical yet modern intellectual tradition, concerned about dogmatism – even when this appears as *science* – but also deeply interested in searching tools to

rationally understand the world. Spatial social sciences would particularly benefit from a higher interest in the work of authors like Marx and the classic German philosophers – main sources of Lefebvre's work and implicitly omnipresent in *La production de l'espace* – who, although apparently did not develop a particular spatial theory, are quintessential to lay the groundwork for any scientific approach.

In sum, understanding Lefebvre's intellectual context, as well as paying attention to his concerns about Marxist theory as expressed in previous works renders essential to grasp the objectives of *La production de l'espace*, as well as many of the arguments developed there. While a wide range of theoretical currents are examined in the book, his reading of and novel response to the problems inherent in Marx's CPE feature a prominent role; they actually determine the very structure of the work, as this piece attempts to illustrate. With the concept of *production of space*, and the combination of the regressive and the progressive methods, Lefebvre proposed a revolutionary way of comprehending history and space, whose origins can be traced back to the writing of *Capital*.

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Intelligibility and its Limits

Arendt, Améry, and Levinas on Atrocity and Suffering

Sidra Shahid

Amsterdam University College

It is often said that evil threatens sense and intelligibility by defeating our normative expectations.[1] From natural evils – catastrophes such as earthquakes – to moral evils – atrocities such as genocide – the suffering produced by evil raises questions about the metaphysical and ethical order of the world. We may, like Voltaire in the context of the Lisbon earthquake, wonder whether in the face of acute suffering our metaphysical conception of the world (in Voltaire's case, Leibnizian optimism) has any explanatory traction. We may, like Hannah Arendt in her account of radical evil, find the motivations of perpetrators undecipherable, transgressing moral sense and meaning.[2] Evil's ostensible unintelligibility also implicates the redemptive powers of art and poetry. As Theodor Adorno famously stated, in the face of the atrocities of the Holocaust, poetic forms of sense-making are not only inert but degenerative.[3]

These paradigmatic perspectives on evil suggest that the presence of evil threatens sense and intelligibility. If, however, evil alienates us from sense, and especially moral sense, it becomes unclear how we can respond to evil morally. Accounts of evil either undercut the unintelligibility of evil,[4] in order to render it suitable for moral accountability or uphold its unintelligibility with the unpalatable consequence that evil comes to transcend the moral sense of the world. This paper proposes an account of evil that satisfies both the intuition that evil is intelligible from a moral standpoint and the intuition that evil is in some sense unintelligible. In order to incorporate both intuitions about evil, I propose that we distinguish between unintelligibility understood in terms of *perpetrator motivation* and unintelligibility *as a feature of suffering*. While the first kind of intelligibility concerns whether we can understand the perpetrators of evil from a moral standpoint, the second concerns how suffering impairs meaning and sense for victims and survivors. Distinguishing between these two accounts allows us to appreciate *varieties* of (un)intelligibility at stake in accounts of evil and enables us to see that the

view that evil is unintelligible is not tantamount to the idea that evil lies outside of moral sense.

Arendt's canonical accounts of radical and banal evil give us two distinctive ways in which perpetrator motivation can be understood. In her account of radical evil, unintelligibility shows up in how perpetrators of evil defy moral sense insofar as our ordinary moral responses – forgiveness, anger, revenge, etc. – fail with respect to them. Arendt's account of banal evil, by contrast, reveals that perpetrators are not, in fact, beyond comprehension but that their moral perspective is deeply distorted. Whereas the first account, falsely, as I will argue, attributes unintelligibility to perpetrators, the second account rightly treats evil as intelligible and morally tractable.

This, however, is not the final word on evil and intelligibility. The unintelligibility associated with evil involves more than the supposed inscrutability of perpetrators. A much-neglected way in which evil and unintelligibility are associated concerns how evil, understood in terms of suffering, destroys intelligibility at its foundations. In order to bring out this feature of evil, I put into dialogue Jean Améry's first-person reports of his experiences during and after the Holocaust as chronicled in *At the Mind's Limits*[5] with Emmanuel's Levinas's essay "Useless Suffering."[6] Reading Améry through Levinas reveals how the suffering of evil condemns the subject to sense-destroying isolation without recourse to intersubjective modes of sense-making. Together Arendt, Amery, and Levinas reveal that intelligibility means different things when we are talking about the perpetrators of evil and when we are talking about victims and survivors of evil.[7]

Radical Evil and Unintelligibility

Arendt introduces radical evil in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* as an unprecedented form of evil that evades moral understanding. The crimes and atrocities of totalitarian regimes, including the Third Reich, are a form of radical evil, because they are "unpunishable, unforgivable […] no longer […] understood and explained by the evil motives of self-interest, greed, covetousness, resentment, lust for power, and cowardice; and which therefore anger could not revenge, love could not endure, friendship could not forgive" (Arendt 1979, 459).[8] In Arendt's view, no comprehensible motive – however perverse or unjust – can be attributed to the architects and executors of these atrocities. Arendt describes this incomprehensibility in terms of the "anti-utility" and "uselessness" that characterized Nazi enterprises, citing the fact that even when shortages of materials were impairing the war effort, the Nazis set aside the exigencies of war and persisted in the costly effort of maintaining concentration camps and the entire transportation network required to run them.[9] The incomprehensible motives of totalitarian regimes are also encapsulated by the violent excesses that place them "beyond the pale

even of solidarity in human sinfulness."[10] We might find blameworthy or punishable utilitarian action that results in suffering taken during a conventional war, but we are, in Arendt's view in *Origins*, unable to find punishable or blameworthy in the standard sense those actions whose motives confound us. Radical evil, therefore, paralyses our moral understanding.

Radical evil, Arendt argues, does not only lack comprehensible motives, it also does not participate in any foundational narratives about evil in Western thought. Arendt cites Kant's account of radical evil, according to which the source of evil is a "perverted ill will," a subject's natural propensity to follow her inclinations.[11] Even the devil has a "celestial origin" in a cosmological drama, i.e., the devil as the long-standing adversary of God.[12] Radical evil does not participate in these overarching narratives because it can neither be explained in terms of our innate propensity for evil nor in terms of satanic malice. As Arendt puts it, "we actually have nothing to fall back on in order to understand a phenomenon that… breaks down all standards we know."[13]

One might point out that in placing totalitarian regimes outside of Western narratives, Arendt also risks placing them outside history, even though *Origins of Totalitarianism* also shows continuities between Western imperialism and the Holocaust.[14] The notion that the radical evil of 20th-century totalitarian regimes has no origins is, in fact, the result of a long-standing myth that portrays European atrocities during WWII as aberrations. It is also an example of what Achille Mbembe describes as a false exteriorization of violence, an invalid separation of the metropole and the colony that results in the artificial separation of domestic and colonial histories.[15] This includes evident continuities between German colonial enterprises in South West Africa, where the first genocide of the 20th century occurred and where concentration camps were also established.[16] The infrastructure of these camps, together with practices like human experimentation, are historical precursors to the Nazi camps. Furthermore, Arendt's claim that radical evil made human beings superfluous by treating them as fully disposable and replaceable[17] applies as much to the inmates of the concentration camps and gulags in Europe as to the genocide of indigenous populations in the Americas and to the Africans who perished in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

It could be argued that rendering human beings superfluous is a necessary but not sufficient condition for radical evil. A second necessary condition, as we have seen, is that radical evil is motiveless and non-utilitarian. What would then set apart the atrocities of totalitarian regimes in the 20th century from, say, the trans-Atlantic slave trade would be the latter's putative utilitarianism. However, first, it is not entirely clear whether the radical evil of totalitarian regimes lacked utility – rendering a class of human beings superfluous for the purposes of establishing racial purity counts as a

means to an end. Second, it can equally be argued that the murder of millions of Africans owing to conditions aboard slave ships, for instance, did not follow any utilitarian logic. Like radical evil which destroys persons through destroying their status as legal, moral, and free persons, slavery consisted of a "triple loss…identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether)."[18] Arendt's view, then, that radical evil has no comparisons and is therefore unintelligible, turns out to be unwarranted.

Banal Evil and Intelligibility

In her letters to Gershom Scholem, prior to writing *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt expresses a change of mind. Rather than demonic or deep, Arendt describes evil as a "fungus" that "lays the world to waste."[19] Evil should not, in other words, be apotheosized to theological prestige, as profound and inscrutable, but rather treated as the lowest and basest phenomenon. The turning point for Arendt is the recognition that characterizing evil as inscrutable confounds our moral understanding—that is, our attempt to see how "average people, neither good nor evil by nature, are able to bring about…immense ruin."[20]

Accordingly, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: *A Report on the Banality of Evil,* Arendt abandons her conception of radical evil and, among other things, attempts to describe the moral framework of perpetrators. Rather than inscrutable depth, Arendt argues it is shallowness that is characteristic of the mentality of the perpetrator of evil. Adolf Eichmann is a case in point: what makes him evil is his failure to pick out what is morally salient in a situation through an internal dialogue within himself. Arendt's treatment of evil as banal serves the purpose of demonstrating that, far from spontaneous and unfathomable, evil is open to moral traction – its perpetrators are not mysterious masterminds and distortions in their moral psychology are in fact open to view. While commentators typically discuss Arendt's account of Adolf Eichmann's thoughtlessness[21] – his failure to pick out what is morally salient in a situation through an internal dialogue within himself – I would like to focus on Arendt's attempt to make the banality of evil comprehensible as a *reversal of normative intuitions*, of which Arendt presents a brief but complex account.[22]

Before I delve into the reversal of normative intuitions Arendt presents us with, let me begin with the associated and well-known claim that Eichmann forfeited Kant's categorical imperative – one ought to act such that the principle of one's action is in accordance with universal laws of reason – which gives the subject the status of self-legislator. As Arendt points out, Eichmann's forfeiture of Kant's categorical imperative rests on his rejection of *self-legislation or autonomy*.[23] He chooses instead to live by the "categorical imperative of the Third Reich": "[a]ct in such a way that the Führer, if he knew

your action, would approve."[24] Whereas Kant's categorical imperative demands that one act in such a way that the principle of one's action does not contradict the universal laws of reason, the categorical imperative of the Third Reich requires that the principle of one's action does not contradict Hitler's law, the *Führerprinzip*, according to which Hitler's word transcends and overrules any written or constitutional laws. Any particular action must pass this new test. Far from a duty-driven cog, Eichmann *resisted* his duties when they conflicted with what he understood to be Hitler's law. For example, Eichmann resisted Himmler's directives towards the end of the war to desist from deporting Jews from Hungary in order to redirect resources to the war effort. In an expression of his loyalty to Hitler's law, and in violation of direct orders, Eichmann remained faithful to the final solution. Arendt explains that rather than blind obedience to duty in whatever form, Eichmann had *unified* his will with Hitler's law, internalizing its commandments and rejecting autonomy and self-legislation.

Let us now turn to the reversal of normative intuitions that constitutes part of Arendt's account of Eichmann's moral framework. Arendt's key claim is that under Hitler's imperative, the relation between one's moral conscience and transgressions is reversed, such that what is ethically demanded by the conscience exchanges places with what is ordinarily considered a transgression.[25] From the perspective of ordinary morality, we may imagine the following situation: contrition struck Eichmann's conscience again and again for sending millions to their deaths, but, at the same time, he failed to resist the temptation to climb the bureaucratic ladder. Arendt argues, however, that the distortion of ethical perspectives under the Third Reich meant that contrition strikes Eichmann when he does *not* send innocent people to their death.[26] As she puts it, "just as the law in civilized countries assumes that the voice of conscience tells everybody 'Thou shalt not kill,' even though man's natural desires and inclinations may at times be murderous, so the law of Hitler's land demanded that the voice of conscience tell everybody: 'Thou shalt kill.'"[27] Eichmann's conscience is troubled only when he fails or believes he has failed to fulfill his duty under Hitler's law and not when he has failed to fulfill his actual moral obligations. The ethical, crucially, did not *disappear* altogether but appeared as a temptation under the Third Reich, "Many Germans and Nazis must have been tempted *not* to murder, *not* to rob, *not* to let their neighbors go off to their doom…and *not* to let themselves become accomplices in all these crimes by benefitting from them."[28] Under the framework of Hitler's imperative, however, it became "virtuous" to discard these "temptations."

Thus, while radical evil obscures moral accountability by portraying the perpetration of evil as unintelligible, banal evil succeeds in bringing out how perpetrators, however distorted, still lie within the moral domain. For despite the inversion of conscience and temptation that Arendt describes, "the organizers of the massacre knew full well that murder is against the normal

desires and inclinations of most people."[29] This understanding of evil is dialectical: it reveals that under the reversal of normative intuitions there is a counter-demand to the call to kill even if this counter-demand appears to perpetrators as temptation. Furthermore, those who sided with the Nazis had "*learned* how to resist temptation," that is to say, they had actively taught themselves to resist the temptation *not* to commit murder (my emphasis).[30] This indicates that unlike radical evil, banal evil is *not* spontaneous but learned and diachronic.

The dialectical situation in which Eichmann participates reveals that he was neither blindly obeying orders nor acting from ignorance or stupidity. He *actively* – rather than merely passively, as a cog in the machinery of fascism – supported Hitler's law. This active support is highlighted in Arendt's essay "Personal Responsibility Under the Dictatorship"[31] where Arendt criticizes the pairing of obedience with passivity. Obedience, in contrast to passivity, should be understood in terms of active support: "If I obey the laws of the land, I actually support its constitution, as becomes glaringly obvious in the case of revolutionists and rebels who disobey because they have withdrawn this tacit consent."[32] The relationship between support and opposition to which Arendt points demonstrates that choices were possible. The decision *not* to support the Third Reich or to join the resistance reveals that it was possible to reject the Third Reich's picture of conscience and temptation, or to, even under the throes of the distortion, give in to "temptation" and to refuse to murder. The dialectic we have examined so far clarifies precisely this point, namely, that Eichmann, far from being enigmatically evil, outside moral sense and judgment, was in the sphere of moral decision-making.

A situation in which the evil at hand is incomprehensible, without origins, without a dialectic between what one ought to do and what one is tempted to do, is a situation in which there is no room for having made choices. There are simply no moral choices to be identified, only a fundamental or radical desire to produce destruction and suffering for its own sake. Radical evil, without origins, as we saw, is spontaneous and autotelic. If understood in terms of the dialectic I have described, Arendt's conception of banal evil brings evil back into the moral sphere, by revealing distortions to perpetrators' moral perspectives. As far as moral responses to someone like Eichmann are concerned, Arendt remarks in "Personal Responsibility Under the Dictatorship" that the Third Reich may *overwhelm* our ordinary sense of justice and associated responses (retribution, protection, rehabilitation, etc.), but it does not thereby destroy it. As Arendt states, "*our sense of justice* would find it intolerable to forego punishment and let those who murdered thousands and hundreds of thousands and millions go scot-free."[33] This remark reveals that "our sense of justice," though overwhelmed and fraught in the face of atrocity, is still operative insofar as it bars genocide from going unpunished. A conception of evil that characterizes it as wholly outside of the reach of justice neglects that our very recognition of evil is grounded in moral

sense. If evil destroys or escapes moral sense, we would not only be able to *identify* an act or agent as evil, we would also fail to rectify social life in such a way that evil is rendered impossible. Adorno describes this latter effort as a categorical imperative of a different kind: "Hitler has imposed a new categorical imperative upon humanity in the state of their unfreedom: to arrange their thinking and conduct, so that Auschwitz never repeats itself, so that nothing similar ever happen again."[34] Our thinking and conduct, however, cannot be normatively rearranged if we believe evil has eluded moral sense.

Casting evil in the right terms is crucial so that evil can be brought back into the moral sphere and the nihilism that can set in as a consequence when evil defeats our normative expectations can be thwarted. Another consequence of bringing evil back into the moral sphere concerns our own proximity to, complicity with, or appropriation of evil. Arendt's message is that ordinary people can commit evil – no demonic masterminds are needed. If we believe that perpetrators lie outside of moral sense, we end up "fetishizing" evil as something of which we, ourselves, are incapable. Furthermore, if we see perpetrators as so beyond the pale that they are undeserving of justice, we open ourselves to committing evil acts of our own. While Arendt's account of radical evil characterized the brutality of the Third Reich as radically unintelligible is open to these dangers, banal evil, by contrast, opens it to moral traction. This, however, is not the final word on evil and intelligibility. In order to address how evil and unintelligibility still remain linked, I will now turn to Jean Améry's first-person account of evil.

Améry: Homelessness and Trust in the World

In *At the Mind's Limits,* Jean Améry chronicles his experiences of torture and internment in concentration camps as well as his life as a survivor of the Holocaust. Améry's central aim, as he makes clear in the Preface of the collected essays, is to do justice to the first-person experience of eyewitnesses, victims, and survivors of the Holocaust. To this end, Améry explains that standard narratives that place the evil perpetrated by the Nazis in a third-person historical or sociological explanatory framework fail to honor the perspective of the witnesses and survivors of the Holocaust.[35] In fact, Améry is critical of Arendt on a similar count. She, too, he argues, leaves behind the victims of the Holocaust when she focusses exclusively on perpetrators, especially in her treatment of banal evil. Arendt's foregrounding of Eichmann elides, as Amery sees it, the realities of those who underwent the consequences of his actions.[36] His own account of detainment and torture is rich in phenomenological detail, precisely because Améry is concerned with deepening our sense of the experiences of those who encounter evil.

Besides being at odds with some perspectives of his time, Améry's approach stands in stark contrast to contemporary discussions of evil

(especially in the analytic context), which attempt to provide a theory of evil that often rests on identifying evil-making properties, e.g., the properties owing to which an act of wrongdoing turns into act of evil.[37] To this extent, Luke Russell argues that an act is evil if it aims to harm people, even if these harms are not actualized, e.g., the act of placing a bomb that is neutralized before it causes harm and injury.[38] Todd Calder, by contrast, argues an act is evil if it, does, in fact, actualize harm.[39] The question in these cases is criteriological: what are the criteria that a perpetrator/act must fulfill to count as evil? Unlike these perpetrator-focused theories, Claudia Card's account takes the violence endured by victims and survivors as crucial to any account of evil.[40] As Card is primarily concerned with laying out a theory of evil, however, the lived experience of victims and survivors does not take *phenomenological* precedence in her work. If we bring Améry's perspective to bear on these theories, with their attention to conceptual rather than phenomenological dimensions, such accounts leave the *phenomenon* of evil behind. Approaching evil, for Améry, requires phenomenological sensitivity and empathic perceptiveness, a turn to the original experience of the suffering subject rather than abstract theorizing. In targeting "objective" and third-person theories from political science and sociology for failing to account for the subjective dimensions of suffering, Améry does not argue that these theories should be cast aside. In his view, an *exclusive* attention to locating objective features – e.g., evil-making properties etc. – impairs the task of deepening our sense of the experiential dimensions of evil, that is, the original, existential and intersubjective field in which evil occurs.

To this end, Améry's essays abound with phenomenological descriptions of his encounters with evil, most notably his essay on torture where he describes his experiences under Gestapo custody after he was arrested for his involvement in the resistance. In describing torture as a physical and *metaphysical* incursion on the subject, Améry portrays the suffering of torture as the reduction of a person to "flesh and death" and the destruction of the *essence* of the subject -- "his soul, or his mind, or his consciousness, or his identity."[41] This encounter with evil, furthermore, is not a temporally-bound event that ends once torture has ceased but remains latent in the subject as a form of "accumulated horror."[42] These remarks on torture do not furnish the components of a theory of evil but deepen the phenomenological reality of suffering, throwing into sharp relief what it is about evil that overwhelms us. Part of suffering evil, for Améry, and in fact, the most enduring element of evil, is a fundamental loss of intelligibility. Amery describes loss of intelligibility through various registers and metaphors, most notably, as "homelessness" and "loss of trust" in the world.

For Amery homelessness is not only the literal expulsion of a person from their home but signifies a more existential, even metaphysical, sense of being bereft of home: "the loss of home entails an exile from community, language, and youth – a loss of one's past…houses, possessions, business, lands, forests,

cities." [43] From an existential standpoint, homelessness includes a loss not only of the tangible but also the intangible mood of familiarity and intimacy that ties us to the world. While home stands for a secure anchorage, a situation in which "we are in full command of the dialectics of knowledge and recognition, of trust and confidence," in the state of homelessness, one "stagge[rs] through a world whose signs [remain] as inscrutable…as Etruscan script."[44] To say that this loss of home is *fundamental* is to contrast it with the secondary state of confusion experienced by a traveler who, while she may feel perplexed and unmoored in a foreign place, still has recourse to the fundamental meanings where she is at home. It is access to these fundamental meanings that allow her to translate the foreign into the familiar and to find her bearings in a new world. The homelessness Améry describes, however, is one in which the former more original sense of intelligibility is impaired, so that one is condemned to a "world full of riddles."[45]

Levinas and Useless Suffering

It is evident that the loss of one's home, language, and one's relations with the other severs the relationships – phenomenologists often describe these relations as co-constitutive of meaning – that make meaning possible. What remains unclear in Améry's account, however, is *how* suffering the violence of torture – the event that he describes in greatest phenomenological detail – condemns one to homelessness and unintelligibility. In the case of torture, Améry places unintelligibility in a different register, not homelessness, but "loss of trust" in the world. Améry describes how the shock of torture destroys trust in basic cognitive, existential, and intersubjective attitudes – torture destroys belief in "causality," "inductive inference," and the intersubjective faith that the other is not out to destroy us.[46] Still, Améry leaves unclear precisely how suffering torture destroys intelligibility, for it remains unclear how the torture situation is able to destroy these fundamental attitudes and certainties. In order to answer this question, I will now turn to Emmanuel Levinas' essay, "Useless Suffering," which elucidates how suffering, which he treats as tantamount to evil, results in loss of meaning and intelligibility.

Like Améry, Levinas considers evil from the first-person perspective, specifically addressing the relationship between *consciousness* and *suffering*. Levinas begins with the claim that consciousness is unable to "assume" suffering.[47] In the Kantian paradigm, which informs Levinas's account, the "assumable" can be understood to refer to any particular that can be subsumed under the a priori forms of the sensibility and the understanding and thereby made intelligible. The intelligibility of experience rests on the ability of consciousness (the transcendental unity of apperception for Kant) to unify experiences by "assuming" them, that is, by synthesizing them under general rules and forms. Levinas maintains that the experience of suffering

"oppos[es] the assemblage of data [of experience] into a meaningful whole."[48] If, following Kant in broad strokes, meaningful experience consists of integrating particulars into meaningful wholes, then suffering, Levinas claims, in disabling this unifying capacity, undercuts the possibility of meaning. Suffering, in other words, is an experience that outruns consciousness; it destroys the fundamental ability of the subject to make sense of the world, because, in Kantian terms, it is not integratable with empirical reality – it defies the rules of intelligible experience. Subjectivity shrinks from pain, finding it intolerable, unable to subsume it. Suffering, thus, impairs the *active* powers of consciousness to generate meaning and leaves the subject passive. This passivity or not-ness, Levinas explains, "[looms] as an evil more negative than any apophantic not."[49] In other words, the "not" – sense-destroying potency – of evil, as a negation of the unifying powers of consciousness, is "a negativity extending as far as to the realm of unmeaning."[50] Evil is "the deleterious per se" because it does not only damage our normative expectations but also because suffering makes *non-sense* of experience.

As suffering is the sort of experience that cannot be woven into the fabric of meaning, it stands as an *excess*, which Levinas describes in "Transcendence and Evil"[51] in the following way:

> While the notion of excess evokes first the quantitative idea of intensity, of a degree surpassing measure, evil is an excess in its very quiddity. This notation is very important: evil is not an excess because suffering can be terrible, and go beyond the endurable. The break with the normal and the normative, with order, with synthesis, with the world, already constitutes its qualitative essence. Suffering qua suffering is but a concrete and quasi-sensible manifestation of the non-integratable, the non-justifiable.[52]

Here Levinas describes how the evil of suffering is excessive in terms of its very essence and quality rather than its quantity (it is excessive not because it exceeds a certain measurable threshold but is essentially excessive). The excessiveness of evil becomes evident in the fact that it cannot be integrated into experience, its "unassumability" from the essay "Useless Suffering." While evil is often understood as a break from our normative expectations of the world, here Levinas's claim is more fundamental and phenomenological. It is not only our expectations that evil defeats (the expectation that, in Améry's case, for example, the other is not my destroyer) but the "synthetic" or "unifying" capacities of consciousness that give order and meaning to the world. The evil of suffering destroys this order by destroying the power of consciousness to render experience meaningful. Without such rendering, the event of suffering stands out as *excess*, as that which cannot be brought into the domain of sense, what Levinas describes as evil's malignant heterogeneity.[53] Excess, then, takes on a different meaning in this context than the familiar one (i.e., "a degree surpassing measure"); evil is excess in relation

to meaning, that is, it lies outside of meaning. Bear in mind here, however, that what is beyond meaning or intelligibility is not the perpetrator's motivations, for example, but the *experience* of suffering itself.

From the Kantian standpoint, then, in destroying the unifying powers of consciousness, the suffering of evil destroys the transcendental conditions of experience and meaning. Yet while the experience of suffering itself is unintelligible or meaningless for the one who undergoes it, suffering opens into a meaningful dimension. Suffering, which renders one passive and condemns one to the loss of meaning, opens into what Levinas describes as the "intrahuman" world. In light of this intersubjective dimension, Levinas asks,

> Is not the evil of suffering—extreme passivity, impotence, abandonment and solitude—also the unassumable and thus the possibility of a half opening, and, more precisely, the possibility that wherever a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh happen there is the original call for aid, for curative help, for help from the other ego whose alterity, whose exteriority promises salvation?[54]

The intrahuman is revealed in the very expression of suffering injury: whether it is a call for help or a wordless cry, the expression of suffering is a call to *someone*. Levinas links the unassumability of suffering to the call for aid. The suffering subject who has little intentional scope of her own expresses her pain through a call to the other, whose otherness is respite that "promises salvation." The isolation of suffering opens into transcendence and alterity, owing to this call (and response). For Levinas, however, this intrasubjective facet of suffering does not make suffering "useful." While the other can come to one's rescue, bring an end to suffering, and return one to the world of sense, suffering itself remains senseless, without justification, without reason, and without use. This perspective is at the heart of Levinas's rejection of theodicy, the attempt to justify suffering. Justification requires that what is being justified is meaningful; as we have seen, however, suffering is meaningless for the subject who undergoes it and thus undercuts justification. As Jennifer L. Geddes has argued, however, perhaps Levinas overstates his claim that suffering is meaningless for the one who undergoes it.[55] While I, the spectator or bystander, cannot make the other's pain justifiable/meaningful, I also cannot forbid the suffering subject from understanding her suffering as meaningful. Levinas can, however, be read as making the weaker claim that *one* dominant modality of suffering is that it impairs our ability to make sense of the world.

Let us return to the question I posed at the beginning of this section: how did torture result in unintelligibility for Améry (what he calls "loss of trust")? From the Levinasian perspective, Améry is thrust into meaninglessness owing to the suffering he underwent, since the suffering of torture destroys the ability of consciousness to generate meaning by destroying the synthetic

powers of consciousness. If, however, the intersubjective can restore sense, it remains unclear, then, why Améry did not recover from a state of meaninglessness and unintelligibility. Like Levinas, Améry describes the cry for help as the basic response to bodily injury, an aspect of what Améry calls, quoting Kropotkin, "mutual aid in nature."[56] This intersubjective and reciprocal "expectation of help," Améry holds, plays as fundamental a role for existence as the struggle for survival we are familiar with from the evolutionary standpoint.[57] In the social world we inhabit, aid is a fundamental presupposition: from the maternal relation, to the medical sphere, we expect aid in the event of injury.[58] In the torture situation, however, no help arrives: "Whoever would rush to the prisoner's aid—a wife, a mother, a brother, or friend— he won't get this far."[59] As a result, with the first blow "against which there can be no defense and which no helping hand will ward off, a part of our life ends and it can never again be revived."[60] Under torture, responses to pernicious others, e.g., retaliation or calling for aid, are unavailable and one is revealed to oneself as fundamentally alone and vulnerable.[61] Rather than the ethical intrahuman that Levinas describes, the torture situation is the *reversal* of ethical relations: we are no longer in an intersubjective world, where if one injures us, another can grant us aid; we are placed defenselessly before the torturer. The intrahuman is annulled when the torturer attempts to destroy one side of the intersubjective relation, namely, the other, so that only he can remain, what Amery describes as the boundless egoism of the torturer.[62]

If not immediate aid, then perhaps consolation, a kind of deferred aid, might provide relief subsequent to torture. Améry, however, remarks that torture cannot be compensated for "by any sort of subsequent human communication."[63] Consolation cannot rehabilitate trust in the world, for consolation still relies on the terms of a world that the torture situation destroyed. To return to Levinas, without the intersubjective dimension having shown the suffering subject the ethical alternative to the senselessness of pain, the tortured subject is forever condemned to the isolation and meaninglessness of suffering.

Levinas and Améry also converge on the question of theodicy, whether suffering can be justified. If suffering is essentially meaningless it cannot be integrated into a theodicy whether religious or naturalistic. Améry, like Levinas, is fundamentally opposed to theodicy, rejecting the view that suffering is, for instance, soul-forging, e.g., it reveals the reality of spirit or brings us in communion with God etc. The suffering that Améry underwent, together with many of the inmates of Auschwitz, he explains, lacked any utility or any redemptive quality. Auschwitz did not leave the survivors with knowledge or wisdom.[64] Rather, those who survived Auschwitz emerged from it "stripped, robbed, emptied out, disoriented."[65] The experience of Auschwitz was plainly destructive: it destroyed philosophical idealism, metaphysical certainty, and the intelligibility of the world. But Améry's account should not be overdetermined to speak for all survivors as an

incontrovertible destiny. Many survivors of atrocities, owing to various dimensions of the intrahuman – e.g., solidarity and community – regain their trust in the world and are restored to intelligibility in spite of their suffering.

There is a relationship between evil and intelligibility that we have yet to cover. We have considered perpetrators as well as victims and survivors, but we have not yet considered how we, as spectators (or as readers of Améry) stand with respect to evil and intelligibility. How, in other words, does the unintelligibility of pain experienced by the suffering subject relate to my sense of intelligibility and meaning? Levinas makes clear that the pain of the other can be *meaningful* (while remaining unjustified) in *me*, as I can assume it into an ethical order in terms of my responsibility to the other. But there is another sense, unexplored by Levinas, in which the pain of the other raises a challenge of intelligibility for *everyone.* To understand this point, it is important to note, first and foremost, that while another subject's pain is *her* pain and not mine (though it might affect me in various ways), it is not a private experience in all senses of the word. As Ilit Faber maintains, accounts like Améry's may disclose one person's experience but they have universal value – they tell us something about ourselves and the world we, too, inhabit.[66] In reading Améry's account of torture, we draw close to him and the world as he encounters it. In fact, "[w]e are now with him, sharing his unavoidable doubt that the world might not always respond to our expectations (of logic, causality, society)."[67] Améry's work should not, therefore, be understood as a psychological or introspective account that is wholly particular – idiosyncratic experiences that can be cordoned off as belonging to the pathological universe of a traumatized subject. Relating to Améry, letting his work count for us today requires that we treat his world as *our* world. The events that unfolded in the cellar where Améry was tortured were events that occurred in our world -- this is a fact, as Ferber rightly maintains, we, too, must contend with. For the world that Améry describes is also our world today, a world where suffering abounds. For this reason, then, the suffering subject's pain impairs not only her own sense of the world but the sense of the world for us, too, albeit in a distinct way. We, too, begin to wonder about the conduct of the political powers that govern us and their propagation of suffering, whether it is the migrants who drown in the Mediterranean Sea or the weapons that are sold only to rain down on innocent others. While Levinas's view that the suffering subject is isolated in the experience of her pain is accurate, the meaninglessness of her pain, her loss of intelligibility, has consequences for us: it reveals to us malignant actualities and possibilities of our world and it calls on us to reconsider the order of a world that propagates senseless (in Levinas's sense of the word) suffering. The only restoration of moral meaning in such a world, as Levinas maintains, is to draw close to those who are suffering and to bring them relief.

Conclusion

In *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation*, Luke Russell remarks that "we ought to deny that incomprehensibility is a necessary condition for evil action, and also deny that incomprehensible wrongdoing is sufficient for evil action."[68] While Russell may be right in maintaining that perpetrator motivation should not be treated as incomprehensible, he neglects other ways in which incomprehensibility – what I have been calling unintelligibility – might play an important role in our understanding of evil. As I have argued in this paper, Arendt's radical evil, in treating perpetrators as unintelligible, risks aggrandizing and exoticizing the perpetrator. This is, indeed, a deeply problematic way of addressing evil. Treating perpetrators as incomprehensible monsters creates ethical issues of its own, since in characterizing them as beyond the pale, we may end up demonizing them and risk committing evil acts of our own. It is crucial, therefore, that we bring perpetrators into the sphere of moral sense, as I argued Arendt's account of banal evil suggests. Perpetrators are neither cogs in a machine with no agency nor demonic masterminds with an incomprehensible agency. They are, rather, individuals whose moral sense of the world is distorted, who have abandoned self-legislation in favor of external imperatives and turned what is typically a temptation (e.g., to murder) into a moral command.

I have argued, however, that this is only half the story about evil and unintelligibility. Both Arendt's account of banal evil and Améry's account of suffering work towards illuminating what is morally at stake, throwing into sharp relief where unintelligibility does and does not play a crucial role. Améry's account of his experiences reveals that when addressing questions of evil and suffering, philosophy would do better to attend to them in their (phenomenological) concreteness. Turning to Améry made evident that evil and unintelligibility are associated in a way that is seldom accounted for in contemporary discussions, which treat incomprehensibility as a feature of perpetrators or as our inability to understand them. Suffering evil, I argued here, imposes a loss of intelligibility on the subject, which Amery describes as homelessness and loss of trust in the world. Turning to Levinas, we saw how suffering rends the unity of consciousness and that, while suffering may impose meaninglessness on the subject who undergoes it, it opens into an intersubjective sphere where consolation (and not, as Levinas's anti-theodicy entails, justification or redemption) is possible. This may not redeem or justify suffering by making suffering meaningful for the subject who undergoes it, but it may restore moral sense by opening suffering to an intrahuman dimension. This, however, was not the case for Amery, for whom torture (among other forms of violence he endured) destroyed the basis of intelligibility – a fundamental trust in the world. Amery's experiences of loss of intelligibility, however, are not restricted to his universe. The fact of evil raises questions of intelligibility for all of us about the senseless suffer brought upon others.

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1 Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015).

2 Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979), 445 (hereafter, *Origins*)

3 Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society." *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Webber (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983), 34.

4 Luke Russell, *Evil A Philosophical Investigation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) (hereafter: *Evil a Philosophical Investigation*).

5 Jean Amery, At the Mind's Limits, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1980) (hereafter: *At the Mind's Limits*).

6 Levinas, Emmanuel, "Useless Suffering" in *Entre nous: Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshaw (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) (hereafter: *Useless Suffering*)

7 I submitted this paper in August 2023, months before the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza began. I find it important to state that while I revise this paper for publication given its themes of suffering and its perpetration, Gaza, and the atrocities we have all witnessed over the last two years, is at the forefront of my mind.

8 *Origins*, 459.

9 *Origins,* 445.

10 *Origins*, 459

11 *Origins*, 459

12 *Origins*, 459

13 *Origins*, 459

14 Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

15 Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019) 26-27 (hereafter *Necropolitics*)

16 Erichsen and Olusoga, 2010 -- David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism,* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010).

17 *Origins*, 457.

18 *Necropolitics*, 75.

19 Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem, *The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem*, ed. Marie Luise Knott, trans. Anthony David. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 209 (hereafter *Correspondence*)

20 *Correspondence,* 217.

21 See, for example, Paul Formosa, "Thinking, Conscience and Acting in the Face of Mass Evil," in *Power, Judgement and Political Evil: In Conversation with Hannah Arendt*, eds. Andrew Schaap, Danielle Celermajer, and Vrasidas Karalis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 89-104; and Richard J.

Bernstein, "Arendt on Thinking" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, Dana Villa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 277-292.

[22] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 135-150 (hereafter: *Eichmann*).

[23] *Eichmann*, 136.

[24] Arendt quotes the Nazi governor of Poland, Hans Frank. *Eichmann*, 136.

[25] *Eichmann*, 150.

[26] *Eichmann*, 137-141.

[27] *Eichmann*, 150.

[28] *Eichmann*, 150.

[29] *Eichmann*, 150.

[30] *Eichmann,* 150.

[31] Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 2009), 17-48 (hereafter: "Personal Responsibility")

[32] "Personal Responsibility," 47.

[33] "Personal Responsibility," 26.

[34] Adorno, *Negative Dialectic* (cited after German edition)

[35] *At the Mind's Limits,* viii.

[36] *At the Mind's Limits,* 25.

[37] Paul Formosa, "Different Substantive Conceptions of Evil Actions," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Evil*, eds. Thomas Nys and Stephen De Wijze (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 256-266.

[38] *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation*.

[39] Todd Calder, "The Apparent Banality of Evil: The Relationship Between Evil Acts and Evil Character," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34 (2003): 56, cited in *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation*, 54.

[40] Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[41] *At the Mind's Limits,* 40.

[42] *At the Mind's Limits,* 40.

[43] Joseph Rosen, "Suffering and Responsibility," in *Between Améry and Levinas*, ed. Magdalena Zolkos (Lanham: Lexington, 2011), 279.

[44] *At the Mind's Limits,* 47.

[45] *At the Mind's Limits,* 47.

[46] *At the Mind's Limits*, 28.

[47] *Useless Suffering*, 91.

[48] *Useless Suffering*, 91.

49 *Useless Suffering,* 92.

50 *Useless Suffering,* 92.

51 Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Evil," in *Collected Philosophical Papers.* Translated by Alphonso Lingis. (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 175-186 (hereafter: *Transcendence*).

52 *Transcendence,* 180.

53 *Transcendence*, 180.

54 *Transcendence*, 93.

55 Jennifer L. Geddes, "Theodicy Useless Suffering, and Compassionate Asymmetry: Primo Levi, Emmanuel Levinas, and Anti-Theodicy," *Religions* 9(4) (2018).

56 *At the Mind's Limits*, 28.

57 *At the Mind's Limits*, 28.

58 *At the Mind's Limits*, 28.

59 *At the Mind's Limits*, 27.

60 *At the Mind's Limits*, 29.

61 *At the Mind's Limits*, 28-29.

62 *At the Mind's Limits,* 105.

63 *At the Mind's Limits,* 39.

64 *At the Mind's Limits,* 20.

65 *At the Mind's Limits,* 20.

66 Ilit Ferber, "Pain as Yardstick: Jean Améry," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy.* 24/3 (2017): 3-16 (hereafter: *Pain as Yardstick*)

67 "Pain as Yardstick," 11.

68 *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation*, 61.

The Significance of Nostalgia for Mediology

A Brief Meditation on the Connection

Erika Lujza Nagy

Independent Scholar

> More often, however, this obstinacy
>
> translates itself into the repetitiveness of nostalgia,
>
> which is, to put it bluntly, simply a failure
>
> to deal with the realities of the present or
>
> the uncertainties of the future.[1]
>
> – Joseph Brodsky

Introduction

Discussions on nostalgia are relatively infrequent, especially in the field of philosophy. Perhaps, the main obstacle is in its ambiguity that was already mentioned: "The ambiguity is evident in nostalgia's characteristically bittersweet quality, its proclivity for combining regret with longing, a vivid sense of missing with an equally vivid sense of what is missed".[2] However, some rare attempts can be found in medicine (Hofer), classical (Kant, Jankélévitch) and modern philosophy (Casey). These works will be analyzed in the first part of this essay, because thanks to it, features of nostalgia will be described. The second part will be an explanation of the role of nostalgia in mediology, therefore Régis Debray's writings will be used. Thus, what mediology is - will be described at the beginning of the second section.

The novelty of this essay is that its aim is to introduce nostalgia as a term of mediology. It will contribute to the further development of this philosophy, because the nexus of terms will be more clearly presented for the reader and anyone, who is interested in mediology.

A General Overview of the Subject

The term 'nostalgia' was coined by Johannus Hofer in his 'Medical dissertation on nostalgia or homesickness' in 1688. Before him no one in medicine made any attempt to observe this phenomenon: "However, it lacks a particular name in medicine, because from no doctor thus far had I learned that it was observed properly or explained carefully. Thus far I had been the first to consider that I should speak more fully concerning it, at the same time that I had first considered it necessary to apply a name".[3] Ordinary people called it *das Heimweh* in German or *la Maladie du Pays* in French. For creating 'nostalgia' Hofer used the combination of two Greek words: *Nosos* which means 'return to the native land' and *Algos* with the meaning of 'suffering' or 'grief'. This term defined "the sad mood originating from the desire for the return to one's native land".[4] For him, this is a disease that is caused by the imagination, when "minds occupied solely about the idea of the Fatherland".[5] By this fixation on one idea a person becomes as an animal, because he is "directed always toward the same motion".[6] It has symptoms: continued sadness, disturbed sleep, decrease of strength, hunger, thirst, senses diminished, frequent sigh, stupidity of the mind, fever. It can be completely cured only by a return to the homeland.

Nostalgia as a subject of philosophy firstly appeared in Immanuel Kant's 'Anthropology from a Pragmatic Perspective':

> The homesickness of the Swiss (and, as I have it from the mouth of an experienced general, also the Westphalians and Pomeranians from certain regions) that seizes them when they are transferred to other lands is the result of a longing for the places where they enjoyed the very simple pleasures of life – aroused by the recollection of images of the carefree life and neighborly company in their early years. For later, after they visit these same places, they are greatly disappointed in their expectations and thus also find their homesickness cured. To be sure, they think that this is because everything there has changed a great deal, but in fact it is because they cannot bring back their youth there. It is also noteworthy that this homesickness seizes more the peasants from a province that is poor but bound together by strong family ties than those who are busy earning money and take as their motto: Patria ubi bene.[7]

The philosopher noticed the temporal and the social aspect of nostalgia. The temporal aspect is based on the sudden awareness of the passing of time at the personal level, when someone through his farewell to his own youth becomes aware of it. This means that there is no return. The social aspect links to the poor and family oriented peasants, because bounds are stronger between them thanks to their interdependence than between townspeople.

This temporal aspect of nostalgia was further developed in Vladimir Jankélévitch's philosophy. It is commonly believed that it is a special kind of pain that can be cured by return. He claims this at the beginning of his thoughts in order to prove the opposite for the reader: to show him, that this belief is misleading. He gives the following definition of nostalgia:

> Nostalgia is a human melancholy made possible by the consciousness that is an awareness of something else, a consciousness of somewhere else, a consciousness of contrast with the past and the present, with the present and the future. This apprehensive consciousness is the anxiety of the nostalgic. The nostalgic is at the same time here and there, not here, not there, present and absent, twice present and twice absent, therefore we can say at will that he is multipresent, or that he is nowhere: right here he is physically present, but he feels absent in spirit from this place where he is present by the body; over there, conversely, he feels morally present, but he is in fact and currently absent from these cherished places that he once left.[8]

Nostalgia, created by the consciousness, is an awareness of time. When someone is able to notice the past, the present, the future and what is between them. He looks at the whole, directly at time. The cause of the tension that follows nostalgia is this anxious consciousness. This makes nostalgia a terminal illness: "What makes the illness incurable, this is the irreversibility of time".[9] Therefore, "Nostalgia is a reaction against the irreversible".[10] According to Jankélévitch the irreversibility of time has only one direction that is the future. This is the reason of change that he explains by using the myth of Odysseus:

> Therefore Odyssey will return to his Ithaca, and he will find there the same place as he had left it – because in the meantime it has not changed its location; although the Odyssey that he once was when he left his island, he will not return to there: this Odyssey-there died and is gone forever; Odyssey now is another Odyssey, who finds another Penelope… And Ithaca also is another island, at the same place, but not on the same date; this is a homeland from another time.[11]

Hence, return is impossible. Finally, the philosopher concludes that nostalgia is not only about the awareness of time, but about someone's self-awareness, self-discovery, wisdom and transformation:

> This rocky islet in the Ionian Sea, that is the stated destination of navigator, hides an invisible goal in order to meet future needs, an inaccessible goal and located at infinity: a goal of an Odyssean journey, this is the rendez-vous with oneself; having overcome all obstacles, disdain the lotus flower, the advisor of forgetfulness, refused Circe's spell, abandoned to their fate the desolate shadows of those, who don't exist anymore, turned a deaf ear to the song of the sorceresses and the sweet nothings of the nymph in love, the nostalgic had departed in order

to encounter his youth and his past. After the illusory spatialisation of time, the temporalisation of space confronts us upon returning with our deceptions and with the truth.[12]

The charm of nostalgia is caused by the fact that our past is irreplaceable, it is always our lived experiences. The pain that accompanies nostalgia comes from the realization of the irreversibility: "Let us go further: irreversibility is perhaps the key to every pain in general".[13]

The strength that someone discovers in himself through his experience of nostalgia, when he must overcome its pain - this is what makes it extremely valuable. This is life, the process of becoming mature:

> That is called: to endure and to age. Instead of movement in space being pure and simple distancing, time serves us by ceaselessly distancing us from adhering. If, at least by retreating more and more into the distance of objective things, our past were able to escape us completely, we would perhaps console ourselves for this loss; by dint of being irrevocable, it would no longer interest us. But not at all; it is not so irrevocable that it no longer depends upon me. That is why the irreversibility of time in general is one of the most common causes of human pain. This happiness of being young, which will have been taken from me by time, has not ceased being mine; and so it becomes a thing that another myself offers to me as a spectacle. Here is one of the great pains of life; it is such a poignant pain that [one wonders) if all the other pains are not simple specializations of it: one wonders if in the pain of men, whatever it is, there is not above all a bitter pain of the irreparable, that is, a certain sort of remorse.[14]

Contemporary philosophy added to these examinations the following: the object of nostalgia is not an exact place, but an established form of being, that is called the "world-under-nostalgement".[15] This is the "past that we *cannot rejoin*".[16] Nostalgia is not external in relation to this world, but a part of it:

> Beyond nostalgia *about* or *over* a past world, there is nostalgia *of* such a world: a nostalgia not only appreciative of this world in its absolute pastness but belonging to it, indeed clinging to it. Thus understood, nostalgia is not only elicited by an anterior world; it can even be said to be at one with it, to be contained in it.[17]

This "world-under-nostalgement" contains all the places that we remember, because they played a crucial role in our process of becoming. We remember only traces of the past world: "Such traces are all that we possess of the past world that solicits nostalgia. Whether expressed in things (e.g., ruins, antiques) or in persons, the traces of this world are precipitated in places conceived as localizations of the world-under-nostalgement."[18]

It can be concluded that nostalgia is not an emotion or a feeling, whether it is love or grief, but "It is a unique mode of insight into a world that has

become irretrievably past and that arrays itself, as we remember it now, in a plentitude of places".[19]

Nostalgia is a Necessity for Mediology

Mediology as a contemporary French philosophy begins in 1979 with the book of Régis Debray *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France*, which in its English translation in 1981 was entitled *Teachers, Writers, Celebrities: The Intellectuals of Modern France*. He examines the role of professional intellectual, who is defined as a "person who has an effect on other people through symbols (images, words, sounds)".[20] He is beyond academia or university, because his main task is to say unpleasant things that are the truth in order to influence people's opinion during his own lifetime. The role of the professional intellectual has changed, because the attitude towards truth has changed:

> The truth is a luxury that rich societies will be able to afford less and less, insofar as the establishment of truth and its dissemination are slow, complicated procedures, and all tend to run counter to common sense, in other words they do not have market value, so show value. It seems to me that there is an industrial economy of reason which will increasingly make reason anti-economic.[21]

It became unaffordable, however, according to Debray, mediology is a solution to this crisis: "A rational discipline like mediology (which aims to be rigorous and must show itself to be so) can help fashion tools to make reality intelligible and weapons to transform it; inasmuch as it acknowledges the real, it can also serve those who find advantage there".[22] It can help, because it is based on the mediological method, using which the process of incarnation and transmission or how abstract ideas such as people's beliefs, thoughts, experience of life get material forces and by that are saved through time. It happens in the form of traces:

> A trace is not just something that remains from religion, knowledge, or opinion, but it is one of the necessary conditions for their appearance and circulation. [...] Trace supposes support, a tool, writing and reading technique, a semiotic regime, a method of indexation, control and conservation and a dissemination system.[23]

The basic confirmation of mediology is that the existence of soul is impossible without the body. This idea is hidden in its name that is a Greco-Roman word combination: medium is from the Latin language with the meaning of body and logos is from Greek with the meaning of explanation. The notion of transmission was found in Paul Valéry's oeuvre and as a term of mediology preserved its meaning: "It is man's greatest triumph over things, to have been able to carry the effects and fruits of eve's labour (literally: results of labour from yesterday) until the next day. Mankind has only slowly risen on the heap of what lasts".[24] In order for transmission to be possible there is a need of

places of mediation such as libraries and someone, who is able to save traces, preserve it as heritage and explain its value to other people. Transmission also based on knowledge, therefore requires education with strict hierarchy, mutual respect and effort. Its aim is to evoke comprehension that leads to duration which is the definition of culture in this philosophy.

Without nostalgia there would be no mediology. Experiencing nostalgia, someone becomes aware of the passing of time. Then, he realizes his own mortality through all the moments when he bids farewell to himself during his own life, the fact that one day he will disappear forever and that there is no guarantee other people will remember him. This motivates him to invent mnemotechnics that is a technique that people use for memorizing. As an example of mnemotechnics gravestones can be mentioned. (It was the first one in the history of humankind). At the heart of mediology there is time. Mediology is focused on mnemotechnics, therefore it deals with death, memory and defines culture as duration. People attempt to preserve themselves in something that will tell the next generations, the future, about them. All these allowed Debray to come to the following conclusion: "Nostalgia is the first phase of mediological consciousness. The discovery of a clear deviation from the old norm grasps the new order as a disordering. More deeply: an intuition of the entropy of systems".[25]

Conclusion

What kills you out there, in orbit, isn't

the lack of oxygen but the abundance

of time in its purest (with no addition

of your life) form. It's hard to breathe it.[26]

– Joseph Brodsky

The novelty of this essay lies in its attempt to explain the essential role of the notion of nostalgia for mediology. It can contribute to the further development of this philosophy, because it helps us understand that the core idea of mediology is time. Then, basic notions of mediology, their interrelatedness and its focus on the incarnation that happens thanks to mnemotechnics become clearer for the reader.

The brief overview of nostalgia as a subject of research begins with medicine and later changes to philosophy. The aim of the examinations of these works is to describe the nature of nostalgia, its features and why it is worthy of our attention. Thanks to Kant and Jankélévitch, it can be realized that nostalgia is not about an exact place, but about time. Casey adds to this the idea that nostalgia is a form of cognitive ability that is directed to the world. Mediology cannot exist without nostalgia, because the experience of

nostalgia leads to the awareness of time, when someone realizes the fact of his own mortality. As it was grasped in poetry:

> O ship setting out on a distant voyage,
>
> Why don't I miss you the way other people do
>
> After you've vanished from sight?
>
> Because, when I don't see you, you cease to exist.
>
> And if I feel nostalgia for what doesn't exist,
>
> The feeling is in relationship to nothing.
>
> It's not the ship but our own selves that we miss.[27]

This realization motivates him to invent mnemotechnics in order to conquer time. Therefore, nostalgia gives birth to mediology.

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[1] Joseph Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 30.

[2] Edward S. Casey, "The World of Nostalgia," *Man and World* 20 (1987): 361.

[3] Carolyn K. Anspach, "Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia by Johannes Hofer, 1688," *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine* 2 (1934): 380.

[4] Ibid., 381.

[5] Ibid., 385.

[6] Ibid., 387.

[7] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 71-72.

[8] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L'irréversible et la nostalgie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), 346. In French: «La nostalgie est une mélancolie humaine rendue possible par la conscience, qui est conscience de quelque chose d'autre, conscience d'un ailleurs, conscience d'un contraste entre passé et présent, entre présent et futur. Cette conscience soucieuse est l'inquiétude du nostalgique. Le nostalgique est en même temps ici et là-bas, ni ici ni là, présent et absent, deux fois présent et deux fois absent; on peut donc dire à volonté qu'il est multiprésent, ou qu'il est nulle part: ici même il est physiquement présent, mais il se sent absent en esprit de ce lieu où il est présent par le corps; là-bas, à l'inverse, il se sent moralement présent, mais il est en fait et actuellement absent de ces lieux chers qu'il a autrefois quittés» (translation – E. L. N.).

[9] Ibid., 367. In French: «Ce qui rend la maladie incurable, c'est l'irréversibilité du temps» (translation – E. L. N.).

[10] Ibid., 368. In French: «La nostalgie est une réaction contre l'irréversible» (translation – E. L. N.).

[11] Ibid., 370. In French: «Ulysse retrouvera donc son Ithaque, et il la retrouvera là même où il l'avait laissée - car elle n'a pas changé de place entretemps; mais l'Ulysse qu'il était jadis quand il a quitté son île, il ne le retrouvera pas: cet Ulysse-là est mort et à jamais disparu; Ulysse est maintenant un autre Ulysse, qui retrouve une autre Pénélope... Et Ithaque aussi est une autre île, à la même place, mais non pas à la même date; c'est une patrie d'un autre temps» (translation – E. L. N.).

[12] Ibid., 371-372. In French: «Cet îlot rocheux dans la mer Ionienne, qui est le but avoué du navigateur, cache providentiellement un but invisible, un but inaccessible et situé à l'infini: le but de l'itinéraire odysséen, c'est le rendez-vous avec soi-même; ayant franchi tous les obstacles, dédaigné la fleur de lotus conseillère d'oubli, refusé les sortilèges de Circé, abandonné à leur sort les ombres désolées de ceux qui ne sont plus, fait la sourde oreille au chant des ensorceleuses et aux douces paroles de la nymphe amoureuse, le nostalgique était parti à la rencontre de sa jeunesse et de son passé. Après l'illusoire spatialisation du temps, la temporalisation de l'espace nous confronte au retour avec nos déceptions et avec la vérité» (translation – E. L. N.).

[13] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *The Bad Conscience* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 83.

[14] Ibid., 83-84.

[15] Edward S. Casey, "The World of Nostalgia," *Man and World* 20 (1987): 364.

[16] Ibid., 365.

17 Ibid., 377.

18 Ibid., 379.

19 Ibid., 380.

20 Régis Debray, "The Terminal Intellectual," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 18 (2001): 59.

21 Régis Debray, "Les Intellectuels et les Médias," *Contemporary French Civilization* 13 (1989): 308.

22 Régis Debray, *Teachers, writers, celebrities* (London: Verso, 1981), 2.

23 Régis Debray, et al. "III. Abécédaire & partis pris," *Les cahiers de médiologie* 2 (1998): 281. In French: «La trace n'est pas seulement ce qui reste d'une croyance, d'un savoir ou d'une opinion, mais l'une des conditions nécessaires à leur emergence et leur propagation. […] La trace suppose un support, un outil, une technique d'écriture et de lecture, un régime sémiotique, une method d'indexation, de contrôle et de conservation et un dispositif de diffusion» (translation – E. L. N.).

24 Ibid., 281-282. In French: «C'est le plus grand triomphe de l'homme sur les choses, que d'avoir su transporter jusqu'au lendemain les effets et les fruits du labeur de la veille. L'humanité ne s'est lentement élevée que sur le tas de ce qui dure» (translation – E. L. N.).

25 Régis Debray, *Media manifestos: on the technological transmission of cultural forms* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), 177.

26 Joseph Brodsky, *To Urania: Selected Poems 1965-1985* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988), 80.

27 Fernando Pessoa, *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe: Selected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 72.

Foucault in Brazil

Silence, Speech, and the Fascism in Our Heads

Lynne Huffer

Emory University

Foucault visited Brazil five times between 1965 and 1976 under conditions of a repressive military dictatorship that began in March 1964 with the overthrow of the left-leaning government of João Goulart and lasted until March 1985. *Foucault in Brazil* circles around a series of questions about Foucault's relation to this authoritarian regime. How did Foucault respond to the dictatorship? How did the dictatorship respond to him? What does Foucault's engagement with this deeply antidemocratic regime of the late 1960s and 70s have to teach us about the current rise of autocratic rule, including the more recent authoritarian presidency of Bolsonaro in Brazil? We might extend these questions to names like Putin, Erdogan, Orban, Modi, Trump.

In this essay I focus on the politics of silence, one of the major concerns of Hoffman's book. Foucault delivered lectures in Brazil at the height of a brutal dictatorship. And yet, he did not speak directly about the dictatorship until his penultimate visit to Brazil in the fall of 1975. Why, Hoffman asks, was Foucault silent for so long? And why was the silence broken? How are we to read that silence? Among the many stunning contributions of Hoffman's book are the thoroughly researched, archivally based, politically situated details it brings to these difficult questions.

Drawing on *Foucault in Brazil*, I ask about silence within the broader frame of Foucault's published work from the Brazil years. This period reverberates with a range of Foucault's writings, some canonical, some more obscure. The ones I have in mind include a 1968 interview in the French magazine, *Esprit*, called "Réponse à une question," about Tunisia; his 1973 Rio de Janeiro lectures, "Truth and Juridical Forms;" *Discipline and Punish*, 1975; his 1974-75 course, *Abnormals*; and the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, 1976, the last year Foucault visited Brazil. Also included in my broader frame are critiques of Foucault's work by decolonial, feminist, and critical race and black

studies scholars. Those critiques frame how I want to navigate *Foucault in Brazil* as an inquiry into the politics of speech and silence.

In her canonical 1988 essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak describes Foucault's speech about the colonial Other as "a site of betrayal."[1] According to Spivak, Foucault, with Deleuze, is guilty of a typical left-intellectual "ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern" (Spivak 27) played out in his analyses of European, mostly French, clinics, asylums, prisons, and universities, what Spivak calls "screen-allegories" of an imperialism he cannot name or grasp. In a 1998 essay, "Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition," Angela Davis complains that *Discipline and Punish* has nothing to say about race, gender, or the historical connections between slavery and carceral power.[2] In 2014, in *Habeas Viscus*, Alexander Weheliye draws on Sylvia Wynter and Hortense Spillers to mount his complaints about Foucault's "truancy" with regard to racism and racialization.[3] Weheliye follows Brady Heiner in accusing Foucault of stealing from George Jackson, Angela Davis, and the Black Panther Party when he wrote his 1975 book, *Discipline and Punish*.[4] More recently, in her 2022 book, *Plasticity*, Catherine Malabou devotes a chapter to Foucault's "Thought of the Outside," where she contrasts Foucault's Blanchotian "literary" "outside" with Latin American philosophy, what she calls an "outside of the outside" Foucault cannot account for or comprehend.[5]

Despite their differences, these disappointments in Foucault's politics reduce his thought to a moral binarism between, on the one hand, a courageous speech on behalf of the oppressed and, on the other, silence as complicity with oppression. That complicity is viewed as evidence of an obtuse inability to see—an Oedipal blindness that is the result of privilege. In Davis, Weheliye, or Malabou, it manifests as a Foucauldian discourse that has nothing to say at all about X (where X is slavery, colonialism, the outside of the outside). In a more surreptitious mode, in Spivak and Heiner, complicity manifests as a discourse that tricks us by ventriloquizing or stealing the other's speech. But in the end, the result is the same: Foucault has nothing helpful or liberating to say about X. Foucault's silence reveals a truth about his work. Because it has nothing to say about X, it is morally suspect and politically inadequate for addressing the roots of oppression.

Foucault in Brazil does not discuss these critiques directly. But we can read Hoffman's book as a way to excavate some deeper questions about the problem of silence as complicity with oppression. In fact, *Foucault in Brazil* begins by questioning what Hoffman calls "the equation" of silence with complicity with intolerable acts.[6] To complicate the silence = complicity equation is not to pardon Foucault for his sins of omission, but rather to think more deeply about what Foucault describes in the 1968 *Esprit* interview as "the relationship between what I say and a certain political practice."[7] To ask about the relationship between "what I say" and "a certain political practice"

is also to ask about the conditions for the possibility of silence and the many forms it can take.

By the time of his second visit to Brazil in 1973, Foucault was famous not only as a philosopher but also as a political militant. His 1966 book, *The Order of Things*, was seen by many as an impetus for the uprisings in France known as May '68. Between 1966 and 1968 Foucault taught at the University of Tunis and actively supported his students there in their protest movement against the authoritarian Tunisian government. Between 1971 and 1972, Foucault founded and participated in an anti-prison group, the GIP. Foucault's scathing critiques of the blackmail of the Enlightenment, along with his political activities, made him a symbol of left intellectualism by the time he returned to Brazil in 1973.

In that year, in Rio de Janeiro, Foucault was lecturing to a community of academics that had been tormented by political persecution through military police inquiries, the IPMs. The IPM, or *inquérito policial militaria*, was the mechanism for the interrogation and sometimes torture of the regime's opponents. But it was not until two visits later, in 1975 in São Paolo during his fourth visit to Brazil, that Foucault finally spoke directly and publicly about the dictatorship. In 1975, he responded openly to news about the torture of a history student, Sarita Mello, and expressed his solidarity with the protesters who gathered in response to this and other instances of arrest, persecution, surveillance, and torture. Forty-eight of those protesting students and professors were subsequently arrested. During the same period in October 1975 the journalist Vladimir Herzog died after being tortured. A massive protest at the cathedral of São Paolo brought public awareness to this atrocity. The intensity of these events in the fall of 1975 led Foucault to cancel his planned course on sexuality at the University of São Paolo and direct his energies toward protest. He made a public declaration that would soon be published as a manifesto. "You can't teach under boot heels," he said,

> you can't speak in the face of the walls of prisons; you can't study when arms threaten. The struggles of intellectual workers unite with those of manual workers. The University of São Paolo knows that your struggle today is connected to the struggle for freedom in all of the countries of the world. I pay tribute to your courage and I willingly associate myself with the decisions you make to ensure that justice here is not an outrageous word (cited in Hoffman 76).

I start here with this *parrhesiastic* scene—a scene of fearless speech, of silence broken—both to emphasize the fact that Foucault *did* speak out, here and on numerous other occasions, but also to ask about the multitude of occasions—in Brazil, in Tunisia, and elsewhere—when he chose to remain silent. I ask about this in order to question our habit of reducing speech and silence to a moral dualism between good and bad politics, where speech is heroic and

courageous while silence is timid and complicit with intolerable acts. As Foucault puts it in a famous passage from *History of Sexuality Volume One*:

> Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences...."[8]

So I agree with Hoffman who asserts that "silence is not reducible to *complicity* in the world of political practices" (Hoffman 14). We might say, then, that silence and speech as political acts are not reducible to ahistorical principles for action. If genealogy teaches us anything it is certainly this: silence and speech must be navigated, evaluated, and practiced within contingent, conditioned, relational networks of power. There is a complex ethics of speech and silence at work here whose conditions of possibility include what Daniele Lorenzini calls a history of truth as "a history of truth-telling" whose force—the force of truth—he aligns with "the possibilizing dimension of [Foucault's] genealogical method."[9] We hear echoes of this in the words of the Brazilian psychoanalyst Jurandir Freire Costa, whom Hoffman cites. Foucault "was never an irresponsible provocateur. He knew that he was under a dictatorship, surrounded by persons who were vulnerable. There was a tacit agreement that *we would only speak of what was possible*" (in Hoffman 51, emphasis added). I'm interested in this "what was possible" and how it relates to Lorenzini's possibilization. More on that in a moment.

As Hoffman puts it, Foucault's silence was "carefully crafted" (Hoffman 69) as a kind of safeguard, "a form of the care of the self and others" (Hoffman 14). "Many living under Brazilian dictatorship," Hoffman writes, "had no choice but to remain silent in their militancy. Maintaining silence in public was a means of protecting oneself and others in a dictatorship bent on detecting, monitoring, and punishing the slightest signs of subversion. Public silence was also a manner of engaging in solidarity with silenced others" (Hoffman 14). Indeed, in 1970s Brazil "silence" was even able to "gestate collective forms of militancy by safe guarding oneself and others for more propitious moments of action" (Hoffman 73). Perhaps São Paolo in October 1975, when Foucault did speak, was one of those more propitious moments.

This empirical reality is interwoven with Foucault's understanding of technologies of power-knowledge invested in discursive games of truth. Such investments include a range of intensities, from sexuality as an incitement to speech, to various mundane or bureaucratic forms of forced speech, to speech

extracted through torture. Drawing on the 1973 lectures, "Truth and Juridical Forms," Hoffman helpfully frames that extraction of speech through inquiry, or *enquête*, as one of those forms. In *Foucault in Brazil*, *enquête* as a scientific technology for gathering data for the production of truth intersects with the historically specific practice of the Brazilian IPMs. That crossing of a historically variable, resurgent *enquête* with its specific instantiation as the dreaded police *inquérito* in the 1970s allows us to situate these particular forms of speech, silence, inquiry, and truth as bound up with the logic of biopolitics.

As Hoffman explains, Brazilian doctors, psychiatrists, and psycho-analysts participated in torture sessions to extend torture to the furthest bearable limits of its victims. Extending torture means extending life through what Foucault describes in *History of Sexuality Volume One* as "the nearly infinite task of telling" (Foucault *Volume 1*, 20). As Foucault puts it, biopower works through "an intensification of the body" via "techniques for maximizing life" (Foucault *Volume 1*, 123). This bourgeois "art of longevity" (Foucault 125)—"ways of having healthy children and keeping them alive as long as possible" (Foucault *Volume 1*, 125) to serve what Foucault calls a "racism of expansion" (Foucault *Volume 1*, 125)—is perversely inverted in the Brazilian regime's deployment of this bourgeois art of longevity against Brazilian members of the middle and upper classes in medicalized practices of torture. The inversion is not only spatial (from France to Brazil) but also temporal: an old technology (torture) criss-crosses with a new one (modern therapeutic medicine) to transform the opposition between life and death in its relation to power. "Death is power's limit," Foucault writes (Foucault *Volume 1*, 138). *Foucault in Brazil* allows us to read Herzog's death under torture less through the sovereign lens of an ancient right to take life or let live—de *faire mourir ou de laisser vivre*—than the lens of a power that fosters life or disallows it to the point of death—de *faire vivre ou de rejeter dans la mort*.[10] Here the famous chiasmus is also a description of a horrifying reality in 1970s Brazil, where life is fostered through technologies of torture that quite literally extend it. Death, power's limit, is "disqualified," converted into a form of "nearly infinite" speech, a nearly infinite speech that masks death with a discursive proliferation of speech and silence, things said and things not said. That discursive proliferation begins with technologies of the *enquête*.

Such an analysis of an almost limitless speech-with-many-silences that begins with extraction through torture brings to the fore a particular kind of silence as a form of resistance—the collective silence of solidarity with the persecuted. This silence speaks not only as solidarity with the tortured caught in a cruel game of speaking and not speaking (where to speak is to admit defeat), but also reframes silence as a powerful collective counter-practice to the torturer's violence. A concrete manifestation of this collective counter-conduct—an inversion of the extractive, individualizing technology of the *enquête*—occurred at the October 1975 interfaith memorial service for the journalist Herzog who was killed through torture. Eight thousand people

arrived in silence at the cathedral. "All of us are conversing in silence," the Archbishop said.[11]

This reinforces the notion we see articulated so clearly in *History of Sexuality Volume One*, that there is not one but many silences, and that silence is less the absolute limit of discourse than something that functions alongside things said. Recall Freire Costa's comment about the tacit agreement in the midst of dictatorship to only speak what was possible: possibilization as a politics of truth. What is possible here specifically? Indeed what does possible mean? In a 1974 letter to his partner, Daniel Defert, Foucault gives us an answer: coded speech. Hoffman cites the letter, written from Brazil, where Foucault says: "You have to maintain a coded historical discourse, the only possible one" (in Hoffman 51). What is this historical coding and what does it mean to say "it's the only possible one"? What does possible mean here and how does it interface with the "possibilizing" politics of truth?

Let me return to "Truth and Juridical Forms," delivered in Rio de Janeiro in five lectures in 1973. Hoffman investigates those lectures, retracing Foucault's delineation of the different technologies for the production of power-knowledge—the juridical forms of the title—through the test, the inquiry, and the examination. Focusing on the inquiry, Hoffman points out that Foucault's original French term, *enquête*, was translated into Portuguese by Jardim and Machado as *inquérito* (rather than *investigaçao*), thereby bringing attention to the word that defines the primary mechanism of repression of the dictatorship, the IPMs—*inquerito policial militaria*. This is a clear example of a historical coding, initiated by Foucault with the word *enquête*, then taken up and intensified by his Brazilian interlocutors in their choice to translate *enquête* as *inquérito*.

But what is meant by a "coded historical discourse" here, and why is it the only possible one? A code is a system of symbols that conveys a surface meaning to be deciphered for the secret meaning hidden beneath it. But this usual conception of code repeats the logic of concealment and revelation, repression and liberation—the logic of the secret of sex—that Foucault was critiquing at this precise moment in writing *History of Sexuality Volume One*. There is not one but many silences…. The idea of code suggests we read Foucault's text like a detective novel whose ending will reveal the secret beneath the code. But in doing so we must bypass the temptation to reduce discourse—the code—and silence—the secret—to a binary structure built on the logic of repression.

The logic that drives Foucault's "coded historical discourse, the only one" is not repressive but proliferative. In a situation of intense constraint—a dictatorship like the one in Brazil—only one discourse is possible: a coded one. But the coding works to proliferate a counter-discourse beyond the constraints of its original context. We might call this the counter-proliferation of Foucault's coded historical discourse. (An important aside: the

proliferation of historical singularities is not the same as conceptual generalization.) Foucault's texts describe singularities—histories, *histoires*, collaged together from archival scraps that bear the claw marks of a power that possibilizes across a scale where historical contingencies matter. In Brazil, only one discourse was possible: a coded one whose "double speak" proliferates its possible scenes like the psycho-ethical doubles he describes in his 1975 lectures, *Abnormal*. That discursive doubling is triggered by images, figures, turns of phrase: little rhetorical bombs strewn throughout the text. The things said speak not only to the scene in question—*Oedipus the King*, *Oidipous turranos*—but also invent, crack open new spaces where we might hear the murmur of the things not said that accompany the things that are said. In *Foucault in Brazil*, we can hear this murmur as "the element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies" (Foucault *Volume* 1, 27). In this sense, *Foucault in Brazil* teaches us how to read Foucault's code as tactical interventions in a field where speech and silences are distributed.

A clear example of this is the 1973 lecture, "Truth and Juridical Forms," where Foucault speaks at length about Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*. Hoffman mentions the relation between Oedipus and the *enquête* that Foucault goes to great lengths to describe, especially the moment where Oedipus learns about his parentage by threatening a slave from Cithaeron with torture. *Oedipus the King* is *Oidipous turannos*. "His only problem is power—can he stay in power?"[12] He's the "chief officer of the law" (Foucault "Truth," 26) and yet he is also "the one who attaches no importance to the laws and who replaces them with his whims and his orders" ("Truth," 28). Just or not, the tyrant "will have to be obeyed all the same" ("Truth," 28). The tyrant's "wish will be the law of the city" ("Truth," 28). And, Foucault points out, the sovereign Oedipus is not only a tyrant of power, he is also a tyrant of knowledge. *Oidipous*, from the verb *oida*, which means "to know" and "to see" ("Truth," 29). *Oidipus turranos* embodies "the autocratic knowledge of the tyrant" ("Truth," 29).

And so we might conclude, on reading these passages, that the code is clear. *Oidipous turann*os is also the modern-day tyrant of power-knowledge. He is the Brazilian dictator of the 1970s. He is Bolsonaro; he is Donald Trump who dreams of a return to absolute sovereign power. But this is, as Foucault tells Defert, a "coded historical discourse, the only possible one" (in Hoffman 51). The code here is contingent, constrained by dictatorship. Which is why, in "Truth and Juridical Forms," there is an inversion of knowledge. Foucault tells his audience in Rio de Janeiro: "What had to disappear from this society was the union of power and knowledge. From this time onward, the man of power would be the man of ignorance. In the end, what befell Oedipus was that, knowing too much, he didn't know anything. The blind ruler who didn't know, and who didn't know because he could do too much" (Foucault "Truth," 32).

The coded historical discourse tells us something important we need to hear today. Dictatorship in the 1970s is something other than a simple return to sovereign power. In *Abnormal*, a course from the same period, Foucault calls it "vile sovereignty": *souveraineté infâme*.[13] The tyrant of knowledge becomes a buffoon: "the weaker the system is epistemologically, the better it functions." (Foucault, *Abnormal* 33). This inversion of the relation between power and knowledge is modern and inventive—alarmingly so. Dictatorship proliferates discourses Foucault calls Ubu-esque – ridiculous, risible, dangerous discourses. *Oedipus the King* becomes *Ubu roi*, where Ubu is Hitler, Mussolini, Bolsonaro, Modi, Trump, the joke that kills. Foucault's coded historical discourse proliferates these figures as biopolitical.

From a "coded historical discourse" as "the only possible one" we find, instead, a proliferation of possibilities. Is this the optimistic parrhesiastic possibilization of truth we find in Lorenzini? Perhaps. Foucault's code here works through inversion and proliferation in a system of gradation whose regulatory, self-correcting functions are much harder to counter than the yes-no dualisms of speech and silence.

Let me end with this unanswered question about possibility and its meanings in the context of the present. At the beginning of the second lecture of "Truth and Juridical Forms," Foucault introduces his reading of *Oedipus the King* with a reference to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, published the year before, in 1972. Here, from the start of the lecture, the inversion has taken place: *Oedipus the King* begins as *Anti-Oedipus*. That inversion of the Oedipal *enquête* as a "political form" (Foucault "Truth," 52) is already a site of invention: it generates ever-proliferating new versions of itself, including libidinally driven, psychological ones. How are we to read these inventions? A year after his last visit to Brazil, Foucault writes a preface to the American edition of *Anti-Oedipus*, which he calls in an "Introduction to a Nonfascist Life" the "Last but not least, the major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism. . . And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini—which was able to mobilize and use the desire of the masses so effectively—the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us."[14]

Foucault famously calls *Anti-Oedipus* "a book of ethics" (Foucault, *Anti-Oedipus* 108). "How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially when) we believe ourselves to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior" (Foucault, *Anti-Oedipus* 108)? *Foucault in Brazil* intensifies these questions, questions for our age. How are we to live in a fascisizing present? In concluding with these questions, I follow Alberto Toscano whose recent book, *Late Fascism* (2023), warns us against ahistorical comparisons: oh look, Bolsonaro, Modi, Trump—they're just like Hitler and Mussolini.[15] Looking around my own campus

invaded by armed police in April 2023 and again, more brutally, in April 2024, I immediately thought "is this fascism?" Following Toscano, I'm learning to modulate this question, one that is driven by fear and horror. Instead of "is this fascism?" I'm beginning to ask: what is this play of fascisizing forces? How can we counter them? What discourse is possible? In each moment, what tactics of speech and silence are possible within a strategic field? And if, as Foucault writes, thought is a form of action, how can thought counter these fascisizing technologies of power-knowledge-pleasure that include the constitution of our desires and affects, the fascism in our heads? These questions emerged like a hologram as I read and reread Hoffman's groundbreaking book. In *Foucault in Brazil*, we encounter Foucault in the midst of a play of historically singular fascisizing forces. The distribution of speech and silence Hoffman describes includes the archives that generated a book called *Foucault in Brazil*. That Brazil archive also includes the extra-Brazilian, pre-1970s archives of madness and *lettres de cachets* where Foucault, again, practices tactical maneuvers within a field of potentially fascisizing forces. We might read *Foucault in Brazil*, like Foucault's genealogies, as a coded historical discourse where, as Foucault puts it, "real lives are played [*jouées*]."[16] "Not a history of the past in terms of the present," but a "history of the present" that leaves us asking: What is possible today?[17]

1 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 23. Hereafter cited in the text as Spivak.

2 Angela Davis, "Racialized Punishment and Prison Abolition," in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (New York: Blackwell, 1998), 96-110.

3 Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 56.

4 Brady Heiner, "Foucault and the Black Panthers," City 11, #3 (2007): 313-356. For a more nuanced view that seriously engages Foucault and Black thought, see Taryn D. Jordan and Haylee Christine Harrell, "black Foucault: An Intellectual Reparations Project," *Foucault Studies* 37 (2005): 5-34, https:// doi.org/10.1080/13604810701668969.

5 Catherine Malabou, "Philosophy and the Outside: Foucault and Decolonial Thinking," in *Plasticity: The Promise of an Explosion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 179-186.

6 Marcello Hoffman, *Foucault in Brazil: Dictatorship, Resistance, and Solidarity* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2024), 14. Hereafter cited in the text as Hoffman.

7 Michel Foucault, "Politics and the Study of Discourse," trans. Colin Gordon, in *The Foucault Effect*, ed. Colin Gordon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 61.

8 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985), 27. Hereafter cited in the text as Foucault *Volume 1*.

9 Daniele Lorenzini, *The Force of Truth: Critique, Genealogy, and Truth-Telling in Michel Foucault* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), 9.

10 Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité, vol. 1: La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 108.

11 The progressive archbishop of Recife and Olinda, Hélder Pessoa Câmara, was asked about not speaking during the service. "Why speak in a high voice," he asked, "when all of us are conversing in silence?" (in Hoffman 94-95).

12 Michel Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms," in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 3: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1994), 25. Hereafter cited in the text as Foucault "Truth."

13 Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003), 12. Hereafter cited in the text as Foucault, *Abnormal*. For French original see Michel Foucault, *Les Anormaux: Cours au Collège de France, 1974-1975* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1999, 12.

14 Michel Foucault, "Preface to *Anti-Oedipus*," in *Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 3*, 108. Hereafter cited in the text as Foucault, *Anti-Oedipus*.

15 Alberto Toscano, *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism, and the Politics of Crisis* (London: Verso, 2023).

16 Michel Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," in *Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 3:* 160.

17 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), 31.

Foucault in Brazil

The Security State and the Conduct of the Intellectual

Corey McCall

Independent Scholar

Why Brazil? That is, why did Foucault make several trips to Brazil over the span of some ten years? After all, he had not published scholarly work related to Brazilian history or culture, nor was his work especially focused on the Western hemisphere or issues that would lead a scholar to turn their interests to Brazil, issues such as slavery or imperialism. Although it does not definitively answer the question (indeed, this question may be impossible to definitively answer), *Foucault in Brazil* offers readers a variety of intriguing responses to this question. In my remarks here today, I'll focus on two.

Marcelo Hoffman deftly traces the significance of Foucault's five visits to Brazil during the decade spanning 1965-1976 in order to show how Brazil mattered for Foucault's thought and to show how Foucault's interventions in Brazilian cultural and political life continue to matter for us today. I want to develop two related themes that emerge from Hoffman's analysis: how Foucault understood the Brazilian authoritarian security state and how his engagement with this state provides us a model for how to engage with this type of state. After briefly explaining what I mean by characterizing Brazil as "an authoritarian security state," I review Foucault's various engagements in Brazil as presented by Hoffman. I conclude by briefly comparing Foucault's engagement in Brazil in terms of his intellectual *praxis* and his complicated relationship with Marx's thought. In addition to showing us how and why Foucault's engagement with Brazil matters, Hoffman's work contributes to a reassessment of Foucault. Once thought of as a cool intellectual who eschewed intellectual engagement (this was thought to be one of the key ways he distinguished himself from Jean-Paul Sartre), Hoffman presents us with a very different Foucault, one engaged in various social movements in way that brings him in closer proximity to the Sartrean engaged intellectual. For Hoffman this reconsideration of Foucault's role as an intellectual engaged with contemporary political debates entails a reconsideration of his relationship with Marx.

Navigating an Authoritarian Security State

Foucault made five visits to Brazil between 1965-1977, and all of these visits occurred while Brazil was governed by a military dictatorship which came to power as the result of a coup in March 1964 and lasted for twenty years.[1] He first visited during October 1965, next in May and June 1973, with the final three visits during October and November 1974, 1975, and 1976 (Hoffman, 3). The regime became increasingly repressive in the years following a wave of protests in 1968. Hoffman details how the dictatorship's Institutional Act No. 5 or AI-5 sanctioned the violent repression of these demonstrations and political dissent more generally. These repressive years in Brazil came to be known as the "years of lead" and were characterized by widespread political torture and the state-sanctioned assassination of political dissidents. Here is how a member of the opposition, economist Edmilson Costa, characterizes these years of political terror:

> Between December 13, 1968 and October 13, 1978, when the discretionary act was repealed, the country lived the Years of Lead with an openly fascist military dictatorship; suppression of liberties; the imprisonment, torture and killing of opponents; stripping of political rights of those whom the dictatorship considered inconvenient to the regime; revocation of direct elections for president, governors and mayors of the capitals; widespread censorship and the building of an espionage network that spanned all sectors of public administration, schools, universities and public places. At the same time, the process of conservative modernization established by iron and fire an economic model of predatory accumulation that accelerated the country's economic growth, expanded industrialization, developed capitalism in the countryside, but resulted in true social apartheid with brutal concentration of income, which would deepen even in democratic periods.[2]

Indeed this coup and the ensuing military dictatorship provided a blueprint for the overthrow of democratically-elected governments throughout Latin America, and the effects of this coup continue to be felt today, with President Bolsanaro promising to reinstate the measures found in AI-5.

Within the political context of this repressive regime, Foucault's visits take on a special urgency. Unlike his later visits to Iran where his task is to publicize the events of the Iranian Revolution to a European audience, his task here is both to speak to and with intellectual audiences in Brazil. The challenge will be how to do this in a way that does not antagonize the government and endanger his interlocutors in Brazil but also present himself in such a way so as not to lend legitimacy to the military regime.

Clearly Brazil's military dictatorship governed through fear. But how can we claim that Brazil under this dictatorship was an authoritarian security state? If the goal of the security state is to free those it governs from fear, then

how can we say that a state governed through fear is a "security state"? But of course the goal of the security state is emphatically *not* to free those it governs from fear, even though its representatives often appeal to this ideal when seeking to justify the security state. Instead, the goal of security, as John T. Hamilton and Frédéric Gros have recently argued, is *care.* Foucault was also interested in security, understood as a particular form of care that he would later come to call *governmentality.* Perhaps one source of his account of governmentality (care for individuals and populations though the management of risk) was his experience in Brazil. Care becomes the justification for terrorizing those in the state who are not deemed worthy of care for various reasons, most commonly because they are outsiders or because they have forfeited basic rights through criminal activity.

Drawing upon German philosophical and literary traditions, Hamilton provides a philological interpretation grounded in Heidegger's appropriation of the Myth of Care in *Being and Time,* tracing its meaning back to the Greeks and then forward through the Middle Ages and then on to the moderns. From this philological approach, we can see how security becomes a guiding concern in the West. Hamilton reminds us that Foucault plays a role in this story too, showing us how security works to constitute the population as its object. "For Foucault, who is interested in examining varying political technologies of power, security becomes a crucial concept, wherein the *population* becomes the privileged object of governance, as opposed to *territory* or *the people.*"[3] Gros relies more on the work of Foucault, emphasizing the role that self-regulation plays in his critique of neoliberalism in *Birth of Biopolitics* and the concept of biopower. The Physiocrats of the late eighteenth century envisioned markets that would, like living organisms, regulate themselves. Government's role was to provide the conditions that would make these markets regulate themselves naturally.

But these reflections on populations and markets, biopower and security all lie in Focault's future. During his visits to Brazil in the early 1970s, Foucault's concerns were on surveillance and discipline. Unlike security, whose target is the population, the target of disciplinary power is the individual; disciplinary techniques seek to normalize the individual through, for example, the organization of space in institutions such as the army barracks, the hospital, and the school. Indeed, these various disciplinary apparatuses were developed by Brazil's military regime into distinct technologies of surveillance and discipline in the service of terror.

Brazil and Foucault's Intellectual *Praxis*

Foucault takes his time responding directly to this situation in Brazil. His initial visit in 1965 was marked by his reticence. He was the noted author of the surprise bestseller *The Order of Things,* and did not speak out against the regime directly; he let his lectures speak indirectly about his attitude toward

the regime. "Truth and Juridical Forms" are perhaps his most well-known lectures of the several delivered during his visits to Brazil, and these lectures "dealt at length with the inquiry, torture, surveillance, the police, and imprisonment in Europe" (10). Hoffman relates the effects that Foucault's lectures had on his fellow intellectuals and students in Brazil. "Merely bringing up[these practices and institutions was a provocative move in Brazil, precisely because they were also obvious features of political repression under the dictatorship. Any talk of torture, above all from a foreigner was prone to arouse the sensitivies of Brazilian authorities, who publicly and emphatically denied the existence of torture" (10). In "Truth and Juridical Forms," he displaces his indirect critique of the regime by placing it in Europe, but apparently neither the government nor his interlocutors were fooled.

In addition to the lectures' contents, the places he lectured proved to be provocative, for he delivered his lectures in universities that were sites of critique and resistance to the military regime. During these early years, the military junta began to undertake military police inquiries or IPMs, and members of his audience perceived his analysis of inquiry in these lectures as a reference to this practice (Hoffman, 11). In the first months after the coup, a special commission welcomed by the university president carried out IPMs against various professors at the University of São Paulo.

By the early 1970s, Foucault began to overcome his reticence for various reasons. The main reason is that he became more politicized as he sought to put his thought into practice through work with organizations such as the GIP. Hoffman cites this as a reason, and claims that his political transformation stemmed from his time in Tunisia. Tunisia was a turning point both in terms of Foucault's political activism and the trajectory of his writing, which informed one another. Foucault states: "That's what Tunisia was for me: it compelled me to join the political debate. It wasn't May 68 in France but March '68, in a country in the third world" (Hoffman, 21, citing *Power,* 79). Hoffman summarizes Foucault's experience in Tunisia to show how he returned to Brazil prepared to draw on his own experience sheltering students in his home and being subjected to what Daniel Defert has characterized as "torture" at the hands of police in Tunisia (Hoffman, 22). Hoffman draws various parallels between his experience in Tunisia and his experience in Brazil. "In Tunisia as in Brazil, Foucault was in what he described as a 'third world' country surrounded by radical students who were undergoing severe political repression, including subjection to torture, for their protests against an authoritarian regime. In Tunisia as in Brazil, he adopted a stance of solidarity with these students that provoked state authorities to take action against him. Foucault even suspected that he was under surveillance in both countries. Third, the severity of the political repression of students in Tunisia left a profound impression on Foucault that may well have compelled him to be much more cautious about his political actions among students and

professors in Brazil" (Hoffman, 22). Foucault drew on his experience in
Tunisia to make sense of his experience in Brazil, not least of which was his
first-hand experience of torture at the hands of Tunisian authorities.

He draws on this experience in the most well-known lectures delivered
during his Brazil visits, "Truth and Juridical Forms," where he marks this
distinction between thought and practice early in the lectures. The
relationship between truth and juridical forms is grounded in a distinction
between internal and external histories of truth. An "internal history of truth
that rectifies itself according to its own principles of regulation: it's the history
of truth as it is constructed in or on the basis of the history of the sciences."
(Power, 4). Foucault contrasts these internally coherent **systems** of scientific
truth with various juridical **practices** of truth: "On the other hand, it seems to
me that there are in society (or at least in our societies) other places where
truth is formed, where a certain number of games are defined–games through
which one sees certain forms of subjectivity, certain object domains, certain
types of knowledge come into being–and that, consequently, one can on that
basis construct an external, exterior history of truth" (Power, 4). He begins the
lectures by paying homage to Nietzsche for his denial of the timeless subject
understood as the ground of truth–the Cartesian/Kantian subject but also (at
least on some readings that Foucault rejects) the Marxist subject. Nietzsche
shows how this stable subject is instead the product of various games of
power and truth. "It is toward this radical critique of the human subject by
history that we should direct our efforts" (Power, 3).

Foucault thus opposes Nietzsche's genealogies of truth and the subject to
the approach of "academic Marxism" which clings to a traditional conception
of the subject as the unified ground of experience. Instead, Foucault proposes
that we "show the historical construction of a subject through discourse
understood as consisting of a set of strategies which are part of social
practices" (Power, 4). Although this is a scathing critique, it is not the outright
rejection of Marxism that many readers mistakenly attribute to Foucault.
Hoffman shows how Foucault's complex relationship with Marxism
demands to be reconsidered precisely because of his visits to Brazil.

Hoffman traces the contours of Foucault's sustained engagement with
Marx's thought so that we might rethink the conventional wisdom found in,
for example the work of Eric Paras (*Foucault 2.0*) that Foucault made a decisive
break with Marxist thought. Hoffman reminds us that Paras dates this break
with Marxism precisely to September 1975. While it is true that Foucault
responded indignantly to a request by a student protester that he speak on
Marx to his group that he was "finished with Marx" (cited by Hoffman 111).
On Paras' flawed account, this shift indicates a move away from Marxist
thought toward neoliberalism. According to Hoffman, the break with Marx
was not nearly so clean. Indeed, Stuart Elden has shown how Foucault
appropriated Marx's *Capital,* specifically his account of cooperation, to show

how the collective productive power of labor could exceed the sum of it individual parts (D&P, 163, cited by Hoffman, 110).

Still, there was a shift in his relationship with Marx's thought after *Discipline and Punish.* He critiques the Marxism's economic focus and pretensions to scientific rigor in the opening lecture "*Society Must Be Defended,*" but this critique is consistent with his critique of academic Marxism in "Truth and Juridical Forms," but his efforts to account for social strife in terms of a struggle between races rather than a struggle between classes reveals a more fundamental difference with Marx's thought (Hoffman, 112).

Hoffman argues that this apparently decisive shift away from Marx and towards biopower is more ambiguous. Citing "The Meshes of Power" delivered in Salvador during October 1976, in which Foucault states that we can find accounts of the "positive mechanisms" of power in Bentham and "obviously" in Marx (Hoffman, 113). He is contrasting his positive account of power and rejecting the repressive account found in psychoanalysis. In "The Meshes of Power" he elaborates on Marx, claiming that in *Capital* Marx shows how power is plural with effects across society and that these powers "are constitutive of state apparatuses; they are productive rather than simply prohibitive; and finally, they can be understood from a technical rather than a juridical standpoint" (Hoffman, 113). Clearly Marx had either changed his mind about Marx between 1975 and 1976 or his rejection of Marx had always been more equivocal than scholars such as Eric Paras claimed.

Again we see the importance of the location where Foucault is lecturing in shaping what he says. These lectures were delivered in Salvador, in the northeastern state of Bahia. Traditionally the Northeast had been the home of elite slaveholding families of Brazil, and Hoffman discusses how in the 1920s descendants of the declining families articulated a politics of nostalgia which was countered in the 1930s by a Marxist movement that conceived of the Northeast as a site for revolution. "They detected the seeds of a revolutionary future in all of the poverty, misery, injustice, and suffering of the Northeast" (Hoffman, 116). Despite their fundamental opposition, what the traditionalists and Marxists had in common was their politics of victimization. His This provided the political and historical context for "The Meshes of Power" and Foucault's positive remarks on Marx's *Capital.* Nevertheless Foucault's local host, Roberto Machado claims that the role of Marx was not essential to his lectures in Salvador. According to Machado, "Foucault did not inhabit Marx's language so much as make Marx inhabit Foucault's language for the sake of facilitating better communication with Marxist audiences. In other words, Foucault presented his own general ideas about power through Marx so that they could be more intelligible and acceptable to those audiences" (Hoffman 120).

Hoffman rejects Machado's interpretation of the role of Marx in these 1976 lectures. Foucault was not simply telling his audiences what he thought

they would want to hear, nor was his discussion of Marx merely a rhetorical flourish. Instead Hoffman finds it more likely that Foucault did not have the time in these lectures to develop an account of his relationship with Marx's thought more fully. What we see in these lectures is Foucault continuing to struggle with how his own thought relates to Marxist thought, and we see him expressing his solidarity with his Marxist audiences in Salvador. Just as the concepts he analyzes in "Truth and Juridical Forms" represented a coded critique of Brazil's military government, his reconsideration of Marx in his Salvador lectures are an effort to identify with the opposition. After all, as Hoffman points out, Foucault could have simply appealed to Bentham's account of power's productive effects to counter the repressive hypothesis. "To suddenly turn to Marx was therefore a way for Foucault to strategically occupy and channel a language of the opposition that had a powerful resonance among the students and professors who surrounded him. It was a coded but easily recognizable way for Foucault to convey his solidarity with those struggling against the dictatorship" (Hoffman, 121). Certainly his audience saw it this way, particularly the anarchist students in the audience, who quickly proceeded to publish "The Meshes of Power" in an anarchist journal.

I began with the basic question of why Foucault returned to Brazil on five separate occasions between 1965 and 1976. The dilemma he faces here is real: how to express his solidarity with those resisting the authoritarian Brazilian government without making their precarious situation worse. His attempt to resolve this dilemma through his choice of topics and the coded language in his lectures, which amounted to an indirect critique of the government. I hope to have also shown the richness of Hoffman's account of Foucault's time in Brazil. His book should be read by anyone interested in Foucault's intellectual development, particularly those interested in how Foucault sought to bring together his philosophical work with his intellectual *praxis*.

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[1] Marcelo Hoffman, *Foucaut in Brazil: Dictatorship, Resistance, and Solidarity* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2024), 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically as Hoffman.

[2] Edmilson Costa, "Remembering the Years of Lead Under Brazil's Military Rule: AI-5 Never Again!" https://www.liberationschool.org/remembering-the-years-of-lead-under-brazils-military-rule-ai-5-never-again/#:~:text=Between%20December%2013%2C%201968%20and%20October%2013%2C%201978%2C,of%20public%20administration%2C%20schools%2C%20universities%20and%20public%20places Retrieved May 15, 2024.

[3] John T. Hamilton, *Security: Politics, Humanity, and the Philology of Care* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 41.

Expanding the Discussion of Foucault in Brazil

Marcelo Hoffman

Pace University

One of the main reasons I wrote my new book, *Foucault in Brazil: Dictatorship, Resistance, and Solidarity*, was to generate conversations in the Anglophone world about Michel Foucault's intellectual and political experiences in Brazil. It seemed to me that this topic had not garnered enough attention in the Anglophone world, especially when compared to the growing literature on Foucault in the United States, Iran, Tunisia, and Poland. I feel immensely grateful to have Corey McCall and Lynne Huffer as interlocutors. Their commentaries not only reflect a careful reading of my book but also creatively push the conversation about Foucault and his many experiences in Brazil in new directions.

McCall nicely encapsulates many of the core ideas in my book. He concisely identifies the main political challenge that Foucault faced in Brazil. Foucault needed to engage Brazilians in a way that did not expose them to the danger of political repression, but he also needed to pursue this task in a way that did not appear to legitimize the dictatorship. As I argue, Foucault dealt with this challenge through a combination of coded critiques and gestures as well as by deferring to the political inclinations of the Brazilians around him. As long as those Brazilians remained silent about the dictatorship, Foucault steered clear of any explicit references to the dictatorship in his public presentations. Once the Brazilians around him began to break their silence, he followed suit, inaugurating a sequence of political activities that led to his surveillance by the security services and his near expulsion from Brazil.

McCall also draws out what made Foucault's experiences in Brazil different from his extensively studied experiences in Iran in 1978. Whereas Foucault was in Iran to write journalistic reports about political events in the country for a European readership (primarily in France and Italy), Foucault was in Brazil to present his ongoing research to Brazilian audiences. He was there to give lectures and talks to Brazilians mainly on university campuses throughout the country. The effects of his contributions were profound. The

concerns and ideas in Foucault's presentations served to inspire groundbreaking explorations of the emergence of articulations of power-knowledge in Brazil. *Danação da norma: Medicina social e constituição da psiquiatria no Brasil*, by Roberto Machado, Angela Loureiro, Rogerio Luz, and Katia Muricy as well as *Ordem médica e norma familiar* by Jurandir Freire Costa stand out as now classic studies that channeled Foucault's insights from his lectures in Brazil to explore the emergence of social medicine, psychiatry, and constitution of the bourgeois family through hygienic interventions in nineteenth-century Brazil. These books appeared long before Foucault's lectures from Brazil were even available in French, much less in English. A unique world of Foucault-inspired research with points of reference that were different from elsewhere thus emerged in Brazil. Given Foucault's intellectual stature, it seems inevitable that a world of Foucault-inspired research would have emerged in Brazil without his visits to the country, but his presence there certainly did a lot to accelerate the process of "translating" his ideas in the Brazilian context. Sadly, however, researchers of Foucault outside Brazil have been largely unaware of the studies inspired by his lectures in the country. Translations of these studies in other languages would go a long way in rectifying this situation.

McCall identifies a potential connection in his discussion of the authoritarian security state that I did not explicitly develop in my book. He speculates that Foucault's experiences in Brazil may well have been one of the sources of Foucault's articulation of the concept of governmentality in the late 1970s, even though Foucault stopped visiting Brazil prior to elaborating this concept. I could not agree more. Foucault's experience of witnessing the dictatorship's invocations of care for the Brazilian population through the terrorization of elements within the population deemed to be communist may well have served as a source of inspiration of his exploration of care and security as aspects of governmentality. But what is clear is that many components of Foucault's account of governmentality were *already* present in his lectures in Brazil. After all, it was in his lectures on social medicine in Rio de Janeiro in 1974 that Foucault publicly introduced the concept of biopolitics, highlighted the overall importance of population as an object of social medicine, and discussed the Beveridge plan in Great Britain. That plan would figure as a crucial and recurring historical reference in his account of the birth of neoliberal governmentality.

Finally, McCall is right to suggest that my book sets out to demonstrate how Foucault's relationship with Marxism needs to be considered against the backdrop of his experiences in Brazil. Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that Foucault's experiences and contributions in Brazil constitute an *obligatory* point of passage for any research seriously considering his relationship with Marxism. It was in his lectures in Brazil that Foucault spoke of the constitution of the body itself as labor-power. It was in these lectures that he sought to understand the socialization of medicine in the West through the lens of class

struggle. It was also in Brazil that he turned to volume one of Karl Marx's *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* as a source of inspiration for an analysis of productive relations of power. The latter move was politically remarkable in the context of a violently anti-Marxist dictatorship. Foucault owed a debt to Marx and that debt was manifest in his lectures in Brazil. His intellectual contributions there show in an especially perspicuous manner that he was anything but an anti-Marxist.

I also go a step further, one that I suspect could easily unsettle the sensibilities of those accustomed to referring to Foucault as an anticommunist as a matter of common sense. I try to show that Foucault's relationship to communism itself is more complicated than what we are told in the conventional narrative. According to this narrative, Foucault's experiences of encounters with Stalinism in the French Communist Party from 1950 to 1953 left him with an enduring and visceral hatred of anything that falls under the name of communism. This narrative succumbs to a vulgar and facile conflation of the French Communist Party with communism tout court. Part of what I found fascinating about Foucault's experiences in Brazil is that his political activities in the country were effectively in support of Brazilian communists. In 1975, he protested waves of political repression that targeted the students and professors around him who belonged to the Brazilian Communist Party. Foucault cancelled his course on sexuality at the University of São Paulo in reaction to the torture and assassination of a journalist and Brazilian Communist Party member, Vladimir Herzog. He also attended a massive interfaith memorial service for Herzog in São Paulo. Of course, Foucault did not share the same political agenda as Brazilian communists but he also did not let his hostility toward the French Communist Party get in the way of activities in support of these communists in a climate of severe anticommunist political repression. Foucault's political experiences in Brazil suggest that there were subtleties in his relationship to communisms and communists that are not adequately captured by his well-known hostility to the French Communist Party and warrant greater attention.

Huffer engages in an incredibly rich and subtle exploration of the politics of speech and silence by putting my book in a dialogue with critiques that I do not address in the book. These critiques emanate from scholars as diverse as Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak, Angela Davis, Alexander Weheliye, Brady Heiner, and Catherine Malabou. They charge Foucault with complicity with forms of oppression because he had nothing to say about these forms. Some of the critiques go further and charge Foucault with the outright theft of the speech of the other. For Huffer, these critiques succumb to a moral binary "between a courageous speech on the side of the oppressed versus silence as complicity with oppression." Huffer very effectively mobilizes the discussion in my book against this moral binary.

Though I do not discuss the authors above in my book, I do target the commonplace idea of silence as complicity with oppression. This idea was

popular at the time of the Brazilian dictatorship and it remains popular today in the context of other political struggles. My goal in rescuing silence from political disqualification was not to denigrate speech. It was to attune us to the strategic possibilities of silence. Foucault's initial silence about the Brazilian dictatorship served to protect the Brazilians around him, many of whom had already experienced persecution by the dictatorship. It also served to allow for a more propitious moment of political struggle against the dictatorship. Indeed, as Huffer eloquently points out, silence among the persecuted in Brazil served as a "collective counter-practice" to the forced extraction of speech through military police inquiries and torture. Huffer focuses on a remarkable passage from *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction* to stress that silence is not the absolute limit of speech. Silence and speech function together. They weave into one another through networks of power relations. In the same passage, Foucault reminds us that there are many silences. In the context of Brazil, there was the silence that the dictatorship imposed through censorship and there was the silence of those opposed to the dictatorship.

In the latter, coded speech was possible. Huffer makes the brilliant point that the preference of the Brazilian translators of "Truth and Juridical Forms" to translate *enquête* as *inquérito* (inquiry) rather than as *investigação* (investigation) as advertised in the original title for the lecture series, served to highlight the notorious practice of the *inquérito policial militar* (military police inquiry). As I point out in my book, one of Foucault's interlocutors in Rio de Janeiro in 1973, the psychoanalyst Hélio Pellegrino, picked up on the resonances between Foucault's discussion in the lectures of Oedipus's inquiry and the military police inquiries in Brazil. However, Huffer here cautions us against a repressive notion of the code, one in which the code serves as a symbol for a hidden meaning to be deciphered. She opts instead for a notion of the code as proliferative. The code, as Huffer writes, proliferates "a counter-discourse beyond the constraints of its original context." The code is thus a "tactical intervention" in "a field where speech and silences are distributed." This proliferative notion of the code allows us to reimagine the possibilities of political struggles beyond the moral binarism of speech and silence that continues to inform many of these struggles today and continues to nourish critiques of Foucault.

McCall and Huffer have been generous enough to critically engage my new book with a great deal of attention to its fine details. Their contributions not only widen the conversations about Foucault in Brazil but also amplify the parameters of more general discussions of Foucault and political struggle.